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- Ted Hughes: Hungarian Connections
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- The Imre Nagy Trial: The Record
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- The Schubert in Wagner – An Interview with Adam Fischer
- The Unknown Photography of Alexandre Trauner
- Roger Fenton: Rediscovered Photographs
- Total Theatre in Transylvania

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Back cover illustration: *Communist Party leaders Leonid Brezhnev and János Kádár at the Presidium of the XIth Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, 17 March 1975, Budapest. Photograph by Ferenc Vigovszki, MTI Photo.*

László Végel

East European Savages

1.

For some weeks now I have been haunted by a scene in Italo Svevo's *Zeno's Conscience*. Zeno, the eponymous protagonist, devoted to Miss Ada Malfenti asks for her hand in marriage and is rejected. Zeno has a second go that same evening, and tries to persuade another Miss Malfenti of the depth of his feelings. He is rejected once again. Panic-stricken after his double failure, he turns to the youngest sister, Augusta, who accepts him in the full knowledge that his true affection is for Ada.

Serbia's current political elite seems to be playing out that same Svevo novel scene, with the difference that in their case the confusion is compounded. It's rather like a passionate Balkan masked ball in which it is impossible to tell who is the suitor and who are the brides-to-be. Only one thing is for sure: unexpected twists lie ahead for the bizarre coalition forged in July 2008, including adulteries and divorces.

Since the May 1988 elections there has been much talk of mysterious trysts and secret deals. Prospects for the most preposterous coalitions have been floated. Ideological programmes belong to the past; the campaigning has long been consigned to the mists of oblivion, it no longer matters who promised what. The Democratic Party caused no little stir by announcing that it would be forming a government with the Serbian Socialist Party. According to Boris Tadić, the party's leader, the Socialists were worthy partners. Both parties have recently deceased leaders who are still grieved over: the Democrats have Zoran Djindjić, the Socialists—Slobodan Milošević. The time had come for national reconciliation. The argument, as put by Tadić, who is leader of the Democratic Party as well as th

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László Végel

*is a novelist, essayist and playwright who lives in Novi Sad, the largest city in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina in Serbia, with many ethnic Hungarian inhabitants. His books include a fictional diary on the war in Serbia (*Exterritórium, *2000) and a volume of essays on life as a member of a national minority (*Hontalan esszék, *20*

current President of the Republic, is that Milošević's party held power throughout the Nineties, while since 2000 everything has shifted to the control of the Democrats, with the end result being that a government of national unity is now needed. The unexpected announcement may have astonished even the most loyal party members, but it is not unprecedented. The beguiling spectre of national reconciliation is haunting the whole of Eastern Europe. István Bibó's post-war precept about the great trauma that had been suffered by the little nations of the region has nowadays again become highly topical. Following the regime changes, Claudio Magris commented that "the freedom that has been gained across Europe is mixed with snarling hatred and aggressive nationalism." Nothing out of the ordinary had happened, however; it was just that old sores had been reopened. The new remedy is to assuage fear and loathing of others through national unity. In a multi-party system, however, national unity is a precarious beast. The newly gained freedom has bred a sense of trauma, that of the lack of national unity. Barely has the multi-party system taken root and new dreams are being woven about how to restore it. Frustration is erupting with elemental force even in countries that have entered the European Union. The nationalist right may accept the multi-party system but will not abandon its dreams of national unity.

This is the play that is being staged in politics today in Serbia too. Meanwhile, no doubt just for the sake of killing time, in the intervals the Socialists go round accusing the Democrats of being the gravediggers of Slobodan Milošević, to which the Democrats retort that the Socialists for their part were the assassins of Zoran Djindjić. Over the graves of the former party leaders one coalition deal after another is being struck, each more absurd than the last, and meanwhile the EU's foreign ministers, meeting in Brussels or somewhere else, raise glasses of champagne to celebrate the idea that in Serbia, according to the results of the most recent elections, the European option won out. They feign to overlook the minor blemish that, possibly, the new government that emerges may be formed in cahoots with Milošević's party, the Serbian Socialist Party. Europe won, did it? Inevitably, an article by Mile Lasić comes to mind that I read recently in *Helsinska Povelje,* the periodical of the Belgrade Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, to the effect that Europe itself is becoming Balkanised.

Europe went on licking and tending to Serbia's wounds to the point that it fell sick itself. Either the original diagnosis was wrong, or the treatment that was adopted was inadequate.

The row continues. The central figures are dissimulating. The booty is shared out before the post-election spree comes to an end. The masqueraders, however, are irritating a substantial portion of the populace. They are watching the antics in disbelief, because the very people who only yesterday were accusing each other of high treason and betrayal are today together feasting on the lamb together. They differ from the politicians of the Hungarians in the Vojvodina in that the latter, of course, regarding each party as a bunch of traitors, are unwilling even to sit down at the same table with them.

2.

The Bosnian writer Dževad Karahasan is waiting with a huge umbrella on the S-Bahn platform at Savigny Platz. In eastern Berlin where I have come from, there wasn't even a sign of rain, while here in the west it has been pouring for hours. It's not unusual, he says; there were even times when it snowed heavily in East Berlin but not a single snowflake fell in the West, explaining it all as if he were himself a born Berliner. He is one of the East-Central European writers who now consider Berlin their second home. I'm not talking about dissidents or refugees, but about writers who long to have two homes or they simply do not feel too good at home. It's not dictatorship they are fleeing now but the new democratic order. This gives pause for thought now that those countries are either already member states of the EU, or else heading that way. In the Eighties the intelligentsia was the motor of change, whereas now their complaint is more likely to be that they did not have these sorts of changes in mind; the transformation to democracy has got onto the wrong track. Anyone who can is fleeing from the capitalist free-for-all of the new Eastern Europe and either withdrawing into internal exile, even though no-one is forcing them to do so, or else pretending to be unaware of where they are living.

Karahasan and I had not met for years, but we still began talking as if it had been yesterday. In one of the nearby Italian cafés we immediately got onto the subject of Yugoslavia. By now I've got used to the fact that any time I meet a Croat, Slovene or Serb writer in Berlin a strange and unaccountable sensation awakens in us and, each and every time, we tell each other stories that have long been well known to us. Those Balkan passions inflicted on us deep traumas that we are unable to rid ourselves of. War capped the history of Yugoslavia's disintegration; a world fell to pieces but it did not sink. I am reminded of Cioran's words about the gratifications of being attracted to destruction, the constant inner turmoil of "a bordello going up in flames".

Dževad Karahasan feels at home in Berlin because he has become a European nomad, one of many itinerant southern Slav intellectuals. Right now he teaches in Sarajevo, but he lives in Graz and has moved to Berlin for one year. He used to consider himself a Muslim and a Yugoslav European, and he was already attracted to conservatism and the right back in the Sixties. He still holds those views today, and that is what also shines out in his many novels, some of which (*Sarajevo: Diary of an Exile, The Book of Gardens, The Eastern Divan,* etc.) are now starting to be translated into German and some other languages, though not, as yet, English. Which is precisely why I snatch my head up when he starts lashing out at the neo-nationalists of Sarajevo, the ones who are seeking to rescue Muslimism overnight. Literary life there abounds in people like those, which is why he finds Sarajevo repugnant for all his doom-laden ties to the city. Wherever he may go, it is always important to him to know that Sarajevo exists, and he has no intention of leaving the place forever. But the "nationalist heroes" get on his nerves. The

class warriors who were the literary dilettantes of a few decades ago have today become career nationalists, he gripes.

I do my best to console and encourage him. Right-wing intellectuals are going to have to endure the same ordeal that left-wing intellectuals have already undergone and watch how the ideas that they stood for in all sincerity and out of deeply held conviction over many years have been perverted. Just as four decades ago the bulk of youth in the West was on the left, and the influence of their '68 experiences remains important to the present day, so rightist thinking became fashionable among young people in the eastern part of Europe after the changes of regime at the end of the Eighties and the early Nineties. Leftist illusions were supplanted by rightist illusions.

3.

As I watched helplessly from my home on one of Novi Sad's main boulevards while the Serbian tanks sent against Croatia were paraded in 1991 I realised that Yugoslavia was bound to disintegrate. A decade before I still harboured certain illusions, not surprisingly, as for very many of us across Yugoslavia the conjuncture of Mediterranean, Central European and Balkan cultures with their wonderful diversity was an exciting intellectual challenge, a European venture. It promised to be an exhilarating European experiment that, culturally speaking, was full of potential. Politically, though, it was untenable. When it came to implementing multiculturalism, Yugoslavia was ahead of the West: what we were born into has only been emerging in the West starting with the past two decades. Thanks to a scholarship from DAAD, the German Academic Exchange Service, I spent a year in Berlin, from May 2007 to May 2008, in the course of which those old memories of Yugoslavia all of a sudden reawakened. Berlin, that multicultural megalopolis, the receiving party, brought to my mind a Novi Sad that is now in the process of disappearing. Not that the symptom is specific to Novi Sad; it is East-Central European and Balkan too. While the western megalopolises of London, Berlin and Paris become ethnically ever more diverse, the formerly nationally motley small cities of the East are turning ethnically homogeneous. And that is being done in full view of the EU. The West has entered the post-national age whereas the East has tumbled into a nationalist euphoria.

During the nineteenth century, and right up to the end of the First World War, Hungary also enjoyed the same sort of ethnically variegated life as Yugoslavia did in the latter half of the twentieth century. It was an ethnically mixed and culturally rich country right up to the end of the First World War, but the Peace Treaty of Trianon led to the loss of two thirds of its territory, and with that the flavour of the "foreign", the "Other", almost vanished from Hungarian literature. And that goes not only for Hungarian literature, because the ethnic make-up of Eastern European fiction is everywhere becoming monochrome. By contrast, the "foreign", the "Other", is finding itself increasingly more at home in western

literatures—English, German, French and Austrian—and, little by little, primarily thanks to the great western megalopolises, a new literary Babylon is taking shape.

The old Yugoslavia used to be an exciting cultural Babylon.

In point of fact, it is only since its disintegration that I really started to understand the writer Joseph Roth's sense of homelessness and statelessness following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. And Robert Musil's, too, who called himself the sort of Austro-Hungarian from whom the Hungarian would have to be subtracted.

In Vojvodina that subtraction and addition was not just politics or culture but a way of life. In the eighteenth century, after the Ottoman power was driven out, the Empress Maria Theresa of Austria swung into a massive colonisation drive to create what was, in effect, a mini America in the middle of Europe. It was Serbs, Germans and Hungarians, first and foremost, who settled, but there were also substantial numbers of Jews, Slovaks, Romanians and Ruthenians, and in the Banat a few small Spanish colonies also came into existence. Austria-Hungary was an empire and not a nation-state, and the various ethnic groups that settled in the vacuum that was Vojvodina preserved their national distinctions. The inhabitants of Vojvodina were caught up in a particularly absurd process of addition and subtraction, and even more complex mathematical operations were in play. Nobody now mourns the loss of the old Yugoslavia because of the brutality and bloodiness of its break-up. There are many who are willing to say that it was brought into this world as a result of French foreign policy; others suspect that it was a fictional entity dreamed up by the Communist Tito, who had spent his early years growing up in a thoroughly Austro-Hungarian milieu. Whatever may have been the case, the concoction resulted in valuable experiences all the same. Now that Yugoslavia has collapsed I read *The Man Without Qualities* differently from the way I read it in the Sixties. Then I considered it a great ground-breaking novel; only now do I see that its grand formal experiment was a better expression of the times than were literary works that it is customary to call realist. Realism may be true to perfection but it is insensitive to cataclysms.

4.

From the standpoint of the Hungarian minority in Serbia, this year's elections have had a very instructive legacy. This is a minority that has managed to survive the great ethnic cataclysms in the Balkans. Following the end of the Second World War the ethnic Germans were dispatched to what amounted to death camps or expelled from Vojvodina. The number of Jews had been reduced to a fraction of the pre-war figure. Then the province's Croat population was halved during the course of the most recent round of Balkan conflicts. The total number of the others—Slovaks, Romanians, Ruthenians, etc.—runs to around 50,000 and so is of little consequence. The last remaining memorial to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the multicultural dominion created by Maria Theresa, is living through its last days. Europe will be the poorer for losing another

multinational region. The present total of close to 300,000 who make up the Hungarian ethnic minority is now in rapid decline, with many of the young having fled during the wars because they had not the slightest wish to fight against either Croats or Bosnians or Albanians: they had no wish to have any part in tearing Yugoslavia apart, and as a result they have had to pay a very heavy price.

Over the past ten years the ethnic Hungarians in Serbia have decided either not to vote in elections, or to cast their votes for one of the national parties. As a result, there has been a dramatic fall in the ballot for the minority parties, and the political leadership of the Hungarian minority has lost any significance they may have had. Financial transfusions from Hungary have lent a measure of artificial life-support, it is true, but that has proved to be a disincentive, because the minority's politicians were not forced into pushing in the wider Serbian political arena for the minority's rights and the funding that goes with them. They have been content to wait to be bailed out for their own negligence by the mother country. The crisis of confidence reached a peak at the general election in 2007, when out of the 240,000 ethnic Hungarians who were entitled to a vote a mere 50,000 or so voted for one of the minority parties. And that was despite Viktor Orbán, leader of Hungary's centre-right Fidesz–Hungarian Civic Alliance, turning up in person in Vojvodina to urge the ethnic Hungarians to vote for their own parties. They paid no attention, and in the second round of voting even fewer bothered to go to the polling stations. The story was the same at the extraordinary parliamentary election that was called later last year. Orbán campaigned very vigorously—and professionally, too, I might add—in Subotica and Temerin, but in both the Hungarian minority party suffered an even greater defeat than had been predicted. Subotica is lost, was the despondent exclamation of one of the minority politicians after being crushed by the Democratic Party. On the evidence of the figures, a substantial proportion of the Hungarian minority's electorate must have voted for the Democratic Party, which has its headquarters in Belgrade.

Many people were surprised that so many of Vojvodina's Hungarians did not listen to Orbán, because the Fidesz leader is undoubtedly very popular amongst the Hungarian middle class here. However, one cannot put this down to any actions on Orbán's part. If one is to have any hope of understanding the phenomenon, one needs to bear in mind the important fact that members of minorities often vote for liberal parties in their countries of residence, but they are supporters of right-wing nationalists in the mother country. That is true, for example, in the case of Serbia's Croat minority, who have dual citizenship, choosing to live in Serbia but entitled to a vote in elections in Croatia. In Croatian elections they vote for the nationalist radicals or right wing, in other words for the Croatian Democratic Alliance (HDZ) founded by Franjo Tudjman in 1991, but in Serbia they pick more moderate candidates. Bosnian Croats are a minority who hold the balance of power between the Croat "Left-Libs" and the Croat "nationalists", so they decide which direction Croatia will take, but back in Bosnia they side with the liberal parties. Serbian citizens who belong to the Croat minority, or indeed ethnic Serbs who fled from

Croatia in the early 1990s and have meanwhile gained Serbian citizenship but still retain their Croatian citizenship, behave in much the same way. Unlike the Croats of Vojvodina, in Croatian elections they do not vote for the Croatian right but for left or liberal candidates, whereas in Serbia they support the Serbian right.

It is the same with the ethnic Hungarians of Vojvodina, voting for the more liberal, Belgrade-based parties in Serbia but unconditionally supporting the right when it comes to Hungary itself. Admittedly, they have no electoral rights in Hungary, but they still make their presence felt at demonstrations run by the Hungarian extreme right, where they can be relied on to pitch in with the rallying cry "We're with you!" It's a paradox that carries a strange lesson. I am reminded of the savage in the joke who is asked what he thinks is the worst thing in the world and to be disapproved of most. He replies, when an outside tribe lays waste to our tents and makes away with our women. So what is the best thing? When we lay waste to the tents of the neighbouring tribe and make away with their women. We are the same with liberalism or multiculturalism and Europe's party politics. We do not like them in our own backyard but are happy enough to offer them to our neighbours, comforting ourselves with the thought that our neighbours do exactly the same. The neighbours can be liberal or multicultural as they like, but we stand for national purity and unity.

5.

I'm in the midst of packing. In a few days I shall be back in Vojvodina. I read that Vladimir Putin has been made an honorary citizen of Novi Sad. I have no idea how many Serbian cities have made him an honorary citizen—maybe twenty. The country simply slathers in its cult worship of Putin. Many people put that down to the fact that the Russian leader took Serbia's side on the issue of the status of Kosovo, and in the UN Security Council Russia vetoed Western proposals to recognise the independence of Kosovo under appropriate controls, but I personally do not think it is just that. Others believe it has to do with the interlacing ties of the Orthodox faith for, let's be clear about it, an Orthodox Europe does exist. In much the same way, there is also a third connecting link. In Eastern Europe one discerns the emergent outlines of a distinctive capitalist model that one may call the Eastern Way. Some countries have already set off on that path; others are still hesitating; and there are yet others in which the forces for taking that route are still just gathering strength. For them the devout nationalist ex-KGB man Putin has fashioned a model that may well be alluring not just for Serbs but right across the whole of Eastern Europe, one that is far more alluring than socialism. But who talks about socialism nowadays? The nation is at issue, not the class war. Or to put it another way, a person may be pro-Putin even if they have no great liking for the man or for Russians. Many a (Slovak, Romanian, Hungarian, Czech, Serb, Croat etc.) little East European may be stoutly anti-Communist, but is still, half-unaware, dreaming of a kind of Putin. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

András Petőcz

Strangers

Excerpt from the novel

I have a favourite doctor.

I don't have a problem with doctors, they are truly kind.

But my favourite one is different.

He sits down beside me on the bed, tells me stories, strokes my cheek.

Sometimes, if he thinks I look sad for some reason, he clowns around and makes funny faces.

He is a short, plump man, my favourite doctor. He has round glasses.

He says he is 45 years old.

He talks a lot.

He tells me what kind of life he has had up to this point. He tells me he had a wife, but she died some time ago, somewhere far away, in another town.

He says his wife died in some kind of attack.

I like listening to my favourite doctor's stories.

My favourite doctor also says it is a miracle that I can hear again.

It is true that I am deaf in one ear and that I can only hear with the other one because they put some foreign-made hearing aid in it which magnifies sound, but my favourite doctor says that even this is quite something.

Because the moment the explosion happened, I was standing at an angle which turned out to be harmful for my hearing ducts.

The fact is that I don't mind having a hearing aid in my ear.

That's the way things are for the moment.

I have a hearing aid, but I can hear.

The doctors and nurses say I mustn't be sad, because that will stop me getting better.

Luckily they give me medicines that stop me being sad.

My favourite doctor checks every morning:

"Hello, Anna. Tell me, have you taken your happy pills?"

András Petőcz
has several collections of poetry and short stories to his name. A volume of his poems entitled In a Row of Sunlight *was published in English in 2008 by Corvina, Budapest. He has also written several novels.*

I take the happy pills every morning. They give me tea, bread, a slice of cheese or a little jam, it depends, and the medicines.

I get the medicines in a little pot, a yellow capsule, a white one and a red one. I swallow them with the tea, that's how I start the day. Then I have the bread and the rest.

I like the cheese and the jam.

Together.

My favourite doctor sits down on the edge of my bed and asks how I am and he also says I have beautiful, red hair.

He doesn't speak very loud, he doesn't shout or anything like that, yet I can understand every word.

That's how the day begins.

Nothing happens during the day.

Sometimes they take me for tests, less and less often. They say I am going to have an operation, but it will only be a routine one. That's what they say.

There are twenty-five of us in the ward.

Children.

We don't really talk to each other. Everyone sleeps a lot, even during the day.

We are not down in the dumps, but we are none too cheerful either. Somehow nobody makes a noise or runs around.

Everybody is quiet.

We are ill.

My favourite doctor comes to see me in the evening too. He asks me how my day went and wishes me good night.

He always says I have to rest. That I must sleep as much as possible.

He says I have been through a lot.

And he tells me not to forget to take my medicines.

Every evening he is very persuasive about a small, oblong capsule. Because it will make me sleep well.

I take the capsule and wait patiently to fall asleep.

I feel very calm.

I like to sleep and I sleep deeply. I don't have dreams. I like to feel my body relaxing. Everything is so peaceful and calm.

Before I go to sleep, I don't think about my mother at all anymore.

My mother was buried together with the remains of the other victims of the explosion, on the plot of land behind the presbytery. The town authorities opened a new cemetery because they wanted the 198 people who died in the attack on the community centre to rest in peace together in one place.

That is how my favourite doctor tells it.

These are his words. I couldn't express myself like he does.

Actually, we never used the land behind the presbytery, that's why I didn't

mention it earlier. My mother only ever grew things in the presbytery garden and fed the animals. That kept her busy enough.

Forever running around looking after the parish-priest.

So she had enough to do anyway without having to look after the land behind the presbytery as well. She wasn't interested in that land.

And now she is there.

Now she is near the presbytery. According to my favourite doctor, there is a nice, little wooden cross on her grave. Because I haven't seen my mother's grave yet.

Actually, I slept through the funeral too.

Or rather I was still very ill then. They operated on my ear and they had to treat my leg as well.

I am feeling better now.

My favourite doctor says my mother had a beautiful funeral. The head of the town, the chairman of the local council spoke and the local military commander. Of course they didn't only talk about my mother, but about everyone who died.

My favourite doctor says that the explosion was an act of stupidity of huge proportions and nobody understands why those that caused it did such a thing.

It's impossible to explain something like that, says my favourite doctor.

Now 198 people are resting there, sleeping and dreaming their eternal dreams. That's what everyone says. The nurses say so too. I asked them.

By the way, last time my favourite doctor also said it might not be that long before I can see my mother's grave.

In a little while.

When I can walk again.

I can't walk yet because of my spine.

Actually, this is the operation I am waiting for.

My favourite doctor says that I will be able to feel my legs when a nerve next to my spine is working again.

He also says that in order for this to happen, I have to have an operation on my spine and they are going to do it soon, but I am not to worry, because nowadays this is not such a big operation and he knows for certain that I will be able to walk again soon.

A nerve near my spine was damaged, that's why I have trouble with my legs, says my favourite doctor.

Because a fragment of a shell damaged a nerve by my spine. It is lucky it did not do more harm, says my favourite doctor.

He also says if all goes well they will do the operation next week.

I like to listen to my favourite doctor explaining things. Everything is so peaceful then. I don't have to worry about anything. I feel I am secure and nothing bad can happen to me.

According to my doctor I will feel both my legs again after the operation and then, when I can feel my legs, I will learn to walk again nice and slowly.

My doctor says that it might take months for me to learn to walk, because the nerve will mend very slowly, but he also says he is sure I will be able to walk again because I am young and my body can still *regenerate*.

That's what he says.

In fact, I am waiting impatiently for all this to happen. To be able to walk again I mean.

It is no good lying in bed all the time.

It is morning. I am waiting for my tea and my medicine. One of the nurses comes, the same one who comes nearly every morning and she says:

"You won't get any breakfast this morning, only a little water. Because you are going to have your operation today. They will send you to sleep. We will take you soon and prepare you. It will be over very quickly, you will see. The most important thing is not to worry. Everything will be all right."

A boy dressed in a green overall arrives. He is pushing a bed on wheels.

He pushes it next to my bed.

The boy smiles, he is kind, but he doesn't say much. He says I should stay lying down, he will see to everything.

He lifts the upper half of my body, pulling me onto the bed on wheels so that my bottom just slides over too. Then he lifts my legs and pulls them over as well.

While he works on me, he asks:

"Can you really not feel me touching your legs?"

"No, I can't," I say. "But the doctors say I will get better."

"I am sure you will," says the boy in the green overall. "Another girl was in this state and they were able to help her. Though they had to cut off one of her legs. But she can walk on the other one now. She walks up and down the corridor using a crutch. She is here in the hospital, one floor down. I will introduce you to her, if you like. They are going to let her go home soon. They say she might get an artificial leg later on. There are very good artificial legs these days. They make such wonderful artificial legs far away in rich countries that, at first glance, you can't even tell they are not real legs. Seriously!"

Meanwhile, he is pushing me along the corridor. He pushes me into a lift and we go right down to the basement. That's where the operating theatres are.

They say the dead are kept down here on this floor too.

The boy in green pushes me into a very brightly lit room.

At least five people come over to me. They are all wearing white masks.

They push some kind of equipment over my head. I can smell strange smells.

Then I don't feel anything.

I wake up to find someone is slapping me.

It's my favourite doctor.

"Well, you really are a lucky girl," he says. "We haven't had such a successful operation for a long time."

I can hardly understand what he is saying. Everything around me is very hazy. I can't even see his face clearly.

My favourite doctor carries on talking:

"Now listen to me very carefully, Anna, because I am going to start tapping your legs a little. We want to know if you can feel anything."

I am still very tired. I can hardly keep my eyes open.

My favourite doctor slaps me again and tells me to drink some liquid. Water.

It is only now I realize there are at least five people standing around me looking at my face.

One of the nurses helps me sit up and makes me drink a little water.

In the meantime, my favourite doctor uncovers my legs and starts tapping the soles of my feet.

He lifts my leg then drops it on the bed.

He lifts it again and drops it again.

He keeps tapping the sole of my foot. I can't feel anything.

I tell him so:

"I can't feel anything. It's just like yesterday."

The doctor doesn't give up. He smiles and taps my sole harder and harder.

I feel something strange. As though the sole of my foot had gone numb.

It feels bad.

My sole is tingling, as if ants were crawling over it.

I tell them so:

"It feels bad. As if the sole of my foot had gone to sleep."

Everyone starts laughing. The nurse strokes my face.

My favourite doctor hits my sole and drops my leg back on the bed.

He says:

"Rub your sole a bit with your hand. It's all right for it to feel numb. You will be running in a couple of months." ❧

Translated by Esther Ronay

János Pilinszky

Poems

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri

The Just-Past

Félmúlt

For Ted Hughes

It arrives, and it goes rigid.
On the still, ashen wall it sits:
the moon. A single, massive blow.
A deathly silence is the core of it.

It shatters roads, the moonshine;
makes them all tremble, crack.
It tears this wall apart, the white
pouring across black.

The black day's rent by lightning,
and lightning, and more lightning. Here,
there is white pouring down, and also black.
In a magnetic storm you comb your hair.

You comb your hair in a mirror more alert
than the just-past, in a silence drenched in light.

You sit there in your silence, combing
your hair in the mirror, as if in a glass coffin.

1957

János Pilinszky (1921–1981)

was one of the greatest Hungarian poets of the 20th century. In English the following are available: Selected Poems *(in Ted Hughes's translation, Carcanet, 1976; extended and revised as* The Desert of Love, *Anvil, 1989) and* Crater: Poems 1974–5, *translated by Peter Jay (Anvil, 1989).* *See the article by George Gömöri on pp. 167–171 of this issue on Ted Hughes's translations.*

The Passion at Ravensbrück

Ravensbrücki passió

One steps clear of the others, stands
in a block of silence, still.
The prison garb, the convict's scalp
blink like an old film-reel.

Fearful to be a self alone:
the pores are visible,
with everything around so huge
and everything so small.

And that was it. As for the rest—
for the rest, without a sound,
simply forgetting to cry out,
the body hit the ground.

1959

Introitus

Introitusz

Who will open the book which is now closed?
Who make the first cut into unbroken time?
Turning the pages over, dawn to dawn,
lifting the pages up, casting them down?

Who of us dares reach into the furnace
of the not-yet-known? Who furthermore would dare
search through the dense leaves of the sealed book?
And who is there to do so with hands bare?

And who of us is not afraid? Who'd not be
when God himself has shut his eyes, and when
the angels all fall down before his face,
and when his creatures darken, every one?

The Lamb, alone of us, is not afraid,
he only, who was slain: the Lamb who (look!)
now comes clattering over the glass sea
and mounts the throne. And then, opens the book.

1961

November Elysium

Novemberi Elízium

A time for convalescence. You stop short
at the garden gate. You have the cloistered silence
of a still, yellow wall as your background.
A light breeze rises gently from the herbs
and now, as if annealed with holy oil,
the five tormented wounds that are your senses,
being soothed, begin to heal.

You're timid and exultant. Yes. And pausing
with childishly translucent arms and legs
in a greatcoat and shawl, both overgrown,
you are like Alyosha Karamazov.

And also like the meek, like those who come
as children, yes, and happy like a child
as well, for you want nothing any more.
Only to glow in the November sun
and give off fragrance light as a fir-cone's.
Only to bask in sunlight like the blest.

1959

Quatrain

Négysoros

Nails sleep in icy sand. A night
of posters drenched in loneliness.
The light outside, you left that on.
It is today they pierce my flesh.

1956

János Lackfi

A Radiator Grille Like a Row of Whale's Teeth

Excerpt from the novel *Mortuary*

The Chaika limousine was coal-black, indeed black as a crow, with glistening bluish-iridescent flashes on its body, a huge, chrome-plated radiator grille like a row of whale's teeth. And wherever one looked, front and back, strips, scrolls and spirals proliferated upon it as if it had been parked in Brezhnev's mythical vine bower, where diamond wine was grown and shoots of silver grape, silver gherkin and silver pumpkins, small and large, had been trained to grow over it. A Chaika was never seen in the street; it was reserved for the Moscow high-ups, notabilities and celebrities.

Brezhnev is said to have been so fearful of attempts being made on his life that he kept five versions of himself on hand at all times. Each so closely resembled him that he himself would have been unable to tell himself apart from himself, so it's a good job they told him. That was why he also had five Chaikas, so if a Chaika pulled out of a Kremlin gate, in reality five Chaikas would pull out of five Kremlin gates, each identical to a hair, with an identical him seated behind the shaded windows in each, so that any would-be assassin would have been more than a bit confused, if he saw all five at once, which one he should aim at. And if he did not see them all at one and the same time, the assassin would simply open fire, giving Brezhnev a one in five chance of dying (or four to one of living).

Of course, the fact is that if the story had reached us in Hungary, in the dusty further reaches of the radiant Empire, then one must suppose any would-be gunman would also have got wind of it and he would have dashed his weapon to the ground, saying it was utterly hopeless, or he would canoodle with one of the serving girls from Big Daddy's palace and one fine day she gets noticed by Brezhnev and groped by him behind the red velvet curtains. Got you! is just about to slip out from the disguise of Brezhnev's all-eyebrow Boris the Bear mask and try to smile, but not on an expectorant pill as he was accustomed to at the Red

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János Lackfi

has published nine collections of poetry (two of them for children) and two novels to date. He teaches Creative Writing at Pázmány Péter Catholic University and translates from French, especially works by Belgian authors. The novel Mortuary, *from which the above excerpt is taken, is reviewed by Tibor Bárány on pp.160–166 of this issue.*

Square parades, when he would wave only to that extent that it seemed he was shading his eyes with a trembling hand, or as if strings were being yanked on his hand just an itsy-bitsy bit every now and then, like one does on a spinning top. No, Brezhnev would force a conqueror's smile to his lips, the stiffened tendons of the face muscles creaking like my younger sister's bones, because she went to gymnastics classes where they were forced to stretch their legs even wider than the splits. And after a weak clinch that would not be shown on Hungarian TV even in adult-rated films—not that I saw any of them, because films like that were forbidden—anyway after that, the slip of a parlour-maid, while fiddling with the commander-in-chief's grizzled chest-rug, would have wheedled out of him, like the secret of his hair out of Samson, which Chaika he would be sitting in the next day, and, having gone outside onto the balcony to Brezhnev's bedroom in order to take the air, would have whistled this information down to her friend, the assassin, at the foot of a splendid fir-tree, who would jot the tune down as the boots of the revolutionary bodyguard crunched around him on the gravel paths.

Then it would have been no use that all of the Chaika's motor parts were of the highest-grade steel, which was why it guzzled eight or nine m.p.g.—and no mixture either but premium, indeed super—not that it mattered because we had more oil than we knew what to do with, and moreover more and more from one year to the next, as it said on the chart in our geography textbook. And it would have been no use that the windscreen and all the darkened glass was bullet-proof. No use that the guard at the gates would have been doubled. Because, where he was least expected, the Assassin would have stepped out and laughed satanically, while we would all laugh along with him, because naturally we too would get to see this. And he would lift up the armour-piercing shoulder-whatnot, much better than the ones they had in the ten-year-old films from the West that could be seen even here, because during those ten years the heroes of those films, particularly the Americans, and that's what the assassin would have been, they would obviously have progressed heaps, obviously their guns too.

But that's not how Brezhnev died. The way he died, I was sick and sitting at home in my bathrobe. I loved being sick because that meant we would go to Doctor Lazarus, who had huge white dishpan hands, but he could manipulate them as delicately as an orchestral conductor directing himself, that huge internal symphony orchestra, and a whisper of a moustache under his nose—only just as much as a normal moustache divided in half. I liked walking along the squeaky-clean hospital corridor, the sound deadened by the linoleum, whizzing up in the flashy steel lifts with all those mirrors, and us having to be polite and let everyone else on first, and everyone else being polite and letting us on first, and everyone wearing a tie, and even the food in the buffet being edible, and the service being nice, because here, son, they're all old-school gents and new Party cadres, so be very careful, there's no knowing who you might bump into, because they're thick as thieves, they're the ruling crowd, and even if they're officially supposed to hate

each other, the fact is they understand one another only too well, because the masters always like to stay on top, whatever the system, those pigs are flattered to mix in aristocratic company, on top of which both bunches are big on pulling strings, that's one thing, you see, where they can outshine each other, and this is their hospital, we are really intruders here, neither cadres nor nobs, we don't pull any strings, it's just—well, an old family acquaintance.

I always had to tell Doctor Lazarus I had a temperature, even when I didn't, indeed especially then, otherwise he would make light of it and not prescribe any antibiotics, and one had to listen to Doctor Lazarus's little lectures, highly entertaining they were too, coughing, you see, brings the mucus up to the gullet by a vacuum effect, and the chunky old-gold signet ring on his pinkie signals the level of the gullet with a pantomime gesture, and it spits it out like a pump, if you please, the signet ring springs forward, that's a biological process, may I say, the two hands fold gently, very gently, and the brow knits to close the case. Doctor Lazarus always explained things that we knew about, or at least thought we knew about, and maybe had even been taught at school. But the way he explained them, one could picture it so well, and the imagination was only stimulated by the sound-proofed office, the artificial leather of the seat, the white-gowned young nurse with the beehive hair-do, the all-glass cabinet that held medicines and gleaming instruments. Here one could let the imagination loose, not like at school, where smudged paintings fluttered on the wall, pictures of nobody and everybody, it could have been me or Uncle László from next door, poet and military leader, born 1651, died 1709. All those busy hands, feet and necks, yes, one also had to pay attention to the hands as they drummed, poked, passed on notes, and where the feet were twisting, then on the wall: work unerringly and aim high, the way a star moves in the sky and with the people through fire and water, which we knew were rubbish, because stars don't move anywhere, they've got no legs, and there may be fire and water in a boiler of a firebox but the plain fact is there was no people, the Commies dreamed that up, which was why it was impossible to pay much attention in school.

There was practically nothing to be had there, yet everything was still sort of interesting, I have no idea how they managed that. One just sat and gawked. Sitting next to me in the waiting-room was a Communist or a blue-blood who had tufts of hair sticking out of his nose as if he had been planted with grass or something. A fine crop of thick, grey grass; one could almost hear the rustling. The same kind of grass was poking out of his ears, and there was even a blade or two sprouting from his warts. It seemed only logical that the guy's head must really have been nothing but bristles and hair inside. He obviously kept it watered through his mouth, or else he took off the balded top of his skull and poured it on that way. Maybe pesticides and other crop-protection chemicals as well.

Then there's that other fellow opposite, reading a newspaper. He was already sitting there and reading when I arrived with Gran. People's Sport*—that must have been what it was, given how absorbed he was. Though it could be he folded*

the paper, I have barely any recollection of the chap, because the part of him that was covered up by the newspaper did not in fact exist at all, so when he closes the paper his wrists and hands plop onto the ground. What exists of his body, from the chest down, flops forward in the seat, with the whole man having been held together only by the newspaper up to now.

Around the hospital were trees, and the sky was always there, sometimes the sun too, because it's only worth being sick on sunny days; the clouds played ball in the sky, and the tree-branches were interlaced in such a way that one could never tell if it was a sparrow hopping around, or perhaps several of them, or it was only the wind playing footie.

The pleasant tatty-brown artificial leather of the chair seat warmed up under my behind as Doctor Lazarus went on. All of a sudden, my body also became an all-glass cabinet and the doctor not only fluttered over the thin membrane of my skin like on a tom-tom, tapping the back of his own hand, but as I put my clothes back on he also pointed out the organs, one by one, the lungs, the way they pump away, the evil little bacteria that we were coming down with. He explained that coughing, I'd have you know, it comes about because the mucus membrane, if you please, is a tissue like that, and on top of that the little lobules in the lungs, I make so free as to inform you, kiss-di-hand, *my greetings, my dear young Clarrie. I always thought of Doctor Lazarus being some very gentlemanly gent, but it turned out he was the son of a simple peasant family, a self-made man, who had pulled himself up to where he was now, this hospital for the crème de la crème, an internal medicine specialist for the elite, on his own merits, and I knew what would come next, what would become of me with my marks at school, and it was a hundred times better to be an honest worker, even a street sweeper, than nothing, nothing at all, so I should make a choice, and be quick about it, what I wanted to be. But the truth is, well, I'm not a self-made man, the way they say it in English: I was made by others.*

It was fun having breakfast in bed and afternoon tea. Drinking lots, hearing it burble down into my chest, as though Doctor Lazarus were explaining it, as though my throat were made of glass and the drink would pass along it, somersaulting, sizzling, scrawling strange ribs like a spring shower on the tarmac of the road. The whole flat would fall silent, and I could rummage among Dad's things and in Mummy's chest-of-drawers, or I could go outside in the spring and reach into the rusty water at the top of the barrel, crumble clods of earth, knead them into clay, then hurl them at something, anything: the bush, where the lump would break apart with a spatter; or the neighbour's dog, which would just get angrier and angrier; or the fence, which would slice up the earth-balls into however many pieces as the wires they hit.

If I fell ill when I was a small boy, Gran would sometimes look after me. With a sweaty eiderdown and big pillows, even making me put on my bathrobe on top of my pyjamas. She would not take kindly to any protests, because her own father had been a doctor, so of course she knew about any disease and

medicine you cared to mention. Referring to them by their Latin names, too, as if they were old acquaintances, and she could call everything by its name anyway, whether it was infection, influenza, croup, thymol, ipecacuanha, and pulmonary lobe. She would bolster my legs so the harmful mucus would drain into my chest and I could spit is out. I even spat neatly into the glass of water that was standing by the bed for that express purpose, the gobs of purulent mucus swimming like strange fish in an aquarium, the light of the bedside lamp shining through them, so when Mum and Dad came home in the evening she would show him how much sputum can come out of the boy and they would smile, thank you very much, Granny, but, would you pour it away now, if you don't mind, please.

Instead, I would spit into a handkerchief or the toilet bowl, or take a run to gob out of the attic window, curious as to how far out it would go, mini-pools of phlegm on the roof-tiles, though some would soar over the gutter and splatter down below on the terrace or land on the lawn, I can almost see before me the thin strand of spittle, like a suspension bridge, between two blades of grass.

It's impossible that a short, bald, tubby man like him can play the piano that much; for a start, it's just impossible, and for another, even if it is possible, it's not fair, today of all days, when I'm ill, and it's not even Monday, when at least there is no TV being broadcast, I fumed to myself after I had switched the telly on for the fifth time and it wasn't showing what was printed in the programme. Out of sheer misery, I opened a sachet of powdered milk, sugared it and mixed it with water into a viscous drool. It became just like the wallpaper paste when we did up the attic, with tiny islands in the whitish mush, little adhesive lumps that had to be punctured because they had air inside, and the half-clotted, glutinous flakes stuck to my tongue, the granulated sugar crunched between my teeth, and at that point the doorbell rang.

Apprehensively, I peeked out of the window to check it was not the man in the black hat with the big briefcase, no knowing what was in it, perhaps he'd got wind that I was snooping after him. There was no-one standing outside by the gate, so it could have been the postman and he'd already moved on, so I took a dekko to see whether he had left anything, and I also took a dekko at the entrance door to the block, and blow me if it wasn't Uncle Szepi. He'd already got in past the gate, he didn't give a shit about anybody. Open up, kid, he immediately thrust his tool box in my hand and waded on in. What's up, then, you shammer, school stink, or what? Where's the olds, anyway, died out like the dinosaurs, or have they been shot out into space? Hands in pockets, he sniffed around the place. He had sausage fingers with hairs on the knuckles, his trousers were strained over his belly so he only ever got half a hand in his pocket, the thumb was left outside with the hairy back of the hand poking out. Grizzled, glass-wool hair and thick eyebrows that while he was talking, or rather yelling, because soft tones were completely lacking from Uncle Szepi's repertoire, wriggled up and down whereas his brow furrowed every which way as the wrinkles did gym exercises on it.

Effing and blinding and moaning and sighing, Uncle Szepi musters the water-main inspection chamber at length, as though he were waiting for something to happen, a flood, say, that would spare him the bother of having to climb down. Better safe than sorry, so he asks if it really is leaking, how do we know, had we seen it? He pulls open the cast-iron cover, a hissing of water can be heard down below. Fetch me a torch, stinker, and with the pale beam of light he sweeps the semidarkness of the hole, his face increasingly troubled. God blast this for a crummy job, why couldn't they build this bloody hole the size of a normal person, he clambers down they folding-ladder that I had brought him just beforehand, holding his arms up high, then turning diagonally in order to disappear in the concrete square of the manhole. Fetch me a monkey-wrench, you know what one of those is, I hear a croaking, cavernous voice from down below like the one you get when you speak into an empty plastic tumbler. In thrillers that's how hostage-takers make telephone calls to announce their demands to the cops: we want a two-seater sports aircraft and ten million francs, but the notes must be in multiple denominations and they'd better not have consecutive serial numbers, and no marks on them. The money's to be in a suitcase and the suitcase on the plane, the aircraft to be at such-and-such a place, but if you try anything funny, the girl gets it, we can get very angry indeed. I'm a wee bit narked at Uncle Szepi, of course I know what a monkey-wrench is, that was what the burglar dressed as a plumber used to crack the security guard on the head in the TV series. Fortunately, no packing, grease, spanners of various sizes, or soldering iron was needed, I hate having to solder down there, Szepi wriggles out like Winnie-the-Pooh who grew too fat for the exit.

You hear, Granny, she is going to do me in, any moment now. She's standing there, looks at my hands, then she just drones on and on, not drawing any breath! Mr Repair Man, the screw track comes in on the other side, she says, you're putting that gland nut in the wrong way round, and anyway there's not enough vaseline for the valve, he's stinting with it. At which point I say, look here, lady, this is not the first gland nut I've had to handle, it'll be fine laid on like that, just dandy. At which she goes, it's the wrong way round, take it from me, I wasn't born yesterday either, I lived through two world wars and I've seen a hundred repair men, and I've seen them come and go, some in pools of blood too. Your granny, eh? She'd talk the hind legs off a donkey with all her gabbing. That really sets me off. Do it yourself, lady, if you're so smart, and I toss the money-wrench over to her. I'll do it, too, you bet, says the old dame and picks up the wrench and gets cracking. If it were up to me I wouldn't pay you a penny for what you do here. My chin dropped, I took the job out of her hands. Lady, this just won't do. Tell you what, I'll do it for you on the house, as a freebie, but I'll not set foot here ever again, you won't see me for dust. Hand us that packing, shammer!

How old are you kiddo, twelve? You don't look it. They won't serve you a spritzer at the bar yet, huh. What d'you mean they already did, get away.

In a year or two you'll have outgrown the chickies in your class, and you'll be growing whiskers like mine. Tell you what, look there, there's hair in my ears and on the middle of my back as well. Women go for that, no, that doesn't do it justice, they adore them, only hairy chaps get them going. The other day, let me tell you, your olds are not at home, are they? Her voice over the phone was so, well, you know, and then the way she opened the door and the kit she had on her. Phew, I knew there was some fitting to be done there, itty-bitty wisps of nothing and it wasn't exactly sweat-running-down-the-crack-in-your-bum weather either. So she says to me, have a peek under the washing machine, it's always leaking, a screw needs some packing, and how, no use my hubby, wimp that he is, fiddling around down there, he just cussed and wiped his filthy hands on his trousers, after which the trickle was even worse than before, and on top of everything I now had his clothes to wash as well. Just leave it to me, lady, says I, it'll be good as new, no loose joints, you'll see. So I stoop over to take a peek at the rotten coupling. Lady, I says to her, how the hell can I be expected to find room here, it's a tight fit for a rat, never mind a normal bloke. Come on now, Master Craftsman, she coos in my ear, you can't be giving up already, and she tousles the hair on the back of my neck. I'm praying to myself, God Almighty, with my gut I'm going to get stuck in there, they'll have to operate to get me out, don't let the missus know, will you? Well, anyway, I says to her, I'll squeeze in only you're going to have to help. Hold on to this tool for the time being, got it, keep holding it, that's good, isn't it? There was some proper packing there, I can tell you, and ever since then I pop round every once in a while to keep the shebang well oiled.

Now then, do you hear what I'm saying? That old pig Brezhnev too. One hell of a hairy freak he was, too, his eyebrows alone would have made two middling-sized paintbrushes, that's why he got so high. One morning I go to work and the boss comes in, a decent chap by the way. Now lads, let's be upstanding for a minute's silence for the deceased First Secretary of the Soviet CP. Show our respects, lads, chop-chop. We happened to be eating our bacon butties at the time, so I says quietly to myself, that beats 'em all, Louie baby, you're a Swab kid yourself. Brezhnev was enough of a prick as it was for any Swab kid to be upstanding for him. But the branch Party secretary had ears like radar or wotthehell, because he goes: you're not worthy to be a member of the working class, but there's freedom of opinion in this country, so step out into the corridor if you prefer, only don't disturb the self-respecting workers here. OK then, whatever, if he's that fussed about it. So I gets to my feet and shuffle out, but in my own sweet time, mark my words, no need to break a sweat. And that asshole is going purple. The mourning party is not obligatory, he shouts after me, and as the door swung shut behind me I could hear the hoots of laughter, they sniggered right through that minute of standing to attention, and the bod rushed off in such a lather that he was frothing. Now then, lads, says Louie, you're all idiots, why the flipping heck can't you can it for just a minute, that asshole is going to blow his lid, and it's me who'll cop for it.

Right, that's done. Fetch us a pickled cucumber, sonny, I bet there's a jar in the fridge. Mmm, nice and crunchy this one, you know, they're best at night too. There are things the wife can't do, but cook, you bet, she dishes out the stewed pork with the quivering gnocchi, a bite of gherkin on the side is what I like, a sip of beer to go with it. See here, Szepi, you can't get much better than this, all this crap during the day is strictly for the birds. By Flórián Square off the end of Árpád Bridge. You know, in the high-rise flats, that's where I live. Like in a fairy-tale, the whole thing, just sit out on the balcony and watch the headlights of those flashy cars, streaming along in the dark, and the lights all on throughout the building, like a jewel it is, liquid gold, the way it flows. And just remember, in each little car is a bloke who's the dead spit of yours truly, going about his business like an ant, or going back home to the wife and to have a gander at what's on the box. As for me, I watch them from up there, and behind all those windows a hundred thousand other little guys, regular blokes, working men. A beer in the hand, they're either watching all this or else following the match or giving the old lady how's your father. That's when I think to myself you can stuff your High Tatras and Low Shmatras and Lomnický Peaks that you have to climb up only to climb down again, because this is my Niagara Falls and my Eiffel Tower, right before my house, at my feet, and I don't need anything else. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

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Miklós Vajda

Portrait of a Mother in an American Frame

(Part of an essay-memoir)

She stands in the kitchen, in a kitchen, not our kitchen, not the old kitchen, not any of our old kitchens, but her own kitchen, an unfamiliar one, not mine, and she cooks, stirs something. She is cooking for me. That's another new thing, a strange thing. But there she stands, repeating anything I want, anywhere, whatever I happen to want most, at the time I want it. I am still here: she is not. And there are things I do want. But even if I didn't want them she would carry on coming and going, doing this and that, entering my head, calling me, talking, listening, now in delight, now in pain, thinking of me or looking at me, ringing me, asking me things, writing to me as if she were alive. I am insatiable: I am interested in all that is not me, in what is private, in affairs before me and after me, in her existence as distinct from mine, and I try to fit the jigsaw together, but nowadays, whatever she is doing—and I can't do anything about this—is always, invariably done for me, because of me, to me, with me or on my behalf—or rather, of course, for me.

At this very moment I want her to stand there, in that kitchen, stirring away. Let's have her cooking one of those dishes she learned abroad, let her make a caper sauce to go with that sizzling grilled steak. But I often have her repeat a great many other things too: for example, I have recently taken to observing her secretly from my bed as she slowly removes her make-up at the antique dressing table with the great gilded antique Venetian mirror hanging over it, looking into the antique silver-framed standing mirror before her, going about her task in a business-like manner, applying cream with balls of cotton wool, her hands working in a circular motion, efficiently, always in exactly the same way, pulling faces if need be, puffing out a cheek, rubbing her skin then smearing it with, among other things, a liquid she refers to as her 'shaking lotion' and which dries immediately so she looks like

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a white-faced clown. Then she wipes it off and I fall asleep again. The room is full of mirrors, each of the six doors of the built-in cupboard is a full-length mirror. My bed is there in her bedroom: my own bedroom is being used by the German Fräulein. Sometimes I wake late at night just as she enters from the bathroom, wearing her yellow silk dressing gown and I hear her as she applies creams and lotions for the night before going to bed, as she moves around, gets comfortable, clears her throat and gives a good sigh before falling sound asleep, her mouth open, contented, exhaling loudly, exactly the way I catch myself doing nowadays. Or I am watching her at eleven in the morning, as she steps into the car, fully made-up, elegantly dressed, wearing hat and gloves and high-heeled shoes, as she throws back the fashionable half-veil, pulls out of the garage, turns in the drive, takes the left-hand lane—the traffic is still driving on the left—and sets off from our Sas Hill villa in the Buda hills into the city centre to do her shopping before meeting her friends in the recently opened Mignon Espresso—the first of its kind in Hungary—or at the Gerbeaud patisserie where she might go on to meet my father who sometimes strolls over from his office to talk over their plans for the next day or whatever else is on their minds. Then they come home together to eat. Or I see her in Márianosztra, or possibly, later, in Kalocsa, at the end of the monthly visiting time, led away by a guard armed with a submachine-gun, out of the hall that is divided in half by a partition of wire netting, leaving through double steel doors, overlooked by enormous portraits of Stalin and Rákosi, and I catch a glimpse of her as she is shepherded away in a procession of prisoners and guards, and she freezes for a moment, conscious perhaps of me looking at her, to look back over her shoulder, sensing me standing there, staring at her. The guard's flat cap is covering half her face but her slight squint, her nod, her faint smile and her suspiciously shining eyes tell me more than she could say to me in the fifteen allotted minutes in the presence of the guard.

Never in my life have I seen her cry. She did not cry when my father died, nor when her sister died. She cannot, she could not, perhaps she never wanted or allowed herself to give direct expression to intense feeling, not in words and certainly not in wild gestures. When either of us was going away on a longer trip she would embrace me and give me a light, brief kiss while gently patting my back by way of encouragement, then drawing a little cross on my forehead with her thumb. That's how we parted in December 1956 at the Southern Terminal, both of us in ruins, like the town itself, silently, crying without tears, since we both knew we would not see each other again for years, maybe never.

Nor did I ever hear her sing or hum. Or, and this is another scene I often conjure, the telephone is ringing there, at her home in New York, and she looks at me in confusion, pleading with me once again silently rather than in words, to answer it again because she has difficulty, particularly on the telephone, in understanding the language. Most of the time, of course, the caller is Hungarian. She hardly knows anyone here who is not Hungarian. Nowadays I have her pull this pleading face time and again, as if repeating a scene on DVD; I torture myself with it, it is my

punishment. I always regret it but once or twice I rebuke her rather sharply for not having in all that time learned the language properly. But no sooner have I said the words than I am already regretting them: I don't know what has made me say them, made me want to lecture and criticise her, what makes me want to assert my independence, to push her away from me time after time. It's some obscure, as-yet-inexplicable urge I have to prod her where she is most vulnerable and often I am unable to resist it. I see she resents it; that I have hurt her; that it saddens her, that it makes her suffer, and that she closes up, but, wisely, accepts the latest rebuke, generously adding it to the rest. Perhaps she understands this instinctively better than I do. Even in the years before prison I was subjecting her to these low tricks; she bore the pain, but maybe, at that time, she could inwardly smile at the thought that her biological destiny had presented her with such a difficult adolescent. Very quickly though we're back to the usual way of doing things. Her patience, her calm, her seemingly endless wisdom in understanding, spring from a source deep within her. But she will never be more demonstrative than this. There are no sudden embraces, no pet-names, no uncalled-for affectionate kisses, no light laughter, no playful teasing, no letting-one's-hair down, no messing about. Nor was there ever. I myself lack the capacity for at least two or three of those. We live in conditions of withdrawal and reserve, which is not the same as living in solemnity or dullness or indifference, nor does it exclude—not by any means—warmth, kindness, solicitude, gaiety and a sense of humour cloaked in delicate irony, something I am particularly fond of. I have instinctively grown used, to some degree at least, to seeking what was missing in her in others: ever since I was born I have received generous helpings of them from Gizi, my godmother whom I adore, and, in her simple, modest way, from Fräulein too. Later I look for these qualities in girls, in women, with wildly varying results. But all in vain, since anything you were not given by your mother, indeed anything she did actually give you, will not be found anywhere else. That is my definitive experience.

