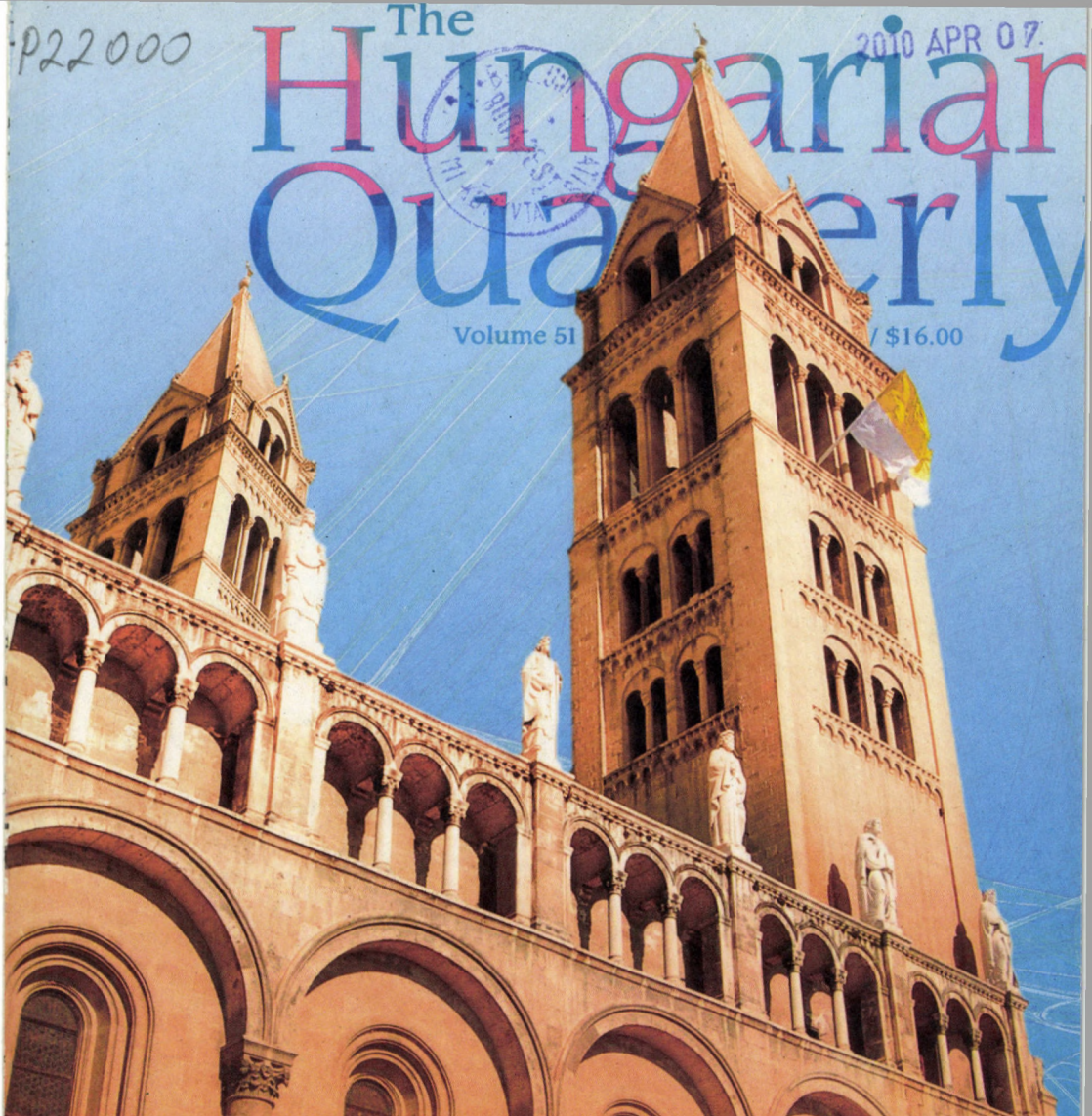
The Hungarian Quarterly

Volume 51 / $16.00



- The Nobility of Mind and Spirit: Calvin's Legacy
- The Secondary Threads of a Crime
- Hungarian Art at the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition

PÉCS: European Capital of Culture 2010

- George Szirtes on Poetry in the Post-1989 World
- Len Rix on Translating Antal Szerb
- Iván Fischer on the Budapest Festival Orchestra
- Richard Zimdars on Liszt and Bülow
- Peter Strickland on His Award-winning Film

The Hungarian Quarterly

First published 1936

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

HU ISSN 1217-2545 Index: 2684

Cover & Design: Péter Nagy

Annual subscriptions:
$70/€50 ($100/€75 for institutions).
Add €15 postage per year for Europe,
US$23 for USA and Canada,
$27 to other destinations and $47 by air
to anywhere in the world.
Sample copies or individual copies of back numbers $30/€20,
postage included.
Payment in $ or €.
Annual subscriptions in Hungary HUF5,500
Single copy HUF1500
Send orders to The Hungarian Quarterly
P.O. Box 3, Budapest H-1426, Hungary

All export orders should be addressed to
The Hungarian Quarterly

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

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

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

eurozine

nka
Nemzeti Kulturális Alap

This issue has been published
with the support of the
National Cultural Fund of Hunga

OKTATÁSI ÉS KULTURÁLIS
MINISZTÉRIUM

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

INDEX

The Hungarian Quarterly • Vol. LI • Nos. 197–200 • 2010

ARTICLES & ESSAYS

HISTORY

IN MEMORIAM ISTVÁN SZÉCHENYI (1791–1860)

FICTION & MEMOIR

POEMS

ART & ARCHITECTURE

INTERVIEW

MUSIC

BOOKS & AUTHORS

BOOKS REVIEWED

THEATRE & FILM

PLAYS REVIEWED *by Tamás Koltai*

FILMS REVIEWED *by Erzsébet Bori*

OBITUARIES

BMC

Budapest Music Center Records

www.bmcrecords.hu / info@bmcrecords.hu

The Hungarian Quarterly • Vol. LI • No. 197 • Spring 2010

MUSIC

BOOKS & AUTHORS

THEATRE & FILM

OBITUARY

Szilárd Borbély

The Secondary Threads of a Crime

1

The more he thinks about it, the less he knows about Ilona and Mihály. Looking back, it is as if he had merely joined up with them sometime in mid-journey. Or maybe they had thrown in their lot with him, and continued for a while together. All of it seems so incidental. The only sure thing is that they weren't with him from the outset, and at one point they just vanished from alongside him. The suddenness with which this happened confused and terrified him. And the meaning of love became uncertain.

2

On the first day of the last Christmas of the millennium, a mechanical voice from the telephone exchange told him to call a number outside his district, immediately. Unsuspecting, he punched the number into the telephone keypad. Perhaps it didn't even ring; the call was answered so quickly, as if someone had been waiting for it. The moment he identified himself the lights of Christmas morning were extinguished. When he put down the receiver, he still did not grasp what he had heard. He understood it, but he had not yet begun to live it. Then he began to plummet, downwards into his body. He sensed the palpable

---

Szilárd Borbély,

a poet and essayist, teaches 18th-19th century Hungarian literature at Kossuth Lajos University in his native Debrecen, a city on the edge of the Great Plain, where he still lives. He has published eight volumes of poetry. Berlin-Hamlet *was published in English by Agite!/Fra, Prague. "The Secondary Threads of a Crime" is a personal testimony as a response to, and in the aftermath of, a horrific crime which occurred shortly before the Christmas holidays in 2000.*

darkness, the quickening tempo of the fall. Unknown depths gaped beneath his feet, dragging him down, down into the depths. Down into the body. He does not recall how long this vertigo lasted. The pressure of the unseen hand that had broken through the wall of the abdomen reached into his entrails and clutched him between his stomach and heart, holding him above the void, now relented slightly. Slowly the unseen hand crept upwards towards his heart. And when this pitiless force slackened, he tried to stand up. He clenched his jaw. A few words came gnashed out through his gritted teeth: just don't let it reach your heart. Stooped over, he trudged into the kitchen and asked for a full tumbler of cognac. The strongest we have, he said. Then another one. He knew he had to knock it down in one gulp. And he also knew that it would be his last drink for months, so that his mind would be able to function properly with neither illusions nor blunting. He would have to be attentive, for he could trust no one, he thought. He sensed that what he would have to avoid, most of all, was sympathy. A sharp presentiment alerted him, like an impersonal whispering, an obscure message, a voice coming from afar, that he would have to remain distant from his own self. He would have to spurn, the wordless whispering told him, his very self. He would have to mercilessly renounce and reject compassion and love, for both are sources of weakness.

3

The autopsy of Ilona's body was held on December 27, 2000, four days after the day of the crime. Rigor mortis had already begun to dissipate. After giving a preliminary assessment of the external injuries, the report stated: "Cause of death of the aforementioned: open depressed fracture of the skull, resultant crushing of brain tissue, followed by cerebral paralysis." The text is impassive; the indifferent striving for precise registration of the facts of the case leaves no room for love. When, years later, he read through the report, he paid particular attention to his own body; the veins in his skin, the throbbing of his pulse as he felt it on the inside of his wrist under the table. It did not quicken: this reassured him. His face remained numb. He knew that a deadening of emotional life is common in post-traumatic states. The objective description of the autopsy report brought him closer to the body which, in accordance with the basic principles of crime scene investigation, had been stripped naked at the scene. Following inspection of the victim's clothes the dead body is stripped and the external injuries are examined and documented. He found the photographs later, at the bottom of the box containing the documents. Months after the court verdict he sees Ilona's naked body in the photographs, laid on a bloodstained sheet on the parquet floor. That is the last he sees of Ilona's body—the body of a woman about sixty years of age—which had also been his own body for nine months. And for the first time, he sees her naked. Lifeless.

4

The photographic appendix to the materials pertaining to the inquiry registered the stages of the examination of the skull. In the photographs, the image of Ilona's crushed face is preserved. Paging through the album, he could observe the sequence in which the skin covering the cranium viscerale was removed. Then he thoroughly scrutinized the expert opening of the skull after the hairy scalp had been pulled down over the face, the stations of the examination of the cerebellum. The analysis identifies the cause of death as the following: "Cause of death of the aforementioned: open depressed fracture of the skull, resultant crushing of brain tissue, followed by cerebral paralysis." At the time of the preparation of the police report, before arriving at their conclusion, the forensic pathologists raise one additional question: "On the basis of the autopsy, the possibility arises of survival for a period of a few hours. For this reason, we removed the tissues, described in detail above, for examination." And at the conclusion of the police report, dated January 8, 2001, they promise, "in full knowledge of the results of the examination, to complete our assessment."

5

On Christmas Eve, the evening of the revelation of the crime, as the shepherds of Bethlehem were hurrying to the infant Jesus lying in the cave and the Christian faithful were heading for Midnight Mass, the forensic pathologists, known as the "smoking guns", suddenly just stopped, saying that they had lost the trace. This can be regarded as symbolic since with this sudden halt, as later became apparent, the investigation itself was stopped in its tracks once and for all.

6

Without a word of question or doubt, the detectives in this situation gave a nod of assent to the first interrogation offering a loophole out of their predicament. One witness at the hearing referred to the money—the reward of half a million forints—in relation to the case of Attila S.: "...it was all because of his father-in-law, because he ratted him out in the hope of getting the 500,000 forint reward." It is possible that this 'reward' played a role in the selection of the suspects. At one point, Attila S. himself admits: "Later on, I told my father-in-law to tell the police that we had committed the crime, because then he would get the reward, which was 500,000 forints..." Reading the police file, the question of who was selected for interrogation at this critical point in the never-resolved investigation appears to be completely arbitrary.

7

The two-month detour, which led ever farther away from the scene of the crime, was the result of a single flawed decision. The initial uncritical acceptance of this misleading thread allowed for the interpretive phrases 'accidental' and 'inexplicable' to become an integral part of the police file. And so the path to any exploration of potential motives was barred. Later, the question of motive and intention, both tightly interconnected, never even arose. One of the fundamental presumptions in the interpretation of a crime as text is that the victim is not made a victim by accident. The two-month detour gave the perpetrators a chance to catch their breath and make the evidence disappear. Under pressure from public opinion and the outrage of the people of the village, which in the meantime had reached critical proportions, the detectives resolved to take one desperate measure. From the evening of March 5 until dawn on March 6, 2001, Attila S., better known as Tatyi, was interrogated at length in the offices of the local police. Well after midnight he still denies involvement, but by six o'clock the next morning he makes a confession incriminating others.

8

Concerning the crime itself, his confession is an attempt to create an interconnected narrative. Thus he is the Narrator. Yet his narrative changes from one day to the next. It is bolstered by neither evidence nor the statements of any others; hence we can speak of a fictional narrative. The confessions of the Narrator are constituted as a text. References to the world beyond the text are constantly suspended and then dismantled. The fictions of the Narrator create a narrative and a story pertaining to a criminal act. For the most part, the composition of the text is structured by the articles of the penal code. At the same time, it must render account of transformations, slippages, shifts of motives. In this sense, the confession of the Narrator, as is common in a literary text, concludes a contract with the reader. The target readers of the Narrator's confession, however, are the detectives.

9

The Narrator, as the storyteller, is not omniscient; rather, he struggles against a severe lack of information. He does not understand his own story. Variations of his tale emerge only to render the gaps in knowledge into a unified narrative structure. He was neither instructed nor initiated. The incentives, the reasons why, are tangled and uncertain even to him. He struggles to see things more clearly. The structure of the actions of the characters, the story that takes

shape on the basis of the texts at his disposal, is not identical with the perspective of the narrative. The Narrator relates the events from the standpoint of an actor in the middle of the story, but as he does not know the circumstances, he frequently uses his imagination.

10

In the Narrator's narratives, which are preserved in the police files, cross-examinations of witnesses, forensic examinations, confessions and letters, one episodic motif emerges with persistent and troubling consistency: the emphasis on his inability to blow the whistle. The repetition of the motif betrays a lack of knowledge, of initiation. This motif, which can be read symbolically, draws our attention to the fact that since he saw nothing, the Narrator can say nothing. Listen, he says, I didn't see anything of what I'm supposed to relate, so I cannot recount the narrative with which you've entrusted me. It's all wrong that I've been chosen as the trusted watchful eye, the key witness, don't choose me, don't listen to me!

11

Also missing from the documents, along with any attempt to comprehend the unfathomable brutality of the crime, is the investigation of any motive. The one text that actually produces a complete narrative in relation to the crime—transforming the interpretation of events into a police file—is the indictment, in and of itself unfounded by any evidence. The detectives did not question a single point of the tale told by the Narrator, who figured as a third-degree suspect in the proceedings. They treated him as a source whose account corresponded with their views. Every variation of the confession, which underwent many changes, was coddled; they did not pry into the inner tensions, the textual flaws, the contradictions. As a result of this identification, there was no curiosity concerning motive. Yet the motive and intention are not in accord with each other. Not even the Narrator can create any connection between them.

12

"We discussed the ruckus for about 10 or 15 minutes..." We see the cold evening, the cigarette smoke, the speakers' breath drifting upwards. We almost see the collusion between the three of them, but due to the nature of the narrative, we cannot overhear their words. It falls under the competence of the Narrator to inform us about them: "On the stairs, Dani began to explain to us that he knew about an empty house, next to the church, where no one lived, and we should break in, "cause we might find something valuable." "As we reached the house,

an outside light—as I recall it could have been above the front door—lit up. When Daniel R. saw the old guy, he raised the hatchet and struck him. As far as I can remember, the lights were already on inside, but they must have been turned on by the old man before he opened the door. I remember that some light stayed on inside. And I remember that maybe the outside light remained on, too."

13

"Daniel R. said that he went after him, attacking him with his fists, but he said he didn't kill him. The old lady probably died on the spot, because she wasn't moving, she was lying there with a fixed stare." "Fixed stare", the phrase that figures in the excerpt quoted, is the formula used to designate a motionless, lifeless gaze. According to the photographs taken at the scene of the crime, Ilona's eyes were actually open, her hands convulsively clamped together, the mark of suffering upon her face. Blood plasma, however, dripped slowly onto the eyelids, on the photographs you really can't discern her gaze, since the eyelids, which had swollen to the size of a potato, turned downwards and covered the eyeballs. The eyes were closed from the hemorrhaging under the skin, caused by blows to the head. These colossal swellings are later cut open during the autopsy; the eyelids are then sewn back into place with tiny stitches, as is the skin around the battered mouth.

14

"[He] hit the lady on the head with the hatchet twice, maybe three times, and he heard Sándor B. asking 'where's the money you've tucked away?' The lady said the money was in the jug, and Sanyi took out the money. In the meantime, B. was still hitting her; she was in the bed but she fell out of it, and he even saw her eye pop out." This last observation according to which Ilona's eye "popped out" does not stand to reason. On the basis of the scene as described, however, if someone had been looking from a distance, by the time the hematoma would have grown to huge proportions, it really could have seemed as if the eye had been dislodged from the socket. In other words even if the account is anatomically inaccurate, as a description of the scene it achieves its goal in rendering the image of the bulging eyelid, hanging out like a bloodstained bladder, reminding one of an actual eyeball in proptosis. The blows rained down upon Ilona's head as she lay on the ground: "The injuries, which covered the head, could have been caused, by all indications, by repeated blows aimed towards the head in general. Most of the injuries occurred while the victim was in a prone position; a large-framed person would not have sustained such injuries while standing. The contusion of the left chest wall and the internal bleeding also occurred while the victim remained in a recumbent pose."

15

Perhaps Ilona died immediately. Though she may have survived for a period of a few hours. But she wouldn't have been able to take in what was going on around her. Just as she wouldn't have been able to take in that all the while Mihály was lying in the hallway next to the bedroom. People searching for jewels, money, deposit tickets step over his body. The Narrator has this much to say about it: "While the search was going on, the old guy who had collapsed outside came in. He was in his underwear, covered in blood, but he didn't say anything. Feri Z. took the iron pipe from R. and beat the old man with it some more, inside the house. The old man collapsed again." It is impossible to know how long Mihály might have lain in the cold hallway, the pool of blood spreading out around his fractured skull. The cold caused his blood to coagulate more quickly and helped him survive. Bleeding diminished. Hovering at just above freezing point, the temperature slowed down his bodily reactions. There was no heating in the hallway. The radiators were all turned down to the lowest setting. At some point in the course of the day Mihály regained consciousness. The blood had already clotted around the wounds. He crawled away from the bedroom door. But not to where Ilona lay on the ground next to the bed, instead two metres further on, in the direction of the other room. This room was even colder than the hallway. Possibly, the door had been left open during the ransacking. And so he had been able to drag himself there, across the threshold, and had concealed himself between some chairs stacked in the right-hand corner. "We went into the other room with the police; the door was closed, my brother-in-law was in this room, sitting on the ground. Bloodied skin hung from his head; my sister's hands were hideously crushed and bloody. He sat on the floor with both his legs wedged between two chairs, muttering 'Don't hurt me, don't hurt me'."

16

Separation from one's mother is a task that lasts a lifetime. First, to separate from her body. Then, to become independent of a mother's love, even if it is always still there, like a husk. Ilona may not have been clever, but she had a powerful emotional intelligence. With the help of her capacity for compassion, she was able to grasp connections for which neither knowledge nor erudition would have sufficed. He later heard from one of her younger sisters that Ilona had been chubby as a small girl. In the company of others she was always a little awkward and clumsy, like children who are mocked for being fat. He remembers that when he was seven years old, Ilona suddenly suffered a nervous breakdown, for reasons that remained a mystery to him. She had been unable to get out of bed. All day she had lain on a narrow bed. It was just after

her thirtieth birthday. She just lay in bed on the cold, narrow terrace attached to the little one-room house. It had lasted for months. Autumn came. Then December, then winter turned to spring. Then he had to remain in the playroom after school. He always came home after dark. Ilona was waiting for him and even tried to smile. But she couldn't. And slowly, he too forgot how to smile.

17

When he put down the phone, he immediately realized that the horror they had come to fear more and more over the past few years had actually come to pass. His body understood and responded to the news: his head began to ache spasmodically, a knot somewhere in his skull. And at the same time, there was another one in his stomach, so strong that immediately he was doubled over in pain. As if, perhaps, his solar plexus had felt the same blows. But before that, he had already begun to pace up and down, in the confined and ever more confining flat. At the front door, the knot suddenly struck him down, and caused him to double over. At first he just fell against the door, then he slowly collapsed, or rather slid down onto the cool tiles. He felt empty. He looked at the patterns on the ceramic tiles. And he felt that he did not and never would have the strength to rise from that spot.

18

Their last conversation had taken place a few hours before the murder. He had called them on the evening of the 23rd around eight o'clock. Ilona picked up the receiver as usual. When he told her that they hadn't managed to get underway, and if they tried again tomorrow there was no telling how long they would have to wait for the bus in the town that had once been the district seat or hope to catch a ride from someone, standing next to the road leading out of town, Ilona had said not to come. It would be better, she said, if they didn't come now. They could come the day after Christmas, she said, although she would have liked it if they had been able to come now, because she didn't know how long she would live, and she had to discuss something that was not a topic for the telephone, she added with anxiety in her voice.

19

"As I stepped into the room, I heard Sándor B. cursing, saying 'Where's the money—whatever it is you've saved from your pension?' He called her an old hag. There was a woman on the bed in the room, she looked a few years past fifty. She sat or lay on the bed, which was made. When I turned back into the room where B. and the old lady were, I saw B. hitting her with the same

hatchet R. had used to attack the old man, he was hitting the wife, who was sitting or lying on the bed. Sándor B. struck her on the head and in the face with the hatchet, several times. Sándor B. remained inside the room with the lady, who said something to B. but I don't know what. While B. was attacking her, the old lady was weeping and sobbing. B. asked her where the gold was, or the jewelry. As I recall, she said to B. 'I'll give it to you, give it to you'."

20

After the autopsy and the forensic pathologists' professional examination, the day before the funeral, they brought the body back. Unconsciously, they followed the procedure for receiving a deceased person from the hospital. The hearse slowly rolled into the open gates of the cemetery and stopped next to the mortuary. This was the last time he would see her, he thought. He crouched down next to the coffin. He felt the need for the certainty of the body's touch. He put his hand on Ilona's forehead, and felt the mild winter chill of late December. It was rigid to the touch. It reminded him not of skin, but of a stiffened cloth. Ilona had a high, arching forehead, similar to that of her mother, Anna. The forehead gave a clear, open expression to both of their faces. This impression was intensified by their clear blue eyes. Then he bent down to kiss her. He felt the same coldness, the same rigid substance with his lips as he had felt with his hands. And as if there were layers of paint on the skin, the traces of cosmetics. Leaning forward even closer, he saw the tiny black stitches fastening the eyelids back into place, and the traces of stitching around the mouth, with which they had tried to cover the smashed, protruding teeth resembling a snarl.

21

Six months after the crime, three detectives arrived from the neighbouring county seat because—as they said—they had come into possession of certain gold objects possibly connected to the case. With one brief glance at the objects placed on the table he determined that they bore no resemblance to anything of Ilona's. The policemen were offended when he commented that he saw no point to this. If they had simply looked into the files, he said, and compared the drawings with the items here, they would never have had to make the visit. The men nodded, and put the blame on the detectives previously assigned to the case. There was nothing to be done now, they kept repeating. Basic mistakes had been made throughout the investigation. From the taking of fingerprints to the ill-conceived investigation and the breaches of confidentiality. So that, six months after the case, there was nothing they could do, they said, their arms spread wide.

22

One glaring absence in the files is failure to raise the question of motive. As if it were being deliberately avoided. The Narrator's confession and the implicit presumptions of the detectives are in perfect agreement. There is no cross-examination about the psychological credibility of the motives, the intentions, the decisions. For more than two months there was an attempt to steer the investigation clear of the scene of the crime and the possible participants. However, in reading through the documents, one thing is conspicuous: on the evening before Christmas Eve there was considerable coming and going. People arrived from afar who knew everyone in the case.

23

A criminal act, like a literary text, can only exist in its interpretations. Truth, like the idea of a single interpretation, is not lifelike. Many different models of explication can be valid at once, and can provide an explanation of the events. In the case of Ilona and Mihály, the models of interpretation that can be propounded lead us too close to other actors whose names surfaced during the investigation. Including some who possessed enough influence to shift the course of the investigation. If we follow the secondary threads of the documents, a completely different interpretive model takes shape, in which the crime was not committed in the same way and by the same individuals as stated by the Narrator in many divergent variations during the investigation, all of which he later retracted before the judge.

24

When, having received the news, he stepped on the third day after the event into the sealed house, escorted by the detectives, he felt as if he no longer had anything in common with any of these objects. He had nothing in common with the rooms, or even with the memories, which until yesterday evening had tied him to these spaces, to the objects. He had nothing in common with the view from the window facing out onto the garden, with that picture he had seen so many times in childhood when he would look up from his writing desk and, for a bit of a rest, turn his gaze to the nearby fruit trees, the trembling leaves on the young branches; or how farther on, he would be comforted by the sight of the towering leafy crown of a tapering willow. Suddenly he realized that the feeling of security with which he had lived up until now, as if he had been protected in a cloak of some kind, was not natural. It had been, he realized, a criminal error not to be aware that every single day, and every single hour of every day, is nothing more than a temporary reprieve.

25

The placing of Ilona's defiled body into the earth was planned for December 30. At that time, Mihály lay in the intensive care ward of the regional hospital. "[December] 30, blood pressure is often high, breathing through the tube placed in the windpipe is sufficient, the pus discharged from the lungs can be drained. Urination is ample. Fever occasionally recurring. General state: satisfactory. Consciousness is gradually clearing. Is willing to cooperate. When addressed, opens his eyes, moves his extremities. Nape of neck free. Large quantities of pus emptied from the breathing tube. Rhonchus is audible above the lungs. In some instances, weaker breathing, rhythmic heartbeats. Diminution of hemorrhaging in the right shoulder girdle. Wounds in order. No incidence of bedsores. Nourishment provided through a tube into the stomach. General condition is good."

26

The funeral can no longer be delayed. The hymns of the Greek Catholic liturgy descended in currents of air, fluttering above the heads of the mourners. They could not take flight towards the heavens. It was cold, but the bright sparkling mercury columns remained above the zero mark on the thermometers. Even that evening, they did not descend below freezing point. That winter, snowfall did not come to our aid. The clumps of earth fell with a dull thud onto the coffin. It grew dark early. In the afternoon sky, already merging into twilight, clouds eddied and the crows billowed above the cemetery, like a long drawn-out black river.

27

He saw himself from the outside, like a stranger. Years earlier, in the midst of a deep depression, he had learned to maintain his distance from himself. He learned how to observe himself from the outside, to become independent of his body, even emotionally. He slowly broke with the use of medications, which had offered him the risk-free wearing away of life. Profound depression is like death. As if he stood behind a perfectly insulated glass window. Nothing reaches him. He observes life as it passes by before him. Life, which is somewhere out there, beyond the secure pane of glass. He is almost sad as he watches his life flitting past. He sees his loved ones, whom he doesn't know how to love. And he sees himself among them, reflected back in the glass, and he doesn't feel any pain, only senses the place where feelings would be.

28

The whole thing was somehow shameful, the brutality of the murder, the way Ilona and Mihály were turned into mere objects during the course of the investigation. He decided he would not write about it or discuss it. He would act as if nothing had happened. Then his plan was overturned. A poet has no private life to speak of. He uses his feelings, which then, like acids, release meanings from his own body and from the bodies of others, filtering out the essential materials from which he creates poems, volatile non-existent objects. And then from all this, something that reminds one of life.

29

In the earth, skeletal remains of medium height will be found. The lovely form of the crushed skull, whose former owner suffered a violent death. The rows of teeth show amalgam fillings, cheap replacements, and in some parts, gaps. The skeleton of the female some sixty years of age is distinguished from the others by a statue of the Virgin Mary, probably originally white and blue in colour, and about 15 cm in height. A mass-produced item from a pilgrimage site somewhere in western Europe. A cheap and shoddy item, yet with a purity of form giving it a certain quality of emanation. A few years later, the grave was disturbed and the skeleton of a man approximately seventy years of age was placed next to the female skeleton. On his skull are traces of surgical intervention, and many open fractures that clearly indicate breaks in the physical continuity of the skull. All of the evidence would seem to indicate that they loved each other. ❧

Translated by Ottilie Mulzet

George Szirtes

Converging Lines

In case anyone should have forgotten, there was a peaceful revolution, a grand European revolution with global implications exactly twenty years ago in 1989 though, if we have forgotten, it may be because we are still living in it. It was Zhou En Lai who, when asked in the 1950s about the effects of the French Revolution of 1789, is supposed to have replied: "It's too early to tell". It is too early to tell with this one.

Too early and already too late. Time, the postmodern phenomenon par excellence, is the great confuser and befuddler of chronologies. There we were, thinking it marched forward, in its somewhat unremitting dialectical way into some all but predetermined future, with evolution as a series of revolutions, when it performed one of its periodic panic fits: a, more or less, bloodless revolution. It was, said Francis Fukuyama, the end of history. Maybe it was then.

But history is not just events themselves, nor the consciousness of experiencing those events: history is what we write about what seems to us to have happened. Who did what to whom, in which order, why, and with what effect, is, to put it mildly, subject to interpretation. In retrospect everything seems inevitable: after all here we are at the end of it. It may be that the task of rival interpretations is to offer us ever more convincing forms of inevitability, to act as Benjamin's Angel of History but with an agenda, a case to make and a set of files to keep in order.

George Szirtes

won the T.S. Eliot Prize in 2005 for his book of poems Reel. *His latest collection,* The Burning of the Books and Other Poems, *was published in 2009 by Bloodaxe. An outstanding translator of Hungarian poetry, he has also translated novels by László Krasznahorkai, Sándor Márai, Dezső Kosztolányi and fiction by Gyula Krúdy. The essay published here is an edited version of the Introduction to* New Order: Hungarian Poets of the Post 1989 Generation. Anthologies in Translation Series. *Edited and introduced by George Szirtes. Todmordem: Arc Publications, 2010, 300 pp. The poems following this essay were selected by Anna T. Szabó. They were not included in the anthology and first appear in these pages.*

It was not just the physical Berlin wall that collapsed in 1989, but its equally important metaphorical-ideological-psychological equivalent. The usual wall consists of bricks held together by mortar. Should the mortar disappear the bricks might remain in place, simply sitting one on top of another, but there would be nothing except gravity holding them together—one good shove and over it would go. The parties, the ministries, the armies, the officials, the management, the cadres, the career paths, might all hang suspended for the equivalent of a historical instant but then the wall would be gone. And that is what happened. By 1989, the mortar that had held brick to brick had long turned to powder.

That mortar was compounded of belief, fear, and a kind of everyday confidence in its sheer existence, a confidence that, however dreadful it was, there was actually a kind of coherence, that things had to be as they were. I once wrote that the characteristic late-twentieth century Hungarian gesture was the ironic shrug, a shrug that worked its way through everything from social manners to literature. There were few ideologues left standing by the time the shrug was established. We were all Shruggists. What, asked my elderly party-member cousin, in the March of 1989, what if a strong man comes to power in Moscow, smashes his fist down on the table, and cries "Enough!"? His far more active party-member son-in-law smiled, shrugged and replied: "The table breaks."

Such walls and tables had been standing pretty solidly for forty years, that is to say for at least two generations. Behind the Hungarian wall lurked the memory of the years of Stalinist terror, the failed heroic revolution of 1956 and the retribution that followed it. Beyond those lay repression, stabilization, expansion, years of a nod and a wink, the shift towards relative prosperity at the price of political acquiescence to the black economy and the accumulation of foreign debt.

The key (unpublished) poem of the pre-1956 Stalinist terror was probably Gyula Illyés's "One Sentence on Tyranny". The key prose works such as Tibor Déry's *Niki—The Story of A Dog,* and his short story, "Love", followed shortly after. The later '50s and early '60s were distilled with scientific precision by the influential poet, Ágnes Nemes Nagy. A contemporary of other Central European poets like Miłosz, Herbert and Holub, she wrote ferociously disciplined verse and experimental prose works which balanced fury, resignation, silent resistance, a geological vision, biting sophisticated irony and a clear-eyed humane quietism.

1956—when Soviet forces violently crushed the armed uprising against Stalinist rule and Soviet occupation—frightened the Hungarian authorities and by the late '60s and particularly the late '70s they were buying off any possible opposition with the coinage of a certain limited tolerance and an equally limited, but relatively broad, range of consumer goods; these were bought on foreign credit, creating what Miklós Haraszti was later to refer to as 'the velvet prison', a country that visiting Russians nicknamed 'little America' and

others as 'the happiest barracks in the socialist camp'. 'Goulash communism', the term by which Hungarian politics of the late '70s and '80s were known, offered a compromise, along with corruption and a steel-edged *bonhomie*. Provided you did not write about certain things—1956, poverty, the Soviet presence and 1968 (the year of the Prague Spring)—you were free to write about what you liked, and there remained a great deal to write, and indeed to write very well, about.

That left, however, a clearly identifiable, often persecuted, underground opposition that kept pushing the boundaries. The leading poet of this group was György Petri, who chose to go into samizdat rather than remove certain poems from his much prized collections. Petri was a child in 1956 but was fully aware of 1968, as his works make clear. His great gift was to feed political discontent through a bitter, colloquial lyric voice that registered as a state of mind, often in a romantic or erotic context.

Petri was very popular but he was a special case in terms of censorship. Other very fine poets lived within the limits: Sándor Weöres, Ágnes Nemes Nagy, István Vas, László Lator, Ottó Orbán, László Bertók, István Baka, Ádám Nádasdy, Zsuzsa Rakovszky, Péter Kántor, Győző Ferencz, not to mention the Transylvanian Hungarians writing in Hungarian but living under a much harsher regime in Romania: Sándor Kányádi, Géza Szűcs, Zsófia Balla, Béla Markó, Géza Páskándi and, among the younger ones, Noémi László and Anna T. Szabó.

Of those based in Hungary, Weöres, Nemes Nagy, Vas, Petri, Baka and Orbán died within a dozen years of the change of system, Petri distinctly voicing his anguish that his favourite toy—the old régime—had been snatched away from him. The others continued to be important and influential poets, none more so perhaps than Rakovszky, who has since become one of the leading novelists too.

Novelists had risen into greater prominence through the '70s and it is important that they should be mentioned here, since Hungary had been associated more with poetry than with fiction, but the mid-century period produced a series of important novelists such as Géza Ottlik, Tibor Déry, Iván Mándy, István Örkény, Miklós Mészöly, and, as the century went on, the Nobel Prize-winning Imre Kertész, György Konrád, Ádám Bodor, Sándor Tar, Péter Esterházy, Péter Nádas, László Krasznahorkai and György Spiró. There were modernists, postmodernists, humorists, elegiasts and visionaries of various sorts, who seemed to steal the limelight from the poets. The rediscovery of Sándor Márai and the adventurous writing of younger novelists like Lajos Parti Nagy, Pál Závada, László Garaczi, Zsolt Láng and György Dragomán ensured that fiction would remain a prominent, often experimental, form. Some of these names are known in the English-speaking world, some are not, nor have I mentioned all I could, a number of whom appear in *An Island of Sound* (Harvill, 2004), the anthology of prose and poetry I edited with Miklós Vajda.

But what of the poets who were born in the 1960s or later; those who were hardly aware of the Prague Spring of 1968 and only vaguely of the political tides of the '70s; those whose sensibility would have been formed by the conditions of the '80s? Or those born even later, to whom the post-1989 world was their first adult experience? For them there was no 'favourite toy' to be snatched away. They would not have been agents in the changes of 1989; to them the world has been the world after.

By the mid-'80s Hungary had begun to curl in on itself. The old system was dying, and while there was a certain gaiety in the air there was foreboding too. János Kádár, who had been running the country since his betrayal of 1956[1], was at the heart of this inward curling, a process accelerated after the wind of change started blowing in from Gorbachev's Soviet Union in 1985. By 1988 Kádár and his world had curled up so tight, he actually vanished. The idiom that Petri had established—one predicated on Kádár and his world—had begun to shift along the spectrum from poetry to practical politics. The literary space was emptying out. The country, like the rest of the world, though in its own distinct way, was moving into unexplored territory.

Poetry, like fiction, had to find a new voice and new ground, something less overtly oppositional, less public, yet with an open ear. It is a great mistake to think that lack of material opportunity equals lack of sophistication. There was not going to be a mad rush towards consumerism as a panacea, certainly not among the 'intelligentsia'. There was, instead, going to be a complicated set of negotiations to be conducted between the past and the present, and between the various ideas about the present, including ideas of self and voice and language itself.

One interesting resource was the tradition of experimentalism in Hungarian art through the twentieth century, beginning with the Constructivist poetry of Lajos Kassák, which had run through Hungarian art throughout the twentieth century. Hungarian versions of modernism and postmodernism[2] flourished in the '60s, '70s and '80s, a period that, in its spirit of officially letting 'a hundred flowers bloom' as long as the flowers behaved themselves, produced playful, prolific, formally experimental poets like Dezső Tandori[3].

1 ■ Kádár had been part of Imre Nagy's revolutionary government but disappeared in the course of the revolution from one day to the next, returning on new waves of Soviet tanks, going on to have Nagy executed in 1958. He was hated for this at first, then later given a grudging admiration by some, as a provider of stable, relatively prosperous, if deeply cynical times.

2 ■ Hungarian versions of postmodernism, say for example the work of the novelist Péter Esterházy, retained a humane face and a human core. There are many complex reasons for this: one probably being the nature of political opposition, another the separation from a globalized consumerist version of capitalism. Irony, intertextuality and metatextuality were devices that asserted the rich complexity of human identity under pressure, not the erosion of the self through simulacra and other phenomena.

3 ■ The distinctions between what was considered traditional and avant-garde were less sharp than they sometimes appear in Britain. Nemes Nagy wrote in straight rhymed verse as well as in experimental prose. No one really thought this odd. Edwin Morgan, regarded as a modernist here, would have been a perfectly mainstream poet in Hungary.

The oldest poet in this anthology is **István Kemény** whose books began to appear from the mid-'80s onward when he was just twenty-three, and whose reputation was quickly established—to the extent that poets half a generation after him (including János Térey) acknowledged him as a major influence. He established a poetic idiom that uses the occasional conscious archaism. "All I do," he writes in an essay, "The Stripping Down of Poetry", "is sit there quietly, my ears blocked with clay, making notes... I am studying how *homo sapiens* behaves while listening to the song of the sirens and try to guess from that what the song might be. It's the only way I can be a poet." There is in fact a wide rhetorical range in his work, the pitch high but veined with an irony that sometimes makes the tone hard to gauge in English as it moves from the personal to the broad and part-public. It is a properly uncomfortable poetry for times which are themselves on the turn as he is writing.

Szilárd Borbély's first book appeared in 1988 then won a series of prizes through the '90s. László Lator, the poet and critic described his poetry as being "of a state of life that is for some reason reduced, eroded", adding that "he does not write specific poems as much as one whole book that can be divided into musical moments that in fact, despite its diverging elements of style, creates a homogeneous, musically structured whole." For that reason I have used poems from one of those musically structured wholes, the book *Berlin–Hamlet* (2008). His translator, Ottilie Mulzet says that to read it "...is an experience akin to strolling through one of the phantasmagoric shopping arcades described in Walter Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*—yet instead of window displays boasting the remnants of 19th-century European optimism, we pass by disembodied scraps of written text from the far more ghostly realm of early 20th-century modernity". I find these poems haunting and lyrical in the way a visual artist like, say, Gerhard Richter is, as presences not quite fixed.

The poems of **András Imreh** seem more straightforward, less "conceptual" but, as he says in his poem "Trees with White Trunks" where he recalls a conversation with his mother,

> *...it's just that our eyes see something different,*
> *yours see white slats of cloud*
> *mine a world that is nowhere transparent.*

The world is nowhere transparent but it remains a human world with recognizable selves and recognizable social obligations. It is just that the selves do not become transparent. The poems deal, apparently simply, with pathos and loss and are distinctly un-dramatized. Time and the weather in "Sunday Morning" are

> *quite forgettable,*
> *a time of endless boredom,*
> *cut of the same cloth as my death.*

Imreh is praised for his economy and precision, both formal and psychological. He often employs rhyme, syllable count and other devices but does so lightly, unobtrusively. This self-discipline is, I think, a quiet form of resistance to the febrile and often debased language of a transitional period. The sensibility deals in small intimate matters but what it perceives and registers are powerful impersonal forces that leave one little space. The tightness of the space is all.

In this respect he resembles **Mónika Mesterházi,** who also picks up something from Zsuzsa Rakovszky's version of the lyric self. That self too has a constricted space available to it. In a short poem—the poems are mostly short—called "Assuming" she ponders what she might give her life for, and decides her life is too light, but then changes her mind:

> *...But say it's possible, that it's not too light,*
> *that I offer it up but bring the universe*
> *down in the process. I think it best*
> *not to harp on the subject of my lightness,*
> *to avoid pretension, to forget I mentioned it.*

Almost parenthetically, one notes the universe being brought down. The poem then slots itself back in the world of manners as if ducking out, to implying: "Did I say that? Surely not." And yet the universe is everywhere in her poems: stars, sandstone, the wind. It is the Romantic element of Rakovszky, inherited from Plath, via Duffy (in the latter's case), that drives the poems on. The distances of Imreh appear as clashing waves on distant shores in Mesterházi, but both are aware of a certain propriety that the state, and indeed the entire state of affairs after 1989, is unlikely to offer. Propriety and quietism are, in this sense, political responses to a world that tends to destroy meaning.

Krisztina Tóth has become one of the leading figures of her generation. The autobiographical self has more narrative room here, or maybe simply gives itself more room. As with Mesterházi, the line from Nemes Nagy and Rakovszky seems fairly clear though, unlike Nemes Nagy, the self in Tóth is distinctly female. She often writes about what are traditionally regarded as female subjects: love, relationship and nature, but the voice is tough, occasionally discursive, often obliquely narrative, and capable of sounding great, haunting depths. Like almost all the younger Hungarian poets she employs elements of what is sometimes called 'traditional' form meaning stanza, metre and rhyme—but in contemporary terms. In many ways she is easier than some others to translate because there is less left out, because the narratives are recognizable to us as sensibility somewhere between Michael Hofmann and, yes, Carol Ann Duffy once more. Behind it is the metaphysical vacuum we detect in Imreh in a less direct way.

Both Tóth and Mesterházi—and to some degree Imreh too—owe a great deal to the school formed around Nemes Nagy after the Second World War, or rather to the magazine she founded with her then husband, the critic Balázs Lengyel. That magazine, *Újhold* (New Moon) was quickly banned by the Stalinist authorities, but it had already attracted the most significant poets of the time including Weöres, Pilinszky, Tandori and many others. Though the magazine was closed down, its aesthetic—internationalist, formal, highly disciplined—continued to exercise influence, and, when it was relaunched as an anthology in the mid-'80s, younger poets such as Rakovszky and Győző Ferencz were soon involved in its publishing and editing. Ferencz is in fact an important figure in maintaining that aesthetic both in his own poetry and, just as importantly, in his teaching and critical writing. A number of young poets acknowledge their debt to him. It is hard to catch the precise strain of the ironic, the oblique, the modest, the lyrical and the heroically tragic in his own poetry in English translation—I have, to my regret, tried without much success but English doesn't seem to possess the right organ stops, or at least I can't find them—but it continues to sing in the work of others.

Virág Erdős is another matter altogether. Her subjects are rarely personal except in an ironic way. She uses wild wit, street language and scatology to savage a clearly public, clearly social realm. One might think of her as a writer of anti-consumerist satires, or a feminist with dangerously sharp scissors. There are grotesques and broadsides and stories, some in verse, some in prose. Some critics think she is uncategorizable. She is also a writer of plays or dramatic dialogues and one can see why she might be drawn to drama. She writes tales too, though as she herself says, she hates tales because they are always the same. She is, in short, a contentious figure in contemporary Hungarian writing, something of a rogue beast. It may be possible to compare her with an earlier writer of grotesques like István Örkény but it wouldn't get us far. She has an extra de-cultured ferocity; she is propelled along on a tide of emotion we might have associated with punk and is in this anthology because she is, in my view, an important writer, one altogether without propriety and metaphysics but possessed of genuine writerly discipline. Every so often, it is salutary to be beaten about the head like this.

The question of the public space is to some degree answered by the work of **János Térey**, a remarkably vigorous, intellectually energetic writer, not only in poems but in a range of literary forms. He enjoys perhaps the highest reputation of those represented here and would, by his absence, constitute the greatest gap. He is central in the way that Erdős is deliberately peripheral (although great and marvellous things, especially in post-imperial times, often happen at the periphery). Unlike Erdős he is difficult to translate as his tone is much more elusive, more complex, more specifically Hungarian in some respects, in that both voice and concern are closely tied in to the current

of Budapest thinking. It is thinking that is always ambitious, always a touch theoretical while maintaining its own form of street talk; it just happens to be a highly intelligent, historically-conscious street. In Budapest the voice falls naturally: in British English it sounds more wilful. There is no easy equivalent to be drawn. In many ways it is fully, consciously, ambitiously literary work. His verse novel of 2001, *Paulus,* was regarded as "the great *Gesamtkunstwerk* of Hungarian postmodern literature (or at least, poetry)." Szilárd Borbély wrote of his 2001 volume, *Ultra:* "The narrator speaking in these verses assumes a wide range of roles, leading us through various historical epochs and various European settings. The poems are replete with bravura rhymes and melodic and syntactical structures, quotations of forms and rhymes, homage, cultural allusions, playful echoes. What flickers to life in the poems is a cavalcade of highly diverse civilizations, washing into and interacting with one another." Some of his work has been adapted to theatre and a passage from his 2008 play *Table Music* is included here. Térey is a highly prolific and protean writer for deeply fragmented, protean times.

The poet István Géher (b. 1972) is not to be confused with his father, the poet István Géher (b. 1940). The father is, again, like Ferencz, one of those influential figures whose teaching has informed a generation, including poets like Mesterházi, and an important missing figure here, Dániel Varró (b. 1977)[4]. In order to avoid the confusion the younger Géher usually publishes as **László G. István.** His work is anecdotal, ironic, humorous, the tone immediately identifiable as lyrical, male and romantic. As the reader may be able to tell his work is more easily translatable if only because we have certain relative, if not entirely thoroughgoing or fully elective, affinities to hand. His subject is modern life with its anxieties and alienation. The poems are beautifully crafted, with a light touch, but retain considerable intensity of feeling. His work can be highly formal but it feels informal. It is the shrug, the hidden formality of the everyday. As his poem about the headwaiter says:

> *A plate slips, falls.*
> *Every one is family, every one bereaved.*
> *Every one is happily deceased.*

Anna T. Szabó is the writer of perhaps the purest and richest vein of lyrical poetry in contemporary Hungarian—her debt to Rakovszky is clear from her technique through to her range of feeling. She was born in Transylvania at a time bad for both Romanians and Hungarians, but particularly tough on ethnic Hungarians. Like her husband-to-be, the novelist György Dragomán, she left

4 ■ Varró is one of the most popular Hungarian poets but one hardly translated into English. His time will come.

Transylvania in her mid-teens and was then educated in Hungary. Her poems lend themselves to translation since her subjects are elemental rather than local. She writes of love, of physical and moral passion, of birth and motherhood, but also of photography, film and all things visual. Her propriety is not a matter of distance or irony but of governed form. Poems open from small specifics onto deeper, larger matters. In some ways her voice is reminiscent of Attila József's in its passion and compassion. As Judit Márványi writes, "The claim and the ability to happiness is there hidden in Anna T. Szabó's darkest poems, as in a well-defended nest or unseen, at the depth of water. But happiness, not as a message, a topic or a story, but as form itself, is there in the body of the poem; the lines proceed in merry dance steps even in the vicinity of death, of anguish." Győző Ferencz writes of the "fragile balance" of her work. There is no subterfuge in her poetry: the passion is underwritten by complexity of experience and a very sharp, very unsentimental eye. One of her most powerful poems, "She Leaves Me", is about childbirth as voiced for the child:

She betrays me, she leaves me.
She pushes me out of herself, and leaves me.
She offers herself to feed on, and leaves me.
She rocks me and she leaves me.
Wipes my bottom, combs my hair,
caresses the soles of my feet, but leaves me.

The rhetorical manner is at one with the universality of the theme that, at the same time, retains its intense particularity, as indeed it has to—and always does—in Szabó's poetry.

Tamás Jónás is of a Roma family. He does not like being referred to as a 'Roma poet', nor is he here to represent the Roma population of Hungary. He earns his place in this anthology as a poet, although it has to be said that his poems are in a different key from most of the poems in this book. Jónás's poems, says Terri Hunter, "...are confessional, almost to the point of being obtrusive. They often lead us right into the middle of the private sphere where we would prefer not to look." It is, she continues, "Roma poetry in the sense that it gives voice to an ethnic group steadily growing in number, but lacking in prominent intellectuals and artists. This is also a reason why his works are markedly different from most of contemporary Hungarian poetry. In the process of finding his own voice, he often reaches back to older literary models—to Villon, Attila József or 19th-century Hungarian poets", adding that "If contemporary poetry is characterized by playfulness, a fundamental irony and theoretical consciousness, then Jónás's poetry is outdated." Well, no, they are not outdated, since the consciousness animating his poems is by no means archaic. But it does

resort to a different mode of telling, one more direct, more involved in myth and tragedy. "Ballad of the Tortured" begins:

I knew Feco when he was strong and proud,
a falcon amongst sparrows round our home.
His dad was in the shithouse that he burnt.
He'd slumped asleep whilst he was on the throne

We can hear Villon there, but are also aware of a proper, credible Villonesque vibrancy.

Orsolya Karafiáth is an interesting figure in that she is highly conscious of her image as a poet and publicly lives up to it—"poet, translator and publicist", says one biographical note. She is also the singer with a band. She plays the glamour card, even to some degree the celebrity card. Images of her in various personae abound on the internet almost more than her poems do, and this renders her a peculiar phenomenon, a kind of Madonna of poetry. If Virág Erdős questions femininity, Karafiáth exploits it in a series of masks. Her poems are like songs, cabaret songs that reject cliché while playing on it. Her poem "Earth" talks directly about mask and its sources.

You know them well. Those weathered stones.
Those rocks in never-ending chains.
The clay soil baked hard. The ashes.
The zinc, the brass, those burnt remains.

Pigment, oil. Platelets. Our faces
emerge now, ready to behold.
We are made of various dusts.
We'll turn into pure dust of gold.

"Lotte Lenya's Secret Song" begins:

My voice will vary every time,
always new cues, new stars, new look.
My words are just a whispered rhyme,
deletion from a shoddy book.

There is, in other words, a highly conscious and skilful crafting involved in the Karafiáth poetic persona. Style and substance are complementary.

If there is a poet as densely lyrical and rich as Anna T. Szabó, it is **András Gerevich**. His poetry, mostly gay love poems, is a matter of perfect balance in pure narrative: in cadence, in period, in detail, in the point where the narrative stops and in the implication of what it leaves out. Everything is simply what it is—or perhaps "simply" is not quite the right word.

It is one of the most difficult things in the world to write poems so clear, so

pellucid, so free of metaphor and simile as to be almost pure speech. Everything depends on narrative shape and tone because there is little else. András Gerevich's poems are like that. They are mostly about love, desire, and passion; a little like a diary, a little like a letter, a little like a confessional, the first person singular being at the centre of each. But there is nothing self-indulgent about them. In that respect they are reminiscent of Catullus on the one hand and Cavafy, in some moods, on the other. It is the range and precision of emotion that gives them their necessary independence: voice becomes free-standing sculpture, moving, elegant, beautiful. The poems enter English with a lightness, almost unannounced, as immediately recognizable feelings that make their own space and hold it as naturally as if they always belonged there.

> *... I'd have liked*
> *to chat with someone, hitchhike into Boston,*
> *spend the night clubbing, but Josh was asleep,*
> *Jamar too, Terence and Jacques,*
> *all the men I never had time*
> *to fall in love with were asleep.*
> *With them in mind, I dozed off briefly*
> *and the wrinkles on my face smoothed out.*

The curse of anthologies is omission. Anthologies assume a false authority that seems to suggest that all that was worth collecting has been collected, and that any material left out is of lesser value, and therefore may safely be ignored. That is far from the case. Omission may be thematic, occasional, temperamental, or opportunistic. Work may be omitted simply because it is unavailable at the time, something that often happens with anthologies of translation. Or perhaps the available translations are not quite good enough; maybe because of lack of money, time or inclination, not enough translators could be recruited to the cause. I have edited anthologies before and always regretted the omissions far more than the inclusions. In that respect, the anthologist is always wrong.

Having worked for twenty-five years as a translator myself I am equally aware that the translator often gets forgotten altogether. Let the translators of these poems not be forgotten. At the core of this book is a project, organized jointly by the British Council and the Hungarian Cultural Centre, that brought together a number of younger British and Hungarian poets for mutual translation that resulted in a pamphlet or chapbook called *Converging Lines,* which included poems and translations by Krisztina Tóth, Antony Dunn, Anna T. Szabó, Clare Pollard, Mónika Mesterházi, Matthew Hollis, András Imreh, Polly Clark, László G. István, Owen Sheers and Péter Rácz, who, like Dániel Varró, and for much the same reasons, is another of the sad omissions. Material from that brief anthology has been used here.

Though anthologists are invariably wrong, I do think there is an impressive and fair selection of work here and that it gives the reader a reasonable idea of what has happened since 1989. Poets are not primarily political commentators, of course, nor are they obliged to act as conscious transmitters of the *zeitgeist* as it appears to them or indeed to an outsider. *Zeitgeist* is what happens between the lines. What seems clear to me is that the change of political system—from something alien to the West to something more recognizable to it—has not turned younger Hungarian poets into versions of Western poets overnight.

Life is far more interesting than that. Consciousness trawls a much deeper sea. That which we had in common before we continue to have in common: that which was different remains different, albeit in a changed and still changing way. Anna T. Szabó's poetry, for example, is often about love, desire, birth, but the edginess and darkness haunting her poems of love and loss are derived from specific local and historical circumstances. It is *that* darkness, *that* edge of fear that lends pressure to the poems. Krisztina Tóth's narratives have an almost transatlantic feel but the cut of the tongue is distinctly Budapest. László G. István's voice is similarly Budapest; the shrug is built into it, as is the nervousness. András Gerevich's poems of desire would have been poems of desire at any time and in any place, indeed some of the places have the leisured internationalism of the modern world. But the nerves on which they play are strung on Hungarian neuroses.

On the more conscious level, Borbély and Térey are both aiming to construct houses big enough to accommodate the wider histories of which they are part. Their enterprise is anticipated by Kemény's. Virág and Karafiáth both live in the twilight of the modern world, that is to say the post-1989 world. They are its critics and embodiments. András Imreh and Mónika Mesterházi live in the consciousness of the new world, and where it leaves them as individuals, as particles of sand on the shore from which the state and its grotesques have so recently withdrawn. There is change everywhere. Tamás Jónás's world is perhaps the one that has changed least, being the most overtly tragic and torn.

These are, if you like, poems of transition from what we think we knew to that which we only apprehend. The illusion of a settled state of affairs in the world, a fixed binary opposition between directly conflicting systems and incomparable lives, has melted away. Maybe it was always an illusion, or at least partly so, but it did offer, if nothing else, an illusion of certainty, something a Hungarian could shrug at and accept as just another 'damn thing' in a long unbroken sequence of 'damn things'. At least it was a constant 'damn thing'.

The illusion is gone, but history has not vanished with it. The new position leaves less room for heroics and for myth, but they have not disappeared either. They are simply moving at greater depth, with smaller, often sharper teeth. ❧

András Imreh

Still, Life

Csend, élet

You have to give me your word nonetheless
the bed will never be moved from the place
where the cat lies down first. See how it curls
up in a ball, comfortable and soft,
upon a pile of pullovers we failed
to put away, just like an embryo
lodged deep inside its mother, or like snails
scattered across the sand. Our room is so
unworthy of its role, the couch without
a flowery throwover, or decorated
cushions, no hot chocolate sends a thread
of steam up on the lowly table, all
the light that falls on it comes from a bulb
of 60 watts, warm, yellowish, as if
we ate our evening meal with just one candle.
The cat, meanwhile, submerged in darkness, far
beyond the wave circles of splashing flame,
looks as if it's keeping watch upon
the silent rituals that satisfy
our hunger. Spend five minutes gazing on
its almond-shaped eyes, and then deny this:
you cannot tell whether, in the half dark,
the cat's pulsating, preparing to step
into the slow, thick, running water of
its dreams, or whether, in the fluctuating
liquid that bathes your iris, in that tense
and trembling watery mirror, all that throbs
is the unmoving phantom of a cat!
It's wonderful, unspeakably so, don't
you see? Am I the only one who thrills
before its majesty as expertly,
unhurriedly, distending its rounded
belly it turns over on one side?

Translated by Christopher Whyte

Anna T. Szabó

Birth

Születés

November; darkness dawns. Slow sifts
of rain, eaves gurgle, boughs drip-drip.
Other-worldly time. Whoever wakes
falls straight to sleep, anew.

Will autumn have a morning?
Moist, black, slimy—the thicket
of dreaming catches skin, sleepers
strive to swim in it, struggling.

But still, a woman sits up in the dark,
tears herself from the tick of rain,
and listens to another pulse:
a living water laps inside her ears.

And she feels it's time for sun
to rip night open; smiles and strokes
her warm, taut abdomen, the embryo
snug up against her palm.

Translated by Clare Pollard

Krisztina Tóth

Blank Map

Vaktérkép

To my son

The faces of the mountain ranges, grinding strata,
the Mariana Trench of the unfathomed mind, the lava
in the soul; why, who knows

why the wind-felled forests, the hobo ravens
live and die, the straying rivers,
penguins on their shirking floes,

the tattered helices of the cloud,
the blinded wandering of the flood,
why, if it can not scent

a course it simply drags its sad ways
and anywhere it goes it's war,
death scores a trench

with names, with birth, with love
with which we should not have
entangled the earth,

our towns, our voice-throwing fortune,
the deep valley basin of memories, living lines,
you see, how they all go forth,

wandering, and have no way of their own;
always, always, it's the mothers, the orphanhood to which, again,
they're giving birth.

Translated by Antony Dunn

István Kemény

Faultless Flood of Light

Hibátlan fényözön

It's as if this moment were a long time ago.
As if her eyes saw wonders
she would only discover in good twenty years.
The eyes of a child are unfit:
but let's see these wonders with befitting eyes:
this late spring afternoon
in faultless flood of light,
it is this moment when out they come, hop hop hop,
and the entire nursery is transported home,
and even the dog comes to pick up little Daniel.
Two mothers, at the open gate, incapable of ending
their conversation. They jam the entrance:
a busty baby-sitter with the twins
drops her sun-glasses right beside the dog.
"Oh, a fox! Oh my god, let's run!"
The car is the house, the house is the chick coop,

and people are chickens and hens too.
The sky, cloudless, it is twenty degrees.
It's twenty years ago.

Her eyes. As if this minute held
the golden age, and nothing else, for ever.
Oh my god. What will I do now?
What will I do?

Translated by Ágnes Lehoczky

Szilárd Borbély

Amor and Psyche Sequences

XIII

Ámor és Psyché-szekvenciák

A medieval legend tells how a very small, utterly helpless
child was stolen from its mother. Falling into the hands
of people traders, it was sold off in a distant land.
The mother set off in search, did everything she could
to gather news, came close to finding him, but the owners
had already passed him on. They told her wonderful things.
While she hunted, he became a man, would soon be old.
They said he brought peace everywhere he went. Letting go of him
was like letting go of life. But others had to be helped too.
His mother lived in constant expectation, also fearing
the meeting might prove more than she could bear.
She therefore put it off until it was too late.

Translated by Christopher Whyte

Orsolya Karafiáth

"To Sing a Happy Song"

Good things don't have a special slot,
they fit along with all the rest.
Thoughtless, they dissolve in me.
I notice. What to do with them?
Untarnished joys like raspberries,
each tiny fruit picked from the bush.
Behind the flesh, the bone-coloured
flash of the plate's porcelain.
Only those who are loved
hold the key to summer's allure.
If I can say, it's happiness.
Cold shaft of light on the house wall.
Rust-coloured water from a garden tap
announcing winter, ice and frosts.
My blouse's clasp askew.
I hope I'll still be happy then.

Translated by Christopher Whyte

János Térey

Delight

Öröm

Puffed up by steam in Christmas snow,
reclining on a bed of roses,
breathing in that fragrance deeply
which can kill if rocked in mists—
you stretch yourself, thinking's transfixed,
a cold drop runs all down your back
(finger down a steam-beaded door)
and, thrusting up from deep below,
delight is incandescent. You
emerge, take your seat in the lap
of a basin of champagne froth,
pampered by a life of shadows…

You gaze, as if outside across
the square: just jealous emptiness,
a brake light sets a snowflake sparkling
and, it could be in a shop window,
the pool puts on a public show…
Though blushing, you still make a move
and as, unsmiling, Christmas nears,
lounge upon a bed of roses
before swimming a lap, your gift,
target of a measureless love.

Translated by Christopher Whyte

Mónika Mesterházi

Waters

Vizek

Italian rivers
slowed by dark green plants
glassy opal-blue waters of Verona
stumbling from stone to stone
the lake at Como that swallowed
vast black mountains
and not too far away
a leafier mirror
the wavy sandy coast with no secrets
and the brine-world of lagoons
the obliquely pouring white
weasel-waves of sea
the sweet-tasting Balaton
white and green wild mountain streams
the tufa water-channels that wash out
and turn the soil to gleaming beard
the Danube's brown-green silk
and how many tiled indoor-pools
how many shorelines store
and interpret my glance
how many kilometres I have swum
to reach this point of rest

Translated by Clare Pollard

András Gerevich

Vauxhall

Vauxhall

I made my way home at daybreak
sipping cocoa
yellow lamplight on the empty street
grey pulsation in the sky
the tarmacadam undulating
my pullover hugged me from the cold
thinking of you
your body's ocean
washed my imagination up
on a rocky coast
the rumbling
the morning chirping
canned music day and night
lulled desire
yearning to sleep
the ocean was a puddle
crows settled around
on dawns like that my body too
is parched yet placid

Translated by Christopher Whyte

Virág Erdős

Eurydice

Eurüdiké

Rácz Bath, Female Pool, around 1900

Floating in hot orange squash
like ice.

I haven't a clue just now
what I am for.

Whether winter
or summer,
whether it's this year
or the next,
whether I am a girl
or heaven knows
what's the best,
whether it's fire-damp
or cloud turbulence
look, it's likely to rain cats and dogs
and still unsure, if I've bathed in steam or fog
see, this is the cost
of having a dip
if I could, I'd get a grip on life
but sometimes I am just so cold
and sometimes I just sweat non-stop
oh please don't come with
this afterlife bullshit, eternity crap,
I have far too many problems
sciatica and liver congestion
gyring joint-gout and the last to mention,
my heart.

Whoever put it
on my head
damn it… no doubt,
the curse works.
Yet I spy, and snoop
and eavesdrop for the bloody

dump truck stuck in front of the house
leaving no access, no way out
from number 10 Shavetail Street
and despite all my official whining
I've lost my name tag with my landing
and my season ticket and, apparently,
so I've been told,
I'm nothing but a zombie.

And it's the price I pay
for ruining my name
for going cahoots with ragtags and prats
for mixing sulphate with bicarbonate
and drinking lye and smoking the pipe
there's no one coming to fix this line
no one's returning to liberate.

Translated by Ágnes Lehoczky

Tamás Jónás

On Water

A vízről

Water is lonely, slow, empty.
Evaporates, flows in-out-in,
burns up in sun, takes dark
from the falling night.
He is riverbed and sky,
excess and remnant,
empty, slow and thoughtless.

And he has bones—trees, the past—
and scars—space and time—
but no family, is severed
from his fallen forefathers.
He is as bored with freedom as
his nerves are with his soul,
that hurts when it does not hurt.

And he has things to do: two sons
he longs for when he is alone.
He's always young but he remains
a lake he fears remaining.
In him the sufferers and passions
are joining and separating.
Whatever he does is done badly.

Translated by Clare Pollard

László G. István

Algae and Angels

Algák és angyalok

What manner of power could hold you
back from being? Like seaweed, our hands
are adrift; expect no prayers from us.
The not-asking is a cave under
water; algae and angels pass through
the eye socket through which you look
upon yourself and see not, my Lord, what you are.
You are what you are, I know; only bubbles
declare your advent; when you come
it is as your going; when you speak it is as
your falling silent; fear is as a hurling rain in me
that you may find me only as I lose you—
faith is like a fall of hail in me, if nothing
grows in it but an eternity
to wait until the heart begins to clench and the word—
allow the name its power to name—becomes the knot of blood.

Translated by Antony Dunn

Krisztina Tóth

Sand Aquarium

Short story

The tram is crossing the city, its walls waist-high in graffiti. Rain is washing the grubby houses, the grey streets, but nothing is getting any cleaner, just steaming forlornly in the latest version of April.

I get off at Oktogon. At the tram stop, beneath the glass roof of the shelter, three hollow-faced homeless men in overcoats are sitting in a heap, leaning into each other. The one in the middle is holding something in his lap, and they are all staring at it. From this distance it looks like a laptop, but that seems rather unlikely. For the homeless to be surfing the Net, I mean. The image could serve as one of those ludicrous ads: the Internet is democratic, WiFi for everyone. But the object in his lap isn't a laptop or a newspaper. I stroll back to see what it is. The man in the middle is holding a sheet of glass. No, it isn't a sheet of glass.

(I never knew what they were called, and now the moment to name the object has come, and I can't. There is no word for it.)

Between two sheets of glass in a frame there is coloured liquid and sand slowly trickling downwards. If you turn the frame around, the sand trickles in the opposite direction. For want of a better word, I'll call it a sand aquarium.

This is what the three homeless men are staring at so intently, the entertainment for today. They sit, motionless, then the one on the left says:

"It went down quicker before."

The mind boggles. So this isn't even the first round, they've been playing with it for some time. I must admit that the first time I saw one of these sand aquariums, it held me spellbound for quite a while too. It was at the entrance to the lido at Zánka, I was with my son, and I remember he said that the picture reminded him of Star Wars, of one of the planets. Coruscant I think it was, but I may be mistaken, again.

I tear myself away from the homeless movie-gazers and set off through the galaxy, through the spatter of a nasty interstellar rain. It isn't an April shower, but a persistent, hopeless drizzle. It does nothing to alleviate the airlessness of the city, washes nothing clean, just keeps drizzling, drizzling from somewhere.

I too am moving, wheeling between two cracked panes of glass encompassing the world. If I could see my own movements from a certain

---

Krisztina Tóth

has published six volumes of poems, three volumes of children's poems and three volumes of prose to date. Her collection of short stories and sketches, from which the two stories published here are taken, is reviewed by László Márton on p. 115 of this issue.

distance, a wider perspective, I would see that I am a brisk, sodden particle moving towards the lower edge of the picture.

We are all living in a sand aquarium, and somewhere up above us an absent-minded hand turns the frame this way and that from time to time, and all the little particles begin to descend in the same direction. They cling together, draw apart, drift hither and thither, create splendid, exciting formations in the grey soup.

I am trying to dodge the other particles, trickling deftly towards Nyugati Station. I cross the street at a pedestrian crossing, the density of the particles is greater here, then becomes thinner, a more diluted medium, I am making for the building with the Shoe Shop sign.

I walk into the shop, out of the rain at last. The shop-window is full of sales signs, yet the shop assistants all look up and stare at me aghast, as if their best intentions notwithstanding they had nonetheless attracted the interest of a customer. I have the feeling that they resent their customers, after all, the shop is not kept open so that people can come in out of the April rain. All those bloody pedestrians: this isn't a covered bus shelter or a refuge hut.

In the neon light, which is on though it's still early in the afternoon, I note that there is a comparatively large number of saleswomen inside the shop, standing around, lounging against the walls. Some of them are obviously trainees, but they all seem immobile, inert, like extras in a bad dream.

I start to stroll around, checking out the shoes on display. No one looks up at me, but whenever our eyes meet by accident they quickly look away, as if I were doing something improper. I don't want to buy shoes at all costs, but I might, you never know. That is why I came in after all, but I am becoming more and more discouraged by the minute.

A turquoise boot catches my eye, I pick it up off the shelf. It is only one boot, not the pair, and it looks a bit scuffed. A lot of people must have tried it on already. It is exactly the right size, but I would like to ask someone whether they have another pair in the same size in better condition. I wander around forlornly, holding the boot, trying to catch the glance of one of the saleswomen. A horse-faced trainee glances at me, then at my hand, and before I can open my mouth she says, in a dull voice:

"No. Only-what-you-see-on-the-shelves."

I lose my momentum, replace the boot, and start watching the only other customer in the shop. The shop assistants have sunk back into apathy except for the woman behind the counter, who is relating a telephone conversation conducted the previous day to her colleague with painstaking precision. She drones on in a dull monotone, unrelenting, like the rain outside.

The other customer, who must have strayed in by accident, is a blonde woman in a black coat. She is wearing patent leather boots and a patent leather handbag, and the faint scent of her perfume pervades the shop. I take

her to be a foreigner, an inhabitant of an alien aquarium. She wanders around looking at the shoes, tries to establish eye-contact with one of the shop assistants,with as little success as I had. I think there must be a special sort of training for this, probably the same sort of training waiters have to go through, and if a customer manages to snag you, or even so much as dares to approach you, you're automatically disqualified. Not just anyone can become a shop assistant, you have to be as vigilant as a security guard, otherwise someone might come up and request your assistance at any minute.

The woman who I take to be a foreigner has made a tour round the shoe-shop, and is now standing in front of the counter. The cashier avoids looking at her, she is leaning against the shelves stacked with shoe-cleaning products, arch-supports and umbrellas. The blonde woman waits patiently, and when the cashier looks up at her irritably, she points to the shelf:

"Umbrella, umbrella!" she says in English.

The cashier does not answer her but says instead to the colleague to whom she was relating her telephone conversation:

"I don't believe it. She's off again."

The blonde woman is smiling patiently, tenaciously and repeating the word umbrella, keeps drawing arcs above her head. The ample-proportioned cashier has had enough. She takes a step forward, leans on the counter for emphasis and says loudly, articulating carefully, into the blonde woman's face:

"We don't sell hats, I've told you already. We-don't-sell-hats."

"She wants an umbrella," I say diffidently.

"Oh, an umbrella!" says the saleswoman, slapping her palm down on the counter. "Why didn't she say so, then?"

Yeah, right, why didn't she. She doesn't know the right word for it, the silly idiot.

The blonde woman steps out of the shop ahead of me, opening her new umbrella. I left without new shoes in the end, but at least she got this black umbrella. She sets off down the street, and I soon lose sight of her. I walk back towards Oktogon in the relentless drizzle, my hood damp against my head. I am now moving in an opposite direction from the one I was taking half an hour ago. An unknown hand has turned over the picture and all the little particles are now flowing backwards, settling into interesting, amusing formations. At the tram stop at Oktogon, for example, three homeless men are sitting beneath the glass roof of the shelter, leaning into each other, watching the picture change.

It is always the same, yet it is always slightly different. The details keep being redrawn, from time to time some mysterious line of force appears. You can watch it unfold, it helps to pass the time. ❧

Panning for Gold

Short story

"Surely no one in their right mind would choose to get married in January," the postman mused. It was bitterly cold, even the mud was frozen solid and the Christmas trees that had already been thrown out were stacked in stiff, icy piles beside the refuse containers. The peeling façade of the building on the corner was dark, only the four basement windows glowed in the early gloom. He stood rooted to the pavement, as if he were watching four television screens in the window of an electrical goods store. All four grimy screens were showing the same scene: a wedding in a grotty basement. Huge pipes insulated with aluminium ran across the ceiling, below stood a long table around which the wedding guests were seated. The chubby bride was wearing a fake fur bolero over her wedding dress, but her bare arms were still on display. The bridegroom was explaining something, gesticulating wildly, and the small low-ceilinged room was hazy with cigarette smoke. The postman moved on, shaking his head. He glanced around, no one was coming, so he stepped closer to the lamp-post and heaving a huge sigh, took aim and relieved himself. "The last thing I need is for my dick to catch cold."

He had been assigned to this district at the beginning of December; he hated the neighbourhood. It was a tortuous maze of winding streets, strange narrow gardens, mixed-breed dogs that barked ferociously and buildings marked with letters instead of numbers. K,L,M,F,G,F and God knows how many other letters, and no signs anywhere, naturally. How hard can it be to put up a bloody street sign? And now, to cap it all, it was growing dark; you simply couldn't find the right houses on the afternoon shift. On one side of the road there were the old modest houses with paths running in twists and turns, on the other the looming blocks of flats marked with letters. He turned in at the entrance, took out the first batch. Gregus, Block K.

"They always get these oversized envelopes," he thought, with hatred. He could not find the second name, Döme, at all. He checked the letter-boxes twice, then, on a sudden impulse, chucked the envelope in with the oversized one. Let them sort it out, if they want. What kind of name is Döme anyway, it isn't even a human name, it's a bear's name, sod it. He felt a great sense of relief; when he walked out of the building even the cold seemed less extreme.

He took out the second batch, slipped off the elastic band. Yvette Kondé. A right slapper she must be, with a name like that. Not Hungarian, that's for sure. He took the letter and slipped it in the Kovács's letter-box in Block F. He had two registered letters, he chucked them in as well, then turned to find Block G. It was somewhere at the back, you could only get there by going around. There was no street-lighting there, and over on the other side of the street the houses with gardens began, with their neurotic dogs. And anyway, there were only

four letters for G, and one of those was a belated New Year's card. He stuck the whole bundle into the plastic pipe in front of Block F where they put the circulars. "Fuck you all," he said in summary, and spat a huge gob of spit onto the pavement in front of the entrance.

He was done and back just after six, warming his hands over the radiator. Both his hands were bright red, as if he had scalded them. His skin could not stand the cold, but you could get used to anything after a while, he supposed. He thought some more about buying the panning equipment off Robi. That's right, he suddenly remembered, the panners were all wearing gloves in that educational film he had seen. Special gloves that came up to your elbows. Pity he hadn't managed to re-record it on tape off the DVD, because then he could have watched it at home, to remind himself exactly what those gloves looked like. Robi had said the panners were all people who had got themselves a degree and everything and already made a pile but had grown tired of civilization and corruption. The Danube is supposedly still full of gold. Robi said that was why the Danube was called Panner's Danube somewhere around Győr, he couldn't remember where exactly, because they used to pan for gold there in the olden days. He also said that if one were to fit a filter to every tap in Békásmegyer where he lived, say, several kilos of gold dust could be collected over a year. But of course that would cost a great deal of money, and it wouldn't be easy, going round all those flats, ringing the bell to get them to let you in to say Hello there, I'd like to fit a gold-filter on your tap. To explain the process to all those Muggles! It would be worse than delivering the post. Trouble is, all those kilos of gold dust are now trickling back into the Danube, and there is no one to pan it, because people can't be bothered to do things like that any more. No one wants to work, but they all want the dosh. That's the kind of world it is. True, he pondered further, the truffle lark had been Robi's idea too, but it wasn't his fault that it hadn't come to anything in the end. It was that blasted dog. He couldn't sniff out the truffles, even though they'd paid a fortune for him. And Robi's pal had said he'd been trained specially. Bloody animal.

On Friday he was called in to see the boss. He didn't think it meant trouble, he'd been called in once before, and all they said that time was that pensions should never be left with the neighbours, the rule was that pensions had to be delivered personally, by hand to the person concerned. He went into the main office before his shift, watched the pallet trucks at work for a bit. On the first floor he almost walked into the sorting office by mistake, it was only when he reached the swing doors that he realized he wanted the next floor up. He had a long wait, the secretary mumbled something about the boss being on his lunch break. And she didn't even glance at him, didn't even tell him to take a seat while he waited, though his feet were killing him. There was some kind of plant, a creeper in a hanging basket on the wall above the woman's head. He hated plants like that, hated creepers, they always had them in the classrooms at school. On the

opposite wall there was a poster of Tigger from Winnie-the-Pooh, and beside that a picture of a goose with a bubble coming out of its mouth that said: "Why me?" It reminded him of how Robi had once said that the Romans had used geese to guard their houses, and that geese could be much, much nastier than dogs. His feet were really killing him. He suddenly burst out laughing because he thought of two geese talking, one moaning to the other about his aching ducked feet. That was some joke, he'd tell it to Robi one of these days. The secretary looked up at him, frowning in disapproval, but she didn't have time to say anything because the boss had arrived and was already ushering him in through the glass door.

The boss sat down, but did not ask him to take a seat. He said that recently a number of complaints had come in from the houses to which he had been assigned, that the supervisors had investigated the legitimacy of the complaints and unfortunately they had in fact proven justified. And that he realized how annoying faulty addresses could be, because in this country it was a fact of life that no one would get any letters at all if having the right address on the envelope were a criterion for delivering it.

"Look," he added, spinning a roll of Sellotape on his index finger, "I didn't start out sitting at this desk you know. I started out as a postman too," he said in a fatherly manner, with a gravity befitting the minister of communications and information.

The postman did not look at him, he was staring at the pallet trucks out in the yard. A bit further, beyond the roof, you could see the station where a train was just beginning to pull out from behind the slate tiles. It was only the last sentence that caught his attention, he turned back towards the boss, who jabbed hard at the Sellotape.

"As it is a case of repeated complaints, I'm afraid we are going to have to let you go."

The postman saw with some surprise that the air above the boss's head was full of gold dust. Well! There must be some way of filtering it out of the air, he thought. There's sure to be some sort of device that you can put in the air conditioning to trap it.

"No problem," he said, looking the boss straight in the eye. "You see I'm going to America soon anyway, I've been learning English for several months."

And he turned back towards the station, where the passenger train he had noticed earlier had left the station and was now chugging along the tracks.

"And I'm getting married," he continued. As the boss said nothing in reply, didn't even congratulate him, he added, in a sudden flash of inspiration: "Just so you know, my fiancée's name is Yvette. She's coming with me." ❧

Translated by Eszter Molnár

The Text Reveals Itself

Vali Tóth Talks with Len Rix

Vali Tóth: *You have now translated all of Antal Szerb's fiction.* Journey by Moonlight *came out in 2001, followed by* The Pendragon Legend *in 2006 and* Oliver VII *in 2008. The short stories are awaiting publication.* The Queen's Necklace, *which Szerb described as "an historical essay", appeared in 2009. When and how did you become interested in Hungarian literature, and why did you choose* Journey by Moonlight *as the first work to translate into English?*

Len Rix: I first heard Hungarian spoken conversationally in October 1989. I was enchanted—such a beautiful, resonant, richly expressive language—and I immediately decided to learn it. I acquired dictionaries, books of grammar and tapes, and began a systematic programme of vocabulary learning, which has never really stopped. Then, in 1990, after I had been learning for about a year, a friend put a copy of the novel in my hand and told me, "This is the book we all read as students. Every educated Hungarian knows and loves this book." It took just three pages for me to realise that it was a great European novel, and when I discovered that it had never been translated into English I made it a project. I was fortunate in that good Hungarian friends in Manchester, where I was living at the time, went through much of it with me, line by line, insisting on the most rigorous standards of literal accuracy. I then revised it again and again over the years until I found a publisher willing to take it. Or, rather, they found me.

Vali Tóth

is an independent producer, broadcaster and journalist based in London. She worked for the BBC World Service as a producer and presenter of the Hungarian Service until its closure in 2006. Since then she has been the London correspondent of Hungarian National Radio. Her latest book, Itt London *(London Speaking), was published in 2007.*

What attracted you to Antal Szerb as a writer?

From the very first page I was struck by the stylistic brilliance, and the sense of a fierce intelligence playing over the material with such deceptively gentle irony. When you come into the presence of a really fine writer you feel an immediate trust, and Szerb certainly inspired that feeling in me. And of course, the more I got to know about his life and character, that extraordinary mixture of powerful intellect, personal vulnerability and sheer kindness—and then the terrible circumstances of his death—that trust became something deeper, a profound admiration.

Given the fact that the English hardly read translated literature, why did you think that this novel would appeal to English readers?

First, we should question whether it really is true that the English "hardly read translated literature". There is a vast army of discerning readers in this country who will buy and read anything of genuine quality, and they show a positive appetite for foreign fiction. The contrary fact that *Journey by Moonlight* alone has now sold 40,000 copies, and the number is rising—which implies an actual readership of around three times that number—makes my point. No, the problem here is not with the readers, but with the big publishers' unwillingness to take risks on what they, quite wrongly, see as an unrewarding market. And we must remember too the very small number of good translations from Hungarian available in English. It's still nowhere near the sort of critical mass required to generate either sufficient material for university courses, or a consistent wider readership.

But as for *Journey by Moonlight,* its greatness seemed so very obvious to me—up there with Flaubert and Proust and Thomas Mann—that I had no doubt other readers would see it too. On the other hand—and this will sound odd—the story, and the character, of Mihály spoke so intimately to me I didn't at the time believe anyone other than myself would truly appreciate it. (I have since discovered that everyone who reads it feels the same way!) The greatness of the novel lies not just in its consummate artistry, but because it addresses, with a directness no other novel I know of does, a fundamental modern problem. Mihály, though he fails to see it, is trying to live "the life of the soul" in a materialistic, convention-dominated world, and his all-too-predictable failure indicts a whole civilisation. It's a major, and very resonant, book.

What particular problems did you have during the translation?

As this was the first major Hungarian text I tackled, it was the simple one of understanding the meaning. But soon I began to see that the real issue was decoding, and conveying, the playful tone and the ever-gentle irony, particularly with regard to his use of the so-called unreliable narrator. The further I went, the more layers of significance were revealed, and it became as great a challenge to

my critical insight as to my linguistic skills. For me the most interesting aspect of translation is always how to render the text into an English that is both accurate, in every sense, and easy, natural and compelling. Szerb's style shifts constantly—mimetically—with the changing situation, and one has to try to follow that while at the same time capturing the unmistakable Szerb manner.

Did you then decide to translate other works by Szerb? Was that your idea or the publisher's?

My passion for the writer is matched by that of my publisher, Melissa Ulfane of Pushkin Press. In fact she initially wanted to do *The Pendragon Legend* at the same time as *Journey by Moonlight.* But any doubts we might have had were soon dispelled by the way *Journey* was received.

Did The Pendragon Legend *pose a different challenge?*

Essentially not. Both are permeated with the same sly humour and shrewd wit. But the range of language styles is even greater in this earlier book. It was enormous fun, especially the endless—and extremely subtle—use of literary parody. I shook with laughter over every page. Besides, by this time, Szerb's style and idiom were thoroughly embedded in my brain. He has a wonderfully distinctive voice, even though he manages to make every character speak in their own clearly recognisable way, and can mimic other writers without moving a muscle on his face.

When you translated Az ajtó *(The Door) by Magda Szabó, did the previous experience with Szerb help or hinder the work? Which was easier to tackle?*

Szabó was a tougher challenge altogether. After finishing it I joked to a friend that it was a relief to get back to Szerb because "at least he wrote in English", and she pointed out to me the deeper truth behind what I had proposed in jest. Szerb does seem to have been influenced by English models, from Jane Austen through Aldous Huxley down to P. G. Wodehouse (he took time off from his musings on Goethe and the great German *Geistesgeschichte* to translate him). His average sentence length is about half that of Szabó's in her novel, and his paragraphs much shorter again. This pithyness is characterisic of the best English style. But above all, he uses the simplest vocabulary possible. Szabó in contrast is much more 'writerly', often falling back on literary diction and sustained syntactical devices to create her effects. In *The Door,* where the narrator is herself a rather 'writerly' sort of writer, she uses the full sinuous, Latinate opulence of Hungarian syntax—endlessly ramifying sentences consisting of sub-clauses and phrases loosely joined by commas—and not always in an order that would seem natural to the English ear. Luckily for me, I used to be a Latin teacher! But these devices pose real problems for someone wishing to translate into 'easy, natural English', because in this respect not

only the sensibility but the thought and language patterns of the two cultures are markedly different.

In the case of Magda Szabó, was it difficult to identify with a female writer? Compared to Szerb, to whom, as you have mentioned before, you feel particularly close, how did you find her as an author?

Learning to identify with her was one of the many pleasures the translation offered, especially as it involved entry into the mind of a woman. But it was rather complicated by the fact that Szabó is, generally speaking, both dramatising and distancing herself from the ostensibly 'feminine' weaknesses of the heroine. Then again, sometimes the 'lady writer' heroine is so closely identifiable with Szabó herself that I had the distinct feeling that boundaries were deliberately blurred, and this worried me. At times I found the 'protagonist' a bit of a pain—as she is meant to be—but she is also very witty at times, and when she is being honest with herself, I found it very moving. The formidable Emerence was no problem at all—she was so like my own late mother!

You have now published versions of both Oliver VII *and* The Queen's Necklace. *Does it get easier with each of his works?*

It certainly does get a little easier, now that Szerb's ideolect and distinctive sensibility have become familiar. Sometimes deceptively so. With *Oliver VII* I found myself more than once 'translating' typical Szerb witticisms that, on closer inspection, weren't actually there and, sadly, had to be removed.

But *The Queen's Necklace* did strike out in a fresh direction, or rather, several. It's an extraordinarily diverse work—a story about archbishops, whores, con-men, philosophers, card-sharpers, royalty, bent policemen and politicians—which at the same time pursues serious formal arguments as to why the Ancien Régime in France met its end. It broaches politics, consitutional and historical matters, agrarian reform, monetary economics and so on, but also the issue of changing sensibility—in painting, costume, landscape gardening, female friendship, music, and the rise of occultism. It's packed with anecdotes, and even little jokes that he can't resist sharing. So the result is a wonderfully diverse text, drawing on half a lifetime's learning and experience. All this made it unusually challenging, but enormous fun.

Oliver VII *is regarded in Hungary as one of his 'lightest' works. At a recent lecture you suggested that you found real similarities between* Oliver VII *and* Journey by Moonlight.

Oliver VII has suffered most of the three novels from the lack of proper critical attention. I think this is because in Hungary literary criticism was traditionally conducted along narrowly 'historicist' lines, even before the arrival of dogmatic Marxism. A novel was not something to be experienced as a finely-shaped,

internally resonant creation, like music, but interrogated for influence and deviation, with reference to such 'objective' factors as social class, the writer's origins and his supposed predecessors—and then of course ushered to its place in the established canon. This makes for insensitive stereotyping. Even Szerb's best and bravest advocate, György Poszler, fails to get much beyond the superficial similarity with Pirandello. But you've only to look a little below the surface to realise that the aims, methods and above all sensibilities of the two writers (Szerb and Pirandello) are universes apart.

All this changes if you set your prejudices aside and simply trust the writer. He is after all a man of far greater intelligence than either his translator or even, dare one say it, his critics. For the latter, it seems to be the old canard of how can a book possibly explore questions of philosophy and morality if it at the same time reduces the reader to gales of laughter? It took years for Hungarian critics to accept the quality of Szerb's literary histories, simply because they are written in an entertaining and readable style, and they have yet to grasp the relevance of that lesson to the fiction. But as for *Oliver VII,* the moment you look for a pattern in the writing the connection with *Journey by Moonlight* becomes obvious. Both books explore questions of identity, conformity and obligation. Both heroes evade responsibility, using typically devious means to do so. Both are instinctive role-players, looking for their 'real' selves in a world they imagine to be connected to some more authentic reality, and in the end both return to the mundane world of 'mere' conformity. The important difference is that whereas Mihály's journey takes him nowhere, and he meekly lets himself be led back to Budapest "like a truanting schoolboy", Oliver actually learns from his experience. He finally grows up—significantly, when he starts to role-play seriously for the first time. He discovers that the elusive 'self' is found in relation to others, through love, obligation, and duty, and his return home is a muted moral triumph. Why is this so hard for people to see?

How have the British reviewers received The Queen's Necklace*?*

I have to say, I did worry about this. It is such an original (and personal) work that I was a bit anxious about how it might be viewed by academic historians. As it happened, the first reviews that appeared were by literary specialists, who said all the sympathetic and admiring things one might have hoped for, but it was some months before a Cambridge don, Dr Ruth Scurr (in the *Times Literary Supplement*), gave it the full treatment as a work of history. I was of course delighted that she responded so sensitively to the qualities of mind Szerb reveals in the writing, but even more gratifying was the seriousness with which she took his arguments as an historian, and heartily endorsed them. 'Tóni' would have been quite pleased, I think. I'm happy to say that the book has also struck a chord with the public, is selling extremely well, and is already due for a reprint.

You mentioned that there are plans to publish a collection of Szerb's short stories as well.

Indeed, at this moment I am putting the final touches to a selection of the stories and novellas from the *Szerelem a palackban* (Love in a Bottle) volume, which Pushkin Press will release in September this year. I have to say they are both a delight in themselves and full of interest for the critic. For one thing, they reflect the way his writing changes and develops between 1923 and 1945. The earlier stories reveal the intense idealism of his youth, and there is a kind of sweet purity in the writing. The later ones—from 1933 onwards—return to the present day, touch directly on themes from the novels, and employ the now familiar irony: gently understated, often directed at Szerb himself (through his representatives), and at times devastating.

For me as translator, the stories have brought their own challenges. The earlier ones are subtly archaicised (to coin a phrase), and one or two technical/historical terms were difficult to track down. There is also the problem, which I shall never satisfactorily resolve, of how far to reproduce his sometimes antiquated or, in the case of the opening tale, folkloric style. I feel certain that in English it would simply sound ridiculous, so I use other techniques to suggest the effect. As always, my overriding ambition is to reflect the meaning accurately and make the text read well in English. I don't want the reader put off because of my limitations as a translator. It's bad enough knowing that you will never capture the authentic sound of this magnificent and musical language.

What is your 'method' as a translator? Do you approach every work the same way, or does each work demand a different style?

The first task is to understand the Hungarian as accurately and sensitively as I can. This involves slow and painstaking work, looking up even the most familiar words in dictionaries to make sure that there is no secondary meaning or nuance I might have missed. I also consult my literary Hungarian friends throughout. I'm sure I do still miss occasional allusions, but it isn't for want of effort.Then comes the business of refining the English. This takes several re-readings and re-workings. By the time I have finished the first draft of the translation my brain has been so Hungarianised I have lost some of my grip on the subtler rhythms of my own tongue. I have to take a break, and retune myself, perhaps by some quality reading in a good native author. Even then, it can take several re-readings to spot lingering 'translationese'—often involving the order of words or phrases. English has very subtle rules for these, far more than people realise.

In short, I treat every sentence as if I were composing a poem in English. I feel that if you reduce a work of great literature to something that is

stylistically mediocre, you produce not a translation but a parody. And you may have irreparably damaged your author in the eyes of the reader.

And after that, I have to toothcomb it all again, to make sure I haven't drifted away from the text. This of course will provoke further 'fine-tuning'. Believe me, it all takes time—I could never make a living this way! Someone, I forget who, has said that "no one, not even the author, reads a text as carefully as the translator", and it may well be true. But the long, slow exposure brings its own rewards, as the text steadily reveals itself.

How have the novels translated by you been received? Is there literary criticism in Britain when it comes to foreign/translated titles?

The reception given by the critics, that is to say the reviewers, has been marvellous. I am continually astonished at the astuteness and quality of the notices these books receive. This is no less true of the quality newspapers than it is of dedicated literary periodicals like *The Times Literary Supplement.* The writers are often established novelists themselves, or academics, and the depth of their knowledge can be quite humbling. Szabó's *The Door* in particular provoked long and searching critiques backed by a breadth of learning and insight I had frankly never expected.

As for criticism in the universities, there are a great number of courses around the country offering comparative literature, focusing on French, German, Spanish, Italian and Russian writers, but I doubt that Hungarian features largely in any of them. But this is understandable given the question of critical mass I mentioned earlier, and our long-established links with the countries that are represented.

We might of course turn this question around and ask, what about the critics at home? In Britain, Germany, France and Italy Szerb is acknowledged as a "great Hungarian novelist". So why are the critics so grudging about him in Hungary itself? After sixty-five years, where are the basic tools of scholarship—the comprehensive bibliography, the detailed biography and the serious critical analysis that such a fine artist deserves? It's one thing to complain about a supposed lack of British interest, but what sort of example does that set? Hungarians should be proud to have given such a fine writer to the world.

What is it like to be a translator of literary works in Britain? Does it attract high prestige?

My experience is that it impresses some people very much, and others not at all. Hungarian enjoys a slightly special status because of its rarity and supposed difficulty. In the big prize season (and there are some very prestigious translation competitions) the public do pay more attention. Many non-literary people still see translation as a rather lowly task, certainly not a literary form in its own right, but that is changing. I am regularly asked to talk

about my work in bookshops, and the turnout is often substantial—up to a hundred people—all very keen to learn more.

I know that in Hungary literary translation has always been seen as a positive duty by the very best writers, but, sadly, that tradition died out here in the eighteenth century.

In Hungary we tend to think that Brits do not read foreign literature. Is it true or is that a false assumption? And how do the novels translated by you find their place in British literature?

Again, I must defend this mythical British reader. He, or she, is just as outward-looking as the German or French equivalent, with perhaps even wider interests. Consider that across Asia and Africa, North America and Australasia there are hundreds of millions of people reading and writing in English, and their work reflects lives and cultures far more 'foreign' to the British reader's personal experience than anything Europe has to offer. The best of these books are very well received here, as can be seen in literary reviews, their sales numbers, and their presence on the shortlists for the big literary prizes. The truth is, the British appear inward-looking and parochial only when considered from a narrowly Eurocentric, or indeed Hungarocentric, point of view.

It's too early to say how or when the various works I have translated might eventually "find their place" in the English-language tradition, though I was amazed and delighted to find a quotation from *Journey by Moonlight* in a prize-winning novel by an outstanding contemporary writer, Ali Smith. My aspiration when I set about translating *Journey by Moonlight* was indeed to admit an unknown European masterpiece into the anglophone literary consciousness, and that does seem to be happening. To have played any sort of role in that process is an extraordinary privilege. ❧

Zsuzsa Rakovszky

Triptych

Short story

1

"I've no idea what I did wrong to get where I am... I constantly chew that over... Was it such a big offence that I committed to deserve this?"

The playful, big, blue eyes are filled with tears. Young eyes, they are, above them spiky eyebrows. A high-cheeked face, girlish, even though wrinkled: like a graceful old countess. No, not that so much as a film star, playing a graceful old countess.

"Don't you see it? Haven't you noticed?" With her long fingers, she picks up, lifts the material over the deep pit of her collarbone (the "salt cellar" as her mother used to say).

"Hospital nightie! Like a child from an orphanage."

"Let that be the worst of it!" I tell her. "You look pretty even so!"

"Pretty! Come off it!... Just look at my arms: like broomsticks!" She raises from the blanket two hands gripped loosely in fists, holds them crookedly in front of her, turning them one way and another as she detachedly inspects her wrists like some object that is being offered for sale. "That hair!" She shakes her head so vigorously that several dishevelled, white curls spring free from the fruit-jar rubber ring which was holding fast the plait at her neck. "See, what does that look like? How many months is it now that I've been here? December, January, February... Where are we now? March? Four months since a hairdresser set eyes on me!"

"Never mind! At least you will see out the worst of the winter here," I say.

Zsuzsa Rakovszky

is a widely translated poet and a translator. She is the author of two novels, A kígyó árnyéka *(The Shadow of the Serpent, 2002) and* A hullócsillag éve *(The Year of the Falling Star, 2005, also translated into German). Her short story collection, from which "Triptych" is taken, is reviewed by László Márton on p. 117 of this issue.*

"By the time you go back home there'll be no need to put the heating on. You won't freeze like last year!"

"And the year before that, and before that..." The big, blue eyes again fill with tears; her eyelids and the tip of her nose reddening slightly. "I'd never have believed that I would have to wash myself in a winter coat..."

"How was your night? Did they allow you to sleep?" I ask, indicating with my head the two neighbours. The one on the left is like a silver-haired rubber doll: the bed-clothes have been thrown off partly, she's sweating, her chest is flat like a young girl's, the mouth agape, her eyes are dim; with unseeing eyes she is flailing at the air. The other is dreadfully ancient, with a scowling, flat chimp-face, silver, shoulder-length hair, and a grim aquiline nose as, like some world-famous scholar, she is staring at us with a sombre, vacant, alarming gaze under her bushy, hoary eyebrows. As if it was not a human being looking at us but a tree or rock. She is tearing sheets of newspaper, or unbuttoning and then rebuttoning the buttons of her nightdress, unbuttoning and rebuttoning, again and again, but mostly keeping an eye on us. Periodically, the pair of dark eyes unexpectedly become fiercer, with an astoundingly intelligent, almost piercing gaze riveted on us, before switching to an old chimp's insistently monotonous muttering of "Nurse! Nurse! Nurse!" That's directed at me: she wants me to button up again the neck of the nightie that she has just unbuttoned. Or unbutton it, if she had buttoned it up.

"Don't pay her any attention! Look, that's the sort of person I'm surrounded with! They're the only company I have all day! She, poor thing," she gestures towards the rubber doll, "is a blessed treasure: she suffers a lot, and she bears it without a peep during the day. But come the night-time... she shouts a lot. She starts after lights out, and often she won't leave off until the morning.

"What kinds of things does she shout?" I am intrigued.

"That's the best part of it: she recites poetry!"

"Poetry?"

"Yes. She was a schoolteacher once upon a time. Maybe that's why."

"What sorts of poems, then?"

"Search me. They're not ones I know... Or rather, there are some that I do. There's that János Arany ballad: *Mistress Agnes*, and the one that begins *'How long, despondent birds, with silent throats, / Will you sit grieving on the wither'd bough?'* Something like that it goes, doesn't it?"

She bursts out in a giggle. "But then you'd know that better than me... Anyway, in the daytime the poor thing just bears it without a peep, and at night she puts all her passion into the poems; just roars through them... Can you imagine?"

I just shake my head: no, I can't imagine it.

* ■ Mihály Tompa: "The Bird to Its Young", translated by Watson Kirkconnell.

"I don't recall her being here last time," I declare about the rubber doll.

"Last time? When were you here last, let me see?" She broods, counting the days on her fingers. "Last Wednesday—that's right? Of course, 'Auntie' Zimonyi was still here... Not yet a week since she passed on, poor thing... She wasn't even eighty yet. The old battleaxe," she rolls her eyes to indicate the occupant of the bed on the right, "She's ninety-five, believe it or not! And do you know what she said to me?"

"What was that?"

"She says: 'I see you too are sleeping on your own... Come over here to me, then we can snuggle up together!" She giggles: "Ninety-five!"

"You can't be getting much sleep, then..."

"Well, no... But the biggest trouble is that there's no one to talk with! These poor dears... well you can see for yourself the state they're in. Many's the time I think I must have gone loopy because I'm talking to myself!"

"That happens to others as well..."

"Yesterday it was so bad I was reduced to speaking with her!" she pokes a chin over towards the bed on the right. "'Auntie' Ritók! She was groaning that this was hurting and that, and what a ghastly life she has had! Believe me, 'Auntie' Ritók, I said to her, it wasn't easy for others either! And just imagine: I went over and sat beside her on the bed, and I went and told her things that I've never said to anyone before. Not even to you!" she added coquettishly. "Private things about my first marriage... You can't imagine how closely she was paying attention, the old bat! Her eyes grew round as saucers... You know, there are times when she can look, you wouldn't credit it, as if she's fantastically all there... I'd never have thought that you had such a hard life, that was what she muttered when I'd finished, and she just shook her head. But five minutes later she couldn't remember a thing... As if I'd dictated it all onto a dictaphone cassette, and it had been deleted straight away..."

We fall silent.

"I've brought you something to read," I say, and pull out a copy of the local newspaper from my bag.

"Oh, thank you! That'll do nicely! Probably full of local tittle-tattle again! Marvellous!" She giggles and rubs her hands. "Thank you, sweetie! The only trouble is," her lips pout, "lights have to go off at nine o'clock, but I can't get off to sleep before eleven, so I'm left just having to lie here again, and my brain doesn't stop. It just keeps going round and round..."

"And what sorts of things are you thinking?" I ask.

"All sorts... Not long ago, for instance, it came to mind that I once had a book, *The Big Waters of the Globe* or some such title... Well anyway, I was wondering where on earth that book might be... Where I put it... It had a marvellous picture of Lake Ontario. It was somewhere I always wanted to get to, but now..." The mournful face again. "I've missed the boat on that, like so much else..."

Nothing is said for a minute.

"Then do you know what else I think about?" She sits up in excitement and starts tidying the rubber band in her hair. "Once I get out of here, I'm going to dye my hair!"

"Red?" I pull her leg.

"Red! At my age! Are you joking? Something more conventional, I was thinking... Kind of mid-brunette, let's say." Smiling bashfully, she rumples the blanket under her hands. "No darker than a mahogany tint... You know, one with a slight, ever so slight shade of bronze in it..."

2

"What's the time?"

"Half past five," I reply at a guess.

The slender upper body tautens (it's very thin: she forgot to feed herself for months before she was admitted here); the thin, silver-haired head arches back on the neck from the effort. She wriggles her body around, squirming, but to no effect because she has been strapped to the bed at her wrists, otherwise she would set off straight home in slippers and nightdress. Until she opens her eyes, the gaunt, emaciated face, its grey head of hair streaming freely to the shoulders, is at one and the same time a death's head and a grizzled little girl's face (a little girl from a horror story who strayed into the enchanted forest and only got out as an eighty-year-old). When she opens her eyes, she is like some fanatic: a saint or prophetess: the gaze is feverish and disturbed. Most of the time, she just mutters and so softly that, try as I might, I cannot understand. From time to time, she looks intently, urgently at me; it seems there is something I ought to do or say. I respond haphazardly, and I see first irritation, then superhuman effort, and finally hopelessness pass through her eyes. It is a major relief if occasionally I manage to understand something, like just now, and I am able to answer.

"Half past five already! Then I have to go!" she mumbles desperately. "Tesco's will be closing!" She tries fiercely to tug her wrists out of the straps.

(Most of the occupants of the ten-bed ward are either sleeping or staring at the ceiling. There are visitors seated by some of the beds, some resignedly, others mutely, with barely disguised impatience, sighing, pursing their lips, checking their wristwatch. Others again talk incessantly in a phonily cheerful, saccharine-sweet voice, the way adults use with small children. On the bedside tables are cartons of fruit juice, cakes from a confectioner's. In the bed in one corner a buxom, round-headed patient with close-cropped hair constantly gabbles and chants in a singing tone, rather like a three-year-old girl: "Godfather, godmother, godbrother..." She pauses every now and then to give it a rest for a minute or two before emitting a weird screech like a big bird of prey.)

"Tesco's will be closing, and I've not got anything! My cooking oil has run out! Venus cooking oil, you won't forget? I need to cook tomorrow's dinner today; I won't have time in the morning," she blathers. "Otherwise Daddy won't have dinner tomorrow." (Daddy is what she calls her husband, who has been huddled in an armchair for years now, more or less incapable of moving. Up till recently, she had looked after the two of them, doing odd jobs, cooking, seeing to whatever had to be seen to, admittedly with growing absent-mindedness—that is, until she slipped and fell.)

"I've done the cooking already," I lie in order to put her mind at rest.

She looks at me, seriously, astonished, wrinkling her brow.

"What did you cook?" she whispers with a struggle.

"Pea soup," I reply at random. She nods pensively.

"That's good..." For a while she keeps silent, her eyes closed, her face impassive, before again launching into a laboured muttering. "Vermicelli..." was all I managed to make out from the muttering.

"I also added vermicelli," I retort with phoney enthusiasm. "Plenty of vermicelli."

"That's good!" she mutters again. Again she utters something I can't make out. I cock my head over to her lips. "Daddy... adores vermicelli... very much!" she whispers and smiles conspiratorially at me.

She closes her eyes; her face is peaceful, her mouth a little open; dozed off, it seems. I am sitting beside her and waiting, wondering what I need to buy at the corner shop on my way back home.

Suddenly her body twitches; the eyes closed, a pained look of indignation and terror flits across the face. The eyes still closed, she starts to mutter rapidly and strenuously, as if she were protesting against something. Her eyes open; she gives a look of utter, uncomprehending despair before recognising me.

"Why won't you help me?" she mutters huffily and irately. The feverish, confused pair of eyes suddenly darkens, she stares at me intently. Who knows what is passing through her head? Perhaps she thinks I am one of them, the "terrorists", who have taken her prisoner and are holding her in captivity here. The last time I paid a visit she perpetually harped on about terrorists, her eyes terrified, big as saucers. Their leader, according to her, was a podgy, elderly gent, verbose and belligerent, by the name of Vizy, a friend of her husband's, whom she never liked. This time she did not talk about terrorists, only from the sudden change in her expression it was a reasonable guess that this is what was running through her head.

("Godlittlesister, godJulie, godStevie...," could be heard coming from the corner.)

Her gaze flicks quickly, panic-stricken, to the left then the right. She mutters something, urgently, imperatively, but again so quietly that I cannot make it out. I bend my head down to the pillow.

"Let's go," she is muttering. "They're not looking now! Let's go, quick, before Tesco closes!"

"We can't go now," I whisper back, feeling like an abominable traitor. "Tomorrow, maybe..."

I thought she would object, but no, perhaps she was not counting on anything different. She closes her eyes, and the pallid, dishevelled death's head sinks back resignedly, with an impassive, withdrawn expression, on the pillow.

"Be a good girl and try a little of the grapes," I urge her, my face beaming. "They're nice and sweet!"

She obediently opens her mouth wide so I can pop in the grapes, one by one, but after the third she closes it. Her lips pressed together tightly, she shakes her head vigorously when I make another attempt. Her face distorts into a pained grimace, yet brave and resolute. She again makes an effort to mumble and tries to lift her head from the pillow, quite obviously wanting to say something very important. I bend my head towards her lips.

"The leftovers... the grapes... take them to Daddy!"

I nod reassuringly. I remain seated beside her for a while, clasping her hand, waiting for her to nod off. When I think she is fast asleep, I pull my hand away, whereupon her eyes flash open. She takes a terrified look around, as if she had slept through some task that brooked no delay.

"What's the time?"

(GodSandy, godKatie, godpostman...")

3

When I open the door, he is sitting with his chin dropped onto his chest. The room is in semi-gloom and sweltering; from the door he looks, hunched in the armchair in an old, floor-length bathrobe, a blanket over his knees, like an old usurer or goldsmith by Rembrandt. There are glowing spots in the gloom: a wristwatch, a tray on which a half-empty tumbler of raspberry juice is standing, the silver setting of a hunting goblet in the glass cabinet. On the writing desk, towards which he is seated with his back turned, a row of family photographs: of his wife (it is getting on for a year since she died), of his son, who now lives abroad, and his grandchildren. A potted rubber plant is in its death throes on one corner of the desk. I touch an arm of the bathrobe. He wakes up with an alarmed snort, takes a confused look around him; he is blinking like a startled owl.

"Good morning!" I beam mischievously. "It's alright! You just dozed off a wee bit!"

He stares perplexed, suspicious, after which his look brightens up.

"Oh, it's you! It's been ages since you were last here!" he moans. He doesn't bother putting in his false teeth nowadays, which makes his jaw jut out like

Popeye the Sailorman's; his mouth is like a dark slit, and he has difficulty articulating, spitting out blurred syllables.

"I've been sitting here for some time," I say, "only I did not want to wake you. You were sleeping so snugly..."

"It wouldn't have mattered if you had," he says grumpily. "As it is, I don't do anything except sleep all day."

He makes a disgusted sweep of the hand, then for a while glowers wordlessly. When he looks up there is a look of bewildered dismay in his eyes.

"Do me a favour. Tell me...," and here he beckons with a hook-like finger for me to move closer, and glances around to check that no one is listening (there are only two of us in the flat). "You don't happen to know how I ended up here, do you?"

"You've been living here for forty years," I retort, beaming like a pupil who has reeled off an exemplary answer to a crafty teacher's trick question.

"You don't say!" He shakes his head in astonishment, his hands fumbling around his temples. "My head... It doesn't work the way it ought to," he says, rolling his eyes in mock horror. "I ought to get a transplant... or simply just: Whoosh! Unscrew it..."

"Come, come!" I say.

For a while we sit without saying a word. He stares in front of him, then looks up. With puzzlement.

"You don't happen to know where Irma is?" he asks in a plaintive voice (he is speaking about his wife, who was called Irma). "She went into town this morning... I can't think where she can have got to... No doubt she met someone," he says sulkily. "I just can't make out why she is leaving me alone like this..."

"She'll get here in her own good time," I say reassuringly.

"These days I forget everything," he starts again in a puzzled, plaintive tone.

"The old things as well?"

"Aagh! Not them!" he says, his features mellowing. "Those I remember quite clearly... The house and the garden... The convent grounds were right next door. Whenever I and my kid brother played footie, the ball would always sail over to the nuns' place. One of them was a tiny, bad-tempered old nun...'This is the last time'—that was what she always said when she threw it back. There was even a time when the ball plopped in the well..."

"Was there a well also?" I ask. "Not yet piped water in those days?"

"'Course there was!" he responds irascibly. He sits with knitted brows, a threatening expression on his face. "All the same, I still had to haul water up from the well every day! A tubful every day!" he says accusingly.

"Why on earth?"

"Why? Why? Because that's what Father ordered me to do! Whether it was to save money, or just one of his wheezes, I know no more than you..." He

ponders. "There came a point—and this is something I've never told anyone before, mind—a point when I felt it just can't go on like this! I'm not going to do this any more!" he shouts out, incensed, as if the father who has been dead these last sixty years and more were right there, in the room.

"And when was this, that point?"

"I don't rightly know... I must have been fourteen or fifteen... Even so, everything went on just as it had up till then." His eyes widening from this unexpected perception, he stares before him in astounded puzzlement. "And even so, you see, I kept on doing it right to the end..."

We sit in silence again for a while. His head again drops onto his chest. Could he have fallen asleep?

"I've had a lot on recently," I make a try. "That's why I have not come round for such a long time..."

He looks at me in amazement, his eyes confused.

"But weren't you here yesterday?" He wags his head. "'Course you were! You were here yesterday, I know that very well! You want to catch me out!" He menaces me with that long, crooked forefinger. "There'll come a day when you get here to find the dogcatcher has carted me off to the dog pound!"

"The dogcatcher?"

"Yes! Too right!" He twists his head as if electrocuted, again rolling his eyes in mock horror. "The one who pulls a noose round your neck, and hauls you off with him! Like so!"

"There's no way we'll let a dogcatcher in here!" I respond with spirited, matronly affability, but he won't let himself be deceived by that.

"It's not as if he asks anyone's by-your-leave!... He just enters!" he mutters. And again his eyes take on a sneering, triumphant glitter. "Perhaps he's already here!"

It wasn't the dogcatcher who came, only his care worker. A handsome, elderly face, silvery hair, a freshly ironed white blouse, brisk, youthful movements.

"So, how are we today, Uncle Feri?" She takes a quick side-glance at the tray on which a dried-up roll and a few biscuits are languishing next to the tumbler of raspberry juice. "I see you left your tea!" she says, shaking her head, raising the roll a bit.

"Sheer gold, that is!" His brows beetling, his mouth open wide, he points to the care worker as if he were the fairytale wolf and she were Red Riding Hood's grandmother. "But all she ever does is argue with me!" he adds peevishly.

"I'll give you argue if you're not going to eat properly!" The care worker brushes from her skirt a crumb from the roll and picks up the tray from the table. "What do you want for supper?"

"Nothing at all!" he declares bossily, throwing back his head.

"How about a nice soft-boiled egg?"

"That's fine, a soft-boiled egg! But only one!" He raises his index finger in admonition.

The care worker busies herself in the kitchen. One can hear her opening the tap and the dirty plates rattling in the sink.

A hand cupped behind one ear, he pays close attention to what is happening outside the room, then with a bewildered, confused expression on his face leans closer towards me.

"Let me ask," he points over to the kitchen. "But who's that?"

"Her name is Sophie," I say. "She's the one who usually comes."

He nods in disbelief. The care worker is already entering the room bringing the tray, and on it a roll and eggcup with a soft-boiled egg.

"What's that, I ask you?!" he points with a lofty, accusing gesture at the soft-boiled egg.

"A soft-boiled egg! What you wanted!" the care worker exclaims with good-humoured equanimity.

"I asked for it?" Again he fumbles with his fingers around his temple. "My head..."

"I'll put the water on to boil for the tea," the care worker says, and she goes out to the kitchen.

Lost in thought, he spoons in the soft-boiled egg. A little of the yolk dribbles down the edge of his mouth and onto the blanket over his knees. His face suddenly becomes distressed; the hand with the egg spoon poises in midair. He claps the hand to his ear and the spoon drops down from it onto the threadbare carpet.

"Is anything wrong?" I ask. "Have you got a pain in the ear?"

"No," he answers uneasily. "I'm just checking that it's still there. And that hairs are not growing in it."

"But why would hairs grow in it?" I ask in genuine amazement.

"I don't know," he says with evident dissatisfaction, and he lets his ear go in annoyance. "I always keep a check that hairs are not growing in them..." He now stares disappointedly before him, his brow furrowed, straining. "I don't know... I can't call it to mind...," he witters forlornly.

"What then?"

He scans quickly round the room, as if he were afraid someone were listening—the care worker, perhaps, or the dogcatcher. Then with the hooked forefinger he beckons for me to lean closer.

"If you don't mind my asking...," he starts in a confidentially hushed voice, very agitatedly. "You don't remember, do you... You don't happen to know... who I am?" ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Sándor Békési

The Nobility of Mind and Spirit

Calvin's Legacy. The Cultural Heritage of Calvinism along the Danube. Exhibition at the Budapest History Museum.
30 October 2009–21 March 2010. Curators: Péter Farbaky, Zsuzsa Fogarasi, Erika Kiss, Máté Milisits and Éva Szacsvay. Catalogue: Péter Farbaky and Réka Kiss, eds. Budapest: Budapest History Museum and Danube Calvinist Ecclesiastical District, 2009, 472 pp.

In our globalized, technocratic age people have a basic hunger for constructive spiritual content and a life imbued with higher meaning. And so we have reason to celebrate the concentration of collective memory embodied in Calvin's Legacy, an exhibition at the Budapest History Museum. While perusing the exhibits and after reading its beautifully designed *Catalogue,* a single thought takes possession: the individual who strives to be creative in a culture and in his faith whilst fulfilling his responsibilities to God in struggles amid the twists and turns of history. István Bogárdi Szabó calls this commitment the "nobility of the mind and spirit"[1].

Lifelong study and teaching—*tota vita est negotium cum Deo,* our lifetime preoccupation with God—is the Calvinist community's creed. Both sacred and secular are the responsibility of all Christians. God should govern a full and active life within the *polis (civitas).* Calvin's rigorous moral discipline and holistic purpose is clearest at the nexus of Church and society: culture. The exhibition's timeframe contains an outline of how this nobility of the mind and spirit succeeded in providing pertinent answers to the historical problems Hungary encountered from the 16th century onwards.

As in Western Europe, humanist and religious revivalist movements ushered in the Reformation in Hungary. Humanism precipitated a new phase in the study of science and the arts based on *studia humanitatis et artes liberales,* the accomplishments of Antiquity. Religious revivalism pointed to a fresh start,

1 ■ *Catalogue,* p. 18.

Sándor Békési
teaches Dogmatics and Ethics as an Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at the Károli Gáspár Calvinist University in Budapest. His special field of research is Theological Aesthetics.

purifying faith. Put together, the mind and soul were reborn (hence the Renaissance). The Reformation owed scholarly precision and the respect for ancient texts to Humanism, while movements within the Church recognised the imperative to purge divine service and religious life.

In the midst of this new intellectual and spiritual climate, Matthias Corvinus (r.1458–1490) established his policies and built his Palace in Buda containing the unrivalled collection of the Bibliotheca Corviniana. Great humanists such as Chancellor János Vitéz, the astronomer Regiomontanus and the Italian humanists Antonio Bonfini and Galeotto Marzio attended his court. After the untimely death of King Matthias the *Sodalitas litteraria Danubiana*, a circle of humanists, established themselves in Buda on the model of the *Academia Platonica* which Marsilio Ficino founded in Florence. They did so in cooperation with the city of Vienna, where Konrad Celtis wrote: "All over Pannonia lovers of literature and science so abound that their company and conversation is my great delight."[2]

Contacts with Erasmus of Rotterdam started when Johann Henckel, the chaplain to Queen Mary (consort to King Louis II), initiated a correspondence. Later her physician János Antoninus, the Thurzó brothers and many others exchanged letters with him. George, Margrave of Brandenburg, who had brought up the King and embraced Luther's teachings, helped, however indirectly, the earliest spread of the Reformation in the region from his estate in the heart of the county.

In August 1526, however, the Ottoman invasion annihilated the Hungarian army at Mohács, and King Louis II was drowned near the battlefield. The widowed queen fled from Buda to Vienna, and thencej to the Netherlands, halting a cultural process in its tracks. The concern of leading thinkers shown for the fate of the queen attests to the significance of the event, which was traumatic for Hungary and shocked the whole of Europe. Martin Luther wrote *Four Psalms of Comfort* (1526), Erasmus of Rotterdam *On the Christian Widow* (1529), Sir Thomas More his last work in the Tower, *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* (1534)—all dedicated to Queen Mary. After the Buda court had been emptied, the remaining men of letters disseminated the gospel in the vernacular, carrying out what Erasmus had proposed.[3] Benedek Komjáti translated the *Epistles of Paul* into Hungarian (1533), Gábor Pesti, the most ardent follower of Erasmus, the *Four Gospels* (1536) and János Sylvester the entire *New Testament* (1541). A Buda theologian, Pelbárt Temesvári, a friar who

2 ■ Tibor Klaniczay, "A Sodalitas litteraria Danubiana." In *A magyarországi akadémiai mozgalom előtörténete* [Prehistory of the Hungarian Academic Movement]. Budapest: Balassi, 1993, p. 65.
3 ■ Ágnes Szalay Ritoók, "Erasmus és a XVI. századi magyarországi értelmiség" [Erasmus and 16th-Century Hungarian Intellectuals]. In *"Nympha super ripam Danubii". Tanulmányok a XV–XVI. századi magyarországi művelődés köréből* [Studies in 15–16th Century Hungarian Culture]. Budapest: Balassi, 2002, pp. 169–171.

was a stricter, more observant Franciscan, as well as Osvát Laskai appeared to be calling for a religious revival in their sermons, while Mátyás Dévai Bíró, Imre Ozorai, Mihály Sztárai and other Franciscans overtly preached in the spirit of the Reformation.

Any presentation of the culture of the Renaissance and Humanism lies beyond the scope of the exhibition and its catalogue. But to understand the Danubian Reformation, it is useful to know something about the culture in which it was embedded. Calvin's spiritual legacy rose out of the ravages of the Ottoman occupation. With his humanist education, Calvin responded most sensitively to the yearning for the 'just' and 'glorious'.

The Ottoman domination in the first half of the 16th century interrupted an initially unified humanist culture and social development. The country was divided into three parts—Kingdom of Hungary, direct Ottoman rule, Principality of Transylvania—and the relationship between Church and society evolved differently in each. Interestingly, Calvinist districts today more or less match the areal boundaries and cultural peculiarities of that three-way division.

Hungary experienced a deep crisis and transition, having lost much of its wealth and some of its independence. In this state, the country discovered what the theology of Luther and Calvin offered: the spiritual home of a living Word of God—the Gospels—and a life worth living in Christ in the midst of worldly tribulations. Knowledge of the Old and New Testaments taught them, by the example of the Jews, that God may punish even His chosen people for their sins by the bloody hand of foreign conquerors. The parallels in the history of the suffering Jews and Hungarians are highlighted in Gáspár Károli's *Két könyv* (Two Books, 1563), which revived the medieval Hungarian chronicles' idea of an analogous 'conquest' by Moses and Árpád. This biblical parallel meant that the concept of nation (*"nemzet"* as derived from "being begotten") is interpreted quite differently in Hungarian than in English, French or German-speaking cultures. It is closer to the etymological meaning of *adoption* than to begetting or birth. Since the age of King Saint Stephen (r.1000–1038), the *natio* implied the community of the children of God, of those belonging to the Christian Church, as it also appears in the works of 16–17th-century Protestant authors. As in other nations, Bible translations were available in the vernacular so that *divinum* and *humanum,* religious and philosophical knowledge, could be attained by many rather than a narrow elite. Book-printing flourished, built on the humanist tradition, as if there had been a nationwide campaign to renovate the scattered collection of the one-time majestic Corvina library of Buda, something which is demonstrated by the typology of the books and their leather bindings with Renaissance portraits.

In the Principality of Transylvania, four denominations—Roman Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran and Unitarian—were declared free by the diet of Torda, while in the areas ravaged by Ottoman wars, itinerant preachers spread knowledge of the Book and the Gospel. Making use of municipal printing offices, Johannes Honterus published works of Classical Antiquity and religious tomes in Transylvania and Northern Hungary. Gáspár Heltai's *Cathechismus* (1559) and *Magyar Krónika* (1575) appeared in this way, too. Péter Mélius Juhász's *Homilies* (1563) were published in Debrecen, his *Herbarium* (1578) in Transylvania. By contrast, the complete Bible translation—which profoundly influenced the Hungarian literary language up to the mid-20th century—was published in the backwoods, in the temporary press of the village of Vizsoly as the work of Gáspár Károli, a preacher in the nearby village of Gönc.

Even under Ottoman occupation, enduring scholarly works were produced and congregations gathered in the country's central areas—evidence of the sheer strength of religious and cultural commitment. The Hungarian saying about wanderers—"they roamed over Tolna, Baranya"—refers to the Transdanubian region, rich in scholarship, where journeying students often repaired to study. At the synod convened at Hercegszőlős in South Baranya, the *Canons of Hercegszőlős*—the disciplinary rules of the Danube Calvinist Ecclesiastical District—were codified (1576). Amidst the clatter of arms, and kidnapped by the Turks, István Szegedi Kis, the Calvinist pastor of Ráckeve and first Superintendent of the district, wrote a Calvinist treatise on dogmatics as well as other theological works. It was published in Basle after his death with the title *Theologiae sincerae loci* (1585). Theologians there used it as a textbook for centuries; even Karl Barth drew on it for his discussion of predestination 350 years later. István Szegedi Kis's successor, Máté Skaricza, not only erected a lasting monument to his master with his biography in Latin and the portrait he drew, but he also took part in a religious dispute in Pécs with the anti-Trinitarian György Válaszúti. He died very young, killed in his own home by robbers. A senior pastor of Tolna, János Baranyai Decsi, produced important literary, legal and historical works besides theology. Of course, as he himself admitted, he kept "aloof of public matters, secluded in the grove of the Muses"[4]. He lived barely more than thirty years. Indeed, that crisis-ridden period contained the germs of a rich revival, feeding the fruits of much effort.

When William Shakespeare was raiding *Emblemata* (1564)—a hugely popular book by Hungarian humanist János Zsámboki, which had several imprints in Hungary—for ideas for his plays, the Roman Catholic restoration was under way following the resolutions of the Council of Trent. By the late

4 ■ *Baranyai Decsi János magyar históriája, 1592–1598* [A Hungarian History by János Baranyai Decsi]. Translated by Péter Kulcsár. Budapest: Európa, 1982, p. 31.

16th century, almost the whole country had been converted to Protestantism. But thanks to the preaching and theological works of the highly gifted Péter Pázmány, Archbishop of Esztergom, most of the magnates were won back to the Catholic faith. The serfs on the estates of re-catholicized lords were often forced to abandon their faith and Protestant preachers were expelled.

The Habsburgs, political and military supporters of the Counter-Reformation, wished to extend their influence beyond the Hungarian Kingdom to Transylvania as well. It was precisely in the struggle against the Habsburgs that Calvin's argument that God "raises up manifest avengers amongst his own servants [...] popular magistrates to curb the tyranny of kings"[5] was first put into practice in Hungary. During the Thirty Years War, which created havoc in the whole of Europe (1618–1648), Princes Stephen Bocskai, Gabriel Bethlen and George I Rákóczi achieved much in securing the rights of the Protestants and the independence of Transylvania. Not only in the arts and sciences did Bethlen and George I Rákóczi continue the model of Matthias' Renaissance court as recorded by Protestant historians, but every one of them also acted as Matthias rex redivivus as statesmen. George I Rákóczi was also patron of schools in Debrecen, Kolozsvár (Cluj) and Nagyvárad (Oradea). In the running of his court in Sárospatak, he had a highly cultured partner in his wife, Zsuzsanna Lorántffy. It was this extraordinary woman who invited Jan Comenius (1592–1670), the exiled world-famous scholar, one of the Bohemian Brothers, to raise standards at the college of Sárospatak. She also tried to assemble an academy rallying preachers, humanists and artists within the Renaissance walls on the banks of the Bodrog. She probably looked upon the French Queen Margaret of Navarre and England's Elisabeth I as examples in the patronage of the arts.

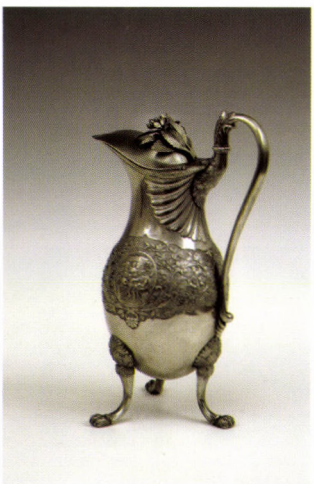
Albert Szenci Molnár (1574–1634) was a great Calvinist scholar of this time. The widely travelled Molnár translated Calvin's *Institutio,* and arranged the Book of Psalms to be sung to the melodies of the Genevan psalter in divine service, wrote a treatise on theology and ethics with the title *Summum bonum,* and compiled the first comprehensive Latin–Hungarian dictionary. His example shows that the Church must harmoniously combine the most pious faith and scholarship of the highest standard in all its work.

This principle underlies the growing importance of Calvinist high schools and colleges, the number of which kept growing with new foundations even in market towns in the Ottoman areas such as Kecskemét, Kőrös and Cegléd. The influence of the modern educational methods of Comenius was widespread thanks to his books printed in Sárospatak. These works were governed by two overriding principles: Humanism and a pure Christian faith, as well as the revival of Classical traditions and a more thorough knowledge

5 ■ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion. 4, 20, 30–31. www.reformed.org/master/index.html?mainframe=/books/institutes/

Calvin, flanked by Princes of Transylvania Stephen Bocskay and Gabriel Bethlen, on a stained glass window in the staircase of the Calvin Hall
of the Kálvin Square Calvinist Congregation, Budapest
Miksa Róth, 1934

Jug for the Lord's Table
(Dávid Zólyomi's jug)
Márton Szegedi Ötvös, Debrecen, 1631
Partly gilded silver, hammered, chased, punched, engraved, cast
Calvinist Congregation of Debrecen
Small Church



Baptismal jug and plate
József Szentpéteri, Pest, 1824. Silver, hammered, chased, punched, cast, engraved
Kálvin Square Calvinist Congregation, Budapest

Lord's Supper cup from Kecskemét
Illés Tar, Kecskemét, 1644 (marked)
Partly gilded silver, with engraved ornaments, the base is damaged
Restored in 2008 by the goldsmith Ferenc Nagy
Ráday Museum, Kecskemét

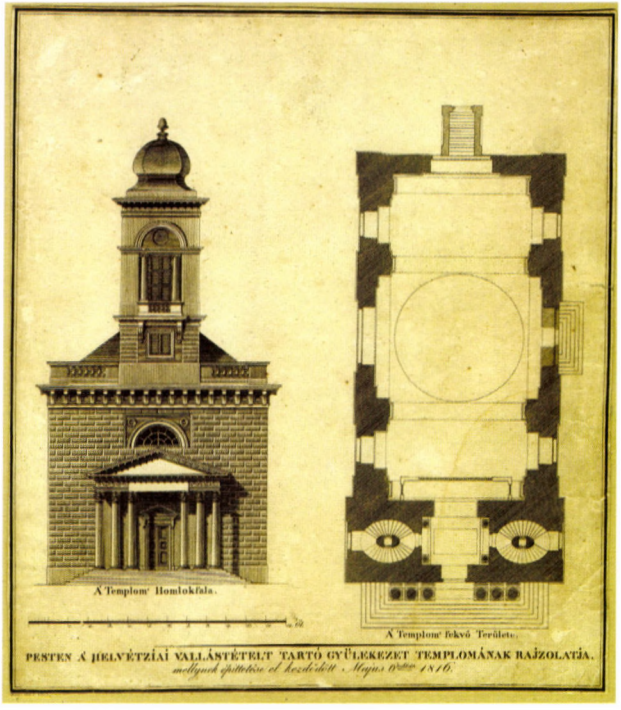
Communion plate from Szabadszállás
Kecskemét (?), 1763 (unmarked)
Gilded silver, with engraved ornaments
Ráday Museum, Kecskemét

István Szegedi Kis's theological treatise with the author's portrait
Stephanus Szegedinus: *Theologiae sincerae Loci Communes de Deo et Homine cum Confessione de Trinitate... Editio Quarta, Basileae per Conrad Waldkirchium*, 1599. Bound with Stephanus Szegedinus: *Tabulae Analyticae, Quibus Examplar illud Sanorum Sermonum... Basileae, 1599.*
Historical Portrait Gallery
Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

Linen for the Lord's Table from Nagykőrös
Turkish, 18th century. Cambric, embroidered, blue and green silk threads
Ráday Museum, Kecskemét

Part of the 1774 eastern choir loft of the Calvinist church of Rétfalu (Refala, Croatia)
Open Air Museum of Folk Art, Szentendre

Part of the 1792 coffered ceiling of the Calvinist church of Drávaiván, Baranya County



Design for the façade and ground plan of the Calvinist Church on Kálvin Square
Ferenc Karacs, 1816
Historical Portrait Gallery
Hungarian National Museum
Budapest

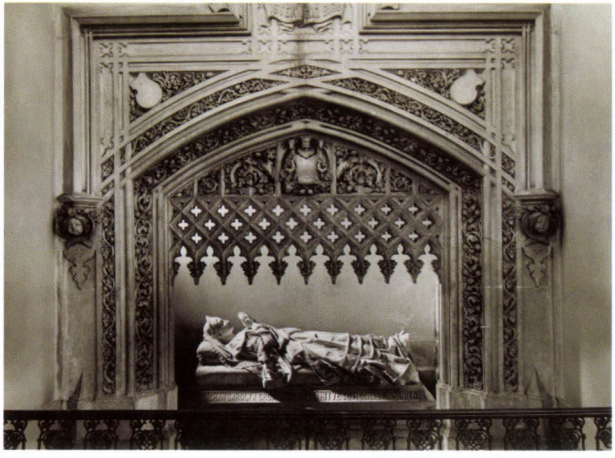
Miklós Barabás: ***Bishop Pál Török,***
1884. Oil on canvas
Ceremonial Hall of the Convent of the Danube Calvinist Ecclesiastical District, Budapest

Organ of the Calvinist church of Fülöpszállás,
1828

Mark Quirin: *Gedeon Ráday,*
1790
Historical Portrait Gallery
Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

The furnishings of the library at the château at Pécel
Convent of the Danube Calvinist Ecclesiastical District, Budapest

István Csók: *"Do This in Remembrance of Me"* (Lk 22, 19) (Lord's Supper), 1890. Oil on canvas
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



Raymond Gayrard–Frigyes Feszl: Sepulchre of the Countess Manó Zichy, née Charlotte Strachan in the Kálvin Square Church, 1854

of nature.[6] Inherent in this ideal of the nobility of mind and spirit—the ideal of the Calvinist *Bürgertum,* the bourgeoisie—is Calvin's humanist, and, at the same time, deeply theological approach.

Persecution and torture also produced martyrs to their faith in the 17th century. Ferenc Wathay wrote and embellished his illuminated *Codex* (1604) which included hymns, songs and autobiographical writings in Ottoman captivity; the *Gallery of All Saints* by János Simonides (1675) and the *Siege of the House Built on Rock* (1676) by Bálint Kocsi Csergő are works by Protestants sold into galley-slavery for their faith. These confessions of faith carried on the tradition of illuminated manuscripts of a high standard.

These were times when Puritanism flourished and Presbyterianism came into being as a way of Church governance commonly associated with Calvinism. In the spirit of "setting apart" Puritanism led to religious self-searching and to the cleansing of churches. Images were replaced by Bible verses and stylized floral ornaments of Renaissance origin. That was when the richly painted coffered ceiling and choir loft became common in what were called "ornamental" Calvinist churches, most often the work of the most fashionable local cabinetmakers.[7]

Not even the Thököly rebellion could halt the hassling of Protestants. Prince Imre Thököly's courageous wife Ilona Zrínyi was forced to surrender the castle of Munkács, which put Transylvania, too, under the rule of Leopold I. The golden age of Calvinist courts was over. In the areas controlled by Vienna re-catholicization hindered Protestant church construction. After the final expulsion of the Ottomans (1689), the Habsburg court ruled that Protestants could only worship in public in a number of places listed in the decree; elsewhere they could only worship in their homes behind closed doors, in family circles. This state of affairs lasted until the *Edictum Tolerantiae* (Edict of Tolerance, 1781) issued by Joseph II and even beyond (the Edict only applied to the Kingdom of Hungary, not to the Principality of Transylvania). Calvinists in Hungary do not display a cross on or inside their churches because of the bitter memory of the politically supported re-catholicization.

And yet the progress of the Enlightenment was promoted by Protestants. Protestants had a leading role in Maria Theresa's programmes of modernization. Joseph II wrote to his mother: "You can find the most highly educated youths, the greatest talents among them [i.e. the Calvinists]. Nearly the whole of the Protestant nobility belongs in this class who surpass the Catholics in learning and the use of knowledge, as well as in travels and the diverse knowledge and experience gained thereby."[8]

6 ■ Endre Kovács ed., *Comenius Magyarországon. Comenius Sárospatakon írt műveiből* [Comenius in Hungary. From the Works of Comenius Written in Sárospatak]. Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1970, pp. 14–15.

7 ■ Tünde Zentai, "A falu temploma" [The Church of the Village]. In *Catalogue* pp. 101, 211–214.

8 ■ Ferenc Kulin, "Polgárosodás és a református szellemi hagyomány" [Modernization and the Calvinist Spiritual Tradition]. In *Catalogue,* p. 62.

Calvinist bibliophiles were most aware of the glory of what had been the *Bibliotheca Corviniana*. "Orphan" Kata Bethlen (1700–1759) collected rare Hungarica of the previous two hundred years. Gedeon Ráday (1713–1793) enlarged a library inherited from his father paying for the books with Tokay wine, smuggling works by the banned French encyclopaedists in the empty barrels. Count Sámuel Teleki (1739–1822), collector of the famous "Teleki Téka" library of Marosvásárhely, paid a fortune in Strasbourg to buy a book that had once been part of the Bibliotheca Corviniana. The library of the Senior Layman of the Danube Calvinist Ecclesiastical District, Count József Teleki (1790–1855) made up the core of the library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, of which he was one of the founders and first president.

The exceptionally old and valuable stock of books of the college libraries of Debrecen, Sárospatak and Pápa is evidence that, starting with Luther, Protestants have always been booklovers. Most of the important early Protestant theologians were also printers, including János Sylvester, Gál Huszár, Gáspár Heltai, Péter Bornemisza, Máté Skaricza and Johannes Honterus. Miklós Kis of Misztótfalu (Nicholas Kis Tótfalusi, 1650–1702) learned printing in Amsterdam. He created a transitional typeface between Renaissance Garamond and 18th-century Classicist typefaces which contemporaries called "Dutch Roman": the Janson Antiqua was known in Oxford and Leipzig.[9] He not only printed a new, illustrated, edition of the Károli Bible, the "Golden Bible" (1685), but also amended the text where needed, which earned him the lifelong hostility and jealousy of a highly respected bishop and fellow clergymen in Transylvania. Kis's Apology entitled *Mentsége* (His Excuse, 1698) truly reflects a stage in Church history in which the spiritually and intellectually committed aristocracy no longer harmoniously embrace secular and sacral elements, and the clerical and Episcopal authority—driven as it was by jealousy—dissociates itself from the opinion of a European-educated and theologically qualified printer who was nevertheless a layman.

A Calvinist theologian, Péter Bod (1712–1769), a preacher at Magyarigen (Transylvania), can be said to have been the first to busy himself with Hungarian literary scholarship. In addition to a number of theological and hermeneutical works, he compiled the first Hungarian literary encyclopaedia under the title *Hungarian Athenas* (1766), covering all the writers and works that he knew of. His successor was Ferenc Kazinczy (1759–1831), a lay representative of the Calvinist Church, writer, poet and a freemason supporter of Joseph II. György Bessenyei (1747–1811) best exemplifies how ecclesiastical offices controlled by the clergy gradually shed secular activities. This process

9 ■ György Haiman, "Tótfalusi Kis Miklós amszterdami betűmintalapja és a hollandi antikva" [Miklós Kis Tótfalusi's Specimen Type and the Dutch Roman Type]. In *A könyv műhelyében* [In the Workshop of Books]. Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1979, pp. 9–18.

was still in an early phase in the 19th century and was consummated by the second half of the 20th. In his youth, as a member of Maria Theresa's bodyguard, Bessenyei had been a published writer in Vienna; however, after quarrelling with the ecclesiastic authorities he retreated into a hermit's life and his manuscripts remained unpublished.

Calvinism came to be identified with the bare white walls of churches built in the first half of the 19th century—unjustly, since no Calvinist tradition demands it. On the contrary, in earlier ages church interiors were covered in rugs, inscriptions, and brightly coloured floral ornamentation suggestive of paradise. The whitewashed wall was a characteristic of Neo-Classicism, the new architectural style, for which a generation of architects brought up on the works of Winckelmann is to blame. Calvinists were allowed to build churches freely after the Edict of Tolerance (1781) and the newly built churches had white walls in the prevalent style of the period, and their size and solemnity represented their growing importance. The Calvinist Church had a natural affinity to Neo-Classicism, since the latter is the manifestation of a bourgeois attitude whose roots go back to Classical Antiquity as an ideal and to Calvin's ideas concerning government by citizens. Bolstered by the Enlightenment and enjoying freedom of religion, it became possible to meld humanism and Calvinist faith in commitment to the intellectual and social policies of the Age of Reform.

One signal event was the building in 1830 of a new Calvinist church in Pest on Hay (today Kálvin) Square with the financial support of Palatine Joseph, Senior Laymen and the districts. Ever since Emperor Leopold I's host had freed the town and put an end to the Turkish occupation no Calvinist church had been built either in Pest or in Buda. Baron József Vay in 1796 and András Fáy in 1842 toyed with the idea of establishing a university in Pest. This idea was uppermost in the mind of the new bishop of the Danubian district, Pál Török, a man of Classical culture and Biblical spirit, who wrote Latin verses and organized congregations. He is not to blame that only a faculty, the Theological College of Pest, became reality in 1855. Four years later the Calvinist Grammar School was established in Pest, in confirmation of the Protestant tradition of pairing Church and school, faith and scholarship.

The 19th century was the age of theological liberalism. Liberal thinking in theology is deeply rooted in culture. At the Theological College of Pest, the teaching staff included professors who were noted scholars of one or the other of the humanities. Professors of theology were members of Parliament, and Senior Laymen of the Calvinist Church were better known as prime ministers, academicians and prominent writers. A good example is the teaching staff of the Calvinist secondary school at Nagykőrös in 1859 when not only the poet János Arany, but all the other teachers as well were members of the Academy. The age of liberalism possibly provided the last chance in the strengthening

process of secularization for the harmonious cooperation of Church and society in the fulfilment of the ideal of the nobility of mind and spirit. The principle of separating Church and state, as interpreted by Baron József Eötvös, Minister of Education and Religious Affairs, ensured that the state did not interfere with the domestic affairs of the Church and at the same time obliged the state institutions to look to Christian moral teaching as the supreme guide. That meant in practice that the members of the Church could take part in political, social and cultural life as Calvinist Christians. As a result, more institutions, foundations, periodicals and societies came into being within the Calvinist church at 19th-century *fin-de-siècle* than at any other time.

A constituent synod of the Hungarian Calvinist Church first convened in Debrecen in 1881 to thrash out the common business of organization, election and education in all the Calvinist districts. This synod marked the beginning of an integrated Calvinist Church in the Hungary of the time. It worked out the procedural rules of majority rule, corporate government, clerical and lay representation in equal numbers, the principle of parity on all corporate levels, and set up a common fund to share financial burdens. Centralization meant that local autonomy, which had lasted for centuries, came to an end, and the freedom of action of congregations, schools and individuals was replaced by a centralized church bureaucracy. The resulting damage only began to show much later.

As the political liberalism of the age of the Dual Monarchy increasingly came under attack from the inside, particularly by the left, so a Church based on a liberal theology was increasingly exposed to internal strife. This is aptly illustrated by the conflict between the liberal Protestant Society, including Budapest teachers of theology, and the new orthodoxy led by Imre Révész in Debrecen. The struggle of the two led to the victory of a third party made up of the "theology of awakening" which attacked conventional churchliness, and the new Home Mission. Cultural Protestantism, just like politics itself, failed to address the spiritual and material needs of the masses torn from their roots, flooding into the cities because of growing industrialization and agricultural unemployment. Millions emigrated to America, and large numbers left the Calvinist Reformed Church and became Baptist. In response, Aladár Szabó and his staff started an evangelizing campaign, calling on people to repent. They started Sunday schools, founded the Christian Youth Society, the Association of Christian Students and the Bethania Society. Their periodical started in 1896, *Új Óramutató,* proposed a policy for the Home Mission as a whole.

After World War I, for a few months in 1919, the country was given a taste of the devastations produced by a Communist dictatorship. The lasting shock was multiplied by the Treaty of Trianon, which meant the loss of two thirds of Hungary's territory. This not only dismembered a country with a past of a thousand years—depriving it of its most important mines, industries and

cities—but the Calvinist Church also lost many of its brethren living in Transylvania, Slovakia, the Vojvodina and the Burgenland. The impoverished little country and its Calvinist Church faced a completely new situation.

Between 1921 and 1945 Bishop László Ravasz (1882–1975) headed the Danube District, and his work influenced the whole Hungarian Calvinist Church. There are reasons why this period is sometimes labelled "Calvinist Neo-Baroque": rapid secularization broke ties with the Church and religious life became purely formal.[10] At the same time, decision-making was concentrated in the hands of the senior clergy—deans and bishops—under the official authority lent them by the synod of 1881. While a hundred years earlier senior laymen and the leading intellectuals carried some weight in governing the Church, their role became greatly laicized owing to secularization, and after the Communist takeover in 1948 this role was merely an alibi to keep up an apparent parity, by placing a noted writer or artist in the showcase. The 'Neo-Baroque' Calvinist Church was, however, essentially different from the Church in the Communist era. In the former period such men of stature filled pastoral offices as Bishop László Ravasz during whose tenure over fifty new churches and 75 schools were built, or Pastor Imre Szabó who created a new district in Budapest and patronized the building of churches, hospitals and secondary schools of some architectural importance. The deaconess service and the Bethesda Hospital were an integral part of the Church. Other links with culture, in this case folk culture, included Klára Tüdős' designs of folk-style, yet modern, clothes and Károly Kós's buildings in Transylvania.

The leading Calvinist theology of the age was 'historical Calvinism' represented by Jenő Sebestyén, professor at the Budapest theological seminary, and the Church establishment. He adapted the theology of Abraham Kuyper, founder of the Dutch Anti-Revolutionary Party and prime minister, to Hungarian conditions. Under the surface, another strain was also effective: Karl Barth's theology, which remained the only permitted theology in socialist Hungary, as it implied the self-isolation of the Church and the resignation from social and cultural contacts.

In the forty years of communism from 1949, when Church and state were only formally separated, the Church was wholly permeated by political agents and a party leadership which interfered *ad hoc*. The extinction of the nobility of mind and spirit would have been complete had it not been for a few martyrs and servants of the Word of God in local congregations. As the revolution of 1956 was drowned in blood, no change was possible. The opportunity for change was eventually created by the democratic political turn of events in 1989–90. But we would need more perspective and more space for any proper examination of this sea-change. ❧

10 ■ Réka Kiss, "A Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület története a 20. században" [History of the Danube Calvinist Ecclesiastical District in the 20th Century]. In *Catalogue*, p. 57.

Closer to the East or the West?

Eszter Rádai Talks with György István Tóth

TÁRKI's contribution to the World Values Survey finds that Hungarians are distrustful, frown upon social inequality and think the welfare system is unfair. They are in two minds about breaking rules and are deeply committed to state redistribution. This places their values and attitudes closer to those of Eastern Orthodox countries than to the West.

Eszter Rádai: *You recently headed a major survey of social and cultural attitudes and their relation to economic development. The survey's findings suggest that Hungary lies eastward on Europe's map of values in relation to its geographical position on the eastern frontier of Western civilization.*

György István Tóth: We looked at Hungarian cultural and social values in two dimensions. The first gauges traditional versus secular values. This suggests Hungarians are not especially deferential to authority. Nor are they particularly religious or community-oriented. In this respect Hungarian society is fairly secular, more so than Poland where deference to authority, patriotism, religious and family-centredness are at a greater premium. The second dimension shows where a society is placed along the open and closed society

---

István György Tóth

is director of the Budapest based TÁRKI Social Research Institute and Head of the Applied Social Research Centre at the Budapest Corvinus University. He participated and/or directed various projects on Hungarian and European income distribution and social policies. He has been a consultant to various international organizations, edited and co-edited over fifteen books including the bi-annual Hungarian Social Report series since 1998, and is editor of the TÁRKI European Social Reports.

He is author of Income Distribution: From the Systemic Change to the Joining of the European Union *(in Hungarian).*

Eszter Rádai

is on the staff of the weekly Élet és Irodalom.

TÁRKI is an independent applied social research centre with 25 years of experience of empirical social science research in Hungary. Its background includes research on a wide range of issues related to social stratification, labour markets, income distribution, consumption and lifestyle patterns and attitudes. TÁRKI is regularly involved in Central European survey research projects, including market and opinion research. In addition, TÁRKI is increasingly involved in overall European comparative research and, on the basis of this, in advising various European Union agencies.

The World Values Survey is an ongoing academic project by social scientists studying changing values and their impact on social and political life in different cultures around the world. WVS has carried out representative national surveys in 97 societies containing almost 90 percent of the world's population. The World Values Survey first emerged out of the European Values Study in 1981, when the methods of a successful European study were extended to 14 countries outside Europe. The leading figure in the early extension of the surveys around the world was Ronald Inglehart from the University of Michigan. Today the database of the merged EVS-WVS has been published on the internet with free access.

axis, whether attitudes are mainly shaped by physical survival or self-expression, which measures the desire for civil and political freedoms as well as trust in and tolerance for other people. In this respect, attitudes in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, and even in Poland are more open. These are countries where political freedom, tolerance for alternative lifestyles and trust are more highly prized.

The WVS finds a correlation between economic development and a change in values. Economic progress transforms values, the WVS asserts. We, however, cannot be sure whether countries of different cultures progress linearly. Further in-depth surveys are needed before we can say for sure. But one thing is certain: compared with countries with a similar gross domestic product, attitudes in Hungarian society are far less open. Why this should be so is hard to say.

Hungarians are more secular and closer to the West in some ways, yet closer to the Balkans in others—how come?

Our part of Europe was under one military yoke after WWII. Yet long-term cultural differences are deeply rooted and often prevail. Hungary resembles Western culture in various sets of values, but interpersonal and political attitudes are closer to those of Bulgarians, Moldovans and Russians.

Historical bad luck, many believe, has determined Hungary's pessimistic national character. Do comparative studies bear this out?

I would caution against going way back in history for an explanation. Until twenty years ago—an historical blink of the eye—Hungary was under the heel of an

empire with eastern roots. It took systematic steps to abolish horizontal personal relations while imposing an eastern-style regime alien to traditions in a country where the evolution of the middle class had been repeatedly delayed and interrupted. During four decades of 'socialism' Hungarians learned doublespeak and lost confidence in public institutions. Parents pass on such attitudes to their children and it will take some time before future generations think otherwise.

You make clear in your introduction that economic woes cannot be ascribed to people's attitudes. Yet you come forward with the strong statement that distrust permeates almost all areas of Hungarian private and public life including the economy. What findings prompted that suggestion?

Our surveys include a question that refers to so-called 'generalised trust': do you trust the majority of your fellows or can you never be too cautious? Another related question: to what extent do you trust Hungarian institutions, politicians, business organisations and government, the media, trade unions and public authorities? Do you believe that they serve our interests and are their actions fair? The third relevant question refers to participation in civil society. How do you value friendship and neighbourly relations; how ready are you to help others or cooperate with them? As for trusting others, Hungarians are not at the bottom of the European list, but trust in the institutions and participation in civil society is extremely low. The consequences can be measured and seen all around us: public institutions operate ineffectively and at a high cost, and morale in general is low.

Is this lack of trust among Hungarians pathological, or just a result of painful historical and everyday experiences?

No doubt painful experience is a factor. "I cannot get my business done because the authorities don't care. Right or wrong, I have to get it done through the back door." Day-to-day frustration undermines public trust even more. As we have no confidence in our institutions, we prefer underhand deals to get our business done. Most people think that the rich prosper at the expense of others. Which means that many people see business as a war in which everybody is against everybody. Nowhere in the world where WVS surveys have been conducted is that belief as strong as in Hungary.

Your research has found that Hungarians are not ready to accept social inequalities and inequalities are thought to be bigger than they actually are.

True. Although Hungary, in terms of inequalities, is similar to Western European countries Hungarians think inequalities are unbearably huge. The Hungarian rich–poor distance is not extreme by European standards. For instance, in Portugal and in the Baltic states inequalities are bigger. True, inequalities are smaller in Scandinavian countries, but they are an exception.

Paternalism and Distrust

On the cultural map of the WVS, Hungary can be found among the European countries with secular-rational values (it has a score of 6.3 out of ten). Yet on the attitude-openness scale, it only has a score of 1.8, which puts it to the lowest segment, in the company of Russia, Moldova, Ukraine and Bulgaria. The additional TÁRKI survey on cultural values and attitudes found that Hungarians distrust their institutions, especially the political parties, the government, Parliament, the media and the trade unions (only the Hungarian Academy of Sciences is trusted) and do not trust their compatriots either. The radius of confidence only extends to the family. Fifty-six per cent of Hungarians think they do not trust others at all or mostly not. That partly explains why Hungarians rarely party with friends or neighbours and are indifferent to civil society initiatives. A composite index that covers helpfulness inside the family, towards the sick and the disabled, the elderly, neighbours and immigrants shows that Hungarians are the least active in Europe. Two-thirds of Hungarians think that they are honest but their compatriots are not. They have a similar opinion about corruption: it is thought to be much more prevalent than it is actually. Four-fifths of Hungarians think that no one can become rich in Hungary with honest work; and those who wish to succeed need to break certain rules. Many respondents say that success depends on connections, family background and fate rather than hard work. The overview of a number of other surveys like Eurobarometer and the European Social Survey shows that Hungarians are less critical of tax fraud and the unlawful access to state aid than people in Poland or the Czech Republic and are relatively tolerant towards petty offences: getting a free ride on public transport is a forgivable sin. Public support for government measures to reduce social inequalities is very high in Hungary, second only to Greece. The decisive majority of Hungarians think that the state is duty-bound to guard its citizens from a wide range of threats but, in terms of the individual's readiness to assume risks, they are behind the average in the European Union. The final report summing up the findings of the survey says that "all the factors mentioned are present in other countries too. Indeed, those factors are even stronger in the other transition countries. But what sets Hungary apart is the combination of those factors". ❧

High incomes are not considered legitimate in Hungary. Four-fifths of the respondents think that only dishonest means can make you rich. Only one-third of Hungarians link their success or failure to work, ambition or individual endeavour. Hungary is the only EU country where so few people think that success depends on schooling and where so many think that what matters most is the family you are born into.

In other words Hungarian public opinion is hostile to market forces. This presumably helps to explain nostalgia for the Kádár regime.

A market economy is more successful than other systems because it can get the most out of society through the synergy of competition and cooperation. To a certain extent competition and cooperation were present already in the Kádár regime, even though it was not dominant. During the 1980s, at a time when the centrally planned economy was on its last legs, some scope was allowed to private enterprise when state-run firms outsourced some of their activities. Market-conscious citizens began to fill the gaps in supply left by clumsy state-run enterprises.

But only as exceptions balancing on the edge of illegality...

And the government praised them before punishing them by imposing legal penalties. Today the law protects the market economy, market actors, however, all too often prefer shifty manoeuvres to lawful solutions.

This takes us to another feature of Hungarian values: haziness about obeying rules. Whereas Hungarians attribute the success of their peers to dishonesty and rule-breaking they are nevertheless somewhat more tolerant of rule-breaking than people in neighbouring countries. What explains their tolerant attitude to, for instance, tax evasion, while their expectations towards government involvement in social services are so unrealistically high?

People who spent much of their adult life under socialism cannot change their mentality just because the regime has changed. On the other hand, negative expectations towards the behaviour of other people are a drag on development. Two-thirds of Hungarians see themselves as honest but consider others to be dishonest. We have found that on several occasions when interviewees had to answer the question a) whether in a specific situation the majority would act honestly and b) how would the respondents themselves act.

The conclusion then is that the two statements are contradictory when applied to the entire population. What follows?

Most people think it is wrong to be corrupt or to break the rules, but they also think that no one can be successful without doing so. Sooner or later they are bound to ask themselves why should *I* be honest? When it comes to the two-thirds of the people who denounce rule-breaking but think that the majority break the rules, the balance between their own behaviour and the behaviour they attribute to others is probably very delicate. Sooner or later that is bound to create bitter frustration. If such persons are unsuccessful, they will come up with self-exonerating explanations and find scapegoats.

The final report of the survey says that twenty years into the transition, Hungarians—owing to values that are reminiscent of those of the Eastern Orthodox countries—still "undervalue the tax cost of social services. Consequently, they expect more from the state than what it can deliver."

Cultural factors probably play a part here. But so do the mistakes made by the ruling intellectual and political elite over the past twenty years. In the relationship of the individual and the state, opinion leaders emphasize the individuals' rights but soft-pedal their duties. They stress the state's obligations towards the recipients of social services but they are quiet about the authorities' duty to press taxpayers to fulfil their obligations.

On both the left and right of the political divide?

Mostly on the left; but statism has advocates also among conservative opinion leaders. Let me give you an example. Those in charge of welfare policy start out from the perspective of the victims. They tend to forget that life is a series of decisions—both good and bad. General debate puts aside the factor of rational calculation and fails to acknowledge that everybody bears individual responsibility for his fate.

Clearly you are not referring to the hundreds of thousands of Hungarians who have been jobless and downtrodden for generations.

I am convinced that the victims of the transition should have been treated as mature adult citizens from the outset. Motivated by a partially mistaken left-wing doctrine, the authorities let jobless people become reliant on retirement pension and welfare. They should have known better: the OECD countries that followed a similar course have run into serious difficulties during the eighties. That policy has stretched the welfare services and increased the desire for greater state redistribution of resources. That is a blend of paternalism and infantilism. When economic growth picked up, the majority of jobless were reluctant to work again. The authorities misread the relation of state and individual: it should have been treated as a contract between equals in which rights and duties are counterbalanced. Attention should not be focused on how much money the state can distribute in welfare and whether or not the related state revenues should be reduced or increased; instead, on what kind of labour market should be created. The overall attitude of professionals towards the state is in favour of redistribution, especially when it comes to their own benefits. I do not just mean opinion leaders but also doctors, teachers, public officials, journalists, actors and the intellectuals of academia. They scramble for their privileges the same as anyone else and do what they can to milk the welfare organisations, wheedling tax allowances and preferential retirement conditions while whining about society moving in the wrong direction. They often camouflage their real intentions by 'championing' the cause of the poor. For different reasons, the anti-market attitude is not uncommon among intellectuals either. Such an atmosphere is unhelpful for the operation of a market economy, not to speak about the bad example it sets to the rest of society.

To what extent are politicians responsible for the public's unrealistically high expectations?

In two-party and quasi two-party democracies like ours, elections are decided by the median voters. But there is an important difference. In other countries only one of the two big parties courts the votes of those who favour stronger state redistribution while the other woos voters who favour less public spending. Personally I think supporters and the elite of the two parties do not bear the same responsibility in this respect. For several elections now various parties have attempted to win the support of voters that have a stake in a stronger state redistribution of resources. They obviously bear in mind the fact that income from the public coffers accounts for a high percentage—I believe the highest in Europe—of the total income of the median voter. In sum, the tactic pursued by the politicians is all too rational from their own point of view. After all, they can only make it to Parliament if they win the hearts of the voters in the middle.

Which is counterproductive for the general good of the country.

By consolidating the checks and balances, perhaps it would be possible to keep this 'spendthrift democracy' under some control, at least until taxpayers find a better way to stand up for their interests either because one of the big parties undergoes the right transformation or a new political force finds its feet.

Yet the past twenty years could as well be seen as a success story for Hungary: just think of the bloodless transition that inspired thousands of people to become politically active, smoothly operating democratic institutions, every fourth year voters get the chance to dismiss the government, accession to NATO and the EU.

Whatever you may think, the transition was a deal transacted within sections of the elite. At a conference held at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences which analysed the findings of the Hungarian national survey of the WVS, Tamás Kolosi, president of TÁRKI, said that the transition, Hungary's gain before 1989, became its drawback afterwards. In Hungary the erosion of the government's power and, to some extent, steps towards a market economy began in the early 1980s, which means the transition was not limited to a single revolutionary outburst. The transition period was marked by the coexistence of two sets of values: on the one hand, there were institutions of the party-state and large state-owned enterprises; on the other, there were tiny units of private enterprise which exploited the bankruptcy of the system. They relied on a state-owned factory base. Private ventures were a balancing act in the border zone of legality. That mentality, dodging the tax system and disregarding the rules laid down by the law on competition, is not feasible in a market economy. The present crisis is graver in Hungary than it should be, for which the blame should be placed not on too much capitalism but on unjustifiably large vestiges of socialism. Genuine reforms are hindered by distrust by the political forces and the public. As the political forces do not trust one another people try to settle claims on a day-to-day basis. That in turn narrows the time horizons of projects. The all-pervasive distrust weakens the

credibility of reforms. Let me illustrate this point with an example from the United States. In the 1990s the administration intended to discontinue a certain category of welfare aid. The day after the aid stoppage was announced protests appeared in the media alleging that "people will starve". But when the welfare actually stopped it became clear that people did not starve. By that time most of the former beneficiaries had come up with new survival tactics and found other solutions. Only the really needy continued to receive aid and the administration eventually found resources to carry on with aid for that narrower circle of beneficiaries. What would be the response to a similar statement in Hungary? To start with, people would publicly question the government's will and strength to follow through such a measure. The aid beneficiaries would ignore the policy declaration rather than devise alternative survival tactics, for the simple reason because people do not believe what the government says. To make things worse, such doubt is often justified because many of the proposed reforms never get off the paper.

That is partly because every attempt at reform provokes opposition; and when a proposed reform is to be killed, this or that professional lobby and the political parties in opposition at the time greet themselves as spontaneous allies.

Such distrust and opposition are known in other countries too, but in Hungary an extremely strong drive is needed to secure any adjustment to a reform; if the impulse is not strong enough, people just shrug it off. As reform programmes do not have credibility they are bound to fail.

If Hungarians do not trust either the political or economic institutions, or their neighbours for that matter, how will they ever find their way out of this quagmire?

It is difficult to say. Government measures do not generally build confidence. This is not something that campaigns or media hype can solve. Even if every broadcaster showered listeners with the message about the brotherhood of man, no one would bother to listen. To illustrate the point I'll mention a sensitive issue that recently flared up. The WVS survey has shown that the integration of the Roma in Hungary requires tolerance, empathy and a gradual series of consistent measures. If however the government embarks on this project by accusing the majority society of intolerance day by day and even claims that society's intolerance is the very source of the problem, its programme will make a bad situation even worse. To restore public confidence, you need patience and perseverance. The real task of a state is to make the sectors that it supervises transparent and credible. Civil servants should stick to a lasting code of conduct; the civil service should not be a pawn of the government of the day. If such advice is heeded, given time, citizens will lend credibility to the public institutions and will not feel the need to hire heavies to enforce the observance of private contracts. Those countries of Europe are successful where public trust is strong, the spirit of cooperation permeates society and public institutions operate predictably and unbiased. We have no other option but to believe that. ❧

Tamás Torma

Perambulations in Pécs

Ripe fruit on fig trees in Sicily or Crete is hardly a cause for surprise. But in Hungary? Believe it or not, shielded from the northerly winds, this Mediterranean delicacy thrives on the southern slopes of the Mecsek Hills. The city of Pécs—Europe's Capital of Culture in 2010 (alongside the Ruhr region and Istanbul)—beckons with a delightful miscellany of culture, art and flora. The visitor can find early Christian cemeteries, mosques and minarets from the period of Ottoman rule, the seat of a thousand-year-old Roman Catholic bishopric, museums with collections of works by outstanding twentieth-century artists, verdant groves of sweet chestnut and fig trees, and a wine district in the neighbouring rolling countryside, where the specialty is a white wine called Zierfandler. And the list is far from complete.

Why Pécs? I first put that question to an Australian friend who had come to Hungary to study painting the year that saw the fall of the Berlin Wall and who has stayed here ever since. Today an accomplished practitioner and professor of architecture, he answered that, in terms of cultural assets, Pécs offers much more than its size might suggest.

After World War I, when Hungary lost more than half of its territory as a consequence of the Treaty of Trianon, cities often as little as three-hundred kilometres from Budapest, such as Pozsony/Pressburg (Bratislava), Újvidék (Novi Sad), Nagyvárad (Oradea), Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) and Kassa (Košice), which had functioned as natural regional centres, suddenly found themselves in neighbouring countries. With the exception of Budapest, which swelled to include almost two million inhabitants, the remaining Hungarian cities had populations between one and two hundred thousand. Today Pécs (in the southwest of Hungary) is Hungary's fifth largest urban centre with 157,000

Tamás Torma

first specialized in the rock'n'roll scene, going on to write on culture in general. For some years now he has been an editor of arts programmes broadcast by Hungarian Television.

residents. In November 2008 Pécs came second in the 75,000 to 200,000 inhabitants category of the International Award for Livable Communitites. Historic buildings are well looked after and, additionally, a splendidly displayed archeological site is, as it were, part of the living city. Towns of similar size include Denver (Colorado), Dundee (Scotland), Dijon and Grenoble (France), Parma and Perugia (Italy) and Heidelberg (Germany). But Pécs represents more to its region than these towns to theirs. The hub of a multi-ethnic region inhabited by Magyars, Croats and Germans, Pécs is home to a prestigious university (including a faculty of music and the visual arts), a fine theatre, a symphonic orchestra, and superb museums and galleries—not to mention rock bands of nationwide fame. Its various institutions and a local culture rich with distinctive tradition offer visitors a taste of the varied history of the region.

Let us take a closer look at this unique city.

The magic of eosin

If the residents of Pécs had to select one thing to promote the image of the city, they would probably choose the Zsolnay majolica. Products of the Zsolnay factory can be found far and wide, whether identified as of Hungarian origin or not. Decorative ceramics of the Zsolnay factory of Pécs add a special character to Budapest's finest Art Nouveau edifices (examples include the Museum of Applied Arts, the Geological Institute and the Postal Savings Bank). Colourful Zsolnay pyrogranite tiles cover the roofs of the Parliament, Matthias Church and the Kunsthalle. Zsolnay's majolica also adorns public and private buildings in Kecskemét, Szabadka (Subotica), Kassa (Košice), Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureş), Prague, The Hague, Berlin, Turin, Milan, Vienna and dozens of other cities of Europe, as well as buildings in cities outside of Europe, such as the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City.

The founder of this stoneware and ceramics factory was Miklós Zsolnay (the tongue-twisting name is pronounced as 'zhowl-naw-ee'). Established in 1853 but entered into the registry of companies only in 1868, the factory had a golden era up to the end of World War I. (After 1920 it was severed from its markets and sources of raw materials for a time.) Miklós's son, Vilmos, who had intended to become a painter, assumed management of the company in 1865. He attracted international attention for the products of the firm for the first time at the 1873 Vienna World Exhibition. The emperor conferred on him the Knight's Cross of the Order of Francis Joseph. Initially the staff of the factory consisted of some unemployed potters, and the firm only supplied water pipes, stoneware and building ceramics for the local market. The honour Zsolnay's company earned in Vienna came in appreciation of Vilmos's experimental approach to stoneware and glaze. Then accolades at the world exposition brought orders from Viennese property developers. Indeed Vienna is third after Budapest and Pécs in

the number of houses decorated with Zsolnay's ceramics. Examples include the stunning courtyard of the Equitable Insurance Company at the corner of Kärtner Strasse and Graben; the Oriental façade of the Zacherl Insecticide Factory in Vienna's Döbling district; and even a modern block that consists of offices and apartments. Designed by one of the disciples of Otto Wagner, the block is in Ungargasse (which means Hungarian street). As the light of day changes, the brightness of the green pyrogranite tiles adorning the façade and the brown tiles that frame the windows changes with it.

The Paris World Exposition in 1878 brought true international success for Zsolnay. His invention, objects made of glazed porçelain faience, won a gold medal and he received the Cross of the French Legion of Honour from the French government. Zsolnay decorative ceramics won the same recognition enjoyed by his building ceramics. It was at that time that the factory was pursuing new techniques involving the use of so-called eosin glaze, which became popular among art lovers at the heyday of Art Nouveau. (Eosin is an iridescent glazing that owes its magic to the refraction of light. When fired in an oxygen-deficient environment, what remains of the metallic coating on the surface of ceramic objects is no more than a greenish glow, uncannily similar to the iridescence of Tiffany favrile glass. Eosin was aptly named after Eos, the Greek goddess of dawn, referring to the reddish glow of the eosin glazing that was produced first.)

Fortunately for the Zsolnay factory, decades later postmodernism in architecture reinvented the use of attractive decorative elements on façades and in interior spaces, so Zsolnay ceramics came into vogue again. The Pécs architect Sándor Dévényi (b. 1948), for instance, used Zsolnay ceramics to decorate houses that he designed for vacant sites in the historic core of the city, and he is not the only representative of organic architecture to draw inspiration from Hungarian Art Nouveau.

Today no other museum in Pécs attracts as many visitors as the one devoted to the glorious history of the Zsolnay firm. Set up in the town's oldest building, it occupies the erstwhile palace of the cathedral's grand provost in Káptalan Street. It boasts the richest public collection of Zsolnay ceramics. On display on the ground floor are, among other things, tiles manufactured for the 19th-century renovation of the palace and a complete majolica altar from a church in eastern Austria, and on the first floor a whole range of products, from tiny decorative ceramic mosaics to objects of art in glass covered with eosin glaze, an experiment which proved a failure because of the war. (The town of Pécs has managed to purchase the world's biggest private collection of Zsolnay products: 600 pieces, which took László Gyugyi—a resident of Pittsburgh, USA—forty years to assemble. Art lovers were only able to see the collection for a short time in 2009 in the Forbes Gallery in New York before it was put into

crates to be shipped to Pécs. Gyugyi bought non-series pieces that had only been on display at international exhibitions and world fairs. All this will be put on show in the Zsolnay Cultural District, to be established on the premises of the Zsolnay factory.)

The garden of the Zsolnay Museum is 'guarded' by pyrogranite lions that once flanked the mausoleum of the founder of the company. Originally there were forty-two of them, but only a few remain, as most have been lost or broken. One can find them above the former factory, just east of the centre, in a terrible condition, but new ones have already been made and are in storage in a warehouse among newly made decorative ceramics and tiles. Indeed the total renovation of the mausoleum is part of the Zsolnay Cultural District project. If you wish to gaze in wonder at the glow of the greenish-gold eosin glaze in broad daylight, visit the ox-shaped gargoyles on the Zsolnay memorial fountain at the southern end of the main square (the first public well was made here during the Turkish era), the façade of the Old Savings Bank or the Postal Palace in Jókai Street.

At the crossroads of history

East of the main square one finds the former synagogue. Once the biggest synagogue in Transdanubia, it was built in 1868 and reflects the lingering influence of Romantic architecture. Along with other synagogues in Pécs, it was expressive of the desire of the local Jews to assimilate and the patriotic sentiments they held as representatives of the Hungarian-speaking *Neolog* community. The first organ made by the famous organ builder József Angster can be found in the central synagogue. His one-hundredth organ, the most famous one, is in the cathedral of Pécs. (József Angster shared the pro-Magyar sentiments of his compatriots. The son of German settlers who came to Hungary from the southern parts of pre-Trianon Hungary, he went out of his way to prove his Hungarian identity. As an old man he fulfilled his children's request to translate his diary from German into Hungarian. He wrote the following confession on the front page of his Hungarian diary: "As a Hungarian I am a child; as a writer I am an uneducated old man.") He became the founder of a dynasty of organ builders. He and his descendents built as many as 1,300 church organs and 3,000 harmoniums in numerous countries, including Poland, Romania, the Czech Republic, member states of the former Yugoslavia, Italy, Austria and Ukraine.

Pécs's four-towered landmark, the cathedral, is as old as the Hungarian state itself. The first Hungarian king founded a Roman Catholic bishopric in Pécs in 1009, but a consecrated building stood on its site already in Roman times. The 11th-century Catholic church became the crypt of the cathedral, which was given its present, Italian Romanesque appearance at the end of the 19th century.

The Bishop's Palace and its garden recently opened to the public are close to the cathedral. A larger than life statue of Ferenc Liszt stands on a specially-built balcony at the corner of the palace, although Liszt only gave two concerts in Pécs during his single visit to the city. True, Liszt paid regular visits to his friend, Bishop János Scitovszky, but these visits only took him to the Episcopal summer residence at Nádasd, on the other side of the Mecsek Hills. Liszt never played on the cathedral's famous three-keyboard Angster organ either, and his festive *Gran* Mass is dedicated to Esztergom, not Pécs.

Just beyond the Bishop's Palace, Janus Pannonius Street attracts attention for two reasons. There are archaeological excavations in the courtyards of some of the houses and the street is the site of what have become known as 'love padlocks'. The padlocks are clamped to a wrought-iron fence that was originally erected to separate two neighbouring houses. No one knows for certain who started this, was it students from the school on the other side of the street, or commuters who come to town by bike or motorcycle? The number of padlocks now runs in the hundreds, and urban legend has it that the first ones were meant to symbolize the pledge of love. Today tourists flock to see the padlocks, which have spread to a nearby fence.

Continuing westwards, beyond the town wall, one crosses the Barbakán, a defensive tower that protects a gate. It was erected in the 15th century when news first came about the approaching Ottoman Turks. The gate is on the side of the fortified tower so that soldiers would be able to shoot at the invaders from above. Barbakán is also the name of a modern block of offices and apartments beyond the town wall. In 2006 it received the "Brick Award" international architecture price by Weinerberger, the world's largest brick manufacturer. It is a colourful building that nonetheless seems to show some restraint. Its almost sentimental modernity, created in part by the innovative use of a combination of brick, tile and plaster, does not aggressively intrude into the ambience as does so much contemporary architecture. Many see the Barbakán building as an architectural manifestation of the 'soul' of contemporary Mediterranean Pécs. Ironically, it was designed by two architects who live in Budapest.

On a narrow side street one finds a building standing as a proud if somewhat solitary monument to Eastern influence in the heart of Europe. The intact jami and slender minaret of Pasha Yakovali Hassan were built some 350 years ago, a few decades before Pécs was finally recaptured from the Turks. In 1664 the edifices survived shelling from the cannons of Miklós Zrínyi, a great poet and a great general renowned for his military feats against the Turks. At the time Pécs was the biggest Hungarian town under Turkish domination, well inside Turkish-controlled territory, so Zrínyi ordered its destruction by mortars, rather than attempting to liberate it. After the Turks were driven off the liberators found the jami too small to destroy, though they did not spare a neighbouring dervish monastery. Today it is a jami museum, oriented towards

Mecca. Viewed from the prayer niche, Mecca lies in the direction of the town's main square, Széchenyi Square.

The name Pécs means 'five' in Slavic languages. Its Latin name: *Quinque Ecclesiae* and its German name: *Fünfkirchen* (both of later origin) mean 'five churches', an image incorporated by the logo of the Zsolnay factory. The Roman settlement of Sopianae was established before Christianity became the official religion and it was subsequently the administrative centre of the southern part of Pannonia province. Hardly any archeological evidence has been found of what had been a flourishing town, demolished during the centuries of the Great Migrations, the underground Early Christian Necropolis however, a World Heritage Site, is considered the most noteworthy early Christian burial site outside Italy. Thus the Christian centre survived (even today the cathedral remains the central point of the city). At one time Pécs was part of the Carolingian Empire, later to become the seat of the Bishopric following the conquest of the Carpathian Basin by the Hungarians in the 9th century. The university was founded in 1367, the same year in which the universities of Vienna and Prague were established. Following the defeat in 1526 of the Hungarian armies at the battle of Mohács (which is not far from Pécs), the Turks ravaged the town. In time, however, they transformed it into a wealthy merchant centre. Baths and jamis were built; the Christian inhabitants were forced to resettle outside the city walls, while southern Slavs immigrated in considerable numbers. In 1664 the Turkish traveller Evlia Chelebi counted seven jamis and ten mosques. Two jamis and one mosque remain.

When Zrínyi's artillery shelled Pécs towards the end of 150 years of Turkish rule, the medieval core of the town was destroyed. The town first became the property of the Bishopric and some eighty years later a free royal town. Germans began to settle in the city and revive the cultivation of vineyards. The next two centuries bore witness to remarkable economic development. Mining became an important industry; the Zsolnay and Angster enterprises were founded, alongside the now defunct Littke champagne factory and the Hammerli glove factory. The Budapest–Pécs railway line opened in the 1880s (and, after controversial setbacks, the M6 motorway will reach Pécs later this year). The aftermath of World War I put an end to an otherwise prosperous century for Pécs: in 1918 it was occupied by Serbian troops, who remained in the area for years; and the university could only be reopened after Bratislava became part of Czechoslovakia.

The postwar city

The historical core of Pécs, its main square and the forest-covered mountain slopes beyond them have a flavour of the past. But the tourists who go to see Statue Park in Budapest, with its monuments from the Communist era, will

probably be interested in the various specimens of architecture from Communist times in Pécs. The map of Pécs is dotted with housing complexes that include four-storey 'socialist realist' blocks from the early 1950s and the drab, nine-storey ferro-concrete tenements of later years, which remind one of tower silos. In the eastern part of Pécs the housing complex called *Meszes* was built under the strictest ideological control of party directives, much like the housing complexes of Dunaújváros, another town in Transdanubia aptly called Stalin Town in the early 1950s. (In 1949 construction of an ambitious industrial town began in the middle of nowhere, on the territory of a modest village. Nowadays the 'socialist realist' town centre of Dunaújváros is also a tourist sight of sorts. 'Socialist' architecture vehemently denied the functionalism of the Bauhaus, but retained its approach to town planning. The most monstrous façades evoke various historical styles, primarily Classicism.)

Leaving Pécs in a southwesterly direction, at the entrance of the M6 motorway, one arrives at what once was proudly called 'Uranium City.' (During the Cold War the Soviet-controlled uranium mines in the Mecsek Hills were camouflaged as bauxite mines.) Uranium City is Pécs's second biggest district, located between the historical inner city and the suburban belt of ticky-tacky single-storey shopping malls. After Stalin's death, some of the principles of modern architecture were adopted: today the three and four-storey blocks of Uranium City are seen as liveable residential solutions. Although many of the communal facilities are missing—which is typical of housing complexes—the once popular Olympia Restaurant is still impressive. The builders of the restaurant used the designs of a restaurant that had been attached to the Hungarian pavilion of the 1958 World Exposition. (For residents of Pécs the building has a cultic significance: the rock bands Kispál és a Borz and 30Y hold their rehearsals here.) Other residential blocks, meant as monuments to Khrushchev's optimistic notions of building communism, are also in disrepair.

Pécs has another monument to the history of architecture: Hungary's tallest block of flats, which has been empty now for twenty years. It was proudly regarded as a skyscraper at the time of completion but, as it turned out, the Yugoslav construction technique did not meet Hungarian building standards—so it has been declared uninhabitable. And in the meantime Yugoslavia itself has ceased to exist. ❧

Gergely Barki

The Bermuda Triangle of Hungarian Art

The 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition

It had simply vanished. Róbert Berény was one of The Eight. The Hungarian modernist's famous portrait of Béla Bartók was not the only one to disappear into thin air. The fate of many of The Eight's works exhibited at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition at the 1915 San Francisco World Fair turned out to be just as mysterious. The FBI is still investigating one case.

I was preparing a book on Berény (1887–1953) when Júlia Szabó[1] drew my attention to the riddle. She was the only Hungarian art historian to have seen Berény's Bartók portrait, in 1992; it was hung in the Florida home of the composer's son Peter. It had turned up. But the point is that many of the Hungarian paintings that were lost after the exhibition have not. The circumstances of those that have resurfaced are equally baffling.

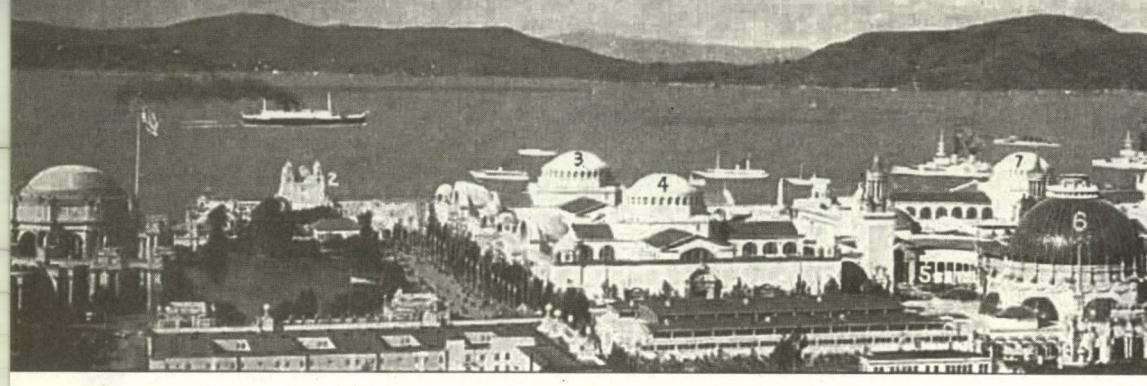
Almost five hundred Hungarian works had been exhibited in San Francisco. You could say that it was the overseas debut of Hungarian art. So I quickly realized the fate of those works was a hot topic. It is worth reconstructing their journey.[2] Many were regarded as outstanding examples of their time, besides the 1915 fair was the last collective showing of The Eight as a group.

We're in the thick of preparations for the Shanghai World's Fair in June 2010. So it is timely to cast a glance back to the San Francisco expo[3], a landmark in a series of 20th-century world fairs visited by nineteen million in a single year. The idea of holding a fair in San Francisco was first raised when work on the Panama

---

Gergely Barki

is a researcher at the Institute for Art History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He was one of the curators of the 2006 exhibition Magyar Vadak Párizstól Nagybányáig 1904–1914 *(Hungarian Fauves from Paris to Nagybánya), also on show as* Fauves Hongrois 1904–1914 *in 2008 in Céret, Le Cateau-Cambrésis and Dijon, France, and will be one of the curators of the centenary exhibition of the group The Eight due to open in the Janus Pannonius Museum in Pécs on 12 November 2010. His work in progress is a catalogue of the oeuvre of Róbert Berény.*



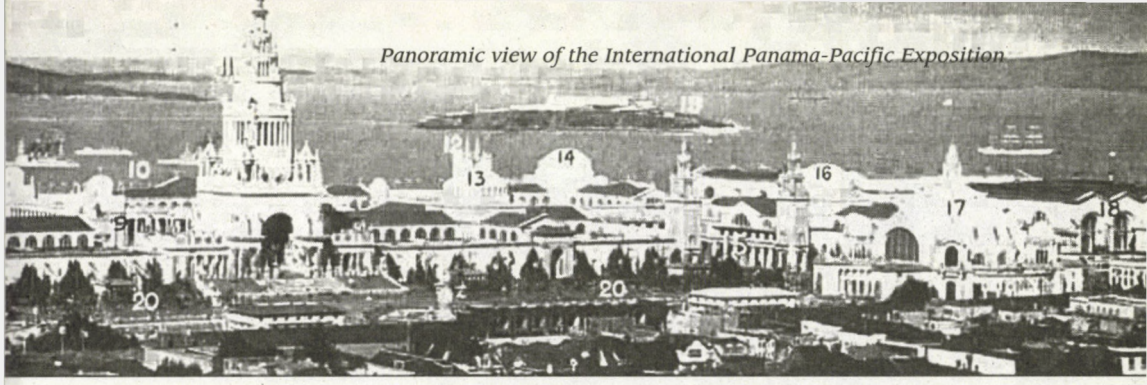
Canal started in 1904. It was supposed to coincide with the canal's completion. After the great earthquake of 1906 doubts were raised about whether a world fair could be held there, but within nine years the city in ruins had been rebuilt, offering another reason for celebration. Besides, it was time to mark another anniversary: Vasco Núñez de Balboa had discovered the Pacific Ocean four hundred years earlier.[4]

The Palace of Arts, though nearly drowned in a sea of gigantic and ephemeral pavilions,[5] housed some ten thousand works of art. Fearing that rooms allotted to European countries would remain empty because of the outbreak of the World War, the organizers arranged a huge campaign to collect pictures in America. As a result, American paintings had to be hung in two or three tiers on the walls of the huge halls. Still, generous wall-space was provided for the twelve officially participating countries, including France, Italy, Sweden, Norway, Japan, China and a number of Central and South American countries.

Their anxiety looked justified for a time. Yet half a year after the opening a new building, the Annex, had to be built to house works from unofficially participating countries as well as by artists of officially participating countries who had not been chosen by their countries. The Annex was built in four weeks and was available by June 1915.[6]

Scholarship on the art that was housed in the Annex is less than reliable. Whereas it is true that neither Germany nor Austria participated officially, several German and Austrian artists were represented. Kokoschka, for instance, had fifteen paintings and a drawing[7]. In addition to Spanish, Austrian, Finnish, Russian, Hungarian and Norwegian works—Hungary and Norway were prominent among them—some by artists from officially participating countries were also on display in the Annex.

The Italian Futurists, plainly detached from conservative Italian art in the Palace of Fine Arts, were allotted a room of their own in the Annex. No modernist



Panoramic view of the International Panama-Pacific Exposition

French art was shown. Even so, it appears that the more modern schools of European painting found their place in the Annex away from the Palace of Arts. Dominating was a collection spanning the oeuvre of the Finnish artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela and Norwegian painters, reflecting the origins of John Nilsen Laurvik, who had assembled most of the works from Europe. Ben Macomber, in a contemporary account, highlighted them as "extreme modernism",[8] referring particularly to the "ultra-radical" Edward Munch, who was allotted a room of his own in the Annex. Some critics described Munch's paintings as scandalous.

Oskar Kokoschka and the Italian Futurists also had their own space. The greatest shock was probably caused by the 'ultramodern' Italian Futurists. This was the first time that Futurist paintings and sculptures were on show in the United States[9] and also the first time that the West Coast public could see modern European paintings. The response was tepid.[10] The Armory Show, an exhibition of modern art two years earlier in New York, made a huge impact but the Futurists, not shown in New York, had little influence on contemporary American painting. San Francisco was, after all, still a long way from being a bustling art centre.

Hungary's contribution was substantial. To start with, it occupied eight rooms. The catalogue lists 76 Hungarian painters, 44 graphic artists and 12 sculptors with nearly 500 works on display.[11] Not only were the numbers impressive; the items on show offered an overview of Hungarian painting even if modern trends got prominence compared with the other displays.[12]

Hungary was among the unofficial exhibitors. How did Hungarian works get to America, then? In the introduction of the deluxe two-volume catalogue[13], John E. D. Trask, one of the curators, writes that the pictures by unofficial participants were obtained from European exhibitions, the artists themselves, art societies and private collectors.

The bulk of the international section had arrived by sea, on the good ship Jason, made available by the US government.[14] Trask explains that diplomatic and

The Palace of Fine Arts today. The original pavilion was demolished in the 1960s to be reconstructed in lasting materials. Today it functions as the San Francisco Exploratorium

consular help was needed in nearly every country, and brand new measures were necessary in some cases, particularly in Hungary's, the country he discusses first. In wartime conditions, the works of art were taken from troubled Budapest to Genoa by a caravan of overloaded furniture carriers. From there, a straight voyage to San Francisco was made and the paintings, sculptures and other works of art were unpacked at the entrance of the Palace of Fine Arts. This report is complemented by John D. Barry's book *City of Domes*[15]. From this we learn that the Jason had taken Christmas presents to Europe's war-stricken areas, and it was on her way back that she carried paintings gathered from all over Europe. Originally only the material from nations at war was to have been loaded, but later it turned out that shipments from other nations were also taken. The captain of the ship, a certain Mr Baker, was particularly keen to take French works.

Enter J. N. Laurvik

John Nilsen Laurvik is, however, more important to our story. It is worth getting acquainted with him more closely since he is the key figure in relation to Berény's unknown and lost works, as well as to the afterlife of the paintings of The Eight and the Hungarian works in general. He was a European delegate to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition's Department of Fine Arts and the representative of Norway in the international jury of the exhibition. He also wrote art criticism for *The Times* in London, the *New York Evening Post, The New York Times* and *The Boston Transcript,* as well as for the periodicals *Art and Progress, International Studio* and several other American and Scandinavian art journals. He curated several exhibitions in the United States, contributing as a critic to the success of the modern section of the 1913 New York Armory Show. He sold his new little book *Is It Art?* at the Boston venue of the Armory Show[16] and the following year he curated an exhibition under the title *Hungarian Peasant Art,* of which nearly nothing is known.[17] Besides, he wrote essays on colour photography and took photos himself, most of his activity being centred around Alfred Stiglitz's famous 291 Gallery and the photographic journal *Camera Work,* but he even found time to translate Ibsen's correspondence.

The Department of Fine Arts of the World Fair sent Laurvik to Europe to obtain works from countries that were not official participants. During his travels, his main argument was that in wartime Europe works of art would find a safe haven in America. That was how he managed to obtain much material in Norway, his native country, Sweden and Finland, the source for several dozen canvases by Akseli Gallen-Kallela. Then he went on to Rome and Venice. According to Barry's informants, the Hungarian collection was loaded in Venice. A few pages later he writes that the Hungarian convoy arrived three days after the Jason was due to sail. Fortunately, the departure date was also postponed by three days. From Venice, Laurvik paid a visit to Milan to see Marinetti who had been a little cross with the Americans earlier. They agreed that fifty works by ten leading Futurists would be exhibited.[18] Italy was followed by Vienna where Laurvik was not officially welcome, so he addressed the artists themselves. Barry notes that Laurvik found an ally in Kokoschka. Another source[19] tells us that Kokoschka introduced him to some of his collectors from whom he could borrow works. It seems, however, that it was only the architect Adolf Loos with whom Laurvik was able to come to an agreement. There were quite a few Kokoschka works at the exhibition, but all were on loan from Loos.

The Italian Futurists' room at the PPIE

A caricature of the Futurists' paintings published in the San Francisco Chronicle Sunday Magazine, *8 August 1915*

Barry devotes a separate chapter to Laurvik's negotiations in Hungary. He claims that, in Budapest, Laurvik contacted Count Gyula Andrássy, who not only offered part of his collection but also encouraged others to do likewise. Barry also mentions difficulties due to the war. Some collectors were reluctant to send their cherished treasures into the

great unknown. Besides, the museums were closed and many art works had already been hidden. The Museum of Fine Arts nevertheless helped Laurvik considerably, but probably only contributed prints and drawings.[20]

Barry's account needs to be supplemented. The exhibition catalogue shows that a number of well-known collectors entrusted valuable works to Laurvik, including Marcell Nemes, whom he does not mention. Works were also lent by Baron Ferenc Hatvany, Béla Benczúr, Dr Ignácz Fekete, Dr Ágoston Alcsúti, Dr Lajos Ferenczi, Adolf Kellner, Lajos Jámbor and the psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi, not to mention artists such as Károly Kernstok, Márk Vedres and Gyula Batthyány.

Elma Pálos: the Hungarian connection

In 1914 John Nilsen Laurvik went to Budapest. It was his second trip, the first being as the correspondent of the *Christian Science Monitor, The Boston Transcript* and *New York Magazine* in June 1913, when the International Woman Suffrage Congress was being held. A hostess and interpreter at the Congress was Elma Pálos, whose mother later married the psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi[21]. At first Ferenczi courted Elma, but he married her mother Gizella after Elma, perhaps escaping from him, married Laurvik on 18 September 1914 after a brief acquaintance. Laurvik's letter of December 1914 to Frank Burty-Haviland[22] says that his wife Elma took part in Herbert Hoover's relief actions (supplying food to German-occupied Belgium), and that she helped him not only in his diplomatic work but also in obtaining Hungarian paintings to be shown at the Panama-Pacific Exposition.[23]

Elma Pálos and John Nilsen Laurvik in 1915

So the presence of a large number of Hungarian works at the PPIE does not appear odd after all. Laurvik's second visit to Hungary took place in the second half of 1914 when he already knew a lot of people from the art scene. His father-in-law Doctor Ferenczi was one of Berény's closest friends, who also invited the Laurviks to his home. The critic György Bölöni, one of the earliest supporters of modern art in Hungary and already an acquaintance of Laurvik, was also present.[24]

Bölöni was to play an important role in subsequent events. He wrote the Hungarian chapter for the PPIE catalogue, which was

Members of The Eight: Róbert Berény, Dezső Czigány, Béla Czóbel, Károly Kernstok, Ödön Márffy, Dezső Orbán (Desiderius Orban), Bertalan Pór and Lajos Tihanyi. Their first exhibition in the winter of 1909–1910 was New Pictures, and they took the name The Eight at the time of their second showing in 1911. Their emergence created a huge stir in Hungarian public life. Neither before nor after has an exhibition in Hungary had so much press coverage. In their third and last exhibition in 1912 only four of the founders were involved. The centenary The Eight exhibition is due to open in the Janus Pannonius Museum in Pécs on 12 November as a highlight of the series of events of Pécs, European Capital of Culture 2010. ❧

translated into English by Elma, and he presumably helped with the assembly of the Hungarian material.[25] (Béla Lázár, another critic, also helped with the choice of works to be exhibited, but neither Barry nor any other PPIE-related source mentions him.)[26]

Laurvik was certainly favourably disposed towards modern art, which probably explains why he obtained the loan of several dozen works by the outstanding Hungarian modernist artist of the period, Róbert Berény. Beside the above-mentioned Bartók portrait, he took with him *Golgotha,* a painting which has not been seen in Hungary since. Not even a decade later was Berény able to find out what had happened to a substantial number of artworks taken out of Hungary. A letter written to his first wife in 1926 appears to suggest, however, that only these two works had not been returned to him. "[...] I'm glad you are going to Máli [the painter and writer Anna Lesznai]. Remember me to her and tell her I love her, and that I haven't got back from America my Christ painting and the Bartók portrait, nor have I been able to find out their whereabouts; I seem to have been robbed—no news, no money."[27] Laurvik earlier informed Berény that the two paintings had been destroyed by fire on a ship. Berény died without finding out the truth; Laurvik only survived him by a few months. In that year, 1953, the two paintings were recovered from a warehouse in San Francisco, put up for auction and changed hands several times. Bartók's portrait is still hanging in the Florida home of Béla Bartók's son, Peter Bartok, while *Golgotha* was lost from sight after several transfers, before resurfacing a few years ago at an auction which the Berény heirs stopped, since the painting supposedly belongs to them. The FBI is investigating the case.

At an advanced age Elma Pálos recollected that her husband planned to buy the two paintings from Berény. She claimed that he did not want to appropriate them, but he was "a real Peer Gynt, full of plans and visions, unable to realize his good intentions."[28] Elma, like Berény, only mentioned these two paintings. The question then arises where the other twenty-odd pictures listed by title in the PPIE catalogue might be, the majority of which are not known to Berény scholars.

An article of 1915 by Elma reports that paintings by The Eight (except for Orbán, Pór and Czóbel[29]) with the stress on Berény were hung in one room and that they

were a sensation. This is backed by Clark's account[30] which presents the ground plan of the Annex with the most accurate room allocation known. The Eight's room was named Hungarian Cubists. Apart from Futurists, The Eight alone earned Clark's appreciation as "progressive". Writing of individual works, he lays special stress on the Bartók portrait but adds that most of the wall devoted to Berény reflected chaotic ideas. Interestingly, he took special note of Bertalan Pór's *My Family,* which he identified as the embodiment of a new art, praising it for its sincerity and courage.[31]

The most important clue for the identification of the searched-for Berény works is a sentence by Elma: "The adjacent little room is full of lively colours and warm, endearing moods: here are Róbert Berény's and his wife's silk embroideries, fabulous compositions, rich in subtle and startling ideas."[32]

Berény's embroideries were first displayed in Hungary at the last showing of The Eight in late 1912, but the couple had shown applied art earlier at the Keller und Reiner Salon in Berlin.[33] The cushions, bags, wall-hangings and other embroideries produced by their undertaking, which soon grew into a manufacturing workshop, brought them considerable financial gain in addition to the acclaim of critics, from Berlin to Rio Grande do Sul.[34]

Some titles in the *Official Catalogue* clearly refer to embroideries, and we can only infer approximately how many of the 23+3 items of the Berény collection[35] were oil paintings, prints and drawings, or embroideries. The *Catalogue* does not separate paintings from embroideries and the titles alternate at random. The situation is further muddied by the fact that in addition to the *Official Catalogue* of the exhibition[36] and the most informative two-volume *Catalogue de luxe,* there are two other smaller catalogues[37]. Both went to press before the Hungarian collection arrived and so they carry temporary lists which appear shorter than the final version. On the other hand the lists include titles which do not figure in the *Official Catalogue.* How could this be? I found the answer in the San Francisco Art Institute Archives. An inventory[38] taken after the exhibition closed lists all the titles that occur in the different catalogue variants. The interpolated handwritten notes in the inventory show that works entered in the temporary catalogues, but not in the official one, had also arrived in San Francisco. But clearly, the curators had not chosen them for display. They include, among others, Berény's *View of Capri,* now in the Hungarian National Gallery, and a female portrait. These works stayed in the storeroom during the exhibition. The inventory also tells us which of Berény's works were embroideries.

A long list

Art historians have long been aware that many Hungarian works, and not only by Róbert Berény, disappeared without a trace after the PPIE. I should add that in recent years Italian Futurist paintings lost after the Panama-Pacific have also resurfaced[39].

József Rippl-Rónai: The Sculptor Márk Vedres, *around 1910. Oil on board. Lost*

Where are, for example, Béla Uitz's works on paper[40]? Where is József Rippl-Rónai's Márk Vedres portrait, which was reproduced in black-and-white in the ornate two-volume catalogue and by a local art magazine, and the colour scheme of which is discussed by Clark[41] but which is not mentioned anywhere in books or articles on Rippl-Rónai? The list of the missing works is long indeed; but have they perhaps been appropriated like the Berény paintings? Would it be fair to dub the Panama-Pacific Exposition the Bermuda Triangle of Hungarian art?

In Hungary, the exhibition was hardly covered by the press. One of the best-informed reports[42] appeared half a year after the world fair closed. It was only this article, and only with reference to the two-volume catalogue, which gave a list of the Hungarian prize-winners and of the ten Hungarian works reproduced in the catalogue. It also furnishes a piece of valuable information which, however, further deepens the mystery around Laurvik: "As far as we know, the man responsible for the Hungarian section, J. Nilsen Laurvik, sent an official report to the Ministry of Public Education. According to him, shipping home those works that were not sold was impossible during the war. Consequently, they—like those of other European countries—were being shown to the public of larger cities around America."

Gyula Batthyány: Longchamps, *around 1910. Oil on canvas. Lost*

French, Belgian and Swedish works were indeed sent on a sales tour, but I know of no itinerant exhibition of

the Hungarian material. Only two Hungarian prints were sold after the exhibition.[43] In addition, in Laurvik's list, three Berény embroideries are marked "sold". Once again it is from a catalogue[44] that we learn why Laurvik did not immediately send the rest of the collection back to Hungary. After the PPIE closed, some of the works of art were returned to lenders, first of all those owned by Americans, and the sold works were delivered to the buyers. The remainder was displayed at a new show mounted in the Palace of Art between 1 January and 1 May 1916 with new works being added also from artists—including Matisse, Picasso and one of the pioneers of American modernism, Max Weber—who had not taken part in the PPIE. The catalogue shows that all the earlier exhibited Hungarian works (with the exception of Viktor Olgyay's sold print) were displayed in this 'post-exhibition', but fewer works were now reproduced than in the two-volume *Catalogue de luxe*. None of the works arrived back in Hungary, not even after this post-exhibition. Yet a number of items now in public and private collections are known for sure to have been included in both shows.[45] When and how they found their way back to Hungary is unknown. Credible information is available only about Bertalan Pór's collection. In addition to his "large canvases" he had entered over 70 prints and drawings[46] which were returned to him as a Czechoslovak citizen after the Great War thanks to the intervention of the Czechoslovak authorities.

Éva Bajkay also provides an important clue, without, regrettably, giving a source. She states succinctly: "After the San Francisco World Fair the Hungarian works of art were taken on a hard-to-retrace tour of America. In the confusion of the World War these works disappeared. From 1920, the Szinyei Merse Society in Budapest endeavoured to find these works of art."[47] Whether there was such an itinerant exhibition is still a moot point, but the Szinyei Merse Society may have considered it its duty to recover these works; at least the 1925 Bulletin of the Society stated that "it has taken the first steps"[48].

Indeed, there is a file in the archives of the Museum of Fine Arts relating to the requested return of Hungarian works exhibited at the PPIE.[49] The papers show that the urgent duty of securing their return had not been carried out by the early 1920s. Some documents suggest, however, that a large number of artworks had found their way back to Hungary in the summer of 1924. No detailed information is included: only a note remains to the effect that the shipment, complete with a list of what it included, was handed over to the Ministry of Religion and Public Education. As the ministry's pre-1945 documentation was transferred to the National Archives, hit by a bomb in the war, this important list is also among the documents missing.

To compound the list of missing information and documents, according to some sources, certain works of art on display at the PPIE were shown in 1916 at the San Diego World Fair for a time concurrently with San Francisco. No information is available on whether that show included Hungarian works.

A possible reconstruction?

Reconstructing the exhibition's history would be a huge task and well-nigh impossible. However, thanks to the revival of the art trade since the regime change, works with the official PPIE sticker on their backs have surfaced with growing frequency of late. Some years ago, a great uproar was caused by a Munkácsy picture seized by customs, and although its attribution was questioned by some experts, it was probably a genuine Munkácsy which had been exhibited in San Francisco.

A few lost works could thus be tracked down at Hungarian auctions[50]. An important initiative in 2005 was a chamber exhibition in the Washington Federal Reserve building entitled The Art of Hungary, 1915, Revisited[51]. It was the first step towards a possible broader reconstruction, with a greater apparatus and relying on more thorough research. The most informative sources of such a venture will be the programme handouts, prospectuses, visitor guides and catalogues published during the exhibition. The most reliable sources for recovering the Hungarian collection are publications with reproductions of exhibits.

One fascinating source is a book written by Christian Brinton[52], who also helped Laurvik in his endeavours with the PPIE, with reproductions of 27 works of the international section including four Hungarian paintings, three of which are not reproduced in the PPIE catalogues. His book has further surprises in store. Discussing the paintings in the international section, Brinton devoted much space to the significance of the Hungarian material, displaying considerable local knowledge and competence in art history. He outlined the history of modern Hungarian painting from Pál Szinyei Merse's epoch-making *Picnic in May* (1873) to the foundation of the MIÉNK[53] group and the emergence of The Eight, and even beyond. It is clear that Brinton did not merely rely on György Bölöni's detailed account of the preceding 75 years of Hungarian art in the PPIE catalogue since Bölöni did not mention Czóbel as one of The Eight. Brinton, however, objected to the fact that the works of István Réti and Izsák Perlmutter had not been shown and neither had Czóbel's. Brinton sharply criticizes the PPIE organizers for not including the representatives of the "most modern Magyar art"—Alfréd Réth, Árpád Késmárky, Elemér Kóródy, József Csáky and several other young radical artists—who were well-known not only in Budapest but also in Berlin and Paris and whose absence made the Hungarian presentation somewhat lopsided.

Brinton must have familiarized himself with modern Hungarian art two years before the San Francisco world fair at a travelling exhibition where only prints and drawings were shown and where the most up-to-date art was given its proper due. It was known as the Buffalo Hungarian Exhibition (though Buffalo was among only three or possibly four venues[54] forming the Exhibition of Contemporary Prints and Drawings in Hungary, Bohemia and Austria). The Hungarian material for this travelling exhibition was assembled by Viktor

Olgyay, professor of the Academy of Fine Arts, and Dr Kálmán Pogány, of the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Museum of Fine Arts[55]. The main organizer and curator was Martin Birnbaum of American-Hungarian origin.[56]

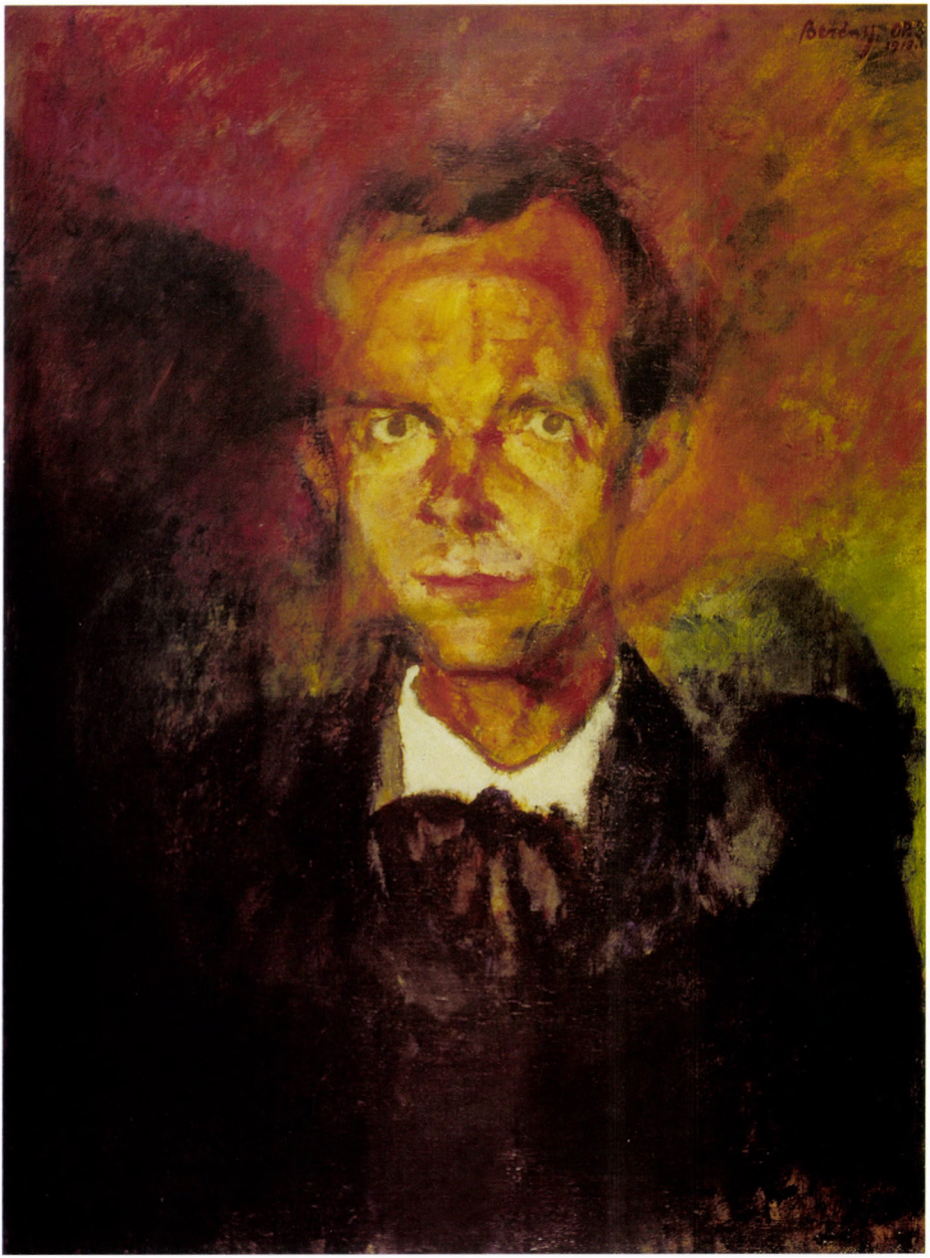
Birnbaum discussed the history of modern Hungarian prints and drawings up to its contemporary representatives in an extremely detailed Preface to the catalogue. He expected drawings by Czóbel, Márffy and by Berény in the first place to shock the American public with their novelty and modernity. Speaking of the radicalism of The Eight, he remarked that when they were not at work in their studios, they made merry in the Japán Café with the architect Ödön Lechner, the giant of Hungarian Art Nouveau, a style they had long superseded.[57] Writing of the most progressive young artists, his tone changes: he mentions that, having left Nagybánya (Baia Mare), Alfréd Réth was a great success in Paris before being exhibited in Berlin at Herwarth Walden's gallery Der Sturm. He names Elemér Kóródy, József Csáky and Árpád Késmárky as Picasso's most ardent followers. He specially refers to a Cubist drawing of the crucifixion by Késmárky, which, in his opinion, was a real sensation at the exhibition.[58]

Alfred Reth and Joseph Csaky—as they have become internationally known—have earned their rightful place in the ranks of modernism; hardly anything is known of the other two Hungarian Cubists, Kóródy and Késmárky.

More research is needed in order to shed light on the as yet unknown works. Years of detective work will be required before it is known what happened to the works which are mentioned in connection with the American exhibition. The most important is to find the lost works whose exact number cannot be estimated. Fortunately luck can help.

Lost and found

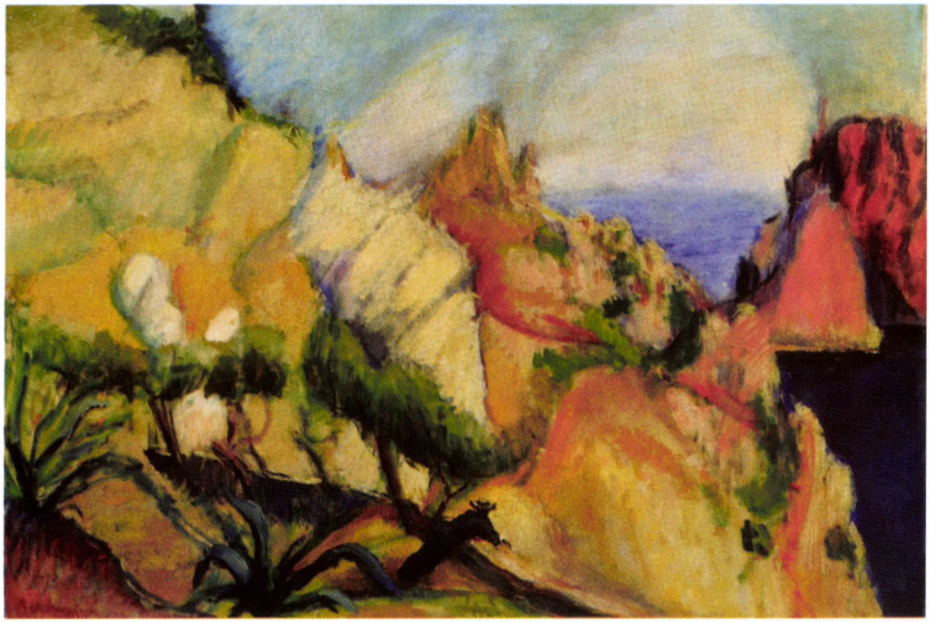
In 2008, I was decorating the Christmas tree while my daughter watched *Stuart Little*, an American film, on television. Through the branches of the tree I was shocked to recognize on the screen, for a fleeting moment, a lost Róbert Berény painting. I immediately got in touch with the Hollywood studio, and, after a long correspondence, tracked down the assistant designer who had worked on the film. She told me that she had bought the picture from an antique shop in Pasadena to decorate the Little family's sitting room and then bought it from Sony Pictures for herself. When I next visited Washington to discover the whereabouts of other lost paintings, I eventually met the owner. We got together on the National Mall, in front of the National Gallery. A hot-dog seller lent us a screwdriver and we took the painting out of its frame and found all the information on the back: Róbert Berény: *Alvó nő fekete vázával* (Sleeping Woman with a Black Vase), which, thanks to Hollywood, can now be regarded as the world's most viewed Hungarian painting.❧



Róbert Berény: ***Béla Bartók,*** **1913.** Oil on canvas, 67.5 × 46 cm
Property of Peter Bartók

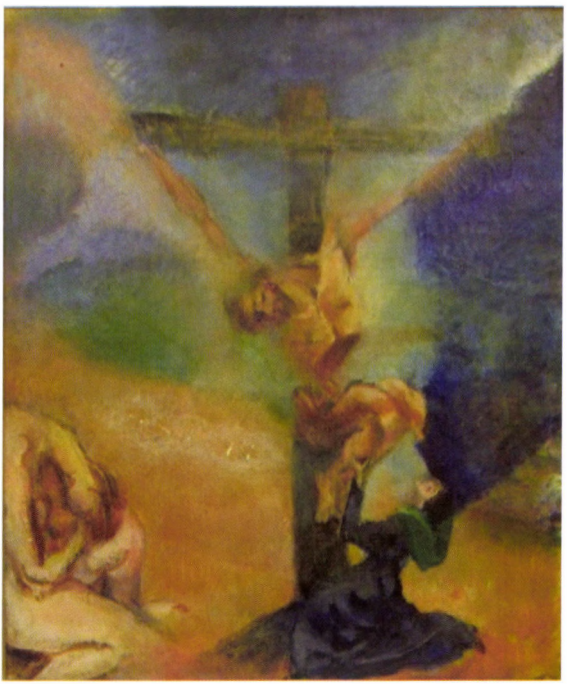
Pál Szinyei Merse: ***Melting Snow,*** **1884–1895.** Oil on canvas, 47.6 × 60.6 cm
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

János Vaszary: ***Countess Ilona Batthyány,*** **1905.** Oil on canvas, 79.5 × 94.5 cm
The Hon. Nancy G. Brinker Collection, Washington D.C.

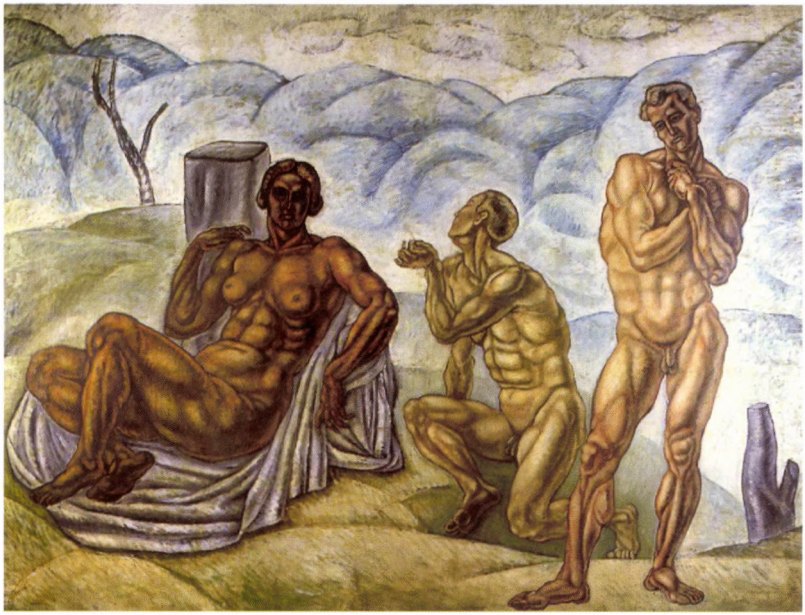


Róbert Berény: *Souvenir from Capri,* 1913. Oil on canvas, 59.5 × 87 cm
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Róbert Berény's embroidery (a bag) made in the 1910's
Property of the artist's grandson,
Dr Thomas A. Sos, New York City

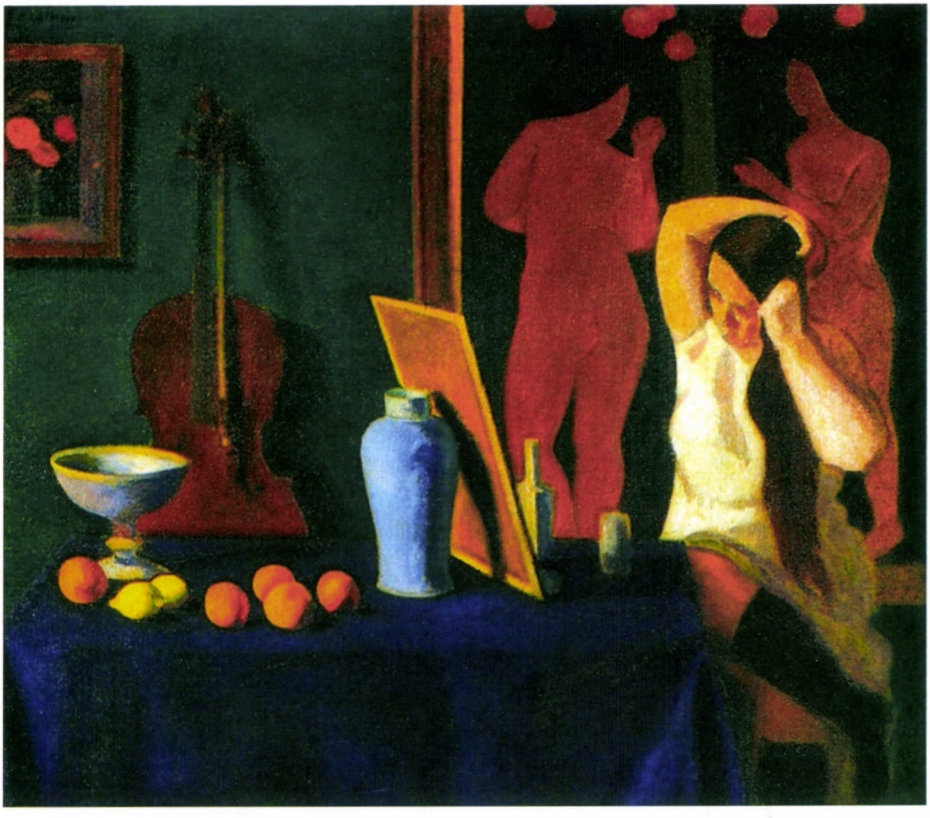


Róbert Berény: *Golgotha,* 1912. Oil on canvas
Private Collection, ownership contested



Bertalan Pór: ***Longing for True Love,*** **1910.** Oil on canvas, 238 × 350 cm
Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs

Bertalan Pór: ***My Family,*** **1909–1910.** Oil on canvas, 176.5 × 206 cm
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



Dezső Czigány: ***Girl Combing Her Hair,*** **1909.** Oil on canvas
Destroyed by fire in a suburban home in the 1990's

Károly Kernstok: ***Horsemen,*** **1912.** Oil on paper, 111 × 218.5 cm
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Lajos Tihanyi: ***György Bölöni,*** **1912.** Oil on canvas, 86 × 70 cm
Private Collection

Lajos Tihanyi: ***Self-portrait,*** **1914.** Oil on canvas, 56 × 45 cm
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Ödön Márffy: ***Still Life,*** **1910.** Oil on canvas, 44 × 55 cm
Jill A. Wiltse and H. Kirk Brown III Collection, Denver, Co.

József Rippl-Rónai: ***Interior in Paris,*** **1910.** Oil on board, 75.5 × 104.5 cm
Tamás Kieselbach Collection, Budapest

NOTES

1 ■ Júlia Szabó, "Berény Róbert Bartók Béla-portréja" [Béla Bartók's Portrait by Róbert Berény]. *Új Művészet,* 1993/7, pp. 14–18, 81.

2 ■ A catalogue is also available. John E. D. Trask – J. Nilsen Laurvik, eds., *Catalogue de luxe of the Department of Fine Arts Panama-Pacific International Exposition.* San Francisco: Paul Elder & Co. Publishers, 1915. (Hereinafter: *Catalogue de luxe–PPIE*)

3 ■ PPIE is the accepted abbreviation.

4 ■ The full bibliographic listing of the five-volume history of the exposition is: Frank Morton Todd, *The Story of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. Being the Official History of the International Celebration Held at San Francisco in 1915 to Commemorate the Discovery of the Pacific Ocean and the Construction of the Panama Canal.* New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1921.

5 ■ After the fair all the pavilions were demolished except for the only fire-proof building, the Palace of Fine Arts complex, which served to house later exhibitions.

6 ■ John D. Barry, *The City of Domes. A Walk with an Architect About the Courts & Palaces of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition.* San Francisco: The Blair–Murdock Company. John Nilsen Laurvik, one of the curators writing about the international section stated that the fitting out of some rooms was still going on. (J. Nilsen Laurvik, "Notes on the Foreign Paintings". *Art and Progress.* Vol. VI, August 1915, pp. 353–363. I am indebted to the granddaughter of Róbert Berény, Lídia Szajkó for sending me a photocopy of the article.)

7 ■ Laurvik discusses at length the pretty conservative German contribution and reproduces works by two German painters, Franz von Stuck and Heinrich von Zügel. (Laurvik, op. cit.)

8 ■ Ben Macomber, *The Jewel City. Its Planning and Achievement; Its Architecture, Sculpture, Symbolism, and Music; Its Gardens, Palaces, and Exhibits.* San Francisco: Williams, 1915.

9 ■ Of Cubo-Futurist works at the Armory Show Ben Macomber writes in 1915 that they are French imitations of Italian works. (Macomber, loc. cit.) and Laurvik plainly declares that the Futurist movement debuted in America at the PPIE. (Laurvik, loc. cit.) Cf. Andréoli de Villers, Jean-Pierre, "Les Futuristes à la Panama Pacific International Exposition de San Francisco en 1915". *Ligeia. Dossiers sur l'Art,* Nos. 57–58–59–60, 2005, pp. 5–17. I owe Krisztina Passuth thanks for calling my attention to the latter study.

10 ■ For a reconstruction of the exhibition important clues can be gleaned from these reviews, and even more from the taunting, mocking caricatures mostly published in conservative papers. One of them illustrates Ben Macomber's article in the August 8, 1915 issue of the *San Francisco Chronicle Sunday Magazine.*

11 ■ For the list of exhibiting Hungarian artists see Valéria Vanília Majoros, *Tihanyi Lajos. A művész és művészete* [Lajos Tihanyi. The Artist and his Art]. Budapest: Monumentum–Art, 2005, pp. 335–336.

12 ■ In Laurvik's view the Hungarian section was the most interesting and instructive of all just because it was the only selection to undertake the presentation of major trends from the early 19th century to the present. (Laurvik, loc. cit. p. 359)

13 ■ *Catalogue de luxe*–PPIE, p. XVI.

14 ■ Ben Macomber also mentions the steamer Vega (in Macomber, op. cit.), and John D. Barry refers to the German ship "Crown Princess Cecile." (John D. Barry, op. cit. p. 28)

15 ■ Op. cit.

16 ■ John Nilsen Laurvik, *Is It Art? Post-Impressionism, Futurism, Cubism.* New York: The International Press, 1913.

17 ■ The brief Laurvik biography in the *Catalogue de luxe* and the detailed report in the 1 March 1914 issue of *The New York Times* both refer to the exhibition by this title, but it is probably the Applied Arts 13th Annual Exhibition of Industrial Art, Works by Hungarian Peasant Potters and Weavers and Tapestry by the Herter Looms of New York. I have not, so far, been able to find a catalogue.

18 ■ Marinetti was probably reluctant to take part in a new American exhibition, as he had taken it amiss that the Futurists had been ignored by the Armory Show. Cf. Brown, W. Milton, *American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1955, p. 64.

19 ■ N. n.: "Collecting Art Exhibits in War-Ridden Europe. Some Experiences of the Special Representative of the Panama-Pacific Exposition." *The American Review of Reviews,* April 1915. pp. 462–464.

20 ■ This is supported by the fact that the only note of the Hungarian graphic material contains the remark that its collection was organized by the Museum of Fine Arts. In this period the Museum of Fine Arts played a pioneering role in the organization of other exhibitions in America, too (see note 55).

21 ■ Emanuel Berman, "Sándor, Gizella, Elma: A Biographical Journey." *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 2004/85. pp. 489–520.

22 ■ I wish to thank Krisztina Passuth for drawing my attention to this letter in the Musée d'Orsay.

23 ■ It is not known exactly how many artists Laurvik met. What is certain is that he called on the studios of Bertalan Pór (Anna Oelmacher, *Pór Bertalan*. Budapest: Képzőművészeti Alap Kiadóvállalat, 1955, p. 28) and Róbert Berény from The Eight group.

24 ■ Róbert Berény to Bölöni: "Dear Gyurka, The Laurviks are coming to see us tomorrow, Sunday, around 4 p.m. to listen to Hungarian music. They and I would be very pleased if you would come, too. As far as I know, he has something to discuss with you. I take it you'll come. Greetings, Rob." Petőfi Museum of Literature (PIM) Manuscript Collection, inv. no.: V.4132/281.

25 ■ The Bölöni papers at the PIM include several notebooks. One of them states: "J.N. Laurvik director of Fine Arts Palace S. Francisco California U.S.A. 18 pictures. 15 50x60cm, 3 9 cm l landscape (illegible) ¼ and 1–3 across 700x600. Transfer assignment, or by shipping agent, transportation is charged on him and ... (illegible) 4 h... (illegible)". PIM Manuscript Collection, inv. no.: V.3501/61.

26 ■ We know from a newspaper article that Lázár was attacked for selecting modernist painters. "A magyar művészek és a San Franciscoi világkiállítás" (Hungarian Artists and the San Francisco World Exhibition). *Magyarország*, 3 December 1914.

27 ■ Róbert Berény's letter to his former wife, Léni Somlyó, 23 August 1926. Hungarian National Gallery Archives, inv. no.: 23306/1992/II.

28 ■ Emanuel Berman, loc. cit.

29 ■ There were no works by Orbán and Czóbel, but Pór was represented by a large collection. According to an article by Elma Pálos there were Hungarian works in eight rooms, the entrance halls and staircases, Pór's huge compositions being displayed in one of the staircases. See: "Magyar művészet San Franciscóban" [Hungarian Art in San Francisco]. *Világ*, 12 September 1915, p.18; In Pór's own recollection, "This *[My Family]* and other canvases were then taken to the San Francisco World Fair, where I had a separate hall. I wanted to attend, but the outbreak of the war prevented it." (Béla Horváth's interview with Bertalan Pór. Manuscript, MTA MKI, Data Collection)

30 ■ Arthur B. Clark, *Significant Paintings at the Panama-Pacific Exposition: How to Find Them and How to Enjoy Them.* Stanford University Press, 1915.

31 ■ "Por. 'My Family', C425, has not flattered these dejected people. His art is a new kind; we can at least admire his sincerity, intensity and courage." (Clark, loc. cit. p. 14)

32 ■ Elma Pálos, op. cit.

33 ■ Zoltán Felvinczi Takács, "Magyar hímzések – Berény Róbert kiállítása Berlinben" [Hungarian Embroideries—Róbert Berény's Exhibition in Berlin]. *Nyugat,* 15 October 1912, pp. 608–610.

34 ■ Works exhibited in Brazil in 1913 were destroyed by fire. Unfortunately most of the Berény embroideries not displayed there are also lost or cannot be traced owing to repeated sales. A single item is known (owned by Dr Thomas A. Sos, New York City).

35 ■ In addition to paintings, Berény was also represented by three works, shown and catalogued separately (*Catalogue de luxe*—PPIE). *Sewing in the Garden* is probably identical with a known 1912 etching, and the Ignotus portrait he also exhibited (owned by Dr Sándor Ferenczi at that time) is perhaps identical with the 1914 Ignotus drawing at the Petőfi Museum of Literature. The third piece cannot be identified.

36 ■ *Official Catalogue of the Department of Fine Arts. Panama-Pacific International Exposition* (with awards). San Francisco: The Wahlgreen Company, 1915. The catalogue is available in an illustrated version (93 figures, including a Hungarian work: Lajos Márk: *At the Toilette*) and without illustrations.

37 ■ *Temporary Catalogue of the Department of Fine Arts. Panama-Pacific International Exposition.* San Francisco: The Wahlgreen Company, 1915. This catalogue does not include the International Section (hence the Hungarian artists, either). The revised edition included Hungarian artists, too: *Temporary Catalogue (revised) of the Department of Fine Arts of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition.* San Francisco: The Wahlgreen Company, 1915.

38 ■ List of Austrian, Hungarian, Finnish and Norwegian exhibits consisting of paintings, graphics,

bronzes, porcelains, sculpture, embroideries, and rugs originating abroad through J. Nilsen Laurvik and on exhibition at the Palace of Fine Arts by the San Francisco Art Association. San Francisco Art Institute Archives. I am indebted to Jeff Grunderson for his help.

39 ■ http://www.adnkronos.com/Speciali/P_Cs/En/13.html

40 ■ Éva Bajkay [ed. and author of the text of the catalogue], *Béla Uitz. Arbeiten auf Papier aus den Jahren 1913–1915.* Budapest–Wien–Moskau–Paris: Graphische Samlung Albertina, Vienna [Exhibition Catalogue, Budapest: Új Művészet Alapítvány, 1991, p. 7.

41 ■ Clark, op. cit. 14.

42 ■ N. n. (from our correspondent), "A magyar művészet a san-franciscói kiállításon. Díjat nyert művészeink" [Hungarian Art at the San Francisco Exposition. Our Prize-winning Artists]. *Az Ujság,* 17 October 1916. p. 14.

43 ■ "*Allée* by Victor Olgyay, sold for $12 to Herbert Fleishhacker, registered at the St Francis Hotel; *Study of Female Nude* by Istvan Prihoda, sold for $15 to C.M. Cole of Mill Valley". These data were placed at my disposal by Heidi Applegate, a doctoral student at Columbia University, whom I wish to thank for this help. The title of her dissertation is: *Staging Modernism at the 1915 San Francisco Panama-Pacific International Exposition.*

44 ■ *Illustrated Catalogue of the Post-Exposition Exhibition in the Department of Fine Arts. Panama-Pacific International Exposition.* San Francisco: San Francisco Art Association, 1916.

45 ■ An important, but rarely intact, identifying mark is the official PPIE exhibition label, which in most cases also shows the name of the owner.

46 ■ In addition to *My Family,* he also showed *Longing for Pure Love* and *Sermon on the Mount.* Anna Oelmacher only mentions the *Popular Opera* cartoon and the three drawings for them, but the catalogue is clear evidence that Pór had far more works on display. (Cf. Oelmacher, op. cit. p. 29)

47 ■ Éva Bajkay, "A magyar grafika az Egyesült Államokban a két világháború között" [Hungarian Prints and Drawings in the United States in the Interwar Years]. In *"Külön világban és külön időben". A 20. századi magyar képzőművészet Magyarország határain kívül 1918-tól napjainkig* ['In Separate Space and Time.' 20th-Century Hungarian Art Outside Hungary from 1918 to Our Day]. Magyar Képzőművészek és Iparművészek Társasága, 2001, p. 21.

48 ■ *A Szinyei Merse Pál Társaság Értesítője* [Bulletin of the Pál Szinyei Merse Society], ed. Sándor Jeszenszky. 12 February 1925.

49 ■ My attention was called to the file by Péter Molnos, for which I am most grateful to him.

50 ■ They include Róbert Berény's Bartók portrait and *Golgotha* of 1913, but concerning The Eight, apart from Károly Kernstok's and Bertalan Pór's identifiable works in public collections, some pictures by Tihanyi, Márffy and Czigány might also be identified on the basis of monographic researches by Valéria Vanília Majoros, Zoltán Rockenbauer and Attila Rum. See: Valéria Vanília Majoros, op. cit., 58; Zoltán Rockenbauer, *Márffy* (oeuvre catalogue). Budapest–Paris: Makláry Artworks Kft, 2006, pp. 70, 76; Attila Rum, *Czigány Dezső.* Budapest, 2004, pp. 295–296.

51 ■ Open from 26 September to 2 December 2005. The Art of Hungary. 1915, Revisited. Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, Washington, 2005, Catalogue. Its photocopy was sent to me by the late István Rozsics.

52 ■ Christian Brinton, *Impressions of the Art at the Panama-Pacific Exposition.* New York: John Lane Company, 1916.

53 ■ Magyar Impresszionisták és Naturalisták Köre [Circle of Hungarian Impressionists and Naturalists] founded in 1908. A few young artists led by Károly Kernstok left the radical wing of MIÉNK to found The Eight.

54 ■ Attila Rum (op. cit.) mentions two venues: New York (6–27 December 1913) and Buffalo (4 January–1 February 1914), but a Chicago version (5 March–1 April 1914) of the catalogue also exists (The Art Institute of Chicago).

55 ■ N. n.: "Magyar művészeti kiállítás Amerikában" [Hungarian Art Exhibition in America]. *Egyetértés,* 20 July 1913, p. 14.

56 ■ Márton (Martin) Birnbaum—art critic, art historian, collector and art dealer—was born in Miskolc in 1878 and lived in the United States between 1883 and his death in 1970.

57 ■ *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Contemporary Graphic Art in Hungary, Bohemia, and Austria* [with introductory essays by Martin Birnbaum]. The Art Institute of Chicago, 1914, p. 10.

58 ■ Loc. cit. pp. 11–12.

It's Not Enough to Get it Right

Judit Rácz Talks with Iván Fischer

Judit Rácz: *As a conductor you're in your prime. Yet you've already notched up one great life achievement: your orchestra, the Budapest Festival Orchestra, considered widely one of the world's best. What makes it work so well? Is it the careful selection of the players, unbending discipline, good luck, good connections, money, or something about your personality?*

Iván Fischer: Firstly it takes good team spirit, morale and lots of personal care. No one is allowed to come to the rehearsals unprepared. Our work throughout the day has to be meaningful. Several basic innovations, but also a constellation of lucky stars at the start helped us to lay down healthy foundations. So while there were earthquakes around us, such as the change of regime, we barely registered them. What matters is what goes on in the rehearsal room; what happens outside is hardly noticed. We are a long way from believing that we function perfectly. We're constantly evolving and innovating together, and we have many debates about what to improve and how. We don't feel we are absolutely professional. On the contrary. We have become a lot more professional since we started, but we are only halfway there.

What can still be improved?

We have found a good concert format for the five to ten-year-olds, but we have yet to find one for people between ten and thirty. We must figure out how to give this age group an intimate connection to the orchestra and to music in general. I don't mean grabbing them, selling them something or making them believe something; I don't even mean teaching them. Rather, we must find the common language which they use and understand. I know many young people with high cultural standards who read a lot and listen to music as well. But I'm not sure they would like a seat in the seventh row of the Bartók Concert Hall

---

Judit Rácz
is a journalist who has translated several books on music.

Iván Fischer is founder (1983) and Music Director of the Budapest Festival Orchestra and Principal Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington D.C. He achieved an unprecendented feat in Hungarian musical life: in 2009, the BFO was listed by *Gramophone* among the ten best orchestras in the world. Numerous outstanding soloists have performed with the orchestra (Yehudi Menuhin, Gidon Kremer, András Schiff, Martha Argerich, Maria João Pires, Kiri te Kanawa, Radu Lupu, Agnes Baltsa, Alfred Brendel, Vadim Repin, Heinz Holliger and others) as well as conductors (including Sir George Solti, Kurt Sanderling, Charles Dutoit, Sándor Végh). They appear in the world's most important musical centres (Salzburg, Vienna, New York, Los Angeles, Tokyo, Paris, London, Florence, Amsterdam, etc.).

Fischer himself studied in Budapest and Vienna (with Hans Swarowsky, then for two years, he was Nicolaus Harnoncourt's assistant). He has introduced new types of concerts, "Cocoa Concerts" for young children, "Surprise Concerts" with unannounced programmes, "One-forint Concerts" where he talks to the audience, open-air concerts on Budapest's Heroes' Square. Other important musical events Fischer initiated include the Budapest Mahlerfest and the "Marathons" (Tchaikovsky, Dvořák, Beethoven), devoting a whole day to one composer's works. Fischer conducted opera in Lyon, London, Glyndebourne, Paris, Brussels, Zurich, Vienna, and made several acclaimed opera recordings on CD and DVD.

Asked about his *ars poetica* as a conductor, he mentioned his "Ninety-two thoughts for young conductors", from which we quote just a sample:

Without purpose, the orchestra can turn into a mob.
It's not enough to get it right.
Children should sing and play instruments.
The quality of the audience matters.
A good conductor awakens the playful child in adult musicians.
People love tonal music.
Don't adore your instrument!
Serving the composer is not enough.
Tiny details have great effects.
Those without talent don't know what the talented are talking about.
Interpretation is not necessary.

sandwiched between two pensioners. This is a complex question, and one of the areas where we can do much better than we have done so far.

Innovations are being made all the time to reach audiences in new ways. On "Museum Night," for example, thousands view exhibitions they could visit on any other day; they are inspired by an unusual format.

That's a good example. I am one of those who are always inspired by their listeners. If I get a six-year-old's attention at the Cocoa Concert, this gives me

ideas. Which doesn't mean I'll do what he'd like me to do: his interest is something I see as a challenge and an inspiration. It's an interactive game with the audience. If there are ten per cent who really listen, that gives me an idea about how to draw in the remaining ninety per cent. I would even say that a 'bad' audience is more exciting than a 'good' one, because they compel me to do something to make them pay attention.

You have an eye-catching method to promote the individuality of your musicians: competitions. Orchestra members can compete once a year before an audience a professional jury, and the three best are invited to play at a public concert. Was this your idea?

Yes, and it is aimed at developing individual creativity. It works, which makes me very happy. My friends abroad had doubts about this initiative. They think that musicians put themselves in a difficult, vulnerable position if they expose themselves to public evaluation. Yet, miraculously, this competition is exceedingly popular with members of the Budapest Festival Orchestra: many musicians have come forward to play concertos. This, I think, is a sign of the orchestra's festive and ambitious atmosphere.

Does the downside of competitions appear? The losers may feel crushed.

I wasn't sure either about whether there would be this kind of stress, but I notice that the number of applicants is growing rather than dwindling.

You've got a great crew, although surely, you are the motivating force yourself. But you are away a lot.

In certain areas, the orchestra is self-sufficient and certain routines work extremely well. Yet there are many situations that they want to discuss with me. This communication never stops: I get messages, phone calls, e-mails, even when I'm in Tokyo.

What is your philosophy when selecting guest conductors? Do you invite them because they have something to teach the orchestra, or do you want to show us something?

Both: I invite people who can work well with this orchestra, or people who are particularly good with a certain type of repertoire and at the same time have something new to say to the audience.

Your programmes are appealing and innovative. What are some of your guiding principles?

I enjoyed coming up with new things even when I was a child. Likewise, my seven-year-old son loves to invent stories and games with their own rules. This sort of thing is very important to me even as an adult: I am always motivated when I can invent something new. I'm fascinated by new

concert formats because I want the concert to have something to say as opposed to putting you to sleep with its reliance on routine. Whether it is a Cocoa Concert, a staged concert, or a surprise concert where the audience doesn't know what they're going to hear, I try to make programming inventive. The audience doesn't always have to be aware of this. For instance, few understood why I combined Wagner with Stravinsky. I'll tell you: in order to experience the contrast between them. Stravinsky's witty, anti-romantic music comes across the freshest after some of the most sensuous Romanticism. The guiding principle is to reveal something about the essence of the pieces.

You rarely play Bach at your concerts.

But we begin every rehearsal with a Bach chorale. Bach, perhaps with Mozart, is above everybody else.

What do you think about contemporary music? Is it true that, no matter what you do, people only like tonal music?

"No matter what you do" is too categorical. By the way, a lot of contemporary music is tonal.

What kind of music do you write?

Tonal music.

Is that because you feel there is an imperative to write tonal music?

Yes, if you want to write for people.

How much contemporary music do you play?

I commission and perform new works every year. I like to play new pieces and to work with composers. In Amsterdam we are now planning a concert cycle spanning several seasons that will consist exclusively of Beethoven and contemporary music.

What do you think of the century-old split between contemporary music and the audience? What can be, and should there be something done about it?

The trouble was with the 20th century. The intellect reigned supreme but feelings were weakened. We saw contrived social systems, incomprehensible paintings, texts and musical compositions. We are beginning to move away from all that. Once again, human beings will be at the centre. Let's stop being so clever and turn our attention to music that pleases!

How would you characterize the sound of the Budapest Festival Orchestra?

It is a dynamic orchestra that plays with great emotional charge. In other words, the main goal is not beautiful sound per se but rather dramatic expression. The latter may be lyrical, humorous or even grotesque; the spectrum is very wide.

I even advise singers not to be overly preoccupied with the beauty of their voice, but rather with its diversity. Your voice, your instrument, should be a means, not an end. The sound should be expressive and varied.

Can we still distinguish among different orchestral styles or sounds? How universal has orchestral sound become?

This is being debated a great deal in the profession, and I'm not sure I belong to the majority when I say sound isn't that important. I don't know what it is exactly that you miss when you deplore the loss of that recognisable sound; you shouldn't fetishize sound. Style and expression: that's really important.

Can we still speak of audible differences between orchestras? After all, few conductors stay with the same orchestra for 25 years; everybody conducts everywhere, and we have recordings to influence us all. Do all orchestras begin to sound the same?

The greater danger is that they might lose their expressivity. Conductors come and go every four to eight years, like politicians. What is recognizable and so wonderful in prewar recordings for instance, is not always the sound but rather the way the conductor hears the piece with his inner hearing, an interpretation he then carries over to the orchestra.

When you hear a recording by a famous orchestra that you are familiar with, do you recognize it?

I may recognize it by a few details, but I could be wrong. I suppose I would identify the principal flute or a characteristic timpani stroke, if it's not a very old recording. I wouldn't be able to guess the conductor, though. That is very hard.

It seems to me that there are two kinds of composers; one thinks in terms of sound, the other in terms of structure. Which one do you feel closer to?

I always approach music from the point of view of structure. Even expressivity is structure: it is the dramaturgy of the piece. Every piece tells a story.

Yet you conduct a lot of Mahler, who is a sound man.

I don't think so. He is a substance man, like all great composers. Sound is nothing but a tool.

You were Harnoncourt's assistant for two years, you studied and performed early music. Yet this is not something one would associate with you, considering that your main work is with symphony orchestras.

Coming from these two different styles of interpretation, I see there a very interesting aspect: the question of respect for the composer. Since Beethoven, performers and audiences have venerated the composer above all. Earlier, it

was different: sometimes the name of the composer wasn't even mentioned on playbills! What made a performer good in the 17th or the 18th century was not his respect for Rameau or Haydn. On the contrary, Rameau, Haydn and their contemporaries composed their pieces so that the performer might evoke different moods in the listener: sad, happy, festive, mournful and so on. What mattered was the event, the feeling transmitted to the listener. Since Beethoven, we have been serving the composer as if he were God. We consider the work to be perfect, which is all right as long as we don't try to apply the same concept to the music of the 17th and 18th centuries. In the seventies, the early-music movement fundamentally transformed our relationship to music (mine too). It was like changing religions. A musician who hasn't passed through this inner transformation by playing early music will approach a Baroque sonata the same way he would do with a later masterpiece; yet here the veneration of the composer is not appropriate. If that unfortunate composer were with us today, he would say: don't worry about me so much, my boy, play something nice for the audience...

How does all this make itself felt in your interpretations? The bulk of your repertoire, after all, comes from the past two centuries.

I keep the same attitude even in later music: the feeling of an automatic 'sacred duty' disappears and is replaced by true respect for the piece. I follow Beethoven's or Mahler's instructions because they are good, but if they don't convince me, I don't follow them.

Have you become freer, more autonomous?

Yes: I felt this effect even when I started composing. One of my main discoveries is that nothing is written by accident. The other: I don't always succeed in realizing my compositional intent. Consequently, I'm not happy if a performer pays too much attention to my awkwardnesses and performs them the same way as he does my great moments. We don't want any slavish performers.

Do you still think there is a gulf between historical performance practice and the others?

Harnoncourt was always very much in favour of bridging that gulf. As he said, people are more important than instruments. To the indignation of dogmatic adherents of period-instrument performances, he had worked with modern orchestras since the beginning, precisely in order to bridge the gulf. Of course, this doesn't always work. I don't like it when an early-music specialist goes to a modern orchestra and starts telling them how to play in an authentic way. It's not as simple as that; we can't just give them a few superficial rules and leave it at that. On the other hand, there are more and more young oboists who have studied Baroque oboe at music school and found that a lot of what they

had learned can also be realized on the modern oboe—a slightly different sound production or phrasing. Likewise, there are many young violinists who have picked up a Baroque fiddle. These gradual interactions seem to me much more important than instructions given from above.

How open are the musicians of the Budapest Festival Orchestra to all this?

Some are more inquisitive, others more cautious. But the influence makes itself felt one way or another—they listen to recordings, some have played in early-music ensembles, our horn players often play on natural horns, say. And they discuss the performing styles of our guest soloists among themselves. We do not cling to our own style. On the contrary, the norm is that you always have to rethink everything, innovate and observe outside influences. They can see that I don't give preference to any one style when I invite guest artists; one week they hear one approach, the next week another.

You conduct far less opera than symphonic music.

I have a problematic relationship with opera. It is hard for me to restrict myself to the music and leave the interpretation of the opera to a stage director who might do something entirely different. I am unable to separate the music from what happens on stage. What's the use of my trying to create a moving, sad moment in the music if at the same time something funny happens on stage: the audience is affected much more strongly by what they see than what they hear. Either I have to find a stage director who speaks the same language I do or I must be my own director. A third possibility is to work with a stage director who wants something very different. All three possibilities may produce good or bad results. Opera is a terribly difficult yet fascinating art form. Music and visuals together produce incomparable intensity; no wonder that opera has always been a battlefield. Emotions clash, everyone fights with everyone else: singers, conductor, stage director, manager, the audience... There is no one way to make good opera, hence this continual war, not only between people but also between the various components: scene, sound, text, space. Even the question of whether or not the horn will cover the voice can spark a fight. What to do if you have a beautiful set that is bad acoustically, or if one singer is allowed to stand in front of another? It is even dangerous to talk about this: every word I say may be misconstrued. Opera generates strong emotions, it is the natural habitat for hysterical primadonnas, ego-minded directors, conductors and listeners with perverse tastes. What interests me these days is an integrated style of operatic performance, where the stage and the music express the same thing. Often I feel that the two weaken or even cancel one another. I want the audience to be able to follow both together; I want a fusion between the two. Sound and image should be in harmony.

It sounds like you're saying that being a stage director is not a particularly serious profession that needs talent and expertise.

It is an extremely serious profession, and one in which I am rather inexperienced in a lot of ways. There is something else, however, that I think I do understand well, something that many people have neglected, namely, the organic connection between music and theatre. By the way, I have a lot of respect for the great stage directors. A well-directed opera performance can be captivating. What I have in mind, though, is a different genre, one that cannot be realized with two leaders.

Do you know any precedents for this? Karajan was often his own stage director in productions he conducted.

I've seen performances directed by Karajan; they weren't very interesting as theatre. Everything was about the music. What fascinates me is strong, modern theatre that has an organic relationship to the music.

How about Wagner?

Wagner takes us closer to the heart of the matter. He also strove for a perfect unity between text and music—a *Gesamtkunstwerk.* That's why he wrote his own librettos.

Yet that is only text and music; the big question is what you see. That is also part of the Gesamtkunstwerk*, and Wagner prescribed it very exactly.*

In those days, stage direction in the modern sense did not yet exist.

Stage direction did not, but the visual element was always there. Do you think that if the stage and the music are in the same hands, the unity you speak about will be guaranteed automatically?

If both are in the same hands then there is at least a chance that music will get closer to the action on the stage.

The visual element is always very strong; therefore, what you see at the moment you hear the music is crucial.

Exactly. That's why you have to be very careful with the visuals if you want the audience to listen to the music at all. For instance, an aria is primarily a musical genre that makes time stand still: a certain emotion or the conflict between several emotions is represented outside time. The same exists, of course, in spoken theatre as well, as in Shakespeare's soliloquies. Yet in the last fifty or sixty years arias have often been staged as though time continued during the singing. Nowadays many people are disturbed by time standing still, yet it does stand still.

This may be because arias have texts that can be enacted. The Countess in The Marriage of Figaro *laments her husband's unfaithfulness in her aria "Porgi amor". It is not bad for the audience if she acts out the emotional process,*

because, as part of the audience, I can feel her presence, I can feel that she is telling me something.

I'm not saying she shouldn't act it out, even with gestures; all I'm saying is that time stands still. Not only does the action stop, time itself does, too. The aria does not run from 5 o'clock till five minutes past five; rather, at 5 o'clock the feelings of the Countess are spread out. Today's audiences don't accept this suspension. For this reason, these arias have been moved into time, as though the aria happened in real time.

Is there anyone that you can still learn from?

I learn constantly. I would say learning and inspiration are interconnected. This is different from learning in my earlier days. When I'm with great soloists, I always feel I learn something from their artistic solutions of small details. It is possible that they feel the same way about me. Every musician needs the experience of making music together. You receive some important and fascinating influences every second. You see what's important for your partner—sound, timing, contrast—and then in the next moment you experiment with something similar, too. I've also been inspired every time I worked with a great opera director: Strehler, Benno Besson, Adrian Noble, Liubimov, Nicholas Hytner. Then there are the living composers whose works we play: our conversations give rise to ideas that keep me going for a long time.

Let's talk about recording. It's still a new technique, just a little over 100 years old. It has had a great impact on musical life and its development has become ever more rapid. Today's teenagers don't even buy CDs anymore; they download everything. The CD industry is close to collapse since we consume music very differently than we used to. Still, CDs continue to be made.

Recording is a funny thing. After all, sounds vanish: why record them? Of course we're curious. I'd love to hear Bach's organ playing, too, but let's face it, the natural thing is not to record. Since the day recording became possible, it has turned our relationship to music completely upside down. Now I can crank up the volume as I please, even though for the most part of human history there were no sounds louder than a lion's roar, thunder or the slamming of a door. The frequency with which people hear music has changed drastically as well. It used to be quite rare: people sang in the fields, in church, there was music-making in an aristocratic home. If a Liszt or a Paganini came to town, it was a great event that took place once a year, an extraordinary happening. All that has changed, and with it, the intensity of the impact that music has on our souls. When music is streaming in the elevator, from the phone and everywhere else, it makes us immune to music. The idea that it is good to record is a human weakness, the same way as taking pictures,

although the natural thing would be to forget what the kids looked like at the age of five. Since recording is technically possible, however, performers and audiences alike have the strong wish to preserve certain moments.

Christopher Hogwood, who has made many recordings, has said that recordings are like snapshots.

I'd be careful with that definition since what it is that you are releasing does matter. Quantity and quality are strongly interrelated. I'm not the type to turn out recordings en masse. When we release a recording, it is the fruit of long, intense labour. We prefer fewer recordings made with greater care. You don't do it for the money.

You yourself don't, but the label makes an investment and needs to sell its product.

I don't think that is so crucial. Record-making is no longer in the hands of the large companies and profit-oriented businessmen. I might say the latter have disappeared from the world of classical music, which is good news. These days, recordings are being made by little guys who are obsessed with music and love to tinker.

And can they distribute their records as well?

Yes, in my opinion they're even better at distribution. Our Dutch firm, Channel Classics, which works with enormous devotion and passion, reaches far more places with its records than does Philips, our previous partner.

Aren't you concerned about the demand for the discs?

No, because in this age of the internet everything is only a click away. We don't even know how many copies of our recordings have been sold. Nor do I want to know. The main thing is that we release a recording that has been prepared with the greatest of care.

When did you start considering yourself a conductor?

Thirty or thirty-five years ago. Klemperer said that conducting begins at sixty—assuming, he added, that you've been conducting for forty years... So it's about time for me to get ready for the profession.

Thirty-five years. How do you think musical life has changed during this time: playing styles, communication, the music business, audiences, repertoires?

Lately I've started to feel as if the second half of the 20th century had been a period of rigidity in the world. That is true of political systems as well as of the way symphony orchestras worked. Before WWII orchestras used to function more dynamically, more things happened. Afterwards, some structures and

routines became established, and nowadays I feel these are beginning to melt away. For instance, orchestras are beginning to search for innovation. The Berlin Philharmonic broadcasts its concerts over the internet. American orchestras have introduced 'casual concerts' at unusual times, with unusual lengths, in different dress, specifically for young people and so on. Musical organizations are interested in breaking with habitual concert routine.

Is the motivation artistic or market-driven?

It's because of the fall in demand. It is getting harder and harder to sell out the big concert halls. Therefore, different outreach programs have been invented: one plays in schools, in prisons. This search for a new identity is strongest in America; in Europe, orchestras sense the danger less because of public subsidies. Yet here too unusual experiments have been taking place. The Budapest Festival Orchestra is an exception to the general trend, and our activities are being closely studied abroad. Our audiences are actually growing, and I'm very proud of that.

If you watch film recordings of orchestras in the 1950s, you see mostly balding men behind the music stands. Today, there are many more young people, many more women, players of different nationalities. This is another change that may have artistic ramifications.

Before, in a more authoritarian world, boys used to practice more; today the girls are much more diligent. Therefore, there are more women at auditions; and because the women become mothers or quit music for other reasons, we have a greater turnover, and the average age of orchestra members decreases. By the way, talking about changes, I think I'm the one who has changed.

In what ways?

I think I was overly ambitious in my twenties. I wanted to change the world, or 'at least' the way symphony orchestra worked. Let's do everything differently; let's change the rules, the work ethic, the working methods, and the results will change accordingly. Today I know that we have succeeded, but I also know that we haven't succeeded completely. I've managed to create an orchestra that has become a global sensation; but as far as my experiment is concerned, it has only been fifty per cent successful. I have changed because if I had been told at twenty-five that the result would be only fifty per cent I would have said "forget it, it's not worth it". Today I think this is a fantastic achievement.

We live faster; the whole concert business has changed. What advice would you give a young musician? Should they run to competitions because that is their only chance, or should they relax and trust that they will be noticed if they are really good?

You mean commercial success?

Not only. I mean inner evolution as well.

I'm not interested in young musicians who talk about their commercial success.

Yet even a great talent needs to succeed commercially.

No: if you are really talented, you don't focus on that. One can tell the difference right away. There are some young musicians who only care about fame, opportunities and recognition. You want to avoid those. There is another type who doesn't even ask that question.

Your generation was perhaps more fortunate in this regard, without the crazy struggles and the whole rat-race we see today.

But we've always had that! When I watch myself on film as I won the conducting competition in London, I see how I was waving my arms in the air, it's all very funny; and I see the other twenty-plus contestants, and their determination to stay in the field and their frustrations. Maybe three or four became conductors. It was very difficult then, too. Yet if you're talented, you will be noticed.

So there is no such thing as a lost talent.

I don't think so. A 'lost talent' always has some problems. He may be fantastic technically, but cannot convey warmth to the audience. Or conversely, there is a clear performing talent in a young musician but a lack of the necessary technical foundation.

You think a true talent always finds the path to the audience.

Always. You can advise someone to proceed in such and such a direction; for instance, you can tell a conductor to play more operas on the piano. Another might benefit from listening to old recordings, a third from attending rehearsals, and I'd recommend five or six conductors from whom they can learn.

Personal growth and professional success are closely related issues. Hungary is a small country—history shows that one usually has to leave in order to develop.

Solti once said to me: young man, it's wonderful what you're doing. I wish I had been able to do this in my day. I wanted to create the great Hungarian orchestra, too, but all I could do was to create a great orchestra in Chicago instead. In that period of our history, he had no choice but to leave. Likewise, when András Schiff left, many people on the international music scene nodded their heads saying, he's a smart boy, he knows that he can only find himself if he escapes this overly closed country. Today, the situation is much better, and I think it is no longer impossible to become an important international artist

here. Yet my advice to a young talent is still to go abroad and receive more diverse impulses beyond the three or four emblematic figures in Hungary.

How long should they stay abroad?

They should go for a few years, learn languages and get to know other musical trends. Anyone who plays on the podium of the Liszt Academy of Music always kind of glances up to the professors' box. You never stop feeling like a student; it's a frame of mind you never get rid of, unless you leave.

So they should travel around the world for five or ten years. But later, can you be a serious international musician if you live in Hungary? Can you live in several places? Very few people can hope to adopt your jet-setting lifestyle.

If you compare Hungary's musical life with that of, say, Germany, you will find that Germany is international while Hungary is not. In the Berlin Philharmonic, or even in the orchestra of a smaller German city, you find musicians from all over the world. At the audition, no one asks a horn player where they're from. On the other hand, any Hungarian orchestra is at least ninety per cent Hungarian. The same is true of opera companies. We are still closed—which has its nice side from a human point of view: it's more relaxed, but one remains very under-informed. A Hungarian singer who stays put or a Hungarian orchestra member who doesn't travel is, in a sense, a perpetual graduate student at the Liszt Academy. If I met an exceptionally talented oboist, I would send him or her to Paris to study with Maurice Bourgue, and, after that, to the Academy of the Berlin Philharmonic, and then they will learn what's important in the profession today. I'll send a young trumpeter to Karlsruhe, a young singer to Italy. It is very important to be exposed to different teachers, different languages, environments and impulses. Afterwards, you may come home. You don't even need five or ten years; two or three are enough.

The question for a musician (and for all of us, I'd say) is: am I going to be engulfed in Hungary's provincialism?

To the question as to whether Hungary is provincial, I would say yes and no. We're not the only small country that is similarly closed. And such an isolated musical scene can be extremely valuable. Our little isolated musical life is much better than the scene in Belgium, Sweden, Finland or the Netherlands.

What makes it so valuable?

First of all an exceptionally high level of musicality rooted in the Hungarian, or Austro-Hungarian, tradition. Then, an outstanding educational system: Kodály's method may be ailing, yet it is still here; this is a great treasure even if it is problematic in many ways. There is also an inspiring spiritual environment: a constant interaction of musicians, scholars, intellectuals. The problem is that

there is not enough exchange with international trends, which often makes it one-sided and inbred. Jealousy and infighting are rampant, petty interests are continually clashing. Thus we see both exceptional values and provincialism.

If you could perform a miracle like a good fairy, what would it be?

I would strengthen the still-existing, wonderful network of music schools. The many fantastic music teachers should be protected, and the few remaining elementary schools that specialize in music should be helped. The Kodály system should be modernized without being spoiled in the process. Our musical institutions have to be opened up, made more international, so that foreign singers, horn players, violinists can come here to work, and Hungarian singers, horn players and violinists can go abroad.

In other words, Hungarian artists should be exposed to international competition.

Absolutely. Then the world would see how competitive they are. When we were behind the iron curtain, the cultural establishment felt an obligation to absorb all music students who graduated in Hungary. Twenty years later they still feel that way despite the fact that many talented people go abroad if they can. So are we going to reward mediocrity at home? If the goal is to join the international circuit while preserving our traditional values, some adjustments must be made. I see our greatest assets in our elementary music training. This is something we often forget while we are busy saving what is not worth saving.

We laypeople (and we make up the majority) can be snobbish: a famous conductor is necessarily a good conductor. Yet even professionals often disagree when it comes to judging the practitioners of this strange (and relatively young) profession. In your opinion, how can we know, see, hear, feel, that a certain conductor is good—or even great?

They must radiate music. As Bernstein put it so beautifully: you need two things—reception and transmission. The conductor learns, digests the score and then transmits what he knows, what he feels, to a hundred people. According to Stravinsky, a conductor doesn't need any special intelligence. To which I would add my own two cents' worth: interpretation is not neccesary.

And the main question (but maybe you will write a book on this some day): what is conducting?

Empathy. ❧

László Márton

The Power of Sensitivity

Krisztina Tóth: *Hazaviszlek, jó?* (I'll Take You Home, OK?). Budapest: Magvető, 2009, 238 pp. • Enikő Darabos: *Hajrá Jolánka* (Go Jolánka!). Budapest: Jószöveg Műhely, 2009, 158 pp. • Zsuzsa Rakovszky: *A Hold a hetedik házban* (The Moon in the Seventh House). Budapest: Magvető, 2009, 346 pp.

If a critic decides to review short-story collections by three Hungarian writers who happen to be men, little comment is made, but a review of similar collections by women almost inevitably seems to raise the question of 'women's literature,' and the critic may be tempted either to discover common thematic concerns or discern some allegedly 'feminine' perspective. I shall try to resist this temptation: in my view the most important common feature of these volumes is that the authors assembled short pieces of narrative prose, and each of them did well, in her own distinctive manner, both in this genre and in the organization of the volume as a whole. This does not imply that the narrative angle is *not* determined by a characteristically female role, that of the mother in the volume by Krisztina Tóth, the daughter in the collection by Zsuzsa Rakovszky, and the young single woman in the stories by Enikő Darabos. Yet the narrative stance should not be confused with the perspective of the author. As far as the latter is concerned, one discerns in the prose of each of the three writers the sensibilities of a poet. This is hardly surprising, as two of the three are poets—superb poets at that. Zsuzsa Rakovszky is considered a living classic, and Krisztina Tóth is generally regarded as one of the best younger poets. Enikő Darabos, the youngest of the three, made her name as a literary historian, but I can easily imagine that she has written enough poems, as yet unpublished, to fill several volumes. The poetic sensitivity at work in these texts amplifies and animates the objects of the narratives, rendering them at times almost magical. At the same time this poetic sensitivity often mocks and distorts, taking a distanced view and even

---

László Márton

is a novelist, playwright, translator and essayist. Among his works are a trilogy of historical novels set in 17th-century Hungary and a drama trilogy on 16th-century Transylvania. Two of his novels, Jacob Wunschwitz igaz története *(The True Story of Jacob Wunschwitz) and* Árnyas főutca *(Shady High Street), have been translated into German and some of his short stories were written in German.*

Márton's translations into Hungarian include Goethe's Faust *as well as works by Luther, Novalis, