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- GYÖRGY KURTÁG Remembers GYÖRGY LIGETI
- **BRASSAÏ: A Life in Letters**
- Pál Rosti: A Photographer's Adventures in Latin America
- ANIMATION AS ABSOLUTE FILM
- IGNÁC ROMSICS on THE HUNGARIAN SELF-IMAGE IN HISTORY
- J. S. Bach's Contrapunctus 14: Reconstructing the Ultimate Fugue
- Fiction by Ervin Lázár & György Dragomán
- Poems by László G. István
- A Memoir by Tamás Blum

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Ignác Romsics

From Christian Shield to EU Member

Perceptions of Hungary's Situation and Role in Europe

The history of the Magyar people in the Carpathian Basin may be divided into four periods. The first lasted from the establishment of the medieval Hungarian state until its fall in 1526. Short periods of crisis aside, over these first five hundred years, the Kingdom of Hungary was among the most powerful and influential states in Europe. The second major period began in 1526 and lasted until the turn of the seventeenth to the eighteenth century. During this century and a half, the Kingdom of Hungary was reduced to a narrow strip of land stretching along its old northern and western borders, now associated with or subordinated to, the Habsburg family's other Central European possessions. A large slice, lying between the extensive plains between the Danube and Tisza rivers and the mountains of Transylvania, was under the direct rule of the Turkish sultan. A new state was established in the east in the form of the Principality of Transylvania from the latter half of the sixteenth century; this paid an annual tribute as a vassal state to the Porte but, in exchange, was allowed to exercise a considerable degree of independence. The third main period may be dated from the final expulsion of the Ottoman Turks in the late seventeenth century and from the recognition of the Habsburgs' hereditary right to the throne (for the male line in 1687, for the female line in 1723) until the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire in 1918. During this period, the Hungarian state or state bodies were, with varying degrees of autonomy, integral parts of the Habsburg Empire. The fourth period dates from after the First World War, when the Hungarian state, for the first time in close to half a millennium, once again became sovereign in terms of international law; however, its territory had shrunk to one third that of its former extent, and more than a third of ethnic Hungarians—in all some 3.3 million people—found themselves living outside the country's new frontiers. This disposition by the Great Powers was confirmed in the aftermath of the

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Second World War and by the arrangements which followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s.

The aim of this article is to characterize the political thinking that attended each of these four major historical epochs; the place that the country's political and intellectual elites envisioned for the Hungarian people among the other nations of Europe; and the distinctive role or task they saw it fulfilling.

"Bulwark of Christendom"

We have no certain knowledge of how the pagan Magyars viewed their place and role before the foundation of the Hungarian state. By the time of the first relevant surviving records, they were already part of European Christendom. Moreover, for understandable reasons, what came down to us about political thinking during the two or three centuries that followed the foundation of the Hungarian state is concerned with the ruling dynasty and its largely clerical milieu rather than with either the Hungarian nation as a whole or, for that matter, a part of it. Such clues as we have are, first and foremost, the typical literary products of the age, which is to say legends of the saints and the *gesta* produced by court chroniclers. Without exception, these sources see the Hungarian nation as forming part of European Christendom, from which their ideals and mission were derived. Hungarian rulers, from the time of Saint Stephen (reigned 1000–1038), were propagators, maintainers and defenders of the Christian faith. The kings of the House of Árpád were acting as defenders of the faith when they beat back the attacks of the heathen peoples that fringed the country to the south and east; they also justified their own territorial conquests as obedience to their holy duty to spread Christianity. The vantage of the author of the *Old Gesta* on the deeds of the Magyars (written around the middle, or at the latest by the end, of the eleventh century) was to trumpet Christian teachings and to fit the origin of the Magyars into the Old Testament genealogy of nations. In that scheme, the Magyars were seen as descending from Japheth and their role on earth was to act as a punitive instrument in the service of God.[1] King (Saint) Ladislas (r. 1077–95), who founded a bishopric in Zagreb before going on to conquer the whole of Croatia, attributed his victories over the pagans to "the prayers of holy men".[2] The Saint Ladislas Legend presented him as a person who "took a vow that he would travel to Jerusalem, so that in the city where the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for our salvation, he would combat with his own blood the enemies of the Cross of Jesus."[3] (Since Pope Urban II

1 ■ Gyula Kristó: *Magyar historiográfia I. Történetírás a középkori Magyarországon* (Hungarian Historiography, vol. 1. The Writing of History in Medieval Hungary). Budapest, 2002, Osiris Kiadó, pp. 30–36.

2 ■ *Árpád-kori és Anjou-kori levelek. XI–XIV. század* (Letters from the Age of the House of Árpád and the Angevin era: 11th–14th Centuries), eds. László Makkai and László Mezey. Budapest, Gondolat Kiadó, 1960, p. 93.

3 ■ *Árpád-kori legendák és intelmek. Szentek a magyar középkorból* (Legends and Admonishments of the Árpádian Era: Hungary's Medieval Saints), vol. 1, ed. Géza Érszegi. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 1999, p. 93.

only proclaimed the First Crusade in 1095, the year of Ladislas's death, the story is presumably without foundation.) By contrast, King Béla III (r. 1172–1196), who retook the southern provinces of Hungary that had been acquired by Byzantium, did vow to go on a crusade, while his son, Andrew II (r. 1205–35), actually did so in 1217–18, in the company of ecclesiastical and secular dignitaries.

Spreading the gospel was usually linked with territorial acquisitions. In the mid-thirteenth century, the time of the Mongol invasion, a new topos appears in the sources: the notion of the Hungarian nation as a bulwark of Christendom. Ten years after their first irruption into the country in 1241, the Mongols offered to ally themselves with Béla IV (r. 1235–70), holding out a share in the expected plunder as an inducement for his acceptance. Béla immediately rejected the offer and, in a letter to Pope Innocent IV in 1250, set out more resolutely and clearly than ever before the typical constituents of the medieval Hungarian self-image: a belief in the unity of Christian Europe and the idea that defending the Kingdom of Hungary was nothing less than shielding Christendom and thus checking the Mongol advance was not merely a task for Hungary but for Europe.

> Since the Realm of Hungary has been largely turned into a desert by the Tatar plague, and since it is surrounded by diverse infidel tribes as the sheepfold is by hurdles, with whom our hosts are even now engaged in battle, we have seen fit to turn to the Vicar of Christ and his brethren as the only and chief help in the ultimate peril of the Christian faith, so that what we fear shall not befall us, and even less so you or other Christians. [...] "If the Tatar would occupy the country—from which the Lord may preserve us!"—the road to other Catholic kingdoms would be wide open to the enemy. Firstly, because no sea would stand in their way going on from us to other Christians; and secondly, because this would be a better place than elsewhere for them to settle their large families.[4]

From the late fourteenth century onwards, when the Turks appeared on Hungary's southern borders and combat with them became permanent, the mission of Hungary's kings and captains as defenders of the faith was generally acknowledged, indeed, it became almost a cliché. Over time, the claim was extended to the country and its inhabitants as well: Hungary and the Hungarians were extolled as the shield or bastion of Christendom. Thus, "the borders of Hungary and Poland abut those of barbarian peoples, and it is to the glory of God's name and in defence of the Christian faith that these two countries are the wall and shield of the faith," says the *diploma inaugurale* of Wladislas I of Hungary (r. 1440–44, Wladislas III of Poland). As John Thuróczy commented in *A magyarok krónikája* (Chronicle of the Magyars), completed in 1488, Hungarians "even as they fight for their homeland defend Christendom as a whole". Following the victory over the Turks at Belgrade in 1456, the pride and sense of vocation of the Hungarian Estates understandably became even stronger. "We are fighting for

4 ■ *Szöveggyűjtemény a régi magyar irodalom történetéhez. Középkor* (Compendium of Texts on the History of Old Hungarian Literature: the Middle Ages), ed. Edit Madas. Budapest, Tankönyvkiadó, 1992, pp. 162–164.

Christ's laws and our Christian Church," and "we shall defend Christ with our swords," was how John Hunyadi encouraged the Hungarian host before the battle of Varna and the battle of the Field of Blackbirds. Hunyadi was perhaps the first Hungarian to clearly see the conflict with the Ottoman Empire in its true life-and-death dimension. In one of his letters he writes: "Either we shall free Europe from the cruel Turkish yoke or we shall be slain for Christ and win a martyr's crown." His son Matthias tried to drum up support from the prince electors of the Holy Roman Empire with more or less the same argument: "From childhood on," he recalled, "we have striven for the good of Christendom; with the sweat and blood of our exertions we have done everything within our power to protect the Christian states from all misfortunes." Moreover, "Our Hungary, although even under our predecessors left without solace or help, was always a strong protector and bastion of Christendom." "This country," a decree of the 1505 diet of Rákos proclaimed, "is the shield and bastion of Christendom which, through great loss of its own blood, is constantly guarding Christendom."

The idea of Christian and European cohesion no doubt trickled down to only a small fraction of Hungarian society in those first centuries following the foundation of the state. Alongside it, in the thirteenth century appeared a second enduring topos of the Hungarian self-image: the myth that the Magyars were descended from the Huns and had inherited their valour from the Scythians. The *Gesta Hungarorum*, set down in the early thirteenth century by the chronicler known as Anonymus, first expresses the idea that Álmos and his successors of the House of Árpád were the descendants of Attila. The same work is the source for the assertion that the Székely people *(Siculi)* of Transylvania were a detached group of Huns, "the people of King Attila".[5] In another chronicle (also entitled *Gesta Hungarorum*) written by Simon de Kéza between 1282 and 1285 the supposition first appears that the Hungarians as a whole were descended from the Huns, and that the power exercised by their leaders—their chiefs and princes—was conferred by their warriors, in a "general assembly", who accordingly also had the power to withdraw it. This may be looked on as the first recorded formulation of the Hungarian nobility's consciousness of themselves as constituting the nation because of a shared ancestry. It is also in this chronicle that Attila is transmuted from barbarian conqueror into dazzling warlord who "at the time he lived was more glorious than all other kings on Earth."[6]

Initially, de Kéza's notion may well have gained currency only among the lesser nobility; in evidence we may cite Béla IV's aforementioned letter of 1250, in which Attila is not presented in any way as an illustrious ancestor, but simply as a heathen

5 ■ Anonymus: *A magyarok cselekedetei* (Deeds of the Magyars). Transl. from the Latin by László Veszprémy. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 1999, p. 13. and p. 43.

6 ■ Simon Kézai: *A magyarok cselekedetei* (Deeds of the Magyars). Transl. János Bollók. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 1999, pp. 93–96. Cf. Jenő Szűcs: "Társadalomelmélet, politikai teória és történelemszemlélet Kézai *Gesta Hungarorum*ában" (Socio-political Theory and Historical Viewpoint in Simon de Kéza's *Deeds of the Magyars*), in: Jenő Szűcs: *Nemzet és történelem. Tanulmányok* (Nation and History: Essays). Budapest, Gondolat, 1974, pp. 413–556.

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foe. As further evidence we may note that the first important Hun cult emerged during the reign of Matthias Hunyadi (r. 1458–90), who was himself of lesser-noble descent. One of the emissaries whom Matthias sent to the Pope in 1475 described the Hungarians as being "highly bellicose Huns". In the 1488 chronicle already quoted, János Thuróczy compared Matthias to Attila and, on the basis of his military victories, prophesied a return of "the bygone splendour of the Huns".[7]

The theory that the Hungarians were related to the Huns was closely tied to the myth of Scythian prowess. The Magyars, it was asserted, ranked with the Huns among the world's finest warriors, indeed had been created specifically for warfare, conquest and domination. Once again, it was de Kéza's chronicle which first articulated this Magyar awareness of Scythian roots, more often than not coupled with a sense of national pride and, at times, xenophobia. In Kézai's eyes, the military skill and bravery of the Magyar raiders who ravaged Europe in the ninth and tenth centuries had no rivals; in his account, even the battle of Augsburg (Lechfeld), at which King Otto I of Germany defeated the Magyars in 955, ended in a Hungarian victory.[8] This belief gained strength and currency during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Antonio Bonfini, Matthias' court historian looked on his patron "as a Scythian Mars" and portrayed Hungarians as belonging to the "Scythian nation", a valiant and intrepid military people "which is accustomed to the idea that they should rule over, without let or hindrance, their own and other people's lands; which is impatient of the yoke, and is indomitable in war."[9]

The citing of Scythian valour as a trait and the defence of Christendom as a role or calling were not seen as contradictory. If anything, they complemented one another well. Bonfini added: "Because God settled this defiant remnant of the Scythians on the frontiers of the Christian community in order that they should absorb the right religion and then shield the true faith steadfastly in the face of all unbelief."[10]

István Werbőczy, the leading figure among the lesser nobles in the Jagiellonian era, expressed himself in similar terms in the foreword to his law book, the *Tripartitum* of 1514, one of the most vivid expressions of the self-image and historical awareness of the nobility.[11]

The first major cracks in the consciousness of Christian cohesiveness began to appear during the fifteenth century. In the city states of Italy and the royal courts of Europe, service in the interest of the state was increasingly seen as having

7 ■ János Thuróczy: *A magyarok krónikája* (Chronicle of the Magyars). Transl. from the Latin by János Horváth. Budapest, Európa Könyvkiadó, 1980, p. 423.

8 ■ De Kéza: op. cit., pp, 103–107.

9 ■ Antonio Bonfini: *A magyar történelem tizedei* (Decades of Hungarian History). Transl. from the Latin by Péter Kulcsár. Budapest, Balassi Kiadó, 1995, p. 197.

10 ■ Ibid., p. 241.

11 ■ István Werbőczy: "Nemes Magyarország szokásjogának hármaskönyve" (Tripartite Book on the Common Law of Noble Hungary), in: *Magyar Remekírók. Janus Pannonius. Magyarországi humanisták* (Classic Hungarian Writers. Janus Pannonius. Hungarian Humanists), ed. Tibor Klaniczay. Budapest, Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1982, pp. 1010–1011.

priority over medieval universalism. In Hungary, King Matthias (1458–90) was the first to grasp that the age of crusades was over and that *utilitas regni,* the realm's advantage, had primacy and not the defence of Christendom or the propagation of Christianity. "Hungary continued to paint itself as the defender of universal Christianity," Domokos Kosáry has written of this transitional period, "but the universal notion of Christianity was by now coloured by national pride."[12]

Between two heathens

Defeat at the battle of Mohács (1526) and the fall of Buda into Ottoman Turkish hands (1541) sealed the fate of Hungary's medieval kingdom. An explanation was needed for the collapse and the 150 years of dismemberment that ensued. Earlier self-assurance gave place to despair and hopelessness in how sixteenth- and seventeenth-century commentators felt: they tended to blame themselves for the disasters. A new topos appeared in their writings: a prophetic and lethargic vision of the end of the nation. Castigation of national failings and social criticism to the point of self-mortification became distinguishing features of Hungarian literature. The most frequently recurring image in the sermons and polemic tracts of the Protestant pastors of the age was of the Turks as "the scourge of the living God and the wrath He unleashed upon us for our sins." "We did not keep our covenant with God, which is why God gave us into the power of the heathen" was the moral drawn by Gáspár Károlyi, author and moving spirit behind the first complete Hungarian-language translation of the Bible, in his *Két könyv* (Two Books) of 1563.[13]

Self-examination and the search for those responsible went hand in hand with the dispute between the Reformers and the Church, which was getting under way in Hungary during those years that immediately preceded the battle of Mohács. István Magyari, a Lutheran preacher, blamed the adherents of "the patchwork Papist creed refurbished from mankind's many inventions"—in other words, the Catholics were the culprits with their worship of "graven images". Among the Catholic responses, for Péter Pázmány, "heresy" was "the woodworm that devours all the strength of fighting men," for God "is wont to belabour men for any innovation and straying of faith."[14]

Along with the mutual recriminations between Protestants and Catholics, there also emerged, partially from the lower orders, criticism of the upper classes: the

12 ■ Domokos Kosáry: *Magyarország története* (A History of Hungary). Budapest, Országos Közoktatási Tanács, 1943, pp. 69–70.

13 ■ Caspar Caroli: *Két könyv minden országoknak és királyoknak jó és gonosz szerencséjeknek okairul* (Two Books for all Lands and Rulers on the Causes of Good and Evil Fortune), ed. Piroska Jablonowsky. Budapest, Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1931, p. 53.

14 ■ István Magyari: *Az országokban való sok romlásoknak okairól* (On the Causes of the Many Decays in Lands), ed. Tamás Katona. Budapest, Magyar Helikon, 1979, and Péter Pázmány: "Felelet az Magyari István sárvári prédikátornak az ország romlása okairúl írt könyvére" (Rejoinder to the Book on the Causes of the Land's Decay Written by István Magyari, Preacher of Sárvár), in *Pázmány Péter Művei* (Works of Péter Pázmány), ed. Márton Tarnóc. Budapest, Szépirodalmi Kiadó, 1983, pp. 7–25. Cf. István Bitskey: *Pázmány Péter.* Budapest, Gondolat, 1986, pp. 53–60.

nobility, the clergy and their ancillaries. In a work written in 1545–47, György Szerémi, himself from a family of serfs, imputed the catastrophe to dissension, fractiousness and repeated treason among the "lords". He showed sympathy for György Dózsa and other leaders of the great peasant revolt of 1514 and defined the three main characteristics of the nobles as "bitterness, blasphemy and bloodshed".[15] In the succeeding generation, Miklós Istvánffy, who rose to the post of *nádor* (palatine or vice-regent) in royal Hungary, wrote of the country's leaders before Mohács: "But instead they forgot about their state and their homeland, because they were prone to greed, habitual tardiness and indolence, and so remiss were they in responding to their summoning that very few of them assembled."[16]

The nobility also came in for strong criticism in Count Miklós Zrínyi's *Török áfium* (Remedy Against Turkish Opium) of 1660–61. The chief attributes of Hungary's leaders, according to this great captain and poet, were "ostentatious displays of their importance" and "giving themselves airs", "racing horseflesh, or in a word: swearing on oath, lying and being up to no good." The first canto of his epic poem of 1651, *A szigeti veszedelem* (The Peril of Sziget) speaks of nothing less than the "divine retribution" visited on the Magyar nation before Mohács on account of *"manifold debauched morals and harsh cursing, / Covetousness, loathing and giving false witness, / Loathsome lasciviousness and calumny, / Larceny, manslaughter and ceaseless revelry."*[17] For him, though, these were not as basic to the ruinous outcome as Ottoman military might and the indifference of the Great Powers of Europe towards it in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His rational and realistic survey, passing from country to country, and taking the precedence of *raison d'état* for granted, concludes that "we Magyars are alone," and "we can only rely on ourselves." After all, "if it's not your own calf, you don't lick it" and "a man on a ship fears a drowning man lest he himself be dragged under."[18] Sin and divine wrath, dissension, isolation and weakness: those were the mutually reinforcing motifs in the reasons adduced for the catastrophe.

But what was to be done? What political strategy could restore the unity and independence of the state that were postulated as self-explanatory goals for any politically right-thinking Hungarian? It was becoming less and less possible to rely on a supranational Christian solidarity. The polities of each state were guided by self-interest, and if that called for entering into an alliance with the Turks, then as the proto-nationalist *hommes d'état* increasingly abandoned Christian universalism—the French in 1534, for example—they were not going to flinch from doing so on the grounds of Christian unity. A section of the Hungarian Estates counted

15 ■ György Szerémi: *Magyarország romlásáról (Epistola de perditione regni Hungarorum)*, ed. György Székely. Transl. László Juhász. Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1979, p. 18.

16 ■ Miklós Istvánffy: *A magyarok története* (History of the Magyars). Budapest, Magyar Helikon, 1962, p. 80.

17 ■ *Zrínyi Miklós összes művei* (Complete Works of Miklós Zrínyi). Budapest, Kortárs Könyvkiadó, 2003, pp. 24—36.

18 ■ Miklós Zrínyi: *"Török áfium"* (Remedy Against Turkish Opium), in *Magyar gondolkodók, 17. Század* (Hungarian Thinkers: Seventeenth Century), ed. Márton Tarnóc. Budapest, Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1979, pp. 240–271.

on support from the Habsburgs because they were also joined to Hungary through a sense of cultural affinity and a similar geopolitical situation. As the Palatine, István Báthori (1519–23), pointed out at the diet in Pozsony (Bratislava, Slovakia) in December 1526: driving the Turks off was inconceivable without a strong ruler and that ruler could only be Ferdinand of Habsburg. Arguing for the election of Ferdinand II as king of Hungary (r. 1618–37) at the County Assembly in Pozsony close to a century later, in 1617, Péter Pázmány, Archbishop of Esztergom, was of a similar opinion:

> The king of Hungary needs to be such that he is able, on his own, to shelter our country and, through kinship with the Christian princes, is strong enough to be able to hope for assistance should the Turks attack us. On the grounds that someone possesses Bohemia, together with Moravia and Silesia, and alongside that Austria, with Styria and Carinthia, it seems bounden upon us to bow our head to him. Because [...] it is impossible that Hungary, with the strength that she has, should be able to survive between those two powerful princes, but it must either fall into the Pagan's gullet or else must rest satisfied under the wing of the neighbouring Christian prince.[19]

Anti-Turkish sentiment was widespread in royal Hungary and usually linked to the defence of Christendom. What was new was that the idea of fighting for Christendom and "for one's good repute and name" (in other words for individual glory) was being superseded more and more by the notion of defence of country and nation. Stephen Bocskai, who was to wage war first against the Turks, then, in 1604–06, against the Habsburgs, was not presented by a contemporary lay as a defender of Christendom but was endowed with such epithets as "the Magyars' shield", "wise father of the Magyars", and "commiserator of the nation".[20] By the end of the seventeenth century, nationalist sentiment had essentially overtaken the Christian faith as a mobilising call for warriors to man the border fortresses against the Ottomans. *"When you combat with pagans / You hit out right and left for our nation,"* runs one such seventeenth-century soldier's song ("The Song of Zsigmond Balogh"). Along with fealty to the monarch and religion, even Miklós Esterházy, the Palatine, appealed primarily to national cohesion when, in his summons to arms of 1630, he urged his troops "from hither and thither" with the words: "All of us are Magyars, and we have but a single crowned king and a single lord."[21]

Up to 1526, Hungarian politicians had rejected any form of co-operation with the Turks; this was to change after Mohács. One section of the Estates—particularly the lesser nobles, who had been mistrustful of the Germans earlier as well—were in favour of a Turcophile policy. At first, King John Zápolya followed

19 ■ István Bitskey: op. cit., p. 134.

20 ■ László Nagy: *"Megint fölszánt magyar világ van..."* ("Magyar Land is Ploughed Up Once More..."). Budapest, Zrínyi Katonai Kiadó, 1985, p. 248.

21 ■ Ágnes R. Várkonyi: "A nemzet, haza fogalma a török harcok és a Habsburg-ellenes küzdelmek idején 1526–1711" (The Concepts of Nation and Homeland during the Turkish Wars and the Anti-Habsburg Struggle, 1526–1711), in: *A magyar nacionalizmus kialakulása és története* (The Emergence of Hungarian Nationalism and Its History), ed. Erzsébet Andics. Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 1964, pp. 58–61.

this path by becoming the sultan's vassal in 1528–29. John and his entourage and, later, many of the leading men of Transylvania and eastern and southern Hungary, took the view that the country's and their own interest would best be served through a temporary break with Christian Europe. In order to rescue the "expiring homeland", Bishop István Brodarics of Szerém, in 1533, argued that they could, indeed should, ally not just with the Turks but "with any infidel people". Among the justifications for renouncing the defence of Christendom and co-operating with the Turks, mistrust of the German nations and the Habsburgs had a prominent place. These circles doubted that the Germans had either the will or the capacity to save Hungary. Many supposed that they were striving to gain dominion over Hungary. Ferenc Frangepán, Archbishop of Kalocsa, made clear in a letter to King Ferdinand I in 1537: "The larger part of the Hungarian nation would rather expose themselves to the most extreme danger, to Turkish power, than bow their heads in the German yoke against their will."[22] In his testament of 1629, Prince Gabriel Bethlen of Transylvania went into detail about the orientation towards the Turks that he had adopted of necessity:

> It is my wish and my advice to my country that, as long as nothing else is possible than that they uphold accord with the Turkish nation, even with the harms that may be suffered, that they should not break off relations with them but seek their favour by every means.[23]

The Austrian or Turkish orientation laid the foundations for the two main lines in Hungarian political thinking and strategies: the "Labanc" and "Kuruc" parties. There was, however, also an anticipation of what the twentieth century was to call "The Third Way", a position taken "between two heathens for one country". Péter Bornemisza, the preacher and poet of the second half of the sixteenth century, caught this well: *"I'm being hounded by those stuck-up German dashers, / Hemmed in on all sides by pagan Turkish pashas. / When, I wonder, shall I have my fine home in Buda?"* Exactly the same appraisal is expressed a good hundred years later in a Kuruc verse, "Thököly's War Council":

> *Between Turk and German we are almost quelled,*
> *One a household crucifix, the other pure hell;*
> *Our breast is as sick of this as of the fanged snake,*
> *The other a bear that bloodsucking won't forsake—*

complains a Kuruc leader, Pál Szepesi.[24]

Stephen Báthori, Prince of Transylvania (r. 1533–86) and King of Poland (r. 1571–86) may be regarded as the first significant figure to represent this intermediate "Third Way"; as he sought, through collaboration between

22■ Géza Pálffy: *A tizenhatodik század története* (History of the Sixteenth Century). Budapest, Pannonica, 2000, pp. 86–87.
23■ Gabriel Bethlen's last will and testament, in: *Magyar gondolkodók, 17. század,* op. cit., pp. 111–112.
24■ *A kuruc küzdelmek költészete* (Poetry of the Kuruc Struggles), ed. Imre Varga. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1977, p. 212.

Hungarians and Poles, to restore the integrity and independence of Hungary. Stephen Bocskai (Prince of Transylvania 1605-6), disenchanted with the Holy Roman Emperor, likewise sought to balance between the two large empires.[25]

Neither he nor his successors accepted the division of Hungary as permanent. The main objective of the foreign policy conducted by Gabriel Bethlen (Prince of Transylvania 1613–29), the Hungarian leader who could be said to have been the most subservient to the Turks (lampooned as "the Mohammedan" by his opponents), was just as much reunification of the separate parts of the former kingdom of Hungary into an independent state as it had been for Báthori or Bocskai.

The higher nobility, too, was trapped between these options. They accepted dependence on the two Empires but were deeply apprehensive about this dependence: "the Turk, even if he should vanquish the German, no good will come of it for the Magyars; but if victory shall fall to the Germans, not one Magyar will they allow to live," István Illésházy, appointed Palatine in 1608, wrote to Bocskai. Archbishop Pázmány for his part described the country's situation through a metaphor: "fingers caught between door and doorjamb".[26]

In the second third of the seventeenth century, it is the writings of Miklós Zrínyi that outline a programme for an independent monarchy for the Hungarian nation while criticising both Turcophilia and Germanophilia. In his younger days Zrínyi had unequivocally supported the Habsburgs; in his thinking the service of the king, the Roman Catholic Church and the nation formed a harmonic unity. In the years following the Treaty of Linz between Austria and Transylvania in 1645, he became equally disillusioned by the Catholic prelates, with their continual accusations of the Protestants, and by the Habsburg rulers, with their pursuit of imperial interests. During the 1650s he was even prepared to turn against the Habsburgs to fight for the unification of royal Hungary with Transylvania under the rule of Prince George (György) II Rákóczi (r. 1648–60). On witnessing the decline of the Principality in the early 1660s, however, he turned afresh to the Habsburgs, but was again dismayed by the manner in which Vienna subordinated the struggle against the Turks to dynastic considerations.[27]

After an Austrian military success, the 1664 Treaty of Vasvár, concluded by Leopold I with the Porte without any consultation with the Estates, failed to exploit the weakened Ottoman position. Disillusioned, many other leading Hungarian figures who had formerly sided with the court turned against the Habsburgs. The Vienna court's "will is law, deception its diploma," and "any convenience was opportune for breach of its faith," Lord Chief Justice Ferenc Nádasdy wrote in an Oration that he published under the pseudonym of Péter

25 ■ The dispensations of Stephen Bocskay's will are in: *Magyar gondolkodók 17. század,* op. cit., p. 14.
26 ■ Kálmán Benda: *A magyar nemzeti hivatástudat története (A XV–XVII. században)* (History of the Hungarian Sense of a National Vocation in the 15th–17th centuries). Budapest, 1937, pp. 96–100.
27 ■ Katalin Péter: "Zrínyi Miklós terve II. Rákóczi György magyar királyságáról" (Miklós Zrínyi's Scheme to Install George II Rákóczi as King of Hungary), *Századok,* 1972, no. 3, pp. 653–666. Also János J. Varga: *A fogyó félhold árnyékában* (In the Shadow of the Waning Crescent Moon). Budapest, Gondolat, 1986, pp. 16–24.

Keserű ("Peter Bitter") in 1668 (he was to pay with his life in 1671 for his complicity in the anti-Habsburg Wesselényi conspiracy). "Seek assistance where you find it, be however it may," closed Nádasdy's pamphlet, in what might also have been a plea for an alliance with the Turks.[28] A similar message was conveyed in a compilation entitled *Siralmas jajt érdemlő játék* (A Game Meriting a Sombre Cry of Woe), published in 1671 as a lament for those executed in the aftermath of the Wesselényi plot; the sentiment was expressed even more forcefully in the already cited ditty "Thököly's War Council" of 1681.[29] The Kuruc party took up the fight against Vienna and, under Prince Imre Thököly from 1678, alliance with the Turks was envisaged. There was sporadic fighting until a major Habsburg campaign against the Turks got under way in the autumn of 1683. (This was to ultimately lead to the liberation of the country.) The label of Hungary as "the enemy of Christendom" was attached to the country at the time of the Thököly uprising but it struck no deeper roots in European opinion.[30]

In the "Austrian beehive"

In January 1699, the Peace of Karlowitz brought an end to a century and a half of Turkish rule over Hungarian territory; except for some small areas in the south, regained only in 1718, the country was liberated. But as Zrínyi and many of his contemporaries had feared, neither independence nor unity was regained. The Habsburgs, as they oversaw this sequence of liberations, were careful to reintegrate the empire's dismembered provinces into a single large economic entity and sought to bring together peoples with very different histories, religions and cultures through the basis of a common German language and culture. The Kingdom of Hungary before the Ottoman conquest was a conglomerate of ethnic and national entities. In the two centuries to follow, their relationship to one another and their place within the empire became central in the debates over how Hungarians perceived their own role and position. The question that exercised Hungarians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was to decide on a national policy: should they strive to bolster Hungarian separatism and to reunite the individual parts of the old kingdom, in other words strike out on the path to a sovereign nation-state, or should they abandon historical and provincial particularisms and accept or even, in the long term, assimilate into a Habsburg

28 ■ In: *Magyar történeti szöveggyűjtemény 1526–1790* (Collection of Hungarian Historical Texts 1526–1790), vol. 2, ed. István Sinkovics. Budapest, Tankönyvkiadó, 1968, pp. 612–621.

29 ■ Sándor Bene: "Hóhérok teátruma (A Wesselényi-mozgalom perei és a hazai recepció kezdetei)" ("Executioners' Theatre" [The Trials of the Wesselényi Movement and the Beginnings of its Reception in Hungary]), in: *Siralmas jajt érdemlő játék. Magyar nyelvű tudósítás a Wesselényi-mozgalomról* (A Game Meriting a Sombre Cry of Woe: Hungarian-Language Coverage of the Wesselényi Conspiracy), ed. Rita Bajáki. Piliscsaba, Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem, Bölcsészettudományi Kar, 1997, pp. 67–68.

30 ■ Béla Köpeczi: *"Magyarország a kereszténység ellensége." A Thököly-felkelés az európai közvéleményben* ("Hungary is the Enemy of Christendom": the Thököly Uprising in European Public Opinion). Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1976, pp. 281–344.

empire? For the overwhelming majority, the ideal would have been the restoration of the pre-1526 independent Kingdom of Hungary, but that proved to be unattainable. There was a fundamental European interest in maintaining the Habsburg Empire; this interest was what lay behind the lack of support for the rebellion led by Prince Francis II Rákóczi of Transylvania (1703–11) and its eventual suppression, as well as behind several key provisions of the Holy Alliance entered into by Russia, Austria and Prussia in September 1815. Because of this and because of imperial Russian expansionist ambitions fuelled by pan-Slavism, by the first half of the nineteenth century there was a growing view that Hungary only had a future as part of the Austrian Empire. "The prosaic truth," Count István Széchenyi cautioned his countrymen in 1842, "is that you will have to discern your true size and contentment in the Austrian beehive." Ferenc Deák and most of his fellow reformers, during the thirty or so years that immediately preceded the 1848-49 War of Independence, also believed that Hungary's incorporation into the Habsburg Empire was anything but a tragedy, in fact it was an imperative necessity. They hoped the Monarchy would quickly perceive that there was a mutual interest in evolving into a confederation of two units: one comprising Hungary and Transylvania, along with their associated Croatian lands and the Military Frontier region to the south, the other comprising the hereditary provinces and other territories conquered by the empire.[31] Baron Miklós Wesselényi's proposed reform differed only in that it paid greater heed to the emerging national feeling of Hungary's non-Magyar ethnic groups and, instead of a putative Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy, proposed a five-member confederation of Austrians, Hungarians, Italians, Bohemians and Poles.[32]

One bone of contention between Austria and Hungary was the question of the official language. Latin, though still used in official life in Hungary, was increasingly unsuited to the needs of the new age. Supplanting it by a modern language that was spoken to some extent by virtually the whole population was an inescapable necessity. What, though, should that language be? Should it be the German advocated by Vienna and already the lingua franca of the western part of the empire, or the Hungarian that was comprehensible to most of Hungary's "lower orders"? There were proponents of German, but the majority of Hungary's higher classes accepted the direction György Bessenyei and other reformers had mapped out for a modernised Hungarian language at the end of the previous century. To put it another way: "No nation has ever become learned in a foreign tongue."[33] The supercession of Latin and German by Hungarian commenced with the Education Act of 1791–92 and concluded with Law 2 of 1844, which made

31 ■ János Varga: *Helyét kereső Magyarország* (Hungary Seeking Its Place). Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982, pp. 120–141.

32 ■ Baron Miklós Wesselényi: *Szózat a magyar és szláv nemzetiség ügyében* (Manifesto on the Matter of Magyar and Slav Nationalism). Budapest, Európa, 1992, pp. 186–189.

33 ■ *Bessenyei György válogatott művei* (Selected Works of György Bessenyei), ed. Ferenc Bíró. Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1987, p. 588.

Hungarian the language not only of public education, but also of legislation, public services and the administration of justice.

A second question that dominated political thinking over these two centuries ensued from the ethnic and linguistic make-up of the territories within the Hungarian state, a make-up which had undergone radical change during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. An estimated 75–80 per cent of a population of 3.3–3.5 million at the end of the fifteenth century spoke Hungarian as their mother tongue. The population had grown to some 10 million by the end of the eighteenth century, but because of losses due to war and assisted immigration, the proportion of native Hungarian speakers had dropped to 39–40 per cent. This proportion looked more favourable if Croatia and the Military Frontier were disregarded, but even then it was only 48 per cent.[34] During the Middle Ages and the early modern age, when Latin or German was used in public administration, and the serfs who made up around 90 per cent of the population were outside the political community, this ethnolinguistic multiplicity had not posed much of a problem. Making Hungarian the primary language, however, inevitably led to serious conflicts. The Hungarians of the Enlightenment and the Reform Age, from György Bessenyei through István Széchenyi to Lajos Kossuth, envisaged that the population as a whole would be willing to embrace a Hungarian identity in language and opinion within a transformed framework of civic life in return for a legislative programme that would be implemented without regard to ethnolinguistic differences. At most, any disagreement that there may have been lay in Wesselényi and Deák endorsing a longer-term and amicable assimilation, founded on the attraction of moral and cultural values. Most of their peers saw nothing wrong with applying more coercive methods.

What followed in the wake of the 15th of March 1848 rapidly dispelled the hopes held by elites of the late eighteenth century and of the Reform Age. Aspirations to set up a Hungarian nation-state not only had the predictable effect of provoking resistance from Vienna but also prompted the various non-Magyar inhabitants of Hungary to articulate their own nationalist goals. The leaders of the Serb, Romanian and, in part, Slovak communities pressed for territorial autonomy congruent with the linguistic boundaries. The Croats went even further and wished to achieve a national status similar to that of the Magyars.

Caught in a vice between Vienna's imperial demands and the aspirations of the non-Magyar nationalities, the Magyar revolutionaries, by now in government with Kossuth at their head, formally declared Hungarian independence and deposed the House of Habsburg on the 14th of April 1849. At the same time, they also had second thoughts about their hitherto ungenerous policy towards other ethnic groups. On 28 July, the Hungarian parliament passed a resolution which guaranteed all non-

34 ■ Kálmán Benda: "Népesség és társadalom a 18–19. század fordulóján" (Population and Society at the Turn of the Eighteenth Into the Nineteenth Century), in: *Magyarország története tíz kötetben* (History of Hungary in 10 Volumes), vol 5/1, *Magyarország története 1790–1848.* (History of Hungary 1790–1848), ed. Gyula Mérei. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980, pp. 425–441.

Magyar communities the right to a free choice of language in church and communal life, in legislative assemblies and in schools.[35] Few Magyars were willing to go any further. Among those few was Count László Teleki, the revolutionary Hungarian government's envoy to France, who warned Kossuth from Paris:

> Not only has Austria died, but also the Hungary of St Stephen [...] *Liberté, égalité, fraternité* is not enough. The peoples also wish to live a national life. We ought to so order it that lack of national unity is compensated through reconciliation of and respect for individual and ethnic rights.[36]

Both the Hungarian revolutionary leaders who fled abroad and those who remained in the country after the surrender to the Austrian and Russian armies at Világos, on 13 August 1849, thought hard on individual (civil) and collective (nationality) rights and their interrelationship, in other words on the internal arrangements of a Hungarian republic and the structure of its external relations. Of those who went into exile, it is Kossuth whose ideas merit the closest attention. The basic idea behind the draft constitution that he produced in 1851 was for a decentralised state apparatus and democratic self-government. This, like the resolution that was tabled in 1849, would have guaranteed that in any village, town and county where an ethnic group formed the majority, they would be free to use their mother tongue and promote their own culture. In addition to initiating structural changes in interior affairs, Kossuth and his associates now also wished to place foreign relations on a new footing. They insisted that once Hungary had won sovereignty, a confederation with the other nations in the region should follow, above all with the Balkan nations which had only won freedom from the Porte in the course of the nineteenth century. Kossuth initially elaborated a plan for a confederation to be set up by Poland, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, and the Romanian Danubian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia; in 1862 he went on to set down a plan for what he called a Danubian Alliance or Confederation, which was to consist of Hungary, Transylvania, Romania, Croatia and Serbia.[37]

Pre-eminent among the Hungarian politicians who had stayed in Hungary in 1849 or returned within a few years was Ferenc Deák. He was to play a key role in working out the principles for a new framework in Austro–Hungarian relations and it was Deák who eventually negotiated the 1867 Settlement or Compromise (Ausgleich) between the two states. The "sage of Hungary" in essence reformulated the viewpoint that he had articulated in the Reform Age: he asserted that "the Hungarian constitution and Hungary's lawful separation are not in contradiction to Austria's existence and power; indeed, the two go very well together." At the

35 ■ György Spira: *A nemzetiségi kérdés a negyvennyolcas Magyarországon* (The Nationality Question in Hungary in 1848). Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 1980, pp. 227–228.

36 ■ *Teleki László válogatott munkái* (Selected Works of László Teleki), vol. 2, ed. Gábor G. Kemény. Budapest, Szépirodalmi Kiadó, 1961, pp. 27–28.

37 ■ György Spira: *Kossuth és 1851–59-es alkotmányterve* (Kossuth and His Constitutional Plan of 1851–59). Debrecen: Csokonai, 1989, pp. 49–83 and *Kossuth Lajos iratai* (Writings of Lajos Kossuth), vol. 6, ed. Ferenc Kossuth. Budapest, Athenaeum, 1898, pp. 1–25.

same time, he marked a clear difference with Kossuth's view, claiming that reconciliation is an international necessity, since powers outside Hungary have made it clear once again that "it is a matter of indifference to us whether Hungary exists as an entity or not, but it does lie in our interest that the state we call Austria should exist in Central Europe, and that it should be powerful."[38]

As to the handling of conflict with different ethnic groups within Hungary, the country's political elite seemed to have forgotten one of the lessons of 1848–49, and returned to a concept of the nation-state that had also been propounded in the Reform Age, which rested on the right for Hungarian to be used exclusively as the official language of the state. Even Deák was not immune to this, declaring in 1860 in response to wishes expressed by the Romanians of Transylvania:

> Hungary is not founded on a confederation of nationalities possessing their own separate, autonomous territory and separate political rights; this concept is not recognized by Hungarian constitutional law. There are nationalities of various kinds here, and they may, indeed do, have legitimate nationality claims; they do not, however, have a distinct political entity, or a territory enclosed by borders, nor do they have any rights that are owed to them, directly and uniquely, as a politically distinct nation. All the land here is Hungarian land, every inhabitant a citizen of Hungary, and no one is hindered on account of his nationality from enjoying his civil rights.[39]

The generations that came after the Compromise also held to this concept of nationality and of the state, as enshrined in legislation in 1868, and any hopes of federalization or cantonization entertained by the nationalities were relegated to the category of "political gaucheries".

Restoration of the old integrity of the Hungarian state, broadening its independence within the empire and the ideal of linguistic and cultural homogenisation, as of a single nation-state, came to be accompanied by a nostalgic wish to regain the greatness and influence of the medieval kingdom of Hungary in eighteenth- and, especially, nineteenth-century political thinking. Those wishes, however, did not cohere into a definite and fully thought-through political programme during the Reform Age. They nevertheless cropped up as imprecisely adumbrated, yet desirable and attainable visions of the future outlined by more than one politician and public figure. Among them were the historian István Horvát (1784–1846), the poet and historian Benedek Virág (1754–1830) and a number of the lesser nobility, who at the time of the Napoleonic wars dreamed of the regeneration, with French assistance, of an independent Hungarian kingdom incorporating Serbia, Bosnia, Dalmatia and Bulgaria.[40]

38 ■ Ferenc Deák: *Válogatott politikai írások és beszédek II. 1850–1873* (Selected Political Writings and Speeches, vol. 2, 1850–1873), ed. Ágnes Deák. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2001, pp. 428–29 & 461.
39 ■ Ibid., p. 337.
40 ■ *Mindennapi. Horvát István pest-budai naplója 1805–1809* (Day-to-Day: István Horvát's Diary of Pest-Buda Life, 1805–1809), ed. Alfréd Temesi and Mrs. József Szauder. Budapest, Tankönyvkiadó, 1967, p. 435. Cf. Domokos Kosáry: *A magyar és európai politika történetéből* (From the History of Hungarian and European Politics). Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2001, pp. 172–186 and 234.

This pipe-dream of what might be called the Hungarian imperial idea materialised as an actual political programme amid the new circumstances created by the 1848–49 revolutions. A plan for German unification that would encompass all German and Austrian territories raised the possibility of a Danubian empire, centred on Hungary and under Habsburg rule. Besides Croatia and Slavonia, Transylvania and the Military Frontier, this Danubian empire would have included Galicia and Dalmatia as well; indeed it would also have attracted, in some shape or form, those provinces on the lower Danube that were breaking away from the Ottoman Empire. This audacious concept, which in its broad outline bore a marked resemblance to the plan that Kossuth was later to propose (albeit without the Habsburgs) for a Danubian confederation, was quickly sidelined under the more pressing concerns of the defensive war that Hungary was engaged in during 1849.[41] It was not totally forgotten, however. Baron József Eötvös (1815–71) was Minister of Education and Religious Affairs under both Batthyány in 1848 and Andrássy from 1867; he worked with Deák to hammer out the terms of the Compromise and the legislation for Hungary's national minorities and thus was one of the most profound political thinkers of the age. He too harboured the fantasy, both before and after 1849, that a Hungarian state reminiscent of King Louis I the Great's dominions would ultimately be created through unifying the Bohemians, the Poles, "other Slavs of the Roman Catholic persuasion and even, at a pinch, the Romanians".[42]

The arguments used to legitimize a Hungarian imperial concept ranged over the historical claims, the commercial angle, the geographical (or to be more specific, geomorphologic and hydrographic) necessity, and the cultural slant. The role as a defensive shield was skipped over since it had been rendered completely anachronistic and irrelevant. All the more emphasis was given to the Magyar function of acting as an intermediary between East and West: an Oriental people in the West and, through its being westernized, a nation suited for spreading the values of Western civilization eastward. Mátyás Rát, the editor of the *Magyar Hírmondó* (Magyar Messenger) at the end of the eighteenth century, still considered the primary task to be that of learning the languages of the Oriental peoples and disseminating their culture to the West. In that way, he wrote "we could be, so to say, middlemen between the Orientals and Occidentals, communicating the treasures of the former and the sciences of the latter."[43] Later on, though, and especially during the post-1867 boom in Hungary's economic and cultural life, an

41 ■ István Hajnal: *A Batthyány-kormány külpolitikája* (The Batthyány Government's Foreign Policy), 2nd edn, ed. Aladár Urbán. Budapest, Gondolat, 1987, pp. 118–126, and Domokos Kosáry: *Hungary and International Politics in 1848–1849.* Boulder, CO & Highland Lakes, NJ: Social Science Monographs and Atlantic Research & Publications (Atlantic Studies on Society in Change, No. 112), pp. 7–44.

42 ■ Baron József Eötvös: *Naplójegyzetek-gondolatok* (Diary Entries and Notes), ed. Imre Lukinich. Budapest, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1941, p. 217 and idem (ed. Imre Czegle): Naplójegyzetek, 1870. augusztus 6.–1870. november 30. (Diary entries for 6 August–30 November 1870), *Történelmi Szemle,* 1978, no. 2, p. 409.

43 ■ György Kókay: *Felvilágosodás, kereszténység, nemzeti kultúra* (Enlightenment, Christianity, National Culture). Budapest, Universitas Könyvkiadó, 2000, pp. 102–107.

eastward diffusion of Western culture was tied to the idea of Hungarian expansion. "The East cannot remain forever in frosty seclusion...," said Benjámin Kállay, the joint Austro-Hungarian Minister of Finance, in his inaugural address as a newly elected member to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. That called for levelling-up and intercession, which "we Hungarians should undertake, because we are best equipped for that... the leading role in tackling this task, should we want it, is ours."[44]

In the years leading up to the First World War, Turanism emerged as an even more ambitious version of Hungarian imperialism, for such it may be called. Playing up the Asiatic roots of the Magyar nation and the supposed close relationship of Hungarian to the languages of Central Asia, this politically tinged intellectual vogue considered not just the Balkans, but also the regions between the Caspian Sea and the Pamir mountains as potential targets for economic and cultural penetration by Hungary. The very first issue of *Turán,* a journal started up in 1913 by the Turanian Society (founded in 1910), declared:

> Go East, Hungarians! East in the national, scientific and economic spheres! [...] The Hungarian nation is standing before a great and splendid future, and it is certain that, after the Golden Ages of the Germanic and Slav peoples, the turn has come for the flowering of Turanism. For us Hungarians, the Western representatives of this awakening huge power, awaits the mammoth and arduous yet glorious task of providing intellectual and economic leadership for a Turanian population of six hundred million souls.

The author of these lines was none other than the young Count Pál Teleki, later to become well known as a geographer, member of parliament and a two-term prime minister (1920–21 and 1939–41) renowned for his sober-minded foreign policy.[45]

This strand of Hungarian imperial thinking, aimed at controlling the Balkans and even setting part of Asia as an objective, was clearly lacking any realistic foundation and profoundly illusory and megalomaniac in character. It was a situation appraisal and role perception that István Bibó (1911–79) aptly described as "springing from a distorted grasp of the real forces."[46]

A second Mohács and a new occupation

The First World War marked the burial of both the Habsburg Empire and of historical Hungary. Generations of Hungarians who had become accustomed to victory and "national grandeur" after victory now had to come to terms with a defeat the proportions of which had been inconceivable and which, both then and later on, many compared to the defeat at Mohács. It is hardly surprising, therefore,

44 ■ Béni Kállay: *Magyarország a Kelet és a Nyugat határán* (Hungary on the Border of East and West). Budapest, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1883, pp. 68–69.

45 ■ Pál Teleki: *Válogatott politikai írások és beszédek* (Selected Political Writings and Speeches), ed. Balázs Ablonczy. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2000, pp. 9–13.

46 ■ István Bibó: "A német hisztéria okai és története" (The Causes and History of German Hysteria), in: *Összegyűjtött munkái* (Collected Works), vol. 1, ed. István Kemény and Mátyás Sárközi. Bern, EPMSZ, 1981, p. 111.

that in the decades immediately following the war virtually every prominent figure in Hungary's intellectual and political life, much as the elite of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had done, searched their hearts and drew up a balance sheet. Out of this arose two main metanarratives that persist to the present day.

Hungary's conservative elite attributed the defeat in part to the indifference and ignorance of the victorious Allies and to the greed of the national minorities, backed up by shrewd propaganda; they also attributed it to the unpreparedness and pusillanimity of Hungary's revolutionaries; indeed—on the lines of the German *Dolchstoß-legende,* or Stab-in-the-Back Theory—to the "subversive work of destructive movements". "The architects of the peace," insisted Count István Bethlen, the most distinguished politician of the time, "did not in the least appreciate the significance of the peoples who live in the Danube Basin, or their relations with one another," whereas "the Czechs, Serbs and Romanians, who were acknowledged as the West's allies, made use of every opportunity to mislead them in that respect." The upshot was that in the place of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which for centuries had ensured a balance of power between West and East, "they have created two mutilated countries, which are cut off from the most basic means of subsistence, and created three other unviable countries, whose very existence is threatened by the danger that internal ethnic antagonisms and tensions may explode at any instant." At the same time, they had failed to take care of establishing new forms of regional co-operation, indispensable for economic and security reasons alike. As a result, Bethlen predicted, it was likely that "either the Slav giant in the East or the Germanic *Drang nach Osten,* or both in concert, will act against the small nations of Central Europe." Because "it was impossible to reach an understanding with the leaders—constantly egged on against Hungary from the outside as they were—of the new inhabitants that were settled, or migrated into, the territories." In Bethlen's opinion, the Hungarians carried no share of the blame.[47]

The role of "international freemasonry and the plutocracy"—something Bethlen, who was generally rational in his arguments, did not mention—was "unmasked" by, among others, the Jesuit Béla Bangha. This Christian Socialist Party ideologue proclaimed in his 1920 book that the above two factors:

> intended us for decline as a European colony, and as a tool for this purpose they singled out—just as in Russia—a Social Democratic Revolution. After four and a quarter years of unprecedented carnage, Social Democracy, liberalism's stepchild, did indeed wrench the arms from the nation's grasp and even prevented it from defending its own frontiers with the retreating army, instead it dispersed the army, terrorized right-thinking but passively inclined citizens, and drowned what little of value remained in the red sea of the proletarian dictatorship.[48]

47 ■ István Bethlen: *Válogatott politikai írások és beszédek* (Selected Political Writings and Speeches), ed. Ignác Romsics. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2000, pp. 269, 315 and 324.
48 ■ Béla Bangha S.J.: *Magyarország újjáépítése és a kereszténység* (Hungary's Reconstruction and Christianity). Budapest, Szent István Társulat, 1920, p. 17.

Against this, the Horthy regime's left-wing opponents created an explanatory schema that rested on the conviction that the collapse of the Monarchy, and of Hungary within its historical borders, was in line with the general trend of development of the states and nations of Europe. The only way to prevent that from happening would have meant either federalizing the empire, or granting autonomy to the nationalities. It was in this spirit that Oszkár Jászi, Minister for the Nationalities in Count Mihály Károlyi's cabinet in 1918, wrote his book in exile in the United States.