I have been feeling closer to her recently, ever since she died in fact. For a long time I believed she was a simple soul: that she lived by instinct alone, was prejudiced, was incapable of articulating her feelings, impressions and passions, or only doing so when she was forced to and absolutely had to take a position on something. Then I realised I was wrong. She had a complex, rich, many-layered inner life, consisting not only of immediate feeling but of the tastes and ways of thinking traditional to her family and class. Over and over again in my head I replay the most memorable things she said, examining and analysing them, and I always come to the same conclusion. Her opinions were thought through, never spur-of-the-moment or improvised, but properly considered and, when called upon, she could present excellent, concise arguments for them. She had outstanding moral judgment, impeccable taste and her understanding of human character was all but infallible. She was not a snob but open and kindly, never condescending even in the genteel role of 'madam', as she was to the servants for example. She was no bluestocking, of course, but was reasonably well-read. It was

thanks to her that I was introduced to Balzac and Dickens in my early adolescence, at a time when I was still reading Karl May and Jules Verne. In her later years she enjoyed reading Churchill's memoirs. She had studied at a girls' grammar school in Arad, her Transylvanian hometown, and, after the Romanian occupation, when her family—a fully Hungaricised landowning family of ancient Serbian origin, some of whose members played important roles in Hungarian history—fled to Pest, she studied the violin with Hubay, as long as they could afford it, which was not long. The photograph of the long-haired, slender, beautiful teenage girl passionately playing her violin—if one can go by such evidence—seems to indicate that she was deeply imbued with the love of music. When the money ran out, she told me, they presented the violin to a poor, blind child genius. In view of that it is surprising that she never showed the least interest in music later. Might she have taken offence at the hand fate had dealt her? Not one concert, not one visit to the Opera. The programme of classical selections on the radio at lunchtime on Sunday—it was always on while we were eating—represented the entire musical diet of the family. Maybe that was because my father had absolutely no interest in music. From early childhood on I would pick at the keys of my godmother's wonderful Steinway grand—a present from the Regent Horthy—and was strongly drawn to music, but year after year they kept rejecting my plea for lessons, dismissing it as a passing, infantile fancy. It was the only thing they ever refused me. Even today I can't forgive them for it.

But what I chiefly desire is to have her tell me stories: I want her to answer my questions, to annoy her by making provocative remarks, to correct her, instruct her, occasionally to cause her overt pain, to punish her, to let her know that she is my intellectual inferior, to confuse her and mock her and, immediately after having done so, somehow to convey to her how helplessly mortified I feel, to show that I know I have hurt her; but I can't quite say it, cannot quite bring myself to apologise, not even to mention the thing that continues mournfully to rattle around inside me like a sheet of newspaper caught on the railings. Not even when she appears to have put it all behind her. Even today when I dream of these things as have passed between us, I experience such a sharp pang of conscience that it feels like a pain in my chest and I wake up in a sweat. But she is capable of retaliating, not out of revenge, but in self-defence, and she can upset me too as when, for example, I ask some question about the family and she retorts: fat lot you cared about the family back then! What did her aristocratic ancestry—which is mine too by the way—the aristocracy of which at a certain time in my life I was so deeply and genuinely ashamed, those historical names, matter to me then? I wasn't even interested in the legendary patriotic general who was executed by the Habsburgs with twelve others at Arad in 1849. And grandmother, who was a baroness, she couldn't help it, what was my problem with her? Today, grandfather's ornate family tree, hand-painted in bright colours on parchment with all the coats of arms going back six generations, hangs on the wall of my flat along with pictures of other famous ancestors.

Right now she happens to be cooking, cooking for me in that kitchen and as she does so, she is half turned to me, in a slightly demonstrative pose as I see it, while merrily chattering on, a pose in which there is no little pride. Her tall slender figure is an elegant exclamation mark in the humble kitchen: see! I can cook! She wants to prove—she is always trying to prove something—that she has learned to cook, and not just any old how. Before, she could manage—when she had to—a soup or two, semolina pudding, an omelette, a slice of veal, a bit of French toast, and not much more. She tied a green-and-white checked apron over her cream-coloured silk blouse, her string of pearls (a cheap yet pretty piece of bijouterie, the real thing having vanished into the Soviet Union), her smart beige herringbone skirt, her stockings, her elegant, narrow but, by-now, not-too-high heeled shoes. She wore these things until it was time for bed (having discarded the apron of course), wearing the same clothes she wore to the office, not even removing her shoes, which is the first thing I do as soon as I get in, here, as I do at home. Or rather there, as at my home. She can't understand why the shoes bother me. Slippers are for wearing only at night before bed, or on waking up. During the day it's so non-soigné, she says, Hungaricising the words to sound: *unszoányírt.* I hate this verbal monstrosity with its German prefix and French descriptor domesticated for home use: it looks even worse written down, something like a mole cricket. I had heard it in childhood from her sisters and my cousins. It must have originated in Arad, presumably inherited from a series of German and French governesses. Naturally, I tick her off, not for the first time, gently but with an obviously annoying superiority, and tell her how many different ways there might be of conveying the same idea in Hungarian, so there is no reason to use a foreign word, especially not one so horrible. She is offended, of course, but does not show it; I am sorry, of course, but I don't show it. We fall silent. We often find conversation difficult in any case or stick to small talk. We are not particularly talkative people, either of us. Not with each other, at least.

The veal with caper sauce turns out to be perfect. I had never tasted it before. Back home whole generations had grown up never having heard of capers. I must have eaten one last when I was a child, when it shimmered in the middle of a ring of anchovy, like the eye of some sea-creature: that's how I remember it. The flavour is familiar and yet entirely new. She is watching me to see how I react to her cooking. Do I like the capers, she asks. I don't let her take pleasure in it: so what if you can get capers in America, you can get anything here we can't get at home. Occasionally you can get bananas at home now, I answer on the spur of the moment with Lilliputian self-importance, and there were oranges too just before Christmas. One had to queue up for them, of course, I add for the sake of objectivity. Really? She asks in a slightly disappointed voice. In my opinion she should feel cheered by this. Could she have forgotten what a banana or orange means to us there? We carry on eating. I sense that the caper sauce, the grilled veal and the whole baked potato in aluminium foil was a long planned-for surprise, one of many, intended for me. It's a real American thing. Later she lists all the other

dishes she can cook, just you see. And it turns out that in her free time she sometimes bakes cakes too, for Hungarian acquaintances, and acquaintances of acquaintances, bakes them to order, for money. So far I only had known—and that was because she told me in a letter—that she occasionally baby-sat, chiefly for Hungarians but also for some American families, and that she had had some amusing evenings with naughty children who did not speak Hungarian, who might, for example, lock her into the bathroom for hours. Most recently she made ten dollars baking a huge Sacher-torte, she proudly tells me. She buys the ingredients and calculates her fee, which, it seems, is the going rate in Hungarian circles, makes up the bill according to the cost of raw materials and often delivers the cake directly to the house. It sometimes happens, she tells me, giggling, that strangers offer her tips. Does she accept them? Of course, why not? I have to take a deep breath. These earnings, taken together with the modest income she has scraped together, have paid for parcels of clothes, chosen with exquisite taste, that would arrive at my home on the Groza Embankment and later for children's toys and clothes at the flat in Vércse Street. And clearly my airfare too, as well as the ample pocket money she has been giving me while here in New York come from the delicious torte as well as the soiled nappies. The People's Republic had, somewhat unwillingly, allowed me five dollars of hard currency for my three-month visit. It is my mother who keeps me; a rather disturbing feeling at age thirty-four. She bakes four or five different sorts of cake, following the recipe in the book of course, and all eminently successful bar the caramel-topped *dobos* layer-cake, she tells me. Caramel is hard to handle. She pronounces it *kaahraahmell,* with wide open 'aahs', not long, in the regional Palóc mode, but quite short, like the German "a". This irritates me no end, I don't know why. It has been aah, aah, aah all the way—*aahkaahdémia, aahgresszív, aahttitűd,* right down to *kaahpri* (capers) and *kaahraahmell*—ever since I can remember. And *maahszek* too, the colloquial word for semi-private undertakings. This time I don't stop myself pointing out that this is not a foreign word, but a Hungarian portmanteau, combining 'ma', pronounced 'muh', from *magán* (private) and *szek* from *szektor* (sector). It is a form of what we call an acronym, I add; adds the conceited, repulsive litterateur, her son. She does not answer. She has no counter-argument. She carries on saying *maahszek* and *aahkaahdémia.*

We eat. As a child I used to enjoy watching her as she adjusted the food on her plate with great topographic precision, shifting it here and there with careful, tiny, sweeping movements of knife and fork, like the director on the set of a film, arranging the shots and instructing the cast before rolling the camera. She pushes the meat to the right side of the plate, the garnish being neatly separated and ranged on the left. Turning the plate one way or the other is common, an unspoken taboo. She cuts and spears a small piece from the meat, loads the appropriate amount of garnish on the round back of the fork and so carries it to her mouth. This is a far from simple operation, as may be demonstrated now, since the caper seeds would drop from the fork were they not perfectly balanced

there and flattened together a little, did not the speared piece of meat or potato block their escape route, and did she not lean progressively closer and lower over her plate with every bite so that they might find their way into her mouth all the sooner. When the garnish includes peas, which means that only a few peas succeed in remaining on the curve of the fork behind the meat, that is to say leaving a surfeit of peas on the plate, she is forced to consume extra forkfuls of peas only. But she has a strategy for coping with that too. Using the knife she spears a few peas that will support a few slightly squashed ones behind them. I have seen others deploy this technique but while they shift and prod the peas about, creating a mess on the plate, she manages to eat them in an undeniably elegant and distinguished manner. It is all done with great skill and grace. She divides the meat, the garnish and the salad so that everything disappears from the plate at precisely the same time, every piece of meat with its due portion of garnish and vice versa. She never leaves any food on the plate. Nor do I. She has lived through the meagre rationing and starvation of two world wars, I only one. Any sauce or juice left on the flat dish, however runny, is conveyed to her mouth with the fork. One simply can't imagine her using a spoon. She leans forward and makes rapid spooning movements with the fork, turning it up a little so there's still a moment before dripping and thus she can safely steer it into her mouth. This spectacular technique requires close attention and speed: it demands a lot of time and energy, but it works. She turns the obvious pointlessness of it into a display of elegance. I eat the same way myself, ever since being allowed to dine with the adults, as did the German Fräulein, the whole act having made a great impression on her. But to the two of us it is like a private second language, and while we often make mistakes, it is the equivalent of a mother tongue to her, it is what she grew up doing, quite possibly never seeing any other way of eating, only this. My father, whose education had been under quite different circumstances, ate differently. That which could not be speared, he swept into the hollow of the fork and stuffed into his mouth. If sauce remained on the plate and he fancied it he was quite happy to spoon it up, if he didn't fancy it he simply left it. If there were no guests he would dip his bread in, sometimes on the end of the fork but sometimes with his hands! He was allowed to. He was the only one. In my first days at the university canteen I was laughed out of countenance as I was unmasked as a true-blooded bourgeois leftover from the old regime when, out of habit, I started employing my mother's technique. The class-alien aspect of the art must have been painfully obvious, a blind man could see, you didn't have to be a Marxist-Leninist to recognise it. Ever since then, when it comes to eating, my strategies are somewhat eclectic, though lately, since I have been dining alone, I have fallen into decadent ways; she out there, on the other hand, alone, is almost certain to have continued using her fork to spoon the sauce to the day she died.

Silence. She clears the table. She starts on the washing-up while I watch, she having refused my help. Her hair still looks chestnut brown and though this is merely a matter of appearances, there is no grey there. Her face is animated,

refined, gentle, very beautiful, her eyes warm though she will soon be sixty. I understand why in the thirties the Budapest tabloid press referred to her as 'one of the most beautiful women in town'. The ritual of the nightly removal of make-up—though, of course, I am not watching this from bed now as I used to but walking up and down behind her, chatting to her, recounting my round of affairs of the day in New York—is quite unchanged right down to the 'shaking lotion' and the same old movements, it's only the lovely antique mirrors that are missing. The face that looks back at her from the cheap mirror now is still a feminine face, all attention: she can still take delight in life, is still curious, still wants to see everything. There is no trace in her of the expression you catch on other déclassé immigrants, the cynical hanger-on's don't-blame-me look. She has not walled herself in, become a solitary, she has not been distorted by the enormity and the harsh bustle of the alien world that now surrounds her. She is just the same as she had been in prison when sharing a cell with eight others. Having made subtle enquiries and going by what is around her, I know she is alone, though I had hoped she might have a man in her life. There is no way of asking her this directly, as it is something we never speak about. Grandmother brought up her three girls, she being the youngest of them, to avoid even the most harmless romantic literature, even that in which the attractive, and in every respect impeccable, young suitor makes so bold as merely to touch the innocent maiden's hand in the long awaited last chapter at the point of engagement. She would glue the last pages together or simply cut them out with scissors, believing such episodes to be unseemly. My mother addressed the issue in less radical fashion, in the way that best suited her: it simply didn't exist. My sexual education at home consisted of a single short sentence that I first heard at the age of about four or five when the words first issued from her lips at a time when I lay in bed with some infection, possibly influenza: You are not to play with your pee-pee. That was it. My father said even less. He said nothing. So I became an autodidact in the subject.

Her circle consisted of a few relatives and female friends, all Hungarian, two of them quite close to her. I suspect, I sense, I see, since she practically radiates it, that she lives entirely, exclusively, for me, and that this, for the time being, is as certain as can be. She wants to show me, to buy me, all she can of America, all that is possible to show or buy, whatever is obtainable in intellectual or material terms. That is because I have chosen to remain there, because I chose not to come with her. That is why she scrimped and saved, that is what she was preparing herself for all her life here. Almost as soon as I arrived the first thing she did was to take me to a medium-range department store and, bearing my tastes in mind, equip me with several suits of clothes, from top to bottom, the way she might a child, that is to say her son, whom she has now had on loan for three months. There were certain items of my own clothing that I had to throw out: she absolutely insisted on that.

There is a photograph of her, some thirty years back in *Színházi Élet,* a magazine for theatre lovers, showing her playing patience with Gizi Bajor, the actress. Gizi is dealing out the cards while she looks on attentively, smoking,

turning the signet ring with her thumb the way she used to. And there it still is, miraculously, the golden signet ring, next to her engagement ring: she doesn't take it off, not even while washing-up. When I was a little boy I desperately wanted to have one of those. Engraved into the deep-red ruby, under a five-point crown, a tiny knight-on-horseback galloping to the right holds high his sword, a moustached head, bald save a single wisp, obviously a Turk's, impaled on it. Patiently and wisely she would explain to me time and again that I couldn't have one because it was not mine to possess, because even my father didn't have one. It hurt me, it infuriated me, it brought me out in a fever: I simply couldn't accept that I was unworthy of it. I, I alone, unworthy! When I could get anything else I wanted! It was the first time I felt the limits of my world and I couldn't understand it, couldn't get used to it. Yet how fine it would be turning it round on my finger while talking, as she did! To answer questions in a careless fashion! Several years, some eras later, I upbraid her on account of the ring. Before the *gimnázium* is nationalised in 1948 and I am still at the Cistercian school—but have become an avid consumer of the works of Hungarian novelists, poets, sociologists and historians, most of whom are outside the Church-approved curriculum, and am fervently committed to the cause of equality—I get embarrassed by my mother, not just in myself but before others too, precisely on account of the signet ring she is wearing, which I see as an emblem of feudalism. She spends her evenings at this time removing, at my stubborn insistence, the embroidered five-point crown above the monogram from the remaining items in her trousseau such as tablecloths, napkins, bed linen, towels, kitchen cloths and dusting rags, and she does it silently, willingly, with a glum expression. Then, something I really haven't anticipated happens: I have to identify with the one-time envied, later despised, signet ring. The dictatorship itself so to speak pushes it on my finger, as I too am a 'class-alien'. Now I fear for her and try to persuade her to remove it because she could get into trouble wearing it. She won't listen to me. She has worn it all her adult life, she will not disown her family, she is not ashamed of her ancestors, she tells me rather sharply. Pretty soon, in November 1949, they arrest her on a trumped-up, patently absurd charge of panic-mongering. "Who are you fucking, you stuck-up whore?" asks her first interrogator at the notorious security headquarters building, 60 Andrássy Avenue.

There are things to take pride in and wonder at in the little kitchen. For example there is a never-before seen gadget, the electric tin-opener, and next to it, hanging on the wall there's a square-metre sized piece of thick, perforated pasteboard, painted white and framed with red insulating tape, from whose holes hang, at a convenient distance from each other, a set of useful hooks accommodating a variety of kitchen utensils. It is a brilliant example of American practicality in offering solutions so blatantly simple that it takes your breath away. She had seen it somewhere, put the scarlet border round it, fixed it to the wall all by herself and it is so handy and saves so much space. I don't recall in our previous life, or lives, rather, ever seeing her with a screwdriver or hammer in her

hand. Now she is the possessor of pliers, chisels, files, a range of screws and keys, measuring tapes and insulating tapes, keeping them all in a professional-looking toolbox, proudly setting them out and recounting what she fixed with what.

We move into the living-room, though she uses the English term with a little apologetic smile, since she could hardly call it a salon, the word we used to refer to the spacious sitting-room in the Buda villa of my childhood. This small space is dark even in daytime, darker than the whole inner-tenement apartment. With a peculiar—and to me entirely unfamiliar—giggle and twinkle in her eyes, she lowers her voice and tells me that, through the window overlooking the tiny yard, she can see into a neighbouring apartment where the occupier, in fact the janitor, a corpulent black man—just imagine, Nicky!—right by the open window, even with the lights full on, there on the sofa, regularly, ahem, caressing himself! You can even hear his heavy breathing! That's why I have to keep the curtains drawn, even in the daytime. There are a couple of engravings on the wall in slightly clumsily fixed ready-made frames. In terms of furniture I see two ancient, much worn, and in every respect dissimilar, fauteuils that might charitably be referred to as antiques, and two, just as dissimilar, also mock-antique, little tables, as well as a spindly baby-sized chest of drawers on barley-sugar legs, matching the rest only by virtue of imitation. These she has purchased, piece by piece, as and when opportunity afforded, from a thrift-shop, that is to say a store where are sold all kinds of cheap things abandoned or passed on by gentlefolk for charitable purposes. Some ornaments on the table, a few minor antique items of bric-à-brac, of silver, copper and porcelain, a photograph in a silver frame, a lovely old ashtray; most of them Csernovics and Damjanich family relics that I had brought from home on request. They obligingly made themselves at home here, as if, indeed, coming home. There are vases on the tables and, as has always been the case, there are flowers in them. The style is familiar: these are obvious signs of her refined taste, obvious only to me of course. I myself lived with her beautiful antique furniture, on Sas Hill, right to the end of the war. She used to collect the tiny bits of polished dark-brown veneer that had flaked or fallen off them and keep them in a tin cigarette-box: from time to time a skilled joiner would come and glue them back on with surgical precision as if they were missing pieces of a jigsaw, and there the furniture would be: repaired, impeccable, brilliantly glossy and majestic once more. Let such things be about her even now, however cheap, however fake, if only to serve for atmosphere, as compensation for the world that was once hers, so she may feel at home. This desire has crossed the ocean with her, it and she are inseparable companions, they are what she is, like her past, like her ring, like those capers balanced on the back of her fork, like the *aahkaahdémia.* And all this moves me, though I don't, of course, show it.

There is an ancient, enormous, clumsy television set in the living room. She gaily tells me how she found it in the street a couple of blocks away, someone had left it on the sidewalk with a note saying: IT WORKS. She hardly had the strength to move it but two unknown young men assisted her without being asked and

carried it on their shoulders, passing the back-breaking load between them, laughing and breathless, she says, bringing it into the house, right up to the elevator. They wouldn't accept money, not even a coffee. It was a neighbour of hers, an out-of-work actor, who installed it for her.

That's what America is like: that's what the story is intended to show. You are never alone. The antenna comprises at least fifteen metres of wire that has to be rearranged each time you change channels since the transmitters in Manhattan are positioned on top of different skyscrapers and sometimes interfere with each other's signals, and this is only on the fourth floor. One should get a proper antenna but there isn't the cash. The wire runs through the bedroom and almost all the way back again though sometimes it happens that you have to trail it into the bathroom, passing by the guest room and taking a half-turn through the kitchen. It makes a difference if the stiff, much twisted copper wire lies on the floor or is raised to furniture height, or even wound round the window catch. It would be easy to trip over it in a careless moment so one has to gather it up before going to bed and start afresh the following evening. It's only a few centimetres this way or that as far as reception goes and there are some interesting programmes where you have to keep changing position to get it right, she tells me laughing, because you can't see what the picture is like from the kitchen or the bathroom. The black-and-white set tries to compensate for its faintness by occasionally providing double or ghost images, but, given a little imagination and a healthy dose of curiosity, it can be quite good fun. She has got quite used to it. There are some excellent programmes too, you'll see. Back home we don't yet have a television: only the janitor's wife has one.

She marvels at it all, at everything this new world that she has chosen for herself has to offer: she smiles, she laughs and very rarely complains. She will not take the darker side into consideration. It is vital for her that America should be an unqualified success offering freedom, security, affordability, peace of mind and a modest degree of comfort. She wrote to me one time saying, "Everything you could want is here, everything I longed for in jail: a warm apartment, a bathroom, nice coffee and life without fear. I only miss one thing, Nicky, and that is you." There are heaps of friendly people who are particularly keen to help Hungarians, who welcome them. America is so interesting, so happy, so full of surprises. She tells it all with a sense of wonder and draws me in to share her amazement. Pretty soon there will be a tap with a sort of atomic device at the end that will give you constant running hot water without the need for a boiler. It will take care of the heating too. The papers tell you in advance, the radio and television announce it, so you know how many road accidents to expect in the locality, where and how much snow is likely to fall, and everything turns out more or less as they say. There is a live radio programme where people can phone in, tell their troubles and explain their problems, and the programme tries to help them. I wouldn't begin to think of such a thing back home. It is only as an incidental, as a minor nuisance, that she mentions she has been robbed in the street three times on her way home

in the evening, though this isn't even a bad area. There is a specific English word for this kind of street robbery, mugging, she says, as though that made it easier to bear. It only took a minute each time. Someone snatched her handbag and by the time she realised and took fright, they had disappeared. Her keys, thank heaven, were in her coat pocket on two of those occasions, but not the third time. They took those as well and it was very hard getting into the apartment, not to mention changing all the locks the next day. All three times the thieves were black but she continued to feel sorry for them and spoke up for blacks, having voted Democrat ever since she was entitled to. We don't get this type of street robbery back home, I say, but am aware I sound as though I were boasting. There's something at least at which we are better. The advantages of the police state, I add with a brief laugh, to avoid any misunderstanding. Twice in a few days the police returned her bag, which had been dumped in a letter-box, complete with documents and only the money missing. It's lucky, she says, that people don't need to carry much cash around since you can pay with a cheque anywhere. Back home, if something like this should, after all, occur and the bag turned up, I answer, I would be rudely called in to the police, and, after a very long wait, made to sign a statement full of spelling and grammatical errors and be given a good telling-off for not being more careful. She relaxes: not because it's worse back home but because, at last, I actually appreciate something here. I'm sure no thief would have the decency to deposit the stolen bag in a letter-box back home, I add, to make her happy. In any case, it wouldn't fit in our type of letter-box, even if he wanted to. We laugh.

What she has continually to be proving, to herself and to me, and not just now but always, eternally, is that she did the right thing in overcoming her own conscience and leaving me, at twenty-five apparently an adult at last, to come here. That's not difficult, in fact it's perfectly natural; since she had twice been freed from prison on a purely provisional basis and she could have been locked up for a third time at any moment. Not to mention the fact that it was I who persuaded her to go. At first I made out that I would go with her, but later, once she had got so far as to commit herself to actions that were not without danger and a none too cheap journey, once it would have been difficult for her, even psychologically, to reverse the process, I announced that I would sooner stay behind.

As for me, what I have continually to be proving, to her as well as to myself, is that I made the right choice in remaining behind. At the time I felt, not without a certain pathos, that I was not free to leave my poor crushed country, for, after all, what would happen to it if everyone were to leave? I had some vague literary ambitions too: I was in love with Hungarian literature, as well as with a glamorous blonde. My mother understood the latter attachment rather more than she did the former. You can still write once you are out of the country, if that's what you want to do, she said. Nine years on, now, here in America, it becomes ever more difficult for me to prove anything. What is more, our mutual need to be proving things is constantly with us: we spur each other on, raising tempers and tensions, forcing each other to behave a certain way, even alienating us from ourselves, so I am

sometimes shocked to listen to myself. And there, hovering between us, is the long unstated, but all the more patent, desire that I should stay. I know this is not merely selfishness on her behalf, not purely selfishness, but because she wants the best for me, for my future and security. Towards the end of my visit, in a more talkative mood, she actually says it. My wife would somehow be able to follow me, she adds, but almost offhand, as if realising she had said too much. An American professor I met back home had arranged an invitation for me from a prominent university and my lecture was followed by the offer of a very tempting post. I heard she was so proud of this that she phoned everyone she knows to tell them about it. I feel I am sitting on a high fence between the two worlds, one leg on either side, looking down, but the genuine opportunity suddenly seems terrifying even while remaining attractive because of the security, and in any case it's not the first time I have been faced with such vital decisions. What is more I have quite a good view of America from here and can see at least one, if not more, possible versions of the future. The only problem is that the fence is made of barbed wire and it hurts: it wounds me. Maybe that is why I constantly feel the need to hurt her. I have to defend myself against America, against my mother. And against myself. After all, it's not like going back to a jungle back home. But as the date for returning draws near it becomes ever clearer that in fact it is all just an interlude, as the visiting time had been in jail. Then we had fifteen minutes per month to talk, now it is only once every three years and though we have longer to do the actual talking, the set-up is basically the same. We can communicate by mail or by phone but are faced with precisely the same censorship as we had been then, nor can you discount the possibility that the same goes on in America too. The difference is that now it is I who am being escorted back behind bars by guards with sub-machine guns. They are waiting for me at the airport.

The police are a major issue. Even here for a while she suffered cramps in her stomach at the sight of a policeman. Another time she was telling me how she kept a slip of razor in her handbag in case they wanted to lock her up again. She had made up her mind not to go back to prison. Nor do I doubt that, given the occasion, she would have used it. She could be very tough when she had to be and she always stuck to her resolutions. Here the police, she enthusiastically tells me, will, if need be, help, give advice, fix your car, change a punctured tyre, chat to you, joke with you: they are amusing, human. A few days after that, she and her best friend, a sweet creature, more experienced in American ways than she, decided to take me on a carefully planned tour. I, a Trabant-owner, am driving an enormous, brand-new, rented Studebaker: she had not taken out a licence herself, for what would be the purpose and, in any case, she hadn't driven since the end of the war. It is like being in charge of an ocean-liner after having only steered a tiny barge: at first it feels oppressive, frightening in fact, but it grows ever more blissful. From the corner of my eye I notice how she and Annushka are looking at each other, watching the delight on my face, proud that it is all going so well.

But what is fated to happen happens toward the evening of the first day: the car begins to judder on the highway in the busy traffic, the automatic gearbox isn't working properly and, sooner or later, it comes to a dead stop. There's nothing I can do about it: it's a production fault. My Trabant-accustomed soul longs to howl with laughter but, given the situation, this is no joke. Elsa von Trabant, as my wife and I christened our two-stroke, fuming, ugly little East German car, was an object of such hatred to me I sometimes kicked it and spat at it despite having had to wait such a very long time before it was delivered to us in the first place. The poor thing chugged us all the way to Rome but it gave up each time we completed a particular day's journey. I got to know its low, stinking, treacherous little soul and could attend to all its troubles, which was just as well as no Italian mechanic would have touched it. There were times I had to crawl under its belly in the pouring rain, my wife using the little mirror of her compact to reflect light from a nearby streetlamp. Seeing her disillusion, I tell my mother these stories as we wait on the hard shoulder. This Studebaker could wreck all those ideas of America she had worked so hard, and so lovingly plotted and planned to instil in me. I can see all this on her face. Not ten minutes have gone by when a police car draws up. Just like in the films, a young traffic cop gets out, an amiable giant in a sparkling uniform, an American Lohengrin. He greets us and kindly enquires what the problem is. He examines the engine, tries this and that, then gives a hopeless wave and springs into action. He gives us a ride in his swan to the nearest motel, arranges for the car to be towed away by the rental company and we are promised a new one in the morning. And true enough, the next morning, a local representative of the company arrives with a fresh car, as well as profuse apologies, promising reparations and reductions. My mother glows. There you are, she has not been shown up, this, after all, is America. Her America. You see, even when you're in difficulties, how generous are its workings! America will not disappoint. I don't keep it to myself: I am thrilled.

Still more wonders await me. Along the highway are enormous billboards with exhortations to VISIT YOUR NAVY! Call in on your fleet. We are en route to a vast naval dockyard. The citizen is the proprietor of the fleet and is perfectly entitled to visit and inspect it any time he likes: indeed he is requested to do so. Everywhere you look there are miles of battleships, aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers, frigates, submarines and heaven knows what else, complete with towers, guns, great mysterious domes, antennae and swivelling radars. Behold the terrifying musculature of a superpower, or rather just an insignificant part of it. Ever since I was a child I have been a passionate sailor on Lake Balaton, fascinated and excited by all naval vessels and I have never seen the like of these. Their sheer size is overwhelming. We are standing on the deck of a warship and an officer explains to me the electronic apparatus and launching gear of some kind of rocket. Once again, a dazzlingly elegant uniform, complemented by a courteous, direct, cultured manner. When I was a student at university we had an awkward, hulking sub-lieutenant constantly struggling with his speech-impediment as he explained the

use, cleaning, dismantling and assembling of a Soviet M-48 carbine rifle under conditions of the strictest military secrecy. My mother, in the meantime, is proud that this too is possible here, that even a foreigner can visit a military installation, and she keeps giggling because it brings to mind, not without a certain irony, the adolescent son who, during the war, developed an obsession with uniforms and weaponry and could distinguish the various German, Hungarian, Russian and Allied aircraft by sound alone, and who had, to the despair of his parents, watched the German propaganda film, *Stukas,* not once but six times; he almost seemed to enjoy the siege of Budapest, and, furthermore, after the war, having grown a little wiser and practical, went to see, probably even more than six times, the American wartime propaganda film *Guadalcanal,* which was about the bloody assault on a small island in the Pacific Ocean. Unlike the eternally victorious, dashing German Stuka pilots who, after a triumphant raid, would gather in the officers' mess to sing loud songs, make jokes, and slap each others' backs while knocking back the beer, the American Marines showed fear and behaved in perfectly human fashion while carrying out heroic deeds and almost all of them died before they could raise the star-and-stripes flag. I can still remember the march that was the theme music of the film.

On that day few citizens happened to be inspecting their fleet, though it was by no means a sight to pass up. Presumably it was not such a big deal for them as it was for me in the Warsaw Pact where, when I wanted to take a picture of my friend from Vienna stepping off the train at the Eastern Railway Terminal in Budapest, the camera was nearly confiscated by a plain-clothes policeman.

We proceed with mother across the football-pitch-sized deck. The admirer of Stukas and US Marines should, I think, be accompanied in her memory by the figure of Mr Pusscat too, the charming little boy who was nevertheless entrusted to the care of various German Fräuleins; the pet godson of the great actress featured in silly articles and photographs in *Színházi Élet*; not to forget the child who, out of forty children in his elementary class photo, was the only one radically to depart from the prescribed pose, as, resting his elbow on his knee, he looked straight into the camera with interest (his father would proudly show the picture around, laughing about it with his friends). And there's the boy who, ever since having received the birthday present he had wished for—the much desired air-rifle —had been marching up and down for hours in front of the villa in proper military fashion, his feet ringing on the ground, doing about-faces like a soldier on guard at a secret military base. And there's the boy who, a little later, was hoping to be a goalkeeper and possessed a high-necked pullover just like the famous goalie he had seen in the magazine, who spent his time diving fearlessly and spectacularly, "swimming through the air", saving the powerful shots of Kari, the janitor, bruising himself black and blue in the process, his knees, ribs and elbows covered in scabs, yet letting through most of the shots directed at his goal while still not giving up. And he should surely be accompanied by the scout in the home-made Indian head-dress who nevertheless pipes Hungarian folk tunes, and by the member of the Holy Mary Congregation at his school, with ideas about taking holy

orders, a regular attender of the first service of the day, serving at the altar and taking the Holy Sacrament, rosary telling, seeing himself as he rushes along in his much longed-for, rustling black-and-white Cistercian habit, to hear confession or celebrate mass. He, of course, wouldn't be willing to share an apartment with my father's 1874 Hungarian edition of the dozen-or-so volume set of Casanova's *Memoirs,* an immoral (though of course maddeningly exciting) work, the work of the devil. At his request the wonderfully amusing and highly valuable set of books is given to a relative, from whom I could recover only three ragged volumes some decades later. And ambling there, we see the aspiring conductor, hot on the heels of the romantic lyric poet. All of these and more is/are her only son/s, all of us following behind her, each one escorting her everywhere, wherever we are stored and safely coded on the constantly spinning hard disc of maternal memory. We trot on quietly, peacefully, in a neat crocodile, in chronological order, each despising and belittling the smaller one behind him, while the halo of an understanding motherly smile hovers over us all.

After the last Fräulein had departed it was up to her to understand and tolerate each one of us, and she did indeed understand and tolerate us, without laughing us to scorn, at most smiling at our follies, thereby showing extraordinary patience and wisdom. Now that I think back it can't have been easy for her: she must have borne it like a saint. The little boy, fatally spoilt by his parents and godmother, had thoroughly learned both overt and clearly transparent strategies for getting his way, and they had always succeeded. Nor was he forbidden anything in the later stages of development. Mothers with sons, I was thinking as we ambled along the deck of the American warship, always conjure a wealth of images, of skin shed, of a cocoon with a hole in it, the child having chewed his way through and flown away: it was only that in her case the sequence of these was longer and more varied. In certain situations she herself will recall one, always with humour, sometimes in the spirit of gentle, sympathetic irony. The little Oedipus-in-waiting, however, cannot be counted among them, he who tried to spy on his mother through the bathroom keyhole, hoping to find the secrets of creation by surveying her naked body. Unfortunately, the door is so positioned that he sees only what he usually sees. His mother knows nothing of this and soon enough her little Nicky has been transformed into a shaving, cigarette-smoking adolescent with a broken voice who, forgetting his mother in this regard, sets out elsewhere, on more complicated, more daring ventures in quest of the secret before, suddenly, he is presented with the chance of an empirical exploration for which there is no substitute.

Let her play patience for a while. After supper she lays out the small cards in neat piles on the New York kitchen table. She draws each one using the thumb and forefinger of her right hand, with a slight snap as she pulls it from the pack in her left, and turns her head a little as she searches the table to see where the rules allow her to place it. Another tiny snap as she lays the card down. She knows four or five varieties of patience, this being something she inherited from her mother,

and each has a name, though I can only remember Roxanne and the Greater or Lesser Olga—grandmother's name. The long, red-nailed fingers move gracefully, elegantly, economically, fingers from my childhood, exactly the same, moving to a choreography much like that of her eating. The movements are quite different from my godmother's, that other great player of patience. Godmother would lay out the cards on a special half-size drawing board covered in blue canvas, usually while in a half-seated position on the divan, her movements unlike my mother's, possessing an elegance she had not inherited but invented, a little amused by her own self-consciousness, as if she were playing the whole game in inverted commas, not believing in it, as my mother does, but carelessly, as mere amusement, playing in whatever fashion she chose to play, playing that she is playing, while talking, making telephone calls, listening to someone giving her cue-lines as she learned a role and rehearsed it, often messing around as she did so. It was as if she were playing some light-hearted fugue with many parts whose melody was a continuous sequence of divisions, expansions and variations that ended by playfully turning back on themselves. She would draw the cards with delicate hands, a look of curiosity on her face, the cluster of golden bangles quietly clinking on her wrist. Then she would look around, her eyebrows would sail upwards, and she'd ponder a little before, gently, light-heartedly dropping her card with a grimace of pleasure or resignation, commenting on her decision but not worrying too much about where it landed. My mother, on the other hand, concentrates furiously when she plays: it matters to her. When I address her during a game she does not reply; her hand hovers in the air, then she looks up, takes a break. She feels it necessary to arrange the cards neatly in their proper rows. I know a great deal depends on whether the game is concluded successfully or not. It sometimes happens, albeit very rarely, that she cheats a little, as she confesses with an embarrassed little smile when I wickedly question her. She is happy when the cards come out and, sometimes, seriously upset when they don't. When I ask her what she was thinking of she mostly just shakes her head and doesn't answer. She won't allow me a glimpse into her private world. I know that the game, in which strategy plays a small enough part, helps or does not help fulfil some secret longing of hers. Now that secret longing is almost certainly something to do with me, or possibly that she should not be retired when she reaches sixty. It's not impossible that she keeps quiet because even she regards it as somehow childish now that she should risk all her secret, most important hopes on a game, though of course she does believe in luck. She is a touch superstitious and believes in the kind of providence that may be influenced by the commission of good deeds to offer rewards in this world out of a sense of fairness or patience, much as I myself once did under the influence of my Cistercian education, which, complete with a mass of spiritual doubts and tribulations, resulted in turning me into a Roman Catholic atheist. I know, because recently she has confessed it once or twice, that, for all important matters, she turns to St Anthony, pleading with him for help and offering him money. If she gets her wish she hands the money over though she is not even Catholic. She gets cross

when, on one occasion, I tease her by joking that she is basically doing business with the redoubtable saint and it is she who determines the conditions. Wounded by this, she replies that the money goes to charity whatever the case. I don't harp on about this.

I try to steer the talk to a more awkward matter that has long preoccupied me, one I might discover more about now. Who knows when another such opportunity might present itself, we having got as close to each other as our temperaments will allow us. I set out on it with a heavy heart because I know the subject will be painful for her. But if she has put up with this much from me, on my account, so far, she might forgive me, even understand me.

If they wanted a child why did they have to entrust me to the care of nurses and nannies? She abandons her game, looks straight in front of her with a serious expression and remains silent. They hardly paid me any attention, while at the same time showering me with every gift under the sun—possibly as recompense. My first few words were English because I happened to have an English nurse at the time. She was soon succeeded by German nurses, and last of all, perhaps the third in line, came Kishi from Dresden. She had long lived in Hungary and had half forgotten her German but was incapable of fully learning Hungarian. She spent eight years in employment with us and we became inseparable. I loved her more than anyone in the world. I was genuinely sad and downcast when sometime during the war she suddenly had to be sent away. My world fell to pieces. The poor thing had started to spend her free days going to some Volksbund—the local ethnic Germans' Nazi organisation—meeting in Buda, only to hear German spoken. She had no conception of politics or Nazism, her great warm heart was matched to the mind of a farmyard hen. They feared—probably not without cause—that she might betray what we talked about at home, if only out of a desire to chatter or, if nothing worse, she'd mention that we listened to nightly English broadcasts on the radio.

I remind her how unpracticed she was taking over the maternal reins and how she left a good many tasks to the housemaid. It was I who would tell them where to find this or that, or when and how we used to do something. Did she not sense the absurdity of the situation? Not that I expect an answer to this, so immediately go on to the next question. It's a question rarely asked of mothers by their grown-up children: did she ever suckle me? After a short silence she answers, hurt: Yes. Then she adds: For a while. Silence. We had the young ladies, because that was the custom in families like ours in those days. They wanted me to speak perfect German, she says. And she gives examples. I give counter-examples. And it wasn't simply language I learned from Kishi but upbringing, I add; in other words all those important years I was left to the care of a simple, utterly uncultivated, wholly undisciplined woman, one blessed with a good heart but who could be persuaded to anything, with consequences that effect me even now. This explanation is unacceptable of course, but then that is not the way I explain it.

From Kishi I learned only a simple kitchen German, but I admit I learnt it well. Decades later, after years of successfully translating English and American works,

when I am faced as a translator by works of Goethe, Eichendorff and Dürrenmatt, I prescribe myself a strict reading programme, to become acquainted with literary—or simply educated—German. But that was nothing compared to the earlier shock of discovering, as a student of Hungarian literature, that my Hungarian was not up to writing or translating, that it fell below the absolutely necessary standard in breadth and depth of knowledge. My mother's language, to put it delicately, was a clumsy mixture of the impure and the homely, and this, as well as the Fräulein's deutsch-ungarisch natter exerted a stronger influence on me than did the *gimnázium* or the literary books I had so far read. I expanded it by heavy reading with a purpose and watched my word-hoard carefully, as I did my style. My mother's elder sister, an excellent short-story writer, as well as being one of the outstanding literary publicists of the time, had made herself, or so my unsuspecting mother said, copy out stories by Móricz and Kosztolányi by hand until she felt her own command of the language—a language whose social context was the same as my mother's—not to mention her style, lived up to her own severe expectations.

The truth is that we rarely saw each other. For a time, mother would check my homework in the afternoon, later on, in my first year or two at the *gimnázium,* my father would, when the fancy took him, quiz me about my Latin, which he knew well, having learnt it in secondary school for eight years, and also by being a lawyer. When it was time to turn the light out my mother would come in and kiss me goodnight. And that was generally it. I was a good student and did not need help but I would have loved to have them share my life with me. There were few enough opportunities for that, except in the summer vacations. From contemporary magazines I learn that it was not only Kishi but Gizi, the actress, who took me to the zoo, as well as to the swimming-pool on the mid-Danube Margaret Island. It's true that my mother took me to swimming lessons at the Rudas baths and to the gym classes for delicate children run by Mr Keresztessy at Szentkirályi Street. At supper or after supper, that is if they weren't going out, there would be guests, almost every blessed night, quite often eight to ten of them, the great majority almost nightly regulars. After I had had my bath I was obliged to enter the sitting room and bid goodnight to each of the guests in turn, something I particularly loathed. There were grander affairs too, proper soirées that entailed serious preparation for several dozen guests. At these times I became a figure entirely in parentheses, generally sleeping over at my godmother's where, under that enormous mansard roof, a proper little apartment lay at my disposal, complete with en suite bathroom, terrace, hand-painted Hungarian furniture, embroidered cloths and milk jugs. There were times when I did not see my parents for several days in a row. It might happen that I would find a little letter on my bedside table in the morning. My father was, with considerable breaks and interruptions, writing a serialised verse novel for me about the easily imaginable, exciting adventures of boys called something like Peeing Peter and Poohing Paul, and my mother likewise tried her hand at amusing me with stories that she illustrated with sweet, clumsy little drawings.

The family lunched together, my father lying down to sleep after the meal, then often returning to his office, or, occasionally, being consulted at home by his articled clerks. I studied or went to attend scouts, now and then going out to play football, while my mother negotiated with cook, checked the bills, arranged the menu, the preserves and so forth, consulting with the housemaid as to when the laundress should come, what bed linen to use, when the spring cleaning should take place, or when to polish the silverware. Whether it was the cook who was twenty years older than her, or the maid who was ten years younger, or the young wife of the caretaker who helped out when there were bigger tasks in hand, or the very sweet washerwoman, all were addressed both by her and my father as *fiam,* 'dear', something even I with my childhood sensibility felt to be ridiculous. But that was the way then, she still insists. It is a fact, and I know this for certain, that those who were addressed in these terms had a very good time with us and were not in the least troubled by it, chiefly because they adored my parents. When the housemaid fell pregnant following a rendezvous with a soldier in the City Park, my mother took care of everything for her, the birth, the hospital, undertaking to be godmother to the child, supporting the child with gifts, giving the maid an extended paid holiday at home, while my father, in his capacity as a lawyer, easily persuaded the young man to accept the 'fallen woman' as his wife. Even afterwards, gifts and packages continued to arrive from America at the little village in the Bakony region. On one of her visits home she asked me to take her there and I did so and there the once grand lady, now the ex-jailbird from America and the ex-housemaid, now-grandmother and member of the co-operative farm embraced each other in delight. All this I already know, but it does not answer my questions. What was it that made her live as she then lived? Was social life so important? I don't say it but the implication is there: was it more important than your child?

She continues going through her deck of cards, then stops. Yes, she says in a hoarse voice, they did not give me much time. I sense that this is a difficult confession dragged up from somewhere deep within her. My father was a very busy man, indeed a sick man, having suffered his first heart attack shortly after I was born, and in any case he completely lacked any pedagogic bent or the patience a small child requires. As for herself, she admits, she has thought long and hard about her role at that time. She deeply regrets it, she adds, and—she is not afraid to say so—it pains her, it shames her to recall how she neglected me. She could offer explanations but the fact is she has no excuses. The excitement of a colourful social life had gripped her, all those interesting people one could spend time with, people she met mainly through my father, who accepted her, gave her love and affection and sought out her company. Together we recreate the guest lists of those days. Gizi Bajor would often call by with her husband after one of her performances at the National. Imre Palló, a star baritone at the Opera, and his wife were regular guests; after my father died the singer became my official guardian. The Minister of the Interior in the mid-thirties Gömbös administration, later chairman of the Hungarian Telegraph Bureau, the Hungarian Film Institute and

the Hungarian state radio, was my godfather. My mother's two sisters, one the wife of a land-owning MP, the other the author, were, naturally, frequent visitors; their daughters, who were ten years older than I, stayed with us, sometimes for a week or two, a couple of times even vacationing with us. A number of prominent writers and artists—some of them now all but forgotten—called quite often. Less illustrious names appear out of the mist: relatives, politicians, aristocrats, some of whom I barely remember. Ah high society, I say in English, giving a mocking laugh because my hackles are beginning to rise. Amongst them were some she couldn't stand, she says as if by way of excuse, and mentions a few names. The fact that she includes among these Endre Illés, the novelist, essayist and critic, my authoress aunt's lover and my ex-boss at the publishing house, Szépirodalmi Kiadó, is, given my experience of him, something entirely understandable. After the death of the authoress he began a furious campaign to court my recently widowed mother, but he was "like a reptile", she adds, shuddering. So what forced them to keep inviting these people back time and time again? She ponders. Friends brought along friends, most of them came with their spouses. Naturally there were obligations to return invitations, obligations on account of favours, as with everyone. That is what social life was like then, she says, and I am aware she would happily drop the subject. There are certain things she still regards as obligatory, views she has not revised but still accepts. She tells how at one soirée all the guests found the tyres of their parked and unguarded vehicles, thirty-six of them, punctured. Most drove their own cars and the few chauffeurs that appeared were invited into the kitchen for supper. Apparently the puncturing of the tyres was an act of sabotage planned by the illegal Communist Party as a protest against the harsh anti-Communist actions of the Interior Minister.

And while we are talking of suckling, she suddenly adds, she has just remembered an amusing little incident. I sense this is a way of dropping the painful subject. Once again she takes a break from the new round of patience. At some point she got to meet a handsome engineer, who was either an industrialist or an entrepreneur, and who began passionately to lay siege to her. He lived near us in Buda and, sometimes in the early afternoon, when he had clearly observed that my father was out or was asleep, he appeared at the door. He must have calculated that the husband being twenty-one years older, very busy and suffering heart problems, he would stand a pretty good chance with his thirty-year-old wife. She couldn't refuse to invite him in and simply tell him to go away, but the visits were becoming tiresome, so, on one occasion, she called me into the sitting room in order that she shouldn't have to be alone with her demanding suitor, and being there I took the rare opportunity to ask if I may be allowed to sit on her lap. While they continued talking over my head I discovered that there were two interestingly pliable round protrusions on my mother's chest that I had never noticed before. And so I asked: 'Mummy, what are these?' They both became deeply embarrassed and tried to cover it up by laughing. She will never forget this, she says in conclusion, and continues playing cards.

What she doesn't add, what I discover only decades later, after her death, is what I learn from my cousin. The next time the engineer came to call she told him to leave once and for all, and he went home and put a bullet through his head. That is what made the incident so unforgettable. Might she have mentioned this herself some time? Maybe on a later occasion. But it's useless for me to speculate. I don't know.

My mother was an exceptionally beautiful, refined, aristocratic woman at that time, not at all a femme fatale. She dressed fashionably but never for show, and took great care of herself. According to the photographs and my own memories of her, she was very attractive but not particularly sexy. Her attractiveness was down to a certain aspect of femininity, a superior sensitivity, or at any rate something that radiated delicacy and high civilisation in various forms. A mature man must have felt that she was not the sort of wife who could easily be tempted into this or that affair—though that might have been precisely what so excited the engineer. I know nothing about the state of her marriage but I saw enough evidence to show that they enjoyed being together, loved each other, were anxious for each other's welfare and lived in harmony. I never heard them have a fight. My handsome, elegant father would have been a great charmer to women in his youth, much liked by all, a witty social success: it was Gizi Bajor, the actress, his first wife, who introduced him to mother at a ball. When my father was dying on account of his heart, he had to spend his last six months in bed and she tenderly nursed him, though she also had to employ a private nurse because she was so busy. The nurse, Annushka, became her closest friend in America, she being our companion in the broken down Studebaker; it was she who in the early days helped her fit in everywhere, was genuinely devoted to her, anxiously bearing all her cares and worries until she died. I can imagine, however, that being married to a sick and exceptionally busy husband who was two decades older than she was, was not always easy for a woman like her. Still, it is wholly unimaginable to me that she would have anything to do with another man, even on a light, flirting level. I am not alone in thinking this, for both my cousin and Annushka, whom I asked after her death, not only agreed but were decidedly fervent in their agreement. She did admit to having a man-friend in Pest after my father died, she told me later, though only after I had asked. The gentleman, who was a regular guest at the villa, was someone I knew quite well and of whom I had been very fond. He was a delightful, elegant, good-hearted, bohemian bachelor who had been Lord Lieutenant of a county and once owned land in the south. He was also an elephant hunter in Africa and had gambled away his considerable fortune, chiefly on cards. He had been sponsor at my confirmation: mother and I spent the siege of Budapest at his place since my Jewish-born but Catholic father was hiding out elsewhere. She could easily have told me about their relationship, since I would have been very pleased, but, she said, she thought it might upset me.

It is a fearful enough business prying into the intimate life of one's dead mother out of selfish curiosity, but I have to clear up every matter before, wherever the non-existent souls of the dead non-exist, I might nevertheless see her again. Or, if worlds really do exist out there in the vast cavities of space, many millions of light years away (which certain astronomers assure us is the case), and there is some corner at an infinite distance where universes parallel with ours spin, and where in the endless flow of time the atoms that comprise us happen to recombine to form a world in which I am once again her son, there I may be able, unconditionally, to look up to her again.

Mother in evening dress, mother in ankle-length yellow silk dressing-gown, mother in fashionable suits, with hats, in furs, in a severe black one-piece swimsuit; mother in the bomb-shelter in long trousers, rough brown woollen coat and ski boots when she has to join in the effort to clear away the rubble; my widowed mother after the siege, elegant now in a more humble way, behind the coffee-machine making espressos; my mother in prison clothes; my mother in the grey working-smock of the Corvin department store, in her ankle-high waitress-style shoes; my mother once more in prison clothes; my mother in smocks and high-ankled shoes again; my mother yet again in long trousers, woollen coat and ski boots as she risks everything and disappears from my sight into the tawdry little passenger train at the Southern Railway Terminal on New Year's Eve 1956, carrying what few belongings she can take with her. All these images are my mother, there they stand in the kitchen in front of me, here they are within me, each image projected onto the previous one like an exercise in film-montage. She, who carried me inside her, who bore me into the world, who suckled me then entrusted me to others, around and within whom the world changed, a world in which she lived for my sake alone, only for me. There, within me, they move in procession, these old, outworn, superannuated versions of her own propria persona, though in America I find yet another one, one that cooks, irons, cleans, uses screwdrivers and files, looks after other people's children, bakes cakes for others, one that now wants to make me a gift of America.

I, in the meantime, have treacherously left it till our last few days together: I have been planning the confession that I know will strike at her very heart. I don't make a good conspirator, my face, my voice, my behaviour, devil knows what, perhaps her own instinct tells her, gives away my secret desire to say something to her. What I have to confess is that, a few years after she left, I sold the enormous, priceless baroque tabernacle, the most beautiful, most valuable, most treasured family possession of her childhood in Arad; that I sold it so I could buy a little second-hand sailing boat to use on Lake Balaton.

It was well over two metres high; it was as imposing as a cathedral. On the upper part there were various forms of baroque volutes and scrolls, an inset gilt-framed painting of a concert party and two doors like altar screens bearing mirrors. Below them the bureau lid folds down to make a writing table. Behind the

mirrored doors and the writing table, and indeed beneath them, countless drawers and recesses, and over the entire surface of highly polished dark brown wood, panels of miraculous marquetry, all kinds of different delicate floral designs. The lower part of the piece comprised a wider section, with three baroque drawers, each with two undulations and ornate baroque brass handles, the whole piece standing on short squat legs. Once the Arrow Cross were chased from our hillside, the Russians, who occupied the villa, took one of the drawers and burned it for firewood. After the siege was over my mother stretched her remaining resources and hired a craftsman to heal the gaping wound.

In the upper part of it, inside the mirrored doors, and behind the writing surface lay forty, almost invisible secret drawers. If I hadn't taken what jewels remained after the Russians left over to my godmother on the night of my mother's arrest, together with her not inconsiderable collection of gold and hard currency—the value of the villa at Balatonföldvár that had, cleverly, been sold just before the general nationalisation—and buried it all in Gizi's garden with the help of her husband, no doubt the two dim plainclothes policemen sent the next dawn to search the house in the presence of the caretaker's wife, wouldn't have found it hidden in one of those secret drawers. But Gizi and her husband had taken another person into their confidence, just in case. After their deaths I wanted to dig up the buried treasure, but it was gone.

It is not easy living with a piece of national heritage. In my childhood I had always to be careful not to bump into it, not to scratch it or cause it any damage. Any pieces that had fallen off would be collected in a tin cigarette box so that they could be restored to their rightful place. My mother referred to it as the Maria Theresa, sometimes as the *secrétaire,* occasionally as the *trumeau.* It was a genuine tabernacle above, the middle part really a *secrétaire* or *trumeau,* as it was used as a writing table. The woman who bought it knew her furniture. It was from her I discovered that it was not from the time of Maria Theresa, but earlier and Southern German in origin. She could see at a glance that I knew nothing about it. I have no idea how much it was worth. She made me an offer and I who am incapable of bargaining and wanted to be through with the deal as soon as possible on account of my bad conscience, immediately accepted it. I don't even dare write down the sum: it was roughly what the owner asked for the much-used, second-hand, small sailing boat without the sails. Today, it would be of astronomical value.

Sailing is joy, freedom, passion, incomparable delight; a heavenly feeling. One continually longs for it, dreams about it, suffers its absence in a way quite different from anything one might feel for a piece of furniture, however beautiful. That was more or less what I intend to say when my mother actually gets round to asking me if there is anything I want to ask or say. Because she suspects there is. And then I tell her, in fragments as if, rather clumsily, wanting to make light of it all: I confess my sin and resignedly await the thunderclap. It does not hesitate in coming. In a sharp, harsh, almost coarse voice, never heard before, she shouts at

me. Have I lost my senses? Do I know what I've done? Do I know the value of that family heirloom I have so gaily disposed of? Do I know who owned that beautiful piece of furniture? It was her great-aunt, someone she knew in her childhood, Mrs János Damjanich, wife of the legendary patriotic general of the 1848 revolution, one of the thirteen Martyrs of Arad! All that for a sailing boat! She gasps, makes flailing movements with her arms, mutters, cries out in fury, pushes things aside, walks up and down the room with great heavy strides and I suspect would love to hit me. I have never in my life seen her like this. She doesn't even ask how much I got for it. I am not in a hurry to tell her. Then she is quiet for a long time and I can practically hear her silent indignation, her furious inner monologue; I can see her disappointment, feel her pain. It's just as it was when I was a child and had misbehaved: I don't know whether to sneak out or stay, to say something and to make excuses or to hold my tongue until she calms down.

That night we eat in near silence. The plate makes a loud noise as she bangs it down on the table in front of me. But I have to speak. I am leaving in a couple of days and we can't part like this. I tell her it all happened in 1958, in the course of a major ideological purge, when, with the active encouragement of my boss, Endre Illés, my late aunt's lover, a great coward and opportunist, they kicked me out of my job as reader and editor, with, what was more, a cadre reference that ensured I would not find steady work for six years. She knows this, of course, but not in detail. I lived by taking on translations, writing reviews, editing anthologies, doing a spot of reading for publishers, and some radio work—sometimes in poverty, sometimes even in great poverty, occasionally slightly better off, but never free of material care. My then girlfriend, later my first wife, had a little house in Tihany, on the north side of Lake Balaton, that served as the temptation to commit the sin. My mother has never been sailing, all my enthusiasm washes off her. Nevertheless, I feel her fury is abating, which may be, in fact it almost certainly is, because she understands that my life was not easy at the time, and that sailing was a rare source of happiness. For a few days more she keeps returning to the subject, but she is merely chiding, and I am once again her little Nicky, a thoughtless and useless son, but still her little Nicky.

Then there we are at the airport, standing together, my socialist passport in my hand, her kiss on my cheek, with the little cross she draws with her fingers on my brow, and, looking back, I can see her suspiciously glittering eyes and how she tries to mask her feelings by smiling bravely, and then we lose sight of each other, and the Atlantic once again rises between us, separating us for a few more years. ❧

Translated by George Szirtes

András Mink

The Right to Be Heard

The Imre Nagy Trial from a Perspective of 50 Years

A per. Nagy Imre és vádlott-társai népbírósági tárgyalásának 52 órás, eredeti, vágatlan hangfelvétele (The Trial—The 52-Hour-Long Uncut Audio Recording of the Trial of Imre Nagy and his Fellow Defendants). Open Society Archives, 9–15 June 1958
A per. Nagy Imre és társai, 1958, 1989. (The Trial: Imre Nagy and His Associates, 1956, 1989). Alajos Dornbach & Péter Kende eds., Budapest, 1956 Institute & Nagy Imre Foundation, 2008, 430 pp.

The third and final phase of the criminal proceedings against Imre Nagy and his associates took place fifty years ago, between June 9th and 15th, 1958. Three of the eight accused—Imre Nagy, Pál Maléter and Miklós Gimes—were sentenced to death, the others to heavy terms of imprisonment, for "treason", "heading a conspiracy to overthrow the People's Democratic order," or actively taking part in the conspiracy. Almost straight after the judgements were handed down, at 5 a.m. on the following day, Imre Nagy, followed by Pál Maléter, were hanged. Their corpses, trussed up with wire, were rolled up in tar paper and buried at an unmarked spot in the prison exercise yard. On 24 February 1961, the coffins were disinterred and taken to the New Public Cemetery in Budapest for reburial, this time under false names—in Imre Nagy's case a woman's name: "Piroska Borbíró"—in another unmarked grave of Plot 301. Only in the spring of 1989 were the bodies formally identified by a committee that supervised their exhumation.

By 1988, with the thirtieth anniversary of the trials fast approaching, the winds of change were already being felt throughout the tottering Soviet empire. János Kádár, the Party General Secretary in power for the past 32 years and the person primarily responsible for instigating the proceedings against the legitimate prime minister during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, had been removed from office. The crisis had brought into the open the issues that were symbolised by the unceremoniously interred dead men, above all, by the figure of Imre Nagy. Kádár's party-state was crumbling under the pressure of an ailing economy, of ideological barriers no longer holding, of the recognition of the regime's historical roots and of memories of the bloody crushing of the revolution and the subsequent cynical and ruthless reprisals.

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One year later, on June 16th, 1989, the state reburial of Imre Nagy and his associates effectively consigned the old regime to the grave. "The public memorial service was akin to the elevation of the Host, at the sight of which Evil flees with a panic-stricken whimper," Péter Kende, a prominent figure among the '56 generation of exiles in the West, wrote at the time. Imre Nagy, his fate, and more broadly remembrance of the 1956 Revolution and its martyrs became a key aspect and the chief constituent of Hungary's 1989 transition to democracy. Nevertheless, it took another twenty years for what was recorded in the trial transcipts and in related documents to become available to public scrutiny. On the fiftieth anniversary itself, the Open Society Archives and the 1956 Institute collaborated to reproduce a replay in real-time of the complete and uncut week-long sound recording of the trial proceedings. The dates fell on the same day of the week in 1958.

A complete recording had indeed been made by the sound technicians of the Interior Ministry, on both audio tape and film, of everything that went on in court, including the first two rounds of hearings, which were staged in February and April of 1958. The film record, with the exception of a highly biased, edited version that was put together for propaganda purposes but never in fact publicly shown, was at some point destroyed (the crude propaganda version of the film may be viewed without soundtrack or commentary as one of the items on permanent exhibition at the House of Terror in Budapest), but the sound recording remained untouched in the archives of the Supreme Court of Justice. After a review of the trial was conducted in 1989, the tapes of this 72-hour-long recording were transferred from the Supreme Court to the Hungarian National Archives (Magyar Országos Levéltár, MOL), where, since the autumn of 2007, with the assistance of the National Széchényi Library, a digitised version has been produced. It was the final 52 hours of the original version that were played within the official programme marking the fiftieth anniversary, thus providing an auditory memorial to the victims. They were finally allowed to speak to the public in their own voices, an opportunity denied them at the time, and not in the distorted form that was broadcast by their executioners and replicated in historical reports that were transmitted after the change in regime. In conjunction with that, the 1956 Institute published a volume of essays and a selection of documents that put into the public domain the most important papers pertaining to the trial and a transcript of the 1989 retrial. As one of the reviewers put it, the only criticism that could be levelled at this carefully edited documentary collection was that it had taken so long to appear. In the same spirit, one can hope that the National Archives will shortly bring out a DVD that presents the digitalised recording of the trial together with the complete transcript and other written material, and thus bring one of the key events in modern Hungarian history closer to the general public. This is gratifying, to say the least, in a country which for decades has been unable to fully assimilate the trauma of the revolution's suppression. This article will attempt to summarise the lessons that posterity may draw from the newly disclosed documents and recordings and, in particular, the extent to which they add to what was already known about the trials.

The political background

The legal proceedings orchestrated against Imre Nagy and his associates was one of the most scandalous miscarriages of justice perpetrated in twentieth-century Hungary. Already in the run-up to the trial, Géza Losonczy, a secretary of state under Imre Nagy, died under unexplained circumstances while on remand in prison, and one of Nagy's closest associates, József Szilágyi, was executed following a separately staged trial. The constitutionally appointed head of the Hungarian government and his minister of defence were hanged, as was the journalist Miklós Gimes, a representative of the intelligentsia within the Communist Party who had turned against Mátyás Rákosi, the instigator of state terrorism in the early Fifties. In addition, two other secretaries of state (one of whom had previously served as President of the Republic), the chief of the Budapest police force and other close colleagues of the prime minister received stiff prison sentences. All this was carried out, from start to finish, in the greatest possible secrecy, hermetically sealed from the Hungarian public. The first the outside world heard was a radio announcement, at midnight on June 16th, 1958, that the proceedings had taken place and the executions by hanging already carried out. It would be hard to express the utter shock this announcement created. For a year and a half after their abduction, not a single communiqué had appeared on the fate of Nagy and his companions. The fact that the executions had taken place was perceived as a direct threat to the entire country. It was meant to signal that János Kádár and his lot had consolidated their domestic power and now feared nothing. The tragic story, of course, began more than a year and a half previously.

It was at precisely 5:20 a.m. local time on November 4th 1956 that Free Radio Kossuth broadcast the well-remembered announcement:

> This is Imre Nagy speaking, the President of the Council of Ministers of the Hungarian People's Republic. In the early hours of this morning Soviet troops launched an attack against our capital... Our troops are fighting. The Government is in its place. I inform the people of our country and world public opinion of this.

Not long afterwards, he and his inner circle, taking up an offer of political asylum from the Yugoslav government, sought refuge in the Yugoslav Embassy in Budapest. Nagy and his fellow asylum-seekers (including wives and children) obviously hoped that by staying in Hungary they would be able to enter into negotiations with the puppet government that enjoyed no popular support at all, apart from the volunteer militiamen called 'padded-jacket guys'—and, of course, the Soviet army. They were not to know that the Yugoslav offer was in reality a trap. In a meeting on the Yugoslav island of Brioni on November 3rd, Tito had promised Khrushchev his assistance in shunting Nagy out of the political limelight. At the embassy they attempted to persuade Imre Nagy to sign a letter of resignation in which he recognised the legitimacy of Kádár's government. Nagy, having drafted something along these lines, refused after consulting with his associates. That left the

Yugoslavs, the Soviets and Kádár's group with an unacceptable stalemate. The latter could not consent to a situation in which Nagy and his companions would be able to move around the country at will, whereas the Yugoslavs were not keen to be seen to be going back on their offer of political asylum. The stalemate was resolved in an underhand manner. On Soviet advice, Kádár and Ferenc Münnich gave the Yugoslavs a written safe-conduct for Nagy and his associates, provided they relinquished their right to political asylum. They were also to be allowed to return home unharmed.

Imre Nagy, his associates and family members left the embassy on November 22nd. As they stepped out into the street they were promptly hurried into coaches guarded by Soviet soldiers armed with machine-guns. They were taken first to a Soviet military base near Budapest, then from there, the next day, were deported to a Romanian Party holiday home at Snagov, close to Bucharest. There they were held prisoner until April 1957, when a detachment of Hungarian political police led by Sándor Rajnai formally arrested those who were eventually to be put on trial in the Imre Nagy case (as well as the other members of the group). They were brought to Budapest in great secrecy and remanded in custody in the notorious political prison on Gyorskocsi Street, where they were to spend the next fifteen months.

János Kádár, who headed the puppet government that took power after November 4th, made repeated solemn promises of immunity for those who had taken an active part in the Revolution ("mass movement", as Kádár initially designated it), as well as for their leaders. In a statement broadcast on November 26th 1956, for instance, he declared: "We have promised that Imre Nagy and his friends will not be prosecuted for their past crimes, even if they should later acknowledge these of their own accord. We shall hold ourselves to that promise." By early December the tone had changed, given that Kádár's attempts to consolidate his position had been rejected by the Hungarian public at large. The Central Workers' Council that had been set up during the Revolution stipulated the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the reinstatement of Imre Nagy as conditions for ending the general strike that had been called in mid-November.

From early December, the authorities resorted to force. The Workers' Councils were broken up and their leaders arrested; protesting crowds at demonstrations in towns across the country were dispersed with volleys of gunfire. A resolution passed unanimously by the Provisional Central Committee (PCC) of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP for short in Hungarian) on December 4th termed the October "events", as they were blandly referred to, as being "counter-revolutionary", their aim being the restoration of the semi-feudal, capitalist Horthy regime. The "revisionist" aims of the Imre Nagy "gang" already figured among the factors—they listed four at that time—that had triggered the counter-revolution.

The idea that Nagy and his group should bear legal responsibility was first aired at a summit meeting of the Communist Parties held in Budapest from January 1st to 3rd 1957, most likely on the suggestion of the Soviet Union. After a visit to Snagov in January by Gyula Kállai, a high-ranking member of the Kádár government, the PCC decided that a formal investigation should be initiated. The final decision to go

ahead with a trial was taken at a Soviet–Hungarian summit in Moscow in March 1957. On April 9th, the Hungarian Party leadership made the decision to formally arrest Nagy's group, and this was done on April 14th. The underlying idea of the trials, as outlined by Kállai in a talk under the title "The October–November Events in Hungary in the Light of Marxism-Leninism", had by then already been worked out: Imre Nagy and his organised group, from November of 1955 onwards, and in league with the imperialists, had deliberately begun to prepare for counter-revolution, undermining confidence in the Party and disrupting Party unity, thereby sowing the seeds for a putsch and the overthrow of the dictatorship of the proletariat. An investigative team under Rajnai started to gather evidence to support that line, and concerted efforts were made to persuade the accused to confess to it.

The prisoners were held in strict isolation from one another. Admittedly, things never went as far as physical torture, as had been the case with those put on trial in the Rákosi era of the earlier Fifties. However, the conditions under which they were held certainly qualified as cruel and inhuman treatment. The prisoners were kept in solitary confinement in dark, damp, filthy and unheated cells, cut off from contacts of any kind; the cells were infested with bed bugs, and it was nearly impossible for them to sleep; the prisoners were even denied the customary exercise in the prison yard. They were also denied proper medical attention, even though both Imre Nagy and Géza Losonczy were known to be suffering from chronic illnesses. Their sole contacts with the outside world during the whole period were their interrogators. All this contributed directly to Losonczy's death in prison in December 1957. Imre Nagy's heart condition was aggravated and he lost over 30 pounds. By the end of 1957 the health of the others had deteriorated to such an extent that it was beginning to be doubtful whether they could be put on trial. As a result, a few weeks before they were due to appear in court, they were transferred to better cells and were better fed.

The original plan had been to hear the cases of former Minister of Defence General Maléter and the Budapest Chief-of-Police Kopácsi separately within the framework of a huge military trial (Maléter had been detained by the KGB General I. A. Serov, at Tököl near Budapest, on the evening of 3 November 1956, and Kopácsi was taken into custody in Budapest itself on 5 November). That idea was dropped, however, in favour of the version that the cases of the revolution's military and political leaders should be linked. For that purpose, so as to have the widest possible basis for presenting the revolution as a "conspiracy" between politicians, representatives of the armed forces and the intelligentsia who backed them, they also needed Miklós Gimes, who had been a leading dissident intellectual after November 4th.

The case proved to be a paradigm of a show trial. The proceedings were conducted according to a scenario and carried out in constant consultation with the Soviet leadership. The indictments had already been fleshed out by the end of the summer of 1957. In the first phase of the hearings, between 15–19 Nagy was unwilling to answer any questions, but he later came to the view that he should at least take the opportunity as a way of documenting his own standpoint and thus

leave a testimony for posterity. Most of his fellow-accused likewise vigorously disputed the veiled political line that their interrogation pushed. On the evidence of the record, Nagy, Maléter, Donáth and Gimes all, at times, entered into straightforward political debates with their interrogating officers. Very soon, however, it was made clear to them that their lives depended on their willingness to co-operate and show contrition, to acknowledge that the events of October and November 1956 had constituted a counter-revolution, and to accept responsibility for their part in that. Imre Nagy was well aware that he, for one, could only expect the death penalty.

One of the most repellent features of totalitarian regimes is the immanent need for terror in legitimising their power. In the case of the trial against Imre Nagy and his associates, indeed in the entire campaign of post-1956 retribution, this meant the need to demonstrate that 1956 was a counter-revolution of direst nature as otherwise there could be no explanation for the inability of "the people's power" to defend itself or why it had been thought necessary for the Soviet Union to intervene. Nagy, who had been in the Soviet Union during the 1930s and had witnessed the Stalinist show trials, was well aware that on the basis of the indictments alone, would be death sentences. The "principal" defendant (i.e. himself) would certainly not be allowed to live. Partly for that reason, he was oblivious to threats. Maléter was another defendant who simply refused to accept he was guilty of any offence, perhaps trusting that his innocence would be established in the course of the hearings. The demeanour of the others is best illustrated by something Miklós Vásárhelyi wrote subsequently:

> We were familiar with judicial proceedings of this kind; we knew that the outcome would be either prison or death... In 1958 I truly did not feel it to be my moral duty, having fallen into the hands of ruffians and murderers, to make sincere declarations of my views, in strictly secret, closed hearings, to state security officers and to the hanging judges. My chief concern was to come out of it alive and without incriminating anyone else.

The trial was not given the go-ahead in 1957, even though all necessary preparations had been completed. The Soviet leadership asked for it to be postponed because Khrushchev was fending off a bid for power by Stalinist hardliners led by Molotov. The last thing he wanted, for both domestic- and foreign-policy reasons, was a trial of Imre Nagy. In addition, the report presented by a five-man commission of inquiry into the "Hungarian question" and adopted by a special session of the UN General Assembly with a considerable majority in September 1957, had concluded that the events that had started in Budapest on 23 October 1956 were a popular uprising which had flared up spontaneously. After a summit meeting of the Communist Parties in Moscow, on 21 December 1957, a closed session of the MSZMP's Provisional Central Committee, on Kádár's prompting, decided to "let legal proceedings run their natural course". Kádár was distinctly edgy at the time. In answer to questions from the leaders of the British Communist Party he had snapped: "If I did not have the interests of world communism at heart, the Imre Nagy gang would have been six feet under long ago."

The first leg of the trial opened on 5 February 1958 in the military court on Fő Street. Dr Zoltán Radó, the presiding judge, gave the accused men a chance to offer a defence on the substance of the charges; this resulted in expressions of disapproval in the reports by observers from the Interior Ministry. The next day, at Soviet request, the trial was adjourned on the pretext that further investigations were required. Death sentences and executions would have threatened the "international peace initiative" that Khrushchev was planning to launch in the spring. Radó, who in the meantime suffered a heart attack, was dropped from the case on the urging of the disgruntled Rajnai.

After the February hearings, József Szilágyi's case was separated from the main trial as his behaviour made it obvious that any attempt to include him would render the entire trial material unusable for future propaganda purposes. Although there had been no plan to pass a death sentence on Szilágyi, as neither the post he had occupied during the revolution, nor his role in it would have justified it, he explicitly set out to provoke his accusers, raising awkward questions, for example, about the absence of Géza Losonczy, who, according to the copies of the indictments he had received, was supposed to be the accused of the second order. Or that if virtually all the members of the leading body of the MSZMP established on October 31st were now seated in the dock, why not Kádár as well, since he, too, had been one of those leaders and, until his disappearance on November 1st, had backed all the political decisions that were now listed in the indictments, including the Hungarian government's declaration of neutrality and the country's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. Accordingly, Szilágyi was taken care of in separate proceedings that went ahead in April 1958. It says a lot for the sheer cynicism of the hangmen that the confessions extracted earlier from Losonczy, when he was suffering from prison-induced psychosis, and the grounds of the judgment in the Szilágyi case were read out as evidence for the prosecution during the June phase of the main trial—by which time both men were dead. József Szilágyi had sentence passed on him by Ferenc Vida, the same hanging judge as the one who would later hand down the verdicts in the cases of Imre Nagy and his co-defendants.

Who was responsible?

During a visit to Budapest in April 1958, Khrushchev was able to satisfy himself that control had truly been consolidated in Hungary. Kádár nevertheless waited until June before allowing the Nagy trial to proceed. Here it is worth digressing slightly to consider how large a role Soviet pressure played in the way the trial was run and in the sentencing. When the world learned of the executions on 16 June 1958, it was generally taken for granted in the West that the Soviet Union had been pulling the strings and return to Stalinist methods was in sight. Indeed, every single Communist Party, with the exception of the Polish and Yugoslav bodies, urged that stern retribution be dealt out in Hungary, as they were fearful that unless the Kádár regime set an example they would see the Hungarians' revolutionary fervour spreading to their own countries.

There is also no question that Soviet consent was needed for the trial to proceed at all, and in retrospect it is clear that the Soviet and Hungarian leaders took joint decisions on every major aspect of the proceedings. All the same, Khrushchev's position and his intentions were complex. The Nagy trial had a direct bearing on the outcome of the succession struggle that only ended in the summer of 1957, four years after Stalin's death. The main feature of this struggle was the lack of a fully fledged ideological recipe acceptable to all concerned as to what sorts of changes were necessary, and how profound they should be, following the dictator's death. Stalin's heirs needed, at one and the same time, to hold on to a one-party dictatorship and meanwhile to do what they could to correct the operational faults that sprang from the very nature of the regime. During this internecine struggle, anyone at any time could accuse anyone else of threatening to undermine the regime's foundations, especially if proposed corrections could be presented as foreshadowing the horror of destabilising the system. It was therefore at least partly with the aim of taking the wind out of the sails of his opponents in Moscow that Khrushchev had given the go-ahead for military intervention in Hungary on 31 October, 1956. The dynamics of the consolidation in Hungary, of which the harsh reprisals were not just a sign but one of the driving forces, clearly strengthened the orthodox Stalinist line. The court proceedings against the former Hungarian premier, redolent as they were of the classic show trials, were supposed to be the high point of that, but after the removal of Molotov & Co. they no longer served the interests of the Soviet leadership.

After the summer of 1957, then, the Nagy trial became really important to Kádár. The Soviet leadership gave unambiguous signals that they were not going to insist on capital punishment. In December 1957, Khrushchev merely inquired via Gromov, the Soviet ambassador in Budapest, what the likely outcome of the trials would be. Naturally, he had not forgotten what he had earlier agreed to with the Hungarians, nor indeed that only that summer they had opted for the death penalty as being appropriate. The unequivocal message of that feigned interest, however, was that the Soviet Union, for its part, might also be appeased by lighter sentences. Vladimir Malin, head of the General Department of the Soviet Communist Party Central Committee, took notes of the secret emergency sessions of the Presidium. These prove verbatim that at the same time as they requested that the trial be delayed, in February 1958, they also expressed a wish that "firmness but also magnanimity should be displayed" in the course of the trial (Malin's records were published in 2003). Nothing can be more telling than the manner in which Kádár presented that request to the Central Committee of the MSZMP: "What are we to do now? 1) We can delay the proceedings. 2) We can finish them, but influence the procedure in such a way so that they hand down a sentence which does not aggravate the international situation. That would be a very poor alternative, however." It is clear Kádár proposed to postpone the trial to a later, more appropriate time when they would not be obliged to take into account the likely international repercussions. In other words, so that they would be able to execute Nagy.

That moment arrived in May 1958. Soviet relations with the West had again hit a low mark and Khrushchev's relations with Tito were once again frigid. Kádár was well aware that in such a situation the Soviet Union would not raise any objection to death sentences being passed in the case. On May 27th 1958 a speedy decision was made to restart the trial. Since February, no further investigations of any kind had been conducted and the indictment was unchanged. It speaks volumes for the haste with which the moves were made that no amendments were made to either the wording of the charges or even to the list of the accused, which is why Miklós Vásárhelyi still featured as an accused of the tenth order in a trial at which only eight persons actually appeared as defendants.

The proceedings

The hearings in the case of Imre Nagy and his co-defendants were resumed in Gyorskocsi Street on 9 June 1958, with Ferenc Vida as the presiding judge. Given the wording of the indictments, both Nagy and Maléter certainly, and probably Gimes too (who was charged with leading the actions of an illegal organisation after November 4th), must have reckoned that they would receive the death penalty, but the same threat also hung over Sándor Kopácsi and Ferenc Donáth. The other three could expect long prison terms.

The presiding judge strove to give the appearance of being a stickler for legality and correct procedure, though in actual fact a whole range of judicial errors is discernible. Thus, the accused had not been allowed to confer with a defending counsel during the committal proceedings; it was only just before the trial started that they were given access to their lawyers, who had received copies of the several thousand pages of written evidence just days before. It was also an infraction of due process that the trial did not commence afresh from the beginning in June, as it should have done, but instead "continued" with a reading of the transcripts of evidence given in February. The presiding judge ruled that on the grounds of state security the hearing was to be held in camera, which likewise contravened the law that nominally applied at the time.

The only genuine state secret, of course, was the fact that the trial was going ahead at all, given that its subject was the actions taken by the defendants whilst discharging their official duties in government and as military or police officers during the period of the revolution—duties that had been carried out openly. The aim, of course, was the dual one of excluding the outside world and of breaking the resistance of the accused, since holding the proceedings in camera not only kept the public out but equally shut the defendants in, bringing it home to them that there was no one to whom they might speak as there was nobody there to hear what they had to say, or at best only what their executioners saw fit to allow. That would have maximised their sense of defencelessness, as it gave them to understand that their captors could do with them whatever they pleased. Indeed, at the first opportunity Imre Nagy was given to speak, he protested against the case being heard in camera.

The defendants' rights were severely curtailed throughout the proceedings. They were called to take the witness stand successively, and not in front of the others, and thus were not permitted to hear what evidence had been given before they were called; any proposals they made regarding evidence to support their claims were, with a few trivial exceptions, overruled by Vida. Every one of the witnesses was called by the prosecuting counsel, many of them individuals who themselves faced criminal charges and the threat of serious punishment; not one of those called by the defence as witnesses was allowed to appear. In the reconstruction of events that was presented to the court the presiding judge invariably ruled against any reference to János Kádár, or to any other politician who had participated in the decision-making process during the revolution but had since switched to the side of the puppet government. But he did not succeed in gagging Nagy. The latter was granted his constitutional right to a last word and had this to say:

> It is deplorable that in the criminal proceedings against me any chance to amplify the evidence was overruled; only witnesses for the prosecution were called, and only the prosecution's evidence was considered. In my humble opinion, it is the duty of the court in any criminal case to throw light on the truth, in addition to establishing culpability. The omission of any amplification of the evidence is reflected in the indictment itself, just as much as in the prosecution's closing remarks, which fail to reflect my activity or my responsibility in regard to either the objective facts or the historical truth.

In the forged trials of the past totally fictional charges had been laid against the accused. In the trials that were mounted as part of the post-1956 retribution, genuine facts were presented in a false light, divorced from their original context, with massive exaggeration of their actual significance, fitted to the political and ideological needs of those in power. Thus, a friendly conversation, an appraisal of a political state of affairs, or a running debate about alternatives, might easily be presented as a secret rendezvous or a conspiracy; attendance at a public political function, or writing a pamphlet, as spreading enemy propaganda, and so on.

The Imre Nagy trial is a glaring example of this. To make it even more preposterous, the great majority of the acts that were the subject of the indictments had been carried out by the defendants acting as members of legitimately authorised executive bodies, or on the orders of such bodies, and all decisions were preceded by political assent by the competent decision-making bodies. The Prime Minister and his cabinet were being impeached for their legitimate political decisions and acts; the heads of the armed forces and the police for implementing political decisions; and intellectuals for public expression of their thoughts. Under normal circumstances, of course, such things could not possibly be made the subject of criminal proceedings. Over and above that was the fact that the indictments and the statements made by the prosecution witnesses, and particularly those of the two star witnesses, Gyula Uszta and Zoltán Szántó, were replete with false and misleading assertions. There is no space to go into this in the present article, but the bogus nature and distortions of the case were set out

MTI PHOTO

Imre Nagy making his closing statement

in detail in the Hungarian émigré press by Péter Kende and Tibor Méray as early as in 1958. Here, then, only a few points will be mentioned.

To begin with, a number of the individuals who were alleged to belong to a conspiratorial group had nothing at all to do with one another before the Revolution. Imre Nagy himself, far from writing secret studies, sent copies of some of his papers on political theory that he wrote in 1955–56 to the Party's central leadership and, indeed, even had a copy sent to Moscow. It was in response to an explicit Politburo request that Nagy had gone to the Parliament building on October 23rd in order to address the huge crowd of protesters who had gathered there. After Nagy and his associates had fled to the Yugoslav Embassy, they could not have had any contact with Gimes, who was indicted for having put together after November 4th issues of what was termed an illicit newspaper and pamphlets or flysheets. Both Ferenc Münnich and Kádár, not to mention Szántó, the star prosecution witness and other prominent figures were regular participants in political decisions that were later blamed on the accused.

A staggering and highly incriminating assertion was by Uszta, who had fought with Pál Maléter as a partisan against the Nazis and later became a Stalinist general in the Hungarian army. He claimed to have witnessed Maléter acknowledge that he had given the order to revolutionary forces to seize the headquarters building of the Greater Budapest Communist Party in Köztársaság tér—Republic Square—on October 30th 1956. The subsequent lynching of a number of presumed secret policemen in the square was one of the truly abhorrent incidents during the

uprising and, not surprisingly, became a leitmotif of the Kádár regime's propaganda machinery, which was why it was so important to work it into the fabric of the case. At the time Uszta threw this damaging mud at Maléter both he, the prosecutor and the presiding judge were perfectly well aware that the actual tank commander who had opened fire on the Party headquarters—and in any case purely in error—was already months into a prison sentence. A long list of further points could be added to demonstrate how the entire proceedings were based on a vicious farrago of similar slanders and outright lies.

Defence strategies

The defendants chose their strategies according to their peculiar legal predicaments. Nagy and Maléter both denied any suggestion of wrongdoing outright; Donáth and Kopácsi confessed to being guilty of the charges brought against them, but even so could not be sure of escaping the hangman; Gimes, though he too had pleaded guilty, albeit with qualifications, almost certainly believed right up to the last moment that he would not be given the death penalty for the minor offences of which he was accused and to which he had admitted. That hope was not entirely groundless. We know that in the official record of the executions his name was entered alongside those of Nagy and Maléter subsequently, indicating that it was not decided until literally the last moment whether or not he would be pardoned. It is more than likely that the only reason he had to die was that he, alone among the defendants, personified the resistance that the Hungarian people had put up after the Soviet intervention. He had to be brought—totally spuriously—into contact with the Imre Nagy group in the Yugoslav Embassy simply in order to throw the obduracy of the "counter-revolutionary conspiracy" into even starker relief. Without him the weight of the indictments would have looked even skimpier than it was.

The defendants were inevitably forced into conflict with each other. Imre Nagy strove primarily to ensure that his own version of events, and his political views regarding the Revolution and what had led up to it, were recorded as accurately as possible. As a result, he missed no opportunity to stress that his decisions had invariably rested on what had been collectively agreed. It was not his intention to shuffle off responsibility: it was to throw light on the fact that during the days of the revolution no one at all—and that included Kádár and Münnich, the two leading figures of the faction that had seized power—had been able to come forward with any other politically practicable and morally acceptable alternative to the one that he, as prime minister, had represented. That anxiety to obtain a precise record for posterity put him at loggerheads with the other defendants. They were seeking to minimise their own role and responsibility, which in turn left them no other choice than to shift as much of the burden as they could onto Nagy since he was, after all, the central figure, even though he was insisting on the collective nature of the decisions. The wrangles between Nagy and the others mostly boiled down to that. This of course was all grist to the mill of those who had concocted the trial and were

thus able to take satisfaction in seeing the defendants contradict each other. The film that was intended for public showing was cut in such a way as to emphasise these dramatic and sometimes heart-rending scenes. Still, the moral authority of the Prime Minister, visibly in poor physical shape, made it impossible to show the film.

One especially harrowing passage in the film shows how, very near the end of the trial, the prosecution appeared to break Maléter, arguably the least political, and in some ways most sincerely idealistic, of the defendants. On the penultimate day, the accused were shown a montage of the atrocities, including the few lynchings that had been perpetrated during the revolution. Maléter, who knew nothing at all about these incidents but had nevertheless been accused of having a role in the Köztársaság Square carnage, retracted his earlier position after seeing the film and acknowledged his guilt. He was not broken as his courage and resoluteness were undiminished; rather, he had lost his sense of moral certainty and took the blame for the event on his own shoulders.

For Nagy there was one diabolical aspect of the trial. The ideological assumptions behind it were shared by all the defendants to some extent, with the exception of Zoltán Tildy, who was never a Communist; for them, this was the language of politics, the only frame of reference within which they could give their accounts of events. The very fact that they used the same terms and phraseology as their accusers did not reduce their sense of vulnerability, but actually increased it. As the notes made by Nagy, Donáth and others at Snagov show, for them the principle on which the whole concept of the trial rested—namely, that disrupting Party unity and Party strife might open the way to counter-revolution, and hence to the restoration of bourgeois democracy and capitalism—was not something that could be dismissed out of hand. They themselves also recognised that in late October and early November 1956 certain tendencies to counter-revolution had emerged. When most of the defendants admitted guilt, what they were really admitting was their de facto responsibility for what had happened: they had not acted with deliberate intent, but they had been mistaken, their political acumen had failed, and hence they had unwittingly harmed the cause of socialism. The one exception here was Imre Nagy. He argued that during the few days the revolution had lasted it was common ground that the uprising had been provoked by the dictatorial obduracy of Hungary's own Stalinists, their insensitivity towards the popular expression of a desire for democracy, and it was their blindness that had endangered the chances for preserving democratic socialism. Preserving that had guided the Reform Communists of the revolution's leadership, and Imre Nagy stuck by this claim to his last breath.

In that connection, it is necessary to turn briefly to the rehabilitation proceedings of 1989. György Litván, in a 1992 paper, now included in the volume under review, observed:

> Whereas submissive attorneys in 1958 made insidious counter-revolutionaries of Imre Nagy and his "accomplices", their 1989 successors recast them as exemplary and staunch Communists.

The 1989 proceedings were far from free of hypocrisy and glaring inconsistencies. In retrospect, it seems obvious that the aim should not have been to rehabilitate Nagy and his fellow accused but to annul the sentences passed on them for what they were: pretexts for plain political murder. That, however, would have cast an uncomfortably strong light on the real "perpetrators" and their political successors, who where still in power at the time and bent on portraying themselves in as democratic a light as possible. The victims were rehabilitated by the same Supreme Court that, just six months before, had refused to release copies of the trial documents to Miklós Vásárhelyi, by then chairman of the Committee for Historical Justice and the sole surviving defendant of the Nagy trial living in Hungary. At the hearing on July 6th, 1989 the Chief Prosecutor was the same person who in February of that year had protested, as a Party member, against the proposal to call what used to be labelled as a "counter-revolution" a "popular uprising". The decision merely to rehabilitate the victims was therefore fully in line with the attempt to find a place for Imre Nagy and his fellow reform Communists in the Party's historical pantheon, and thus to utilise their memory to bolster their own shaky legitimacy. Just as Nagy and the others had been condemned on Party instructions in 1958, so too were they rehabilitated in 1989.

Bearing in mind the historical antecedents, and also the line taken by those representing the powers that be in the immediately preceding months, to try and obstruct, to the very end, any examination of the resting places, exhumation and reburial of the bodies, rank hypocrisy is the phrase that springs to mind. It must also be conceded that the opportunity for that was given, at least in part, by the defence strategy that most of the accused had been obliged to adopt at the time. Imre Nagy himself insisted throughout the entire procedure that he had conducted himself "in accordance with Party discipline", or, in other words, he had invariably acted in line with resolutions passed by the Party's competent bodies. The principal reason why he considered the criminal proceedings against him unlawful was that he was convinced that the proper forum for debate over his actions was within the competent bodies of the Party, not a court hearing held in camera. And that political discussion should have addressed the specific question of whether the appropriate solution to the crisis into which Stalinist dictatorship had driven Hungary was the kind of democratic socialism for which he stood, or the restoration of the earlier despotism. Taking this into account, the 1989 "rehabilitation" was a misrepresentation, if only because, as Litván writes,

> ... [T]hese men (with the exception of Zoltán Tildy) were all former Communists, who, in response to the exposure of the crimes committed under Stalinism, had become disenchanted with Communism (and indeed even with Marxism itself), whereas in response to the Revolution they had identified with the Hungarian people's aspiration for democracy and national independence.

The truth is that the defendants had to be punished for what, to the Communist dogmatists of the times, was a double heresy that they simply could not stomach.

A few words should also be said about the defence lawyers and the cases that they presented. The defence lawyers had to be chosen from a list that only included lawyers who were reliable from the regime's point of view. Despite that, all those who were selected did make an effort to make the most of any opportunity that would help their client. They too had to act under major constraints, not being permitted to question that what had erupted in Hungary in October 1956 was a counter-revolution; at most only whether the accused had played an active role in that outbreak with malice aforethought. Most of the defence lawyers in fact tried to deploy Marxist lines of thinking by arguing that what had happened was the product of a longer historical and social process that could not be ascribed merely to the actions of particular individuals. Chief among them was Imre Bárd, Nagy's own defence counsel, who laid particular emphasis, among other things, on the fact that when the members of a country's government have at their disposal barely any of the means needed for that task, they may indeed carry political responsibility for any decisions they make, but it was utterly incomprehensible how that would render them criminally responsible. Warming up to his theme, Bárd also questioned how much trust could be placed on statements by the star witness Szántó, who had been with the Nagy group when they sought refuge in the Yugoslav Embassy but had later betrayed his former colleagues in exchange for immunity from prosecution. To have ventured such suggestions under those circumstances attests to considerable courage on Bárd's part.

The common final note struck in all the summings-up by the defence lawyers was a faithful reflection of the absurdity of the whole proceedings and indictments. It followed from the inner logic of their closing statements and the legal arguments they had employed that the defence, given the absence of any evidence that the defendants had committed any criminal acts, were bound to ask for all their clients to be acquitted. That was out of the question, however, so they all asked at least that clemency should be exercised in setting their punishments, on the grounds that none of the accused presented a threat to "the people's power". Several of them, Bárd included, made reference to the fact that the authorities had well consolidated their hold on power, so there was no need to set an example by imposing the ultimate sanction of the death penalty. But those who wielded power clearly thought exactly the opposite, and they had only dared to stage the trial at all because they felt they would be able to get away with anything. Imre Nagy, Pál Maléter and Miklós Gimes were sentenced to death, Sándor Kopácsi received a life sentence, Ferenc Donáth 12 years, Zoltán Tildy 6 years, Ferenc Jánosi 8 years and Miklós Vásárhelyi 5 years.

The verdicts

One has to ask why, if Soviet pressure was not a decisive factor, Kádár and the MSZMP insisted on such drastic penalties. The explanation can lie only partly in the idea that the logic of the thrust of the trial demanded the imposition of either the death penalty or heavy prison sentences. Kádár most likely considered it of vital

importance to himself personally that Nagy be removed permanently from the ranks of the living, for if he were to remain alive, his mere presence would have been a standing reminder of the events of the revolution and of how Kádár had gained power, unlawfully, through foreign military intervention. Nor can one exclude other psychological explanations. As Nagy's biographer János M. Rainer has pointed out: "For Kádár, tormented as he was by complexes about being eternally the smallest boy and of having grown up without a father, the way to power, where he was finally left to himself, led via a symbolic (Rákosi) and then a real patricide (Nagy)."

The accused as the verdict is read out. From left to right, among guards, Imre Nagy, Ferenc Donáth, Pál Malét

The ultimate rationale, though, most probably lay in the internal state of the newly reorganised party that Kádár headed, the post-revolutionary MSZMP. Startling proof of that is to be found precisely in the sound recordings of the court proceedings that have now been made available. In rejigging the Party organisation, the only people on whom Kádár could rely were either members of the police, and more particularly the former State Security (ÁVH or ÁVO), or else hardline Stalinists of the second and third rank. As Rainer has written in an article earlier this year, this is more or less verbatim what can be heard on the tape, coming from the mouths of both the presiding judge and the public prosecutor. The main purpose of the trial was supposed to have been to reinforce the Party's sense of identity, but it is perfectly clear from the tapes that neither the judge nor the prosecutor saw it as a matter of fulfilling a Party duty, but a matter of personal pride, to see that the thinking behind the trial was borne out.

In their words, in their histrionics, and the cadences of their voices, even after half a century, the deep loathing that they felt towards their victims is clearly discernible. This post-Stalinist stratum of Party cadres had an elemental need for

a simplified explanation for the revolution; namely, that they had been the dupes of a conspiracy, which explained why their authority had swung in the balance, and justified their treachery while at the same time it absolved them of responsibility. These were the cadres that in 1956 had been forced to face the horror of losing power and privileges—precisely because they had shown themselves to be unfit, both politically and morally, to hold authority and power in Hungary. That unfitness had been demonstrated most strikingly by precisely those individuals who, during the days of the Revolution, had accepted the

klós Vásárhelyi, Miklós Gimes and Sándor Kopácsi. Still.

programme of democratic regeneration of socialism and managed to gain the trust of the people. Kádár and his cronies dragged off to the gallows or to prison precisely the men who did not run for their life at the sight of the elemental fury with which the populace rose up but tried, to the very last, to find a more democratic alternative socialism. Those men were living proof that there was such an alternative; that it would have been possible to choose a way that had room for personal honour, a sense of allegiance and responsibility to the nation, and a commitment to socialist, or at least to left-wing democratic ideals. That was why the defendants had to be destroyed and gagged.

The trial is thus, unavoidably, the story not of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, nor of the deeds of its leaders; it is the story of the Kádár regime, conceived as it was in blood and murder. It throws much light on the circumstances under which the Kádár regime came into being, and its links to 1956. It left its imprint on the Kádár era as a whole, and as became clear in 1989, on the character of János Kádár himself, showing as he did that he was unable to forget, and would not be allowed to forget, his crime. ❧

Bob Dent

My Very Own 1956

Like anyone trying to write about the 1956 uprising in Hungary, I was faced from the start with the fact that the main, albeit not exclusive set of events took place during an extremely short period, from 23 October to 4 November that year—a period of less than two weeks, during which the situation changed literally day by day, sometimes even hour by hour. Documentation about that dramatic period is available in the form, for example, of surviving newspapers and transcripts of radio broadcasts, but the journalists who were writing those pages of history, so to say, inevitably had a limited perspective due to the rapidly changing nature of the events and to the physical limitations preventing them from being at all the places where something significant was happening, particularly during the periods of heavy fighting. It is not surprising therefore that accounts of 1956 rely heavily on a wide variety of other sources, notably the various published memoirs of participants, plus the many recorded oral history interviews made with people over the past 20–25 years.

I am a great fan of oral history and 'people's history' in general. At best they are a useful counterweight to the history based exclusively on official documents and the letters and written records that (usually powerful) participants have left behind. At the same time, studying Hungary 1956 taught me that you have to be careful with this, as with any other type of historical source. I wanted to write a book which would recount not only the top-level political events of the time, but would also recall the details and the atmosphere of what actually happened on the ground, day by day, in particular locations. For this, the many interviews which had already been made and the many memoirs which had already been published were a great help. In a rapidly evolving situation like that of 1956, with events driven to a large extent from below, and spanning a relatively short period of time, oral history and memoirs of grass-roots participants take on a greater weight than usual.

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However, I was soon confronted with the problem that it was not so easy to determine 'the facts' of what actually happened in different places. One eyewitness remembers as fact something which occurred at a certain place on a certain day. Another eyewitness, present in the same location at the same time, remembers something quite different. That is quite understandable in situations of violence. There is usually an element of panic and chaos when bullets begin to fly, which results in contradictory accounts of what actually happened. In the case of 1956, however, I was also confronted with this difficulty in relation to events which were entirely peaceful.

Take the great mass gathering in Bem tér, for example, the first major demonstration, which took place on the afternoon of Tuesday, 23 October. Nobody disputes that such a gathering happened and that it was significant. A few other facts are established, for example that the Writers' Union president Péter Veres spoke there, as is confirmed by documentary film. But what he actually said, and who else spoke and what they said is not so clear. Were the famous Sixteen Points of the students read out, for instance? It depends which source or eyewitness account you consult.

This is what I discovered in relation to an entirely peaceful event on the first day. How much more difficult it was when it came to matters of chaotic violent conflict. What to do? I opted for an unusual but I thought honest solution. Where it seemed that neither one account nor another could be fully confirmed, I offered readers both, or more than two accounts on occasion. In this way, by examining and presenting conflicting versions of events, and by trying to give an appreciation of differing accounts of 1956, the book became, in part, a work about history itself and, by implication, about how history can be very selective and how, therefore, the past can be used for different purposes.[1]

As I researched the different accounts of 1956 a phrase kept reoccurring in my head. It wasn't something I had read or heard at any time, it just seemed to emerge in my mind—*we all like to remember the things we want to remember and we prefer to forget the things we would rather not remember.* In other words, we like to dismiss uncomfortable truths, truths which don't quite fit our preferred image of the past.

In connection with 1956 this works in all sorts of ways and for all sorts of perspectives. The official view of 1956 during the Kádár era was a negative one. Much of that focussed on a number of atrocities which took place during the events, in particular the lynchings and shootings in cold blood following the siege of the Party's Budapest headquarters in Köztársaság tér on 30 October 1956. There was a tendency to identify the entire uprising with those terrible events, to argue that the true face of 1956 emerged during those atrocities. It suited the ideological position

1 ■ George Orwell's *1984* articulates the extreme case. Winston Smith is made to repeat the Party slogan: "Who controls the past controls the future." The following part of the slogan is equally thought-provoking: "Who controls the present controls the past".

very well, and was constantly emphasised in books and essays, but also with political rallies held in Köztársaság tér and in monuments erected there. After 1989 the view of 1956 became positive and the tendency was for the atrocities of Köztársaság tér to be downplayed and in many cases forgotten. They didn't fit the new image. They muddied the picture. The less said about them the better.[2]

I deliberately decided that the first chapter I would research and write would be about the events of 30 October in Köztársaság tér, even though that chapter was not planned to be among the early ones of the book. The reason was precisely because those events were the most controversial of the uprising and in some ways the most difficult to write about in a truthful and balanced way. If I couldn't do that, I reckoned, it wouldn't be worth doing much else.

It took a lot of time and much reflection, and the result consisted of two parts: one about what happened on that day and another dealing with the variety of responses to the events. 'What happened' is today more or less agreed. The siege of the building and the exchange of fire between insurgents in the square and defenders inside was ended by the arrival of Hungarian tanks, sent to defend the Party headquarters but which shelled the building by mistake. The defenders surrendered. Three who emerged with a white flag were shot while others, including rank-and-file ÁVH conscripts, were dragged outside and similarly executed. Some of the bodies were strung up on trees and mutilated.

Earlier versions included some quite fantastic details about 'what happened'. The most famous of these revolved around the belief that there were secret chambers and cells below the Party building where the ÁVH was allegedly holding many prisoners. There were no such chambers and cells, but that didn't stop some people from treating the allegations as fact and even presenting 'evidence' for doing so. One of the strangest examples of this must surely be the account given by George Mikes.

Mikes was a Hungarian émigré writer living in Britain, best known as the author of *How To Be an Alien.* In 1956 he reported from Hungary for the BBC and he later wrote about the events in his *The Hungarian Revolution,* published in the UK in 1957. Without quoting any source, the book details as fact that when "freedom fighters invaded the Party headquarters", they "freed a large number of prisoners from the cellars and then went up to the third floor where a number of high-ranking ÁVÓ officers were having a dinner party [sic!] ... Altogether there were about a hundred and twenty people round the table." Mikes further says a "sharp battle ensued" in which about 40 ÁVH (i.e. ÁVÓ, the secret police) officers were killed. Another 60, he says, were captured and taken downstairs where "they were all hanged on trees and lamp-posts around the square..." Sixty hanged? The researchers of the 1956 Institute reckon that in total 23 defenders lost their lives.

Mikes then takes up the story of the underground cellars, writing that some of the attackers heard voices coming from below the ground even while the siege of

2 ■ That situation changed in late 2006 with the publication of László Eörsi's informative and balanced work *Köztársaság tér,* published by the 1956 Institute.

the building was underway! The voices apparently said that there were "a hundred and fifty-four of us" and that there was an "ÁVÓ man with us". A frantic search was started, he writes, but although Mikes acknowledges that "the secret passage was never found", he amazingly concludes that the "hundred and fifty-four men and their ÁVÓ guard perished."[3]

Such types of confusions and contradictions regarding Köztársaság tér apply to other events during the 1956 uprising. Here, however, the specifics of the brutalities and mob violence add a special dimension. The problem with trying to bypass, minimise, isolate or 'explain' this 'embarrassing for the revolution' dimension, without tackling the matter head-on, is that it has left the field open for all those who have indeed highlighted what went on in the square for the purposes of condemning the entire uprising negatively as a 'counter-revolution'.

Confronting the matter head-on is, of course, not easy. It involves analysing the nature not only of 'mass' violence, but of violence itself, and it raises the issue of the negative impact of 'hatred' in the uprising. In 1991, a symbolic foundation stone for a 'monument of atonement' was placed in Köztársaság tér, its inscription referring to all the 'martyrs and victims of 1956'. If any kind of monument of atonement or reconciliation is ever to be raised there or anywhere else, the difficult issues of 1956 will have to be tackled first.

With this in mind I quoted words spoken by Árpád Göncz, in 1994, in his then capacity as President of Hungary, on the 38th anniversary of the execution of Imre Nagy. "Everyone has a right to interpret 1956. But no one has the right to expropriate 1956. Only the knowledge of the undistorted truth can mellow the one-time confrontation into peace." Nevertheless, attempts to expropriate 1956 and its significance have continued unabated year in year out, as exemplified by the different political parties and veterans' organisations holding separate commemorative ceremonies on 23 October each year, as happened even on the fiftieth anniversary in 2006.

My '56... your '56... his '56... our '56... their '56. You really can use these terms and they can all have different meanings. I am not convinced that there is anything necessarily wrong with this, though I am convinced that we should all be wary when someone claims that his or her '56 is the *only* '56. However, perhaps one unfortunate result of the confusing variety of versions of 1956 is withdrawal on the part of the 'non-involved' majority and an indifference on the part of the young. Surveys have repeatedly shown that knowledge of and interest in 1956 among the generations of Hungarians who have no direct experience of the events is particularly low.

3 ■ According to historian György Litván, the existence of underground chambers in Köztársaság tér constitutes just one of several enduring legends about 1956. See his "Mítoszok és legendák 1956-ról" [Myths and Legends about 1956]. In: *Évkönyv* [Yearbook] VIII, Budapest, 1956 Institute, 2000. Also on the Institute's website: www.rev.hu. This is an important work for anyone willing to get to grips with certain misconceptions about 1956. Unfortunately it has still to be translated into English.

On the one hand this is surprising, given the momentous nature of the 1956 events. On the other, it is not an unknown phenomenon. A few years ago I was in Barcelona and was quite astounded to find that the city museum there contained next to nothing about the Spanish Civil War of 1936–39, even though Barcelona was one of the crucibles of political activity in those years. Spanish people I have spoken to seem not to be interested in the subject and a little surprised to find an outsider who is. It seems that the Spanish Civil War was so utterly divisive that any collective memory of it is too painful and therefore better suppressed.

Maybe there is a certain parallel with Hungary? I do not think that 1956 was a civil war, but I do think that there were elements typical of civil war. Consider two of the most serious scenes of armed confrontation in Budapest—the siege of the radio building on 23 October and the already-mentioned events at Köztársaság tér exactly one week later. Those violent conflicts involved Hungarians fighting Hungarians. No Soviet forces were engaged. The two, of course, even when coupled with similar outbreaks elsewhere, do not constitute a civil war, but they do challenge the widely accepted simplistic view that 1956 can be understood *only* as a struggle of 'the united Hungarian nation' which rose up as one to oppose Soviet rule.

It is not popular among many to point this out. Nor is it popular to highlight that there is still no consensus in Hungarian society about 1956. I am referring to a lack of agreement which goes beyond the bickering of the political parties and touches on the perceived essence of 1956.

One of the most surprising discoveries I encountered during my research involved the results of a public opinion survey about attitudes to 1956, published in 2003. Among such surveys, this is still the most profound and most detailed I myself have found. Sixteen per cent of respondents indicated that their view of 1956 was one of 'counter-revolution', the official view of the Kádár era. That proportion is not large, but neither is it insignificant, particularly considering that the survey was conducted 14 years after 1989—since then the notion of 'counter-revolution' has been repeatedly discredited.[4]

During my research I came across, sometimes in person, sometimes through their writings, many different people with many different views. A common thread linking some of them reflected what struck me as a 'pain of memory'. Sometimes the pain was obvious and direct. The person may have lost a relative, killed during the events, or executed afterwards. They may have been in prison, or closely related to someone who had been. Then there was the pain associated with a feeling of being misunderstood or of being left out of history. These types of pain could overlap the simplistic 'for' or 'against' 1956 divide. People who were 'on the same side' in 1956, or who identified with one perceived side, could have

4 ■ Mária Vásárhelyi, "Csalóka emlékezet" [Elusive Memory], *Élet és Irodalom,* 47. évfolyam, 24. szám. It wasn't the case that the other 84 per cent were all of the same opinion. 53 per cent were happy with the term 'revolution', while the remainder preferred alternative notions, including 'people's uprising' (14 per cent) and 'freedom struggle' (13 per cent).

differences with their apparent co-believers, and if their views were not being acknowledged, that, too, resulted in a 'pain of memory'. It seems to me that this issue has barely been acknowledged, let alone addressed. No wonder Göncz's "one-time confrontation" is taking a long time to mellow.

As for the issue of terminology, of 'revolution' or 'counter-revolution', it may seem surprising that I wanted to avoid it. I tried not to use either term. To explain why, let me deal with 'counter-revolution' first.

