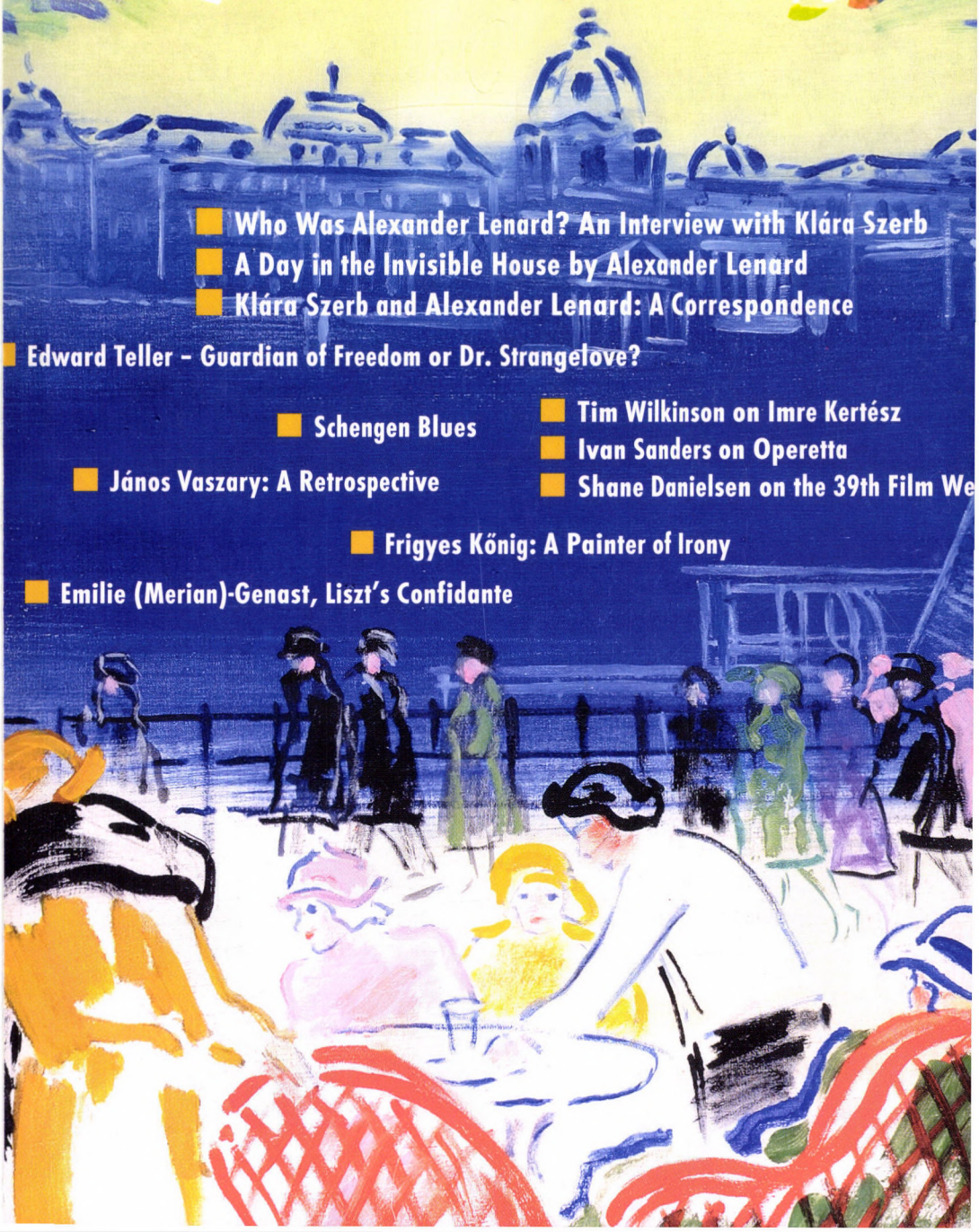
The Hungarian Quarterly

Volume 49 • Spring 2008 • €14.00 / $16.00



- Who Was Alexander Lenard? An Interview with Klára Szerb
- A Day in the Invisible House by Alexander Lenard
- Klára Szerb and Alexander Lenard: A Correspondence
- Edward Teller – Guardian of Freedom or Dr. Strangelove?
- Schengen Blues
- Tim Wilkinson on Imre Kertész
- Ivan Sanders on Operetta
- János Vaszary: A Retrospective
- Shane Danielsen on the 39th Film We
- Frigyes Kőnig: A Painter of Irony
- Emilie (Merian)-Genast, Liszt's Confidante

The Hungarian Quarterly

First published 1936

The Hungarian Quarterly
formerly *The New Hungarian Quarterly*
8 Naphegy tér, Budapest H-1016, Hungary
Telephone: (361) 488-0024 Fax: (361) 488-0023, (361) 318-8297
e-mail: quarterly@mail.datanet.hu
homepage: http://www.hungarianquarterly.com
Published by The Society of the Hungarian Quarterly
Printed in Hungary by AduPRINT, Budapest,
on recycled paper

HU ISSN 1217-2545 Index: 2684

Cover & Design: Péter Nagy

Annual subscriptions:
$60/€50 ($90/€75 for institutions).
Add €15 postage per year for Europe,
$21 for USA and Canada,
$24 to other destinations and $42 by air
to anywhere in the world.
Sample copies or individual copies of back numbers $24/€20,
postage included.
Payment in $ or €.
Annual subscriptions in Hungary Ft 5,500
Single copy Ft 1500
Send orders to The Hungarian Quarterly
P.O. Box 3, Budapest H-1426, Hungary

All export orders should be addressed to
The Hungarian Quarterly

The full text of *The Hungarian Quarterly* is available
twelve months after print publication on EBSCO Publishing's
database, Humanities International Complete
and on the
Central and Eastern European Online Library

Articles appearing in this journal are indexed in
HISTORICAL ABSTRACTS ■ INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL SCIENCE ABSTRACTS ■ AMERICA, HISTORY & LIFE ■ THE MUSIC INDEX ■ ARTS & HUMANITIES CITATIONS INDEX ■ IBZ (INTERNATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PERIODICAL LITERATURE) ■ IBR (INTERNATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BOOK REVIEWS)

The Hungarian Quarterly
is a member of the Eurozine network
www.eurozine.com

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OKTATÁSI ÉS KULTURÁLIS MINISZTÉRIUM

The Hungarian Quarterly
is published with the support of the
Hungarian Ministry of Education
and Culture

INDEX

The Hungarian Quarterly • Vol. XLIX • Nos. 189–192 • 2008

ARTICLES AND ESSAYS

POEMS

MATTHIAS & HIS LEGACY

FICTION & MEMOIR

INTERVIEW

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY

BOOKS & AUTHORS

BOOKS REVIEWED

MUSIC

THEATRE & FILM

PLAYS REVIEWED by Tamás Koltai

FILMS REVIEWED by Erzsébet Bori

The Hungarian Quarterly • Vol. XLIX • No. 189 • Spring 2008

Cover illustration: The Pest Bank Danube Promenade *by János Vaszary, c. 1934, oil on canvas, 61 x 72 cm. Courtesy of Móra Ferenc Museum, Szeged.*

László Végel

Introduction to the Bastard Novel

Extract

> I can say something about my own language only if I step somewhere into the no-man's-land between two languages. If I have left my own language and look back. Weighty concepts like country and homeland cannot be defined by happiness or joy, by national anthems or adoration, by a mined borderline or even by one's own language—more by intimidation, sorrow, unhappiness, departure, doubt, separation and silence.
>
> *Péter Nádas*

> I don't know who was first to use the expression 'closed society' but it would be hard to find a more accurate way of describing a world which, in its own relativity, offers itself as sole absolute reality. Anyone who steps out of this world loses his home. He loses his bolt-hole, his threatened protectedness; loses his barbed-wire-girt certainty. In a purely symbolic sense, he sets off on a long journey about which he has no idea where it will lead him and just one thing is for sure: he is getting ever farther away from any possible domicile and refuge.
>
> *Imre Kertész*

Part 1. Extracts from the Novel and Annotations

1

The parlour window of the family cottage in the village faced northwards. The father would often stand in front of the window and gaze into the far distance.

Hungary lies over there, he would say.

It seemed that he wished to impart something very important. The mother and her son nodded, pretending that it was important for them too, though it wasn't at all.

For the rest of the family Hungary merely signified an imaginary locus—a virtual world.

Life was somewhere else altogether.

The father had made a trip to Hungary thirty or so years before, when there had still been a Kingdom of Yugoslavia. For a first and last time, he slipped over the

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László Végel

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border. He had been invited to a wedding just across the border at Jánoshalma. A male cousin was getting married. He supposed that if people had gone to the trouble of notifying him about the event, then he would be expected to turn up. Not that he went empty-handed: he took along with him three hanks of spiced sausage and a ham.

He crept stealthily along the designated path that his younger brother had carefully sketched out for him. He crept among the bushes with a knapsack stuffed full of sausages and ham, halting every now and then in order to take stock of the route along which the male relatives of the family had wriggled a good few times before.

While stopping with ever greater frequency as he crawled in order to lay his trembling body on the ground, he would hear *Stoj! Stoj!* from one side of the border and Halt! Halt! from the other, so he knew he was on the right track.

He relaxed a bit only after he had crossed the strip of no-man's-land.

The Hungarians didn't shoot; they just carted people back to where they had come from, his cousin had wised him up. True, it could well be they stuck one in the slammer for a few days and grilled you in order to ferret out your reason for illegally crossing the border before sending you back, goodbye and good riddance. And stay alert even after you have no-man's-land behind you or you won't enjoy yourself at the wedding feast.

The boy listened uncomprehendingly to his father, to whom lawbreaking and frontier violation had still not brought home the borders of languages. All he made out of it was a story about an eventful journey. Nothing reminded him of the borders of languages; all he recognised was the country's borders. Nor did he wish to recognise that even the borders of his language had still not been opened up by crossing the frontier. He did not sense that he was lugging along with him the very border that language had drawn. His language was as yet innocent, uncorrupted and pristine. The boy hadn't even dreamed that he would trespass on two languages. That he would become the prisoner of languages, and every little thing would have two names at one and the same time. The one would not be complete without the other, because it would no longer be possible to separate them. This was an even bigger pitfall than Derrida's, who was aware that there was one language, but even that was not his.

2

The boy searched for Radio Free Europe, or to be more specific: Free Hungary, on the crackling old wireless set. That was his regular daily chore when the father, every evening after work, went into the parlour. He did not understand quite what the father, standing before the window, was referring to with that significant utterance, nor why he wished every day to keep on top of events in Hungary.

On getting home from work he would potter about in the garden until dusk. Then he would retire into the parlour, into that other, separate little world that was his, and his alone, though he was not at all conscious of it. It occupied an

imaginary locus in a story in which nothing noteworthy could happen to him. Only oblivion attracted him. For him oblivion had the express purpose of guaranteeing his state of happy, self-forgetful ignorance.

The father found himself in two worlds that were strictly demarcated from one another. He lived two stories that were unconnected and had nothing to do with one another, as a result of which it was easy for him to tell the two separate worlds, the two languages, the two stories apart. Metaphorically speaking, he stepped into the parlour and later stepped out of it. The radio, the closed room, represented one world, everything outside the room, the other. A precisely defined boundary ran between the two. The two languages, the two worlds, the two stories did not challenge one another. There was no point of intersection. Only parallel stories existed, the strands of which did not intertwine. No common story was produced that would hold the father's two worlds together, or at least shuffle them up together.

In the absence of comprehensive, common stories, two languages are readily demarcated from one another. In the absence of that neither is its own. One language lives its own life between the four walls; the other, externally in the outside world. When the two discourses can be so precisely demarcated, then one steps nonchalantly from the one into the other; willy-nilly one duplicates oneself, the one self being for one language; the other, for the other. Two selves that have nothing to do with, and are foreign to, one another live their own lives. The languages live parallel lives in this harmonious schizophrenia. The one language is totally foreign to the other.

Yet within this, for the individual, one of these is foreign; the other, his own—and that is still the case if it is not possible to formulate the reason why one of them is foreign and why the other is his own. In its state of naïve ignorance, the existence of the personality is automatically duplicated. There are no intertwining, shuffled-up stories. The word and the sentence have no shadow or mirror image. The mother tongue is his, but the story of the mother language is not rooted in its own world and yet is the possessor of a story that is not his. The mother-tongue lugs around a foreign story. The foreign language, on the other hand, conceals an individual story, which is why that language is his; it has been condemned to be his.

Languages merely seek their places; stories, however, seek their language.

At this point the extremes join in an embrace.

One extreme is a happy cosmopolitanism. Narcissus' grove! Words become intoxicated when they kick free from stories. There is no hard-and-fast rule, so everything is allowed. There are many languages in this regularity, but there is no common story. Narcissus is liberated because he has "cleansed" himself of the drama of stories. Words are just playthings; stories are just anecdotes. If life is somewhere else, then one does not have to struggle against it.

The other extreme is homeless nationalism. The Prophet's familiar fortification! The prophet flees into the fort and raises a portcullis or drops a net around him in

order to free himself of the common story. If life is somewhere else, then it is foreign, dangerous, and it must be hated for that reason. It is a beneficiary of the same delusion as overbearing cosmopolitanism.

In our irresponsible, shallow age the lack of a common story pulls differences down to a common denominator.

The father dallied on the threshold of a story; he waited a lifetime long. He paid no heed to the threshold. All that remained of him was the garden, the window and the far distance.

But then what would happen if the two discourses demanded a story?

What would happen, one wonders, if someone were to become a slave to the wish that it did not cleave existence in two?

3

Family anecdote, autumn 1956. The son dallied on the threshold to which the father paid no heed. It is Sunday; the customary rest-day spread is served up at the dinner table at which, for several weeks now, two guests have been taking their places. Both have come from Hungary. One is a teacher, the other is chief accountant for a state company in Budapest.

Close to the refugee camp, in Green Road, the same scene is being played out in all the houses where a Hungarian family is living.

The street's residents are seized by a strange excitement every Sunday when they entertain the Hungarian inmates of the refugee camp. Hope seemed to flicker up that the common language locked in two different stories, in two separate worlds, would meet.

But could they truly meet, or was that just one illusion among the many?

These Sunday meals were the first time they had come face to face with Hungarians from Hungary. Or at least so they kidded themselves, because many of them had already experienced such face-to-face encounters after the Hungarian army invaded in April 1941.

The boy was looking for a common story.

The father was subconsciously fleeing from it.

It crossed the boy's mind that the father had nowhere to flee to. This began to dawn on him when his father told him the story of Peter Schlemihl.

Old man Schlemihl engaged a Gypsy band to give the Hungarian army a musical welcome. He hauled out of a cranny in the attic a long-hidden flask with armorial bearings, filled it with home-brewed mulberry hooch and plied the Hungarian soldiers who marched in with that.

He was sure that a long-cherished dream of his would, at long last, come true. He had deliberately placed his daughter, Hargita, in a commercial college because he wanted her to become a postmistress behind the post office's sliding window, selling postage stamps and cancelling letters. He had been pushing for years for her to be taken on at the post office, but had been foiled. He had tried to win over the influential *nachalniks,* the Serb top dogs, dancing attendance on them,

delivering oven-ready chickens, fattened ducks, even whole sides of pork, to their door, but all in vain: all his efforts were to no avail. In the end, a small-time official, a real *chinovnik,* took pity on him and advised him that he should not bank on landing the post, it was hopeless to think that his daughter would ever get the job since it was a position of trust.

Hope that his dream would finally be fulfilled was raised again, naturally enough, on seeing the Hungarian soldiers march in. That was why he was the first to hang a Hungarian flag out from the attic window, and he supplied the new public notary with eggs and a dressed chicken, and he treated the army officers to his home-brewed slivovitz. He was quite sure that this time his attentiveness would bring results—all the more so as one of the lieutenants, not long after the army's arrival, solemnly declared that he was going to look after the Magyar brothers.

It was going to be just a matter of days before a new post office was to be opened, he murmured sotto voce, to the accompaniment of conspiratorial winks.

Schlemihl constantly sneaked out in front of the village post-office to inspect developments, when the new Hungarian post-office building at long last opened its doors. But he was astounded to glimpse a new postmistress behind the sliding window. He made inquiries there and then, and before the day was over he had ascertained that the new woman had arrived straight from Budapest, just as the staff filling posts at the parish hall and other important public places were all, so to speak, trusty personnel who had likewise come from over there. Their belongings were delivered in large removal vans, so the village crier was hard put to drum up enough reliable, strapping deliverymen.

The lieutenant did what he could, between sups of spirits, to console Schlemihl. Time will tell, because the locals are still going to have to prove themselves, he mused philosophically.

Peter Schlemihl had already sold off his last three acres of land several years before: he had needed the money for the girl's education. He was angry that the big landholder, who had picked up this family inheritance dirt cheap, had now been invited to go to Subotica for the August 20th Harvest Festival celebration in order to greet Regent Miklós Horthy, whereas he had been completely overlooked. He had been transported there, along with his wife, in the parish hall's official automobile. It also came to Schlemihl's ear that the man had given the official speech in the parish hall's banquet hall, whereas his wife had procured an ornamental hat for the occasion from the most famous of Budapest's milliner's, because the local hatters had no idea of the latest fashion.

Given that, he felt that his indignation was justified; he sincerely believed that he had been outwitted, treated with disrespect. In a huff, he concealed the flask with armorial bearings at the back of the old cabinet. Every evening, however, he would turn on the radio and fanatically listen to the news from Budapest. The radio was his one and only: that was all that was left of the family inheritance. Then before evening fell he would shamble off to the post-office building—with the whole street by now laughing at him—and, from a bench that stood in front

of the entrance, would gaze enviously at the postmistress from Budapest, for whom the lieutenant would wait when closing time came round. She would step out with a giggle, link arms with the lieutenant and they would vanish in the gathering gloom.

Peter Schlemihl would then place on his head the hat that he was accustomed to setting down beside him, on the bench, and trudge back home. It went on like that for months. The old man had the feeling that an eternity had passed. One evening it so happened that, just before the postmistress slipped out, the lieutenant grubbed a few bits of small change out of his pocket and tossed them into the old man's hat. The latter fished the pennies out and was about to toss them away in the heat of anger, but then he thought better of it. If he were to throw them away, maybe that would give offence to Miklós Horthy in person, and he could not do that, because while sitting in front of the post office he often imagined that a military orderly would draw up to take him by limousine to Budapest, to appear before Miklós Horthy himself, who would serve him champagne, grasp him cordially by the arm and sigh with deep concern: My dear brother Hungarian, we must do our utmost to put right what has been broken, we'll do everything we can to repair the damage. It's hard work, alas, because now I can't trust even my own ministers: they manoeuvre behind my back, meddling with things without my knowledge. Everyone is only after what's in it for him. When they take leave, Miklós Horthy with a smile presses into Schlemihl's hand a stamped document in which he ordered that, from the following day, Hargita Schlemihl was to be the village's postmistress. This was the imaginary meeting that Schlemihl had in mind as he slowly slipped the coins into his pocket and briskly set off home, because his daughter was waiting for him with supper.

He laid the pennies out on the table and switched on the radio.

While twiddling the tuning knob, he accidentally happened to come across the Hungarian-language news bulletin broadcast from London. An unknown voice was saying, "This is the BBC's Hungarian-language service." He discovered from the news that severe blows were being levelled at the Germans and the Hungarians on the frontline. That left him flabbergasted and he was seized by an indescribable uneasiness. Just to hear something like that can be dangerous, he thought to himself, but he did not have the strength to change wavelengths. Or maybe the BBC was lying when it babbled on about the British and the Americans planning to carry out bombing raids on Budapest. He ought to listen to the news from Pest, the thought flashed through his mind, and he retuned the wavelength. He gave a sigh of relief: so it wasn't true, the BBC was fibbing and spreading false reports. We Hungarians are invincible. The next day, however, he was unable to keep his curiosity in check, and at ten o'clock in the evening he listened in to the news from London. The broadcast crackled and whistled and kept fading out, but he doggedly strained his ears, more attentively than the previous evening, and the suspicion awakened that maybe there was a grain of truth, after all, in what it was saying. The things didn't quite add up, he mused. No wonder the news from the

front was bad if there was no discipline, and even lieutenants were chasing after the postmistress, he muttered to himself.

From then on, he was unable to resist the temptation, and he was a regular listener, every evening, to the BBC News from London. If it was telling the truth, he took stock of the situation, then the young lady from Budapest would soon be returning to where she had come from and the armchair behind the sliding window would again be vacated. At night he would toss and turn in his bed, unable to sleep, ruminating that if the British and the Americans were to arrive, then maybe his daughter could at long last be taken into consideration.

The same thoughts were also preoccupying him in the vegetable patch when he was greeted by Svetozar, owner of the garden at the back of his. Before the war they had been on good terms, often going for a drink together, but since the Hungarians had marched in Svetozar would invariably stalk out of the garden whenever he spotted his neighbour. They no longer even so much as greeted one another. He no doubt bears a grudge against me because I flew the Hungarian flag and plied the Hungarian soldiers with mulberry hooch, he thought to himself. He has only himself to blame as in doing that I did no harm to him, any more than to anyone else. More recently, though, the neighbour's behaviour seemed to have changed. He was the first to offer greetings, and he would have an enigmatic smile on his lips. He's either trying to make the best of it or he's forgiven me, the old man thought.

One day, they struck up a conversation. Svetozar came close to the wire fence and complained that this year there were hardly any tomatoes growing. The next time he spoke disparagingly about the poor wheat yields. There was going to be a famine. There would not be enough rations for the soldiers at the front. They're going to die in Siberia, he said. From the tone of voice in which this was said Schlemihl assumed that Svetozar was secretly glad about the bad harvest. Instead of answering he gave a big gulp. He was astonished that what he was hearing from his neighbour's lips was exactly what the BBC had been saying. How could Svetozar know, given that he didn't own a radio.

The neighbour plucked up courage more and more, became ever more talkative, from one week to the next. Then once, just offhand, he threw out the remark: that lot didn't even take on your daughter at the post office, yet you leant over backwards for them.

He then carried on weeding as if nothing had happened.

The remark struck home with Peter Schlemihl. Who did not know how much he wanted his daughter to manage to land a job with the post office? No doubt the whole neighbourhood was keeping tally of his frustrated efforts and was now having a good laugh at his expense. No doubt they too were saying that he had leant over backwards for them. He did not deign to respond but rather continued to hack at the spreading weeds.

He decided that he was not going to sit in front of the post office any more. No one was going to make fun of him.

A few days later, it was again Svetozar who set conversation going.

But it's not all over yet! The people who'll put everything right are coming.

The British, slipped from Peter Schlemihl's lips, but the very next moment he regretted his indiscretion. It could be the British, it could be others—the main thing is that you stay on the alert lest you are cheated out of it yet again, Svetozar countered and shambled off.

Schlemihl stood staring in total astonishment. How did he dare to put something like that in words? And so sure of himself at that! Never before had he awaited the news from London in such fever pitch as he did that evening. He decided he would probe further into where Svetozar came by his information.

It was useless his spying after the event: he did not find his neighbour in the garden.

Days went by, but there was neither hide nor hair of him. One morning, two gendarmes with cockerel-plumed hats rapped on the window and ordered him to get dressed, because he was to be taken straight away to the gendarmerie. Peter Schlemihl, not suspecting a thing, went with them to the barracks block, where he was bustled into some sort of office. They stood him before a chap in civilian clothes, who peremptorily bawled at him to spill everything he knew about his neighbour. Schlemihl swore that he knew nothing: How could he, when his neighbour had been avoiding him recently? You're lying, the detective screamed back. Let's start again from the beginning. Make a full confession, or it'll be the worse for you. Out with it! Schlemihl made the same statement as before. Whereupon the hulking chap signalled to the two gendarmes who were standing guard by the door. Then let's start all over again from the beginning, he said irritably. What do you know about your chum? Alarmed, Schlemihl stared mutely at the carpet, whereupon one of the gendarmes, at a sign from the detective, clouted him so hard that he dropped to the floor in the middle of the office. The other gendarme hauled him up, but he had not even got to his feet before he was hit by another blow. This was repeated a number of times; they toyed with him like a cat does with a mouse, meanwhile guffawing raucously. Schlemihl sensed that blood was starting to trickle from his mouth. The detective forcefully demanded that he finally spill the beans, no more shamming, because they were well aware that he was in cahoots with that fanatical Commie every evening in the garden. You don't mean to tell me that you spend the time talking about cabbages and tomatoes? With who else, apart from you, was the scoundrel in contact? Did he let on where their hideaway is? Did he tell you stories about Stalin? The questions rained down on him. Schlemihl could not have answered them even if he wanted to; he shrugged his shoulders helplessly, then after a few seconds' deliberation, timidly spoke up. All he said was that the wheat yields have been poor. He would have added a bit about Siberia, and by that the neighbour had suggested that the army would not have anything to eat, but the detective snarled that he should pull his shirt up and lie face down on the table. They then proceeded to pummel his bare back in the kidney area with rubber truncheons. Before passing out, Peter Schlemihl sensed the drops of blood beading his throbbing body.

Siberia, he tried to carry on the confession.

But that only wound the detective up even more, and he began to fume.

I'll give you Siberia. Comrade Stalin as well.

Schlemihl came to hours later in another room. He was just about to struggle to his feet when the detective's voice snapped out: Well? he asked. Peter Schlemihl swore to God that he knew nothing about the wretched fellow. He had nothing to do with him. True. They had occasionally got talking at the end of the garden, but the only things they spoke about were paprikas and tomatoes and wheat yields, nothing else. He did not dare even so much as to let the word Siberia pass his lips. He swore blind that he was a true Hungarian patriot; he had been the first in the village to unfurl the national flag, he had also hired Gypsy musicians in honour of the forces when they had marched in, even been lavish with his carefully stashed home-made hooch to the brave soldiers. He was certainly not one to let himself get chummy with the enemy.

Hypocrite, the detective spat out, with a scathing look. Now get lost, and burn today's lesson deep in your brain. Beat it, and make sure you behave like a good Hungarian should, because we'll be keeping an eye on you. If you see anything suspicious, report it to us at once. Got that? Peter Schlemihl nodded.

It was after midnight by the time he had dragged himself home. He could thank his lucky stars that he had not been detained overnight, because if they had released him in the morning, the whole street would have been able to see his split lips, his battered face, his swollen eye and his bloody shirt. His daughter screamed out in horror when he walked in through the kitchen door. He, near to collapse, he waved that aside and dragged himself to a stool at the table. He stared vacantly at the tablecloth, astounded to see, lying beside a slice of cured bacon fat, the fresh spring onions that his daughter had picked that day in the garden. He tried chewing at the spring onions as he began disjointedly to relate what had happened. He kept on moaning about the dreadful luck the neighbour at the end of the garden had brought upon them. He cautioned the girl not to speak to him on any account if he were to show up in the garden.

From then on, Peter Schlemihl would be much more cautious. He decided that he wasn't going to set foot in the garden if the neighbour were skulking around at the end. He did not see him, though; not once did he loom on the horizon. How right the detective had been: that fanatical Commie really had done a bunk, leaving him in the lurch.

What tormented him most of all was that, after what had happened, his daughter would never become the postmistress.

He then stumbled into the room and cast a hostile glance at the wireless set. He resolved that never again would he listen to the confounded BBC broadcasts from London. He kept on crying out in pain throughout the night. In his half-waking, half-dreaming state Horthy appeared to ask him reproachfully: So, have you too misled me? Did I deserve that? You too, the one in whom I placed my trust—you too have let me down? But it wasn't that way at all, not a word of it is

true, my enemies are lying, he pleaded penitently before the presence of Miklós Horthy, I fell under suspicion on account of the postmistress from Budapest. They want to cheat me, Your Serene Highness. Horthy wearily waved a hand in dismissal. And what about patriotism? The dear homeland for which one must make sacrifices? As I see it, you don't want to make sacrifices for the dear homeland either. Is the postmistress's job the be-all-and-end-all for you? He was slumped in his armchair and kept moving his lips, but Schlemihl couldn't make out what he was saying. Your Serene Highness, may I ask you to speak louder, he pleaded. But the entreaties were all in vain, Miklós Horthy did not regain his voice, whereupon he shambled out of the Regent's room. The oppressive influence of this strange half-waking dream was not alleviated when he woke up in the morning. He mooched about in the house, muttering something about having deserved the drubbing.

The wounds healed but slowly; he limped badly and was unable to bend down as before. It worried him that he tired more easily, and he could not spring out of bed in the morning as readily as he used to. He was also lying awake on the morning that the gendarmes again rapped on his window. He could only whimper when he spotted two gendarmes entering the room with his daughter, deathly pale, behind them. They were the same pair who had hauled him off to the barracks the time before. He mustered every last drop of strength to get out of bed, but one of them made a gesture that he should desist. Stay as you are, wretch, it wasn't you we came for but your radio. A miserable worm like you doesn't deserve to have a wireless set of your own.

Peter Schlemihl nodded. Fair enough, maybe it's better they take it away, he thought to himself; he hadn't switched it on since they had given him the third degree anyway. He was scared of being tempted. He'd had enough trouble with it as it was, he'd get by without it: what was happening in the wider world was no longer of any interest. He no longer even set foot outside in the street, there was not a soul whom he wished to meet. The only thing he dared do, from time to time, was go out in the garden, and even then he was very careful, heeding every little sound for fear of an unexpected appearance of Svetozar, whom he had no desire to see after all that had gone before. There was no trace to be seen of the neighbour, however, and even of an evening no lights could be discerned filtering from his house. After a while, Schlemihl therefore began again to potter around a bit more easily in the vegetable bed and assiduously tend to the garden, meanwhile looking both left and right as a precaution. He was curious as to who might be spying on him, who was watching his every move, who was squealing on him.

Ever since the radio had been confiscated, he had regained his composure and turned more into himself.

His daughter was all the more uneasy. She was in agonies of doubt and made ever more frequent hints that he needed to be careful. It was not advisable for him to mess around on his own in the garden when everyone else was

shutting themselves up in the house, and a deathly hush ruled even in the streets. Their nibses were packing up, suspicious characters were lurking around on the outskirts of the village, and there were even mutters from the sides of mouths that the border was swarming with Russians. Peter Schlemihl would just shake his head, listening sceptically to the rubbish being talked by the child. He couldn't make head or tail of it, but in the end none of it was of any importance to him.

He finally woke up to the fact that something was happening around him after all when, out of the blue, who should turn up but Svetozar. He emerged like a ghost, rifle in hand, in the depths of the garden. Beside him was the ugly sight of a spade and a mound of fresh earth—all in all a rather bizarre sight. Schlemihl immediately realised that he had caught his neighbour red-handed, in the act of digging up the rifle. But he simply nodded as if greeting him. Meanwhile his brain was working furiously. He was calculating how quickly he would be able to reach the gendarmerie once he had slipped away from the neighbour's field of vision. He needed to notify the detective at once that the rogue had dared to show his face again and, what was more, was strolling around in the garden with a rifle. Still, he exchanged not a word with him.

On seeing the old man's confused, panicky movements, Svetozar plucked up courage and started to tease him. He was in a good mood, laughing, one moment flourishing the spade and the next, the rifle. He then threw the spade aside and aimed the rifle at Schlemihl. The old man's feet were rooted to the spot. Svetozar strove to convince him that he needn't be scared, he didn't have to run away, there was no reason for alarm. The liberators were already at the door. Peter Schlemihl didn't believe a word of it but eyed him suspiciously and drew back towards the house. Svetozar, for his part, casually slung the rifle on a shoulder and followed his neighbour, step by step. Schlemihl then hurriedly raised his hands above his head, so that the other neighbours would see that he had not entered into conversation with this scapegrace of his own accord, and meanwhile he racked his brains to come up with an escape route lest anyone in the neighbourhood should try and smear him with accusations of hobnobbing with this Commie lunatic.

I want to talk to you, Svetozar yelled. I know you're a decent chap. I've heard that they beat you to a pulp and then requisitioned your radio as well. Peter Schlemihl stared incredulously at him, for, having leapt over the fence, he was now quite close. I also know why they tortured you, and that was because you, along with us, were waiting for the liberators. Now they're here, just outside the village. The Russians will be coming in tonight, he said, making no secret of his satisfaction. You've nothing to be scared of. Comrade Stalin will be grateful to you, he tried to reassure Schlemihl. He will get to know what a decent, honest, upright bloke you are, and what a big sacrifice you made for him. He can even make a postmistress out of your daughter, if that is what you want, and you'll get a tractor, a truck, a bicycle—he'll bear you in mind, you've earned it!

Peter Schlemihl ummed and aahed. In his confusion, he started rambling incoherently about how winter was approaching and the garden needed digging over. A few trees would also have to be cut down for firewood. Svetozar roared with laughter. We won't need to dig any more, we can plough the ground with a tractor in future, he said, and, slapping his neighbour on the back, stretched out his hand.

What's got into him, the old fellow pondered. We've never proffered hands to one another before.

He must have gone soft in the head while he was away. No one in their right mind comes back to dig up a rifle, he mused. That's very fishy. I'd better not take any risks. When he managed to shake Svetozar off, he dashed into the house and pulled on his one and only white shirt. He did not even have time to say anything to his daughter. He made his way hurriedly to reach the gendarmerie as quickly as he could. The detective had to be tracked down before a stink was raised. It could be that what happened in the garden had already been reported to him. He raced in a panic-stricken scramble. On reaching the place, however, he was astounded to find that there was not one cockerel-plumed gendarme on guard, the doors were wide open, and anyone could come and go as they pleased. There was nobody in the corridors. He was just about to enter one of the offices when he halted before he had even pressed the door handle. No, he couldn't do that. He might get into trouble and even find himself accused of being up to no good.

He stepped back out onto the street, took a look around the centre of the village, then headed for the post office. When he got to the building, he was rooted to the spot. The post office was also closed, from which he deduced that indeed something extraordinary must have happened. Best go home, he thought to himself, but then he decided to go back first to the gendarmerie, all the same. He plucked up all his courage and went through the offices. Not a soul anywhere. They had flown the coop. Taking heart from that realisation, he began hunting around for his wireless set, searching the barracks from top to bottom, but no trace of the radio was to be found. Desks and seats topsy-turvy, papers scattered all over the parquet. In one room a framed photograph of Miklós Horthy lay on the floor; two pairs of gleamingly waxed boots stood to attention in one corner, by the window. He inspected them; they were in good condition. Initially, it occurred to him to take them, but then he changed he mind, in case he got into trouble for that reason. He had come to get his own radio but he was leaving empty-handed; all trace of the radio had vanished. There was a sight for him on the way home, however, on the road to Beče. An endless stream of trucks and peasants' carts was snaking towards the village. All full of soldiers. People were waving from the open windows of homes on the outskirts of the village, knots of inquisitive people were jostling in the gateways. Men, women and children raced ahead of the newcomers and showered the convoy with flowers. Some offered drinks of slivovitz. Peter Schlemihl stared round-eyed, then he summoned up his remaining strength and thought it better to slink away. Home, his instinct prompted; home is the safest.

His daughter had just finished preparing supper. The Russians have arrived, she said while laying the table.

So Svetozar had not been spouting nonsense, old Schlemihl decided. He asked his daughter to pour a small measure of slivovitz. He had been unable to swallow a drop ever since he had been tortured; he simply had no wish for liquor, could not even bear the smell. Now, though, he had the wish; it put new life in him. He swigged another shot, and that left him feeling a pleasant tingle. If Svetozar had been telling the truth and Stalin really was going to hand tractors out to people, then perhaps his daughter might be postmistress yet, the thought flashed through his brain.

Svetozar came round while you were away, father, the girl continued, bringing half a sackful of sugar as a gift and some strange flag. He left a message that we should put out the flag on the house tonight, if we know what's best for us. Schlemihl picked up the red flag with the hammer and sickle. He shook his head, because he had never seen the like of it before. Maybe Svetozar knows what is the right thing to do, he thought to himself, and he hobbled up to the attic. He pulled in the Hungarian red-white-and-green and put out the new flag in its place. He then trudged out into the garden, buried the Hungarian flag, cleaned the spade, then he took out the scythe. He whetted its blade before proceeding to cut the grass. It had barely grown since the last time he cut it, but he set about it, all the same. He made progress in a leisurely fashion. He pottered around, taking his time because he was hoping that Svetozar would show up. Evening gathered, but there was still no sign of the neighbour. Before turning in for the night, he took a look over towards the house more than a few times to check whether any lights were burning but there was nothing to suggest that Svetozar was at home. The street was pitch-black, with no lights of any kind. A crackle of gunfire was audible in the distance. He ordered his daughter not to light the paraffin lamp. He tottered up to bed and pulled the blanket over his head. It was all going to go the way that Svetozar had foreseen: in the morning Comrade Stalin will arrive, he mused to himself. A bicycle and tractor, he muttered.

At just after daybreak, two armed civilians had him jumping out of bed. They ordered him to follow them instantly as he was, though he could put a blanket around him. The dour characters escorted Peter Schlemihl to the same barracks where he had been the previous day. The one where he had been thrashed black and blue. The tables, chairs and piles of papers were still there, higgledy-piggledy, the framed photograph of Miklós Horthy lay on the floor. Nevertheless one might guess new tenants were moving in from the fact that several people were lugging a carpet, while another group were running along the corridor with a few telephones. The dour types bundled him into one of the furnished offices that had already been supplied with a carpet. A man strode up and down, hands behind his back. The door slammed behind Schlemihl, and a uniformed character stood straddle-legged before him, a hand on the holster. So you're the fine fellow, are you? As you see, the public merrymaking is over. Peter Schlemihl clutched his hat. A gypsy band, right? First to put out a Hungarian flag, right? Now it's the hammer

and sickle, right? Aren't you ashamed of yourself, you two-timer? Do you think you can pull the wool over our eyes, scum? He took a big swing with the left hand and clouted him round the ear. Then another. There'll be more of that. But first you're going to have to work for your punishment.

That is how Peter Schlemihl ended up doing forced labour on the land of the Serbian big landowner.

A white armband was knotted round his arm and he was pushed into the maize fields along with the rest.

By chance, he found himself next to the father. He felt a little better seeing that it had happened to someone from the same street.

What's going to happen to us, he asked fretfully.

We'll snap corncobs, the father replied listlessly, and glanced apprehensively at the armed guards in civilian clothes who were policing the tract of maize. They've given out a strict order that there is to be no talking among us, or else they'll shoot, he warned Schlemihl.

In the evening, when they were left to themselves, Schlemihl told the father in confidence that it was Svetozar, the neighbour at the bottom of the garden, who had implicated him. It was due to him that the Hungarian gendarmes had beaten him up; now it was a red flag he had left behind that had brought trouble down on his head. At the gendarmerie he had been accused in his old age of being a double-dealing, two-timing scum. Once again I drew the short straw on account of my gullibility, he complained. But what else could I have done? If I hadn't put the flag out, then I would only have infuriated Svetozar and ended up here just the same. Did I have any other choice?

Let's go to sleep, the father brought the conversation to a close; at dawn, come what may, we'll have to snap corncobs. He would not condescend to give a word in response to the drivel that the old man had come out with, but instead reminded him to take care of his blanket otherwise it would be pinched, whereas the late-autumn nights were rather nippy.

The father looked down on old Schlemihl because he reckoned the fellow had made a compact with the devil, and that was why he was always getting into hot water.

So how did you know, father, that he had made a compact with the devil, the son was amazed.

Well, anyone with more than one shadow, you know, you can be sure that he's made a compact with the devil, he imparted to the boy, for his ears only.

And did you see Schlemihl's shadows, father?

I did, the father answered uncertainly. But that's not important. I don't have to see a shadow to have proof. Anyone who has now one flag, now another fluttering on his house, you can be quite sure, has several shadows, even if you can't see them. The trickery will come to light sooner or later.

But how is it possible for a person to have more than one shadow, the boy fretted.

It's just possible, the father said sharply, but then added: Unlike Schlemihl, why was it that he had never stuck any flag on the house? He had only stood before the

parlour window. Both when the Hungarians marched in and when they had marched out.

Should he have forgotten about the shadows? Blotted them from his memory, once and for all? That was why people could no longer recall 1941, or in other words the time when they had encountered Hungarians from Hungary.

As if they were afraid of their own shadows.

The place was now swamped with Hungarian refugees, and the local Hungarian community were seized with renewed curiosity as to what real Hungarians were like.

The guests would sit around the table and complain about how difficult it was for them to lay hands on a Canadian entry visa, that being where they intended to emigrate to. Others had America as their goal, and a few were preparing to travel even further away, to Australia.

The camp-grub was awful, which was why on Sundays, the street's residents would invite round to their places the refugees, who could count on getting a fixed pass for such occasions.

The winter frosts were drawing near. There was no heating in the camps. The guests complained that they were freezing and asked the head of the family if they happened to have any spare plaids. On loan. Until they were issued with a Canadian or Australian entry visa. The father and mother looked at one another in perplexity: they were not familiar with the word plaid. Just as there was much else that they did not understand from the words used by the Hungarians. It was not just a matter of their being unfamiliar with this or that word, but also of certain words having one signification for the father, another for the mother, and yet another for the Hungarians.

The guests would never have understood the father's standing in front of the parlour window and his portentous declaration that Hungary lay over there.

The Hungarians—that was what the hosts called the guests. The refugees were the Hungarians. They scrutinised them curiously, studied their movements, listened to their lamentations and calculations. In the end, though, they came to realise that they were something else again, after all.

The boy broke the silence.

Blankets, he said. That's what they're asking for: blankets.

The father and the mother, feeling embarrassed, looked at one another.

There are none, said the father. There was one that we obtained when the palace for the viceroy was under construction, but that was carried off by the Hungarians in '44. They were fleeing home but didn't have enough blankets. He suddenly came to a halt. The boy watched his father tensely. In case he spoke, since undoubtedly old Schlemihl's radio had come to mind.

But the father fought shy of the story. He had no wish to make a compact with the devil. In 1934, the father explained after an awkward pause, that's when I was given it, when I was working as a haulier. When they were building the viceregal residence in Novi Sad, the foreman offered me a blanket so I should not freeze while waiting for the freight to be unloaded.

At this the guests exchanged glances.

The boy did not remember that blanket. He knew only about the blankets that had been issued to him at the boarding school in Novi Sad. The allocation was two per boy, but one had to take great care of them, because boys who shared dormitories regularly filched them from one another. Only when it was time to go to bed did the loss come to light. Thirty slept in a dormitory, and there was not enough time between the bedtime bell and lights-out to track down who had taken a blanket.

Everyone would be looking for his own blanket. *Gde je čebe?* Where's the blanket, they would cry out in chorus.

It was there, in the boarding school, that he had been introduced to blankets.

Back home their only bedclothes were eiderdowns. In summer the cover was a sheet.

The fact that plaid meant blanket was something he had gathered from reading a Hungarian novel. In any case, it sounded far too genteel, so whenever possible he avoided making any use of the word plaid.

The father stepped out of the kitchen. The boy noticed that just before doing so he beckoned surreptitiously—so the guests would not notice—to the mother.

They then sneaked off, one after the other.

The mother returned, cleared the dinner plates from the table then served out the pumpkin strudel before leaving the room again. The strudel was almost all eaten before she got back.

When farewells were being said, out on the external balcony, an eiderdown was pressed into the arms of the departing guests.

On going to bed that night, the boy noticed that his eiderdown was a lot thinner than it had been before. Using the feathers taken from the family's three eiderdowns, the mother had filled two more covers and donated these to the Hungarian refugees. As soon as they had been issued the Canadian visa, they came round to take their leave and they brought back the eiderdowns, thanking them for the kindness they had been shown. It's a fine thing that we Hungarians stick together, they mumbled gratefully.

The father and the mother just carried on repeating that it was nothing really, only natural.

There was something else very important that they wanted to say besides that, but they didn't manage.

There was something else very important that they wanted to know, but it came to nothing.

He said nothing either.

The father may have wished to forget the story of Peter Schlemihl once and for all.

4

The weeks passed, and the guests arrived promptly every Sunday at two o'clock in the afternoon. They ate the Sunday lunch and afterwards conversed ever more desultorily. They had nothing to talk about. Most of all, they would hatch plans about their new country, their new life. They dreamed about how good it

would be in Canada, America or Australia. The farther away, the better, they would say, just for the sake of saying something. One of them—it happened to be the teacher—made a slip of the tongue. They had been unaware before now that there were Hungarians living in Yugoslavia. The father snatched up his head. All we knew was that there were some in Transylvania, but it wasn't possible for us to flee there, the chief accountant tried to break the awkward silence. The atmosphere turned frigid.

There was no further talk about where there were Hungarians living.

The boy, though, felt that there were things they had to say to one another given that the father and the mother had always awaited the guests' arrival with such great eagerness. For some mystifying reason, around that time the parents wished to communicate something to them, but they could not find the right words. They wished to hear something important, but what, they didn't know. Every sentence uttered during the conversation came to a standstill, broke off; not a word was able to live its own life.

The words had no common story.

That was perceptible, even when the chief accountant started to vilify and denigrate the Russians, at which the father snatched up his head.

The boy held his breath as he watched in suspense. This was the chance for the father to tell his own story—his reason for not wanting to run down the Russians.

Because Svetozar kept his word. The next morning he appeared at the line-up and said that Peter Schlemihl was to go with him. He was flourishing a sheet of paper in one hand and announced: Step forward, Comrade Schlemihl.

Peter Schlemihl limped forward from the line and stood with head bowed in front of Svetozar. Svetozar nodded that they should set off.

The others looked on in amazement as they clambered into a military jeep.

Types like that always get away with things, the father reckoned.

But you weren't beaten up like old Schlemihl was, the boy reminded him of what had happened. He deserved it, the father retorted pensively.

The boy saw no sense in arguing the point, and after all he did not wish to attack his father. Why did the father disapprove of old Schlemihl, when all the people pulled in for forced labour were also freed a few days later? He was leading them over to a new tract of maize when armed soldiers turned up in the distance. On the first truck, a bearded private was playing a squeeze-box and the others were tipsily singing along. The same sort of pennants were fluttering on the trucks as the one Peter Schlemihl had put out on his house. They were Russians. As soon as they glimpsed the armed civilians guarding the forced labourers, one of the officers gave an order that they should be disarmed and those wearing armbands rounded up. The guards mooching at the edge of the maize field did not resist in any way but straight away threw down their weapons. The officer demanded that they lie face down on the ground. The Russian soldiers hastily gathered the discarded rifles together and tossed them onto their vehicle. The officer sprang onto the truck, beckoned to the interpreter to join him and launched into a

thundering speech about fascism's day being over. Now there would be Communism. Comrade Stalin had vanquished the Hydra-headed dragon, no one had to wear armbands. Long live Comrade Stalin and the victorious Red Army, long live the Soviet Union. Death to fascism—freedom to the people. The Russian soldiers enthusiastically hurrahed and applauded, meanwhile the pitcher went from hand to hand.

But why aren't you applauding, asked the officer, staring at the frightened forced labourers in astonishment. Not counting on getting an answer, he gave orders that the armbands were to be torn off the Jews instantly. From today you are free. Suspicious, the forced labourers looked hesitantly at one another, then glanced at the guards lying face down on the ground. The officer slapped his brow and ordered his men to rip the bands from their arms, one by one. The tipsy Russian soldiers ripped the bands from their arms, one by one, then embraced each and every one, then smacked three kisses on the cheeks of each one.

We're brothers, they kept repeating triumphantly and offered them swigs of vodka.

They sheepishly accepted the flask and timidly licked its mouth.

The Russians shoved the guards onto one of the trucks. They then announced triumphantly that they were free and could go home.

The officer again jumped up onto the back of the truck and held forth.

Give your thanks to Comrade Stalin, the Red Army and the glorious Soviet Union. They've driven off the fascist hordes and saved your lives.

They started the motors and departed with a horrendous clatter.

The father had stood around awkwardly, along with the others, at the edge of the maize field.

Someone said, we'd better tie the armbands back on and carry on working. The guards will be back anyway and will only take revenge. Some disagreed, on the grounds that it would be better to do what the Russians said. What if they were to come back and catch them with the armbands tied back on their arms?

Let's carry on snapping corncobs, but without the white armbands, suggested a third.

They reached agreement on the latter suggestion. They slipped the armbands into their pockets so they would be to hand, just in case, and they carried on snapping corncobs. As twilight gathered, however, they looked helplessly at one another. The new tract of maize lay a long way from the farmstead where they had been held in makeshift quarters. They were not even sure exactly where it lay, what direction they should take. They reached agreement in a trice and then stole off. Each made his own way back home. They closed the door and waited.

There had been more than a few times when the father thanked heaven that the Russians had saved him. The boy peered at his father's face. Would he say out straight that he had the Russians to thank for his life, he wondered?

But the father held his peace. No doubt he was thinking that the guests wouldn't understand anyway. He chose instead to switch subjects by saying that

the boy was going to grammar school in Novi Sad—and a grammar school where the instruction was in Hungarian, what's more. There was a grammar school nearer to them, but there the teaching was in Serbo-Croat, and he wanted to enrol the children in a Hungarian-language one, he boasted. The guests said nothing, didn't even nod appreciatively, which rather annoyed the father. At the next Sunday lunch he again raised the subject of his son's schooling, of the Hungarian grammar school, just in case what he had wanted to say the previous Sunday had not been clear enough. But the Hungarians attributed no significance this time either to the father's far-reaching decision. It meant nothing to them. The father for his part was surprised that the Hungarians were looking for Hungarian–English and English–Hungarian dictionaries. That was their sole preoccupation, because in their new homeland they would have to speak English. Where, they enquired, might they find such dictionaries? Certainly not in this hole, they said, but maybe in a bigger town. The father promised to make inquiries. He sought out the Hungarian lawyer who lived in the village, but he told him there was no such dictionary. To the best of his knowledge, an English–Hungarian dictionary could only be obtained in Budapest. The guests winced when the father informed them about the dictionaries. No doubt they were wondering to themselves how anyone could spout such nonsense.

During these months the father spent even more time than previously standing in front of the parlour window. His looks emanated a sense of great composure, with his gaze being fixed on a nameless point in the far distance, his face seemingly dreaming. Maybe he was dreaming of Hungary.

The boy sat silently, not wishing to disturb his father while he was deep in thought.

All he really wanted to work out was what had led his father to suppose that old Schlemihl had more than one shadow. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Magda Székely

Poems

Translated by Daniel Hoffmann

Albigensian

Albigens

1

First the pure gesture
then the cloven hoof appears
the angels' moment now
wastes away, no longer fierce

For the true is vanquished by the bad
the bad by what's more evil
why should anyone
oppose infamy still

2

When the good gives no benign
marker, even with no sign
in deepening darkness one must start

until, lighting up as a window
to myself I shine.

Magda Székely (1936–2007)
lost her mother in the Holocaust, and the attendant horrors of the period left their mark on all her life and oeuvre. A translator and literary editor, she received several prizes for her eight impressive, though slim, volumes of poetry.

Judgment

Ítélet

When like fortresses all times have fallen,
virtue and vice on Judgment Day
on either side stand in equal array.

The good and the bad under the same colours
the victims and their victimizers
with no choice but to merge into each other

Although with no avail aspiring in pain
each figure tries to distinguish and regain
its own identity as foreordained

But there is no place for vain endeavour,
to elude in expansion can happen never
sin's comfort is then lost forever.

There is no evil proceeding on its way
the unready are cooled while trying to escape
memory is reduced to ashes.

It's only the good who with no guilt
and in long lines start on its way,
from a single summons is the frail bridge built,

when consummated from the other side
continually flooding from the light
becoming some other thing, something more bright.

Depression

Depresszió

Humiliated, powerless,
rolled up like a caterpillar
in the bed without undressing

Days pass who knows how many
even one's own self's too hard to bear
no contact with anything in this despair

Waiting for mercy to no end
the body trying to haul into the deep
in darkness, into warmth of straw-filled stall

What is needed now is rest
exiled from life, a final rest
shrunk to rigor mortis in the bed

Yet something still with unseen eye
something finds her in her sty
and moves with her when rising from the dead.

Breath

Lehelet

His faithfulness
is ever more strong
it warms me until
I can hold on

Although it can reach me
from farther away
his protection somehow
can find me still

and tenderly
as a breath
it permeates this
delicate space

Answer

Felelet

Because she was the one more dead
than those around her who've become
mere scattered dust, she knew too well:
survival is impossible.

But because she had to resist,
not die like them, she did the best
she could have done
gave birth to her only son

The Other One

A másik

The other one is quicker. He can talk,
Slippery in debating.
But high above his triumphs is the One
compassionately waiting.

The Odds

Papírforma

The odds are that the
bad should always win
the good doesn't even start how come
it overtakes before the goal-line

The Present

Jelenidő

No sunset, and no night
delighted years float in procession
I live in the vertical light
of unending resurrection

Who Was Alexander Lenard?

An Interview with Klára Szerb*

László Rapcsányi: *We have you to thank for making Alexander Lenard's name and work known.*

Klára Szerb: Thank you for crediting me with discovering Sándor Lénárd for Hungary. But it isn't that simple. A lot of people knew him, even if his circle was narrow. After 1945, he became the physician to the Hungarian Academy in Rome. Sándor Weöres[1] and his wife,[2] and János Pilinszky[3], who lived there at the time, and many others like Ágnes Nemes Nagy[4] and Balázs Lengyel,[5] they all knew him.

When I looked him up, the entry said that he was a physician, writer, poet and translator, who was born in Budapest in 1910 and left Hungary in 1938, at the time of the Anschluss.

Klára Szerb (1913–1992)

was born into a family of high cultural and artistic attainment. The writer Frigyes Karinthy referred to her as "the daughter of Nyugat*". Her father, Aladár Bálint (1881–1925) was a writer and the art critic of that legendary journal, Ernő Osvát, her uncle, was its editor. Her brother, Endre Bálint (1914–1986) was a painter, a cousin Pál Justus (1905–1965) a social democrat politician, editor, poet and translator, another cousin István Bálint (1943–2007) a poet, writer, actor and director, and her son János Szerb (1951–1988) a poet and Tibetologist.*

"For many years I worked as a nurse: it is the only qualification I have, because I was born into the numerus clausus*, and was not admitted to medical school. And my mother, who was a widow, could only afford to send one son abroad..." , she informed Alexander Lenard in one of her letters to him in 1965. Her erudition and memory were legendary. From 1945 she worked at the Institute of Adult Education, and from 1959 until her retirement in 1973 in the Bibliographical Department at the Institute of Literature of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. She took part in the compilation of* A magyar irodalomtörténet bibliográfiája, 1905–1945 (The Bibliography of Hungarian Literature, 1905–1945).

She married Antal Szerb (1901–1945) in 1938 and did everything within her power to bring recognition for the writer and literary historian labelled 'bourgeois' in post-war Hungary.

This is a shortened version of an interview broadcast by Hungarian Radio on July 8, 1984. The interviewer was ***László Rapcsányi,*** *author and broadcaster.*

That's an error. Lenard left the country in 1918, and never lived here again. His family moved to Austria—he was still a child at the time. At the time of the Anschluss, he emigrated from Vienna to Rome.

Where he became physician to the Hungarian Academy in Rome?

That was later, much later, from 1946 to 1949. And after 1949, at the time of the Korean War, he moved to Brazil, I suppose when the threat of a Third World War seemed to loom heavily over us.

How did you come to know him?

In a very amusing way, I must say, by pure chance, through a series of fortunate coincidences. In 1965 I received a huge package, a hand-written translation of Antal Szerb's *A királyné nyaklánca* (The Queen's Necklace), without a single line of explanation to accompany it. I checked the name of the sender: Lenard, an unfamiliar name. The return address was Blumenau—only much later did I notice that this is in Brazil. I skimmed through the translation and liked it enormously. As I had already signed a contract for *The Queen's Necklace* with Hildegard Grosche, one of the leading German publishers of Hungarian literature, to be published in German, I wrote to her immediately to tell her I had received a fantastic translation.

But you couldn't give her any information about the translator.

I only knew his name. So I wrote two letters. I wrote to the address that this Lenard had given me and told him it was absolute madness, a very rash thing to do, to translate a Hungarian book into German without a contract. I also told him that I thought his translation was excellent and that he should contact Hildegard Grosche, to whom I wrote the second letter. She replied. "I didn't know whether to laugh or cry when I read your letter, it was we who commissioned Lenard to translate *The Queen's Necklace.*" I only received the letter covering the manuscript from Lenard weeks later, in which he explained who he was, the friends we had in common, Károly Kerényi[6] and so on and so forth. That was how our correspondence and friendship began. That was also when I learned that a book of his had been published in Germany entitled *Die Kuh auf dem Bast.* He sent me the book.

The German or the Hungarian version?

The German and the English, both of which he had written himself; Robert Graves wrote the foreword to the American edition, which had the title *The Valley of the Latin Bear.*

1 ■ Sándor Weöres (1913–1989), poet, playwright.
2 ■ Amy Károlyi (1919–2003), poet.
3 ■ János Pilinszky (1921–1981), poet.
4 ■ Ágnes Nemes-Nagy (1922–1991), poet and essayist. She helped compile Szerb's last work, the anthology titled *Száz vers* (A Hundred Poems) which Szerb kept with him throughout the months spent in a labour camp. She translated some of Lenard's poems from the German.
5 ■ Balázs Lengyel (1918–2007), writer and critic, husband of Ágnes Nemes Nagy.
6 ■ Karl [Károly] Kerényi (1897–1973), classical scholar, historian of religion.

It's strange that he did not send you the Hungarian version.

As he had not yet written it in Hungarian, he couldn't have sent it to me in Hungarian. I asked him whether he'd be prepared to translate his own book into Hungarian. He said he would write it instead. And he did; so his book exists in three versions, all of them slightly different. The essence is the same, but each has elements specific to the language it was written in and to the nation that speaks the language. Let me tell you something else: the manuscript I received was written in a beautiful hand, on onion-skin paper, I had to type it out before I could give it to the Hungarian publisher.

All of this was by post?

Yes, this is all by correspondence, I have about a thousand to a thousand five hundred letters from him.

In the photograph you've shown me, he has a beard, a thick moustache, a high forehead, and is well dressed, wearing a tie, looking like a professor.

No, he was a bear. He was always badly dressed. When he was teaching at Charleston College in South Carolina this was a problem for him, not to come to classes in jungle gear. Because that was where he actually came from, the jungle. He taught four semesters in Charleston.

A peculiar place to choose to live, the Brazilian jungle, amongst poor German settlers.

There was a German settlement around him, and poor Indios, in the state of Santa Catarina.

As far as I know, Lenard was always in straitened circumstances. How was he able to find peace of mind and buy a farm in Brazil?

Straitened circumstances—that's putting it mildly. He was always extremely poor. There was a huge Bach competition held in São Paulo called "The Sky's the Limit". He was one of most knowledgeable people in the world on Bach and entered the competition. It lasted six months; in the end he won and bought his pharmacy and his farm in Blumenau with the winnings.

Erudition and intellectual passion aside, he must have been a bit of a gambler at heart.

A gambler? Perhaps. He always thought of himself as lazy. Yet, despite all his laziness, he did work hard; his oeuvre attests to that.

His manuscripts are written in a minuscule hand—you practically need a magnifying glass to read them. Didn't he have a typewriter? Or was this an attitude?

It was to do with attitude, yes. He had a great many theories concerning how one can, should and must live, how one must write. Not with a typewriter, because a typewriter doesn't write, it typewrites.

The Hungarian version of The Valley of the Latin Bear, *entitled* Völgy a világ végén *(Valley at the End of the World) was published in 1967 and had an extraordinary effect on readers for the spirit in which it was written and its emotional content.*

Being published in Hungarian was perhaps the happiest event of his adult life. The great dream of his life had been realised, something he had thought he had had to renounce for ever: he became a writer in Hungary, in the country he had left when he was eight years old.

Who was he?

It is very hard to answer that. He was a poet, but he also drew well—he illustrated his own books. And he was an excellent pianist. I heard him play; if he had chosen that life for himself, he could have become a leading musician. He was also a gifted linguist; he wrote and spoke over ten languages, six or seven of them like a native.

Soon after the publication of the Hungarian version of The Valley, *probably at your instigation, other works followed:* Egy nap a láthatatlan házban *(A Day in the Invisible House) and* Római történetek *(Roman Stories) in 1969.*

Roman Stories first appeared in fragmented form in a Hungarian journal published in Brazil. The title may not have been the same—he never actually finished it—but at my request he sent me the pieces that had appeared. From these fragments I put together the book known as *Roman Stories*. I would also like to tell you how *A Day in the Invisible House* came into being. I asked him to describe a normal day, what he does from morning till night. He replied that it would be a little bit complicated to do that in a letter, he would try to do it in several letters. And that is how the book came about, from these letters.

Alexander Lenard died in 1972. He was 62 years old. Just before his death the news was circulating in Budapest that he was coming home to visit or to settle.

No, there was never anything in that rumour. He couldn't have come home; he was seriously ill during the last two years of his life.

He could have come earlier.

He could have, but he was kept back by his little farm in Brazil, and by the opportunity to teach Latin and Greek at Charleston College.

I feel there was something else. He may not have come home because he had a virtual Hungary within himself.

Exactly. For him, Hungary was the Hungary of Endre Ady, Mihály Babits and the other great poets. Perhaps he was afraid that he would have to face a milieu which would make him feel like an outsider; that was what I often felt at the time. We spoke about this often during the long years of our correspondence, I had one or two letters from him every week.

You corresponded from 1965 to 1972?

I got the last letter from him on the day he died.

Did you ever meet?

We met in Charleston in 1968. His semester was just ending. I was in America at the time and I went to Charleston from New York to see him.

Did he speak then of coming home to Hungary?

No, not right then, because fate struck, as it strikes all men of a certain age, and he fell desperately in love with a twenty-year-old student—hopelessly of course. Unfortunately, he was already ill by the time he returned to Brazil.

And who was with him in Brazil?

His second wife, his "Italian" wife as he called her, Andrietta.

So he had a family.

Of course he had a wife and a professor son in Germany, a pediatrician, and he has a son in Brazil called Sebastiano; not by chance, seeing as his whole life was centred around Bach.

Where is he buried?

He is buried on his farm. We haven't said a word yet about the Lenard Foundation: Knowing how much he loved the Latin language, I asked his wife to assign the Hungarian rights to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. From the interest, every second year, on Lenard's birthday, a young Latinist receives an award for his work.

Was his Latin translation of Winnie-the-Pooh *a labour of love?*

Winnie-the-Pooh? Of course it was. He firmly believed that he could make the Latin language useful again; you just had to start teaching children at the right age. He taught Latin to the children of Brazilian engineers, and the idea came into his head to translate Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* into Latin for them. And so he did. Out came *Winnie-the-Pooh* in Latin in 1960. You could say that he first made his name known to the world because of this book.

This has been a little like your unfinished conversations with him. Lenard says in one of his books that no writing is ever complete, it is doomed to remain a fragment for ever.

That's exactly what he wrote, and sometime someone should write a book on his life, so fragmented, yet, in its own way, very full. It's a life that deserves to be written about. ❧

Alexander Lenard

A Day in the Invisible House

Extracts

I have a missing photograph of Mussolini to thank for my life and an American publisher's tie-pin to thank for my estate.

In times of chaos we fail to recognise the significance of certain events. At the start of the War armies and navies marched and sailed into action. But it is the four or five physicists, scribbling formulae in their notebooks, who really changed history. Our universe of clashing cosmic dust clouds and exploding suns embraces neither order nor design. Man, whether the rule or the exception, hangs on the merest of trifles. It even dawned on the Bible's omniscient authors that God's excellent plans for mankind went pear-shaped with regard to the apple conundrum. Could it be that the fate of the world turns on the smallest of things?

The aforementioned photograph of Mussolini went missing from the Royal Hungarian Legation. Or to be more precise, from the Royal Hungarian Legation in Rome. To be even more precise, it was missing from the Legation to the Quirinal. (A photograph of Mussolini was also missing from the Legation to the Vatican, but that was natural—the Legation to the Holy See was suspended in a different reality.)

The Royal Hungarian Legation was housed in a villa. Chaos demands that the villa had once domiciled a house of ill repute belonging to an organisation of repute, the Knights of Malta. The Excellencies now crossed the same threshold, the same notorious villa, as those Cardinals whose names had been barely whispered.

Quirks of fortune and the storms of war had delegated the strangest people to represent Hungary.

There was Councillor Nagy, the chief patron of the Maltese Ladies. These Ladies were not the faithful wives of the Knights of Malta. They came from far away. Maybe as far away as the end of Mester utca in one of the poorer areas of Budapest. The Ladies used to spend three months every year in Malta as tourists before coming to Rome for three months to recuperate. There were quite a few of these Maltese Ladies, and the Knights also recruited Austrian dancers. The Ladies, however, did more than spend their three months in Rome recuperating, and this got them into trouble with the Italian police, prompting Councillor Nagy to intervene by issuing a *note verbale* in order to protect Hungary's good name. The Ladies were naturally most grateful to him.

And then Councillor Sommer-Szász, appointed to the Order of Vitéz, happened to be on the same ship carrying Rear-Admiral Horthy to the Straits of Otranto. At the same time, an Italian light cruiser happened to be searching the horizons. They cautiously fired at one another and both vessels put back for harbour. That was all that happened. The Italian Captain had no idea that he had just shot Quartermaster Sommer, the former resident of Pola, into Vitéz Szász, Councillor in Rome.

I do not know what blind fate had rocketed Colonel Kovács to the rank of military attaché, but it must have been blind indeed. Military Attaché Kovács had firm faith in Mussolini's regime. He did not know that the armour of Italian naval vessels was made of silver-foil, or that their bombers had wooden frames, or that Italian tanks were made of tin. He might have been the only person in Rome to have watched all the military parades without realising that exactly the same twenty tanks kept rolling past Il Duce. Every time the tanks completed a circuit of the Colosseum, the crews were given caps and flags, each of a different colour.

Another member of the Legation staff was Pompeio, a citizen of Rome and Italy by birth. He was originally employed by one of Franz Joseph's foreign ministers. After the property belonging to the Imperial and Royal Legation was divided up, the Hungarians got Pompeio. He subsequently became a telephone operator; by then he could handle Austrian, Hungarian and French on the phone.

There was also a porter at the Legation, but his fate was still to come. It arrived when a squadron of Liberators crossed the skies of Rome. The porter happened to watch their slow, dignified flight overhead in the garden. A single solitary bomb happened to fall. The next day someone visited the Legation, bearing a silver button from the porter's uniform picked up in a neighbouring garden. No other trace of him was found.

There was also an employee called Horváth in the office. Of him I knew nothing...

Who exactly, I wondered, did the Legation and its employees represent? Well, they were listed under 'H' for Hongrie, and they certainly represented Hungary in the strictly diplomatic sphere. But that was not all. From a different point of view they also represented the Hungarian State, Nation and Motherland. Contrary to what one might believe, these terms are not synonymous—far from it.

The State imposes taxes and sometimes kills its citizens. The State's political form changes, though it always proclaims itself eternal. Many people make their living out of the State, but nobody loves the State. We may be proud of the Nation, we may fervently work for the Nation, and we may even give to the Nation. But we are happy to die for the Motherland, because she holds us in her bosom and she sustains us. *If the Motherland calls, then rise to your feet...*

No one would suggest that the above mentioned gentlemen actually represented the Nation. (His Excellency himself floated so high above the others in his top hat, that he could not be seen at all.) In fact, the Legation represented the State on three hundred and sixty-three days of the year.

Anyone sitting in the waiting room was expecting the voice of the State to call out. While waiting, one could acquaint oneself with the duties, powers and

apparatus of the State. Beautiful, coloured 17th- and 18th-century engravings hung on the walls of the waiting room and staircase. One showed the city of Esztergom, with impaled people and a condemned man kissing the cross prior to his execution in the foreground. Another depicted the city of Győr, complete with a hanging on the left and a beheading on the right.

Whenever they opened the door of the office, one could hear the State's voice shouting:

"You must bring in your grandparents' certificates of baptism."

"What are you doing in a foreign country?"

"You need to prove beyond doubt that your father was not a Freemason."

"You are not Hungarian, you just speak Hungarian."

"Shut up or I'll hand you over to the Italian police!"

However, on the other two days of the year, March 15, the anniversary of the 1848 revolution, and on Hungary's national day, August 20, the Legation would put its stamps in a drawer, fly the Hungarian flag and open its doors wide. On these days the Legation became the Motherland. On these days, the Motherland welcomed her hungry, dispossessed sons with love and sandwiches. From the walls of the large hall, painted Austrian Archdukes smiled down at the gathering. The Archdukes were not able to exchange their Austrian red and white ribbons for the Hungarian tricolour on these occasions.

In 1919 the new Austrian Republic surrendered Pompeio as well as its princes, archdukes and white-uniformed aristocrats bearing the Order of the Golden Fleece. When Mussolini marched into their old palace, the homeless paintings marched over to the Realm of the Holy Crown of Hungary. These Habsburgs, even if not beribboned with the red, white and green, were welcomed gladly nonetheless.

Her blue-blooded kinsfolk on the walls would no doubt have agreed with the Archduchess in Ferenc Molnár's play, *Olympia,* when she said "I have nothing in common with the common," had they seen the greed of the mob rushing the sandwich-laden table.

A war was on and people were hungry. Refugees and immigrants lived in a misery unknown to the locals, not even those in prison. On the days of the State, haggard souls waited with their tin bowls for the Capuchin friars to hand out dishwater. However, on the days of the Motherland, an entirely different reality prevailed: they sipped coffee from Herend china. It was the Motherland who encouraged them:

"Do have some scones."

"Another apricot brandy, perhaps?"

The year was 1942. The councillors were all in black.

A young Someone-or-other was in full Hungarian ceremonial attire.

On a table in the corner of the hall, two photographs were displayed among flowers. One was of His Majesty Victor Emmanuel, King of Italy and Emperor of Abyssinia. The other was of Admiral Miklós Horthy of Nagybánya, the Hero of Otranto. Neither of them had the smile of an Archduke; the same kind of sour dignity adorned the faces of both the Emperor of Abyssinia and the Admiral on horseback.

Mr Horváth was standing by the table when someone asked him:

"Mr Horváth, can you tell me why Mussolini's picture is not displayed?"

"But this is not a circus, Sir! We are at the Royal Hungarian Legation!" Mr Horváth replied, without batting an eyelid.

I happened to be standing right next to them. I understood that I had found a true man—the kind of person Diogenes, lamp in hand, had looked for in vain in the market.

I had a grave problem with my passport at the time. My passport was invalid, and my case was hopeless. It was none other than Mr Horváth who resolved this problem. It was neither the State, nor the Motherland, nor even the Legation, but Mr Horváth himself. He saved me by issuing a paper which verified, in Dante's tongue, that my passport was being held by the Legation 'for renewal'.

"If the Italians accept this document, everything will be fine. If I'm asked about it, I'll have to say it's a fake. Use it in health!" he said.

The Italians accepted it. I even received bread coupons. The finest fruit borne of Italian humanism was that Italians believed anything that had not emanated from their own Propaganda Ministry.

In the wake of dramatic changes, the kings, princes, and all the extras on the stage of world history, resemble those kings of the stage who scrub off their make-up and eat cheese sandwiches in the pub after the curtain falls. Mussolini's picture was eventually removed from every table and Italy ceased to be a circus. The relics of the Dual Monarchy had disappeared from the Roy. Hun. Legation, while a councillor of more refined taste, on the first day of his arrival, had removed the images of the impaled and the hanged convicts from the Legation walls. Only Pompeio remained, on his throne in the phone-room. Mr Horváth disappeared, too.

Now, in my wooden house, I think of Mr Horváth much as a grateful patient thinks of the doctor who saved his life. In Rome, my papers were very ill. Many people died of sickly paperwork back then, but Mr Horváth's brave operation had cured my illness. What he did was as courageous an act as carrying a paralysed patient out of a burning building.

I do not know what became of Mr Horváth, even whether he is still alive or not. What I do know is that he represented nothing but humanity in that villa standing on those extra-territorial grounds outside the walls of Rome. I will feel gratitude towards Mr Horváth until the day I die.

While the missing photograph of Mussolini—"the lobster-eyed monster"—was the instrument of fate that saved my life, it was Mr Macrae's generous tie-pin I had to thank for my quiet little estate.

Mr Macrae's tie-pin was beautiful. Its four little diamonds and four little pearls glimmered in front of me in the restaurant of the New York club where its owner, the publisher of my Latin Winnie-the-Pooh translation had invited me for breakfast.

("Please do not hesitate to accept my invitation," Mr Macrae had kindly said, "I've made two hundred thousand dollars on your book.")

[...]

Mankind has spent millions of years on Earth, surviving ice ages, creating arrowheads, discovering corn and even numbers. However, what mankind has always failed to foresee, since mankind has always lived in chaos, was that a time would come when the lives, the days and the hours of mankind's grandchildren would be ruled by those numbers. Mankind did not foresee that everybody would eventually find themselves counting and calculating to the extent of being able to state absolute certainties concerning matters that no-one else really knew the first thing about.

It is enough to know that out of the few hundred or few thousand days left to me, a new day has begun. The cockerels have already discussed this with each other. The leaf-cutting ants have already used their jaws to cut pieces from their first leaves, which fit their tunnels perfectly (I remember when the stonemasons used to cut bricks like this, just as the church bells struck the dawn bell at five).

The lie of my valley is such that on most mornings the clouds seem to fly out of the rising sun, and then fall onto the setting sun at night. There are other times when groups of tired, broken clouds retire to the valley to sleep. These clouds are not awakened by the hands of any old clock. They could even be thought of as fog, until they struggle out of their valley-bed and fly on their way once more.

To find out what the weather is like, I breathe in the air and watch the force of the wind as it shakes the sardine-shaped leaves of the eucalyptus trees. In the morning, the wind is so refreshed after a good night's sleep that it even brings the scent of Christmas trees from the Chilean pine which stands further away.

The weather! Unlike humans, weather cannot be divided into categories of 'good' and 'bad'. These categories were invented by poor city-dwellers who neither sow nor glean. They call it 'bad weather' when they need raincoats. But people living with plants will slowly develop an empathy with leaf and root. 'Good weather' is simply the weather for sowing. Today, for instance, it would be good if all the little rolling clouds flowed together to become a grey-bearded, melancholy old-man-cloud, consigned to shedding all his tears upon the maize.

There is a Jehovah's Witness (one of those people who use their own wits to interpret the Bible) in this valley, who explained to me why the weather is so unusual here.

"Our Lord Jesus Christ made Saint Peter responsible for this whole weather business. But Saint Peter was a fisherman, not a peasant! What did he know about weather? A fisherman is never afraid of drought, for the sea never dries up. That's why he sometimes forgets that he needs to provide rain as well!"

There must also have been a problem with whoever was responsible for distributing the four seasons. He has sent eternal spring here, together with a few days of frost in July and one or two sweltering weeks at Christmas. He has sent autumn elsewhere. He has stolen all the snow, down to the last crystal. He has confiscated half of the dusk, and all of the frost, and he has taken the icicles abroad, to safety. I know this is the way things work here—the powerful confiscate, the weak steal and the canny take their wealth elsewhere. I can understand, but it won't stop hurting.

Half of homesickness is a question of weather. For someone who has been cast by chance beyond the banana trees—however wonderful that place may be—it pains him to learn that he has to make do with one season when it is four that he had learnt in school. It hurts him to realise that the snowdrops do not grow for him, so unfairly have they been distributed.

After I wake up in the morning, my faithful companion, homesickness, wakes up too.

A neuralgic patient of mine once told me that he always woke up free of pain. It was only a minute later that his pains woke up and spread through his nerves.

Poets have written more about homesickness than psychologists have. People infected with homesickness do not go to psychologists, for they do not believe it will heal them to have their consciousness—and what lies underneath it—picked apart. They know exactly what hurts. They know that understanding the cause of their problem is about as helpful as a plague-infected patient being shown a picture of the bacteria that caused it.

Homesickness is mysterious and deceitful. What is 'home'? 'Home' is neither a state nor a nation. Is it one's motherland? Maybe Japan is the home, the land of the sun. But what happens when a young girl is sent off just ten kilometres to work as a servant-girl and two weeks later returns, because she could not stand the distance and the homesickness could have killed her? Can you die of homesickness? I think you can.

Once, a small Hungarian boy went to Rome with his parents. He fell ill a few days later. He did not talk, he did not eat. He just grew numb. He could not explain, he could not say exactly what he felt. I observed him and examined him for hours, and then I realised that he was suffering from a bout of acute, life-threatening homesickness. He returned to Budapest with his mother. There he got better, like someone seasick setting foot again on *terra firma.*

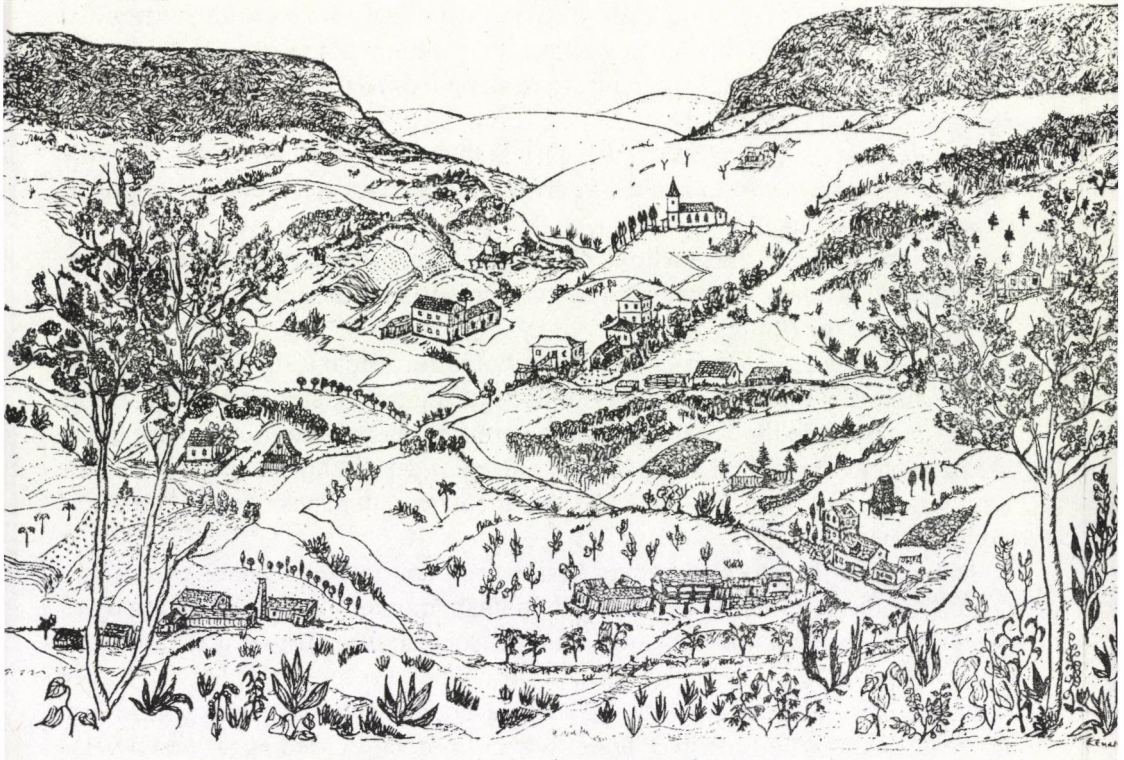
There are more serious, chronic cases, too. Thirty or forty years do not reduce homesickness. At best, relief only makes the patient aware that it was there in the first place. Out of the family furniture and books from the old world, the face of a little boy sometimes appears (that same little boy who now wears the mask of this old man); homesickness ceases for a few hours, and this is when you notice how much the homesickness has hurt.

The problems of the emigrant are impossible to solve. Either he withdraws into himself, into isolation from his new world and feels alienated, in which case he gradually becomes melancholic. Or he learns the language of his new homeland and its metaphors, its quips and allusions. He even uses this new language with his children. But then his personality becomes divided, schizophrenic, like that of the many-headed monster of fairy tales.

Homesickness is akin to what afflicts plants. We know now that all plants need a certain number of hours of sunshine. Tulips do not grow when planted in the soil of Paphlagonia in February, because they notice that the days are getting shorter.

Perhaps the whole world will be alike one day, and all cities will have the same face. Then the resident of a cave in a concrete mountain can move without pain into a cube far away. Man cannot put down roots through tarmac, and so it will be easy to stroll over to another tarmac faraway. Those who grow up in a garden, however, can only move to another garden by tearing up their roots.

Every morning I have to enter the world anew. This world feels strange after a dream which illuminates its depths. Homesickness hurts in the morning, when it wakes up.



Thirst and hunger wake up later, after homesickness.

Hunger is more familiar to me than thirst. Even if it has not haunted me as often as homesickness, it did keep me company for long periods. Hunger used to be a loud companion. I still recognise its true face, even under the friendly guise of appetite. In the half hour before breakfast something still lingers from those of my days that went breakfastless. Thank God ghosts fear the cockerel's crow!

My kitchen is housed in a separate building, if I may call a small wooden shed a building. A wall with a window separates the dining area from the small area where the stove stands. This is the way Italians build their houses. A separate kitchen means extra safety for wooden houses. It is harder for the whole house to burn down.

The separate kitchen also means that different roles in life are played out on different stages. Eating takes place in an entirely different setting than thinking or music. Man can choose freely: he can view eating as real life, and regard work and

reading as activities of greater or lesser importance to fill the time between meals. Or he can regard sipping his soup as a necessary evil that allows him to work without the vicious circle of visions of bread whirling round and round before his eyes.

Maybe every countryside has its own *spiritus loci.* Indios lived here for thousands of years. They were quiet people, whose ancestors must have walked from Siberia and across Alaska towards the end of the Ice Age. After a walk of one or two thousand years they brought the Stone Age down here. The Stone Age here did not finish that long ago. Axe-heads are still lying in the grass, and arrowheads still appear from the ground after only one strike with a hoe. Indios regarded eating and sleeping as the purpose of life. They did not eat in order to be able to work. They worked a little—shaping stone axe-heads to thirty-thousand-year-old designs—so that they could eat.

I accept that I am governed by the spirit of the countryside. I proceed along the brick path through the yard to the kitchen building with the knowledge that the important things happen there. Maybe this would not be the case if, for the past two thousand years, those who lived here had been hermits, not forgiving the body for the needs which call man away from stroking the scrolls left behind by the Fathers of the Church.

My breakfast does not resemble my predecessors' breakfasts, which consisted of chewing raw manioc roots by the light of the rising sun. Neither does my breakfast resemble the breakfasts of the hermit masters, who used a piece of dry bread to entice back their souls that so longed to depart. My breakfast has had a long journey here, just as I have had. My breakfast quenches hunger, thirst and homesickness.

Different worlds are so far apart, that the rifts cannot be breached by words.

One would think that "Péter had breakfast" means the same in Hungary as "Peter had breakfast" does in England. This could not be further from the truth. Péter in Hungary had *paprikás* bacon, and wheaten bread made with boiled potatoes, caraway seeds and salt. He washed it down with plum brandy. However, Peter in England had a cup of tea, a bowl of porridge, fried eggs, and he also finished the life on dry land of some smoked sea fish. So even breakfasts are impossible to compare.

Whoever has lived away from his native land for a long time (yet another guise taken on by state, homeland or nation) will have learnt that eating is not something that involves only hunger, thirst or work; it also involves homesickness.

Providing experimental evidence for this is not a simple affair.

At home with a bowl of pea soup with little egg dumplings one only senses whether it has enough salt or not, whether the peas are ready or should have been cooked for another ten minutes. All you feel after your meal is that you are not as hungry as you were before.

However, near the southern shores of the Atlantic, it feels different. After having not seen peas for ten years, because the natives do not know of peas and because I did not have a garden, I finally acquired some land. I wrote letter after letter, until

I received two handfuls of sowing peas from five or ten thousand kilometres away. I planted them, watched the clouds for rain to water the peas, checked at night for guzzling crickets lest they might steal my seedlings, watched whether the pea flowers would be as white as the wings of the butterflies back home. And then one day, one very fine day, I had two handfuls of peas! These will not only make soup, but, out of the steam, a long lost world will swirl. My homesickness will be assuaged between the first and last spoonfuls. My wanderer's anxiety will lessen—the wanderer who knows, even in his sleep, that whatever direction he takes, he will never arrive home.

Only in pea soup or in a Schubert quintet is he ever at home...

Or in a breakfast that cannot be matched within a thousand miles. It cannot be matched, because it requires a packet of paprika to set off from the banks of the river Tisza and travel to town, where kindly hands send it on its way by means of some flying contraption. This particular packet will have to be the packet that is not stolen by any of the countless hands it goes through as it travels deeper and deeper into the jungle by coach, car and ox-cart. And when the wandering treasure arrives, there is still no *paprikás* bacon. For this you need to find a German who is aware of the connection between fatty bacon and pigs. If he is in a talkative mood, the German will let you explain what form God had in mind for fatty bacon when He was in high spirits and created the pig. Then you have to explain the problems of curing the bacon. This is how the purple-coloured medicine for homesickness is born.

[...]

It was in Rome, in '43, a long time ago, that a Hungarian foreign mission first honoured me with its trust. The War was approaching the Eternal City, hunger had already arrived. Medicines had long been in short supply.

One day my phone rang.

"This is the Hungarian Legation to the Vatican. Can you come quickly, doctor?"

"What is it about?" I needed to know what medicine to take with me.

"I believe it is pneumonia. Please come quickly."

I took some Sulpha tablets with me. According to the radio, these pills cured Churchill's pneumonia. I felt confident.

Who could the patient possibly be?

As I was crossing the Pincio, where there were cabbage plots instead of flower beds—emphasising the Spartan times—I became preoccupied with a strange medical problem: I knew what the patient's ailment was, but did not know who had the pneumonia. Was it the Minister? Baron Apor, a descendant of princes, a passionate golfer. The game would hardly lead to pneumonia, especially in the summer. The only place this small man ever visited was the villa of the Knights of Malta, where he used to walk in the shade of centuries-old family trees. He was a true gentleman: he never touched anything dirty, not even with his little finger. He himself had chosen his secretary and his press attaché from the strange zoo of diplomats, two oddballs in danger of their lives who were there despite their sickly

lineage. For how could someone, whose mother's maiden name was Schwartz, have ever become Secretary without Apor's intervention? And how could an illiterate pseudo-Catholic, who was pushed into the diplomatic services by some bishop, have become press attaché? I knew both of them well. Normally, if there had been a problem, they would have called me themselves. Was it the Papal prelate, who actually did the work of all three of them? A silver-headed priest with a look of goodness all over him—Molnár could have based the character Jácint in *The Swan* on him. It has always been a mystery to me why he later became Minister under the Szálasi regime when the rest of them, the Baron and his protégés, resigned.

I was racking my brain. I knew that the Secretary slept in the morning, and played bridge with an Italian Marchesa, who happened to be a relative, in the afternoon (her husband, the Marchese, slept in the afternoon). The Press Attaché's duties consisted of receiving a copy of the Vatican daily, *Osservatore Romano,* and underlining all the news he thought might interest Budapest with a red pencil.

I could still not fathom who the patient might be. I had not recognised the voice of the person who rang.

When I got to the Legation, a young stranger opened the garden gate and introduced himself:

"I am Jóska. I called you."

I must have looked somewhat surprised, because he continued to explain himself:

"His Excellency had me brought here. I have only been here two months."

"Where is the patient?" I asked.

"You can look at him right away," he said, and he started leading me, but not in the direction of the villa.

"Where is the patient?"

"There."

I could only make out a fence and a building resembling a sty at the end of the garden.

"Who is the patient? Who has got pneumonia?"

Jóska opened the sty door and showed me:

"The Royal Hungarian Legation's pig. He's been coughing all night. I reported it to the Ambassador. It must be pneumonia. He told me that all the numbers were next to the phone. There was no horse-doctor on the list, but I thought that a doctor knows what pneumonia is, so I called you."

The piglet took the tablets, and soon got better. Jóska already had my honorarium ready, and he shed some light on the pig affair. Thanks to his diplomatic sources of information, the Ambassador knew about the approaching difficulties, and so he purchased a porker. Since neither he, nor his secretaries, knew how to chop carrots, he brought Jóska over from Hungary. The little piglet attacked the Chilean Chargé, which caused serious diplomatic ructions between Hungary and Chile, so Jóska built a sty and a pen and took charge of the Legation pig. Once a week he took the car, bearing a red and white and green Hungarian

flag on its left wing, and the gold and white flag of the Vatican on the right, to the estate of Prince Borghese, and brought back the pig's carrots from there. History proved the Ambassador correct. In the months of the worst hardship, my patient supplied the Legation with bacon and sausages.

So I had a chicken thief and a coughing pig amongst my not-too-refined circle of patients. I would rather have followed the path of my successful colleague, Axel Munthe, whom I managed to see in the Scandinavian Club in Rome. He was almost blind, but he still managed to distinguish the old dragons from the young female students amongst his admirers, and returned the admiration of the latter.

I could also boast that there was a bishop and a princess amongst my patients. Unfortunately, my creator cursed me with a feature that tends to close down the career paths of both diplomacy and writing for me. My pen obsessively insists on the truth. Oh, well! I will have to do without a villa on Capri, for it would soon be revealed that my bishop, that pious and scholarly gnome sitting in Ancient Rome under the picture of Hindenburg, was the one arranging journeys to Argentina for Eichmann and his kind. He was not a bishop to boast about. And my princess, dressed as a buffoon, just sat with her snappy little dog and four or five sweet tortoises in her studio full of broken windows, where she was always painting her self-portrait. She was not a princess to boast about.

I am a snob. I am proud of the great and the good who will float high above bishops and princesses on Judgement Day, and whom I was able to touch with my own hands, thanks to benevolent Chance or my thankless profession. When I think of them, I cannot call my profession thankless anymore. Furthermore, I would even be prepared to make the sacrifice of a black cockerel to Aesculapius (the cockerel that had been stolen from me was brown).

After the war I was doctor to the Hungarian Academy of Rome for a time. Of all my jobs, this is the one I am proudest of. It cost me a great deal of money, but it was still worth it.

This is how it happened. The director of the Academy, a great scholar of humanism, telephoned me to come and see him and declared:

"I will appoint you as the doctor of the Academy. Your monthly honorarium will be five thousand lira. Is that all right?"

It is difficult to have an argument about numbers with people who are not mathematicians. If I place the money on the eternal scales, it could not have been more than eight dollars as I write now. Too much for a dinner, too little for a month. The Director noticed my anxiety.

"I know five thousand is not very much. But it will be enough for what you'll have to do here, which is absolutely nothing in the world. Your office is merely symbolic. You can have a life like that of Prince Lancelotti, who takes the Pope's Golden Rose to chaste Catholic queens. He is not overstretched. Everybody who comes here is in perfect health after their medical examination. This is what you will have to do—come in once a month and have a little chat with me in Latin, for a laugh. Then you can take your money and go shopping nearby on Campo de' Fiori."

"Five thousand is quite enough for doing nothing!" I accepted the job.

It was enough for trams, but not enough for a taxi when I received one of the numerous urgent calls, mostly at night. Almost every guest introduced himself upon arrival, in the firm conviction that they would end up buried on the Campo Varano.

After a little practice, my long-distance diagnoses always proved correct. When the porter rang me to say "the honourable artist is about to die" or "the honourable writer is still alive, but the *monsignore* is with him", I just asked a couple of questions.

"Did he arrive yesterday?"

"Yes."

"Did he go to the beach or did he have pizza?"

From the answer I could tell whether the honourable artist had sun-stroke or cholera-like symptoms. I packed my bag and rushed. None of Hungary's great sons died at the Academy.

People coming from Budapest were dazzled by Rome. The city had been liberated in '44. The English and the Americans had brought money, food, light and hope. The Italians, having survived fascism—the saddest circus in history—were now happily dancing, drinking and enjoying their freedom. Foreigners went for a pizza on their first evening after arriving. They had hot, cheesy, oily pizza with fish and mushroom toppings, washed down with Frascati and oranges afterwards. They felt so good that they went somewhere else for a *pastasciutta* swimming in tomato sauce. At midnight they went back to the Academy. At two in the morning they called for a priest, a doctor and a notary to make their wills.

On summer days they first made tracks for the sea, the great symbol of freedom. Our outstanding Hungarian classicists threw themselves into the briney waves reciting Homer in Greek. At night, in Hungarian, with faces the colour of lobsters, burnt skin peeling in shreds, heads infernally throbbing, they cursed the fate that had driven them to Rome.

"To be born in Keszthely and to die in Rome!" groaned one.

The next day, however, you could manage a conversation with these artists just back from the banks of the Lethe.

It was not only the newcomers who honoured me with their calls. In the Palazzo Falconieri the floors were of stone, the windows did not close properly and the palazzo did not have any heating. Our poets staying there went hoarse, the arthritic legs of the pianists iced up and could not find the pedals. The telephone rang, I had to hurry. Flying, by tram or on foot, it did not matter. It was a question of the gods on the Hungarian Olympus. It was an expensive occupation. I do not know from where I got the money to pay for it. Now, many years later, I can proudly say that my patients' writings make up a considerably large library. They also painted beautiful pictures. It is with great respect that I lay my syringe before them.

Happy is the doctor whose patients are immortal! ❧

Translated by Krisztina Pheby

Péter Siklós

The Klára Szerb–Alexander Lenard Correspondence

The Petőfi Literary Museum in Budapest holds over a thousand items belonging to the correspondence between Alexander Lenard (Sándor Lénárd) and Antal Szerb's widow Klára between 1965 and 1972.[1] It would be impossible to condense this unpublished correspondence into a few sentences. Indeed it is difficult enough to survey the letters of even the first year without leaving much out that is of importance. Naturally, there is mention of Antal Szerb's works, especially of *A királyné nyaklánca* (The Queen's Necklace), which Lenard translated into German, and *Journey by Moonlight,* a novel set in Italy, evoking people and places Lenard was familiar with. By March 1967 Klára Szerb was writing:

> I get my herd of cows and graze them in Budapest, you see. In this shop on Bartók Béla Road there were 50 copies just five days ago—today they had two left, but only because I rang to have them put aside for me. They asked whether I had any news of you, as you had "flown off the shelves!"

These lines were written on the back of a receipt for 43 forints, dated 30 March, 1967. The book which was flying off the shelves was *Völgy a világ végén,* the Hungarian version of *Die Kuh auf dem Bast.* Lenard had written the latter in German (Stuttgart, 1963) and later turned it into English as *The Valley of the Latin Bear.* Klára Szerb is referring to the German title, which translates, in the dialect of the German settlers of Santa Caterina in Brazil, as "The Cow on the Meadow", a title the two of them constantly play with in the letters. Klára Szerb reports on the success of the Hungarian edition which she vigorously promoted for two years. The recipient—then aged fifty-seven with a dozen books in German, Italian, English and Latin behind

1 ■ 997 letters, written between 1965 and Lenard's death in 1972, were left amongst Mrs Antal Szerb's papers. These included 428 letters and postcards from Lenard and 569 from Mrs Szerb (PIM Archives, V. 5415/116). Lenard's widow, Andrietta, sent numerous documents to the Museum, which made up a separate Lenard collection, including a further 68 letters and cards from Mrs Szerb (V. 5473/95).

Péter Siklós

has done research on Alexander Lenard's works published in German. Some of his writings on Lenard are available on the website http://www.elib.hu/kiallitas/lenard/indexeng.html

him—had been published in the language he had been born into: he had finally become a Hungarian writer, and not in translation: Lenard re-wrote the book in Hungarian, with a new title which translates as "The Valley at the End of the World."

Alexander Lenard's first letter to Klára Szerb is dated 20 February, 1965. On that same day he sent her his German translation of Antal Szerb's *A királyné nyaklánca,* a book-length essay on a famous scandal involving Marie Antoinette. His covering letter arrived, however, weeks after the translation itself, which is not surprising, considering that both items had been mailed from the depths of Santa Caterina in Brazil, where Lenard lived.

Klára Szerb was delighted to have unexpectedly discovered such an excellent German literary translator and Latin scholar: "...it is my firm belief that you are a magician! And a white one at that, blessed with a lucky hand." She obviously refers to a 1940 essay in which Szerb discusses *The Tempest* and which became the title of a posthumously published collection of essays, *A varázsló eltöri pálcáját* (The Magician Breaks His Wand). She goes on to explain:

> You are a good magician. What follows is my testament, and I believe no-one in the world is capable of executing it but you. I am obsessed with the *History of World Literature*.[2] I think it is Tóni's most important book and it should be translated, and thereby saved, into another European language. Time is racing past, and already more than twenty years have passed since he wrote it. I even told Grosche[3] that I did not want a penny in royalties, as long as they published it as a matter of urgency. Of course, they do not dare to bring out such a lengthy work by an unknown author with no track record. In the meanwhile, the Hungarian copyright bureau have scolded me for this offer, because we need "hard currency". I couldn't care less, and they can even do a pirate first edition. If I choose not to sue the publisher, then in whose name could the bureau possibly sue them? Of course, we're only speaking about the first edition. Tóni's book on the theory of the novel, *Die Suche nach dem Wunder,* came out in German at the end of the Thirties. This book alone was enough for a Swiss man called Wehrli[4]—if I remember his name correctly—to refer to Tóni in his literary history! That's why my heart breaks to think of the *History of World Literature* being available only in Hungarian.

The Tóni referred to is Antal Szerb, whom she had married in 1938 and who was beaten to death on 27 January 1945 in the camp at Balf, near the Austrian border.

Letters were exchanged more frequently in the summer months. Lenard sent his most important books to Budapest, either directly, or through his publishers. These

2 ■ *A világirodalom története,* 1941, by Antal Szerb. It is still only available in Hungarian.
3 ■ Hildegard Grosche (1913–2006), publisher and literary translator. She was the founder, and between 1949 and 1970, the manager of Steingrüben Verlag. In the early 60s she also headed Henry Goverts Verlag, who in 1960 published *A királyné nyaklánca* (The Queen's Necklace). In the 70s she stopped working in publishing and became the most revered literary translator from Hungarian into German translating, among others, works by László Németh, Tibor Déry, Iván Mándy, István Örkény, Miklós Mészöly and Péter Nádas.
4 ■ Klára Szerb is referring to *Hétköznapok és csodák* (Workdays and Wonders, 1936) by Antal Szerb and *Allgemeine Literaturwissenschaft* by the literary historian Max Wehrli (1909–1998).

included the German version of *The Valley of the Latin Bear,*[5] which is an account of Lenard's life in Southern Brazil, peppered with delightful anecdotes and a wise sense of humour; Lenard's Latin translation of *Winnie-the-Pooh,*[6] which became a bestseller; and *Die römische Küche*[7], an unconventional anti-fascist cookery book cum cultural history, which was published by Steingrüben Verlag of Stuttgart, the publishing house run by Hildegard Grosche, who commissioned the translations of works by Antal Szerb. Lenard made sure that Klára Szerb received a copy of *Ex Ponto,*[8] a collection of his poems published in Vienna in 1954, in addition to his Latin translation of Françoise Sagan's novel *Bonjour Tristesse*![9]

The effect Lenard had on Klára Szerb's life can be seen in her correspondence. She threw herself into "researching" Lenard. She asked Hildegard Grosche for information, she enquired about Lenard asking common friends and acquaintances. She first approached Magda Kerényi[10], who happened to be translating Szerb's *Journey by Moonlight* into German for Grosche at the time. She then asked Lenard's friends, Bence Szabolcsi[11] and his wife Klári. "*Ex Ponto:* Bence and I were wondering whether there was anywhere in the world where you would give a different title to your collection of poems. Please let me know! [...] I tried to question them about what you are like and what you look like. Bence says that you are handsome, but Klári's response was less forthcoming. Still, you shouldn't worry."

For a short period in his life, between 1946 and 1950, Lenard had met many prominent Hungarians in Rome. Those few years saw a stream of the Hungarian intelligentsia at the Palazzo Falconieri, which housed the Hungarian Academy, the Collegium Hungaricum of Rome, to which Lenard had been appointed physician. Klára Szerb was working for the Literary Institute of the Hungarian Academy of

5 ■ *Die Kuh auf dem Bast,* Stuttgart, DVA,1963 was followed by an English edition, introduced by Robert Graves: *The Valley of the Latin Bear* (New York, Dutton, 1965). The Hungarian version, *Völgy a világ végén* (The Valley at the End of the World, Budapest, Magvető) was published in 1967.

6 ■ Lenard's translation was first published by himself in São Paolo in 1958 and was followed by a Swedish edition in 1959 by Svenska Bokförlaget with the title *Nalle ille Pu.* The book's worldwide success came after its publication in 1960 in London by Methuen and in New York by E.P. Dutton with the title *Winnie Ille Pu,* where it became the only non-English-language book ever to appear (for twenty weeks!) in the *New York Times* bestseller list.

7 ■ Published in English under the title *The Fine Art of Roman Cooking* (New York, Dutton, 1966). The Hungarian edition only appeared in 1986 (*A római konyha,* Budapest, Magvető). In the 21st century Lenard's works have only been published in Hungarian by his old publishers, privatised during the regime change. They brought out a new edition of *Völgy a világ végén* (The Valley at the End of the World) in 2002 for the 30th anniversary of Lenard's death. This was followed by *A római konyha* (The Fine Art of Roman Cooking) in 2004 and *Egy nap a láthatatlan házban* (A Day in the Invisible House) in 2005. An Italian publisher is bringing out an Italian translation of *Római történetek* (Roman Stories) in 2008.

8 ■ Alexander Lenard, *Ex Ponto.* Wien–Bad Bocklet–Zürich, Walter Krieg Verlag, 1954.

9 ■ Francisca Sagana, *Tristitia salve.* Stockholm, Svenska Bokförlaget, 1963. (São Paolo, Officina, 1963; Paris, Julliard, 1963; Stuttgart, DVA, 1964).

10 ■ Magda Kerényi (1914–2004), an art historian, was her husband's, Karl Kerényi's literary executor. While he was alive, she also dealt with his correspondence, in order to give him the peace he needed for his research.

11 ■ Bence Szabolcsi (1899–1973) musicologist. He was editor and contributor to many Hungarian and international journals of musicology. He was the founder and first director of the Bartók Archives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Musicology.

Sciences at the time: "Just imagine. I am working on the bibliography of twentieth-century Hungarian literature, I have about a hundred thousand index cards, and I have a personal connection to almost every one of them. Sometimes I just sit amongst them crying like a fool, because I mourn them as my own dead. I sit in this National Pantheon, like Niobe, still alive by chance. I feel very anxious for the few people who are still physically present." (August 4, 1965)

Klára Szerb followed up all the traces she could find of Lenard's family, primarily the works of his father, Jenő Lénárd, who had written *Dhammo,* the first book on Buddha in Hungarian, and Lénárd's younger brother, Róbert, who was a graphic artist. She met the then aging Lóránt Basch, who was the poet Mihály Babits's literary executor and who told her about Lenard's translations of Babits's poetry (Klára Szerb published the only translation found among Babits's papers along with a letter of praise from Babits to Lenard). She also drew from him his recollections of the Lénárd boys, whom he remembered from the 1910s. She asked various scholarly and academic friends to research Lenard's family tree. She visited the places where Lenard had spent his early years in Hungary, including the house where he was born, the house he lived in before the First World War, and his aunt's house where the family stayed during the war.

Amongst her discoveries were a scholarly report on an expedition by Lenard's father to Turkey in 1918 and two early works by Lenard himself, which he had sent from Rome to a Budapest-based theatre magazine in 1939. These she typed and sent on to Lenard in Brazil. She started to collate systematically Lenard's letters, manuscripts, drawings, photos, publications and other details she was able to find about him. She also searched for, and found, personal and family connections with him: "I'll just tell you quickly that the last book my father[12] read was *Dhammo.* Did you know that he was the translator of *Italienische Reise?* My mother had also read it many times." (September 21, 1965) She acted as host to Lenard's sons and acquaintances when they visited Budapest and exchanged letters with his second wife in Brazil. She got in touch with friends in São Paolo, including Dezső Landy, who had published Szerb's anthology of poetry, *Száz vers* (A Hundred Poems).

Antal Szerb's widow knew everyone in Hungarian intellectual life and was in touch with many public figures. She left no stone unturned in her efforts to have Lenard discovered and introduced to the Hungarian literary scene. In a letter to Gyula Illyés, the most prominent poet and author of the times, she wrote: "Gyula, I have a piece of friendly advice for you: for God's sake don't let our publisher, Grosche, have anyone other than Sándor translate a single line of your work! I am talking from experience, as he translated *The Queen's Necklace* into German for Grosche, and I can honestly say that it is congenial." (October 18, 1965) It was essentially due to her that Lenard's works were allowed to be published in Communist Hungary, although he counted as a Hungarian living abroad.

12 ■ Klára Szerb's father was the writer and journalist Aladár Bálint (1881–1925).

She managed to secure the approval of György Aczél, in charge of cultural policy at the time, who had been a childhood friend of her brother. She also ensured appropriate publicity for *Valley,* the first book to appear in Hungarian.

Klára Szerb sent at least as many books to Lenard as she received from him. In the Sixties, Szerb's works were once again allowed to appear. It was during this period that *Szerelem a palackban* (Love in a Bottle) was released, a collection of his short stories (previously only published in reviews) and fragments of an unfinished novel. As Antal Szerb's literary executor, she commented:

> When I put the volume together I felt I had to hurry. There was no hope of a critical edition which could have been reasonably comprehensive appearing in the foreseeable future, and it became unclear whether it would be published at all if it didn't get printed quickly [...] My sole ambition is to put as much as I can into order while I am alive. I want to get every publishable manuscript published. When a work leaves my drawer, my role is fulfilled. (September 21, 1965)

Klára Szerb sent the book to Brazil, along with the first, 1937, edition of *Journey by Moonlight* and a new edition of *The Pendragon Legend.* She sent regular updates about the Hungarian literary scene, about the growing interest in Antal Szerb's work, and about her task of looking after his papers. She also sent musings on her memories of life with her husband, and on her own life, on the joys and problems of raising her son born in 1951, and on her illnesses. She gave advice to Lenard on all sorts of matters and constantly scolded him for not taking care of his health. She was not very keen on his facial hair, either, suggesting more than once, but always in vain, that he shave off his beard and his moustache. Lenard, in turn, tried to persuade Klára Szerb to stop smoking. On December the 11th, he sent her a present of the Hungarian translation of a Theodor Storm poem[13] for "chucking those damned fags in the stove. [...] My only concern is that your fingers shouldn't be yellow and you shouldn't get lung cancer and that you get yourself together and start breathing air instead of smoke." Needless to say, Lenard's victory ultimately proved to be Pyrrhic.

Klára Szerb was a passionate indoor gardener, growing cacti and succulents. Lenard's gardener's view of the world is now well known. He often wrote about his difficulties obtaining sowing seeds for certain vegetables and flowers. Her letters to Brazil in turn enclosed poppy, pea or herb seeds. In return, Lenard arranged for cactus seeds to be sent to Budapest from South Africa. They regularly gave an account of what they were reading to one another. She carefully introduced Lenard to contemporary Hungarian literature and its most important authors. In his letters, Lenard recounted his activities and literary work. In turn, she was impressed by his ability to read and write in so many languages and by his numerous pursuits in addition to his medical practice. The two also regularly discussed music, as they were both passionate record collectors.

13 ■ Lenard was a keen and talented player of a game favoured by the *Nyugat* poets, which is essentially a series of translations of a poem backwards and forwards between two languages. See: *Im Walde* by Sándor Lenard and Theodor Storm at http://www.mek.iif.hu/kiallit/Lenard/szeminarium/irasok/storm.html

They exchanged the gossip of the Hungarian community in São Paolo for that of the Budapest intelligentsia. Lenard was in his element, and he recorded dozens of anecdotes. It was his firm conviction that only stories with a beginning and an end, and shaped like anecdotes, would stay alive in history. His method of writing comes through in these letters. He recounted anecdotes over and again, in much the same words. But they became more and more polished and honed with every attempt. Eventually he used these in his prose works. His first bestseller, which became in English *The Valley of the Latin Bear,* the book with three lives, was born out of a string of such stories.

It was Klára Szerb who persuaded Lenard to release his works in Hungary. First she got him to "Hungarianise" the "cow book". She took part in the editing and they came up with the final title together. Lenard sent the manuscript with the title *"Patikus a bozótban"* (Pharmacist in the Bush); the title which translates as *Valley at the End of the World,* only emerged later.

On the last day of the year in which their correspondence started, Klára Szerb was able to report on its Hungarian appearance: "At last! At last I can lie back! And congratulations, my dear, and a thousand hugs, and congratulations again: Kati Rayman[14] rang in the afternoon and we know for sure now that your cow will also graze on a Hungarian meadow! [...] you will get the 'official' notification from Magvető Publishers next week."

It was also Klára Szerb who encouraged Lenard to collect his memoirs of Rome of the late 30s and 1943, which had appeared in various Brazilian and German journals. The collection eventually appeared as *Római történetek* (Roman Stories)[15]. Even before they finally met in the States in 1968, Klára Szerb asked Lenard to describe one of his days to her. This request inspired *Egy nap a láthatatlan házban* (A Day in the Invisible House)[16], perhaps the most beautifully written of all of Lenard's prose works. (The extracts published on pp. 31–42 of this issue are from this memoir.) Lenard dedicated all three of his books in Hungarian "to Klári".

At the end of the first year of their correspondence, on 30 December, 1965, they established a habit of writing their first and last letters of every year to one another. Lenard wrote:

> I have written and accomplished very little this year (old age has reached me; I just haven't got used to it yet). I can truly and seriously say that the best things that have happened this year were your letters—I will remember the year 1965 for this alone. Thank you for bringing me out of the bush for one last chapter, and for nursing me with your frequent accusations—Your grateful, faithful, not always obedient, but loving friend, Sándor. ❧

14 ■ Katalin Rayman, Lenard's Hungarian editor. She also wrote an article on Lenard entitled "Egy magyar Schweitzer Brazíliában" (A Hungarian Schweitzer in Brazil), *Nagyvilág,* 1966/6. See also the extraordinary memoir by Katalin Rayman in *HQ* 153, Spring 1999.

15 ■ Sándor A. Lénárd: *Római történetek.* Magvető, Budapest, 1969. The story "Róma 1938" (Rome 1938) appeared in four issues of *Kultúra* in 1955. In 1957–58 the same journal published "Két hét múlva jönnek" (They Will Be Here in Two Weeks) in ten instalments. This recounts his memories of 1943 Rome, which appeared in German as *Am Ende der Via Condotti* in 1963 in a special 75-page Christmas gift edition published by DVA.

16 ■ Sándor A. Lénárd.: *Egy nap a láthatatlan házban.* Budapest, Magvető, 1969. In German: *Ein Tag im unsichtbaren Haus.* Stuttgart, DVA, 1970.

The 1965 Letters

A Selection

Alexander Lenard to Klára Szerb

February 20, 1965

Dear Madam,

I have enclosed a copy of the translation for Steingrüben Verlag with this letter and sent it to your address. I hope you will recognise the voice and style of the original in *Halsband der Königin* [The Queen's Necklace].

I have tried to follow the text as closely and accurately as possible, even where this was to the detriment of the German style—my aim was to preserve the book's unique voice.

I have left out fifteen lines at the most: the genealogical tree of the Esterházy family, which is of no interest to the German reader—and the long, bungled Latin poem, which is full of misprints in the Hungarian version and which, in any case, is a mere curio of Hungarian literary history.

I have attempted to tone down the remarks concerning the xenophobia of the French despite the truth in them. After what has happened, embittered remarks on the French in a German text do not make a good impression.

I have rectified the omissions, about fifteen or twenty lines in all: I have added some facts about Cagliostro's death, gathered from new Italian publications—and I think my comment on how the figure of Sarastro in *The Magic Flute* did in fact immortalise Cagliostro will be of special interest to German readers. It would perhaps be worthwhile writing a short essay on this some time. You will find my rectifications under the heading *Bemerkung des Übersetzers*.

The spelling of the French and German quotations in the Hungarian version was full of mistakes. I have corrected these in the German version throughout.

I would like to ask you to let me know should you wish to make any changes in my translation… and I would just like to add that translating this book was an uncommonly pleasant and rewarding task.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Sándor Lénárd

This is Alexander Lenard's first letter. It arrived weeks after the package containing the German translation of *A királyné nyaklánca* (The Queen's Necklace). The polyglot Lenard considered Hungarian to be his native tongue, but wrote his poetry in German, the language he felt most at ease with. He translated regularly for the Stuttgart publisher Hildegard Grosche, who had a crucial role in introducing Hungarian literature to the German reading public. Lenard's translation of Szerb's book-length essay was published in 1966 (*Marie Antoinette oder die unbeglichene Schuld,* Stuttgart, Gomert). Lenard also translated György G. Kardos's novel *Seven Days of Abraham Bogatir* into German (*Die Sieben Tage des Abraham Bogatir,* Stuttgart, 1970, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt).

The Queen's Necklace (published in Hungarian in 1943) recounts the scandal surrounding Marie Antoinette's notorious diamond necklace. As Szerb writes in the Foreword: "It can be regarded as the symbol of the entire age, because, like the ideal drama, it condenses everything that is characteristic and essential in the protean mass of events. But, at the same time, I can use it as a vantage point from which a perspective opens in every direction that the age offers, it is like the fountain in the park of Versailles, from where tree-lined alleys lead in star formation, and I endeavoured to go down each one of those alleys." Szerb searches for omens of the approaching catastrophe in a historical moment when, to quote his Foreword again, "the times teach literary men to put aside their usual subject and look towards History as a source of inspiration for their work." The "times" were the years 1941 to 1943 when Antal Szerb, a cradle Catholic, was dismissed from his job and called up for forced labour service, being considered a Jew in terms of the relevant legislation. One of the characters in *The Queen's Necklace* is Cagliostro; Lenard later wrote an essay on him and sent it to Klára Szerb. The essay appeared in *Völgy a világ végén és más történetek* (The Valley at the End of the World and Other Stories), under the heading "The Cagliostro Case" (Budapest, Magvető, 1973, pp.159–171).

Bemerkung des Übersetzers—Translator's note

Alexander Lenard to Klára Szerb

April 1, 1965

Dear Madam,

Someone who has lived on the fringes of the jungle for ten years is accustomed to problems with the post. Letters are delivered late, or go astray only to turn up eighteen months later with a South African or Czech postmark. There is a Blumenau in Germany, and one near Bratislava... I have recounted the story of how a German apothecary named Blumenau came to be the founding father of this place in my book *Die Kuh auf dem Bast* (Deutsche Verlaganstalt, Stuttgart). I have sent two or three copies of the book to Budapest, but will gladly send more as soon as the expanded edition is published by Deutsche Buchgemeinschaft. *[note on the margin]* I've just remembered: Otto Beöthy, Tibor Kardos, Cini Karinthy, Sándor Weöres each have a copy.

I translated *The Necklace* from the 1963 edition published by Magvető.

Sadly, I was not personally acquainted with your husband. I have been living abroad since 1919, but we probably have many friends and acquaintances in common. I talked about him at length while strolling with Károly Kerényi through Assisi, and I have been corresponding with Magda Kerényi, who is enthusiastically translating *Journey by Moonlight,* since 1952, when I left Rome.

I hold the Szabolcsi couple in great affection and esteem. They are unforgettable, wonderful people. It would be wonderful to persuade Hildegard Grosche to publish his history of music! (I used to have a fine signed copy, but Menyhért Lengyel borrowed it and forgot to return it.)

Coincidences and complications: my son (a paediatrician in Munich) is travelling to Budapest this week, so I asked him to look up the Szabolcsis, as I haven't heard from them for years; they may not even be living at 40 Pozsonyi Street any more... and it turns out that Bence is in India!

This time last year I was in New York—it so happens that it was I who translated *Winnie-the-Pooh* into Latin (150,000 copies have been printed so far) and in honour of this I was invited to a college in Illinois for six weeks, and I had just dropped in to the offices of *The New Yorker* where they were editing Joseph Wechsberg's article on Budapest, so they asked me to check the spelling of the Hungarian words, and that is how I came across Bence Szabolcsi's name. Wechsberg gave an account of the interview on the Bartók Museum, and spoke very enthusiastically about Bence. I don't know if the article has been published yet—copies of *The New Yorker* arrive here sporadically.

The Latin version of *Winnie-the-Pooh* was published in Germany by Hildegard Grosche. (In England by Methuen, in America by Dutton, in Sweden by Svenska Bokförlaget.) If you would like a copy of *Winnie Ille Pu,* Frau Grosche would certainly send one to you promptly and gladly.

The Sagan was not a bad idea at all, it was a pleasure to translate, slipped into Latin with ease and it has already been published by Julliard, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt and Svenska Bokförlaget. Of course it will never surpass the Latin bear.

I would just like to add that translating *The Necklace* was an exceptional pleasure, and I hope that after this, and *Journey by Moonlight,* Frau Grosche will have the *History of World Literature* translated next—and I hope that the German translation will clear the way further West for the books. I shall at all events recommend *The Necklace* to Dutton's, the owner of my Latin *Winnie-the-Pooh* (and the real Winnie, who sits under a bell jar and is treasured like an heirloom)!

Faithfully yours,
Sándor Lénárd

A constant, inevitable topic in the correspondence is the erratic and unpredictable nature of the postal service between Hungary and Brazil. Another recurring theme is recollection of mutual acquaintances. Pre-eminent among these is Karl Kerényi and his wife Magda, and Bence Szabolcsi and his wife Klára. Antal Szerb also knew them, as he did Sándor Weöres and Ágnes Nemes Nagy. Other recurrent topics are which Hungarian literary works should be translated next and the quality of the German and English translations that have already been completed.

Tibor Kardos (1908–1973), renaissance scholar. In his capacity as director of the Hungarian Academy in Rome, he engaged Alexander Lenard to serve as physician to scholarship holders then staying there. Lenard charged extremely moderate fees.

Ferenc (Cini) Karinthy (1921–1992), writer, playwright, went to Rome in 1947. He corresponded with Alexander Lenard until the latter's death.

Sándor Weöres (1913–1989), poet and playwright. He spent almost a year in Italy on a scholarship together with his wife, the poet *Amy Károlyi (1919–2003),* staying mostly in Rome. They became good friends of Lenard's. Upon the Hungarian publication of *Völgy a világ végén* (The Valley at the End of the World) in 1967, they wrote to the author: "You, who are familiar with almost every taste there is, from the first sip to the last, will already be aware that the memory of the stomach is the most lasting. As soon as we see your name on the air mail envelope with a Brazilian stamp, curls of steam arising from golden soup begin to wreathe under our noses, the golden swirls of Italian fish soup... Oh, Sándor, that soup is eternal, it is enough just to think of it, and already the hunger of belly and soul are appeased. And that fish soup not only tastes good and smells good, it has colour, form, atmosphere and yes! even life, and, as every decent memory, a story as well... Well, that is what we found in your book, where, from the living, wriggling parts of an exotic reality, seasoned with known and unfamiliar herbs and spices, you sublimate a brew that makes us laugh and cry, blow our noses and wipe our eyes as we taste it. There is one difference between the then of twenty years ago, and the now of the present. You are now treating the whole of Hungary, not just your former guests, Sándor Weöres and Amy Károlyi, to a feast."

Karl [Károly] Kerényi (1897–1973), classical scholar, historian of religion, emigrated to Switzerland in 1943, was guest professor at several universities and became a colleague of C.G. Jung. Antal Szerb was one of his circle in the 1930s. His wife, Magda Kerényi, translated *Journey by Moonlight* into German at the same time as Lenard was translating *The Queen's Necklace,* both translations commissioned by Hildegard Grosche.

Bence Szabolcsi (1999–1973), musicologist, founder and first director of the Bartók Archives, was a good friend of the Szerb family from as early as the 1930s. Szabolcsi tried to encourage Antal Szerb to like folk music and folk art. He even managed to persuade the tone-deaf Szerb to sing folk songs. Lenard's acquaintanceship with Szabolcsi also dated from the years spent in Rome.

Melchior [Menyhért] Lengyel (1880–1974), writer and playwright.

Joseph Wechsberg (1907–1983), writer, author of several works on Central European cultural history. He emigrated to the United States from Austria.

The Sagan... The Latin translation of Françoise Sagan's *Bonjour Tristesse,* published under the title *Francisca Sagana: Tristitia Salve, Fabula amatoria e gallico in latinum sermonem* in several editions by different publishers in 1963 and 1964. Lenard also translated Wilhelm Busch's *Max und Moritz* into Latin (Maxus atque Mauritius, in *Vita Latina* (Avignon), Janvier 1962, pp. 97–109.

History of World Literature... Szerb's magisterial survey, published as *A világirodalom története* in 1941.

Alexander Lenard to Klára Szerb

July 2, 1965

Dear Donna Klári,

It is unnecessary for me to tell you that *Journey by Moonlight* is a wonderful book, but may I just say it has totally bedazzled me! Did your good husband write this book for me? I daren't believe that he did; he wrote it for the Kerényis too, and also for the Kerényi's neighbour Elisabeth (you have heard of her?)—but he did write it for a very small circle of people who know their way around the Palazzo Falconieri, who have taken the local train to Perugia, who have picked strawberries by Keats' grave, and seen the prison named Regina Coeli—and who all profess that "the practical career is a myth, a humbug invented to cheer themselves up by people who aren't capable of doing anything intellectual".

He wrote it for a select few, but it is my secret conviction that Dante wrote for a select few as well, and it is not his fault that he is read by so many.

No—I do think, in the end, that this book was written specially for me. I lived in Rome for fifteen years, almost twice as long as in Budapest... and I know it INSIDE-OUT. It is a wonderful experience to return from the INSIDE to the OUTSIDE... where the Trastevere is still mysterious, the stone-floored rooms still unfamiliar, and the Circolare tram line still wonderful. Mihály from the novel returned to everyday life... he could have remained in Italy, of course. There are ordinary days in Italy too; they are just harder to find. You can't keep "slipping back", you've got to grow old into them—and then it will be hard to see Italy as a stage once again, something not quite serious; it will be almost impossible to see it as a slightly less realistic reality. Your husband saw Italy just long enough for it to remain a stage, where every member of the cast is still largely, or at least half foreign, a stranger. And yet he was there long enough to hear the critically important sentences ("He speaks foreign", "there haven't been any wolves since Mussolini became the Duce around Gubbio") and to find the domains of secrets.

Gubbio, Foligno... you know, there is a black-bearded soothsayer who has lived in Foligno for two hundred years. There is no Italian who will not buy the Barbanera di Foligno almanac on the first of January... (think of the numbers in circulation, Dante, even Pinocchio cannot come close!) If Barbanera says it is going to rain, it is dead certain that it is going to rain somewhere. "Death of a famous man" he wrote for a given day, and Roosevelt died of a stroke. In Foligno you walk about in the streets with the feeling that your future is written in a book, the immortal Barbanera already knows your fate.

And Assisi? I cannot imagine that Magda has not told you about Caldari! The apothecary in his tower who can tell the past and future with his pendulum... who found Apollo's shrine beneath the bishop's palace, with the first and only Greek inscriptions in Umbria, and frescoes depicting (perhaps) coffee-trees. Pythia was intoxicated, made ecstatic by coffee. I took Károly to the magician once; it was Károly who made him famous in Sweden, Elisabeth who made him famous in

Germany, and of us all three became corresponding members of the Accademia Properziana del Subasio. They searched for water in Subasio for a thousand years —in vain. Caldari felt there was a spring 56 metres down... that spring quenches and bathes the whole of Assisi today! A country of miracles, a city of miracles!

There is a passage in *The Necklace* in which someone describes, after the French Revolution, how a couple foresaw it all.

It is a great temptation to play this game here and now—for literature is life too and a personality invented or put together from fragments of live people is no less real than someone made up of pure protein. *(Cogitatur, ergo est.)*

Time before 1938 passed just as quickly as it did in 1786. A day lasted 24 hours. Cats grew old in ten years, men in 60... Mihály's adventure was no more distant from 1938 than the necklace trial was from Bastille Day. He returned into practical life, into reality. Into that tangible, not dreamlike reality where "Ervin's family was exterminated, the "Ulpius" flat bombed, his factory and Pataki's business ruined. Rome remained... but the dead did not pass gently from the tomb of Cestius down to Orcus, but to the accompaniment of machine-gun fire, and it was there that the German invasion broke in on September 12, 1943. It was there that an uncertain number of youths armed with hand-grenades and muskets from 1891 managed to hold them up for three or four hours. One of the Hungarians—Sándor Kereszty—absent-mindedly loitering and looking on, was shot in the back of the neck at the Fossa Ardeatine along with 350 other "hostages". The weekdays of nine months meant five thousand dead—and here too the zealous death-demons wore black and swastikas. The hetaeras of death did not dance on frescoes. The Regina Coeli was an island of death, too.

The writer and his characters converge into one fate because there *really* is no difference between creator and creation.

These reminiscences notwithstanding, this is a great novel. (Even if it can only be read in Hungarian and French.) From the German translation will follow English—Danish—perhaps even Italian versions. (I would like to do that one.) And what a film could be made out of it! (If Károly should take on Waldheim's role, for example, *senzo trucco*.) The translation will be a success. Would you not like to go and see Assisi with Magda Kerényi? To visit Caldari? The pharmacy of secrets, which was founded by a wandering Hungarian after the Rákóczi revolt? Perhaps Elisabeth—not the Elisabeth (Erzsi) of the novel, but the Elisabeth who could so easily be the heroine of any novel—could return for an evening to visit the magus who loves her as Goddesses should be loved by the possessors of smaller secrets.

It is not only poetry that is important; the novel is too, as long as it is dreamlike.

Fond regards,
Sándor

Lenard reads *Journey by Moonlight* as a roman à clef, instantly recognising the people who must have served as inspiration for some of the characters in the novel. With the recollection of the possible fate of each character, he talks about the common trauma of their

generation, the Second World War and its aftermath. In a letter (possibly) dated July 27, Klára Szerb herself relates who served as models for the characters in *Journey*:

> Tóni wrote this novel primarily for himself: the "Ulpiuses" and Italy were relevant, fundamental experiences for him...Among his manuscripts I found a notebook containing "The Death of Tamás Ulpius". He must have been about 19 years old when he wrote it. Tamás Ulpius—Benno Térey, a beautiful, homosexual boy who committed suicide very young. I have a photograph of him. Italy: there were years when he travelled to Italy whenever he could spare five minutes. During the war he missed Italy terribly, unutterably. He dreamt of Italy every night, the landscape or the back-street alleys. And he wept as he dreamt, because he knew he was only dreaming. Whether he ever wrote about this to Károly and the others, I don't know. Károly refused to talk to Tóni for over a year because of the novel. He took umbrage. He thought Tóni had made him look ridiculous in the figure of Waldheim. Though he knew very well that Waldheim was based on him, Altheim and our friend Béla Zolnai. Károly Altheim had a German colleague—I became deeply attached to him because not so long ago he still asked Magdi about my hair and ankles—Béla Zolnai was an excellent Hungarian linguist, literary historian, and practising madman (...) Károly was immensely vain, and his taking offence was foolish to say the least. So I especially appreciate the idea that he ought to play the role. Of course it is really not fair to relate this story today. Best forget it as quickly as you can. Ervin was the Szedő boys, together. Three Jewish brothers and cousins, converted to Catholicism; one of them became quite a good poet, all three joined religious orders. The conversation with Ervin took place in Eger, I can't exactly remember where. One of them became a Carthusian. And the one I knew went about his business wearing a star, a yellow star, and had a hard time of it with the others. He celebrated mass for Tóni several times here in the small modern church in Pasaréti Square. Up until the time they dissolved the order he belonged to.

(Károly: Karl Kerényi. Benno Térey was the son of Gábor Térey, curator of the Old Masters Gallery in the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest. Benno Térey and Antal Szerb were schoolmates at the Piarist *gimnázium*. Ervin in the novel is Mihály Szedő, poet, translator, Franciscan friar; he died in 1983. Klára Szerb knew him personally, but the order was not dissolved, it was one of the three Catholic orders that were permitted to function in the Hungarian People's Republic. László Szedő was a Carmelite friar and his name in religion was Pater Severinus, which corresponds to the name given to Ervin in the novel. In the figure of Waldheim, beside Karl Kerényi, some elements of Béla Zolnai and Franz Altheim, Szerb's classics professor in Graz, are also recognisable. Zoltán Pataki's figure incorporates many features of Szerb's classmate, Gusztáv Engl.)

Elisabeth Dryander-Treviranus, author of travel books devoted to cultural history, was the enchanting neighbour of the Kerényis in Ascona. Lenard thought highly of her, and corresponded with her regularly. It was in her company that Lenard and Kerényi paid a visit to the apothecary of Ascona, Dr Fioravanti Caldari, at the beginning of the Fifties, the man who not only found water 56 metres deep below the city, but also found a shrine to Apollo

beneath the Santa Maria Maggiore, the church of the bishop's palace, with frescoes and Greek inscriptions. Karl Kerényi makes mention of the event (Karl Kerényi: *Unwillkürliche Kunstreisen (Fahrten im alten Europa 1952–53),* Zürich, 1954 Rhein-Verlag pp.12–13 and 17–18. Lenard also writes about the visit and Caldari in an article "Apollo in Assisi" (*Kultúra,* August 1953 pp. 38–44).

Palazzo Falconieri... the splendid palazzo with a Borromini façade and loggia that housed the Collegium Hungaricum in Rome, to which Lenard was physician between 1946 and 1950.

"The practical career"... quoted from *Journey by Moonlight,* here in a translation by Len Rix. Lenard's letter is sprinkled with quotes from the novel.

Barbanera di Foligno Almanac... the famous lunar calendar by the monk of Foligno was first printed in 1762. To this day "Barbanera" is synonymous with "almanac" for Italians.

time before 1938... Lenard refers to the Anschluss, when he was forced to flee from Vienna to Rome.

Fosse Ardeatine... an old burial site of Christian martyrs in Rome behind the Catacombe di Domitilla. More than three hundred people, mainly Jews and political prisoners, were taken there and killed. After this massacre, German troops blew up the tunnel leading to the "Chamber of Death" in an attempt to destroy all traces of the crime.

Senzo trucco... without make-up.

Klára Szerb to Alexander Lenard

September 29, 1965

My Dear Old Cave-bear,

I am going to be wicked today, and tell you about my work in "cemetery-anthropology".

You will have realised instantly that I did not immediately connect this activity and the piecing together of bones in Rome. Calcification of the gyrus (cerebral sclerosis)! But, since I've caught on to yours, you're not going to be left out of mine.

1945 made everyone lose their minds, but I'd already lost mine in 1944. It began with my believing that it was my responsibility to keep my sister-in-law and her son alive and safe until I could hand them over to my mother and her mother, when I did not even know, right to the end, whether they were alive or dead. We'd brought them over from Slovakia to Budapest to save them from the Germans, and they lived through the siege in Pest, while we were in Budafok—from where Rózsika and I sent the postcard—along the main road to Lake Balaton, caught between the two-pronged Russian advance towards Székesfehérvár and Pest, and the German counterattack, with the front line constantly surging to and fro. My sister-in-law, with a close to four-month-old dead foetus in her womb, had lost a great deal of blood, was suffering from septicaemia, and drifted in and out of

consciousness. We carried her with us everywhere on a stretcher. There was no medical assistance to be had anywhere, and I cursed our fate, that she had to die barely two hours' distance from Pest, because, in my naivety, I believed that there were still hospitals in Pest where people could go for care. It later turned out that she only survived because she was not in hospital, and because I was out of my mind. I froze water in a plate to use for a compress on her, or melted snow, stole sugar from the pantry of the convent that had taken us in—I think they were Salesians—and used it to make a concentrated solution which I fed to her, drop by drop, whenever her fever abated. And we forced a Hungarian Nazi doctor, at gunpoint, to clean out her gaping womb with his bare hands. And all we had by way of medication was aspirin. Then we were running again, because the Germans had once more reached the village, and the nuns in the convent were all looking forward to handing us over to the Germans—except for the Mother Superior, who will become one of the saints of the twentieth century. Until the order was resettled in Austria, she came to visit me every six months from the borderland. That is how my brother's wedding took place. Imagine the tableau: a narrow cell, the shrieking of the Katyushas around us, the Germans counterattacking, Irina lying in bed, unconscious, a wailing, pee-sodden child in my arms. Bandi, by then also completely out of his mind, was convinced that the world would come to an end if Irina were to die before they were married, so he found a registrar, and literally dragged him into the convent so the child would have a name. The man, quaking in fear—Bandi had brought him at gunpoint also—a red, white and green sash tied around his middle, began rattling off his speech: Dear betrothed, do you… you can imagine. The bride was dying, the child was crying, there was incessant gunfire from the cannons and the planes, but Irina became a lawful wedded wife, sadly without becoming aware of it. All that I've recounted here took place not in the space of ten lines of course, but from Christmas to the end of January.

Then came that sudden speechlessness in April, about which I still cannot bring myself to speak, and the madness of having to bring Tóni home, because I couldn't possibly leave him there, where he had been murdered. The madness grew into a fully-fledged obsession, an extremely impracticable obsession. Balf is a long way—near the Austrian border—and opening up a mass grave meant procuring authorisation, an endless round of bureaucratic things-to-be-done, and the intervention of several administrative organs and institutions. And of course a great deal of money to pay for labour and transport. Naturally, the government consented to Tóni's exhumation—Keresztury was the Minister of Education and Religion at the time—they even gave me some money, but, and here comes the but: the Jewish community dug in their heels, and let it be understood that this was not a personal, private matter, but a public one. About 560 men had been buried there, and I was either to bring them all back, or leave Tóni in the mass grave. In other words, they wanted me to pull out the chestnuts roasted in the fires of hell for them, because everyone expected them to organise the exhumations, but they were too impotent to do it, and they thought that Tóni's person would

guarantee the great, demonstrative funeral of the "victims" that they wanted. I accepted this condition as well, and little by little a small consortium came into being, of which I was the merry leader. There was no money; inflation was rife. Everybody who had a piece of precious metal put in their bit, and we soon got to the point where I had collected about 70 per cent of the total, so the expedition could finally set off, with the exhumers, a tractor pulling two wagons with prefabricated boxes, because the railways refused to undertake the conveyance of this kind of passengers. And I also had to contend with the frantic next of kin who all demanded to be present at the exhumation. The "management" of my little firm finally acceded and coerced the others into accepting the decision that relatives should stay put. The reason why I insisted on this was that I knew it would be hard enough just to see it through, once we were there, in Balf, I simply wouldn't have the strength to tend to hysterical relatives as well. I knew where I would find Tóni, because Antal Lukács (de genere Baron Kohner) had been there with him, and though he had not helped him, he had known, as he says, that he had to note down everything about Tóni, "for posterity". He was senseless enough to tell me that he had had a piece of bacon, a bit of this, a bit of that, but he hadn't given Tóni any, because then he wouldn't have had enough to last him until his escape. That rotter with his wolfish grin was almost beaten to death by the others when Tóni died. It was this noble, upright banker's son who drove me there to show me which of the six mass graves Tóni was buried in. Oh yes, I haven't told you this part yet: the relatives—those who survived that is—all gave me distinguishing marks to look for. Some of them had been visited by a survivor from Balf, who told them what to look for, what distinguishing marks or signs they had tied on their son, husband or brother, to help with the identification later on. These marks or signs were mostly empty boxes, bits of tin tied to their necks, arms or legs. Most often the person who made the sign did not survive either, and just as often there was no one left to tell at home. Of those who did survive, some trusted in "teeth" to identify their relatives, others put their faith in hair colour, or the remnants of clothing. (This of course would never have worked, because those who died were immediately stripped of all clothing.) These were the most important variations. I had only four days to do the job, because in the meanwhile at home that miserable community, who would not do a thing until I started threatening them with an interpellation in parliament, had organized a demonstrative funeral with much military pomp and circumstance for Sunday morning. It was not the major who asked me whether I could not "hurry things along" but the Chevra Kadisha (the Jewish burial society) who kept on sending messengers and telegrams. I was raking through remains that had been decomposing for twenty months, and could only "name" and hand over twenty or so with reassuring certainty to relatives who were happy to have this at least. And I do admit to some *pia fraus* as well. I hope I won't go to hell because of that. I gave sons to two mothers who wanted to get their only sons back, at least to bury. There were plenty to choose from. And then something very strange happened, at the exact moment that I found Tóni. It may

sound funny, but at the time it wasn't funny at all: one of my teeth, a good, healthy tooth even today, started to ache. Not like when you have toothache and take a painkiller and it goes away, but constantly, day and night, without respite. It was maddening, and if the possibility of sleep had ever arisen, I still wouldn't have been able to sleep because of it. And the toothache lasted up until the moment we set off for home. Set off, and how! The monster funeral was to be on Sunday morning, Tóni's funeral was to take place two days later, in the Kerepesi Cemetery. He was to be buried in a special grave granted at public expense. And on Saturday morning we found another mass grave—quite by chance—the seventh one. So we dug that up as well, and Saturday night found us still at Balf, still filling and nailing down boxes by the light of pitch-torches. There was one episode to "cheer us up". Mr Roth from Miskolc—he really was Roth; a short, red-haired little Jew—suddenly turned up in Balf, despite all the prohibitions. He believed that his poor little seventeen-year-old only son would be more likely to be found if he was present. We did not find a body that could be identified with any certainty, but he would not move an inch from the grave. I pleaded with him to start for Pest immediately as we could not take him. With the exhumers and myself there were five of us in the driving compartment of the tractor. But Mr Roth refused to move—he had to observe the Sabbath and wait until it was over. He was an Orthodox Jew. By then I'd come to the end of my tether, and started screaming at the poor man—chased him away because I knew that if he did not set off immediately—Sabbath or not—the train would leave, and he would not arrive in time for the ceremony in the Rákoskeresztúr Jewish Cemetery. Mr Roth disappeared. We set off late that night, and on the outskirts of Balf who do we see waving at us to stop the tractor but Mr Roth. Because he was not allowed to travel while the Sabbath was still on, but the train did not know that, and left without him. It was raining, a strong wind was blowing—terrible end-of-October weather—so we stopped. Mr Roth sobbed. "But Madam, I'm only a little Jew, I can sit on someone's lap." We stood there, swearing, then I remembered that there was a huge spare tyre on the tractor roof. We sat Mr Roth in that, covered him with a piece of tarpaulin to keep off the wind and the rain, so he would not catch pneumonia, and set out into the world. The tractor with Mr Roth sitting on the spare tyre, pulling two wagons behind us with the five hundred boxes. It was so unbelievably infernal that today I can hardly believe it really happened. After having checked on him several times along the way to make sure he was still in place, we left Mr Roth in Győr, so he could come up to Pest on the early morning train, while we went into an all-night café to get warm and to have a hot drink. But after five minutes the proprietor came up to us and threw us out; why? Because we stank: we stank so badly that no one could stand to be near us. You can imagine, you know from experience what it's like to take part in an exhumation, especially one lasting several days, day and night. We could never again wear the clothes we were wearing then because of the smell. Then in the morning I handed over my consignment at Rákoskeresztúr, and Tóni at the

Kerepesi Cemetery. I went home, had a bath, and went back for the special funeral. But I felt nothing, and it was the same at Tóni's funeral two days later: Sándor Sík, the speeches of the minister, it all failed to move me. You can imagine. It had lasted a year and a half, this story. As I've said before: my coronary spasms have nothing to do with my ancestors. As for my toothache, the one I had in Balf, our psychiatrist friend, the one who analysed Ágnes' writing so "appositely", told me that primitive peoples would knock out their own teeth whenever a death occurred, and according to interpreters of dreams, to dream of toothache signifies death. I hadn't known that at the time, but the tooth that suddenly went mad at Balf, independently of me or not, is still healthy. How did it "know" that it was supposed to behave that way? Was it some kind of witchcraft? One very embarrassing thing remained with me for a long time after this adventure: I could not bear to see dun-coloured, broken, torn things, broken pieces of wood, torn clothing. This aversion was so bad that one time at the Granasztóis' I silently slid off my chair in a faint because someone had brought a broken plank of wood into the room. This was the first and I hope the only time that my body behaved in an undisciplined manner. Perhaps you are right after all, and it is impossible to live in this world! The trouble is, even if I were to hide myself in the jungle, this world would not cease, and that other world, your world, is still a part of this one. Napalm in Peru, in Vietnam, and potentially everywhere. "These times are worse than one thinks," said Goethe indignantly, incensed because instead of mosaics they manufactured costume jewellery in Venice. What would he say today, I wonder? You asked me in your last letter, and this little story of mine has brought it to mind: in Babits' translation, Circle Eight is *"Rondabugyrod"*, you remembered right. Have you a copy? Tell me if you would like one, and I'll send it to you gladly! And I've also wanted to ask you several times: do you own a complete Babits? If you don't, I'll send you that as well. There is no life for you without Babits, I hope we are fully agreed on that. His lines could serve as an epitaph, Life is no good

And in these harsh times, when souls are cheap
and those who cannot bend will break,
There'll be no coffins for all of the dead
For some of the living, no life to live.

Did you get Ágnes' address? I repeat, it is: XII. Királyhágó u. 5/b.

Forgive for this letter. Please look after yourself. I am the professor of grave digging, not you. Your tooth did not ache, and you were not searching for your life. ❧

Lenard sent Klára Szerb some of what he had published in the 1950s in the São Paulo Hungarian review *Kultúra.* Among these pieces was "The Resurrection and Death of Habakuk Brittle". In this he recounts a short period of his life following the Second World War, when, working in his capacity as anthropologist commissioned by the Graves Registration Service

of the US army in Naples, he had to prepare for their return home the remains of American soldiers killed in action and exhumed. From a "surplus" cervical vertebra and other "borrowed" fragments of bone, a missing soldier was for a short while "resurrected" then "killed" again. Klára Szerb responded to this piece with two letters, one of which appears here.

Antal Szerb was taken to a labour camp at the beginning of 1944. His company was moved near the Austrian border in November. By then circumstances were truly terrible there. In December 1944 two young army officers, Guido Görgey and Jenő Thassy, tried to have him released using false papers, but Szerb pleaded for the attempt at rescue to include two of his friends, the essayist Gábor Halász and the poet György Sárközi. The attempt failed. Szerb was beaten to death in the camp at Balf on January 27, 1945; his friends died shortly after.

pia fraus... pious fraud

Dezső Keresztury (1904–1996), literary historian, poet, minister of education and religion between 1945–47. A member of Szerb's circle of friends, it was he who delivered the address at Szerb's funeral.

Sándor Sík (1889–1963), poet, translator, member of the Piarist order, the provincial of the order in Hungary from 1948, school teacher, later university professor. He was Antal Szerb's teacher of Hungarian language and literature at the Piarist gimnazium in Budapest. It was he who, at Mrs Antal Szerb's request, conducted Antal Szerb's funeral service at the Kerepesi cemetery.

the Granasztóis... Pál Granasztói (1908–1985), architect and writer, and his wife were friends of Antal and Klára Szerb.

Circle Eight is "Rondabugyrod"... A reference to Circle Eight, "Malebolge", in Dante's *Divine Comedy.*

And in these harsh times... From Mihály Babits' poem of the same title *"E zord időben",* in the cycle *Magamról II* (On Myself II)

Ágnes... Ágnes Nemes-Nagy (1922–1991), poet, essayist. See Note 4 on p. 27.

András Beck

Workdays and Wonders

Browsing an antiquarian bookshop in Budapest a couple of years ago, I happened across a hefty cloth-bound tome entitled *A Companion to Hungarian Studies,* published in 1943.

Written in English with an introduction by Count István Bethlen—President of the Hungarian Quarterly Society, established in 1936 to publish the journal—it outlines Hungarian history from its very beginnings to the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy with inserts on the country's geography, culture and language. Leading experts of the time contributed, among them the writer Antal Szerb (1901–1945). He and another contributor, the musicologist Bence Szabolcsi, were Jewish—not a little surprising for a semi-official Hungarian publication of 1943 (the publication itself was no less odd given that it targeted readers in Britain and the United States, both hostile to Hungary). I discovered three separate ten-page typewritten English texts between the pages. The first was untitled and contained copious references to the pluralist philosophy of William James; another was entitled "New Hungarian Literature", by A. Szerb, while the third was headed "Hungary in the Older English Literature" with Antal Szerb's full name in pencil. Unlike the flimsy copy paper of the first two, the third was of wider and thicker stock and bore several handwritten insertions. The bookplate indicates the volume had belonged to István Sőtér, a writer and literary historian, a member of Szerb's circle. He helped many literary people to survive the German round-ups and may or may not have been part of an abortive attempt to save Szerb.[1]

Unsheathing the three typescripts, I had the thrilling feeling I was onto something.

1 ■ In this venture, two lieutenants—Guido Görgey (who bore the hereditary title of "Vitéz", since it had been conferred on his father by Regent Horthy) and Jenő Thassy—offered to go by official army car to the camp at Balf, just outside Sopron in western Hungary, where Szerb had been interned doing forced labour service; with false papers they would order his release into their custody. On being presented with this order the camp guards at Balf produced Szerb. If he had simply climbed into the car, he would probably have survived the war. However, he was unwilling to leave without his writer

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Szerb and the pre-war *Hungarian Quarterly*

Szerb's involvement in *A Companion to Hungarian Studies* was not without its own convoluted history. József Balogh, the editor of a French-language periodical called *La Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie,* launched in 1932, had asked the young literary scholar for contributions twice and received evasive replies. On the second occasion, Szerb told him that all his time was taken up with a history of literature. This was no idle excuse—his sweeping survey of Hungarian literature, *Magyar irodalomtörténet,* appeared in 1934. All the same, Balogh scribbled an indignant comment on the margin of one of Szerb's postcards: "It's impossible to get anything out of him!"[2] Most of the correspondence between the two has been lost, so whether the editor got fed up with Szerb's dallying or whether Szerb thought up a new excuse is not known. But almost three years later their relationship was rekindled when István Bethlen asked Balogh to edit a new sister publication, *The Hungarian Quarterly,* whose launch was a further gesture towards the Allied powers. Both journals had Bethlen's foreign-policy ambitions to thank for their existence. Bethlen had resigned as prime minister in 1932 but played a part behind the scenes in setting them up and organising their financing. Balogh was enormously erudite (his many achievements included translating the *Confessions* of St. Augustine) and he worked tirelessly to persuade the most distinguished authors to contribute. In 1936 he approached Szerb once again, changing tactics by suggesting a topic and asking for an article on the great Enlightenment-era poet Dániel Berzsenyi: "I hope this time you are not going to turn me down," he wrote. "Indeed, I also hope that my prompt receipt of the article will provide the opportunity for renewing our acquaintance." This time Szerb did send in an article,[3] though he was not overly concerned about following up (when Balogh asked the author to add to the essay, it appears Szerb told his translator to incorporate several paragraphs from the text of his *History of Hungarian Literature.* Balogh wrote back: "That is a job for the author, not the translator. Trust me; the thing is worth taking the trouble.")

They got over it. Balogh wrote at the end of that year: "As I already told you, I find it hard to think of a person more fitted than your good self for presenting Hungarian intellectual concerns to the outside world." From that point on, their

friends, demanding that Gábor Halász and György Sárközi also be released. Unfortunately, his was the only name on the written order. The discussion dragged on, and the already suspicious Arrow Cross guards sounded the alarm to a nearby SS patrol. That sealed Szerb's fate; indeed, it was touch and go whether the two lieutenants themselves would pay with their own lives. See Emil Kolozsvári Grandpierre: "Eretnek esszé Szerb Antalról" (A Heretical Essay about Antal Szerb), *Életünk,* 1986, no. 9–10, p. 840. Thassy himself has confirmed that Sőtér "came to play an active part [...] in the rescue machinery", but according to his recollection he took no part in the undertaking to save Szerb (cf. Jenő Thassy: *Veszélyes vidék* [Tricky Terrain]. Pesti Szalon, 1996).

2 ■ The Balogh–Szerb correspondence forms part of Balogh's papers in the Széchényi National Library: see József Balogh to Antal Szerb, 22 September 1933 and Antal Szerb to József Balogh, 1 July 1933, OSzK Archive, Fond 1/2013.

3 ■ Antoine Szerb: "Le soir de Berzsenyi," *Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie,* 1936 vol. 55, pp. 47–55.

relationship ran fairly smoothly, though Balogh urged Szerb to send in articles written specifically with foreign readers in mind rather than rehash works already published in Hungarian. Also, he was keen to make sure the country's image was projected properly: "It would be fitting to work into the article a page on those parts of Nicholas Bethlen's memoirs that refer to France, and where you write about Bethlen's personal hygiene you could mention that Louis XIV's ablutions were no better, lest unsuspecting foreign readers gain the impression that we were any dirtier in that age than other nations."[4] The following year, in 1938, tight-lipped admonishment can be detected through a veil of polite formality: "I should ask you to be so kind as to write a little more about the interesting figure of [linguist and ethnologist] Antal Reguly and to fill a further five pages with what I might call scholarly apparatus, providing some overview of his life's work. I should also ask you to decide whether you intend the piece to be directed at the English or the French. My feeling is that it would be of more interest to English readers, but in that case it ought to be written slightly differently [...]"[5] It is as if Balogh wanted to intimate that Szerb had not paid due consideration to the full weight of the journal's political and cultural mission.

The journal's raison d'être was given added urgency after the First Vienna Award of November 1938, in which Germany and Italy arbitrated in Hungary's favour over a Hungarian–Czechoslovak border dispute (most of northern Hungary had been given to the new state of Czechoslovakia by the 1920 Treaty of Trianon). The journal's fate became more precarious, too. At the end of 1940 the government considered scrapping *The Hungarian Quarterly* altogether,[6] and when Hungary entered the war at the end of 1941, this is precisely what happened. Bethlen had written in vain to Prime Minister László Bárdossy urging the journal's continuance: "War has not been declared between the United States and the Axis powers and diplomatic missions are still in place." If the *HQ* were to endure until the end of the war "its existence and politically unblemished past will count in the Hungarian nation's favour when the time comes for peace talks."[7] It appears he was prescient about Hungary's fate.

Barely a month later Hungary was on a war footing with both Anglo-Saxon Great Powers. So who could have authorised, and on what basis, the publication of the *Companion,* which expressly called itself the single-volume 1942 edition of *The Hungarian Quarterly* more than a year after the latter had been discontinued (the last number was the Summer 1941 issue), and how was this able to appear in 1943? The likely explanation is that Miklós Kállay (Bethlen's man), who replaced Bárdossy as prime minister on 9 March, had future negotiations for a separate

4 ■ Anthony Szerb: "Count Nicholas Bethlen's Autobiography," *The Hungarian Quarterly,* vol. 4, Winter 1937, pp. 684–89.

5 ■ József Balogh to Antal Szerb, 10 February 1936; 31 March 1937; 18 January and 25 November 1938, OSzK Archive, Fond 1/3013.

6 ■ József Balogh to István Bethlen, 19 December 1940, OSzK Archive, Archive, Fond 1/322.

7 ■ Tibor Frank: "A *Hungarian Quarterly* irodalompolitikája 1936–1944" (The Literary Policy of *The Hungarian Quarterly* 1936–1944), *Filológiai Közlöny,* 1978, no. 1, p. 55.

peace in mind as his highest priority. By the end of that year, following Stalingrad and El Alamein, the war situation had changed. At Balogh's initiative, Hungarian material for future peace negotiations was collected.[8] The plan for the *Companion* was part and parcel of a Western-oriented propaganda campaign that came to fruition in the spring of 1943.[9] As part of that same drive, a series of books was also projected in which, as Balogh put it with the coy non-irony of official communications: "We shall try to supply the educated Hungarian public with the necessary basic facts about our Anglo-Saxon adversaries."[10] By August 1943, the ball was rolling to assemble a writing team for a second volume of the *Companion.*

Factitious or facetious?

It is certain that Szerb did not produce the typescript *Hungary in the Older English Literature* for *Companion II*—this volume was intended to give an idea of modern Hungary's history and society, and, in any case, someone else had been entrusted with the chapter on literature.[11] One can assume that Szerb wrote it for *The Hungarian Quarterly,* since it falls under the subject heading "Hungarian Studies", a field dealing with Hungary's language, culture and history in an international context and encompassing Anglo–Hungarian relations, and as such eminently suited for the journal. The typescript includes a separate two-page insertion (marked pages 6a and 6b, which follow page 6, with the regular numbering only being resumed thereafter), which Szerb could well have added at Balogh's request. The two pages concern the experiences of the Elizabethan adventurer Captain John Smith (1580–1631) during a visit to Hungary (more on that later). The snag is that the pages are almost word for word the same as the article "Captain Smith in Transylvania" which Szerb wrote for the Winter 1941 issue of *HQ,* his last appearance in the journal. The typescript itself must have been drafted earlier. But if that is indeed the case, why did Balogh not publish it?

It was Smith, of course, who colonised Virginia, the white man whose life was saved by a plucky American-Indian princess Pocahontas after he was captured by her father's tribe. Szerb wrote about this well before the couple were immortalised by the Disney cartoon, but they had been legendary figures, widely known in the English-speaking world. Szerb wrote a short piece which appeared in Hungarian under the title "The First American in Transylvania" in the September 12th issue of the daily *Magyar Nemzet* about Smith's Transylvanian adventures (these had been published as early as 1630.)[12] Here Szerb mentioned

8 ■ See the chapter "A nyugatbarát politikai erők élén" (At the Head of the Pro-Western Political Forces), in Ignác Romsics: *Bethlen István.* Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2005.

9 ■ The volume seems to have appeared some time around April 1943, as one learns from one of Balogh's letters, OSzK Archive, Fond 1/990.

10 ■ See a letter from Balogh to Domokos Kosáry dated 14 August 1943, in which he asks Kosáry to write a short Hungarian-language history of England.

11 ■ József Balogh to István Bethlen, 8 July 1943, OSzK Archive, Fond 1/322.

12 ■ *The True Travells, Adventures and Observations of Captain John Smith* (1630).

"as a matter of strict scientific accuracy" that Smith's story had been the subject of intensive study by the nineteenth-century Hungarian scholar Lajos Kropf, who had come to the conclusion that Smith's patent of nobility and coat of arms were nothing but "common forgeries". Neither was it certain that "Smith had ever set foot on Transylvanian or Hungarian soil". Szerb was more indulgent than his sceptical predecessor: "It is perhaps not for us to take sides on the issue," he remarks, only to do exactly that with his very last sentence, grandiosely and in an unscholarly way side-stepping the issue of the truth: "In all events, it is more fun to suppose the curious adventurer really did pass this way, in the Transylvania of old."

Szerb's friend István Gál (1912–1982), who wrote the section "Hungary and the Anglo-Saxon World" for *Companion I,* took issue with this facetious laxity, sallying forth with scholarly guns blazing in a letter in next day's issue of the paper, decrying the article's "allusive approach". He marks Szerb down for quoting solely from Kropf's Hungarian-language article without indicating he had any awareness of Kropf's series of articles in English. Here Kropf noted that the King of Arms at the London College of Arms, who entered Smith's claimed patent of nobility into the official register, was later incarcerated for forgery. This conclusively settled the matter of the patent's authenticity and, in Gál's view, meant that Smith's adventures in Transylvania were also fabrications.[13]

Szerb did not react directly to the criticism. Instead he worked his response into the expanded essay on Smith that appeared in the *HQ.* Here he refers to one of Kropf's English articles, supplying the publication date with impeccable scholastic pedantry. An academic ethics committee adjudicating this delicate handling of the dispute might well judge that Szerb had only checked up on the piece by Kropf after the event. But did it really happen this way? How can we decide with hindsight of half a century? In any case, academic muscle-flexing was alien to Szerb's nature. Szerb makes clear that information about the forger had been brought to his attention only recently. He could do this with a clear conscience as it did not require him to alter or retract in any way what he had written earlier: "...but even if we call into question the authenticity of the patent of nobility [...] it does not follow that Kropf is right in his general condemnation." For Szerb, Kropf represented the hypercritical spirit of the nineteenth century, "that spirit which doubted everything that could be called into question and made a clean slate of history", adding "though we do not know for certain that Captain Smith actually visited Transylvania, we may state with much less certainty that he did *not* go there."[14] In so saying, he was essentially using the *HQ*'s gravitas and academic respectability to repeat his earlier frivolous closing remark that "it is

13 ■ "Az első amerikai Erdélyben és a román propaganda" (The First American in Transylvania and Romanian Propaganda), in István Gál: *Magyarország és az angolszász világ* (Hungary and the Anglo-Saxon World). Argumentum–OSzK, 2005, p. 27.

14 ■ Anthony Szerb: "Captain John Smith in Transylvania," *The Hungarian Quarterly,* vol. 7, Winter 1940–41, p. 741.

more fun to suppose the curious adventurer really did pass this way, in the Transylvania of old."

(The question of where the truth lies is a contentious subject to the present day. One thing is certain: if one Hungarian scholar who was domiciled abroad, Lajos Kropf, dealt a grave blow to Smith's credibility at the end of the nineteenth century, then it was another one, Laura Polányi, more than half a century later during the 1950s, who tried hardest to prove that "However incredible the youthful adventures of Captain John Smith may seem, his story is true."[15] Whereas her renowned brothers, Karl and Michael Polanyi, left Hungary soon after 1919, Laura—the mother of Éva Zeisel, whose experiences provided the raw material for Arthur Koestler's 1940 novel *Darkness at Noon*—followed her daughter in leaving Hungary during the Thirties to go first to Berlin before moving to New York towards the end of the decade. The findings of her research were first published as an appendix to a 31-page biography of Smith by an American historian about which Charles Olson, one of the great American poets of the immediate post-war era, stated in an essay cum book review that it was the greatest contribution to the files on Smith since the traveller himself had written his books.[16])

If my reasoning is correct, Szerb drafted the insertion on Smith in *Hungary in the Older English Literature* between the appearance of the Hungarian and English versions of his article. Let's assume that the basic text was an English version of an earlier article he wrote for *Magyar Nemzet* (28 December, 1939) presenting curios and droll descriptions of Hungarians garnered from seventeenth-century English geography books (the quotations and sources are mostly the same); and let's imagine, too, that the typescript was an intermediate text. Accordingly, Balogh read the aforementioned newspaper article and, shortly afterwards, in 1940, asked Szerb to write a more substantial piece about references to Hungary in English literature of old; Szerb submitted his piece and Balogh, as usual, urged him to expand it, whereupon Szerb inserted the two pages about Captain Smith. In the meantime, *Magyar Nemzet* published Szerb's article on Smith and Gál published his brickbat. Balogh would have read these too (he tended to read everything with an eye on recycling pieces for the *HQ*). Rather than just expand this fascinating insert, Szerb was asked to write a self-standing article on the Captain. This was what eventually gave rise to Szerb's English-language piece about Captain Smith in the Winter 1941 issue of the *HQ*. This is mere conjecture on my part. But, how else to account for the two-page insert, on the one hand, and the fact that it remained unpublished, on the other?

15 ■ Laura Polányi: "Milyen szerepet játszott Magyarország John Smith kapitány életében?" (What Role Did Hungary Play in Captain John Smith's Life?), in: *Írástudó nemzedékek. A Polányi család története dokumentumokban* (Literate Generations: the Polányi Family's Story in Documents). Budapest: MTA Filozófiai Intézet—Lukács Archívum, 1986, p. 69. See also Laura Polanyi Stricker: "The Hungarian Historian, Lewis L. Kropf, On Captain John Smith's *True Travels:* A Reappraisal." *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography,* 1958, vol. 66 (January), pp. 22–43; and Nándor Dreisziger: "The Life and Times of Laura Polanyi Stricker". *The Hungarian Quarterly,* vol. 47, Winter 2006, pp. 128–131.

16 ■ Charles Olson: "Captain John Smith," in: *Human Universe and Other Essays,* New York, Grove Press, 1965, p. 131.

We must go back more than a decade in order to understand the background to Szerb's interest in the topic. Gál wrote that Szerb had asked to meet him after hearing he was about to follow in his friend's footsteps at university and read English. Szerb "regaled me with stories about his years in London, his research, and the image of Hungarians in the English literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance".[17] That was in 1931. Unfortunately, there is no question of "years in London"—Szerb was not granted that opportunity, but he did spend the academic year 1929–30 on a scholarship abroad, and Gál quotes from the report that Szerb wrote for the Grants Committee, from which it transpires that during this period he was collecting material for a paper that he was to write under the title "Hungary in Old English Literature". He did in fact manage to trace some 150 works with Hungarian references dating from the late fourteenth century to the eighteenth century. His draft manuscript dealt specifically with passages that could have influenced the impression the English had formed of Hungary (rather than facts).

Gál thought the manuscript of Szerb's final version might be lurking somewhere (it has not turned up to this day), and although the typescript I happened on bears the same title, it is definitely not the draft in question. However, it is beyond doubt that the earlier paper served as a source for the typescript I discovered, so in this sense it dates not to circa 1940 but to a decade earlier. So what could have been the reason for the burst of activity around the beginning of the 1930s?

A fitting answer to that is supplied by the programme that Szerb outlined in a 1926 essay entitled "The Mythic Face of the Hungarian Nation":

> What does the world suppose of us, Hungarians? That question preoccupies us before every first and last question; often we would give up years of our life in order to have the chance to creep for just one minute into the soul of others and, after such endless speculation, suspicion and fear, be able to come face to face with the most fascinating sight in the world: the perception of us that lives in the soul of others... What did the world suppose of us, Hungarians, in the most halcyon of all eras, when the face of the Earth was still as dazzling as it would be to the eyes of a sixteen-year-old young man in those heroic centuries that we customarily call the Middle Ages? And, did a perception of the Hungarian nation not also live in this youthful light, mythically expanding towards some ultimate value, fastened by some wondrous strand of legends to the heavens, which at that time lay so close to the Earth?... We cannot here string together the scattered, as yet still undiscovered but undoubtedly existent facts. We seek to give expression to this presentiment as presentiment, as an intuitively experienced reality, and we await verification of this belief from researchers of the future.

17 ■ István Gál: "Adalékok Szerb Antal életéhez és munkásságához" (Contributions to Antal Szerb's Life and Works), in: *Bartóktól Kodályig* (From Bartók to Kodály). Budapest, Magvető, 1973, p. 266.

What sublime, soaring phrases; what large ideas and grand vistas! If only the world opened itself up to us we would recognise ourselves in its mirror, he seems to be saying. But was it possible to arrive at such dizzying heights through Hungarian Studies? Did Szerb succeed in doing so, just a few years later, in the reverential atmosphere of the British Museum reading room? Was he, one wonders, also touched by that other kind of giddiness which, while it may not be so elevated, is well known to scholars and bookmen? (Anyone who opens the impressive 1,000-page volume of Gál's collected writings, recently published under the title *Hungary and the Anglo-Saxon World*[18] will pick up this steady and admirable murmur of data and references with Hungarian associations and will discern that scholarly giddiness.)

A summer vacation in the library

Szerb was not the only literary man who hunted for Hungarian data among the book stacks of foreign libraries at that time. One of his closest friends, András Hevesi, was busy at work in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris on his doctoral dissertation "Bibliography of French Stage Works with Hungarian Allusions", in which he managed to track down 70 such plays, as compared with the 38 that had previously been known about. This library venture was later to find its way into his masterly 1936 novel *Párizsi eső* (Paris in the Rain). The classical scholar who is the main protagonist of Gyula Lovass's 1942 novella *My Countrywoman Micheline* likewise settles down in the Bibliothèque Nationale while on a scholarship. The first pages of that book give the most vivid impression, perhaps better than any other work, of the fever of archival exploration:

> A scholarly hum buzzes among the ceiling-high bookshelves, under the domed roof, sweeping the lonely reader along with its monotonous drone, and filling him with much the same religious fury as the tapping of tom toms does black men... Whenever I took a hefty tome in my hand I would veritably pitch myself on it, as if I had to find what I was looking for in it as a matter of urgency, now or never, otherwise the data that I needed would vanish, being like perfume and already volatilising. Can you imagine the passion of philology? No, I don't mean the wrangling of historians; just the times when one skims over the pages, just scanning them, as if you had no time to read through them and yet you are sure that you will light upon whatever is of importance. There were days when, restless and driven, I would dispatch twelve or fourteen books: it is an impossibility to read that many, but the scent was there, and I find it hard to believe that I let anything essential slip by. There is also another species of philological wonderment, almost the opposite, when the data, though you have nothing to do with them and you make no use of any part of them, all of a sudden become irresistibly fascinating and suggestive, and you don't know what they suggest, but neither can you be rid of them. For hours now you have been

18 ■ István Gál: *Magyarország és az angolszász világ.* Budapest: Argumentum–OSzK, 2005.

reading a book that, in terms of the goal at which you are aiming, you ought to have abandoned after just ten lines.[19]

Library encounters of that kind form what is almost a distinct trend in the Hungarian fiction of the 1930s. Szerb was its representative figure. He was intoxicated by these huge institutions of scholarship, arching above him as if erected from bricks of historical wisdom. A passionate reader is surrounded by a library's walls of books, like Kant by the starry firmament, and they offer a similar memorial to emotional jolts and succour to anyone else who feels the atmospheric pressure of the human imagination, the pursuit of knowledge and history. In Szerb's writings, whether essays ("A Summer Vacation in the Library", "Dulcinea"), short stories ("Cynthia", "At a Garden Party in St. Cloud") or novels *(The Pendragon Legend),* these experiences, rather than centring on Hungarian libraries, revolve around the British Museum and the Bibliothèque Nationale, perfect venues for the suspense that is a crucial element of living on a grant—the sense of protection that walls of books in the library provide is even stronger far from home in unfamiliar surroundings. This is the place that offers familiar ground to János Bátky in *The Pendragon Legend.* Szerb was to broach the subject in many places, but his letters from his year in England are the most informative.

One winter in London

Szerb set out in late June 1929, not for London, but Paris. It is a good while before we find a trace of his research into Anglo–Hungarian relations in his reports. Most of the letters were written to two newly made acquaintances whom he met on the train to Paris, Magda Tanay and Dionis Pippidi. Even though they travelled together only as far as Zurich, Tanay made a profound impression on him. Pippidi was a Romanian classical scholar, an ethnic Greek, whom he got to know in the Bibliothèque Nationale where they regularly shared a table. He was still in Paris on September 12th when Szerb wrote to the poet and editor Mihály Babits, whom he honoured and respected above all others:

> It is best of all in the library, where I spend practically the whole day [...] the most comfortable wicker chairs in the world are to be found here, the smell of strewn formaldehyde reminds one of the cleanliness of the sciences, and I won't even begin to describe the bliss of every book being here and my being able to fondle the most exquisite first editions... This year I am reassured to see that many good-looking young men and women are also reading, because in previous years it was disheartening that I was constantly spotting one hundred per cent whistling codgers, cripples, old biddies, university dons, madmen, Chinamen and other flotsam and jetsam.[20]

19 ■ Gyula Lovass: *Honfitársnőm: Micheline* (My Countrywoman: Micheline). Budapest, Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1942, pp. 5–6.

20 ■ *Szerb Antal válogatott levelei* (Selected Correspondence of Antal Szerb), ed. Csaba Nagy. Budapest, Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, 2001, pp. 32–33. (Hereafter letters will be identified in the text solely by their date.)

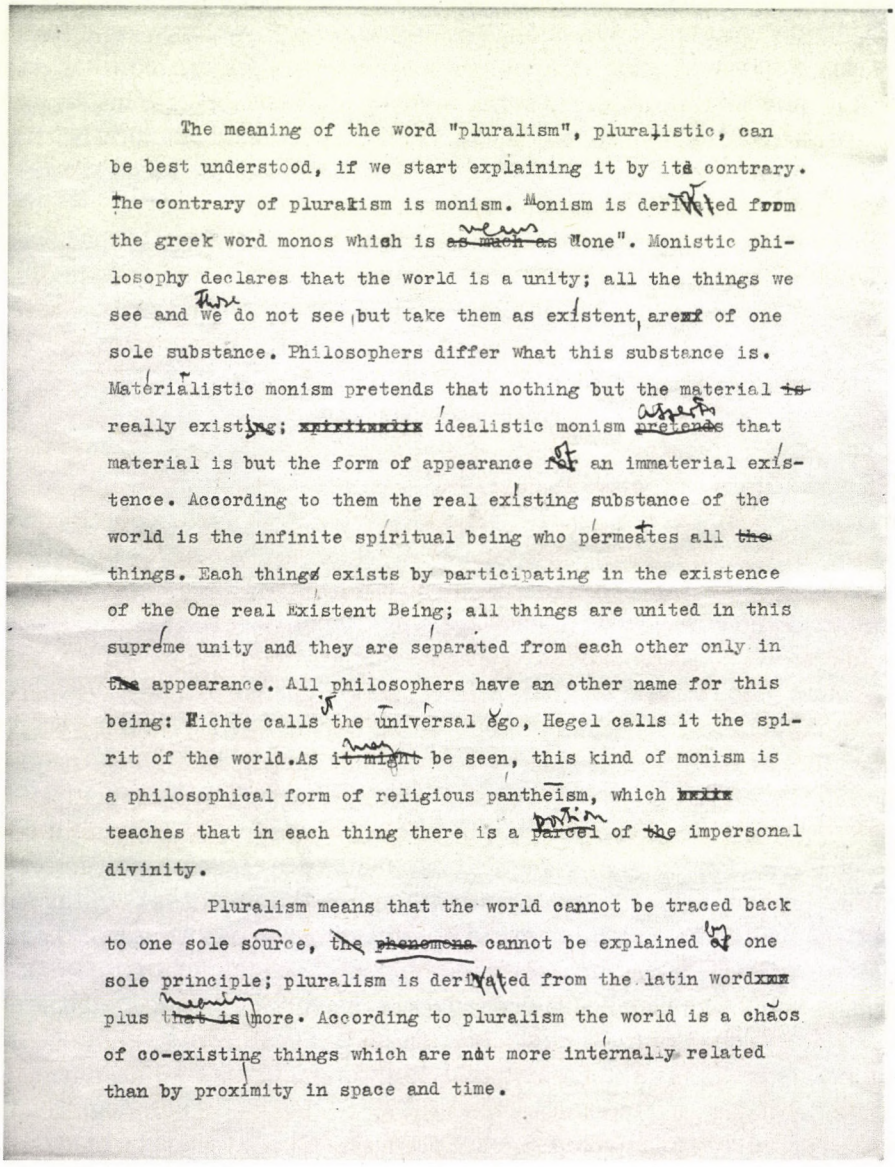
Szerb was fascinated by the paradox embodied in the book-engrossed scholar who sought worldly pleasures beyond the heavy library doors. Don Juan's secret is that every woman appeals to him, Szerb noted several times. Like the amorous Don, Szerb longed for an affair with every reader. His superb histories of Hungarian and world literature (published in 1934 and 1941, respectively), *Hétköznapok és csodák* (Workdays and Wonders, 1935) about the western European novel of the 1920s and 30s, or *A királyné nyaklánca* (The Queen's Necklace, 1943) about Marie Antoinette's notorious necklace, are more captivating than any number of novels. His goal of seducing readers led him to his distinctive blend of adventure story and reference book, the whodunnit of cultural history. In *The Pendragon Legend,* a whole library of knowledge about the secretive world of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century alchemists, Rosicrucians and Freemasons, far from boring his readers, actually spurs them on. The atmosphere of the library is always permeated by a fine mist of eroticism: the pleasures of caressing books are contagious. Books and people become entangled; the library becomes the venue for chance meetings and, indeed, trysts.

Interlude: a London lecture

At the end of October 1929, Szerb was to be found in London, but only temporarily. It was from there that he writes to Pippidi (presumably the model for Cristofori in *The Pendragon Legend*) with whom he had struck up a lifelong friendship:[21] "I have emotional reasons for returning to Paris" (11 November, 1929). In the end, he only went back again to London after the New Year, but he was not left without company even there. While in London he paid a visit to the Association of Individual Psychology, the centre for Adlerian psychology, where he met with much success. "On the grounds that I speak German and have a PhD, people think I must be a great philosopher back home," he writes to another friend, adding, "In two weeks' time I have to give a talk on Pragmatism" (17 January, 1930). The likelihood that he not only gave the talk but set it down beforehand is attested to by his letter of 21 January to Magda Tanay, informing her that he would be giving a lecture in English the next week. In the same letter, he also paints a graphic picture of the colourful assortment of London Adlerians in whose company he found himself: "The intellectual core of the group is a supreme blend of psychoanalysis, Russophobes and Dalercze that makes the milieu of Sönza's circle, Mrs Páczai or Évi Strikter so alluring." This sentence, teeming as it does with odd-sounding and unfamiliar names, has something of the same effect on me as the town name of "Olumpagh" had on Szerb when he read it in Captain Smith's account, and after which he remarked in parenthesis: "If only I knew what it can be!" (Thanks to Laura Polányi, we now know that "Olumpagh" was the Captain's spelling of "Oberlimbach" on the

21 ■ *Idem,* Csaba Nagy, p. 129.

Austro–Slovenian border[22]; and it seems almost certain that the Évi Strikter is in fact Laura's daughter, Éva Stricker, whose Russomania carried her straight to Stalin's gaols and, as previously mentioned, on whose memoirs Koestler, a former lover, based his novel. Eva Zeisel, as she became, celebrated her 101st birthday in New York in 2007 after a world-renowned career as a ceramic artist.)



The meaning of the word "pluralism", pluralistic, can be best understood, if we start explaining it by its contrary. The contrary of pluralism is monism. Monism is derivated from the greek word monos which is ~~as much as~~ means "one". Monistic philosophy declares that the world is a unity; all the things we see and we do not see, but take them as existent, are of one sole substance. Philosophers differ what this substance is. Materialistic monism pretends that nothing but the material ~~is~~ really exists; ~~spiritualistic~~ idealistic monism pretends that material is but the form of appearance for an immaterial existence. According to them the real existing substance of the world is the infinite spiritual being who permeates all ~~the~~ things. Each things exists by participating in the existence of the One real Existent Being; all things are united in this supreme unity and they are separated from each other only in ~~the~~ appearance. All philosophers have an other name for this being: Fichte calls it the universal ego, Hegel calls it the spirit of the world. As ~~it might~~ may be seen, this kind of monism is a philosophical form of religious pantheism, which ~~teaches~~ teaches that in each thing there is a ~~parcel~~ portion of ~~the~~ impersonal divinity.

Pluralism means that the world cannot be traced back to one sole source, ~~the phenomena~~ cannot be explained by one sole principle; pluralism is derivated from the latin word plus ~~that is~~ meaning more. According to pluralism the world is a chaos of co-existing things which are not more internally related than by proximity in space and time.

22 ■ Cf.: Laura Polányi: *Milyen szerepet játszott Magyarország John Smith kapitány életében?"* (The Part Played by Hungary in the Life of Captain John Smith), in *Írástudó nemzedékek*... op.cit., p. 64. This paper originally appeared in English in *True Hungary,* 1957, no. 2–3.

By mid-January 1930 Szerb had already completed half of his scholarship year, yet so far there was not the slightest trace of any work on Hungarian Studies. Instead, we stumble upon something else. At the start of this article I referred to three typescripts, one of which, untitled, is about pluralist philosophy and refers to William James. Many of Szerb's friends and other contemporaries have related how "omnivorous" his reading was, but until now there has been no evidence of any interest in this particular subject. Still, there are suggestions in the letters that this English-language typescript was quite probably also produced by Szerb himself. A number of small handwritten marks above certain words in the text support the suggestion that it was in fact produced to be read out, with Szerb, or possibly an English-speaking acquaintance, indicating where the stress was meant to fall and thereby serving as a guide for how it was to be properly enunciated.

The finest book of our century

According to his September 1929 letter to Babits, Szerb was engaged in copious reading of both old and modern English writers, and he was planning to carry on working on a book in the reading room of the British Museum. But it is not until the letters he wrote during January 1930 that we learn for which book he was collecting all the material. It is, in fact, entitled *Az angol irodalom kis tükre* (A Pocket History of English Literature, 1929) that was printed in its Thesaurus series by the Magyar Szemle Company, a publishing consortium that also involved the *HQ*. Around this time, though, Szerb was informed that "owing to the confounded relations between the publisher partners" the book was not going to be brought out as promised. That news plunged him into a minor crisis, not just because it seemed that the past half year of work had been profitless, but because, as he wrote, it had robbed him of what was "most important of all: a programme" (4 January). As one learns from his letters to Pippidi, in the depths of his despondency, he decided that he was going to abandon an academic career and go back to fiction writing. In just a couple of days he had written over 40 pages of manuscript, though he was unhappy with the results. He then latched onto another idea: what if he were to have a go at writing fictionalised biography, much as Lytton Strachey had done in the decade or so since his *Eminent Victorians*? He would then be able to mix and match literature and scholarship, fantasy and fact, to his own liking. His choice of subject fell on Mary, Queen of Scots, and he threw himself into working on it with great relish. "I am incredibly engrossed by the sombre beauty of Mary Stuart's life and have the feeling that I am going to write something very fine," he enthuses on 13 January. "Mary Stuart is progressing nicely, and I love her" (January 21st); "I am spending the day in the British Museum, working on my Mary Stuart, which is going to be the finest book of our century" (30 January).

Still, what is happening with Hungarian Studies, one may reasonably ask with growing impatience. When are we to catch a glimpse of the mythical face of the Hungarian nation as mirrored in the English literature of old? What's with the 150 works with references to Hungary, as mentioned in that report to the Grant

Committee? To what ends are some individuals putting funds that have been furnished by the Hungarian state?

One has to wait until mid-February for an answer. Szerb received a letter from Professor Sándor Sík of the University of Szeged, who writes that "Szeged University is ready to qualify me as fit for lecturing. Am I to believe that? There is an old Piarist here who says I should not get downhearted but carry on working in the interests of the Department. Tomorrow I shall begin a new life and set about a boring scholarly subject" (14 February)." What a rude awakening! What a tumble from the ecstatic stratosphere of ideal Hungarology into the treadmill of down-to-earth Hungarian Studies! "As for me, I am working at the British Museum on Anglo-Hungarian problems that are of not the slightest interest to me" (10 March). The passionate curiosity that had driven him towards this kind of subject a few years earlier had given way to sober calculation. The Hungarology that had been a mirror held up to foreign eyes became an academic task to be carried out under force of necessity.

In the end, the 'habilitation' at Szeged did not proceed—or rather, to be more accurate, it only took place five years later, in 1935, so the dissertation, too, clearly lost any point (that is if it was finished at all: it speaks volumes that it was not published and has not survived in any form). Either it was destroyed, or perhaps Szerb himself destroyed it. The sole memento of Szerb's studies is the handful of later pieces on Hungarological matters that have been dealt with in this article.[23] Then, of course, there is the draft paper that I discovered in that antiquarian bookshop, which now pops up from the past like a ghost of Szerb's work in the field. The once enthusiastically projected comprehensive study goes on living a phantom life in the typescript "Hungary in the Older English Literature".

In that 1926 essay "The Mythic Face of the Hungarian Nation" he had asked "What does the world suppose of us Hungarians?" And even in the report to the Grants Committee he had spoken of "the impression that the English formed about Hungary." When the topic crops up anew ten years later (and also in the typescript) it is in response to a slightly modified question: "What did the Englishmen of old know about Hungary?" In other words, imagination, malleable as it is and shaped at will, with its unexpected configurations, yields its place to the more desiccated forms of learning and scholarship.

Workdays and Wonders

The letters make mention of just one specific subject of Hungarological relevance, but this in turn makes it possible to give a reply to the question of whether István Gál was right in taking Szerb to task for adverting to Captain Smith

23 ■ The sole contemporary academic publication produced by Szerb's studies in London was the paper "Yeats magyar tárgyú költeménye" (A Poem by Yeats on a Hungarian Subject), which appeared in the May 1930 issue of *Debreceni Szemle*. Cf. "May I bring to your attention the poetry of W.B. Yeats. I would have liked to write a long essay about it but it shrank to four sheets of typescript and only deals with one poem on a Hungarian theme" (letter from Szerb to Miklós Szentkuthy, 4 April 1930).

in the way he did in 1939. We know from a letter dated 15 March 1930, that Szerb asked his writer friend, the equally omniscient and omnivorous Miklós Szentkuthy, to check whether he could find anything written in Hungarian on a certain Captain Smith, about whom Lajos Kropf had published several articles in English journals. It is beyond doubt then that, in spite of what Gál stated, Szerb was familiar with what was published in English on Smith.

Szerb's critics and those envious of his talent would occasionally throw doubt on the soundness of some of his wittily expressed assertions. In point of fact, Szerb was thorough almost to the point of pedantry; it was just that, for him, an academically impeccable end-product was hardly ever the be-all and end-all that he was after. What the author of *Workdays and Wonders* was drawn to above all, in Hungarology as in other areas, was wonder. Many of the things that the English of long ago thought about us Hungarians surprise us through the very preposterousness of the perverse surmises. Workaday reality is transformed under the magical surface of the imagination to display its fantastic aspect. It is just that under the scrutiny of scholarly research, that wonder is transfigured into a mere curio; or rather, the curio is all that scholarship can save from the wonder. Szerb's approach to Hungarology was a rescue attempt of this kind, a recounting of some of the oddities of cultural history with the aim of diverting readers.

His appetite for curios was to no avail; he was not really cut out for this kind of work, and he did not keep it up for long. All things considered, out of the year that he spent abroad on that scholarship, Szerb's Hungarological exploit lasted a mere three months, from mid-February to mid-May 1930. "For my part, Anglo–Hungarian literary contacts have made me seasick, and for several weeks I have done nothing," he wrote to Dionis Pippidi from London on 4 June. But, he continues, if anything, even more typically for him: "Instead of that, I am reading a lot, and I have begun to go into *Amadis de Gaula* and that marvellous series of romances about his lady love, the fair princess Oriana." One gets an impression that this is the very point that marks the start of a new programme, a new life. In one sentence is the sober reality of the Hungarian Studies he has turned his back on; in the next, the inception of his history of the novel—it is as though he already had one foot on the shore of wonders. It is as though the three months he had given up to academic research were a low point that, with one vigorous kick, was followed by a huge liberation, the finding of his true literary, essayistic, voice.

It is precisely that moment of groping from scholarship to romanticism that he captures in the unfinished novella to which he gave the title "Cynthia"—his first literary endeavour after his juvenilia. The male protagonist of this story likewise buries himself in the Amadis cycle in the British Museum reading room in 1930. And the typescript in question also erects a modest scholastic memorial to this moment by closing with a mention of the Hungarian connections of Amadis de Gaula and the other chivalrous romances to which reference is made in *Don Quixote.* In other words, Szerb evokes Don Quixote, and in so doing conjures up the essential inspiration of a man of letters, arching like a rainbow above the worlds of reality and imagination. ❧

Antal Szerb

Hungary in the Older English Literature

As a person is inevitably much interested in the question: what is the opinion of other persons about him, how do they see him—in the same manner a nation is always curious, how it is considered by its fellow-nations. Therefore it is one of the most interesting parts of the comparative history of literature which deals with the opinions of one nation about another nation.

What did the ancient English know about Hungary? What was e.g. the opinion of Shakespeare's age about Hungary?

The simplest way to answer this question is to look up the old English geographical works, to find out the chapters in them that deal with Hungary. Some of these old books are translations of foreign works, some are original English; but as for their information[s] about Hungary, they all have the same sources and their items are nearly identical.

Botero's *Historicall description of the most famous kingdomes and Commonwealths in the Worlde,* 1603, has been translated from the Italian. It says that the inhabitants of Hungary "be of stature and complexion not unlike the English, but in habit resembling the poore Irish; in war strong, valiant and patient." A very curious and rather inexplicable remark of Botero is the following: "The Hungarians neuer combat among themselves, but reuenge injuries with words, except the objection of cowardize, wherof the charged is neuer disburdened, vntil he haue proued him self in Single combat with a Turke."

The manners lawes and customs of all nations, by Joannes Boemus Aubanus, a Dutch-man, translated into English by Ed. Aston, 1611, is not very precise in its information. We learn from this book that the Hungarians of Magna Hungaria, i.e. the old country, live under the protectorate of the Grandduke of Moscow, that the Hungarians are chiefly fishers, they fish corals, whales and especially a curious fish called Mor which likes very much to climb on rocks. Hungarians never take

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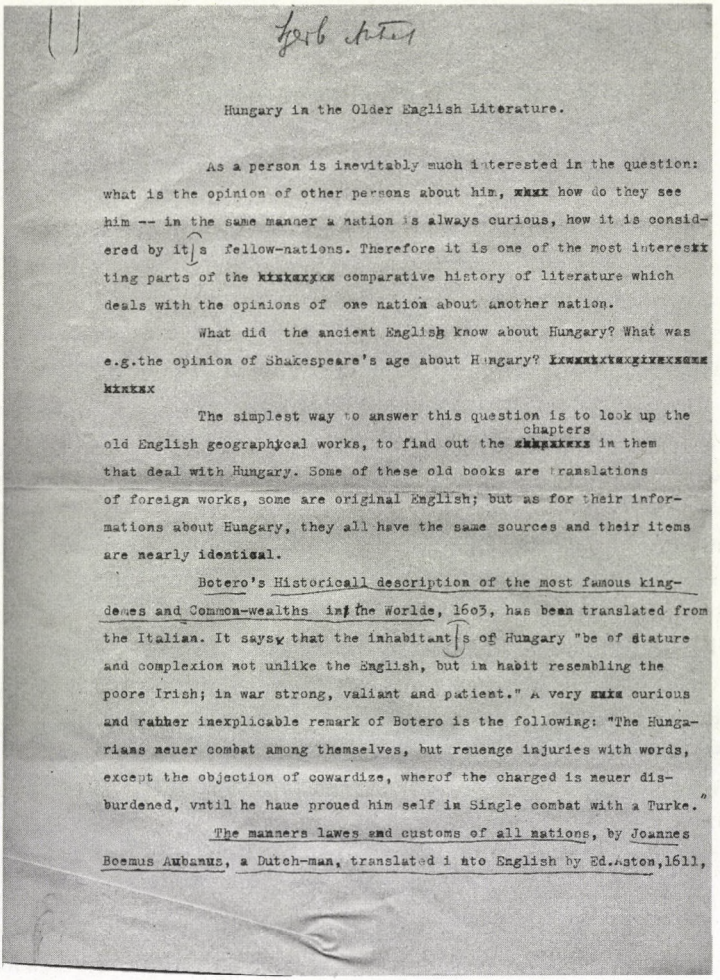
We publish here the typed and unpublished English text by Antal Szerb, found by András Beck in 2007 in an antiquarian bookshop. While this is an unedited manuscript and likely to contain errors of fact or grammar, we felt there is no need to overburden it with notes and have kept corrections to a minimum.



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off their hats, the ladies always wear veils. Trials are decided by ordeal. Hungarian language is much like that of the Bohemians.

The Geographicall and anthologicall description of all the Empires, by Robert Stafforde, 1618, knows that whoever drinks Hungarian wines, gets immediately drunk, because the vine grows in the neighbourhood of sulphurous waters. This book has a special chapter about Transylvania. It has not got a very high opinion about the Valachian inhabitants. They are "very stubborn, slothfull and intractable, following the religion of the Greeke Church, reading from the right hand vnto the left, and swearing alwaies by Jupiter and Venus." On the other hand it praises the Székelys who live much like the Swiss.

The Microcosmos or A Little Description of the Great World, by Peter Heynlyn, 1621, says that Hungarian men and women never sleep in bed before their marriage. This book knows much about the "wonderfull" fertility of the Hungarian soil where the grass exceeds the height of a man.

Speed's *Prospect of the most famous Parts of the World,* 1631, gives the pictures of Presburgh, Ofen, Comorra and Raab, as well as the pictures of a senator, a Gentleman, a Cittizoun /with an axe/ a Contrey Man, further the Wives of these men.

The best geographical book of this age is that of the Dutch Mercator and Hondius, translated by Henry Hexham, 1636, its information is rather exact, it knows that "the Ciculi make noe distinction betweene a Gentleman and a Clowne."

All these books relate that if a Hungarian kills a Turk in the battle, he puts a feather into his hat and so they wear as many feathers as many Turks they had slain.

Hungary is often mentioned in the old English zoological books too. E.G. Topsell's *Historie of Four-Footed Beastes,* 1607, the famous "Elizabethan Zoo", knows about a Hungarian beast called Vncken, "which dwelleth in holes of the earth as conies do, the outward proportion whereof is like a weasel... it is reported that the breathing thereof vppon the face of man is venomous and pysonfull..." What kind of animal can that be? Maybe the toad the German name of which is Unke.

In this connection we could quote the book of John Baptist Merin, translated into English and printed in 1732. This Frenchman visited the mines of Hungary in 1615. He asks the miners whether they had seen any demons. They answer they see them sometimes, they come in the shape of little black children, but they want only to talk, they don't do any harm to the miners.

Historical books about Hungary were not very numerous in the England of those times. The most remarkable among them is *The Generall Historie of the Turkes,* by Richard Knolles, 1603. It gives a very extensive account about the Hungarian Turkish wars (the book has 1151 pages in folio!). Its chief sources as for Hungary are Bonfinius and especially Paulus Jovius, whose great work about the Turkish wars has been translated into English first in 1546. Such a book is *Florus Hungaricus,* translated from Latin in 1664.

There are some facts about Hungarian history in *The Negotiations of Sir Thomas Roe in his Embassy to the Ottoman Porte from the Year 1621 to 1628.* For the historian of literature this book is as far interesting as it has been published by the printer Samuel Richardson, the author of *Pamela.*

The seventeenth century was the age of the tractates, called *True Relations. True Relations* is generally the beginning of the title of those small pamphlets, flying-leafs which were the principal means of news service in those prae-journalistic times. In the infinite multitude of these "true relations" we found some relating to Hungary. I give the long title of one, from the title you can know everything about it: *Strange fearful and true news, which hapned at Carlstadt in the Kingdome of Croatia, Declaring how the Sunne did shine like Bloude nine dayes to gether and how two Armies were seene in the Ayre, the one encountring the other And how also a Woman was deliuered of three prodigious sonnes, which Prophisied many strange & fearfull things, which should shortly come to passe, All which happened the twelfth of June last, 1605.* The pamphlet has been translated from the Dutch.

Much akin to this genre are the broadsheet ballads and political songs of the seventeenth century—there are some of them that mention Hungary or Hun-

garians. In the Bagford and Roxburghe Collection you find ballads celebrating Christian victories over the Turks in Hungary, some of them are mocking Thököly who as a rebel was not very popular with the Tories, the authors of these ballads and songs. There is a Scots ballad in the Roxburghe Collection about Joan of Naples and Andrew of Hungary, its political point is against Mary Stuart.

The Princes of Transylvania, the two George Rákóczis, but particularly Gabriel Bethlen play a great part in the political writings, further the gazettes and other primitive newspapers of the age. According to the testimony of these the English public in the 17th century took very great interest in the happenings in Hungary, admired Hungary's heroic resistance against the Turks, as protestants they were all for the princes of Transylvania in their national revolts against Catholic and Imperial power. In the 18th century, when Hungary entirely lost its independent role in the theatre of the world, the interest of English public entirely disappears, among the political songs of the 18th century I didn't find but two which mention Hungary.

A particular literary genre of the 17th century is that which could be called Theatrum: a compilation of all kind of anecdotes, facts, both historical and geographical, illustrating the greatness, the infinite variety and the infinite restlessness of the world. These compilations are very characteristic expression of what we call after German patterns *"barokk világérzés."*[1] The most beloved such writings were those of the Spaniard Mexio, the *Treasurie of auncient and moderne times,* translated into English in 1613. This book was followed by many English ones of the same kind such as: Beard's *Theatre of God's Judgements, wherein is represented the admirable Justice of God against all notorious sinners, great and small* etc, 1648, Clark's *Mirrour or Looking-glasse For Saints and Sinners,* 1654, Camerarius' *The Living Library* has been translated from the Latin in 1621. Such works were further Robert Burtons's ones: not only the well-known *Anatomy of Melancholy* which does not refer to Hungary, but also his *Wonderful Prodigies of Judgement and Mercy,* 1682, and the *Unparalleld or the Matchless Actions and Passions of Mankind.* Now these compendious works have a great deal of curious references to Hungarian history and show quite well which events of Hungarian history occupied some place in the imagination of Western nations. It is rather funny that the best known Hungarian in Old England seems to be that László Kerecsényi, commandant of the fortress of Gyula, who treacherously handed the fortress over to the Turks but as a result he was put by the Turks into a barrel with nails in its side and was rolled down from a hill. This was an exemplary judgement for high treason and very popular in these times.

The English travellers who came to Hungary and wrote about their experiences, are more or less known. The most serious of them was Edward Browne whose *Brief Account of some Travels in Hungaria, Servia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Thessaly, Austria, Styria, Carinthia, Carniola and Friuli* has been published in 1673. Professor Szekfü[2] in his *Hungarian History* often refers to this work. Less reliable but funnier is the work

1 ■ *barokk világérzés*—the Baroque sense of the world.
2 ■ Gyula Szekfü (1883–1955), the most influential historian of the inter-war period.

of the Scotsman William Lithgow, *The Totall Discourse of the Rare Adventures and painefull Peregrinations of nineteene Yeares Travayles from Scotland to the most famous Kingdoms in Europe, Asia and Affrica,* etc, published in 1632. Lithgow came to Hungary in 1616. He goes into traditional ecstasies about the fertility of Hungarian soil, but has no high opinion about Hungarian character. "The Hungarians haue euer beene shiftuous, treacherous and false, so that there one brother will hardly trust another, which infidelity among themselves and distracted deceitful governours was the chiefest cause of their overthrow and subiection vnder Infidels... There is a great Gentry in this Kingdome, but untravelled abroad, farre lesse mannerly at home, being luxurious and ill taught, and damnably given to that Masculine misery, the whole Southern World is defiled with." He has his own reasons to be unsatisfied with Hungary, he was twice robbed and barely saved his life.

But the funniest and most unreliable traveller was Captain John Smith. C.J.S. is one of the names which mark the beginning of literary history in North America. In the later part of his adventurous life, C.J.S. abandoned participation in actual adventures for the more passive, but apparently more lucrative role of describing them. It was then that he wrote the work which contains interesting references to Hungary: *The True Travells, Adventures and Observations of C.J.S.* /1630/.

According to the anonymous historian who gave this account, C.J.S. came to Hungary in 1601 and he joined the army of the Duke of Mercury, i.e. The Duc de Mercoeur, the French nobleman who came to fight against the Turk. C.S. distinguished himself during the siege of several towns in Hungary by inventing and using light signals with great success. But the most interesting part of his adventures is his sojourning in Transylvania, during the reign of the Prince Sigismund Báthory. The Transylvanian army under the command of Moyses Zachel /Székely Mózes/ was besieging the fortress of Regall. The Turks in order to beguile the tedium of the siege, send a message to the commander of the Transylvanian army "that to delight the Ladies, who did long to see some court-like pastime, the Lord Turbashaw did defie any Captaine, that had the comand of a Company, who durst combate with him for his head."

The Christian captains drew lots as to which of them should answer to the challenge of the Turbashaw, the lot fell upon Captain Smith. Smith luckily killed his adversary and carried away his head as a trophy and offered it as a present to Moses Székely. Afterwards he killed in duel another Turk named Grualgo who came to take revenge for his bashaw and then a third one, called Bonny Mulgro, whom he had challenged. Moses Székely embraced him before the whole army and presented him with a beautiful and well-harnessed horse, with a scimitar i.e. a Turkish sword and a golden belt worth 300 ducats. Some time later Prince Sigismundus visited the camp, in order to pass his glorious army in review. He was greatly pleased to hear how wonderfully C.S. had fought the heathen and to reward him he presented him with a coat-of-arms including the three Turkish heads and with a patent of nobility, furthermore with his own portrait and an annuity of 300 ducats.

Now the patent of nobility that C.S. received from S. Báthory was a matter of lively discussion in later years. A Hungarian scholar Lewis Kropf investigated the matter

and stated that it is an impudent forgery. Any Hungarian, even if he is not an expert, will see at first glance that even supposing that S. ever got a patent of nobility from Sigismund Báthory the text given in his book could never be the authentic one. The Prince of Transylvania never was Earle of Anchard, Salford and Growenda, however beautiful and romantic the names of these non-existing earldoms may sound.

But how is it possible in that case that this document was certified by the Garter King-of-Arms in London? Concerning this problem I have learned that Kropf informed Mr. Eugene Pivány, the renowned expert of Hungarian–American relations, that the official of the London College of Arms who entered the document in the register, was subsequently imprisoned for the forgery of documents, his certification may therefore not be considered authentic.

Less well known but maybe more reliable are the *Relations of Sydnam Poyntz,* edited for the Royal Historical Society in London, 1908, from a MS in the British Museum. S. P. came in 1624 with Mansfeld's Army to Hungary, fought against Wallenstein, was made a prisoner by the Turks, spent six years in captivity, partly in those parts of Hungary which were then occupied by the Turks. But his accounts also sound somewhat romantic.

So far we have spoken only about works which have a certain documentary value and relate to Hungarian reality. Now let us turn to the works of fiction, let us see what was the role of Hungary in the *belles lettres.*

The oldest mention of Hungary in the English *belles lettres* is, as all pupils of Professor Yolland[3] know, in the Middle English metrical romance called *The Squyr of Lowe degre*. It was first published by Wynkyn de Worde about 1520. This romance has only as much to do with Hungary that its hero, the squire of low degree, loved the King's daughter of Hungary. As a distant country, Hungary is now and then mentioned as the scene of romantic exploits in the Middle English poems. So e.g. in *Torrent of Portyngale* the hero goes to Hungary to kill the giant Slongus. A rather prominent role is played by Hungary in the metrical romance called *Le Bone Florence of Rome.* The king of Hungary, Sir Phelyp dies and leaves two sons, Sir Mylys and Sir Emere. They later deliver the beautiful Florence, daughter of the Emperor of Rome, of several captivities and other dangers etc.

Very much akin to these fictions are those we find in the English versions of the great medieval collections of stories, the *Gesta Romanorum* and *The Seven Sages.* In the *Gesta Romanorum* there is a story about Emperor Polemus. The King of Hungary wants to marry his daughter, but she loves a simple knight and elopes with him. In the Latin original the King of Hungary is King of Apulia—its seems that for the English of those times Hungary sounded more interesting than Apulia. In the collection of *The Seven Sages* the English version of the so-called Cotton-Rawlinson MS locates two stories to Hungary, the Inclusa and the Medicus.

It is rather well-known that at the beginning of English Renaissance and Humanism, the great humanist Sir Thomas More wrote a book which has an im-

3 ■ Arthur B. Yolland (1874–1946), moved to Hungary in 1896. From 1908 to 1946 he was professor at the English Department of Pázmány Péter University, Budapest.

portant reference to Hungary. I mean the *Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation.* It is a Christian meditation made by More in the time when he and the Catholics were persecuted all over England. Hungary tribulated by the Turks gives the fictitious frame to this work. "To this persecution of the Turks," says the book, "may well be resembled the whole practice of Heretics in any place where they can prevail".

We find stories located to Hungary in the Renaissance short stories, so among those of William Painter, in his *Palace of Pleasure,* 1575. The title of the Twenty-First Novell is: "A Gentleman of meane callinge and reputation doth fall in love with Anne, the Queen of Hungarie, whom shee very royally requited. The Twenty-eighth Novell says: Two Barons of Hungarie assuring themselves to obtayne their sute to a fayr Lady to Boeme, receyved of hir a straung and maruellus repulse, to their great shame and Infamy, cursing the tyme that ever they aduentured an Enterprise so foolish." The source of this second story is Boccaccio. Now this second short story is important as far as it has been the source and inspiration of the great contemporary of Shakespeare, Philip Massinger, in writing his drama, *The Picture,* which consequently takes place as well in Hungary and Bohemia.

With Massinger we are already in Shakespeare's neighbourhood. Sh. himself mentions Hungary as far as I know twice: once in *Measure for Measure:*

> *LUCIO. If the duke with the other dukes comes not to composition with the King of Hungary, why then all the dukes fall upon the King.*
>
> *First Gent. Heaven grant us its peace, but not the King of Hungary's!*

The other is *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, where Falstaff exclaims:

> *O base Hungarian wight! Wilt thou the spigot wield?*

It is well-known what Sir Philip Sidney says about Hungary in his *Defense of Poesie,* I don't want to quote it. Marlowe makes an important figure of our King Sigismund in his *Tamberlaine.* Besides the above mentioned drama by Massinger there are traces of several Elizabethan dramas which had Hungary for scene, but their text has been lost. There is also a Baroque drama with Hungarian subject: *The Mustapha* by Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery, printed in 1690. Its source was a novel of Mlle de Scudéry.

One could quote very much of the romances of chivalry which started with the story of Amadis de Gaule in the beginning of the 16th century and went on up to the 18th century. In those novels, as e.g. Palmerian de Oliva, Primaleon of Greece, Palladine of England, Belianis and so on (the names are familiar to those who read attentively *The Adventures of Don Quijote de la Mancha*) we find Hungary very often mentioned, sometimes its king plays a certain role, sometimes it is the home of a knight-errant, a magician or a giant—but of course all this has nothing to do with real Hungary, the name of our country is only applied because it is a distant country and its name sounds rather romantic to English ears. ❧

Why Won't He Tell a Proper Story?

Imre Kertész in Conversation with Zsigmond Sándor Papp

Zsigmond Papp: *Are you back again in your old routine?*

Imre Kertész: I couldn't rightly say that, since my life never really has run in a routine—not that this would have been possible. Winning an award like the Nobel brings certain advantages and drawbacks, you can become a target. All the same, it is easier for me to draw attention to certain topics, and that wasn't the case before. I still find it new and astonishing to speak or write about something and for that to carry weight.

What have you in mind?

I mean quite basic issues. I can't emphasise often enough, for instance, how incorrect the use of the word "Holocaust" is. It doesn't mean what it is supposed to mean. Its purpose is to avoid calling a spade a spade: the extermination and destruction of Europe's Jews. That is a universal moral trauma.

And drawbacks?

I have lost count of the number of interviews and talks I have given. However, there are good sides to that too. It's made new demands on me. For instance, I had never written essays, but I was asked to compare conditions in the Soviet and Nazi camps. I took it on since it's something that interested me. I'm always grumbling that I can't do my own work on account of things like that, but then I come round to the idea that the topic is of interest to me—at least in around ten per cent of the cases, let's say.

Do you find it easier or harder to write now?

I've had two books published since the Nobel, but in neither of them will you find anything that I wouldn't have written before. I don't represent anybody, don't

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Sándor Zsigmond Papp
writes for the arts pages of the daily Népszabadság.
He has published four volumes of short stories and essays. The above interview was conducted in December 2007 in Budapest.

speak on anyone's behalf. If I protest, then it's in my own name. I've always considered writing to be a private affair.

Still, you work with a different sense of responsibility.

There's no doubt about that! But generally it's best not to have to reckon with such a sense of responsibility. If I am asked for an opinion on a key political issue or a critical situation, that does carry a responsibility, but responsibility as a human being, not as a writer. There are circumstances when one's responsibility as a human being can assume a political dimension, but literature should not assume a political guise. It should be untrammelled and pure. I have never written for a target audience, and I have never adopted ideas that lay down how I am supposed to regard another person.

What comes harder for a writer: failure or success?

There are two kinds of failure. One is true failure, which really is disagreeable, when you cannot accomplish something you have taken on, or to put it another way: you acknowledge failure in what you stand for. The other is when you hit upon a truth, proclaim it and everybody denies it. That too is failure, yet you can feel sure that you have said something, that you have caused a slight tremor around yourself.

And success?

I have no idea what success is. If one of my books sells so-and-so-many thousand copies that is truly success, but it cannot be grasped. Someone coming over, like after a reading the other day, and saying that your books have changed their life—maybe that's success. The sort of success in which someone is praised to the skies repels me. I only ever had a few readers, but at least they read my books with the sense that I wrote them. In other words, they find their way from one existence to another; they articulate matters of vital importance and that is how readers experience them.

Writers no longer seem to create oeuvres on the scale of a Balzac or a Mór Jókai.

Writing was not so problematic in those days; one didn't have to put one's existence on the line, stories would just dash off by the pen. The same miraculous sense of delight in abundance simply bubbled over from Mozart too. A contemporary composer is doing well if he reaches his second symphony. Something happened to the world which seems to make art feel not natural, as if the natural forces and primeval springs have become clogged up. Maybe the stock of language has dried up.

With what consequences?

We have had to wake up to the fact that mankind is capable of things that were never imagined possible, and that produced what I would call atonal prose. Atonal music appeared around the time of the First World War, when composers felt that the language they had used earlier had become exhausted, hollowed. I call the new prose atonal because it has to reckon with the absence of a basic ethical and moral

consensus—the equivalent of the tonic in tonal music. Words now mean something different in each and every mouth. If prose registers this, as it has to, then it loses its naturalness—the certainty that when I tell a tale the audience listens open-mouthed. If we do not express the essence of this loss, or turning-point if you prefer, then we are not writers. We have missed out on life, on our own times.

So what will become of this disenchanted art?

Struggle has its own charm—at least for a while. Trouble ensues if literature were to lose its guts, the courage to present what is new in new forms. Camus and Sartre had that courage after the Second World War; the problems they raised were of burning interest. But there were problems that could never have been formulated had there been no war. Two totalitarian regimes, Nazism and communism, ran their courses before my own eyes. If they had left no trace in my writings, boring or otherwise, I am not a writer. What would be the point of my wearing out ballpoint pens? It is also a problem of technique, by the way.

In what sense?

The question is in what way I am able to feed this into sentences. Naturally, this challenge complicates contemporary literature. People like to kid themselves that the world around them is rational, so if someone spotlights its irrationality, not everyone takes kindly to that. What's he messing around with? Why won't he tell a proper story?

A writer, in other words, stands on moral grounds?

He doesn't moralise, but his way of looking at things cuts across the instinct by which we set values on things. He pitches his readers into a world in which a stand has to be made. Just picture, if you will, what I was confronted with when writing *Fatelessness*. If I had painted a squalid world that disgusted people and made them loath to hear anything about it, then I would not have been doing my job well. It is up to me to generate the pleasure that will draw readers into the book. In spite of the fact that the topic is horrendous and the subject is not 'literary' at all. The whole thing is disgusting, but it had to be turned into an exciting read. That's what I mean by a problem of technique.

Are there any ideas or topics that you still want to deal with?

That's why I am still writing.

Are there many of them?

One book's worth for sure.

So there will be a new Kertész novel?

That's hard to say. If someone says I'm looking well, I tend to answer: have another look tomorrow. I've reached the age of seventy-eight, and I'm cautious: I limit my ambitions to a single book.

You give the impression of being very disciplined.

Not in the least! I've always been incapable of organising my time, perhaps because I lack the strength to beat off life's demands. I consider the sort of discipline needed to chalk up the obligatory page of writing every day, come what may, to be ludicrous. Or to work non-stop from eight in the morning until four in the afternoon. If there was a hidden camera to spy on me, the writer at work, then it would record me taking a book off the shelf, making coffee, nodding off to sleep at the writing desk—doing anything but write. I don't really understand how a finished book ever emerges from the wreckage of my daily wash-outs.

Aren't you too strict with yourself?

Whenever I feel elated by the day's work in the evening, and I'm able to quote my sentences accurately, remember them, then you can guarantee that part will have to be deleted the next day. If I write something good, I no longer recall it. I find it reassuring though if I am still able to marvel a little at the parts I have already written.

Do you often get blocked in a text?

I'm not one of those writers who is able to write three hundred pages at one go and then work it over. I find that I can't make any progress until I've mapped out the territory. I can't move ahead unless my sentences are built on a foundation that has been carefully mulled over and is logically clear. If I find I am unable to keep a text going, if I am making attempt after attempt at a passage, then I know that there is probably something wrong with the starting premise. Then I am able to discard what I've written with considerable relief. You see, a writer's activity cannot be called economical!

Why do you live in Berlin?

You're asking me that as if it were unheard of for a Hungarian writer to live abroad for a while. Endre Ady, Dezső Kosztolányi and Sándor Márai spent years abroad. In contrast, for a long time I did not even have a passport. Why Berlin specifically? I like the city, it provides inspiration. To some extent it's taken over the role that Paris used to have between the two world wars. To say nothing of the fact that it was in Germany that I felt for the first time that I was having an impact, that my writing was having a real effect on other people.

What responses do you consider important?

The genuine ones. When I have the feeling that a person who has read a book of mine has put in the work. That he's been hard at work on the material. Has tried to unravel the book's secret. In my view, that's the most important: for some dark secret should be busy somewhere deep down in a work—whether it's a word, a moment, anything. A book remains alive as long as it has a secret. ❧

Gábor Miklósi

Schengen Blues

"How much foreign currency are you carrying?" asked a customs officer, pulling me out of the queue. It was August 1990 and my younger brother and I were at Ferihegy airport in Budapest headed for London. Presumably the customs manual listed long scraggly hair and dirty denim jackets among the typical features of currency smugglers. Denials were in vain; our pockets soon revealed cash far in excess of the permitted amount (anything over 100 deutschmarks required bank clearance). Start with my brother, I pleaded; I'd hitchhike there in two days if this palaver forced me to miss the flight. The guards got around to me 25 minutes later and asked a few questions before making me sign a document testifying to the confiscation of foreign bank notes which my father and aunt—working and living in London and Hamburg respectively—had allegedly given me. A minibus rushed me to the plane and the stairway was towed back to the already locked rear door. At any rate, I found myself sitting on the plane next to my terrified brother who had been figuring out in the meantime how to make his way from Heathrow to our father's flat in southeast London. We spent the rest of the flight discussing how our parents might react. (After initial dismay, they burst out laughing and reimbursed our lost cash.) My mother may have remembered an incident in 1975 when she travelled to Košice, Czechoslovakia on business. She had accidentally left her bank deposit book in her bag before leaving home, and was later prosecuted for her wickedness. Just as she eventually got most of her money back, I was reimbursed later at the customs office in Budapest. My offence got me entered into the criminal records, though I was pardoned when the crime was deleted from the Criminal Code.

I was reminded of all this a few years later while reading Imre Kertész's newly published novella *Sworn Statement*. In 1991, Kertész recounts, Hungarian customs officers had ordered him to get off an express train bound for Vienna at Hegyeshalom for the same offence. Kertész saw more than an act of humiliation

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here, and it turned into an allegory about the relativity of freedom. Kertész implies that it takes longer to change the relationship between state and citizen than it takes to change the political system. Euphoria over the political transformation had dimmed by then. At the same time, the sense of being a free man and pride of citizenship were not yet ingrained in people's consciousness. Evidently, the boneheaded customs officers' insistence on pointless rules had activated in Kertész his acute sense of the vulnerability of an Eastern European subject.

As I read Kertész, I wondered why I hadn't felt the same sense of humiliation at the airport (ludicrous though the whole thing was). True, I was twenty back then and far more interested in girls and travel than politics. Still, how is it that I had sensed nothing of the significance of the blurring of the divide between imprisonment and freedom? Perhaps it had something to do with the way my mother had gazed in astonishment at my generation's nonchalant grabbing hold of passports and starting off into the wide world. She was amazed at what we took for granted: going wherever we liked for as long as we could afford. Any obstacles along the way were, as far as we were concerned, anomalies; we certainly didn't suspect that only appearances had changed.

Ferihegy was not my first border adventure. During a high school spring break in 1988, my girlfriend and I travelled to Sopron, a town near the Austrian border, to taste the local wines and at last spend a long unsupervised weekend together. Incidentally, Sopron is known as the city of loyalty because of what happened there in 1921—in a citywide referendum, Sopron chose to be in Hungary rather than Austria, and the whole country took them to its bosom (though their descendants, in the years of Socialism, were not convinced of the wisdom of the decision). We were travelling on a domestic intercity train, but a border guard got on anyway and asked us about the purpose of our journey, aggressively warning us that we should not even think of fleeing to Austria because we would be caught and then we would be in a lot of trouble. We could hardly contain our laughter.

Nevertheless, I must have suffered a mild form of post-party-state trauma: before we went to Venice recently, my wife, well aware that our identity cards were enough to enter Italy, firmly decided to leave her passport at home. When it was our turn at Treviso Airport, the border policewoman hesitated for a moment. After studying both sides of the plastic card—I was about to reach into my pocket for my wife's passport which I had secreted there—the officer produced a laminated document, located the Hungarian identity card on the list, and shepherded us on smilingly. I was surprised and relieved, but my wife apparently did not think for a moment there might be a problem. In a few weeks' time we are going skiing in the French Alps with some friends. I have already started to convince myself that a passport won't be necessary, but for the time being I think I will eventually end up slipping it into my inside pocket.

Hungary and eight other EU member states joined the Schengen Zone on 21 December 2007, which means we now stand a good chance of being able to travel

as far as Portugal with our identity cards without being stopped by border guards. True, we have to slow down a little at Hegyeshalom until the gates are demolished at the old border crossing station, but this shouldn't take more than a few months. The opening of the borders was not celebrated with such euphoria as the decision to allow East German tourists to cross into Austria in 1989. For a long time, passport control has been a mere formality; if you had as many EU passports as people in the car, the guards would wave you through without any further ado.

Austrian border guards, with their eye for detail, may have noticed that the stickers on at least one in five Hungarian cars (according to my non-representative survey) show a country totally unlike the Hungary in official documents. The weird shape is historical Hungary as it used to be before the Treaty of Trianon. The use of these stickers shows that to this day millions of Hungarians are unable to accept the fact that treaties between the major powers after the First and Second World Wars saw two thirds of Hungary's territories annexed to neighbouring countries with a better sense of diplomacy.

Here I could cite numerous reasons, including the blows and traumas Hungarians have suffered throughout their history, the fact that we failed to face our past during the 40 years we spent as a Soviet satellite state, and I could contrast all that with the beneficial effects of the social dialogue in Germany concerning the Nazi and Communist past. I could also recall the famous Pan-European Picnic in September 1989, when Foreign Minister Gyula Horn (Prime Minister between 1994–98) tore the Iron Curtain to pieces all by himself, at least in his own opinion, to let hundreds of Eastern Germans across. It was indeed a giant leap for mankind, but too big a step for one man—even ten years later as a democratically elected prime minister, Horn failed to apologise for his actions as a member of the special political police in 1956. However, all that would lead us far from the subject of the opening of the Schengen borders.

Today, only extreme right-wingers dispute the fact that Hungary's borders can no longer be redrawn. Nonetheless, there are still some conservative families in Hungary who—at least as part of the rhetoric of Sunday family lunches—declare that they will not travel to Transylvania and the former Northern Hungary while they need a passport and a different currency to do so. What that originally meant was: until they once again become part of Hungary. However, the criteria may also be interpreted in narrower terms. For example, Hungarians had been able to travel to Slovakia without a passport for a long time before the border control was eliminated altogether. A few years down the line we might even have a common currency, the euro (although they may introduce it sooner than us), which means that there will be tens of thousands more Hungarian holidaymakers. Transylvania is a tougher nut, but Romania's accession to the EU in January 2007 means that prospects are encouraging. The extension of the Schengen area to cover Romania is not expected till 2011–2012. Since the Schengen border now runs between Hungary and Romania, controls, for the time being, far from being more relaxed, are stricter than they used to be.

The borders drawn at Trianon have had the most absurd and tragic effect in some places. In Szelmenc, a small village along the Slovak–Ukrainian border inhabited by Hungarians, villagers had for decades been forced to travel 50 kilometres to the nearest border crossing station whenever they wanted to hug family members or friends living just 20 metres away. The small border crossing stations that were opened over the last few years have made the lives of these people, as well as people who like visiting shops and pubs in neighbouring villages, much more convenient. However, the new state of affairs after the introduction of easy border-crossing options did not lack absurdity either. Cered, a village in Hungary, is found only a few hundred metres from Tajti (Tachty) in Slovakia. In summer 2006 a paved road was built between the villages, but the border was only opened for excursionists, which meant that while pedestrians and cyclists were allowed to cross, cars were not. In a bid to enforce this rule, local border guards agreed to saw off a metre and a half of the barriers to help cyclists cross without difficulty.

It quickly transpired however that you cannot just go and saw off pieces of barriers at Hungarian borders. Fortunately, a creative solution was found—the Slovaks chopped off the end of the barriers on their side, while Hungarians raised theirs (this was not against the rules). Still, the authorities decided to man the post for two more weeks (apparently they still had the budget for that). Everyone was happy: cyclists were riding happily back and forth, and the Hungarian border guards left two weeks later, satisfied. This was when the problems began. Motorists who had heard about the opening of the borders and who came from more remote areas saw that the barriers on the Hungarian side were raised, whilst those on the Slovak side, although somewhat shorter, were padlocked. They assumed this must be a mistake, they took the law into their own hands, broke the padlocks and drove merrily on. Of course, the Slovak border guards installed new padlocks the next day, and this game went on for a while. Finally, the Slovak officers must have contacted their Hungarian counterparts, since the barriers on the Hungarian side were also fitted with padlocks to make things absolutely clear. Unfortunately, this also blocked the path of cyclists wanting to cross the border who refused to rest on their laurels either, sawing off the end of the barrier on the Hungarian side one night instead. This situation prevailed for a year and a half; that is, until the extension of the Schengen Zone on 21 December 2007. Since then, people, or for that matter, cars, can cross the green border wherever they like, including roads blocked by half a barrier.

Unfortunately, Schengen has not lived up to expectations in every respect. For example, Hungarian paragliders and hang gliders—a group with rather modest lobbying power—had been trying together with their Slovak friends to convince authorities for years that the opening of internal borders should also involve uniting the airspaces of member states for sports purposes. People using unpowered gliders constantly fight to gain altitude and fly as far as possible. If, for example, they reach the edge of legally usable airspace marked by flight paths,

they will of course land to avoid the risk of colliding with a sixty-ton jet, jeopardising the lives of a hundred passengers. Sometimes they have to land due to thunderstorms, but that is also part and parcel of what they do. However, there is nothing more frustrating for a glider than having to land after a short flight because of an invisible "border" when they could have flown for a hundred kilometres over the beautiful hilly country, as gliders in the Alps normally do. According to current regulations—which the Hungarian aviation authorities defend with all their might for no apparent reason—the opening of airspaces only applies to aircraft using registered airports, not to sports aircraft that typically take off from hillsides.

Pilots fume but do nothing. Austrian residents, however, have decided to take action. Not all Austrians, or "brothers-in-law" as they are sometimes called by Hungarians, are happy that the job of fending off illegal immigrants has been transferred from the rigorous Austrian border guards to their Hungarian, Slovak and Polish colleagues, who may not be as reliable. For this reason, Austrian officers in many villages near the Hungarian border "forgot", even after Christmas, to remove roadblocks, the huge welded metal obstacles that were once part of the Iron Curtain and were later used to deter people smugglers. An article published in *The Sunday Times* on 20 January 2008 portrays the Austrians' cautiousness in a somewhat different light. According to the article, the accession of Hungary and Slovakia to the Schengen Zone has brought about a golden age for Ukrainian people-smugglers. Business is supposed to be thriving while bribed Ukrainian border guard commanders provide "windows" for smuggling. A smuggler boasted to the British reporter that their references are improving and two-thirds of their clients successfully make it through the borders. Thus demand for their service, which costs up to £10 000, is increasing. The report continues by claiming that cellars and abandoned farmhouses in border villages in Sub-Carpathia are packed with refugees who are guided across the border by children too young to be prosecuted. However, the article does not say how these groups of refugees escape the watchful eye of uncorrupted Hungarian and Slovak border guards. As part of this hysteria, authorities in some villages in the Burgenland have placed NO ENTRY signs on smaller roads from the border, many of which were constructed using EU funds. This means that you can drive up to the border from the Hungarian side, but from there you have to walk or hop on a bicycle unless you are prepared to break traffic rules. It seems, however, that the idea of a common Europe, coupled with some common sense, has gained more currency than it did at the time of the incident involving Imre Kertész: the NO ENTRY signs sometimes go missing. ❧

Ilona Sármány-Parsons

A Plea for Vaszary

János Vaszary (1867–1939). A Retrospective Exhibition
at the Hungarian National Gallery, 18 October 2007–17 February 2008.
Vaszary János 1867–1939. Catalogue.
Budapest, MNG, 2007, 444 pp. + Appendix, 55 pp.

The Vaszary retrospective was the last in a series of three exhibitions at the Hungarian National Gallery celebrating the 50th anniversary of its foundation.[1] János Vaszary, whose works were last shown in 1961, was a prolific painter: he is estimated to have created well over a thousand works, although as yet there is no *catalogue raisonné* of his oeuvre. The National Gallery has put 375 of them on exhibit, of which 108 are on loan from private collections and a further 55 from other museums. Mariann Gergely and Edit Plesznivy, the two curators of the retrospective, are to be commended for their considerable achievement in sourcing and administering the exhibition, which includes remnants of interiors (tapestries and furniture) designed by Vaszary in his Art Nouveau/Secessionist period, around 1900. Vaszary was, nevertheless, primarily a painter, though some of his graphics are outstanding examples of early modernity.

In spite of his successes, indeed, fame, Vaszary has never been wholeheartedly endorsed by the critics. Anyone walking through the rooms of this fine exhibition with an open mind, however, will find this reluctance hard to understand. One explanation may be the preference in Hungarian art-history writing for artists with a unique, or at least a strongly individual, style, one that informs the whole oeuvre. Even if a painter's work bears the stamp of several periods, experimentation with a view to establishing one's unique artistic identity is considered appropriate only for the youthful artist. When the painter has reached maturity, it is tacitly assumed that he or she will (and should) remain faithful to a consistent form of artistic expression, which will manifest itself in a coherent, personal manner or style. Artists who die relatively young can measure up to this ideal more easily, though there are also examples of long-lived masters who have successfully adhered to the same stylistic formula or manner throughout their careers: László Mednyánszky, to name a Hungarian artist, or Caspar David Friedrich.

1 ■ It was in 1957 that the paintings by Hungarian artists housed, up to that time, in the Museum of Fine Arts were allotted to an independent institution to be eventually relocated in a wing of what used to be the Royal Palace on Castle Hill.

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Many of the major Hungarian painters—Csontváry, Károly Ferenczy, József Egry, István Farkas and Lajos Kassák, for example—changed but little after discovering the fundamentals of their personal vision. But Goya's oeuvre, to say nothing of Picasso's, is convincing evidence that great art is possible even with radical turns of style and approach. By the twentieth century, when 'novelty' became the core notion of 'artistic progress', painters simply *had* to keep changing: they altered their vocabulary to express the newest stylistic trends.

In retrospect, we speak of these artists' oeuvres as falling into distinct periods. Contemporary Hungarian critics, on the other hand, tended to speak of Vaszary as being overly impressionable, even superficial, of his succumbing to the dictates of fashion and the ephemeral, of his courting novelty for its own sake. And the accusations have stuck. He was, unquestionably, impressively talented, but he was 'not serious enough'; on the contrary, he was rather superficial, even shallow. Can one take seriously an artist who has, in turn, been a Naturalist, a *plein air* painter, a Symbolist, an Impressionist and then a Post-Impressionist, a Secessionist, an Expressionist, a Modernist and an Art Deco master? Which of these was the 'real' Vaszary? Did he truly identify with all these styles? Or did he simply adopt them for mercenary reasons, or because he could not resist the lure of being considered 'trendy'? How can we find the inner core of art created by one who was so thoroughly fashion's slave? Reservations of this kind are being voiced by important critics to this day. Curiously, these same critics would never question the artistic or personal credibility of Picasso, who had embraced as many styles and trends, though significantly, he did so in Paris. In Paris, it seems, malleability and a flare for experimentation are forgivable sins, even virtues. Not so in Budapest.

The aversion to Vaszary goes back to Lajos Fülep (1885–1973), an immensely influential father figure for generations of Hungarian art historians. Combatant and mercilessly exacting, he started to write art criticism in 1904 and was active till the First World War. In the Twenties and Thirties he was a pastor in a Trans-danubian village, deepening his knowledge of art and the humanities all the while. After the Second World War, he returned to Budapest, eventually becoming a professor of art history at Eötvös Loránd University. Fülep was the custodian of aesthetic values and ethical principles in those difficult years of the 1950's when critical discourse, too, was dominated by Communist censorship and political slogans. Yet, he was not infallible. As a young man, he sometimes made value judgements which were motivated by considerations that lay outside the field of aesthetics, and, on occasion, made pronouncements that were *ad hominem* and biased. When Vaszary held his first retrospective in the Nemzeti Szalon in the spring of 1906, Fülep wrote two totally different critiques within two days. The first one was highly favourable, indeed enthusiastic; the second one pronounced Vaszary to be "lacking in genius".[2] Did he really change his mind in so short a

2 ■■ Lajos Fülep: "Vaszary János képei" (János Vaszary's Paintings). *Az Ország,* March 27 1906, 9; and Lajos Fülep: "Vaszary János képei" (János Vaszary's Paintings). *Magyar Szemle* 1906. 13, 207.

time, or was it simply that he tailored his review to suit the readership of the two very different journals? Scholarship has not been able to resolve this puzzle. More influentially, Fülep continued to disseminate his youthful prejudices and preferences in his old age, then from a far more authoritative position.

The Francophile István Genthon was another influential art historian who, in his survey of modern Hungarian painting, delivered a crushing verdict on Vaszary[3], characterising him as a weak personality, easily swayed by the "flavour of the month". As he saw it, Vaszary's work showed an endless sequence of influences, but no style. "What is appreciable in his work is the passion and painterly virtuosity that holds his oeuvre together," wrote Genthon.

There were, however, also a number of broad-minded and sensitive critics, Elek Petrovics[4], the legendary director of the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts, among them, who recognized the unquestionably high quality of Vaszary's work in every style that he adopted. Aurél Kárpáti and Artur Elek[5], both brilliant essayists and critics, were also admirers of Vaszary.

An artist of a small nation is practically expected to be an epigone. If he should make a genuinely original contribution to any of the 'styles' that is his idiom at any particular time, he is immediately suspect to the opinion-makers. Contradictory judgements await such an artist in this part of the world: either he is accused of slavishly adopting something that is foreign and alien to local traditions, or he is faulted for not following his original mentor(s) with sufficient accuracy. The non-classifiable painter is thus branded as either unpatriotic or insufficiently progressive. The groundlessness of such judgements and the blindness of those who have made them have not prevented them from becoming near clichés in Hungarian art history.

In fact, the new ideal of artistic genius constantly in flux was part of the paradigm shift in the discourse about the function of art that occurred around 1900. This was just the time when the career of János Vaszary began. Coming from the provinces, and studying (like most Hungarian painters of the time) in Munich and Paris, Vaszary was ambitious and ready to keep in step with the *Zeitgeist,* an ambition that required flexibility, intelligence and professional knowhow. Vaszary possessed all of these qualities. Among the first generation of modernist Hungarian painters, however, he was a rare phenomenon. The others, too, rebelled against Historicism, conservative artistic ideals and the moribund styles of academic or salon painting, but worked 'instinctively', cultivating spontaneity. They were, for the most part, either unwilling or unable to deal with the aesthetic, theoretical or philosophical aspects of the new trends. Vaszary stands out for his interest in all three.

Vaszary was also something of an outsider because of his aristocratic and condescending view of the Bohemian milieu then in vogue. There was also his reticence. Whenever art historians tried to write up his career in the decades after

3 ■ István Genthon: *Az új magyar festőművészet története 1800-tól napjainkig* (The History of New Hungarian Painting from 1800 to the Present). Budapest, Magyar Szemle Társaság, 1935, pp. 231–233.
4 ■ Elek Petrovics: "Vaszary János". In: Elek Petrovics–Aurél Kárpáti: *Vaszary.* Budapest, 1941.
5 ■ Artur Elek: "Meghalt Vaszary János" (János Vaszary Dies). *Újság,* 20 April 1939, p. 6.

his death, they soon discovered that there was no extended correspondence replete with personal references (as there is for József Rippl-Rónai). Nor was there an image-building autobiography with remarks on contemporaries, juicy stories, or gossip. As a person, Vaszary remains a closed book. There is only one short, unfinished autobiography from 1936 covering his youth and full of his impressions of Paris and Rome, as well as the somewhat sparse memoirs of his wife.

On the other hand, we do have an exceptionally valuable source for Vaszary's intellectual and artistic development, namely his writings on art, which he published sporadically in art journals and newspapers.[6] Most of them are travelogues and criticism, occasionally pamphlets and disputatious articles on Hungarian cultural policies, and they all demonstrate his ability to analyse the cultural and social issues of his time. One encounters through them an honest, independent mind with a huge knowledge and understanding of the age he lived in.

The forthrightness and civil courage with which he attacked the extremely conservative cultural establishment after 1932 is also exceptional. His first text, dealing with various issues in painting, was published in 1903 when he was 36 years old; his last one, a major study of modern art and its relationship to contemporary art policies ("What Will Happen to Our Art?")[7] appeared just a few weeks before his sudden death in the spring of 1939. All his writings reflect depth of character: Vaszary was sensitive to ethical issues and had a profound sense of responsibility, both for the culture of his country and for the coming generation of artists.

The Catalogue of the current Vaszary exhibition starts with an extensive introductory essay ("The Style Seeker") by Márta Kovalovszky. There follow eleven studies and a richly illustrated list of Vaszary's paintings. Alongside the items on show, analogous works from private collections are also reproduced, as are illustrations taken from other publications. All in all, we are offered a thorough and stimulating introduction to an exceptionally rich oeuvre. The Catalogue also includes an Appendix of documents, some of them Vaszary's own texts, and some interesting memoirs by his students. There is also a family tree, a biographical chronology, a list of the exhibitions where Vaszary's works have been shown, and finally, a select bibliography. Although the Catalogue has no English version, the biographical chart is bilingual, and each study has a useful English summary. The explanatory notes introducing each section of the exhibition posted on the walls of the National Gallery are likewise bilingual.

Five essays follow the painter's career and development chronologically.[8] Then

6 ■ The most substantial anthology of his writings is: Ottó Mezei (ed.): *Vaszary János és/vagy az új reneszánsz. Vaszary János összegyűjtött írásai* (János Vaszary and/or the New Renaissance. The Collected Writings of János Vaszary). Tatabánya, 1987.

7 ■ "Mi lesz művészetünkkel?" *Pesti Napló*, 9 April 1939, 35. In Ottó Mezei (ed.), op. cit., pp. 189–191.

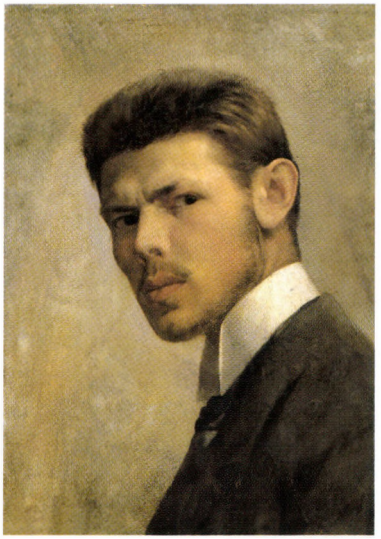
8 ■ Judit Boros: "From Naturalistic Conversation Pieces to Realist Compositions"; Edit Plesznivy: "The 'Golden Age': The Art of János Vaszary between 1896 and 1910"; Orsolya Danyi: "Neo-Renaissance and Avant-Garde: The Art of János Vaszary between 1910–1914"; György Szűcs: " 'From the Carpathians to the Adriatic': János Vaszary and the First World War"; Mariann Gergely: " 'East and West': János Vaszary's Art in the Twenties and Thirties".

come the topical studies: his contribution as an applied artist[9], as a graphic artist[10], as a teacher[11], as a publicist[12] and as a public figure.[13] Finally, there is a very amusing account of how modern painting was perceived by the public.[14]

Even in these studies, however, we can still discern traces of the old clichés of the critical discourse on Vaszary. Márta Kovalovszky, for example, in her fine introductory essay contextualizing Vaszary's works in his times—and providing, in a nutshell, a *grand récit* of modern Hungarian art—compares Vaszary's paintings to those of his closest contemporaries, and gives him worse 'marks' than his colleagues. Vaszary emerges as inferior in each genre he cultivated: his monumental peasant portraits are less impressive than the *Poor Lads* of Adolf Fényes; his war scenes are inferior to those of Mednyánszky; his scene of mourning is less powerful than that of Gyula Derkovics. One is bound to ask: what standards are being applied? Though the essay enumerates all the traumas of Hungarian history which made the lives of artists such a struggle in this part of Europe, an unspoken reproach can be read between the lines: why did Vaszary fail to embrace the—politically leftist—avant-garde? Vaszary himself candidly provides some ammunition for this reproach: "I love modern art," he observed, "and I know that it is the future. But I have already stopped at Post-Impressionism, and I can go no further".[15] We do not know the year in which this statement was made, but his oeuvre itself calls it into question. The last years of Vaszary's life were a time of yet another stylistic renewal: he became a virtuoso of transparent, sensual colour, and his works the powerful emanations of his innate *joie de vivre.* It seems that it is exactly this style, radiating a passionate enthusiasm for all the sensual joys of life, which is the most suspect to those who value theory above painterly virtues.

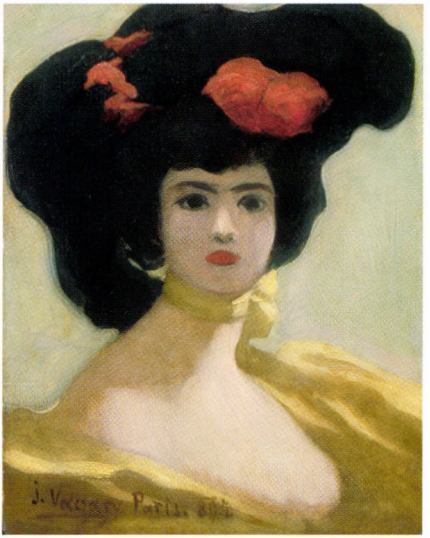
In the voluminous literature on Hungarian *fin-de-siècle* painting, Vaszary is always treated as a Secessionist artist. His main Secessionist canvas, *The Golden Age* (1897), was even used as the logo for several travelling exhibitions dealing with this period. His position in the art scene of the last two decades before the First World War, when Hungarian modernity gained ground in the fine arts, remains ill-defined, as does the evaluation of his oeuvre as a whole. This may be because he did not belong to any group and preferred to stand aside from the mainstream. Though a participant in the modernization of the art scene, he was more of an elegant ally and sympathiser than a directly involved protagonist.

9 ■ Őriné, Cecilia Nagy: "János Vaszary, the Applied Artist".
10 ■ Eszter Földi: "'The Making of Posters', János Vaszary and Graphic Design".
11 ■ Emese Révész: "'Modern Art for Young People!' János Vaszary's Art Pedagogy".
12 ■ Gábor Pataky: "Advantage Turned Disadvantage: On János Vaszary´s Writings".
13 ■ Anna Kopócsy: "The Emancipation of Modern Hungarian Art: János Vaszary and Artist Groups and Societies".
14 ■ Bernadett Kovács: "'The Beheaded Chambermaid' or the (Mis)representations of János Vaszary's Works in the Caricatures of the Time".
15 ■ Catalogue, Appendix, p.16.



Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

János Vaszary: *Self-Portrait*
1887, oil on canvas
44 x 32 cm.



Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

János Vaszary: *Woman in Black Hat*
1894, oil on cardboard
34.8 x 27 cm.

János Vaszary: *Golden Age*
1898, oil on canvas
92.5 x 156 cm.

Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

A Plea for Vaszary

Muzeul de Artă din Târgu Mureş, Târgu Mureş

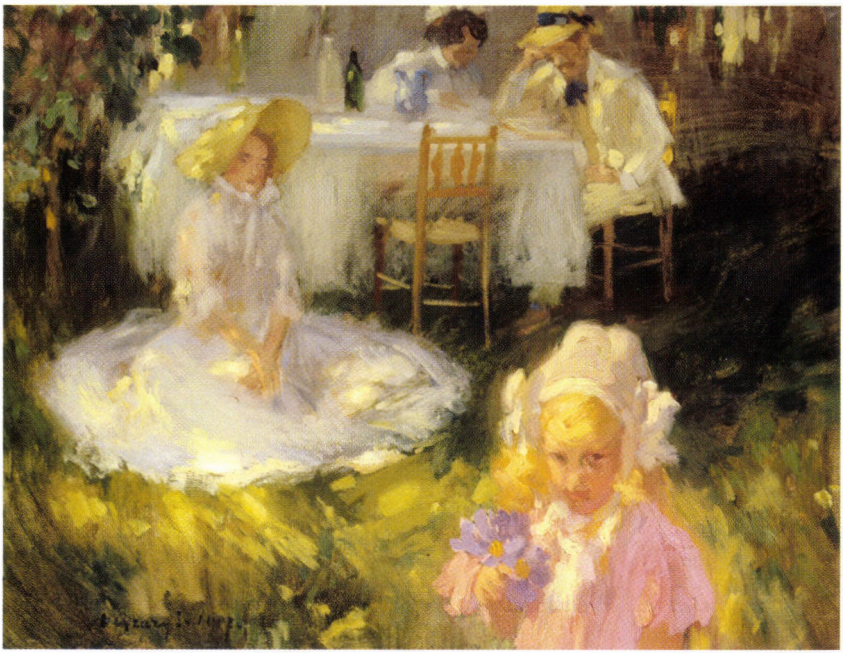
János Vaszary: *Adam and Eve*
1900, oil on canvas
214 x 195 cm.

János Vaszary:
In Front of the Mirror
1904, oil on canvas
94 x 82.5 cm.

Rippl-Rónai Museum, Kaposvár

János Vaszary:
Old Couple
1901, oil on canvas
90 x 110 cm.

Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Udine

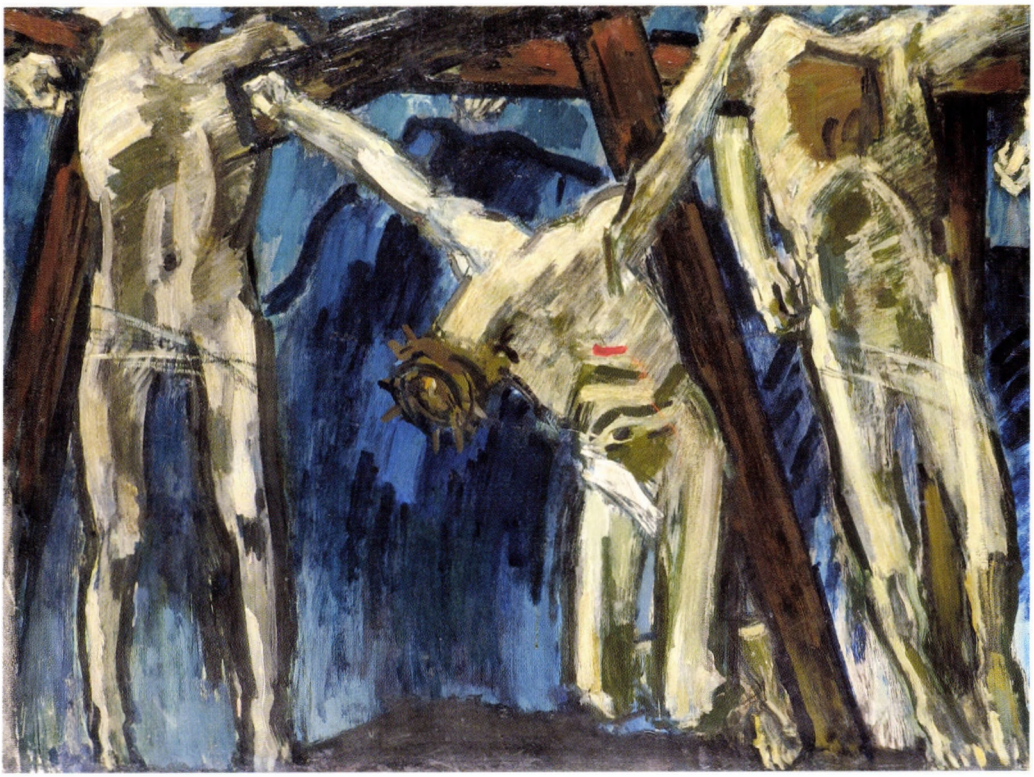


Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

János Vaszary: *Breakfast in the Open Air*
1907, oil on canvas
77.3 x 100 cm.

Private Collection

János Vaszary: *Conversation*
1909, oil on canvas
81 x 100 cm.

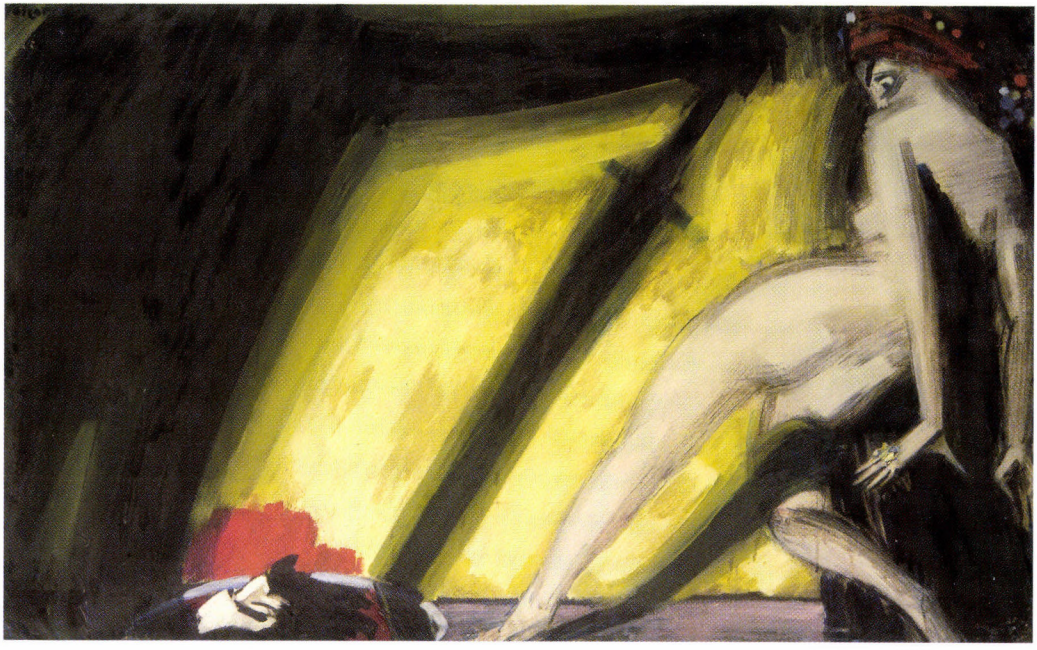


Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

János Vaszary: *Crucifixion*
cca. 1920, oil on canvas
100.5 x 134.5 cm.

János Vaszary: *Finale*
1923, oil on canvas
72 x 93 cm.

Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

János Vaszary: *Salome*
1928, oil on canvas
84 x 136.5 cm.

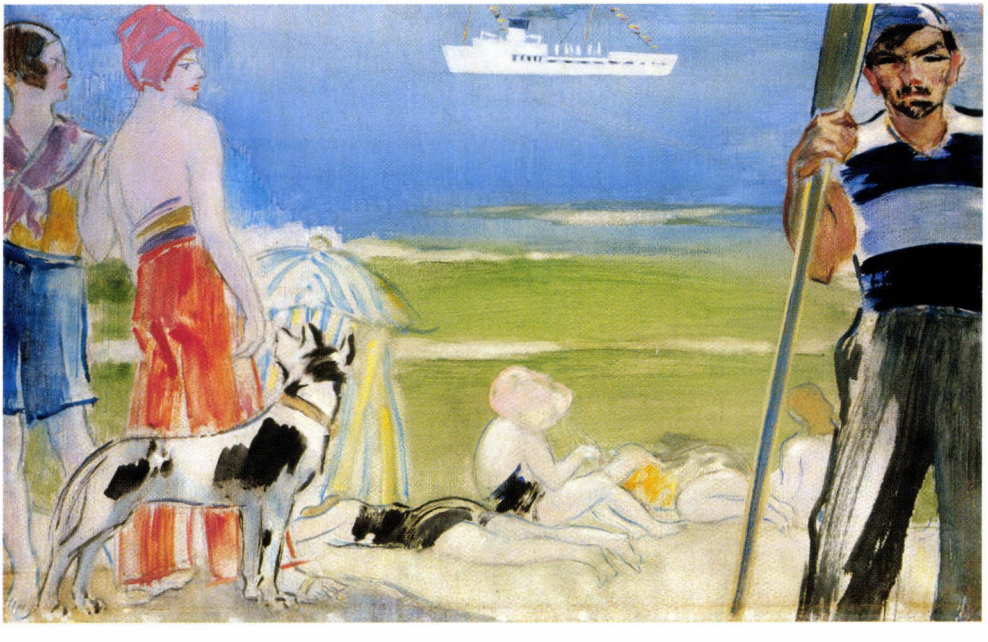
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

János Vaszary:
In the Park
1928, oil on canvas
80.5 x 102 cm.

Kovács Gábor Collection, Budapest

János Vaszary: *The Pest Bank Danube Promenade*
1934, oil on canvas
50 x 66 cm.

János Vaszary: *White Ship*
1939, oil on canvas
54 x 83.5 cm.



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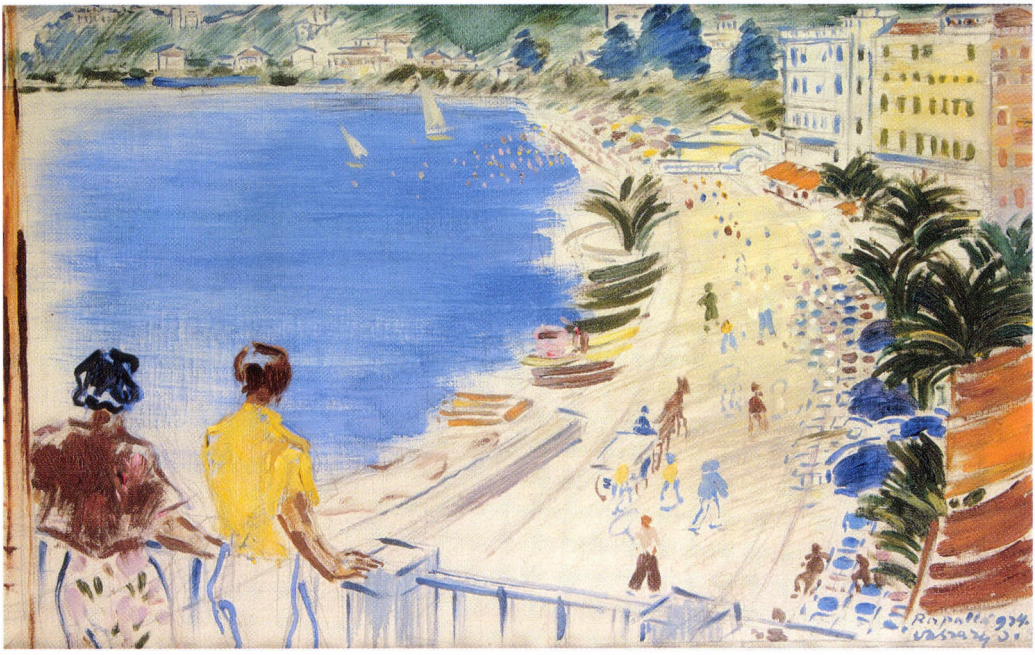

Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

János Vaszary: *Rapallo*
1934, pencil, pastel on paper
15 x 40 cm.

Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

János Vaszary: *Autumn*
cca. 1938, oil on canvas
74 x 81.5 cm.

Every major retrospective is first and foremost an opportunity to put on public view works by the artist that are little known: ones that have been ignored or considered lost. The storage rooms of the National Gallery itself yielded works which have not been seen since 1961. In addition, several major paintings which were thought to have been destroyed turned up recently in private collections and were lent for the show. Finally, a major early work, the *Adam and Eve* of 1900, which had not been shown in Budapest since 1913, is now on loan from Tîrgu Mureş (Marosvásárhely, Romania). The result of all this is multifariousness, both sequential and synchronic. Within the main chronological framework, the pictures are grouped by genre and/or subject matter. Thematic cohesion traditionally implies stylistic cohesion, so the visitor may well be surprised to discover that the exhibits in the first four rooms are so diverse that one could easily take them to be the works of several different artists, so abrupt are the stylistic breaks between religious pictures, genre-paintings and tapestry designs.

How can we explain this extraordinary diversity, to say nothing of the unusual pluralism of artistic solutions? The Catalogue simply does not address this point. The essays dutifully discuss styles and influences, but they seem to take for granted that Vaszary painted synchronically, in very different styles up to the First World War. If we are to understand this *modus operandi* not simply as the product of creative insecurity or latent hubris, we have to look at the artist's personality more closely. Up to 1903, there is no written *ars poetica* that articulates his views; still it is possible to contextualize him in the social and art scene of his time.

Vaszary occupied a privileged social position in the first two decades of his artistic career, one quite unlike that of any of his peers: he was the nephew of Kolos Vaszary, who in 1891 became the Archbishop of Esztergom and Primate of Hungary, the highest religious office in the country. Not that his childhood and early youth was spent in financial security and comfort. His father, a school-teacher in Kaposvár, a small provincial town in Transdanubia, was a spendthrift, and the large family of seven children had to learn to live with grave financial difficulties, an experience which might have taught the future artist the hardships of life, the importance of self-discipline and the value of money.

Vaszary's introversion and taciturnity in regard to his private life may be traced back to those difficult times. While he certainly learned a lot about the ways of society, his personal inclination bordered on reclusiveness. When his uncle decided to provide financial help, he knew his largesse was being bestowed on a youth with strong, even austere, principles, one for whom *la vie Bohème* held no attractions whatever. Vaszary does not seem to have known the joys of youthful excess: according to all the sources, he did not drink, did not take part in any irresponsible capers, hated bad manners and deplored bad morals. With a natural inclination to seriousness (there are hardly any signs of humour, either in his writings or in his works, the few that do emerge coming when he was already over sixty) and a deeply felt responsibility to his family and uncle (the

latter had helped him to Church commissions early on in his career), he became a dedicated artist and workaholic.

For Vaszary, painting was a profession one has to take seriously, and art was a sacred vocation. The artist was privileged, but he also had responsibilities towards society. Art, with its various genres (such as religious painting or society portraiture), was to serve the different needs of society. Professionalism was the *sine qua non* of any claim to be an artist, and the painter Bertalan Székely described him as one of the most brilliant students he had ever taught. Apart from being drawn to the young artist's undoubted talent, Székely surely also felt a spiritual kinship with his student's earnest, and still romantic, attitude towards art as a vocation, one which one has to approach with humility and diligence. Vaszary's attitude was, thus, completely different from that of the Bohemians in the circle of Simon Hollósy in Munich. Indeed, he had few professional friendships throughout his life (only István Csók and József Rippl-Rónai could be said to have been his friends). It is all the more curious that no friendship developed between him and Károly Ferenczy, a kindred spirit and the sole non-Bohemian among his fellow artists. His uncle's patronage may well have been envied by Vaszary's rivals, while his extreme reserve made it difficult for him to break out of his loneliness.

Vaszary's first exhibited work (at the Budapest Műcsarnok, in 1893) was a monumental portrait of the Primate. Although its critical success got him off to a good start, he did not then choose to follow the well-worn ways of academic painters or routine portraitists, nor become a specialist in religious commissions—all options which stood open to him. What came after the fairly unorthodox and indeed surprisingly modern official portrait of Kolos Vaszary was *Woman in a Black Hat,* painted in 1894 in Paris (where he was studying at the Académie Julian), a stunning precursor of Hungarian Art Nouveau. His early genre pictures with rural subjects and landscapes are realistic *plein air* depictions, somewhat in the tradition of Jules Bastien-Lepage, although he never followed him as slavishly as most of his Hungarian colleagues (Csók, Ferenczy or Iványi-Grünwald).

He was painting in different genres and styles simultaneously from the start, returning to previous stylistic experiments (for example, to Art Nouveau) in later years, if the style seemed appropriate to the matter at hand. His was the uninhibited approach of an artist who easily mastered the different techniques, and who had a special affinity to decorative effect. *The Golden Age* (1897), for example, is an undisputed masterpiece, whose effect is greatly enhanced by the exquisitely carved, gilded frame. The work is a highly accomplished exercise in *Jugendstil* Symbolism, while *The Return of the Spring* (1899) is another example of German influence, in this case a rather heavy-handed Naturalism-cum-Symbolism. The crowning glory of this series is, unquestionably, the *Adam and Eve* of 1900. Although this ambitious attempt to create a monumental biblical scene was very similar to what Károly Ferenczy was doing (in Nagybánya, Ferenczy was continuing the style he had developed in Munich already, in the mid-1890s), neither Vaszary's contemporaries nor posterity has appreciated

how much this picture owes to 'mood symbolism', a branch of *Stimmungsmalerei.* It is suffused with a magical, dark green light, creating a mood that is plainly related to reserves of symbolic meaning derived from the common unconscious of our European cultural heritage.

Ferenczy's paintings (for example, his *Sermon on the Mount* and *The Three Magi*) are also examples of 'mood symbolism', a style which was deeply rooted in *fin-de-siècle* spirituality and pantheism. Ferenczy's works are doubtless more lyrical than the Symbolist compositions of Vaszary, but *Adam and Eve* remains a masterpiece, and an unusually haunting one. Here it is theme which defines mood. Original sin is not exactly a poetical *sujet* if one takes its implications for the psyche seriously, and it is this tragic aspect which the artist exploits symbolically to highlight the antagonism between man and woman. In Vaszary's interpretation, the strikingly self-absorbed stance of the two nudes (depicted on opposite sides of the Tree of Knowledge, with their backs turned to one another) suggests their unbridgeable alienation from one another. It was a popular subject, especially in Germany, but none of the contemporary German painters was able to endow this painterly cliché with such latent tension, such a menacingly real, yet simultaneously unreal, atmosphere. Vaszary opts for remarkably simple, but sophisticated, artistic touches. These include the moist, hazy light in the depths of a dark green wood just before dusk, the erotic allure of Eve's luminous, full body, and the merciless naturalism (which outraged some contemporary critics) of his rendering of Adam, underlining the mortality of all flesh. Here, Vaszary certainly shows an inclination towards Naturalism, though in a letter written in February of 1901 he was already describing himself as an "Impressionist".[16] Károly Ferenczy, on the other hand, described himself as a "Naturalist" in the Preface to his first retrospective (held in the Nemzeti Szalon in November of 1903), although in the eyes of posterity, his "Naturalism" is but an aestheticized realism full of lyrical overtones.

In 1901, Vaszary began working simultaneously on two different cycles with fundamentally different themes. The first are what I call "boudoir paintings" (small-scale intimate interiors with female nudes). In these, he employed soft pastose brushwork and subdued colours (*Nude,* 1900, *Toilette,* 1901). By way of a stunning contrast, the second cycle consisted of realistic, lifesize or oversize portraits, or genre scenes with peasants (*Old Couple,* 1901, *Celebration,* 1902, *Harvesters,* 1902). *Harvesters* was bought by Franz Joseph at the Exhibition of the Műcsarnok and was placed in the waiting hall leading to the Audience Room in the Royal Palace in Buda. (Unfortunately, it was destroyed during the Second World War.) This lost picture, with its stark realism, is like a Hungarian Courbet; it remains a puzzle as to why a picture focusing on desperate but flintily determined peasant faces was thought to be appropriate to decorate the antechamber of Franz Joseph. As a warning of peasant unrest and the harvest

16 ■ Catalogue, Appendix, p. 19.

strikes (which were frequent in 1900 and 1901), this composition was a Marseillaise in paint. Even later treatments of peasant subjets would focus rather on the decorative quality of their folk costumes; whereas on Vaszary's canvases, the anonymous peasant models always retain their rugged individuality and dignity.

Looking at both the "boudoir" pictures and those celebrating rural Hungary, one is bound to ask: who is the Impressionist with whom Vaszary identified? Certainly this *soi-disant* Hungarian Impressionist had a busy alter ego, the *plein air* landscapist. According to the list of titles put on display at the yearly exhibitions at the Műcsarnok, the alter ego painted dozens of landscapes, mainly of Lake Balaton. Three of these are now on display and all three avoid depicting bright sunshine, focusing instead on cloudy skies and stormy weather. The lack of bright, sunlit colour was characteristic of Vaszary's paintings at that time: many of the interiors he painted around 1903/1904 are also nearly monochrome. His wonderful *Rain* (1904) and *Spring* (1904) with their refined, fluid brushwork suggesting moist air and immense space, still employ colours that are on the subdued, shady side: mossy greens and gentle blues. His canvases are bathed in sunshine from 1904 onwards, when he embarked on a truly Impressionist period (*Breakfast in the Open Air,* 1907). But even here, Vaszary reminds us not so much of a French as a German Impressionist. He uses loose brushwork and bright, sunlit colours, rather than tiny brushstrokes and complementary colours. His Impressionism is as 'synthetic' as is Ferenczy's Naturalism of the same years. Vaszary, however, prefers quite different colour harmonies than his great contemporary, and blurs the outlines of his figures with a brushwork that is uniquely his own. Both artists were among the first leaders of the Society of Hungarian Naturalists and Impressionists—MIÉNK—an alliance of all shades of modernism founded in 1907.

The year before, in 1906, Vaszary had a one-man show in the Nemzeti Szalon, an important retrospective, where he exhibited one hundred and fifty works, a large number of which were sold. (According to his wife, he made the princely sum of 32,000 Crowns from this show.)[17] In the wake of this success, he embarked on a long study-tour, visiting Venice, Milan, Barcelona and Madrid. The Spanish journey features prominently in the sketches he brought back, but his preference for vibrant colour had been evident in his work even prior to this trip. His return home marked the beginning of a most prolific and happy period in his life. Vaszary's proved to be a good marriage, and his wife and her family often figure as models in his Impressionistic canvases.

Aurél Kárpáti, who wrote the introduction to the first album of Vaszary's works, published in 1941, once asked the artist what he considered to have been the most

17 ■ All in all, 1906 appears to have been the *annus mirabilis* of the nascent Hungarian art market: Rippl-Rónai had a very successful auction in January, and then Vaszary also sold a lot of his pictures in spring.

profound experience of his life. His answer was one word: "Colour". It is indeed colour, but this time an untamed, extremely fresh colour which begins to light up his canvases in scenes that radiate *joie de vivre* (e.g. *Conversation,* 1909). The paint, still somewhat heavily applied and pastose, is even more radiant and more plastic. But though the paint is, the figures and objects are not entirely subordinated to the dictates of colour.

From 1910 onwards, Vaszary revived the line. His change to linear brush strokes became the harbinger of the fundamental stylistic change that would be his answer to the newest aesthetic movements in Paris and elsewhere. By then he was over 40; successful, but no longer young, he was determined to move with the times and meet the challenge of the new "isms"—Expressionism, Cubism and Abstraction. His stunning drawings of nudes at this time are the fruit of this quest for modernity, a quest which makes him unique in his generation in Hungary.

However, there was little time to crystallize these restless and diverse experiments into some sort of synthesis. The First World War changed everything. Like most of the artists of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Vaszary was protected (no well-known Austrian or Hungarian artist was sent to the front lines). Painters, however, were obliged to serve the war effort, illustrating crucial events for the public. Originally their sponsors expected depictions of heroism and victory, but reality dictated otherwise, and most of the artists in fact reported on the human tragedies of war. Vaszary's wartime pictures and drawings are deeply expressive, full of pain and mourning, much like those of the (by then) aged László Mednyánszky.

After the war, Vaszary tried to reinterpret the tragedies he had witnessed in terms of the universal symbolism of his Golgotha pictures, which evoked the suffering of mankind through the sacrifice of Christ. For these Golgotha pictures, Vaszary used a black background, which then became standard for all the genres in which he painted: still lifes, portraits, nudes and somewhat enigmatic scenes borrowed from the world of the circus and the theatre. The early 1920s were the most traumatic years for him and his wife. The lost war, the disastrous Paris peace settlement, poverty and an overall sense of uncertainty are well articulated in this 'Black Period' when the basis of all his compositions is a black background, from which the colours break out like prisoners streaming into the light. The Vaszary of this period is mesmerisingly Expressionistic, but it was a stage of his life that ended quite abruptly in the spring of 1925 upon the impact of the fresh artistic impressions he received in Paris.

He had not seen his beloved Paris since 1912: the now bustling and wealthy metropolis with its stimulating art scene revived his zest for life. Another source of stimulation was his teaching job at the Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest (from 1920 onwards). He took his painting classes extremely seriously as indeed he took everything in life. Contact with youth galvanized him and revived in him the spirit of experimentation. It was a challenge to explain to a new generation everything

he had learned about the world (and not only about painting), but he rose to it, becoming one of the best teachers in Budapest. In his teaching, Vaszary focused on principles and on an ethical approach to art but remained open to all new artistic experiments introducing his students to all the latest "isms" that he saw on his regular visits to the French capital. From 1925 onwards, the pulsating rhythm of the modern metropolis becomes a favourite subject for him. First Paris, but soon also Budapest, with its emblematic panoramas seen from the Korzó on the Danube embankment, became his new leitmotivs. The black background disappears, to be replaced by a sparkling white one, where virtuoso blue silhouettes of people and buildings form a playful Art Deco vista, the details pulsating with his rediscovered delight in being alive.

Portraits, still lifes, townscapes, beach scenes and lyrical vistas are the fruit of this wonderful Indian summer of artistic creativity. Nevertheless, Vaszary cannot be said to have been totally fulfilled as an individual. In 1932, he was unjustly dismissed from his teaching job due to the pressure of the conservative lobby at the Academy. From then on, he taught in private drawing schools, which was hardly the same.[18]

He did not give up his struggle to make room for modernity in Hungarian art and continued to write persuasive manifestos for the cause. Personally, he had achieved a lot, but he was also a civic-minded individual who had set himself the task to work in a manner that was not only modern but also patriotic. Drawing on the wealth of impressions garnered during his metropolitan Parisian interludes and his hugely-enjoyed trips to the old towns and modern seaside resorts of Italy, he created a sophisticated artistic idiom that was Hungarian, and yet everything but provincial. He was 72 when he died, but amazingly young in spirit.

Some people take the view that Vaszary's truly personal style was his last one (he was about sixty when he embarked on this style), where the colours dance in space on a white background in palettes that are harmonious, polyphonic and, not least importantly, extraordinarily beautiful. Art Deco is the category into which the fruits of this period are usually forced. But in fact, this last Vaszary period expresses the spirit of the interwar École de Budapest in its most elegant and sensual form. Vaszary's brush elevated the Budapest panorama into an airy, dream-like space, the aesthetic equivalent of the good life which, however, was the privilege of only a very few. Nobody has ever painted this city so lovingly, nor endowed it with such a beckoning, friendly, dreamlike quality. Vaszary created the quintessential pre-Second-World-War 20th century, located in a particular time and place. It was a world that had, perhaps, never existed, save in the imagination of this great colour-magician. ❧

18 ■ Most members of the "European School" (Európai iskola), a group of post-Second-World-War avant-garde painters who cultivated non-figurative or abstract painting, were originally Vaszary disciples.

Julianna P. Szűcs

The Irony of Frigyes Kőnig

"Hundreds of times we say that this world's worth shit, that life's a lot of bull, and of course, that's true enough; but at the same time we all know that life is fascinating, and can make us burn with curiosity, that it is enriching beyond belief, and can make us incredibly happy". The quote is from an interview with Frigyes Kőnig, who hails from Transdanubia (he was born in Székesfehérvár, and still spends his summers at Lake Velence), and worked at the University of Fine Arts for some time now (teaching at the Department of Applied Anatomy and Scenography until 2006, then, subsequent to his appointment as full professor, as the University's rector). Now 53, he has won many prizes, been the recipient of many fellowships and lectureships, and there is an impressive bibliography dealing with his works. But that—as they say—is not why we love him.

Frigyes Kőnig lives at a time when there's practically no escaping the imperialism of the machine-generated picture, when a handmade work of art is considered an anachronism, when post-modern critics refuse to see any difference in value beetween image and image, and when the past is degraded to nothing more than a computer-generated stage set, or a prop to hang one's unshakeable beliefs on. At the risk of oversimplifying matters, we might say that given these pretty well 'globalised' conditions, three types of coping strategies have been worked out.

The first strategy is to identify authenticity with competitiveness, competitiveness with the brand of choice, and the brand of choice with state-of-the-art technology and a marketing infrastructure running at maximum efficiency. Those who have adopted Strategy One are every curator's idea of the ideal artist, and "the artists" when the public service media need artists to star. Put more simply: they paint only when they absolutely have to, but then they use all the newfangled techniques to advantage.

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The second strategy is to express authenticity in terms of tradition, tradition in terms of museum art, art in terms of middle-class taste, and middle-class taste in terms of the conservative discourse that legitimates the power of the power elite. Those who have adopted Strategy Two win the prizes set by state institutions—and conspicuously civic-minded millionaires—and are starred by the popular (i.e. non-insider) media. More simply: on the face of it, they work like the "old" artist, but most of them would have a hard time competing with the old works of art. On the other hand, they make good money.

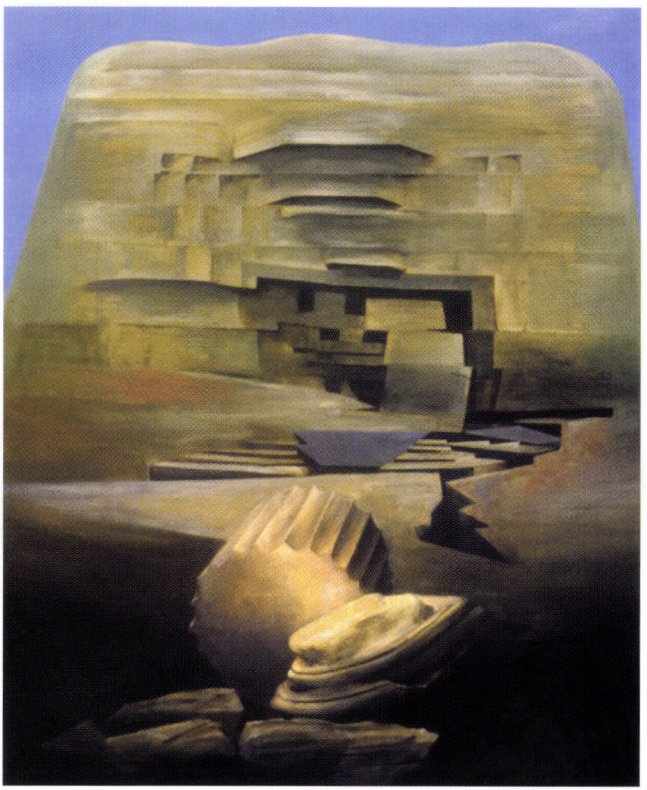
The third approach to authenticity is Frigyes Kőnig's. (There are others like him, but he's the one we're writing about now.) He is versed in the new technology, and is familiar with the past. He has made friends with the machines, and is in tune with tradition. He slaloms freely between genres, and studies the world, in all humility, in its most minute detail. He is at once free of restrictions, and respectful of the task at hand. Having entered into things, he looks upon them as an outsider. Irony is the word they use in aesthetics to describe conduct which tacitly negates what it directly expresses or asserts. And indeed: irony is the intellectual tool with which Kőnig bridges the chasm between assertion and negation. He makes paintings (drawings, reliefs, sketches and collections of exercises for his students) as if nothing had changed. But the way he does it makes it clear that nothing is unchanged.

As if the world were a collection of collectibles

"You can't seduce every woman, but you can try." So goes the Hungarian saying which could be the motto of all collectors, most particularly of a well-defined set of painters. "Collectionism" harks back to Leonardo (or perhaps Pisanello), continues in Dürer, acquires sophistication in the late Mannerist Luca Cambiaso, is aestheticised in the Surrealist Joseph Cornell, and becomes, in the works of Paul Klee, one of the possible canons of depicting the visible world. *Orbis pictus,* the painted world—Kőnig commemorates Comenius in adopting the title for one of his books—is nothing other than an infinite set of juxtaposed variants. As an image can be broken down to pixels in digitalisation and then be recombined to give a detailed and seemingly continuous image, so one's chance of depicting the whole lies in the trick of adding together juxtaposed details. The more "pixels per inch", the clearer the picture *(Digital Sculpture).* The technology is new, the method is not. The method was already practised by Georges Seurat, that Pointillist master and one of the immovable movers of a variety of Kőnig's paintings *(Esther; Ruin I).*

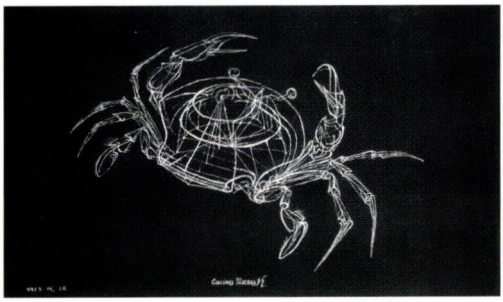
Frigyes Kőnig: *Esther III (Window III)*
1995, oil on canvas
30.5 x 25 cm.

Frigyes Kőnig: *Digital Sculpture*
1997, wood
5 x 20 cm.

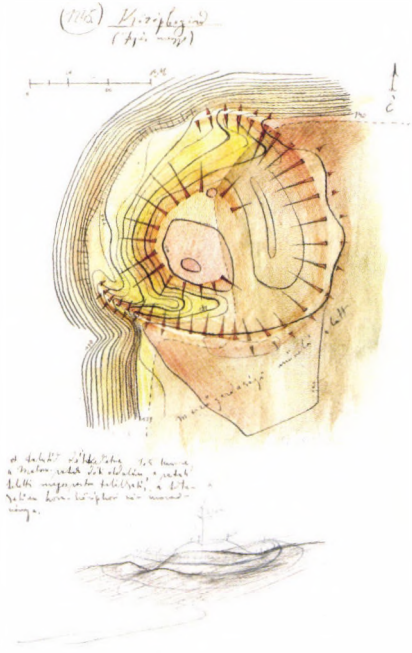


Frigyes Kőnig: *The Ruin I*
2007, oil on canvas
175 x 110 cm.

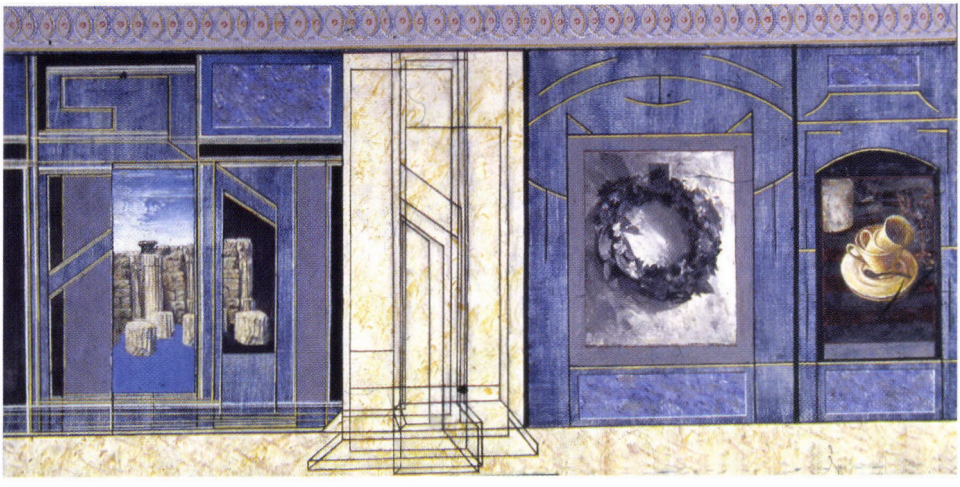
Frigyes Kőnig:
From the series *Hymenoptera*
1989, paper

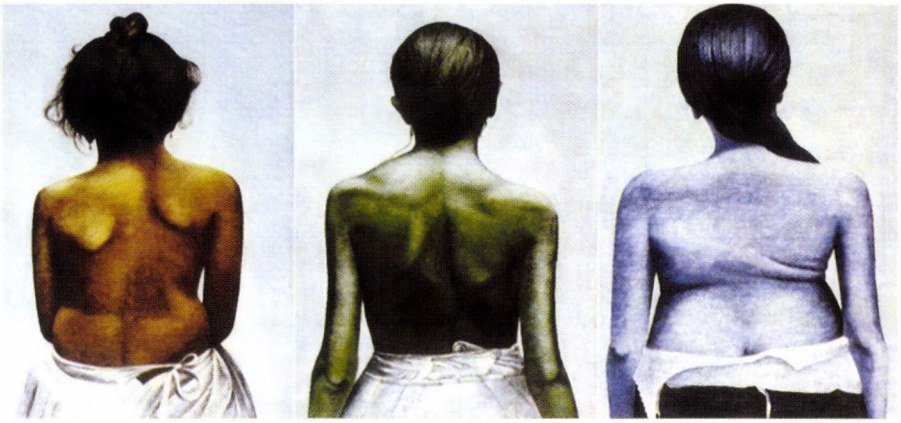


Frigyes Kőnig:
From the book *Fortresses*
1999, paper, watercolour,
Indian ink
27 x 17 cm.



Frigyes Kőnig: *Gorsium*
2003, oil on canvas
60 x 120 cm.

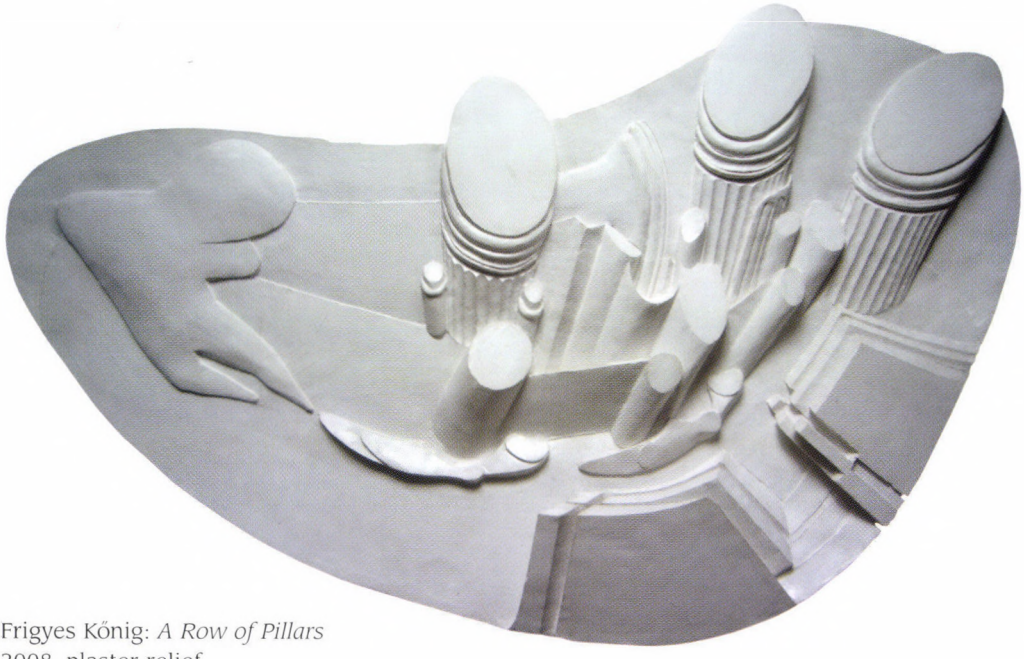




Frigyes Kőnig: *Three Backs*
1987, oil on canvas
100 x 210 cm.

Frigyes Kőnig: *Bathers*
1999, oil on canvas
180 x 150 cm.

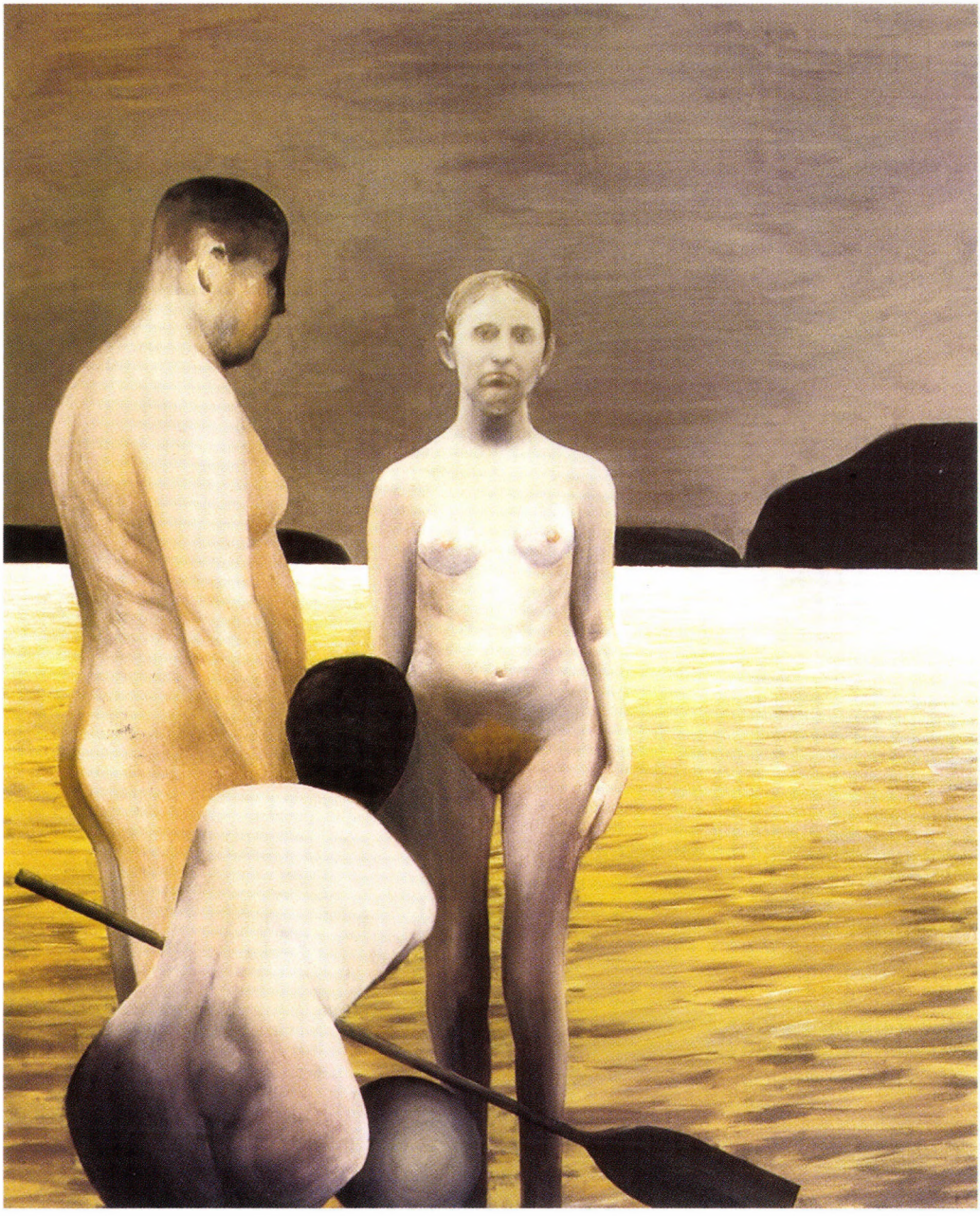
Frigyes Kőnig: *Monuments of Childhood Memories V*
1989, oil on canvas
200 x 120 cm.



Frigyes Kőnig: *A Row of Pillars*
2008, plaster relief
70 x 100 cm.

Frigyes Kőnig: *The Ruin II*
2007, oil on canvas
60 x 60 cm.

Frigyes Kőnig: *The Two Vörösmartys*
1990, oil on canvas
204 x 126 cm.



Frigyes Kőnig: *Bathers*
2002, oil on canvas
114 x 270 cm.

Generally speaking, the collector-artist has no faith in the fatefulness of inspiration, nor in the miracle of enlightenment, nor in the overwhelming significance of his own ego. He does not believe in the omnipotence of visual erudition or expressivity, nor in the supremacy of ideology. The collector-artist—Kőnig, for example—believes that addition—the stubborn repetition of some theme, form or pattern—though it might fall short of the desired Platonic ideal, will, asymptotically, still approximate it more closely than one single capricious representation of the chosen object. To manually reproduce the appearance of a single insect takes skill. To draw two takes virtuosity. But to draw thirteen pictures of a fly in thirteen different positions on a single sheet of paper is qualitatively something altogether different. It is no longer a case of 1+1+1. It is an opportunity for the artist to observe: "I was fascinated to find a perfect, closed system of ratios in every case" *(Hymenoptera)*.

For Kőnig, then, the way to truth is repeated variation. His "collection" is based on non-stop practice and professional discipline transformed into spontaneous mastery. It is a series of "prayers" which stand for God even if one lacks faith. "He has to draw and paint," writes Ernő Marosi, one of the most authoritative of contemporary Hungarian art critics, "because everything he sees, analyses, draws and depicts he integrates and assimilates into his consciousness, and that cannot be done with technical imaging." And by drawing and painting, let us add, he lifts the particular into the realm of the generic, even if the subject does not, in itself, warrant such a transformation.

One is hard put just to enumerate Kőnig's "collections". Pride of place must surely go to the overwhelmingly profuse and inimitably detailed castle series *(Fortresses)*. It is the most Dürerish of his drawing series. *Opus 1* probably dates to his teenage years, and is clearly not an exercise in self-expression as an artist. It is a drawing to warm the heart of any young archaeologist, monument protector or local historian. (One envisages photos, field trips and primary sources behind the drawings, a complete second profession.) The later ground-plan-perspective-reconstructions are no more "arty", though it is these meticulously crafted exercises that give us the deepest insight into Kőnig as an artist: they show careful craftsmanship and curiosity, erudition and imaginativeness. All Renaissance virtues in an anti-Renaissance age, and all evidence of irony in a world insensitive to subtlety.

The fortresses and castles, of course, are just the setting. Kőnig's *Wunderkammer*, his passion for observation and abstraction, encompasses all animate and inanimate things. His imaginary cupboard is chock-full of carefully noted physical abnormalities *(Three Backs)*, magical still lifes, portraits of the great lunatics of Hungarian literature and mementos of that greatest lunacy of all, war *(Ruin II)*. Bunkers or truncated Corinthian columns: they are all one. The concrete monstrosities in his pictures are mysterious and beautiful hotbeds of horror, while the cool marble relics are objective witnesses to the passage of time.

Central perspective has been the synonym of science and individualism, and chiefly of scientific individualism, since Masaccio finished his fresco of the Holy Trinity in the church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence nearly six hundred years ago. For the past century and a half, however, painters have been railing and fighting against the self-centered illusionism of the single vanishing point. They either repudiated it altogether and returned to linear motifs; or excised the centre and, in the name of collectivism, introduced an axonometric perspective; or, in the name of law and order, restored Renaissance scenography. Kőnig, who believes in sublating tradition, looked for yet other options. Of course, he, too, had an aspacial phase: his *Monuments of Childhood Memories V.* is a collage of memento fragments crowded one atop the other. He also experimented with axonometry, for instance in his *Gorsium* series. As for traditional perspective drawing, it is his job to teach it at the university, where he regularly fosters his students' interest in the subject with exhibitions and publications.

His ironic outsider-insider stance, however, has led him to work out a new way of representing spatial relations. We see harbingers of this in works where he combined a single vanishing point with structures created by a mobile light source, and when he placed his moveable puppet models in three-dimensional space in such a way that the phase drawings show them breaking out, so to speak, of their apportioned spaces.

His fluid spaces acquire their final and definitive artistic form when he adopts the twisted perspective which reconciles space and time. We see this in his paintings of ruins, and in the recently completed reliefs *(A Row of Pillars)* which grew out of them. These works are much more than intellectual games devised in the light of the laws of modern physics. And much more than restructured variants of the perspective geometry devised by that other prime source of Kőnig's erudition, the Italian Baroque Era painter, Andrea Pozzo.

Space in flux sends a message. Once they are tossed into a runaway space-time tunnel that has been relativized to the core, Kőnig's bluish-greyish-brownish requisites (concrete wrecks, castle walls, archaeological rubble, plates, cups and wooden puppets) immediately lose their ostensibly everlasting monumentality and metaphysical meaning, precisely executed mimetic fragments though they be. *"All things are but a dream; all the created world / Fades like tiny forget-me-nots"*,* wrote the 19th-century poet, Dániel Berzsenyi. Indeed, it is not just the forget-me-nots, Kőnig would add, abstracting from personal experience. "Everything perishes under the sky" is the message of his works. The objective way he applies the colours side by side on canvas, the detached precision of his brush strokes all suggest that he wastes no emotional energy on deploring this distressing fact. He shows us the merciless punitiveness of time almost as dispassionately as he calls our attention to two-headed embryos preserved in spirits, or fish with deformed heads and gills.

* ■ Translated by Peter Zollman.

As if one had a clear understanding of the world

"It was in the spring of 2002 that I first met the *Bathers* series in his studio. It opened up a new vista of space and time. The painting itself was the panorama window. The vista presented was no other than life. It was my own life that I could see through his pictures. And I could no longer distinguish painting from life." This is how an old friend and artist, András Lengyel, remembers his first encounter with Kőnig's depiction of human subjects. But it wasn't the subject matter that so enthralled him. Though not too often, Kőnig had painted people in the past as well: there were the deviant heroes, the characters remembered from his childhood, the intimate portrayals of his wife and, of course, his highly successful series of Hungarian writer portraits for the Petőfi Museum of Literature.

There is, however, nothing heroic about the *Bathers.* They're not playing a role, they are not distorted, and they are not enhanced with the whimsical trappings devised by recollection. The people standing in the water are numerous, naked and locked inside the prison of their skins. They are not beautiful and they are not ugly; most of them have poor muscle tone and poor posture, and they are all silent. The water in which they stand both separates them and unites them. They are not ashamed of their bodies, but they don't flaunt them, either; they simply accept them as they are. They may be thinking, or just looking out of their heads. They are both more and less than "real, live" people. They simply are. They are the human race.

Kőnig's people in these paintings, "normal", average samples of our kind, are documentary evidence of time stood still. If we rewound the imaginary film, they would all be firm of flesh. If we pushed the "forward" button, they would all be in the geriatrics ward. But now is now. Here, "the moment" is not stop-effect, but what we are allotted. The widest chasm lies between the moment and infinity. It is practically impossible to track all this down patiently, professionally and creatively without recourse to irony.

The Hungarian University of Fine Arts has been headed by many painters, all with wills of their own. Though he has never explicitly said so, Frigyes Kőnig has obviously found a role model among them. Jenő Barcsay was a painter and taught applied anatomy and representational drawing from 1945 to his death in 1988. He lived through precarious democracy and totalitarianism, revolution and soft dictatorship. Neither his career nor his oeuvre show any evidence of these historical upheavals. All his grand artistic life he was preoccupied with ratios, proportions, sizes—political-system-neutral factors, all of them. He was a great artist: his *Anatomy for the Artist* is sought after in all the major bookshops of the world. If Kőnig has chosen him for his role model, he will be long-lived in our cultural memory. And he is likely to have happiness, though not necessarily wealth. ❧

István Hargittai

Edward Teller—Guardian of Freedom or Dr. Strangelove?

...[Teller] fought obstinately for what he believed in.
I may have disagreed with his tactics
but never with his goals.
John A. Wheeler (1911–),[1] "the most versatile physicist of the 20th century"[2]

After the political changes of 1989,
people will have to reevaluate Teller's role
because of his impact in bringing down the Soviet Union.
Manfred Eigen (1927–),[3] Nobel laureate

Born a hundred years ago, Edward Teller (1908–2003) was the youngest and most ambitious of the Hungarian Martians—a group of Jewish-Hungarian scientists that also included Theodore von Kármán (1881–1963), Leo Szilard (1898–1964), Eugene P. Wigner (1902–1995) and John von Neumann (1903–1957). They were born in Budapest, where they got their high school education and started their university studies. They benefited from the sizzling intellectual life of *fin-de-siècle* Budapest that by Teller's time had mostly disappeared. Anti-Semitism and the lack of prospects drove them to Germany where they completed their education and became members of the scientific elite in their own fields. National Socialism then forced them out of Europe and they all ended up in the United States. What made them a group was that they all had a deep concern for the Free World and were relentless in their efforts to defend the United States, even at risk of their careers in science. The label "Martians" has long figured in anecdotes about these extraordinary and talented Hungarians, who seemed to be extraterrestrial visitors in disguise.

1 ■ M. Hargittai, I. Hargittai, *Candid Science IV: Conversations with Famous Physicists.* Imperial College Press, London, 2004 , pp. 424–439, p. 429 (John A. Wheeler).
2 ■ L. Motz, J. H. Weaver, *The Story of Physics*. Avon Books, 1992.
3 ■ I. Hargittai, *Candid Science III: More Conversations with Famous Chemists.* Imperial College Press, London, pp. 368–377, p. 377 (Manfred Eigen).

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is Professor of Chemistry at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. His most recent book is The Martians of Science: Five Physicists Who Changed the Twentieth Century. *Oxford University Press, 2006 (soft cover edition, 2008).*

The contributions the Martians made to twentieth-century science had fundamental value as well as military significance. These contributions range from fluid mechanics to quantum mechanics, from the stored-program computer to molecular biology, and from nuclear chain reactions to game theory. Von Kármán had a key role in developing the U.S. Air Force; Szilard initiated the American program for the atomic bomb, called the Manhattan Project; Wigner was instrumental in building the first nuclear reactors; von Neumann had multifaceted contributions to defense-related projects; Teller was the father of the American hydrogen bomb and the main proponent of the Strategic Defense Initiative, popularly known as Star Wars. Their activities extended well into the Cold War era, but had mostly come to an end by the mid-1960s, due to death or diminishing interest and capacity. Teller was the only one who carried on and stayed active and influential through the 1980s. The present account, after a brief introduction, focuses on some highlights of his political-military oeuvre.

Teller went to the legendary Minta (Model) Gimnázium in Budapest. The school was part of the system of secular high schools developed by Maurice Kármán, Theodore's father, during the last third of the nineteenth century. The eight long years Teller spent there were painful for him. His teachers did not appreciate his talent and penetrating interest. He started his university studies at the age of 17 at the Budapest Technical University, and moved to Germany when he reached 18. First he went to Karlsruhe where he majored in chemical engineering, then transferred to Munich. After two years, he became Werner Heisenberg's doctoral student at the University of Leipzig. He obtained his doctorate in physics at the age of 22 and continued for three years as instructor at the University of Göttingen. With Hitler's accession to power in Germany, he left for Copenhagen, then London, and finally, in 1935, became Professor of Physics at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. He participated in the Manhattan Project in Los Alamos, though not in a leading role; his attention was more on the next generation of nuclear weapons than the first atomic bombs. Following World War II, he continued part time in Los Alamos, but his principal job became a professorship at the University of Chicago.

He had a leading role in developing the American hydrogen bomb, and he initiated the second weapons laboratory of the United States in Livermore, California. In 1954, he testified against Robert Oppenheimer, the legendary scientific director of Los Alamos, and thereby lost the friendship of most of his fellow physicists. He was appointed to a professorship at the University of California and later became a Senior Research Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. His influence as an adviser to military leaders and conservative politicians of the United States was ever increasing. He maintained his influence through the Reagan-Bush presidencies and was awarded the highest distinctions. He died on September 9, 2003.

Even Teller's dry biographical data sound exciting. He lived in "interesting times," as the Chinese proverb says, and took up, with zest, the challenges

presented to him. He was significant as a scientist, but his oeuvre has had a longer-lasting impact in the political and defense arena than his discoveries in science. His principal achievements came in nuclear physics and physical chemistry. However, apart from the greatest discoverers, scientists have fleeting fame. Scientific achievements are different from artistic creations. What one researcher does not discover, another will, sooner or later. *Guernica* could not have been painted by anybody other than Picasso. No other composer could have written Beethoven's symphonies. The famous B.E.T. equation describing the adsorption of gases was established by Brunauer, Emmett, and Teller. Had Teller and his colleagues not arrived at it, others certainly would have. In preserving his name Teller was even "lucky" because many effects carry his name—always together with others to be sure, since he created best in the company of colleagues. Incidentally, the significance of some of the effects bearing his name has recently even gained in importance.

Teller's political awakening was gradual. It started on the eve of World War II. Szilard made two visits to Albert Einstein on Long Island in the summer of 1939, during the preparation of Einstein's letter to President Roosevelt warning him about the possibility of the atomic bomb. Eugene Wigner accompanied Szilard on the first visit, providing him company but also acting as Szilard's chauffeur. Teller played this role on Szilard's second visit. Thus Teller was involved in the American atomic bomb effort from the beginning, but his role was more accidental than initiating. In May 1940, Teller attended a large meeting of scientists where President Roosevelt spoke about human rights, the blessings of democracy, and the progress made by science. The president called on the scientists "to protect and defend by every means at our command, our science, our culture, our American freedom and our civilization."[4] Teller felt as if Roosevelt was speaking directly to him and he was mindful that, among the huge audience, he might have been the only one thinking of the atomic bomb. From this point on, he believed his path had been charted, along with those of the other Martians, because—in his words—"We five were survivors of a shipwreck and found a lifeboat. Of course, we were eager to protect it against all dangers."[5]

Teller joined the atomic bomb project from its outset and when preparation of the bomb moved to Los Alamos, he was there. He worked in the theoretical group, but only part of his time and efforts were devoted to the atomic bomb. His real interest lay in working out the possibility of a yet more devastating weapon, the thermonuclear bomb, also referred to as the Super. Some time in 1941, a fateful discussion took place between Enrico Fermi and Teller about whether an atomic

4 ■ *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt,* with Special Introduction and Explanatory Notes by President Roosevelt (Samuel I. Rosenman, comp.), 1940 vol.: *War—And Aid to Democracies.* MacMillan, New York, 1941, pp. 184–187, as quoted in Teller, *Memoirs,* pp. 149–150.
5 ■ Attributed: Edward Teller to the co-author of his *Memoirs,* Judith Shoolery. Private communication in conversation with Judith Shoolery in Half Moon Bay, California, February, 2004.

explosion might produce a thermonuclear reaction. Fermi was one of the giants of twentieth-century physics and one of the leading physicists of the Manhattan Project. In the atomic bomb, fission takes place, that is, an element is split into two smaller ones. Fermi raised the question whether an atomic explosion might produce sufficient energy to join two elements together and produce a larger element, a process referred to as fusion. Fusion would liberate much larger amounts of energy than fission. However, it would take enormous energies to overcome the repulsion of nuclei, and the necessary energy could only be provided by the fission bomb.

It was not feasible to build a fusion bomb before the end of World War II; even the simpler fission bomb was barely ready in time to be deployed against Japan. The efficacy of the atomic bombs in bringing the war to quick conclusion has been debated ever since. My own view is that there is overwhelming evidence that it served this purpose eminently, and saved hundreds of thousands of American lives and many more Japanese.[6] There was yet another goal behind their use, namely, to issue a warning to the Soviet Union.

When the war was over, the question arose whether to continue research on the thermonuclear bomb, or shut down Los Alamos. Teller would have stayed at Los Alamos had it been promised to him that vigorous efforts would be made to develop the fusion bomb or at least to further perfect the atomic bombs. He received no such assurance and he left for Chicago. He was not alone in his views, however, because there were others who thought that the nuclear advantage of the United States should be maintained and guarded by all possible means. It was decided, for example, that there would be continuous monitoring of radioactivity in the atmosphere.

Teller's situation after the war was markedly different from that before it. From an almost playful physics professor, he was gradually taking up the role of trusted advisor, and was even invited to testify before the U.S. Congress on questions of national security. His main arena of activity, however, was still in academia. He was a respected professor of physics at the University of Chicago and scientists of later renown studied under him. His involvement in politics focused on committee work concerned with nuclear reactor safety. At the same time, he never abandoned his interest in the development of thermonuclear weapons, known as 'hydrogen bombs' because the fusion reaction involved the joining of two hydrogen nuclei. During the period 1945–1948, there was much hesitation on the part of the American administration as to how to continue with the development of nuclear weaponry. On the one hand, the apparent atomic monopoly as well as scientific and material superiority of the United States gave the impression that an intensified program was not needed. On the other hand, there were some who advocated increased efforts to enhance the defense capabilities of the country. The Hungarian scientists recognized the necessity of serious preparations. Von Neumann went so far as to advocate pre-emptive strikes against the Soviet Union.

6 ■ See, e.g., discussions in Chapter IV in I. Hargittai, *The Martians of Science: Five Physicists Who Changed the Twentieth Century*. Oxford University Press, 2006.

Others, like Szilard were merely concerned with maintaining full preparedness. To clarify Szilard's position is especially important. He opposed the deployment of the atomic bombs against Japan and later made efforts to convince the superpowers to ban the testing of nuclear weapons. This was combined with his advocacy of negotiations with the Soviet Union. All this made later authors writing about the Cold War period assume that Szilard must have opposed the development of the hydrogen bomb. We will see below that this was not the case.

The years 1949–1950 were a time of awakenings, tragically combined with the rise of Joseph McCarthy's star in the U.S. Senate. McCarthy misused his position and authority to spread fear and to level baseless accusations of Communist conspiracies even within such venerable institutions as the State Department and the U.S. Army.

From 1947 on, the U.S. monitored the atmosphere for unusual radioactivity; this vigilance yielded a spectacular dividend in 1949, when a Soviet nuclear explosion was detected. On January 27, 1950, the Americans learned from the British that one of their physicists at Los Alamos during the war, Klaus Fuchs, had passed nuclear secrets to the Soviets. On June 25, North Korea invaded South Korea. Senator McCarthy's first charges about Communist infiltration of the State Department were made on February 9, 1950. When Teller heard about the Soviet nuclear explosion, he called the former scientific director of Los Alamos, Robert Oppenheimer to ask, "What do we do now?"[7] Although Teller knew that Oppenheimer had opposed the development of thermonuclear weapons, the former director of Los Alamos still represented authority for him. Oppenheimer brushed him off by saying, "Keep your shirt on." At this point, Oppenheimer ceased to be a yardstick for Teller because he was convinced that this was a new situation, calling for immediate action.

Edward Teller had a historic role in facilitating the United States embarking on a crash program to develop the hydrogen bomb. A brief summary here will help in understanding the enormity of difficulties Teller had to overcome in fulfilling his self-imposed task. The decision about such a program ultimately rested with the president of the United States. He relied in part upon the recommendations of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). It was not a scientific body, but was assisted by a nine-member General Advisory Committee, headed by Oppenheimer and consisting of first-rate physicists, chemists and engineers. Teller was not a member of this committee. He had some allies, however, outside of the committee. Ernest O. Lawrence, the Nobel laureate discoverer/inventor of the cyclotron and his subordinate, the future Nobel laureate Luis Alvarez sided with Teller in his crusade to convince politicians and military leaders that the United States had to have the hydrogen bomb. In the fall of 1949, the GAC came to its decision concerning the development of the hydrogen bomb. It was not unanimous, but both the majority and the minority opinion rejected the program of building a hydrogen bomb.

7 ■ E. Teller (with Judith L. Shoolery), *Memoirs: A Twentieth-Century Journey in Science and Politics*. Perseus Publishing, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001, p. 289.

The majority opinion strongly recommended against an all-out effort to develop the hydrogen bomb. It condemned it as a tool of genocide, which, of course, it is; it also stated that "In determining not to proceed to develop the super bomb, we see a unique opportunity of providing *by example* some limitations on the totality of war and thus limiting the fear and arousing the hope of mankind."[8] (my italics) Wonderful thoughts, but they reflect naiveté about and ignorance of Soviet intentions and determinations. The minority report, signed by two Nobel laureate leaders in physics, Fermi and Isidor I. Rabi, stated, "...we think it wrong on fundamental ethical principles to initiate a program of development of such a weapon. At the same time it would be appropriate to invite the nations of the world to join us in a *solemn pledge* not to proceed in the development or construction of weapons of this category."[9] (my italics) Again, the naiveté and trust are staggering. By then an accelerated Soviet program was underway.[10]

The Free World did not know about the weapons development in the Soviet Union, and there was a tendency to underestimate the Soviets in general and the Soviet physicists in particular. In the comfort of Western democracies, it was also hard to imagine that there was no discussion in the Soviet Union about the question of the development of the hydrogen bomb and that thousands of slave workers would be used to complete the program under inhuman and unsafe conditions. If not then, today it is ridiculous to maintain that the United States could have stopped the development of the hydrogen bomb by its own example of refraining from it. Relying on the recommendation of star scientists from GAC, the Atomic Energy Commission voted to advise the President of the United States not to decide on a crash program to develop the hydrogen bomb. President Truman then asked for advice from his National Security Council (NSC) consisting of three aides, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State and the Chairman of the AEC. Teller and his colleagues had succeeded in their self-imposed task of alerting the politicians and the generals about the looming danger of non-action. As a result, the trend reversed in the NSC as it voted two to one in favor of the development. It was a great victory for Teller when President Truman announced his decision on January 31, 1950, giving directions to continue research on all atomic weapons, including the hydrogen bomb. He augmented this decision in March 1950 with a secret directive to intensify work on the hydrogen bomb. It is important to stress that after Truman's decision, all physicists that were needed for the work, including some who had fiercely opposed it, quickly and without duress converged on Los Alamos and resumed their research. Teller as a physicist went on to play a decisive role in solving the scientific and technological problems connected with the development of the hydrogen bomb. The mathematician

8 ■ See in full in G. T. Seaborg, *A Chemist in the White House: From the Manhattan Project to the End of the Cold War.* American Chemical Society, Washington, DC, 1998, pp. 42–43.
9 ■ Ibid.
10 ■ I. Hargittai, M. Hargittai, *Candid Science VI: More Conversations with Famous Scientists.* Imperial College Press, London, 2006, pp. 808–837 (Vitaly L. Ginzburg).

Stanislaw Ulam made comparable contributions, especially in moving beyond the theoretical dead-end that at a certain point seemed to make the project hopeless. In this, the relative weight of Teller and Ulam's contributions cannot yet be assessed because the relevant documents are still classified.

It must have been lonely for Teller, even when a few others had joined him, to go against the tide of the majority of his distinguished colleagues. It was not his first experience of loneliness, and not the last either. There seems to be a discrepancy between the perception of Teller the public figure and the figure that emerges from a closer scrutiny of his life. The public perception of Teller is of someone fiercely arrogant and headstrong, sure of himself, winning all his debates, someone of strict principles that emanate from tremendous inner strength. However, it could be argued just as convincingly that he craved acceptance by his peers, wanted to please his superiors and was torn by self-doubt. I do not wish to imply that he was misunderstood: he himself cultivated the public image he became identified with. Donald Glaser tells about a flight he shared with Teller, on which they had an amicable and meaningful conversation. However, after deplaning, in the presence of an audience, Teller immediately put on a show of loud behaviour.[11]

Teller was teased and bullied by his classmates at the beginning of his *gimnázium* years and strove to gain the friendship of his fellows. During the same period, his virtually boundless respect for authority was inculcated in him by his revered maternal grandfather, who taught him that laws must be obeyed without exception. He never accepted that personal responsibility might override the law even if it worked against one's conscience and never subscribed to the American tradition of preferring to break a law rather than doing something against one's conscience.[12] This is why it is uncomfortable to imagine how Teller might have conducted himself in a Soviet or a Japanese environment had he chosen to emigrate eastward rather than westward after the Nazi takeover in Germany.

Teller enjoyed his years in Germany, where he flourished in the community of physicists. He was never part of German society, but he was of the society of German and other physicists, and this sufficed. Similarly, he felt very comfortable during the second half of the 1930s at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. There, George Gamow was his colleague, and many others joined them for the annual meetings they organized in theoretical physics. When Gamow characterized him as "helpful, willing, and able to work on other people's ideas without insisting on everything having to be his own," he was referring to this period. What a contrast to the Teller of later years!

Los Alamos at the time of the Manhattan Project was not to Teller's liking. There were many more important physicists around him and he was relegated to a subordinate role under his friend, Hans Bethe. He declined this role, and it was mainly

11 ■ I. Hargittai, *The Martians of Science: Five Physicists Who Changed the Twentieth Century*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2006, p. 224.
12 ■ Ibid., p. 11.

Peter D. Lax on Edward Teller*

Peter Lax (b. in 1926 in Budapest) is a mathematician world renowned for his contributions to the theory and applications of an important area, the partial differential equations. He is Professor Emeritus and former director of the Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences at New York University. He was awarded the 2005 Abel Prize by the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, the most prestigious award in mathematics. He received the U.S. National Medal of Science in 1986.

The Lax family left Europe for the U.S. to escape the persecution of Jews, on December 5, 1941, for the U.S. Still as a student, he enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War II and joined the Manhattan Project in Los Alamos in June 1945. In the following, slightly edited excerpts are presented from our conversations in 2005 and 2007.

How were you selected for the program?

All recruits, when we entered the Army, took a very detailed intelligence test, and it must have been the result of that test.

What did you know about the Los Alamos project when you arrived?

Once we arrived there, they explained to us what they were doing. I came in a group of about 30 people.

When you learned about the project, were you shocked?

I was. They told us that they were building a bomb out of plutonium, an element that did not even exist in the Universe, but they were manufacturing it in Hanford.

Did you realize at that point the role of the Hungarian scientists in initiating the program?

I did not; I only knew that Teller was there.

What did you do in Los Alamos?

I did a criticality study of an ellipsoidal assembly of explosives. There was a thought that uranium might be shaped not as a sphere but as a slightly eccentric ellipsoid. That was a non-trivial study. Then, when I got my PhD in 1949, I returned to Los Alamos and became interested in differential equations in solving fluid dynamical problems.

The debates raged about the hydrogen bomb in 1949. You have stressed that Teller was right in the debate about the hydrogen bomb because the Soviets would have built it anyway. Why do you think he is still being ostracized for his role in this?

I don't know if he is regarded as a villain for that; I do know that he is regarded so for his role in the Oppenheimer case. He really believed that Oppenheimer was an obstacle to the hydrogen bomb.

You stated somewhere that Teller brought Star Wars into the White House through the back door rather than exposing it to a debate in the scientific community.

Yes. This is how I see it. Teller was a man of hundreds of ideas. Fermi said about him that he was a monomaniac with many manias. Although many of his ideas were off the wall, he was always willing to discuss his ideas with his colleagues. His tragedy was that due to his enormous success with the hydrogen bomb, he became a member of the higher circles in Washington, who were not scientists and who were unable to contradict him.

Do you think Star Wars was his idea or did he just play the front man to promote it?

I think he was the brain behind it even if there was a team at Livermore working on the project.

I. H.

* ■ The full interview has appeared in Hungarian translation, István Hargittai, *Magyar Tudomány*, 2007 November, pp. 1466–1479; the original text in English is scheduled to appear in *The Mathematical Intelligencer.*

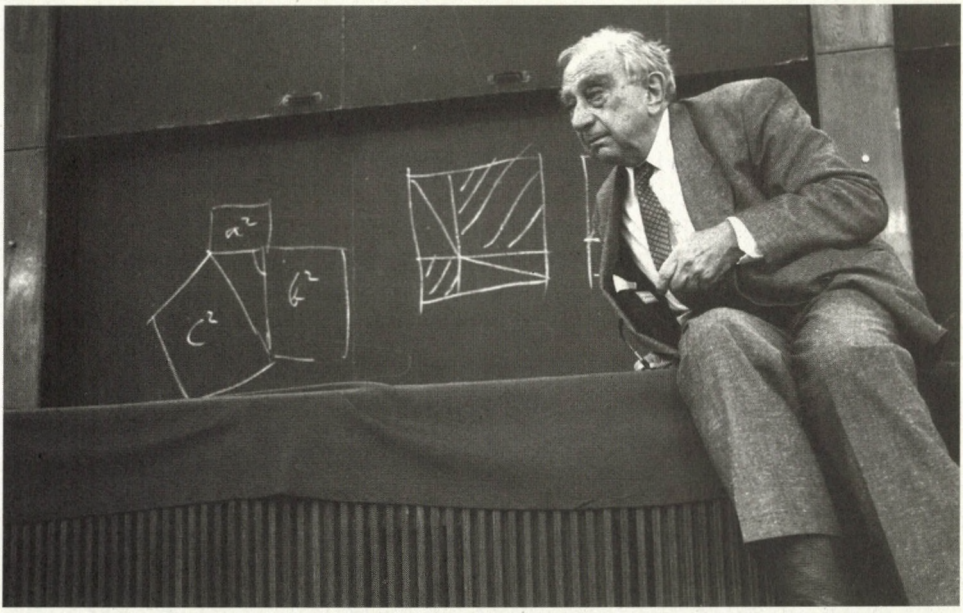
due to Oppenheimer's tactful approach to Teller's insistence on working only on the fusion bomb that there was no major clash between Teller and other physicists. Teller was never comfortable with Oppenheimer, but heeded his advice and declined to sign the petition Szilard sent him that protested against deployment of the atomic bombs in the summer of 1945. In Los Alamos, Teller also found solace in von Neumann's friendship during the latter's periodic visits to the weapons laboratory.

After the war, Teller was dissatisfied with the performance of Los Alamos. However, upon becoming Professor of Physics at the University of Chicago, in spite of the prestige and comfort of the position, he could not find the contentment in peacetime he had had at George Washington University before the war. He was gradually becoming involved in politics. In addition to the development of the hydrogen bomb, he fought for the establishment of a second weapons laboratory (today the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory). In this quest for the second weapons laboratory, he teamed up, again, with Lawrence, who was more right-wing than Teller, but was a better politician in that he tried to avoid antagonizing his fellow physicists. Both Enrico Fermi and von Neumann warned Teller against getting too close to Lawrence, but to no avail. Teller went to California, and at Livermore, he was surrounded by many younger colleagues whose jobs were largely due to him (i.e., to Teller).

Teller's ultimate loneliness came as a consequence of the role he played in Robert Oppenheimer's security hearing. He could have declined to testify, or, if he felt that impossible, he could have acted similarly to von Neumann, who was not a great friend to Oppenheimer, but was diplomatic in his testimony. Instead, Teller chose to be unambiguous in expressing his view that Oppenheimer was a security risk. When I.I. Rabi sarcastically congratulated Teller on the "brilliance" of his testimony and the "extremely clever way" in which he had expressed his opinion that Oppenheimer was a security risk, it signified his third and final exile. Rabi was a doyen of American physics, and he ignored Teller's proffered hand (just as Mikhail Gorbachev did to Teller decades later).

Teller's first exile was from Hungary, from where he was driven out by anti-Semitism and the lack of prospects for building a meaningful life. Hitler and Nazism forced him out of Germany and Europe. Each of these first two exiles were involuntary and both led to an improved situation and greater opportunities. The third exile was different. It was a consequence of his own actions and it isolated him from what was most important to him, the community of physicists. This would have been difficult for any scientist, but it was especially hard on Teller as he thrived on working in collaboration with others. Teller's great loss was compounded by the deaths of Lawrence and von Neumann, as well as Wigner's gradual marginalization. Szilard's death in 1964 was another blow. Szilard had remained a friend to the end, in spite of them being political adversaries.

Teller was haunted throughout the rest of his life by his performance at the Oppenheimer hearing. In his *Memoirs* he stated that he "never wanted Oppen-



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Edward Teller lecturing at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, 21 October 1991.

PHOTO BY AND COURTESY OF MAGDOLNA HARGITTAI

Edward Teller and the author in the Tellers' home in Stanford, California, 1996.

heimer's opinion on the hydrogen bomb to count in the decision on his security clearance". He further declares that revoking Oppenheimer's clearance was not justified. This is a puzzling statement in view of his testimony. One wonders whether his judgment by then was so clouded that he expected his readers to believe this, while the same book includes excerpts from his testimony, providing evidence to the contrary. To the question whether he believed that Oppenheimer was a security risk, he concluded his response by saying that "...I feel that I would like to see the vital interests of this country in hands which I understand better, and therefore trust more. ...I would feel personally more secure if public matters would rest in other hands." At a later stage of the testimony, to a similar question, he said: "If it is a question of wisdom and judgment, as demonstrated by actions since 1945, then I would say one would be wiser not to grant clearance."[13]

In his *Memoirs,* which appeared decades after the Oppenheimer hearing, Teller claims that his misjudgements were due to not thinking his testimony through. But there is evidence from Teller's prior testimony to the FBI that what he said at the Oppenheimer hearing was not something uttered on the spur of the moment but a reflection of long-held views. More convincing is the letter he wrote to his friend and former pupil, Maria Goeppert-Mayer, shortly after the hearing in 1954. In it, he writes about backbone: "I seemed to get along fine without one. Now there seems to be some growing pains. I also wonder whether it is growing in the right direction."[14] One must read this tormenting revelation several times to believe one's eye, it sounds so incredible. Teller was close to Goeppert-Mayer, and it is difficult to imagine him opening up to this extent to anybody else at that time. In the *Memoirs,* he shares this thought with the world, but its effects are dampened by his assertions about his testimony.

Returning to Teller's loneliness in the initial debates about the hydrogen bomb: if anyone could understand a situation that seemed hopeless, but in which the importance of action seemed overwhelming, it was Leo Szilard. He had had a similar experience in 1939, when he took it upon himself to alert the American leadership about the feasibility of the atomic bomb and the danger of Germany acquiring it. Szilard reflected on the debate of 1949 in a little-known speech in 1954. He posed the question, "Why did America come so close to missing out on the hydrogen bomb?"[15] According to him, the United States "would have missed out on the hydrogen bomb altogether had it not been for the accident that there was still one man left who—for a variety of reasons—still liked to think about the problems of the bomb." He meant Teller, and he called it accident because if there had been only one man left, there could just as easily have been no-one left. Szilard mentions that the enemies of the United States could have easily managed to discredit Teller through

13 ■ Teller, *Memoirs*, pp. 208 and 209.
14 ■ Ibid., pp. 399; 400.
15 ■ L. Szilard, "The Sensitive Minority among Men of Science." In *Leo Szilard Centenary Volume* (G. Marx, Ed.). Eötvös Physical Society, Budapest, 1998, pp. 176, 182, 184.

false accusations rampant during the McCarthy years. Thus the situation was precarious indeed. Szilard also noted the physicists' readiness to join the program once there was a presidential go-ahead. Szilard left no doubt that in his eyes "there can be only one justification for our development of the hydrogen bomb and that is to prevent its use." MAD, the aptly named doctrine of "Mutually Assured Destruction" between the two superpowers, was just what Szilard had hoped for.

Parallel with Teller's de facto exclusion from American physics, he was becoming more and more part of the Establishment of the American military and defense industry. From being a part of a circle of irreverent scientists, he shifted to people for whom subordination prevailed and where hierarchy mattered most, and where his views and ideas were neither scrutinized nor criticized. He was eagerly welcomed into this company, and he was fast becoming a much sought-after advisor of politicians and generals. Perhaps it could not be recognized in the process, but with hindsight, this had tragic consequences for Teller, beyond the missing collaborators. Within the collegial community of physicists, Teller was always willing to discuss his ideas. In his third exile, he was no longer surrounded by colleagues, but by military and political leaders. This made Teller's isolation from criticism total: even if he had wanted to discuss his ideas with them, they would have been unable to contradict him. The consequences became all too apparent during the debates about the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), popularly known as "Star Wars."

Teller has been accused of having brought SDI to the White House through the back door, that is, without having it subjected to the criticism of his peers.[16] However, he had had a negative experience with the judgments of most of his fellow scientists in the hydrogen bomb debate. In addition, by the time of SDI, he had got out of the habit of exposing himself to the scrutiny and criticism so common in science but so little practiced in defense circles. There is plenty of evidence for Teller's influence on the White House, but very little for his personal involvement with President Reagan during the early years of his presidency. His influence can be assessed by the fact that President Reagan's science advisor between 1981 and 1986, George A. (Jay) Keyworth, was appointed at Teller's recommendation.

President Reagan gave his famous speech announcing the SDI program on March 23, 1983; it was televised from the White House and was delivered in front of a select audience that included Edward Teller and, among others, Charles Townes, the Nobel laureate co-discoverer of the laser. Powerful X-ray laser beams were to be the main tool for knocking out enemy ballistic missiles. Later in the 1980s, the idea of the X-ray laser had to be abandoned and other concepts were adopted. There was never a shortage of intriguing buzz words, like "Brilliant Pebbles," which were small, kinetic-energy arms to be deployed in swarms. The political aim remained the same in that rather than subscribing to the policy of "mutually assured destruction" it was meant to be a policy of "assured survival". Mutually assured destruction—as awful as it sounds—maintained peace between the two superpowers for decades. As early

16 ■ See, e.g., Recorded conversations with Peter D. Lax, New York City, June 2007.

as 1945, Albert Einstein stated that "...atomic energy ... may intimidate the human race into bringing order into its international affairs, which, without the pressure of fear, it would not do."[17] The Soviet Union felt that SDI broke the precariously maintained balance. The paradox that a new means of defense was an act of offence must have appeared valid to the Soviet leadership, and all the more so because the Soviet Union by the mid-1980s was no longer capable of matching the United States in the technological advances that SDI necessitated. The Soviet Union was lagging behind in what SDI relied upon most: electronics, computerization and miniaturization. This was not for want of excellent scientists; on the contrary, selected branches of physics in the Soviet Union thrived. What was lacking were the means and mechanism of translating scientific advances into technologies. In the past, the Soviet Union had been able to catch up with the West by making sacrifices in other segments of their economy. By now there was not very much more to sacrifice and even if there had been, no lowering of Soviet living standards could have been translated into high technologies. This is why Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev was so apprehensive of SDI. It was under these circumstances at the Reykjavík summit in October 1986 that the Soviet president offered his American counterpart an incredible compromise: he suggested that the two superpowers eliminate all offensive strategic arms and limit SDI to the laboratory. This signalled a tremendous success for SDI regardless of whether it was scientifically, technologically or militarily feasible. To rid the world of all the offensive strategic arms would have been the achievement of the century and would have justified the expenses of SDI many times over. However, President Reagan declined the offer. We might say that he gambled with the fate of the Planet and, in hindsight, he won, but he took a tremendous risk. The Soviet Union collapsed and a new world order has taken shape. To the extent that SDI contributed to the demise of the Soviet Union, the initiative seems to have, bizarrely, paid for itself. Again, to the extent this is valid, Edward Teller contributed considerably to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Thus it seems justified to distinguish between the validity of claims and criticism of SDI and Teller's zealous promotion of it, and its eventual dividends, whether as directly consequential or by default.

It will take some time for historians to make an objective judgment over Edward Teller and his oeuvre. His *Memoirs* have to be read with circumspection. Teller wrote them late in life and the book appeared in 2001, when he was 93 years old. The book has been judged to be rather self-serving. The *Memoirs* suffered from further handicaps. One was that a stroke prevented Teller to be as active in writing the second half of the book as he was for the first half.[18] The second half became much more the product of his co-author, Judith Shoolery than the first half.[19] Sadly, I failed to recognize Teller's distinctive style of narration in the *Memoirs.* Expressions in the

17 ■ A. Einstein, "Atomic War or Peace." *Atlantic Monthly,* November 1945, quoted in the *Expanded Quotable Einstein.* Collected and edited by A. Calaprice. Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 176.

18 ■ According to Teller's co-author, Judy Shoolery. Private communication in conversation with Judith Shoolery in Half Moon Bay, California, February, 2004.

19 ■ It is inexcusable that Judith Shoolery's name was omitted in the Hungarian translation of the book.

spirit of "I claim" and "I don't know, but I'll tell you" are missing. Apparently, it was not only that the written text is different from spoken narrative. Again, according to Ms. Shoolery, an over-conscientious editor at the publishing house weeded everything that was not deemed the most proper usage of English. When the edited text arrived, Teller faced the dilemma of whether to request a revision, but he felt too tired to make the book suffer yet another delay. A further handicap was that the text did not undergo editorial scrutiny for contents and the spelling of Hungarian words. The latter is sad in view of Teller's excellent Hungarian, which he maintained through his old age. As to factual content, I mention here just one innocent example, the episode in the *Memoirs* in which Teller drives Szilard to Einstein's home on Long Island, and they are having a difficult time finding it. In reality, this happened when Wigner was driving Szilard on his first trip to Einstein. When Teller and Szilard went together, Szilard already knew the way. However, the story of the Wigner-Szilard trip has become part of the lore and must have replaced what Teller might have remembered about his own trip.

Soon after the appearance of Teller's *Memoirs,* Peter Goodchild published a book on Teller entitled *The Real Dr. Strangelove.*[20] Goodchild tends to rely on Teller's *Memoirs* and other publications, rather than original materials. The reference in the title of the book is to Stanley Kubrick's 1964 movie, *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb.* It is about the start of a nuclear holocaust and involves an insane ex-Nazi warmonger high in the echelons of the United States high command. I do not think it fair to assign this label to Edward Teller for the following reasons. As I have argued, the creation of the American hydrogen bomb helped to prevent rather than to initiate a nuclear holocaust. Teller was never a Nazi and thus could not become an ex-Nazi. Dr. Strangelove's irrational behavior was not like Teller's at the time of the debate over whether to develop the hydrogen bomb. It would be more difficult to avert such portrayal for Teller in the debates about SDI or "Star Wars," but that came in the 1980s, long after the movie was made. There have been other suggestions for a model for Dr. Strangelove, but it seems more probable that the negative traits of several individuals were combined in Strangelove, who has become a symbol of reckless warmongers.

Edward Teller is certainly someone who figures in questions of "What might have happened if?" In the August 14, 2007, issue of *Japan Times,*[21] there was an article about the Japanese atomic bomb project during World War II. The project was confined to the laboratory, but the fact that it existed is of interest. The article was prompted by the recent publication of letters and documents of Yoshio Nishina, the project director. The article mentions a letter to Nishina by a German physicist, dated April 21, 1933, saying that "Edward Teller was hoping to stay in Japan after fleeing Nazi Germany." (There is no mention of the name of the German physicist and there is no mention of such intentions in Teller's *Memoirs*.)

20 ■ P. Goodchild, *Edward Teller: The Real Dr. Strangelove.* Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 2004.
21 ■ Hiroki Sugita of Kyodo News in *Japan Times,* August 14, 2007.

It would be only too easy to dismiss the suggestion of the letter. However, it came years before Japan joined the Axis alliance. At this point it is worth mentioning the fact that at the same time Caltech was persuading Theodore von Kármán to move there in the second half of the 1920s, von Kármán received invitations from Japan through the Japanese Embassy in Berlin. He was offered generous terms, which he declined by requesting yet even better terms—and the Japanese accepted them. So he went and later he claimed (with false modesty), "I do not wish to take too much credit—or perhaps in this case, blame—but I believe I was also the man who introduced Japan to metal airplane propellers."[22]

Sugita poses the question, "If Teller ... had joined Nishina's group, would Japan have been the first to produce the bomb?" I think it is safe to say that Japan would not have been the first. First, even if Teller and/or others had joined the Japanese scientists at the time or soon after Hitler came to power in Germany, that is, around 1933, the bomb program could have not started until after 1938, that is, after the discovery of nuclear fission. From 1939 till 1945, Japan's resources would not have sufficed to enrich uranium and create the bomb. Japan could not have competed successfully with the United States, even if a few physicists of Teller's caliber had joined in.

But there is an alternative scenario. Nuclear fission could have been discovered in 1934. In fact, Enrico Fermi in Rome fissioned uranium, but misinterpreted the results of his experiments. Also, Leo Szilard dreamed of the nuclear chain reaction and, had he made a systematic search for the fissionable element, he could have hit upon uranium as early as 1934. This would have given the Japanese more time to enter a race for the atomic bomb and it is unlikely that the Western democracies would have made as much of an effort and devoted as many resources to a similar program during the second half of the 1930s as they did during the war. However, had either Fermi or Szilard discovered nuclear fission in the mid-1930s, it can be supposed that Nazi Germany would have seized the opportunity to build an atomic bomb and, again, it would not have been Japan to succeed in it first. But would it have mattered whether Germany or Japan built the bomb first? Either outcome would have led to unimaginable calamity. This is why Leo Szilard suggested many years later that Fermi and he deserved the Nobel Peace Prize, not for something they had discovered, but for something they had missed.

In the final analysis, Edward Teller's "fathering" of the American hydrogen bomb contributed to the lasting peace of the four decades of the Cold War. His advocacy of SDI may have been misguided, but its consequences contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the liberation of Central and Eastern Europe, including his native Hungary. Perhaps Teller's self-evaluation could be condensed in what he himself expressed as his goal: "Protect the free world with whatever means".[23] ❧

22 ■ T. von Kármán (with Lee Edson), *The Wind and Beyond: Theodore von Kármán, Pioneer in Aviation and Pathfinder in Space.* Little, Brown, Boston, 1967, p. 133.
23 ■ Attributed.

Tibor Frank

Memory and History: Visiting Edward Teller

It was the tail end of a sun-drenched California summer in 1988. I was immersed in my research into the interwar migration of Hungarian intellectuals at the archives of the Hoover Institution on the campus of Stanford University, between quarters at the History Department of the University of California, Santa Barbara. Part of my research during those years involved seeking out and interviewing their few surviving contemporaries. Wherever I went, I talked to elderly Hungarian immigrants and learnt a great deal. I had become good friends with György Hoff, a patents lawyer in Santa Barbara; his brother Miklós Hoff, a professor of aeronautics at Stanford University, would introduce me to Edward Teller, or so he promised. I did not doubt that with their assistance I would meet Teller, and I eagerly prepared for the conversation with him.

The day after my arrival, unexpectedly, I bumped into my brother-in-law and his family in Stanford's sprawling gardens. (They had come to visit me in Santa Barbara a little while before.) He told me excitedly how they had chanced on Teller on the Stanford campus. My then twelve-year-old nephew made a video recording of their friendly chat at his father's behest.[1] Teller was most interested in Hungary's latest and, as it turned out, last Communist leader Károly Grósz and his July 1988 visit to the U.S. The experience left my brother-in-law quite enthused and he urged me to meet the great man, saying that all I needed to do was mention them and Teller would "surely be most forthcoming". I reassured him that I had already planned to meet Teller and indeed wouldn't need to fall back on family connections (on which I suddenly set little store).

1 ■ The video recording made of Edward Teller at Stanford on August 23, 1988 has survived to this day in the collection of the author's family.

Tibor Frank

is Professor of History and Director of the School of English and American Studies at the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. Recently he was co-organizer, together with nuclear physicist András Patkós, of the centenary conference on Edward Teller at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, on January 16, 2008.

I reflected a bit on the matter, not wanting to rush things. It turned out that Teller had an office at the Hoover Institution in the same building as the archives where I was doing my research, and so an in-house phone call seemed like a sensible idea. To my great surprise Teller was quickly connected through the phone and chatted quite congenially for around twenty-five minutes. The conversation proved interesting, focusing mostly on the political situation in Hungary. He paid scant attention to my mention of Miklós Hoff, but this seemed of little significance. All this took place right after Károly Grósz's Washington visit.[2] Teller thought him ill-fitted for his position. Speaking to me like we were two powerbrokers, he asked me which politician we might "bring in instead of Grósz". This took me by surprise.

At that time I had been in the United States for almost a year as a Fulbright visiting professor and had little reliable information of recent developments or currently prominent names back home. Imre Pozsgay, however, was frequently mentioned by the media and so I suggested him to Teller, who was familiar with his name. Teller thought at the time that if Pozsgay were to travel to the United States it might do some good for relations between the two countries. While this is essentially all I remember of the content of our phone call, I was struck by his courteousness, indeed, he was "most forthcoming". I asked him if I may call on him for an interview. He told me he'd be glad to meet me, and I should make an appointment with his secretary.

Teller's office was just above the archives, but his name was not posted anywhere. Such secrecy was somewhat forbidding. I had only two or three weeks left at Stanford, and so one day I clambered up the stairs of the Hoover Institution—as far as I remember—to the second floor to book the interview. Before leaving, I told his secretary how pleasant Teller had been to me and also my brother-in-law, to which she replied, "He has his good days and his bad days". This struck me as odd.

And so it was that a few minutes before 3 pm on Sunday I came to be standing in front of Teller's home. They lived in a faculty villa on the Stanford campus. Flourishes of a Mozart sonata drifted out of the window, left open in the heat of late summer. A lovely performance, I thought, but I would have been hard put to tell whether it was live or a recording. When a few minutes later I rang the doorbell Teller himself stood up from the piano and came to open the door. To get the conversation going I asked, mindful of the quality of his playing, if he practised regularly. "I don't do anything regularly," he replied, morose and indignant. It was immediately clear to me that he was having one of his "bad days".

We were joined in the living room by his wife Mici. The conversation was strained. He didn't really understand—or simply didn't believe—that I was interested in details of his emigration from Hungary some sixty years earlier. I had the feeling that he didn't quite know what to make of my visit. Our conversation

2 ■ Károly Grósz, at this point both Prime Minister of Hungary and Secretary General of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, paid an official visit to the United States between July 19–30, 1988.

had only barely begun when his wife, who up to that point had said little, asked me unexpectedly: "Tell me please, do you think that we will ever be able to go home?"

I felt extraordinary tension in the question and the pain and bitterness of several decades of having lived far from Hungary. In the autumn of 1988 it seemed unlikely that Teller would ever see Hungary again, and the three of us were quite aware of this. For a second, I didn't know what to answer to the old lady's anxious question. Then, to my immense relief, I remembered a case rather similar to that of Teller: the case of Leo Szilard.

I had begun to study Szilard's writings a few months earlier in the library of the University of California, San Diego at La Jolla, which housed the late physicist's papers. At the time it had only been inventoried, not catalogued. A little earlier that summer I had found there an official Hungarian invitation to Szilard. These letters so surprised me that they remained fixed almost like snapshots in my memory and provided a relatively palatable response to Mrs Teller's question.

Compared to Teller, Szilard counted as a man of the left, and he had carried on a dialogue with Soviet leaders, from Stalin to Khrushchev. Nonetheless, he was an American nuclear physicist for whom a visit to Hungary would have been inconceivable for quite some time. In the early 1960s, however, in the wake of the period of détente, Hungary under János Kádár had begun to build ties with some of the Hungarians abroad. Szilard received a letter in Hungarian, dated July 19, 1962, on the Academy's stationary, from Professor István Rusznyák, president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences at the time.

> Highly honoured Professor Szilard,
>
> Permit me, on behalf of the Presidential Board of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, to extend an invitation to you and your wife to spend ten days in Hungary as guests of the Academy. It would be a great pleasure for us to be able to acquaint you here in person with the scientific work and findings of Hungarian researchers, and the scientists of the Academy await the opportunity to meet you with great anticipation.
>
> The Hungarian Academy of Sciences and I personally would consider you our guests during your stay in Hungary. Concerning the date of the visit, this is entirely up to you. We would like to suggest, however, that perhaps you might come to Hungary after the Pugwash Conference in London.
>
> Sincerely hoping that both you and your wife will be able to accept our invitation, I await your reply at your earliest convenience.
>
> István Rusznyák
> President[3]

Soon Szilard also received a Hungarian letter from Lajos Jánossy, the vice-president of the Academy, dated August 1, 1962. It seems the invitation, and even more so the visit to Hungary, was urgent. Jánossy assured Szilard, then a professor

3 ■ István Rusznyák's letter to Leo Szilard, July 19, 1962. In Hungarian. University of California, San Diego (UCSD) Libraries, Mandeville Special Collections Library, MSS 32, Box 12, Folder 14. First publication in English.

of the Enrico Fermi Institute for Nuclear Studies at the University of Chicago that, "For my part I would take great pleasure in using this occasion to be of assistance with respect to the planning and organisation of your stay in Hungary, and I look forward to meeting you." Jánossy's letter also casts light on events preceding this exchange: "I recall with delight our latest, very pleasant meeting in Vienna..."[4] What must be remembered here is that Szilard's help was instrumental in the emigration of members of Teller's family to the U.S. Teller told the story to István and Magdolna Hargittai, who spoke with him in 1996 at Stanford.

> Later Szilard was with the Pugwash group. Once I took him to dinner in Washington. We never were on a first-name basis. We called each other Teller and Szilard or Teller Úr and Szilard Úr [Mr. Teller and Mr. Szilard]. We were good friends. He said to me, Teller, you are mistaken. What the Soviets in Russia are doing is very good. You should go to Russia, spend two weeks there, and your mind will change. And I said no, I won't go. And Szilard said, why not? Szilard was a very tolerant person. He allowed people to disagree with him but not without reason, so he asked, why not? So I told him the reason. I said, look, my mother and sister are in Hungary. I go to Russia and I'll be blackmailed. I won't go. Szilard said, you are wrong, they never would blackmail you but I'll do something about it. The funny part of the story, and the nice part, is that he did. At the next meeting of the Pugwash group which was in Austria, he went to the Russian leader and asked him, why don't they let Teller's mother and sister come out? The Russian said, "I have nothing to do with that. They are in Hungary; it is an independent country," but the same day the Hungarian representative came to Szilard. They had a conversation and in a couple of months my mother and sister had the permission to come out.[5]

Lajos Jánossy, the nuclear physicist who had taken part in the (3rd) Pugwash conference in Kitzbühel as the Hungarian representative, had informed Szilard on December 24, 1958 that "Teller's mother and sister have received permission to leave the country."[6] On January 18, 1959 Teller welcomed them at the San Francisco airport.[7] In a letter of January 21, 1959 Szilard thanked Jánossy for his help.[8]

Szilard, finally, did not visit Hungary. Already ailing, he did not consider it possible to travel to Budapest in such a hurry, and in a letter dated October 15, 1962 he declined Rusznyák's invitation. In a letter written in English in response, Rusznyák extended the invitation "to a later date".[9]

4 ■ Lajos Jánossy's letter to Leo Szilard. August 1, 1962. In Hungarian. UCSD Libraries, Mandeville Special Collections Library, MSS 32, Box 12, Folder 14. First publication in English.
5 ■ István Hargittai, Magdolna Hargittai: "Edward Teller", *The Chemical Intelligencer,* Vol. 3, No. 1, 1997, pp. 14–23, repr. in Magdolna Hargittai and István Hargittai, *Candid Science IV: Conversations with Famous Physicists.* London: Imperial College Press, 2004, pp. 405–423, quote on pp. 410–411.
6 ■ Leo Szilard's letter to Lajos Jánossy. January 21, 1959. In English. Archives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Published in *Fizikai Szemle,* XLIV, 1994/1. p. 7. Repr. in Teller Ede: *Üzenetek egy marslakótól. Válogatott tanulmányok* (Messages from a Martian. Selected Papers) (Budapest: LiLLi, 2008), p. 269.
7 ■ György Marx: "Teller Ede köszöntése" (Welcoming Edward Teller). *Fizikai Szemle,* XLVIII, 1998/1. p. 5.
8 ■ Leo Szilard's letter to Lajos Jánossy. January 21, 1959, *Fizikai Szemle,* XLIV, 1994/1. p. 7.
9 ■ István Rusznyák's letter to Leo Szilard. October 15, 1962. In English. UCSD Libraries, Mandeville Special Collections Library, MSS 32, Box 12, Folder 14.

Returning now to the Teller villa in Stanford in September of 1988, suddenly recalling the story of Szilard's invitation to Budapest—though not mentioning it aloud—I replied to Mici Teller's question that perhaps they would be able to visit Budapest at the invitation of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. For a moment she looked visibly pleased. Teller responded however with an impassioned cry: "We shan't go!" To this I could only say that it was not I who had raised the question after all, but rather his wife. But this elderly gentleman, visibly out of sorts that day, did not care to hear any more on the subject.

He sat right next to me on the sofa and so I was confronted—as it were physically—with the great tragedy of his life: he had lost half a leg in a streetcar accident in Munich in his youth. He had a wooden leg. That's why he always carried a large cane and walked with difficulty. I mention my experience that day here because I thought that this physical handicap was also a key to the understanding of the Teller phenomenon and the Teller psyche, and perhaps less directly an understanding of the one and a half hour conversation I had with him that afternoon. At one point he lost control of himself. He found the perfectly innocent conversation disturbing and jumped up from the sofa, yelling at his wife: "Don't you understand? *He's going back!*" He meant I was going back to Hungary and so they must not speak so freely in my presence. I found this insulting and so began to take my leave, at which point he insisted that I stay. Then, unexpectedly, after a whole hour had passed, he began to speak about his emigration. Still, it was clear that he didn't really want to recall events; he suggested that I broach that subject with his sister or Miklós Hoff instead. (At the mention of this name I realised that either Hoff had never actually spoken of me to Teller, or, maybe, more likely, he had, but Teller had forgotten. Either way Teller had no idea who I was or why I had come.) The conversation soon came to an end, leaving the indelible impression of a "bad day".

One cannot exclude the possibility that my suggestion about a possible return to Hungary had an agreeable ring to him and stuck in Teller's mind, even if in 1988 he still rejected the idea. Whatever the case, it is a fact that when Teller first did return to Hungary in December 1990 it was indeed the Hungarian Academy of Sciences that had invited him. According to the recollections of Eszter Tóth, György Marx had established contact with him by phone in May 1988.[10] This makes Teller's reaction in late August of the same year even more interesting. György Marx, Béla Szőkefalvi-Nagy and Imre Tarján prepared his nomination as an honorary member at a regular assembly meeting of the Academy in May 1990, but his induction did not actually take place until the extraordinary assembly on December 3, 1990. The distinction, bestowed late but in time, was presented by Domokos Kosáry, elected president of the Academy in

10 ■ Eszter Tóth: "Teller Ede 1908–2003" (Edward Teller, 1908–2003). *Fizikai Szemle*. LIII, 2003/9, p. 312. Today Eszter Tóth recollects that the telephone conversation took place a few weeks before János Kádár's resignation, sometime in May 1988. I am indebted to Eszter Tóth for her valuable information.

May 1990.[11] Now that we are commemorating the centenary of Teller's birth, we should recall his memory with his own words. After taking pains to point to the positive aspects of atomic energy (for example, it helped to close the gap between developed and underdeveloped nations) as well as Hungary's embrace of it, he said, in Hungarian:

> It is not easy for me to speak but I must. I find this event incredible. I am profoundly grateful; extraordinarily grateful.
>
> I departed for Hungary intending to continue pursuing here the things that most interest me. I had heard there was a certain something here that was very important.
>
> The fact that we have come to understand the atom during this century signifies a great change. In principle, we have made a single science of physics and chemistry. This is to be greeted not with fear, as many people have done the world over, but with hope. Everyone is faced, we in particular, with the task of finding the path—the cautious path—that leads forward in a way that obliterates the causes of fear.
>
> Naturally I am thinking now of atomic energy. Yesterday I travelled to Paks [Hungary's sole nuclear power plant]. I have no doubt that atomic energy is not only important for Hungary but for the entire world. Without atomic energy the huge gap between the developed and underdeveloped world will never be eliminated. Atomic energy creates perspectives for creating a harmonious world. But this is not possible without caution. We must apply ourselves to this. I myself have worked on this for decades because it is important and because it interests me. Energy is essential for Hungary. If we do not take fright, if we work sensibly, then, in this field, Hungary can play a leading role in the world.
>
> I have returned home. It has been a considerable shock. They asked me how I felt; I was unable to say. I feel so many things that I am unable at the moment to put them in words. Perhaps two weeks from now I will be able to explain. Part of what I feel is fervent enthusiasm; the hope of a brighter future—the hope that a word spoken in Hungarian may someday mean a great deal, not just to Hungarians but to people everywhere. For the modern world words are particularly important guiding principles, since, from one day to the next, they can change the world and colour it with fear. But the world should not be coloured with fear! Words should change it in such a way that people suspect, sense and understand that our future, understood in the most beautiful sense of the word, can be free of fear. Thank you.[12]

On the occasion of the centenary of Teller's birth we could not recall his tragic figure with any better words. ❧

11 ■ *Előterjesztés a Magyar Tudományos Akadémia 1990. évi rendes közgyűléséhez tiszteleti tagok és külső tagok megválasztására* (Submissions to the 1990 regular assembly of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for the election of honorary members and external members). Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, 1990; the text of the submissions was published in the Akadémiai Osztály-közlemények (From the Sections of the Academy) column in *Fizikai Szemle,* XL. 1990/10, pp. 317–318.
12 ■ Ede Teller: "Hazajöttem" (I Came Home). *Fizikai Szemle,* XLI, 1991/1, p. 1.

János Kirz

Major Players

István Hargittai: *The Martians of Science—Five Physicists Who Changed the Twentieth Century.* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, 368 pp.

Thanks to the magic of the Internet, I can sit in my office in Berkeley, California and listen to Bartók Radio. When the clock strikes 3 p.m, it is midnight in Budapest, and Vörösmarty's great poem *"Appeal"* comes on the air. As I listen to

A nagy világon e kívül
Nincsen számodra hely
Áldjon vagy verjen sors keze,
Itt élned, halnod kell...

(There is no place for you anywhere else / in the whole wide world, / You must live and die here, / whether the hands of fate will bless, or beat you)

I tell myself: how strange it is to have these outdated nineteenth-century ideas enshrined in a poem that we all learn as small children. Yes, two hundred years ago there may have been some truth to the saying, *"Extra Hungariam non est vita; si est vita, non est ita,"* but by 1937, the poet Attila József could register that *"one and a half million of our people staggered to America"*. The five physicists who changed the twentieth century, the subject of Hargittai's book, were part of this exodus. They certainly made a place for themselves outside Hungary, but never forgot their origins. They were not the only Hungarians of world fame who fled the homeland they saw heading for the abyss. When I arrived in Berkeley in 1957, half of the leading orchestras in the United States had Hungarian conductors. The team of economists that guided the United Kingdom through the wrenching transition from a colonial empire to a modern European country was Hungarian. The stunning successes of Hungarian athletes in the 1956 Olympic Games (many of them

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János Kirz,
a physicist and Teller's nephew, met two of the other Martians as well.
He escaped from Hungary in 1956 on foot at night, but has been back frequently since 1989.
He is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Stony Brook University (New York), and
Scientific Advisor at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in California.
He specialises in X-ray optics and microscopy.

subsequently became sports heroes in the West), the courage of the fighters of the uprising at home, all created a mythical aura about Hungarians in the world. But the five Martians who form the subject of Hargittai's book clearly stand out. *The Martians of Science* is both an authoritative history and a fascinating story.

Rather than produce a collection of essays devoted to the lives of individuals, Hargittai chose to compare and contrast them at every period of their lives. This device makes for lively, interesting reading. It is also appropriate because the five were friends (some close, others less so) in spite of their divergent views on life and politics. In a particularly well-written chapter, Hargittai traces the historical and cultural context of their origins as upper middle-class Jews growing up in the golden age of Budapest in the period before the First World War. The author, though of a later generation, is of the same origin, and sets the stage with care and with the warm glow that I recall in the descriptions given by my own grandparents when they were talking about "the good old days". He goes on to describe how the turmoil of the First World War, the short-lived and brutal 1919 Communist revolution of Béla Kun and the subsequent White Terror under Miklós Horthy shaped the lives and political awakening of his subjects. He points out that Kun and many of his gang were Jews, and that this strengthened the rabid government-sanctioned anti-Semitism that followed. While Teller's family suffered during the Kun regime, we learn from Hargittai that von Karman's idealism led him to take a role in the Kun government, with responsibility to modernise higher education, before his own disillusionment with the dictatorship of the proletariat.

These events, along with the attraction of the great scientific and cultural opportunities of the Weimar Republic, led the Martians to move to Germany. They arrived during the golden age of physics, the time when quantum mechanics and its applications to atomic and molecular physics were developing rapidly. They all found themselves in the company of the scientific leaders of the day, including Einstein, Heisenberg, Bohr and Planck, and were welcome due to their remarkable gifts, insight and productivity.

Hargittai describes Szilard as the Martian with the greatest ability to size up the political landscape of the time, with von Karman, the oldest of the group, at the other extreme. And as the Nazis came to power in Germany, it was Szilard whom many saw as selfish for patenting his ideas, who devoted all his energies and limited resources to rescue academics from harm's way. He was a visionary who recognized that atomic energy could be harnessed for military uses. He and all of the Martians, by varying routes, ended up in the United States in the 1930's. By this time, they were all leading scientists, recruited by top American universities.

Von Karman's remarkable contributions were in the area of aerodynamics, the design of airplanes, wind tunnels and rockets. His influence on the US Air Force was profound, but he was not interested in becoming a public figure.

After the discovery of fission at the beginning of 1939, Szilard worried that Nazi Germany might take the lead in building an atomic bomb. He was the most active in getting the US government to get going on research toward exploiting atomic energy for military purposes. He enlisted his friends, Wigner and Teller, to help in this endeavour. Hargittai's description of these well-known events during the 1939–1941 period reads like a detective story. Szilard also attempted to prevent the use of atomic bombs on Japan at the end of the Second World War.

Von Neumann may have been the most highly regarded among the Martians in the scientific community because of his seminal papers both in mathematics and in theoretical physics. He made major contributions to the war effort of the US Navy before joining the team working on the atomic bomb when it was already in full swing. The conceptual development of digital computers is probably his best-known achievement.

Wigner, the only Nobel laureate of the group, made fundamental contributions to theoretical physics, especially in elucidating the important role of symmetry. He participated in the Manhattan Project and made major contributions to nuclear reactor design.

Teller, who would have been 100 years old on January 15, 2008, and who is best known for his role in the design of the hydrogen bomb, also made a name for himself in the world of science through his important contributions to chemical and nuclear physics.

As four of the five Martians took part in the Manhattan Project to build the atomic bomb, Hargittai considers at length the attitudes of his principal characters regarding this matter.

Possibly the best chapter in the book is the one on the Cold War. Hargittai takes us through the lives and struggles of the Martians, now major players in US weapons research, from 1945 until the end of their lives. They all understood the dangers that Stalin's ruthless thirst for power represented better than most of their contemporaries. Their reactions varied considerably, however, with Szilard working on communication with scientists across the Iron Curtain,[1] Wigner advocating Civil Defence, while the other three invested their energies in making sure that the US did not lose the arms race. Hargittai's account of the development of the hydrogen bomb and Teller's major controversial role in it is fascinating and as carefully researched as possible in view of the fact that many of the documents are still classified.

It was during this period that four of the Martians died. Teller, the last survivor, continued to play a critical role in defence matters, especially Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, known popularly as Star Wars. His many critics attacked the programme as a reckless adventure and total waste of money. He saw it as one factor that led to the free world's triumph in the Cold War.

1 ■ As mentioned in the book, Teller's sister and mother could join him in the US in 1959, which was made possible by Szilard's influence with the Soviet authorities.

One of the last chapters is devoted to contrasting two of the Martians with notable contemporaries: Szilard with the great Italian physicist Enrico Fermi, and Teller with J. Robert Oppenheimer. In this way, Hargittai provides the background to the famous "Oppenheimer case", where Teller's testimony was interpreted by his colleagues in the scientific community as a betrayal of his former boss. The author brings the complex events to life in a way that conveys the context as well as the actual events.

The book ends with an Epilogue that is designed to complete the picture. Here one gets the impression that it is the scientist rather than the gifted writer that is in control. It is only here that we learn about von Neumann's seminal contributions to game theory. The description is complete and correct, but not inspired.

The photographs are very interesting, but not of high quality, and the captions do not always identify those who are of interest, but this is only a minor flaw.

If these five scientists had ordinary lives, ordinary habits, ordinary values, the term Martian would not apply. It is clear from the narrative that the Martians were fully devoted to what they saw as their mission. This mission was mostly science, but when they perceived a threat to freedom, to human values, they devoted their full energies to addressing that threat as they saw it (and they in no way saw it the same way). Mission came first, private life and family had to take a back seat. Does this mean that they were humourless, boring characters? Not so. But they did not shy away from being unconventional eccentrics, with the possible exception of von Neumann and von Karman for whom the enjoyment of life was probably more important than to the others.[2]

Overall, the book succeeds spectacularly because the author, a renowned professor of physical chemistry, has himself lived a life in science, has had a second career interviewing the giants of science,[3] and has a gift for writing about science and scientists.[4] He also happens to be Hungarian, and of the same cultural roots as the subjects of his book.[5] His careful scholarship is documented by extensive notes at the end of the volume. He is fascinated by the Martians, but this fascination does not blind him to their faults, limitations and peculiarities. ❧

2 ■ Much as children go to music lessons, sports or other extracurricular activities these days, they learned ballroom dancing in the first decades of the 20th century. Von Neumann was in the same dance class as my mother.

3 ■ István Hargittai and Magdolna Hargittai: *Candid Science: Conversations With Famous Scientists*, London, Imperial College Press, 2005 (6 volumes).

4 ■ István Hargittai: *The Road to Stockholm: Nobel Prizes, Science, and Scientists*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002.

5 ■ István Hargittai: *Our Lives: Encounters Of A Scientist*, Budapest, Akadémiai, 2004.

Tim Wilkinson

All That Fall

Upsides of the Shorter Fictions of Imre Kertész

> Mr Rooney: Who is the preacher tomorrow?... Has he announced his text?
> Mrs Rooney: "The Lord upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up all those that be bowed down".
>
> Samuel Beckett: *All That Fall*[1]

Beckett's first radio play, written in English during the summer of 1956 and first broadcast to the UK in January 1957, would appear to have been relegated to a limbo of general unremarkedness, and as far as I know has not been translated to Hungarian to this date (certainly not back then, with Beckett and other non-socialist realist writers being lumped together, at least by some English critics, into the so-called absurdist 'school' and thus prime targets for the cultural tsars of socialism in one country). All the same, one of the observations made by Mrs Rooney, the chief female figure in the play, might easily be used as a motto for Kertész's first and still best-known piece of fiction, the novel *Fatelessness*,[2] published in 1975. This is a story narrated by György (Gyuri) Köves, a 14-going-on-15-year-old boy, about how, one day in the summer of 1944, he and the rest of what was, in effect, a teenage forced-labour unit in Budapest were crammed together with hundreds of other Jews of all ages in a brickyard on the outskirts of Budapest before being carried off in a cattle truck to the Auschwitz death camp, then onwards, a few days later, to the Buchenwald concentration camp and finally to a satellite labour camp at Zeitz. There are several definite allusions to literary works in the novel, but these are all to works that an intelligent grammar-school boy in pre-war Budapest might plausibly have encountered (from Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper* and Dostoevsky's *The House of the Dead* to Goethe's *Erlkönig*). Beckett's play was still over a dozen years away, but one imagines Kertész would relish the black humour of another comment put in the mouth of Mrs Rooney: "It is suicide to be abroad. But what is it to be at home, Mr Tyler, what is it to be at home? A lingering dissolution..."

Two years after *Fatelessness* came a volume containing two short novels or novellas: *Detective Story*[3] and *The Pathseeker: Searching for Traces*,[4] both of which ostensibly deal with matters that have no obvious connection with Gyuri Köves's concentration-camp world. A second Kertész novel, *The Failure*—which some English-language commentators refer to by the misleading title of "Fiasko" under

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Yorkshire bred, is the translator of a range of works on history and culture. Among his translations of literary works by contemporary Hungarian writers, five volumes by Imre Kertész have appeared in the USA and UK. His translation of Fatelessness *was awarded the 43rd Annual PEN Club/Book of the Month Translation Prize for 2005.*

which the German translation was published, though of the several meanings connoted by the Hungarian word *(kudarc)* used by Kertész, it is demonstrably the Beckettian sense of failure that is intended ("Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."[5])—did not appear until 1988, when the Communist regime that took over in Hungary after the crushing of the 1956 revolution was approaching its end. After the country's 1989–90 transition to independence and quasi-democratic pluralism a fair flurry of works appeared, including the novel *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* (1990),[6] the novella *The Union Jack* (1991),[7] the longish short story *Sworn Statement*[8] (1993), and also *Galley-Boat Log* (1992), a 30-year notebook (1961–91) that is near-indispensable for anyone who seeks to identify the rich range of reading and thinking that informs Kertész's published works.[9] This was followed by *Someone Else* (1997), more a series of sketches of the sometimes hilarious and always instructive adventures that befell Kertész during the mid-Nineties, when his fame was starting to grow in the German-speaking world.[10] A fourth novel, *Liquidation* (2003),[11] is very much a counterpart of *Kaddish* in both its characters and subject-matter. Along with some three volumes of essays and, most recently, *The File on K.* (or *The K. Dossier,* 2006), in which the author sums up his life and works in the form of an extended interview, that is the published Kertész oeuvre in a nutshell.

Given that just three of the novels, a couple of the shorter fiction pieces and a few extracts from the two journal-type works are accessible in English translation, which certainly impedes appraisal of Kertész's approach,[12] readers reliant on that language are hardly in a position to appreciate that there are several strands that run through all the writing. Impressive continuities are traceable over the last thirty years or more. In particular that Kertész's theme or 'message' is of much wider relevance than the ghetto of "Holocaust" literature to which, in view of the non-accessibility of important parts of the whole oeuvre, it has been all too easy to assign him. Apart from anything else, I would like to set Kertész in the mainstream of literature—and not just Hungarian literature, but (obviously, in translation) European, American, and indeed universal literature—where he truly belongs and which, moreover, shows why he was a well-merited recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2002.

On the face of it, the two novellas from 1977 have nothing to do with that subject or, for that matter, with each other. *The Pathseeker* recounts the seemingly opaque activities of a protagonist who is the implicit narrator but is known impersonally throughout, in the distinctly offhand third person, as the "commissioner" while he roots around for unspecified "clues", for an unspecified purpose, in an unidentified locality in a country that is not directly identified but may be inferred to be Germany. Closer examination, however, will show that this has organic links to important elements and loci of the 1975 novel. Even more strikingly, *Detective Story,* set in an anonymous Latin American banana republic, presents itself as the first-person-singular memoir of a secret police operative named Antonio R. Martens, compiled in prison shortly before what he accepts will be his inevitable execution. Nevertheless, links do exist.

It is very tempting to follow the Beckett lead, since there is no doubt that Kertész finds the Beckettian world-picture and mordant sense of humour very congenial. Kertész has elsewhere certainly acknowledged that influence, as well as those of a very eclectic mix of authors, including Goethe, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Rainer Maria Rilke, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann and Thomas Bernhard, but possibly no writer has been so consistently drawn on for inspiration down the decades as the 1957 Nobel Laureate, Albert Camus.

That influence is intermittently evident in Kertész's first published novel, *Fatelessness,* being discernible from the opening lines to the point at the very end, where Gyuri Köves observes:

> Over ahead, in the direction that I would need to take, where the street appeared to lengthen, expand, and fade away into infinity, the fleecy clouds over the indigo hills were already turning purple and the sky, a shade of claret... It was that peculiar hour, recognized even now, even here—my favourite hour in the [concentration] camp, and I was seized by a sharp, painful, futile longing for it: nostalgia, homesickness... For even there, next to the chimneys, in the intervals between the torments, there was something that resembled happiness.

Camus's Meursault, on the other hand, noted:

> For a few brief moments, as I left the Law Courts on my way to the van, I recognized the familiar smells and colours of a summer evening... I rediscovered one by one, as if arising from the depths of my fatigue, all the familiar sounds of a town that I loved and of a certain time of day when I sometimes used to feel happy.[13]

It is a direct quote from Camus, recorded in *Galley-Boat Log* during summer 1975 soon after *Fatelessness* was published, that offers perhaps the most lapidary perspective on Kertész's viewpoint: "Nothing for which totalitarianism has, in its opinion, found a cure is so bad as to be worse than totalitarianism itself," though this is far from an uncritical stance, as another quotation, entered shortly after his forty-sixth birthday towards the end of that year, shows:

> Camus: "The strongest passion of the twentieth century: slavery." (Despite which he fails to understand Kafka and may even be incapable of understanding him; for Mediterranean countries even slavery is something else than what it is in East Europe.)

Not long after that (autumn 1975) is a telling diary entry which suggests that the idea for *Detective Story* must have been germinating by then:

> Camus traces the justification for murder back to de Sade, Romanticism, Ivan Karamazov, etc. Whilst a half-witted police officer applies an electric current to your tongue, the colonels, dictators, General Secretaries or Grand Muftis who wield unlimited power have never in their lives so much as heard about a Karamazov, or God, or Kant, or a moral crisis; they merely do their job. Is there not some mistake in the theoretical foundation here? "If there is no God, then everything is permitted"—this is the sort of pathetic comment to which one can only respond with a shrug of the shoulders in a world where nothing is

permitted and everything is possible... Maybe Camus believes that what is important are the ornaments and principles with which man prinks his mind in order to corral and enslave it, though all that is important here are the corralling and the enslavement: they are the real facts, the rest is nothing, just words, words, words—a game devised by executioners to enable them to carry on their work undisturbed in the meantime...

Another aspect that Kertész evidently brooded over for many years is raised, seemingly just in passing, in the pages of *Galley-Boat Log* as early as 1966:

A writer cannot create a more irrational world than God... The personality trap, psychology, passion. How much do we really have to do with our passions; exactly how big is our part in them?—Swann's story. Meursault's revolver shot.

Looked at more closely: show the individual psychological motives of deeds in the torture chambers of the totalitarian state. Futile, by the way, because here only the role is significant, the fact that people are capable of being executioner or victim, and how the cogwheels function in the machinery of death, taking no account at all of the individual case. Here individuality, if it finds expression in anyone at all, can at most only lament its past. In this respect, therefore, there is no multifaceted humanity, no complicated and many-layered characters, no extraordinary personalities, because the essence of totality is precisely uniformity.

Thus, arguably the linchpin in Kertész's view of the world is his refusal, despite his concentration-camp experience, to harbour a victim's grudge; his insistence that each of us individually holds responsibility for every step we take, even when those steps are taken under constraint. As Gyuri asserts on his return from camp:

"In any case," I added, "I didn't notice any atrocities," at which, I could see, they were greatly astounded. What were they supposed to understand by that, they wished to know, by 'I didn't notice'? To that, however, I asked them in turn what they had done during those 'hard times'? "Errm,... we lived," one of them deliberated. "We tried to survive," the other added. Precisely! They too had taken one step at a time, I noted. What did I mean by taking a 'step,' they floundered, so I related to them how it had gone in Auschwitz, by way of example... where I too was standing, you would [therefore] have to allow ten to twenty minutes before you reach the point where it is decided whether it will be gas immediately or a reprieve for the time being. Now, all the time the queue is constantly moving, progressing, and everyone is taking steps, bigger or smaller ones, depending on what the speed of the operation demands... "So what is it about, then?" they asked, almost losing patience, to which I replied, with growing anger on my part as well, I sensed: "It's about the steps." Everyone took steps as long as he was able to take a step; I too took my own steps, and not just in the queue at Birkenau, but even before that, here, at home. I took steps with my father, and I took steps with my mother, I took steps with Annamarie, and I took steps—perhaps the most difficult ones of all—with the older sister.

Meursault, Camus's protagonist in *The Stranger* (or as it is still best known under the somewhat perversely translated title of *The Outsider* in the UK, or *Közöny* ["Indifference"] in Hungary[14]), offers this observation: "What interests me

at the moment is trying to escape from the mechanism, trying to find if there's any way out of the inevitable..." For Kertész's Martens the steps are "the logic" that he seeks from the beginning of the memoir he compiles in his prison cell:

> And I finally grasped his [Diaz's] logic, or at least I believe I grasped it. I grasped that we had now cast away everything that bound us to the laws of man; I grasped that we could no longer place our trust in anyone except ourselves. Oh, and in destiny, in that insatiable, greedy and eternally hungry mechanism. Were we still spinning it, or was it spinning us? Now it all amounts to the same thing. You think you are being very clever in riding events out, as I say, and then you find that all you want to know is where the hell they are galloping off to with you. (*Detective Story,* p. 105)

Those steps are not so apparent in *The Pathseeker,* but the very concept of searching for clues implies there were "steps" that left clues in the first place. Nevertheless, another way of seeing the two 1977 novellas is as exemplifying an idea that had already drifted up unprompted in that 1966 entry but resurfaces a decade later, in a more focused fashion, in *The Failure.*

Perhaps the most striking feature of *Detective Story* is that it is not set in Europe, let alone Hungary, but in some anonymous Latin American banana republic. That might fleetingly tempt one to recall *Mexico City,* the bar in which judge-penitent Jean-Baptiste Clamence practices in *The Fall,* but in this case the Antonio R. Martens who narrates *Detective Story* is much closer to the Meursault of *The Stranger.* One important point to note is that although by the late Seventies, when *Detective Story* was published, Hungary, under Communist First Secretary János Kádár, had a comparatively relaxed attitude to criticism by writers (for instance, György Konrád had his implicitly hard-hitting first novel, *The Case Worker,* a thinly disguised account of his own experiences as a social worker published in 1969, while Péter Esterházy had by then given up his day job as a mathematician, had his first collection of short stories published, and was within an ace of delivering his first masterpiece, *Production-Line Novel,* a devastatingly funny critique of the socialist work ethic.) Any suggestion that the Hungarian secret police employed questionable methods, however, was quite beyond the pale until the end of the regime.

In retrospect, however, *Detective Story* can be seen as a sort of dry-run, however truncated, for the story-within-a-story-within-a-story structure of *The Failure.* Thus, Martens's narrative, which includes extracts from the diary of Enrique Salinas, the subject of the investigations that Martens leads as a new recruit to the Corps, is framed by a brief introduction from his unnamed defence lawyer which attests to the bona fides of Martens's memoir. *The Failure,* by contrast, opens as the story of an "Old Boy" (plausibly an *alter ego* of Kertész) who is living with his wife in a cramped bedsitter in Budapest, probably in the mid to late Seventies:

> The Old Boy was standing before the filing cabinet. He was thinking. It was morning. (Relatively —getting on for ten.) Around this time the Old Boy was always in the habit of having a think. He had plenty of troubles and woes, so he had plenty to think about...

More specifically, the "Old Boy" is casting around his "bottom drawer" for inspiration for a follow-up to his last book (it is explicitly mentioned that he has already published a book, which is not specified but may be assumed to be *Fatelessness*). In the meantime, he (the "Old Boy", that is) has been making a living—supported by his wife's work as a waitress—out of translating German-language pieces, but while he leafs through his "bottom drawer" he comes across the kernel of a story called "The Failure", which takes up the rest of the book. This story-within-the-story is about György Köves, by now an adult (in fact a journalist at the start of the story), which plays out in a setting that is nominally an aircraft-journey away from Hungary, yet is uncannily reminiscent of Budapest under the grip of rampant Stalinism, in the early Fifties. A major element of the plot concerns the exotic denizens (they include characters known only by their nicknames: "The Uncrowned", "Pumpadour", "The Transcendental Concubine") of a restaurant-cum-bar known as *The South Seas,* who are served by a waitress called Alice, who seems to be linked, possibly even married to a writer by the name of Berg. The latter vanishes one day but later, on being tracked down by Köves (with Alice's help), reads to him the opening pages of a singularly inflated piece of writing that he entitles "I, the Executioner...," which contains the following:

> My book is the fruit of that wonderment, of the childish amazement, won back during the tranquil months of my arrest and detention, over what has been my life and what now, during the nebulously melancholy time of my captivity, affects me with such a peculiar magic...You have every right to... regard as sadly typical the brazen uninhibitedness with which I dare to construct a link with the aforementioned blessed geniuses, I, a jailbird, as it has become clear from what I have said; even if you know who I actually am, although I have already alluded to that in the book's title. And even if on top of all that you were to recognize my name, the rightly infamous name that I shall disclose to the Reader in one of the ensuing paragraphs!... I, who will stand before the court accused of causing the deaths of 30,000 people, am able to transcend my fate, and to my pleasant surprise—obviously to the world's surprise as well—I still feel that much responsible interest towards life as not to be ashamed of spending my last days and hours with moralizing—rather appropriately and not unskilfully, you have to admit.

The story then proceeds:

> "At least give me an idea what happens over the course of the plot," Köves grumbled. "Who is that fellow, anyway? Who did he take as his model?"
>
> "Who could I take it from if it were foreign to me?" Berg responded to the question with a question.
>
> "Do you mean to say," Köves was incredulous, "you are that fellow?"
>
> "Let's just say that is one of the possibilities," Berg replied. "One possible path to grace."
>
> "And what other paths might be possible?" Köves wanted to know.
>
> "That of the victim," came the answer. [...]
>
> "And writing?" Köves piped up again. "Isn't writing grace?"
>
> "No," Berg's high voice snapped back as a curt yelp.

"Well what, then?"

"Postponement. Pretext. Pulling punches," Berg itemized. "The putting-off—impossible of course—of the election of grace."

"In other words," Köves asked, "you are either executioner or victim?"

"Both," Berg answered in a slightly impatient tone, like someone who is required to provide information on matters that have long been known. His glance skimmed over the table until it stopped on a slip of paper, which he now lifted up from among his papers. 'It might perhaps be pleasant,' he read off it, 'to be alternately victim and executioner.' Berg put the slip down and again glanced at Köves. "That's what the writing says, and I am its realizer," he said.

"What writing is that?" Köves inquired. "Did you write it?"

"No," Berg replied. "When it was written the time had not yet come. The time," his clear tone chimed out as if he were not speaking but singing, "the time is here now."

The quotation, in this instance, is not Camus but comes from Charles Baudelaire's diary notes *My Heart Laid Bare* (the quote forms almost the last bit of a short entry for 1978 in *Galley-Boat Log*). It is much more productive to think about the idea of providing witness, general though it may be, rather than in terms of executioners.

> The Salinas affair soon intruded itself. Too early, damnably early... nothing that could be done about that; I have not been able to escape it since. I have to speak out, therefore, in order to leave behind some testimony before I go... before I am sent on my way. (*Detective Story,* p. 10)

A quote from *The Pathseeker* suggests that it and *Fatelessness*—novella and novel—are linked in time and possibly other respects:

> ...this time it was not a matter of him having to expose the sight, but of him having to expose himself to the sight; not of collecting evidence but of becoming the proof, a contrite yet implacable witness to the victory that would pulse up as proof

A bit later on, in an encounter with a strange woman who wears a black veil:

> The commissioner all at once found the words he wanted, as if he could see them written down: "So that I should bear witness to everything I have seen." Then he added, slightly plaintively, as if he were only thinking aloud, "I would not have credited that my work here would be made so much more difficult."

First published fully 15 years later, *Sworn Statement* might seem a world apart from *Detective Story,* or even *The Failure* come to that, but the very title betrays its intended function. Quite apart from that, though, it should be viewed in the context of serving the certainly rare, if not unprecedented function of providing the foundation for a wonderful "double act" by which the above-mentioned Péter Esterházy, in a short story entitled *Life and Literature* that is dedicated to Imre Kertész, pays tribute to his older (but at the time still virtually unknown) compatriot by recycling the same broad story elements, indeed quoting many of *Sworn Statement*'s words, in an exquisitely funny persiflage. Both stories are about a train journey to Austria, one (Kertész's) interrupted, the other (Esterházy's) suc-

cessful, though both are almost called off before they are embarked upon (toothache in Kertész's case, backache in Esterházy's):

> My back, down by the hips, had been aching for days—not a lot, not intolerably, but persistently. That is hard to tolerate or, to put it better, what may be ascertained with certainty, and without self-pity, is that I am hard to tolerate... the aches portended nothing at all; they were too slight, too insignificant, for that. No blood had flowed, no bones had been broken, no muscles torn, and nothing on me that might swell had swollen; the most that could be made out from the malaise was a vague hint that it might involve a periostitis or an ironic allusion, heralding, as in the best English novels, the presentation of a case of gout, 'as if' I were that English novel, this one here... I won't go—my mind made up, I was telephoning the people who had invited me—*unless*... At the other end of the line they knew with whom they were dealing. The idea did not so much as enter their heads to ask if that was a yes or a no; in my opinion, this is a publisher whose authors are quite incapable of answering with a straight yes or no, though they unabashedly nod their heads up and down at the idea of giving a book-reading: all yea, yea, nay, nay. A publisher will build upon that unless. *Tu es Petrus,* and me upon this quagmire...

And again, since English readers have been vouched only a fraction of Esterházy's total oeuvre, including less than one quarter of the 1985 masterpiece *Introduction to Literature* (or *Introduction to Belles-Lettres* as I would have it), and so will be unaware that the opening pages of the very first section *(Scooting in Prose)* prominently features a quotation from Matt. v, 37: "But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever be more than these cometh of evil." (Nothing to do with the Beatles, then, although one of the shorter sections in the *Introduction*, which is largely pieced together from short extracts from the newspapers of Hungary's hardline Stalinist era of the early 1950s against which the 1956 uprising broke out, bears the title [in Hungarian, of course] *A Hard Day's Night*).

To return to *Sworn Statement,* Esterházy gives a splendid summary of the plot:

> The man, who was the same age as me, smoothed his hair with a tired gesture and quietly spat back a sentence to the effect that he wished to inform me about the relevant currency and foreign-exchange regulations, the upper limit to the amounts of money that may be exported, and the obligation to obtain an official permit for the exportation of sums exceeding this limit. I quickly closed my eyes in order to find my way back to the end of the world: "Dearest Mummy, help! Help me just one more time, dearest Mummy." For that sentence had immediately evoked in me, accursed literature, the bloody vision of Imre Kertész's *Sworn Statement,* which happened to have elevated (or rather pushed, shoved) a customs story to his interpretation of life. More currency than permitted, forced to alight at Hegyeshalom, etc. It was not the image of my mother that came to life before my closed eyes but, far more hopeless, that of Imre Kertész. I saw him: his long, hunched, heavy figure, an anti-Michael Kohlhaas who is not in search of his truth, for his truth has already found him. I saw his sentences, each in itself, those long, hunched, heavy sentences and the way they totter, inexorably, towards the last naked insight, and in the meantime my colleague goes his own way. You see, he understands his life; he has avidly clutched at the

aggression shown towards him like a dagger—for what else could he do?—and directed its blade towards himself: but this time the strength and bitter pleasure with which his thoughts laid their hand on him, as it were, had almost shocked him with their unfeigned ferocity. *All things, all things, / all things I know, / all is clear to me now! / I hear the rustle / of your ravens' wings...*—yes, the cup was full, he was unable, it seems, to bear any more wounds.

Why the preoccupation with customs officers? The Hungarian word for a customs officer *(vámos)* sounds very like (indeed only has an extra consonant), and therefore served as a widely understood coded reference to, the acronym *ávós* by which security operatives (spooks) of the State Security Department were known (*The Failure* is set in a state run by the customs department, like the ÁVO in Hungary or KGB in the Soviet Union). Aside from the above quote from *Götterdämmerung*, the eclectic list of references ranges over the likes of Plato ("Now it is time we were going, I to die and you to live; but which of us has the happier prospect is unknown to anyone but God": *The Last Days of Socrates*), Rilke ("One of them with a sort of night-stand drawer slung on a white strap round his neck": *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*), and Kafka ("Judgement does not come suddenly; the proceedings gradually merge into the judgement": *The Trial*)—and does anyone need telling where *Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate* or *Arbeit macht frei* come from? In addition, there are at least four or five references to Camus's *The Stranger:* "Why, why did you fire at a dead body?"; "In any case, you're always partly to blame" (or is that Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*?: "The main thing is that, however you look at it, it always turns out that you are chiefly to blame for everything..."); and "Am I to be decapitated in a public square in the name of the French people?".

How does *Sworn Statement* lead back to the Kertész works described earlier? For one thing, immediately after the author's figure has been seen off the train at the main Hungarian border crossing into Austria (Hegyeshalom) for carrying unauthorised foreign currency, comes a direct quotation from *The Failure*:

I am not allowed to brood further as my name is called: "so he jumped up in order to follow the customs man into his office." They are all sitting there, the men in grey. "One was smoking a cigarette, the second was leafing through some kind of documents, the third scrutinising him—they so fused together in his blurred gaze that Köves saw them as a single three-headed, six-armed machine"—my own prophetic words from my novel *The Failure.* My man, the chief customs officer, puts some papers in front of me: I should read and sign them. What's this? The statement, he says. I start to read it. At the very first sentence, which takes up nearly three lines, I find myself gasping for breath. At this moment a flash of lucidity seizes, engulfs and enthrals me. At this moment I finally realise exactly what has befallen me. I could almost cry out Eureka! *All things, all things, / all things I know, / all is clear to me now! / I hear the rustle / of your ravens' wings...*—yes, those three lines state, in essence, that on the 16th day of April 1991, etc., having notified me of the relevant currency and foreign-exchange regulations, the upper limit to the amounts of money that may be exported, and the obligation to obtain an official permit for the exportation of sums exceeding that limit, he, the customs man, had enquired, etc. Yet the man had notified me of nothing. As far as enquiring goes, he

had enquired, though certainly not in a proper manner, fully in accordance with the regulations, but more in a form of a snap cross-examination. With that the matter had already been decided, a specific mechanism was set in motion. For at least fifty years, ever since my country entered into war against the civilized world and, above all, against itself, ever since then—except for a break of, let's say, three years—every law of the land has invariably been unlawful. What my ears picked out behind the customs official's deceitful question, with its automatic presumption of guilt...

Camus's Meursault has the feeling: "In a way they seemed to be conducting the case independently of me. Things were happening without my even intervening. My fate was being decided without anyone asking my opinion." *Sworn Statement* has a hilarious *jeu d'esprit:*

I begin to be imbued by a sure feeling that I know all too well from my, at least in this regard, all too rich experience of life: in a certain sense I have forsaken the scene... one is secretly aware—and maybe not even regretting—that the end is inexorable... we perceive with absolute clarity that we have become part of a certain clockwork folly which is—or so we believe—totally alien to us, to our very essence, and that bothers us a little throughout; but we are, quite simply, no more capable of checking this self-propelled mechanism than the undignified, side-splitting movements of our diaphragms on viewing a low farce.

The closing sentence of *Sworn Statement,* appropriately enough, swings into a final quotation:

At this point I come to my senses. We are passing Tatabánya again. In the meantime, my journey too is over, and see! I understand my life. Now, as ever, since I can do nothing else, I clutch greedily at the aggression that has been shown towards me as at a dagger, and direct its blade towards myself; but the strength and bitter pleasure with which my thoughts, as it were, lay their hand on me this time almost shock me with their unfeigned ferocity. *All things, all things, / all things I know, / all is clear to me now! / I hear the rustle / of your ravens' wings...*—yes, the cup is full, I am unable, it seems, to sustain any more wounds. Six decades of varied, albeit monotonous dictatorships, now the as yet unnamed residue dictatorship of all that, had worn down an immunity that I had built up by my tolerance—pointless tolerance. On my riddled, mortally wounded body, now held together solely by the bundles of my nerves, there is no place left for a hypodermic needle, never mind a spear tip. I have lost my tolerance, I can be wounded no more. I am lost. To all appearances I am travelling with this train, but the train is merely transporting a corpse. I am dead. *For the final consummation and for me to feel less lonely, my last wish was that...*

Except that Kertész wittily subverts this by replacing Camus's last words ("...there should be a crowd of spectators at my execution and that they should greet me with cries of hatred") with his own ("...that on my grave or my urn, or whatever should remain of me, if not as a sign of rehabilitation, then at least as a sign of forgiveness, a customs officer should lay a single flower stem..."). Esterházy, rather than seeking to cap this, opts for:

I was sitting together with some Italians. They did not trouble themselves over me; Italians do not trouble themselves over pangs of conscience. There was no doubt about my guilt. But why does God not ask? why the uniform? Can God stay silent, but not a customs official? If the law was that it was up to me to say one number, then he says a number, then we compare the two numbers, that can be done. And if mine is greater than... Is that the law? a > b, is that the law? First I thought about Imre Kertész, then about the customs official. I did not wish to come to terms with what had happened; I called on my feeling of guilt for a proper punishment. It even crossed my mind to approach the customs official: I had something private to talk about with him, would he mind if I were to tell him everything, the and-so-on, Imre, the short story, freedom, slavery... That was the moment when I irrevocably discovered fear within me. That it is inside me, and so I have it within me. In the same way as I have lungs, a liver, a cerebral cortex inside me. One cannot feel fear occasionally; one can only feel fear eternally. That is how it will be. Yes, the cup is not full, I shall be wounded again and again. And I have not lost the capacity for suffering: I can be wounded. I am not lost, but I might be the very next second. I am travelling by train. I am not dead. But like a ferret I keep watch searchingly.

Let me end on a couple of essentially literary considerations, as one of my intentions is to show that Kertész, however much he may deny it, is a man of letters through and through. How, for example, should the shorter pieces touched on here be classified? If length is a yardstick of a literary work's genre, I would simply note that *Detective Story* and *The Pathseeker* are both roughly 25,000-words long; *The Union Jack* (not considered here), about 15,000 words; and *Sworn Statement* just 8,000 words. *The Failure,* by contrast, weighs in at nearly 120,000 words; indeed, the Köves novel-within-the-novel alone is almost exactly the same length as its counterpart, *Fatelessness* (even 'I, the Executioner', the fragment of a novel-within-the-novel-within-the-novel included in it, would come to around 4,000 words), making it easily the heftiest of Kertész's fiction works. By that yardstick, the shorter works might all be classified as 'short novels' or novelettes or novellas. But then, for what it's worth, I might point out that *The Stranger,* which is usually regarded as Camus's first novel, is barely a few thousand words longer. Moreover, all three of the Beckett late pieces *(Company, Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Worstward Ho)* that are nowadays published together under the umbrella title *Nohow On* are respectively just 10,000, 4,000 and 5,000-plus words long yet were regarded by their author as novels, while Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas* (about 40,000 words), which many would regard as an archetypal novella or even novel, is referred by the British publisher of a modern translation as one of the writer's "eight masterly short stories".

That in turn begs another question. It became quite fashionable to refer to, first, a trilogy of Kertész novels (*Fatelessness, The Failure* and *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*) until *Liquidation,* a stripling of little over 30,000 words by comparison, appeared, so people then started referring to the tetralogy of "Holocaust-related" works. Well, in that case one wonders on what grounds are works like *The Pathseeker* and *The Union Jack,* or *Sworn Statement* for that matter, excluded from the list, thereby making up, say, a heptalogy? Or maybe a modern-day Heptameron? For what it is worth, this

translator feels that it is more profitable to look at the works as contrasting pairs that are in dialogue with one another. The most complex of all the works is demonstrably even in dialogue with itself at multiple levels. But would that be too simple?

Fittingly, one might leave the final word with the author:

> Whether it's trilogy or tetralogy—that doesn't change anything. The truth is that with my work everything is connected with everything else, but those connections arise by an organic process without my having made them fit some premeditated literary box of tricks. They come out so unintentionally that I often surprise myself. Those are the rare lucid moments when one suddenly becomes aware that every line, every sentence that one writes is operating in the force field of a kind coherence from which we are able to surmise the presence of a more solid reality, of our genuine existence, lurking at the very bottom of our existence. That's sufficient for me to turn my back on the trilogy with a shrug of the shoulders.[15] ❧

NOTES

1 ■ In: *Collected Shorter Plays*. New York, Grove Press, 1984.
2 ■ Translated as *Fatelessness*. New York, Vintage Books, 2004 and London, Harvill Secker (2005, hardback) and Vintage (2006, as paperback entitled *Fateless*).
3 ■ New York: Knopf and London, Harvill Secker, January 2008.
4 ■ To be published: New York, Melville House, March 2008.
5 ■ *Worstward Ho,* in: Samuel Beckett, *Nohow On*. New York, Grove Press, 1996.
6 ■ Translated as *Kaddish for an Unborn Child.* New York, Vintage Books, 2004.
7 ■ Translation first appeared as "The Union Jack," *Hungarian Quarterly* vol. 43, no. 168 (Winter 2002), pp. 3–28. A slightly reedited version of this was published in the UK in: *Leopard V. An Island of Sound: Hungarian Poetry and Fiction before and beyond the Iron Curtain,* eds. George Szirtes & Miklós Vajda. London, Harvill Press, 2004, pp. 86–116.
8 ■ Published as "Sworn Statement," *Hungarian Quarterly* vol. 42, no. 163 (Autumn 2001), pp. 45–58.
9 ■ A very small selection of the texts that relate specifically to Kertész's fiction works has been published as: "*Galley-Boat Log (Gályanapló)*: Excerpts," in: *Imre Kertész and Holocaust Literature* eds. Louise O. Vasvári & Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, West Lafayette, Indiana, Purdue University Press, 2005, pp. 97–110.
10 ■ A selection amounting to almost half the text has been published as: "Someone Else: A Chronicle of the Change," in: *Common Knowledge* (Duke University Press) vol. 10, no.2, Spring 2004, pp. 314–346.
11 ■ *Liquidation.* New York, Knopf, 2004 & Vintage Books, 2005; also London, Harvill Secker, 2006 & Vintage Books, 2007.
12 ■ *Imre Kertész and Holocaust Literature,* edited by Louise O. Vasvári & Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, brings together assessments by 20 academics from eight countries and includes a comprehensive bibliography of publications in major languages by or about the author.
13 ■ In her essay "The Novelness of Imre Kertész's *Sorstalanság (Fatelessness)*" in *Imre Kertész and Holocaust Literature* (pp. 258–270), Louise O. Vasvári points to this and several other intriguing parallels with *The Stranger*, from the opening sentence onwards.
14 ■ This is strictly a side-issue, but the over-interpretation inherent in the word "outsider" makes for spurious difficulties when it comes to translating for UK readers, for instance, a recent book by the Hungarian writer András Petőcz which borrows directly on the French title of Camus' book, as evidenced by its unidentified epigraph ("Perhaps because of the shadows on his face, he seemed to be laughing"), only makes sense if rendered as *The Strangers* (or just possibly *The Foreigners,* but not *The Outsiders* or, for that matter "Indifference"). Kertész himself certainly first encountered the work under the title of "Indifference" during the 1957 Book Week in Budapest: "A yellow-backed little volume came to my hand, an unfamiliar book by a French author with a name that was unknown to me. While standing there I read a few sentences before looking at the jacket: it was priced at 12 forints... ...that was the second fatal blow for me. I didn't get over it for years" (*The File on K.*, pp. 190–191).
15 ■ *The File on K.*, pp. 240–241.

Ivan Sanders

Eternal Operetta

András Gerő, Dorottya Hargitai and Tamás Gajdó: *A Csárdáskirálynő: Egy monarchikum története* (The Csárdás Princess: The History of a Monarchicum). Budapest, Habsburg Történeti Intézet/Pannonica Kiadó, 2006, 172 pp., illustrated.

The original title of Imre [Emmerich] Kálmán's best-known and most beloved operetta was the alliterative but rather conventional-sounding *Es lebe die Liebe!* (Long Live Love!). When rehearsals began in Vienna in the autumn of 1915, this was still the working title, but weeks before the première it was changed to the more intriguing, and more Hungarian, *Die Czardasfürstin (The Csárdás Princess).* A year later, when Kálmán's operetta was staged in Budapest's King Theatre, perhaps not surprisingly, the noble rank in the German title was ratcheted up a notch, from princess to queen, and the Hungarian title became *A csárdáskirályné.* In time this was further modified, with *királyné,* which can be a queen consort, becoming *királynő*, which can only mean a queen regnant. So this perennial favorite is known in Hungary as *Csárdáskirálynő.*

It is nevertheless important to note the original titles; for, in spite of the fact that the composer was Hungarian, and one of the two authors of the book, Béla Jenbach, was Hungarian-born, too, most of Kálmán's operettas were born in Vienna and were products of Viennese popular culture. Put another way, they were representative examples of a musical genre which in many ways unified the multifarious Austro-Hungarian Empire. The term "Monarchicum" (i.e., a Monarchy specialty), coined by the authors of the book under review, refers of course to this aspect of *The Csárdás Princess.* Clearly, Kálmán's tuneful and rousing Hungarian-style music in this and other operettas of his was written primarily with Viennese audiences in mind, in whom the images, or stereotypes, of the fierce and exotic Hungarian race were still alive. It should also be stressed that the *The Csárdás Princess* found its true audience in Central Europe. Unlike Lehár's *The Merry Widow* or Johann Strauss Jr.'s *Fledermaus* —which while products of the same culture have remained a staple of the light opera repertoire the world over—*The Csárdás Princess*'s strongest appeal was, and is, in countries that were formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In the English-speaking world, for instance, it is far less well known and less popular—although it was introduced in New York under the title *The Riviera Girl* as early as 1917. One of its adapters, the British humorist P.G. Wodehouse, shifted the setting from Vienna and Budapest to Monte

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Carlo. Still, not even this could save *The Riviera Girl;* it was a flop on Broadway. What explains, one wonders, the more limited appeal of the *Csárdás Princess?* And why is it that the country where its popularity has lasted the longest is Hungary?

This source book on the Kálmán operetta, written by András Gerő in collaboration with Dorottya Hargitai and Tamás Gajdó, tries to provide answers to both questions, especially the second one. *The Csárdás Princess*'s lack of universal appeal, despite the surefire success of Kálmán's music, may be attributed to the weakness of the original book by Leo Stein and Béla Jenbach. Critics have complained about this from the very beginning. The Cinderella-type story of a girl who would marry above her station is at once trite and unnecessarily complicated, with plot twists that are less than gripping. It is also true, however, that for contemporary Viennese audiences there was something delicious about the story of a music hall chanteuse in love with a handsome prince who has every intention to marry her, embarrassing thereby his parents who are connected to the highest circles of the Austrian aristocracy. Of course they do everything in their power to prevent this marriage from taking place, and of course their machinations are bound to fail—the young couple love each other too much.

Early twentieth-century operettas were often about aristocrats and royalty (the words count, countess, princess, duchess, empress figure in most titles), but they were written for the bourgeoisie. As elsewhere, middle-class readers and theatre-goers had an insatiable curiosity about the lives of the upper classes, and also a keen interest in their follies and indiscretions. Viennese operetta was heavily influenced by French comic opera, above all by Jacques Offenbach's frivolous concoctions, which were notable for their biting social satire. The drolleries of French operetta became earthier in Vienna, the comedy a little broader as it conformed to native theatre traditions—although the Viennese offspring could at times be as irreverent and wicked as its Parisian antecedent. Conflicts such as the one depicted in *The Csárdás Princess* were familiar on and offstage. Liaisons between high-born men and women in the not-quite-respectable performing arts: actresses, singers, or—*horribile dictu*—chorus girls were not uncommon. Let's not forget: a well-known actress, Katharina Schratt, was for years the "special lady-friend" of the Emperor himself. All the same, some critics in Vienna clucked their disapproval of the book by Stein and Jenbach. "The librettists lit into the aristocracy a little too strongly," wrote one. Another reviewer found the whole thing downright shocking: "How could it ever happen that a member of our higher nobility or the officer corps should get himself involved with a hussy from the vaudeville stage, and talk to her about marriage and such?" In spite of bad reviews and the fact that the show opened in the midst of war, *The Csárdás Princess* had a long and successful run in Vienna. In little over a year it was performed four hundred times. The lavish Budapest production was no less successful, and one reason for its success may have been that the adapter of the book, Andor Gábor, made the operetta, Hungarian in spirit to begin with, even more Hungarian by changing, among other things, the Romanian-sounding name of the variety hall singer, Sylva Varescu, to Szilvia Vereckei, which couldn't be more Hungarian, alluding as it does to the Verecke Pass, through which the Magyar tribes under the leadership of their chieftain, Árpád, were supposed to have entered the Carpathian basin at the end of the ninth century. Following the Budapest premiere, *The Csárdás Princess* was staged in every major Hungarian city, and there were a number of famous revivals of the

operetta during the interwar and immediate post-World War Two years, as well as German film versions featuring Hungarian actors. But by far the most memorable and celebrated revival came in 1954. Indeed, the huge success of this historic production provides the answer to the question raised earlier about the reason for the extraordinary longevity of this operetta on Hungarian stages. The chapter on this production, "*The Csárdás Princess* and Socialism", is the most interesting and informative in the present volume; in fact, it is an acute case study of popular art triumphing over political strictures.

After the Communist takeover, operetta became a suspect art form, a vestige of the old bourgeois ways. Hard-line critics argued that for all its satiric edge and delightful music, the typical Viennese and Budapest operetta was in awe of the privileged classes and glamorised the lives of the idle and decadent rich. The problem was that audiences clamoured for these discredited and obsolete musical plays. So in the early nineteen-fifties, Budapest's Metropolitan Operetta Theatre tried to come up with a few new "socialist" operettas and began to recast old ones to make them appear "progressive". During the period of the Thaw after Stalin's death, the prerequisites for staging prewar operettas eased somewhat. A playwright of the period could declare in a popular magazine that operetta is what it is; it need not be naturalistic, educative or, by hook or by crook, relevant. Thus, on November 12, 1954, a brand new production of *The Csárdás Princess* opened in the Operetta Theatre with a substantially revised libretto, the work of István Békeffy and Dezső Kellér, writers for the musical and cabaret stage. The present source book includes both libretti, and it must be said that the Békeffy-Kellér variant is far superior to the original. While it is true that certain changes were made so that the new production would pass muster with the watchdogs sitting in the Ministry of Culture, the reworked book on the whole is wittier, more sophisticated, dramaturgically more sound and generally more entertaining than the old one.[1]

It's important to note, though, that not all the revisions were politically motivated. The librettists wanted to create appropriate roles for two stars of the musical theatre: Hanna Honthy, the reigning queen of Hungarian operetta, and Kamill Feleki, a versatile actor of great charm and dexterity. As Hanna Honthy at this time was past sixty, she could no longer play a "chansonette" who sings at the Orpheum, as Budapest's most famous nightspot was known at the turn of the twentieth century, so they enlarged for her the role of the young prince's mother, who, though a princess herself through marriage, had once been a *csárdáskirálynő,* that is, a celebrated singer and dancer at the Orpheum, but through a series of advantageous marriages wound up as the wife of Prince Leopold Maria Lippert-Weilersheim. All this was revealed in the original story, too, but not much was made of it. Here, however, the Princess's checkered past is played up. But in spite of the revelations, the Princess in her present position would stop at nothing to

1 ■ There are also good things to be said about the original book, especially the lyrics. The noted drama critic and all-round theatre maven, Péter Molnár Gál, has compared some of the original lyrics with the Hungarian version and shown convincingly that the German lyrics are more colloquial and unpolished, and therefore more natural, than the overpoeticised, prettified translations by Andor Gábor. Of course, for those who grew up hearing the Hungarian words, these translated verses are the real thing, even if they know it's not great poetry. (See Péter Molnár Gál, *Honthy Hanna és kora* [Hanna Honthy and Her Age], Budapest, Magvető, 1997, pp. 82-94.)

prevent her son from marrying a mere "chansonette". In the new production, then, the rather insignificant Anhilta, the Prince's wife in the original book, became the scheming, conniving yet disarmingly charming, utterly irresistible Cecília. Hanna Honthy proved once again that even as a "mature" woman she could be the prima donna.[2]

The part of Miska, the headwaiter at the Orpheum, was similarly built up and turned into a meaty role that would showcase Kamill Feleki's many talents. In the revised story line, the worldly-wise and unflappable Miska turns up everywhere, and always near Cecília, whom he knew and admired way back when. By rewriting these roles, Békeffy and Kellér actually shifted the focus of the story to the two older characters, which was just as well, because the romance between the prince and the showgirl was never that interesting.

Audiences loved the operetta. It would probably not be too much to say that the 1954 revival of *The Csárdás Princess* was one of the most successful theatrical productions of the postwar period in Hungary. As required, aristocrats were presented as nitwits. But that didn't bother anyone; it was all in fun anyway. What people enjoyed seeing on stage was the charm and grace of a bygone era which contrasted sharply with the grim Hungarian reality of the nineteen-fifties. And they adored their favourite actors, above all Hanna Honthy. The previously mentioned playwright, Miklós Gyárfás, who asked the guardians of socialist ethics and aesthetics to let operetta be what it is, also wrote that operetta should be like Hanna Honthy: "lightly witty, charmingly wry, tuneful, colourful, and able to soar". Honthy played Cecília hundreds of times and was identified with the role to the end of her life. (She died in 1978 at the age of eighty-five.)

Of course, there were sceptical voices from the beginning that raised the issue of inconsistencies in Cecília's beloved character. In the section of the source book devoted to the critical response to the 1954 revival, we find a number of such objections. For example, the theatre critic of the Communist Party daily, *Szabad Nép,* pointed out that "a woman of easy virtue who, denying her past, has clawed her way to the top of society and is now trying to prevent two young people from finding happiness—such a woman cannot be so likeable." But then, reinventing oneself or airbrushing unwanted specks out of one's past was not necessarily a deplorable act in the Hungary of the nineteen-fifties. This was a time when everyone had something to hide—people were endlessly rewriting their CV's in a desperate attempt to satisfy the changing requirements of good citizenship in a socialist society. Miska the headwaiter makes this comment to an old roué in the second act, clearly alluding to Cecília: "These people are mad at their past, I tell you; they are not on speaking terms with their own selves." People sitting in the

2 ■ Hanna Honthy remained the quintessential prima donna to the end of her days. Her entrances and exits were legendary, as were the ovations she received regularly after her first entrance. With advancing years she became more demanding and capricious. Her fellow actors knew that there would be hell to pay if anyone dared to upstage her. She and Kamill Feleki were partners many times and seemed to be the best of friends, but according to Budapest theatre lore, their relationship was stormy. One often recounted incident occurred when after a performance of *The Csárdás Princess* she decided to take a solo bow and not one with her co-star as they had always done. When Feleki tried to take her hand and lead her to the footlights, she struck him hard with the parasol she was still holding. Kamill Feleki controlled himself, but once backstage, he said he would never again appear with Hanna Honthy and would never again act in *The Csárdás Princess.* Not only did he keep his word, he left the Operetta Theatre and joined the company of players at the Petőfi Theatre (now called Thália), where he excelled in non-musical roles, too.

Operetta Theatre at the time must have smiled knowingly at this. Other critics were concerned about the excessive popularity of operetta. An article in the journal *Népművelés* [People's Culture] bemoaned the fact that "we have paid homage in epidemic proportions throughout the country and even beyond our borders, in theatres and concert halls, on radio and film, to *The Csárdás Princess,* which has no classical value and is not modern either." The veteran theatre director Miklós Szinetár, who was in his twenties when he staged the '54 revival, has said: "Operetta was a persecuted art form and has remained that." Ideologues in the nineteen-fifties had their own reasons to despise operetta, but before and since then high-brow critics and others have repeated the charges against it *ad nauseam*—that the stories are inane, predictable, formulaic, out-of-date, the music simplistic, catchy but kitschy, and so on. Imre Kálmán, who was trained as a classical musician and composer, and was by all accounts a modest man, said himself in an interview in 1913: "I know that half a page from the score of a Liszt work is worth more than all the operettas I have written and will ever write. But I also know that half a page from that score calls for an audience with a high degree of musical sophistication, and that constitutes only a small fraction of the general audiences that attend theatre performances."

In the nineteen-fifties, operetta-lovers received a boost from unexpected quarters. The authors recount this part of the story in a section entitled "Operetta Diplomacy". About a year after the opening of the new version of *The Csárdás Princess,* the entire company went on a tour of the Soviet Union, which turned out to be a triumph. They performed several operettas, including a Soviet one, but what audiences everywhere wanted to see was Imre Kálmán's great hit. The tour ended in Leningrad, but the company was asked to return to Moscow for one more performance, which was attended by practically the entire Soviet leadership, including Khrushchev, Kaganovich, Voroshilov, Mikoyan and Suslov. Actually, outside of Central Europe, the country where Imre Kálmán's operettas scored the greatest successes was Soviet Russia. *The Csárdás Princess* (known there as *Sylva*) was a particular favourite, its popularity going back to the thirties. A Soviet film version of the operetta came out in 1944; and in the nineteen-eighties, a film about Kálmán's life, a Soviet-Hungarian co-production, was released. Nevertheless, it is a sad commentary on the state of Soviet music that when influential Soviet composers visited Budapest in the early fifties, they were full of praise for the music of Lehár and Kálmán, intimating that there was more to like in operetta than in the elitist, "formalist" music of a Béla Bartók.

The Csárdás Princess survived its detractors as well as those who overpraised it. In the decades following the 1954 revival, it was a more or less permanent fixture on the Hungarian stage. The Operetta Theatre reprised it at regular intervals with—as long as she was alive—Hanna Honthy in the starring role. It was also a mainstay of provincial theatres, helping them get over fiscal rough patches. The enormous popularity of the piece became a given, an incontrovertible, unavoidable fact of life. Adventurous theatre people tried to face this fact by mounting unconventional productions of the operetta. There have been non-musical versions, surrealist versions, absurdist versions; *The Csárdás Princess* survived these experiments, too. As the authors point out, the operetta also survived the end of Communism. In the last ten-to-fifteen years, there have been at least a half a dozen new productions of it across the country.

The attractively produced and richly illustrated source book (or case book) put out by the Institute of Habsburg History of

Budapest offers a great deal to the reader in addition to the full text of both libretti—a survey of the composer's life, concise essays on the historical background and theatre history, and longer ones on the political and cultural context of the '54 revival. Special mention should be made of the extensive photographic material included in the volume, as well as reproductions of *Csárdás Princess* memorabilia: posters, playbills, original scores, all of which were imaginatively selected by Tamás Gajdó. Particularly memorable are three pictures of a performance of *The Csárdás Princess* put on by Hungarian prisoners of war in Russia in 1919. Judging from the photos, this was no amateur show, but a highly professional production with elaborate and expensive-looking sets and costumes. What the publication does not offer—and being a cross between a coffee-table book and a volume of studies, perhaps cannot offer—are thoroughgoing scholarly analyses of the operetta's music, language, or its popular culture content and sources. Yet, these are the types of essays that have begun to appear ever since a few prominent historians—Péter Hanák in Hungary, Moritz Csáky in Austria—began to consider operetta a legitimate subject for scholarly investigation, and marked out areas of research for future scholars.

The authors of the book suggest—correctly, I believe—that not only is *The Csárdás Princess* a typical product of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, so was the composer. Born in 1882 on the shore of Lake Balaton in the then still village of Siófok into a traditional Jewish family, Imre Kálmán was a loyal son of Hungary and a loyal citizen of the Monarchy. Stefan Zweig in his memoirs, *The World of Yesterday,* lists Kálmán as a matter of course among Jewish Austrians who made significant contributions to Viennese culture. Yet, Imre Kálmán—though he spent much of his life outside his native country—never wanted to be known as anything but a Hungarian composer. ❧

Tamás Koltai

The War of All Against All

László Márton: *A nagyratörő* (The Pretender to Greatness) • György Spiró: *Árpád-ház* (House of Árpád) • György Spiró: *Ahogy tesszük* (As We Do It)

Bellum omnium contra omnes was how Thomas Hobbes laconically summed up the condition of mankind in 1651, a generation after Shakespeare's historical plays reflected this judgment. László Márton, born in Budapest in 1959, clearly had Shakespeare in mind as a model for his magnificent trilogy, *The Pretender to Greatness*. He employs Shakespeare's dramatic form in order to portray one of the bloodiest periods in Hungary's history: the final years of the sixteenth century, which happens to coincide with Shakespeare's early work for the stage (the events in Márton's trilogy unfold between 1593 and 1598).

Already established as a fine novelist and translator from German (his version of Goethe's *Faust* has been highly praised), Márton put *The Pretender to Greatness* to paper in the early Nineties. Although in published form (1994) it had met with critical acclaim, only the first part had hitherto been staged, by a Transylvanian Hungarian theatre company in Çluj (Kolozsvár), Romania. It has finally reached the Hungarian stage, at the Gárdonyi Theatre of Eger, and again it is this part that is performed. What might be the reason for such a delay in mounting a trio of plays of such unarguable distinction—no one wants them, not even the National Theatre, which ought to consider it a bounden duty to perform them?

Although the work makes large demands on its huge cast—which alone would single out the National Theatre, with its financial and technical resources—this is not the main reason for the delay in bringing it to the stage. For Márton has lighted upon a previously unexploited seam to mine for a Hungarian historical play. By and large, Schiller has been the example for Hungarian drama rather than Shakespeare's raw and true-to-life approach. Loud proclamations of self-justifying ideas and missionary pathos all too often have drowned the cacophony of reality or the author's personal voice. There have been periodic attempts to counterbalance the Hungarian theatre's prevailing air of national grief and tragic sublimity—plays by Dezső Szomory, Milán Füst and Sándor Weöres come to mind—but most of them (with Szomory's exception) took years, even decades to reach the stage. This too has been the fate of Márton's—and, as we shall see, György Spiró's—similarly inspired plays. It would seem that it is their unflinching gaze on history and reality that makes them unwelcome.

Tamás Koltai

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

The trilogy is set at the beginning of what is known as the Fifteen Years' War, when the small principality of Transylvania, caught in the middle of a life-and-death struggle between the Ottoman empire, and the Habsburg dominions and the Holy Roman Empire, had to decide which of the two great powers it was going to side with. This new production of the first part of the trilogy opens in a Transylvania that was coming to the end of a fairly peaceful and prosperous period under Turkish suzerainty. In the shadow of renewed war between the great powers, the country's irresolute, young, quick-tempered and fickle Prince Sigismund Báthory is caught between a faction of pro-Turkish noblemen and the attempts by Carillo, the Jesuit who was his tutor and is now his confessor, to forge an alliance with the Catholic empire. He is driven in turns by his own despotic leanings and by his refusal to obey what a ruler's sense of duty demands; most of all he would like to abandon his responsibilities and make for the home of the arts, his beloved Italy. His relations with his cousin Boldizsár Báthory, the commander of Transylvania's army, are similarly ambivalent. The most powerful of the pro-Ottoman barons wants to strengthen the Ottoman party by arranging for Boldizsár to marry his daughter; meanwhile Sigismund has chosen a Habsburg bride and is awaiting her arrival. There is a clash between the two parties at the diet; Sigismund, in a moment of weakness, declares himself unfit to rule and relinquishes the crown to Boldizsár. He has second thoughts, retracts and has his opponents—his cousin among them—rounded up and executed. Betrayals, outrages, assassinations and anarchy follow. The German bride finally arrives at the end of Part I to find a groom who retains his few remaining supporters through terror.

The following two parts unfold between similar coordinates. The events and names would say little to a reader who is not reasonably well-versed in Hungarian history. What is crucial, though, is the vision that is laid out by the piece, written in Shakespearean blank verse. Because the poetic force and harsh rhetoric are not simply the trappings of a verbal theatre, the intellectual spotlight illuminates those monumental forces that we are familiar with from Renaissance times. Violence, cloak and dagger—all aimed at power. That is the work's Shakespearean heft: the characters unbare their secrets in soliloquies. Sigismund is haunted by the spirits of his ancestors, by his predecessors and other historical figures in the same way as Banquo's descendants torment Macbeth. Boldizsár's widow invokes the curses of a Queen Margaret on his whole milieu. Hired assassins go about their tasks with blood-curdling irony just as in *Richard III*, and the Chronicler sums up the political events just like the Scrivener of that play.

Márton erects his own dramatic edifice, but he takes care to incorporate old and solid building blocks into the foundations and sets small plaques of homage into the robust main walls in the form of literary allusions and references. His language manages, without resorting to the archaic, to unite mythological imagery with vulgarity and leg-pulling modernism. Its idiom plays with gradations of oratory from Renaissance obscenities to the modern grotesque. The language of the trilogy becomes progressively more vulgar as the ardour for nation-building is extinguished in one character after the other. Anachronisms pile up, ripostes are deliberately made ever more prosaic, chunks of the plebeian vernacular appear with growing frequency; all stand in sharp contrast to the Shakespearean cadences, with the rhymed couplets that mark the close of every scene.

Tibor Csizmadia, the director of this production, has suggested that Márton "is not seeking to illustrate a fairy tale, and wishes to avoid any impression of setting in

motion on the stage kings in suits with briefcases... The director is faced with a similar dilemma. Should he put on a historical tableau, or should he parade a series of figures from contemporary reality under the guise of a historical play?" He admits to seeking something between the two: he tries to discover a strain of modern thinking in the personalities and conflicts of the historical figures, something valid not simply in terms of day-to-day polemics, but also at a deeper level of correlation. It has to be said that this does not come off entirely. The stage setting, surprisingly, is a rooftop inclined at a 45-degree angle in which dormer windows offer ledges or footholds. The cast is dressed in garb close to modern-day jogging strip and trainers (with appropriate historical requisites also indicated) to give them some chance of perching on the slope, a space which offers little variation and makes scenes somewhat static. (The only visually arresting moments involve the imprisonments and executions, with the prisoners and the dead sliding remorselessly down into the trap of the orchestra pit.) Even in this highly truncated version, with many of the characters coalesced, Part I proved too much for the company to handle.

Plays by György Spiró regularly reach the stage. *House of Árpád* was conceived in 1994–95 and it too, by strange coincidence, has only just received its much-delayed première, almost simultaneously with Márton's. It too is a piece about Hungarian history, though the action is set much earlier, in the early twelfth century and in the kingdom of Hungary proper.

The play concerns two members of Hungary's ruling house, Coloman (or Kálmán) and Béla II, who as an infant (together with his father) had his eyes put out on the orders of Coloman. The latter would have had Béla castrated as well—at least, in Spiró's version—but the priests charged with concealing the boy refused to carry out this order. It was thus that, after eventually succeeding to the throne on the death of Coloman's son, Béla was able to father a son who was able to secure the continuity of the House of Árpád.

As with *The Pretender to Greatness* the play revolves around a barbaric struggle for power, with family members, whether brothers or cousins, vying tooth and claw against one another with the aim of obliterating the "blood relation" so that no rival can present a threat to the current occupant of the throne or have legal title to depose him. In Spiró the characters are even more merciless and murderous than in Márton, involved in a succession of atrocities, butcheries and mass murders. They are not given the slightest chance to launch out into poetry or flights of rhetoric: they speak in prose, in the uncouth vernacular of today, which is only accentuated by the occasional archaic locution. The author presents a historical model, underlined by the fact that the pairs of fathers and sons—murderers and the victims who in turn grow into murderers—are played by the same actors, as indeed are some of their collateral descendants, who likewise emulate their relatives and forebears.

The play starts with a pledge of allegiance taken by two brothers, and it ends with a similar oath sworn by another pair of brothers. The first pledge is followed all too soon by carnage, and quite evidently this is also going to carry on after the closing affirmation of fraternal loyalty, because the mechanism of history is remorseless and implacable—a notion introduced by Jan Kott, the great Polish commentator on Shakespeare's plays. In that sense, *House of Árpád* can be considered Shakespearean, even though it lacks any of the stylistic features or poetry of that great model.

The Budapest Kamara Theatre is a minuscule studio, where it was possible to strip the play to its bare bones, as a modern

parable. András Almási-Tóth's production conformed with the suits-and-briefcases approach; indeed, it had no real choice but to do so, and that choice—in contrast to grand tableaux—emphasises thoughts about the appalling inevitability of power that are articulated by characters within little more than an arm's reach of the audience. In such an intimate setting, the war of all against all shows itself to be a consequence of history that functions to the present day.

Not content with interrogating the past, Spiró also directly addresses the present—or at any rate the immediate past. He wrote *As We Do It* in 1989 and it was first staged that year; Budapest's Bárka Theatre is now putting on a revised version. Despite the title, there was not the least possibility of its having been conceived in a Shakespearean mould: it is a musical, co-written with the composer János Másik. The pair called it "A Ballad Opera for Today" on its first presentation, but that today has now become yesterday. Yet despite the nearly twenty years that have passed, the play hasn't in the least dated. Not long after it premiered, Hungary underwent its democratic transformation and the premonitory signs of this were already palpable. Curiously enough, far from brimming with confidence, the work is permeated by feelings of unease arising out of the past rather than by optimism for the future, the ghost of communism being still very much in evidence. Having said that, Spiró and Másik did not try to examine the ideology or politics of the day but rather the domain of private life, despite which—or perhaps because of which—the psychological misery that weighs on the characters' daily life came as a great shock for the audience.

As We Do It is a story about a divorce. Relations between Hero and Wife—they are given no other names—have broken down irreparably. Both educated and middle class, they have a young child and have a tiny apartment. They have no money, and they have to split all their possessions—the child too, figuratively speaking—in two, but that is not going to leave them enough to start living separately. The hassle over the divorce gives rise to mutual loathing, they lose their friends, normal human contacts, their self-respect. The time comes for living in rented rooms, drinking, disintegration. Their lives are ruined, though popular belief would see them as being that mainstay of society, the nuclear family, who should carry the dead weight of that society on their shoulders like the caryatids that support the cornices on old buildings. If they were to give way, the whole edifice—predicated on a community of human beings—would collapse. In the final scene of this production—an epilogue—a young man makes an appearance as one of a crowd in a busy subway. This is the couple's now grown-up son, who has long become a total stranger to them. The play thus ends on a sinking feeling of hopelessness for the future—yesterday's future, in other words, today.

Since then, the Berlin Wall has fallen, Hungary has acceded to the European Union and has demolished frontier posts under the Schengen Agreement. Freedom and a new order have arrived. Yet the change of regime did not alter role models or the means of earning a living overnight. Any belief that it might bring an improvement in our mentality or in how we relate to one another has proved illusory. The Berlin Wall inside people's souls that separates them from freedom has yet to fall; the mental barbed wire has not come down; and individually tailored free choices have still not been made. Hungarians are still laden with misgivings and tensions because their relations with one another are such that they continually harm mutual ties. Emotional balance sheets are chaotic, because the ways of making a living are chaotic.

As a result, *As We Do It* is still valid as a melodrama of lives that have gone off the rails: a marriage that has hit the buffers, a way of life that is devoid of prospects, a quality of life that is unspeakable—a private tragedy at a time of social turbulence. A bitter slice of reality that has been shorn of any new-found illusions, a private history, played out within crumbling frameworks for living, in which the crisis of divorce maps an existential and mental crisis, a lack of a civilized framework for living. And that is something everybody who lives in Hungary senses: the artificially inflamed political passions, the polarisation of society into left and right, the parading of racists and neo-Nazis on the streets.

The director, Róbert Alföldi, has extended this rewritten version through some of his staging. Hero and Woman have lost any individuality: they have no history or fate, they have merged into the crowd. Indeed, a mass effect dominates to the detriment of the personal: it is the director talking through the production by inscribing into it the politics of today. Spiró wrote about an inner crisis in which the world was reflected; Alföldi, on the other hand, magnifies the symptoms of external crisis by bringing onto stage the hooligans of the extreme right, the couple's anonymous grown-up son one of them—victim and perpetrator at one and the same time. This is the point that has been reached in a story that began with a change of regime and a theatrical première almost twenty years ago.

That is a galling lesson, and it is not of the slightest comfort to reflect that it can be inferred from history itself just as from all these three plays. ❧

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Re: The review of Michael Korda's memoir of 1956 ("Of Remembering and Forgetting", *HQ* 188, Winter 2007).

Checking and Forgetting

In the early Spring of 1957 the Lord brothers gave a party to welcome home Judy Cripps from Hungarian captivity. At the party the "Lords" and I recalled our own first meeting in Budapest on 31 October 1956, when they were advised to go to Peterfy hospital with their medicines. I have kept a diary of 1956 and 1957, unlike Korda, who as their companion, also stayed in Budapest at that time. At Magdalen College, where the party was, Michael, recounting his—then fresh—experiences, remembered episodes vividly and well. No doubt dates fade in fifty years, and good writing is not necessarily good history. After reading his preliminary article to his book, the Journey, I sent Korda my own faction of 1956, *A Time of Everything* to read. His letter of thanks included a remark that he "read it with interest." The fact is that impressions (true or false) are retained in the memory better than facts.

Dr Thomas Kabdebo

CORRECTIONS

The four short stories by Ervin Lázár in *HQ* 188 were translated by Judy Sollosy. We regret omitting her credit.

On page 52 of the same issue, our acknowledgement for permission to print "Struck by Apollo" by György Kurtág should have read: *courtesy of* signandsight.com, *a service of the journal* perlentaucher.de

Telling Stories Would Be a Good Start

Shane Danielsen in Conversation with Dávid Dercsényi

David Dercsényi: *You clearly like Hungarian movies: you did a retrospective of Jancsó's films as well as programming Mundruczó, Tarr and Hajdu in Edinburgh. After sitting through the 39th Film Week what did you think of it?*

Shane Danielsen: Whenever you have an event like a Hungarian film week it's going to be a very mixed bag because you're a slave to whatever's been made in the country the year before. It's just one country so it's always going to be patchy. Still, a real problem is the widening polarisation between arty arthouse directors like Szabolcs Tolnai and dumb commercial movies like Robert Koltai's *Train Keeps a Rollin'*. There's no middle ground. There was a period when Hungarians made good commercial movies —they effectively made Hollywood—but it's a lost art. What Hungarian directors should do is to look at a movie like the Coen brothers' *No Country for Old Men,* watch it over and over again, analyse how it tells the story and look at the narrative strategies—not in order to make the same films but to draw lessons for a film of their own. There are obviously some good stories; it's just that they're not getting told properly.

Béla Tarr's The Man from London *has received plaudits but it's not really a Hungarian movie, is it?*

No, it's a European movie. These kinds of distinctions rapidly become meaningless for filmmakers because their careers are now sustained by many countries and many funds so that the question of authorship becomes very difficult to ascertain. It's Tarr's movie, but it has a German cameraman, British actors—so it's a European film. I think this is the future. When you had the studio system in Hollywood you were certain to be paid and money was there to realise the projects. In return, you sacrificed your authorial vision. But everyone knew they would get to make movies. Now it's not guaranteed at all.

A studio system of sorts operated during Hungary's Communist period; it's just that it was subject to censorship and political control.

Dávid Dercsényi
is a freelance journalist and critic.
Shane Danielsen
is a former artistic director of the Edinburgh International Film Festival. The above interview, arranged by the Hungarian Film Union, took place in Budapest on 5 February 2008.

It's an unpopular view, but communism is the best thing that ever happened to Hungarian cinema. How could a filmmaker like Miklós Jancsó have achieved his vision without the resources of the studios of the Communist party? The same was true of Academy Award-winner István Szabó. Likewise István Gaál. All those filmmakers were sustained by this big mechanism. And yet, in not wanting to fully co-operate with them, they were forced to be cunning and clever, and they made more interesting films because they tried to make films beneath the censorship radar. When everything can be realised nothing is worth doing—suddenly you have nothing to say because everything can be said. And Hungarian cinema, like Czech and Polish cinema, went through a post-Communist phase when suddenly you have a million films about drugs, sex, guns, gangsters and the like, and the whole world goes: so what? It's been 18 years since communism ended and you're still making these adolescent movies—you should have grown up by now.

Are Hungarians still waiting for credible films about their past?

In Romania now they're using the freedom of the post-Communist world to talk about the Communist world. That's a fascinating dichotomy. The problem with Hungarian cinema is 1956. It's a national obsession. I made a pledge last year: no films about 1956 and no films about the Roma. That immediately discounts sixty per cent of the national product. It would be far more interesting to see films like the German *The Life of Others,* which was about people dealing with the dictatorship. Before and after 1956 you have a historical convulsion in terms of communism: that's the most fascinating thing that ever happened to this country; moving from an imperial regime through democracy to the Communist regime. It's a captivating narrative full of dramatic conflicts within people, even filmmakers. And yet we get endless versions of György Szomjas's *The Sun Street Boys*: young boys are brave against the Russians. Who cares? Tell us something about the way the people lived! Jancsó is a great filmmaker. He uses dramatic archetypes. In *Beloved Elektra* (1974), for example, he's using classical mythology in order to make political points about what it means to live under a Communist state. That's really clever because it's operating on multiple levels. If the lesson of Romania teaches us anything it is that you don't need many filmmakers to make a movement. The new Romanian cinema? Four filmmakers: okay, that's enough. The Nouvelle Vague was six.

To be fair, a new generation of talented filmmakers has emerged in Hungary: Szabolcs Hajdu, György Pálfi, Ferenc Török, Diana Groó. Pálfi has a very interesting and unique style and can create very good narratives.

It's unique. But *Hukkle* was a 20-minute short film stretched out to feature-length. And *Taxidermia*—that's a completely empty film; it says nothing interesting about either communism or the human body or the effect of communism on the human body. It's only trying to shock you. He's not an intellectual, but he *thinks* he's an intellectual. Kornél Mundruczó isn't an intellectual either; he's just a gifted filmmaker—his film *Delta* was head and shoulders above anything else at this year's festival.

You mentioned Jancsó. He's managed to reshape his classic style to new circumstances.

The Pepe-Kapa stories in his last five films—I think they're quite incomprehensible. They're strictly for Hungarians. I can't understand them. Jancsó had to adjust, to redefine his style for financial reasons. He's fascinating, but those films are full of linguistic puns, satirical references to events in Hungarian culture

that I know nothing of. So his films will never get seen in other film festivals around the world.

What do you think are the chances of Hungarian films being distributed abroad?

In the UK almost never, and in the US even less so. The problem is only partly the Hungarian cinema. The trick for a national film industry like Hungary's is for its filmmakers to produce something which is culturally specific and exotic, but universal enough in its themes. *The Life of Others* is a prime example. But that's only part of the problem. The main problem is that distribution in the UK and US is so conservative and so adverse to other languages. Only French cinema can break through. But the situation was so different in the Sixties. Cinema is passing from the centre of culture to the edge of culture. It's just one of many things that has to compete for people's leisure time—television, books, magazines, playstation, the Internet.

But on the other hand arthouse cinema is becoming more and more aristocratic.

Exactly, and that's because it is sustained by festivals. But festivals don't feed into the mainstream anymore; they exist in parallel. So this kind of filmmaking doesn't make any money. Without the support of 20 influential people in the world Béla Tarr would not have a career. Arthouse cinema has no connection with commercial reality. But some makers of these movies, like Béla Tarr, are cultural ambassadors of a sort.

You're quite tough on Hungarian filmmakers.

No, I love Hungarian movies. It's a typical film-making country: 10 per cent of it is good, 90 per cent of it isn't. You can say the same of France or Britain.

Romanian director Cristian Mungiu has said Hungarians like to make comments on what they show in films, while the Romanian directors try to describe the reality while avoiding the comments.

Hungary is quite self-obsessed in a way which is I think a legacy of having been part of an imperial power—the Italians are the same, the French, too. I think the challenge for Hungarians is to do the pictures with a non-subjective point of view. Telling a story is not a bad thing, but people here have problems with it—they think it's not artistic enough. Telling stories would be a good way to start. And really good moviemaking is the genre movie—*No Country for Old Man* is a western, just not a traditional one. That's why I liked György Fehér and his movie *Passion* (1997) or his first, *Twilights* (1990), an adaptation of a Friedrich Dürrenmatt story. They have a particular artistic sensibility matched with a very commercial outlook, and it's a very interesting mix. If you have a technique of knowing how to make a genre film, how to tell a story cinematically, you can abandon the technique and do something else. But as John Coltrane said: "You can't improvise on nothing." I like Nimród Antal's way of doing things: he went to America, and he didn't want to make *Control* again. He learnt some technique and made his second movie *The Vacancy,* which is a commercial movie. But if someone makes a good commercial movie, I take my hat off to them because it's very hard work. ❧

Erzsébet Bori

From a Tower, Darkly

Béla Tarr: *A londoni férfi* (The Man from London)

We set off from below the Plimsol line then we gradually reach the surface and eventually the deck. The night ferry from England has docked, along with the character who gives his name to the film and his accomplice, the evil influence who is manipulating him. Virtually all the disembarking passengers board the boat train for Paris. Who is there to notice the two men who, after a brief, tense discussion, part to go their separate ways? One slips away, while the other throws a suitcase over the rail onto the quay before himself disembarking. The train chugs out of the station. There is a heated exchange, a struggle develops, one falls into the sea, the other rapidly makes off, empty-handed.

Beyond the port and the railway station spreads the town itself: first a square with a bistro, a cheap hotel and the first dingy row of houses facing the sea. The Englishman walks into the bistro, from the lighted squares of which customers look out onto the street.

The Man from London is a film about points of view (and changes in viewpoint), and to that extent it takes up again the subject of *Satan's Tango,* Tarr's 1994 seven-hour epic, which unfolds within a large, concentrically rambling building in such a way that the viewer is both in the middle of it, yet also seeing it from the outside. (True, not at the same time, but through switching in immediate succession, going back in time—which amounts to much the same thing as stepping into the same river twice or again and again.) By tracking just one character, *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000) showed events from a more traditional viewpoint, but this new Tarr film attempts to synthesise both approaches. The first third of the film goes by without granting a single glimpse of the tower that is at the centre of its world. I envy any viewer who can watch the film knowing nothing at all about the tower at the beginning, and for whom the first glimpse of it must come as a true revelation. Even forewarned, however, the viewer is in for a rough ride, with one's head being literally sent spinning as if one were bodily caught up in the huge panning shot which slots all the previously glimpsed elements together into a spatially unified whole.

The film's principal character is a railwayman named Louis Maloin (Miroslav Krobot), who spends every night up in the points tower that overlooks the sea, the harbour, the railway tracks and the town, keeping an eye on what is going on, and it is through

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his eyes that we see. Thus, the protagonist is the one who is watching, the eponymous character is the one being watched.

Or so we are led to believe, until the man from London (János Derzsi) glances up from below. This is a truly spine-chilling moment; if this were another film, you would hate to be in Maloin's shoes right then. In this film, though, at least by that moment, you are indeed in Maloin's shoes: the man from London is looking straight at you—you, the person who has just robbed him of the money that he stole from a theatre owner to provide for his family and for which he has just killed his accomplice. But Maloin too has a wife, who has to pay the household bills, as well as a daughter, who deserves something better than the job she is stuck in. Two family men look one another straight in the eyes. The pointsman and the ageing music-hall artiste, "the human fly" from London, recognise themselves in each other. The poor devil who, until the moment he was within reach of it, thought that money would solve all his problems. (And here Tarr does not necessarily take this to mean poor in the literal sense: what he has to say applies to everyone, but the rich and powerful have all too many things to screen their spiritual poverty from us and themselves.)

This time Tarr has drawn on a short story by Georges Simenon, best known for his Maigret books (in no small measure due to their adaptation for film and television). Simenon's *L'Homme de Londres,* which was translated as *Newhaven–Dieppe,* is an early masterpiece which has already yielded two films: *L'Homme de Londres* of 1943, directed by Henri Decoin, and *Temptation Harbour* of 1947, directed by Lance Confort and starring Robert Newton, Simone Simon and the then 40-year-old William Hartnell, later to become famous as the original Dr Who of the 1960s. Most strikingly, this story does *not* feature the inspector, because the Maigret stories always have a resolution in the shape of the Master himself. It is not just a matter of his being able, through observation coupled with deep familiarity with the ways of the world and insight into human nature, to work out the motive for a crime, to identify and bring the culprit to justice, though this would allow any reader or viewer to sleep at night safe in the knowledge that all is in order and functioning smoothly in the world. But of course Maigret represents more than that—something more than formal legal rectitude (after all, in some of his cases, he feels entitled to let the guilty party go free), yet not blindfolded Justice either. Maigret is never blindly ignorant (at most he may deliberately turn a blind eye): he is very much a person who keeps his eyes open. His cool, but never cold eagle eye is that of an outside observer who well understands the pressing worries and petty desires that can drive a person to crime, but without being tempted to give in to them himself.

The world of *The Man from London* is far grubbier and darker for Maigret's absence. There is a detective, but he's a foreigner, an Englishman who comes over by ferry to retrieve the money and return it to its rightful owner. To do that he, too, would need to be familiar with the mentality of the people he is holding under surveillance, with what makes them tick, but unlike Maigret, he has no interest in serving justice on matters that are none of his business. This detective, Morrison (István Lénárt), plays a key role in Tarr's film, because viewers would feel totally lost were it not for the succinct English- or French-language explanations that he supplies from time to time.

For when it comes down to it, Tarr is not filming stories: he is not in the business of telling stories with the aid of pictures, producing moving picture-books for "readers" in an illiterate age. He belongs to that rare and dying breed of filmmakers who regard film as a work of art, indeed

a *Gesamtkunstwerk:* "I have said it a thousand times before, that film is picture, sound, rhythm, noise, music, human looks, metacommunication—everything but story," to quote him. That holds even for the films in which he has managed to convey the detail of two of László Krasznahorkai's novels (or sections of them) with such staggering accuracy—although he does anything but chop the written texts into scenes and set these in visual terms. Tarr doesn't just speak the language of film, he thinks in its terms too; he doesn't take the literary material and simply adapt it for the cinema screen, but he reconstructs it, which means he first has to break it down into its component parts.

That is particularly clear in *The Man from London.* His long-time collaborator László Krasznahorkai was not asked to turn the Simenon novella into a screenplay; the text was dissected into figures, sites and situations; from these the process of rebuilding started to the music of Mihály Víg, the actors' faces, Fred Kelemen's camera work, and the town square that was created in Bastia in Corsica. It is not something that comes easily to my lips, but Tarr's films have an undeniable magical power: a cinema audience need only submit itself to be instantly transported away.

The problems only start when the rational mind seeks to unravel the "secret"—and bounces straight back. Because the magic potion consists of nothing other than the above-listed humdrum constituents that are available to anybody: actors, locations, set-ups, music and so on, but what comes into being as a result of the "mixing" is something familiar to us as the human condition, the reality of our existence. It is almost a plus that when it comes down to bare essentials this film is somehow truer to the original book than if it had remained faithful to every word and detail of the text. The analytical mind may come to grief because Tarr's films cannot be perceived in terms of the usual psychological, sociological or moral categories. Of course, they have these dimensions, the characters do have a social relevance, but one simply gets nowhere by starting with—say—the unpaid bills that Brown (the man from London) leaves in his wake, or the problems that Maloin is facing in his marriage. Obviously, the pointsman who picks up the suitcase full of money, and Brown, the music hall performer who stole it in the first place, are seeking something better for themselves and their families; it is just that they quickly have to face up to the fact that there is no other life. Brown and his accomplice have thought out and executed a brilliant plan: they have managed to get themselves abroad with the money and all they need do now is share it out then make themselves scarce. Instead, within a matter of minutes Brown is left standing without an accomplice or the money, and is now a murderer to boot.

Maloin has had no time to make any plans. He has come upon the money unexpectedly; he does not even touch it to start his "new life" (an idea that he has cherished for who knows how long or for what reason). He simply clears out the savings that the family had scraped together so painfully with no regard for the consequences (a truly Gidean *acte gratuit*) when he pulls his daughter (Erika Bók) out from her dead-end job and buys her a fox-fur collar (simply because the whore who gladdens the life of the bistro's proprietor happens to have one).

One could go on for pages analysing just that motif alone: the pitifulness and senselessness of the extravagant fox-fur collar sitting on Henriette's shabby, threadbare overcoat; the look on the shy girl's face in the mirror as she slowly breaks into a happy smile; then the way her father tries to "rationalise" his senseless steps and pronounces that as long as it is worn sparingly, on rare occasions, a genuine fur will last as

long as ten years; or when she seeks to console her mother by promising to return it to the shop the next day; or the despairing fury of Maloin's wife, which one supposes relates to the money that has been thrown away, until one sees Tilda Swinton begin to scream because after that she is lost for words and her lips can only tremble... And then there is the other woman, Brown's wife. Morrison brings her over from London, and from the moment we see her we know that she has been brought over to be used by Morrison. Even more unsettling is the question of whether Brown really intended to offer her a better life by stealing the money in the first place (Ági Szirtes, who plays this role, has barely three lines of dialogue, but it is enough just to look at her to know that she would never touch anything that belonged to someone else). No, Mrs Brown has made the journey in order to help her husband, and she is forced at more or less the same instant to come to terms with the fact that her husband is a thief and a killer, and by the time she can begin to grasp that, he is already dead.

Not for a second, then, should one suppose that Tarr's films are abstract models of everyday human existence. Nothing could be further from the truth; one is always presented with people of flesh and blood who are facing very true-to-life situations with all too real emotions and motivations. Those emotions and motivations are so uncomplicated that there is no need for any psychologising, the basic set-up is self-explanatory. The fundamental condition is one in which people attempt to face up to what they have lost. It's not that I think individual human fates are treated as negligible in Tarr's films, or that a growing number of followers now enjoy them simply for their stylistic bravura as they join Tarr in the utterly weird worlds of a rundown socialist-era mining village, a remote farmstead in the rural flatlands, or a market-town in the Great Hungarian Plain.

Ever since *Satan's Tango*, Tarr has worked in co-production arrangements, using non-Hungarian actors. Nevertheless, *The Man from London* is the first film in which Hungarian is not spoken and the story is not quintessentially Eastern European. (Judging from the enthusiasm with which it was welcomed by foreign critics, and the slight bewilderment of domestic critics, the points of reference have shifted: from Tarkovsky to the classic film noir.) One might also see the decision to shoot the film outside Hungary as a large step in the career of a director who has always used very specific set-ups—whether places or types of people—that he knows inside out. My guess is that some of the "formal" approaches of *The Man from London*—the frequent references back to the earlier films, the even sparer use of dialogue and panning—can be attributed to that foreignness. Simenon's superb novella is a very French story about French people. The tower at night may well have been the visual starting-point, but for a Hungarian director to be able to engage with this French story another foreigner was needed: the man from London.

Like other auteurs, Tarr avers that he is always directing the same film, just doing a slightly better job of it every time. That may be, but it is also possible that *The Man from London* is an experiment, and that we shall eventually look back on it as a sort of autumn almanac, marking the end of one creative period and the start of another. ❧

Klára Hamburger

Emilie (Merian)-Genast, Liszt's Confidante

In the early autumn of 1862, Richard Wagner once again missed a deadline set by his publisher, in spite of the advance he had received. This time, it was Act I of *Die Meistersinger* that he had failed to deliver to Franz Schott. Wagner, however, thought of a way to help him out of his predicament. Among the many singers with whom he was acquainted, he chose Emilie Genast and asked her to come to his home in Biebrich. He placed a brand-new manuscript, *Fünf Gedichte von Mathilde Wesendonck,* in front of her. Hans von Bülow sat down at the piano and helped the young mezzo-soprano learn this rather demanding song cycle, so different from the traditional art-song repertoire, in a short period of time. Wagner's plan worked. As the memoirs of conductor Wendelin Weißheimer[1] recount it, the publisher sent a carriage for the party of five. Two ladies, Emilie Genast and Cosima von Bülow and three gentlemen, Wagner, Bülow and Weißheimer, took it to Schott's summer home at Laubenheim.

> Miss Genast sang the Five Wagner-Wesendonck Lieder to Hans von Bülow's accompaniment for this small but select audience. The effect was overwhelming; everyone was stunned, Frau von Bülow was in tears. Franz Schott rubbed his hands with satisfaction and immediately locked the manuscript away in a cabinet.[1]

Emilie (Merian)-Genast, who was Liszt's muse and regular performer of his vocal works, must have been no mean musician and singer. Yet her name and biography are strangely absent from the encyclopaedias and dictionaries of music, perhaps because she was a performer of art song and oratorio and did not appear in opera. The writings of Marie Lipsius (who used the nom de plume La Mara) and a few other accounts by contemporaries[2] are the only sources to tell us that Emilie, who came from a distinguished theatrical family in Weimar, had a small but beautiful warm mezzo-soprano voice and sang with exceptional artistry and personal magnetism. Her repertoire ranged from Handel to contemporary composers. She was an excellent pianist and was able to accompany herself even from memory.

She was also the "Mitzi" referred to in a confidential and vehement letter Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein wrote to her "dear kinsman" Eduard Liszt on 30 May, 1875.[3] The Princess accused "Mitzi" of having "taken Liszt out of habits which had almost led him to a life of wisdom and

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the intellect." She added: "She is the sort of woman for whom a man, once he has possessed her, will commit all manner of follies." She blamed "Mitzi" and Liszt's relationship with her for the fact that she, the Princess, couldn't marry the Master, even though she had sacrificed everything for him.

The Russian-Polish princess Jeanne Élisabeth Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein (1819–1887), an extremely wealthy landowner, was Liszt's second longtime companion. Separated from her husband, Prince Nicholas, she had met Liszt in Kiev in 1847 during his Russian tour. Liszt spent several weeks at her estate at Woronince. For Liszt's sake, she left the major part of her enormous fortune behind in the Russian Empire and fled to Germany in 1848 with her daughter, Princess Marie, to settle in Weimar with Liszt. In order to marry him, the Princess, a Catholic, had to obtain an annulment of her marriage from the Holy See. To that end, she travelled to Rome in the spring of 1860. The annulment was eventually granted, and the Prince died in 1864, but the marriage between the Princess and Liszt never took place.[4]

When still young, Emilie Genast (1833–1905) performed in several German cities. She made a name for herself in numerous contemporary works, and in songs and psalms by Liszt in particular. In the 1870s she had great success with the oratorio *St Elisabeth* and the cantata *St Cecilia* (the latter had been dedicated to her). Her personal life was very unhappy. She married Dr Emil Merian, the director of a Basle insurance company in 1863; he became incurably ill. After some years they moved back to Weimar where Dr Merian died. Emilie was left with three children; her two daughters were sickly and soon died, leaving her alone with her son. She lived in dire financial straits. Yet, in spite of all these misfortunes, "my aunt Merian", as her niece Helene Raff called her, "always kept her vitality, her kindness and her good spirits."[5] (Helene Raff's mother was Emilie's sister, the actress Doris Genast, who had married Liszt's former assistant Joachim Raff.) Emilie also had a good sense of humour, according to Wagner.[6] A great deal of excellent chamber music was made in her cozy salon in Weimar, where many celebrities felt at home.[7] She sang enchantingly in private and sometimes in public as well; in addition, she taught, wrote music criticism and even did charitable work.

Her relationship with Liszt has long been a blank spot in the composer's biography. It can only be reconstructed from Liszt's letters to her, in the Goethe-Schiller Archives in Weimar. (Understandably, Liszt did not keep Emilie's letters to him.) A study of these letters by Liszt makes it clear how unfounded Princess Carolyne's jealousy had been: Emilie never induced Liszt to commit any "follies". On the contrary, of all the ladies constantly around him she was one of the most congenial, both artistically and personally.[8]

Liszt had known Mitzi, 22 years his junior, since she was a young girl. He appreciated the young mezzo-soprano's talents and recommended her to others. Her bold and outstanding interpretations helped many of Liszt's works to achieve success, especially the German songs and the psalms. Liszt wrote several works expressly for her, including the songs *Die drei Zigeuner* ("The Three Gypsies"), *Es muß ein Wunderbares sein* ("It Must Be Something Wonderful"), *Muttergottes-Sträußlein* ("A Bouquet for the Virgin"), *Wieder möcht' ich dir begegnen* ("I Would Like to See You Again"), *Blume und Duft* ("Flower and Fragrance"), as well as the second version of *Nonnenwerth.* In addition, Emilie inspired the orchestral versions of *Mignon, Die Loreley* and *Die drei Zigeuner;* and it was for her that he orchestrated Schubert's songs *Die junge Nonne* ("The Young Nun"), *Gretchen am Spinnrade* ("Gretchen at

the Spinning-Wheel"), *Lied der Mignon* ("Mignon's Song") and *Erlkönig* ("Erl King"). This "amiable and courageous champion of my abstruse songs, which had received so many bad reviews", encouraged Liszt to commit ever new *Missetaten* ("misdeeds")—that is, the composition of new works.[9]

Their relationship became intimate during what was probably the most anguished period in Liszt's life. Due to a series of intrigues, and following ten years of intense and highly successful activity as music director in Weimar, he decided to resign from his post at the end of 1858. A year later, his talented son died at the age of 20. Princess Carolyne left for Rome on 17 May, 1860 in order to petition for her annulment so she could marry Liszt. Liszt's secret love, the "lovely Agnes", Agnes Street-Klindworth (1825–1906), was living in Brussels with her father. (Dr Georg Klindworth was an infamous, brilliant secret agent who acted for some of the darkest figures on the European scene, such as Czars Nicholas I and II, Metternich and Guizot. His daughter was his constant collaborator. The person mentioned as her husband, a certain Mr Denis-Street, probably never existed.)

Agnes had relationships with several men, including the social-democrat leader Ferdinand Lassalle; the daughter she bore him died at an early age. It is not known who had fathered her two sons, but it certainly wasn't Liszt. The Sayn-Wittgenstein family had sent Agnes to Liszt in Weimar, to have her seduce him away from the Princess, whose enormous Russian wealth was at stake. (Officially, she took piano lessons from him.) Unexpectedly, Liszt and Agnes fell deeply in love, and the master remained in contact with the intelligent, well-informed and attractive woman, who was a gifted writer and an excellent pianist, to the end of his life. In his letters to her, he revealed more of his innermost feelings than he did to anyone else.[10]

Close to his fiftieth birthday, Liszt found himself alone and had no idea how or where he would continue his life and work. All he knew for certain was that he had to leave Weimar and that, too, depended on others. He felt defenceless and insecure, unable to work, which only deepened his depression. In September 1860, he drafted his testament.[11]

His 95 letters to Emilie Genast (all but a few unpublished) and a letter of recommendation written on her behalf show that their relationship was anything but a passing adventure. On the contrary, it was based on mutual admiration, many shared interests and sincere emotions. The singer, highly gifted, though not conventionally beautiful, may have provided the composer in his depressed state with his only source of comfort at the time. Since they were both living in Weimar, he sent his letters mostly by hand of messenger. Their trysts took place secretly in hotel rooms. If they were to see each other at one of their homes, Liszt discreetly indicated which one by referring to the monuments of the city's great poets. "Towards the Herder monument" stood for "my place", "towards the Wieland monument" signified "yours". When they were together, they often made music as well, if they had the opportunity. After Emilie had moved away for career reasons, they arranged to see each other in third cities. They reunited in Weimar for the holidays.

In August 1861, the singer took part in the festival of the Tonkünstler-Versammlung in Weimar for the last time. Subsequently Liszt closed down the Altenburg, the Weimar home he had shared with Carolyne for ten years, thus bringing to a close a significant period in his life and work. He saw Emilie for a last time in October. A long caesura followed, and the nature of their relationship changed. Liszt's next letter to her was written four years later and dated from the Vatican. In the meanwhile, Emilie had got married. Liszt

visited her and her husband in Basle. After 1869, during the 'tripartite' years, when he divided his life between Pest, Rome and Weimar, he was a regular guest in Frau Merian's famous salon in Weimar. An intimate relationship had turned into a friendship between two artists, Liszt honouring Emilie's status as a wife and, later, as a widow.

Most of Liszt's letters are undated and their order can be established only approximately. The earliest letter was probably written in 1856, the last one in the 1880s. Seventy-eight letters out of the ninety-five were written in German. In the early days of their relationship, Liszt wrote to Mitzi Genast in French (a language he had persuaded her to learn) only when he didn't want others to understand. (Earlier, during his liaison with Marie d'Agoult, he had similarly switched back and forth between the two languages in his letters to Marie and his mother Anna in France; then he had used German for confidentiality.) The later letters, addressed to Frau Merian from Rome and Pest, were all written in French, but Liszt switched to German again when they were both in Weimar.

The letters cover a wide range in length and subject matter, from short messages—calling cards attached to bouquets—and, when they were apart, longer reports on the social and artistic life in the place Liszt happened to be. There are letters of warm condolence on the death of Emilie's father, a well-known stage director[12], and on the loss of her daughter. He frequently wrote on musical matters.[13] On one occasion, he quoted an aria by Handel in which onomatopoeia occurs, to justify his own idea of programme music. The musical example from the oratorio *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* is found in the letter dated 7 August 1860:[14]

> I haven't left my house all week. Bach and Handel have been keeping me serious, edifying company. The most recent volume published by the Handel Society contains the oratorio [...] There are wonderful things in this work, such as a 60-bar Andante decorated with a simplicity [here Liszt inserted a musical example, rich in ornamentation] that furnishes the most convincing proof that the Old Masters, at least the greatest ones, avoided all onomatopoeia in their works. How low the most recent bunglers have sunk! One has only to compare this pure diamond of Handelian ornamentation with the roadside pebbles of Meyerbeer's sensationalism, for instance in the duet for flute and soprano from *L'Étoile du Nord.*"

On 28 November 1860 he wrote concerning the orchestration of his own setting of *Mignon*:[15]

> *Mignon* [Goethe] and *Loreley* [Heine] have been orchestrated. The vocal line in *"Auf Säulen ruht sein Dach"* has now been improved; same for *"Das Maultier sucht im Nebel seinen Weg"*—and, as I indicated to you earlier, the entire *Mignon* has been scored in 6/4 time, which is much more advantageous for the orchestration.

On 23 March 1861, he asked for advice on the title role in his oratorio *Die Legende von der Heiligen Elisabeth*:[16]

> In the past weeks I have worked only on subsidiary tasks (revisions, arrangements and corrections), which always puts me in a very bad mood. But I shall return to *Elisabeth* shortly and complete it. I would like to ask for your kind assistance once again in the final scene, taking it on myself to inconvenience you, by asking you to try out several different versions. I hope you will grant me this friendly service, for which I shall repay you by writing the conclusion somewhat to your liking.

From the Vatican, he wrote to Emilie in French on November 1, 1865, respectfully recommending a Hungarian pupil:[17]

> A young Hungarian girl of a good family, well-bred and very gifted, has become so taken by a fine enthusiasm for an artistic career and thinks of nothing else but singing

[...] everything. Her greatest desire is to come to Basle for a few months with her mother to meet you, to hear you and to hear you again [...] and finally to ask for your advice and follow your musical direction. She is taking great pains to learn how to sing Schubert, Schumann, Franz, etc. Don't resent me for sending her your way. She dreams of the theatre, roles, applause... You will be able to judge better than anyone whether she can hope to accomplish any of this and how she should go about it. She will be very docile and submissive. Before recommending her to you, I assured myself that she deserved it, and did not fail to let her know, as I should, that it would be an exceptional favour if you perhaps agreed to work with her. I attach the last page of her letter, to which I want to add only that Miss Dumtsa has a wide vocal range and a good vibrato—and beautiful blond hair

—Liszt added as an incorrigible connoisseur of women. (From a later letter it emerges that this overly ambitious Hungarian girl got married and her singing plans came to nothing.)

Although the letters to Emilie do not carry the same detail or intimacy as those to Agnes Klindworth, they do occasionally express his grievances, his vulnerability and the uncertainties of his situation.[18] Thus, on 21 July 1861, he wrote to Emilie from Weimar:

> My departure from Weimar is now fixed for the 17th of August. Where I will go is quite uncertain—yet under no circumstances will I go to Paris. It goes without saying that in my present situation I cannot even think of either work or rest. I carry my burden day after day, though I don't want to bore others with it.[19]

Ten years later, after Rome had become the capital of a united Italy, following the withdrawal of French troops who had protected papal interests, he wrote from Pest on 28 January 1871:

> I have been overcome by an unspeakable sadness for several months... They will probably keep me here, but it is not yet clear how they will use me. If I could decide my own fate, I would prefer to withdraw to a small village, no matter where, with my books and my manuscript paper. That was quite successful for me last winter at the Villa d'Este, and I was hoping to continue the same way. Yet after the events of last September, I am repelled by the idea of returning to Rome; I confess I'm unable to split myself between the sorrows on one bank of the Tiber and the joys on the other bank.[20]

On 17 July 1868, he confided his

> complete aversion to my old profession of salon pianist, which repeatedly brings me humiliations such as to make my whitened hair blush.[21]

Events concerning members of his family are occasionally touched on, such as the accident suffered by his mother in Paris[22] or Cosima's dangerous illness.[23] Yet he kept silent about the problems of Cosima's marriage with Bülow, since he didn't want to acknowledge that crisis himself. As late as 1866, he asked Emilie and her husband, then living in Basle, to help the Bülows, who were being driven out of Munich, to settle in Basle.

> Allow me to count on M. Merian's help and your own, Madam, in giving these two people a friendly welcome: I feel closer to them than I can ever expect them to feel towards me in return.[24]

It was not until 21 September 1869 that he broached this subject to Emilie. By that time, Cosima, after the birth of her third child by Wagner, had moved in with him permanently and severed all contacts with her father:

> I am sad—not because of myself; human suffering affects me only to a very small degree, and if it does, noble and loving sentiments can usually assuage my grief. I am sad because of another soul, one I love like the extension of my

own. I don't have to speak about her at the moment; I can only pray for her to God. I entrust my anguish and my tender feelings to the merciful heavenly Father. Only He knows the secrets of the heart, and only He lifts up a broken heart [...] He will not abandon my daughter, no matter what her fate may be.[25]

Marie Lipsius informs us that Emilie (Merian)-Genast, the important interpreter of Liszt's works, a dear and loyal friend who never intruded on him, was one of the few people admitted by Cosima to visit the dying composer in Bayreuth in late July 1886. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ Wendelin Weißheimer, *Erlebnisse mit Richard Wagner, Franz Liszt and vielen anderen Zeitgenossen*, Stuttgart-Leipzig, Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1898, pp. 129–130.

2 ■ La Mara [Marie Lipsius], "Emilie Merian-Genast," *Liszt und die Frauen.* Leipzig, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1919 (revised edition), p. 205–220; La Mara, *Durch Musik und Leben im Dienste des Ideals*, vols. 1–2. Weimar, Kiepenheuer, 1912, pp. 54, 63, 77, 243; Adelheid von Schorn, *Zwei Menschenalter. Erinnerungen und Briefe aus Weimar und Rom*, Stuttgart, 1913 (revised edition), pp. 106, 134, 155, 315; Adelheid von Schorn, *Das nachklassische Weimar*, vols. 1–2. Weimar, Kiepenheuer, 1912, pp. 54, 63, 77, 243; Franz von Milde: *Ein ideales Künstlerpaar Rosa und Feodor von Milde: Ihre Kunst and ihre Zeit*, Leipzig, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1918, vol. 1, pp. 38, 56, 164-65; vol., II, pp. 66, 185; Hans von Bülow, *Briefe*. Ed. Marie von Bülow, Leipzig, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1898, vol. III, Nos. 109, 146, 176, 178, 186, 237, 481, 530, 600; Lina Ramann, *Lisztiana. Erinnerungen an Franz Liszt in Tagebuchblättern, Briefen und Dokumenten aus den Jahren 1873–1886/87*. Ed. Arthur Seidl, rev. Friedrich Schnapp, Mainz-London, Schott, 1983, pp. 71, 239, 295.

3 ■ Maria P. Eckhardt and Cornelia Knotik, *Franz Liszt und sein Kreis in Briefen und Dokumenten aus den Beständen des Burgenländischen Landesmuseums.* Wissenschaftliche Arbeiten aus dem Burgenland, vol. 66. Eisenstadt, 1983, No. 33, p. 67–68.

4 ■ On this see Alan Walker, *Liszt, Carolyne, and the Vatican:. The Story of a Thwarted Marriage.* American Liszt Society Studies Series No. 1. Gen. ed. Michael Saffle. Stuyvesant, NY, Pendragon Press, 1991.

5 ■ Helene Raff, *Blätter vom Lebensbaum*, Munich, Knorr & Hirt, 1938, pp. 208–211.

6 ■ Richard Wagner, *Mein Leben*, 2nd popular edition. Munich, F. Bruckmann, 1915, vol. IV, p. 371.

7 ■ See n. 3.

8 ■ La Mara, *Liszt und die Frauen,* p. 211.

9 ■ See his letter from 2 July 1860 and another undated letter from the same period. Klára Hamburger, "Franz Liszts Briefe an Emilie Merian-Genast aus den Beständen des Goethe-Schiller-Archivs, Weimar", parts 1–2. *Studia musicologica,* vols. 48–49, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2007, Nos. 28, 33.

10 ■ More on their relationship in Pauline Pocknell, *Franz Liszt and Agnes Klindworth: A Correspondence, 1854–1886.* Franz Liszt Studies No.8., Gen. ed. Michael Saffle. Hillsdale, NY, Pendragon Press, 2000.

11 ■ "Mein letzter Wille. Ceci est mon testament". 14 September 1860. See La Mara, *Liszt's Briefe*, Leipzig, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1900. Vol. V, pp. 52–63, No. 27.

12 ■ Eduard Genast (1797–1866).

13 ■ See Hamburger, op. cit. Nos. 32, 34, 41, 54, 68, 91.

14 ■ Hamburger, No. 32.

15 ■ Hamburger, No. 43.

16 ■ Hamburger, op. cit. No. 55.

17 ■ Hamburger, op. cit. No. 67.

18 ■ Pocknell, op. cit.

19 ■ Hamburger, op. cit. No. 62.

20 ■ Hamburger, op. cit. No. 86.

21 ■ Hamburger, op, cit. No. 73.

22 ■ Hamburger, op. cit. No. 30.

23 ■ Hamburger, op. cit. Nos. 53, 54.

24 ■ Hamburger, op. cit. No. 69.

25 ■ Hamburger, op. cit. No. 78.

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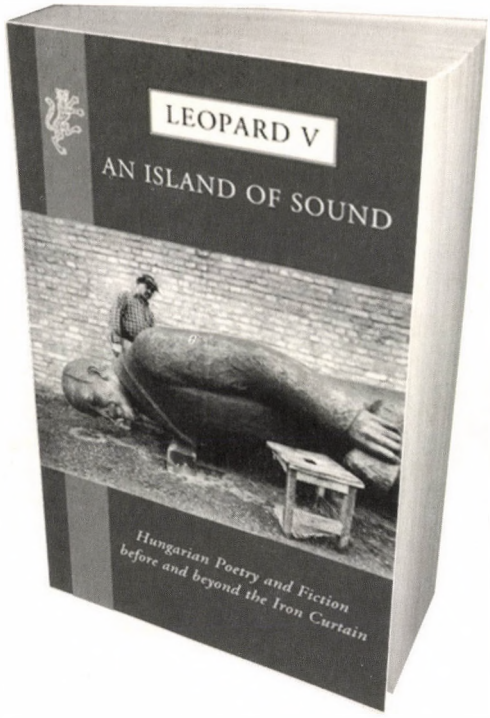

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Dona Ema Brazil April 1972

In a cabin of sweet cedarwood
deep in an orange-grove
an old Hungarian doctor-poet, dying,
is writing his last quirky postcard
to an English friend. His brown eyes twinkle
as he thinks of his thirteen languages,
his theory of pain, his use of hypnosis
in childbirth, his work with the Resistance
in Italy, his wryest fame in Winnie
Ille Pu, *his end*
in a nest of lianas.
With a laugh he stops
just short of the date
which who cares who will add.
ALEXANDER LENARD, says the card,
obiit, meghalt, starb, mori, *died.*

Edwin Morgan

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