> The dissolution of the Habsburg monarchy and the establishment of new national states on its ruins was, in its essence, the same process which in many other states of Europe led to the integration into the state of those peoples having a common language and culture. The same fundamental causes working for unity in the nationally homogeneous states worked toward dissolution in the ethnographical mosaic of the Habsburg Empire [...] The monarchy collapsed on the psychic fact that it could not [...] establish reciprocity among the different experiences, sentiments and ideals of the various nations.[49]

The writer László Németh, arguably the most prominent theoretician of the Populist movement and an exponent of the middle or "Third Way" during the 1930s, likewise interpreted what had happened as a logical outcome of history. "The Habsburg Monarchy," he expounded, "was torn apart by what was the end product of nationalism, the principle of self-determination. While this nineteenth-century principle propelled our nationalities into power, Hungary could not remain in its old form; it would have blown apart, as much through concessions as through intolerance."[50] Ede Ormos, who had once supported Jászi's Civic Radical Party and is Béla Bangha's left-wing *alter ego* in this context, was less fatalistic. He placed the blame on the lack of generosity in Hungary's policy towards the nationalities over the previous half century:

> Nobody can deny that the immediate cause is our defeat in the world war. That, though, was the punishment that was inflicted for our ancient sins [...] The reason why the nationalities fled from the ruins of the collapsing country; why the Romanians, Slovaks and Serbs wished to be free of Hungarian rule [...] was the chauvinistic and arrogant disregard towards the common people on the part of the nobility, which made Hungarian rule loathsome and detestable to the nationalities.[51]

There was broad agreement across the two main camps—from the conservatives through the liberals and democrats to the populist movements—that, for economic and security reasons alike, the structure of mutually antagonistic small states had to be replaced by a form of regional co-operation. As to when such an

49 ■ Oscar (Oszkár) Jászi: *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy.* Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1929 (5th impr. 1971), pp. 7 and 130.
50 ■ László Németh: "A magyar élet antinómiái" (The Antinomies of Hungarian Life), in: László Németh: *Sorskérdések* (Vital Matters). Budapest, Szépirodalmi Kiadó, 1989, p. 119.
51 ■ Ede Ormos: *Mi okozta Magyarország szétbomlását* (The Cause of Hungary's Collapse). Vienna: Verlag Julius Fischer, 1921, in: *Trianon*, ed. Miklós Zeidler. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2003, p. 354.

alliance could come about, and in what form, opinions were divided. Those who sided with Hungary's conservative government considered that the first step should be the most thorough revision possible of Hungary's borders; within the federation or confederation to be set up, they envisaged the leading role or, at the very least, the position of *primus inter pares* for Hungary. The reannexation of territories by Hungary that went ahead between 1938 and 1941, which from a strictly ethnic viewpoint could be regarded as fair, was therefore seen as just a first step; this ought to have been followed by a restoration of the internal structure of St Stephen's Kingdom of Hungary, albeit in a modernized form and with due allowance for the needs of the national minorities. In the reasoning that underpinned this vision, a central place was given to the cultural dominance and civilizing mission of the Magyar nation over the course of history, along with their particular skills in political organization and experience of state administration. This viewpoint pervaded establishment thinking during the Second World War and the journalism of representative writers of the era such as Sándor Márai. In a "pamphlet" on the subject of "national education" that he published in 1942, Márai argued:

> The situation created by the war has designated for the Magyar nation a leading role in the Danube Basin. Yes, we believe that the sole historical means of subsistence for Magyars is for them to consciously accept and demand this leading cultural and economic role [...] the Magyar nation in Southeast Europe is the balancing force whose useful and beneficent effects no new power constellation can do without [...] No one can deny that the Magyars have a calling, the supreme sense of which is that they should allow free expression of the talents and abilities of all the nationalities who live here within the framework of a Hungarian state. St Stephen's design created, in this part of the world, the conditions for the effective interplay of all the peoples who are living here that, given Magyar intellectual leadership, also guarantees a qualitative leading role for the nation in the Danube Basin [...] And just as it is an undeniable historical fact that Hungary was, for centuries, the eastern bastion of Western Christian culture, so too is it an undeniable reality that this Western Christian culture continues to radiate most shiningly in Southeast Europe, to the present day, within the boundaries of historical Hungary [...] Two nations, it is my firm conviction, will have an exceptionally important task in the new Europe as it is being regenerated in a moral and material catharsis of qualitative competition: the Magyars in Southeast Europe, the French in the West.[52]

In the interwar period, the idea of Hungarian imperial expansion beyond the Carpathian Basin no longer occupied centre stage. It did not disappear entirely, however, living on primarily among members of the Turanian Society. The aim of this fringe body was "to make the Magyar people [...] once more as powerful as it was at the time of King Matthias", or "the restoration of the realm of St Stephen and King Matthias". Among the political parties that kept the imperialism of the Turanians and

52 ■ Sándor Márai: *Röpirat a nemzetnevelés ügyében* (Pamphlet on the Matter of National Education). Bratislava, Kalligram Könyvkiadó, 1993, pp. 46–87.

others alive, was the Arrow Cross Party under Ferenc Szálasi and, later on, the "Hungarist" movement. The ancestral lands of the Greater Hungary envisaged in "Aim and Demands", the programme of Szálasi's first party, the National Will Party, when it was founded in 1935, would have included not only the pre-1918 country but also—"reaching across to the Adriatic coast"—Bosnia and Dalmatia. Subsequently, when Szálasi divided Europe up into *Lebensraums* in 1943, he classed the entire *Völkerchaos* of Southeast Europe as falling within the Hungarist or "Carpatho-Danubian" *Lebensraum.* He envisaged this as being "the most completely central area" of the "great European *Lebensraum*"—one that was "a gateway to the East" and also "the threshold... for anyone coming from the East towards the West".[53]

The revisionist programmes put forward by the left-wing opposition adhered to ethnic or ethnographico-national principles: "We aim for nothing other than an ethnographic rounding-off of the country and effective protection of Hungarian minorities in foreign lands," was how Rusztem Vámbéry formulated the Civic Radical Party's priorities in 1928. "Revision," wrote the liberal Miksa Fenyő in 1935, could mean nothing less than "the reannexation of territories inhabited by populations that are either solely Magyar or Magyar in the majority."[54] The same is put forward by László Németh: "there is a watchword much more sacred than an integral Hungary and that is an integral Magyar nation." "The Magyar nation instead of a Magyar state—that is the watchword through which a Hungarian writer can veer back to the community that is sending him off."[55] An ethnically-based revisionist agenda was something that left-wing intellectuals liked to link to a co-operation that was based on full equality of rights for all the peoples of the region. In that context, they frequently referred to the plans for confederation that Kossuth had floated a good three quarters of a century earlier. "A Danubian confederation, there is no other path," declared Imre Kovács, one of the young rural sociologists in 1937; Dezső Szabó, a writer who can be regarded as a forerunner of the Populist movement, envisaged a union of the states (Association of Eastern European States) between the Baltic and the Black Sea.[56]

The Treaty of Trianon radically transformed the way Hungary perceived her role in the world. Following the Second World War this re-evaluation continued. A new political elite started out from assessments and interpretations of Hungary's role that the rural Populists and the pre-war left-wing had put forward, and tried to apply these in the new circumstances. In preparing for the new peace settlement, Imre Kovács, who was now Secretary-General of the National Peasant Party, put it this way:

53 ■ For a more detailed survey of the different ways of thinking about a Hungarian empire, see my article "A magyar birodalmi gondolat (The Hungarian Imperial Concept)," in: Ignác Romsics: *Múltról a mának* (About the Past for the Present). Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2004, pp. 121–158.
54 ■ Quoted by Zsuzsa L. Nagy: *Liberális pártmozgalmak 1931–1945.* (Liberal Party Movements, 1931–1945). Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986, p. 79.
55 ■ László Németh: "Új reformkor felé (Towards a New Reform Age)," in: *Sorskérdések,* op. cit., pp. 41–43.
56 ■ Dezső Szabó: *Az egész látóhatár* (The Whole Horizon), vol.1. Budapest, Magyar Élet, 1939, pp. 211–236. Cf. Gábor Bátonyi: "A Duna-konföderáció gondolata a két világháború közti Magyarországon (Ideas for a Danubian Confederation in Hungary During the Period Between the World Wars)," *Alföld,* 1985, no. 8, p. 39.

> It is chauvinism to demand the country's one-thousand-year borders, and anyone making this demand is not just a chauvinist but hostile to the people, anti-popular and anti-democratic and must be eradicated from politics and society as a noxious element. It is not, however, chauvinism to talk about the Magyar nation's wish to set up its own nation-state in such a way that this new nation-state should contain the territory of the ethnic Magyar community.[57]

The break with St Stephen's principles of statehood, with the country's historic borders, and with various grand revisionist plans as against the acceptance of the idea of a nation being a cultural and linguistic entity, received its classic formulation in broad historical and sociopolitical perspective in several essays produced by István Bibó in 1946.[58]

The victors of the Second World War had no more interest in a "Greater Hungary" as advocated by conservative circles during the interwar years than in the "Little Hungary" position taken by left-wing parties in government following the war. Instead they reinstated the Trianon borders of 1920. Plans for a Danubian confederation also foundered after 1947–48; promoting co-operation between the states of East-Central and Southeast Europe was not in the interest of a victorious Soviet Union, now the power exercising hegemony in the region. The dashing of revisionist hopes and the stranding of plans for a confederation was compounded by the sovietization of Hungary, which at the highest level was managed from Moscow. Prospects for the future were even bleaker than they had been after 1920. Many of the old elite chose exile; some were executed or, in the case of István Bethlen and others, carried off to the Soviet Union. Among those who stayed and were allowed to express themselves publicly was Gyula Szekfű, the pre-eminent historian during the Horthy regime and appointed as ambassador in Moscow in 1946. He foresaw the advent of a "new period of foreign occupation" reminiscent of that under the Ottoman Turks. In his 1947 book, *After the Revolution,* he stated:

> The circumstance that the Danube valley and the states lying along it have become neighbours of the Soviet Union has put them in a position similar to that of the limitrophe states further to the north and the south of the Soviet Union. Hungary today is in a line stretching from Finland to Bulgaria, which includes the vanquished as well as the Czechs, Poles, Romanians and Yugoslavs who sit with the victors at the peace table. The difference between victory and defeat dissolves, first of all, in the fact that we are all neighbours of the Soviet Union and by virtue of this fact we have passed under its political, economic and social influence [...] From all this, it is the easiest thing to draw conclusions as to the behaviour we must adopt today and tomorrow. There can be no talk either of any double-dealing since we have just one neighbour, the Soviet Union [...] To the West, the fate of the lands of the German empire, huge and powerful for centuries, is for the time being one

57 ■ Imre Kovács: *Népiség, radikalizmus, demokrácia* (Populism, Radicalism, Democracy), ed. Tibor Valuch. Budapest, Gondolat/Századvég, 1992, p. 144.

58 ■ Ignác Romsics: "Bibó István és a trianoni magyar határok" (István Bibó and the Hungarian Frontiers Set by the Treaty of Trianon), in: *Múltról a mának,* op. cit., pp. 297–312.

of chaotic amorphousness. Its splintering means that at least some parts of it will fall under Soviet influence. We can no longer dream of a role as a bridge between West and East either, not just because this expansion of the "East" towards the West has already transcended our meridian, but because we are just one modest stitch in the seam that, passing from north to south, joins what we might almost call two different continents [...] We can toss the bridge idea onto the scrapheap on which so many empty phrases from all our political pasts that were born of boastfulness, but were not realizable in practice, now lie at eternal rest. The only possible conclusion is none other than to accept the situation and hit upon a course of action with which, by gaining the trust of our neighbours and, above all, our huge eastern neighbour, we can secure a peaceful development for Hungary under new, but in my opinion unchanged, conditions.[59]

Szekfű's appraisal was accepted by many who tried to adapt to the new circumstances. Others, however, put their trust in help from the West and urged resistance. Among them was Archbishop József Mindszenty, the Prince Primate of Hungary, whose pastoral letters set out the plain truth about the abuses that were being committed by the Soviet army of occupation as the incipient sovietization of the country took place. "We have to say," was his message to the faithful in the autumn of 1945, "that we are now experiencing many, a great many, events in public life in Hungary that are in glaring contrast with democratic principles [...] it seems as though in Hungary one totalitarian tyranny has been replaced by another." He went on to encourage his congregations:

Do not be frightened by the threats of the sons of Evil! It is easier to stand up to and suffer a simple threat than it is to take the path onto which foolish and unscrupulous people wish to lure Hungarians. Violence and despotism will be all the greater the lesser the resistance they encounter.[60]

Communist power in Hungary, with the backing of the Red Army, was ruthless in eliminating opposition to the transformation that gathered speed from 1947 on. This was also the fate of the uprising that erupted in late October 1956, whose prime goal was to win back Hungarian sovereignty, both internally and vis-à-vis the outside world. Despite its failure, the Revolution proved to be a watershed in the country's postwar history. In its aftermath, most Hungarians fully comprehended and accepted Szekfű's 1947 assessment—that Hungary could not count on getting any effective external support in its struggle for independence and could truly only imagine its future within the Soviet camp. Recognizing and exploiting this, János Kádár, Moscow's new, post-1956 "proconsul", shaped the policy that, over time, would be referred to as the "Hungarian model"; this managed, without jeopardizing the Soviet Union's Great Power interests or the foundations of its dictatorship, to create conditions that few Hungarians frankly cared much for, but most accepted as the best that could be expected.

59 ■ Gyula Szekfű: *Forradalom után* (After the Revolution). Budapest: Cserépfalvi, 1947, pp. 120–122.
60 ■ *Mindszenty okmánytár. Pásztorlevelek, beszédek, nyilatkozatok, levelek* (Mindszenty Archive: Pastoral Letters, Speeches, Communiqués, Letters), vol. 1, ed. József Vecsey. Munich, 1957, pp. 70–76.

Through his manner of coming to power, his policies and their results, several commentators have likened Kádár to Prince Gabriel Bethlen.[61] Understandable, and partially justified though the comparison may be, the differences are striking. Bethlen regarded co-operation with the Turks as a necessary evil, and his ultimate objective was to restore Hungary's integrity and sovereignty; Kádár, by contrast, accepted the kind of sovereignty that the country enjoyed from start to finish within the Soviet camp, strictly limited though it was to the very end, and he looked on the Soviet troops that were stationed in the country as the ultimate and necessary guarantee of his authority. The ideology that legitimized all this was proletarian internationalism, which was usually coupled with a disparagement of the traditions of independence and patriotism cherished in Hungarian history. As Party documents had it, Hungary formed part of the "socialist world system", and its duty was to facilitate the triumph of socialism worldwide by contributing to the ultimate overthrow of "imperialism" and the "capitalist world".[62] In this perception, naturally, not much notice was paid to Trianon or to the Magyar ethnic minorities in "fraternal socialist countries". Shifts in this policy took place in the 1970s, and especially in the 1980s, insofar as greater emphasis was placed on national traditions in the loosest sense of the word; the Party line that had forecast that ethnic minorities would become assimilated and die out as such was replaced by condemnations of the assimilation of nationalities and, in conjunction with this, cautious support for efforts to preserve the ethnic and cultural identity of Magyar minorities abroad. "Here in Hungary," Kádár himself said in an address to the Party's 12th congress in 1980, also intended for consumption outside Hungary, "people of various nationalities live, work and prosper as citizens with full rights, in accordance with the principles of Leninist nationalities policy, our laws and our constitution. We wish the same for those Magyars who live beyond our borders."[63]

Hungary's place and opportunities were redefined by the epoch-making collapse of the Soviet Union, which had become a fait accompli by 1991. The opposition parties that were organizing within Hungary from the autumn of 1987 on demanded, much as in 1956, the restoration of Hungarian independence and free elections; they saw the most urgent foreign-policy task as "to take the country as close as possible to the developed countries of Europe."[64] In his address to Parliament on the policies

61 ■ *Mr. Kádár,* ed. Jenő Faragó. Budapest, Hírlapkiadó Vállalat, 1989, p. 131; Ágnes Hankiss: "Bethlen Gábor. Adalékok a 'kötéltánc' archetipikus képletéhez" (Gabriel Bethlen: Addenda to the Archetypal Imagery of Tightrope Walking), *Valóság,* 1983, no. 3, pp. 22–43; Paul Lendvai: *Magyarok. Kudarcok győztesei* (Hungarians: Masters of Failure). Budapest, Helikon, 2001, pp. 127–128; and Sándor Kopátsy: *Kádár és kora* (Kádár and his Era). Budapest: C.E.T. Belvárosi Könyvkiadó, 2001, pp. 143–145.

62 ■ *Magyar történeti szöveggyűjtemény 1914–1919* (Compendium of Hungarian History, 1914–1919), ed. Ignác Romsics. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2000, p. 257 (Resolution of the 8th Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party [MSZMP], 1962).

63 ■ A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt XII. kongresszusának jegyzőkönyve (Minutes of the 12th Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party). Budapest, Kossuth, 1980, pp. 450–451.

64 ■ *A rendszerváltás programja* (Programme for the Change of Regime). Budapest, Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége (Alliance of Free Democrats), 1989, pp. 18–19.

that he was planning to follow, József Antall, who headed the new multi-party government formed after the democratic elections of 1990, declared:

> The new government will be a European government and not merely in the geographical sense. We profess the traditions of democracy, pluralism and transparency. The past 40 years represented a break in the history of our nation; we wish now to return to the European heritage, and to those newer values that Europe has created over the past 40 years, in the aftermath and in light of the dreadful events and experiences of the Second World War. The other aspect of Europeanness is a return to what history disrupted: the unity of the continent. The government is committed to the idea of European integration.

Alignment with the Soviet Union, adopted under force of circumstances, thus gave way to an alignment with Europe, or in other words a swing round from the East to the West. Alongside this, two other major planks in the new Hungarian foreign policy were to be the promotion of regional interstate co-operation and the protection of, and support for, Magyar minority communities beyond the borders.

Amid changes of such far-reaching importance, many Hungarians within and across the borders thought that after Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam, it was time to set aside, or at least modify, the agreements reached by the Great Powers at Trianon. The 4th of June 1990, the eightieth anniversary of the Treaty of Trianon, brought several hundred demonstrators onto the streets in Budapest. One of their speakers declared: "A future for the Carpathian Basin is only conceivable on the basis of unity, but for that a revision of the Treaty of Trianon is absolutely necessary."[65]

After 1990, the issue of frontier revision was kept on the agenda by various political fringe groups, but was not espoused by any of the main political groupings. With minor shifts of emphasis, the three chief goals enunciated in 1990 have remained government policy ever since. In the meantime, Hungary became a full member of the European Union in 2004. With membership came a voluntary renunciation of certain elements of state sovereignty and, in all likelihood, there will be more such to come. To that extent, the position of Hungary, in this new millennium, is comparable to the circumstances that were faced after the expulsion of the Ottoman Turks. The parallel also stands up insofar as, from a linguistic and cultural viewpoint, the country once again finds itself in a "beehive", and sooner or later a lingua franca is going to be needed, which obviously will not be Hungarian. At the same time, regional co-operation, to which so many have attached excessive hopes, has not really come to pass. For a lack of economic complementarities and other reasons, various initiatives either faded or lost their appeal by the end of the last century. The cause of the ethnic Magyars who live outside Hungary's frontiers, by contrast, has acquired added significance, with EU expansion, both to date and yet to come, placing it in a new perspective. The most important task now facing Hungarian public life is to think this issue through, as well as Hungary's new position and possible role within Europe. ❧

65 ■ *Magyar Nemzet*, June 5th, 1990.

Ervin Lázár

Four Stories

The Man from Csillagmajor

He wore a white linen shirt. He said he'd like to join in the harvest. We were share-harvesting corn on the landlord Kiss's field, and the yield was feeble to begin with. And now this, when we could hardly pick enough for ourselves! Just look at the size of these cobs, Gyuvi said to him, they're no bigger than a donkey's thumb, for that is how people spoke in Rácpácegres. Besides, they hardly have any kernels on them. But the man in the white linen shirt just smiled.

"You know what, I'll just gather what the rest of you leave behind. I'll trail up the back."

"Go on then, if you haven't got any more sense in your head."

I was blowing on the tips of my fingers because they smarted. We picked the corn without the husk. We grabbed the tunic under the dried silk, wrenched the cob free with a single jerking motion, then snatched off the end. The husk remained on the stalk. Those that want to make a wicker chair from it or weave a basket or what have you, pick it with the husk, and come winter, there's a separate corn stripping—it's usually a time for fun—and the corn only ends up in the shed afterwards. But the landlord Kiss wanted the corn without the husk, so I had to keep blowing on the tips of my fingers because they smarted.

"Haven't you got a *cuca*?" the man in the white linen shirt asked.

"A what?"

He reached inside his pocket and handed me a piece of wood with a sharpened point tied to a string. It was no bigger than the end of a pencil. You had to slip the string around your wrist and slash open the tunic of the corn with the sharp, pointed end. This made it easier to pull off. But despite the cuca, my fingers

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Ervin Lázár

(1936–2006) was a journalist and author of a number of popular children's books and books for adults. Csillagmajor, *published in 1998, from which these stories are taken, is based on the author's experiences growing up in a small remote Hungarian village where the people were poor in goods, but rich in tales.*

went on hurting and the pain would not let up, though it was less stinging, to be sure.

We flung the picked corn into a sack or pouch hanging around our neck, and when it was full, we walked to the edge of the field. We each had our own heap and piled the contents of our sack on top, then walked back to our rows. If you've never done it, you've never heard the soft rasping sound that comes from the dried leaves of a corn field.

As the heaps grew in size, we gradually forgot all about the man in the white linen shirt, and he didn't come to mind again till sundown, when we finished work.

"Where's the man in the linen shirt?"

"He's gone."

"No wonder. Picking what we left behind. What a laugh."

And indeed, as we looked about us, we saw no sign of him having done any work, certainly not on the side of the field where we'd been gathering the corn. But then one of the men sauntered over to the farther end of the field and let out a shout of surprise.

There stood the man in the white linen shirt next to a large heap of corn.

"You picked all this?"

We went over to see.

"Next time, don't leave the best behind," he said with a broad smile.

"There's something fishy going on here," Jopi Molnár said.

"Hey, Jopi, my friend," the man in the white linen shirt said to him, "don't kid yourself," then he turned his back on us and headed for the road.

"How does he know your name?"

Jopi gave a shrug.

"I may have met him in Szabaton."

"He's not from Szabaton. He's the son of that man from Csillagmajor that plaits whips for swine herds."

"That's not him. I know him, and that's not him."

Meanwhile, the man had reached the main road and was heading straight for Simontornya.

"Hey there, turn back! What about the corn you picked?"

But the man in the white linen shirt did not turn back.

A shiver ran down Jancsi Jósvai's back.

"I knew it."

"What?"

"Didn't you see? He's wearing a shroud."

But by then the stranger had disappeared behind the thick growth of young acacias, and we looked at the heap of corn he'd left behind with misgiving, expecting it to disappear along with the man who'd harvested it.

I took the *cuca* from my pocket to see if there was anything out of the ordinary about it, but for all intents and purposes, it looked like ordinary string and ordinary wood. As for his shirt, it's not true that it was a shroud. It was alive. Alive.

The Blacksmith

"I smell sulphur," Lajos Szűcs announced.

His journeyman shot him a look of surprise. He was about to say, "So what, we're in the shop," for this is what the people of Rácpácegres called the smithy, and in a shop it is only natural that a variety of vapours and gases should fill the air, that the bellows should make the smouldering coal belch forth uncommon smells, that the searing iron should let out bitter hazes of steam when it is plunged into cold water. Even the minute sparks of sizzling iron dancing in the air when the anvil is struck have their own distinctive smell to them. The air is always permeated by the smell of metal, burnt hoof, smoke and sulphur.

But the journeyman did not say what he was thinking, because just as he shot the blacksmith that look of surprise, the door to the smithy came into his field of vision, and he saw a man, a gentleman of sorts leaning against the jamb-post. He had on pantaloons and a long flowing cape.

"How come we didn't see him come in?" the journeyman wondered in surprise, and since he'd been pinning his eyes on the same spot for some time, the blacksmith and the prentice boy followed the direction of his gaze. The prentice boy saw right away that the newcomer's legs were out of the ordinary, and without realizing, moved closer to the blacksmith, seeking the invisible aura of his protection.

"Good day, sir," Lajos Szűcs said respectfully. "We didn't see you come in."

But instead of returning the greeting, the gentleman in question let out a jarring laugh.

"Are you the blacksmith everybody's talking about?" he asked oozing with charm and affectation, whereas there was nothing in the world Lajos Szűcs hated more than this sort of preciosity.

"Am I?" he said, straightening up with a sense of self. "It's certainly the first I've heard of it." But having straightened up, he seemed even thinner than he was, and taut as the string of a crossbow.

"I've heard said that the Creator didn't make you out of dust and ashes, like the rest of mankind," the stranger commented, then fell silent. Perhaps he was expecting a question. But if that's what he was expecting, he had a long wait ahead of him, because neither the blacksmith nor his journeyman or prentice boy said anything, and their silence was redoubled by the silence of the objects around them—the huge bellows on the ceiling, the two iron wings of the fireplace, the drilling machine with the horizontal flyer, the sundry tools hanging on the wall, the threaders, the pliers, the duck-bill pliers, the iron drills, the punchers, the flat jumpers, the small hammers, the big hammers, and the anvil, too, were profoundly silent.

Having been met by silence, the stranger had no recourse but to continue.

"He forged you out of iron, they say."

The prentice boy imagined the Lord ripping a great big chunk out of the

Mountain of Iron, heating it up until it smouldered, then hammering it into the likeness of Lajos Szűcs. It would explain how a lanky man like him could be so awfully strong. Yes, Lajos Szűcs must be made of iron.

However, the blacksmith didn't take the stranger's comments as a compliment, it seems, because he tensed up even more.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he asked brusquely.

"Now that you ask," the fake gentleman said oozing with charm, "my horse needs shoeing."

Lajos Szűcs opened the two wings of the wooden door, sized wide enough to allow a carriage to pass into the shop when its wheels needed hooping. There was no need to open both wings to shoe a horse, but the blacksmith, it seems, wanted more space around him, or else he was overwhelmed by the smell of sulphur.

While he was opening the door, he already caught a glimpse of the horse and was slightly taken aback. He couldn't even tell at first what had frightened him about the animal. Was it his monstrous size? Or his colour, black as the blackest coal? Or the whites of his eyes flashing out of all that black? Or the fact that it was sly? For when a horse flipped back both its ears as a sign of hostility, the people of Rácpácegres said he was sly, a dead give away of its nasty nature. Well, this particular horse had to be the nastiest of the lot, that's for sure!

Quite a crowd had gathered outside the smithy by then. God only knows how, but the people of the puszta got wind of the fact that something was up at the shop, and they gathered in great numbers, forming a large circle at a respectful distance from the sly black brute, but with unshakable confidence in their master blacksmith, whose daring grew in proportion to their numbers, and who by then couldn't have cared less what made the huge black animal so frightening. He took a half-finished horseshoe from a nail on the wall and heated it up as the huge bellows bleated and the air hissed between the two iron plates. Then he started outside with the glowing horseshoe to size it to the horse's hoof and determine if it needed to be made larger, or possibly smaller.

"Is that what you expect to nail on him?" the stranger asked with a belittling smile.

"Well, didn't you say he needed new shoes?"

Hearing this, the stranger went up to the master blacksmith and without further ado extracted the glowing horseshoe from the grip of the pliers, and with a single movement of his bare hands, crushed it as if it weren't made of iron at all, but raw dough. Then he flung the wrecked shoe at Lajos Szűcs's feet.

"You will now make proper shoes for my horse!"

The silence that followed outsilenced every other silence in the history of Rácpácegres. It was so profound, you could hear the prentice boy's heart pounding inside his breast, and the reason the prentice boy's heart was pounding so loud inside his breast was that he suddenly understood what made the stranger's feet so unusual, and the horse, too. Of course! He took one more look to make certain that his eyes had not deceived him. Two small horns were sticking

out behind the horse's ears. Though they were no bigger than a thumbnail, they were horns just the same. As for the stranger's feet, they were not feet, but hoofs.

He sneaked over to the blacksmith, who stood there like a pillar of salt, and tugging at the leg of his pants, started pulling him away.

"Stop pulling, for crying out loud!" the blacksmith yelled, but obediently made for the shop all the same.

"Sir," the prentice boy whispered once they were inside, "that there is the devil!"

"What do you think, I haven't got eyes in my head?" Lajos Szűcs whispered to him, then shouted, "Get the bellows working!" and he got down to work. He held a whole brace of flatiron in the flames, enough to mount five wagons. He made it glow white, he hammered it, he stretched it out, then bent it in, thumb, thumb, went the journeyman's big hammer, and the blacksmith's, too, one on the red-hot iron, two sharp ones on the anvil. The blacksmiths were making music, while outside, the people of Rácpácegres knew that trouble had been averted.

The horseshoe was ready. It was so heavy that the stand under the anvil groaned under its weight. Lajos Szűcs grabbed it with the largest of his pliers. When he raised it, every muscle in his body bulged with the strain. He held it up for the devil.

"Try crushing this, if you can!"

The devil, who didn't dare try any of his tricks with this particular horseshoe, gestured that it would do. The blacksmith nailed it to the horse's hoof, then continued his labours. The sparks hissed through the air, the anvil rang out, the second horseshoe was done, too, and before long, so was the third. In no time at all, the blacksmith was already working on the fourth.

"More iron!" he called out.

"There isn't any more, sir," the prentice boy whispered.

"What do you mean there's no more iron?" the blacksmith said sternly. "Bring me the tools!"

The boy brought Lajos Szűcs's tools, which he'd forged with the work of his own two hands, then the store-bought ones, the expensive thread-cutter sets, the drilling machine with the flyer. But even that was not enough for the blacksmith.

"More iron!" he shouted, loud enough for the people outside the shop to hear. "People! I need more iron!"

The people of Rácpácegres ran helter-skelter, but hardly had a minute elapsed, if that, and they came running back, the men bearing pitchforks from the granary, cattle chains, sweating irons, bridle bits and pummel rings from the horse stable, and the women cradling coal-heated irons and fire pokers from their hearths. Auntie Ilona rushed back offering her famous three-legged iron cauldron, and the children their toy boomerangs and hoops.

The horseshoe needed a lot of iron. But after a while, it was ready.

"Phew," the blacksmith said, wiping the sweat off his forehead with his shirtsleeve. The journeyman was bathed in sweat, too, and the shirt of the prentice boy was sopping wet.

As the last horseshoe was fitted on the horse's hoof, it hissed, and as it was only

to be expected from the devil's horse, the smell of the burnt hoof mingled with the lesser smell of brimstone. The blacksmith hammered in the horseshoe nails, made some adjustments with his file, then straightened up. The horse's shoed hoof fell to the ground with a mighty thud, a reverberating boom like thunder.

"Okay, your horse is ready," Lajos Szűcs announced, but instead of thanking him, the devil let out a snigger, mounted his horse, untied a leather pouch from his belt, and threw it at Lajos Szűcs's feet. Something inside clinked loud enough for all to hear.

"For your labours," the devil said, then dug his spurs into his horse's side. The horse heaved to, wanting to take off as easily as it always had, but the weight of Lajos Szűcs's iron horseshoes held him back, and in its surprise, it almost landed on its knees.

"Gidde'ap," the devil screamed.

Its muscles straining, the huge monster buckled to the task until bye and bye it managed to lift its front legs off the ground. But he let them fall again, and with an ear-splitting thud, the earth caved in under it. The devil screamed in desperation, but his screams were in vain; the horse was now plunging into the pit made by its hoofs, and his goat-footed master plunged in along with him. The earth groaned and rumbled, a sinister sound if ever there was one, but before it could close up again, swallowing the hideous devil and its hideous horse, Lajos Szűcs quickly grabbed the promising leather pouch from where it lay by his feet, and flung it after them.

That night there was a grand celebration in Rácpácegres, and though the music was provided by combs wrapped in tissue paper, because the strings of Juliska Mészáros's zither had also been sacrificed for the devil's horseshoe, the cheer reached the very heavens. And so, dear stranger, if life should ever take you to the vicinity of our little village, make sure to bend down and rest your ear against the good earth in front of the former smithy, for you will then hear the muted strains and shouts of the devil struggling with Lajos Szűcs's horseshoes.

The Woman in Blue

The snow would not fall that winter, and just a couple of weeks before Christmas, the land with its shivering, frozen clumps of earth was still black. It was from this blackness that the figure of a woman emerged with a baby boy cradled in her arms. There was no knowing where she'd come from or how long she'd been standing outside our door, because she didn't knock.

"In the name of God," my mother said, "come on in. You'll freeze to death."

But the woman did not move, she just raised her eyes to my parents and said very softly, "They're after me."

"After a woman and a baby?" my father asked. "Why?"

My mother took the woman gently by the arm.

"Don't be afraid. Come on in."

"I haven't done anything bad," the woman said, but she still would not cross our threshold. "They said that if anybody helps me, they'll be severely punished."

"Never mind. Come in."

The woman was very beautiful. She divested herself of her exotic mantle, light collared and adorned with a golden trim, undid the swaddling clothes of her baby boy, changed him, and gave him of her milk. The baby laughed at us with toothless wisdom.

"Just till Christmas," the woman said. "By Christmas we'll have a place to go."

Mother looked at us children.

"Children, you will not tell anybody that the lady is staying with us, understand?"

"You needn't fear anybody here, of course," my father said. "No one's going to tell on us in Rácpácegres. Still, better be safe than sorry."

Back then we were all thinking of the same thing, Duri Bederik. Duri Bederik didn't live in Rácpácegres, but he was always lurking around the neighbourhood. He was some sort of keeper or forest or field guard. He shot our dogs when they strayed outside the confines of the village, he made the children cry, and he scared the women when they carted food to their men in the fields.

There was plenty of reason not to trust Duri Bederik. Ever since the woman with the baby came to stay, he'd been lurking around the neighbourhood even more than usual, and after the decree had been read out in the village, he went about it openly.

The soldiers had come in a camouflage-painted jeep and honked their horn until all the folk came out of their houses. One of the soldiers stood up and read out something—read? bellowed, fit to burst. They were looking for a woman with a baby, he said, and anybody that sees them is bound by the rigour of the law to report it. If they don't, they'll be shot and their house burnt to the ground.

As we stood there, our hearts turned to ice. Would they search the houses? But they left, all except Duri Bederik, who made straight for our place.

"I can leave right now, if you wish," the woman said to my father. "I'll sneak out the back, and no one will be the wiser."

"You're not going anywhere," my father said. "It's only five days to Christmas and we'll manage till then. Now go, hide!"

Duri Bederik sat in our kitchen till nightfall, listening for a baby's cries. But he listened in vain, because as soon as he'd made himself comfortable, Jancsi Jósvai appeared from behind the outbuildings and kept waving to my mother until she saw him.

"What is it, János?"

"I've come because of the woman and the child."

"What child?" my mother asked in alarm.

"Don't be frightened. The whole puszta knows. As long as that man's sitting inside, they'll be safer with us. They could sneak through the back without being seen."

This is how it came about that the woman with the baby first ended up with the Jósvais, and when Duri Bederik began snooping around them, they were taken to the families at the lower end of the village, then the upper end, then back to the middle. There was no family in Rácpácegres who had not given them shelter, if only for an hour or two.

Christmas came, and my sisters wrapped walnuts in silver foil and tied threads through popcorn to hang on our Christmas tree. By that time, the woman with the baby was back with us again.

"They'll be waiting for me at the Old Hill in Pálfa come nightfall," she said softly.

My father harnessed the horses and just to be on the safe side made a detour, taking the woman and her baby son to their appointed place through the woods above the river Sió. He even smiled at his own extravagant safety precautions. Who'd be loitering around these parts on Christmas Eve?

But somebody was. Duri Bederik appeared from behind the trees.

"Stop! Who's that with you?"

My father did not answer him but snapped his whip, and the cart gave a jerk and a start. He wasn't fast enough though, and Duri Bederik grabbed hold of the woman's mantle with the golden trim. It stayed in his hand, and he waved it about triumphantly.

When my father and the woman reached the foot of the Old Hill at a gallop, they found another cart waiting. The woman bid my father a quick farewell, got on, and the light peasant cart disappeared in the dark of night.

My father turned the horses around and started for home, this time taking the high road. But when he reached the foot of Paphegy, a peal of frightful laughter issued from behind the bushes lining the road. My father didn't have to be told who it was, and in that chilling darkness watched the wind sweep a bunch of dried weed hither and thither with an aching heart.

The following day at dawn, the people of Rácpácegres awoke with a start. The soldiers! The soldiers are coming! I don't know who'd brought the news, but before long everyone in the village had heard that a monster with caterpillar tracks was coming to demolish their houses. Duri Bederik, who had lost no time, was now at the head of the column, we were told, running in front of the tank, waving the evidence, the blue mantle with the golden trim, in his hand.

For a while we were hoping that the men who brought the news were just trying to scare us, but as the rising sun illuminated the slumbering countryside, it cast its light upon the soldiers marching along the Lőrinc road. They were fully armed, and behind them roared and rumbled a monster with caterpillar tracks. We're done for! Rácpácegres, you're done for! We prepared to flee. The women hurriedly gathered together some bundles, but by then somebody had come running from the granary, there's no escaping, anyone with eyes in his head could see we'd been surrounded, he said. From the Ráadás road all the way to Paphegy, even as far as the Vitéz farm, there were soldiers everywhere, their raised bayonets like so many spikes on a barbed wire fence.

But who is that woman and her child that they should be the objects of such hatred?

The women dropped their bundles and we all backed away, huddling under the great mulberry tree like a herd of cattle at high noon. The monster was already approaching the Small Corner with a frightful rumble. We could hear the unrelenting roar and we could see, too, the flash of blue in Duri Bederik's hand when Pisti Keserű shouted, "Look!"

And indeed, the outlines of the houses began to dissolve as if a heavy fog had settled upon them, except it couldn't have been fog, because everything else could be clearly seen—the fir tree on Erzsébet Hill, and the church spire of Lőrinc, too. But the houses were lost in a haze, insubstantially floating like the mirage over the puszta on a sweltering summer's day. Then came another shout, "My hand! My hand! Look, my hand!" and lo and behold, our bodies seemed to dissolve, too, our hands became translucent, our clothing paled in colour, and for a moment I could see the hills through the bodies of the people huddled next to me, and the moment after, not even that, just the hills and the trees. The people and the houses, they're gone, like mist, and the village of Rácpácegres nothing but a deserted plain! And still, here we are, I can feel me grasping my mother's hand and I can feel my little sister's breath on the small of my back.

The soldiers are standing stupefied in the midst of this emptiness, while Duri Bederik snaps his head like a madman, what's happening, it was all here a moment ago, it's gotta be here! Then a soldier, an officer-type, climbs out of the tank as Duri Bederik waves the blue mantle with the golden trim at him. The officer-type raises his cane and strikes Duri Bederik first on the shoulder, then across the face. Someone from among us laughs out loud, be quiet, my father orders, but there's no stopping the sounds of malicious glee as it comes trickling, then bursting from the many throats, you had it coming, you traitorous rascal, and before long the people fall on him and, whining like a wounded animal, Duri Bederik starts running helter-skelter inside the circle of villagers so that one almost feels sorry for him.

Their mission unaccomplished, the soldiers form ranks, the tank turns around, and Duri Bederik, he's lying on the ground like a discarded rag. When the soldiers disappear on the horizon, he scampers to his feet, boiling over with rage, shaking his fist at the sky, the soldiers, the villagers, and in answer, we, the invisible, give way to a great, joyous laughter of relief as Duri Bederik makes for the fields, putting more and more distance between him and us until he looks like a wind-swept bunch of dried weed, if that.

A pale tremor, the houses are solidly back in place, our hands and faces reappear from the mist, hurray, we're back, the jubilant folk of Rácpácegres glow incandescent, and as if it had been waiting only for this all along, the snow begins to fall in big white flakes like grace from the very heavens.

The Knotweed

It wasn't long before they were surrounded by a curious crowd. The dreams were gone from the women's eyes, while the children cast curious glances at them from behind their mothers' skirts. In the middle of the crowd stood a frightened old couple, a man and a woman. Bits of straw were stuck to their clothes and hair, and they were each holding a small cloth bundle. Mrs. Szotyori could not take her eyes from the knots of the tablecloths, for some insubstantial childhood memory pained her heart.

"They deserve what's coming to them is all I have to say," Gyula Hujber announced.

"Hold your tongue," András Priger said turning on him, though he knew perfectly well that Hujber wasn't thinking of the two old people but of Hungarian Swabians in general. Except now it wasn't a question of Swabians in general, but of this here couple, Konrád Pámer and his wife, Lizi Hoffman. András Priger found them in the hay when he went to the stables at dawn.

"Who might you be?"

"We hail from Györköny," Konrád Pámer offered. His wife attempted a smile, but her tight, narrow lips managed only a grimace.

Seeing that they were frightened, András Priger tried to reassure them.

"I've seen you around the Dorog fair," he offered.

"You see?" Lizi answered, this time with a gold toothed smile, for she could hope again.

"They caught up with you, too?" András Priger asked.

Konrád Pámer nodded, but dared not speak for fear his voice might tremble.

The night before, István Hatala had paid them an unexpected visit. He plopped down in a chair and let his huge fist fall on the table. Lizi saw the tabletop cave in under its weight. For a while he remained silent, for he did not know how to begin what he had come to say. They didn't offer him any food or drink, and before long forgot about his presence.

"We're surrounding the village tonight," István Hatala blurted out. "You're all being sent back to Germany. The wagons are waiting for you at the Nagydorog station."

Lizi's gaze sought out the cupboard, then the old Singer sewing machine.

"What about the house?"

"Only what you're wearing, plus anything you can carry in one hand," István Hatala said.

A long silence followed. Hatala removed his fist from the table and hung his head.

"I'm on guard duty out by the wine-presses," he offered quietly.

Later, they made their way toward the press houses over the back roads, under cover of the heavy vegetation. They hadn't made any decisions yet, except that they would flee. The idea of Rácpácegres first came to them on the dirt road to Bikács.

Rácpácegres was in the back of God's own throne. No one would think of looking for them there. They made a detour around Bikács, crossed the wooden bridge over the Sárvíz, then crossed the island and waded through the waters of the Sió. The wet, plaintive night hovered over them like a shroud, unaccustomed sounds and smells assailed their senses, and from time to time, they shivered with fright.

As they walked along the road to Ráadás, they thought they saw something stirring behind a bush.

"I think there's somebody there," Lizi said.

They stood still for a while, but nothing moved.

"You're imagining things," Konrád Pámer whispered.

They continued on their way. They were just a stone's throw from the Great Corner, and before long reached the houses of Rácpácegres looming uncertainly under cover of the night sky. Since they didn't want to disturb anyone at that late hour, they agreed to spend what was left of the night in a stable. Strange as it may seem, the dogs did not bark at them.

And now, they were standing surrounded by the people of Rácpácegres.

But why did that man say that they deserved what was coming to them?

"There's empty rooms in the Lower House," Mrs. Szotyori said quickly, as if afraid of being overheard. "Even two."

"All right, follow me," András Priger said, and started for the Lower House by the end of the village.

"But the responsibility is yours," Gyula Hujber warned.

András Priger felt a sudden surge of anger. His upper lips trembled under his thinning moustache, but he kept mum.

"You could get into trouble because of us," Lizi said as they walked on with Priger.

"Leave that to me," Priger shot back abruptly as he continued to march in front like a soldier, his wide-legged boots flapping against his shin.

The room hadn't been lived in for some time. The earthen floor had turned to dust, spiders that nobody had disturbed in a long while sat crouching in the blackened cobwebs, while the bit of weak light that filtered in through the dirty window just made the place look even more forlorn.

But a ray of hope was already approaching in the hefty person of Mrs. Szotyori, who was coming along the lorry tracks armed with a battered washbowl, a paintbrush for whitewashing, a broom and an assortment of rags. The triumph of the recent exchange she had with her husband still gleamed in her eye. "Must you stick your nose into everything?" he had growled, and as if she hadn't heard, in one ear and out the other, she just said to him, "Go get me some yellow earth!"

Mrs. Szotyori and Lizi set about cleaning the room. They whitewashed the walls and spread mud on the floor, and the fresh smell of the lime merged with the incorporeal yet full-bodied smell of the moisture-rich mud. They polished the top of the cooking stove with iron dust until it shone, and they drew lines in the wet earthen floor with the tips of their fingers, which obediently turned a deep

yellow by the time they finished. The whole world smelled of cleanliness and hope. Maybe they could even smell it in Györköny.

"May the Lord rain toads upon your heads," Lizi said.

Mrs. Szotyori looked at her in round-eyed amazement.

"What did you say?"

Lizi could hear the harsh thud of the household things landing on the loading trucks, the frightened cackle of the hens locked into the coops, the sharp cries of Kati Hufftlesz piercing the general din. She could see Gyuri Szeip's family standing like pillars of salt among the horse-drawn carriages, their wheels creaking for lack of grease, and the three children standing in front of Gyuri Szeip's wife, with little Zsuzsi's face opalescent under a heavy black shawl. "What are you banging for? The door's not locked. I didn't lock the door so you wouldn't have to break it down. So stop banging."

But no. This smell of cleanliness couldn't have reached as far as Györköny.

"May the Lord rain toads upon your heads," Lizi said once again.

They passed their midday meal with the Prigers.

When they walked back to their lodging, the kindling wood in the cooking stove had been started up. Someone had stuck two or three armfuls of chopped wood through the shoot. In the middle of the room stood two old chairs. Konrád Pámer shook them by their backrests and ascertained that they hardly needed any fixing to make two sturdy, reliable chairs.

"Okay, Lizi, you can sit down now."

Annoyed with the sudden onrush of sentimentality that had taken hold of her, with the back of her hand she tried to wipe a tear from the corner of her eye. She'd need the tears for other times, she knew.

The Jósvais brought a sack they'd stuffed with the remains of the manorial haystack. The Gazdags found a rickety bed in the attic. The sideboard joints were loose, but Jancsi Jósvai wedged them and nailed them secure just like an expert until the bed was as hale as if it were almost new. They had no idea who'd brought the blankets, but when they finished fixing the bed, they found two neatly folded horse blankets on one of the chairs. Mrs. Bűtös lent them her kerosene lamp, which she reserved for special occasions and kept as decoration on top of the wardrobe. She was very proud of that lamp, and no wonder, for it had a brass stand, and its shade was fashioned out of milk glass. "Don't sit in the dark. But when you find yourselves another, I'd like it back," she told them.

But they didn't burn the lamp very long because they were very tired. They lay on the freshly stuffed straw mat under the rough horse blankets, their sides touching.

Lizi felt a sense of awkwardness, and a sense of expectation, too, a profound warmth toward her husband, like when she was a young bride and slept in the same bed with Konrád Pámer for the first time. She took his hand, and that is how they slumbered off, holding hands.

A nervous scratching at the window. Dazed with sleep, Lizi opens her eyes. For a moment she doesn't know where she is. The walls are bright in the early

morning half-light. The smell of whitewash permeates the room. The scratching at the window turns into knocking.

"Pámer! Pámer!" someone calls in stifled tones.

Of course! They're in Rácpácegres, and Szotyori is standing outside by the window.

"Quick! They're coming! The soldiers are coming!"

Lizi runs back to the bed and grabs the bundle they'd brought with them the day before. Then she lets it drop and settles on the side of the bed.

Szotyori leans in through the window.

"Hurry up! You hear?"

"We're not going," Lizi says. Then she adds, "Thank you all the same."

Szotyori's head disappears from the window. They take their time getting into their clothes. Konrád Pámer would like to hurry, but he dare not. He knows that Lizi would not like it. He buttons up his coat, but then he can't hold himself back any more and hurriedly gathers the few items they'd brought from home and stuffs them inside the one open bundle.

"Don't," Lizi says. Then, feeling that she has been too abrupt, she adds, "Kuni, don't."

They hear the rattle of a carriage and the reverberating sound of hoofs as the horses come to a stop in front of the house.

"Konrád Pámer, come on out!"

Lizi takes her husband by the hand. When they reach the threshold, they stop. In front of the house, a peasant cart, a shamefaced peasant on top, holding the reins of two obedient horses. Two soldier-types in shoddy uniforms are standing by the side of the cart. One is wearing civilian trousers. The one standing closer to them has a machine gun with a drum of ammunition slung over his shoulder. The other has a long infantry rifle with a bayonet. Duri Bederik is standing on top of the cart, his legs wide apart. Further back, at a respectful distance, stand the people of Rácpácegres, grownups and children alike.

"Who do you think you are," Duri Bederik asks as he continues to stand with his legs spread authoritatively, "what makes you think you're above the law?"

The two old people continue to stand in the kitchen door.

"You should be ashamed of yourselves," Mrs. Szotyori yells at the soldiers. "What harm have these two old people done you? Duri Bederik, may you rot in hell! It must've been you that betrayed them!"

"Hold your tongue, Mrs. Szotyori, if you know what's good for you," Duri Bederik snorts, "Be glad I don't have the lot of you thrown in jail for complicity. Who let these people move in here anyway?"

András Priger is about to take a step forward, but Gyula Hujber beats him to it.

"It was me. And what are you going to do about it?"

The crowd reacts. Shrill women's cries and deep men's grumbles fill the air. The soldier with the machine gun tightens his grip on it and turns to face the people of the village. Duri Bederik, who realizes he'd better not strain the situation to the breaking point, turns on the two old people instead.

"Well, what about it? I haven't got all day."

Silence. Konrád Pámer and Lizi do not move.

"You breathed Magyar air long enough. Now go back to your own kind in your beloved Germany!"

Lizi takes a step forward and opens her mouth. Her gold tooth flashes as she speaks.

"So maybe you're a Magyar? You're a piece of shit, that's what you are, not a Magyar!" Actually, she says it like this, "Zo may be you're Madjar? You're piece of schitt, eez vat you are, not Madjar!"

"Komm Konrád," she says to her husband, and they walk away. They walk past the horses, skirt the pig sty whose sides are held up with corn stalks and whose roof is covered with straw, and are almost by the steep mound of the lorry tracks overgrown with weed when Duri Bederik springs into action.

"Stop!" he shouts.

"Stop!" the soldier with the gun repeats, as with a metallic click he pulls back the safety catch.

Konrád Pámer and Lizi stop and turn to face Duri Bederik.

"Come back here!"

The two old people do not budge. The wild mallow that grows in abundance in these parts, the foxglove, the henbane and knotweed, reach up to their knees. Ever so gently, Lizi takes her husband's elbow and helps him sit down, then helps him lie on his back, and then he disappears from sight in the lush growth of weed. Lizi smoothes the folds of her skirt and lies down by her husband's side. They are gone from view. The lush weeds do not stir.

The silence is like crystal. The soft breeze stops blowing, the leaves on the trees are still, the clouds stop rolling in the sky.

"All right, that's enough. Come out of there," Duri Bederik orders, sounding as if he had a lump in his throat. But by then the people know what can be known.

"Bring them here," Duri Bederik orders the man with the machine gun.

His steps faltering, the soldier goes to the scene of the crime, his feet rooted to the ground.

"There's nobody here."

Duri Bederik screams at him.

"What do you mean there's nobody there?"

But his voice is distorted with fear.

The people begin converging on the man with the machine gun. They want to see for themselves that there is nothing in the weeds. Even the frightened peasant climbs off the wooden seat of his cart to have a closer look. Only Duri Bederik does not move. Petrified, he continues standing on top of the cart.

The circle closes in. The imprint of the two bodies is clearly visible in the knee-high weeds. At the bottom is the knotweed, and over it the broken stalks of mangold. The big-leaved weeds and the wild mallow have straightened themselves out again. But the people can see that this is where Konrád Pámer lay,

and this here, this here was Lizi. The people take great care not to step on the spot where the bodies had been. Even the soldiers.

Duri Bederik is screaming with rage.

"Go find them! Search everything!"

But the soldiers ignore his orders. They jump on the cart, the peasant cracks his whip, the two horses break into a trot, and the cart heads for Sárszentlőrinc, leaving a trail of dust behind.

The people of Rácpácegres continue to stand around the pressed-down weeds as if they were standing by a fresh grave. The men remove their hats.

That night Gyula Hujber wakes with a start because he hears somebody cry. It is a barely audible, muffled, plaintive cry, yet loud enough to keep him awake. He shakes his wife's shoulder.

"Somebody's crying. Can you hear?"

They listen.

"Calm down," Mrs. Hujber says, "it's nothing."

But the sound will not subside. At times it filters in through the windowpane very softy, at others it has a loud urgency about it.

Gyula Hujber slips into his clothes.

In the cold autumn mist outside he pulls his coat tighter. His ears have not played him false. The cries are coming from over there! He pressed his ear against the flattened weed, and the sound comes louder now. He recognizes Lizi's thin wails and behind it, Konrád Pámer's muffled sobs. He strikes a match and sees the flower. The knotweed has brought flowers, two beautiful flowers the colour of the rainbow, no bigger than the nail on one's thumb. Gyula Hujber knows that such flowers do not exist, and yet he is not surprised. He takes out his penknife and cuts a big circle around the knotweed so he can pull it out by the roots. He takes off his hat and places the knotweed and two handfuls of soil inside it. He listens. The weeping has stopped.