As I understand it, during the Kádár era the view was that the 1956 events constituted a counter-revolution for a number of reasons. These included the destruction of Communist symbols and attacks on Party buildings, the 'fascist' atrocities which took place, and the belief that the underlying orientation of the events was towards a restoration of capitalist relations of production. In my view none of these can be substantiated enough to warrant the label 'counter-revolution' being applied overall. True, red stars and other communist symbols were torn from buildings, as was the Soviet-style coat-of-arms from the national flag. Yet, at the same time many Party members participated in the events, from the rank and file in the street fighting or in the workers' councils to Imre Nagy and others in the political arena. The attacks on the Party were attacks on its monopoly of power, not on the ideal of socialism or workers' power as such. It is understandable, however, that many in the Party thought that was the case since, in line with the Leninist tradition, they believed that the Party represented the interests of the working class.

Atrocities did take place. There is no doubt about that. Those which happened at Köztársaság tér were the most prominent. Yet it is difficult to show that these were characteristic of the events in general. It is even more difficult to find substantive evidence showing that the overall orientation was towards a capitalist restoration.

"No one should dream of going back to the world of aristocrats, bankers and capitalists. That world is definitely gone!" These oft-quoted words were spoken not by some crazed, left-wing street activist of 1956, but by a leader of the revived Smallholders' Party, Béla Kovács, who was appointed minister of agriculture in the Nagy government during the events. His words were echoed in countless proclamations issued at the time, notably by the many workers' councils. 'The factory is ours and should remain so under workers' management' was a common theme.

As for 'revolution' I had never been happy with that term, either. For me a revolution means a change in the relations of the power structure. It doesn't mean either simply the outbreak of violence, or a change of rulers if the structure of rule is maintained. The events of 1956 in Hungary were too short to implement a real change in the power relations, though I would acknowledge that there was a revolutionary core to the events. In my view, that revolutionary element was best represented by the many village and town councils which appeared and, in particular, by the widespread emergence of workers' councils. The irony here is that to a large extent the Hungarian workers' councils of 1956 have become 'hidden from history'.

There is perhaps what might be called an ideological reason for the relative lack of interest in the workers' councils. They certainly represented a tricky problem for the new Kádár government and the later historians of his era. How could the government rightly claim legitimacy as representing the interests of the Hungarian working class, when masses of Hungarian workers were refusing to acknowledge that legitimacy and, moreover, had their own organisations separate from those of the ruling party and government? The existence of the workers' councils in opposition to Kádár at the start of his rule exposed the flaw in the classical Leninist proposition—that the Party necessarily expresses 'the interest of the working class'. As for 'the West', the workers' councils did not fit neatly into any 'acceptable' category. In so far as they were 'anti-Soviet' or 'anti-Communist', or perceived as such, that was fine. If they were in favour of liberal reforms such as the introduction of free speech, a multi-party system and parliamentary elections, that was also fine. But it was not quite 'acceptable' if they were, as they actually were, 'anti-capitalist' and 'pro-socialist', even 'revolutionary' in the sense that they were firmly in favour of maintaining the social ownership of property and putting it under workers' management.

The Hungarian workers' councils have been neatly described as 'anti-Soviet soviets', and for many that apparently contradictory notion has not been easy to digest, neither in post-1989 Hungary nor indeed elsewhere—therefore easiest, perhaps, to ignore them.

Irrespective of any analysis of concepts, there was a more pressing reason why I wanted to avoid the terms 'revolution' or 'counter-revolution'. In my view, the terms have become divorced from socio-economic realities and are simply used as moral judgements. Kádár said it was bad. We say it was good. He called it counter-revolution. We call it revolution. Here the irony is that the 'official' views of the pre- and the post-1989 eras, in this respect at least, share something. Revolution good, counter-revolution bad.

Years ago I used to avoid the issue by using the term 'uprising' to describe the 1956 events. The term is somewhat more neutral and it doesn't have the definite sense of either 'revolution' or 'counter-revolution'. The 1989 announcement that the Party's revised view of the events was one of a 'people's uprising' over-politicised the term, and so I wanted to avoid 'uprising' as well.

The essence of my dilemma in writing or talking about 1956 was that 'revolution', 'counter-revolution' and 'people's uprising' had become labels, rather than guides to understanding. Use one and your readers would immediately put you in a box, believing they knew what you were going to say next, before you had even thought of it yourself. I wanted to get behind and beyond such labels and understand and write about what actually happened in 1956, not what people believed had happened. Yet, you can't always escape labels and snappy definitions, so my not-very-successful approach was to invent an entirely new term for the events of 1956. I started to call 1956 a 'social explosion'. Paradoxically, the term was (and is) useful, almost precisely because it doesn't

carry any implicit meaning, or rather any ideological weight or baggage on its shoulders. It demands, at least this was my intention, that we go beyond accepted terminology to examine exactly what happened and exactly what we really mean.

During the 50th anniversary year of 2006, to my mind, an awful lot of odd things were said and written about 1956. This was perhaps understandable, since it was quite predictable that politicians and others would selectively use the memory of 1956 to bolster their current positions or pet theories and/or to attack someone else's. One idea which re-emerged involved the notion that the changes of 1989–90 were a realisation of the ideals of 1956. It was an idea which had appeared 17 years earlier, at the time of those changes, and it is still quite widespread today. Allow me to challenge it.

Of course, there were overlaps between the goals of 1956 and those of 1989–90: the idea of national independence, the demand for a multi-party system, a free press and the end of all forms of dictatorship. But in some, in my view significant respects, 1989–90 was quite different in that it was simultaneously both more and less than 1956. In other words, it involved elements not present thirty-three years previously and omitted others which were.

Take the latter first. As already mentioned, factory-based workers' councils and locality-based revolutionary committees sprang up all over the country in 1956. These bodies represented a form of direct democracy somewhat different both from the forms of a multi-party parliamentary system and from the classic Soviet-style, one-party system.

Hannah Arendt's "Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution" in her renowned *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is often quoted and referred to as a positive appreciation of the 1956 events, but rarely do authors themselves reflect deeply on her comments about the direct democracy of the councils that emerged as the core of what was positive. This is almost proof of her own words where she describes how such councils, whenever they have appeared in history, "were met with utmost hostility from the party-bureaucracies and their leaders from right to left, and with the unanimous neglect of political theorists and political scientists." Certainly the idea of such councils was neglected in 1989–90.

Where 1989–90 went beyond (very much beyond, in my opinion) 1956 was clearly in the desire to accelerate privatisation and to further develop a free-market economy. Demands for such changes were virtually non-existent in 1956. Does this explain the absence of any reference to these issues among those fond of the 1956–1989 connection? Perhaps another reason is that if anyone did somehow try to argue for such a connection, it would resemble the accusations of the Kádár era. It would clearly be difficult to retrospectively read into 1956 the free-market orientation which dominated 1989 on the economic front.

But who knows? Many strange elements have been written into the history of 1956. ❧

Erzsébet Őrszigethy

Space without Strength

From an Outsider's Diary

20 August 1967, Constitution Day, the village of D., Pest County.

On a blood-scented afternoon the entertainment starts in the middle of the village. The yard of the crescent-shaped House of Culture has been turned into a shambles. There the boss of the consumer co-operative, in rubber apron and rubber boots, is skinning sheep, surrounded by volunteers in white-aprons, basins, cauldrons, a campfire, in a cracking booze-fuelled mood. The gala dinner for the local notables is simmering in the yard. The drink is being supplied by the party secretary of one of the nearby villages, who is also the licensee of the bar in the House of Culture.

Those who have received invitations assemble in the auditorium. The festive decorations hide the gaping, fist-wide crack in the partition wall between the hall and the vestibule. The true decoration is anyway the laid table—red wine and red goulash on a white tablecloth. I hustle and bustle and smile as befits a hostess, wriggling for myself a place between the two co-operative farm chairmen (in those days the village is still able to sustain two co-operative farms), doling out the goulash first to the one, then to the other. Maybe the banquet will mellow the otherwise fiercely rival chairmen into bounteous donors, because money is needed for culture; the place needs to be "developed", if only to brick over the crack in the wall. Autumn is on the way.

The village has a third chairman: that of the council. I cannot expect much from him because he follows his paramour's orders—and she's the council treasurer. This rural pulchritude, with her heavily lacquered hair-bun, is a veritable nemesis; she curses everyone who seeks to swindle the state's money from her. A popular educator with her own ideas is a downright public enemy in her eyes. Development is an iniquity against the state; in other words, the sinister crack will remain.

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What is important is the banquet to celebrate the grape harvest. The council chairman's son swears that the whole council machinery is getting ready for this. A wedding party makes merry in the House of Culture. A teetering tower of beer crates is leaning against the crack, but the wall is bearing up for the time being.

I quit being a popular educator sooner than the wall did. I just couldn't stomach soaping up the two chairmen. On whose behalf was I doing this, anyway? I supposed it was for the people. To officially fight for high-quality culture for the people; or at least I believed that's what my role was, if the state and the powers-that-be were not going to do it. Meanwhile villagers revelled at the wedding thrash and at the wine-harvest ball that followed it. By the time New Year came round, I was starting to have my doubts. Were values and beliefs I acquired at college in vain? At the crack of dawn on the day after the festivities, I meandered around in the wasteland of the hall of the House of Culture. With Evie, the cleaning lady, I scooped up the broken bottles and ripped knickers into the rubbish bin. Pista, the party secretary-cum-licensee of the bar, indulged us by keeping up our spirits with black coffees and a dash of rum.

While I worried about bricks dropping off the House of Culture, the people (or at least the fortunate co-op members) were building new homes for themselves. I devoured magazines; the villagers dug foundations, raised walls and put up wire fences. Each having fun in his own way. The state took care of order and its money and initialled permits for the gainful occupation of one's free time, the police acted as midwife at cultural functions, and the building authority kept an eye on the house-building.

The authorities were satisfied. A whole row of houses was proof of progress: the "civic consciousness" of the peasants of the Great Hungarian Plain was resolved in a building boom. There was no need for world-saving popular educators in this scheme of things, not that they found much company, since popular educator and people spoke different languages. In those days, the difference was not linguistic so much as cultural (during the Sixties the village redeemers and rural developers spoke plain Hungarian, not English as they do nowadays). The position could be defined as a failure of communication—maybe that is what experts would call it today. In truth, neither side was talking to the other: the villagers only bothered themselves with their families, their dwellings and their land; the popular educator was sustained by blind faith, trusting in the mass appeal of her "burning spirit" and waiting for the people to draw near.

In the wake of the Sixties, village folk ate and drank, built with gusto and began to forget the times of privation. The well-meaning popular educator I was wanted to persuade the villagers to dance and sing and make music in the House of Culture. To strut about the stage, throw off the chains of labour. The trouble was that there were endless other things for them to attend to on burgeoning household plots and in the intoxicating atmosphere of the emergent second economy.

In the world of the co-operatives the people reserved their energies for working their private plots, and the popular educator objected to that. She would have

been happier to see some kind of civic set-up that also made culture, value and identity of interests communal. She recalled with nostalgia the old traditional village (spinning room, reading circle, craftsmen's circle, farmers' circle) that had been wiped out by the onset of workaholism. She saw her task as being one of creating new communities that would act as seed-points for cultural values.

Then came Hungary's transition to democracy. In the rush to privatise everything, the first casualties were workplace communities, then remote workplaces; those who were commuting long-distance to work found themselves staying at home. An era of unemployment was ushered in: there was no money and no work.

During the Nineties rural poverty kept on growing, especially in the northern, eastern and southern marches of the country. Successive governments were preoccupied with balancing their budgets, and, even in the best case, long-term plans lasted only to the end of the parliamentary cycle (and the capital's city limits). The politicians put their faith in injections of capital and had no other prescriptions. Their other suggestion: keep your eyes peeled.

Social scientists—sociologists, statisticians, and the rest—kept us duly informed about the causes of poverty and its manifestations, but they offered no prescriptions. The powers-that-be seemed to be at a complete loss. How to redistribute, when there is so little to redistribute?

Meanwhile humanitarian-spirited civic and state bodies were operating in those parts of northern and eastern Hungary that had sunk into hopeless poverty. Some of the helpers handed out clothing, shoes and food to the needy; others offered money and loans in kind to try and stimulate the unemployed to undertake individual and collective enterprises. These gifts and puny ventures did little to cushion everyday cares. The state also had no brighter ideas than doling out subsidies to investors: what's the point in cosying up to capital when the latter has no interest in moving to derelict regions?

Made in the developed world

Working capital might not have reached the marginal regions of Hungary by the turn of the millennium, but by then a new speciality, regional development, had come into being. This is aimed at revitalising, by means of various (internationally guaranteed) remedial tweaks, regions that had slumped into poverty and despond. An official list of the most deprived and disadvantaged districts was only put together at the end of 2007, but even before that the authorities knew, through sociological surveys and statistics, precisely which parts of the country most needed assistance.

A model programme that had been jointly worked out and financed by the Hungarian government and the United Nations Development Programme in November 2005 was initiated to come to the aid of the Cserehát, the worst-placed of all the areas in northern Hungary. Four sub-regions lying between the Aggtelek

National Park and the Zemplén Nature Reserve make up the Cserehát Programme area. There are 128 settlements with a total population of 96,000, with 80 of the villages having fewer than 500 inhabitants. Unemployment is running at two or three times the level of other parts of the country, with the proportion of registered working-age unemployed standing at over 20 per cent. According to official census data (Central Statistical Office, 2001), 16 per cent of the Cserehát's inhabitants describe themselves as Gypsies (Roma). A government regulation issued in 2007 listed all four of the Cserehát's constituent districts among the 33 most disadvantaged in the country.

I personally took part in the programme from March 2006 until December 2007. I was not working as a regional development officer; my task was to keep a record, as an outside observer, of what was happening within the programme. Although I visited some fifty or sixty villages and six towns within the area, I came to know less about that part of the world, but more about the behind-the-scenes realities of regional development than I would have liked.

To begin with, I met the administrators who were in charge of the programme. The programme manager had a university degree in economics. His main specialisation was European integration and global economic adjustment, with economic policy as a subsidiary. His assistant was qualified in international relations, likewise specialising in European integration, but he had previously worked for regional bodies of international organisations. Implementation of the programme required not only experience in regional development but also familiarity with how international bodies work, as the programme came under the scrutiny of a UNDP centre with headquarters in Bratislava, Slovakia. English was the official language. The technical director was well versed in the practice (and theory) of regional development, both in Hungary and internationally. He worked out a developmental technique that would chime with the regional development approach of the UNDP, the international partner. The regular field work occupied ten regional development officers—one for each micro-district. They included a sociologist, a geologist, a popular educator, a Roma expert, a teacher of English and history, a horticultural engineer, a social worker, a psychotherapist. Typically, every one of them was doing something other than their basic training had equipped them for. Most of them had been employed as consultants, development officers, analysts or trainers in regional and agricultural policy, leadership training, organisational development, community development, project management, sustainable growth, employability. (To my eyes it is a world that is more than a bit skew-whiff, and it crossed my mind more than once that I would need a change-management consultant to work out what it was all about; but then there was even one of those among us.)

The field workers were referred to by various titles: animators, facilitators or mentors, but most frequently as coaches. 'Coach' has been remagyarised and sometimes appears even in written texts as *"kócs"*. They functioned in much the same way as coaches in any sport. The pre-existing and newly-formed Cserehát

communities had their trainers, and besides them business consultants and teamwork managers from all these organisations and institutions.

It was thanks to joint on-site visits and monthly reviews of the work ("coach meetings") that, over time, I was able to see how regional development works. A typical regional development officer, the way I see it, has a mechanic's or technocrat's mindset. This has little in common with that of a sociologist who tries to interpret social phenomena: he is no social worker engaged in case work. The regional development officer is a forthright yet amiable being, concerned only with events or persons useful to his work. In other words, he is no brooding social scientist but an expert who navigates within safe margins. He selects as the object of his work people (groups of people) in networks of relationships, and tries to institutionalise those relationships and groups. He is fully convinced that the groups formed at his bidding will be able to reincarnate a vanished local society. A regional development officer has his mind focussed on the future; his measure is the global trend. He is proud to think of himself as someone who works hard and rarely errs.

What differentiates a popular educator from a regional development officer, when both are seeking to save village communities? What is different are the remedies they adopt to deal with tangled village relations. The way they relate to people, a more detached or distant form of social discourse: "a weeping surgeon cannot operate."

My colleagues regarded the usual signs of unemployment and widespread poverty as a given; they were no more moved by the floods of complaints than they were by centuries-old churches, or Hussite houses hiding centuries-old secrets, or the marvels of a peerless collection of Protestant Bibles. The focus for them was action. In their encounters with villagers they learned that the erstwhile communities had been broken up by years of destitution and believed that functioning communities could be built through the gravitational pull of a common goal.

Raising seed money

Regional development agencies sprang up in the late Nineties, since when a great many regional development plans and programmes have been rolled out. Having a National Development Office, and later a National Development Agency (1 July 2006), made planning livelier still. The smallest territorial unit of development in Hungary is the district *(kistérség),* which in 1994 was no more than a statistical category: back then, just 138 districts were registered. Four years later there were 150 of them, and by 2003, 168 of them, and from then on they were not merely a statistical category but developmental units. The latest updating took place in the autumn of 2007 when a government decree designated 174 districts. The district works alongside existing local councils. Districts are for regional development or planning.

On reading through, as an outsider, the regional development plans that had been drawn up for the districts since the turn of the millennium, I was struck by their similarity. The aim in all localities was a better life; in areas of poverty they

urged, among other things, new workplaces, high-quality (market-driven) education, the amelioration (introduction) of infrastructure. The Cserehát Programme, however, sought to accomplish this by a singular approach.

What exactly did the programme aim to develop in the Cserehát? Not any links; or in other words, not the roads, the schools, the shops, the water, sewerage or other networks, or even the labour market. The long-term goal there, too, was an improvement of rural conditions (quality of life), and in such a way that the local inhabitants would learn how to raise money to improve their lifestyle.

It is a time-honoured principle that money is earned by working for it; loans may be more sophisticated, but they are also riskier. The latest and most advanced form in which they are accessible, however, is the competitive grant application. This has now become so widespread that virtually each and every step, from inviting bids to submitting applications and judging them, has become a line of business in its own right. Individuals can submit bids, or enterprises, civic organisations, local councils or institutions, but the better organised the applicants the better their chances.

In deprived regions, if things go on like this, even local councils will be unable to carry out tasks that are mandated by the state without applying for money by competitive tender. Civic bodies are likewise dependent on grant applications. And since there is no throbbing economic life in the Cserehát, in its disadvantaged state (local taxes and benefactors being equally thin on the ground), just about all that official and civic circles can rely on is making virtual tenders. If the state is no longer able to command capital into the impoverished regions, the destitute will have to be instructed on how to tap the funding by making competitive bids for grants (most of which the state itself dispenses).

Dealing with local councils and civic organisations is a classic regional development task. The Cserehát Programme, though, also sought to turn an unorganised population by magic into a force applying for grants. A local population can only become a fighting force if it is capable of forming communities, so the exercise was adjusted to the level of organisation. (In the early days, they didn't bother much about local under-capitalised but profit-oriented entrepreneurs, because these did not count as an ideal developmental "target group".)

The instruction began with basics. The keywords: co-operation, partnership, alliance, etc. In order to pass on that instruction the programme invited applications to run training projects. For a potentially successful tender for "small local partnership-based projects", applicants had to designate strengthening the community as a goal and promise to promote information flow between settlements, institutions and communities. Another tender was tailored to local conditions, being the development of public services. The upper limit of the grants on offer was the princely sum of Ft2 million (€8,000).

A total of 189 applications were received from 75 settlements in the region, of which 103 were successful. Three quarters of the successful applicants had been drilled by the programme's coaches.

The coaches started to go around the region in December 2005. The Cserehát population were pretty sceptical at first, partly on account of their experience of successive failure with the competitive bids they had put in up until then, partly because nothing had come of a major state programme that had been promised to be implemented that year.

The leaders of the small villages moaned that the regional centres were mopping up all the funding that could be bid for (36 of the settlements have fewer than two hundred inhabitants, while the largest regional centre has just 11,000 and the smallest a mere 2,200). The "potential" competitors in the villages, both small and large, were trying to boost their chances of winning by engaging bid-writers who supposedly wrote such applications for a living. (Some coaches were even asked what percentage they were expecting to rake off as their share of any amount awarded.)

People in the Cserehát had little taste even for the "local partnership" that featured so highly among the goals of the bid for funding. There were rivalries straining relationships between neighbouring villages, between regional alliances and individual settlements, between civic bodies and local councils, not to speak of one civic body and another. A great many stories and remarks bore witness to strife between the Roma and non-Roma communities, and one would have been hard put to say that it was all peace and light even within the Roma community.

The first task for the ten coaches was to meet and get to know the local dignitaries and key figures of the ten micro-districts ("mapping the partners"), which duly took place, despite initially drawing a blank on more than a few occasions. After telephone calls and exchanges of e-mails, the first official invitations (under the logo of UNDP-ICSSZEM) were sent off to participate in meetings aimed at acquainting people with the programme and the grants. Not many turned up for the "roundtable" discussions that launched the programme—only about half of those who had been invited. And who were they? Mayors, regional development managers, representatives of settlement associations and multi-purpose district alliances, school heads, administrators of government institutions, and a sprinkling of "private" individuals (from a people's college association, the regional Roma organisation, a charitable foundation, a priest, an agronomist).

Following that, each of the coaches worked as they saw fit and according to their experience within their special areas. A regional development "pro", quickly putting out feelers, would decide what bodies would offer the best chance of putting in a bid that was consistent with the goals of the programme. He would provide systematic support for the hopeful candidates, but in response to general demand he gave advice to everyone. The "dead cert" regional development officer assisted institutions and bodies with semi-complete bids or ideas for bids ("generation of projects") and meanwhile attempted to gather in friendly meetings ("building partner contacts") the leaders and members of those institutions who showed any

inclination to put in bids. One coach who "thought out loud" made efforts to ensure that possible applicants for grants were able to articulate the values that were inherent in their own ideas, and organised a roundtable group from the prominent members of those institutions and civic bodies that could be prevailed on to co-operate. The "catalyst" coach tried to stimulate individuals and institutions that were far apart in their way of thinking and attitudes to make common cause. The "psycho-pedagogic" coach regarded the Cserehát populace as his pupils and set them straight on the ins and outs of the "inner" and the "outer" world; wherever possible, he sought high-grade experts to support the applications, and he was also an advocate and lobbyist for disenfranchised groups, even taking issue with the disenfranchisers where he thought necessary. The "integrationist" coach put most of his effort into fostering harmony ("dialogue") between the Roma and non-Roma. He did not consider a joint application to be the most important aim, but mutual acceptance of ideas and the individuals who had them ("I helped aspiring Roma individuals who wanted to break free from the physical and mental poverty to which they have been condemned to live in for years, even if the chance to break free is not available in the social dimension.") The "Roma expert" coach was not one of the typical regional development officers; indeed, he came under criticism from one of the latter ("You're more of a Gypsy than the Gypsies themselves!") He kept track of every event in the Gypsy community, from house-building to job searches, but while he instructed people on how to "write up projects", and indeed sometimes acted as the "pro" in himself setting out the Gypsies' ideas in the form of a grant application, he was also constantly worrying, being unsure whether he was really helping them as he should. (In the summer of 2007 he married a Gypsy girl and added her family name to his own.)

Celebration at Homrogd (Szikszó district, Central Cserehát micro-district), 31 March 2006

There is a stand-up reception in the two-storey school, sandwiches and bottles of soft drinks on the white tablecloths. At one end of the longish hall the locals are pouring out cups of coffee, at the other end the colleagues from the Programme Office in Budapest receive the circulating public with their attendance registers and questionnaires. Upstairs, in the school principal's room, the dignitaries, foreign, national and local, introduce themselves to one another and chitchat; the press are also hanging about.

The entrance hall invitingly detains one: everyone is able to find old acquaintances. On the programme is an announcement of the results of the competitive bidding process, yet there is no expectant buzz as those in question have already been told that they have won. Officially, the function is not an award celebration at all, but a conference, with the participations of a minister. In line with the usual rules for such a meeting, there is a registration process, an opening speech, round-table discussions, a press conference, then as a final item (before

the sandwiches) comes the announcement of the results. The conference is partly informative, partly congratulatory.

All's well that ends well. The winners talked about what they were doing, with the Programme Director calling on everyone to come to the podium for that purpose. All of the winning bids corresponded to one or other of the three objectives (strengthening the community, information flow, public service). Here are a few of the entries.

The bid put in by Szendrőlád's local council was to strengthen the sense of community and improve public amenities: they wanted to build a sports field on the site of the Gypsy colony by getting the community to rally round. (Some 1,400 of Szendrőlád's population of 1,850 are Roma; the Gypsy colony is just a toponym, since there are just as many Roma living along the main street of the village as on its outskirts. According to the coach who worked there, the mayor was one of the very few who "regarded the Roma as partners". The school janitor was a Roma, and so was the day-care attendant at the nursery school. The mayoress had been a family social worker for more than twenty years.

The Cserehát's inhabitants also put in applications to improve their schools and nurseries. Some enthusiastic nursery school teachers came from the micro-district of Szárazvölgy: they were awarded a grant to set up and run a nursery dance group that would preserve the Roma customs. One third of the one thousand villagers are Roma (according to the 2001 census). One year later the dance group gave a public performance in the capital, with the children dancing, singing and playing music in traditional costume. While the performance was in progress the Szárazvölgy coach was standing next to me, searching for a paper handkerchief: "It just occurred to me what sort of fate awaits them once they have grown up," he muttered.

The Foundation "For Happier Childhood Years" used the money won in the competition to take village children on trips. They also went to the Parliament building in Budapest, which was a unique experience even for the attendants, nursery teachers and parents who accompanied the kids (a return journey by bus and train to the capital, some 160 miles from the village, nowadays costs Ft10,000, or around €40). It is a pity that the photographs recording the memorable day-out have not been put up on the Cserehát Programme's increasingly spare-looking website.

According to the data collected by the Central Statistical Office in the 2001 census, there are Roma residents living in 98 of the Cserehát region's 124 settlements, but the proportions as perceived within the individual settlements rarely tally with the official figures. Although I had no means of carrying out any systematic comparison of the two sources, on going round the villages it was my impression that the proportions that came from local estimates were a good deal higher than the official figures indicate, with the discrepancy at times assuming quite implausible proportions. Yet the programme still had to go by those figures if it was to gain any measure of the extent to which it had succeeded in "mobilising" the Roma population.

A total of 90 of the 103 winning applications were submitted by settlements with Roma inhabitants; one third of these were localities where, even according to the official statistics, at least 20 per cent of the inhabitants were Roma. The backing provided by the coaches had been effective, so it seemed. Predominantly Roma-populated settlements where they helped were successful in 90 per cent of the cases. They did not manage to reach every single place, though, as most of the coaches had to cover ten settlements, (some were allocated twenty or more) and without the help of the Rom Som Foundation of Tomor they would have had a hard time managing at all. In the words of one of the coaches in the area: "This is the only civic body in the micro-district which functions well for the Roma and has any history behind it. Rom Som workers made it possible by helping the Roma in a number of nearby settlements to take part in the present bidding process." The Foundation itself submitted a proposal to undertake a social mapping of the Cserehát region.

At the ceremony where the results of the competition were announced, I happened to sit next to László Siroki, the chairman of the Foundation. I had already begun chatting with one of his clients, Pál Horváth, before the function got under way. When the results were announced he spoke about the "Together for Youth" scheme whereby the Selyeb Roma Self-Help Group won a grant of Ft 1.2 million, the grant having been applied for to set up and operate a youth club for young Roma. The Group came into being in February 2006. The applicants with the least chance were those classified as unregistered civic bodies and, as such, at the bottom of the organizational scale. Eleven groups of that type entered the Cserehát competition, and seven of them won funding.

> We were sought out by the Rom Som Foundation and they told us that we could also put in an application if we were to organise programmes for the young here. There are a lot of kids in the village and they don't know what to do with themselves, so they muck about, both the young ones and the older ones, with no place to meet except the streets or the pub. We thought it would be good if there were a youth club, any sort of place that they could go to. The school kids have nothing, whether they are little or older. There are lots of things that they could do together in a club. And it wouldn't be just for the Gypsies but all the young people of Selyeb. We are not registered as an organisation, so officially Rom Som carry the responsibility, and it is with their assistance that we put in the application and were successful. Now we shall be able to pay for equipment for the club; we have already got a promise from the mayor as to where we can be accommodated. It is hard for us to negotiate with him, because he is always judging us on outward appearances rather than the kind of people we really are. But at least we got a promise from him.

Thirty-five years of age, Pál Horváth has been unemployed since 2005 and supports his wife and two small children out of whatever casual work he can secure. Selyeb, the village in which he lives, has 540 inhabitants of whom 250–260 are Roma (that is the local estimate). Only 87 villagers work. The proposed project aimed to cater for the fairly large number of residents who are between 6 and 29 years of age, about one third of the population according to the Central Statistical Office in 2001.

Strength without space, Selyeb (Szikszó district, Central Cserehát micro-district), 23 September 2007

The façade of the House of Culture is gleaming white in the autumn sunshine. A small brown door is adorned by a padlock. The inside of the building is hardly an inviting spectacle. In the middle of the large hall a new table-tennis table with a drooping net stands forlornly, its top and underneath cluttered with empty soft-drink cans and crisp packets, muddy footprints all over the grimy parquet flooring. Underneath the two windows are battered, obsolete storage-heating radiators and a few cigarette butts. Long benches are stacked against the wall. At the end of the hall opposite the entrance is a stage with a plank leading up to the dais; faded blue hangings provide a reminder that there once was a time when theatrical performances took place. Kati, my escort, looks aghast at the mess and searches for a brush and dustpan: "We bought one, so it must be somewhere around," she grumbles. Her husband slopes off; another key is needed before he can show everything. I am hanging around with the wife in the open doorway when a middle-aged man looms up in the light. He wants to know why the House of Culture is open. It's fully in his rights to know, because he is the mayor. He too expresses his regrets at the state the hall is in:

"That's how the youngsters leave it, though," he says. "Nothing I can do about it."

"Is there not a caretaker or official in charge of it?" I ask.

"No, it's not worth hiring anyone for that purpose. We'll have to put in an application for a grant to renovate the place. If that's successful, there will be a person to look after it. It's no use my telling the kids to keep it tidy," he replies as Kati looks around and wanders off.

We stand about in dismay: beyond any doubt the village's foremost figure has just written off the village's youth club. The club is operated by the Selyeb Gypsy Self-Help Group and led by Kati's husband, Pál ('Patyi') Horváth, whom I got to know a year and a half before and who is currently on a key-hunting expedition.

A few minutes later, Patyi arrives with the key and the man who is responsible for the programme. It turns out that the youth club members have not been in the House of Culture for something like two weeks, but a few days before the community had put on a rummage sale of clothes and also a disco.

"There's no point offering explanations or excuses. It's better to keep one's peace," says Patyi as he guides us up onto the stage, balancing on the plank, before again stopping in front of another locked door on the right side of the stage. The Self-Help Group has its own key to this. The door to the former dressing room creaks open. Down below us is a room six-by-six foot square that it would be truer to say one jumped rather than stepped into it. Any light comes in through a tiny window; in the evening it is dark, with no light, no light switch and no heating. The equipment comprises a sort of writing table with a little shelf above it and a seat before it. And next to the table, at floor level, yawns a gap—an even bigger crack than the one I had come up against thirty years before in my

popular educator days. A small child could easily wriggle through it. The crack "leads" into the second dressing room, which does not even have a door that can be locked while the floor is covered in rubble and a few broken bricks.

This crack-riddled, padlocked dressing room is what the local council gave the Selyeb Gypsy Self-Help Group for their use. Patyi spells it out:

> The mayor suggested that we should demolish the wall between the two dressing rooms, do the space up nicely and then move in. But if they stack the benches onto the stage, then we can't even get in! We had a word with the lads that there is now a trade school in the village and so many children that it won't be long before they are being taught in the pigsty. The kids come in from some four villages from hereabouts. We have heard talk that teaching will be arranged in the House of Culture. So are we expected to sink what little money we have into doing up the place and then be expected to move out?

It would not be the first time.

> With Guszti's help (the "integrationist" coach) we were given two rooms in a two-storey house with a garden. It used to be a private dwelling but the people who were living there did not pay the bills and had to move out. We had the use of a twelve-by-fifteen foot room, and the entrance hall, which was twelve by sixteen. The house has a doctor's surgery on the ground floor, which holds surgery hours on Thursdays, so we could not use it then, but on the other days of the week our kids could be there from four or five in the morning till eight in the evening.

Having only been formed in February 2006, the Gypsy Self-Help Group had already landed a grant by the end of March that year. The first disbursement arrived in Selyeb from the Cserehát's Programme's Bratislava centre during the summer of 2006. At that point the Group was in a position to buy the furniture and equipment that were needed to run the youth club: shelving, movable seats, a table-tennis table with netting, table-tennis bats, footballs, nets for the football goals, paint, pens, pencils, paper for those who wanted to sketch, and much else. The Group was allocated the two rooms in August 2006, but they were obliged to clear out in May 2007. That was when they landed up in the House of Culture. The more valuable items, such as the moveable seating, have to be kept in the home of the programme's organisers; likewise the large number of drawings and paintings that were produced in the club. To begin with, they had their own separate lock and key, but after the mayor's office, without any warning, had this changed, they were only able to have the new key for as long as their functions lasted. Those occasions were increasingly infrequent, perhaps because they were unable to feel "at home" in the multi-functional House of Culture. Space is needed for the youth club, but it seems that the club's organisers can only put their trust in the open air, which is why they are waiting for the weather to improve. A programme will be arranged once it is sunny and warm, but until then who knows what is going to happen to the 50 or 60 Selyeb children and youngsters who used to attend the club? They will drift about in the village's

streets or loaf around by the pub, just as they did before the Self-Help Group was formed.

The Cserehát Programme will operate at half steam until the end of 2008. There has been no budget for coaches since the autumn of 2007 and they have quit the area. Selyeb's residents are still counting on holding a close-down party for the programme's organisers, at which they will report on how much they have managed to do since February 2006. They would like to recount how Roma and non-Roma children happily tucked in together at functions designed for the villagers. ("There were some died-in-the-wool Hungarian racists who brought their grandkids along to play football with the Gypsy boys.") Though no doubt they would keep quiet about the fact that what they had been given for the football pitch, instead of a promised expanse of communal parkland, was a pasture at the back of the pub. (The Self-Help Group and the local council put in a joint application to renovate the parkland—and, what is more, they had been successful.) The mayor even provided goal-posts for the football pitch that was set up on the pasture, though admittedly the pitch is half a full-size one and only big enough for six-a-side games with one goalie ("It's fine like that, just great. We asked the local co-operative farm to give us some used tractor tyres to mark the boundary").

When the Self-Help Group was given the two club rooms by the council in the summer of 2006 they signed a declaration of intent. In the declaration it was stated that the Group could use the rooms until the council sold off the property, or until the Group was in a position to purchase or obtain suitable premises itself.

The five-member Self-Help Group put on programmes for young people and children. Not one of the five had a regular job or permanent workplace, let alone a wage that can support their families. Patyi, the leader of the Group, with a wife and two children, can count on an income of just Ft84,000 (little more than €300), and the only reason they had to be thankful for a pleasant Easter was that Patyi was able to find work after the storms that hit Hungary in March. ("The roofs of a lot of houses were blown away. I worked as an assistant to my brother-in-law, who's a carpenter and runs his own business.") Collecting scrap iron also brought in some money.

The members of the Self-Help Group have no chance of buying or obtaining a house suitable for a youth club even if they pool their resources. Their only hope now lies in getting registered: before long they will become a foundation. They have submitted the paperwork and asked to be registered under the name of the "Association for the Cserehát Roma". Once they are a registered association they will be free to submit their own applications for grants. ❧

Yvette Szabó

Work for Benefits?

Post-communist states are going through the same crisis of welfare provision as states in Western Europe. In Hungary, too, the institutions that provide the welfare net are being dismantled. Most recently, social support has been the target of the cutbacks, on the grounds that many beneficiaries would be able to support themselves and that putting people back into work would be an effective way of boosting a sluggish economy, which is growing by less than 1 per cent annually. However, despite a number of attempts and programmes designed to encourage job seekers, the Socialist government, in power for more than six years, has been unable to improve employment figures. Less than 57 per cent of Hungarians between the age of 15 and 74 are at work, which is one of the lowest percentages in the European Union.

The unemployed, who may receive benefits up to the minimum wage of around €270, can take home as much as those in a full-time job—without doing any work whatsoever. This arrangement does not encourage the unemployed to take up jobs given that most of them are unskilled and their wages would hardly be higher than the minimum wage. Surveys have confirmed the suspicion that benefits deter the unemployed from work; one out of five is satisfied and another 27 per cent are reasonably satisfied with their jobless status.

The latest debate on social support was set off in May when the local council of Monok, a village in an underdeveloped region in the north of Hungary, openly defied current legislation by refusing to pay the regular benefits, financed by central government, to their unemployed unless they participated in public works. In addition, the local council stipulated that child protection support is only to be paid to parents who enrol their children in kindergarten or school. Before long, this practice was adopted by half a dozen settlements, claiming that they have lost patience with those who consider living on benefits to be a sustainable lifestyle and apparently have no intention of getting a job. In a letter urging statutory amendments, sent by several settlements in the region around Monok to Katalin Szili, the speaker of Parliament, they argued that the family support system has increasingly become an incentive for people of low social status to turn childbearing into a gainful occupation. It has also, they argued,

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led to the organized abuse of benefits and illegal moneylending, in which loans are provided to the poor at cripplingly high interest rates (100 per cent per month is common). What is more, the letter refers implicitly to the Roma minority, among whom unemployment is exceedingly high; 50–60 per cent for men and even higher for women, whilst at the same time families typically have a large number of children.

Although public administration offices and the Ombudsman for Minority Rights have declared these municipalities' resolutions unlawful, the idea of "work for benefits" has proven popular with the general public. To the effect that the rising level of discontent in the affected villages has at last compelled the government to take some form of action. Although a "Road to Work" programme had been announced by the Prime Minister in February in which retraining and placement of the unemployed were included as incentives, the government took no specific measures until early this summer. Now the popular reaction to the Monok initiative forced the government to urgently start discussions. Thus a number of NGOs, such as the National Association of People with Large Families and the National Roma Self-government, joined the cabinet in working on a bill to be laid before Parliament in its autumn session.

As far as the government's plans are concerned, what is known is that from January 2009 the amount of social support is to be fixed at 180% of the minimum pension instead of being linked to the minimum wage. Since this works out Ft 51 000 (around €200) a month, the new linkage may make employment more attractive than welfare dependency. In addition, the cabinet would like to encourage municipalities to use funds for public work programmes rather than benefits. To this end, the government plans to widen the scope of public employment, that is, central or local government tasks that can be fulfilled through temporary work arrangements under preferential conditions. The government would like to improve the opportunities for unemployed career starters, who account for 40 per cent of those receiving support, by withholding their benefits unless they agree to participate in some form of training. Although women with small children constitute the most valuable labour reserve, public nurseries can only accept one out of ten children under the age of three. The plan is to increase the capacity of nurseries by adding 15 000 new places to the 31 000 existing ones. In a bid to meet this objective, steps will be taken to loosen absurdly strict public health regulations, which were introduced forty years ago in line with the public health conditions of that era and which have made the operation of such institutions too expensive.

No sooner did the government begin to formulate these plans than the opposition, alongside economists and NGOs, unleashed a storm of criticism on them. They were sharply criticized from the left by Zsuzsa Ferge, one of the most respected sociologists in Hungary, saying that cutting benefits would harm the most defenceless, i.e. children. In her view, single men and women without children, who account for half of the beneficiaries, have never received social benefits in excess of the minimum wage. Therefore, she argued, the cutback in benefits would affect families where the money parents could earn by taking jobs at near the minimum wage really could be less than the amount of their own and their children's benefits. Not to mention the costs of going to work, such as clothing and travel expenses, while surveys show that 80 per cent of people on benefits work in the black labour market either occasionally or on an ongoing basis to complement their benefits.

The right-wing opposition expects the government to adopt even stronger measures. The largest opposition party,

Ups and Downs

Both before and after 1989, Hungarians were told that they were given more by the state than the citizens of Western nations. In everyday life, very few people felt this was true, either before or after 1990. In terms of actual welfare payments, beneficiaries receive more in Western countries than in Hungary. Facts however confirm that welfare spending in Hungary is high, at least compared to what the country is able to finance. During the 1980s, for example, 21–24 per cent of Hungary's GDP was spent on education, healthcare and pensions, whilst the same ratio was 17–20 per cent in lower-income OECD countries. Even in affluent welfare states such as Sweden, these items accounted for only 30 per cent of GDP. Hungary currently spends 31 per cent of its GDP on welfare, the average of all the OECD countries being 26 per cent.

Trimming welfare spending was one of the key social policy objectives after the switch to a market economy. The goal of equality during Socialist times extended support to nearly everyone, a policy which paradoxically exaggerated social inequalities when it continued under market conditions. For example, at the end of the 1980s, 1.4 million households were eligible for family allowance, in line with the number of children. In 1995, however, eligibility was made subject to income, cutting the number of beneficiaries to fewer than 300,000 families. Childcare benefit, paid by the state since 1967 until children turned three years old, was also subjected to eligibility criteria in 1995, and childcare allowances, introduced in the mid-1980s and payable until children turned two, were abolished altogether. Since the end of the 1990s, however, these allowances have been again allocated with no regard to income brackets.

By the early 1990s, unemployment and social supports emerged as new forms of welfare payments unknown under socialism. The system boasted full employment and those who shirked work faced criminal prosecution; since Socialist ideology did not acknowledge the existence of poverty either, the needy were not supported. After 1989, covert unemployment turned into overt unemployment as tens of thousands were laid off by bankrupt state-owned enterprises. The number of beneficiaries receiving social support grew rapidly during the 1990s. In 1991, fewer than 200,000 jobless people received some form of support. By 1993, this number had almost reached 500,000. During the mid-1990s, only 23,000 people received social support on a regular basis. By the year 2000, however, the number of beneficiaries had rocketed to 100,000 and to more than 319,000 by 2006. ❧

Y. Sz.

Fidesz–Hungarian Civic Alliance, which is polling twice as much support as the Hungarian Socialist Party, believes it can create no less than a million jobs. This would mean that half of the two million of the inactive between 15 and 64 would be reactivated. The government does not entertain such great hopes and argues that the addition of 400 000 to 500 000 people to the labour market is a more realistic objective. However, even that target seems to be over-optimistic in the light of results from recent years. Since 2005, labour centres have spent Ft 200 billion a year on training (some of which comes from EU funding) but no real impact can be expected until a sufficient number of crash retraining courses are organized to provide those who have lost their jobs with the knowledge and skills that enable them to find long-term jobs.

To make matters worse, the abundant labour supply in some areas is coupled with a shortage in others, such as skilled workers and graduates in engineering and technology. Figures from the Central Statistical Office suggest that unemployment exceeded 8 per cent in the spring of 2008, while the number of companies suffering from a long-term labour shortage nearly doubled, with 15 per cent of employers complaining of such difficulties in 2007. The unavailability of skilled professionals is especially worrying in the processing, transportation, telecommunication and construction industries, where one in five companies experience difficulties as a result of labour shortages. However, about 40 per cent of the jobseekers and the jobless are unskilled.

There are abundant reasons for this. After the shift to a market economy, the former state-owned companies fired tens of thousands of industrial workers, while an increasing number of young people showed a preference for the humanities as they went up the educational ladder. For many years there was no demand for skilled workers in the labour market, nor did young people feel the urge to acquire skills. This training was neglected by successive governments, and companies were slow to recognize that they need to contribute to education if they are to have access to a skilled workforce. Unsurprisingly, every major construction project brings up the question: will there be enough workers available? There was a positive answer to this recently when a new Mercedes factory was established in the city of Kecskemét with jobs for 2500 people. However, unemployment is below the national average in Kecskemét, and local employers are worried about skilled employees being lured away by Daimler, which in turn has pushed up wage levels. Even so, employing a Hungarian workforce for an average wage of Ft 1600 (approximately €6) per hour is still favourable for the company when compared to the €27.70 per hour labour costs in Germany.

Additionally, cross-border recruitment on both sides of Hungarian frontiers has become common practice nowadays. The Suzuki factory in Esztergom in the northwest of Hungary provide jobs to some 2000 Slovaks who live across the Danube. In contrast, the underdeveloped south-eastern region of Hungary is bordered by one of the most developed areas of Romania, which now drives the workforce in the other direction, with hundreds of Hungarians commuting to the industrial parks mushrooming around Oradea and Timişoara. In the meantime, investors show

Key indicators of the Hungarian economy, 2000 to 2007

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2004	2006	2007
Rate of unemployment (per cent)	6.4	5.7	5.8	5.9	6.1	7.2	7.5	7.4
Rate of employment (per cent)	56.0	56.2	56.2	57.0	56.8	56.9	57.3	57.3
GDP growth (as a percentage of the previous year)	105.2	104.1	104.4	104.2	104.8	104.1	103.9	101.3

Source: Central Statistical Office

The Bleaching of the Black Economy

In 2007, Hungary's Exchequer took in Ft80–100 billion (€300–400 million) in extra revenues as a result of the tax administration taking a tougher line against suspicious companies and private individuals. More than 11,000 "asset accumulation audits" were carried out, based on which Ft42 billion (€160 million) of tax arrears were collected. According to the Central Statistical Office, however, the black economy in Hungary still accounts for 15 per cent of the country's GDP, that is, more than Ft3000 billion (€12 billion). Thus there is a lot left to do to legalise the economy. The government is more inclined to use the stick rather than the carrot in its uphill battle against tax evaders and contribution dodgers. Labour safety, consumer protection and other authorities carry out inspection after inspection to nab offenders, whilst GDP-proportionate taxes and contributions grew to 38.1 per cent in 2007.

Many consider tax evasion a national pastime in Hungary. In recent decades, those who did not contribute to public spending were not shunned. On the contrary; tax evasion was considered smart, even admirable. This attitude goes back a long way. The nobility in Hungary was exempt from taxation up to the mid-19th century. In Socialist times, a dual economy evolved. Besides safe but poorly-paid employment by state-owned enterprises, individuals with initiative were able to establish private ventures of sorts. What were called economic working partnerships and ancillary business branches at agricultural cooperatives often used the infrastructure and resources of their state-owned employers. After idling through their mandatory working hours, people went to work privately, for their own benefit. So it was that state socialism, although it advocated community property, got people out of the habit of contributing to community objectives as taxpayers.

Not even the incumbent government disputes that tax cuts are needed to improve the competitiveness of Hungarian businesses. However, the 4 per cent budget deficit is restricting the government's options. Currently tax cuts of Ft100–200 billion (€400–800 million) at most are being considered, whilst many economists believe companies' public dues should be reduced by Ft1000 billion (€4 billion) at the minimum if willingness to pay taxes is to be increased. ❧ **Y. Sz.**

little interest in the Hungarian villages and towns near the eastern border. If investors plan to locate to a village in Hajdú-Bihar County, in eastern Hungary, sometimes the local mayors themselves dissuade them: there may be fewer than a hundred locals available for work.

Agrobusinesses employing workers on a seasonal basis report similar problems. The authorities have stepped up inspections to check whether companies are employing seasonal workers legally and their taxes and social contributions are being paid in the meantime; some seasonal workers who start working in the morning do not even last until the end of the day. The long-term unemployment prevailing since the switch to a market economy is now creating the second generation of people who do not consider legal and regular work as an option. To add insult to injury, in January 2008 Austria opened its labour market to Eastern Europeans with exactly those skills that are in short supply over the border. The hourly wages of skilled workers start from €8–14 in Austria compared to less than €2 in western Hungary. Nearly half of the 252

Eastern European skilled workers who found new jobs in Austria in the month of January alone were Hungarians. People working across the border have turned the traditional social hierarchy upside down—workers who live in Hungary on Austrian wages are significantly better off than teachers and white-collar workers with diminutive public servant salaries and in constant fear of losing these underpaid jobs.

Despite being the most debated issue, social support is not the largest welfare expenditure item in the 2007 central budget, which still has an enormous deficit of 5.5 per cent of the country's GDP. The government spends approximately Ft60 billion (€240 million) on 160 000 to 180 000 beneficiaries, while stay-at-home mothers and the working-age disabled (440 000 people) cost Ft57 billion (€228 million) and Ft580 billion (€2.3 billion) respectively. A total of more than Ft8000 billion (€32 billion) have been earmarked in the 2008 budget for social and welfare benefits, but more and more people are calling for cuts. According to András Simor, the Governor of the Hungarian Central Bank, benefits should be reduced by Ft2000 to 2500 billion (€8 to 10 billion) in order to put Hungary's economy on a par with similar countries and prevent Hungarian companies from suffering a competitive disadvantage. The Governor has blamed misguided labour policies for the current situation, in which people typically stop working at the age of 57 even though the official retirement age is 62. The number of people who have taken early retirement or are receiving disabled pensions is exceedingly high, and many of them should not be entitled to these benefits. (During the mass lay-offs in the 1990's, a disabled pension was the only possible survival technique available for many.)

The list of contradictory proposals regarding the cuts in Hungary's welfare system is endless. Protesters voice their concerns despite the fact that the largest economies in the world are adopting similar measures. Whether work generates sufficient income to make a living is a central talking point of economic policy in Hungary, just as it is in Germany. The debate focuses around the issue of whether to introduce a universal minimum wage that would apply to everyone, everywhere. At the moment, in Germany the prevailing view seems to be that keeping wages low is essential for competitiveness. If labour costs were to increase, many companies would go out of business, and the government's benefit bills would go through the roof. For the time being, reform policies based on this argument seem to have triumphed in several Eastern European countries. Slovakia owes its 10 per cent annual growth rate to the fact that the previous government, which was in power for eight years, drastically cut social spending and family allowances, tightened unemployment registration procedures and raised the retirement age in 2004. Although the hunger riots in the east of Slovakia have given a clear indication of who suffer most from the cuts in the welfare system, people in the eastern and western parts of the country are equally looking forward to the introduc-tion of the euro, scheduled for next year. In Poland, the liberal-conservative coalition elected last October went as far as adopting the slogan that large-scale economic growth and the boosting of employment are the best social policies. The question in Hungary is whether the minority Socialist government will have enough power to make further reductions in public spending and take the measures required to bring the long-term unemployed back to work. ❧

Júlia Papp

The Amateur and the Professional

Twelve Original Photographs by Roger Fenton. University Library of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, 19 November 2008–31 January 2009
Drawing Class on the Roof. Budapest Schools in the Photographs of Mór Erdélyi. Kiscell Museum, Budapest, 24 April 2008–10 August 2008.

During a recent reorganisation of the collection of old prints held by the University Library of Budapest, a dozen photographs by Roger Fenton, one of the pioneers of photography, came to light. In the 1850s Fenton took the new technology of wet-plate photography to high levels of artistic achievement and public visibility. In that decade he was the pre-eminent landscape and architectural photographer in England and a founding member of the Royal Photographic Society. His photography was many-sided: he made reproductions of collections in the British Museum, took portraits of the Royal Family at Windsor and at their country seat in Scotland and went to the Crimea to record a controversial war. Fenton brought a painter's eye to the new medium, enthusiastically exploiting the new methods as they evolved. Most recently, a major exhibition of his work was shown in the U.S. and London between 2004 and 2006.[1]

Fenton was born on 20 March 1819 in Heywood, Lancashire, the fourth of seven children by his father's first marriage. His father, the son of a wealthy cotton manufacturer, was a banker and member of Parliament, and had ten more children by his second wife. After taking a degree in arts at University College London in 1840, Fenton went on to study law, though he only qualified as a solicitor in 1847, no doubt because he had meanwhile become interested in learning to be a painter, studying at least part of the time in Paris. He managed to get paintings accepted for several of the annual exhibitions at the Royal Academy, London, around the turn of the 1840s into the '50s, but his real successes were to come through his photography. Impressed by the photography on display at the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, Fenton embarked on a study of the technique. He went to Paris and studied at the studio of Gustave Le Gray (1820–84), and became involved in the

1 ■ *All the Mighty World. The Photographs of Roger Fenton, 1852–1860.* Catalogue by Gordon Baldwin, Malcolm Daniel & Sarah Greenough. New York & Washington, 2004.

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world's first photographic society, the Société Héliographique. In 1852, he journeyed to Russia with the engineer Charles Blacker Vignoles. He photographed the bridge over the River Dnieper that Vignoles had designed, as well as sights in Kiev, Moscow and St Petersburg. In the same year, he showed over forty of his photographs—some taken in Russia along with views of the countryside and architecture around Britain—at an exhibition put on by the Society of Arts in London. A larger series (twenty-three in all) of the Russian pictures were also featured at the Photographic Institution's 1853 show in London.

It was in 1853 that Fenton became one of the founding members of the Royal Photographic Society. As secretary, he guided Albert, the Prince Consort, round the Society's first exhibition, put on in London in 1854. Afterwards Fenton became a regular visitor to the royal family, not just at Windsor Castle but at Balmoral in Scotland where they spent their summers. Appointed the first court photographer, he made many portraits of the royal family. Alongside these official pictures he also captured many informal scenes of their private lives.

Fenton worked with photographic equipment of the highest quality, and presumably this, along with his training in art, explains his appointment by the British Museum in the summer of 1852 as their first official photographer. The photographic recording of objects in their holdings was part of the transforming of what was essentially a grand collection of curiosities into an institution of modern learning. The engagement of Fenton signalled that photography was gaining a role in cataloguing and documenting museums and art.