He stands up and walks away. When he reaches the Small Corner he turns left, then having passed the Big Corner, turns onto the road leading to Ráadás. Halfway to the Sió, a bush along the road seems to stir. "Come out, you lurking pig," he says under his breath as he keeps his eyes trained on the bush. But nothing stirs. Still, for some time he keeps a strong grip on his penknife as he walks, not pocketing it until he's passed the Sió and is on the island. He crosses the wooden bridge over the Sárvíz. His tread on the boards booms in the night. He keeps a firm grip on his hat. He makes straight for Györköny along the fields. He knows that the graveyard is on this side of the village, which is a good thing. Hopefully, they won't think of guarding the graveyard. Surely, they can't be afraid of the dead, as they are of the living.

There are several large unsightly holes in the rusty wire fence around the graveyard. Gyula Hujber climbs through one, carefully pressing his hat to his chest. He finds himself among large marble tombstones. This must be the place where the wealthy citizens of Györköny are laid to rest.

"The pox on these uppity Swabians," Gyula Hujber grumbles as he makes his way among the sunken tombstones and crumbling wooden crosses to the old graveyard. He stops short by a tall boxwood and places his hat on the ground. He lowers himself on his knees, grabs his penknife, and digs a hole in the soil the size of his hat. He removes the loosened soil with his hand. He takes the knotweed from his hat, places it in the hole, and packs it round with earth. He arranges the flowers with his middle finger and shakes off the grains of dust that had settled on their petals. He gets up again. He turns his hat inside out, knocks the clods of earth out of it, then scrapes what's remained from the lining. He turns his hat the right side out, punches a crease in the middle, and lowers his arms. "Well, Auntie Lizi, you're back home again. May you both rest in peace," he says. Then he turns around, passes the tombstones of the rich, and climbs through the hole in the wire fence. After he's gone a ways, he puts his hat on his head again, and makes for Rácpácegres. ❧

Clarissa Upchurch: Appointment with a Shade. *From:* Budapest: Image, Poem, Film *by George Szirtes & Clarissa Upchurch. Budapest, Corvina Press, 2006.*

László G. István

Poems

Translated by Antony Dunn and George Szirtes

Abraham

Ábrahám

You have to laugh at those aging thighs
when they sag a little propping up that torso,
they struggle even downhill on a slope,
the thinning beard, the sparse body-hair
a transparent layer to veil the body
the way the knowledge of death is a cataract on the soul.
Hang on and laugh if your desire should flower
among weeds, if the orphaned blossom of early
winter shares your fate and launches
an avalanche, a generation; the word is weed
but out of its loins springs a promise
to the fateless, to reproduce at last, in vain.
Laugh at yourself and hang on to your stick
as to the present day, grin with your toothless
gums between aged thighs, as if Sara were giving
birth into the wind, the child an uprooted marrow,
and carve your old face henceforth into the newborn
into its infant mouth and laugh, laugh at Isaac.

László G. István
is a poet, essayist and translator. He has published five volumes of poetry, and has won several scholarships and prizes.

Headwaiter

Főpincér

Not his strength; he employs his accurate
gaze, his deodorant-tone; a sleepy
musician disregarding his beat,
he moves things around – waste paper, stained table-cloths,
drips of wax varnishing his nails, a blindly
accomplished ritual among the paraphernalia
of the acolyte's long service.
Table five wants the bill.
There is no elevation of the host, but the palming of the tip,
starched thanks.
Flat footed. Casual attention. Reserved,
measured rests.

In his head, the faces of his guests are a graveyard.
A ritual without kaddish, as if he's digging,
he brings in round upon round, the orders for afters.
So many stomachs for the earth to swallow down,
to inter, invisibly. A new company.
Elegiac pose, sweet laughter, the gourmet's salad of leaves.
Salt is spilled. A plate slips, falls.
Every one is family, every one bereaved.
Every one is happily deceased.

Burger King

Burger King

As if their heads were so many conkers,
brown light-cracks muscling through their cells of pins,
the men are eating.
They are not thinking of women or of heaven,
but banging open greased-up wrappers
with mayo weeping through white napkins;
they bite off more than they can chew
while food-gauze comes like Velcro from its wounds.
With mouthfuls barging round their mouths
and pushing in along the tongue
as if by being swallowed they'd be born,
they are eating, all alone.

Fishmonger

Halárus

This is his day. On the crest of his hair,
like some military mock-up,
his cap lists; he weighs up the punters
by their quickest flickers, pulls out carp quick snap,
keeps his in-growing fingernail stinging
in fish water—
got to feel
the heads of the fish. The silvering eyes
only make sense to the man
with gut-knife in hand, in his gut his intent
to the cut; the man who does what he does
for us all, who does what he must, what is meant;
who knows the points at ankle, wrist,
to best hammer a nail in; who can fillet
a man easy as you'd ease open
one of these fish, who cuts the chat
to let his blade do the talking; tidy; fights when he hurts.
There is no bark around his heart. I mean picture a tree
nailed by lightning, the hanging flash of it aflame.
No I meant
the fish aflame in his hands, its last supper, its mouthing
for water in the air.

Translated by Antony Dunn

The Lake

A tó

The water seemed to be made of bone,
its body of spine, ribs and shoulder-blade
composed of waves, lines of the current.
Impossible to swim in this, I said.
No one had sent me or enticed me in.
The sharpness of the sun, a disc tattooed on the sky
radiated from some deeper blindness.
No need to dip in, the surface is unruffled—
the lake like a secret too soon discovered
had turned boring, simplistic. I knew
it would taste sweet and yet I felt the crackle

of salt-crystals in my mouth like an explosive sweet.
So how many heads do you have? someone asked.
How many? Just the one. Then jump in alone.
The water seemed composed of bone and on it
the shadow of my head, the crack clear on the X-ray.

The Road to Autumn

Út az őszbe

In the leather-covered back seat of the taxi
you nestled in beside me as if about
to lay an egg. You might even have been
wearing furs like a bird in a wrap, our driver
puffing at his cigar, bored and insolent. You extended
your nails the way a predator hands over
its prey, what's it to do with me? I rubbed
at the lacquer with the ball of my finger like someone
waiting a long time for this. The rain wept in the street,
sparking off mudguards as if each street corner
were lighting a match. You too lit your cigarillo as if
you could taste it, silent, glittering and twitching
in your mouth. I never could bear pregnant women.
The silence sits in them like a stone. I have never needed
that sleepy look at the heart of which nothing is dreaming
only time. What after all is there to bequeath to posterity?
How many more streets before we get out of the taxi. There are
birds, possibly penguins, where it is the father
that broods over the hatchlings, but we are fine as we are.
I talk of this or that, that we'll soon be there. When we arrive
you at last confess that you never wanted children. There's blues
of some sort playing, I don't ask the driver to turn it off.
Emergency of course, the hospital. I tug at you till
you're out as if I were delivering you from the narrow taxi.

Translated by George Szirtes

György Dragomán

Prince

(Short Story)

When Misi got home soon after dawn, Alina, his big sister, was waiting for him outside by the hole knocked through the brick wall, and she poked a finger at the cardboard box he was carrying. "So, what did you bring? And where did you leave the motorbike?" Misi just gave a wave of the hand before folding back the top of the box. Alina looked inside, but as soon as she saw the puppy nestled in soft strips of towel, she slammed shut the box, almost causing Misi to drop it, and the sudden movement must have scared the tiny dog, for it gave a yelp. Misi turned to go in toward the small building that used to be the caretaker's quarters, which is where they lived, but Alina blocked his way. "It's best you take this mutt right back where you got it, you hear?" she said, furiously shaking her head. "We don't need no dog around here."

Misi looked at Alina's face, at the rock-hard wrinkles rage had etched onto its side. "What do you know?" he said. "Just don't you go saying a thing, I mean, remember the stuff you said when I decided we should come here to live, you cursed me up and down, and then I turned out to be right after all, didn't I? We've got it good here, don't we? We're living in a real mansion, aren't we?" He tried going by his big sister, but once again she blocked his path. "Mansion? What mansion? This is place is a wreck, you hear, a wreck."

Stooping a bit, Misi shoved Alina out of his way with his shoulder. "There's plenty of room for us here," he said, stepping past her. "Us and the kid, you and Balázs. So don't you go saying a thing."

Alina turned toward him. "You're not going in there, you hear? You're not going in until you tell me what you gave for it. What kind of a dog is this, anyway? It's

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György Dragomán

was born in Transylvania, Romania, where he spent his childhood until he moved to Hungary in 1988. He has published two novels, A pusztítás könyve *(Genesis Undone, 2003) and* A fehér király *(The White King, 2005, forthcoming Doubleday UK, Houghton Mifflin, USA). This short story was written for a reading organised by the magazine* Beszélő, *where all the stories responded to the untitled photos of* **Lenke Szilágyi.** *The photographer has exhibited her work many times in and outside Hungary, and has published two albums to date.*

LENKE SZILÁGYI

not even a real dog, it's not even as big as a rat. Why'd you go bringing it here, huh? Go on, what did you give for it."

The puppy stirred in the box. Misi could feel rage moving up into his throat. "What did I give?" he asked, knowing he too would be shouting any moment now. "That lousy motorbike," he finally said, taking a deep breath but not shouting after all. "Now just shut up. Okay? Shut up!"

Alina didn't shut up. "You've gone nuts!" she declared. "Hear that, Misi? Nuts."

Misi didn't say a thing back, he just kept going, carrying the cardboard box and muttering to himself, "What do you know, this here's pedigree, with best-of-breed parents, those lousy wheels weren't worth a damn anyway, I did a good deal, I did." Meanwhile he stepped along the cemented-over one-time park, one of the basketball poles was still standing, and then he stepped onto the rag rug at the entrance to the caretaker's quarters and through the cold, butter-scented kitchen, taking the cardboard box straight into the smaller of the two rooms. Linda and Li'liván were still asleep, and as usual, Li'liván wasn't on the old cot, which he hadn't liked ever since Alina told him orphans used to sleep on these cots for years and years, back when the mansion hadn't yet completely fallen apart, and not even after Misi painted it green did he want to sleep on it.

Without stopping by the window to roll up the heavy wooden blinds, Misi went by the little bed and began by putting down the box on the floor in front of the bed, on the cheap bright rug, and then he took the pedigree and the picture from the inside pocket of his sports coat and the leash from an outside pocket, putting all this on the stool by Li'liván's clothes. Only then did he go over to the blinds, only then did he grasp the thick canvas strap, only then did he give it a yank—ever since he put in a tractor-axle-bearing into the wall mechanism the week before, the strap didn't get stuck anymore. As he kept tugging, the blind creaked its way up with shrillness outdone only by Misi as he now began shouting, "Up you get, Li'liván, up you get! And happy birthday! Happy birthday with many returns, a whole heap of returns. Grow up big, my son, big and strong."

Linda sprang up at once and then so too did Li'liván, but without saying a thing: he only stared down at the cardboard box, which bore an illustration of the television it once held. Looking up at Misi, he asked, "What's in there? Is it really a real TV?" Pointing at the box, Misi replied, "It's much better than a TV. Take a look, Li'liván. It's a surprise. I brought it for you." Li'liván now climbed out of bed, his hair tousled and his eyes still full of sleep, but he went over to that box all the same, opening it up and peering inside before suddenly crying out, "Ah! It'll bite!" As he jumped right back into bed and disappeared under the blanket beside Linda, the box fell over, and out climbed a little white dog.

Linda now sat up in bed and looked at Misi. "Have you gone crazy? You know full well Li'liván's been scared of dogs ever since being chased by that boxer. Out on the street, it's over to the other side if he sees one. So why'd you go bringing a dog home?"

All the shouting drew Alina into the room along with Balázs, and there they all stood looking at the puppy. Balázs was the first to speak. "Just what kind of a dog is this supposed to be?" he asked. Misi took the pedigree from the stool and handed it to him. "You'd know if you could read," he said. "It's a toy poodle, best of breed. We'll be taking it to shows, we will."

Pointing a finger to her forehead, Alina announced, "Like I said, he's nuts." Then she looked at Misi. "You've gone nuts, kid brother, you must've fallen off your motorbike and gone nuts. What do we need a dog around here for? Especially one like this, that ain't even a real dog?"

Li'liván began crying under the blanket, and Linda caressed him. "Now don't you cry," she said. "The mice aren't thirsty now, so they don't need your tears, you hear?" But Li'liván kept it up as he buried his face in the pillow so only his black hair was visible, which is what Linda now stroked. "All right already, don't be sad," she said, "I'll make you a nice *lángos* for breakfast." Then she looked at Misi. "That's it? That's really what you brought your son for his fifth birthday?"

The dog sat there on the rug, trembling. Misi bent down. "It's not just for him," he pronounced, "but for the whole family." And with two hands, just like he'd been shown, he reached under the pup, closed his hands around it, lifted it up, and held it there in the air. "Just take a look at how little he still is," he said, reaching it out toward the bed, "his eyes haven't been open long at all. Sure, his coat hasn't grown out yet,

but it will, and then we got to trim it." Smiling, he reached into another pocket of his sports jacket and produced a small plastic bag, which he held out toward Linda. "So I brought something for you too. A beard trimmer. Came along with the dog. That's what we got to trim it with. You've always wanted to be a hairdresser, anyway, so at least from now on you won't go practising only on us. We'll take the dog to shows, we will. It'll be gorgeous. Just take a look at the picture of its dad."

After undoing the rubber band around the top of the plastic bag, Linda removed the beard trimmer, which she then began opening and closing repeatedly. It wasn't new—the chrome had chipped off in one or two spots on the cutting head—but it did click open and shut like a charm.

"You really are completely nuts," she said, already smiling through what remained of her anger as she removed the little black-and-white photo from the bag. "Heavens," she said, looking at the picture a long time before putting it back in the bag and again fiddling with the beard trimmer, opening and closing it while brushing a finger up against the cutting head.

Misi reached out the trembling pup toward his son. "Whadaya say, Li'liván? Want to pet it?" The boy lifted his head out of the pillow; he was no longer crying, but his face was still full of tears. He didn't dare reach out his hand.

"No one's saying you got to," said Misi, putting the puppy down on the rug. "I'm taking it for a walk. Give me the leash." No one moved, so he picked up the long, synthetic-leather lead himself, clipped it onto the thin little collar around the puppy's neck, and patted the dog carefully on the side.

"Clever dog," he said. "Come on."

The dog went, Misi stepping backward down the hallway toward where they'd knocked a hole in the wall into the inside courtyard. He stepped out, his shoes tapping against the stone-tile floor of the colonnaded former ballroom, whose roof had long since collapsed, the dog meanwhile heading toward the columns, pulling the leash tight before stopping by a clump of grass or some root that had broken through the floor, which he began to sniff, his stubby tail twitching about. Looking on, Misi thought back to his morning at the flea market, to the breeder's Lada station wagon with all those gorgeous pictures plastered on its side of award-winning, ribbon-adorned dogs, gold cups and podiums, and that's when it occurred to him that their dog didn't even have a name, yes, it had to be given a name, and right then the puppy lifted a hind leg and peed all over that clump of grass or whatever it was, or maybe it was just going through the motions, and all at once the dog's name came to Misi, who even said it out loud, "Prince," and then he looked to where the ornamental pond used to be, and it occurred to him that they could have it scooped out, why, fish could even get by in it, and as Misi then looked back at the dog, he heard the others slowly coming outside, yes, without even looking back he knew they were all there, Alina, Balázs, Linda, and Li'liván too, he knew they were standing there behind him, each one of them looking at the dog, whose name, come to think of it, they still didn't even know. ❧

Translated by Paul Olchváry

György Kurtág

Struck by Apollo!

Remembering György Ligeti

Obituary, speech of mourning? For me he's more alive than ever. For months my small study in St. André has been filled with his compositions, writings and speeches, with essays, articles and commemorative texts about him. Again and again I read the scores and listen to all the recordings I can get my hands on.

In front of me is his life's work—perhaps even his life.

No end of things I'd like to tell him, including what I've finally understood about his music after decades. Perhaps there are correlations that only I've discovered now. So many things I'd like to ask. Sometimes his later works give answers, but other times it seems hopeless because he's not here to explain them.

I'd like to find out how you too might have known him. I must summon the help of those better equipped than me to portray him.

"You had to hear him speak, if possible see him," writes Wolfgang Sandner *(Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* June 17, 2006), referring to Ligeti's lively, expressive gestures. "He was a master of the curious art of linguistic polyphony. Anyone lucky enough to experience his wonderful way of expressing himself could understand his music far better afterwards. Because his language bore a striking congruence to his scores. The same lively, bustling sound configurations, the richness of associations, the far-fetched lightness of touch that nevertheless grew in some magical way into a complex linguistic architecture. Ligeti was a *Gesamtkunstwerk*."

György Kurtág
is Hungary's leading composer. Below he remembers his lifelong friend, the composer György Ligeti, who died on June 12, 2006.
The speech was delivered at a memorial session of the Ordre Pour le Mérite in Berlin and was published in German in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung *on August 4, 2007. The section marked Appendix, from which parts I, II, VIII, IX are published here, expresses those thoughts and ideas Kurtág was not able to include in his speech because of time constraints. The speech and the relevant parts of the Appendix appear here courtesy of* signandsight.com, *a service of the journal* perlentauche.

A recollection written by neurobiologist Gerhard Neuweiler, Ligeti's closest friend during the last six years of his life: "He began asking me what I was doing at the moment... He questioned, and I answered, he probed, and I responded, he bored deeper and deeper..., he was like a volcano, always spewing new ideas, stimulations, doubts, questions... He forced me to reflect and inquire more closely, and through his inquisitorial curiosity he led me into new and unexpected aspects of my own discipline."

In my own private mythology, I ascribe this kind of probing to the Socrates-Ligeti.

Yes, that curiosity!

Now I quote his words from 1993: "As different as the criteria for art and science are, they are similar in that those who work in them are driven by curiosity. The key thing in both areas is to investigate coherences still undiscovered by others, and to create structures that haven't existed until now."

This "insatiable curiosity, the euphoria of discovering and understanding, the breathtaking speed of thought," as Hungarian composer László Vidovszky put it, which characterised the heights of the Renaissance, this never-being-content with what you've achieved, always on the lookout for new ways of expression...

At the same time, the true Ligetian *poiesis* emerges from the experiences of musical history from Machaut to today.

Much has been written about how he profited from folklore research (that of Brăiloiu, Kubik, Simha Arom and, of course, again and again, Bartók), but it seems that even he forgot that it was the young Ligeti (1950–53) who revealed in a seminal essay the functioning and harmonising patterns of Romanian folk orchestras.

For him, "the sciences were also a true source of inspiration" (Vidovszky). With Marina Lobanova he spoke about the "paradoxes and beauties of the mathematical way of thinking..." And literature, the arts...

From Heinrich von Kleist to Gyula Krúdy, from Proust to Weöres, Hölderlin and Kafka, Shakespeare and Lewis Carroll, the Joyce of *Finnegan's Wake,* from Beckett and Ionesco to the Borges of *Labyrinths,* from Bosch to Piranesi, from Cézanne to Miro and Escher—so much is reflected in this music!

We met and became friends sixty-two years ago. In the first days of September in 1945, the entrance exam for Composition at the Budapest Music Academy changed my life forever. We waited to be called. At the same time I flipped through his scores and saw how far above me his knowledge, maturity and musical fantasy put him.

I hooked up with him for life. Until 1956, as long as he lived in Budapest, we were bound by a close friendship. I had the privilege of witnessing the creation of his works, and participating in his life. I was there when he met Vera, and best man at their wedding in 1952.

I see his life as a single entity, his oeuvre as endlessly ramified, held together by LOYALTY, fidelity. Above all to childhood.

a) His early childhood *Urtraum*: motionless textural blocks transform gradually and imperceptibly, squirming and writhing from inside, on the verge of building musical structures. For decades this will be one of his fundamental musical typologies, appearing in its purest form in the immense chromatic clusters and micropolyphonic meshes of his *Atmosphères*. Then later in the beseeching voice fascicles of the Kyrie fugue in Requiem (1962–1965), unapproachable in its perfection.

b) Kylwyria, his imaginary country, which he built up between the ages of five and thirteen. He drew colourful orohydrographic maps which could pass for Miro paintings, invented the Kylwyrian language and grammar, geography and history, describing in naive Utopian terms Kylwyria's legal and social systems.

Out of Kylwyria come his *Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures* (1962–1965). They articulate his second fundamental musical typology: abundant humour, dramatic twists and turns, unexpected tremorous flashes and equally unexpected moments of pause, aggression and apprehension. The three singers develop very human relationships on the basis of non-existent phonetic (Super-Kylwyrian?!) linguistic material. His intention was to unite the two *Aventures* in a single opera entitled *Kylwyria*. Happily, *Le Grand Macabre* was born instead!

Equally, in the Dies Irae of the Requiem a medieval sequence of images unfurls from desperation to anxiety, from the tragic to the grotesque, as if intoning the flash point of a *Last Judgement* by Hieronymus Bosch, or Hans Memling.

c) Sometime in his childhood he read the short story by Gyula Krúdy about an old widow whose apartment is bathed in twilight and stuffed full of antique clocks which beat confused, irregular time, creating a unique atmosphere. From this childhood memory and his experience with the *Poème Symphonique for 100 metronomes*, Ligeti developed a new type of scherzo whose tempo and character notations already disclose much: "Come un mecanismo die precisione" (String Quartet Nr. 2, III) or "Movimento preciso e meccanico" (Chamber Concerto III).

The 1962 world premiere of the *Poème Symphonique for 100*—mechanical—*metronomes* was a scandal. The title, harking back to the heyday of Romanticism, together with the mechanically oscillating metronomes was like a provocation, an attempt to *épater le bourgeois*. But later concerts showed the sheer poetry of the piece over and above its daring novelty. At first the metronomes, all set at different speeds and set in motion at the same time, build an impermeable mesh of sound. But then the structure becomes increasingly clear as the quickest machines run to a halt. The beats of the two slowest, the two "soloists" remaining at the end, are like a moving, moving, lyrical farewell.

The last minutes. Vera and Lukas are by his side. His breathing slows, halts, starts again, becomes even slower.

Lukas: "Like the end of the metronome piece."

...the breathing slows even more and then...—stops.

On the afternoon concert on the day of the funeral service, the *Poème Symphonique*. Astounding, tragic, Beckett-like.

ANDREA FELVÉGI

Márta and György Kurtág with György Ligeti in the studio of the Budapest Music Center. 1998, Budapest.

Appendix

I

Remarks with no claim to completeness or system...

...on the theme of "loyalty." Symmetries in work and life.

Again and again he comes back to the poetry of Sándor Weöres. After 1956, Weöres is the sole Hungarian poet whose work Ligeti sets to music.

1946: For me *Táncol a Hold* (The Moon is Dancing) and *Kalmár jött nagy madarakkal* (A Peddlar Came with Large Birds—2 songs with piano accompaniment) are explosive, courageous, surrealistic madness, both self-discovery and promise for the future, incomparable with anything in his oeuvre right up until the electronic *Artikulation* of 1958. I would almost say that I count the "true" Ligeti from this point on.

2000: His last completed work, again setting poems by Sándor Weöres to music: *Sippal, dobbal, nádihegedűvel* (With Pipes, Drums and Fiddles).

Right away in the first song it moves mountains with a few strokes, instilling the grey wolves with fear and horror. The enchanting instrumentation of the "Bitter-Sweet" in the 6th movement is a revival of North-Transylvanian folk songs. Its harmonies integrate Kodály—heard through Bartók—and are reminiscent of the Ligeti of the 1940s and early 50s.

It may be a coincidence, but then again it may not, that his life's work closes with Sándor Weöres and his mother tongue.

In 1955, Weöres: *Éjszaka* (Night) and *Reggel* (Morning) for mixed choir. Perhaps the most perfect composition of this kind in his years spent in Hungary.

Éjszaka foreshadows the meshwork of *Atmosphères,* without however pointing clearly in this direction. The author of this work could follow brilliantly in Bartók's footsteps. (His first string quartet, *Metamorphoses Nocturnes,* is just as alive to me as if it were Bartók's unwritten 7th. And apart from Bartók's six, this work remains the most important string quarter ever written in Hungary.)

In 1955–56, he worked on Weöres' *Istár pokoljárása* (Ishtar's Descent into Hell). True, all that remains of it is a few sheets of sketches, but we talked about it so much at the time that it has fixed itself in my memory as a special, major work.

In 1983, Weöres once more with the *Magyar Etűdök* (Hungarian Etudes). The first, the "mirror canon", displays breathtakingly virtuosity. The third, *Vásár* (The Fair), arranges five choir groups, each one set apart from the rest. Every group sings five different poems, each in a different tempo. Their melodies refer to Hungarian folk music in ever-changing ways, without being direct quotations. Dizzying, teeming, fairground business, in all its density.

II

Ligeti's knowledge of folk music didn't come from books. From the age of three he was surrounded by the living reality of Hungarian and Romanian folklore. As a small child enjoying the summer freshness in Csíkszereda (Miercurea-Ciuc) in the Transylvanian mountains, he listened to the *bucium,* the Romanian alpenhorn.

Its special sound (which immediately attracted him to this instrument measuring several metres) derives from its ability to form only natural overtones. These sound false, yet attractive, to our ears accustomed to a tempered tuning.

1949 to 1950, he studied in Romania. He worked at the Bucharest and Cluj Institutes for Folklore, listening to and making many recordings.

1951: *Concert românesc* for orchestra. The horn solo in the third movement demands a *bucium*-like natural sound of the soloist.

1998–99: *Hamburg Concerto* in 6 movements. In 2001, he added a seventh. The work is a horn concerto for soloist, 4 differently-tuned natural horns and orchestra. This is the most decisive progression to a new harmonic world. Each horn plays its own natural tones. But their different tunings interfere with the harmony. In this way he transgresses the tempered tone system with the simplest means.

Whether the composition is finished remains an open question. In any case, he spoke at the time of more movements.

But perhaps it wasn't sickness that hindered him; he may have considered the piece finished with 7 movements. In any event, the consequences of the work could not have been fully exhausted. For those who come after, it is seminal, opening up new ground for their quests.

VIII

The legacy.

When I started copying Webern in my thirties, I had to stop in the first movement of his Symphony Op. 21 to deconstruct and analyse the mirror canon in its separate parts, and recast it in a multi-coloured four-voiced score. I felt that studying this music complemented the analysis of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (which we took very seriously at the Music Academy), and should be made obligatory for all composition students (which is now the case in Budapest).

Recently, when I once again took up the study of Ligeti's work, one of the first sources I came across was Simon Gallot's outstanding analysis of the 5th movement of the *Nonsense Madrigals,* the "The Lobster Quadrille" (Simon Gallot: "György Ligeti populaire et savant—aux origines du style." Doctoral thesis, 2005, Universite Lumière, Lyon).

My first reaction was: if I weren't eighty-one years old, I would have to get to work copying and analysing Ligeti's "model pieces".

That would mean, it turned out, taking a close look at many compositions. Not just one or two. Almost like with Bach. Above all, I would have to analyse Requiem, the Kyrie, but also *Atmosphères, Lux Aeterna* and *Lontano.* Of the études, at least "Desordre" and "Automne de Varsovie." But also the first movement of the Violin Concerto (both versions; after the first in 1990, he wrote another in 1992), as well as the mirror canon of the first movement of the *Hungarian Etudes, Continuum* and *Aventures.*

Numbers 1, 5 and 6 of the *Nonsense Madrigals* also open up the task of once again looking closely at Josquin and Ockeghem. But it's too late for that, it seems completely hopeless.

Yet, it's not inconceivable that I should get to work: "*Io e i compagni eravam vecchi e tardi*"—"I and my company were old and slow." I could at least copy, analyse and get through Kyrie and *Lux aeterna.*

But it's hard to imagine what it could mean for young composers to immerse themselves in these works, to be versed in the problems posed by the "Hamburg Concerto." What's important for me could mean life itself to them.

IX

On the etymology of Kylwyria: Vera says that as a five year old, Ligeti had seen a poster for a film called "The Ordeals of a Mother," using the Hungarian word "kálvária" for "ordeals". The word "kálvária" in the title pleased him, but so did the letter Y, which is why he called his country Kylwyria.

As he planned the fusion of *Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures* into an opera, the first draft was to be called "Oedipus" (see: Egy anya kálváriája, in English: The Ordeals of a Mother!). But then he decided in favour of Kylwyria. In the end, he wrote *Le Grand Macabre.* ❧

Translated from the German by John Lambert

Károly Kincses

Brassaï: The Hungarian Documents

A Chronology in Letters 1940–1984

As co-editor of the series *History of Hungarian Photography,* published by the Museum of Hungarian Photography in Kecskemét, I have worked on the oeuvre of almost fifty Hungarian photographers over some twenty years. The series has included several photographers who left Hungary when quite young, such as André Kertész, László Moholy-Nagy, Márton Munkácsi and Robert Capa. Most recently, my colleagues and I have spent two years studying the life and work of Brassaï (born in 1899 as Gyula Halász), including research on his relatives and friends, alive or deceased.

During this project, two events helped to place Brassaï's work in an entirely new light. The first of these was a 2006 auction in France, where 550 vintage Brassaï photographs were sold to private collectors, dealers, galleries and public collections for tens of thousands of euros, the first such auction since the deaths of Brassaï (1984) and his widow Gilberte (2005).

The second event was an unexpected stroke of luck, of the kind any museum will experience only once. As in a fairy tale, a man arrived in Budapest from Braşov in Transylvania, after a 12-hour train journey, carrying two enormous, musty-smelling folders. Opening the folders, we found 221 original Brassaï letters, along with postcards, early drawings, signed photos, newspaper clippings—a total of 637 items, which were offered to us at a very reasonable price. Although the museum was unable to purchase the material, their possessor donated forty letters to the museum, and we acquired copies of the other documents as well.

Many of Brassaï's relatives and descendants of his friends live in Transylvania or Hungary to this day. We started investigating these connections and visited the places where Brassaï spent time, more or less regularly, during his youth. We had clearly embarked on this project at the twelfth hour. Many early documents, such as photos, drawings and letters came to light, some of which had lain in drawers for half a century. By collecting them, transcribing the interviews and gathering

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Gyulus: Brassaï képek és dokumentumok *(Gyulus: Brassaï Pictures and Documents, Magyar Fotográfiai Múzeum, 2007) as volume 45 in the series*
A magyar fotográfia történetéből *(History of Hungarian Photography).*

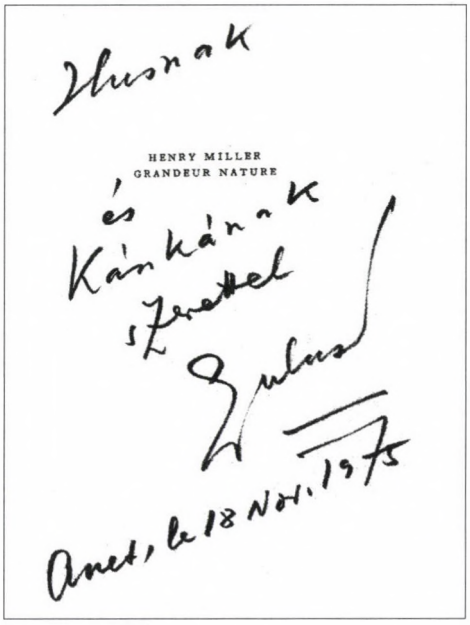
together the scattered sources, we have uncovered some hitherto unknown events in Brassaï's life, events that left direct or indirect traces on his art as well. The documents shed light on his school years, during which he recited poetry, was involved in sports and got his start as a painter. Some interesting details surfaced regarding the First World War years and his involvement in the 1919 Revolution at the Budapest Arts Academy. We know exactly how he left for Berlin in December 1920, how he returned to Braşov, which by then had become part of Romania, and how he left his native city for good to go to Paris in late February 1924.

The book, *Gyulus: Brassaï képek és dokumentumok* (Gyulus: Brassaï Pictures and Documents) thus compiled presents Brassaï's Hungarian connections more fully than any previous publication. It also includes his so far unpublished correspondence with his family after 1940, and documents presented to the Museum of Hungarian Photography by János Reismann, Miklós Rév, André Kertész and others. The title *Gyulus,* is the diminutive of Gyula (Julius), which was how he signed his letters to his family even at the age of seventy.

Our activity also resulted in an exhibition with over 100 pictures, held at the Mai Manó House in Budapest, the Museum's sister institution (10 September to 2 December 2007). Brassaï's relatives in Hungary and Transylvania were of great help in this project, and we wish to thank them again for their cooperation.

Most of the events of Brassaï's long life are well known. The roots of his oeuvre, however, have long remained hidden. Brassaï lived in Braşov (Brassó for Hungarians and Kronstadt for its German population) until the age of 18, and in 1931, at the age of 32, he adopted the name alluding to his hometown's Hungarian name. As he himself often related, he only used this name at first to sign his com- mercial photographs while he was hoping to establish himself as a painter under his real name.

Part of the correspondence with his parents from the years between 1920 and 1940 was published by Kriterion, Bucharest, under the title *Előhívás* (Developing, 1980); here Brassaï writes about his struggles and successes as he was trying to find his place after his arrival in Paris. This volume came out in English as well (Brassaï: *Letters to My Parents: 1920–1940.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997).



Title page of Brassaï's book on Henry Miller, inscribed by him as 'Gyulus', his family pet name, to his sister-in-law Ilus and his brother Kánka.

For Brassaï, the breakthrough came with his first album, *Paris de nuit,* with 60 photographs published in 1932. It became a classic and afterwards Brassaï's career progressed by leaps and bounds.

The selection presented here chronicles the most important events of his career in chronological order from 1940 to his death. Dry biographical data are now complemented by the previously unpublished excerpts and documents.

1940–43 During the Second World War, Brassaï, who has been living in Paris for many years, received his call-up papers from the Romanian army. He still holds Romanian citizenship, but he chooses to remain in Paris.

> *He refused to work for papers published with the permission of the German occupying forces. He read an enormous amount, wrote (for his drawer) and played chess. He patiently listened to the endless stories of Marie, his loquacious cleaning lady, publishing them in 1949 as* Histoire de Marie. *From September 1943 until close to the time of liberation, he took photos of Picasso's sculptures. We saw each other almost daily in those days. We had lunch and dinner together. In the evening, we would play chess until curfew. Whenever I went to see him, I found him writing. During the good season, he wrote standing up at his lectern. In the winter, as his apartment was not heated, he built a little "hut" in his room out of plywood, with his photos pasted on it and various leftovers from his exhibitions. He heated the hut with an electric hot plate and went in there to write.*
> (János Reismann: "Beszélgetések Brassaïval" [Conversations with Brassaï], *Tükör,* 2 January, 1968, pp. 19–20)

He starts recording his thoughts and his conversations with artists, especially Picasso. Asked by Picasso during a photo shoot why all previous photographs of his sculptures were so bad, Brassaï replies:

> *They had the stupid habit of placing the bright sculptures in front of dark backgrounds and the dark sculptures in front of bright backgrounds. That was the death of them. The full spatiality of a sculpture can be realized only if the bright parts remain brighter than the background, and the dark parts darker.*
> (Quoted by Ferenc Galambos, "Brassaï." *Horizon,* February 1970, p. 119)

1944 His younger brother Endre goes missing on the Russian front.

> *My youngest son Endre Halász, who disappeared on the battlefront in 1944, was a great sportsman, an accomplished skier in particular. [...] He was also an outstanding swimmer, target shooter and mountaineer, and popular among his young companions. Up to April 1944 we were in contact with him; after that, all our efforts were in vain, there was no trace of him.*
> (Gyula Halász: *On the Threshold of the One-Hundredth Year,* pp. 105–6)

Brassaï photographs the liberation of Paris in August. Picasso takes a look at his friend's drawings for the first time.

1945 The first exhibition of Brassaï's drawings and paintings opens at the Galerie Renou et Colle in Paris. His photographs of this period are mostly nostalgic misty landscapes. He enters new territory with the sets of the ballet *Le Rendez-vous,* created from photographs blown up to very large sizes. The acclaimed book of the ballet is by Jacques Prévert, the music by Joseph Kosma, the choreography by Boris Kochno and Roland Petit, and the

curtain—blue, violet and flesh-coloured—by Picasso. The premiere takes place at the Sarah Bernhardt Theatre. Later, the ballet is performed in several other cities, and is used in Marcel Carné's film *Les portes de la nuit* (1946).

1946 Every year, Brassaï spends long stretches of time in the Chamonix area. He takes many photos while walking in the hills of Bossons and Argentière, one of them a portrait of Henri Michaux. A new book, *Trente dessins,* is published, containing his pen and ink drawings, with a prefaratory poem by Jacques Prévert.

1948 He marries the young French painter Gilberte Mercedes Boyer.

> *Dear Daddy and Mummy, now that I had to confess all my sins before the church wedding, I take the liberty to write to you again, asking your forgiveness for my long silence. Well, it's finally over. During my three years of "married" life with Gilberte, I never doubted that she was a worthy spouse. [...] A few months ago, I was able to obtain and furnish a studio not far from here, and although I have hardly had time to escape there until now, I hope to devote myself, once again, to painting and sculpting very soon. Several books of mine are in the process of publication, one in London, one in Paris and one in Switzerland.* (Letter to his parents, 19 July)

Brassaï, whose life had been rather Bohemian, now turns into a home-maker. The marriage lasts 36 years, until Brassaï's death. The rare visitors to their home (he does not allow many to enter into his intimate space) cannot resist his collection of objects. André Kertész calls Brassaï a "surrealist in his soul". On the narrow edges of the bookshelves, objects—daguerrotypes, painted photographs, paintings in progress, dice, dolls, shards of clay and all kinds of snapshots—vie for space. An album, *Études de Nus,* is published, containing eight nude photos by Brassaï. During his excursions in the Pyrenees, he finds the large water-washed pebbles that were to inspire his sphere-like sculptures—a new artistic genre à la Brassaï, which he will pursue to the end of his life.

> *I am extremely busy at the moment [...] First I spent 8 days in Arles, Nîmes and the Camargue area; one day with Jean Hugo, the grandson of Victor Hugo, one day with Magny Hugo, Jean Hugo's sister. Then I had to develop and deliver the photos. Today I have to be in Dieppe, to visit the painter Georges Braque (another assignment for* Harper's*), then I have to go to Chartres to shoot an American painter who lives there. Of course, there are another hundred things in progress and unfortunately my name is so well known that everyone wants something from me. Two weeks ago, Jean Cocteau asked me to do the sets of his new ballet for the Paris Opera. I did the model and Cocteau was in raptures when he came to see me yesterday. My photos, 12 to 14 meters tall, will create a scandal on the stage of the Opera, provided the plans are carried out. Both Mr Hirsch, the director of the Opera, and [choreographer] Loge Lifar, however, have given us carte blanche. The ballet is called* Phèdre. (Letter to his parents, 30 October)

Gyula Halász, Sr. (1871–1969). Brassaï's father, a teacher of French, journalist, contributor to the Hungarian press of Braşov. His memoir *A századik év küszöbén* (On the Threshold of the One-Hundredth Year, Bucharest, 1967) is frequently quoted below. The Halász family belonged to the respected professional middle-class of a city inhabited by Germans, Hungarians, and Romanians in various proportions over the centuries. Brassaï writes about his father:

> I am thinking of the letters I received from my father. Not only did he not oppose my artistic ambitions, but he supported me all along, not only morally but financially, even though his teacher's salary was rather modest. He had once dreamed of becoming a poet. He undoubtedly passed the mantle on to me, his eldest son, to fulfill his dream. He decided before I did that France would be my chosen homeland. My father was an enthusiastic admirer of Paris. He completed some of his studies here, then moved back with his family for an entire year in 1903. That is how I became a Parisian for the first time when I was barely five years old. When I returned in 1924, I felt I was returning to my second homeland—my childhood memories were still vivid. My father's letters! I have preserved them through all these years. Wit and joy radiated from them, along with encouragement and concern, of course. The dialogue that never ceased until his death at the age of ninety-seven can only be complete this way, with his voice.*

He corresponded with his son up to the age of 97, in full possession of his mental faculties.

Mrs Gyula Halász, née Matild Verzár (1876–1952): Brassaï's mother. Hers was a Magyarised, art-loving Armenian family that had lived in Transylvania for many

* Brassaï: *Letters to My Parents 1920–1940,* The University of Chicago Press, 1997. Preface, pp. XXI–XXII.

1948 *Histoire de Marie,* based on the stories of Brassaï's cleaning woman, is published with an introduction by Henry Miller. This book finally brings him much media attention.

> *If you get this letter in time, you can hear my voice for five minutes in the programme "Lu et approuvé", next Tuesday the 17th, at 8:35 p.m. Paris time. [...] The recording was done this afternoon, so I can listen to myself as well.* Marie *has been published and is already in the bookshops. Both the printing and the layout came out very well; I think it will be a great success and the first edition will soon be sold out. Thus, on the threshold of my 50th birthday (and according to schedule) and before bringing out my more serious books, I have embarked on a literary career. Several famous writers (Charles Plisnier, etc.) were at the radio; they had come to talk about Maeterlinck's works but stayed on to listen to* Marie. *I watched them through the glass wall during*

generations. Today, most of the descendants of the family live in Hungary and in Paris. The grandchildren of Matild Verzár's sister Jolán (Gabriella, Attila and Endre Lengyel) are professional musicians. Roland Borsody, the grandson of Matild's other sister, is a photographer in Budapest.

Kálmán Halász (1900–1978). The "Kánka" of the letters. Brassaï's younger brother, an architect in Braşov, where he spent all his life. As an independent contractor, he designed and built several private and public buildings. After the Second World War, he taught in a secondary school (1947–54) and later became chief architect for Braşov County. He edited the collection of Brassaï's letters to his parents (1920–1940) for its Bucharest publication. After their father died, he was the last link between Brassaï and his native city.

János Reismann (1905–1976): Photographer and journalist, one of Brassaï's closest friends. They met in Paris in 1925 and lived in the same house for some time. In 1927, Reismann moved to Berlin where he worked as a photojournalist, collaborating with Erwin Piscator and John Heartfield. In 1931, Heartfield arranged an exhibition of his works in Moscow. Reismann accompanied him there and spent seven years in the Soviet Union as a journalist. His residency permit was not renewed, thanks to which he escaped Stalin's purges. Between 1938 and 1945 he used the labs of his friends, Brassaï and Robert Capa, and survived on various odd jobs. Committed to left-wing politics, he returned to Hungary after the liberation and worked for the press office of the Hungarian Legation in Paris in 1948–49, being appointed cultural attaché. In September 1949, he was condemned to life imprisonment on trumped-up charges in the Rajk trial, but was amnestied in 1954. He was allowed to travel, and published some splendid photo albums on Italy and Sardinia, with prefaces by Carlo Levi. He worked for various Hungarian magazines from 1960 to his death. All his oeuvre and his correspondence are now in the Museum of Hungarian Photography, Kecskemét.

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the recording; they were laughing their heads off and afterwards offered warm congratulations to their new colleague. (Letter to his parents, 11 May)

Les sculptures de Picasso, containing Brassaï's photos, is published in French and a little later in English. Focal Press brings out *Camera in Paris,* with 62 photos, which establishes Brassaï's name in Britain, thanks to the publisher's excellent marketing.

My dears, I'm not writing from London but from Scotland, from Edinburgh. We got here by plane on Friday. [...] We left Le Bourget on September 2, accompanied by Carmel Snow, the editor of Harper's. *This was my first plane ride. [...] A Scottish captain was our guide in the castle; I took pictures of the Scots Guards who guard Buckingham Palace in London. [...] There were three performances of* Rendez-vous *at the Edinburgh Festival, one of them attended by the Queen.* (Letter to his parents, 4 September)

He plans another photo exhibition, much larger than any of his previous:

I have decided to put on a large photo exhibition to celebrate my 20 years in photography, my 50th birthday and my French citizenship. I'm not sure where and when it will take place, but it will probably happen during the winter. I'm thinking of about 300 photos, and am currently in the process of selecting them and making prints. This will take a lot of time and money, but it is very important as I have never had a one-man photographic show before and my photos are mostly known only from reproductions. 175 photographs are now ready, blown up to 40 by 50. I am convinced that this will be the most beautiful collection of photos anyone has ever seen. [...] Now that I'm on the threshold of my 50th, I feel that my life is only beginning; it is only now that I'm given a chance to speak. With no more financial difficulties to hold me back, I can finally devote my time to some of my deepest passions which I earlier had to put off not by a day, but by a year or ten years. This is why I want to get photography over with—in the most elegant way possible. [...] Many hugs and kisses for all of you, from your Gyulus who loves you very much. (Letter to his parents, 26 September)

1950 He takes photographs to be used as sets in the play *D'Amour et d'eau fraîche* by Elsa Triolet and Jean Rivier at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. He also produces sets for the ballet *Phèdre* by Jean Cocteau and Georges Auric, premiered at the Paris Opera, and for *En passant* by Raymond Queneau at the Théâtre Agnès Capri. His finances improve and, forgetting the frequent impecunious periods during the early Paris years, for the first time he tells his parents about their summer home purchased in 1948 in great detail and with several small drawings included.

*My dears, I received Daddy's postcard a day late, because there are two villages named Èze, one on the sea-shore (Èze-Plage) and the other on the hill, at an altitude of 300 meters (Èze-Village). If the address only says Èze, the letter will go to Èze-Plage and they won't bring it up here until the next day. [...] Although we're on vacation, I've been very busy, this time with our little house; it took us ten full days to make it comfortable. [...] Our two rooms have beautiful white walls and dark beams, the floors are in red faience; our dining-room table also has faience tiles—green. The staircases are of black slate. The contractors worked very well and, having first seen the house almost in ruins, I was very pleasantly surprised. [...] Èze has a very special setting; it dominates the whole Riviera. We can see Èze-Plage and St. Jean-Cap-Ferrat below; to the left are Monaco, Menton and the Italian Riviera, to the right the bay of Villefranche, then Mont-Borou and Nice. [...] The purchase of the house in Èze even made good business sense, because we bought it for 50,000 francs and it is now worth, maybe, 800,000. [...] Kánka, as architect, might be interested in the floor plan of the house, so I'll sketch it. (*Letter to his parents, 17 July)

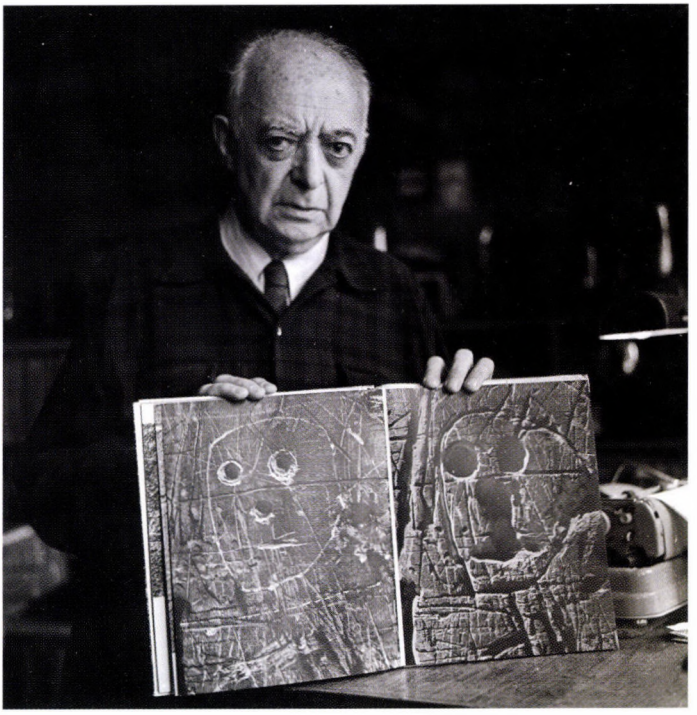
Unknown photographer:
Braşov in the mid-1920s.
Picture postcard. Private collection.

Gyula Knauer jr:
Gyula Halász jr (Brassaï) with his mother, Braşov, cca 1901.
Cabinet card, matte collodion printing-out paper.
Private collection.

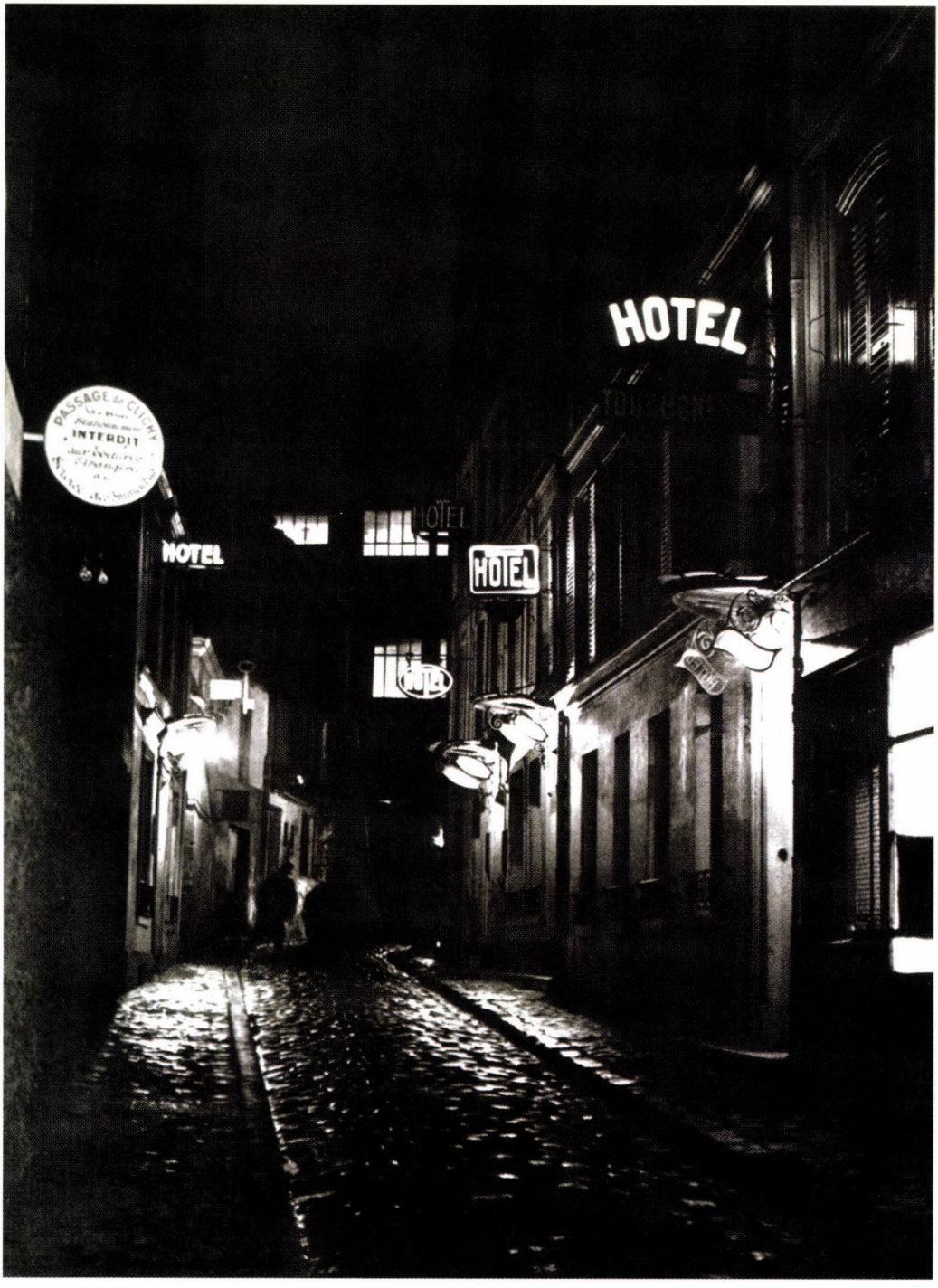
Unknown photographer:
Brassaï and Lajos Tihanyi
in the park at Vincennes, 1925.
Property of Roland Borsody.

André Kertész:
Brassaï and his parents
on the balcony of his studio
in the Rue Servandon, Paris, 1927,
gelatine silver print, 6 x 9 cm.
Hungarian Museum of Photography.

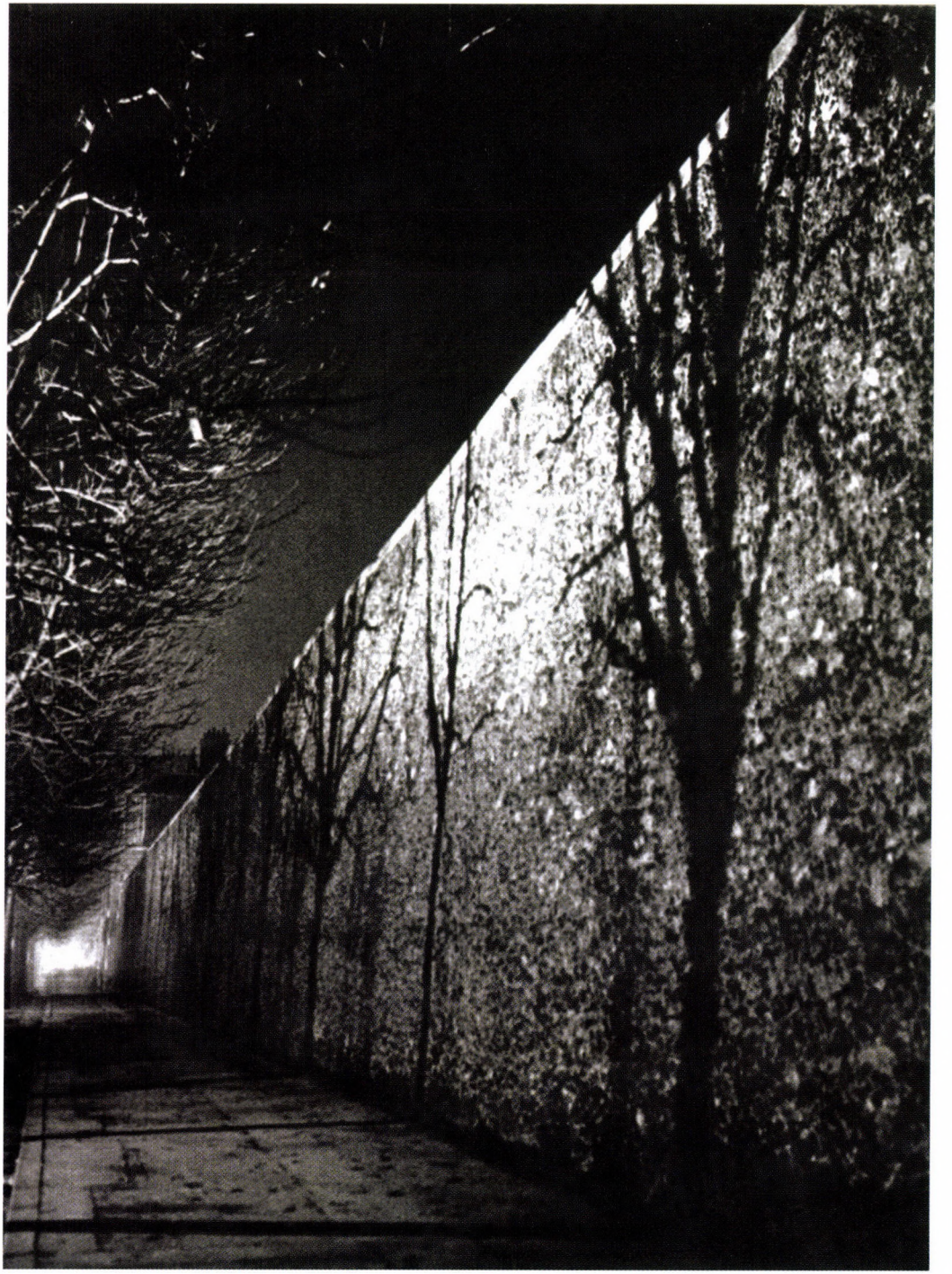
Lajos Erdélyi:
Brassaï with his folders and objets, July 1973.
Digital print.



Lajos Erdélyi:
Brassaï with his album Graffiti,
July 1973.
Digital print.

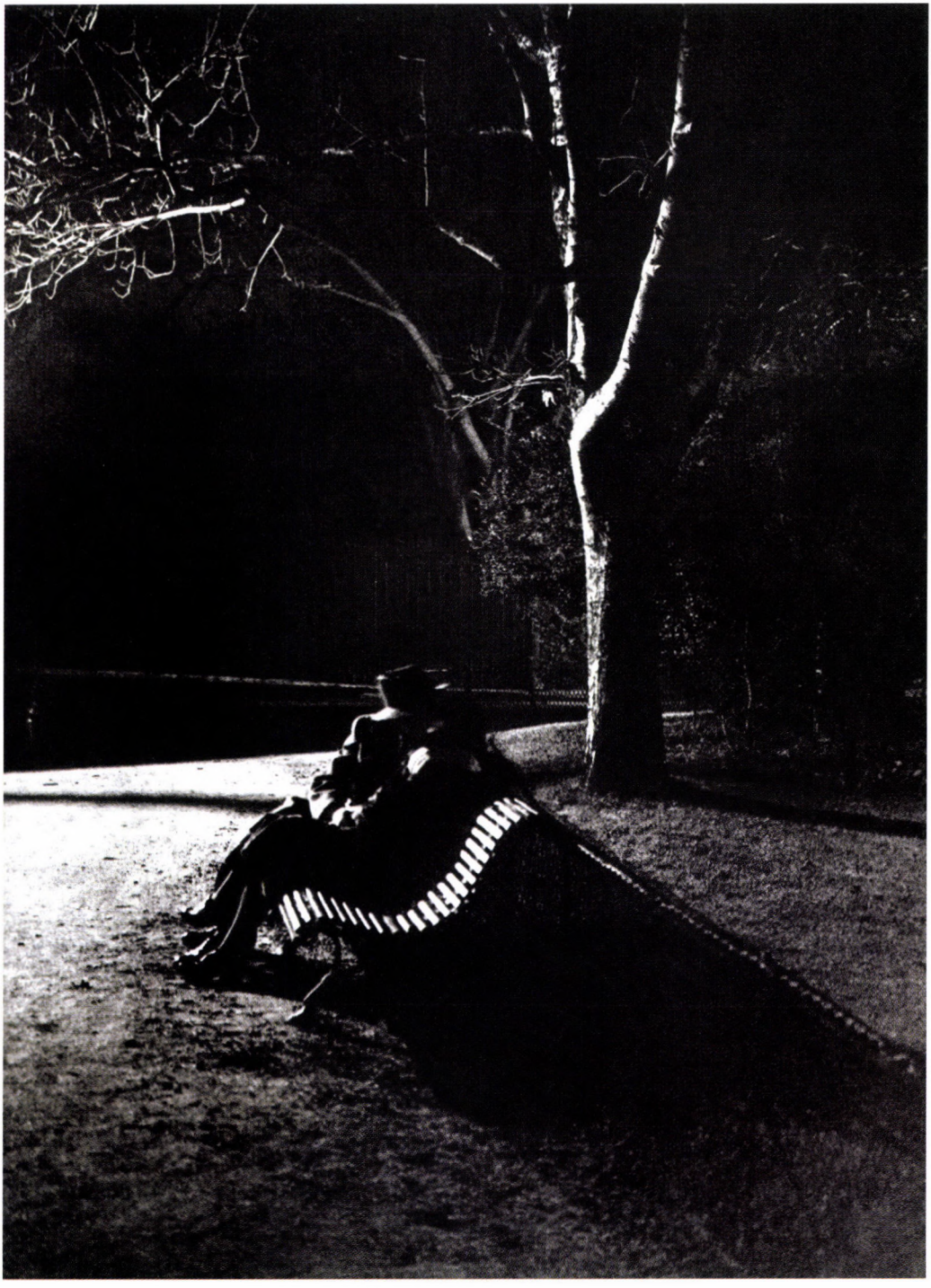


Brassaï: *Hotels,* Paris, cca 1933.
Private collection.



Brassaï: *Wall of the Santé prison,* Paris, cca 1932.
Private collection.

Brassaï: *Printing the paper on the Boulevard Poissonière,* Paris, cca 1933.
Private collection.



Brassaï: *Lovers in the Jardin des Tuilleries,* Paris, cca 1932.
Private collection.

Brassaï: *La Fête de Bayonne,* 1949,
vintage gelatine silver print, 23 x 29 cm.
Hungarian Museum of Photography.

1951 Brassaï tries his hand at a new art form on the occasion of a masked ball in an aristocratic house.

Today we are a bit tired, because we didn't get home from the soirée of the Vicomtesse de Noailles until 6 in the morning. It was a splendid ball; people had been talking about it for weeks. We were among the 300 invited guests. The theme of the evening was the population of an imaginary town, Lune-sur-Mer—to be more exact, a party held in that town. Gilberte was the village idiot, confounded by the atomic bomb. I was the montreur d'images, *but I also played an important role in the programme. Marie-Laure de Noailles, to whom I once showed the moving images I had invented, asked me to project them at the party. It took me four days to draw the nine moving images in colour and to realize 24 figures. In addition, I had to build a little theatre. Half an hour before the show, I was still busy gluing coloured cellophanes, hiding in a separate room. I didn't have a chance to rehearse with the orchestra. In spite of that, I had a great success. I can't go into how the figures moved, but it was not a marionette show. Yet the figures move all their limbs and come into fantastic relief. Don Quixote rides his Rocinante and Sancho his donkey, at the wildest gallop. In my skit* Les Blanchisseuses, *the shirts and underpants flutter in the wind which lifts the skirts of the* blanchisseuses, *etc. The applause grew from one tableau to the next, and when the last one was finished (with the frenetic boogie-woogie dance of the Hottentot Sisters), I received a veritable ovation. Marie-Laure embraced and kissed me (I had surprised her by bringing to life her two famous Goya paintings). For the rest of the evening, they kept congratulating me and asking what the secret of this wonderful animation was. Jean Cocteau said this was the most diabolical thing he'd ever seen in his life. Georges Auric liked it so well he said he wants to compose some original music to go with it. [...] The success was all the more surprising since it came from the coldest of all audiences, from people who are the hardest to impress. Ambassadors were present, the greatest names of the French aristocracy, and several famous writers and composers.* (Letter to his father, 17 January)

The exhibition *Five French Photographers* opens at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Most of Brassaï's photographs have been taken in Brittany, Spain and Marrakesh; the other four photographers involved are Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Doisneau, Izis and Willy Ronis.

As for the exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, I've managed to reach an agreement with them. They invited four other French photographers besides me, but I wanted to exhibit my work in a one-man show. In the end, I accepted their proposal to display 50 of my photographs in 40 by 50, while the other four photographers will have 25 pieces each, of a smaller size. The show will open in early October. (Letter to his parents, 28 June)

1952 Robert Delpire, the director of Editions Neuf, publishes *Brassaï (Photographes, dessins),* his first book to contain drawings and sculptures in addition to photographs.

> *The book in preparation,* Brassaï, *has been keeping me very busy because I had to take care of almost all the details. It was finished a few days ago and it came out very beautiful. [...] There are about 60 photos in the book, and an 8-page essay by Henry Miller, "Oeil de Paris", written in 1932. My most recent sculptures are shown in six pages, and another six contain my earliest drawings from 1921. There is also a text similar to* Marie, *this time from the life of a cab driver. Unfortunately I never received Daddy's three letters with the childhood recollections. So I had to write* Souvenir de mon enfance *myself. It turned out longer than planned, but I think it is lively and funny. Among other things, I related Daddy's adventures in the garden of Warté, and the Parisian scenes I still remembered (from 1903? Or was it 1904?). There are also a few pages of Notes, about Miller, Prévert, Picasso,* Paris de Nuit, Marie, *my four stage sets, etc. [...] As for the New York exhibition, I can be satisfied with the success, from what Carmel Snow, Dobó and Radó have told me; I have also received a few press reviews. [...] I am happy to read in Daddy's letter that if poor Mummy's condition hasn't improved, it hasn't worsened either and her mood is somewhat better. I will send more packages within days (yarn and medicine). [...] I congratulate Mummy on her 75th birthday, and send you all many kisses. Your loving Gyulus.* (Letter to his parents, 22 January)

After a long illness, Brassaï's mother dies in Braşov. From now on his letters home are addressed to his father.

1954 The preface to *Séville en Fête* (Collection Neuf, Robert Delpire Editions) is written by Henry de Montherlant. The text is compiled by Dominique Aubier. Brassaï's 74 photos are outstanding; they probably owe a great deal to Picasso, who often spoke to him of Andalusia.

> *We are both doing very well. We're more comfortable since we've been in our new apartment, but our responsibilities have also increased. [...] The trip to Barcelona was interesting but exhausting. I photographed Gaudí's architectural works above all (Kánka may have heard of him, he was active around 1900); after delivering the photos, I was quite exhausted. So for ten days I went to Cauterets, a little spa in the Pyrenees at an altitude of 1000 meters, accompanied by my friend Radó, who had come from New York to Paris for three weeks. [...] I climbed the Pic du Midi, but Radó wasn't up to it.* (Letter to his father, 2 September) *[...] At the moment, I'm working on my Chicago exhibition, which will be at the Art Institute from 15 November through 1 January, 1955. Then the material will go to Rochester.* (Letter to his father, 11 September)

1955 The previous year, he purchased a 16 mm camera at a sale. His experience of film-making is minimum (from working with Alexander Korda almost twenty years previously); nonetheless, he tackles everything himself: script, camera work, editing. For weeks, he visits the Vincennes zoo every day to shoot his movie *Tant qu'il y aura des bêtes.* He concentrates on the movements of the animals, skipping, dancing or acrobatic, and creates a surprising, occasionally comic, movie with suitable music for each movement. It is screened privately at the Cinéma Marbeuf on 8 December.

> *It's been exactly one year since I bought my 16 mm camera. Since then I've been experimenting with the possibilities of film in my free time. It's costly and my equipment is not complete yet, but I've acquired the most important lenses. For the last few months, I've also had a projector and a screen, as well as a viewer, a cutting board and everything that's needed for editing. I finished my first film—35 minutes long—a few days ago. Now I'm adding the sound, which unfortunately requires a lot of additional things. [...] The fact is I'm interested in film, even more than in photography, and the results are encouraging. I can see now that the concept of my film is entirely new, filled with original cinematographic ideas. [...] Many kisses, your loving Gyulus.*
> (Letter to his father, 11 September)

In spite of the evident success of this film, he makes no others, although he does take many more photographs. Several US cities put on exhibitions of his work.

1956 Although mostly engaged in marketing his movie, various publishing projects also keep him busy.

> *I'm horribly busy these days. I'm working on three books; in addition, there will be a 15-minute television programme about me and with me on Thursday; I have to write a text and compile the photographic material for the special Brassaï issue of the Swiss journal* Camera. *A series of pictures is also due at* Harper's *this week. Fortunately, I'm in good health and in good form. I haven't sold the film yet (I'm thinking about a financially advantageous agreement); if this doesn't work out, it will be released at a big theatre in Paris.* (Letter to his father, 17 January)

The film is nominated for the 1956 Cannes Festival, where it wins the Palme d'Or for most original movie. His father, visiting his son in Paris between August and October, manages to see it.

> *It was shown in one of the Parisian movie houses after a piece about miners. The elephants, hippos, giraffes, birds, ostriches and monkeys of the Vincennes Zoo dance an entire ballet on the ground and on trees. The otherwise silent piece is accompanied by some splendid music.*
> (Gyula Halász: *On the Threshold of the One-Hundredth Year,* p. 153)

During this visit, Brassaï's father is struck by a car while on his way to the Jardin de Luxembourg. Fortunately, the old man escapes without serious injury. Brassaï had premonitions about the event:

> *Mon cher Reismann, [...] Things are getting more complicated just now, because Paris traffic has become horrible and I can't let my father walk around the city by himself, even though that is his most fervent wish. On the other hand, I am terribly busy at the moment. Gilberte won't be back for another week. Well, it will all work out one way or another. Un amical merci! Brassaï.* (Letter to János Reismann, 22 August)

The exhibition *Graffiti* meets with great success at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and makes Brassaï well known in the United States.

> *Paris has become a kind of home port from where we are planning various new trips. They want me in New York at all costs, they have invited me and will cover all expenses. This would be a good opportunity since I'm going to have a major exhibition, called* Graffiti, *at the Museum of Modern Art and they would like to have me at the opening. I would have preferred to go in the spring of 1957 and spend two to three months in order to get to know the country and Mexico, too. Right now I'm making a major effort to learn the language with the help of* Assimile *and other books. I can read and ask questions, but I have a hard time understanding the answers. There is another circumstance that is hampering my travel plans: the arrival of my 85-year-old father who is going to come to Paris around the same time. [...] Despite his age, he is remarkably youthful in mind and body. He has just finished a book on Béranger, and frequently sends poems to Gilberte (in French). As for me, I feel pretty youthful too, ready for new beginnings. Thus I threw myself into movie-making, with some success as you can see:* Tant qu'il y aura des bêtes *was chosen from a hundred French short films for the Cannes festival, and it won a prize there so that I came home with a huge "certificate"! I have some very fond memories of this festival, not because of the "certificate" but because Gilberte and I stayed at one of the big luxury hotels in Cannes (paid for by the Princess) and I didn't feel the usual obligation to take photos and write reports, which tends to ruin these business trips. The film even had some commercial success; for months I've been living on the royalties. After selling it for a very good price in France, they sold it in several other countries as well, even Greece and Norway! Since I had made the film all by myself, including the editing (though Bessière wrote some very beautiful music for me after the final editing), and since I had signed an exceptionally lucrative contract this time, I may earn twenty to thirty times what I spent on it. But it's better not to talk about the amount of time it has taken! Frightening! Weeks and months! I did it as a study, and it was well worth the effort. I may make another film soon if I fall in love with another subject. [...] For three years now we have not lived on Fbg. St. Jacques; the*

apartment was too small for the two of us. We now live in a villa surrounded by a garden (Villa Adrienne, 19 avenue d'Orléans, Pavillon Vauban), where I can devote myself to gardening for recreation. I only have ferns and other wild plants which I brought from Fontainebleau and the Chevreuse valley. I wanted to find myself among the underbrush when I woke up in the morning... It is surprising that such a thing can exist two steps away from the lion of Belfort. So I go back and forth between Fbg. St. Jacques and the villa; sometimes, also, I go to my studio in the Rue Saint-Gotthard. Someday you may get a chance to come to Paris... Now I stop gabbing. Friendly handshake, Brassaï. (Letter to János Reismann [orig. in French], 11 August)

1957 He receives a gold medal at the Venice Biennale for his photography. He visits the United States for the first time, staying for several months. He sends a few photographs home via the Budapest photo-journalist Miklós Rév (who had visited him a year earlier in Paris) for the show *Twentieth-Century Hungarian Artists Abroad* at the Budapest gallery *Műcsarnok.*

1958 His photo *Reedstalks* is chosen by the architects of the UNESCO headquarters in Paris (Le Corbusier, Marcel Breuer, Pier Luigi Nervi, Bernard Zehrfuss and Georges Salles) to be on permanent display in the building. János Reismann, living in Stuttgart at the time, introduces Brassaï to a German publisher. The correspondence between Reismann and Brassaï, about 40 documents, as well as Reissmann's other correspondence, contains interesting biographical and historical information. A few selected excerpts follow.

We fell into each other's arms Tuesday morning at 7. After telling me that I hadn't changed at all, so that he could highly recommend my lifestyle to anyone, he refused to go to the hotel booked for them by Weipert, but wanted to have breakfast and a chat instead. His balding head was covered by a cute velvet cap bought in Scotland covered in cigarette burns; he didn't in the least look like "prominent" personalities do. He talked about his experiences, his travels and his life with incredible zest and youthfulness. He follows life, and all artistic manifestations, with such youthful curiosity and interest that I felt almost like an old man next to him. But he infected and awakened me with his youthfulness! I could fill 30 pages with all the interesting and charming things he told me—about his adventures in the United States, his father, our mutual acquaintances, about Paris. Of course he demanded to hear my stories, too. (Letter from János Reismann to Erzsébet Mágori, July 9)

Reismann is fascinated by Brassaï's personality and tries to catch his character in his next letter to his partner:

He has this unbiased, playful, unprejudiced curiosity children (4-6 year-olds!) have, a curiosity without vested interest, snobbery or singleness of purpose. Such curiosity is a quality of those artists favoured by God, in whose hands everything comes alive, those who can tackle any material immediately, following the simplest rules and following ideas that seem the

most banal. They don't have to struggle in order to create for the delight of humankind—they just play. Brassaï is one of those. (Letter from János Reismann to Erzsébet Mágori, August 6)

A few months later, Brassaï, almost 60, writes from London to Braşov. He spends more and more time in Provence, despite his frequent travels, commissions, exhibitions and books. The extreme pressures result in a serious illness, from which he recuperates in the south. Brassaï writes about their new property, replacing their house in Èze-Village:

We've bought a property of about 4,000 square metres; all of a sudden I am the owner of 27 olive trees, 35 almond trees, plus fig trees, etc. There are several houses on the property, built in 1889, somewhat run down but in good and inhabitable condition, though no one has lived there in the last 30 or 40 years. The location is excellent; it is, so to speak, a 200-meter terrace above the Mediterranean, between Monte Carlo and Nice. [...] We didn't even have a garden the size of a handkerchief before, but now we've become completely entranced, so to speak, and I grabbed a spade, hatchet, mattock and rake and worked up there the whole time, first around the buildings. It's almost like digging in Pompeii, for the old paved courtyard among the houses was covered by 30-40 cm of dirt. I couldn't have dreamt of a better therapy after my illness and, in fact, I am now completely cured. (Letter to János Reismann, 17 June) *[...] I can tell you now that I am completely healed: I had some kind of nicotine poisoning, and had to stop working for several weeks and follow a hygienic regime. So we went to Èze in order to sell our house there and buy something closer to Paris instead, for instance in the valley of Chevreuse. Meanwhile the political situation in France became more serious (almost on the brink of civil war), so we stayed in the south for almost three months instead of three weeks. [...] Now I'm writing from Stuttgart, where I had successful negotiations with a German publisher and printing company about the publication of two books.* Graffiti *will be published in 20 thousand copies; we also discussed the contract of a book about southern France.* (Letter to his father, 4 July)

The *Graffiti* exhibition opens in America, at the Institute of Modern Art.

My dear Daddy, I sent you a letter in today's mail, with the texts of the Carmagnole and the Ça ira that you asked for. But I forgot to congratulate you (belatedly) on your birthday. Are you 86, or 87? I can only wish that Ça ira... ça ira... ça ira *(if it has gone this far). I am sixty years old myself [...] I enclose the clipping of the new UNESCO headquarters; there have already been three or four articles like this one. The Comité artistique was very pleased with my photo, and wrote me a thank-you letter. The photo is six meters wide and three meters tall; it will be very effective since it is in a large room. (The trouble I had with this!) Fact is, I'm one of eleven international, artists chosen. Many kisses, your loving Gyulus.* (Letter to his father, 16 September)

[...] I'm working on several books at once, but haven't taken any photos in weeks. The model of Graffiti *is finished, and I hope I'll find a good publisher for it. The* Graffiti *exhibit has been invited to London and Tokyo. [...] I'm also thinking about a new film, but the idea hasn't quite matured yet. In addition, I'm working on a book on photography, for which I already have a publisher; soon I'll be able to give literary reviews some excerpts from it.* (Letter to his father, 4 February)

1960 Alarmed by his illness and mindful of his age, his situation, his whole existence, he informs his father of a momentous decision:

I don't think I'll have Daddy's energy and youthful mental alertness at 86. I can feel my age already in my sixties, because nothing goes as fast and easily as it used to. [...] After my trip to Brazil, which was beautiful and interesting but very exhausting, I made an inventory, so to speak, of all the important works that I still want to produce, and since the list is a long one, I have made the decision not to accept any work that I'm not 100 per cent interested in. That includes Harper's Bazaar *and other things as well. Thus in recent months I was able to devote myself to things I was interested in, although my financial situation was not always the best. [...] One result is that the exhibition of my sculptures opened on 8 March. I exhibited 50 sculptures in stone and I can say the success was great. I sold a few sculptures and drawings, even the Musée d'Art Moderne bought some. I could have sold even more if I had set my prices lower, but this exhibition will travel to the United States in the autumn and therefore I saved the material for later.* (Letter to his father, 11 April)

He finishes *Graffiti,* whose idea was first conceived in the 1930s. The album is first published in Germany, and then, a year later, in France. He is also working on *Conversations avec Picasso*.

My dear Reismann, I was very glad to hear from you, and good news yet. [...] I have come to Paris for a few days from the South to take care of a few things before I return to Èze-Village before the end of the week. We stayed in Juan-les-Pins for quite a while because I accompanied Henry Miller to the Cannes Festival (he was on the jury). I also met Picasso. Gallimard will publish my book about him (conversations), which I have to finish in the next few weeks. I think Gallimard will end up publishing Graffiti *as well. I saved a copy for you (I only received twelve!). I will send it soon. Everybody likes it, including Picasso.* (Letter to János Reismann, 12 July. Original in French.)

Jean-Marie Drot makes a TV film on Brassaï, using the music of Béla Bartók (probably at Brassaï's request). Both Henry Miller and Raymond Queneau speak in the film, which also features Jacques Prévert's poem.

It was a success beyond all expectations... The broadcast was advertised as a real event; I had to give sixteen interviews and all my photos (that is, photos

of me) went like hot cakes. After the broadcast, there was a stream of telegrammes, greetings from well-wishers... It was very touching, almost like a funeral without the wreaths; truly the honours were such as if I had died... I unexpectedly achieved a new authority, enabling me to publish whatever I want. I can take my manuscripts out of the drawers and my photos out of the boxes. I have enough for thirty books! But enough of bragging. Now I have to guard against success. I have hired two secretaries to close the gates. For now everyone wants something from me. I have sold eight drawings to the Musée d'Art Moderne, and a dozen or so sculptures since the exhibition [...] I don't even dare to tell you that I wrote a play in the spring, Le Cri de détresse. *I think it's very interesting.* Conversations with Picasso *will be published by Gallimard in the spring of 1961. [...] It is interesting that last November, after my 60th birthday, everything that I had taken on and collected all my life, and the short time I have left to bring it all to light, all this brought on a sudden attack of panic. All my life I was running slowly, in the rear of the field, but now the bell for the last lap has given me a signal. My whole life will be summarized in the next few years. I'm glad that you are satisfied and at peace, after so many difficult, turbulent years. But you will understand, I think, that for me, the days of long journeys, and even short ones, are past. That's why I don't believe I will be able to go to Hungary, despite your kind invitation and my own longing. We have just bought a little property in the South; a quiet corner just above the Mediterranean, with 40 olive trees and just as many almond and fig trees. It is between Nice and Monte Carlo. I will work there for the greater part of the year because Paris, inundated by cars, is becoming more and more uninhabitable—like a river infested by crocodiles or a sea by sharks. Especially if you have been discovered by four or five million TV viewers. Since the broadcast I am constantly being addressed by strangers, newspaper vendors and even cab drivers: I know you, sir, I know exactly what you do! I've seen you on TV.* (Letter to János Reismann, 13 November)

The TV film in question is not broadcast by Hungarian television until 1997, twenty-seven years after its shooting.

1964 *Conversations avec Picasso* finally comes out in time for Picasso's 83rd birthday, with 50 photographs. It is translated into a dozen languages, including Hungarian in 1968.

My dear, good Daddy, winning the Nobel Prize wouldn't have made me happier than your little postcard! So you are alive and well, and still writing, marching towards the 100-year jubilee to the tune of the Marseillaise *[...] My conscience was very, very bad. Your charming letter of invitation [...] reached me at a moment when I wasn't sure how to solve my own problems. Our new house (the little old houses restored and enlarged) was not inhabitable until late last September. The constructions continued through*

the winter, so that we spent the winter here. Gilberte never budged, while I went to Paris on business four times, for 10–15 days each time, except for my fourth trip in April. Then I went for three weeks but ended up staying three months because of the publication of the Picasso book. It would have been impossible just then to go to Romania, as you had wished. Conversations avec Picasso *[...] will come out at the end of October or early November. It was hard and delicate work that almost made me ill. I can't even judge the book any more after all these re-readings, revisions and corrections. But I think it's an interesting and rich book—the liveliest ever written about this painter of genius. [...] I returned to our little paradise at the end of June, in a very bad nervous state. After a few days' rest, I embarked on a new book:* Conversations avec Henry Miller. *(Gallimard has already given me an advance on that one.) I wrote 240 pages in two months, based on my notes; I think I can finish it before the deadline. [...] I'm scarcely interested in photography any more—it was planned and decided that way in my life's programme. I haven't held a camera in more than two years. Your proposal that I should take photographs of my native land came at the wrong moment. All the more so that I would never know what I could or couldn't do there, and what I was or wasn't allowed to shoot. I'm 66 years old myself (in a few days) and I have to devote my precious remaining time to the publication and promotion of my works.* (Letter to his father, 28 August)

His book *Images de caméra* is published. Besides his own photographs, it contains work in various genres by leading photographers from France and elsewhere and may be best described as a subjective history of contemporary photography. No matter how carefully Brassaï watches his health, no matter how much he tries to change his lifestyle, he suffers another heart attack.

I had a heart attack five months ago. I'm well again, slender as a youth, and it has reduced my weight from 78 kg to 66 [...] I have no desire to travel, and even less to do photography. But I do feel like writing, and I will certainly do a few more books. Conversations with Picasso *is a great moral success, and a financial one as well. Since its publication, six countries have purchased the rights. Picasso likes my book very much. This portrait resembles me the most, [he said]. And he helped prepare an exhibition of mine in Cannes.* (Letter to János Reismann, 15 March)

1965 *My dear, good Kánka, I'm trying to write in Hungarian, but as the years pass and September arrives (the month that makes us older), this becomes more and more difficult. I haven't spoken Hungarian in years, except a few words here and there.* (Letter to his brother, 13 September)

Brassaï was instrumental in saving and preserving the work left behind in Paris by his painter friend Lajos Tihanyi, who died in 1938; it is now handed over to the Hungarian government.

It turned out that almost all of Tihanyi's paintings were left in his Paris studio. He had owed rent, and the landlord allowed the paintings to be taken away only on the condition that the debt was paid off from the sales. The promissory note was signed by three men: György Bölöni, Brassaï and Jacques de la Frégonnière. Brassaï and de la Frégonnière took most of the paintings and, in 1965, transferred them to the Hungarian government. There was only one condition: a commemorative exhibition in Paris before the paintings were shipped back home. (György Bölöni: *Among Pictures*. Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1967, p. 599)

1966 Brassaï is elected an honorary member of the American Society of Magazine Photographers, along with Ansel Adams. He receives a letter from Stefan Lorant (Lenox, Massachusetts) about his book. Their relationship goes back a good thirty years; Lorant published many Brassaï photos in his magazines *Picture Post, Liliput* and *Weekly Illustrated.* After resuming the contact, Lorant invites Brassaï to America.

An old Hungarian friend of mine, Stefan Lorant, has written to me in Hungarian. He writes books in English, mostly about American history; he lives in America, too. "My dear friend, I read your book tonight, and it is excellent! It's the best writing about Picasso and the age. I'm very proud of you. My last two books were published by Doubleday, and since they made a lot of money on them, I have some influence. I told them to publish your book and to promote it, because it is an excellent work. I have also called some friends at several New York magazines and asked them to review it. I will send you the reviews when they are published. Congratulations and hugs, István Lorant." 18 November, 1966.

Today, the 19th, I received another letter. "Dear Brassaï, here is the first and most important review. Congratulations from the bottom of my heart. This will appear in tomorrow's New York Times *(circulation a million and a half). I have received the issue early since I'm a contributor. This is the only review that counts in America. The only one. The others don't matter much. This one does. It is very rare that the* New York Times *should devote a whole page to a review. About your book, they printed more than a page, adding an extra two columns. More than a page and a half! This would be a great achievement even if the review weren't good. But it is a pœan from beginning to end. Congratulations from the bottom of my heart, and I'm very glad about your resounding success. István Lorant." And then I saw the article in the* New York Times. *Higher praise would not be possible. The review was not written by a professional critic but by someone whom I love and respect, a great figure in the cinema world: Jean Renoir, the son of the great painter Auguste Renoir. I'll send you the text or its translation when I can.*

As Lorant says, it's written beautifully from beginning to end, and the whole thing is a single hymn of praise. I think I've won the battle in the United States [...] Many kisses, Gyulus. (Letter to his father, 22 November)

It is a very active year for the 67-year-old Brassaï in every way. His letter to his father, now 95, bears witness to his astounding vitality and activity.

Dear, good Daddy, [...] of course I'm worried by what you say about your sick spells and your falls, and I'm glad you've decided to take some time off, at 95! In a few days, on 25 October, we will celebrate Picasso's 85th birthday here on the Riviera, in Paris and all over the world. He hates it, it's no great fun to be another year older [...] My last conversation [with him] is appearing just now (last Thursday and tomorrow, October 20) in Figaro Littéraire. *You will see (I'll send the two issues together) that they will publish it with great reverence. This piece, with new photos of Picasso (I saw him on 8 July), will also appear, I believe tomorrow, in* Stern, *the biggest German picture magazine, published in Hamburg. There's a small section in it about you [...] Picasso's friendship is a great comfort to me [...] If God lets him and me live longer, I will write a sequel, titled* New Conversations with Picasso. *The material is beginning to grow to respectable proportions. The book is published in Germany this month, and in Japan and the United States next month. The biggest German papers* (Süddeutsche Zeitung, Der Spiegel) *are publishing full-page excerpts from it, with photos [...] In the United States,* Harper's Bazaar *announced my book in a three-page article. It will be published in England around December, and in Czechoslovakia—I'm not sure when, but I think in the spring of 1967 [...] It is interesting that the Slovaks bought my book but neither the Hungarians nor the Romanians did [...] Maybe they will some day [...] Now I spent two weeks putting a book on photography together, in which I collect several of my writings, my essay on photography, my interviews, radio and TV talks, etc. It will be a sizable book, published, for sure, by Gallimard.* (Letter to his father, 19 October. Begun in Hungarian, continued in French)

1967 He publishes a new book, *Transmutations*, in a limited bibliophile edition. He designs tapestries with graffiti themes, and has them woven at the Gobelin Studio in Paris. His father makes a final attempt to invite him to Braşov, again to no avail.

1968 *My dear, good Daddy, [...] we are both well, I'm not running myself into the ground but one has to live, pay the enormous expenses and live up to the demands of my little glory around the world. My next obligation will be an exhibit of my sculptures, to open on Friday, 8 March, in a famous gallery, where my bibliophile album* Transmutations *with 12 engravings will also be on display. In addition, I will be showing drawings from three different*

periods (1921 –1933 –1945). Fortunately, most of the stone sculptures are already on their bases, and the bronzes all cast and numbered, but I had to have about twenty drawings reframed. I set my prices pretty high. I prefer to sell less but at a good price. Since the art trade is in a rather dramatic shape right now, I may sell nothing at all [...] I also have to prepare my photographic exhibit for New York (Museum of Modern Art) for October. The museum will publish a Brassaï monograph with about 80 photos. Another book, which is in progress, will be an important album, to be published by a group, with the photographic studies of moeurs from my 1932–33 Paris by Night. *There are plans to publish it in England, Gallimard wants to do it in France, Doubleday in the United States; I also have publishers in Germany and the Scandinavian countries. Many of these photographs have never been published. I haven't forgotten Romania. I've asked Radu Varia to get Meridiane Editions (I think) to make a written offer for the Brassaï book.* (Letter to his father, 27 February)

By this time, Brassaï is much sought after. Another exhibition of his sculptures, drawings and engravings opens at the Galerie du Pont des Arts in Paris.

Now I can say my show is having success. The first week, I sold five sculptures and two engravings, and wonderful articles are soon to appear in the press. The gallery is packed at all times... There were two TV shows and three radio programmes, a short film shot at the gallery and in my studio for Actualités cinématographiques. *This may even be available in Romania since these short films will be shown abroad.* (Letter to his father, 18 March)

The sculpture exhibition is followed by another show at the La Boétie Gallery in New York, of drawings, sculptures and tapestries.

I'm working on my sculpture exhibit for New York. I have to send the sculptures very soon; they will have to go by airplane because the American dock workers are threatening to go on strike. Two small pieces of news. The tapestry Graffiti I, *based on my graffiti sketches (1.5 by 3 meters), is very beautiful. It is really well done. It will soon be followed by a second one. I think I'll exhibit it at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Secondly, I learned yesterday that the French state—the Ministry of Culture—has purchased one of my large sculptures (let's say "fairly large" = 45 cm) at the gallery where it was on display. (The price was 9,500 new franks.) This is encouraging, isn't it? I hope I can sell in the United States, too. We haven't decided yet whether we're going on 28 October.* (Letter to his father, 27 September)

At long last, *Conversations with Picasso* is published in Hungarian by Corvina. The poet Gyula Illyés wrote the preface, János Reismann checked the translation against the original. The book contains 53 photographs by Brassaï. While writing the preface, Illyés talked to Brassaï on several occasions. Asked when he would come to Hungary, Brassaï replied:

I really long to go to Braşov, but I feel there's time. Look, here is my father's newest book, it has just been published in Bucharest, in Hungarian, of course. It is a book of memoirs titled On the Threshold of the One-Hundredth Year *[...] I'm not even seventy yet. I'll certainly visit home again. But there is still a lot of time.* (Quoted by András Kő, in: "The Eye of Paris: Pencil Sketch of a World-Famous Photographer", *Magyar Nemzet,* 19 June 1999)

In one of his last letters to his father, Brassaï, now almost seventy, writes:

Your handwriting, calm, well balanced and very legible, shows an excellent physical and mental state, which makes me very happy. I carry my work and my name around with me like a ball and chain. How can I get rid of it? By doing something new... Isn't that so? It would be wonderful if one could change one's name and identity and start all over. This is the only way one can be young again. That's what Hokusai tried to do several times during his long life. (Letter to his father, 11 October)

Brassaï is now interested in sculpture more than anything else, and travels frequently to Italy. He also writes an essay on Henry Miller and edits their correspondence for publication.

My dear János, we've been in New York for the last three weeks, where I have two exhibits running, one at the Museum of Modern Art (photographs), the other at a very good gallery on Madison Avenue (1042 Mad. Av.), Gallery La Boétie. I think it is very successful in every way—I mean, $-wise, too [...] I sold several sculptures and drawings on the very first day. At the museum, the reception on 28 October was wonderful. There were about 400 guests, and the Brassaï monograph published by the museum had turned out very well, as had the exhibit itself, which has lots of visitors every day (until 5 January) [...] Twice a week, my only film, Tant qu'il y aura des bêtes, *is projected at the museum. What a difference between my first visit to New York, in 1957, and this one! My Picasso book must have contributed to the change of my position here. By the way, how is the Hungarian edition? Wasn't it supposed to come out in the autumn of 1968? Do drop me a line! We're staying here to the end of November. I embrace you, Brassaï.* (Letter to János Reismann, 17 November)

1969 Brassaï's father dies in Braşov at the age of 97, without ever having seen his son again. His brother Kálmán Halász, nicknamed "Kánka" (his junior by one year) is now the only one at home Brassaï can write to.

It would have been a great pleasure to hear your voice, Kánka, had I not known immediately that this meant poor Daddy's end. And it is hard for me to write even now because my Hungarian has become quite stumbling. Sometimes I search in vain for words and expressions. It's been almost fifty years since I have written or spoken my mother tongue. [...] I miss Daddy

very much. He got me used to the thought that he'd never die, or not for a hundred years. When a doctor examined his heartbeat in Paris in 1956, he said Daddy might well live for a hundred years, and Daddy said that was exactly what he intended to do. He had great curiosity about the past, present and future, and that's what kept him alive for so long. Thank you, Kánka, for taking over my possessions. The correspondence probably makes up a large package. I would mostly be interested in my letters from Berlin and the early Paris days, because I have almost no documents from those times; what I had got lost in the cellars of unpaid-for hotels. I would also like to know in what year I began to use a typewriter—because I probably have copies [from that time on]. Would you be able to organize the letters (especially the earlier ones) according to year and date? [...] Maybe I'll ask you to have the earlier letters typed and to send them to me, but this is not urgent. (Letter to his brother, 17 April)

1970 The exhibition *Thirty Coloured Panels* opens at the Galerie Rencontre in Paris. The French government commissions a tapestry, *Graffiti II,* for the 5th Lausanne Biennale. His essay on János Reismann, written in French, is published in Hungarian translation in the photo magazine *Fotóművészet* (1970/1, pp. 33–37).

I'm very happy about your youthful and well-founded conviction, and I'm sure you'll make it to the "finish line". This gives me great satisfaction since I've always believed in you since I've known you, and I was always convinced that you were one of the best. Affectionate hugs to you and Gilberte. (Letter from János Reismann, 21 August)

This is Reismann's last letter to Brassaï, his friend of more than fifty years. Six years later, Reismann dies in a psychiatric hospital in Budapest. A commemorative exhibit of works by Lajos Tihanyi opens at the Galerie Entremonde in Paris. The preface to the catalogue is written by Brassaï. He is visited by his brother Kálmán in Èze.

I'm sorry you need heart treatment again, but I'm confident that you'll pull through all right. I've always admired you for walking so fast, wherever we went, that I could barely keep up with you, as in the cactus garden or the cave in Monaco. I should have reminded you of the old proverb: "Walk easy, go farther." (Letter from Kálmán Halász, Braşov, 31 October)

1973 Brassaï travels to Washington for the opening of his exhibit at the Corcoran Gallery of Art. From there, he goes to California at the invitation of the great photographer Ansel Adams and his wife, and visits Yosemite National Park with them. They are accompanied by Nancy and Beaumont Newhall, another major figure in American photography.

I used to work for the magazine Ígéret *[Promise] in Tîrgu Mureş. [...] Thanks to a friend, I was able to go to Paris to visit Lucien Hervé, who introduced me to Brassaï. I had to do a story on him; he was totally unknown in Romania at*

the time. When I finally met him, he received me very graciously. He showed me his albums one by one, as well as his raw images. I was fascinated by what he had done in portraiture, for just then I was working on my volume of portraits of writers and artists. He told me that he was less interested in portraiture than in genre photography. During my short visit I was able to do a story and take some very good photos of him. They were published in the magazine on two pages. I sent him a copy and received a very friendly letter in return; he thought the material was very dynamic, a good piece of photo reporting. (Interview with the photographer Lajos Erdélyi by Roland Borsody, Budapest, 2006)

1974 The tone of Brassaï's letters change little over the decades. He writes almost exclusively about himself, and things that have happened to him, to Mummy and Daddy, then, after his mother's death, to Daddy alone, and finally to Kánka, his only surviving close relative.

I had 13 exhibitions in 1971—ten abroad and three in France. Seven out of thirteen were solo shows. In 1972, I had seven exhibits—five abroad and two in France, and three of these were solo shows. In 1973, I had the following exhibits: 1. Corcoran Gallery, Washington (Brassaï Exhibition), from 1 June to 15 July; 2. A Century of Photography, *Schoelkopf Gallery, New York (group show), from 19 June to 20 July; 3. Witkin Gallery, New York (Brassaï Exhibition), from 12 July to 19 August; 4. Dartmouth College, Dartmouth, USA (Brassaï Exhibition), September; 5. Friends of Photography, Carmel, California (Brassaï Exhibition), from 15 October to 17 November; 6. Cali, Colombia (Brassaï Exhibition), from 22 March to 15 April, Museo La Tertulia; 7. Bogotá, Colombia (Brassaï Exhibition), from 28 April to 21 May, Museo de Arte Moderno; 8. Medellín, Colombia, from 12 June to July 12, Museo de Zea; 9. Lima, Peru (September-October), Instituto de la Cultura. That is, nine exhibitions, eight of which are solo shows, all abroad. Currently I have one exhibition running in Santa Barbara, California, from 5 January to 17 February, at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, and one at the Wolfgang Wittrock Galerie, in Düsseldorf, Federal German Republic, from 15 January to 15 February. My South American exhibitions will continue to circulate in Mexico, Brazil, etc. This year I accepted an invitation to participate in the Arles Festival around 15 July and to exhibit at the Arles Museum at the same time. The article in* Figaro, *which I am enclosing, is one of many written for a book; it will accompany my photos taken in the seedier milieux of Paris in 1932–33. I am currently negotiating with a major American publisher about a book with the working title* The Secret Paris of the 1930s. (Letter to his brother, 5 February)

He and his friend Ansel Adams are guests of honour at the International Festival of Photography in Arles.

I'm exhibiting with a great American photographer, Ansel Adams of California, at the Arles Museum. He came to my exhibition in Washington, and I was his guest in Yosemite National Park for two days. That is where the giant pine trees stand; they are thousands of years old (2,000 on average), and some are 150 metres tall. Around 15 June, we shall return to Èze. I will exhibit some sculptures and one tapestry at the Menton Biennale as well; it will open on 1 July. This biennale will pay tribute to Picasso; they will publish an excerpt, of a few pages, from my "Conversations" book. (By the way, I have no news, and no money, from the Romanian publisher; nor have they returned the 54 photos I had lent them. Maybe they'll come later.) [...] My chest pain (angina pectoris) comes back almost every day, especially after walking. I switched medications, but I'm afraid there is nothing to be done. The machine is worn, rusty, clogged up, and needs a new engine. But the pain is not unbearable. (Letter to his brother, 21 May) *[...] I continue in French, trying to answer your questions: my exhibitions which are constantly running in the United States (after Australia and New Zealand) and concurrently in South America are exclusively of photographs. Yet I continue to show my sculptures as well; at the moment, three large sculptures are at the Menton Biennale, at the entrance of the Picasso room, where a tapestry of mine is also hanging. I have about ten tapestries circulating in various exhibitions. I was always very close to Picasso, but in the last months he wasn't very well and I didn't see him in Mougins. When he died, many wanted to interview me for the press, radio and television, and I turned them all down. I didn't want to use Picasso's death to promote myself. If I have time, I will write a second volume on Picasso. [...] If they write less about me in Hungary, it is because I never went back to Budapest, and never exhibited there. I never even accepted official invitations for Tihanyi's or Vasarely's exhibitions.* (Letter to his brother, 26 September)

1975 Gallimard publishes *Henry Miller grandeur nature* with 16 photos by Brassaï. He is hospitalized again with heart problems.

I lost weight due to the illness, 7 or 8 kgs, I believe, if not more (I probably went from 76 to 69), which is very good in my case. My mood is excellent, and I could work on my Proust book the entire time. Henry Miller grandeur nature *will come out on 27 November, and I believe I'll be well enough by then to do a book signing, though I will turn down the exhausting interviews. I have only good news now (apart from my illness). My book* The Secret Paris of the 1930s, *with 160 photos and 100 pages of text, which I had entrusted to Gallimard, had a great success at the Frankfurt Book Fair. It was bought by four other countries (Pantheon, New York; Thames and Hudson, London; Fischer-Verlag, Germany; Mondadori, Milan, from Italy). Thus, we're able to print a very large run, producing a relatively cheap and beautiful edition. At the end of the month there will be an exhibition at the Marlborough Gallery*

in New York, one of the most significant art (not photo) galleries, with three photographers: Bill Brandt (London), Berenice Abbott (New York), and Brassaï (Paris). I will have 30 photos there. Thank you, Kánka, for what you wrote about the Romanian edition of my Picasso. *The publisher will probably send some copies to Gallimard, but I don't know when. I would like to ask you, then, to send me a single copy to satisfy my curiosity. [...] I hope I can soon give you some good news about my health. Hugs and kisses, Gyulus.* (Letter to his brother, 19 October)

In fact, his health improves; the tone of his next letter is even more confident:

Tomorrow I will leave the sanatorium after a month's stay. I had a wonderful time here, carefree and without any noise or disturbances. [...] I'm almost glad to have some heart problems because they forced me to rest and observe a diet; now my condition is entirely satisfactory... (Letter to his brother, 21 November)

1977 Devastating earthquake in Romania. Brassaï anxiously follows the news:

What a relief to hear your voice, and to know that you and your family are safe and sound! I already saw in my mind's eye your children and grandchildren buried in Bucharest [...] Strangely, not a single newspaper mentioned Braşov, although it was very close to the epicentre. Of course I thought that, if Ploieşti suffered a lot, Braşov must have suffered even more [...] And it didn't [...] You say only a few vases broke [...] It's almost a miracle. How do you explain it? (Letter to his brother, 12 March)

Paroles en l'air is published. In this book he collected his texts on how spoken language is transformed when written. The letters he wrote to his family from Paris between 1924 and 1940 are serialized, after lengthy negotiations, in the Hungarian-language Bucharest weekly *A Hét*. The publication of the early letters (either in *A Hét*, or in book form at the publishers Kriterion) has been a constant topic in the correspondence since mid-1976.

As I wrote to you, the introduction for Kriterion is OK. But I'll go further and write some notes to explain certain passages in my letters. Yet for that I would need the entire material, that is, not only the published letters but the unpublished ones as well (those I would like to include in the book). Some passages are boring, some sentences confusing, although they express the confusion of my situation, my will to clear it up, and my total self-confidence through it all... [...] Everyone says that Budapest is very beautiful now, and life—and the cuisine—is very pleasant. I'm very sorry that I was unable to go in August. I had no time! Today, October 10, a major Brassaï exhibition is opening in Hamburg. We were invited, and I thought of going, but I had to cancel the trip. (Letter to his brother, 10 October) *We are inundated with letters, magazines, catalogues and invitations so that our little two-room apartment is completely jam-packed [...] We fight for some free space, for some air, as best we can [...] In the last two years I received more*

letters than I had all my life, and there is no reason that this should stop. But don't think that the house is in total chaos, as your letter implies. On the contrary, everything is filed away in folders: manuscripts, letters, reviews, photos—but there are so many folders I don't know what to do with them. My studio on Rue Saint-Gotthard, which is very large, is also full. Of course, my letters from Berlin and Paris are also in a well-marked folder—even easy to reach. You did a tremendous job retyping and arranging them. But the truth is that I felt no inclination to read, or re-read them. I'm always turned toward the future and have never been attracted to the past. I was afraid I would turn into a pillar of salt like Lot's wife. Obeying the angel, I never wanted to look back. Therefore I never opened the folder with the old letters [...] Thus the publication and re-reading of these letters was a surprise for me, and a rather pleasant surprise at that. (Letter to his brother, 1–2 November)

1978 He writes self-critically about his career to Andor Horváth, who is editing his letters home to his parents (1920–40):

In my preface, I shall explain the confused reasons of my "crises", which were moral rather than financial and could not be understood without these explanations. Fortunately (or rather unfortunately) for me, I possessed several skills in equal measure, and each demanded loudly to come to the fore. There was a veritable civil war raging inside me; each wanted to destroy its rivals and assume sole and undivided power. Yet never in my life was I willing to give preference to one skill over the others. I always abhorred specialization, which is one of the principal demands of our civilization but also one of its principal curses. Of course I was thinking of the great figures of the Renaissance, who allowed all their skills and faculties, including the brain, to live and flourish in wonderful harmony and "democracy". Another reason for my "crises" was that the legitimacy of the arts had really been called into question in our time. Oswald Spengler's Decline of the West, *which I had read in Berlin, had affected me deeply with its pessimistic views of the arts. I agreed with him that art had lost the exquisite role it had enjoyed in the past and artists had to yield to engineers and builders just as they had to do in ancient Rome. Thus, if I downplayed my skills upon arrival in Paris, it wasn't out of lack of confidence but rather because I no longer believed in the arts. Thus I fudged, beat around the bush and made my living with activities I otherwise despised. In other words, I felt the crisis of the arts, which is so evident today, very acutely in the thirties. In addition, at the beginning I was so fascinated by the richness of Parisian life that I had no desire to lock myself up in a studio. Life seemed much more exciting to me than art. [...] My letters could lead anyone to believe that I had turned to photography for exclusively practical reasons, in order to provide my own illustrations to my articles for the great German illustrated magazines. But no sooner did I get used to the camera than this empirical reason, too, was*

ruled out. By the way, none of the reports I had written to make money were illustrated by my own photos. I did photography solely for my own enjoyment. I had discovered just then that photography enabled me to capture all the nocturnal beauty of Paris, which held me under its spell during my Bohemian years. At the same time I understood that it matters how we choose our ways of self-expression in a given era. Photography seemed to be one of the defining media of our time, along with film, radio and television. The recognition of this fact was a turning point in my life during the 1930s. Strangely, the attitude of our 20th century towards photography was the same as mine, except it dates from forty years later. The world was indifferent, almost hostile to photography until the 1970s, when it suddenly realised that it is one of the characteristic forms of expression of our time. This realization fundamentally changed the position of photography in the world. Museums, universities, art collections, galleries, which until then had accepted only paintings, sculptures, engravings and drawings, opened their doors to it, especially in the United States, which was less burdened by the overwhelming tradition and prestige of painting than Europe was. I would like to say a word about the "gold mine" as well. Speaking of Picasso's famous and all-too-often quoted dictum, an American critic remarked that although Picasso was usually right, in Brassaï's case he was wrong. For photography, and not drawing, is the real "gold mine". I think he was right; and I felt the same way when Picasso reproached me for choosing photography. I retorted that I hadn't chosen it as a "second profession", to make money, but rather because it was one of the characteristic tools of expression of our time. (Brassaï's letter to Andor Horváth, 4 January)

Gallimard publishes Henry Miller's *Rocher heureux,* with photographs by Brassaï. Brassaï writes his self-introducing, explanatory preface to *Előhívás* (Developing), containing his letters written between 1920 and 1940. Throughout the year, he works on the writings and photographs of *Les artistes de ma vie,* the last book of his published during his lifetime. He receives the *Grand Prix International de la Photographie* in Paris. The last two years of his brother's life are entirely taken up by the retyping, organization and publication of their correspondence.