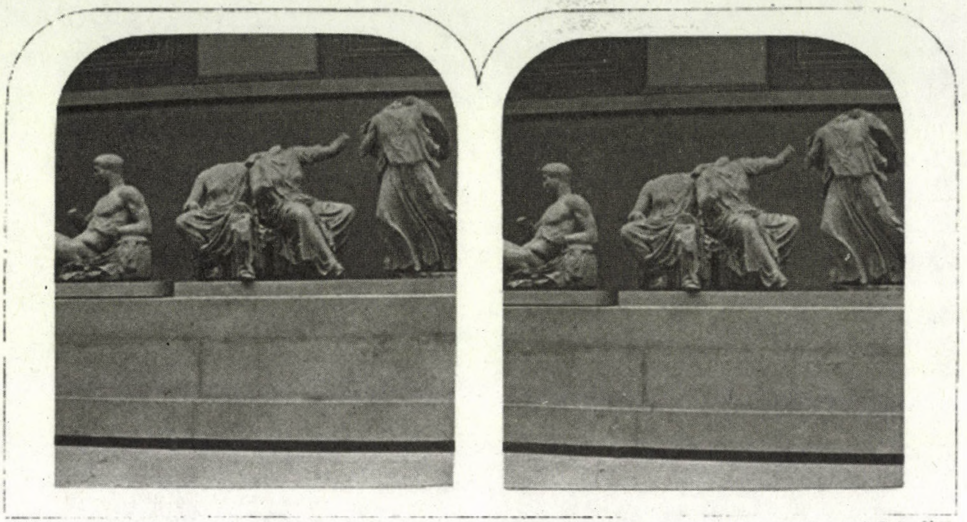
In 1855, armed with a letter of recommendation from the Prince Consort and with the financial backing of the Manchester publisher Thomas Agnew, Fenton set off by steamship to the Crimean Peninsula, where Great Britain, in alliance with France and the Ottoman Empire, was at war with Russia. In the course of the Crimean War (1853–56), under arduous conditions, he produced some 360 glass negative plates, including portraits of common soldiers and officers, scenes of military life and views of battlefields. The most famous of the latter is probably *Valley of the Shadow of Death* (1855), in which the bleak emptiness of the cannonball-strewn valley (the location of Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade") evocatively gives a sense of the cruelty of war. Eventually becoming a metaphor for the Crimean War as a whole, this picture is of the gully that was kept under heavy artillery fire by the Russians and thus was named by the troops after verse 4 of Psalm 23 *("Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil...")*. Indeed, while he was photographing the valley, a cannonball slammed into the ground not far from him. These photographs of the Crimean War reached a wide public in England, and were viewed by the French imperial couple as well as by Victoria and Albert.

In the late 1850s, Fenton struck up a working relationship with Paul Pretsch (1808–73), an Austrian pioneer of photogravure who from 1850 headed the photography section of the Austrian state press and whose photos of Schönbrunn Castle had won a prize at the 1851 Great Exhibition in London. In 1854 Pretsch

Roger Fenton: Valley of the Shadow of Death (A Battlefield in the Crimean War).
Photograph, 1855.

moved to London and, engaging Fenton's assistance, employed the photo-galvanographic technique that he had patented in Vienna to publish the large-format album *Photographic Art Treasures,* which was the first commercial publication venture (sadly, the venture failed) in which the photographic plates were printed by the purely mechanical process of photogravure. It is an indication of how closely the two worked together that the majority of the photo-galvanographs in the book were produced from Fenton's photographs. Pretsch also drew on Fenton's work to popularise art. They made reproductions of Dürer's studies of horses and a cuneiform inscribed stone in the British Museum.

Fenton was by then thoroughly at home taking photographs of natural vistas and architectural monuments. He made a host of photographs of the countryside of North Wales and southern Scotland, as well of the cathedrals, abbeys, universities and castles in England. He hit on a new subject in 1858. In his London studio, he produced a series of studies of male and female figures—friends, acquaintances, models, even himself in a few instances—dressed in costumes and placed in "Oriental" settings. With these genre pictures, which are clearly akin, both thematically and formally, to the paintings of Delacroix and Ingres, Fenton was aiming, just as much as with his still-life photography, his romantic depictions of landscape or picturesque studies of clouds, to elevate the new medium to the rank of art.



Roger Fenton: The Elgin Marbles in the British Museum. *Stereophotograph, 1850s.*

Another aspect of Fenton's activity is to be seen in the *Stereoscopic Magazine,* which appeared in England between 1858 and 1865. The periodical issued stereoscopic pairs of pictures with explanatory texts and aimed to present subjects of interest from nature, the arts and the sciences. Among these were stereoscopes taken by Fenton of objects in the British Museum, of English landscapes, of buildings and still lifes of flowers and fruit. In the latter he sought to achieve a painterly impression and a sense of materiality—work that displays influences of seventeenth-century Dutch painting.

Fenton was travelling again in England during 1860–61, photographing cathedrals, ruins and country houses, but towards the end of 1862 he abandoned photography. He was no doubt spurred to do so by the changes that had taken place in how the medium was regarded and the subsequent drop in its social prestige. By the late 1850s it was less and less the preserve of gentlemen amateurs and was becoming a means of earning a livelihood. Fenton might have now seen the law as an occupation far more compatible with his social status than photography.

The Fenton holdings

Although the set of photographs held by the University Library of Eötvös Loránd University covers several genres and subjects, with architectural representations, landscapes, group portraits and even Orientalising images, ten of the twelve pictures in question constitute a unit in that they are of Scottish topographical subjects—scenery, buildings, people. We assume they were taken by Fenton during his tour of Scotland in September of 1856. One of the photographs is inscribed ("R. Fenton 1856").

Seven of these ten are identifiably records of Balmoral Castle and its environs, the beauty of which came to Queen Victoria's notice during her first visit to Scotland in 1842. Situated in the Highlands, on the right bank of the River Dee in Aberdeenshire, the fifteenth-century castle and its huge estate were acquired from Sir Robert Gordon by the Prince Consort in 1852, who had a modern residence built that was more suited to the royal family's needs. Three of the Fenton photographs in the Library's possession show the recently completed castle. *(Picture 1)* Another four are of royal huntsmen in a sunlit woodland clearing. *(Picture 3)*

One of the photographs is a shot of the Braemar Gathering *(Picture 2),* an assembly held not far from Balmoral, the origins of which are believed to have been a visit paid there by King Malcolm Canmore (King Malcolm the Great Chief) in the eleventh century. Since medieval days, clan chiefs gathered their followers in the autumn, when the deer were fat, for a hunt lasting for several days. Competitions would also be held to select the strongest, the fleetest, and the most skilful warriors. The tradition was revived in 1832, since when the Gathering has been held by the Braemar Highland Society (Royal from 1866 on).

A signed Scottish landscape showing a bend in the River Dee *(Picture 4),* which runs behind the marked contours of the foreground and is closed off behind by a range of hills, evidently belongs to the photographer's examination of photographic space. (Fenton's own contemporaries remarked on the particular sensitivity and talent that he had for capturing landscapes.) Another shot is of the bridge in the village of Castleton, close to Braemar, which portrays the romantic, almost extravagantly wild countryside in classically composed harmony. At the geometrical centre of the picture we see the graceful arch of the old stone bridge over the stream, with hills in the background and a rocky bank in the foreground. *(Picture 5)*

Two of the photographs in the collection—one showing a woman in white carrying water, the other a turbaned man in Eastern garb—clearly belong to Fenton's Orientalising period around 1858. The man's clothing appears to be more authentically Turkish;

Roger Fenton: Pasha and Bayadère.
Photograph, cca 1858.

the unposed picture strikes one as being a study of costume rather than a genre picture. The representation of the woman holding the pitcher, by contrast, is more mannered, the affectation being reinforced by the rugs on the ground and various Eastern objects such as hookahs and crockery. On the basis of other known photographs by Fenton, the bearded turbaned man can be identified as Frank Dillon, the English landscapist. *(Picture 6)* A friend of his, Dillon appears in many of the pictures in the Orientalist series, the best-known being *Pasha and Bayadère,* in which he is the Turkish musician playing for the dancing girl and is seated next to Fenton, who is posing as the pasha.

The provenance of the photographs by Fenton that were discovered in the University Library of Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest—whether by purchase or gift or by bequest—remains unclear, at least for the time being. The importance of the discovery is enhanced not only by the fact that there are no pictures by Fenton in any other publicly accessible collection in Hungary but also because five of the Budapest pictures—two of the Balmoral hunting scenes and three Scottish landscapes—have not hitherto come to light in public collections anywhere else.

Photography as business: Mór Erdélyi

The Budapest History Museum, at its Kiscell premises, documents a glorious chapter of municipal history with more than 60 photographs by Mór Erdélyi recording the outcome of a huge construction programme of tenements, residential housing and schools between 1909 and 1912. The show is part of a series: nearly 90 original-size vintage prints, bearing his name or signature, out of over one thousand items held by the Photography Collection at the Kiscell Museum, were on display within the Prints Collection in the autumn of 2007. These were views or genre pictures of the capital, which included those of the old city hall before it was demolished, the building work that was going on in the Royal Palace during its extensive reconstruction from 1893 to 1905, the Óbuda district in the old days, and the area around the new Parliament building (completed in 1904), as well as everyday scenes in the metropolis. A few of the pictures were of newly built schools in Budapest, which are the subject of the most recent exhibition.

Portrait of Mór Erdélyi. From Edison in Hungary, *facsimile edition, Budapest, 2006. National Széchényi Library, Budapest.*

Erdélyi, cs. és kir. udv. fényképész *Budapest, Újvilág u. 2 sz. a Kossuth Lajos u. sarkán*

Mór Erdélyi: The Hungarian Pavilion. *From the album illustrating the 1900 Paris Exhibition. A plaster model of János Fadrusz's statue of King Matthias is at the centre. National Széchényi Library, Budapest.*

Active for more than half a century, from around the turn of the nineteenth well into the twentieth century, Mór Erdélyi (1866–1934) was one of the most prolific of all Hungary's photographers.[2]

He was the son of an affluent Jewish merchant in the town of Érsekújvár in what was then Upper Hungary (Nové Zámky, Slovakia). When the family became impoverished in the 1880s, he was apprenticed to Ede Ellinger, a renowned Budapest photographer. By 1891 he set up his own studio in the city centre in Erzsébet Square and turned into a successful, much sought-after portrait photographer. Erdélyi had a fine nose for new opportunities that were opening up in the frantic construction boom and contrived to land regular commissions from the Metropolitan Council to make photographic records of major Budapest events, jubilees and celebrations. In 1894 he was appointed court photographer. The pictures that he took of the imperial family the following year at their Hungarian country residence in Gödöllő

2 ■ Judit Baróti, "Erdélyi Mór élete és munkássága" [M. E.'s Life and Work], *Fotóművészet,* 1997, no. 5–6, pp. 82–90; Zsuzsanna Demeter, "Erdélyi Mór, a sokoldalú fotográfus" [M. E.—a Versatile Photographer], *Budapest,* April 2008, pp. 11–14.

were not only printed by the Sunday paper *Vasárnapi Újság* but were also used as illustrations in an album. An indication of the political contacts that Erdélyi was able to cultivate both at home and abroad was his appointment, when barely 30 years old, as court photographer in Serbia as well. After expanding into new premises on the main thoroughfare of Kossuth Lajos Street, at the corner of what is today Semmelweis Street, he kept and catalogued his growing collection of glass plate negatives of major events and celebrities in literature, the arts and politics. The studio's retouching, copying, bookbinding and laboratory sections also carried on a thriving business bordering on mass production.

In 1896, Erdélyi took photographs of all the prize-winning livestock at the agricultural show in Budapest at the time of Hungary's millennial celebrations. Scenting another business opportunity, he had copies sent to the stockbreeders. The recipients were mostly members of the country's aristocracy, and a good few of them invited him to photograph their ancestral homes. Erdélyi and his staff toured the whole country, from Upper Hungary to Transylvania, taking pictures not just of the castles and chateaux but also the surrounding countryside, people, and architectural and ethnographic subjects that were of interest. As a product of a decade or more of that effort, an album of 680 of the photographs was published in 1909 under the title *Magyarország* (Hungary), with captions that were translated into several languages, the publication costs being borne—for motives that were patently not unrelated to the wider "marketing" potential of the subject—by Hungarian State Railways. In 1898, Erdélyi submitted a proposal to Prime Minister Dezső Bánffy to ensure that Hungary's pavilion at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1900 would make a suitable impact: Erdélyi should produce stereoscopic pictures of Hungary's prime beauty spots and places of interest. Visitors would be able to view them at 50 stereoscopes that would be set up, all equipped with high-quality optics. For the work that he produced for this display, Erdélyi was awarded a gold medal. He made a photographic record of the entire Hungarian pavilion, which was produced as another album, a copy of which is held in the University Library of Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. (See the illustration on p. 101)

Besides touring Hungary, Erdélyi also kept up his documentation of the changing face of the capital. He took pictures of houses in the Inner City and along Kerepesi Avenue that were due for demolition, and he asked for the permission of the Metropolitan Council to photograph the capital's schools. He offered a selection of his views of the Budapest sights for purchase by the Metropolitan Museum, and he was also commissioned by the Museum to chronicle particular edifices and areas of the city.

In 1903 he proposed to the Metropolitan Council that they should make educational use of the collection of glass slides of Hungary's historical and art historical heritage that he had amassed. An expert committee appointed by the Council selected a set of 200, and between 1903 and 1917 Erdélyi received regular orders for these copies. A further step in his schemes to link photography with education was setting up a firm called the Uránia Works for Visual Teaching Aids—

the first of its kind in Europe—whose aim was to develop a system for educating people through the use of projected images. The sets of glass slides for instruction in geography and the history of art were listed in catalogues, and the firm's engineering workshop also manufactured the necessary slide projectors and lenses. All this grew out of contacts he had made in 1899 with the Uránia Theatre, established to disseminate information about the sciences by making extensive use of projected images. By 1916 Erdélyi was appointed to the managerial board.

Although the firm's finances were badly shaken by a forced handover into public ownership during the short-lived Soviet Republic in 1919, they saw a recovery in the 1920s, and Erdélyi continued to play a part in the Hungarian photography scene and publish articles in specialist journals. A piece that he wrote for *Magyar Fotográfia* under the title "Photography in the Service of Tourism" recognised the crucial role that visual information was playing in the worldwide growth of tourism. Underlining the close link that existed from the start between the visual media and the growth of mass tourism and mass culture, pictures were, as he put it, "the kernel, the very substance, the quintessence of every advertisement and communication... tourism coincides with a time when it is possible to receive, with the most unsophisticated immediacy, in true-to-life photographic reproductions, a picture of anything in the world that can be pictured, and in such colossal quantities that could be accessed, from royal palaces down to simple log-cabins".[3]

After 1926, Erdélyi's interest switched to cinema, and he made an unsuccessful bid to head the Pedagogical Film Studio, which was engaged in producing educational films.

Based on current information, it seems that the only portion that has survived of Mór Erdélyi's prodigious output are photographs that passed into public collections while he was still alive. We know for certain that nothing remains of the stock of roughly 150,000 photographic prints and glass plate negatives that he kept in his own studio. The bulk of the existing documentary, scenic and architectural views and portraits are held by the Budapest History Museum at Kiscell and by the Szabó Ervin Library, also in Budapest. One can get at least some idea of the scope of Erdélyi's oeuvre from the surviving albums that were compiled from the pictures that he took at the funeral of Louis Kossuth (on 2 April 1894); of the Danube Iron Gates; of such Budapest buildings as the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Parliament building and the Széchenyi Swimming Baths; or of the offices of the Royal Hungarian Mail.

István Bárczy's building programme for Budapest, 1909–1912

One presumes that Erdélyi must have been commissioned by the Metropolitan Council itself to provide a pictorial record of the substantial building programme that went ahead between 1909–1912 to expand the numbers of

3 ■ Baróti, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

tenements, small homes and schools in Budapest, since the book published on the project was illustrated by over 130 photographs taken by him of the completed buildings and the works of art which served as their ornaments.[4]

The big drive to boost the capital's housing and school stock was very much a pet project of István Bárczy (1866–1943). He first entered municipal service in 1889, and he was the city's mayor for over a decade, from 1906 until 1917. One of the pioneers of Hungarian urban policies in the modern era, he made sweeping reorganisations of public transport and education in the capital, took the existing utilities into city ownership, and took over direction of their further expansion.[5] He sought to create a sort of "urban welfare state" by following a crash programme of social policies that were backed by a close institutional network. To accomplish his ideas for the city's development he leaned heavily on experts committed to what was new and progressive in social thought in the early years of the century. To outline his programme he turned to the findings of modern demographic and sociological research, which shed light on various aspects of urban life and living conditions—findings that found an outlet in a journal that he founded under the title *Városi Szemle* (Urban Review).

Over the course of the nineteenth century the population of Buda and Pest exploded more than fifteen-fold, from 60,000 to over one million, which meant that by the beginning of the twentieth century addressing the city's two most pressing problems, the acute shortage of housing and schools, could be put off no longer. Due to sky-high rents, the poorer end of the lower middle class and factory workers were only able to find affordable accommodation in villages outside the capital. The number of public elementary schools rose by some 50 per cent, from 55 to 77, between 1873 and 1880. Even so, by the start of the new century education, too, was in an increasingly parlous state. An attempt was made to alleviate the chronic shortage of schools by cramming children into ones that were set up in the tenements; most of these fell far short of what was needed on educational and public health grounds alike.

In 1909, in a joint approach to the housing and school shortage, the capital city, with a firm shove from Bárczy, embarked on a huge building programme. The plans to implement the new social policy featured the construction of apartments for renting by the growing middle class and of more modest tenements tailored to the limited means of the working classes, as well as permanent or temporary, portable schools. An attempt was made to curb the use of doss- or flophouses by building workingmen's hostels. In addition, so-called "people's homes" were to give the poorest people a chance to raise themselves culturally, to arouse and satisfy a demand for higher cultural needs and provide a higher standard of

4 ■ Gyula Kabdebó, "Budapest székesfőváros kislakás és iskola építkezései" [The Small Homes and Schools of the Budapest Metropolitan Building Programme], *Magyar Építőművészet,* Special issue, December 1913.

5 ■ Gyöngyi Erdei, "A mintaadó polgármester. Bárczy István beruházási programja (1906–1914)" [An Exemplary Mayor: István Bárczy's Investment Programme (1906–14)], *Budapesti Negyed* (3rd district), 1995 no. 3, pp. 97–116.

entertainment. It was suggested that these centres be furnished with a library, a reading room, a writing room, a lounge, facilities to put on concerts and plays, a hall for dancing, lecture rooms for educational talks illustrated by slides, a dining room, a garden, playground and ablution facilities. Another indication of the aim of "improving" the poorer elements in society was the intention to include in plans for estates of small apartments "popular welfare buildings" which would have a lending library, lecture room, nursery and crèche.

After repeated modifications,[6] the plans were put into action, and, in three phases between 1909 and 1912, the metropolis built on vacant land already in its possession a total of 25 tenement buildings *(Picture 19)* and 19 housing estates—altogether 2,000 new homes—and 55 schools incorporating 24 nursery schools, adding almost one thousand classrooms. About one half the total outlay of 62 million crowns, raised largely through loans from Britain and France, went to the construction programme for housing, the other half to schools. The second phase saw the erection of a Workingmen's Hostel (Népszálló) with 417 dwelling cubicles in Aréna (now Dózsa György) Avenue and a People's Home (Népház), serving both social and educational ends, in Vág Road. Whereas the Workingmen's Hostel operated on a commercial basis (the income from letting the rooms was used to repay the money loaned for its construction), the Metropolitan Council covered the costs of its functions as a public welfare institution that provided for those without an income, offered facilities for the unemployed left with time on their hands *(Picture 17)* and day care for street children.

The new tenements lacking all modern conveniences—only the small flats in the inner city had a bathroom—strike us as backward, but these light and dry homes, with access to a small garden, represented a genuine step up the social ladder for the families of lower paid office and factory workers, as was indeed proved by the unprecedented popularity that the scheme enjoyed. Prime Minister Wekerle's government exempted these dwellings from rates due to the state until building costs were covered, and the owners were able to let the dwellings at rents 25–30 per cent below market value, as a result of which applications for homes were 8–10 times in excess of what was available even before they were built.

Architectural approaches were unconventional; the rents for one inner-city tenement could be kept well below the average because the rooms were unusually small for the times. Ceiling heights were lowered from the customary four metres, which made it possible to add extra storeys, and therefore tenants, to buildings on expensive city-centre land. Virtually every important architect in Budapest prepared designs for the housing and schools that were due to be built as part of this scheme, so the structures that emerged reflected a corresponding diversity of styles. The Metropolitan Council took the view that with their own larger buildings they should set an example to private developers, so they showed a general

6 ■ Agreement had to be reached with the Metropolitan Council's General Assembly and with Prime Minister Sándor Wekerle (in his second term from 1906–10), who was broadly supportive of the building programme.

tendency to go for the styles generally accepted at the time, above all Historicism and late Eclecticism (e.g. a block of flats designed by Samu Pecz for Haller Street). Nevertheless, they equally wanted to champion the new and most up-to-date. An outstanding example of the modernist Art Nouveau style was the school on Vas Street, designed by Béla Lajta, with the space it afforded for folk-art motifs to be worked into larger architectural masses. *(Picture 9)*

Because they were frequently accused by the public and press of being unpatriotic, the liberal council leaders also considered it important to make a point of highlighting more explicitly native "Hungarian" approaches. Accordingly, among the designs accepted by the programme was one by the partnership of Károly Kós and Dénes Györgyi for the nursery and elementary school on Városmajor Street, and one by Dezső Zrumeczky for a school on Szemlőhegy Street, both of which drew from Transylvanian folk architectural traditions. Folk-inspired motifs were also present in the applied art of the time. The frescos that Mariska Undi, one of the group known as the Gödöllő Workshop, produced for the Workingmen's Hostel, for instance, depicted Hungarian folk customs and occupations, while Sándor Nagy, also of the Gödöllő Workshop, did much the same for the school on Százados Road. Hungarian folk scenes were also used in wall paintings by Árpád Juhász in the school on Fehérvári Road, by Béla Sándor in the school on Mária Terézia Square, and by Pál Jávor in the school on Soroksári Road. Decorations included reliefs by Ödön Fülöp Beck, one of the foremost Art Nouveau sculptors in Hungary, and frescos by Ödön Márffy and Géza Faragó.

Something of a patron of the arts by nature, István Bárczy's wish that the programme should not implement a purely social-welfare viewpoint but also be "exemplary" in its aesthetic aspects led to much unnecessary extravagance and waste in the view of many contemporaries. Foreigners inspecting the buildings were also surprised by the broad scale of the socio-political and cultural aims, the equipment and elegance that had been invested in the schools and the Workingmen's Hostel, and some regarded it as excessive. In 1913, with Hungary's economy weakening, a temporary halt was ordered to the investments, which eventually were called off definitively on the outbreak of the First World War.

The idea of the new school

The photographs on show at the Budapest History Museum in Kiscell Museum superbly document the individuals involved in the schools programme. Bárczy's school-building aims sought to draw above all on new thinking, sociological insights and foreign experience. The goal was to replace the dogmatic Prussian-type school system with a child-centred approach to education.[7]

7 ■ Miklós Mann, "Budapest oktatásügye a dualizmus korában [Public Education in Budapest in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy]," *Új Pedagógiai Közlemények,* Budapest: Eötvös Lóránd University of Budapest, Department of Education, 1997. Bárczy founded the Metropolitan Teachers' Seminar and also the periodical *Népművelés* [People's Education].

In line with the most progressive thinking on education and hygiene, and embodying high aesthetic standards given the large numbers of children from disparate ways of life and cultural backgrounds, the schools were obliged to socially integrate as well as teach them. Practically every school included a gymnasium—two in the bigger schools—an innovation for the time *(Picture 16)*; libraries for the teachers and the pupils; there were also school baths to make up for the general absence of baths at home. Attention was given to designing comfortable and practical desks, even to defining dimensions for classrooms and corridors so that every child should be afforded sufficient space. Classrooms in those days catered for anything between 48 and 60 children, but even that represented an advance on the classes of 100 that had been common at the turn of the century.

Instruction for everyday life and the adult world of work was facilitated for boys by Educational "Sloyd" (meaning "handy" or "skilful"), a system of woodworking education. First devised in Sweden in the 1870s, learning was accomplished through the gradual introduction of increasingly difficult tools and techniques, and for girls by "domestic science" rooms, where they could acquire skills in various aspects of housework. Another aid to preparing children for working life were the model offices in commercial colleges, meant to mimic a real bank. Well-equipped specialist classrooms and stockrooms raised educational standards and allowed the junior high schools to offer tuition in some novel subjects. At ten of Budapest's inner-city schools where lack of space made it impossible to create a schoolyard of appropriate size, roof terraces were constructed which offered an opportunity not just for games and fresh air, but also for teaching lessons such as drawing or physical training. With the help of Mór Erdélyi's photographs, it is possible to reconstruct terraces, internal architectural details and ornaments that have long since disappeared from many of the schools, not to mention the equipment and furniture in specialised classrooms, gyms, offices and stockrooms of great historical interest.

Erdélyi took pictures of structural minutiae as well as of the internal décor of the schools he photographed, among others the reliefs that Ödön Fülöp Beck carved for the school on Szentendrei Road *(Picture 11)*, the mosaics by Bertalan Pór and stairwell sculptures of Ödön Moiret in the Vas Street school, built in 1911–12. One picture that he took of a stairwell manages to bring out the rational, geometrical, constructivist deployment of internal space as well as a painting by Mondrian *(Picture 10)*.

A sign of the ground gained by more modern, child-centred pedagogical aspirations is seen in Erdélyi's pictures of the school in Egressy Road, in which, apart from a well-equipped physics laboratory, there is also a door marked "Játszóterem" (Playroom), or of the sandpit built in the yard of the Fehérvári Road school, or of Márffy's frescos in the Kiscelli Road nursery and elementary school *(Picture 12)*. His photo of the children playing in a sandpit in the yard of the Kiscelli Road nursery school under the watchful eyes of two teachers, shows the blur of the "ghosts" left by the children as they moved from the sandpit to cross the yard, evidence of the long exposure time required *(Picture 20)*.

Nicolas Zrinyi

Count Francis Széchenyi

Gabriel Bethlen

Crown Prince Rudolph

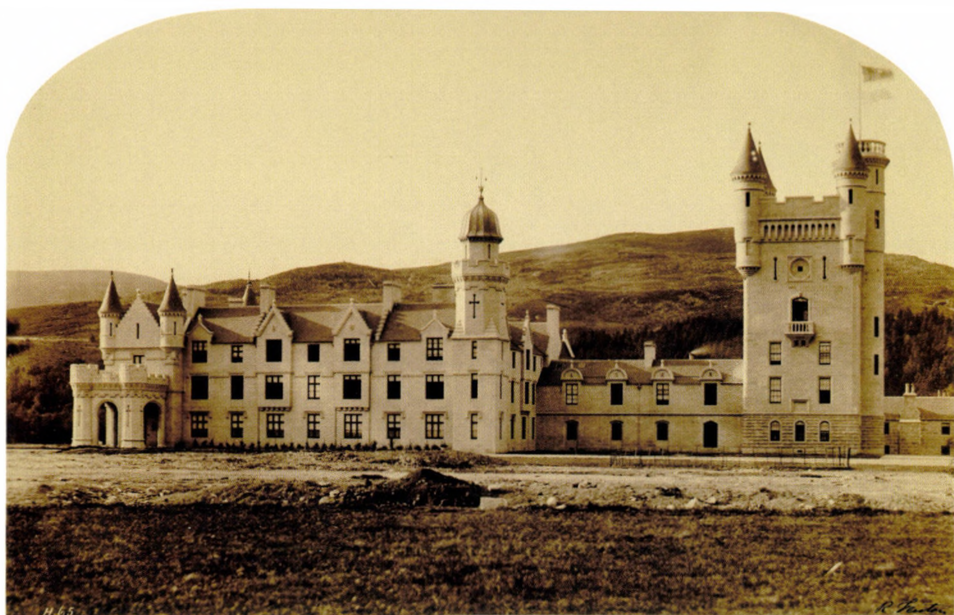
Count Alexander Károlyi

Dr. Ignatius Semmelweis

Mór Erdélyi: Budapest statues. From Edison in Hungary. *Photograph, 1912. National Széchényi Library, Budapest.*

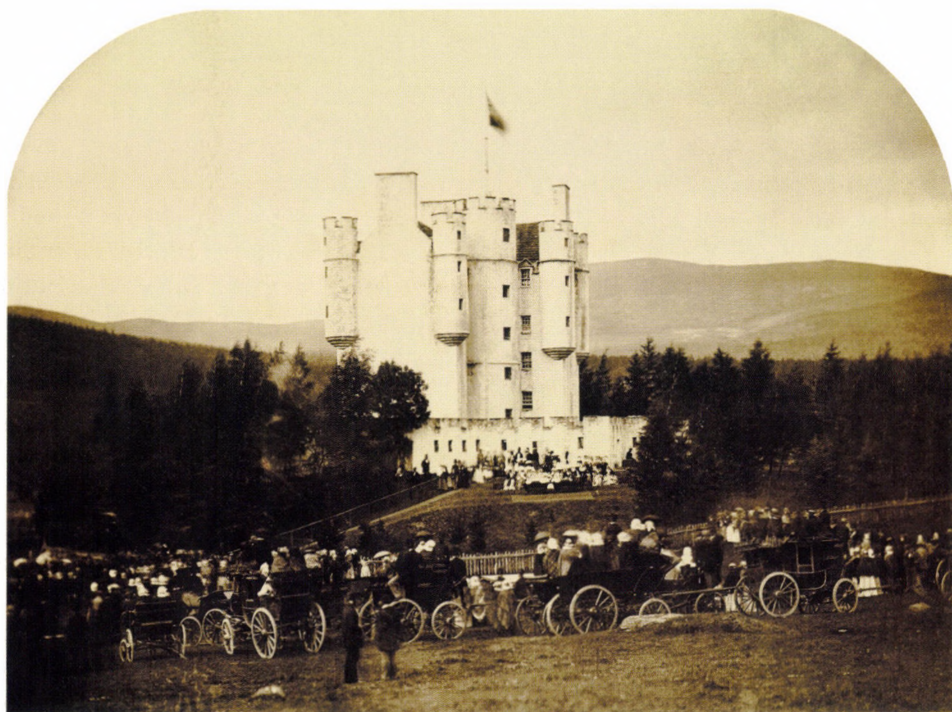
Erdélyi even gave an impression of the activities that took place on those roof terraces, as with the girls playing with their teacher on the upper terrace of the school on Márvány Street *(Picture 13),* or the drawing lesson in progress on the roof terrace of the boys' junior high school on Kertész Street *(Picture 14).* A lifesize reconstruction of the latter is in the middle of the gallery, with two old drawing "donkeys" standing beside two newly-made ones, and similar geometrical bodies are placed between them as the "models" seen in the photograph. A flavour of school life of the day is evoked by a selection of school equipment, textbooks and reports from the early twentieth century displayed in two glass cabinets. In addition, a few of the photographs record life on the new housing estates, with one showing a gymnastics class being held in the yard of a single-storey wooden hut that was put up beside a block of small apartments constructed on Százados Road, another, of boys playing football there with a ball made of rags *(Picture 15)*; and a third, children playing on an estate on Budafoki Road.

Asked to document the results of the house-building programme in Budapest, Erdélyi contrived in these posed "genre" pictures to illustrate the functions of structures (roof terrace, playground) that were modern in their day, with knots of citizens who are standing around before various newly erected buildings, or the boys queuing up in neat PT lines in well-equipped modern gyms as little more than "extras" to bring a bit of life to the pictures. That illustrative approach is also encountered in a presentation album that was compiled to mark Thomas Edison's



1. Roger Fenton: *Balmoral from the South*, 1856. Photograph.
University Library of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest.

A photograph of the royal summer residence shortly after it was built.
The signs of recent construction work are clearly visible in the foreground.



2. Roger Fenton: *The Gathering at Braemar*, 1856. Photograph.
University Library of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest.

3. Roger Fenton: *Gillies at Balmoral,* 1856. Photograph.
University Library of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest.

Balmoral gillies also appear in three other group photographs in the holdings of the University Library.

4. Roger Fenton: *Windings of the Dee*. Photograph.
University Library of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest.

This view of the Dee shows Fenton's interest in landscape painting
and spatial arrangements.

5. Roger Fenton: *Bridge at Castleton, Braemar*, 1856. Photograph.
University Library of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest.

Fenton took a number of photographs of the bridge. In a print by Francis Frith of a Fenton negative auctioned in 1862 and showing the stone bridge from the same angle, the woman reading and the man in the light-coloured coat have been replaced by two kilted men, one sitting and one standing with the angler moved to the other bank of the burn.

6. Roger Fenton: *Untitled*, 1858. Photograph.
University Library of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest.

Fenton's friend, Frank Dillon, the landscape painter, sat for a number of orientalising photographs. Dillon himself was interested in the history of the East. On a Nile journey in the winter of 1854–5 he painted a number of watercolours of the ruins of Thebes, Karnak and Luxor.

7. Mór Erdélyi:
The Millennium
Tower in Zimony
(Zemun, Serbia).

Both photographs are from an album produced in 1897 containing memorials which commemorated the Magyar possession of the country.

8. Mór Erdélyi:
The Millennial Memorial
at Dévény (Devin, Slovakia)
near Pozsony (Bratislava,
Slovakia).

9. Mór Erdélyi:
Entrance to the school
on Vas Street,
1912. Matt collodion.
Budapest History Museum,
Kiscell Museum.

The building designed by Béla Lajta served as a Commercial College and is still the premises of a Commercial Secondary Trade School.

10. Mór Erdélyi:
Stairwell in the school
on Vas Street,
c. 1912. Photograph.
Matt collodion.
Budapest History Museum,
Kiscell Museum.

The photograph shows a modern approach to interior space doing away with superfluous ornamentation.

11. Mór Erdélyi: Girls' entrance to the school on Szentendrei Road with reliefs by Ödön Fülöp Beck, c. 1910. Photograph. Matt collodion. Budapest History Museum, Kiscell Museum.

12. Mór Erdélyi: Pavilion in the yard of the school on Kiscelli Road, c. 1912, with frescos by Ödön Márffy, c. 1910. Photograph. Matt collodion. Budapest History Museum, Kiscell Museum.

Judit Szalatnyay-Fáry

Judit Szalatnyay-Fáry

13. Mór Erdélyi: Girls on the upper terrace of the school on Márvány Street, c. 1912. Photograph. Matt collodion. Budapest History Museum, Kiscell Museum.

Games and lessons were held on the flat roofs of the schools.

Judit Szalatnyay-Fáry

14. Mór Erdélyi: Drawing lesson at the school on Kertész Street, c. 1912. Photograph. Matt collodion. Budapest History Museum, Kiscell Museum.

Judit Szalatnyay-Fáry

15. Mór Erdélyi: Playing football in the Százados Road school, early 1910s.
Photograph. Matt collodion. Budapest History Museum, Kiscell Museum.

Judit Szalatnyay-Fáry

16. Mór Erdélyi: Gymnastics lesson in the school on Pannónia Street, c. 1913.
Photograph. Matt collodion. Budapest History Museum, Kiscell Museum.

The new gymnasiums were well equipped and spacious.

Judit Szalatnyay-Fáry

17. Mór Erdélyi: Basket weaver, c. 1915. Matt collodion.
Budapest History Museum, Kiscell Museum.

Judit Szalatnyay-Fáry

18. Mór Erdélyi: Statues and typical characters seen in Budapest.
Edison in Hungary, 1912. National Széchényi Library.

Erdélyi wished to pay his respects to Edison, the self-made man, by including in this album produced on the occasion of the inventor's visit to Budapest and Pozsony (Bratislava, Slovakia) not only portraits of the prominent and panoramas of Budapest, but also photographs of the people to be seen on the street.

Judit Szalatnyay-Fáry

19. Mór Erdélyi: Courtyard façade and garden of tenements on Simor Street (now Vajda Péter Street), in 1910. Photograph. Silver gelatine. Budapest History Museum, Kiscell Museum.

Judit Szalatnyay-Fáry

20. Mór Erdélyi: Children playing in the sandpit at the nursery school on Kiscelli Road, Óbuda district, Budapest, c. 1912. Matt collodion. Budapest History Museum, Kiscell Museum.

The blur of the "ghosts" left by the children as they moved from the sandpit to cross the yard is evidence of the long exposure time required.

Unknown photographer: Alexandre Trauner.

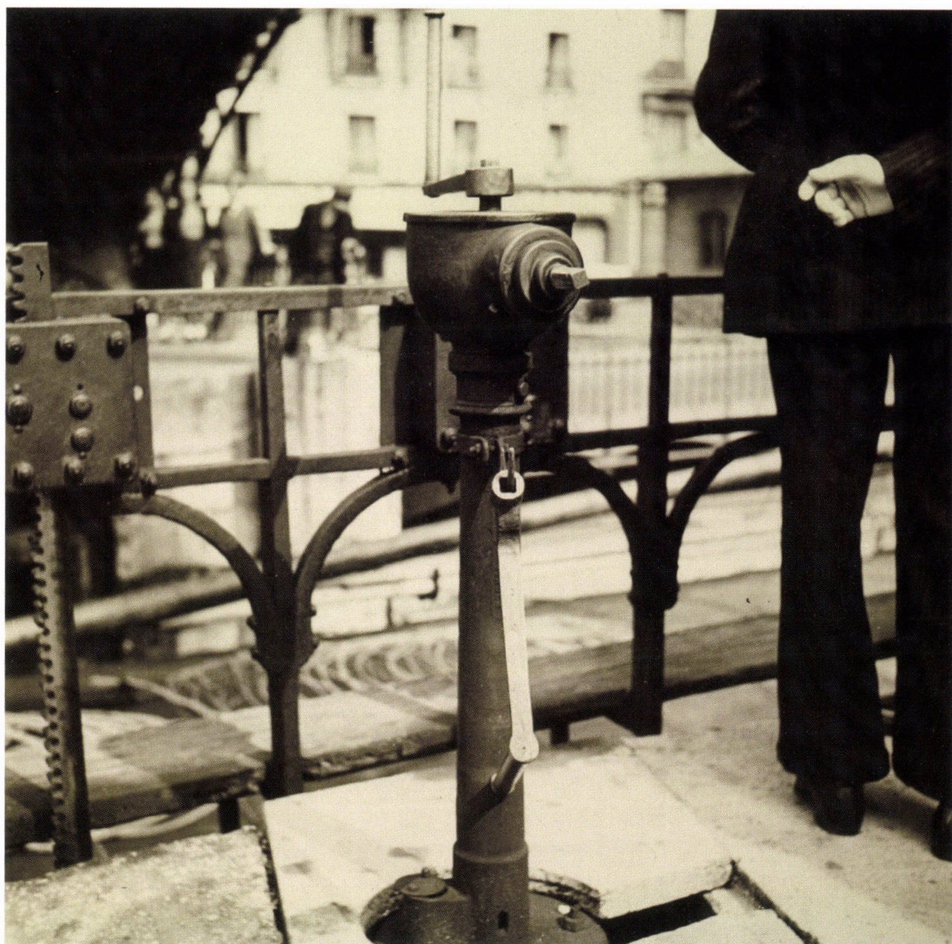
Alexandre Trauner: *Street Scene in Paris.* Late 1930s. The Trauner Estate.

Alexandre Trauner: Décor for *Hôtel du Nord.* The Trauner Estate.

Alexandre Trauner: Searching for motifs with a camera for *Hôtel du Nord,* directed by Marcel Carné, 1938. The Trauner Estate.

Alexandre Trauner: Searching for motifs with a camera for *Hôtel du Nord*, directed by Marcel Carné, 1938. The Trauner Estate.

Alexandre Trauner: Searching for motifs with a camera for *Le jour se lève*, directed by Marcel Carné, 1939. The Trauner Estate.



Alexandre Trauner: Searching for motifs with a camera for *Le jour se lève*, directed by Marcel Carné, 1939. The Trauner Estate.

Mór Erdélyi: An old street in Pozsony (Bratislava, Slovakia). From Edison in Hungary. *Photograph, 1912. National Széchényi Library, Budapest.*

visit to Budapest and Pozsony (Bratislava, Slovakia) in 1911. (See the illustrations on pp. 108–109.)[8] The aim of these pictures, just like a popular series of Viennese engravings of eighteenth-century urban occupations that may have served as Erdélyi's model,[9] was not to demonstrate any social specifics so much as to provide local colour *(Picture 18)*. A sort of social interest is much more readily discernible in the pictures that he took of everyday life, or to the work given to the inhabitants of the newly constructed People's House in Vág Street, though even that is hard to separate from an effort to give an idealised, propagandistic view of the result of Bárczy's building programme *(Picture 17)*. Indeed, in the genre pictures that Erdélyi took of the "little men" of Budapest—the shoeshine boy, the station porter, the corner-shop grocer, or the pictures from the 1920s in which he recorded the crumbling housing of the Óbuda and Tabán quarters and their shabbily dressed inhabitants his search for picturesque subjects to document a vanishing old world is often overridden by his patent sympathy for the people he photographed. ❧

8 ■ *Edison Magyarországon* (Edison in Hungary). *This album commemorates the visit of Mr Thomas A. Edison to Mr Etienne de Fodor and Mr Francis Jehl in Budapest on September 11–12, 1911* (facsimile edition: 2006). A copy of the album, which was produced in 1912, was sent to Edison.

9 ■ Johann Christian Brand, *Kaufruf in Wien* (1775–1776). Eighteen of the 29 photographs in the Edison album present "typical characters" of Budapest life (to use the term given by the title for the section). They form a series in which the figures (possibly retouched from genuine street shots) are seen against a white background, tying Erdélyi's pictures to the engravings formally speaking as well.

András Bán

Camera Sketches

Hôtel du Nord. The Unknown Photography of Alexandre Trauner.
Exhibition at the Miskolc Municipal Gallery, 4 September–4 October 2008
Vintage Gallery, Budapest, 14 October–7 November, 2008
Paris Photo, Paris, 13 November–16 November 2008.

Alexandre (Sándor) Trauner (1906–1993) the production designer and art director for the cinema achieved world fame. He worked with such directors as Marcel Carné *(Le jour se lève, Les enfants du paradis, Hôtel du Nord),* Billy Wilder *(The Apartment, Irma la douce, The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes),* Jules Dassin *(Rififi),* Joseph Losey *(Don Giovanni),* John Huston *(The Man Who Would Be King)* and Luc Besson *(Subway).*

Sándor Trauner as a painter is still well-remembered. He worked together in the same studio at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest with George (György) Kepes and Dezső Korniss. The audacity of their diploma exhibition created a minor public scandal. As with most of his generation, he thought it best to try his luck elsewhere, which took him to Paris, a step closer to the world of cinema. But he never left off painting.

But Alexandre Trauner the photographer is virtually unknown. The Miskolc Municipal Gallery and the Vintage Gallery in Budapest are the first to show photographs of his taken in the Thirties and which were found among his papers in 2008.

Trauner was 23 years old when he arrived in Paris, seemingly just another bohemian artist trying to live on centimes in another cheap atelier in Montparnasse. He didn't speak French, he frequented the Café du Dôme, a favourite of Hungarian émigrés, where there was always someone who would buy him a coffee. He wanted to be a painter, a famous painter. Within ten years he was one of the best-known production and art designers on the French film scene.

He was born in Budapest, on the poorer Pest side of a city that was nursing its pretensions to be a metropolis. His father was a lady's tailor who played cards after work, quarrelling with his partner over who was better at cards and better at their job. One of the sons of this partner was later to gain fame under the name of Robert Capa.

Trauner's grandfather engaged in quite a few enterprises without much success, from establishing a factory to trying his luck in America. Trauner

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

remembered him as a kindly old man who gave French lessons. (This is where adventure and the French strand first met in Trauner's own story.)

The family had two branches, one wealthy and the other decidedly not. The Trauners belonged to the latter: although they were not poor, there were everyday financial difficulties. Nevertheless, his parents tolerated Sándor's artistic ambitions with great patience. Though he was sent to secondary school and did well in science, and though they would have been happier if he were to take up something practical, like studying engineering, they put up no resistance when he applied for the Academy of Fine Arts. Getting in was not easy. Trauner drew beautifully but Hungary had passed a *numerus clausus* act in 1920, setting a quota on the number of Jewish students who were to be accepted into higher education—and the Trauner family was Jewish.

It was one of his uncles, comfortably off in banking and an amateur painter, who put his career on track. The uncle adored Paris—another French strand in the story—as a country of democracy and liberty. Just as István Csók, Trauner's master at the Academy, who had brought the painting of *Les Nabis* to their attention. Trauner was fortunate: he never had to wear a uniform, at school, or in the war (he was too young to be called up during the First World War). And in the Academy, he was in a class that aspired to freedom of intellect and art. The revolution of abstract painting was in progress; for them, abstraction was not opposed to realism, but simply the potential fulfilment of freedom. Trauner's interest was in colour and it was in the painting of Matisse that he found his own direction.

There was another chance French connection in the person of François Gachot, who had come to Hungary to teach French for the Alliance Française. It was he who opened the door to the living Paris for Trauner. Trauner was interested in everything and at one and the same time, Bartók and Pudovkin for example. But it was the modernist writer and painter Lajos Kassák who had a particularly great influence on him—and on his entire generation.

All this emerged in a 1988 interview Trauner gave to Jean-Pierre Berthomé (*Décors de cinéma,* Paris: Jade-Flammarion). He spoke of fond memories, with dangers lurking below. Wherever his personal details were recorded for bureaucratic purposes in Hungary, the first question concerned religion. Being an atheist didn't count, he carried the mark of a religion on him that had no relation to his beliefs. The only rational option for him was to quit the country while there was time. He and Kepes set off at the same time. Kepes joined László Moholy-Nagy in Berlin; Paris awaited Trauner.

Trauner's companion in the studio, George Kepes, related their years together in the Academy and the story of their departure in an interview:

> We felt some sort of intellectual affinity between us. We became close, good friends, and we still are. Csók meant a lot to us. He was not an intellectual leader; honesty was his compass. He never lied to us; he always said what he thought. We knew when he understood us, and when he tried to stay with us. The Academy was like a nest, and Csók's warm and liberal heart meant the world to us. Once a State Secretary called Kornis came to visit us at the

> school, he later became a bishop. At the time, we were painting Cubist pictures, and this official could not understand this. And he didn't like what we were doing. He asked what our intentions were; he also said that he didn't believe in such strange things. And then someone among us said: perhaps you don't understand such things. This was not the most politic thing to say. In any case, we received a letter from the Academy that we could not return. And Csók, who was truly a brave man, he stood by us—Csók was sent into retirement.

Trauner's planned destination was Paris, but chance took him to Épinay, to the film studio. He became first an occasional helper and then assistant to the Russian set designer Lazare Meerson, a few months after his arrival. There was a bond between them: both would really have liked to paint. Instead, they both began to consider their sets as large-scale versions of their paintings. Trauner worked alongside Meerson on twenty films; René Clair was the director of the first few among them—this was certainly not a bad school in which to learn filmmaking. During this time he met Jacques Prévert, who was to become a lifelong friend. Through Prévert he gained an entry to *le tout Paris* and found himself part of the Parisian intellectual scene. He changed his café, shifting from the Dôme to the Flore. Prévert also recommended him to Marcel Carné, when the director was looking for a set designer for *Drôle de drame.* Thus he received astonishingly exciting challenges from Carné and Prévert and became a part of a long run of successes, working together with the best actors and scriptwriters of the era. They collectively expressed the spirit of 1930s Paris, through the strange dramas and lyrical realism that were a feature of Carné's best films and Trauner's best sets.

He worked with Carné until 1950, but his commissions from other directors also multiplied. He was leading designer on some seventy films until 1985, and not only in Paris. After 1956, he was often given work in Hollywood, first alongside Billy Wilder, but he also worked with Marc Allégret, Orson Welles, Joseph Losey, John Huston, Luc Besson, Bertrand Tavernier, to mention but a few of the directors.

He renewed himself for every film, and even found the time to paint. From the 1980s, numerous exhibitions of his work were arranged across the globe, also in Budapest: in 1981 at the Hungarian National Gallery, and in 1992 at the Vigadó Gallery.

The photographer Alexandre Trauner is barely known. Even if his camera was always hanging around his neck, he didn't consider himself a photographer. When the Trauner archive was opened to researchers, dozens of boxes were found there aligned in order, arranged mainly according to film titles, and inside every box were hundreds of photos. They were not arranged carefully, according to portfolio convention, between sheets of cardboard, but simply piled on top of each other, some folded and scribbled on, others stuck together. On closer inspection it turned out that not every photograph had been taken by Trauner: a number of assistants worked for him and Trauner, though he was not a systematic collector, put aside prints taken by others at various shoots, including those by professional photographers. Searches for motifs, preparations for set construction and photos of stills were all jumbled together, making it extremely difficult to put them in order.

Still, in the case of the early films, the role, style and authorship of the photographs are unequivocal. Trauner's first camera was of high quality: a 6x6 Rolleiflex. (Even today, a young Hungarian photographer continues to use the camera in Paris.) The shots depict Parisian street scenes, blocks of houses, interesting architecture, shops, a staircase, an alleyway. Many of the photos can be precisely connected with the late Thirties and the locations of films made in those years and were apparently linked to concrete motifs. Other images aimed to capture rather the mood, atmosphere, light effects and shifts in perspective.

The collection of motifs should not be understood as Trauner selecting elements from the city, script in hand, in order to freely compose an imagined city. For instance, *Hôtel du Nord* (Marcel Carné, 1938) is set in a well-known Paris location: Canal Saint-Martin. For the film, the entire neighbourhood was reconstructed in Billancourt, including the houses and the canal—it would not have been possible to close down this bustling quartier for a month just to make a film. The reconstructed Canal Saint-Martin itself became a tourist attraction, drawing many visitors while they were shooting (including Picasso and Zervos). In actual fact, the set was not a reconstruction: it did employ many elements from the Canal Saint-Martin but it also used the existing architecture and set elements from Billancourt too. It was thus an original composition, comprising found, built and painted parts, *trompe-l'oeil*, with natural and artificial lighting effects—a symbolic picture rather than an imitation of reality. In this sense, it could truly be considered as a Trauner painting, which translates the experience and the impression into cinematic images, creating compositional elements from street and architectural elements and creating tonal variations from colours. The photographs made for this purpose are experiments at translation, investigating just how the scene transforms into a filmic-photographic image. With just this intention, Trauner produced these wonderful shots of streets, the banks of the canal, the unique iron structure of the bridges, the voluble, grey light of the squares, the mood of the *bistros,* the bleak rhythm of the rows of windows, the fantastic, unmistakable roofs of Paris...

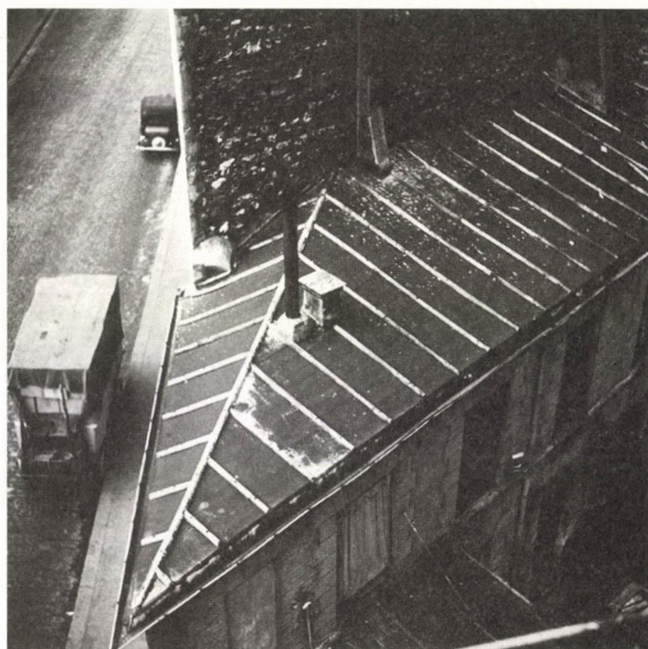
The photographs were thus aids for the set director. There are holes punched with drawing pins in many of them, written notes and the dimensions of visual elements; on the back of one, there is even a hastily scribbled note in pencil: *Nous sommes à la cantine*—We've gone down to eat. On the other hand, however, they are essays in photograph exploring the spectacle, the mood, the particular Parisian atmosphere. Trauner was master in this medium, too. Unwittingly so, perhaps, but he created significant works all the same. His Parisian cityscapes made in the Thirties could rightfully be included among the works of the "greats", from Atget to Doisneau, and other figures of Humanist Photography.

Trauner had arrived in Paris only a few years previously. The city, for him, was an experience, something new at every corner, every alley producing surprises. He took photographs in their hundreds, so that the spectacle of the city would become his native idiom, so that the place would become his own. The photo-

graphs of the Thirties were born as a part of his working process, with the intention of discovery but also as attempts at photographic composition.

Trauner continued to photograph. With the Fifties, both the intention and the method of his pictures changed. He continued to record various parts of the city, but he was much more interested in a single strange detail, an unusual moment. And he also photographed his journeys: countless photographs have survived from his holidays, from his visits to Italy and Africa. These were taken with artistic intentions, as the photographic memoirs of his experiences. Thus was born his photographic exhibition, *Dans les rues de Dublin* (On the Streets of Dublin), arranged in 1986 by the Fondation nationale de la photographie, which presented his genre photographs taken while he was shooting in Ireland, and whose catalogue featured a dialogue with Robert Doisneau, in which Trauner, on this single occasion, formulated his relationship to photography:

> I am not a photographer. To me, photography is simply a crutch, a notebook. In the old times, you would make sketches; now one presses the shutter. [...] When looking at the pictures [of Dublin], I remember sounds again. There were bells, many bells, non-stop, a quantity of bells. This I could not photograph: a cavalcading sounding of bells. And footsteps on the pavement. Inside the yards, it was like in Budapest when I was a child: the noise of carpets beaten on a kind of wooden stand. The children playing their little games and their little comedies. And sometimes, somebody drunk who shouts a bit. ❧



Alexandre Trauner: Searhing for motifs with a camera for Hôtel du Nord, *directed by Marcel Carné, 1938.*
The Trauner Estate.

Levente Püski

The Long Farewell

Aristocracy in Hungary in the 20th Century

Amid the gradual modernisation of post-1867 Hungarian society, the aristocracy was considered to be the closest embodiment of the "historical", being seen (by the lower and rising middle classes, and even the aristocracy itself) as a social stratum which owed its continued existence to a system of traditions and privileges dating back to the Middle Ages. Bearing one of the titles of the higher nobility was, originally, the sine qua non condition of being a member of the aristocracy. (In Hungary, as in most other countries of Europe, differentiations of status were developed over the centuries according to a ranking system.) There were three traditional aristocratic titles. The most junior in respect of the prestige and influence that went with it was that of *baron.* This was followed by *count;* and *prince* ranked the highest. From time to time, the use of a foreign aristocratic title was allowed in Hungary, as in the case of the Pallavicini family, who were *marquesses.* The title of *archduke* was reserved for members of the ruling Habsburg-Lotharingian dynasty.

There were three main ways of becoming a member of the Hungarian aristocracy. The primary way was through heredity: a peerage awarded one's ancestor by a King of Hungary was inherited by all descendants.

The situation was a little more complicated if the peerage was conferred by a foreign ruler. In this case, the individual had to undergo the process of *indigenatio* (a kind of naturalisation) to acquire the right to use his title in Hungary and pass it on to his descendants, and, of course, to enjoy the associated privileges. Naturalisation through *indigenatio* was the prerogative of the feudal Diet, and required royal sanction in every particular case. The net result of the institution of naturalisation was by the 20th century a rather motley and, in respect of origin, multi-national Hungarian aristocracy, with titled families hailing from practically every country in Europe. There were families of German origin (such as the Wenckheims and Dagenfelds), Polish descent (such as the Benyovszkys and Zelenskys), Italian origin (such as the Pallavicinis and Odescalchis) and Danish

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ancestry (the Kaases). Contrary to prevailing opinion, though their numbers were by no means negligible, the *indigena* families never formed the predominant part of the Hungarian aristocracy. Károly Vörös puts the ratio of *indigena* families at 25 per cent, while Szabolcs de Vajay's estimate is somewhat higher, 36 per cent.[1]

The third way of joining the ranks of the Hungarian aristocracy was for the king to personally confer the rank of baron, count or prince. For instance, in 1918, the last year of royal rule, eleven individuals were created barons by King Charles IV. Historians find that between 1848 and 1918, the kings of Hungary swelled the ranks of the aristocracy with two new princes, 17 new counts and 140 new barons[2]. An impressive number indeed. No less impressive is the diversity of social backgrounds that we find among the new aristocracy. For ambitious members of the landed lesser nobility, a title bestowed as a reward for outstanding (local or national) political service had, for generations, been a major avenue of social advancement. This, basically, was the story of the Tisza family. Outstanding service to the dynasty was another traditional path; in practical terms, this meant a lifetime spent in the civil service, or a successful military career. With the spread of middle-class values and the rise of the middle classes by the last quarter of the 19th century, one could be rewarded with a peerage for outstanding achievement in practically any walk of life. We find scholars and professionals among the new aristocracy (e.g. Frigyes Korányi, the father of modern Hungarian medicine, who was made a baron in 1908), but most people tend to associate this trend with the conferral of a peerage on prominent figures in Hungarian business and finance. Between the 1867 Compromise and 1918, the so-called "Dualist Era", baronage was conferred on 28 upper-middle-class Jews, among them Adolf Ullmann, the director of the Hungarian General Credit Bank in the difficult years before, during and after the Great War.

The creation of new peers and the numerous cases of *indigenatio* added to the already sizeable number of aristocrats. There is some disagreement as to the exact numbers at the beginning of the 20th century. While János Gudenus speaks of 600 clans in his exhaustive genealogy[3], other sources give estimates of somewhere between 320 and 380. According to Péter Hanák, there were 209 magnate clans in Hungary in 1848; by the 1910s, *indigenatio* and royal favour had swelled their numbers to 367[4]. The use of the term "clan" is far from arbitrary: as often as not, the title belonged to extraordinarily large extended families. If, thus,

1 ■ Károly Vörös, "A főrendiház 1855. évi reformja" [The Reform of the Upper House in 1885]. In Á. Varga László ed., *Rendi társadalom—polgári társadalom I.* [Feudal Society—Civil Society I]. Salgótarján, 1987, p. 401. For de Vajay's data, see János Gudenus–László Szentirmay, *Összetört címerek* [Shattered Coats of Arms]. Budapest: Mozaik, 1989, pp. 314-22.

2 ■ *Magyarország története 1890–1918, I.* [The History of Hungary, 1890–1918, I], edited by Péter Hanák. Budapest: Akadémiai, 1983, p. 436.

3 ■ János Gudenus, *A magyarországi főnemesség XX. századi genealógiája, I* [The Genealogy of the Hungarian Nobility in the 20th Century, I]. Budapest: Natura, 1990. *Volume II,* Budapest: Tallér Kft, 1993. *Volume III–IV,* Budapest: Heraldika, 1998.

4 ■ *The History of Hungary,* pp. 435–6.

we want to speak of aristocratic families in the narrow sense, it seems appropriate to triple Hanák's figures. This will give us 1,100–1,200 aristocratic families, who, contemporaries agreed, formed the top of the social pyramid in pre-war Hungary.

The power and prestige of the aristocracy at this time was still based primarily on their accumulated wealth: landed property handed down over the centuries. The continued existence of great landed estates in Hungary into the 20th century was facilitated by *entailment*. Certain aristocrats limited the inheritance of a part of their property to a specified succession of heirs—usually first-born direct descendants; property thus entailed could neither be sold, nor given away. The philosophy behind entailment was that the family property—the basis of the family's elite status—had to be safeguarded both from subdivision and from the whims of prodigal heirs. In theory, entailment was an option for every landowner, but in practice, it was the great landowners who utilized it. In 1914, there were 91 entailed great estates in aristocratic hands, comprising a total of 2.3 million *hold*s, or 3.3 million acres.

Subsequent generations have tended to consider the predominance of aristocratic great estates as one of the salient features of early 20th-century Hungary. The sources, however, do not quite substantiate this. Data for 1911 relevant to landowners in possession of more than 100 *hold*s show that there were 597 aristocrats among them, who together owned 13 per cent of Hungary[5]. Other sources indicate that in 1893, the aristocracy owned over 3 million *hold*s in the parts of the country that would become post-Trianon Hungary[6], or 19 per cent of the country as a whole. The ratio of aristocratic holdings reached 23–25 per cent only west of the Danube—the real centre of aristocratic *latifundia*. As for most of the entailed land being in aristocratic hands, we find that of the 16.3 million *hold*s of entail, only 14 per cent was owned by aristocrats, an area equal to no more than 4.8 per cent of the total area of Hungary.

That great estates were, nevertheless, so closely associated with the aristocracy in the public mind had probably to do with the circumstance that when it came to *latifundia*—landed estates of over 10,000 *hold*s—aristocrats were, in fact, the predominant owners. Twenty-five of the fifty greatest landowners in Hungary were magnates, and the wealthiest landowner by far was the princely branch of the Esterházy family. Miklós Esterházy was lord of 403,000 *hold*s of entail, and altogether more than 500,000 *hold*s of land. It was easy enough for contemporaries to project the wealth of the wealthiest aristocrats onto the class as a whole, and to raise it to a proportion that was unattainable. As the writer Gyula Krúdy put it: "To the Hungarian imagination, the name Esterházy stood for everything that could make heaven of life on earth... It meant living like a real lord. Not like the lord in the anecdote, whose power ended where the village did, but like a LORD, someone who was second only

5 ■ *The History of Hungary*, pp. 435–6.

6 ■ Eddie M. Scott–Ingrid Hutterer–Iván Székely, "Fél évszázad birtokviszonyai. Változások a trianoni Magyarország területén, 1893–1935" [Changes in Landownership Over the Years in the Area of Post-Trianon Hungary, 1893–1935]. *Történelmi Szemle*, 1990/3–4.

to the old king himself."[7] Landed property, of course, was not just an economic asset; it also meant social and political influence, since a great many people were dependent on the lord of their particular region for their jobs and economic status.

Many aristocrats held some kind of public service position, and this, too, tended to consolidate their influence as a class. The "Hungarian aristocrat" stereotypes notwithstanding, the aristocracy did not necessarily shun involvement in the modern economy, and several magnates did their best to excel in the world of industry or finance. The Marquess Ede Pallavicini was, perhaps, the most successful: from 1869 to 1880, he worked in the Ministry of Finance, and then, for the next 20 years, headed the Hungarian General Credit Bank which, under his direction, came to be the most important financial institution in the country. Aristocratic careers of this sort, however, were few and far between, nor did they win much peer approbation, presumably because they required an expertise and energy that was, on the whole, out of keeping with the aristocratic lifestyle. A somewhat more popular form of involvement in the economy was to sit on the board of directors of various companies and financial institutions: the minimum of work invested was remunerated handsomely—the nobleman's real contribution was the social capital and aristocratic name that he brought to the enterprise.

The arts and sciences were traditional areas of aristocratic interest and admiration, though they were likely to prefer the more conservative art forms. There were some aristocrats who themselves embarked on artistic or scholarly careers, with more or less success, but the majority confined their involvement to patronising concerts, museums, the opera and the theatre, or collecting works of art.

A growing tendency to non-involvement in society is discernible even in the case of careers traditionally pursued by the aristocracy. Except for newly-created barons, we find fewer and fewer aristocrats joining the officer corps, the civil service, or the Churches, and those who did can hardly be credited with a definitive role as a class. There were just two spheres of government where the aristocracy still served in outstanding numbers: the Lord Lieutenancy and the diplomatic corps. Aristocrats filled the position of Lord Lieutenant in about a third of the counties, conspicuously so in Transylvania and in Transdanubia (the western part of Hungary). The diplomatic corps was the aristocracy's other preferred choice of career—and little wonder. It was in the foreign service that an aristocrat could make best use of his particular skills—fluency in foreign languages, his general culture and erudition—to say nothing of his easy familiarity with etiquette. Furthermore, he had the means to finance the cost of the social responsibilities that his job entailed. Accordingly, we find young aristocrats choosing not so much the foreign ministry as the diplomatic corps: 26.6 per cent of the junior civil servants in the former were of aristocratic descent, as compared to the 63.6 per cent in the latter[8].

7 ■ Gyula Krúdy, *A tegnapok ködlovagjai* [Knights of the Mists of Yesteryear]. Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1961, p. 43.
8 ■ Pál Pritz, *Magyar diplomácia a két világháború között* [Hungarian Diplomacy between the Two World Wars]. Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1995, p. 20.

Aristocrats provided an even higher percentage of the members of the Upper House of Parliament. Originally, every Hungarian aristocrat was entitled to sit in the Upper House. One of the reforms of Act VII of 1885, however, was a property qualification: only aristocrats who were able to pay a property or house tax of at least 3,000 forints a year were entitled to sit in the House. Those who were not had their membership suspended. Another restriction involved those who had gained their title after 1885: a title did not automatically entail membership in the Upper House; the right to sit in the House had to be conferred expressly by the monarch. "Paper barons" was the derisive term subsequently coined for those who were given a title, but not membership of the Upper House. Even with the new reforms, however, the Upper House remained primarily the forum of the aristocracy, with aristocrats comprising 72–76 per cent of the membership in the early 20th century[9]. Formally, the Upper House was the coequal of the House of Representatives; in fact, however, it had less and less of a role in the political decision-making process. The result was that the majority of the aristocrats sitting in the Upper House simply lost interest in its proceedings. Some typical data: between 1861 and 1910, of the 51 Zichys sitting in the House, 40 never once addressed it; likewise, of the 39 Esterházys in the Upper House, 29 never rose to speak[10].

As the Upper House gradually faded into political insignificance, membership in the House of Representatives became more and more attractive to the aristocracy. The percentage of aristocrats in the Lower House in the Dualist Era was between 7 and 17 per cent, which, considering their ratio in the population as a whole, was clearly a case of overrepresentation. Nor was there any indication of a declining trend. Quite a few aristocrats involved in politics were independents, with no affiliation to parties and interest groups. They were wealthy enough to finance their own electoral campaigns, or simply ran in an electoral district where they themselves, or their friends or relatives, had estates.

Reflecting the politics of the times, there were aristocrats for every shade of liberal and conservative opinion in the early 1900s. But they seldom committed themselves to any party. True enough, the Constitutional Party led by Count Gyula Andrássy enjoyed the support of a rather large and influential magnate group between 1905 and 1910, but even they could not rally to their side the greater part of the aristocracy. In 1895, aristocrats—primarily Count Nándor Zichy—played a major part in the founding of the Catholic People's Party, but basically they were able to win the support only of the Catholic aristocratic families of Transdanubia. Parties organising along class lines in the early years of the 20th century attracted them the least; they were conspicuous by their absence from the Smallholders', Social Democratic and Christian Socialist parties.

9 ■ Ernő Lakatos, *A magyar politikai vezetőréteg, 1848–1918* [Hungary's Political Leadership Stratum, 1848–1918]. Budapest, 1942.

10 ■ Miklós Nagy, "Milyen legyen at új főrendiház" [What the New Upper House Should Be Like]. *Magyar Élet,* 1923/6.

When it comes to membership in the various governments, on the other hand, we can once again speak of overrepresentation. Of the fifteen Prime Ministers who headed governments in the Dualist Era, nine were aristocrats, as were 38 of the 111 ministers who held portfolios during this period. Aristocrats got to be ministers not by climbing up the civil service ladder, but for political services rendered. Though we find them at the head of practically every ministry, they tried to steer clear of portfolios—finance, for instance—that required professional knowhow. By the early 1900s, there were fewer aristocratic ministers, two or three per cabinet, as a rule. There was also a shift away from the old families in the direction of more recently created titles: Baron Samu Hazai, for instance, a career officer who was Minister of Defence in several cabinets; and Count István Tisza, who was Prime Minister from 1903 to 1905, and then again in the years 1913–17.

The aristocracy took quite an active part in the creation and running of social organisations and movements, of which the semi-political agrarian movement would become the best-known. The agrarian movement, an umbrella organization representing agricultural and landed interests, got off the ground in 1896. Count Sándor Károlyi was its chief theoretician and organizer, but other aristocrats also took a more or less active part, including Sándor's kinsman, Count Mihály Károlyi. Of the various agrarian organizations, aristocratic influence was the strongest on the Hungarian National Agricultural Society (OMGE), whose roots reached back to the pre-1848 Reform Era.

Aristocrats were to be found in leadership positions in sports organizations as well. Count Sándor Andrássy did much to popularise motor-car racing in Hungary, and became president of the Royal Hungarian Automobile Club (1906–1941). A cousin, Count Géza Andrássy, was dedicated to promoting the Olympic movement in Hungary: for many years (1905 to 1927) he was president of the Hungarian Olympic Committee, and was also on the International Olympic Committee (1907 to 1938).

Hungarian aristocrats willingly spent time at court: the women as ladies-in-waiting, the men as courtiers in various offices. Of the dignitaries attending the king at court at the beginning of the 20th century, there were still 12 bannerets; it was part of the respect for tradition of the Imperial court that 11 of these 12 positions were still filled by members of old magnate families.

When it came to social intercourse, the degree of deference owed to a magnate was in any given situation strictly regulated by etiquette. Indicative of the elite position of the magnate class was the fact that they were awarded additional titles and honours more quickly and more easily than any other social group. A magnate could expect to be made a *Hofrat,* a *Geheimrat,* even a privy councillor, and hope to receive the most prestigious honour of all, membership in the Order of the Golden Fleece. All these honours made for a strong sense of social superiority, and contemporaries, and at times the magnates themselves, would castigate the hauteur of some aristocrats with good reason.

Except for this sense of superiority, the aristocracy was not a homogeneous group either politically or socially. What region of the country one came from was a particularly divisive factor, with the Transylvanian aristocracy forming the most distinguishable group. Religious affiliation was another line of division: aristocratic families of different denominations mixed with one another only to a limited degree, and most of them were Roman Catholics. How old a family was, and how illustrious a name it had was another important consideration. The old historical families often looked down on those who had come by the titles of baron or count by way of "recent" royal favour. Wealth, however, was the greatest divide. It was particularly when it came to marriage that financial circumstances—by which we should understand the size of the estate—of the partners played a crucial role.

There was no such thing as an "aristocratic lifestyle". The lives of some Hungarian aristocrats were intimately tied to life at court: they spent most of the year in Vienna, had some estates outside Hungary proper, and often married into non-Hungarian aristocratic families. Other aristocratic families no less cosmopolitan in education and outlook and possessed of estates lucrative enough to finance an exclusive lifestyle seldom, if ever, attended court. Though they spoke several languages, often sent their young men to the best schools in Europe, and regularly travelled abroad, their kinship ties, contacts and affairs tied them to Hungary. They liked to be in the public eye as politicians or heads of associations, or made a name for themselves in the field of science or culture. When contemporaries thought of aristocrats, it was their names that came to mind. Yet another group of aristocrats was formed by those who had no significant inherited wealth, and whose profession was also their livelihood. Most of the newly-created peers belonged amongst them, men like the eminent jurist Baron Gyula Wlassich. The fourth type of aristocratic lifestyle was that of the "urban" aristocrat, men who were not interested in a serious career of any sort. Budapest attracted them due to its social life and the endless opportunities it provided for pleasure and entertainment. For example, Count Elemér Batthyány—the son of Hungary's first Prime Minister, executed on Imperial orders in 1849—exchanged his estates and country house for an annuity, and moved to the capital. A breeder of racehorses and a devotee of horse racing, he was a typical Budapest society figure in the early 20th century.

The "rural" aristocracy lived a life of relative seclusion on their estates. They seldom left their homes to spend time in the city or to go abroad, took little part in public affairs (at most at the local or regional level), and spent most of their time supervising their estates. This was the life chosen, up to 1919, by Count Gyula Károlyi (Prime Minister: 1931–32).

The only thing this heterogenous class had in common—besides being titled—was a certain set of social norms and values: an insistence on the traditional hierarchic forms of social intercourse, piety, and adherence to a certain traditional code of morals. There was, however, something else which joined at least some of them in a community of interest, and that was the existence of *latifundia*. Their vast estates were a source of immediate social influence and, together with their

chateaux, were a token of their power and their historical authority. "Having roots in the land" was indispensable if the aristocracy was to keep its social predominance, opined Count Pál Teleki[11]. Indeed, only great landowners could allow themselves the life of luxury which the aristocracy as a whole sought to live. In 1911, 597 aristocrats had estates of over 1,000 *holds*. Those outside this magic circle were in a kind of limbo. On the one hand, they were tied to a middle-class lifestyle in a great many ways; on the other, they had the chance—if they made a successful career for themselves—of winning some degree of acceptance from the highest circles: of being invited to the right soirée, of being asked to join the right club, or, very exceptionally, marrying into a magnate family.

In the early 1900s, Hungary had not yet attained a degree of modernisation sufficient to undermine the land-based influence and authority of the aristocracy. The "Michaelmas Daisy Revolution" that followed defeat in the First World War, however, changed all this. Most of the magnates distanced themselves from the new government headed by Count Mihály Károlyi, and with good reason: what the country's new leaders had in mind was a radical transformation of the socio-political situation. The end of the monarchy, the extension of the franchise and equality before the law, and a radical projected land reform involving a 50 *hold* ceiling on landed property were all steps calculated to subvert the age-old social status of the aristocracy. For all that, initially there was a substantial minority who decided to wait it out, and even try to accommodate to the revolution. Thus, for instance, on November 13, 1918, a delegation of Upper House magnates led by Baron Gyula Wlassich sought an audience with Charles IV to try to persuade him to abdicate so that Hungary could be declared a republic without conflict. When it became clear, however, that the revolution had acquired an impetus of its own which Károlyi was unwilling to rein in, the aristocracy turned against its leaders practically to a man. At a loss for what to do, though, and kept busy with just protecting their estates and families, most of them were passive observers of the events around them.

There was, on the other hand, a small but politically very active group which tried to undermine the revolution more and more openly. We find among them several people whose political career would fully unfold in the 1920s: Baron Zsigmond Perényi, Count Kuno Klebelsberg, Count Pál Teleki and Count István Bethlen. On February 19, 1919, a new, expressly conservative party was formed under the latter's leadership, the Party of National Unity.

Recruitment to the party—which was slow at best—was put an end to by the Soviet Republic, declared on March 21, 1919. The Soviet-type government which it introduced meant, in effect, the annihilation of the aristocracy. They were not allowed to take part in any social or political organisation, and their lands and other properties were nationalised. Though some managed to stay on in their homes,

11 ■ Lóránt Tilkovszky, *Teleki Pál*. Budapest: Kossuth, 1969, p. 79.

most of them were forced to go into hiding, or seek refuge abroad. The politically more active among them formed counter-revolutionary organizations. In early May, a counter-revolutionary government was set up under Count Gyula Károlyi in Arad; at the end of the month, it moved to Szeged, a conservative safe haven under French occupation. Career officers and conservative members of the middle-class had also flocked to the city, and soon took over leadership of the counter-revolutionary movement. Gyula Károlyi's "government" came to an end on June 12; his most lasting contribution to Hungarian history was, it would turn out, to start Miklós Horthy out on his political career by appointing him his Minister of War.

Another group of magnates, led by Count Gyula Andrássy, had been organizing support in Switzerland and Vienna to help topple Hungary's Soviet government. At the instigation of Count István Bethlen, the various counter-revolutionary activist groups working abroad had united on April 12 to form the "Anti-Bolshevik Committee"; it was assimilated by the central counter-revolutionary "government" in Szeged by the end of May.

The Hungarian Soviet Republic collapsed on August 1. The counter-revolutionary government that gradually took shape after its defeat did away with all its revolutionary measures: the aristocratic families were able to return to their homes, and it seemed that slowly things would again be as they had been. The lost war and the disappearance of historical Hungary, however, brought changes so profound that no return to the pre-war status quo would ever again be possible. Moreover, a significant percentage of the population regarded the aristocracy with hostility, holding them responsible, in part, for the tragedies of the past few years.

But it was not just their social prestige that was at an all-time low; financially, too, the aristocracy had suffered serious losses, particularly the magnate class. The post-war chaos had led to the destruction of houses and property; the requisitions under the Soviet Republic and looting by the Romanian army that had invaded Hungary compounded the loss. Every one of Hungary's successor states introduced radical land reforms—partially as a social measure, partially to rid themselves of the "Magyar" great landowners; in consequence, most aristocratic estates were expropriated in the lost territories. Only the chateau and a few hundred *holds* were left to the landowner, as a rule. Partial compensation was paid in every country, but the amount received was subsequently taxed. Romania topped this off by refusing to pay compensation except to citizens of Romania. Acting for the injured parties, the Hungarian government sued the Romanian government, and much of the 1920s was spent in litigation.

The need for land reform, however, was on the agenda in Hungary as well. Certain aristocrats—Count József Majláth, for example, and the Marquess György Pallavicini—had supported the idea of a limited land distribution before the war, but after the victory of the counter-revolution, ideas of this sort were expressed ever more tentatively, and then not at all: wholesale repudiation of land reform was the common sentiment of most of the old-new ruling class. In the end, Act XXXVI

of 1920 did introduce a restricted reform: 1.1 million *hold*s of agricultural land (8.5 per cent of the farmland in Hungary) were slated for distribution as family farms. Though more than just a token measure, the Hungarian land reform fell short of that introduced in the neighbouring countries.[12] On the whole, thus, the aristocracy's resistance had achieved its goal.

The popular antipathy to the aristocracy, on the other hand, did have political consequences. Though 12 aristocrats did get elected to the House of Representatives in January of 1920, they comprised only 5.5 per cent of the House, as opposed to the pre-war 15 per cent. No important portfolios were assigned to them, and they resigned from the lord lieutenancies. The apparatus preparing the Hungarian position for the peace talks, on the other hand, did have aristocrats on its staff, and the peace delegation itself was headed by Count Albert Apponyi.

One reason for the aristocracy's apparent withdrawal from politics was that they had a hard time finding their place in the new mass parties that had replaced the old historical ones. Their conservative values seemed obsolete to the newly enfranchised masses, and most of them felt maladroit campaigning for election by secret ballot. Some counts became objects of ridicule when they tried to win favour with their audience by starting their campaign speech with: "Honoured peasants!"[13]

It seemed unlikely, in the early 1920s, that anything could put a halt to the post-war down-trend in the aristocracy's political fortunes; but the Bethlen "consolidation"—the economic, social and political stability that were the hallmarks of Count István Bethlen's premiership (1921–1931)—did just that. And yet, the beginning of Bethlen's tenure was conflict-ridden indeed. A great many aristocratic families—particularly the traditionally court-oriented Transdanubian aristocracy—professed themselves to be faithful to the dynasty (legitimists), until Bethlen finally decided to openly oppose Charles IV, who was planning a return to the throne. Relations between Bethlen and the legitimists deteriorated further in early 1926, when Bethlen barely survived a scandal over the forgery of French francs, which the legitimists exploited in an attempt to topple his government.

Though Bethlen was no legitimist, he was a conservative at heart: the social and political order of Dualist Hungary was, for him, a foundation to build on, with the necessary reforms to be introduced but gradually. He consistently opposed the rule of the masses entailed by universal suffrage, and declared the need for the leadership of a politically mature and financially stable elite, which would include the aristocracy. He once confessed himself to be "proud of his noble family, whose members were keenly aware that their birth and circumstances laid great obligations on them"[14]. Consequently, he wanted to see the aristocracy take its "proper" place in Hungarian politics, and was determined to win its support for

12 ■ In Romania, 27 per cent of the land was distributed, in Czechoslovakia, 17 per cent.
13 ■ Jenő Gergely, *Prohászka Ottokár.* Budapest: Gondolat, 1994, p. 198.
14 ■ *Est*, 15 December, 1927, p. 8.

his policies. On the whole, he succeeded on both counts. Legitimism lost much of its appeal: the immediate influence of Count Gyula Andrássy's radical legitimists was confined to a very small circle. Legitimist magnates sequestered themselves in an exclusive club, the Holy Crown Society of Hungarian Men, and their wives in its ladies' auxiliary. As for the majority, in time, most of them came to terms with the Regent, Admiral Horthy—considered a parvenu, they called him "the sailor"—even as they came to terms with Bethlen himself.

Contemporary critics often accused Bethlen of attempting to restore the Hungary of the turn of the century. There is no denying the fact that the Bethlen consolidation, as compared to the earlier post-war years, went hand in hand with strengthening the position of the aristocracy. In 1921, the year he set up his first cabinet, Bethlen offered portfolios to three aristocrats; in 1931, the year he resigned, he had two aristocratic ministers. The House of Representatives, too, saw an increase in the ratio of aristocrats elected: in the 1931 elections, it was as high as 11.4 per cent. Though ideologically speaking there was not much difference between them, politically the aristocrats sitting in the lower house fell into three main groups: 50–60 per cent of them belonged to Bethlen's Party of National Unity, others to the pro-government Christian party, and the rest—mostly independents—were legitimists.

In early 1927, the quest for legal continuity led to the restoration of the Upper House. It was to have 235–240 members; 38 of the seats (i.e. 17 per cent) were expressly assigned to the aristocracy. Aristocrats could, however, get into the Upper House on other grounds as well, and in 1927, we find them in 26 per cent of the seats—not a negligible figure, but a far cry from their majority in the old Upper House. Most of the magnates in the new were supporters of the government; there was no real room for legitimists, and not even Count Gyula Andrássy won a seat in 1927. In the newly reconstituted Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7–12 per cent of the staff was of aristocratic birth; in the diplomatic corps, the figure was 21–25 per cent[15]. Where the aristocracy's disappearance from politics seemed to be permanent, on the other hand, was in the provinces, at both local and regional levels.

István Bethlen's premiership was a guarantee that the Hungarian aristocracy would be spared any radical land reform. Moreover, political and economic consolidation brought with it a return to the hierarchic social structure of the pre-war years. Traditional codes of conduct were revived, the formal aspects of social intercourse were again of utmost importance, and so was familiarity with, and adherence to, the complex system of ranks and titles in every social situation. All this helped to restore the social preeminence of the aristocracy. Several aristocrats came to *hold* high positions outside the sphere of politics: the prehistorian Count István Zichy was appointed director of the National Museum; and the Chamber of Agriculture had first Count Imre Almásy, then Count Miksa Hoyos for its president.

15 ■ Pál Pritz, *Hungarian Diplomacy...*, p. 25.

There was, of course, no turning back of the clock. With all the successor states being largely nation-states, there was no room for the old supra-national aristocracy. Vienna was no longer an imperial capital: old ties slackened, and the court aristocracy as a class faded into oblivion. Prince Tasziló Festetics, for example, a representative court aristocrat, left Vienna after Austria was declared a republic and lived in isolation in his chateau in Keszthely. Most Hungarian court aristocrats declared their loyalty to the Hungarian state by choosing to make their permanent home in Hungary. With no king to grant titles and honours, the ranks of the aristocracy were no longer replenished let alone added to.

The Hungarian aristocracy, though it too was one of the losers of the new, post-1918 geopolitical order, recovered after the post-war revolutions, thanks, in part, to Bethlen's conservative social policies, which Regent Horthy, for his part, wholeheartedly endorsed. Public opinion also had a lot to do with the new-found—though passing—vogue of the aristocratic; amid the profound social and economic upheavals of the immediate post-war years, people looked with nostalgia to the values and social milieu of the turn of the century.

Very little of this sentiment, however, survived the shock of the Great Depression. The 1930s further eroded what was left of the political positions and influence of the aristocracy, under pressure from the racist right, on the one hand, and a new generation of reform-minded intellectuals, on the other. These young people's thinking had been shaped by the Great War, the revolutions, and the Treaty of Trianon; their professional convictions—and ambitions—also brought them into conflict with Bethlen, and indirectly, the aristocracy as a class. Though they disagreed on many points of detail, they were united in their calls for radical social and political reform, and for the empowerment of a new elite committed to seeing these reforms through. László Németh, Gyula Szegfű, and István Weiss were just the most eloquent of the aristocracy's many critics: as a class they were decried for their passivity, lack of patriotism and their anachronistic, traditional, hierarchic notions of society. A new and comprehensive land reform was one of the reformers' key demands—the "popular movement", in particular, was most insistent on this score.

Assailed by wave after wave of ever more direct criticism, the aristocracy found itself pushed back to a more and more defensive position. In his 1942 book, the publicist Miklós Wesselényi noted in his introduction: "Today, and particularly in Hungary, the aristocracy ... is a class under attack."[16] Those directly concerned were themselves aware of the gravity of their situation. As early as 1932, István Bethlen ruefully noted: "It is as if the wellspring of great sons borne the nation by the aristocracy and the historical classes ... were gradually running dry".[17]

There was, of course, good reason, in the 1930s, for the aristocracy's coming under attack. The class had become the symbol, in the public discourse of the

16 ■ Miklós Wesselényi, *Az arisztokrácia válsága és jövője* [The Crisis and Future of the Aristocracy]. Budapest, 1942, p. 4.
17 ■ István Bethlen, *Válogatott politikai írások és beszédek* [Selected Political Writings and Speeches], edited by Ignác Romsics. Budapest: Osiris, 2000, p, 156.

times, of everything that reformers of whatever hue wanted to change or do away with. The attacks on the aristocracy generally provoked them to counterattacks, which left little room for a constructive exchange of ideas. This was particularly true when it came to the question of land reform. There were magnates who argued that abolishing the *latifundia* and the system of entail would not solve the problem of the mass poverty of the country's agricultural population. The *latifundia,* they maintained, by no means comprised the majority of the farmland, and historians have corroborated this claim. In 1935, estates of over 1,000 *hold*s accounted for 29.8 percent of all arable land,[18] and by no means all these estates were owned by aristocrats. Entail notwithstanding, there was a definite, if not radical, decline in aristocratic holdings. In 1893, 19 per cent of the over-100-*hold* estates had had aristocratic owners; by 1935, this figure had declined to 13.6 percent.[19]

Another valid argument advanced by Count Gyula Károlyi, for one, was that *latifundia,* if well-managed, were as productive as smallholdings. Furthermore, smallholders were finding it as difficult to market their produce, given the worldwide Depression, as the *latifundia.* At the same time, the aristocratic defenders of the status quo conveniently ignored the fact that great estates were somewhat foreign to East-Central Europe as a whole. Nor could they come up with an alternate suggestion as to how to do away with the pressing problem of mass agricultural poverty within some reasonable time frame.

The reformers, for their part, were urging changes which fundamentally undermined the position of the aristocracy, and did so with some success. The entail reform passed by the Gömbös government in 1936 set a ceiling of 3,000 *hold*s on what a given individual could *hold* in entail: what they hoped to achieve—within a relatively long space of 20–30 years—was to put 30 per cent of the entailed properties on the open market. Later that same year, another reform made 400,000 *hold*s available for peasant ownership within the ensuing 25 years.

In 1939, Pál Teleki's government passed the leasehold act. Introduced by Béla Imrédy, the bill proposed to set up a kind of permanent lease system through which between 1.3 and 1.5 million *hold*s of land would end up in peasant hands, with at least 100,000 *hold*s per year being slated for distribution in the first ten years. In principle, it was a momentous reform; but the government used the war as an excuse to indefinitely postpone its practical implementation.

The aristocracy's participation in the political system declined, particularly after Gyula Gömbös's appointment as prime minister in the autumn of 1932. In the House of Representatives, this trend became clear primarily after the 1939 elections, which also reflected the fundamental changes in the aristocracy's political affiliation. Though the class as a whole can still be said to have supported the conservatives in the 1930s, the younger generation of aristocrats was very much divided politically and ideologically. There were left-wing socialists among them, as well as members

18 ■ Mihály Kerék, *A magyar földkérdés* [The Issue of Land Reform in Hungary]. Budapest, 1939, p. 298.

19 ■ Eddie M. Scott et al, op. cit.

of the Smallholders' Party; there were also those who—like Count Sándor Festetics, Count Fidél Pálffy and Count Lajos Széchenyi—conformed to the spirit of the times, and were conspicuously active National Socialists. Even those on the government benches—Count Domonkos Festetics, for instance, or Count Viktor Károlyi—were likely to swell the ranks of the governing party's right-wing radicals. The older, more conservative generation and the legitimists had little chance of being elected to the Lower House; they took refuge in the Upper House, where Gyula Károlyi and István Bethlen were still considered to be the ultimate authority.

Aristocrats continued to enter the foreign service in considerable numbers, but were not appointed to capitals of significance. As for cabinet posts, there were no aristocrats at all in Gyula Gömbös and Kálmán Darányi's governments from 1932 to 1938, and there was only a single aristocrat in both László Bárdossy and Miklós Kállay's governments from 1941 to 1944. Of those who did fill government offices, only Pál Teleki, who was prime minister from 1931 to 1941, can be said to have been a statesman of stature.

Writing in 1940, the historian Gyula Szekfű opined that the aristocracy, "for all its superior etiquette and social prestige" had become peripheral, and that the middle class had become the real ruling class.[20] With due respect to Szekfű, however, we must note that though the aristocracy did lose out on positions of influence in the second half of the Horthy era, its social and economic position as a whole was unshaken.

Miklós Wesselényi, in his above-cited book on the crisis of the aristocracy, observed that the future of the upper class would largely depend on the outcome of the war. As it turned out, the social and political changes that swept over Hungary in the wake of the Second World War were tantamount to a landslide. Those who had been active National Socialists or members of the Szálasi government—Count Fidél Pálffy and Baron Gábor Kemény, for example—had to answer for their deeds before people's tribunals, and were executed. Other aristocrats with a political "past" managed to flee the country in 1944–45. They were joined by many who had not been politically active in the Horthy era, but who believed that Bolshevism would enter Hungary along with the Soviet army. This was the first wave of aristocratic emigration.

Those who stayed—and they were the majority—found themselves in a totally changed socio-political milieu. The coalition parties, which formed the government and had a parliamentary majority, passed laws which led to the end of the aristocracy as the ruling class. The land reform of 1945 did away with the economic basis of their influence: great estates of over 1,000 *hold*s were expropriated; while of estates under 1,000 *holds,* at most 100 *hold*s were left in the hands of the landowning aristocrat. Roughly 1,500 chateaux and manor houses were seized by the state. Once it was divested of its economic clout, the aristocracy lost its social prestige as well. The laws passed by the four-party coalition sent a clear message to Hungarian society: the

20 ■ *Magyar Nemzet,* 31 March, 1940, p. 5.

aristocracy, its traditional privileges notwithstanding, was entitled to no special consideration or esteem. It was a sentiment which found legal expression in Act IV of 1947, which did away with the use of noble and aristocratic titles.

Overnight, the aristocracy as such disappeared from public life. The legislature was the uni-cameral National Assembly; there was no talk of the restoration of the Upper House. They were debarred from the lower echelons of the political system as well. Even aristocrats known for their wartime anti-Nazi stand were discriminated against, men like Count György Pallavicini, Jr. and Count József Pálffy who, in 1944, had played an active part in organizing the Hungarian Front, the illegal anti-German coalition. Count István Bethlen himself, who had had to go into hiding in March of 1944 to escape the Gestapo, was deported, once the Soviet army occupied Hungary, to the Soviet Union, where he died in prison sometime between 1947 and 1950. The legitimists fared the worst: they were ruthlessly hounded by both the Hungarian and the Soviet authorities. György Pallavicini Jr. was charged with participation in a legitimist conspiracy and deported to the Soviet Union in 1946; he died two years later in a Siberian prison camp. Count Géza Pálffy met a similar fate.

Aristocrats were branded the reactionary enemies of the people. In 1946, they were put on the so-called "B-list", and, in consequence or coincidentally, lost their civil service posts and army commissions one by one. It was in the foreign service that they were tolerated the longest: here, class cleansing started only after the Treaty of Paris was signed, in February of 1947.

Though they suffered crushing losses, most aristocrats accepted their fate with stoic resignation. It is a telling fact that no one was ever taken to court for breaking the law outlawing the use of aristocratic titles. Prince Pál Esterházy, who lost all his Hungarian estates as a consequence of the land reform, did not move to one of his estates in Austria, but married a prima ballerina and lived quietly in a modest apartment in Budapest until 1948 when he was arrested and, though in no way implicated, was condemned as one of the accused in the Mindszenty trial.[21] (In 1956, friends and retainers fetched him from gaol and took him to Austria across a canal which bordered his former estates.) The aristocracy still had hopes of somehow finding their new place in Hungarian society, for the restrictions on their activities at this time still touched only the public sphere, and not their private lives. Putting their education and knowledge of languages to practical use, they were, for a time, able to make a living for themselves and their families: many of them found jobs with some firm or other, or themselves went into business. They were also able to socialise with one another, and keep up old ties, albeit now informally.

The Communist Party's aggressive takeover from 1947 on and the ensuing sovietisation of Hungary set off a new wave of emigration among the aristocracy; those who stayed risked utter annihilation. In terms of Communist ideology, the aristocracy was the class enemy who had to be swept out of the way, to the very periphery of society.

21 ■ Lajos Izsák, "A Mindszenty-per és Esterházy Pál" [The Mindszenty Trial and Pál Esterházy]. *Jogtörténeti Szemle,* 2005/2, pp. 1–8.

Throughout the Rákosi era (1948–1953), the aristocrats were debarred from positions of authority and indeed from all professional and white-collar employment. Basically, the men were hired only as unskilled physical labourers, while the women filled administrative jobs. Their children were not admitted to institutes of higher education. The worst punishment they faced purely because of their class was being dragged off to internment camps. The next-worst was internal deportation: being sent to live, under restricted circumstances, in a closely watched part of the country. We have no exact figures as to the number of people involved in these measures. What we do know is that while only about a dozen aristocrats were interned, internal deportation to certain communities in the Great Plain was on a large scale. The largest single round—affecting, according to various estimates, somewhere between 100 and 190 aristocrats and their families—took place in May of 1951.

Though the country's Communist leaders would as soon have done without them, there were aristocrats who tried to adapt totally to the new order. György Pallavicini's brother, Antal, turned his back on his family heritage—he even changed his name to Antal Pálinkás—and made a career for himself as an officer in the new People's Army.

Stalin's death on March 5, 1953, and the ensuing changes—primarily the end of internment and internal deportation—brought some relief to the aristocracy. It did not, however, solve any of their day-to-day problems: they did not get back the homes they had been removed from, which had been nationalised; they received no compensation for the years of unlawful sequestration; and they and their children were still discriminated against when it came to employment and educational opportunities.

Briefly, the 1956 Revolution held out the promise of greater liberty and a new beginning for the aristocracy as well. For those who did not leave the country came the Kádár régime: installed on the ashes of the crushed revolution, it was determined to demonstrate the counter-revolutionary nature of those ten days also by presenting them as the machinations of the aristocracy. It was at a loss for evidence, however, for hardly a handful of aristocrats took part in the Revolution, and even they played but minor roles. The aristocracy as a whole kept to itself in October 1956, and watched the events unfold. It was only the ex-aristocrat, Antal Pálinkás, who had what would turn out to be a tragic part. Pálinkás was commander of the armoured regiment stationed in Rétság; on instructions from the prime minister's office, it was he who assembled and then led the convoy which took Cardinal Mindszenty from his place of house arrest to Budapest on October 31. Later, his aristocratic origins would make him a perfect scapegoat for the Kádár régime, which pointed to him to demonstrate aristocratic participation in what had, therefore, been clearly a counter-revolution. Pálinkás was tried in the autumn of 1957, sentenced to death and executed.

For the aristocracy as such, the immediate result of the 1956 Revolution was that those still in prison were set free, and the temporarily opened borders made possible a new wave of emigration.

For a little while after the revolution was put down with the help of the Soviet army, it seemed that the Kádár régime would simply amount to the restoration of the

pre-1956 system, and the aristocracy would once again be dubbed a prime enemy of the people's state. The 1960s, however, saw the beginnings of a new policy of reconciliation, with palpable impact on their position as well. The general amnesty of 1963 essentially put an end to the reprisals. Kádár's new policy of raising living standards and introducing social reforms improved the circumstances of much of the population, including the aristocracy. The restrictions on their employment were gradually eased, and, except for the leading positions, professional careers opened up to them as well. In 1962, the restrictions on admittance to institutions of higher education on grounds of class were abolished. Though they still had to work harder than others to get into colleges and universities, they at least had the chance to do so. Recent sociological research has shown that the aristocracy as a whole made the best of these new opportunities.[22] True, the old social ties had been rent, and the aristocracy no longer formed an exclusive social circle. Family traditions, however, guaranteed the endurance of certain values: respect for religion, as well as a thirst for culture and education, both of which were predicated, in their minds, on fluency in the major European languages. In the late 1980s, towards the end of the Kádár era, two thirds of Hungary's aristocrats lived in Budapest, and 80 per cent of them held university degrees. It was part of the process of their reintegration that by the 1980s, one met with aristocratic names among the popular public figures: the two Esterházys, the writer Péter and the footballer Márton, two grandsons of a prime minister, Count Móric Esterházy, to name just the best known.

After the successive waves of emigration, 20 per cent of those from titled families lived in Hungary at the end of the 1980s. Those who had gone abroad had had much more diversified careers than those who stayed home. A small group had been able to integrate into the Western aristocracy, with all the benefits that this involved. Most of them, however, had found it hard to make a new start in a new land. They had had no marketable professional skills, and had been able to take none, or only a fraction, of their assets with them. Still, there were those with talent and perseverance enough to make a fine career for themselves, men such as Count Lajos Károlyi, who settled in Brazil and became one of the CEOs of a large industrial enterprise.

There were aristocrats who tried to join one of the many émigré movements, with little success. Best-known among those who did succeed is Count Gyula Dessewffy, who, after leaving Hungary in 1947, headed the Hungarian Department of Radio Free Europe (1951 to 1954), and was elected (1949) to the body coordinating all Hungarian émigré organizations, the Hungarian National Committee.

The émigré aristocracy showed little cohesion; on the whole, they integrated into their host societies. The families who had the best chance of preserving their

22 ■ Ágota Lídia Ispán, "Arisztokrata családok életmódja, életstratégiája 1945 után" [Aristocratic Lifestyles and Life Strategies after 1945], *Aetas*, 2007/2, pp. 33–51. Éva Sztáray-Kézdy, "Egykori arisztokrata családok leszármazottai a mai Magyarországon". [Descendants of Former Aristocratic Families in Hungary Today]. http://www.lib.uni-corvinus.hu/phd/dr_kezdy_eva.

traditional values were those who stayed on in Western Europe, and were able to take some part in the social life of the local aristocracy.

In theory, the end of Communism in Hungary and the political changes of 1989–90 meant new opportunities for the aristocracy. It was primarily the émigrés who tried to make the most of the new situation. Many of them returned to Hungary, and brought home all or a part of their businesses. The "homecoming" that most fired the public imagination, however, was György (Georg) Habsburg's moving to Budapest. A grandson of Charles IV, the last Habsburg king of Hungary (the Emperor Charles I), György's making his home there has been seen as symbolic of his family's continued interest in the country.

Most of the returnees were much better off financially than those who had spent their lives in Hungary. This allowed them to continue the practice of helping out the Hungarian members of the family, but generally proved insufficient for starting up some major business ventures. Many of them restricted their activities to buying up some of the family's former lands, and particularly the chateaux, with a view to renovating them. The Nádasdy château in Nádasladány is a case in point. Though the building itself has stayed a national heritage monument, the family and the foundation they set up had a lion's share in the extensive renovation carried out during the '90s, and in the running of the renovated château.[23]

Scions of the aristocrats who had continued to live in Hungary have shown no desire to revive the family traditions of public service, and, given their limited means, were not able to take part in the process of reprivatisation to any significant degree. For all that, the 1990s have seen a certain strengthening of the Hungarian aristocracy's group identity. There are several associations dedicated to rebuilding old ties, reviving cultural traditions, and coordinating social activities. Among the charitable organizations, the Knights of Malta and those of St John deserve mention, as does the Association of Historical Families, and the Vilmos Apor Foundation, the organizer of the annual Apor Ball.

The post-1989 decades have been a time of growing public interest in the aristocracy, and those concerned have themselves proved more and more willing to share with the public certain details of their lives and family histories. Numerous interviews, articles and memoirs attest to this willingness to communicate. Péter Esterházy's recent autobiographical work, *Celestial Harmonies,* is an outstanding literary example of such coming face to face with the past.

In the first few post-1989 years, there were social scientists who expected that the energetic aristocratic returnees would become a social force to reckon with, and one of the pillars supporting the Antall government. They became neither. Though an integral part of Hungarian society, the aristocracy of today has no social position to compare with that of their grandfathers in the early 1900s, or their fathers in the Horthy era. Nor do they show any sign of their forebears' sense of cohesion, or of their aloofness from the rest of society. ❧

23 ■ József Sisa, *A nádasladányi Nádasdy-kastély* [The Nádasdy Château in Nádasladány]. Budapest: Műemlékek Állami Gondnoksága, 2004, pp. 88–99.

András Cieger

'We are now the first people in Hungary'

Count Andrássy's Family and Friends through the Eyes of an English Governess

"... for there is scarcely a European country in which the Anglomania rages more fiercely than in that slighted land. [...] there is scarcely an event of English life, a folly of London fashion, or an invention of British industry, which does not find admirers and commentators and imitators, among the Hungarians of respectable degree," declared Catherine Grace Frances Gore, an English writer in one of the stories set in Hungary that she published in 1829, at the very beginning of what that country calls its Reform Age.

It was indeed true that a growing interest in English culture, economic progress, technological innovations and political institutions was manifest among the élite of Hungarian society roughly from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards. For the Liberals of the Reform Age, in no small measure due to the example set by Count István Széchenyi, a grand tour of Europe's developed countries—above all England—was considered almost mandatory. These tours provided an inexhaustible fund of personal experiences and the received cultural impressions were integrated into plans about how social betterment and progress could be achieved in Hungary.

Also notable, albeit understandably more modest in its dimensions, was the cultivation of contacts in the opposite direction. A growing swell of travellers and artists from Britain visited Hungary, English tutors and governesses were increasingly engaged by the Hungarian aristocracy. According to John Paget (1808–1892), an English physician who settled permanently in Hungary,[1] by the mid-1830s many French and English women were to be found working as governesses, whereas two decades earlier such households had only employed

1 ■ Having married Polyxéna Wesselényi, sister of Baron Miklós Wesselényi, one of the foremost magnates of Transylvania and a leading liberal reformer, Paget settled in Hungary as a landed proprietor. He participated actively in the 1848–49 War of Independence and after the Hungarian defeat was obliged to live outside the Habsburg empire until 1855.

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He edited the Hungarian edition of Mary Elizabeth Stevens' correspondence.

German-speaking governesses. Paget also acknowledged the spreading custom of becoming fluent in foreign languages, as a result of which quite a number of the upper classes spoke English.

One beneficial outcome was that a growing number of pamphlets, literary works and travel accounts by British writers were published, most of them viewing Hungary in a favourable light, though the reports were not shy in pointing out what were perceived as anomalies.[2] The most popular of these descriptions, still consulted a good twenty years later, was a three-volume account, by Julia Pardoe first brought out in 1840. Opportunities for extended stays and the cultivation of contacts may have diminished during the years of Austrian absolutism that followed the Hungarian defeat in 1849, but Anglophilia lived on in private.

This was the prevailing atmosphere when Mary Elizabeth Stevens (1844–1924), travelling via Vienna, entered Hungary after her baggage and the publications she had with her had been thoroughly scrutinised. This twenty-year-old English-woman had been engaged as companion to Etelka Szapáry, the widow of Count Károly Andrássy, at her estate at Letenye, County Zala, in the far south-west of the country. Mary and a sister, Eliza, had been born to Elizabeth Holland Sutton and Andrew Stevens in France but, owing to the father's death a few weeks after Mary's birth, the girls and their mother had been left in straitened circumstances in Boulogne. Not long after that they moved to Dunkirk, where (their mother's Protestant faith notwithstanding) the two sisters were educated at a convent school and were thus fluent in French as well as English.

Members of the family had already sought to take advantage of a burgeoning interest in the English language within the wider Habsburg Empire, with their aunts findings posts as governesses or lady's companions with several families of the Austrian aristocracy or middle nobility—a cousin was even engaged as a governess for Archduchess Gisella, the second daughter of Emperor Franz Joseph I. It was one of Mary's aunts who obtained for her the position at Letenye, thus bringing her into contact with the Andrássys, one of the most illustrious of all the aristocratic families in Hungary and immensely proud to trace its lineage back into the Middle Ages.[3]

Mary stayed barely half a year besides "the old Countess", cloistered in the rather secluded and monotonous world of the Andrássys' chateau in Zala, but the tranquil life there did give her an opportunity to become acquainted, through Etelka Szapáry's stories, with the Hungarian War of Independence in general and the

2 ■ Among the works that appeared were: Catherine Grace Frances Gore, "Preface" to *Hungarian Tales,* 3 vols, London: Saunders, 1829; John Paget, *Hungary and Transylvania, with Remarks on Their Condition, Social, Political and Economical,* 2 vols, London: John Murray, 1839; Miss Pardoe, *The City of the Magyar, or Hungary and Her Institutions in 1839–40,* 3 vols, London: George Virtue, 1840. For further information, see: Sándor Fest, "What an Englishman Observed in the Hungary of the Age of Reform", in: *Skóciai Szent Margittól a walesi bárdokig. Magyar–angol történeti és irodalmi kapcsolatok* [From St Margaret of Scotland to the Bards of Wales: Historical and Literary Links Between Britain and Hungary], ed. Lóránt Czigány & János H. Korompay, Budapest: Universitas, 2000, pp. 647–653.

3 ■ On the history and material possessions of the Andrássy family, see: Beatrix Basics et al., *Betlér és Krasznahorka. Az Andrássyak világa* [Betlér and Krasznahorka: the Andrássys' World]. Budapest: Rubicon Könyvek, 2005.

glorious deeds of the Andrássys in particular: "It seems to have been a noble struggle of a noble band of patriots for liberty," she wrote sympathetically (17 June 1864). A frequent participant in the exploits that the Countess related was her middle son, Gyula Andrássy (1823–90), about whom Mary learned that in 1851 he had been condemned to death in absentia for his activities as both soldier and diplomat, only to be pardoned by the Emperor after spending eight years in exile.

The opportunity for Mary to make the acquaintance of the rebel aristocrat was not long in coming, for after half a year had elapsed she was "borrowed" from her mother-in-law by Andrássy's wife (née Katinka Kendeffy) to act as English governess to her three children. Her life was transformed as Count Gyula and Countess Katinka Andrássy pursued a busy social life both at their residence in Pest and in their various country houses. Mary was therefore plunged into a very different intellectual milieu by this leading Hungarian statesman and his shrewd wife, who knew her own mind on most aspects of public affairs of the day:

> The evenings pass very quickly. When there are no visitors the Countess reads to me, or I to her, or we work and talk and often get into long discussions on history and politics with the Count, who is a very clever gentlemanly man, and whom I like very much. I like proper conversations very much, as much as I dislike small talk and discussions about the price of wine, and the many sins of omission and commission on the part of the servants, such as we had constantly at the old Countess's. (15 December 1864)

She reports in several letters on her new place of residence, Budapest. Understandably she is taken by this city of 300,000 inhabitants, so varied in nationality, languages and religious denominations. She was especially delighted when she had the opportunity, unchaperoned, to stroll along the thronged streets, through the market, or to admire the panoramic cityscapes.

> I went over the bridge and up the steep hill to the strange old town. It is approached by flights of steps that are most fatiguing to climb, but, the summit once reached, the beautiful view well rewards one. At one's feet is the winding Danube, before one the handsome bridge, down on the left two small islands covered with trees; on the right the steep rock with its crowning fortress, and across the river, Pesth with its church towers, and the beautiful cupola of the Synagogue, which is the finest building of the town. (6 April 1865)

However, she takes exception to the fact that the city has few paths to stroll on, the streets are inadequately cleaned and more should be done about parks (they cannot be compared to those of London) but she recognizes that Budapest is on its way to developing as a great city.

A major turning point for the Andrássys, and hence for Mary too, came when the selfsame Emperor Franz Joseph who a decade and a half before had Gyula Andrássy condemned to death, appointed him Prime Minister. In February 1867, in the wake of the successful negotiations to reach a historic Compromise between Austria and Hungary, Andrássy was charged with forming its first government after

Pesth, March 24th, 1867

We are not yet in our house as it has to be put in order first. It is almost as big as St. Paul's, a splendid palace adjoining the Castle, and containing 63 rooms, all very large indeed. The reception salon is I should think as long as the station at Moorgate Street, or nearly so; it is immense with pillars in the middle all gilt, and great mirrors all along the sides.

I went there a few days ago with two of the children and was quite startled to see the size of the house and number of rooms; how are we to occupy them all is a problem I have not yet solved. The house will want cartloads of furniture. It stands on a hill and has most magnificent views from three points; one side looks all up and down the Danube, all over the town of Pesth and the bridge with its magnificient towers and arches crossing the broad river—a lovely picture the day I saw it for both towns were still decorated with the flags, banners and garlands that had been put up in honour of the Emperor's coming.

It certainly will be pleasant for some things to live at Buda; the palace and adjoining buildings called the Buda Vár (or Festung *in German) is built up on a precipice almost, and so the air is particularly clear and healthy. Perched up there I do not think we should suffer from the heat.*

We shall be lodged like Princes—but you must remember we are now the first people in Hungary, and that is no more than it should be.

*We are going to have several more servants now, and I am sure this house is full enough already with "*valet aille*". But such are the exigencies of rank you see. We shall now have a* Maître d'hôtel *and a porter and another butler, and another bodyservant—a Huzzar you know in a livery fine enough to turn the heads of all the girls in Pesth, with no end of a white plume on his head, a dazzling gold and yellow coat, long sword and goodness only knows what besides.*

If you can manage to get the Daily Telegraph *of the 18th March you will see a description of the Emperor's entry into Pesth, and really a very true one it is though perhaps rather penny-a-liner.*

All the people here are beginning to prepare for the Coronation which we hear will take place in May and will be—if only half as grand as people say—a most beautiful sight. The entry was really a very pretty sight and the Emperor met with a very different reception from the one last year. He is also very much more friendly, cordial and affable than he was.

Our Count came in the same carriage with His Majesty; as he passed our house, of which all the windows were crowded, he turned to Count Gyula, whom he saw saluting his wife and children, asked him if that was his family, and on receiving an affirmative answer made

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the restitution of constitutionality. This brought a sea change to the family's life: they moved into the huge Sándor Palace of Buda Castle; the size of the household staff expanded dramatically; the Andrássys were swamped with a growing number of representational duties, leaving them even less time to devote to their children. That in turn put greater demands on Mary, which she invariably carried out conscientiously, if not always with pleasure. She was now, at one and the same

several low bows with the greatest amiability to the Countess, kissing his hand to her as a salutation from his wife.

While he was here the Count was almost continually with him, dined with him constantly and even slept several times at the Palace.

There was a grand illumination the night of His Majesty's arrival and a few days later a magnificent Fackelzug (torchlight procession). Pesth was never better illuminated before. I know my room was light enough for between each of the double windows I had four lights.

I do not know whether the Imperial children are coming to Buda this summer, if they do I suppose we shall see a great deal of them. We shall probably stay there till towards autumn, and then may go to Carlsbad or Ischl or Petronell (near Pressburg), but probably not to Terebes—and I am glad as it is such an out of the way place, and letters are so often lost when we go there.

I have now heard that the "gentleman of the cotillon" is an artist here in Pesth and it seems from what I have since heard that I quite broke his heart! He used to walk up and down in front of the house for a day or two after that ball and went continually to the Protestant Church in hopes of seeing me, but I have not seen him since the ball, and though I may have broken his heart he has not, most fortunately, broken mine! Though I liked him very much as a partner. But he is not the only one here in Pesth that I have made a conquest of, there are several though you may not believe it; but I have nothing to say to any of them.

I wish I knew Mr. Stokes' method of teaching the science of memory so that I could stick things in Ilona's head. Do you know at all how the multiplication table can be learnt, I wish you could tell me for I cannot get her to remember even the twice times; she invariable answers "twice six are seven", and she is really so stupid over it.

I am afraid when the bonne Emma goes I shall have her entirely on my hands. I am sure she and little Duczi need a Kindsfrau to attend upon them, and I really cannot undertake the care of him as well as of his sister.

The Countess is to go to Vienna at the end of this week to buy furniture for the house and perhaps court dresses for the Coronation, for these ladies are all coming out as grand as princesses. It will be a most interesting sight; the King wears at the Coronation the old crown, mantle and boots of St. István (i.e. Stephen) who was the great Hungarian King and lived hundreds of years ago. (...)

Excerpt from Letters from Hungary 1864 to 1869
by Mary Elisabeth Stevens

time, a governess, a lady's companion, a language tutor and at times even the Countess's private secretary. In long letters home, she kept her mother and sister informed about all the goings-on, a mixture of glitter and banal irritation.

Mary Elizabeth Stevens's letters add little to our understanding of Hungarian politics in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Their value as a documentary source lies in the more precise light they are able to cast on the life, way of

thinking and tacit social relations (at times even the gossip) of Hungary's aristocracy, during the 1860s in particular. They allow the reader to see, through the eyes of an English governess, the everyday life of the family of Hungary's first prime minister as country and capital entered the boom years of development that followed the Compromise of 1867. This is rounded out by the sort of acute observations that could only come from a woman: about the role that aristocratic ladies played in public life (from charitable work to making public appearances, not least their own attitude to politics); the social norms to which they complied (e.g. the aristocracy's own pecking order); their educational principles; their customs in clothing and eating (e.g. hairdressing tips or views on the fashion for taking slimming cures); the kinds of leisure pursuits that were open to them. On reading the letters, one can imagine oneself among the crowds in the streets of Budapest as they celebrated Franz Joseph's coronation as King of Hungary (see excerpt on pp. 136–7); enter ballrooms; take part in tea-parties put on for the children of the aristocracy; take a seat in the theatre; accompany the Andrássys on trips to their country houses or to the celebrated spa at Carlsbad (Karlovy Vary); even take a peek into the private rooms of a family of the high aristocracy. Mary also devotes quite a lot of space to society beyond highly privileged circles, taking transparent delight in the information she is able to impart about the mores, dress, diet and festivities of peasants, or personally taking part in typically rural events like beating the bounds of a village, the celebration to mark bringing in the grape harvest, or a wedding feast, and she even has a go at learning the steps of Hungary's national dance, the *csárdás*.

There is no question that Mary was in an unusual position for, despite being a foreigner and employee, in some ways she was nevertheless able to come into closer contact with the Andrássy family than anyone else. Rather like a modern-day anthropologist, she was able to study her subjects as an outside observer but at the same time was privy as an insider to many intimate aspects of their life. Language was a barrier to her understanding of much of what was said in Hungarian, but she was all the sharper in noticing and recording their demeanour and their rituals.

Hitherto the only available document that is comparably forthright in the insight it gives into intimate relations and conduct within the Andrássy family pertained to the period around the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century in the shape of the memoir that was written in exile by Katalin (Catherine) Andrássy, a granddaughter of Gyula Andrássy. She married Count Mihály (Michael) Károlyi (1875–1955)—leftist first Prime Minister, and even more briefly, President of the Republic of Hungary when the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy fell apart at the end of the First World War—thereby earning herself the sobriquet of "the Red Countess."[4] Indeed, by juxtaposing the two books one can get a fairly good overall picture of the family, with Mary's letters telling about the great-

4 ■ *A Life Together. The Memoirs of Catherine Károlyi.* London: Allan and Unwin, 1966.

grandparents' and grandparents' generation from the perspective of the 1860s, and Catherine Károlyi's book about the fate of the generation born towards the end of the nineteenth century and their parents. There are some striking similarities in what the two sources disclose about the Andrássy family's mindset over the period in question. Quite irrespective of their very different social rank and nationality, and the very different positions that they occupied within the family, even at a distance of decades, the two ladies speak about virtually identical principles of upbringing and education, emotional attachments and family customs. It is equally interesting to compare the portraits that are presented of the characters—first as children, later as fully grown adults—of Mary's young charges, the Andrássy boys Gyula Junior (known as Duci or Chubby) and Tivadar, and their sister Ilona, with the latter cropping up with particular regularity.

Mary's letters tell us a great deal about the Andrássy and families related to them (the Karátsonyis, the Pejasevichs, the Szapárys and the Wenckheims), and they also reveal much of their author. What emerges from the letters is a picture of a deeply pious, prim and proper young woman who had received a good education and yet was often prone in her correspondence to let herself be guided by passing moods and her emotions to leap to hasty judgements about those with whom she came into contact. Romantically inclined by nature, she devoured the English and French literary works of the era. Likewise she showed an interesting ambivalence in her attitudes. Thus, while she was undeniably attracted to the comforts of an aristocratic life, the opportunities for entertaining and cultivating herself (attendance at social gatherings, elegant clothes, frequent visits to the theatre, piano lessons, etc.) that were offered by a financially secure life, she managed to remain aloof when considering the mores of the aristocracy. She was quite open with her own relatives about her disparagement of the lack of religious instruction given to the Andrássy children:

> The Countess thinks that children should not go to Church or be taught religion too early, lest it should weary them, but I am sure that is a bad plan. Earnest simple talks with a child about God's goodness and love, can never weary them. (22 May 1865)

She also took exception to how little time the parents were willing to devote to their children, and especially to their emotional upbringing, remarking disapprovingly that very little was expected of the scions of nobility in respect to their scholastic attainments but how no expense was spared when it was a matter of outward show (glittering soirées, banquets on the grand scale). At one point, she even lets fly at the English royal family when she gets news that a new grandchild has been born to Queen Victoria:

> I think really there ought to be a law against so many children being born for us, poor loyal subjects, to have to clothe and feed and give portions and estates to when they come of age—it is quite terrible. (27 November 1868)

Her knowledge of political and social conditions in Hungary was superficial indeed. Not knowing the language, she owed all she knew to those amongst

whom she lived or to English or French travelogues, perhaps to what she overheard at some social gathering. She repeated clichés entertained by the Hungarian upper classes, particularly in regard to the minorities, Croats or Slovaks, Gypsies or Jews. However, many of her prejudices were home-grown. She repeatedly included references to recent events related to the ever more acute Anglo–Irish conflict in letters written in Budapest. Many of her critical observations show her as an English young lady with a superiority complex, proud of the culture and achievements of her nation.

At the same time, one also comes across instances where personal experience may substantially mollify the harshness of a prejudice. On seeing the handsome exterior of the Dohány Street Synagogue in Budapest, Mary decided that she wanted to take part in an actual act of worship there, and without an escort at that (2 March 1865). Equally, it is important to note that her account is no more or no less accurate than the books that were published about Hungary around the time that Mary was writing her letters.[5]

The letters are best seen as a sort of diary, and indeed at one point she herself refers to them in those terms: "...now darlings I will give you a journal of all that happened after I left dear Mama" (4 May 1864). She very deliberately took on the task of keeping an unbroken record of all that befell her and those in her immediate environs. The moment her duties allowed, she would sit down and during the breathers, long or short, diligently write some lines to her mother and sister before returning to her chores. Rather than send a letter out immediately, it was not unusual for Mary, maybe out of thriftiness, to wait for a week or two to elapse before sending off a missive of ten or sixteen pages, though that meant that in many instances the same letter would bear two or three dates. One can read on the same sheet of paper, for example, about an event that happened one week previously and another that was happening at the very moment:

> She [Ilona] is beginning to twist about! Sleep child do, and leave me a little peace! There go those maids banging the doors, oh! I could pull their ears for them; hang their stupidity! (23 December 1867)

The tone of the letters suggests that Mary began to tire and was tormented by a growing homesickness after she had spent five years in Hungary. She finally took her leave in late March 1869. Following her return to England, she married in 1871 and soon devoted herself to raising her own five children.

No trace of Mary Elizabeth Stevens' stay in Hungary is to be found either in the Andrássy family's archives or in the social columns of the Hungarian newspapers of the day; any record of her seemed to have passed though the crude sieve of

5 ■ See, for example: Mrs. William Pitt Byrne, *Pictures of Hungarian Life, by the Author of Flemish Interiors.* London: Ridgway, 1869. Far more meticulous is: Arthur J. Patterson, *The Magyars: Their Country and Institutions,* 2 vols. London: Smith, 1869. For an assessment of the general image that the British had of Hungarians around that period, see: Tibor Frank, *Picturing Austria-Hungary. The British Perception of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1865–1870.* New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2005.

time. But then written records sometimes have an adventurous fate that is all their own. One of Mary's daughters, Margaret, decided that she would raise a memorial to the years her mother had spent in Hungary. It was she who found the correspondence in the attic of their home during the Second World War, read it, transcribed it, then made a typescript. She must often have faced a major struggle, because there are many passages where it is extremely hard to decipher the minuscule and, in places, blurred or faded handwriting. The job was finally completed by Mary's great-granddaughter, Katharine Armstrong, who had them published in the original English in 1999 (*Letters from Hungary 1864 to 1869. Written by Mary Elizabeth Stevens to her Mother and Sister.* London, DRP, 1999). By sheer good luck, a copy of the volume happened to come into the hands of Paul Odescalchi, a great-grandson of Gyula Andrássy, who lives in France, and he instantly took it upon himself to arrange for the publication of a Hungarian edition. As a result, Mary's letters also appeared in Hungarian in 2007 in Vera Bánki's translation, some 140 years after they were first written (*Levelek az Andrássy-házból, 1864–1869. Egy angol nevelőnő levelei* [Letters from the Andrássy Household: the Letters of an English Governess]. Budapest, General Press, 2007). This edition has copious footnotes to guide readers on the general history of the period, and Hungary's aristocracy in particular, as well as providing family trees for the more frequently mentioned persons and a full name index. The book also includes a selection of never previously published photographs now in the possession of the Stevens family and Prince Odescalchi. ❧

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Eugénie Odescalchi

A Princess Remembers*

Excerpts from a memoir

In the first moments of my life I was a disappointment to my parents—they had been expecting a boy. But my mother soon reconciled herself to having another daughter; after all, I did have an elder brother, the son and heir. I was my mother's fifth child.

I positively worshipped my brother Károly, two years my senior. Whatever he did or said, I approved of wholeheartedly, I complied with his every wish without a word. Károly was aware of his supremacy over me but he never exploited it. For many years we shared the same French governess, then a German governess—children from aristocratic families did not then attend state schools—but later on Károly had a Hungarian tutor to cram him full of learning. At times, tutoring my brother really was cramming rather than the imparting of knowledge, because truth to tell Károly was not overly fond of schoolbooks. He was more interested in the exploits of Winnetou. He had an active, fertile imagination and his thoughts tended to wander. And I was more interested in my dolls than in studying. A corner of my room was set aside for my collection.

In those days Pozsony [Bratislava, Slovakia] was a bustling town with a busy social life. Though it was somewhat quieter than Vienna, the old Hungarian coronation city still retained most of its former splendour.

Franz Joseph's cousin, the Archduke Frederic also chose to make Pozsony his family home, despite the fact that he owned a beautiful palace in Vienna. But they spent little time there, visited only on occasions when they had to attend an important court function.

Archduke Frederic's wife, the Princess Isabelle Croy, was the "Première Dame" of Pozsony, the mother of six children. Their long awaited son Albrecht, heir to the family's great fortune, was born after five girls. It was common knowledge that the Archduke Frederic was the wealthiest Habsburg. In part because most of his estates were in Hungary, but his Bohemian estates, with the famous butter factory in Teschen, also yielded a large income.

Many aristocratic families left their estates to spend the winter months in the former coronation city, as did many Austrian artists and scholars. Excellent concerts were held in the Redoute built for this very purpose; in my youth I attended many wonderful concerts there. (...)

* ■ Eugénie Odescalchi: *Egy hercegnő emlékezik*. Budapest: Gondolat, 1987.

Eugénie Odescalchi was born in 1898, in Szolcsány, into an aristocratic family of Italian origin which had settled in Hungary. In 1918 she married Baron Béla Lipthay, who was later known as a distinguished naturalist. The family spent the period between the two world wars on the Lipthay estate in Lovrin, in the Romanian Banat. During the Second World War they sold their estate and moved to Szécsény in the county of Nógrád. In 1944, when the fighting reached their estate, they gave refuge to three hundred people in their mansion. After the war ended, they lost their lands; later their mansion too was nationalised. Though the family were spared the forced relocations of the Rákosi era, the elderly couple lived in seclusion, in modest circumstances. In the beginning of the Eighties, the Princess decided to record her long life and memories, using her notes and fragments of her diaries. Her memoirs—by her own admission—were completed in 1983. She did not live to see their publication in 1987, as she died shortly after their completion in 1985.

Though she occasionally refers to important historical events, or the lives of other members of her family, she essentially writes about her own life. Eugénie Odescalchi never played an important role in public life, her recollections are significant from a social rather than a political-historical point of view. They provide an insight into a bygone set of values, into the everyday life and customs of a private, exclusive world and allow us to view it in a more nuanced way. From this aspect, the most interesting parts are those that bring to mind the early twentieth century, the "balmy days of peacetime". She recalls the most important events of her life and her, at times, drastically changing environment, for the most part in chronological order. Though she looks back on her past with obvious delight and at times with nostalgia, she obviously took care to guard against criticism in a climate when her class and its lifestyle was condemned, and more often than not, persecuted. ❧

I was six years old. My mother wanted to find playmates for me and Károly, so that the months spent in Pozsony would be happy and diverting. She soon learned that the Wenckheims, an amiable family with many children, would be coming there for the winter months as well. Soon after, she invited Count István Wenckheim and his wife Margit Pálffy to tea. They had six children. The two youngest—a boy and a girl—were the same age as us. Freddy was the same age as Károly, and Mária, nicknamed Baby, was a year older than me. So the parents agreed to hold the first children's party the following Sunday. It all centred around a tea party. Our governess gave us strict instructions on how to comport ourselves towards our guests, so we greeted them as well-behaved members of the household should. After tea, which differed greatly from the boring cocoa and buttered rolls we usually had, Károly invited Freddy into his room, where they built two fortresses in a jiffy. The boxes filled with soldiers were soon emptied and the battle commenced, the fortresses were besieged. Károly had no inkling then that some years later he would be fighting battles for real. (...)

We had many lessons besides religious instruction. Károly and I both spoke three languages already: I learned all my school subjects in German and French. Hungarian was for reading and writing only. Károly learned all his subjects in Hungarian; for him, German and French grammar were secondary subjects. We

kept to a very precise and strict timetable. But, to our delight, I was allowed to spend all my free time with my brother. In winter, in accordance with Károly's wishes and direction, our walks almost always ended at the station, because the fast train from Vienna arrived at four o'clock in the afternoon and watching it pull in brought us great pleasure. I can just imagine how bored our patient governess must have been with these walks—she was not a conventional sort of person, and deserves a special introduction: her name was Fräulein von Wendeler. We called her Mady. She was the one we loved the most. She meant more to us than a governess normally does, she did not only teach us, she was also our friend. (...)

Today it might seem strange, even grotesque that we were limited even in our choice of shops to frequent. In Vienna for example the aristocracy patronised the shops on the Kärntnerstrasse and the Graben. The shops along Mariahilferstrasse counted as third-class. The dream shop of our childhood was Mülhauser, the famous toyshop on Kärntnerstrasse. All our toys came from there. As far as toys were concerned we were very spoilt—to tell the truth, we were spoilt in many other respects as well. The best and most important frocks and gowns of my childhood and girlhood were all ordered from Vienna, from the then fashionable Fahrenhammerat firm. There were two famous pastry-shops in Vienna, both of them "superior" patisseries as one would say nowadays. We were allowed to frequent only one of these, Gerstner's, and not Demel's, for the latter was often visited by the gentlemen of Viennese society in the company of demi-mondaines. But we loved Mayer, our famous pastry-shop in Pozsony, even more than Gerstner. Some of its pastries and confectioneries far surpassed those of the Viennese patisserie and those of Gerbeaud's in Budapest.

The patisserie in Pozsony belonged to the patrician Mayer family. When Princess Isabelle held a ball or gave an evening party, she always had the pastries fetched from Mayer's. The rooms of the patisserie with their Biedermeier furniture had a cosy, pleasant atmosphere. Papa sent some pretty pieces of furniture from Szolcsány to furnish one of the salons. It is a pleasure to recall these names and memories, the intimate atmosphere of that *"gemütlich"* and patriarchal world. I was about eight years old when Princess Isabelle first invited me to the theatre. (...)

1910

That summer is memorable for me for other reasons as well. That was when my sister Nini married Zoltán Bánffy in Kolozsvár [Cluj, Romania]. My mother did everything she could to prevent the marriage, for Zoltán was a close relation of ours, my mother's cousin. But Nini stubbornly refused every other suitor, she would not hear of anyone else, only Zoltán. She had only one condition, and that was that her future husband should choose diplomacy as a career. Zoltán promised to do this and completed his studies brilliantly, "Sub Auspiciis Regis". He was immediately appointed to his first post as an attaché at the Imperial and Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna. After the wedding, from which

my father was conspicuously absent, the young couple travelled to Vienna, to Zoltán's first post.

At first I too disliked my brother-in-law, I could not forgive him for carrying off my beloved sister. But I could not resist his disarming kindness and charm for long. Thanks to him I travelled to many places, saw and learned a great deal, and for this I shall be eternally grateful to him. After the First World War he lost a substantial part of his fortune; after the Second, his estates were nationalised and he lost everything that was left, and of course his diplomatic career was cut short as well.

But we are still after the wedding, the excitements of which took a toll on my poor mother's heart. When we returned to Pozsony, Steinlechner, her doctor advised that she spend some months in a sanatorium. But what to do with me while she was there? Margit (Szapáry Henckel-Donnersmark), my aunt invited Károly to stay with her, so he moved to her palace. My mother decided to place me in a convent school for those few months, where they would prepare me for confirmation as well.

There were two convent schools to choose from, the Sacré Coeur in Pressbaum and the Convent of the Salesian Sisters in Vienna. My mother chose the latter, so I could stay in Vienna and thus be closer to her. The patroness of this convent was the Archduchess Maria Valeria, the youngest daughter of Franz Joseph, so it was to her that my mother turned for help, to exercise her influence on my behalf and have me admitted mid-term, which was rarely done at the time. The Archduchess made the request to the Mother Superior of the convent, who gave her permission forthwith. (...) In the convent school reports were handed out on the first Sunday of every month, and rosettes were then pinned on our shoulders, our marks determining the colour of the ribbons. White ribbons signified outstanding marks in every subject. Purple was for very good, green for satisfactory. I was sometimes given a white rosette, but most often purple, never green.

It was in this convent that I met a close relation of my future husband, a young girl whom my future mother-in-law sent there to be educated. She was an orphan, having lost both her parents—the Lázárs of Szárhegy—at a very early age. My mother-in-law was also a Countess Lázár of Szárhegy-Gyergyószentmiklós by birth. This family owned the oldest Renaissance palace in Transylvania, the only palace built on the flatlands, in Szárhegy.

Later, as a young wife at my mother-in-law's, the Lipthay mansion in Budapest, we once received the Archduke Albrecht. He was fond of a joke and was greatly amused even when he was made the butt of someone else's joke. We spoke of various families, among them the families of Transylvania, and it was mentioned that the Lázár family name does appear in the Almanac de Gotha, with the addition "Uradel", in other words, "ancient nobility", but the name of the first authentic ancestor is not recorded. To which my mother-in-law replied with a slightly derisive smile: "Oh, the Lázárs were already in their castle when the Habsburgs were still putting goats out to pasture in Switzerland." Albrecht had a good laugh over my mother-in-law's comment and recounted it to his mother, who, clever and witty woman that she was, at once retorted: "Maybe, but the Habsburgs made more of a mark in the world." (...)

1914

In spring we were preparing to go to Transylvania again, to the newly reforested Berecztelke, the denuded "mushroom castle". We stopped over for a few days in Kolozsvár. I was very happy: I had not seen the capital of Transylvania since I was a child. One morning we were given terrible news: the heir to the throne and his wife had been assassinated in Sarajevo. All my mother said was: "War will break out, mark my words, the world's been in a turmoil for some time. Károly has matriculated, I'm afraid he's going to take part in it." (...)

Shortly after this I accepted an invitation to a neighbouring castle, the home of Count Otto Bissingen. They welcomed me very kindly and insisted that I stay several weeks. The so-called "Marosmente" region was bustling, lively, the young people often got together. Two Imperial and Royal cavalry regiments were billeted in neighbouring villages, the Eleventh and the Thirteenth Hussars. They were resting, had lost a lot of men. The families in the region were trying to help them forget or at least to soften the impact of the terrible experiences of the past months.

Aunt Nora Bissingen was the chatelaine of Meggyesfalva, one of the most beautiful homes in the Marosmente region, and without a doubt she was the most hospitable of hostesses. The whole family was much liked by everyone in the region. Meggyesfalva was a beautiful home, everyone always had a good time there, not least because of the three young ladies of the house, the Countesses Nóra, Margit and Erzsébet, and their brother Antal. The mansion was multi-storied, a large, villa-like building with spacious mansard rooms which were fitted up for guests. Like most Transylvanian homes, it stood in over a hundred acres of parkland, on the banks of the river Maros, with excellent bathing facilities, and a large, well-kept tennis court. Tennis was the favourite sport of the entire Bissingen family. Beside the main building, there was another smaller, villa-like building also for guests.

My friends the Bissingen girls often spoke of the Hussar officers of their acquaintance who were stationed nearby. Two of my own relations were among them, two Counts Zichy. Pali was a closer relation; in my childhood I was often able to enjoy the artistic piano-playing of his grandfather, Géza Zichy. Uncle Géza had lost one of his arms in a hunting accident, but he did not give up playing the piano, in fact he brought his art to perfection. In his youth he was taught music by Franz Liszt, who was his tutor for many years in the castle at Láng. Listening to Uncle Géza play, no one would have known that only one hand was rippling over the keyboard. He was a highly gifted musician, unforgettable for me.

1917

The two Zichy boys often spoke of their cousin, Baron Béla Lipthay, who in their opinion was an extraordinary character, a fine figure of a man blessed with artistic talent, brave to the point of recklessness; he had already been decorated

several times. He was more or less engaged—so they said—to one of the most beautiful young girls in Hungary, the Countess Éva Teleki, but his mother, Margit Lipthay, disapproved of the marriage. (...)

One day Béla came over in the afternoon. In the morning during parade he had told his commanding officer and good friend Colonel Sztojanovics that he had become engaged to me, but that it was still a secret, the parents did not know about it yet. Sztojanovics congratulated him, and at the same time assured him of his good offices. Intimate, joyous days followed. Béla came over to us every day for a couple of hours. Our engagement was still a secret, as Béla was expecting a posting any day, but it was long in coming. One time he said he had Sztojanovics to thank for this reprieve.

Several liaisons were formed that summer on the banks of the Maros. Baron Pista Apor began to court Margit Bissingen, Count Hermann Salm courted Nora. All these courtships resulted in engagements, and in a year's time marriages, but sadly, after a number of years, in divorce.

I hastily made my engagement known to my mother and sister. I asked Nini to come to Meggyesfalva, because I could not travel to Berecztelke from there, there was no one to accompany me. The replies arrived by return of post. Mummy was worried that I had made my decision rashly, without due reflection. Nini came quickly. She met and spoke to Béla. She stopped worrying. Béla made a very good impression on her. Not only his appearance, but everything they had spoken about. We travelled to Berecztelke, the three of us, to visit my mother. She welcomed us affectionately. I noticed that Béla made a very good impression on her too. Béla asked for my hand in marriage and my mother gave us her blessing. My fiancé told his parents about our engagement.* (...)

1918

Béla's family's year of mourning would soon be over, our wedding day, November 30th was fast approaching, My mother-in-law had sad news to impart: she could not come to the wedding, nor could Maria. The Serbs were preparing to occupy the Banat. Only my brother-in-law Antal would be present. He had recently returned from a prisoner-of-war camp, he had been lucky and survived, as their camp was often visited by the Swedish Red Cross. My sister-in-law Zsófi also had to chuck, she was unable to leave her home. Her husband, Rudi Széchenyi did not dare come either. Gyöngyösapáti lies close to the Austrian frontier. All the Odescalchi relatives chucked as well. It was too dangerous to travel.

We had planned on having a big wedding, but in the end could count only on our relatives and acquaintances from Pozsony. Instead of an evening party, there

* ■ A touching reference to the couple by Patrick Leigh Fermor: "Another guest (at Ötvenes), a tall princess, married to an erudite landowner called Béla Lipthay, from Lovrin in the Banat, was a descendant (not direct, I hope) of Pope Innocent IX of the famous house of Odescalchi, lords of Bracciano." (*Between the Woods and the Water.* John Murray, London, 1986, p. 104.)

would be afternoon tea. Everybody would be hurrying home. We had wanted to hold our wedding reception in the banqueting hall of the Carlton Hotel, but the hotel was pillaged two days before the wedding, all the furnishings were destroyed. (...)

Today even sitting down to breakfast differs from the usual, because my mother graces us with her presence. The atmosphere is festive. A telegram comes from my father, his thoughts are with us. A deluge of congratulatory telegrams begin to arrive. After lunch a buffet is set up in the dining room, in readiness for the afternoon tea party. I stand amazed at the variety and amount of food on the table. Delicacies we have not seen for a long time. My father sent us game, venison and pheasant, which have been turned into excellent patés; he has also sent us a famous "Habsburg cake". When I look at the *bombe-Habsburg*, I remember everything that has recently happened. The Austrians have forced their emperor to abdicate, they have deposed the Habsburgs to whom the country owes so much. I tried not to think of all this on the eve of my wedding, as I was quite certain at the time that they would ceremoniously recall the emperor, because of course, or so I thought then, you simply could not imagine Vienna without an emperor.

We march out, the clergy walk ahead of us. The guests stand up. The vestry is full, we are surrounded by relatives, friends. My eyes are full of tears. I am young, yet I am feeling faint. Tenderly, carefully, Béla leads me out of the church. The autumn sun is shining, and there is silence, you cannot hear the gunfire. I sit beside Béla in the carriage. They are taking us to be photographed. Many photographs are taken.

Our carriage stops in front of Aunt Paula Oderndorff's palace; we alight, our guests are there waiting for us. I cannot see my mother. Don't worry—people say—she has been taken home, she was very tired. The banquet awaits us at home. The footmen serve champagne and fine wines. I cannot eat, can hardly swallow a mouthful, my heart is in my mouth, yet I am inexpressibly happy. Béla is sitting beside me, and I can barely choke back my tears. Toasts and congratulatory speeches are spoken. My ears are buzzing, I am smiling, but my eyes are brimming with tears. I am starting out towards a new, unfamiliar life. Béla grips my hand. This gives me strength. I can even laugh now, everyone is so kind to me.

The reception is over. We move into the salons, where they are serving coffee and liqueurs. My girlfriends surround me, I am all theirs now. I hold court until Aunt Paula signals that the carriage has arrived. It is time to leave. (...)

1945

On New Year's Day it is announced that the Russians have arrived. We have made preparations for this eventuality in the cellar. Almost everybody pretends to be asleep. Only Béla, Father Armand and the cellar commanders—Králik and Nemes, the teacher—and a number of other men stand bravely at the cellar door,

to welcome the arrivals. Suddenly the door of our bunker opens with a harsh grating sound and a confusion of deep male voices breaks the tense silence. The loud Russian words sound strange and frightening. (…)

1951

In the autumn it came to our knowledge that thirty families were being relocated from Szécsény, and that our names were on the list. We did not lose heart, we knew this was an absurd and unfair decree. It soon turned out that we were quite right to be hopeful: the president of the local council did not enforce the order in our case. (…)

The relocation act—as far as I can remember—came into effect in 1951. During those years our relatives and friends suffered severely. They were relocated to villages in the Great Plain. My sister, other relatives, among them Dániel Bánffy, the former Minister of Agriculture, with his wife and seven children. They had to live in a single room with an earth floor, all nine of them. The same happened to Dániel Bethlen and his children. The villagers were very good to them, they helped the unfortunate, afflicted families as much as they could and dared. The male members of these families, like my brother-in-law Antal, worked on small farms. They were relocated to the Great Plain at harvest time. Threshing had begun. Antal and Dániel Bethlen were hard at work on the threshing machines. As there were no elevators, the heavy sacks full of wheat had to be carried on their backs. Dani Bethlen sometimes carried two sacks on his shoulders so the work could go faster. But his back remained unbowed, so acquaintances who saw him later related. He must have inherited Prince Gabriel Bethlen's legendary strength and energy.

When tempers had cooled and spirits had lifted, a more normal way of life was resumed in Hungary. Ilona Bethlen wanted to visit her relatives in Transylvania. She applied for a passport. The official asked for her name. "Mrs Dániel Bethlen," she replied. "And your maiden name?" "Ilona Bethlen." "And your place of birth?" "Bethlen." "If you say the name Bethlen one more time," said the official, smiling, "you will not get a passport."

In 1953 forced relocation ended, and the relocated were permitted to leave their assigned domiciles. But many of them had nowhere to return to, as they had lost their own homes. ❧

Translated by Eszter Molnár

INTERVIEW

The Schubert in Wagner

Judit Rácz in Conversation with Adam Fischer

In 2007 the first two parts of the Ring Cycle—Das Rheingold *and* Die Walküre—*were put on at the Budapest Palace of Arts as part of the 2007 "Wagner in Budapest" Opera Festival (see* HQ *187). This year, between June 19th and 22nd, the entire cycle was mounted on four successive days, under conductor and artistic director Adam Fischer and Hartmut Schörghofer as director, and featuring an international cast. The production is described as semi-staged—something between a straight concert and a full-blown opera-house production.*

Dominating the stage was an enormous segmented screen which opened and closed and was projected onto; it provided a backdrop, at times transparent, at times a gloomy shadow, through which the cast could come and go. In front of it the singers in evening clothes acted out their parts; behind them, on an elevated stage, dancers would sometimes underscore or supplement the action beneath them. And finally this wall acted as a mirror or had real or computer-generated video images projected onto it. The staging incorporated various layers of realism along with stylisation, photorealism and video: a free interplay of devices that, although diverse, were interrelated. And why would that not be appropriate, given that Wagner's operas are largely built up of musical special effects? Video-art finds it easy to present the miraculous creatures and the visionary spectacle of the Wagnerian world. This was a production that, for once, did not strive to push a point didactically but set up and presented associations in modes that were both serious and playful.

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Judit Rácz: *How do you feel about this Wagner marathon? For me this production made the* Ring Cycle *approachable.*

Adam Fischer: Mounting a *Ring* is such a complex enterprise that we can only be grateful that there were no major organisational glitches, like one of the cast not being able to make it, or falling ill, or something going missing, or the lighting

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Judit Rácz,
a translator and journalist, was the Hungarian translator of Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years *and* Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years *by Alan Walker.*

Adam Fischer studied composition in Budapest and conducting in Vienna. In 1987 he was appointed Music Director of the Kassel Opera. In the same year he set up the Haydn Festival in Eisenstadt and founded the Austro-Hungarian Haydn Philharmonic whose artistic director he remains. Between 2001 and 2005 he was Music Director in Mannheim. He is Music Director of the Danish Radio Sinfonietta (since 1998), of the Magyar Radio Symphonic Orchestra (since 2006) and the Hungarian State Opera (since June 2007).

From 1980 he has been a guest conductor at the Staatsoper Vienna, conducting the Ring Cycle *amongst others. He has been guest conductor in many major opera houses including the Paris Opera, La Scala in Milan, the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in London and the Metropolitan in New York. As a symphonic conductor he has worked with the Vienna Philharmonic, the London and the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestras as well as the Chicago and Boston Symphony Orchestras. He was awarded the Grand Prix de Disque for his recordings of Goldmark's* Queen of Sheba *(Hungaroton) and Bartók's* Bluebeard's Castle *(CBS/Sony).*

He made his Bayreuth debut in 2001 and was named Conductor of the Year by Opernwelt. *For several seasons, he conducted* Parsifal *on the Green Hill, and his account of this opera at the "Wagner in Budapest" Opera Festival in 2006 was an enormous success.* ❧

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not working. The *Ring Cycle* is by far the most demanding work in the entire operatic literature. I was utterly convinced that this was how Wagner himself wanted it: to perform the whole cycle within the space of just four days. I am also convinced that the *Ring* is conceived as a unity, not four operas but one, and has to be performed with this in mind. Some incredible risks are entailed in doing it this way. The fact that everything worked with virtually split-second timing was a huge stroke of luck. But I don't want to kid ourselves, because problems will no doubt crop up in the future. Someone will go hoarse, we'll have to improvise. Wagner singers are a good deal more vulnerable than other singers: the slightest snuffle or sign of hoarseness and they are simply unable to go on stage.

Did all the main roles have proper covers?

The thing is that they didn't. Each opera house has its own way of handling such eventualities. The Americans always provide covers because of the sheer physical distance between opera houses there. That's not always the case in Europe, however. In our cycle we use two Siegfrieds, but they cannot substitute for one another as it is simply not possible for anyone to take on such a demanding role on successive evenings. Zurich Opera takes the line that it's best not to cover, because you can be sure that if you do, someone will become indisposed; if there is no cover, then people just do not fall ill. Well, of course people sometimes do fall ill, and they have had occasions when a makeshift arrangement had to be set up half an hour beforehand, with someone singing from the orchestra pit, or the side of the stage and the ill-disposed singer acting out the role on stage. That sort of thing has happened at Bayreuth as well. Evelyn Herlitzius lost her voice on the afternoon she was due to sing Brünnhilde in *Walküre,* and Judit Németh was not

able to step into the role in that production, so she sang it from the edge of the stage, using the vocal score.

You had a terribly short rehearsal period, just to add to the risk.

We had no chance to plan for safety measures of any sort, we did not have the money to pay for them, and anyway the singers did not have the time. We had to be very professional. We could not have taken it on at all had we not been able to base ourselves on earlier productions. I had conducted the *Ring Cycle* for years with Evelyn Herlitzius and Christian Franz, I had previously worked with them both through every bar of the love duet between Brünnhilde and Siegfried, so that passage, musically speaking, was fully fledged and there was no real need to rehearse it. Here we used Herlitzius for Sieglinde, too, with Stig Anderson singing Siegmund's part.

That's two of the cast. You also had two Wotans and two Brünnhildes.

Alan Titus was the Wotan of the Bayreuth production I conducted there, so there was no need for me to run through how we would work together. I had previously

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"Wagner in Budapest" Opera Festival 2008

A joint production of the Palace of Arts and Hungarian Radio

Artistic director and conductor:	**Adam Fischer**
Director, stage designer:	**Hartmut Schörghofer**
Dramaturg:	**Christian Martin Fuchs**
Choreography:	**Teresa Rotemberg** (*Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*)
	Gábor Vida (*Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*)
Costumes and puppets:	**Corinna Crome**
Light designer:	**Andreas Grüter**
Video:	**Momme Hinrichs, Torge Moller** (fettFilm)
Director's assistants:	**Katharina Kühnel** and **Golda Fischer**
Video assistant:	**Thomas Zengerle**

MR Symphonic Orchestra. Assistant conductor: **László Kovács**. Musical assistants: **Gábor Bartinai, Péter Oberfrank**

June 19, Thursday 18.00
Das Rheingold

Wotan	**Alan Titus**
Donner	**Oskar Hillebrandt**
Froh	**Attila Fekete**
Loge	**Christian Franz**
Alberich	**Hartmut Welker**
Mime	**Michael Roider**
Fasolt	**Jan-Hendrik Rootering**
Fafner	**Walter Fink**
Fricka	**Judit Németh**
Freia	**Anna Herczenik**
Erda	**Cornelia Kallisch**
Rhine-maidens:	
Woglinde	**Eszter Wierdl**
Wellgunde	**Katalin Gémes**
Flosshilde	**Erika Gál**

June 20, 16.00
Die Walküre

Siegmund	**Stig Andersen**
Hunding	**Walter Fink**
Wotan	**Juha Uusitalo**
Sieglinde	**Evelyn Hertlitzius**
Brünnhilde	**Susan Bullock**
Fricka	**Judit Németh**
Valkyries:	
Helmwige	**Gertrúd Wittinger**
Gerhilde	**Eszter Somogyi**
Ortlinde	**Mária Ardó**
Waltraute	**Gabriella Fodor**
Siegrune	**Éva Várhelyi**
Rossweisse	**Jutta Bokor**
Grimgerde	**Kornélia Bakos**
Schwertleite	**Annamária Kovács**

June 21, 16.00 (7 June)
Siegfried

Siegfried	**Christian Franz**
Mime	**Michael Roider**
The Wanderer (Wotan)	**Alan Titus**
Alberich	**Hartmut Welker**
Fafner	**Walter Fink**
Erda	**Cornelia Kallisch**
Brünnhilde	**Susan Bullock** (on 7th)
	Evelyn Herlitzius (on 21st)
Voice of the Wood Bird	**Gabi Gál**

June 22, 16.00 (14 June)
Götterdämmerung

Siegfried	**Stig Andersen**
Gunther	**Oskar Hillebrandt**
Hagen	**Matti Salminen**
Alberich	**Hartmut Welker**
Brünnhilde	**Susan Bullock**
Gutrune	**Erika Markovics**
Waltraute	**Cornelia Kallisch**
Norns:	
1st Norn	**Annamária Kovács**
2nd Norn	**Mária Temesi**
Rhine-maidens:	
Woglinde	**Mónika González**
Wellgunde	**Katalin Gémes**
Flosshilde	**Atala Schöck**

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conducted Juha Uusitalo as the Dutchman, so his voice was well-known to me. So the whole thing could only be brought together by lining up the work I had done in the past. That meant that I didn't have to spend so much rehearsal time on Act 3 of *Siegfried*.

Many of the singers you did know, but there were many you didn't.

I had not worked before with Susan Bullock, who was one of our Brünnhildes, and I had very little rehearsal time with her. But then she had already sung with the others. The fact that I have conducted many operas in the standard repertoire helped a lot. I have a good sense, for instance, of where singers need to breathe. I can sense how long they can hold their breath, because if a singer wishes to take a breath in the middle of a phrase, then I have to hold back just a little immediately beforehand to allow them to do so. If, on the other hand, they don't wish to do so, then I need to speed up to allow them to reach the end of the phrase. Or if I sense that the passion is rising a touch, then I will pick up the tempo just a fraction. When Susan Bullock took a step down the stairs towards the dead Siegfried it was crystal clear to me that she understood my thinking here, so I shaped the transitional passage with that feeling in mind: everything up till that point had been addressed by her to the world at large, and now the world had fallen away and she wanted to be left alone with her dead husband. Not a word had passed between us beforehand about any of this, still she immediately picked up that that was what I wanted and responded.

All the singers say that they were hanging on to your every beat.

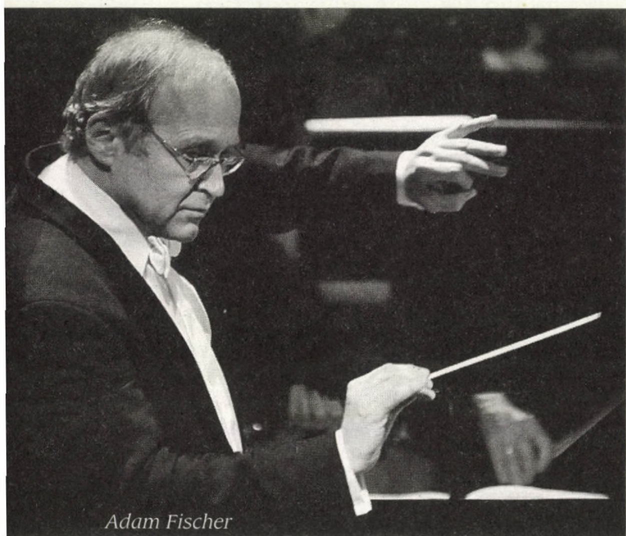
It would have been interesting if they hadn't! After all, nothing was arranged beforehand. It's one of the basic dilemmas for any conductor: Should I explain or should I show? If I had had to talk the singers beforehand through every one of the, let's say, forty thousand bars of the almost 16 hours of music in the *Ring,* we would have been at it for years. Feeling in tune with each other had to be a given. It's just not possible to rehearse for months on end. I don't say it with any malice, but I know there are some conductors who claim to be sticklers for perfection, which means they rehearse things to death! Ninety per cent of the reason for that is their inability to demonstrate what they want. Whether to show or tell was an argument that raged a long while ago within my family. There are two different approaches. I have no trouble in saying what I'm looking for in the case of, say, Haydn's 'Clock' Symphony, but you just can't do that in the *Ring.*

So am I to take it that you are happy now?

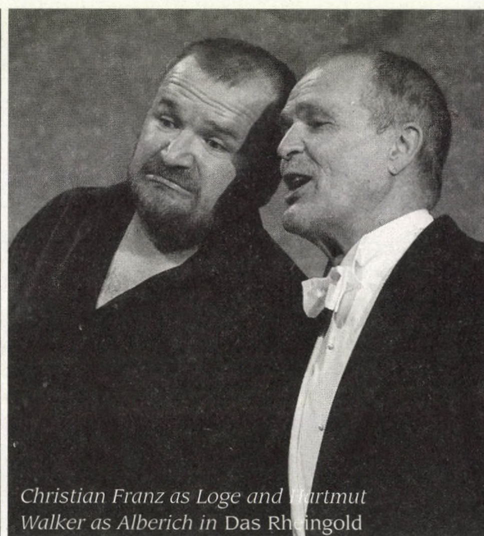
I felt that it was a great success. I've heard some talk about how one singer was better than another or a third, and how I was supposed to have had a good reason for deciding who sang and when, but the simple truth is that availability of singers depends on their contractual obligations. It is my job to let everybody know that, like it or not, mistakes are going to be made willy nilly. We would be foolish to think otherwise.

Was this year's Festival too successful your own good? I'm thinking of the future.

This time it was a success—and success means that 60–80 per cent of it came off well. It's rather like taking a penalty in football: there is no way I can guarantee that I'll slot home every penalty kick. What state of nerves a horn player will be in when he plays that particular solo passage? He did it well this time, but if he fluffs a note on some future occasion does that mean that the "Wagner in Budapest" Opera Festival should be abandoned? My dream is that a day will come when our own press will look on this in the same way as the local press in Salzburg or Vienna treat the Salzburg Festival, or the New York media treat performances at the Met, because for them even the best is not good enough. What I would like is



Adam Fischer



Christian Franz as Loge and Hartmut Walker as Alberich in Das Rheingold

for them to feel it natural, the most normal thing, that the best musicians in the world are active here in Hungary. And of course the Hungarian media are not the only factor in having international attention being paid to Hungary. I am working towards establishing something that will induce foreign singers and a foreign audience to come here. And foreign music critics, too.

The audience did come, by the busload.

Just as performances in Aix-en-Provence or Salzburg are not only attended by locals. Apparently, 40 per cent of audiences at some of the Budapest performances were visitors. We need to know what is being said abroad about the performances here. It's not the press that I work for, but we have to satisfy the expectations of both the press and the public.

Now that you have proved that the Ring Cycle *can be played on four consecutive days, would it be fair to say that this production is fully set and a four-day event is possible? Or is it always going to be risky?*

To some extent, always. Bayreuth has been doing it for 120 years and it is still always risky.

But there it is not done in four days.

Doing it in six days is no joke either. We are currently arguing over whether it should always be done in four days in Budapest, or whether to switch to six days. I don't wish to push either one or the other—they both have their advantages and their drawbacks. Four days is good for Germans, because the Lord's Day becomes a long weekend, and next year, as it happens, that falls right at the end of the scheduled dates, so visitors will have no trouble fitting in four days of Wagner, and therefore the foreign-tour operators say: "Let's do it that way!" That is how we will

The Rhine-maidens

do it in the next two years, they have already fixed their schedule. These things have to be planned ahead.

Quite a few of us had bones to pick with Götterdämmerung. *I am thinking of the scene which had a projection onto a white background of people in evening dress looking menacingly bored, furniture being pushed around and, finally, their red-haired hostess taking a vacuum cleaner to it all. It stuck out like a sore thumb and at the interval there were comments about how it couldn't have been the same director! The standard set by the first three parts was so high and the approach so different that there was a sense of disappointment at this incongruence.*

I intend to talk that over with the director, Hartmut Schörghofer. But bear in mind that most directors these days do transpose *Götterdämmerung* to the present day. What Schörghofer does, though, is small beer compared with some productions I have seen. There is a generation gap at work here too. I've already said as much in connection with the *Parsifal* we put on in 2006. There are things that

I instinctively reject, but I just have to accept that my son finds them dead cool.

Isn't this a passé modernity? The problem is not that it's ugly, that is a matter of taste, but that we are being forced to take a step back...

... to the German *Regietheater,* yes. But the poor director had just six months to prepare a completely new production. That everywhere normally takes three or four years.

For many the dancing was also fairly borderline.

At the outset I agreed that it was necessary. I didn't place enough trust in the music, and that was a big mistake, because it turned out that the music was at the

Michael Roider as Mime and Christian Franz as Siegfried in Act 2 of Siegfried

Alan Titus, the Wotan of Das Rheingold *and The Wanderer of* Siegfried

very heart of it after all. My hope was that if there was a dancer or a puppet on the stage, then that would distract the audience's attention and give me more freedom to slip in a new singer, for example, without upsetting the production. But with singers as good as this, who needs such props?

You were originally thinking of doing it with puppets.

Yes. Not that it's something I have any expertise in; I was more like a child who wants a bit of this and a bit of that too...

Why was the production referred to as being semi-staged? What was "semi" about it?

Nothing. There's no such thing as being half-pregnant. The sworn enemies of our attempt are most likely directors who are piqued because they see it as a direct threat. Ours is a twenty-first century production, with "disposable" elements that can be changed, allowing us to tailor the parts to specific individuals.

Do you expect this approach to refresh the way Wagner is performed?

I'm not looking to refresh the way Wagner is performed. I just want to show that it is possible to do it—with these theatrical devices and rehearsal time at our disposal and still serving the music. Our *Ring* was built on the acoustics and the visual opportunities offered by the Palace of Arts. The auditorium is a treasure acoustically speaking. It won't be easy to put on Wagner in the Budapest Opera House after this.

Presumably you are aiming your performances at the young.

Of course. Indeed, it was them we had in mind in the first place. If I scare them off the first time they come, they are not going to come back in a hurry!

You said in an interview that you had given the cycle "a totally different interpretation". In what sense?

Susan Bullock as Brünnhilde and Christian Franz as Siegfried in Act 3 of Siegfried

Matti Salminen as Hagen in Götterdämmerung

I was able to place human relationships and passions at its centre.

What lies at the centre of traditional performances?

The story has usually a bigger role to play. The acting space in the Palace of Arts is smaller, thus the characters on the stage appear larger. Here it is more important for two figures to show their love for each other than it is on a huge stage, in front of the prompter's box, with all sorts of other things going on all around. The proportions, the wonderfully intimate acoustics here allow a greater focus on the subtleties of the human drama. To be able to enter so intensely into the love scene between Siegmund and Sieglinde—I can't imagine that being possible on a bigger stage.

And the mythological is not lost either.

I agree, but one thing that many performances of Wagner operas lack is the Wagnerian chamber music. The vast orchestral sound is all you hear most of the time, but in fact the music is actually packed with Schubertian moments. It is

much easier to bring that out in this auditorium and within this approach. I was looking to bring out the Schubert in Wagner.

Some people scorn the spectacle; they reckon that one should only listen to opera from a recording, or if it's in a theatre, with their eyes shut. How much of the spectacle can be done without?

Precious little except of course for someone who knows the music very well and feels it very deeply. I personally don't need the spectacle any longer, but one of my worst experiences ever was of a live broadcast from Bayreuth when I was eight years old. I would like a performance to be such that it also gives great pleasure to those who choose not to look at the stage, where the staging is not needed to rescue the music. The music and staging should not be set against each other. What the staging has to do is present the music in a fuller, rounder light.

Composers never gave concert performances of their operas.

No, of course not. An opera is not conceived for performance on a concert platform. But I don't want to take away the pleasure from those who listen to opera in concert performances. They just should not suppose that it works for everyone.

To what degree are you affected by what is happening on the stage?

A great deal. And in this particular case I told Hartmut Schörghofer how I see what is happening emotionally in the *Ring,* and nothing he did clashed with that. If the spectacle, on the other hand is greatly at odds with the emotion I feel, there is a huge problem, because I cannot dissociate myself from the spectacle, on the other hand, I have to serve it. If I sense, for example, that Gutrune should be whimpering in fear because she suspects something has happened to her husband, but dares not ask aloud and simply whispers, whereas I see her rushing about in panic on stage, because that's how the director senses it, then I find it impossible to do my job as a conductor. There was nothing like that in the Budapest *Ring.* In a production of *The Flying Dutchman* that I conducted in Munich, there was an issue over whether the chorus were afraid of the Dutchman's ship or they were goading him, trying to provoke a reaction. My sense was that it was fear, the director took the opposite view, and one could justify either because the passage is marked *pianissimo.* Both he and I felt that it was not working, so we talked it over and managed to find an acceptable resolution in a few places.

Are such conflicts between director and conductor inevitable?

They needn't be. It's much the same sort of thing as in chamber music. A member of a string quartet should be able to make his will prevail but it may not mean that this will work as he intended. I need a partner, and it may be that one is continually arguing with that partner until something emerges. It's wrong to take up the position that I'm the conductor and I'll decide what should be happening. Well, one can try, but it's far from certain that the outcome will be any good. There

were many times when I had to step into pre-existing productions, and I felt I had gained something by being able to assimilate just a bit of what the director had visualised. There are times when that can be very difficult though. As a rule, one instinctively says no to a great many things, but it's better to make an effort to understand the view taken by someone else. If I conduct against the spirit of the direction, nothing good will come of it.

It could also be a question of stature and authority. Sometimes the conductor hardly gets a mention because the director's is just about the only name that comes up in connection with a production. Sometimes it is the other way round.

A director has to innovate; a conductor is reading a score. It's true that a score can be read in many different ways, but the audience is less likely to notice that. The press is always preoccupied with the production. We'll have to wait and see what happens with the Budapest Opera House's new *Fidelio* [Adam Fischer is scheduled to conduct, with Balázs Kovalik as director].

Will the success of the Ring *have an effect on how the Budapest Opera House will continue to function?*

I don't know. My hope is that we shall manage to turn *Fidelio* too into a success that makes it an event. This is another work where preconceived ideas have to be dismantled. For instance, what voices some parts are written for. There are two kinds of critics: you might call them the Beckmessers and the Hans Sachses. A Beckmesser just itemises all the specific mistakes, whereas a Sachs looks at whether the aim of a work was accomplished. *Fidelio* is one of the greatest musical masterpieces ever written, but Beethoven was congenitally unable to come to terms with hard realities, and he pays no heed to things like the capabilities of the human voice, acoustics—nothing! What I mean is that he does not compose as slickly for the singing voice as a Puccini or a Verdi does. But then that's not what the piece is about! *Fidelio* is an excruciatingly difficult symphony. To listen to it in the way one does to Verdi—that is the sort of Beckmesserism and preconception that I want to cut through. *Fidelio* is the most popular of all operas in the German-speaking world, whereas in Hungary it is seldom performed. Well, now it's time for everyone involved to learn! Beethoven is musically good enough for us to sing it well. *Fidelio* has an elemental force that no other piece in the repertoire has. That's what I want to demonstrate.

What part of the Budapest Ring *did you like best?*

The final pages of *Siegfried* definitely came off pretty well. Apart from that, there are two other scenes that always raise the hairs on my scalp: the one between Brünnhilde and Siegmund in *Walküre* and the one between Waltraute and Brünnhilde in *Götterdämmerung.* Time just has to stand still for them. ❧

Tibor Bárány

Rejected Fathers, Avowed Traditions

Zoltán András Bán: *Susánka és Selyempina* (Suzikins and Silkpuss). Budapest, Scolar Kiadó, 2007, 112 pp. • Zoltán András Bán: *Hölgyszonáta (*Ladies' Sonata). Budapest, Scolar Kiadó, 2008, 224 pp. • Balázs Szálinger: *A százegyedik év* (The Hundred and First Year). Budapest, Magvető Kiadó, 2008, 208 pp. • János Lackfi: *Halottnéző* (Mortuary). Budapest, Noran, 232 pp. • András Petőcz: *Arcok* (Faces). Budapest, Palatinus, 2008, 204 pp. • András Petőcz: *Idegenek. Harminc perccel a háború előtt* (Strangers: Thirty Minutes Before the War). Budapest, Palatinus, 2007, 244 pp.

Is contemporary Hungarian literature living through a golden age or will the first decade of our century later be seen as grey, uneventful years? Are we on an exciting road, connecting what preceded it with what is yet to come, or are we simply rolling along a boring detour? Can we in all conscience, to quote the title of a volume of short stories by Géza Ottlik, say that "it's all there"? The question is whether the current Hungarian literary market is a soundly structured market where consumers can locate products that match their tastes, or whether contemporary Hungarian literature has left readers to their own devices.

It is possible to argue for both cases. One might, perhaps, claim that maybe contemporary Hungarian literature has never been so kaleidoscopic, so richly diverse, never before have there been so many literary magazines, that Hungarian authors, even those of the second rank, are receiving serious attention abroad. Equally one might insist that readers simply do not perceive that diversity, because literature has lost its significance to society; the plethora of magazines is actually a sign of subsidised vegetating for want of a readership that is capable of sustaining it. There is effectively no competition between them that would be able to push standards up; while the front rank of Hungarian literature is indeed coming up with work of consistently high standard, it lacks the support of a reliable second (let alone third or fourth) echelon.

Those who lean to a golden age, however, have the more straightforward job. All they have to do is hold up a few recent works by writers who may not (as yet?) have attained the internationally acknowledged front rank but whom it would be well worth paying attention to—works by, say, Zoltán András Bán, Balázs Szálinger, János Lackfi and András Petőcz.

Born in 1954, Zoltán András Bán had been best known as a translator from German literature and one of the leading literary critics. He made a fairly late start in publishing his first novel only in 2007. In length *Suzikins and Silkpuss* is more of a novella, a philosophical romance of considerable narrative fantasy about an ironic, self-aware, self-reflexive subjectum, who, having reached manhood, spends rather a

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lot of time, perhaps more than he should, in the "amorous stage". To put that a little less cryptically: Bán's novella gives literary form to a bizarre and original philosophical concept, and does so without falling into the trap of merely illustrating the conjectures in question.

The story itself is fairly banal. Zsigó ('Siggi'), an ageing archivist of musical scores and occasional prompter, falls in love with a waitress—a love that is unrequited. The narrative structure is all the more involved. The real-life plot unfolds inside the protagonist's brain, with Zsigó's story being told by the "memory cells" of the "Brain Centre", while Brain Centre and the narrator of the text keep up a running commentary on the activity of the cells. That splitting of the unity of narrative voice, the accumulating paradoxes of the narrative, and the way the different fictional levels are projected onto one another enact the protagonist's melodramatic voyage of self-discovery as a kind of Hegelian or Kierkegaardian subject. The outcome is a highly entertaining yet extraordinarily provocative work that has recourse to the whole complex armoury of familiar narrative devices and tactics of "postmodern" fiction—a firework of modernist literary forms for a thoroughly classical nineteenth-century philosophical idea. To top it, the narrator of the story adopts the exquisite *fin-de-siècle* prose style of Gyula Krúdy so it is not hard to understand why the book was such a success with readers. The encounter of postmodern poetics and lavishly rolled out Krúdy-style sentences on the terrain of classic German (and Kierkegaardian) philosophy is gratifyingly perplexing.

Zoltán András Bán's second work, which appeared recently, is no less challenging. *Ladies' Sonata* contains three pieces: two shortish stories, "Letter to My Father" and "Lieutenant Kotányi", and the book's eponymous novella. The two pieces originally came out about eight years ago in a literary journal, well before *Suzikins and Silkpuss* in fact, when Bán gave up his work as a critic to embark on a career as a novelist (fortunately the break has not proved permanent). These have been quite extensively revised for inclusion in the present volume (Bán himself says that "Ladies' Sonata" is a "radically rewritten" version that "invalidates the novella previously published under that title.")

At first glance, this novella looks like a close relative of *Suzikins and Silkpuss.* Here too one is dealing with a complicated, divided narrative structure, with the Essence of Narration telling the story of Robert, the main protagonist, and it goes almost without saying that in the cathartic finale Robert duly recognises himself to be the Essence of Narration. A specific philosophical background likewise pertains, with the Essence of Narration frequently quoting the Philosopher (primarily René Descartes, and his writings on physiology, though sentences from Hume, Kant, Hegel and Wittgenstein, or paraphrases of their thoughts, also play a prominent part at one point or another). For all that, however, this is not a treatise in novelistic form; the narrative does not reflect the form of a philosophical train of thought but is a sketch of a disturbed personality. There is no attempt at any psychological realism, one should swiftly add: it is a matter of the splitting of the narrative unity and the accumulation of narrative paradoxes. This, along with the other devices, gives literary form to—rather than mapping—the functioning of a paranoid-schizophrenic personality. In fashioning what is happening to the protagonist, or more specifically in his brain, Bán—and the Essence of Narration—draws on the memoirs of a certain Daniel Paul Schreber, published in 1903 (Schreber's memoirs on his recovery from the second episode of his illness inspired Freud's famous 1911 essay on paranoia).

The provocative nature of this novella is not solely rooted in its use of a literary form in lieu of dispassionate description. The author's notes and the sleeve notes tell us "Ladies' Sonata" structurally follows a musical logic, with the work making frequent subtle references and allusions to various artefacts of high culture (Goethe's oeuvre, and above all his *Elective Affinities,* is in evidence throughout). All the same, the text is not informed by the refined eroticism one might expect; instead, the narrator adopts the crudest pornographic language (as in *Suzikins and Silkpuss,* where the reader can only look on dumbfounded, but with growing aesthetic approval, as pornography invades Krúdy's linguistic world). The plot concerns a concert appearance made by a female vocal trio in Vienna—the novella's finale is the concert itself. Before reaching that, though, we learn of the amatory and erotic tangles of the members of the trio and the menfolk and children who are associated with them—or rather the manner in which they crop up in Robert's erotically and philosophically overheated mind (imagination)?

"Lieutenant Kotányi" is a good deal less provocative than either "Ladies' Sonata" or *Suzikins and Silkpuss.* Little over thirty pages long, it is a neat homage to Kleist. Lieutenant Kotányi returns to Budapest at the end of October 1956, not long after the outbreak of the Hungarian revolution, from which point on events succeed each other at breakneck pace. We learn from the first sentence of the short story, Kleistian in its length, that the lieutenant surprises his wife *in flagranti* with one of his superior officers, whom he immediately shoots dead, after which another day and a half passes until fate catches up with Lieutenant Kotányi. Not that the day and a half passes without incident, with the revolution roaring ahead at high momentum (although all that the Lieutenant and his wife apprehend of it is that their lives are at risk from riffraff who are at loose in the city). Kotányi's older, fatherlike, friend and superior takes his own life, and he is forced to the realisation that everything that is happening to him is "the culmination of the total incomprehensibility of a life spent bereft and at the beck and call of strangers, at once a punishment and deliverance, or in point of fact: total liberation."

"Letter to My Father", unlike the other two pieces in the volume, did not appear previously as no magazine at the time was willing to publish it. Presumably that was out of an exaggerated respect for authority, since the piece is a harshly defiant, merciless and sarcastic dismissal of the Father—a Father who bears the unmistakable imprint of Imre Kertész. All the same, it is not a case of a simply devastating, iconoclastic parody. What the short story seeks to portray is the attempt (invariably condemned to partial failure) that writers make to detach themselves from their literary Fathers, to repudiate their oppressive cultural and literary heritage, but find they are nevertheless still obliged to speak in the same language as the Fathers. Contrary to appearances, the protagonist and narrator of "Letter to My Father" both disconcerts and dazzles the reader by discoursing in a language that is, at one and the same time, both savagely derisive and reverent. (One might add that Bán's literary provocation has succeeded brilliantly, the German translation of the short story has so far failed to find a publisher.)

A good deal younger than Bán (born in 1978), Balázs Szálinger launched out similarly powerfully. In an Addendum to *Zalai Passió* (The Passion of Zala), a mock-epic or epic parody in hexameters that was originally published in 2000, he rejected rather brusquely (though presented in what, poetically speaking, are fairly sophisticated terms) the "well-meant fatherly advice" that Ottó Orbán, a more senior Hungarian poet, had given to Dániel Varró, one of Szálinger's contemporaries, at the end of the Nineties:

"Time will tell what becomes of the adult you: / a poet or a slick master-rhymester". Szálinger's proud but impertinent riposte made it clear that a young poet has no need of the protective cares of literary Fathers, and he simply repudiated any suggestion that he might be "a slick master-rhymester".

The Hundred and First Year contains three epic poems: the above-mentioned "Passion of Zala"; a "poem about human nature" that first appeared in 2005 under the title *A sík* (The Plain); and the "poetry novel", or "lyric pamphlet", as the author terms it, that supplies the title for the whole volume. Szálinger's gesture might seem odd at first sight: why would anyone, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, write a regular mock-heroic, a narrative poem or a poetry novel? What implications does the genre chosen have for the author's stance towards literature? Might Orbán and others be right in thinking that young writers truly see the resuscitating of a relationship to our neglected literary historical traditions as being a task, serious but playful, for contemporary literature, and for them a kind of formal virtuosity is tantamount to the attainment of poetic mastery?

The answer to that is both a resounding "Yes" and a resounding "No!". Yes, inasmuch as the three epic poems are composed with dazzling technical virtuosity: "The Passion of Zala" is an out-and-out mock-heroic poem (a worthy counterpart to Sándor Petőfi's 1844 masterpiece, "The Hammer of the Village") in which the poet raises a monument to the never-existent heroic tradition of "the people of Zala"; "The Plain" is a regular *"poème d'humanité"* (a worthy counterpart to Imre Madách's 1862 verse play *The Tragedy of Man* in which God and the Devil put man to the test, with the plot steering one all the way through human history; "The Hundred and First Year" is a novel in verse echoing László Arany's 1872 *A délibábok hőse* ("The Hero of the Mirages") in which the poet, in relating the rise and painful fall of the political career of a young official, paints a depressing picture of the state of present-day Hungarian public life. The conventions that are called on work perfectly here, with the epic apparatus being entirely fitting and the versification immaculate; there is no hint of irony about the genre, or any expectations readers may have of it.

The resort to these conventions is no mere virtuosity. Szálinger's poetic gesture indicates that a literary historical continuity may be constructed between the nineteenth-century tradition of epic poetry and today's literature, and that continuity is not created by the works per se but by their readers: Balázs Szálinger works with the popular image of poetry in the best possible sense of that term. It is his conjecture that poetry has again become common ground, not an esoteric venture on the part of a small band of adepts, and hence much greater emphasis is placed on a poet's confidence and the personal relationship between poet and public, indeed, on poetic competition, rather than on poetry's metaphysical weight, its "seriousness". Not that poetry is being "hollowed out": however many times one may reread Szálinger's superb poem, one always finds different, only passingly reassuring answers to the questions that it poses (Lucifer's famous lines from *The Tragedy of Man* might well serve as an epigraph for this work as well: *"Free-will and fate in mutual pursuit: / it lacks all harmony, all sense of meaning."* Translation by George Szirtes). It was a brilliant idea to publish these three works by Szálinger together, enabling the reader to take in three very different aspects of the same concept of poetry.

János Lackfi, born in 1971, earlier made his name as a poet. The narrator of his second novel is not someone who is suffering from the presence of an overbearing Father but from the lack of a Father. *Mortuary* is a novel about the loss of

a father, with every little detail pointing to the suicide that the narrator's father commits in the closing pages of the book (the very last word of the book is "Father").

The narrative voice is that of a teenage boy in the early 1980s. He speaks about his family, his life in and outside school, his attachments, the strange grown-ups around him, about an adolescence with its full share of high spirits and anguish. It is not long, though, before it becomes plain that the narrative perspective is complex; at some points the boy relating events directly after they have happened dominates and at others, the adult's recollections as he looks back on events (a process he sometimes appears incapable of controlling). In addition, the change in perspective generally takes place within the space of a single sentence, with the narrator suddenly saying something that is unexplicable if linked to twelve- or thirteen-year-old Johnny, or at least would not tally with his language or narrative stance. In a highly colloquial text, funny and captivating through the rendering of the vernacular and story-telling techniques of adolescent boys, a host of fantastic, even grotesque poetic images are unexpectedly let loose. Furthermore, Johnny is more than happy to hand over to others: in following the train of thought of a narrator who is impossible to place one may find oneself at times in the thick of a chapter of a (presumably non-existent) boy's adventure story, a Soviet war novel, a slushy historical novel, or a novel about redskins, whereas at other times the strange adults around the boy monopolise the text. Indeed, there are times when the narrator seems deliberately to be letting his earlier self do the talking: the sixth of the book's thirteen chapters contains three of Johnny's letters (admittedly the narrator also discloses that these are letters in German, French and Hungarian that were never written, let alone sent), while in Chapter 10 the reader is given a glimpse of the boy's diary.

If such a thing as an unputdownable piece of writing exists, then *Mortuary* is probably one. The chapters are short and, without exception, hilariously entertaining. The deliberate lack of clarity about the narrator's position and the choices of perspective and voice lead us effortlessly to the conclusion. By the time the reader has reached the last chapter it is abundantly clear that the re-creation of the idiom of the teenage Johnny and the process of recollection have been serving just one purpose: that of working through the trauma that the father's death meant to the adolescent. It is not for nothing that young Johnny mentions so often that most of the girls in the neighbourhood have no daddy; nor is it pure chance that the emblematic scene of family bliss is the description of a big family row (when the father becomes embittered enough to threaten to do away with himself); and it is no coincidence that so much is said, directly or indirectly, about identity, about "constructing" or "making" ourselves. The narrator's boyhood reaches its end on *Mortuary*'s closing pages: the anguish that had been the boy's everyday experience loses any sense when it turns out that a mysterious Man-in-the-Hat who crops up at several points in the course of the novel is just a door-to-door knife grinder. The Man-in-the-Hat and the father together leave the childhood world which is by then no longer a childhood world.

András Petőcz was born in Budapest in 1959 and was best known for his poetry before turning to fiction; at first glance his work seems much sparer than that of the three other writers under review. *Faces* consists of eighteen short stories, each little more than a few pages long and each in the form of a first-person monologue. The faces presented in the stories bear no resemblance to one another: they include someone working in Hong Kong for an American multinational, a homeless Parisian who has come down in the world,

a middle-aged female civil servant, a young Congolese man, a tourist on summer holiday in Andalusia, a ninety-five-year-old Hungarian woman, a San Franciscan cop on sick leave, a citizen of Lucerne. Yet, although the lives of the protagonists are totally different, *Faces* as a whole has a surprising unity.

All the stories deal with having to face a perpetual sense of strangeness, foreignness, alienation. Petőcz's characters move around in a mystifying and frightening world. There is no way of escaping a sense of strangeness; the protagonist of the title-story is a young American working for a big multinational company which suddenly transfers him to its Hong Kong office; once there, he sees exactly the same faces on the underground trains and comes up against exactly the same stories from those he meets in the streets as he had done in America: "Somehow all so strange" the story finishes.

And yet the protagonist of the first story finds himself in a better situation than do those in the stories to come. In one, a young man has left his native Congolese village to commence a new life, but he hasn't the slightest idea what awaits him and why he has to shuck off his earlier life. ("I'm under way. I don't know, and have no way of knowing, where I will get to.") The narrator of "The Message", after a protracted wait, is summoned by the mysterious Lady of Kafka's Castle, the path leading to which is bordered by carnivorous plants. The ninety-eight-year-old who features in the final story is waiting in Madagascar for her life to be snuffed out because her name has been placed on a list that is compiled by officials who work in the Centre: "I understand and I accept that this is what has to happen. After all, there has to be some kind of selection," she says resignedly, and in the meantime the Madagascan chameleons, for some unknown reason, are destroying each other.

The strangeness of the world in Petőcz's stories is never-ending. Even the few characters who manage to make themselves feel more or less comfortable with their lives, still have to confront the darkest secret of all: death. "However much I tried to acquaint myself with death, though, I did not get to know it inside out," the faithful and talented young disciple of an enigmatic Indian Master admits. In these fictions, death ultimately becomes a metaphor for the insuperable strangeness of the world, wherever the story is set, in an exotic backdrop or in the drabness of the big city. These short fictions put the reader in mind of Kafka, Borges, Poe, Ambrose Bierce or, for that matter, Géza Csáth, the short-lived, early twentieth-century Hungarian writer. The settings for Petőcz's stories, the background or biography of his characters, are variations on the overall human condition. For Petőcz, the short-story universe boils down to treating a single experience of life and in this sense his is a conservative gesture. Come to think of it, Petőcz is no less provokative than Bán, Szálinger or Lackfi.

"If I had a father, I would love my father a lot," says the young girl who is the first-person narrator of András Petőcz's most recent novel. *Strangers* is a further variation on the poetic model of the short stories of *Faces*. Although the novel came out a year before the short-story collection, reviewing the two in the reverse order can be justified, since it is easier to appreciate how the larger structure works by starting out from those of the stories.

In *Strangers* an eight-year-old girl arrives with her mother at an unspecified point in time at an unnamed small town in a country that is never closely identified, though one imagines it may be somewhere in the Caucasus in the early twenty-first century. It is a world populated by foreigners and strangers. The soldiers who are occupying the town, the multi-ethnic refugees who cram into the town, and the "barbarians" who are engaged on a series of terrorist explosions—all are strangers (the pen-

ultimate scene is a description of a horrifically savage siege redolent of the Beslan school hostage crisis in September 2004). Then there are the many distinctly odd characters who play a part in the plot: a parish priest spouting about the need to have respect for one another; the Thin Girl who is hiding in the house opposite the rectory (she eventually starves to death); a mysterious pianist who plays 'Für Elise' over and over again; a teacher who represents the aggressive oppressor power; or the grandmother of the heroine's best friend, Amélie, and her constant fear of "barbarian" attacks.

The fate of the girl is a parable of insuperable foreignness: on arriving at the town, she is given a new name and a new identity, but not for one moment does she accept that as her own identity. Her existential, emotional and sexual exploitation becomes ever more intolerable by the minute. While there is no marked change in either the style of the narrative or the pace of the story: Anna uses the same stark, clipped sentences, whether she is relating the humiliating and incomprehensible treatment she experiences at school, or the adventures that befall her on her secretive visits to the pianist's home, or in the cellar of Amélie's house, or whether she is relating her account of being raped, the death of her mother, or the drama of the school siege. This is the same tone as that employed in the short stories of *Faces.* It is a tone that is able to depict an individual's sense of strangeness stretched to the limits of the absurd and monstrosities committed against humans as perfectly *natural* phenomena.

There is however one aspect in which *Strangers* does differ from the short stories of *Faces.* The unnumbered introductory passage of the novel (itself three numbered chapters) ingeniously overwrites the deliberately open ending of the book (the girl heroine escapes via an underground tunnel "thirty minutes before the war", as the subtitle informs us, though we are not told directly whether she manages to survive this adventure). The few pages of this "prologue", however, have already outlined an episode taking place some fifteen years on from what follows, so we know that the girl did survive and did escape from the horrific place where she passed her childhood. No explanation is offered as to why, in that case, she is relating, in a sort of near-final, flashing-before-the-eyes moment of the escape, the whole year and a half or two years that have preceded. That uncertainty subtly implanted about the vantage point from which the narrator is speaking can only have one purpose: to make clear to the reader that the narrator is just as much a stranger in the textual world that she has created as the protagonist is in the horrific and enigmatic setting of that small town in the Caucasus.

While Zoltán András Bán's and Balázs Szálinger's narrators, as we have seen, have to contend with the presence of an overbearing Father, János Lackfi's and András Petőcz's works both place the spotlight on the lack of the Father. However, whereas that absence is presented by Lackfi as a traumatic experience, in Petőcz's novel it is a metaphor for the sheer foreignness, the extrinsicality, of the world. It is up to us of course which of the models for a father figure we choose, the rejected one or the missing one, though the mere fact that one has a choice is testimony to the rude health and fascinating diversity of contemporary Hungarian literature. ❧

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Ted Hughes: Hungarian Connections

Letters of Ted Hughes, Selected and edited by Christopher Reid, London, Faber and Faber, 2007, 756 pp.

Ted Hughes: Selected Translations, edited by Daniel Weissbort, London, Faber and Faber, 2006, 232 pp.

Ted Hughes was probably the most important English poet of the second half of the twentieth century. Though he was not awarded the Nobel Prize (which went to poets whose work was more accessible), his verse collection *Birthday Letters* (1998) became an unexpected best-seller on both sides of the Atlantic. During the past two years his publishers Faber & Faber have brought out two collections of his writings which help towards a better understanding of Hughes's poetry. The Poet Laureate remained a powerful lyrical voice to his death, and these present selections of his letters as well as (published and unpublished) translations show the wide range of his interests and the intensity of his diverse preoccupations. Hughes was a voracious reader interested in history, travelling, fishing, Tarot cards and astrology, not necessarily in that order.

Christopher Reid, Hughes's editor at Faber & Faber, had a formidable task in selecting the letters, and within the constraints of his project did as good a job as possible. As he says in the introduction, many more letters to and from Ted Hughes have survived and three volumes could have been published instead of the present (fairly voluminous) one. Reid's selection, with a separate explanatory note after each letter, probably contains Hughes's most important letters from 1947 to the poet's death in 1998. Hughes came from a Yorkshire family and his father was a carpenter; though he went to a state school, he won a place in 1951 at the University of Cambridge. Already the letters from the 1950s contain some surprises: who would have thought that this by and large apolitical Englishman would have wanted to live in 'cheaper' Hungary in early 1956, or that for years he entertained the idea of emigrating to Australia? It was meeting Sylvia Plath in 1956 that at last dissuaded Hughes from leaving England for the Southern Hemisphere. While his brother Gerard's emigration to Australia some years earlier could have acted as a magnet for him, a place in post-war Cambridge should have been enough for most young men of Hughes's age to give up the idea of emigrating forever.

In a letter to his sister Olwyn, who at the time was living in Paris, Hughes reports his meeting with Plath, a few months after the

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event: "I met a first-rate American poetess." (p. 39) What he omits here is "with whom I have fallen in love". At any rate, soon afterwards Hughes and Sylvia married and moved into a dingy, dark Cambridge bed-sit in 55 Eltisley Avenue, later immortalised in a poem by Hughes.[1] In Reid's collection there is just one letter from this address sent to Hughes's friend and old flatmate Lucas Myers. The name of Myers should be noted by Hungarian readers—in 1956, it was he who tried to interest Hughes in the poetry of Attila József. Myers later married a Hungarian violinist with whom he settled down in California.[2]

It seems that at one point Hughes was genuinely interested in reading and possibly translating József. He wrote to Myers in early 1956: "I am as interested in the Attila enterprise as you are" (p. 34). Although this interest never materialised in the form of his own translations, later, on more than one occasion, he praised Myers's versions. This early interest in modern Hungarian poetry reappeared a decade later, when Hughes with Daniel Weissbort decided to launch the magazine *Modern Poetry in Translation* in which they promoted several Hungarian poets. By this time the marriage with Sylvia Plath was over (after separating from Hughes, Plath committed suicide in February 1963). One can surmise that Hughes's association with his new partner, the translator Assia Wevill (née Gutmann), was one of the reasons which made the poet seriously interested not only in translating but also in publishing translations. (Earlier he did a number of 'draft' versions of poems by Paul Éluard and finished some versions of two Portuguese poets, but those were to remain unpublished). Wevill and Hughes translated the poems of the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai from 1964/65 onwards.[3] Though *Modern Poetry in Translation* was launched in 1965, it was only two years later that the Hungarian poet János Pilinszky first visited London and the idea of the "Pilinszky project" was born.

This was, however, preceded by Hughes's 'discovery' of another Hungarian, Ferenc Juhász, who in the 1950s wrote a number of long 'neo-Romantic' poems against a background of folk-tales and national myths. In this he imitated Béla Bartók on whose composition *Cantata profana* Juhász based "The Boy Changed into a Stag Cries Out at the Gate of Secrets". The English translation of this long poem by the Canadian poet Kenneth McRobbie in the anthology *The Plough and the Pen* (1963), edited by Ilona Duczynska and Karoly (Karl) Polanyi, convinced W. H. Auden that he had come across a masterpiece. Ted Hughes, while probably sharing this view, was not quite happy with McRobbie's translation, so he tried a version of his own. What made this enterprise somewhat problematic was the fact that Hughes knew no Hungarian and yet volunteered to retranslate the poem without any reference to the original text. In fact, when preparing the very first issue of *Modern Poetry in Translation,* he stated in a letter: "I'd like to make one of the early issues on Ferenc Juhasz—the Hungarian" (p. 232). Plans for the Hungarian issue were "indefinitely postponed"[4], Hughes's translation remained unpublished until 2003. In a sense, the 'Pilinszky project' made Hughes forget about Juhász; instead he concentrated on translating a poet who was intellectually

1 ■ Not knowing about the Hughes–Plath connection, I bought that property and converted it back into a house in 1970—I lived in it until 1978, and my remarried ex-wife until her death in 2006.

2 ■ Some of Myers's translations of Attila József were published in 1989 by the *New Hungarian Quarterly*.

3 ■ Amichai's *Selected Poems* were first published by Cape Goliard in Guttman's and Hughes's translations in 1968.

4 ■ Ted Hughes, *Selected Translations,* p. 24.

much closer to him than the more effusive Hungarian of peasant origin.

János Pilinszky (1921–1980),[5] who could be described as a Christian Existentialist, spoke French but only rudimentary English. In order to translate him Hughes needed an intermediary, or more correctly, a co-translator. With Olwyn's help Hughes chose János Csokits for that role, a Hungarian émigré poet living in Paris. The truth is (and this part of the story, unfortunately, is not told by Weissbort) that Hughes had heard about Pilinszky long before co-operating with Csokits, so he was not the only one who got him interested in translating the poet of "The Desert of Love". A number of us, post-1956 Hungarian émigrés in England, tried to convince the editors of *MPT* of Pilinszky's excellence, and if I remember correctly, I happened to be the first one to publish a short essay on him and a few English translations of his poems, which Weissbort (and most likely Hughes) also read.[6] Another translator, Peter Siklós also provided some rough or not so rough versions to *MPT* before Csokits took over when he moved to London.

Hughes, by the way, had a rather poor opinion of most Hungarians who were advising him or trying to influence editorial policies of *Modern Poetry in Translation*. In a letter to Hana and Yehuda Amichai, dated late 1967, he is close to despair on that issue: "At present, the translation magazine is trying to muster an issue of Hungarian poetry, but the Hungarians are still tribal-Goths, Huns, Ostrogoths, one against the other in a totally murderous state of mind" (p. 277). It is hard to tell which category applied to me—was I a Hun or a Goth? Also I can't remember whether I was actually planning to murder Csokits, Weissbort or Hughes. In view of this climate though, one can understand Hughes's relief when he settled down to working with Csokits, who could have well been an Ostrogoth, but he did have his sister Olwyn's support and recommendation. It is also true that his draft versions of Pilinszky prepared for Hughes were by and large accurate, and as a poet himself, he was able to elucidate some moot points in Pilinszky's extremely sparse, almost mysteriously laconic poems.

On the other hand, though Hughes praised him on several occasions, Csokits did not entirely fulfil Hughes's expectations. This one can gauge from a letter dated 28th of May 1974 in which the English poet addresses twelve questions concerning Pilinszky to János Csokits. We don't know how many of these were later answered, but the editor's note after this letter makes the following claim: "In the event, Csokits felt unable to supply answers to TH's questions, being reluctant to approach Pilinszky himself, who was *under the constant watch of censors and informers at home in Hungary*" (p. 351). I italicised the second part of the sentence which, I am afraid, indicates only Csokits's extreme shyness and/or fairly advanced mania of persecution. To my best knowledge the post-1956 Communist State always regarded Pilinszky as a harmless and totally apolitical poet who was able to get a passport (i.e. an exit visa) every time he was invited to foreign festivals. He was also quite accessible and expressed his views frankly on all subjects, as demonstrated in an interview which he gave to the Hungarian section of the BBC as early as August 1967!

The Hughes–Csokits correspondence was, by the way, published in its entirety in Hungary some years ago. The present collection only contains six letters to Csokits, which are badly indexed at the end of the book. Indeed, others too are poorly indexed—the names of Herbert, Holub and

5 ■ For new translations of János Pilinszky's poems see pp. 15–17 of this issue.
6 ■ This was published in a short-lived American review: *The Hungarian Quarterly,* 5 (1965), pp. 43–47.

even Charles Newman are missing, though from a number of letters we learn about Hughes's interest in other East European poets apart from Pilinszky and also of his association with Newman, for some years editor of the prestigious American journal *Tri-Quarterly,* and also, for a time, English language editor of *The New Hungarian Quarterly*. It is interesting to note that apart from Juhász and Pilinszky Hughes translated only one other East European poet, the Romanian Marian Sorescu. Here again he needed somebody for the draft version and he found her in Sorescu's English friend Joanna Russel-Gebett.[7] Nevertheless, while he translated just three poems of Sorescu's for an anthology, in 1976 he presented Carcanet with a whole collection of Pilinszky's, i.e. *Selected Poems*, which was also published in a revised edition as *The Desert of Love* in 1989. It's a pity that we don't know how Hughes reacted to Pilinszky's death in 1980—if there is a letter extant about that, Reid should have included it in his selection.

I have dwelled extensively on Ted Hughes's Hungarian connections, but the Reid selection also contains many other letters of importance—one in particular reproaching the critic Al Alvarez for his interpretation of Plath's suicide. Some years later, Hughes's second partner Assia Wevill also committed suicide. In 1970, however, Hughes married Carol Orchard and lived happily with her for nearly thirty years, often visiting foreign countries, amongst them Persia, Iceland and Alaska. In a letter to his son Nicholas (written in 1986) Hughes reminisces about the years he spent in the United States soon after he and Sylvia married. From this long letter one can sense his sorrow over lost opportunities—he was just too young and inexperienced, interested only in writing and not in the vast and 'fantastic' land to be explored. Hughes makes an amazing confession here: "My three years in America disappeared like a Rip Van Winkle snooze" (p. 512).

It transpires from the *Selected Translations* that Ted Hughes translated no less than 24 foreign poets. Not all the translations are lyrical verse—Weissbort's selection includes excerpts from plays as well: by Lorca, Racine, Euripides, Aeschylus and Seneca. Hughes's great interest in antiquity is indicated not only by his working on these playwrights, but also by the fact that he translated a hundred lines from Homer's *Odyssey* and produced a whole book on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* entitled *Tales from Ovid* (Faber, 1997). Weissbort counts the latter amongst Hughes's "major works" and reproduces here the entire "Venus and Adonis" and a short fragment from "Salmacis and Hermaphroditus". There are also two texts in this collection which unexpectedly connect Ted Hughes with the Hungarian Sándor Weöres. The first of these, "Bardo Thödol—Tibetan Book of the Dead" is a scenario written by Hughes in 1959 in California where Hughes collaborated with the Chinese-American composer Chou Wen-chung. "Bardo Thödol" is a guide in verse "for the dead during the state that is held to intervene between death and the next rebirth". Those who know Weöres's work will remember how often the Hungarian poet delved into the mysteries of birth and death in his poems. A random quote from "Internus" will suffice: *"After death shall I still exist? / No handcuffs then upon my wrist, / I have dissolved identity, / why wish it in eternity? / Being or non-being: nakedness / suits undying presences"* (Edwin Morgan's translation).

Another link between the two poets may be established from "Orghast". This was Hughes's attempt to create a new language

7 ■ Hughes, *Selected Translations,* p. 92.

for a play to be performed at the 1971 Shiraz Festival in Persepolis. Weissbort prints just two pages from "Avesta" written in "Orghast" which in its sound-system vaguely reminds one of a mixture of Farsi and Gaelic. At that time Hughes probably still had not heard of Weöres's "Barbarian Song" in which the Hungarian poet experimented with an invented language, offering a translation of three stanzas produced in this fantastic new tongue *(Dzha gulbe raar kichere...)*. These similarities, to my mind, show the great linguistic inventiveness of both poets.

Describing the priorities of Ted Hughes, Daniel Weissbort is on the whole objective —he does not hide the controversy which certain of his friend's translations provoked. For instance, translating Seneca's *Oedipus* Hughes could not resist the temptation of severe reductionism. Working closely with Peter Brook, he tried to underpin the director's vision and reduced Seneca's text substantially, cutting out mythological references, also shortening sentences. The result is a paraphrase—much more Hughes than Seneca. When translating Aeschylus Hughes made fewer cuts and the translated texts of the Greek playwright reproduced in *Selected Translations* are impressive enough, though as Weissbort points out even in this case Hughes "does not attempt to reproduce the metre" (ST, p. 126).

This statement brings us to the problem inherent in Hughes's method of translation. As Weissbort points out in his introduction, of all living poets János Pilinszky seemed "closest to him"(ST, ix), and in translating Pilinszky Hughes tried to convey the Hungarian poet's 'elemental message'. Whatever he gained in intensity in sticking closely to the meaning of Pilinszky's words, he lost in his unwillingness to recreate the richness of the poet's form. The horror of the KZ-world of Germany in 1945, one of Pilinszky's central themes, is conveyed well by the Hughes versions, but the ballad-like rhythm that hammers out these experiences is missing. So while one welcomes the 'Hughesian' Pilinszky of 1977, there is a case for re-translating Pilinszky's major poems into English in a manner more faithful to the form of the originals.[8] (As for Pilinszky's post-1970 poems which were written mostly in free verse, the problem discussed above does not arise).

To provide a background to Hughes's method of translation, Weissbort adds fifteen "appendices" to the text, indicating the extent to which Hughes changed the 'cribs' or literal versions provided by his collaborators. Although on occasion he regarded himself just as a 'troubled mechanic' trying to build new parts into an imported vehicle, in most cases Hughes was a powerful co-translator of foreign poems. Like Weissbort I too am convinced that translating enriched Ted Hughes's own poetry and it also gave encouragement to other English poets to reach out towards intriguing foreign models. Against this background the founding and editing of *Modern Poetry in Translation* was no mean achievement, and it stands to the lasting credit of this Poet Laureate and English translator of contemporary European poets. ❧

8 ■ Hughes was aware of this problem which he indicated in his letter to Lajos Koncz, where he claims that "the real excellences of Pilinszky... are beyond me, naturally, and obviously cannot be approximated. What I concentrated on was his overall tone...", *Hungarian Quarterly,* 171, Vol. 44, (Autumn 2003), p. 99.

THEATRE

Tamás Koltai

Total Theatre in Transylvania

András Visky: *Hosszú péntek* (Long Friday) • Chekhov: *Uncle Vanya* • Puccini: *Gianni Schicchi*

In the course of its troubled history, Transylvania has been an independent principality, a province of the Austrian Empire, from 1848 united with Hungary and, after the First World War, part of Romania. Hungarians have seen their numbers declining over the last eighty years. However, even as a national minority lacking political and cultural autonomy, they have retained a sense of identity that is expressed through a number of institutions.

Isolation does not necessarily entail decline—indeed, interaction between different cultures is as likely to lead to mutual enrichment and cross-fertilization. This is particularly true of the theatre, which enacts itself with the simultaneous participation of the audience and, thus, finds it more difficult to isolate itself from the everyday milieu and current forms of behaviour and conduct.

In Transylvania, Hungarian theatre goes back as far as in Hungary itself, with the first performances in the Hungarian language given in the 1790s. The Hungarian National Theatre of Kolozsvár (Cluj) opened its doors in 1821. As nation-states in the nineteenth century favoured the use of the national language, the ideal of independence and of national identity emerged as its guiding principles. The avant-garde of the twentieth century, on the other hand, gradually wiped out rigid intellectual and aesthetic boundaries. Though there have been conflicts in the relations between Hungary and Romania in their ethnic policies both in the Communist era and since the transition, Transylvanian Hungarian theatre has been a beneficiary of interethnic coexistence. Rooted in its conservative, literary-oriented and naturalistic tradition, it has profited greatly from the more imaginative, highly visual art of the Romanian theatre and its taste for the abstract and the stylised.

To be sure, this required openness on the Hungarian side. Of the twenty or so Hungarian-language theatre companies in Transylvania, it was the Kolozsvár company that showed itself to be pre-eminently open-minded. They were the first to break with a theatrical style springing from romantic national ideals that was archaic, pathetic and hopelessly dusty and which carried the implied message that respect for tradition was a pledge for retaining cultural identity. This break started with the 1960s and was associated with an outstanding director, György Harag. One of his students, Gábor Tompa brought the company to

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international fame, turning it into a regular participant at major festivals and, this year, gaining admission to the elite club of the European Theatre Union.

Of their current productions, three deserve special mention. Two of them are directed by notable Romanian directors, and Tompa himself has directed a stage adaptation of a novel by the Nobel laureate Imre Kertész.

Kaddish for an Unborn Child is, as they say, "not suitable for the stage". It is a pretty abstract, moral-philosophical monologue that summons up various localities, temporal planes and subjects. The text that uncoils between the first and last words of the novel, at least between *"Nem!"* and its reverse: *"Ámen"* in the original Hungarian (English has to make do with "No!" and "Amen") is in effect a prayer (a Kaddish, in fact) which presents the arguments that the narrator (called B.) has against the perpetuation and prolongation of his existence in the form of offspring. His refusal to allow a child to be born to him stems from the trauma of having survived the extermination camp of Auschwitz and, more widely, his experiences of Jewishness while a child and of the concentration camps more generally (and the word "experience" is not used frivolously, or in any way blasphemously, in light of the entire Kertész oeuvre). The subjects that keep recurring, rather like variations on a theme in a piece of music, stem in part from some of the striking images in Paul Celan's poem "Death Fugue" (e.g. to quote, in Michael Hamburger's translation, the two lines that are used as the novel's epigraph: *"...he calls out more darkly now stroke your strings then as smoke you will rise into air / then a grave you will have in the clouds there one lies unconfined"*). Then there is a nightmarish glimpse that the young boy catches of his aunt when he goes to stay with her in the countryside. She has taken off the wig that is prescribed by Orthodox Jewish custom for married women: "a bald-headed woman in a red negligee seated in front of the mirror." Then the boys' boarding school, with the assemblies and drills that "pedagogically equipped" him for Auschwitz, the headmaster of which had himself "gone up in smoke". His relationship to his own father: "And if the assertion that God is a glorified father-figure holds any truth, then God presented to me in the image of Auschwitz." Or the "irrational" act by which "Teacher" in the camp saves the narrator's life by passing on to him his due ration of food when he could have doubled his own chances by keeping it for himself ("this is what there is no explanation for, since it is not rational as compared with the tangible rationality of an issue of food rations"). Then, having survived the camps and now living as a married man in (by implication) Budapest in the socialist post-war era, he now becomes buried in his own work—leading a prison life within the prison, from which his wife seeks to extricate him ("she had done all in her power to save me"). This finally precipitates a crisis in the marriage, with B.'s wife stating that she has to divorce him because he had effectively remained in Auschwitz ("all at once [he] had let go of her hand and started to run away from her, back into the swamp"). Out of all of which B. draws the conclusion that "No! I could never be another person's father, fate, god." Thus the non-existence of the unborn child is seen as "the necessary and radical liquidation" of B.'s own existence, that is, his incapability of "total assimilation to the extant, the extant circumstances and existing conditions" to life.

This particular version of *Kaddish,* as created by András Visky, treats the text very much "like a musical fabric", to take an expression that Kertész has used elsewhere against which are set scenes of saying prayers ("Kaddish").

What ensues is a theatre of ritual, foregoing the use of plotline, narrative or

psychological situations in the traditional sense. Themes and variations are repeated through the use of particular lines, distinguished from other quasi-poetic lines, stylised movements, visual and acoustic events. Somewhat in the vein of B. saying in the novel, "I see our entire life with all of its sounds, events and sentiments in some sort of blurred and chaotic unity." The prayer is broken up from time to time by almost realistic situations played out by ten actors (the minimum number required when Kaddish is said). Nine step out of the Chorus to take on their various roles, only B. has a constant role. All are dressed in black three-piece suits, a white shirt and a bowler hat; some of them have trouser legs rather on the short side (clownlike? Beckett-like?). The acting space is a square surrounded from three sides by viewers, its white floor covered in handwriting, where the scenery consists of nine transparent movable plexiglass boxes and an unmoveable plexiglass cabin. The acting is a blend of the tragic and the ironic, faithfully reproducing the shifts of mood the B. of the novel undergoes. A style of alienation and, at the same time, a captivating composition of words, picture, motion, music and light. A red crown of hair loud against the black-and-white of the background; a monotonous four-line tune repeated over and over again: its incessant start-again contrasting with occasional bursts of Baroque music or the stubborn click-click of a typewriter; the scenes are intercut by an alternation of blind darkness and sharp light—the rhythm may not be easy to catch but the effort is certainly worthwhile.

U*ncle Vanya* was directed by a director who has achieved word fame, Andrei Şerban. The production starts in the auditorium. The actors are downstairs, the audience up on the proscenium, seated in three rows. The reversal of the usual positions of player and audience is provocative. The endless vista of the auditorium creates an impression of vacuous emptiness which lasts throughout the first act. Professor Serebryakov and Elena sit somewhere in the grey emptiness of the balcony (with the lights searching for them), while the other characters are dotted about down below. After a while everyone changes places. Elena comes down to take the sun, exposing her face to the artificial light; Astrov either wiggles his way in between the rows to stare at the legs of attractive women or walks on the balustrade of the balcony with Telegin trailing him, risking his neck as he brings his tea. Vanya turns up here and there with an oration from time to time, while the nursemaid sits beside the little tea table with the samovar in the centre aisle. The entire thing is like a rehearsal read-through with texts spoken without real inflection, voices that carry through the wide spaces. For the moment it is enough to play "from without", in a theatrical fashion; even the vast chandelier is lowered to the ground to render everything even more theatrical. Vanya keeps hugging Elena like an old lecher, she in turn cannot stop showing herself off to the audience in the manner of a cat-walk model (she even addresses individuals in the audience), her words interlaced with English sentences. (This recurs throughout the play, several of the players uttering at odd times in French, German, Italian and even Russian on occasion). Eventually Serebryakov asks the characters to dance, one by one: as the auditorium fills with music, the couples tango their way up to the stage just behind the rows of viewers, tracked by red, blue and green lights.

From this point onwards the stage becomes the acting space. The audience is seated in the middle on scattered chairs, turning whichever way we like. The stage is only closed off on one side, where the safety curtain is let down; on the three

remaining sides further spaces open up. In each act the dominant space is in a different place until, in the finale, the entire theatre becomes filled with the play.

The characters live their lives in full awareness of the theatre public, their presence offering so many outrageous attractions. Serebryakov is a mannered and provocative poseur, worldly, arrogant—indeed tyrannical. He swings from euphoria to apathy, bursting forth in calls of triumph and howls of pain; blatantly healthy, he uses a feigned illness to shock his audience, who collude with him despite their awareness of the make-believe.

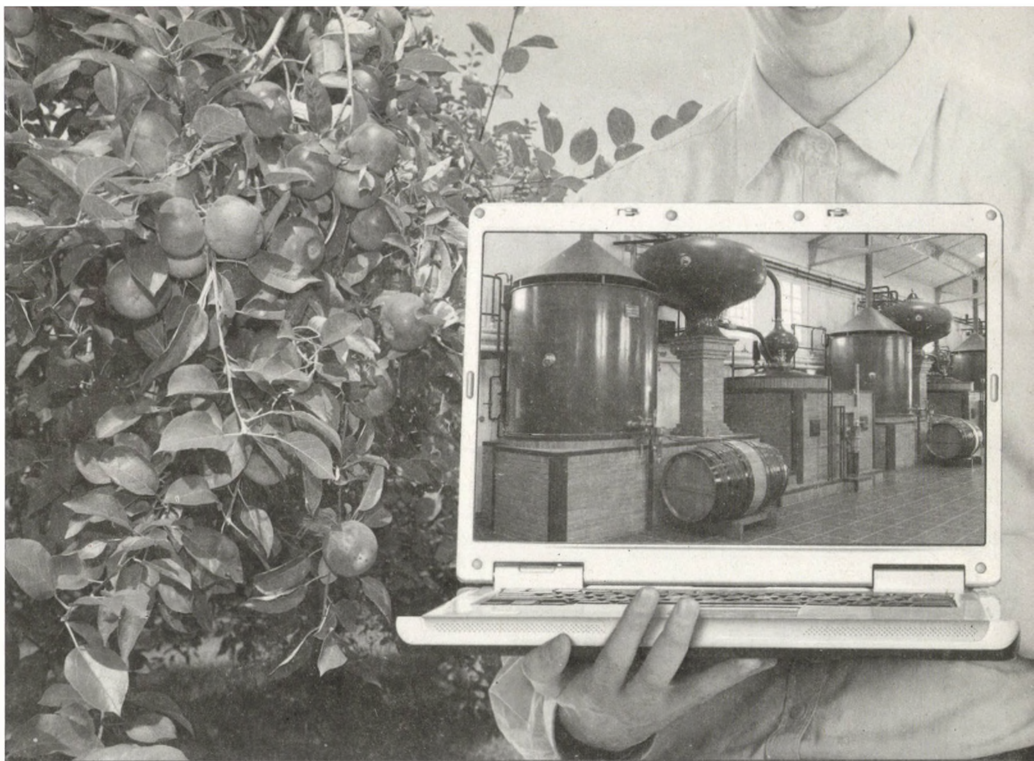
Elena and Serebryakov's relationship is founded on a perverse sexuality which both binds them together and makes it impossible for Elena to rid herself of her husband. This sheds a totally different light on her former lover and her dreams of a young husband (in her conversation with Sonia). The same is true of the professor's complicity in his wife's flirting. Not only can Serebryakov see the liaison developing between Elena and Astrov, not only does he spy on them—he takes a voyeuristic pleasure in doing so, as though the experience aroused his sensuality. We intuit that the couple's next lovemaking will profit from this. Elena, flaunting the body of a model and acting with the artificial and calculated coldness of a puppet, confirms this suspicion. Her every movement is at once a lure and a rejection—a woman who promises all and gives nothing. She deploys the full arsenal of seductive trickery against Astrov. The latter knows full well how to play along—at first he offers himself as a partner in cool pride, as if he had the upper hand, but he inevitably loses his head and tries to rape her. After he knocks her onto a long table, what follows is a struggle between devotion and rejection which kills all eroticism.

Some scenes are circus turns. One of the actors, playing a drunk, falls off a startlingly tall fire ladder, tumbling and bouncing ever lower in an ankle-breaking feat, finally slumping against the wall at the bottom of the ladder, only to rip out, with the same momentum, a plank of wood. He then staggers along holding on to the plank wobbling on his shoulders and stands it beside himself only to catch it adroitly the next moment and break its fall just before it lands on one of the audience. When Vanya fires at the professor, he fights his way through the audience, 'misses' five times over; when the gun fails to fire at the sixth attempt, he places the chair upside down on top of a table under which the potential victim is hiding, during which time the gun finally does fire. This is pure knockabout slapstick. Upon taking their leave, the actors roll over in the mud which covers the stage after a theatrical rainfall, causing the finale to be entirely devoid of poignancy or melodramatic pain. Instead, they are all overcome with cynical bitterness and heavy lethargy. They summarily re-visit all the important locations before taking their leave by the safety curtain, toward the auditorium, thus linking the close of the play to its beginning. The safety curtain rises, and during the applause all the players rush along all the possible isles and paths, along the top of the seats, up the outside stairs to the balcony, taking bows and leaving gobs of mud behind them wherever they go. The reality of theatre soils theatre itself—the 'temple of art'. The raising of the chandelier puts a full-stop mark to the performance and a sentimental tango booms out for a last time.

The production of Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* by the Kolozsvár theatre was directed by an equally famous director, Silviu Purcărete. This is a fantastical, philosophical theatrical treat, starting with a fifteen-minute pantomime. Buoso Donati, dead-man-to-be, whose fortune, according to the original plotline, is to be shared out

by the title character, is preparing for his death among a set of piled-up chairs and monstrous, wrapped-up wardrobes. A sorry figure naked down to the waist, barefoot in black trousers, he plays a melancholy tune on his recorder while two doctors busy themselves around him. Tidying and pottering, lighting candles with a soldering iron, they take the recorder out of his hand, gently lay him on the table, tie up his jaw, cut his toenails, hang an identity-tag round his toe and place candlesticks by his head. From the centre isle through the balustrade of the orchestra the relatives arrive to mourn for their dead. However, instead of the number expected, just under a dozen, they come two or three times as many: a whole crowd with children, old people, men and women, dressed in mourning suits of tulle, veils and fancy hats, just like something out of a play by Pirandello. The funeral party begins, they start putting out the chairs and tables, lay white cloths on two tables and place them alongside those upon which Buoso lies in state. They start laying the tables, raising a mighty rattle as they deal out the plates and cutlery, spooning their soup and reeling off the usual to-do of Italian extended family scenes. Forming cliques, gossiping, bickering, looking askance at the poor relatives, the children bouncing a big spotted ball all over the place including the dead man's forehead. In the meantime the musicians float in one by one, making little squeaks and sounds until eventually they start playing. Next the conductor rushes in, just too late, from the auditorium—a lithe woman in black trousers, she jumps into the orchestra pit and the action continues accompanied by music and song. The crowd whirls along the stage in carefully engineered chaos, some of the characters duplicate or even triplicate themselves, merging and emerging, singing their parts in duos or trios. The space slowly becomes dominated by the phantom-like shadow of a *femme fatale* who silently looks down as the crowd turns everything upside down in search of the will. Papers and objects fly about the place, a woman jumps on top of the dead man's chest and pulls him onto the ground. The *Totentanz* whirls around Buoso's half-naked body as they raise him on their shoulders and carry him about. At an unexpected moment the dead man rises and silently rejoices behind the back of the crowd as he sees Schicchi arrive from the auditorium—all is perfect chaos.

This typical ensemble piece is performed by a dramatic company with only two opera singers. The orchestra plays not in the customary set-up or number—percussion instruments are over-represented, nor did Puccini compose a saxophone part in the original. Some conservative opera buffs protest, just as they did when Peter Brook, with the help of Marius Constant, had *Carmen* reorchestrated for a chamber ensemble. When asked who was the author of the opera, Brook replied: "during the show nobody bothers to distinguish; nobody cries out, 'Ah, this is Bizet!', 'ah, this is Brook!', 'ah, this is Constant!' It is only the experience that counts. The encounter with living theatre." ❧



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Brezhnev is said to have been so fearful of attempts being made on his life that he kept five versions of himself on hand at all times. Each so closely resembled him that he himself would have been unable to tell himself apart from himself, so it's a good job they told him who he was. That was why he also had five Chaikas, so if a Chaika pulled out of a Kremlin gate, in reality five Chaikas would pull out of five Kremlin gates, each identical to a hair, with an identical him seated behind the tinted windows in each, so that any would-be assassin would have been more than a bit confused, if he saw all five at once, which one he should aim at. And if he did not see them all at one and the same time, the assassin would simply open fire, giving Brezhnev a one in five chance of dying (or four to one of living).

From:

A Radiator Grille Like a Row of Whale's Teeth *by János Lackfi,*
pp. 18–25.

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