I have collected Brassaï's letters from 1947 to 1968 and from 1974 to 1978. I haven't yet arranged the letters from 1944 to 1947 (I have to find them), as well as those from 1968 and 1973. (Letter from Kálmán Halász to Andor Horváth, March 1978)

In March, Brassaï instructs his brother about what to do with the letters omitted from *Developing.* Kálmán's illness and eventual death prevent him from completing the project.

As for my letters after 1940, don't worry about arranging them. Since 1949, I have always used a typewriter and saved copies, which I keep in folders

arranged by year. (I'm better organized than you might think, in spite of the flood of letters I receive—and write.) But if you have some free time, I would like to ask you to copy my handwritten letters from before 1949—there can't be all that many. (Letter to his brother, 7 April)

Brassaï, at 79, hasn't given up his plans to visit Hungary and Romania.

Next Wednesday, 17 May, we're leaving for Brussels. At 11 on Thursday I shall receive the Belgian journalists and critics, then have lunch at Baron Lambert's (from Lambert Bank), who is a famous art collector. We're returning to Paris on Friday. Thank you for what you wrote about your grandchildren. Maybe I'll meet them if we go to Budapest and Braşov next year. I just received a call from Brussels that my exhibit was awarded the Prize of Art Critics (I don't know what this means but it's good publicity for the show). (Letter to his brother, 11 May)

In his last letter to his brother, Kánka writes almost two pages on his work with the Brassaï correspondence, his haggling with Kriterion; he also responds to Brassaï's queries and comments. Then he strikes a more personal tone:

Now, to turn to something more pleasant, I wish that the pain in your right shoulder would go away. I myself have not been feeling the best these past few days. I had shivers with no fever, then a pain in my stomach; now I'm better, however. Congratulations, my Gyulus, on your major exhibition in Brussels; I also await with the greatest interest the new photo album you announced, Les artistes de ma vie. *They would welcome this important publication in this country, too, if you could include a few trifles about Brãncuşi, even though he was known to be hard to approach. I'm waiting for your response to my letters from April and May. Hugs to you and Gilberte — —your loving Kánka.* (Letter from Kálmán Halász, 25 May)

Kálmán "Kánka" Halász dies, shortly before his 78th birthday in September.

1979 Brassaï's 80th birthday is marked by retrospective exhibitions in New York and London.

1980 *Előhívás (Levelek 1920–1940),* the volume of Brassaï's letters on which Kálmán Halász had worked so hard, is published by Kriterion in Bucharest. The book contains notes and an afterword by Andor Horváth, as well as 59 photographs and drawings by Brassaï.

1982 *Les artistes de ma vie* is published by Viking Press (New York) and Denoël (Paris).

1984 Brassaï dies suddenly of a heart attack at Beaulieu-sur-Mer on the Mediterranean coast. He was working on his book on Proust to the last day of his life. He is buried in Paris, in Montparnasse cemetery. ❧

Júlia Papp

Pál Rosti (1830-1874) Traveller and Photographer

No history of 20th-century photography would be complete without mentioning photographers László Moholy-Nagy, André Kertész, Martin Munkacsi, Robert Capa, Brassaï, George Kepes or Lucien Hervé, who left Hungary to become famous abroad. However, the history of photography in Hungary goes back much further, to the late 1830s. Louis Daguerre's invention was announced on January 7th, 1839 at the French Academy; less than a month later the Pest journal *Hasznos Mulatságok* (Useful Diversions) printed news of this. In the spring of 1839, Daguerre presented pictures he himself had made to the Emperor Ferdinand V, Metternich and to Count Antal Apponyi, the Austrian minister in Paris. In 1840 a book on photography was published in Hungarian, and there was an exhibition organized by the Pesti Műegylet (Art Society of Pest) displaying three daguerreotypes that had presumably been brought from Paris. To our current knowledge, the first photographs in Hungary were also taken in 1840. In that August, Antal Vállas, a professor at the university in Pest, presented two daguerreotypes that he had taken from a window of the chamber in which the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was sitting: they show the Danube bank and the Royal Castle across the river in Buda. The painter Jakab Marastoni (born Giacomo Maraston in Venice), the first professional photographer active in Hungary, opened his studio in January 1841. To date, more than 40 daguerreotypers are known to have been active in Hungary between 1840 and 1850, and the number of daguerreotypes they produced is estimated at several thousand.

During the 1850s and 1860s, the expensive daguerreotype, which produced only a single copy, was displaced by the easily reproduced paper photograph in Hungary, just as in western Europe. While albums depicting famous individuals (politicians, scholars, artists) and views of bathing resorts and cities were steadily increasing their sales, studio portraits taken on commission made up the greater part of the photographs produced. In Hungary, too, there were a few photographers whose work was outstanding by any standard and who successfully experimented with other genres as well. Among them were the Transylvanian Károly

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Szathmári Pap,[1] who in 1854 took more than 200 photographs during the Crimean War, one year before Roger Fenton and James Robertson, usually cited as the first war photographers, and Pál Rosti. (Picture 1) The latter established his own place in the history of photography through one compilation, the series of 47 pictures taken during his travels in Central and South America in 1857–1858.[2] (Picture 2)

Pál Rosti was a scion of the Rosty family[3] from Barkócz, a family cultivated in literature and music and belonging to the reform party of the nobility in the Hungary of the first half of the 19th century. His father Albert Rosty, deputy lieutenant of the County of Békés, was active towards the end of the 1830s as a member of a review committee of the National Theatre and later directed its operatic division. Tutor to the young Pál Rosti was Antal Vállas, already mentioned as the first person we know of in Hungary to prepare a daguerreotype. The Rosty mansion in Pest was a favoured meeting place of the liberal nobility. Among those who frequented the house were two leading members of this group, Ágoston Trefort and József Eötvös (who served as Minister of Religion and Education in the first post-Ausgleich Hungarian ministry). One of Pál Rosti's elder sisters became Eötvös' wife and mother to the physicist Loránd Eötvös. Another, Ilona Rosty married Trefort, a close friend of József Eötvös' and himself Minister of Religion and Education from 1872 until 1888. After the 1848–1849 Revolution and Fight for Independence Rosti, who had served in the Károlyi Hussar Regiment and feared punitive reprisal, travelled abroad with the assistance of his family. He studied Geography and Ethnography at the university of Munich, then, in 1854, he went to Paris, where he studied photography in order, as he himself emphasised, to be able to record as precisely and effectively as possible the regions to which he journeyed. His travels in Central and South America in 1857–1858 were inspired by those undertaken some fifty years earlier by Alexander von Humboldt, the great German natural scientist and traveller. Rosti took pictures of the larger cities and the natural wonders, mines, architectural monuments and flora of Cuba, Venezuela and Mexico. Venezuelan and Mexican historians regard his photographs as the first to depict the landscapes and distinctive features of their countries with the aim of producing a scientific record.[4]

In its treatment of subjects and technical execution, Rosti's work rivals that of any of his contemporaries. The best known of his photographs are those he took of the waterfall near Cuernavacca (Quauhnahuac) (Picture 3) and of the ruins of the 16th-century Franciscan cloister in Tlalmanalco (Mexico) (Picture 4). According to one account, on seeing the photograph of a zamang (Pithecolobium Saman), an enormous leguminous tree near Catuche Turmeo in Venezuela (Picture 5), the 90-year-old Humboldt, to whom Rosti had presented a copy of his album in 1858 at his family seat just outside Berlin, cried out with tears in his eyes:

1 ■ *Uralkodók festője, fényképésze: Szathmári Pap Károly* (Painter and Photographer of Rulers: Károly Szathmári Pap), ed.: Magdolna Kolta, Kecskemét, 2001.

2 ■ *Rosti Pál 1830–1874*. Essay by Károly Kincses, written on the occasion of the publication in 1861 in Pest of the fascimile edition of Pál Rosti's book *Uti emlékezetek Amerikából* (Recollections of a Journey through America). Hungarian Museum of Photography & Balassi Kiadó, Budapest, 1992.

3 ■ He was the only member of his family to spell his name with an 'i' instead of a 'y'.

4 ■ Pál Rosti: *Memorias de un viaje por America*. Caracas, Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1968; Josune Dorronsoro: *Pál Rosti: Una Visión de America Latina. Cuba. Venezuela y México, 1857–1858.* Caracas, 1983; Pál Rosti: Memorias de un viaje por América. Caracas, 1988; María del Consuelo Andara: "The Vision of the Other: Images of National Identity. Travelers in Venezuela in the Second Half of the 19th Century". In: *Tierra Firme,* April 2004, vol. 22, no. 86, pp. 229–240.

> see what has become of me, this fair tree is still the same as it was when I saw it sixty years ago. Not a single one of its giant branches has drooped... Then we were young and strong, filled with joy, and our youthful ardour brightened even our most solemn studies.[5]

In his own account, Rosti relates the meeting with a slightly different emphasis:

> to my great delight, the renowned old man recognized at first glance the great zamang, which in his youth half a century before he had seen and described, so vivid was the impression that the beautiful tree had made on the yet youthful traveller's soul, and so wondrously true the memory of this distinguished man, who already stood so close to his grave, and so trifling the change that fifty years had made on the enormous tree![6]

In terms of style, a photograph of a Mexican coffee plantation (El Palmar) in the valley of the Aragua river merits attention (Picture 6). It depicts the forest undergrowth and a footpath leading into its depths, bringing to mind a plein-air Barbizon painting. This is not a scholarly, descriptive introduction to the natural peculiarities and architectural monuments of alien lands and exotic cultures; it is, rather, an evocative landscape seen with a painter's eye.

Most of Rosti's photographs are taken from a distance (often from above). In contrast, this coffee plantation photograph emphasises intimacy through the closeness of the shot: the viewer's gaze is drawn to the winding path leading into the forest, arousing a desire to walk past the small cart left by the wayside and stroll among the trees. Rosti's own account reveals why this photograph of a coffee plantation might make us think of European forests. Between the young coffee trees

> buchares and bananas have been planted so that their broad leaves might offer some shade to the delicate coffee beans. The buchares is a tall tree, the branches of which spread wide, offering splendid shade. Its leaves resemble those of the poplar, its trunk and form resemble the beech.[7]

It is interesting to compare the photograph and the lithograph accompanying this account, made by Gustav Klette for Rosti's account in book form on his travels. The latter is much more an ethnographic study, a genre painting, with its portrayal of the negro workers relaxing in the foreground. (Picture 7)

On August 8th, 1858 Rosti returned from his eighteen-month journey through Central and South America to England, arriving in Southampton. On November 1st he went on to Berlin to seek out Humboldt and, three days later, he arrived in Hungary. Since the bindings for his albums were the work of Despierres in Paris, he clearly spent some of this time in France, for he presented a bound copy of an album to Humboldt.

Following his return home, he took an active part in Hungary's scholarly, artistic, musical and athletic life. He gave lectures and wrote articles on his travels. In 1861 he had an account of these travels published, complete with lithographs and engravings (both steel and wood) produced from the photographs he had brought back. He devotes as much attention in his book to the siting of the cities, the climatic conditions and the natural spectacles (waterfalls, volcanoes, caves) as he does to individual buildings (Pictures 8, 10, 11), mining (Picture 9) and agricultural industries (sugar, coffee and tobacco plantations and sugar refining). He takes an archeological interest in pre-Columbian remains,

5 ■ Károly Kincses: *Rosti Pál 1830–1874*, p. 19.
6 ■ Pál Rosti: *Uti emlékezetek Amerikából.* Pest, 1861. pp. 70-71.
7 ■ Ibid, p. 55.

devoting several photographs and detailed descriptions to the Aztec ruins at Xochicalco (Picture 12) and captured the Aztec stone calendar walled up in the cathedral in Mexico City (Picture 13). The exposures in which he presents the history, customs, religion, outward racial characteristics, clothing and weapons of the indigenous peoples of South America (the Mexican Indians among them) indicate his ethnographic bent.

Rosti was an acute observer of the social structures and peculiarities of South American society. One of his remarks reveals his sensitivity to social questions and the liberal outlook he presumably imbibed from his family environment:

> What is monstrous and appalling in slavery is the thought that such a creature is compelled from early childhood until old age to allot, with not the slightest measure of free will, his hard work, strength, talents, his entire existence to another, that the fruit of his ceaseless labour will be reaped by another without him being able, with his industry and his application, to alter his fate in the slightest, that in such a manner he has ceased to be a member of the human race and is nothing more than a toiling brute.[8]

At the same time he notices that the circumstances in which Cuban slaves lived were no worse than those of European workers, and that they were treated far more humanely than black slaves in the United States.

He observes local customs with great interest. He makes mention of religious life, which he finds more intimate and absorbing than that of Europe, as well as the colourful religious processions and celebrations. He offers a vivid description of the cock fights, unusually popular in Havana, where the social barriers dividing rich and poor break down at the ringside; at the same time he strongly condemns the carnage of bull fights, much more savage than those in Spain. He provides a detailed account, seasoned with humour, of the strict courting traditions of young Mexicans. In the first stage of the relationship, the young man may only follow his chosen on horseback as she rides in a carriage on the paseo. A conversation between the two is permitted only several months later, followed by a secret correspondence, which also lasts several months. It may come to pass, however, that the young man's affections are left unrequited.

The climate and the mentality, both so different from those of Europe, tried his patience and his adaptability. In Mexico, he climbed Popocatepetl and spent the night in the miners' temporary quarters in the volcano's crater. Although he was badly affected by the altitude, the cold and the sulphurous gases, the sight of the stars resplendent with a glow and magnificence he had never seen before, and the profound tranquility and isolation above the clouds "almost made me forget the discomforts and dangers of my night-time lodgings, leaving a memory in my soul that will remain ineffaceable for the rest of my life."[9] He quickly grew accustomed to and came to like sleeping in a hammock; whenever he did not find lodgings for the night, he would sleep outside in the *chinchorr* that he always brought with him.

Rosti the explorer was swift to adapt to the unexpected. In November 1857, a Mexican newspaper reported that lava had erupted in the Puente de Dios cave. At Rosti's suggestion the Mexican Miners' College launched an expedition, in which he naturally took part, with the purpose of observing the geological phenomenon. After an exhausting journey, they made their hazardous way into the cave. There they discovered that the smoke and flames

8 ■ Ibid, p. 20.
9 ■ Ibid, p. 179.

PICTURE 1

Ignác Schrecker: *Pál Rosti,* 1865. From an album published on the occasion of the inauguration of the building of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences which includes photographs of its members.

HAS MANUSCRIPT DEPARTMENT, MS 10899/ 158.

DENES JÓZSA

PICTURE 2

Pál Rosti: *Photographic Collection,* 1857–58. The leather binding of the Rosti album in the Library of the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest is ornamented with the initials of Anna Rosty, wife of Count Rudolf Amadé.

DÉNES JÓZSA

PICTURE 3

Pál Rosti: *Waterfall near Cuernavaca (Mexico)*, 1857–58. Photograph.

LIBRARY OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BUDAPEST.

Picture 4
Pál Rosti:
Cemetery with the ruins of the Franciscan cloister in Tlalmanalco (Mexico), 1857–58. Photograph.
Library of the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.

Dénes Józsa

Picture 5
Pál Rosti:
The Great Zamang next to Catuche Turmeo (Venezuela), 1857–58. Photograph. Alexander Humboldt had carefully examined this giant tree some fifty years earlier.
Library of the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.

Dénes Józsa

DÉNES JÓZSA

PICTURE 6

Pál Rosti: *Coffee plantation in El Palmar (Mexico),* 1857–1858. Photograph. The leafy trees of the plantation provide shade for the young coffee trees.

LIBRARY OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BUDAPEST.

PICTURE 7

Gusztáv Klette: *Coffee plantation in the Aragua valley (El Palmar).* Lithograph, based on Pál Rosti's photograph in *Uti emlékezetek Amerikából* (Recollections of a Journey Through America) published in Pest in 1861.

Dénes Jozsa

Picture 8
Pál Rosti:
The oldest Conquest-period house in Mexico, 1857–58.
Photograph.
Rosti found the building, which according to local tradition was once the living quarters of Cortez, in a state of great neglect.
Library of the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.

Dénes Jozsa

Picture 9
Pál Rosti:
Panoramic photograph of the mining town of Pachuca (Mexico), 1857–58.
Rich silver mines were in operation in this desolate region.
Library of the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.

PICTURE 10

Pál Rosti: *Panoramic photograph of Mexico City,* 1857–58. Taken from above, it shows the Palacio National, the former palace of the viceroys. At the time of Rosti's travels in the region, the building was the residence of the President and also housed ministries.

LIBRARY OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BUDAPEST.

DÉNES JÓZSA

DÉNES JÓZSA

PICTURE 11

Pál Rosti: *The Catedral Metropolitana in Mexico City,* 1857–58. Photograph. Built on an Aztec sacred site and using stones from the demolished building, the cathedral signified the the triumph of the new religion over the old and its consecration was meant to drive off the malevolent pagan and demonic spirits.

LIBRARY OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BUDAPEST.

DÉNES JÓZSA

PICTURE 12
Pál Rosti:
Eastern side of the pyramid in Xochicalco (Mexico), 1857–58.
Photograph. Most of the stones of the enormous pyramid, which served both religious and military purposes, were used by the people of the surroundings as building material for their homes.
LIBRARY OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BUDAPEST.

DÉNES JÓZSA

PICTURE 13
Pál Rosti:
The Aztec calendar in the wall of the Catedral Metropolitana in Mexico City, 1857–58.
Photograph.
LIBRARY OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BUDAPEST.

The Fifth Album

"I will mention parenthetically that Rosti had three sisters, and while Anna lived farther away, it is not likely that he was on worse terms with her than he was with Ilona and Ágnes. It is quite possible that she too had a 'family' copy, though this cannot be proven,"[10] Károly Kincses argued. Indeed, we used to know of four surviving albums, including the two that Rosti gave to his sisters, Ilona and Ágnes. Kincses's intuition[11] has proved sound, for as the dedication in the album recently found in the library of the Museum of Fine Arts shows, Pál Rosti did indeed have a copy of the album bound for Anna as well.

Rosti gave one of the albums that he brought back to Hungary to the National Museum, emphasising his commitment to fostering learning in his native land. Today it is in the National Széchenyi Library in Budapest. The album presented to Humboldt is held by the Deutsches Museum in Munich, and that presented to Ágnes Rosti-Eötvös is in the Geophysical Institute of Eötvös Loránd University. Ilona's album became part of the Trefort estate. In 1975 it was purchased by the Alliance of Hungarian Photographers, and it is held in the Hungarian Museum of Photography in Kecskemét. In 1997 a facsimile version of this album, published by the Museum of Photography, was produced containing 46 pictures from its Pál Rosti Photographic Collection.

The leather binding of the Rosti album in the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest is ornamented with 18 copper stars and, in the centre, a gilded coat of arms with a nine-pointed crown and the monogram "A A" at the centre. (Picture 2). The former owner of the album is indicated in lines at the top of the title page: "To Baroness Anna Amadey with brotherly affection, Pál Rosti". The initials in the coat of arms are those of Rosti's eldest sister, Anna Amadey, who married Baron Rudolf Amadé (1814–1898), Hofrat to the King and Emperor and later Governor of Bucovina.

The address of the Parisian firm which bound the other albums appears in small gilded letters at the bottom: Despierres Rel. de l'Empereur 3 rue de L'Echelle. On the title page, as on the title pages of the other copies, is the inscription, "Photographic collection made by Pál Rosti during his travels in Havana, the region of Orinocco, and Mexico, 1857–1858."

The significance of the copy held in the Museum of Fine Arts is augmented by the fact that, of the four albums in Hungary, it alone contains all the 47 photographs known to be taken by Rosti.

"Of the copies of the Photographic Collection, one is part of the Humboldt bequest, another is in the National Museum, the third is kept by the author, who welcomes with disarming cordiality in his lodgings on Magyar street in Pest anyone who desires to examine these indeed fascinating rarities..."[12] runs one magazine account in 1861. Pál Rosti therefore presumably had his own album, which he may have given to Klette, who engraved the illustrations that appeared in the account of Rosti's travels published that year in Pest. But the existence of another copy, from which Klette worked, cannot be excluded. Thus there is still some hope that, some day, further albums of this collection will come to light.

that had been holding the local peasants in superstitious terror for months had been caused by the accumulated excrement of bats in the depths of the cave, which had caught fire. Rosti saw the incident as an example of the mentality and the conception of time in South America, so markedly different to the European. During

10 ■ Károly Kincses: *Rosti Pál, 1830–1874,* p. 20.

11 ■ *Ibid,* p. 20.; Mihály Simon: *Összehasonlító magyar fotótörténet* (A Comparative History of Hungarian Photography). Budapest, 2000, pp. 23, 54.

12 ■ Ferencz Girókuti P.: "Utazási jegyzetek. Rosti Pál amerikai utazása" (Traveller's Notes. Pál Rosti's Travels in the Americas). In: Ferencz Girókuti P.: *Nagy Képes Naptár 1861-dik évre* (The Illustrated Calendar, 1861). Pest, 1861, p. 188.

the three months of his stay in Mexico, they never undertook a chemical analysis of the sample of fumes taken from the cave despite his continuous urgings.

He learned from personal experience that the turn of phrase often heard among the wealthy of Mexico that, "My home and my person are at your service," could only be taken seriously as long as one did not actually invoke assistance. Until the money he was expecting from his London banker arrived, he lived off the valuables he had pawned, eating cornpone and fruit. In need of food and lodging, he entered into service as an assistant to a German apothecary who had settled in Mexico. However, once confronted with more pleasant challenges, he quickly found his feet. When his host in El Palmar took him to a gathering in his honour organized by his coffee plantation workers; he used his knowledge of the Hungarian *csárdás* dance and soon mastered the local dance to the astonishment of the locals. He had intended to spend only a single day in El Palmar, he wrote, but the Hamburg-born owner of the plantation entreated him to stay so kindly, with a hospitality comparable only to that of Hungarians, that in the end he spent a month on the estate. Clearly he did everything in his power to acquaint himself with all the social strata and the thinking, values and customs of both natives and newcomers.

In 1861, as a writer on geography, the Historical Division of the Academy of Sciences elected him its corresponding member. The photograph taken of him on the occasion is included in Ignác Schrecker's Academy Album of 1865, a collection of photographic portraits of the members of the body.[13] (Picture 1) From 1863 on, he was active on the board of the Fine Arts Society and later as a member of the committee of the Pesti Műegylet.

He was an acquaintance of Richard Wagner and was one of the organizers of the gala dinner in Wagner's honour that was held in Pest in 1863. The memory survives of a boat excursion to Margaret Island taken at the time of Wagner's sojourn in Hungary that began pleasantly enough but almost ended in tragedy. At the conclusion of the entertainment on the island, Wagner embarked on Rosti's boat to return across the blustery waters of the Danube to the city. The boat, however, almost collided with the rafts moored along the shore.[14]

Rosti considered physical endurance to be important. During his travels in Central and South America he had needed to be in shape. He noted with no small pride that, according to the locals, there were few among the native peoples who dared to spend the night in the Popocatepetl crater. As a founding member of the Budapest Boatsmen's Society he often took part in boating tours in Hungary, and in 1862 he undertook to row a two-man rowboat from Rotterdam to Pest, sometimes under extremely difficult conditions, according to the account written by his fellow boatsman.[15] During an eventful life, however, the only photography he ever engaged in, at least to our current knowledge, was the series recording his travels in the New World. ❧

13 ■ *Magyar Akadémiai Album. A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia ünnepélyes megnyitásának emlékéül* (Album of the Hungarian Academy: In commemoration of the Ceremonial Opening of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences). 1865. From the photography studio of Ignácz Schrecker in Pest.

14 ■ István Birly: *Csolnakút Rotterdamtól Pestig* (By Boat from Rotterdam to Pest). Pest, 1863.

15 ■ "Alas, the major part of Wagner's Hungarian letters has been lost. Thus in Pál Rosti's bequest, now in the possession of the wife of Baron Amadé, there is not a single letter." Emil Haraszti: *Wagner Richard és Magyarország* (Richard Wagner and Hungary). Budapest, 1916, pp. 204–205.

Iván Bächer

Blum's Way

A Note on Tamás Blum's Memoirs

Tamás Blum was born a Central European: all his family were bilingual in German and Hungarian, just as much at home in Vienna (indeed his father lived there for years), in Berlin or, for that matter in modern-day Slovakia, as they were in Budapest.

Travel was as much part and parcel of their lives as work, or reading, or music-making.

As is clear from the first part of his memoirs in the previous issue, the tyro conductor, on landing in neutral (and pacific) Switzerland, after incarceration in Bergen-Belsen towards the end of the Second World War, instantly found his feet and had spotted a place where he fitted in.

Small wonder then that, back at home, someone accustomed to freedom was especially affected when the Iron Curtain dropped on Hungary in 1948, putting paid to any thoughts of travel for many a year.

Between 1948 and the end of 1956, it was not just the *répétiteur* Blum—a person whom Otto Klemperer during his 1947–50 spell at the State Opera House in Budapest regarded as his most cherished colleague—who was unable to travel from Hungary to the West: neither could world stars like the basso Mihály Székely, or the baritone Alexander Svéd (both carried around in their pockets valid contracts from the New York Metropolitan Opera). Like many others, they were prisoners of the company in Budapest, so marvellous in other respects.

When the Sixties came, one of the special "favours" of the Kádár era was every now and then permitting Hungarian citizens, hampered by all manner of provisos and procedures, a trip to the fabled capitalist West. In the second extract from the memoir here published, Blum mentions at one point that it was fairly rare for a

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Iván Bächer
is best known for his autobiographical books, short stories and a regular feauture column in the national daily Népszabadság.

whole family to be allowed to travel: the children were often refused an exit visa to ensure that parents would return home from abroad.

Trips to the West were also made difficult and galling by the regulations concerning "hard" currencies, restricting to a bare minimum the amount of Western money (typically US dollars) that could be officially purchased for Hungarian money. In the Sixties, the allowance for a trip was a princely $5 (next to nothing even 40 years ago). Hungarian travellers would either smuggle out money that had been bought on the black market, or else throw themselves on the mercy of family or friends who lived in the West.

Not that there was any lack of those. At least half of those who could be said to make up the Hungarian arts had either "defected" or otherwise quit the country in several waves, the biggest of which were in 1938, 1948 and 1956.

Defection and the defectors were an integral part of Hungarian life. Not surprisingly, this spawned any number of jokes at the time. One, for instance, goes:

How does a smart Hungarian speak to a stupid Hungarian?

On an international line.

Hungarian citizens may have been bound by strict regulations, but the rules were there to be broken; indeed one was obliged to break them. Typically for that merriest barracks in the Socialist camp, such transgressions did not usually have disastrous consequences.

Tamás Blum quite regularly prolonged his visits by making sure to miss his plane or train.

Artists, of course, did have opportunities for foreign travel, but even they were not given much latitude on the money side of things, and many found themselves having to deal with rather embarrassing predicaments. Tamás Blum was able to smooth his way with his commanding presence, his marvellous grasp of languages, and the fact that he had friends all over the world—and if he didn't have one where he happened to be, then he made one in no time at all.

And, of course, if he was really up against it, he could always croon an aria from *Tosca*... ❧

Tamás Blum

Itinerary

Part 2

June–July 1962, Paris and Italy with Józsa

This was a semi-official, semi-private trip. Official to the extent that I was supposed to do a translation of the libretto for *Electronic Love,* an ingenious one-act opera by József Kozma[1] (or Joseph Kosma, if you prefer), and conduct the piece at the Opera House in Budapest. When Kozma had been in Pest, he suggested I go to Paris that summer and go through the text with him. As a result, the Opera House paid for my train ticket and also gave me a per diem allowance. Apart from that, they authorised me to extend my trip to Italy, at my own expense. I think I was permitted to purchase $200 with forints, the rest I smuggled over the border, by the usual method of tucking it away under the inner soles of my shoes. On the way to Vienna, I took particular delight that in the sweltering late June, while my colleagues at the Opera House were having to play five-hour slabs of Wagner in tails or heavy costumes, I was in shirtsleeves and able to create a cool draught of air of my own choosing in a compartment on the train. In Vienna I strolled around the Kärntnerstrasse area with my violinist friend, Jóska Sivó, who since 1956 has become a Herr Professor with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. That evening we boarded the sleeping-car for Zurich. A young fellow in glasses was engaged in such a passionate leave-taking from his girlfriend that we felt obliged to tell them to move over a bit because we couldn't get onto the carriage. By the time we had

1 ■ Joseph Kosma (1905–69). Composer. Born as Kozma József in Budapest, he went to Paris in 1933. He scored several of the great films in cinematic history, including those of Jean Renoir and Marcel Carné. He wrote operettas and a handful of comic operas and was the composer of the perennial song "Autumn Leaves".

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.*

finished sleeping, we were approaching Switzerland, and for the first time my wife Józsa was able to see her life-long friends, the Alps, in the morning sunshine. The passionate young man also showed up and asked where we were travelling on to after Zurich. He was delighted when we said Paris, because he too was headed that way and when he got to Zurich he wanted to switch to the car that his father had left there for him. It turned out he was the son of a wealthy Greek. He proposed that we travel on together by road. That appealed to us, so we agreed to split up when we reached Zurich and meet again that afternoon at a restaurant called the Poly, which was a haunt of the local Greeks. We took a look round Zurich, little knowing that we would soon have literally decades to look around the city. The Greek was there with his car, a Jaguar, however, the Jag was knackered. We puttered along to Basel, where the French border guard was willing to wave us through, but not the driver, on the grounds that Greece was a Communist country and all Greek citizens needed a visa for France. In vain the poor fellow tried to explain that Greece was a kingdom, and he was free to travel where he pleased; he had his passport taken off him and only returned a long time later—naturally with not the least apology. People in uniforms are always right, no matter how oafish they are—something that does not only apply to Hungary.

We slept in Vésoul, a horrible small town west of Mulhouse, in the cheapest hotel we could find, where bricks did the job of legs on the bed. A hundred kilometers from Paris the car's brakes failed, so we had to go on using the hand brake when needed, which didn't make us too happy. There was a Jaguar service on the route nationale, but they would only take on work for September. In the end even the hand brake wasn't working, so by the time we reached Paris the car, technologically speaking, was no better than a handcart. [...] Depending on natural loss of momentum was a bit risky at a red light. To make things worse, I suggested a route that required going down some steps. I was so used to being on foot that it never occurred to me this was impassable for a car. I should add that Georgiadis, the poor lad, could not understand anyway how a conductor and a chemical engineer between them were unable to drive. We didn't even try to explain to him that we didn't own a car.

Seeing that we were invited to the Kozmas that evening, we bade a hasty farewell and took up quarters in a minute hotel room. The bed was a bit like a watering trough, whichever way we lay on it we ended up rolling onto each other, and there was a constant noise of running water in the nearby communal WC that could not be turned off. We slept, changed clothes, then went out only to see Georgiadis in the small square, putting his barely used Jaguar up for sale.

The Kozmas lived in the Rue Ampère. The whole apartment was just full of scores and sheets of music and dedicated photographs, with a bust of Beethoven's facing Kozma's chair. The only reason Kozma's partner was a woman was, as he himself put it, "that an artist is supposed to be either a Communist or a homosexual, so I chose the former." Not a word was said about his opera or its performance. After dinner he put on a gramophone record, a really boring piece by Varèse, and

Józsa spent her very first social call in Paris fast asleep on a sofa. That was, in fact, the end of the professional side of things. We met Kozma once more at Les Deux Magots, the famous meeting place for artists. No great artists turned up that day; apart from us, the only other people sitting there were two elderly ladies.

We got together with a number of our friends, including György Sebők[2] and his wife, whom I had last seen in Debrecen when we performed Bartók's *Third Piano Concerto.* Little suspecting then the future successes that were in store for him, Sebők expounded on the joys and mysteries of driving cars. Sebők and his wife at that time were living in Maisons Lafitte, and when we called on them János Starker[3] and his wife happened to be visiting. I hadn't seen Starker since he abandoned his post as cello soloist in the orchestra at the Opera House in Budapest and went to America to become world famous. [...]

The real purpose of our trip was to get to Italy, which neither of us had been to. We had a couchette to sleep in from Paris to Lucerne, sharing the compartment with a Franco-Polish Orthodox Jewish father, mother and their two children, who kept on eating all the time. In Lucerne the weather was freezing cold, and winter coats would not have been out of order. Consequently we spent the greater part of the day huddling under the hotel eiderdowns. We ventured out for a walk in the evening and bumped into an English music critic, a lady, who shortly before had enthused over the premiere of Emil Petrovics's *C'est la Guerre* at the Budapest Opera. She was now in Lucerne for the Music Festival and was astounded that I didn't wish to buy tickets for the opening concert. One of Józsa's first experiences of Switzerland was seeing the *Uri* at its mooring—a boat that plies the waters of Lake Lucerne—and on which I had told her that my mother had once taken a trip; from this Józsa could tell that names didn't change everywhere as quickly as they do in Budapest. The next day we travelled on to Como. At first I was worried about the rustiness of my Italian (I had picked it up from my two companions in the piano trio at Lausanne, just after the war), because over the intervening years I had done little more than delve into the vocabulary of *Rigoletto.* We managed to locate a hotel that was just about affordable and then went off to the lake shore for a meal. It was slightly off-putting that a young woman at a nearby table winkled out the shrimps from her fish salad and fed them to her pet pooch as it squatted in a begging pose. If it had been sausage, which is much dearer there,

2 ■ György Sebők (1922–99). Pianist. In 1949, he was named professor of music at the Bartók Béla Conservatory in Budapest. He left Hungary following the 1956 Revolution, settling first in Paris. In 1962, he took up a post at Indiana University School of Music in Bloomington. The cellist János Starker, with whom he made many recordings, said of him "First-hand, second-hand or in recordings, György Sebők is the greatest pianist who ever lived." An acclaimed teacher of master classes he subsequently regularly visited Hungary to teach and appear on the concert platform.

3 ■ János Starker (1924–). Cellist. Invited by Antal Doráti to become first cellist of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, in 1948 Starker laid aside his career as a soloist and emigrated to the United States. He then went on, with another Hungarian, Fritz Reiner, first to the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and then to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. He resumed his career as a touring soloist in 1958, the same year he joined the faculty of Indiana University. He was a chamber music partner of György Sebők on the concert platform and on numerous recordings.

I would not have taken such a strong exception. From Como we went on to Genoa. We knew it would be an attractive city, and we had two acquaintances there: members of the Genoa Opera House chorus, who earlier in the year had been in Budapest with their company, and I had shown them around. They were the first to point out for me how many splendid buildings there were in Pest: *tutti palazzi,* as Cesare Oliva put it.

The hotel in which we took a room was so dingy that we couldn't sleep or breathe in it due to the racket and the stench. Of course, the heat wave was back with us, and the pullovers we wore in Paris were needed for just a day. I had an upset stomach, so I was not really in the mood for going out to dine with Cesare and the others, but I had phoned him only that morning and there was no way of getting out of it. He picked us up in his car at the hotel. He couldn't get over how the maestro could stay in such a dive. He took us up to his apartment in a splendid villa on top of the hill. He was only a member of an amateur chorus because the opera season at Genoa only ran for a few months; the rest of the time he was a dental technician, he explained. But he was proud of his glorious bass voice and without further ado he launched into Fiesco's aria from *Simon Boccanegra,* to my piano accompaniment. [...]

For all Cesare's protestations, proud Genovese as he was, that there is nothing at all worth seeing in Florence (and no sea either, he added maliciously), we went all the same. There we wore our feet out going round churches and museums and went to the camping site on the hill at Fiesole, which has the most magnificent view. Cesare was clearly wrong. On the cloister wall of the little church in Fiesole is an inscription that runs (in Italian): *If you're a believer, say your prayers; if you aren't, be astounded; and if you're a dolt, scrawl on the wall.* On the next day we apprehended the profound truth that this articulates when, on a wall of the Uffizi, we saw an inscription (in Hungarian): *Tiny and the pricks were here.*

It was with heavy hearts that we moved on from the city, but we still had Venice ahead. I knew that it was going to be difficult to get a cheap room. I went into the CIT travel agency office in Florence and spelled out what we were looking for. They trotted out the prices of a few hotels, at which I could only splutter. I explained that I was a poor Hungarian conductor. Oh, maestro, the young lady burst out, in that case you must know how *Tosca* opens. I growled it out for her, which backed up my claim as far as she was concerned. She immediately telephoned to reserve a room on the Lido at a luxurious hotel called the Villa Roma, which was not yet quite ready, and so it was possible to stay there for a fraction of the usual rate. We weren't bothered by the fact that there were not yet any chandeliers in the dining room and our telephone did not work. We went sightseeing and bathed, and we were sad when we had to set off back to Vienna. Because we wanted to eat something memorable for a last supper with our remaining liras, at the waiter's suggestion we ordered a big Venetian speciality: *fegato alla veneziana.* The only difference from a chewy fried liver as served up back home at the cheap railway restaurant in Miskolc was that here the cat that came round to scrounge even

jumped onto the table, which it would never dare to do in Miskolc. Józsa swatted it on the chops with the menu.

Early in the morning in Vienna we paid a fifty-schilling fine because we crossed a completely empty square against a red light.

It was on this trip that I started taking photographs, which, in my own amateurish but somehow adroit way, I have enthusiastically done ever since. The picture that came off best is one I took on our return to Budapest: the pigsty all over the floor once we unpacked our luggage.

September 1963, Warsaw Autumn Festival

I was invited by the Poles to attend their contemporary music festival. It was a little tricky to get out of the country because, due to a case of suspected smallpox at the Hotel Royal in Budapest, Hungary was under quarantine, and the only people allowed to leave the country were those who had recently been inoculated. The first shot I was given did not take properly, so the second time they whacked in a shot big enough for a horse, which left me with a fever and covered in red spots—even after I got to Warsaw. Still, it was a good experience, even if I had to share a room with the musicologist Dr László Eösze, and he snored. I remember Cathy Berberian's recital and Severino Gazzelloni's flute-playing. I was very impressed by Lutoslawski's *Trois poèmes d'Henri Michaux* for mixed chorus. I congratulated him too, saying with due respect that the choir's voices were set as sonorously as in a Verdi opera. That was not to his liking, and it was then that I noted that modern music is often offended if found only as good as yesterday's.

I sat at the same table at lunch with a Soviet nuclear physicist, who was here for a conference. We were able to converse in English, and he told me how the Soviet Union is now delivering nuclear reactors to an African country where they don't yet have any sockets to plug into. I was somewhat taken aback by the flippant tone, especially when he asked whether it was compulsory to play brass band music as in his country, seeing as how that was the only music that Khrushchev liked.

I met up again with the music critic Dankowski, and he even invited me to his home. He damned everything and everyone, except that he was full of praise for the reptile collection at the Budapest Zoo. That meant, sad to say, that when he next visited Budapest two years later, I had to tag along with him on a snake trek. The avant-garde spirit that reigned in Poland was very moving, even if most of the works that were performed were ugly. I was again surprised that it was possible to read English newspapers anywhere one went and that no one gave a fig for the official line of culture. At this time in Hungary there were still bags of restrictions that needed to be relaxed, though even the state machinery itself no longer knew what it should ban or tolerate or actively tout in its efforts to dress up the whole eyewash in a neat impressive-sounding package.

April 1964, Helsinki, Stockholm

[...]

We, Blum, the soprano Gabriella Déry, the tenor Ferenc Szőnyi, and the dancers Gabriella Lakatos and Ferenc Havas, were meant to appear at the opening of a trade show in the Stockmann department store. The Hungarian export companies who were displaying there provided a fabulous buffet, with red-white-and-green beribboned salamis, butter, yellow peppers, masses of grub and drinks in the conference hall where, after walking round (with the Finns looking at the produce), potential buyers were supposed to dig in and even get a bit tiddly so they would place big orders. This is where we were intended to provide a little "light entertainment". However, they had forgotten to open the doors to the exhibition hall, and by the time this occurred to anyone the Finns were already out on the street and had no wish to go back in. That meant that the exporters' salesmen were obliged to wolf down all the remaining food.

We also made an appearance on the radio—without the dancers, of course. This included Szőnyi singing an aria from Erkel's *László Hunyadi,* and the presenter asked me to announce it because he had too much of an accent. I got an extra 40 markkas for my troubles, which made those the most richly rewarded two words I ever said.

They took us (for tea) to the supermodern district of Tapiola, then to a marvellous fish restaurant, and (for supper) to a restaurant called the Budapest, where Hungarian waiters served us Hungarian dishes. Szőnyi and I were the only two still sitting there, drinking apricot brandy, when the waiter came over to ask if we would care to go back with two ladies in pretty good nick who were sitting at the next table—back to their place, that is. When we turned down the offer (the husbands are drunk and asleep, the waiter said), he informed us in a mournful tone that in that case he and the chef would have to fill in today as well.

I wanted to visit Stockholm too, so once again I managed to make sure I was left behind. Before we set off back home, I went to the Swedish Embassy to ask for a visa. They told me that they were sorry, but they were closed for a national holiday; if it was urgent, however, I should call on the consul at his home. Which is what I did. At the address I was given I managed to calm down the guard dog and, with the aid of sign language, I explained to the cleaning woman what it was all about. She took away my passport to return ten minutes later with the visa. Whether it was she or the consul who stamped it in I had no way of knowing.

I called up the Kleins,[4] and Éva met me at the airport where I managed to be late for the connecting flight. I immediately got on to the Malév office, who

4 ■ George Klein (1925–). A Hungarian-born biologist. Headed the Department of Tumor Biology at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm for more than three decades. His collections of essays range from scientific topics to the autobiographical and the discussion of ethical problems. See *HQ* 160 for his "Mother". His wife, Eva Klein is also a biologist, currently working at the Microbiology & Tumorbiology Center of the Karolinska Institute.

proceeded to inform me that the earliest I would be able to travel onwards would be in three days' time. Exactly as I had thought. I had a bed for the night in the guest room of the Karolinska Institute's Institute for Oncology—as Gyuri himself pointed out, as a next-door neighbour to several thousand experimental mice. As I had done in Helsinki, I went to the opera in Stockholm, too, and saw a good *Falstaff,* a good *Lady Macbeth of Mtensk* and a dreadful *La Bohème.* The Kleins of course worked all day, but even so we were able to spend some time together in the evenings, once at their place and once at a larger gathering where we had roast reindeer for dinner. One afternoon I watched a London production of *Uncle Vanya* on TV, with John Gielgud. After that, to my greatest surprise, Gyuri spoke on the box (I was sitting in his professorial room at the time) haranguing viewers to give money for cancer research.

Gyuri and Éva were the two of my earlier friends who managed to advance furthest in their profession. For me the very atmosphere that they breathed, their temperament, was like the Vienna Festival Weeks—two degrees higher in intensity than I had been used to in Hungary. All the same, they took their success very humbly, without any fuss, and to this day I don't understand precisely what area of medical science they were concerned with.

There was a flight that left early in the morning, going via Copenhagen and Berlin. Unfortunately, in Berlin it was established that one of the crew had been drinking alcohol, so the flight was held back for a whole eight hours. My one and only stay in East Germany was spent in a sort of reception room where, for eight hours on end, not even a glass of water to drink was offered, and the most profusely freckled of three armed female guards provided an escort to the toilet.

October 1964, Rome with Józsa

At that time it was normally possible for a Hungarian to get a passport every three years, and this entitled one to buy a limited amount of Western currency. We, however, were not among the reliable who were permitted to take their children with them; in our case a hostage had to be left behind. This was a rule that was adhered to so stringently that when my son went to stay with some friends abroad, I was not allowed to leave the country until he had returned.

We therefore decided that we would go to Rome, which we had never seen, without János. Goethe said that even after years one cannot get to know Rome, so we thought it would be safe to assume that two weeks would not be enough. Nor were they.

Friends of ours, the Merényis, booked a room for us in a small hotel which overlooked the San Andrea della Valle—the church that figures in the first act of *Tosca.* Merényi was the director of the Hungarian Institute in Rome, in a palazzo on the Via Giulia where he, the representative of Communist authority, lived on one floor and on another some employees of the Catholic Church, who had been there since before the war—the very symbol of peaceful but

unfriendly coexistence. That symbolism was embodied in the figure of 'Old' Tóth, the doorman, who opened the gate and the lift door for people of either persuasion.

The Merényis lived the usual life of Hungarian diplomats in the Kádár era. They had to attend various posh receptions, indeed sometimes had to give them themselves, but they didn't have a bean to their name. [...]

I met Zoltán Peskó, who was studying composition in Rome. He introduced me to Petrassi[5], his teacher (whom I don't really consider a good composer). We spent more time with Peskó at the Etruscan Museum, his favourite, than at concerts. Zoli is the son of my singing teacher at the Fasor Gimnázium. Before Rome, I had last seen him when, at his father's request, I pushed him home in his pram to Rottenbiller or Dembinszky Street. Around then many Hungarians were able to get abroad, so it was not uncommon for us to run into acquaintances. In the Vatican Library we bumped into a Transylvanian Hungarian who had just defected and was proud of the fact that even though he was a Christian, he had managed to use false papers to work his way into a group of Jews that Israel had paid the Romanians to allow to leave the country. Times had certainly changed since the days of Bergen-Belsen.

On the trolley bus on the way home from the Etruscan Museum, the bloke standing before us wanted to get off, but the trolley did not stop. Peskó quietly said: "Press the button, old man!", to which the fellow responded, "I did!" He then alighted at the next stop without realising that he had been speaking in Hungarian to Hungarians.

As to what I liked and what I disliked in Rome, I was only able to think it over properly when I was back home. No other city is so muddled, so intellectually chaotic, at any rate as far as I am concerned, than this genuinely eternal city, which already two thousand years ago must have been much the same as the New York of today. Enormous and decadent, technologically over-developed, politically ungovernable. Anyone seeing the road construction office's red cabins by the side of the highways may be able to weigh up mentally what it must have been like all that time ago, working from similar cabins, to build and maintain around 10,000 kilometers of paved road. In Transdanubia, in western Hungary, a section of the old Roman road still exists to this day and even now can be used by motorcars.

I personally got the most out of the Capitol and S. Paolo (the one outside the walls) and of course the Michelangelo *Moses* and *Pietà*. I didn't know what to make of St Peter's, the Trevi Fountain, the Coliseum, or the stone jungle of the Forum. After Athens and Mycenae, the latter struck me rather like Aquincum back in Budapest. The Pantheon, on the other hand, was downright ugly, though not of course in the same sense as, say, Victor Emmanuel's memorial bathroom, or the fascism moulded in stone of the EUR quarter.

5 ■ Gottfredo Petrassi (1904–2003). Composer, also highly influential as a teacher of composition. His students included the Hungarians Zoltán Peskó, Zsolt Durkó and Attila Bozzay.

What I really loved were the streets, the tavern at Trastevere, the kids playing football in the Piazza Navona and, above all, the nearby Campo dei Fiori, at some times a market, at other times a historic monument. It was while we were in Rome that we learnt about Khrushchev's dismissal. We were fearful that this would automatically mean an end for Kádárism as well, in much the same way as people were alarmed not long ago, even in Switzerland, by the attempted putsch against Gorbachev.

I harbour within me—it may come from Mother's enthusiasm for Russian literature—an instinctive attraction for Russians, even though I don't speak the language and have never been in their country (I always managed to wriggle out of being roped into trips to the Soviet Union, maybe so as not to lose any remaining illusions). I felt it was disgraceful that a leader of this people (who had, after all, moved the rusty machine forward) could only be replaced, for want of a functioning constitution, in much the same way that cannibals snack on the tribal chief. [...]

[...]

1966, Switzerland with Józsa

This was a journey we did by car (a Moskvich with the registration plate CA-6243).

Two married couples had visited us in Budapest the previous year, and both invited us to come to Switzerland. The first couple were Eliz Cserfalvi and Árpád Gérecz[6]. I had started at the Fodor School of Music on the same day as Eliz—me, the piano with Pál Kadosa[7]; she, the violin with Dezső Rados[8]. As we later confided to each other, about ninety per cent of all we ever learned came from that school, from those masters and in that artistic climate. The most characteristic common trait of the large group of prodigious Hungarian musicians, scattered as they are now across the globe, is the naturalness with which they turn to music. Instrumentalists and singers, conductors and composers all learned, from teachers of a calibre as high as ours, that they, the pupils, were people for whom music was their life, and they did not permit any false respect to develop towards difficulties. I have a huge number of colleagues for whom making music is pure joy, even though they got there by working just as hard as those, embittered on principle, who did it by sweat alone.

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. Of course, a Persian rug made in Hungary can still be a fine carpet.

6 ■ Árpád Gérecz (1924–1992). Violinist. Best known for an unparalleled recording of Mozart's Complete String Quintets with Arthur Grumiaux as first violin, Georges Janzer (viola), Max Lesueur (viola), Eva Czako (cello).

7 ■ Pál Kadosa (1903–83). Composer and pianist, legendary teacher of generations of Hungarian pianists at the Liszt Academy of Music.

8 ■ Ferenc Rados (1891–1974). Teacher of violin at the Fodor Music School in Budapest in 1920–40, at the Liszt Academy of Music in 1947–59.

Eliz and many others submitted themselves to that foreign ordeal and came through it. I had not really known Gérecz earlier, but when, at the funeral service for Eliz in the church in Étoy, they played the recording of Mozart's String Quintet in G minor, in which he had sat next to Arthur Grumiaux, then it struck me that he too belonged to that group which had passed every test.

But back then, Eliz had still been gay and beautiful and she took a fancy to Józsa's latest dish, mirrepoix in aspic. We agreed to visit them in their house at Grandvaux above Lake Geneva.

The other guest in Pest had been Anikó, a relation of my Aunt Borcsa's from Balassagyarmat. During the summer holidays I spent there, she became like a real cousin for me. She and her mother managed to survive Bergen-Belsen. Her father and younger brother were killed.

All I knew was that she was alive. And there she was, calling me up one day from, as she said, the Gellért Hotel, bursting into tears. An hour later, she and her husband, a modest, jovial Swiss, showed up at our place. I learned that she had gone back to Balassagyarmat after the war, then moved from there to Israel, then from there to a school for hotel management in Lausanne. There she had met Hansjörg Badrutt, who owned a hotel, and they are happily married. (Every other Swiss owns a hotel, I explained to Józsa.)

After recalling all the old stories, it was agreed that we would visit them—either at their home in Zurich or their hotel. We should telephone them in Zurich and they would say which.

The Moskvich proved itself in Hungary, we both were drivers, indeed we were both happy to leave it to the other to drive. We took a deep breath and set the car and ourselves onto unknown Alpine roads. The first night, we slept in the village of Sankt Valentin, and we rang the Badrutts from there to ask where we should go. They said the Palace Hotel in St Moritz. That sounded promising, I had never been in that area before. We worked out a shorter route through Landeck, and once again stayed the night in a tiny peasant cottage.

I knew that St Moritz, at an altitude of more than 1,900 metres, could be cold even in summer, so I bought a pullover in Landeck—a black one with a red pattern on it. The real Austro-Swiss frontier was closed for road repairs, so we had to make a marvellous detour via Nauders and Martina. The Moskvich made a stout job of tackling the mountains, and we halted wherever possible to marvel at the Alps and take photographs. After these fantastic villages, St Moritz would have merely been modern and ugly had it not been for its natural surroundings. We stopped in front of the biggest building, which seemed to us as colossal as the House of Parliament in Budapest, to ask for directions to the Palace Hotel. They just stared at us and spluttered that we happened to be in front of it. Along came Badrutt, whom I was by now on familiar *"du"* terms with and whom I called Hansjörg. He took the suitcase from me and brought it into Parliament. He said that the *voiturier,* or parking attendant, would be along right away, so I should leave the key in the ignition. After a glance at the tone of our Hungarian travel clothes he decided (despite the new pullover

I was wearing) that we had better not go across the lobby. We went up a small staircase to our room, which was on the same corridor as their own private suite.

It took a while for it to sink in where in fact we were; that Anikó from Balassagyarmat and the kindly Swiss were the proprietors of this twenty-eight-star edifice, as solemn as a cathedral. Our room, though undoubtedly one of the more modest, was a gilded lily compared with the hotel rooms we had been used to, what with a telephone by the bath, bowls of fruit all over the place, heated towel racks, and so on.

For lunch we went across to the Badrutts' suite and ate an equally twenty-eight-star meal, served by an Italian waiter and several pretty Italian waitresses, on a huge terrace that overlooked the lake and mountains. Also there were Anikó's mother, whom I had last seen in Balassagyarmat, some German guests and their Chihuahua pooch (all eight inches of it), which was called Montgomery. (After the British field marshal.)

We agreed to a house rule: given our meagre wardrobe, we could move around in the hotel wherever we liked during the day, but in the evenings it would be more seemly for us to remain in our room or the Badrutts' suite, and if we were going out for a stroll, we would use a back entrance.

We did that straight after our first evening meal, walking out into the Alpine night. Apart from elegant motor cars, hardly anything or anybody was to be seen in the streets, just the mountains sparkling all around. All of a sudden, though, we thought we must have gone crazy. Among the elegant hotels emerged a group of about thirty people—caftanned Jews with side-curls, talking or arguing in what seemed to be Yiddish (Flemish it transpired). Their hotel was on that street, too, the kosher Edelweiss, where diamond cutters from Antwerp and wealthy Orthodox Jews from elsewhere came on vacation. They had come to an understanding with the local authorities that they would only go about the streets during the hours of darkness, thereby tacitly endorsing an unspoken presumption that by daylight they would spoil the overall picture. The inhabitants of St Moritz, who for the greater part lived off the hotel residents, were willing to admit the sidecurled willing to be milked, but only if they kept under cover. They, for their part, didn't mind as they had not the slightest wish to ride horses and play tennis, or to ski and bobsled in winter. It made one think.

Anikó just laughed when I recounted this to her the next day, because for her they were just as much a part of the townscape as American millionaires, Arab or Greek nouveaux riches, poules de luxe, the Karajans and Greta Garbos of this world.

We made a number of excursions, which were not only delightful but gave us a bit of a breather from the paradox of feeling like fish out of water inside the hotel. We went out by Rolls Royce supplied with a picnic lunch that we took along at Lake Saoseo, which is not in China but a fabulous tarn in the mountains near the Italian border, of whose existence even the Swiss are not widely aware.

The following day (somewhat apprehensively) we took a cable car up Corvatsch, though not to the very top, just to the restaurant at the midway stop (quite the most upper-crust place I have ever been to all my life). The air had given us a very healthy appetite, and when the waiter brought the bill Hansjörg paid it

with a troubled look, commenting that actually he needn't have bothered because he was the owner, or at least part-owner, of the restaurant. They showed us Lake Black and Lake White, which are just a few yards apart, but one flows into the Inn and thus into the Danube and so eventually into the Black Sea, whereas the other drains into the Mediterranean. We also saw Alpine flowers, which are utterly different from lowland plants, and we ate wild strawberries about the size of large raspberries, after which we returned from the marvels of Nature to strait-laced hotel life. There was an Italian contessa who had her wheelchair constantly pulled over by a slave so that she should be half in the sun, half in the shade. In the dining room a rear-admiral was employed purely for his smile, and he kept his blue eyes beaming on us until we said how glorious the weather was, at which point he agreed. Then came the menu card, for which a large French dictionary would have come in handy. On one occasion we had dinner with the Badrutts and a company of others in the spa attached to the hotel. We were introduced to an émigré Hungarian baron, whose lady friend Józsa immediately recognised: one of the very top Party functionaries at the university in Budapest.

The Moskvich was a great success. The first evening we had a call from the parking attendant that there were a few drops of oil under the car, and should we perhaps have it serviced. I said that if it was just a few drops, then it must have been one of its better days as there was usually a fair puddle under it. A Basel banker asked if we would let him drive the strange machine, and he even had himself photographed sitting in it. I secretly hoped that he would write it off and, by way of compensation, buy us a Mercedes, but he came back half an hour later, very contented.

Everything was fine and dandy; we were fond of the Badrutts, the only thing was that we were not used to feeling so out of place. On the evening of August the 1st, the Swiss national day, we went up to the restaurant on the mountain where they were offering endless cold dishes on an endless table and we watched as the traditional beacons were lit on every peak.

In the early days of our subsequent life in Switzerland we had so little money that if we needed some rest, it was only in the Palace Hotel that we could stay because it was free; we would not have been able to afford the price of even a village inn. There was actually one occasion when I held a two-week course in St Moritz. In the spring, the hotel was not open so I had the whole shebang to myself, like a ghost in an abandoned castle.

[...]

1968–71, Germany

[...] I went to Germany so many times during these three years that there is no point in detailing each trip.

Once I was sent to Hamburg by Hungarian Television to select and order from their films of operas. I enjoyed myself there; I was mollycoddled as a potential

buyer. Liebermann,[9] the director of the Opera House, was happy that I liked his TV production of *The Magic Flute;* he invited me to attend a gala performance of *Tristan* and took me by car from the film studio to the theatre.

The crucial trip, however, the one that fundamentally changed my outlook on life and was to lead to my emigrating from Hungary, was linked to Pollák. I use his family name, because his first name Ödön, or Edmund as he was called in Germany, does not suit him so well. Pollák was a Transylvanian by birth; had studied German; he spoke Hungarian, Romanian and German with equal fluency. When he somehow managed to defect to the West, he had settled near Bonn and since then had been working for an office which had the task of forging links between universities in Germany and abroad. He was responsible for Hungary and Romania. At that time there functioned (and may still function to this day) a foundation by the name of Inter Nationes which financed study tours by foreigners in Germany. Pollák offered to arrange an invitation for me along those lines, and some time later I did indeed receive one: I was supposed to present myself to the foundation's office in Munich. I was given a card that would allow me to charge theatre and concert tickets directly to their account, sleep in hotels at their expense, and on top of that provided me with a per diem of 100 Deutschmarks, which was a lot of money in those days. I paid a visit to my sister-in-law in Würzburg, who had emigrated the year before, then went to Frankfurt, Cologne, Trier, Hanover, Bremen, Hamburg and, of course, called on Pollák, who was living in a castle just outside Bonn. The castle belonged to an old baron, who made a living breeding dachshunds, but there was still a moat with a drawbridge leading to the gate. Pollák was a lodger; I think he was free to rent as many rooms as he wished and was able to keep heated. He and the baron used to philosophise of an evening; the baron, to the best of my recollection, also had a sideline in Sanskrit philology. The dogs would greet me with frantic barking each time I dropped in during one of my trips, and Pollák gradually won me over to the idea that German culture did indeed have true values. So as a trustee of architectural, literary and musical traditions of every kind, he took me around, showing me Speyer and Worms, Aachen and Bernkastel-Kues, the churches of Cologne and Bonn, took me to Schönberg's *Moses and Aaron,* and played for me records of various old organs to show the difference in sound. He claimed that those roots had not ceased to have an impact to the present day, and that even though all most people see of Germany is trains and trucks carrying pipes and cables, there does exist an intellectual life that is very close to us Hungarians. Especially to people like me. That chimed with my own idea of quitting Hungary, which had proved to be the sort of socialist state in which only the non-socialist things worked. I had had enough of being fettered; professionally speaking, I had achieved almost everything that my abilities entitled me to expect. My fourteen-year-old son was showing signs of

9 ■ Rolf Liebermann (1911–99). Composer, from 1959 to 1972 director at the Hamburg Opera where he revitalised the repertoire.

mathematical talent and had a near-fanatical interest in space travel; I, though, had not the slightest inclination to be the old man of a budding holder of a Soviet military scholarship. Józsa had never hidden the fact that if it had been up to her, she would have left the country in 1956, and, on top of all that, there were signs that I was being shaped for a role as an opera intendant, and that was not something I wanted to be. And so there arose another world as outlined by Pollák and another country, where I might embark on a new life and whose language I could already speak.

[...]

May–June 1972

With that I have come to the penultimate trip that I made abroad from Budapest. Of the very last one, there is nothing to be said: the three of us set off for Switzerland, arrived the next day and have lived there happily ever after.

Beforehand, however, it did not seem so simple, even though when I told Józsa about my plan to emigrate she accepted it without any discussion. Not that we wanted to discuss it. This was around the time when Lotte Klemperer wrote that her father was very ill, and he would like to see me and make the acquaintance of the rest of the family. That made me feel good, and it supplied a reason for me to apply, for the first time, for all three of us to be given passports. Despite the fact that by then this sort of request was virtually always okayed, in our case it was turned down for some inexplicable reason. I was called into the secretarial office at the Opera House, where a stranger with a moustache informed me that only two of us could go: we should tell them in Zurich (which was where Klemperer lived) that the boy was sick. I said that in that case none of us would go, and anyway Klemperer had lived in Budapest for three years after the war, so he was familiar with what lay behind that sort of story. A week later I took another call in my room at the Opera telling me to go along the next day to the Gresham coffee-house. There the man with the moustache imparted that the matter had been sorted out, and he handed over the three passports. You're not going to skip anyway, he said, because they want to make you a big wheel here. He then went on to ask me to check whether the singer József Dene, who had defected to Switzerland, was enjoying life there and to ask me what I knew about him. Dene had been living in Zurich ever since, and there was nothing about him that would have given any authority any reason at all to enquire about his well-being.

I was scheduled to make one further appearance that season, conducting *Fidelio* at the Erkel Theatre.[10] Up till then I would just have to brace my nerves and sort out what we could take with us. We set off the morning after the performance. János, as ever, took the back seat, because he hated car journeys. As we were getting closer to the frontier at Hegyeshalom, he was overcome by a fit of thriftiness, and suggested we have lunch on the Hungarian side so that we could pay in forints. He tucked in

10 ■ The Erkel Theatre is the dependence of the Budapest Opera House.

merrily, but neither Józsa nor I could get a bite down our throats. There was no hold-up at the border, and by that evening we had almost reached Salzburg, or to be more precise the Mondsee. That was where we had to break it to János that we were not going to go home. This was a bombshell that had an extremely complicated impact. On the one hand, the adventure side of it thrilled him; on the other hand, he would have preferred to bring along with him his school, his grandma, the dog and even the socialism that he had heard so much about at school and that he identified with his own privileged position. We didn't say much about the matter and did not stop until we reached Munich, where they had found us cheap lodging at the Hotel Lohengrin.

From Munich we made phone calls to inform several friends of our intention not to return to Hungary: Pollák, the Kleins in Stockholm, and Dezső Ernster in Zurich, who had maintained a paternal-friendly relationship with me since our days at Bergen-Belsen. [...]

I wanted to look for a job, but Pollák talked me out of it. He proposed that we should go and live at his place, in the castle, and apply for German citizenship, which we were sure to be granted soon—Józsa on account of her ethnic German father, and I as the child of parents who had got married in Vienna and also as a translator of the librettos for many of Wagner's operas. Applications of that kind (i.e. to be treated as *Bundesvertriebener,* or German nationals who had been forced abroad) were handled by the local authorities and, as Pollák put it, where he lived there were more than enough old Nazis on the committee who wanted to be seen to be treating Jews well, so I would have an excellent chance. Anyway, why not stay with him until I managed to land a job that was truly up my street. We came to realise later on that this was a totally realistic plan, but at the time it sounded very odd. Pollák went off the next morning and I went into the Munich Opera House. The intendant's secretary was Hungarian, and I wanted to ask her advice.

She told me that although now, in late May, there were very few openings left for the coming season, she would make a call to Stoll, who was the boss of Schulz's, the famous concert agency. Stoll saw me the next morning and told me that he had heard lots of good things about me and would do whatever he could to help. His first question was whether I would be willing to take a post as an opera director at Enschede in the Netherlands: I said I wouldn't. He was sure I could have got it. The other two opportunities were not so sure, but they would be in Germany, at Bremen and Frankfurt.

Meanwhile, with 48-hour transit visas only, we were worried that we would soon be breaking the law, so we dropped in at a police station in order to extend the visas, lying that János had been taken ill. (We were supplied with a doctor's certificate.) We were granted the extension, so we set off for Frankfurt to speak with the intendant there (Christoph von Dohnányi). In the meantime we spent one night at my brother-in-law's home in Würzburg while they were moving to a bigger place. The next day in Frankfurt I played a bit from *Rosenkavalier* and conducted for a pianist who was playing the score for *The Marriage of Figaro,* and they gave me the post. I phoned Stoll, who informed me that he had spoken to the director at Bremen and I had got

that job too, sight unseen. It turned out that Stoll had been filled in about me by István Kertész,[11] who likewise said a lot of good things about me.

With two jobs in hand, I rang Pollák, who summoned me to the castle at Flamersheim. He told us not to be stupid, we should calm down and not drag the boy around like a dog dragging a feather duster. We were unable to calm down, especially as the police had set up a roadblock on the motorway (in connection with the Baader-Meinhof gang) and we also ran across a very vocal demonstration of some sort. Józsa announced that she had no desire to see János being called up for the German army in a few years' time; we ought to go straight away to Klemperer in Switzerland. Pollák was furious, but we set off southwards. We were feeling decidedly dubious, but the two job offers were some reassurance that we would not starve to death.

On reaching Switzerland, we phoned the Badrutts at their home in Zurich. After a lot of searching, we reached them late that night. They did not quite see eye to eye with us, for as far as they could tell things had been going very well for me in Budapest, so why should I throw that up for an uncertain life in Switzerland. All the same, they understood how we felt. They offered János a bed at their place, and we rang Jóska Dene, who recommended a decent cheap hotel. The next day we had lunch with Ernster, after which I went to see Klemperer on my own. He was very much in favour of our staying abroad and said there was an Opera House at the end of the street: why not give that a try, too. And I did in fact go the next day to see Juch, the director. I explained my situation, including the two opportunities I had in Germany, but he had no place that he could offer. Józsa and János had meanwhile become very enthusiastic about the idea of Switzerland; after the horrible Frankfurt of those years, that was easy to understand in this pleasant weather, with the Alpine backdrop to the lakeside view. That evening János said that if we were going to stay there, that was fine by him but if we had to go to Germany, he would rather we went back to Hungary. I grew even less sure about what to do, but the next morning I took a call from Juch's secretary, who said there was a vacancy after all, and I should go round to sign a contract. I later learned that Juch too had telephoned Kertész, who had told him to take me on at once. I signed the contract, though before I did so I called up Stoll, who quite understood my reasons for making the decision and would not hear of being compensated for his trouble or even telephone expenses.

Anikó took Józsa along to the professor who ran the central laboratory of the clinic, where they said that they could find a job for her, though not at the level she was qualified for.

In our great joy, we would have liked to go that evening to the performance of *Rigoletto* that was on at what was to be my new place of work, but the girl at the box office, as per usual over the past 19 years, couldn't find the tickets that Jóska Dene had set aside for us. So we sat down by the side of the lake and tried to calm down. On the advice of the Badrutts, we started to scan the advertisements for

11 ■ István Kertész (1929–73). Conductor. After a stint at the Budapest Opera from 1955 to 1957 he left Hungary after the 1956 Revolution to embark on a brilliant international career as documented by dozens of opera and orchestral recordings.

flats to rent; on seeing the prices, we soon realized that we were going to be rather hard up. The next day we alerted everyone, including Klemperer and Pollák, to our situation and arranged a celebratory dinner for that evening at a restaurant in a village called Cham, which served catfish fried in batter—the one and only time I ever saw it on a Swiss menu. We still had our Italian and Yugoslav visas, but we reckoned we wouldn't be needing them any more.

I went in to the Opera House to sort out when work would start, to be told that at 10 a.m. on August 15th I would be taking a rehearsal with the two conspirators in *Un Ballo in Maschera.* They also told me that as I was a foreign citizen I would have to apply for a work permit, and that this would only be granted if I had applied for it from outside the country, at a Swiss embassy. I had to leave the country, therefore, and say where the permit should be sent to, and it would be arranged within three to four weeks. When I told them that I wanted to ask for political asylum, the secretary informed that this was hopeless right now, but it could be sorted out once I was working there.

That simply was not true: if I had sought asylum at that time, I would have been granted it without any further ado, and as a refugee I would not have needed a work permit at all. I believed the lady, however, even though she was just acting important over things she knew nothing about. My nerves weren't the best anyway, and I didn't know what I should do. János was very level-headed and didn't want to influence my decision. Józsa was pretty sure that if we were to go back to Hungary, we would never be let out again, because so many people in the West knew about our plan that word of it was sure to have got back to Budapest by now.

We worked out that none of our visas would be enough to cover us while we waited abroad for the work permit to come through. Even if we were to get back to Germany, the four-week "window" in our passports (i.e. the stamp which stated in Hungarian how long passports, nominally issued in French for five years, were actually valid on this occasion) would close before the paper came through. I made a phone call to the Ministry of Culture in Budapest to inform them that I had been given a one-year contract at the Zurich Opera House, a wonderful opportunity (of course, it wasn't wonderful), so would they release me from my commitments back home? I also added that Klemperer himself was very much behind the business and considered the experience would be of great future benefit to the Hungarian State Opera House. Mrs Barna, the head of the music department, who admired me, replied that it was a great idea; if it had been in Germany, which was a member of NATO, then she would have been less happy, but seeing that it was neutral Switzerland, then it was quite all right by her, though obviously the decision rested in the hands of the management at the Opera House. That sounded promising, particularly as I was well aware that my three-year contract with the Opera House had just run out, though its extension by the director was a mere formality even if he had not done so yet. Józsa kept on insisting that they would not let me go next time, but I was in more of a funk than was called for, and I lied that there was no question of that, and if we were officially permitted

to stay out of the country for a year, we would still have plenty of time to decide and, what is more, we would legally be able to take out our belongings for a year abroad. That is what in fact eventually happened, though Józsa was right anyway: I had done something very stupid on the basis of incorrect information.

The date when I was due to give a concert for Hungarian Radio was fast approaching, and I needed to rehearse. However, we still had unused Italian visas, so we climbed into the Fiat (the third car we had owned, following a Volkswagen) and slipped away from Switzerland without a word to Pollák, Ernster or Klemperer. The only reason I write nothing about the journey back to Hungary is that I recollect very little about it; I had other things on my mind. We spent two nights in Florence and one in Bologna, where I phoned Budapest to say I was ill and would have to cancel the Radio concert. The next day we looked round Venice with János, who was seeing Italy for the first time. After that we had a night in Grado, in a small hotel on the sea front. There were swarms of mosquitoes.

Before we crossed the border into Hungary, our knees were just as shaky as they had been on our outward journey. We slept just once more in Yugoslavia, at a place by the name of Novska, which suffered a rocket attack two days ago. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Clarissa Upchurch: Film III.
From: Budapest: Image, Poem, Film *by George Szirtes & Clarissa Upchurch. Budapest, Corvina Press, 2006.*

Csaba Károlyi

Worlds Apart

Imre Oravecz: *Ondrok gödre* (The Ditch of Ondrok). Pécs, Jelenkor, 2007, 384 pp. • Péter Farkas: *Nyolc perc* (Eight Minutes). Budapest, Magvető, 2007, 111 pp. • Ervin Lázár: *Csillagmajor* (Star Farmstead). Budapest, Osiris, 2005,184 pp.

The Hungarian literary tradition affords a special place to portrayals of the peasant world. Until the middle of the 20th century, Hungarian society was essentially agrarian, and by the interwar period a distinct populist literature had developed; it attempted to call attention to the miserable conditions the peasantry lived under and the threats facing the very existence of the nation (Gyula Illyés and László Németh were among the leading writers). Many of these works were clearly influenced, even if distantly, by the pan-European "peasant novel". Works by Gottfried Keller and Emile Zola were taken as models in the periphery of Europe, primarily in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe; absorbing Tolstoyan views, this trend retained its popularity for some time. Later, it was to come dangerously close to the ideas projected under National Socialism and to socialist populism, whose propagandistic portrayal of village life was motivated by Communist ideology. Numerous examples are found of the former in Nazi German literature, the Northern European literatures and the Eastern European literatures of the interwar period, and of the latter in Soviet literature after 1917 and Eastern European socialist literatures after 1945. More often than not, these works bore a crude ideological message. Imre Oravecz's novel is hardly of this ilk. It bears a faint resemblance to John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath,* in which the dispossession and hardships of the small farmer are depicted through the flight of the Joad family. The anger in Oravecz's novel has no political role, nor does it have a sociological or biblical significance. (If the villagers are angry, it is at each other over everyday troubles.) This work does not aspire to argue with fate, aiming simply to describe the workings of fate through a theme and literary material that the author feels his own. In contemporary Hungarian writing, it is the novels of Pál Závada (*Jadviga's Pillow, Milota* and *A Photographer's Legacy*) which depict the story of a village spanning several generations with the intensity that Oravecz brings to his works.

In his principal work to date, the verse cycle *The Fisherman* (1998), subtitled *Fragments of a Village Novel,* Imre Oravecz wrote of the memories binding him to the small village of his birth, Szajla in northern Hungary at the foot of the Mátra Hills. Towards the end of the 19th century, his great-grandparents had fled poverty and the ruinous division of peasant smallholdings

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for America, from where part of the family later returned to Szajla. His first book of poetry, *Husk,* was published in 1972. Between 1972 and 1989 he himself left home on three occasions, travelling to Paris, London and the United States for longer periods, later moving to Berlin. In 1983 he published *Book of the Hopi,* a collection of poetry inspired by his study of Native American cultures (his actual contact with the Hopi themselves was in 1985). A counterpoint to this, *September 1972*, came out in 1988, a collection of poems depicting a crisis in a love-life. *A Hill Walks* (2006), a prose collection, is a selection of his experiences and memories of Szajla and of his return to the village after 1989. Here in *The Ditch of Ondrok* he gives us, this time in the genuine form of a novel (a "village novel"), the story of his family and his home village.

Concerned with the peasantry and the village, it is above all a description of the state of rural Hungary between 1867 and 1896. (The Ditch of Ondrok itself is the valley where the author's family once had their smallholdings.) The novel weaves three strands together: the story of a family (three generations of the Árvais), a Bildungsroman (the close observance of the son István's growth into adulthood and the conflict between father and son) and, last but not least, a sensual love story. It is also a thorough investigation into why some one million citizens of the old Monarchy, mostly peasants of Hungarian, Slovak and other ethnic origin, emigrated to the United States at a time considered the heyday of the Monarchy and of Franz Joseph's reign. The story of the family, itself far too engaging to be put down, offers a comprehensive and sensitive description of peasant life and the particular circumstances of smallholders, in a form Hungarian literature has not seen before.

The narrative style is one of empathetic neutrality, at times verging on coldness. Yet its detachment elicits compassion. The writer has found the voice appropriate for this description of the vanished world of the peasant: non-ideological and incapable of being exploited for any political aim. The novel does not condescend towards those whose story it tells nor does it mock them; it does not claim the image it presents to be singular or ancestral nor that the peasant's is the only authentic culture. There is no trace of the romantic dirge for village life (as there was at times in *The Fisherman*). The village of Szajla is depicted as home to hardworking people with their loves, hatreds, impulses and whims, people who are slowly ground down amidst the sacred traditions and the unceasing trials that cause them to break away or go under. And because they work the land, continuity alone could give them peace. In the modern world, however, this form of survival cannot be found anywhere else. The awareness of a lost kind of existence determines the profoundly tragic fate of these individuals. In the words of the novelist Péter Esterházy, Oravecz approaches them with a kind of "aristocratic plebeianism". A writer in this situation can do no better.

The Ditch of Ondrok seems set to continue, given its subtitle of *The Stuff of Dreams: Book I.* Towards its close, the protagonists, István Árvai and Anna Madár (the Steve and Anne almost certainly modelled on the author's grandparents), take ship for America in 1896, just when gigantic celebrations were taking place in Hungary to mark the thousandth anniversary of the Hungarian conquest. What became of them and their two young children in the New World and how they eventually returned home remains to be written.

Péter Farkas, just turned fifty, is barely known as a writer; though Budapest-born, he has been a resident of Cologne, Germany since 1982. At the end of the 1970s, he was active in the Hungarian

democratic opposition and edited *Túlpartról* (From the Other Shore, 1979), a dissident samizdat. Two earlier short novels, *Net* (1996) and *Installment Payments* (2004), did not arouse particular interest. This novella *Nyolc perc* (Eight Minutes) is his third published book.

It is an unsettling, dispassionate and succinct depiction of an old woman and an old man, a couple approaching the end of their days, vegetating yet as sentient as anyone younger. Their memories are beginning to fail, but they still have their love for each other. They suffer all the torments of physical and mental deterioration (though not in exactly the manner the young imagine, for instance there is still a bit of sex along the way) and find joy in life's last little pleasures (such as plum jam, which the old man makes with childish delight and gives to the old woman, who accepts it with childish delight). Unnamed, they live in an unnamed city in a housing development. (It is not even clear what country their story is set in.) All that is important is that they are human—people feeling, breathing and awaiting their final hours. They hold up a mirror to the young: they too, should they be so fortunate (or unfortunate) to survive to old age, will experience these declining days. In recent Hungarian writing, *Film* (1976) by Miklós Mészöly portrayed an elderly couple with the same insight and brutal, merciless dispassionateness, mitigated with the same understanding and compassion. In Mészöly's work, however, the story of the elderly couple is a sub-plot to the shooting of a film and the anthropological, historical and metaphysical *flagrante delicto* on which the narrator of *Film* concentrates. Here, by contrast, the only goal is the portrayal of the elderly couple. It is a poignant story, and a fine film could be made out of it (in contrast with Mészöly's novella, which would be impossible to film). Two people bound together by their love for each other in old age, neither wanting to outlive the other, is as moving a situation as can be.

Farkas's title *Eight Minutes* refers to the time it would take us to realize that the sun had ceased giving off light and heat: eight minutes from the sun's death to our noticing the absence of its radiation here on earth. It is clearly meant to draw our attention to the different sense of time experienced by the elderly. For them, everything slows down, all that is insignificant loses importance, while other items of little interest acquire importance. As to what remains meaningful to the end, Farkas often leaves us in doubt: descriptions that are vague and, even, overly detailed can overcomplicate what would be poignant in its simplicity. The picture presented would be more distinct if the portrayal were more vigorous. The condition presented here, in which one awaits (or perhaps no longer awaits) a miracle, is fit for a Kafka or a Beckett. However, *Eight Minutes* seems to have a stronger voice for the narration of good than for the presentation of bad.

Ervin Lázár, who died last year at the age of seventy, is considered one of the great storytellers. Although born in Budapest, he spent his childhood in the small village of Alsó-Rácegrespuszta, which frequently provides the backdrop in his writing. His first book, a fairy tale for children published in 1964, was an immediate success, and he followed this up with numerous tales on which generations have been raised in Hungary. (A large number have been adapted for the stage, screen and radio and translated into many languages, though not as yet into English.) His finest "adult" work is the short story cycle *Csillagmajor* (Star Farmstead, 1996—see the extract on pp. 28–43 translated by Judy Sollosy), which conjures up the poor peasant world of his childhood on the

southern plains of Transdanubia. It has been republished in an expanded version as part of an edition of his collected oeuvre.

Magic, miracles and mystery appear in this collection too, though Lázár does not borrow any figures or themes from his fables. Using the raw materials of his childhood, he creates a world that is leaner and more restrained. The individual stories feature precisely measured dialogue, overwhelming dramaturgy and snappy conclusions. Taken together, they form a kind of festoon bound by their setting and some recurrent characters. They are generally set in the period before the Second World War in an impoverished and remote village. The first novella, "The Giant", bears most affinity with his children's tales. From this, the reader is led to think that a child-narrator will tell the stories; however, this narrator recedes into the background and the narrative mode becomes impersonal—to the benefit of the texts themselves. With the exception of the first, the titles ("The Countess", "The Blacksmith", "The Woman in Blue", "The Knotweed") all refer to some everyday character or incident. Autobiographical but not nostalgic, the stories propose no moral either. Sometimes the narrative voice falters, but more often than not Lázár keeps his subject well in hand (however great the temptation towards sentimentality or whimsy tinged with pathos): memories come over as concise, succinct and condensed as possible. This sparse style is in keeping with the portrayal of the hard and merciless world of the poor peasantry, while giving everything a mysterious quality. This is not the mysteriousness of the children's tale, even though Lázár has often been likened to the Latin American magical realists such as García Márquez, as well as to the more light-hearted magic of Czech literature, of which Hrabal is the standard-bearer (though I would contend that Ervin Lázár cannot really be likened to anyone). If we have to find something similar to *Star Farmstead* in contemporary Hungarian writing, it would be perhaps in another short story cycle, Sándor Tar's *Our Street*. (Tar also came from the poor peasantry, worked in a factory and also told the stories of his village.) Lázár is more gentle and fantastic, Tar more resigned, hardened and earthbound; still, both give impartial depictions of their characters, fallen yet hopeful even amid the worst of conditions.

One of the best stories in the collection is "The Blacksmith", in which the Devil arrives at the forge in Rácpácegres (the name Lázár consistently gives to the village of his birth) to have his horse shod. The smith does not have enough iron for the four horseshoes: he has to use his tools and all the iron in the village. So well does he do his work (with the enthusiastic help of all the villagers) that in the end the earth swallows up both the Devil and his horse because of the weight of all the iron in the horseshoes, and the people of the village celebrate with a ball. Only a few pages in length, this is masterful narrative, permeated by a mood that both alarms and soothes, in which characters and situations are adroitly created in a sentence or two. The gentle and (one might say) more angelic than demonic narrative mode makes plausible the reaction of the villagers, who, far from lamenting the loss of their iron, react to the development with extreme joy. Ervin Lázár shows the less familiar, more endearing, humorous, playful, angelic, enchanting side of his childhood: the people who, privations and poverty notwithstanding, are most curious about that which is good. The characters in *Star Farmstead* are responsive to good because so little of it befalls them, but the little that does draws their appreciation. ❧

Anna T. Szabó

Unfixed City

George Szirtes and Clarissa Upchurch: *Budapest: Kép, vers, film / Budapest: Image, Poem, Film.* Budapest, Corvina Press, 2006, 64 pp.

"Budapest is a city I am in love with"
George Szirtes

According to Franz Kafka, reality is only an echo of the dreams of poets and the lyre of the modern poet is made of endless celluloid reels. Indeed, film has now taken priority over the other arts, in terms of popularity at least, but only the greatest poets in the genre have managed to make it a "twenty four-fold truth per minute", as Godard has called it.

Truth is also primary for George Szirtes: "Poetry's only obligation is to the truth. Whether this truth is widely popular or not is irrelevant. It should be the best truth possible, and that is the only quality that gives it any hope of survival." He and his artist partner have created an unforgettable film out of words and images, a book of poetry and paintings, and have published it in Budapest, the city it is addressed to. It is a unique combination of a long poem "Reel", and an essay, "Painting as a Story-Board: The Lost Movies of Clarissa Upchurch", by George Szirtes and illustrated with a series of Clarissa Upchurch's pictures on Budapest; it is an investigation of the nature of the city and of the relation between painting and film. Just as words try to translate or at least interpret the pictures, so do words reflect each other through translation: in this bilingual book, both poem and essay are translated into Hungarian with care and introspection by the poet Zsuzsa Rakovszky. The book is thus something of a joint venture involving three highly acclaimed artists.

George Szirtes has often described his own poems as buildings, and Clarissa Upchurch's paintings in this volume reflect architectural structures—the Eclectic, Secession and Art Deco buildings characteristic of Budapest. Behind the disciplined and carefully balanced static façade, the pictures and the poem are highly dynamic, filled with motion, emotion, agitation, action and colour. The poem recounts a day, from early morning to night, running parallel with the shooting of a movie *("Film crews / Shoot Budapest for Berlin",* because *"The city rhymes / With its imperial neighbour, like one bruise / With another").* It is the quest for narrative, a thread that holds all those scattered images together, that confronts the viewer. The thread eventually turns out to be a reel of film and the narrative nothing less than the story of time in its process of passing. *"Today is history",* the poem closes, and the emphasis is on both words.

The book carries us along like a river, an element that is always the same but never

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similar: a film of pulsating images and the flowing music of poetry. As Szirtes has a painter's eye (his unique imagery has been much praised by critics), word and image are in perfect rhythm. Both are full of agitated voices: *"car sounds, radios", "car door slams", "odd stray"* words, the *"scutter"* of feet, the *"whisper"* of statues, *"wind ruffling the embankment trees",* the sound of trains and cogweel railways, the chimes of bells—even *"the fine spray of rain breathes evenly"*; in Upchurch's pictures there are always people and cars in motion, creating sounds for the eye and speaking to the viewer. Even more, to the mindful observer the houses themselves will speak:

on balmy afternoons you walk for miles
Trying to listen to the architecture.
It mutters continually, waving dusty files

Of unsolved grievances.

Something is always in process here: Budapest's history tries to speak, and it needs impartial but compassionate observers to record it.

Szirtes and Upchurch had spent almost a year in Hungary in 1989, at an exact turning point of history when communism was crumbling away. They watched a change of regime, one of several that happened in twentieth-century Budapest: *"Here all the clocks tell different times. / All the statues point different ways."* They were both deeply influenced by this experience of transition and their observation of another culture: the painter has used the city as a topic of her pictures for more than fifteen years, and the poet began to write the poems that were to be included in the volume of poetry *The Budapest File* (2004), which (together with books such as George Gömöri's *My Manifold City*) introduced Budapest as a topic in British poetry. The late Eighties was the era of *"old shredded documents in blackened piles",* the change in the *"naming of streets: / Tolbuhin, Münnich...",* the time when people met on the squares where there was *"never any lack of news".*

The poem and the pictures, though, do not try to pinpoint one single historical moment. Instead, they seek a narrative which fastens together all the happenings of the place. They are not holding onto any single moment, nor are they deceived by slogans or political monuments; they know that the *"city is unfixed",* and the enduring has to be sought in the transient; their only alignment is to the truth, the speech of *"cracked angels"* who can sing for both place and people. This "reel" of pictures and words does not advertise anything, except perhaps the beauty of light.

Yes, light, which is one of the most temporal things in a city which *"glories in its element",* and which itself works as a detached observer, impartial to anything or anybody, creating a "visual sub-plot" of a *"peculiar imperative"*: the *"sparkingly authoritative language"* of truth. The paintings almost always contain a wedge of *"the familiar sky"* above the buildings, a wedge which seems to be a shade of enduring blue, in spite of the constant movement and shadows of cars and people below. The poem shows with striking precision the real life of the inhabitants living and dying here, regardless of the time when they lived. For their life is still present in the persisting structures of architecture:

Here is a square where everybody meets.
Here is a doorway through which troops have pressed.
Here is a yard where women hang sheets

And corridors where boys in Sunday best
Are waiting for a housekeeper or maid
To join them on a stroll in the soft west

Wind ruffling the embankment trees. Decade
After decade resolves itself in the traffic.

"Art is a house that tries to be haunted." Emily Dickinson's epigram is one of George Szirtes's favourite sayings. Budapest is haunted, these words and pictures about Budapest are haunted too: one image evokes another, standstill evokes motion, echo evokes sound, and the faceless, phantom-like people of the paintings evoke living, breathing, talking persons, each one telling his or her own story, waiting for us to listen. Thus "Reel" becomes "The Waste Land" of Budapest, a city *"before some ultimate collapse"*. (Appropriately, the collection for which it was the title poem won the T.S. Eliot Prize, praised by the judges as a "a brilliantly virtuosic collection of deeply felt poems concerned with the personal impact of the dislocations and betrayals of history".)

This film does not have a fixed narrative, only personal interpretations: *"The city offers you no evidence, / Except the collage"*, while still *"something true survives"* in the *"dark corridors and courtyards"*; an artist can *"draw out the sound"* of the dead *"in terms of light"*. Both Szirtes and Upchurch have the special gift of being able to speak for the dead, to fix something that is otherwise fleeting for generations to come. Just as Tony Harrison speaks for the lost people of Leeds or Douglas Dunn for the inhabitants of Terry Street, Szirtes and Upchurch here speak for the lost people of Budapest, hearing the echoes of the past. "Echo is the natural speech of the region" says George Szirtes in the accompanying essay. This kind of moving architecture (in other words, the film of their joint creation), conserves and links the scattered images and gives us the hope of watching it over and over again and thus to try and find the narration which moves it. The poem always evokes some new echo of feeling, and the picture *Direction,* for example, which at first sight can be interpreted as a ghost walking down the street, against the traffic, soon becomes the story of a detective watching us viewers, recording our every movement. The original documentary about ghosts thus becomes a mystery movie, and the viewer accompanies Szirtes and Upchurch in this "city of readings" on their quest for truth.

The *Budapest* film is, therefore, a mystery story; but as it advances, it not only records the crimes history has committed *("Dull monuments express regret / ... for crimes committed in names they're trying to forget"),* but it also points to a higher level of mystery, the relation of the world to its supernatural organising element. And this is nothing less than lost narration itself, the personal myth George Szirtes is looking for, something that has led him from his Genesis *("a narrow / Bedroom that served as my Old Testament")* through his Exodus to England back to Budapest again; something that seems to organize the puzzle of life into a unified picture, revealing the meaning of the *"masquerade"* (this absurd dumb show of a foreign city) as well-known, something which can be understood and accepted. Without the *"imperative"* or the *"evidence"* of this truth, all things, as Szirtes' essay states, slip into chaos, "because their meanings can no longer support the narratives we demand of them."

In many of Clarissa Upchurch's paintings (such as *Shadow Tower* and *Intrusion*) there is a special quality of light: mysterious yellow rays infusing the dark streets as if trying to communicate something. These are the mystical "displays that billow down mysterious streets", while being nothing more than sunlight, hinting at something, but never proclaiming anything—showing without revealing. In *Angel* there is no revelation either, only a shadow on a roof, a winged statue perhaps, but the viewer has an uneasy feeling that a higher power is at work here. The same suspicion is evoked by *Blinding,* where a ray of strong white light penetrates a dark street, and by *Appointment with a Shade,* where shadows are in motion. Uneasiness seems to be the key

element of these pictures, and not only where light is concerned, but also in the paintings that evoke the history of a country, the frightening era of personal surveillance and political persecution. (Although pictures like *Tracking, Surveillance* or *Hot Pursuit* can be interpreted even without a political background.) The evocation of political and personal crime creates another kind of uneasiness which can also be interpreted in several ways.

This is why Szirtes calls the pictures a "story-board" and "a syntax-provider".

> We are aware of the characters only in action or in between actions and in so far as the actions are piecemeal and detached from the main body of some supposed narrative, we see them in suspension. They do not give them- selves. Their identity has been transferred to their environment, their sphere of isolated action.

Similarly, the words and images of the poem can be interpreted in more than one way, and as in the picture *Chance Street,* here also almost anything may happen—an *"odd stray word"* can be recognised, the artist's eye can *"enter through the walls"* and the *"world's edge"* will be reached when night comes.

And finally: love, the greatest mystery of all, can also appear in this city of traffic, beggars and ghosts; not only in the *"statuesque embrace"* of a couple in a square, but also in the gentle and understanding manner the poet addresses the painter, his wife Clarissa, the *"you"* of the poem. She seems to be the only person who can observe with caring and personal concern how the Budapest-born speaker of the poem, after arriving to *"the heart of the exotic",* will soon find *"something true"*—*"bits"* of his own *"heart".* As all "artists are workers of the imagination inhabiting contiguous, sometimes overlapping but never congruent words", these two, a painter turned poet and a painter of poetic intensity, are helping each other to interpret the mystery of the world by showing one single place, Budapest. Together they have created a reel of exceptional power and beauty, a book that must be re-opened and re-interpreted over and over again. ❧

Clarissa Upchurch: Swing. *From:* Budapest: Image, Poem, Film *by George Szirtes & Clarissa Upchurch. Budapest, Corvina Press, 2006.*

John Lukacs

A Life and an Exit

Balázs Ablonczy: *Pál Teleki (1874–1941): The Life of a Controversial Hungarian Politician.* Translated from the Hungarian by Thomas J. and Helen D. DeKornfeld. East European Monographs. Distributed by Columbia University Press, New York, 339 pp.

There were five prime ministers of Hungary during the Second World War. Three—Bárdossy, Sztójay, Szálasi—were found guilty of war crimes and executed after the war. One—Kállay—freed from a German concentration camp, went to live in exile—only his ashes were returned to Hungary many, many years later. One, Count Pál Teleki, killed himself early in the war, in April 1941. He is the only one who has had serious biographies.* The most substantial and valuable is the recent one by a young Hungarian historian, Balázs Ablonczy, adequately translated into English.

The main features of Teleki's life are these. He was a scholar (a geographer of repute) who was also involved in politics, Prime Minister twice. The second time he was summoned by the Regent, Miklós Horthy, to become Prime Minister in February 1939, as a way out from a then complicated political situation. Soon thereafter the Second World War began. Teleki hoped to keep Hungary out of the war. Because of the preponderance and the influence of the German Reich this became more and more difficult. In late March 1941, Hitler decided to invade and occupy Yugoslavia, a state with which Teleki's Hungary had concluded a Pact of "Eternal" Friendship only a few months before. Hitler requested that Hungary join in the invasion. Horthy and the military and most of the government party were ready to go along. In that event Great Britain would declare war against Hungary or at least break its remaining diplomatic relations with the latter. That was not unexpected. Nonetheless it contributed to Teleki's conviction that there was no exit. On the night of 2–3 April, alone in his office, after writing a short, bitter letter to Horthy, Teleki shot himself.

The history of his last twenty-four hours is not simple. Many dreadful matters weighed him down, among them the grave

* ■ Kállay wrote his memoirs (translated into English decades ago) but they are now largely forgotten. This is a pity, because (a) Kállay was a very honourable man, (b) the circumstances under which he held office as Prime Minister (1942–44) were even more difficult than Teleki's.

John Lukacs

is a Budapest-born historian, living and teaching in the U.S. since 1946. His books include Budapest 1900 *(1988);* Confessions of an Original Sinner *(1990);* The Duel *(1990);* The End of the Twentieth Century—The End of the Modern Age *(1993);* A Thread of Years *(1999) and, most recently,* Democracy and Populism: Fear and Hatred *(2005);* June 1941: Hitler and Stalin *(2006);* George Kennan: A Study in Character *(2007).*

illness of his wife. But then his personal character and the course of his public life were not simple either. Until Ablonczy's biography, the great majority of books and articles devoted to Teleki dealt mostly with the two years of his last Prime Ministership. But that was only the last chapter of a life that lasted sixty-seven years.

There were dualities in Teleki's character. One was the duality of his vocation: professor and/or politician. The other was the duality of his ideology, a conservatism that was traditionalist and/or authoritarian. That there was an ultimately unavoidable conflict between these—at first seemingly reconcilable—tendencies did not occur to Teleki for a long time. Yet there they were.

The professor/statesman duality is easier to summarise. He was one of the rare members of the high aristocracy in Hungary who chose a career of professional scholarship. He was a geographer of broad knowledge and considerable intellectual curiosity—eventually one of the main pillars of geography in Hungary. For a long time he had political interests rather than political ambitions, though of course these two inclinations are not entirely separable. His geographical capacities, too, were often employed with political purposes in mind. During the chaotic, sordid, and for Hungary, tragic years of 1918–1920 he was a principal figure in the nationalist and conservative counterrevolutionary groups opposing the short-lived Communist regime of Béla Kun. Teleki attracted the interest of Horthy, the future Regent. He was entrusted with foreign affairs. In 1920 he was Prime Minister for about nine months. It is this period in his life and career that has been hitherto largely unexplored by biographers. Ablonczy's archival and other research now illuminates many significant details of this, Teleki's first Prime Ministership.

Ultimately the duality—and his tragedy—were latent in the complex nature of his conservatism. In one sense he was not untypical of Central European conservatives in the 1920s and 1930s, being anti-Communist, anti-Socialist, anti-liberal, anti-Semitic (a painful matter to which I will return). At the same time he was traditionalist, a devout Catholic, opposed to much that was "modern" and radical. He saw and believed—as did many others—that not only Marxism but also liberal parliamentarism failed: whence his often outspoken admiration for authoritarian but not total dictators such as Salazar, Franco, Dollfuss and Mussolini. He did not see, for some time, the discrepancies between that kind of conservatism and the essentially revolutionary and populist rule of Hitler. In 1933 Hitler's coming to power and some of his innovations and institutions, particularly involving the training and organization of German youth, impressed Teleki favourably. It took him some time to realise that the character and the purposes of National Socialism and of the Third Reich were not conservative at all. This recognition corresponded with a significant change in his political aims. Until about 1939 his main desire, as that of almost every Hungarian political figure, was that of Revision, to revise some of the unjust frontiers and restrictions that had been imposed on Hungary in 1920 by the Treaty of Trianon. As the Second World War erupted Teleki realized that the preservation of some of Hungary's independence now became even more important than the revision of frontiers. When in April 1941 he saw that to march in step with Hitler (including the casting off of a recent treaty) was fatal for Hungary's then present and future, he chose no other way for himself than suicide.

A martyr for his and his country's sake, a conservative, an ascetic scholar-patriot—that is how he has been respected and revered by many Hungarians till this day. But then his political career was not spotless. One element, not only in his

political career but in his mind and character, was his convinced and nearly unconditional anti-Semitism. He believed—and the predominant presence of Jews in the Béla Kun regime fortified this belief—that Jewish presences and Jewish influences were unacceptable, dangerous and even ruinous in just about every field of Hungarian life. He was instrumental in proposing and carrying through the first anti-Jewish legislation (the so-called "numerus clausus") during his first Prime Ministership in 1920. Even thereafter his anti-Jewish convictions did not lessen. In 1939, at the beginning of his second and more consequential Prime Ministership, he proposed and supported yet another, more stringent and injurious, anti-Jewish law, and in 1941, it seems that he was ready to institute yet another, extremely stringent, one.

Ablonczy must be commended for his judicious marshalling of the related evidence and circumstances. Of course in 1938 and 1939 and 1941 the presence of Hitler's Germany and its wishes played a role in these lamentable—and perhaps to some degree unavoidable—Hungarian "adjustments": but there was not only that. At the same time I, for one, do not think that, had Teleki lived to 1944, he would have supported the mass deportations, leading to the mass killings, of the majority of Hungarian Jews. But that was a future he did not live to face.

My only, and partial, criticism of Ablonczy's valuable biography involves his treatment of the political situation during the first months of Teleki's Prime Ministership in the spring of 1939. Teleki did not "totally rely" on Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer (who was, alas, not "a grey eminence of Hungarian politics"). The universal suffrage election at the end of May 1939 was not a real triumph for Teleki, even though the government party received a huge majority of 187 out of 260 seats. It was not at all a united party: a great majority of its members represented something other than Teleki's cautious and traditional conservatism, including his reluctance to tie Hungary's destiny to that of the Third Reich. In addition, nearly 30 per cent of the nation's votes were cast for the Arrow Cross parties, who professed a radicalism that was not only alien to Teleki but went even beyond that of their admired German National Socialists. To this landslide for the extreme "Right" Teleki had contributed. Could he have done otherwise? Given the circumstances of 1939 perhaps a little, but not much. Did he realize the consequences of his particular brand of conservatism on that tragic night in April 1941? We do not know. What we know, and respect, is that he chose personal martyrdom over abject shame. ❧

Mátyás Sárközi

Ferenc Molnár: The Plays and the Wives

Katalin Varga and Tamás Gajdó (eds.): *...or not to be. Molnár Ferenc levelei Darvas Lilihez* (...or not to be: Ferenc Molnár's Letters to Lili Darvas). Budapest, Argumentum/Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, 2003, 145 pp.

Ferenc Molnár (1878–1952) married three times. Several of his friends recall Molnár confessing that the love of his life was not one of his three wives, but someone he had unsuccessfully laid a sustained and amorous siege to. The target of his affections was an attractive, delicately featured, extremely talented actress by the name of Irén Varsányi, who played the female lead in several plays of his. He had fallen in love with her during rehearsals for one of them and subsequently wrote roles with her specifically in mind. Varsányi, married with two small children, after much agonising and several probable falls from grace, decided to stay with her husband (a boring but wealthy manufacturer of tiles), mainly for the sake of their children, one of whom had fallen seriously ill at exactly the time the affair came to a head.

Molnár was tender in his approach to this sweet-tempered actress, thus making her an exception among the women in his life: as a general rule, perhaps in order to cover his weaknesses and sentimentality, he tended to be excessively harsh and cruel, intellectually and physically.

Molnár's younger sister, Erzsébet, in her memoir of the writer, recounts a number of escapades in their childhood. Even as a schoolboy, Molnár was in the habit of deploying his various talents to dazzle the girls, included his sister, but he also took pleasure in terrorising them. He would often pin Erzsébet to the ground and twist her arm while he crowed: "I'm the top, you're the pit!"

Like many other distinguished writers and poets of that era, Molnár began as a newspaper reporter. His father, a medical man, intended him for the law, so he went to read international criminal law at Geneva University. However, he took any opportunity he could to escape the undue calm and orderliness of Geneva for the bohemian world of Paris; it was his slick reports from there that got him started as a journalist, at which point he gave up his studies. We know from the memoirs of one of his then close friends that while the good doctor in Budapest paid for his son's lodgings in Geneva, the young man used his allowance to rent another room elsewhere in town, to

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Mátyás Sárközi

is a writer, journalist and broadcaster. He was nineteen when he left Hungary in December, 1956. After completing his studies at the University of London, he worked first for Radio Free Europe and then for the Hungarian Section of the BBC. Lately he has been reporting from London for a Budapest radio station. His books include The Play's the Thing (2004) *on his grandfather, the playwright Ferenc Molnár.*

which he could take ladies of easy virtue whenever he pleased.

In 1896 Molnár joined *Budapesti Napló,* one of Hungary's most reputable and modern-thinking newspapers, where he was taken under the wing of József Vészi, the highly respected, literature-loving editor-in-chief. A number of notable writers immediately became colleagues, among them Endre Ady, the greatest and most influential poet of that era.

Molnár was stage struck from an early age. While he was still at school, an uncle made it possible for young Ferenc to go and see plays regularly. The uncle's job for an insurance company involved checking that theatres were complying with fire regulations and free tickets were a perk. These he was in the habit of passing on to his favourite nephew. Molnár's moment to conquer the stage came when his friend László Beöthy, a fellow journalist and writer, was appointed director of the National Theatre in 1902. In keeping with the new spirit of the new century and to escape from an undeviating diet of classics and leaden plays on Hungarian history, Beöthy commissioned Molnár to come up with a comedy. There was a general revival in the dramatic arts in Hungary at the time and Molnár's novel *Az éhes város* (The Hungry City), a sketch of Budapest society, had been a runaway success a year before. Molnár had translated a sufficient number of French farces to be able to quickly knock together his debut, *The Lawyer,* a comic tale of a burglar and a burglary. A new star playwright was born. It was in *The Lawyer* that the enchanting Irén Varsányi made an appearance, some years before she assumed a major role in Molnár's life and garnered her first sweeping stage success in *The Devil.*

Vészi, the bald, jovial editor-in-chief in his pince-nez, father of three adolescent girls and two boys, purchased a property at Dunavarsány, a village about 20 miles to the west of Budapest, but far enough away to be free of the city's hubbub. Fellow journalist Géza Lengyel recalls it in his memoirs:

> Dunavarsány is an unimportant railway halt about one hour away from the Eastern Terminal. It is in the Great Plain, a flat and monotonous countryside, only a little more wooded than is general for the stretch of land between the Danube and the Tisza. There József Vészi bought a small property with a low but spacious early nineteenth-century single-storey house. Year after year, his large family would spend the summer there until late autumn—colleagues on the *Budapesti Napló* counted as family too. During these summer months Vészi himself would take a train to Budapest in the morning and get back in the evening. On weekdays and Sundays a growing stream of the more distant members of the clan would gather, with friends and acquaintances succeeding one another so that the light horse trap was almost constantly taking visitors between railway station and house.
>
> A few trees provided shade for the house, and there was an orchard and a coppice of acacias that belonged to the small property. A broad corridor with doors opening to the rooms ran inside along the entire length of the house. Guests would find places for themselves in the rooms as best they could.
>
> Busiest of all was the dining room. In the early morning, the big table would be piled high for breakfast with coffee, butter, honey, salami, fruit, bread, milk-loaf. Hardly had the last breakfaster left the table than it would be laid again, and at two o'clock would arrive a lavish luncheon: soup, a starter, a joint of roast, poultry, desserts. Then there would be afternoon tea and a hardly less ample spread for supper.

The merry weekend party of writers and artists would chatter away and drink and smoke on the terrace until the small hours of the morning. At the centre of the

company would be Margit, the oldest of Vészi's daughters, who had travelled around Europe and was particularly drawn to Paris. She was training to be a painter, though she had also studied singing and had aspirations to be a writer. Her paintings were not anything to write home about, but she could dash off stingingly irreverent caricatures of friends and of the famous personalities of the day. No great beauty, she was a picture of elegance in her frilly, lacy summer dresses and large hats. Ady wrote poems to her and Molnár impressed her with his wit.

At this time, Molnár lived a bohemian life, drinking a lot, burning the candle at both ends, doing the round of the coffee-houses and night clubs with his fellow revellers until dawn. When it became clear that he was going to win out in the rivalry for Margit's hand, Vészi warned his daughter not to form any close attachment to Molnár, who, however talented he might be, was a dissolute bohemian.

Margit Vészi went ahead and married Molnár on 20 May 1906. By the autumn of that year they had parted ways—not for the last time as it turned out. A daughter named Márta, Molnár's only child—my mother—was born in the spring of 1907. It was around then that Margit Vészi fled to the parental home, bearing on the bridge of her nose a permanent scar from a wound that had been inflicted by her violent husband. Later, taking the baby and a nurse with her, she resumed her art studies in Paris, then went on to become the Berlin correspondent for a popular Budapest evening newspaper. Her circle of friends included Giacomo Puccini, whom she first met in Rome. Whenever the German premières of his operas were mounted in Berlin he would call on recently divorced Margit Vészi with the clear intention of cheating on his wife. She, however, for her part was more than happy just sitting down at the piano, singing Puccini arias all evening.

In 1907 Molnár presented his next play, *The Devil,* and a happy conjunction of circumstances brought him world fame. It was still fashionable at that time for Italian and German companies to appear in Budapest. One such Italian company arrived with Ermete Zacconi at their head. Although he had no Hungarian, he sat through a performance of *The Devil* and was so struck by the lead role, a cynical, Mephistophelian devil figure, that he decided he absolutely had to play it. The play was translated overnight and Zacconi toured round much of Italy playing in it. Ferenc Molnár's career had taken off around the world.

This Faust-inspired play concerns a love affair between a married woman and an artist, with an elegant but demonic gentleman making frequent appearances to intervene in the proceedings, on some occasions philosophising, at others egging on the painter and the well-to-do woman with whom the intriguer had previously had an affair. He is the Devil of the play's title. It was Irén Varsányi who created the woman's role in the play's first performances. Molnár grew even more infatuated: the play's message, after all, was that the woman should leave her husband.

Varsányi, however, did not have the courage to do so. Molnár made an unsuccessful attempt to take his own life by drinking on top of a massive overdose of sleeping pills. He was found in time and saved. "So he's committed suicide again. It's just a cheap way of attracting attention," was Margit's reaction. The playwright Sándor Bródy, an older friend of Molnár's, explained to the younger writer at his regular coffee-house that he should have set about it differently. "The only person who can give me advice on suicides," Molnár fumed, "is someone who has pulled it off successfully."

Two years after *The Devil,* with the divorce from Margit still in progress, Molnár

produced another intriguing play, a story about a fair-ground barker. Its title—*Liliom,* also used by the 1921 English translation—was the nickname of a barker who actually worked the merry-go-round at Budapest's amusement park (the Vurstli) and who was, as in real life too, anything but a lily. (The basic plot was used for Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1950 musical *Carousel* and its 1956 film version.) The barker scoops up a young domestic by the name of Juli (played by Irén Varsányi in the original 1909 production) and gets her pregnant. His nemesis, his vicious, card-playing partner Ficsur (Charles Laughton in the first London production, with Ivor Novello in the title role), persuades the young barker to join him in carrying out a robbery at knife-point. The robbery is bungled, the police arrive on the scene and Liliom kills himself. He turns up in Purgatory and after some years is told by the authorities that suicides have a chance to return to Earth incognito in order to sort out any unfinished business they may have. If they do well by their loved ones, they can escape the fires of hell. Weighing heavily on Liliom's conscience is the fact that before his death he got into an argument with Juli and hit her. On his return to Earth he filches one of the stars from the firmament in order to give it as a present to his daughter, who in the meantime has grown into her teens. He adopts the guise of a peddler and knocks on the door of the little house in the run-down neighbourhood where Juli and her daughter are living. They don't recognise him and offer him a bowl of soup. He has an argument with his daughter at the garden gate and strikes her. His chance forfeited, hell awaits him. When the girl complains to her mother about how the strange man hit her, Julia observes wistfully that a blow dealt by someone whom one loves is like a caress.

That at least was the message Molnár intended for Margit Vészi, who did not share his view.

As far as Molnár's professed notions of the institution of marriage go, these were summed up rather well by Frank Marcus in the foreword to his 1978 translation of *The Guardsman.* (This came out, as part of the Molnár centenary celebrations, in conjunction with a production at the National Theatre in London starring Diana Rigg and Richard Johnson in the principal roles.):

> The distillation of theatre is illusion made real for the duration of two hours. Molnár felt much the same about marriage, which he regarded as an artificial institution depending for its success on the degree of skills in role-playing shown by the protagonists.

Molnár's second wife was Sári Fedák, the most scintillating Budapest diva of the period. To quote a recently put-together (unsigned) internet theatre history:

> Each and every episode of her career was played out in full public view. She exploited the possibilities opened up by the press to groom her image, starting with the legend she cultivated about being a daughter of the landed gentry. (In reality, she was the daughter of a general practitioner in the town of Beregszász, or Beregovo now in Ukraine.) Her family at first opposed her choice of career before standing by her and playing an important part in building her up. She was spectacularly successful in her early appearances in operetta, and from that point on she was very calculating about moulding her life and persona off the stage. She aroused admiration and created a stir with her extravagant behaviour and dress, taking great care that she should be constantly in the public eye. Even her private life, with her lover Count Imre Degenfeld, was grist for the mill.

A woman whom everyone had seen dancing in her tights could under no circumstances be allowed to link herself to a family that was able to trace itself back to 1200. In despair, the young count took to

injecting morphine, and in the end his family had him committed.

This is how Sári Fedák recalls her first encounter with Molnár in a memoir written in 1929:

> One evening, when the audience had called me back on stage for the eighteenth time after the Second Act, I was rushing, flushed and exhausted, across the so-called lounge towards my dressing-room. Someone called my name. The lounge in the Király Theatre is a rather dim place, lit by a solitary weak bulb in one corner. "Fedák, stop here!" In the half darkness, I tried to see who had been calling me. "We are here, with Viki."
>
> And there they were, standing against the light. As I approached them the man, the one who had called out, spoke to me again: "Judging from the last scene I can see you have real talent. But do you know what you really need to reach the heights of your profession? To become one of the elite of the world's greatest actresses? You need a Jewish boy like me, someone to dominate your life."
>
> He was very good-looking. Black velvety eyes and white hair. Júlia, my maid, who was watching us from a respectful distance, was rather upset when she asked me in the dressing room: "Who was that cheeky man? How dare he to speak to you like that, Madam?"
>
> "It was Ferenc Molnár," I said and nervously started powdering my nose.

From the failure of his first marriage the writer drew the lesson that he was unfit to live with anyone; the relationship between Molnár and Sári Fedák nevertheless lasted for 12 years. She owned a spacious penthouse apartment atop a block on the Danube embankment, offering a glorious view of the river and the neo-Gothic Parliament building opposite. Molnár bought a nearby apartment and had only to stroll for less than five minutes to get to the actress's place. Both were at the peak of their careers, with Fedák appearing to huge acclaim in operetta after operetta. When Molnár wrote for her the 1916 piece *Carnival,* calling for real stagecraft, she rose to the challenge.

The First World War brought an end to the *belle époque,* and Molnár duly did his bit as a war correspondent. A few of his superb reports, with their keen eye for detail, were even picked up by the press in Britain despite the fact that Britain was officially at war with the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Fedák wrote passionate letters: "I don't mind being told off by you, because you are generally right. And I don't mind that you come home and dish it out to me, one-two. I love you regardless."

"Zsazsa" may have loved him, but she cheated on him left and right. When he returned from the front, his malicious friends told him that in his absence she may have been granting her favours to more than a few. "But for money, she only did it with me," was Molnár's scathing riposte. The stormy quarrels and clashes were everyday occurrences. Molnár made her a present of a painting and she hung this in the entrance hall. Every now and then the writer would stalk out of the house, proclaiming "I'm leaving forever and I'm taking the picture with me!" A few days later he would be back full of contrition, picture under his arm. It was a performance that was repeated on at least half a dozen occasions.

In 1920, during a summer production of *Romeo and Juliet,* Molnár fell in love with the strikingly pretty, talented, velvet-toned novice actress who was playing Juliet. This was Lili Darvas. Despite the age difference of 24 years, he embarked on a serious affair with the young star, who was attracted to mature, experienced, established men, having earlier been seen often at the side of the editor of a theatre magazine. When Fedák was on a tour of America singing and dancing with a Hungarian Gypsy revue, Lili Darvas was seen walking hand in hand with Molnár along the boulevards of Budapest. The enchanting Lili was quite different from

Fedák even though they came from similar backgrounds, Lili also being the child of a Jewish doctor.

How did he make out with Lili given his bullying nature? He tried very hard to be extra pleasant and charming as he was truly smitten by the young woman and wanted to hold on to her. Family legend has it that on one occasion when they squabbled and he made to raise a hand against her, she snatched up a brass candlestick and hissed, "If you touch me, you'll wake up in hospital."

On returning from America, Fedák sent word that she wanted to see Molnár straight away, to which he replied that he didn't have time: he was working flat-out on a new play. "In that case, I'll dish out all the dirt on you to the press." The next day Molnár turned up at her door with roses in hand. A tense exchange, fully worthy of a Molnár play, ensued.

> "I've decided that you're going to marry me," Fedák declared.
>
> "Then what?" came the dead-pan response.
>
> "Then you'll get a quick divorce, but not for free," Fedák retorted and got to her feet to signal that the audience was at an end.

The wedding took place on October 11, 1922 with only the registrar and two witnesses present besides the bridal pair. Fedák's was a well-known divorce lawyer. Molnár wore a sports jacket and matching slacks.

"You might at least have put on a dinner-jacket, Feri," remarked his witness, an editor on the *Pesti Napló.*

"Black ties are only for premières," was Molnár's reply.

After lengthy negotiations, they agreed on a sum of $80,000 for the divorce settlement. That was a huge sum in those days. Fedák went on to find herself a new lover, the very handsome Tibor Mindszenty, whom she resolved to take over to America and—with the aid of Alexander Korda—make the new Rudolf Valentino. That never happened on account of Mindszenty's truly modest acting skills. Instead, he became a studio photographer and paid frequent visits on Korda's wife.

One of the main figures in the 1925 play *The Glass Slipper,* translated into English the same year, is an ageing but upstanding carpenter with whom a serving-girl falls in love. This is about the time when Molnár and Lili Darvas started corresponding. In 2003, to mark the 125th anniversary of the writer's birth, this correspondence was published in a de luxe limited edition of 500 copies. The first six letters date from before the marriage, while in the rest Molnár was writing to his lawful wife, the wedding having taken place in 1926, the same year as his daughter, Márta, 19 years old at the time, entered her first marriage.

The two of them, Molnár and Darvas, made an odd couple, and not just by reason of the age difference. Molnár wanted to tie the hands of the young woman, who all of a sudden attained fame as an actress. Lili, for her part, with her penchant for seasoned men, was disposed to a marriage that promised an affluent lifestyle, advanced her stage career and had the sort of cachet that she could count on as Molnár's spouse. Nor did she ever separate from him. What made the connubial bond genuinely special was the understanding on which their union was founded. It is clear, even from the rather mannered letters printed in this volume, that Molnár doted on Darvas. To begin with, he uses endearments like "dearest heart" and "precious", along with such emotionally loaded injunctions as "love me, because you can count on me, once and for all," or "I want to live with a she-leopard just like you." These effusions however are followed by the startling "I am your carnal love for one week in every year."

It was not long before Lili Darvas was discovered by Max Reinhardt, then at his peak as a director-manager. She toured the German-speaking countries as a member of his company. Molnár made an effort to accompany her. They would meet up and

stay in the same luxury hotels, touring some of the loveliest areas on the continent ("Are you in the mood of roaming about in a car with your old pal?"). They would work together, Molnár coaching Lili for her roles in his plays, but they never moved in together and they never had a continuous married life. Darvas received a very generous allowance and extravagant gifts from her husband, and no doubt she was able to absolve the one week of carnal relations called for during the year, but she remained an independent woman. It is likely that she was a more faithful bedmate to the debonair, handsome Hans Járay (1906–90), who was four years younger than her and already an acclaimed star of film and stage, than she was to Molnár. Járay was there even after they had all emigrated to America, both in Hollywood and New York. By then Molnár had also found a Hungarian companion for himself in the person of Vanda Bartha. It could be that around 1936 the writer intended to set up a proper home in Budapest, as he bought a pleasant villa on a leafy street in Buda, but in the end they did not move in. The next year, in 1937, Darvas and Molnár came to Hungary for the last time for the premiere of his play *Delila.* As reconstruction work on the house was still in progress, they stayed at the Hungária Hotel. A monocled Molnár, wearing a boater, would stroll along the promenade by the Danube, revelling in the views of a Buda drenched in late-summer sunlight and in the elegant sweep of the city's bridges. That was the last time he set foot in the country. The villa was transferred to his daughter Márta's name, who was able to move in with her second husband, György Sárközi, myself as their new-born son, and the two children from her first marriage.

As distinct from the "dear heart" or the more typical "darling child" that he used to address Darvas in letters written before their marriage, he switched to more playful endearments, starting with "Pumiszkám" (Poochie Sweet) and later "Minyuszkám", while sometimes referring to himself as "Banyu". (He would always sign himself Feri, the standard diminutive for Ferenc.) One can at best only guess the etymology of some of these nicknames. A distorted form of the Hungarian word "nyuszi" (meaning little rabbit) appears in both Minyuszkám and Banyu. The first may also contain the word "minus"; after all, Lili Darvas was 24 years younger than Molnár. In an essay that accompanies this edition of the letters, Tamás Gajdó points out that in *The Glass Slipper,* which gingerly touches on the subject of a relationship between an ageing man and a young woman, there is a line: "In 70 years time, when she'll be 90, I'll be 118, people will say we're an old couple." Molnár put it more pungently among friends: "A hundred years from now Lili will be 124 years old and I'll be 148, and the difference in age will be much less noticeable."

From the facsimile letters reproduced here, it is evident that Ferenc Molnár had exquisite handwriting (in those distant pre-typewriter days writers needed a legible hand), while as a writer for the stage he was accustomed to marking and emphasising text with coloured pencils. When he sent Lili a letter from the Carlton Hotel in Cannes, most probably in 1936, he wrote two short lines in blue and red, just before the closing sentence, and tacked on the remark "Greetings from Micurka". In an interview that she gave on a visit home from New York to Budapest, Darvas had mentioned that Molnár kept a dozen pencils in a box and "objects took on a life of their own in his hands." His favourite pencil had one end red and the other blue. That was Micurka—Mannekin.

The phenomenon is also open to psychological inquiry.

This well-annotated book lets one know the places from which "Banyu's" letters and telegrammes were sent to his "Minyuszka"—in the main, from Budapest, the Hotel

Imperial in Vienna, Munich, Paris, the French Riviera, the Hotel Danieli in Venice, Karlsbad, Geneva, San Remo. Regrettably, in most cases there is no indication of where their addressee happened to be at that time.

The last messages from Europe, those from Geneva and San Remo, are tinged with anxiety. Molnár was in flight from Hitler. He spent the winter of 1939 in staid, sober Geneva, the cherished city of his university days, waiting to find a boat to take him to America. It is then, quite exceptionally, that he makes a reference to his daughter: "Márta is in the habit of writing, they are in reasonable shape, she is cooking quince jelly and making a business from that." György Sárközi, a Catholic poet of Jewish origin, despite having a letter of exemption from the Interior Mministry, was unable to last for long under Hungary's anti-Jewish laws as an employee of the Athenaeum Publishing House—they were compelled, with great reluctance, to dismiss him. (He was later killed, as were two of his friends, the writer Antal Szerb and the literary historian Gábor Halász, who both ended their days in the dreadful labour camp of Balf close to the Austrian border.) My mother, so it seems, sold quince jelly as well as learning how to darn clothes. We had to live off something.

In 1938, following the Anschluss, Lili and Járay had left Vienna together to spend a brief period in Zurich before taking ship to America. On the very last day of 1939, Molnár boarded the Italian Atlantic liner the *Rex* and disembarked in New York on his sixty-second birthday, on 12 January 1940. He was on the same boat as Ingrid Bergman, who not long thereafter was to play the rule of Liliom's girlfriend, Juli, on Broadway. A rarely seen photo in this richly illustrated book shows Molnár dining on board the *Rex* with István (Stefan) László, a proprietor of illustrated magazines. Vanda followed Molnár soon after, and Molnár wrote a philosophical drama that took the phrase from *Hamlet* as its title:,... *or not to be.* It is not one of his better pieces.

Molnár was never to return to Europe. He moved into a suite on the eighth floor of the Plaza Hotel, with a view over Central Park, and paid for a room for Vanda on the fifteenth floor. Lili lived a few blocks away, and they would regularly dine together at Macario's, an Italian restaurant—all three of them. Lili grew to be very fond of the self-effacing secretary, and she felt very bad about the shabby treatment Vanda received at Molnár's hands, being given very little money to get by on, though he was intending to leave her a large sum in his will. Vanda put an end to her own life, with an overdose of pills, in her hotel room in 1947. She was found by a cleaning lady in the early afternoon. The house detective was merciful enough to inform Molnár directly of the tragedy; it is distinctly odd, though, that the author had made no inquiry about her well-being earlier, at least by telephone.

Vanda's death, coming on top of the tragedy that had befallen Europe, the bitterness of an exile's fate and the growing sense of creative burn-out, precipitated a total collapse. Within a short space of time he aged twenty years, being hit by a series of illnesses, and he would burst into tears any time he heard Vanda's name mentioned. He strove to preserve her memory in his autobiographical work *Companion in Exile.* It is a curious fact that he preferred to share his grief with a few Hungarian friends that he had in New York rather than with Lili, his wife.

Hungary did make efforts after the war to tempt Molnár back. A string of his plays were placed on theatre bills, and the prime minister of the coalition government that ruled the country before the Communist takeover wrote a letter of invitation. He had neither the desire nor the strength, however, for a return home. He eventually died of cancer in April 1952.

On Molnár's gravestone, Lili Darvas had a line engraved from his best-known play: "Just go to sleep Liliom." ❧

Éva Forgács

The Centre of Europe before and after the Fall of the Central Powers

Elizabeth Clegg: *Art, Design & Architecture in Central Europe 1890–1920.* Yale University Press, 2006, 305 pages, 300 black and white and colour reproductions.

Coined in 1915 by Friedrich Naumann as a geopolitical term, *Mitteleuropa* or Central Europe made a comeback in the 1980s as a positive and optimistic concept to counter the politically dire cold war term Eastern Europe, a synonym for Eastern Bloc. The exact meaning of Central Europe has been widely and passionately discussed in many books and essays in much the same manner as the table talk of well-informed and skeptical Central Europeans—with a plethora of original ideas and insights and no ultimate consensus. Thus, Elizabeth Clegg has good reason to feel that she needs to give her own definition of Central Europe when writing about the art, design and architecture of the region between 1890 and 1920, a period when the term had only a vaguely geographical meaning. For her impressively large-scale and richly detailed book, she defines Central Europe as "that segment of Europe that, between 1867 and 1919–20, constituted Austria-Hungary".

Both definition and time frame can be challenged on many grounds. Scholars like the Hungarian literary historian Endre Bojtár or the American art historian Steven Mansbach would not accept a Central Europe which excludes most of the Baltic states; others, including the writer Milan Kundera and the historian Timothy Garton Ash, would not go by geography alone, since they regard Central Europe as "the kingdom of the spirit". Aware of this, Clegg refers in her introduction to the main pillars of the Central European mythology: Musil, Kafka, Joseph Roth and Hašek's *The Good Soldier Švejk;* however, before we identify Central Europe only with the complex, sardonic wisdom of these authors and their works, we must remember, as did Garton Ash in citing François Bondy, "if Kafka was a child of Central Europe, so too was Adolf Hitler."[1]

This brings to mind that Central Europe may have been long neglected in the West not because it was on the wrong side of the

1 ■ "Does Central Europe Exist?", in Timothy Garton Ash: *The Uses of Adversity.* Cambridge: Penguin Books, 1989, p. 166.

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Iron Curtain, but because, as the seedbed of two world wars, awareness of it may have been, to use a Freudian term, suppressed.

Clegg claims originality on several accounts. She sorts out the interrelated aspects and the interconnections of the visual cultures in the former Dual Monarchy, treating "the region as a whole" (p. 4). She gives an overall assessment of the infrastructure and the events of the Empire during the period she chose to cover, and chooses, in many cases, hitherto unknown or little published visual material. Clegg has researched Art Nouveau, the regional styles, the beginnings of modernity and, to a lesser extent, the early avant-gardes of Vienna, Prague, Cracow, Budapest, Zagreb, Ljubljana, and, at various points, of Zakopane, Galicia, Moravia and Bohemia.

Unlike such books as Mansbach's *Modern Art in Eastern Europe,* Krisztina Passuth's *Les avant-gardes de l'Europe centrale,* and a great many exhibition catalogues and collections of essays which have tried to trace the beginnings of modernism in Central Europe in order to explore either the similarities between this region and the West or their differences, Clegg is interested in the cultural establishment of the Monarchy, which, by its very nature, was created to fend off modernisation. She focuses on the immense machinery of the Monarchy's cultural bureaucracy and examines the eventual modernist developments, so to speak, from the point of view of that cautious and circumspect political-cultural establishment. Accordingly, she discusses in detail the centralisation of art life and all those conservative initiatives that make most other authors and readers yawn. Her focal point is the K.u.K. (Kaiserliche und Königliche), Dual Monarchy, with its infrastructure, railway network and hierarchy of institutions that spread the Viennese model to the other capitals and larger towns.

The choice of 1890 and 1920 as time frame is quite unusual. To suggest that 1890 marked the beginning of something new makes sense only if one is writing the history of the region's modernism. If one sticks to the inner political and cultural processes of the Habsburg Empire, 1848 is the watershed after which a new era began. The year 1920 as the ending to a period is even more problematic, because nothing worth mentioning happened in that year. Most historians agree that the time of change was 1914, with the outbreak of the First World War, which marked the end of both the "long nineteenth century" and the *belle époque.* It was the assassination of Franz Ferdinand that marked the virtual end of the Empire and, in the field of visual culture, brought about the radicalisation of art. 1920, as Clegg says, was the year when the peace treaties were signed, but they were only the belated rubber stamp to the change that had been wrought on the face of Central Europe and the whole continent.

Clegg's richly detailed description provides an unusually wide and complex background to the visual arts. She weaves a multitude of facts about the art scene—the establishment of artists' groups and colonies, as well as organization of exhibitions on their own initiative or on state incentive—into the fabric of political and sociological data. All these facts come in no hierarchical order. Clegg appears to be a positivist who accords more importance to an approximately full account of the events and complete data than to an overarching concept. Her objective tone sometimes falters—for example, when she calls Joseph II's 1781 Edict of Tolerance "*surprisingly* enlightened" (p. 17, my emphasis), and the simple juxtaposition of facts in lieu of a vision also takes a toll. The most problematic slip is that in spite of the impressively detailed historical narrative that she offers—tracing Habsburg history

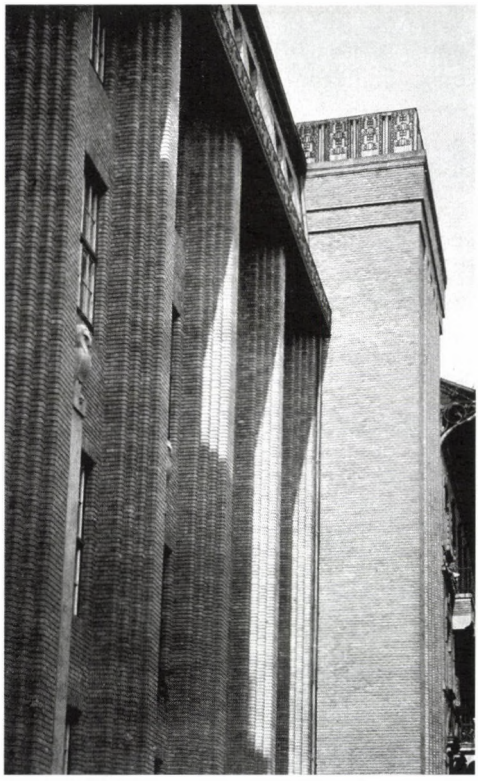
back to the thirteenth century—she quite amazingly overlooks one quintessential group of events, whose impact lasted for more than a century and determined much of what was to follow: that of the 1848 revolutions. These get a fleeting mention as "the multiple outbursts of a revolutionary zeal that were the Austrian contribution to the pan-European unrest of 1848–49" (p. 18), which makes one ask if the author has a historically accurate assessment of these "unrests" in wider European history. As far as Clegg's concept of Central Europe is concerned, it appears that historical research and historical understanding may follow parallel, forever separate, tracks; whereas it is simply impossible to grasp most of the subtext and reference system of the region's subsequent culture without understanding the emotional, historical and political impact of 1848.

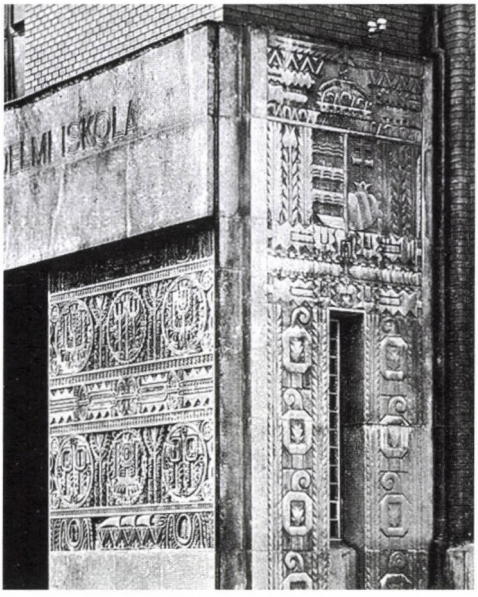
While Clegg makes the sociologically correct observation that the "weakness of either aristocratic or bourgeois private patronage" (p. 21) made state support for the arts necessary in the Dual Monarchy, she does not fathom the real reasons for this centralization. As Jan Bakos remarks in an essay discussing the situation of art history, which also applies to the arts themselves,

> the institutionalization of art history in the Habsburg Monarchy came into existence just after the defeat of the 1848 bourgeois revolutions... [these institutions] were intentionally established as vehicles of political restoration... their task was on the one hand to legitimize the restored political power of the aristocracy by means of history, and on the other to contribute to the centraliza-tion of the Empire by means of the idea of a common trans-national cultural heritage.[2]

Thus, when Clegg says that "The Habsburgs were certainly no strangers to art patronage" (p. 21) and describes the founding of the Vienna and Budapest Ministries of Religion and Education, the establishment of the Academies of Fine Arts in Budapest, Prague and Cracow and other colleges on their Vienna model, not to mention the encouragement of Historicist architecture and History painting which thematized the historical past, she is accurately reporting real facts, but she is overlooking the actual political purpose and strategy behind these developments, which is very far from "patronizing the arts". She gets closer to the purposes of the state's centralizing efforts when she notes, regarding the great number of commemorative travelling exhibitions, that they were meant to serve "the aims of the state: at home promoting the virtues of a cohesive diversity, abroad sustaining the illusion of a diversity coexisting with modernity" (p. 23). However, the book leaves unmentioned the traumatic defeat of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution and its bloody, Haynau-presided retaliation, followed by years of terror and the Hungarians' intense hatred for Austria. Yet, the 1867 *Ausgleich* cannot be assessed without that, nor can the dynamics of the ensuing nationalisms within the Monarchy, eventually leading to the First World War and the collapse of the Monarchy. Overlooking the significance of 1848 makes her suspect that the term *der Ausgleich* is "conventionally, but perhaps somewhat misleadingly, rendered in English as 'the Compromise'" (p. 20). Again, there is no argument to justify her suspicion, which is wrong: *der Ausgleich* was, indeed, experienced as a humiliating compromise by the overwhelming majority of Hungarians in spite of the many tangible advantages of the

2 ■ Jan Bakos: "From Universalism to Nationalism. Transformations of Vienna School Ideas in Central Europe", in Robert Born, Alena Janatková, Adam S. Labuda, eds.: *Die Kunsthistoriographien in Ostmitteleuropa und der nationale Diskurs.* Berlin: Gerüder Mann Verlag, 2004, p. 79.





Béla Lajta with Lajos Kozma: Commercial College in Vas utca, Budapest, 1911–12. Anonymous photograph published in Művészet, *1913. From the book under review.*

Realpolitik (ever since a dubious, ironically mentioned concept), which made it possible.

Following her geographic and historical introduction, Clegg discusses Art Nouveau, or "the spirit of Secession", then the "New Voices" in art after 1900; the dynamics of "Retrospectivism/Progressivism" around 1910; the more radical modernist tendencies between 1912 and 1916; and, choosing 1917 as a watershed, the final chapter discusses the avant-garde/Neo-Classicist dichotomy. There are several issues of periodization (regarding the subdivision of the chapters, or the fact that Clegg goes beyond her chosen limit of 1920) and choice of artists and illustrations that could be debated. But the fundamental impression one gets from the book is that Clegg is much more interested in the political and sociological set-up of the Monarchy than in the individual artists and artistic achievements—although she offers a few good descriptions of artworks—and she aspires to create a complete databank rather than to point out outstanding individuals or works. Although one of the merits of the book is the quantity of data included, it is a challenge to the reader to keep track of the many names, events, societies, movements and other details that are densely packed in the six chapters. The artistic developments in various parts of the Empire are juxtaposed and come across as equally important and valuable rather than providing context and contrast to a few outstanding figures and oeuvres. Because of this positivist attitude, it is all the more astonishing how objectivity gives way to unexplained subjective views at some points. For example, Clegg calls the avant-garde's commitment to internationalism "forcible" (p. 225), and she contends that Traditionalism (Hungarian Neo-Classicists, Czech Civilists and members of the Polish group Rytm) was the "more characteristic" art for the region (p. 225). While the illustration material of the book also

includes a number of neo-conservative pieces which may have documentary rather than artistic value, it is such statements that make me wonder whether the author is taking a fully objective or valid stance as a historian. There is no justifiable reason whatsoever to declare that the commitment of the avant-garde to internationalism was "forcible"—among other things it was the outbreak of the Great War that generated a sense of brotherhood and solidarity among many modernist artists, indeed, an international anti-war front across national boundaries—nor is it justifiable in any way to declare, in the absence of argument, that Neo-Classicism suited Central Europeans more than modernism or the avant-garde. Neo-Classicism appears to have gained about as much ground in the Western half of Europe as in the East after the war, but such a comparison makes as little sense as the declaration itself.

Clegg's study also seems to neglect the predicament of the nationalities in Central Europe. Many people adjusted their family names to the country they lived in. German, Slav or Jewish names were willingly changed into Czech-sounding, Polish-sounding or Magyar-sounding names in a gesture of assimilation. There is a general consensus in the region, and I think in the entire world for that matter, to call people by the name they use and consider them as members of the nation they were born into, or chose to belong to, as citizens. Many of these names are the obvious result of such a change, but the consensus is that this should not be challenged. Also, the ethnic background of the artists' families in ethnically mixed Central Europe is usually not scrutinized in enlightened writing unless it has a direct and significant bearing on the work. This is a sensitive issue everywhere, but particularly so in a region burdened with a heavy tradition of ethnic confrontation, hatred and, at times, murderous violence. For reasons I cannot fathom (perhaps in pursuit of impeccable scholarship and exhaustive research), Clegg has dug up the original family name and ethnic background of a great number of artists and art critics and indicates her findings in brackets at the first mention of the name. Hence, the reader is provided with information that Hungarian art historical literature has so far considered irrelevant; to give just two examples: Simon Hollóssy, the founder of the legendary Nagybánya Colony was, in fact, not Hungarian but "of Armenian descent"; or Ödön Lechner, the par excellence Hungarian Art Nouveau architect was, summarily, a "non-Magyar". And so it goes on endlessly with each and every name. This is an embarrassment in a scholarly book, a break from the existing consensus and a violation of the artists' right to the identity they wanted to express in their work, as well as through the family name they used. While Vincent van Gogh is never referred to as a French-Dutch artist (or vice versa), here we read about Polish-Jewish, Hungarian-German, Czech-Jewish, Hungarian-Jewish, etc. artists, who are never referred to as such in their own cultures. This is a thorough misinterpretation of the multi-ethnic Central European culture that this widely researched, richly illustrated and impressively compiled book discusses with compelling results. ❧

József Sisa

From Gardens to Films

Gyula Ernyey (ed.): *Britain and Hungary, volume 3. Contacts in Architecture, Design, Art and Theory during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Essays and Studies.*
Budapest, Hungarian University of Craft and Design, 2005, 295 pp.

When Gyula Ernyey approached the Glasgow School of Arts around ten years ago to sound out the prospects for collaboration, he little thought that a book would come of it. He certainly could not foresee a third volume on the broad topic of British–Hungarian contacts by the year 2005, particularly when the subject-matter might not have seemed at first to offer much to sink one's teeth into, as it is generally taken as self-evident that Hungary, historically speaking, has largely fallen under Germano-Christian influences, with Central Europe dominant when it comes to tastes and thinking on the arts. What is now becoming clear, in the wake of Ernyey's undertaking, is that the picture is a good deal richer and more subtle—thanks to what is, in effect, centuries of "globalisation" of Europe in general, and the rise to prominence of England in the early modern era in particular.

The study of Anglo–Hungarian contacts looks back on a distinguished past, with scholars such as István Gál, László Országh, Aurél Varannay, György Gömöri, Lóránt Czigány or Tibor Frank discussing first and foremost many aspects of the literary links. The wider fields of the arts are the subject of the present volume, which contains a total of 19 papers by 18 authors. Space does not permit them all to be listed and commented on, but there are several key points that deserve to be underlined.

The very first essay was not originally written for this volume, nor is it a recent article at all, as it stems from the pen of Kornél Zelovich in 1929 and deals with Count István Széchenyi's engineering projects. It is, though, a thorough and well-argued discussion of the subject, which stands its 80 years well and deserves its place in this volume; the achievements of this Anglophile aristocrat—the "greatest Hungarian" as he was known in his time—can hardly be overestimated.

Kristóf Fatsar's paper "Anna Zádor and the English Garden" is of special interest. The author was not personally acquainted with Professor Zádor, who was a pioneer of the history of gardens in Hungary. Through the chair she held at the Eötvös Loránd

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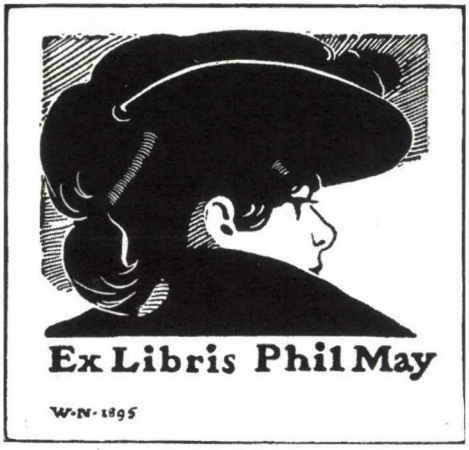
University of Budapest, she had considerable influence on several generations of art historians. Fatsar limns a finely nuanced portrait of her, bringing out the key role her love of nature played in bringing her, both as scholar and person, to the subject. Professor Zádor also had an important place as a historian of architecture, and it is in that role that her name crops up again in the next paper: Pál Ritoók opens his discussion of the recognition that the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) has given to Hungarian-born architects with a review of a lecture that the art historian and architect Imre Henszlmann (1813–88) gave to RIBA, a lecture to which Professor Zádor was the first to draw attention. Those links, which reached a high point with the awards of honorary RIBA membership to Imre Steindl and Alajos Hauszmann at the end of the nineteenth century, have remained very much alive down to the present day—perhaps the longest-lived institutional link of all.

Mariann Simon writes about hitherto practically unknown aspects of architecture in her account of how, during the 1960s, a string of Hungarian architects (17 in all) had the opportunity to make one-year study trips to the UK under the aegis of Ernő Goldfinger, a Hungarian-born British architect who was an outstanding figure in modern architecture. Here it is not purely the strictly professional element that is of interest, but also the general climate that surrounded that era, fraught as it was with secretiveness and jealousies.

Imre Makovecz, a well-known figure of contemporary Hungarian architecture (acknowledged even by Prince Charles), is the subject of a paper by János Gerle that pays particular attention to his reputation in Britain. Jolán Rácz examines how Great Britain and Hungary, despite their radically different pasts, have found common ground in the care of historic buildings following Hungary's democratic transformation.

A separate section is filled with articles that either discuss items of equipment in the Budapest Museum of Applied Arts that were originally supplied from Britain or discuss various groups of objects in the Museum's



W. Nicholson: Bookplate, *1895. Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest. From the book under review.*

collection of British origin. In this way the authors—Piroska Ács, Ferenc Batári and Hilda Horváth—throw light on the different facets of the collection's history and of the material culture that have had an impact on daily lives in Hungary, with particular regard to that amazingly productive period around the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Britain's role as an example for Europe in this is widely acknowledged, but these studies present a full spectrum of very specific and tangible objects that, through the acquisition by this and other museums, helped popularise British tastes within Hungary.

Britain has long welcomed talented artists from abroad; many French, German and Dutch painters and graphic artists either settled there, or at least stayed there for extended periods. A few notable Hungarians fall into this category. Outstanding

among them was Mihály Zichy, who visited England and Scotland during the 1870s, where his amorous paintings and hunting scenes garnered considerable success. Katalin Gellér gained access to a number of Zichy's works held in parts of the Royal Collection that are closed to the general public. She provides an astute study of the way in which these works fitted into British traditions, and also of those aspects in which they departed from the native prototypes, showing what would have been perceived as their foreignness in a British context. It is little wonder, Gellér concludes, that the artist did not stay in the British Isles.

Éva Bajkay tackles a twentieth-century Hungarian artist, Béla Uitz, whose "Analysis" series of graphic works was acquired by the Scottish National Gallery. Her article's interest lies not just in tracing the fate of his works, but also in capturing the attraction that Central European modernity was able to exercise in a British cultural environment, nurtured as it is by a quite different tradition. Péter (László) Péri's socialist-inspired realism was of another trend, yet his works too—as a paper by Magda Czigány makes clear—found an appreciative public in England.

Tom Steel examines Arnold Hauser and Herbert Read in connection with the concept of writing art history as social history. He discusses the impact of Hauser's ideas, including the strengths and novelty of his Marxist interpretation within the context of British intellectual life—whilst not disguising the extent to which Hauser in person, along with his views, remained very much a peripheral figure there.

Alexander Korda remains to this day one of the emblematic figures in cinema history, both in Britain and throughout the world. His is one of the names hard to avoid in any discussion of British–Hungarian contacts in the arena of the arts. Two papers, one by Ferenc Zsákovics, the other by Mária István, broaden the scope of this volume by discussing the life and work of both Alexander Korda and his brother Vincent, a leading art director whose career in cinema spanned sixty years. What is particularly striking here is the way in which the pictorial world of Vincent Korda is shown to have grown out of the Neo-Classical trend of Hungarian painting in the 1920s and thus became a formative influence on British visual culture in the middle of the twentieth century.

The classical example of a delayed British influence is that on the art scene of Transylvania during the interwar period, as shown by Paul Stirton's study. While the Arts and Crafts movement of the second half of the nineteenth century had largely run out of steam by the end of the First World War, it acquired a new and vital lease on life in Transylvania of all places, where the virtue that it made of limited resources was very much in tune with the local circumstances and mood at that time.

The editor decided to close this account of these contacts with the third volume and has included two very useful sections to this end. One is a detailed chronology, which organises the huge diversity of subjects covered by the three volumes—events and the more important works—from Count István Sándor's first trip to England in 1786 through to the large series of cultural events that were organised in the United Kingdom during 2004 under the "Magyar Magic" banner. The other is a cumulative index for all three volumes, making good on one of the decided drawbacks of the first two.

Looking at the series as a whole, such is the number and depth of studies that some more general conclusions may be drawn, starting with the way that the main points of convergence and trends during the roughly two centuries of British–Hungarian contacts in the arts are outlined.

Perhaps first and foremost among these is the kind of landscaped garden which, to this day, over most of Continental Europe, is referred to as the English garden. The aesthetic renaissance of gardening, in which England was at the forefront, was closely related to the new thinking of the Enlightenment, and it would be hard to overrate its importance. It is no coincidence, of course, that the triumph of landscape gardening in Continental Europe went arm in arm with the process by which Britain seized world leadership for a time in the political and cultural domains.

Another major aspect is the increased demand for comfort, with the associated spread of interior decoration and a concern with all aspects of the design of objects. Hungary had already begun to show signs of receptiveness to these trends by the middle of the nineteenth century, thus preparing the ground for the Arts and Crafts aesthetic to exert its full influence by its end. By then there was a close-knit network of personal contacts that helped to propagate British ideas and forms, with artists of the calibre of Charles Robert Ashbee and Walter Crane playing a leading role. Fin-de-siècle artistic ambitions in Hungary were bound up with steps to create a national art form, to escape from the pressure of Austro-German culture, with the British connection and example serving as one of the means for doing so. Another major avenue for contacts was provided by civil engineering, in which Britain, the first country to go through an industrial revolution, was again to the fore. Thus, the construction of the Chain Bridge over the Danube between Buda and Pest, and the person of István Széchenyi, who was the driving force behind it, crop up in all three volumes in one way or another.

Hungarian artists who either visited or actually settled in Britain form another major strand of this series. Thus, alongside the likes of Mihály Zichy or Fülöp László (Philip László de Lombos), one can also cite names from an earlier period (though neither of them is touched on in these volumes) people like Jakab Bogdány (James Bogdany, c. 1660–1724) or Károly Brocky (1807–55). It would be fair to say that, although each of them was a worthy representative of Hungarian talent abroad, what marked them in the end was their ability to blend in with, or at least accommodate themselves to, British tastes and demands.

What has been mentioned so far are settings in which it was Britain that served as the model and inspiration for Hungary to accept and fashion to its own liking. By the twentieth century, the interactions can be seen to be two-way. A number of Hungarian modernist masters found that they were not just understood but even regarded as exemplary, as in the case of Béla Uitz and, even more so, in the case of Ernő Goldfinger, who was a Hungarian-born naturalised Briton and one of the leading figures in British modernist architecture. There were also important Hungarian-born and educated art historians of a left-wing or progressive persuasion like Arnold Hauser and Frigyes (Frederick) Antal, alongside whom one might also mention János (Johannes) Wilde, who receives no mention in these volumes. Their approaches gave a regenerative push to the field in their chosen new homeland. Equally, both Sándor (Alexander) and Vince (Vincent) Korda had garnered a huge amount of experience in Austria, Germany, France and Hollywood (as well as Hungary) before making their mark on the British film industry for close on two decades from the mid-Thirties onwards. In all these cases, there was no question of adjusting to existing values or adopting and adapting British innovations, but of transplanting certain values from Hungarian art, of participating as equal partners in a dialogue between the two cultures.

An impressive roster of authorities were involved in compiling the three volumes.

The Hungarian authors concerned make up a veritable "who's who" of art historians, and distinguished names feature among the British scholars as well. The enterprise is thus very much an Anglo–Hungarian dialogue. This brings us to the issue of language. The conceptual world of the two languages and cultures are far enough removed from each other to make blunders in this area a danger to the value and credibility of the whole enterprise. (Sadly, Hungarian publishers of works translated into English have provided more than a few instances of this in the past.) In this case, though, demanding standards have been met throughout, and there is no noticeable falling-off of quality in the English texts by Hungarian authors. This is borne out by the special praise bestowed on the first volume for its linguistic clarity by Paul Dick, at the time the British Council representative in Budapest. It is also worth pointing out that the book design too conforms to British expectations. Lóránt Czigány, the literary historian domiciled in England, mentioned in an interview that a number of British colleagues had turned to him for clarification on volumes published in Hungary, even though the translations were satisfactory. When Czigány pointed this out, it turned out that the unfamiliarity of standard Hungarian design formats for book covers and layout threw British readers, who simply perceived them as foreign. That sort of problem does not arise in the present case, form and content being fully integrated.

The Chain Bridge between Buda and Pest. *Drawing by G. Hawkins Jr. Hungarian Architectural Museum, Budapest. From the book under review.*

As editor, Gyula Ernyey has accomplished a significant feat not just in the narrow sense of his professional expertise, but also in terms of his organisational skills. It is hard to believe that he will not eventually be tempted to add to the series, as there remain plenty of other aspects of British–Hungarian connections in the arts that merit exploration and publication. Let us just mention painting and the history of collecting as two areas that hold out promise. ❧

George Gömöri

Of Remembering and Forgetting

Michael Korda: *Journey to a Revolution. A Personal Memoir and History of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.* New York, HarperCollins, 2006, 221 pp.

Does the difference between fact and fiction matter? This question is asked occasionally by some of us who respect both written and oral history, or rather the great insight one can gain from comparing different eye-witness accounts of a particular event. Reading Michael Korda's new book, the question takes on great urgency.

Korda is the author of best-selling books, and his publishers HarperCollins are one of the leading publishing houses in the United States. Yet, the editor who accepted this book for publication omitted to do one thing: to check the veracity of Korda's account against other, still living eye-witnesses of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. This was a fateful omission: in Michael Korda's book, fiction or rather a heavily fictional account of the author's experiences, takes precedence over facts which, for students of Hungarian matters, are fairly easy to check.

About half of the book is an introduction to Hungary's recent history. That is culled from other authors and is, by and large, acceptable, though some of Korda's statements of fact even here are of dubious value. For example, after the Hungarian War of Independence of 1848–49, the Polish General Jozef Bem was not summarily shot by the Russians, as Korda believes (p.43) but fled to Turkey where he converted to Islam and died in 1851. Korda uses the word "fascism" as loosely as certain Communists—the Hungary of Admiral Horthy, though he came to power through a counter-revolution, was definitely *not* a fascist country; it was not a liberal democracy either, but operated a conservative, "controlled" bicameral parliamentary system which remained loyal to the Regent until March 1944. The true domain of fiction, however, starts on page 111. Either Michael Korda kept no diary in 1956, or fifty years later his memory fails him badly, though there is so much consistency in his fiction that it seems to rule out simple forgetfulness. It is true that he made an expedition bringing medical supplies to Budapest in the company of three other young Oxonians, but apart from that one fact, everything else is wrong. I happen to know some of his fellow-students from Oxford and can state with certainty that neither the dates of his visit, nor the places he visited correspond to reality. (The actual facts can be checked in a book published in 1957, and found in the appendix of

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George Urban's *Nineteen Days;* here, two of Korda's fellow-students talk about their Hungarian experiences to the author, a BBC journalist.) It was not on October 29 but November 1st 1956 that Michael Korda and his friends arrived in Vienna (p.118) and they did not stay that night in the Sacher Hotel but in the Hotel Europa. The Astoria Hotel in Budapest was never called the "Red Star" (p.119). Korda describes Professor Haynal at the clinic where they delivered the medical supplies as "a small, intense man"; in fact, he was a rather tall, grave, very courteous person. The letter of recommendation given by Haynal to the English students was not stamped (p. 136) by the Professor—this can actually be verified on the next page in the book where a facsimile of Haynal's letter is reproduced. But what is even more important about this facsimile, is the date it displays—November 3, and not the October 30 or 31 that Korda claims! Here he inadvertently hoisted himself on his own petard.

It is hard to understand why Korda wants "to protect privacy" by changing the names of certain individuals fifty years after his visit to Budapest. On page 140, he introduces a "Martha Dalrymple" who could only be Mrs Anthony Terry, the wife of Anthony Terry of the *Sunday Times.* It is a minor detail that the Oxford students met these people only later in the British Legation, not in the bar of the Astoria Hotel, but it is astounding what these journalists allegedly tell young Michael Korda. Let me quote: "our brief fame... was about to be eclipsed by the arrival of Judy Cripps, the daughter of Sir Stafford Cripps." Two errors in one sentence, for Judy Cripps was Sir Stafford's granddaughter and she visited Hungary only two months later, in January 1957, when she and her fellow-travellers were arrested and briefly held in jail by the Hungarian authorities. As it is absolutely certain that Judy Cripps did not set foot on Hungarian soil in November 1956, one cannot accept all the other "information" or rather speculation provided by the mysterious Mrs Dalrymple, that Imre Nagy (at that time Prime Minister) "would probably be replaced by Kádár" (p.142). This, before November 4, 1956, is pure nonsense, the fabrication of afterthought. But if we know that the Cripps story is Korda's invention as much as the political forecast by the all-knowing Mrs Dalrymple, there is no reason to believe any of Michael Korda's other cock-and-bull stories. I cannot believe that he spotted either Imre Nagy returning to Parliament (p.148) or Cardinal Mindszenty seeking refuge at the American Legation (p.171): all these must be the product of his prodigious imagination. He also claims that General Pál Maléter was shot without a trial in November 1956 (in fact, he was executed in 1958) and that Imre Nagy was tortured in Romania (p. 202), when he was treated reasonably well there before being brought back to Hungary where he was tried in secret and hanged (not shot, as Korda says) in June 1958.

I have to end this review with a comment on the American historian Michael Beschloss, who claims on the back cover of *Journey to a Revolution* that Korda's book is "superb scholarly history" and "captivating storytelling". The second part of his statement might be partly true, but the first is totally unfounded. Michael Korda's book on Hungary can be dismissed by serious scholars as a work of glib, loquacious (and more confusing than entertaining) fiction. ❧

János Malina

The Ultimate Fugue

Johann Sebastian Bach: *Contrapunctus 14 für Orgel aus der Kunst der Fuge.* Arranged by Zoltán Göncz. Stuttgart, Carus-Verlag, 2006, 20 pp.

Last year, Carus-Verlag, a Stuttgart publisher specialising in early vocal church music, issued a slender volume containing Zoltán Göncz's reconstruction of the last movement of Bach's *The Art of Fugue,* a late work considered to be one of his crowning achievements. The 19th movement, *Contrapunctus 14,* is arguably the most famous unfinished composition next to Mozart's Requiem and Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony.

Göncz's reconstruction is based on his research in print both in Hungary and abroad as early as the 1990s. It was a decade and a half before the final result was published.

What is so special about *Contrapunctus 14* that impels someone to have a go at completing it every five years or so? Putting the professional aspects of the challenge aside, the answer is surely that this fugue is clearly Bach's great summation. Bach himself no doubt intended this way. Even in its fragmentary form the movement is one of his most breathtaking of pure polyphonic essays. Completing it is like solving a puzzle, a test of the interpreter's mastery of Bach's legacy. To pass it is to take symbolic possession of that legacy.

The Art of Fugue is a summing up, a précis not only of various technical devices but of a compositional approach which, by the mid-18th century, had been honed over a good three centuries. Polyphony—the dynamic interplay of melodic voices—provided a technical means towards a greater end. Namely, a piece of music should be organic; it should achieve unity through a dense web of internal connections. Contrapuntal possibities should be explored to the full, as being a musician means to labour incessantly at perfecting ourselves and the work. *The Art of Fugue,* several movements of which Bach revised and expanded over the years, presents an ageless model.

We now know that many important Bach compositions have been lost. Many others survived by happy accident, and *The Art of Fugue* is perhaps the happiest of chance survivors. There are two main sources: a 1742 manuscript containing twelve fugues and two canons, and the first edition, published not long after Bach's death. The latter contains fourteen fugues, four canons and—intriguingly—a chorale arrangement. Some of the earlier pieces appear in new versions. Bach called the

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fugues *contrapuncti,* an archaic term he never used elsewhere, as if to emphasise his own role in transmitting an ancient tradition. *Contrapunctus 14* is one of the movements that are absent from the 1742 manuscript. What is remarkable in the first edition is that it is separated from the other thirteen *contrapuncti* by four intervening canons. It is labelled *Fuga a 3 soggetti* (fugue with three themes), and, being incomplete, is "rounded off" by the chorale "Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sein."

The editors of the first edition were not exactly at the top of their game and were unsure of the order of the movements, which significantly differs from that of the manuscript. Some movements were even switched during the printing process! Small wonder then that the debate concerning *Contrapunctus 14,* its place in the cycle and its state of completion (a more or less complete version might have later been lost) has continued unabated ever since. Even his contemporaries recognised the extraordinary significance of this movement. Bach's Obituary—published four years after his death—not only mentions it, but goes on to discuss it in considerable technical detail.

For a long time it was thought that the fugue was supposed to be based only on the three themes introduced in the fragment. This opinion is reflected in the movement's title in the first edition. Since the actual main theme of the *The Art of Fugue,* used in several different versions throughout the cycle, is not among the three themes of *Contrapunctus 14,* it seemed that this movement did not originally belong to the cycle at all. One of the three themes is a distant, simplified variant of the absent main theme, the second is a longer, sinuous melodic idea, while the third is none other than the B-A-C-H theme, made up of the letters of Bach's name (B being German for B flat and H standing for B natural), with a short cadence added for closure. Being a personal statement, it was understandable that the B-A-C-H theme came to be seen as the movement's culmination, excluding the possibility of a fourth theme.

An 1881 article by music scholar Gustav Nottebohm changed all that. Nottebohm discovered that the three themes could be combined with the principal theme of the cycle to produce flawless four-part counterpoint, opening the door to a re-evaluation of the fragment and raising the theoretical possibility of completing it as a fugue with four subjects—i.e., a quadruple fugue.

At this point we must briefly pause to explain how the extant portion of *Contrapunctus 14* unfolds and how fugues work in general.

It begins with the exposition of the first theme. In a four-part fugue, this means that the theme is heard in each voice (soprano, tenor, alto, bass). It alternates between two slightly different forms known as *dux* "leader" and *comes* "companion" (the reason for the alteration of a note here and there is to avoid incongruent harmonies). The theme then undergoes several transformations. For instance, it can be inverted and transposed. Sometimes successive entrances are brought closer together, a device which is called *stretto.* Both the original and the inversion appear at least once in each voice.

The second theme is introduced in the second section, appearing in each of the four voices, just as in the first theme. Both themes are combined and each theme appears again in each of the four voices. This time, however, there are no inversions.

The third section, which brings in the B-A-C-H theme, is presented in inversion and then in *stretto.* Finally, all three themes are played simultaneously in *stretto.* That is the point where the manuscript breaks off.

Even though the third section is incomplete, the overall structure of all three sections is clear:

1. Exposition – first theme – elaboration
2. Exposition – first and second theme – elaboration
3. Exposition – 1+2+3 – elaboration

After Nottebohm's discovery, it is safe to assume that Bach intended *Contrapunctus 14* as a quadruple fugue to crown the whole of the *The Art of Fugue,* and the main theme of the cycle was saved for last. Therefore, the task was to complete section 3 by a few additional *stretto* elaborations of themes 1–3—making sure that each of the three themes appears in each of the four voices—and write the fourth and last section of the fugue following scheme 4: Exposition – 1+2+3+4 – elaboration. Many musicians since the late 19th century have tackled it. Some, notably Donald Francis Tovey, Helmut Walcha and Erich Bergel, achieved solutions of a high standard.

It was around 1990 that Zoltán Göncz first took up the challenge. Göncz, a musical editor at Hungarian Radio, is also a composer. His interest in music theory and history, though not informed by formal academic work, is evident from his not too extensive but exciting compositional output: he uses archaic forms and complicated structures in his works. Earlier attempts at reconstructing Bach's fugue left him dissatisfied. This "system of equations" had too many unknowns and therefore allowed too many arbitrary choices. Many widely divergent solutions had seemed all too equally acceptable. Göncz, in contrast, wanted to discover something inherent in the music that narrowed the range of solutions. He wanted to walk an even tighter rope and to push the work of reconstruction in the ideal direction that best suited Bach's intent. Thus he made a long-term, in-depth study of Bach's counterpoint and the *The Art of Fugue* in particular. His goal was to ask questions, draw conclusions and learn as much as possible about Bach's compositional methods and way of thinking. He strove to introduce some new points of view that, although relevant to the topic, had been previously neglected. While his conclusions, like those of his predecessors, cannot always be accepted with absolute certainty, his methods are not as speculative as theirs. Göncz avoided all preconceptions, attractive as they might seem, regarding the formal symmetries in *Contrapunctus 14.* He also resisted estimating the length of the missing part by extrapolation. He was both stubborn and humble: by dint of sheer analytical observation, he, in a sense, questioned Bach about his way of thinking and his intentions until the dilemmas were solved by the Master himself.

Göncz's meticulous and labour-intensive method involved making a comprehensive survey of all possible contrapuntal combinations and then sifting these combinations from the standpoint of texture and the fluidity of voice-leading. Moreover, while assembling various fugal sections and *stretti,* Göncz devotes particular attention to the solutions employed in other fugues within the cycle. A model is also provided by noticing the way Bach changed keys in the other fugues and existing sections of *Contrapunctus 14.* Göncz explores every major possible inherent combination too, striving for the greatest possible economy to follow another Bachian requirement.

On the one hand, this method yields a stylistically correct reconstruction that satisfies all expectations; on the other, it reduces the possibilities of arbitrary decisions at almost every turn. Göncz always finds a clear reason which is textural, tonal or other to distinguish between a good solution and a less good one. In other words, the solutions are suggested by the musical material itself. This method is made possible in the first place by the specific nature of Bach's

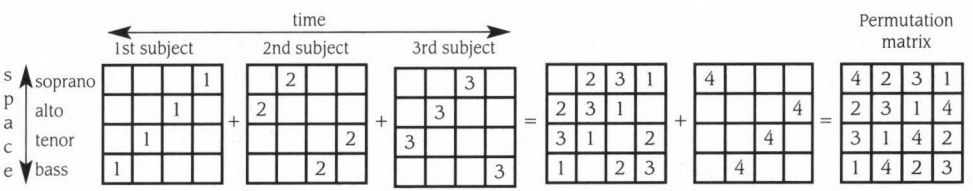
thematic material and the conceptual framework on which the quadruple fugue apparently rested.

As already noted, Bach's manuscript breaks off just after the first simultaneous presentation of the first three themes. Göncz completes the third section by artfully distributing *stretto* entries among the voices and taking into account the direction of key changes. In this way, he manages to introduce all three themes in all four voices.

It is Göncz's realisation of the fourth and last section of the four-subject fugue where his most important contribution lies. This accomplishment owes itself to a "key" he found in the course of his analysis and made possible by the interesting structural rules he had discovered in the course of analysing the expositions in the extant sections of the fugue. A simple diagram will help clarify his thought process.

He superimposed the first three matrices on top of one another. The four empty spaces outline the fourth exposition. Now Göncz projected the matrix of the fourth exposition onto the combined matrix of the first three.

Göncz noticed that this pattern belonged to a well-known type of Bach fugue, the "permutation fugue" found in several of his vocal works. This is perhaps the strictest of all fugue types, almost like a canon in its structural rigour. It has as many themes as it has voices, a different theme in each voice in any of the fugal sections; yet each theme makes the rounds and is presented in each voice as in a canon. Of course, the order of the entries may change from case to case. However, there are no a-thematic interludes between the themes; in other words, the permutation fugue is a hundred per cent thematically saturated.



In the exposition of the first fugal section, the theme appears in the bass first and moves up from there to the tenor, the alto and the soprano. By following the diagram, you can see which voice leads each subject entry. Incidentally, the empty spaces simply denote each voice's "filler" material unrelated to the themes. In the second fugal exposition, the theme is first introduced by the alto. From there it moves up to the soprano; then, since it cannot ascend any further, it goes to the bass and finally one voice up, to the tenor. The third exposition starts in the tenor and, like the first two expositions, keeps moving upward to the next higher voice.

At this point, Göncz takes a step that has far-reaching and surprising consequences.

Göncz found that this matrix, which he dubbed "permutation matrix", functioned as a concrete operative command. In other words, the thematic voices of the first three fugal expositions, if superimposed one on top of the other, produce a flawless contrapuntal texture, and the exposition of the fourth theme fits into that texture perfectly, filling in the "empty" spots in the voices. This can be no accident. It rests on the assumption that Bach planned the musical material of the permutation matrix before composing the movement and derived the first three expositions from that material. Thus the permutation section forms the essence of the entire movement and is a precondition of its very existence.

This is how Göncz achieved his objective. The exposition of the fourth theme coincides with the permutation section that brings the four themes together—perhaps because the theme and its close variants have already served as fugue themes throughout the cycle. Furthermore, musical logic demands the continuation of the "intensification" process that started towards the end of the third section; the extremely concentrated permutation fugue follows naturally from there.

This, however, does not mean that the permutation fugue, which rotates four themes in four voices in the most concise musical process imaginable, is all there is to this section. In fact, Göncz has two other surprises in store. First, he discovered that the fourth theme fits the others not only in its original form but in inversion as well. This is another possibility that Bach "preprogrammed" into the material and it therefore has to be used. So, after the permutation fugue has unfolded, Göncz immediately begins combining the first three themes with the inversion of the fourth, the latter appearing first in the bass and then in the soprano. When the remaining two voices take over the theme, it would seem that all the contrapuntal possibilities have been exploited. Yet, at this point, Göncz serves up his final surprise: simultaneously with the inversion (now in the alto and the tenor), the fourth theme appears in its original form as well, producing a five-part contrapuntal texture in the last eighteen bars of the fugue. All the themes appear together, including the Ur-theme, the seed from which the entire cycle grows, together with its own mirror image. (As a sixth voice, a pedal point on A, later D, definitively confirming the D-minor tonality, is here added to the texture.)

In the 1990s, György Ligeti called Göncz's essay, outlining the reconstruction, "excellent and convincing". To György Kurtág, reading the essay was an "overwhelming and illuminating experience". Göncz's reasoning is all the more convincing because he has probed the material with unflagging devotion and sagacity, without trying to formulate any facile personal hypotheses. He brings to the project the total freedom of an independent scholar; his approach is refreshingly un-dogmatic.

Göncz's work on *Contrapunctus 14* will surely make its mark on the musical consciousness of the world, and, before long, reference books on the subject will count it among the most seminal findings of recent times. The new Carus edition is the guarantor of Göncz's important legacy. ❧

Tamás Koltai

Comic Morals

György Spiró: *Prah* • Kornél Hamvai: *Szigliget* (Writer's Retreat)

György Spiró's *Prah* is a two-handed comedy, the characters called simply the Man and the Woman. They are stuck in an unsellable tumbledown house standing over a closed-down mine, built by the Woman's grandfather and now with a glassed-in veranda. They have a son and a daughter attending *gimnázium,* for whom they skimp and save and try hard to provide everything they can. Working class, they are uncultivated but not ignorant, simple but not uncouth.

One day they win six hundred million forints (about $3 million) on the lottery. They are well aware that this is roughly equivalent to two Nobel prizes, that the Burtons bought an Adriatic island back in Tito's time, they are aware of stocks and shares, stock markets and inflation, aware of cholesterol-free diets and policemen being able to find the heroin they've already planted in the wardrobe. In short, they know too much and too little to feel unrestrained delight at their good fortune. The first thing they do is stash the winning ticket in a cocoa tin (a Prah tin, brought back from Yugoslavia in the Seventies). The more they think about what they can do with the money, the more doubts they have—the Woman in particular. She's convinced the Man will spend it on other women and the children will probably leave off their schooling, which they aren't too keen on anyway; they will all probably have to leave the country to get away from their relatives and what's in it for them abroad... "Why the hell did you buy a ticket?" she asks. The win has become a burden they would be best advised to shed. Spiró catches the tone of this relationship perfectly and their helplessness now that fortune has smiled on them. Even so, *Prah* is no psychological study—it's more than that.

Trying his hand at anything and everything (small business deals, subcontracting this and that, you name it), the Man has always come off badly. Everyone, from the small fry to the multinationals, has taken advantage of him: he's been lied to, ripped off, driven into debt and had the heavies turned onto him. The Woman has been no more fortunate. Sixteen years previously someone forged her signature on a denunciation; proceedings were started against her, and by the time her innocence was established, she had lost her job and was unable to look local people in the face. Even when she borrowed money from relatives, the extortionate rate charged meant they had to sell their car to

Tamás Koltai

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pay the loan off. They know the world of money: thugs sitting on a kitchen stool to count out their protection money, an ear-ringed shaven-headed gorilla who tried to run the Woman down on a zebra crossing and kicked her on the shins while on-lookers just laughed. This is how we should behave when we are rich, she tells her husband, if we are to fit in, get your skull shaved and mow them down on the crossings. After all, people only like you for your money. Perhaps their own kids will hire a hit man so that they can lay their hands on all the money. Maybe the winnings won't even be paid out by the bank; they'll deny everything, take the ticket round the back and never come back. Besides, no one's going to believe them, they'll get stitched up on a charge of fraud, bank robbery even. There's nothing they can do about it. *Que sera, sera.* "Misery—we had our share of that. And there's no changing that." Spiró's description of those who lost out in Hungary's democratisation after 1989–90 is right on the mark, sharply covering the bleak social realities of the last seventeen years. Even so, Prah is no docudrama, no dramatisation of current affairs—it's more than that.

For the Man and the Woman, the 600 million-forint prize is the sort of chance they are not equipped to handle. At first, however, they reckon they are up to it. Their imaginations, fuelled by the movies, are set free, even if they don't take the ideas they come up with too seriously. They can buy an island, a villa on the sea, a mine—even a six-kilometre stretch of private motorway. But when they put their minds to it in earnest, it becomes clear that they lack a firmly grounded point of view. "They won't amount to anything anyway," says the Man, talking about their offspring. "Not even if they scrape through to college. They're dispensable, just like us—the whole country's excess to requirements..." Spiró, using his characters as mouthpieces, sketches out what it means not to see a future. There's just the postcommunist legacy, the lack of prospects that lurks under the leaking plastic sheets that cover their glassed-in kitchen, the provincialism, the loss of class roots. He brings out the responsibility borne by society's élites, without naming specific politicians or institutions (political parties are only referred to in the context of their hiring of mobsters). There is no reference to the political skirmishing or to the power games and manipulations disguised as ideas and principles that, taken together, conceal the real problems. The only thing on display is everyday people. Those who have "won" on the lottery of Hungary's change of regime and are alarmed by their prospects are, of course, the audience. We laugh at ourselves, just as we do in Gogol's *The Government Inspector.* A tragicomic metaphor of a play, *Prah* is truly an allegory for our times.

Péter Valló chose simple, clear and naturalistic devices in directing the piece at Budapest's Radnóti Theatre. The glassed-in veranda that houses the kitchen is represented by stacked-up rows of empty fruit jars, making the stage even smaller than usual in this small theatre. It provides limited space for the actors to move in. The only sign of life from outside the room is the flicker of a TV set and, from time to time, they stiffen into immobility as they gawp at the golden light streaming from where the Prah tin is currently placed. The weightier moments of life—worries, fear, embarrassment, resignation—are distilled into an inflection of the voice or a wordless glance. In the end, the couple burns the 600 million-forint ticket. The Man tremulously, with tears in his eyes, pronounces a "great curse": an amalgam of modern-day malice and the horrific tones of the prophet Isaiah.

Kornél Hamvai likewise chooses comedy, or rather farce, as his way of smothering venomous views about the state of society,

though for him Communism is not of the "post" variety but the original article. He goes over half a century back in time, to the early Fifties in Hungary. One of *Szigliget*'s interesting aspects is that it takes Michael Frayn's *Balmoral* as its model, rewriting it with the author's permission and subsequent approval. Most Hungarians are likely, at best, to dimly recall Balmoral as the royal residence that features in *The Queen,* where the British royal family traditionally spend their summers. In Frayn's play, writers take over the castle as a kind of retreat where they endeavour to produce creative work. In Hungary, that function has long been fulfilled by an old country manor at Szigliget, at the western end of Lake Balaton, and this is where Hamvai locates his own piece. Another aspect of Frayn's farce also attracted Hamvai's attention: the word "Balmoral" itself, which lacks only an acute accent for Hungarians to read it as a somewhat sardonic way of saying "low morale". Hence the word *"balmorál"* is appended to the Hungarian title as if it were indicating the piece's genre.

Frayn's conceit is that communism has taken over in Great Britain, and a journalist, a Communist from czarist Russia, arrives at the retreat in order to conduct an interview with one of the writers. Hamvai, of course, has no need to invent the idea that communism rules (or rather ruled) in Hungary: he simply sets the action in the year 1953 and makes the journalist an Italian sent to Szigliget as the personal envoy of Palmiro Togliatti, the Italian Communist Party boss of blessed memory, in order to interview Tibor Sass, a Stalin Prize-winning Hungarian writer of the day. As in Frayn's work, or in Georges Feydeau's French farces, there is matrimonial infidelity—the author in question beds a woman writer—and a love triangle, with the jealous husband making an unexpected appearance. There is also a corpse, with the Stalin Prize-winning author pegging out, which means that someone has to be found in a hurry to take his place and keep the lid on any scandal. And who could be more suitable for this cover-up than the ingenuous caretaker who bears an uncanny resemblance to the writer? (As in Feydeau's pieces, this is a matter of double-casting, with the same actor playing both roles.) Hiding the dead writer in a trunk affords the obligatory comic situation, the verbal banter affords wry witticisms, and behind it all is the rigid political climate of Fifties Hungary, with its stool pigeon, the Party's trusty caretaker, and the Interior Ministry's minder for foreign visitors (who is almost blind and falls in love with the Italian journalist). That background need not be taken too seriously; there is no longer anything new to reveal about that era. Hamvai aims to entertain rather than scandalize—unlike, say, Joe Orton did, forty-odd years ago, with the same sort of plot elements in his *Loot.* Hamvai insouciantly skips over the inconsistencies of the plot, trusting that the audience will be more interested in the situations than their logic.

The National Theatre's production, under the direction of László Babarczy, meets its primary goal: tempo and rhythm are fine after the first half hour, and the period trappings are genuine enough. However, the style is more fitful than it needs to be, with more than one passage lacking the essential lightheartedness. There are plenty of laughs to be had (even if Fifties Hungary was rather short on them). After all, it was one of the classics of Marxism who quipped that mankind takes leave of the past with a laugh. If one happens to see Spiró's play after Hamvai's, the laugh is likely to freeze on one's lips. ❧

Klára Muhi

Suspended Animation

Two years ago a brash, witty, low-budget animated feature, replete with rap speech patterns, attained almost instant cult status after its release, selling something over 100,000 tickets at the Hungarian box-office. *The District* was a debut film for both its co-directors, Áron Gauder and Emil Novák. The whores, cops, petty criminals and Roma who feature in the film are all drawn in two-dimensional photorealist-style animation. The leading figures are a group of teenagers (accurately reflecting Budapest's Eighth District's ethnic mix) who use a time machine to travel back into prehistory and gun down whole herds of mammoths, because their giant corpses, in the distant future, will turn into oil, and the oil into lots of money, which, with Osama bin Laden himself being holed up in the district, will give the "Eightfers" some say in how the world goes on. The main character, a Roma Romeo by the name of Ritchie Lakatos, his pockets lined with dosh, is now at last in a position—against his father's total opposition—to pursue his Julia, who comes from a family who are their deadly rivals. Needless to say, the gushing new oil wells in the Eighth District set off a string of international repercussions. The film was successful not just at the box office but on the festival circuit as well, carrying off the top award for the best feature film at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival, which is the Cannes of animation.

The District made quite a splash in the animation world at home, with its subject matter, technical tricks and ambition all breaking new ground. Gauder and Novák's film simply tore up the rulebook: fizzing with humour, it touches on red-hot issues such as terrorism, Roma affairs, all sorts of aspects of minority rights and inferiority complexes—topics that are normally only encountered in Hungarian animation, when at all, coded within a fairy tale or in a sophisticated context. It is also of note that the two young directors sought their audiences in mainstream cinemas rather than allowing the film to be treated as a product of a second-rate genre. That may well have been the most surprising aspect of all for the Hungarian film industry, given the rather patronising way it has looked on its animators, even the most successful, as engaging in "kid's stuff".

Klára Muhi

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That status was frankly acknowledged in a short, *Cartoon* (2005), released the same year as *The District.* It has a commissionless animator doodling on his drawing board, purely for his own amusement. Some of the images show flickers of life, with a bird or two taking wing and a few interesting figures breaking into a run, but there is no development, no climax—nothing emerges in the end. Although Pál Tóth, a lone pioneer of computer animation in Hungary, probably intended this elegiac piece as a portrait of his own predicament, I would not be at all surprised if it struck a familiar chord with many of his colleagues, given the current dearth of financial backing for animation projects that they all have to contend with.

For the bald fact is that animation has been in a parlous state for the last fifteen years or more. True, there has been no lack of accomplishments or prizes. Only five short years ago, Zsófi Péterffy took a Silver Lion for the Best European Short at the Venice Film Festival for her expressive *Lover of Pirates,* while Géza M. Tóth's *Maestro,* a virtuoso comic tale about the mysteries of a cuckoo clock, received an Oscar nomination. This year, Tibor Bánóczky, still a student, received a special mention at Annecy for his short *In the Dead Channel,* which has an exceptionally strong script. A round of the festival circuit is also expected for what was possibly the most articulate and elegant of this year's crop of animated shorts, *Life Line,* from the newly graduated Tomek Ducki—and this is before saying anything about the middle generation, among whom the likes of Zoltán Szilágyi Varga and Ferenc Cakó have gained considerable recognition abroad. Unfortunately, however, these successes are not testimony to an industry in rude good health, artistically speaking—quite the reverse. Most animation directors, including those who have seen much better days, are now having to make do with occasional one-off shorts.

To understand why, it is necessary to go back to that year of change, 1989. The transition from a socialist to a free-market economy brought a drastic reduction in state support and cinema, like the arts in general, was badly affected. The state-owned studios went to the wall; audiences were drawn away by a seemingly endless stream of foreign (mainly American) films that now had unfettered access to the country; consequently, a new domestic production set-up has been able to emerge only very slowly. The public service broadcaster, Magyar Televízió, is chronically on the verge of bankruptcy and has been subject to an ever-changing management who seem to have no clear idea about what a public broadcasting service's role could be in a commodified cultural market where the commercial channels are cheap to run—since they are able to fill their schedules cheaply with imported packages of films and soaps. The seven lean years, which in practice have lasted for seventeen, were somewhat mitigated by the Film Act of 2004, but it is the animation sector which has been hit most heavily of all, with an allocation of a bare €1.0–1.2 million out of the Ministry of Culture's annual budget. And that amount has, in fact, been further reduced in the current year, so that it is now at best one fifth of the support that was set aside before 1989 (as a rough guide, one minute of animation costs approximately €4,000). Adding to the problems is the fact that the few grants available are not co-ordinated. At a recent conference, Marcell Jankovics, the doyen of Hungarian animators, commented that Hungarian animation these days did not compete on equal terms with its foreign counterparts in either the advertising market or on piecework rates. (Due to the desperately slow

trickle of financing, Jankovics has as yet been unable to complete his major project: a feature-length adaptation of Imre Madách's classic verse play, *The Tragedy of Man*.)

Animation is being kept alive largely by the television companies, but whereas in most of Europe the television companies are long-standing customers for computer animation, Hungary's public service channel shows no interest at all in this branch. From the Sixties to the Eighties something like four dozen animated series, several hundred episodes altogether, were produced for MTV; since 1989 not a single series has been commissioned for television. Not long ago, Duna Televízió cancelled an amusing and charming series by Kati Macskássy called *Peasant Decameron* after only the third episode. By comparison, the now classic series of shorts that Marcell Jankovics directed under the umbrella title of *Hungarian Folk Tales,* which several generations of Hungarian children grew up on and which ran to nearly 100 episodes, has now long lost any trace of a TV company logo. Admittedly, József Nepp, who created *The Mézga Family* (1968) and Béla Ternovszky, who created *Cat City* (1986), have recently managed to obtain contracts for follow-ups. One is all too well aware, however, that not all soups taste as good when reheated, and the most recently completed episodes are indeed far from convincing.

It is also symptomatic that the Pannónia Film Studio, the distinguished linchpin of Hungarian animation over the forty years of socialism, has finally given up the ghost after a drawn-out death agony. For the time being there is no knowing what will happen to its archives, its materials and films. Many animation directors, including Kati Macskássy, the daughter of Gyula Macskássy, a founding father of the genre, are seriously worried about what is going to happen to this incomparable legacy. In its prime, around the late Fifties, Pannónia was one of the best-known animation production companies in the world, ranking alongside the likes of Hanna-Barbera, Disney, Soyuzmultfilm in the Soviet Union or Toei Animation of Japan. During those postwar decades "Hungarian animation was one of the ambassadors for Hungarian culture in the wider world," as the recently deceased Sándor Reisenbüchler, one of the studio's leading lights, put it. What is now clear is that there were just too many fortunate factors which coincided to make that a golden age for animation in Hungary. Among these factors were the advent of television, the primacy the public broadcasting service principle had in the dictatorships of the Soviet bloc, the lavishness of state patronage (all the more generous because animation was not regarded as a political threat) and even the non-market-driven and more entertainment-centred culture of advertising.

The opportunities inherent in what was a fortunate conjunction of circumstances, were exploited to the utmost by a singularly gifted generation of artists. Gyula Macskássy and fellow directors or their pupils kept Hungary at the forefront of animation internationally decade after decade. Among them were Jankovics with his adaptation of Sándor Petőfi's classic folk epic *John the Valiant* (1973), which was the first feature-length Hungarian animation film; Reisenbüchler with his extraordinary collage technique; József Nepp who created *Gustavus,* the socialist little man, with the series subsequently extended by Attila Dargay and Jankovics to a further 68 episodes in 1964, then by another 52 episodes in the 1970s; Dargay himself, who pioneered the Disney approach in Hungary; Ferenc Cakó, the master of sand animation; and Líviusz Gyulai, a virtuoso of line. It was, after all, an animated film, Ferenc Rofusz's 1981 short, *The Fly,* that was the first Hungarian film of any type to win an Oscar.

A string of feature-length animated films racked up box office sales of over one million each, eloquent testimony to the skill of their creators in finding an idiom that spoke to their audiences. Among these were *Vuk* by Dargay (1981); *Water Spider—Wonder Spider* by József Haui, Szabolcs Szabó & Csaba Szombati Szabó (1982); and *Saffi* by Dargay (1984).

What kinds of opportunities and configurations have arisen during the years since 1989? The general audience for public broadcasting service TV is now giving way to the more specialised consumers of YouTube-style offerings. (Viktor Németh, a young animator, noted in a recent talk shop that a film of his had been downloaded by over 7,000 people within a few days of its being made available on the Internet, which is not much less than the audience a mainstream Hungarian feature film might bring into cinemas nowadays.) Unrestricted do-it-yourself entertainment is thereby starting to take the place of state-supervised commissioning; a single monolithic production facility has given way to a multitude of intriguing little workshops and private universes. Among these are the Grazia Creative Workshop, which is hoping to emulate the Pannónia Studio traditions; or Pál Tóth's Paja Film, where the first Hungarian computer animations have been made; or the avant-garde spirit of Igor Lazin's MyFilm; not to forget the Kecskemét Film Studio under director Ferenc Mikulás, which is now just about the only place left in Hungary where regular creative work is still going on. This started life in the Eighties, incidentally, as a provincial offshoot of Pannónia, while the Kecskemét Animation Film Festival (KAFF) that Mikulás has been running for more than twenty years is now the sole regular showcase available to Hungarian animators.

Hungarian animation has thus been reduced in effect—to the extent that it is still limping along, that is—to the financing of shorts. Feature-length animations are limited to simple, light-hearted and amusing anthropomorphic animal tales or fairy tales of a rather more sophisticated kind. Hungarian animation shorts, by contrast—from *Sisyphus* (Jankovics, 1975) or *New Tenants* (Gyulai, 1978) to *Farewell Little Island* (Reisenbüchler, 1989)—are now considered classics. They are technically advanced graphic philosophies, with every frame of them offering an artistic concentrate. *Time-sights* (2004), one of István Orosz's more recent works, has the delicacy of lace in its use of M.C. Escher's *trompe l'oeil* and of the deceptive time shifts that Alain Resnais plays with in his films. Just as enchantingly drawn are the graphic artist Líviusz Gyulai's last two films: the risqué *The Diary of Captain De Ronch* (1998) with its silent movie ethos and Art Nouveau stylisation and his nostalgic *The Small Town of Mine* (2002). In *Psycho-Parade,* Ferenc Cakó, best known for his sand animation, but currently working with clay, has returned to wrestling with sombre topics. His figures are trapped behind bars and fret over, or maybe root for, a throng of people who are struggling to save themselves from drowning. A panicking clay figure who has fallen into the sea calls out from start to finish in *Help! SOS!,* and in the end manages to shout the whole world into a big desert.

Indeed, the range of topics addressed by animation has, if anything, become broader in recent years. We had long got out of the habit of expecting a film to comment on our everyday lives. *The District,* in its own way, has offered a recent refreshing exception to that rule, while one might well conclude that the child characters who feature in Kati Macskássy's earlier *There Are Good Things and Bad Things* (1997) offer a rather damning testimony, both verbally and visually, of Hungary in the Nineties.

Oscar winner Ferenc Rofusz this year came out with a film on the unpleasant

sides of Hungary's *nouveaux riches.* His re-emergence itself is a surprise: twenty years ago, following the massive success of *The Fly* and during the heyday of Pannónia Film Studio, he left for Canada because he found that Hungary placed too many restrictions on his work. *Dog's Life* (2005) is a modern-day La Fontaine fable in which an executive, reversing the logic of tales, swaps

Áron Gauder: The District

places with his own dog in order to experience first hand what the less fortunate have to face.

Many younger animators are also seeking to carry on the Pannónia Studio's more serious traditions. In *Arlequin* (2003), Kinga Rofusz created an elegant and strangely beautiful world; every one of the works produced by Zsófi Péterffy, like the Silver Lion winner *Lover of Pirates*, or *The Charioteer* (2005) testifies to the cogency and virtuoso technical skill of her flair. Indeed, a growing number of the younger generation are experimenting with techniques and searching for new paths, trying to combine feature film, literature, painting and animation.

In Szabolcs Pálfi's short *The Bus,* the voices of real people waiting at a village bus stop, tape-recorded with documentary fidelity, stand in oddly bizarre contrast to the visual setting of an idyllic, sun-kissed countryside. In *Littleannie* (2004), the story of a little girl's disappearance, Zsolt Pálfi achieves a striking blend of naturalistic documentation of the monsters-like heavies on the prowl on Budapest streets with the shock techniques of Japanese *anime.* László Csáki makes superb chalk drawings in which there is no poetry or high art or a conventional story building to a pay-off. *Days That Were Filled With Sense By Fear* (2003) is a gory *Kill Bill*-style melodrama that is swiftly sketched out on a blackboard. *Wasps, Geese, Pear-Tree* (2004) is an expansive Prohibition-era novella on chalk about a grandmother and her tippling husband. Igor Lazin's latest film, a clay animation entitled *Morb,* is a kind of anti-*Tragedy of Man,* in which a robust-bodied but pin-headed and solitary Adam keeps coming to grief in an out-of-the-way corner of the universe and for some reason remains untouched by the hand of God, who is therefore unable to set the history of man in motion.

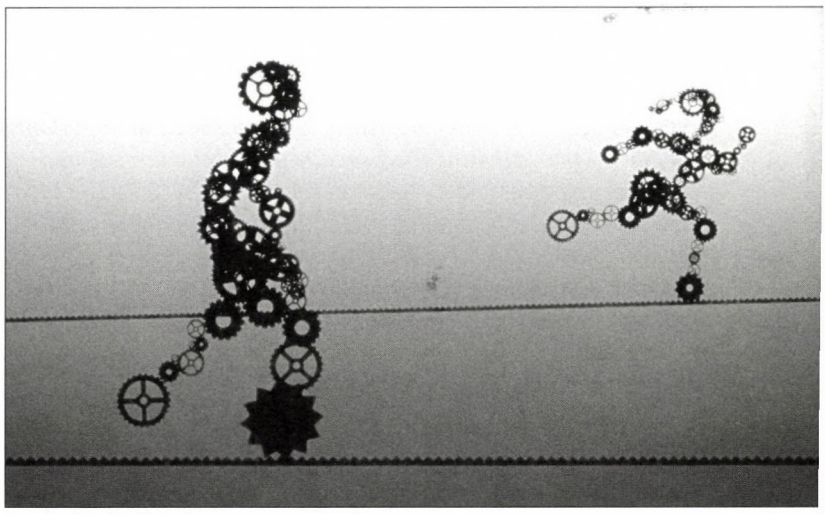
These creative spirits see their medium in the technically fastidious, philosophical, painterly and abstract traditions of Hungarian animated shorts; their low-cost, more extempore approaches convey a sense of the drastically altered place that animation now seems to occupy in the film.

Sadly, only those who regularly attend KAFF, the Kecskemét Animation Film Festival, organised by Ferenc Mikulás and his team, will be able to form an idea about

what is going on. For reasons that are utterly incomprehensible, animation films made in Hungary are not invited to the country's big annual review of films, and they are scheduled only sporadically by television companies. In other words, if there were no KAFF, there would be no animation film-making left at all in Hungary. It is now as simple as that.

In that context the KAFF biennale is virtually a Noah's ark—a vessel for old Pannónia Studio films, spanking-new student work or the latest offerings from fully-fledged animators ploughing their lonely furrows. Those who attend are given an opportunity to see the latest international trends, form impressions of the young at the start of their careers and revisit the glory days of Hungarian animation. (This year, for instance, a retrospective of the work of the recently deceased Sándor Reisenbüchler had a truly revelatory impact.) The only people conspicuous for their absence are potential sponsors, commissioners or curators with bankrolls. The programme of short films entered into competition is always a particular delight. As there are no commissioning agents, producer's expectations or even a paying audience to speak of, there are no diktats on taste either: Hungarian animators may have to manage on very modest budgets, but at least they enjoy complete artistic freedom. At KAFF there is the opportunity to sample that curious flavour of wealth in poverty.

It is hard to come up with predictions as to what is likely to happen in the immediate future. In the absence of any substantial commissions from TV channels or advertising agencies, those creative artists who are eking out an existence on the limited funding available through the Motion Picture Public Foundation of Hungary (MMK) are something like the figures in *Life Line:* the delicately engineered cog-wheel people in Tomek Ducki's film



Tomek Ducki: Life Line

move in the void along a track just the thickness of a line. Gracefully, precariously, each on their own tightrope... Maybe it would be better to take a closer look again at what Gauder and Novák are doing. In *Egill* they have made the hero of an Icelandic saga the subject of their latest feature-length project in a big-budget international co-production. Thus, they are seeking to convert the creative credibility that they amassed from the festival successes of *The District* into a European-scale project.

The digital revolution has whetted appetites for animated worlds. Given their demonstrated talents, Hungary's young animators have every right to hope they will take their place at the cutting edge of this development. ❧

Absolutely Animated

Áron Gauder, Géza M. Tóth and György Szemadám in Conversation with László Kolozsi

The Annecy International Festival is the single most important shop window for animated films. A good showing there greatly improves a film's chance of global distribution, award winners gain peer and industry respect. Áron Gauder's The District (see HQ *180) carried off the prize for the best feature-length European animation in 2005. Now Géza M. Tóth's Maestro has arguably gone one better by being Oscar nominated for the best animated film of 2006. Its single long take features a cuckoo looking at itself in a dressing-room mirror while waiting to get a drink and a brush-down from its dresser before going on stage.*

Not too long ago, Hungarian animation went through a bad patch, when money was hard to find for production or distribution. Has it pulled through? That was one of the questions put to Áron Gauder and Géza M. Tóth, the directors, and to György Szemadám, a key figure on the distribution side. Once a lion tamer, György Szemadám has made a name for himself as a graphic artist and author. He is on the advisory board of the Hungarian Motion Picture Public Foundation, a crucial source of financing in Hungary. Although the 2004 Motion Picture Act offers attractive tax breaks, private finance is simply not available for animated films, with state subsidy being the main source.

*

At Annecy in 2007 there were five Hungarian animated films on show, with Tibor Bánóczky's Milk Teeth *(which was treated as a UK entrant) receiving the Jury's special award in the Graduation Film category. Is this a prize for Hungarian Animation?*

Géza M. Tóth: Tibor finished at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art in Budapest three years ago, and his very first effort, *In the Dead Channel,* already got him noticed. He went on to complete the National Film and Television School in London, one of the best training grounds for animators anywhere, and *Milk Teeth* was his graduation piece there. It's a "three-hander" about a night passed by a brother and sister. She sneaks off to a cornfield to meet her boyfriend; her younger brother goes after her, and that leads to all manner of complications.

György Szemadám: The film has an uncommonly strong screenplay. Bánóczky himself wrote it, very finely gauged to the visuals, and the cutting underlines what the script is saying.

László Kolozsi
is a writer of short stories and a film critic, who has also published on music and new fiction.

What are you three working on at the moment?

Áron Gauder: I'm working on a Viking story. I've been interested in the Viking world since I was a boy—it may have started when my grandmother read to me from *The Song of the Nibelungs.* Old Norse sagas fascinated me, just the very idea of those people, the ancestors of the Vikings, fleeing from the kings and taking over Iceland. A new translation of some of the sagas appeared a few years ago and that prompted me to trek all over Iceland. At that time I was churning out a huge amount of advertising stuff, working round the clock. On top of a glacier it came to me I had to change my life. So the trip was a lucky turning point for me. It finally pushed me into getting out of advertising. Since then, a screenplay has been written for a film that will be called *Egill,* and the storyboard is ready. It is going to be about a man who grows up in a society of free peasants and can't fit into the feudal world, because he can't accept the thought that any person should be placed under or over another. What I want to show is what the Vikings did when they weren't raping and looting.

Géza M. Tóth: At the end of July we finished work on a short which will be just over eight minutes long. It's been done with 3-D animation and it's muted, visually and in its sound. We're trying to say something about why we feel a need to leave our mark on the world, and how we manage to leave that mark. The storyline isn't important, it will be a mosaic built up of tiny details, which will knit together into a coherent whole. The aim will be for the air to stand still as it is being projected.

Your Maestro *won awards and was nominated for an Oscar, the most successful Hungarian animated film since Ferenc Rófusz won an Oscar for* The Fly *back in 1981. That film shows the last minutes in the life of a fly that has strayed into a room and seems to know exactly how to keep the viewer in suspense.*

Géza M. Tóth: I studied psychology, really getting immersed in cognitive psychology. But I don't start from what I know, I start from what people who see the film are likely to know. When I present an image and place it alongside certain sounds, am I sure what impact that image and sound will have on an individual or a mass public? Animation offers the opportunity to wink at audiences who are interested in animation, who are familiar with its idiom and logic, and who can make links with films they have seen previously.

György Szemadám: In point of fact, it was Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse who won the Second World War. Cartoons had a huge impact not just on the Allied soldiers but on the public, who saw a reflection of themselves in Mickey. Mickey always picked himself up and dusted himself down. He was the embodiment of the resourceful, indomitable little man. More and more feature-length animated films are being made now, and it's getting hard to tell where the acting stops and the animation starts in something like *Lord of the Rings.*

Géza M. Tóth: They're not two different genres; putting them in separate boxes is oversimplification. Some people would argue that feature films are one large category in which animated films are just one subcategory, but that's not right either. It is owing to an illusion of movement, after all, that we can speak of motion pictures anyway. Films with actors, as a rule, present the everyday world more faithfully that animations do, but the approach of the director is essentially the same. The makers of the great slapstick films in the silent years were keenly aware of how cartoons and feature films with live actors could live side by side; Chaplin, for instance, was

quite ready to use stop-action when appropriate. How much animation is there in *Lord of the Rings* or the Harry Potter films is a meaningless question for me.

Since the days of Georges Méliès, the storyline has shaped films.

Géza M. Tóth: For Béla Balázs cartoons were "absolute" film. In the Felix the Cat shorts, every time Felix hits a problem, his tail curls into a question mark, which he uses as a hook. Now, that's something that no other art or any device used by another art could have done. Animated pictures still preserve a bit of the magic that film had back at the very beginning.

Áron Gauder: György Pálfi's *Taxidermia* has a bizarre visual world and a stream of ideas to show the workaday lives of three generations of Hungarians, and I was involved in that. Although it has not been nominated for an Oscar yet, it stands a decent chance. It offers the viewer 69 varieties of tricks—all with the aim of lulling viewers into not noticing that any tricks at all are being played.

Géza M. Tóth: When it came to shadowing, the German expressionists worked with an even greater degree of freedom. They went ahead and boldly used the opportunities opened up by the then new techniques. There's surrealism and exaggerated reality side by side with naturalism. Terry Gilliam is a sharp-minded director, a man who also comes close to absolute film. He doesn't separate animation and acting. Pálfi thinks in much the same way as Terry Gilliam. He does not put fetters on the imagination: if need be, he'll have a fighter-bomber pass under a bridge. As far as he's concerned, that is just a technical problem for the pros.

György Szemadám: Pasolini once said that film is excessively naturalistic because it can't just show the dog or the table, it is always a given dog and a given table. It can't shuck off the handicap of the natural world.

Áron Gauder: I can do a sketch of a policeman, and you will say that's a policeman, but if I were to show you a photograph, then you would say that you're looking at Sergeant John Smith.

Géza M. Tóth: Feature films are well aware of the power they wield when they hit home. Eisenstein did not show just any old pram bumping down the Odessa steps in *The Battleship Potemkin,* but *the* pram. In this respect Fellini was another outstanding director. One of my favourites is the papal fashion show in *Roma*—a scene that verges close on animation.

There is a lot of talk about Hungarian animated films these days, in part due to your efforts at the Motion Picture Foundation, but there is still no separate category for animated films in the Hungarian Film Week.

György Szemadám: Even though these films are always shown to full houses and win awards at the yearly Film Week event. The snag may be that animated films are much less dominated by trends, fashion or politics than feature films. Topicality is alien to them. So it's no wonder that politicians pay no attention to them: they get about the same state support as is spent on the fireworks displays on a national holiday, and that situation is not helped by differences of opinion and antagonisms within the industry.

Géza M. Tóth: There's a different set-up in higher education as well. The University of Dramatic and Film Arts carries more prestige than the Film School of the Moholy-Nagy University of Art, where I myself teach. Up till now, at any rate.

György Szemadám: It's often the case that directors just don't meet the right sort of

producer for a project. Líviusz Gyulai is always able, from the start, to provide a hand-drawn storyboard that's an absolute joy to flick through and read. If he were backed by a skilful producer, he'd be able to work miracles. Even though old stagers, let me put it that way, the great veterans, are not going to change very much, or even be capable of changing. Marcell Jankovics, for instance, is currently making a feature-length animated film of *The Tragedy of Man,* Imre Madách's classic play. Thus the phalanstery set is in comic-book style, each scene in turn changing to whatever style is typical. The scene in Egypt, for example, has a set based on Egyptian drawings and hieroglyphs. So, a series of stylistic tours de force and parodies. In the scene in Rome, a mosaic starts moving so the gladiators start tussling. The amount of state subsidy that has been put into this is just a small fraction of what a feature film would get. And yet there was a time when Hungarian Television commissioned and financed Jankovich to create the *Hungarian Folk Tales* series, a classic and always being repeated. Alas, no television channel would spend money on that sort of thing nowadays.

Géza M. Tóth: I've been to Estonia a lot. The only reason I mention it is to avoid referring to countries that are well known for their subsidization of animated film. The main commissioning body there—and this is set down in law—is the public service television channel. That is the body that sustains artists; television jobs offer a steady means of livelihood. Here in this country, even a string of awards from one festival or another is no guarantee of anything: you may still be working on a Wednesday, but on Thursday you might have to deliver newspapers to make some money.

György Szemadám: In one radio talk I did, the interviewer was a young woman who maintained that cartoons were harmful to children. Indeed, it's not healthy if the Cartoon Network is used as a babysitter. There are plenty of people who think that animated films are that channel. Fortunately, you can't equate Hungarian animated film with moronic trash.

Géza M. Tóth: I agree, but let me add: animation has a readily definable craft core, a certain know-how that can be picked up from instruction. I belong to the school which considers intuition and inspiration to be less important than that kind of learning. My students make Cartoon Network type films in order to get a grounding in the routine tricks of the trade—they have to acquire a basic knowledge. As to which of them will make it professionally as film-makers after they have left school— that will be decided by will and talent, and those will come to light after their training.

Áron Gauder: Not everyone has the ambition to make an animated film; some will content themselves with designing a TV channel's look, or producing advertisements, or the graphics for game shows.

Are YouTube and other websites that offer on-line video content having any influence?

Géza M. Tóth: If you watch an animated film on YouTube, it's rather like purchasing a coffee-table book of reproductions of pictures by a favourite artist. You can say you know about Van Gogh, for instance, but you can't say that you have seen his paintings. Incidentally, though, there have been more than 100,000 downloads of *Maestro* to date from YouTube.

Áron Gauder: Those sites are not taking viewers away from us. In fact, we ourselves are deliberately uploading low-grade versions of our films, so that anyone who looks at them will be keen to see the real

thing. A bigger problem is that a movie like *The District* wasn't in the cinemas for even a month before bootleg DVDs of it were on sale from market stalls and car-boots. That's very disconcerting, we lose a lot of the potential audience that way. We tried to track down the people behind it, and how they managed to acquire a copy, but we never got anywhere.

Are styles or the technology of animated films changing as software gets more sophisticated?

Áron Gauder: We were accused of making *The District* on a shoestring. It was completed in under a year, and computers made that possible. I etched my graduation film directly onto film stock, because I had decided never to use computers for filmmaking, but I have warmed to them since then.

Géza M. Tóth: Fashions in graphics have been with us from the start. The Zagreb school of the Sixties and Seventies was quite different from what is trendy today. Animation is at bottom the creation of an illusion of movement. I have shown my students the best films from the Zagreb school, and they pointed out that, despite the graphics and musical styles striking them as old-fashioned, the timing was precise, the plotting of the story taut, the harmonisation of sound and movement perfect. They found the films fascinating; *The Fly,* Ferenc Rofusz's short, would still be a hit if it were made today. The significance of the computer is that user-friendly software has democratised the medium.

Áron Gauder: The cost of making a professional film hasn't changed; a Disney or Pixar production hasn't got cheaper. What has changed radically is the technology, which allows a finished production to reach the market much more quickly. Ever since Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was released in 1937, animated feature films have been family viewing, but animated films really came of age with SGI, starting with 3-D animation, in films like *Finding Nemo* or *Shrek.* Many films are being made in which all you can see is that its maker has learned how to use the software, is really pleased with himself on that score, but there is little more on show.

György Szemadám: It's difficult to nail the perfect rhythm. Animated films work with simple, stripped-down sentences, and they must not get carried away with spectacle; there is no leeway to hide anything with flashy images. I'm a visual artist and have a bias towards the visual arts. The Hungarian school of animated films in Hungary was created by visual artists, and to the present day they are still among the very best practitioners. István Orosz's *Garden* is incredibly elaborate, but it's a marvellous piece of animation; flashy, video-clip computer films are on another plane altogether. A way needs to be found to balance the two approaches.

Géza M. Tóth: I have a different take on things. In the training we provide, we emphasise that the technology should always be the servant of the storyline. Animated film as a genre has looser ties to the visual arts than to a film's storyboard and movement. Áron Gauder portrayed a multitude of initiation ceremonies in his Budapest graduation film, which is why he chose to etch his raw materials straight onto film: the technique matched his subject, and that made the film even more elemental. At the same time, there were others in his year who were working with 3-D animation. If Hungarians have any common characteristic, it's their ability to find a match between subject matter and technique.❧

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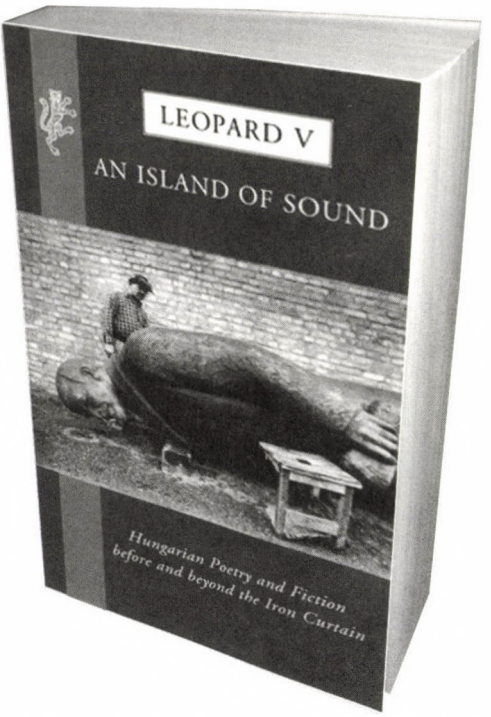

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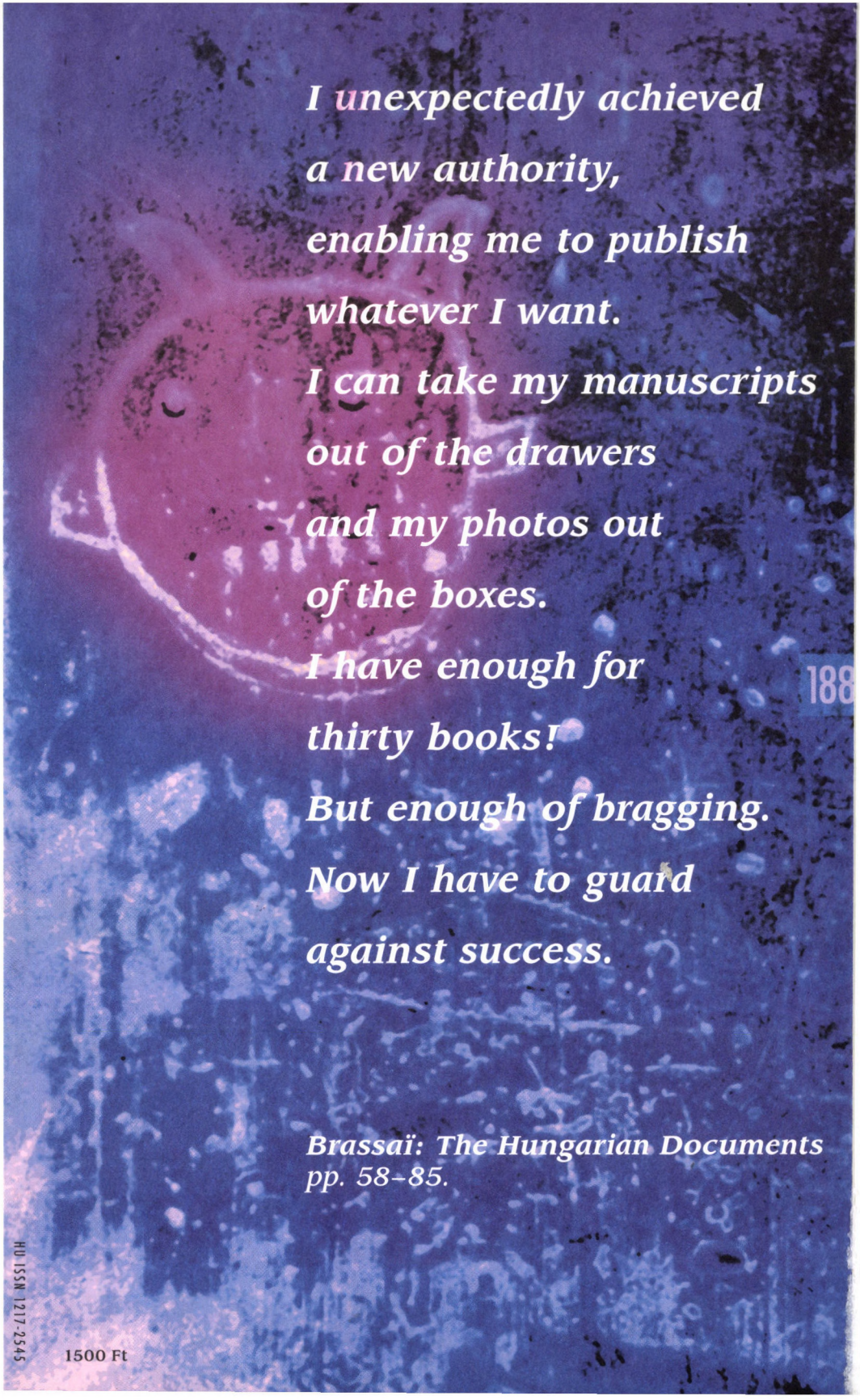

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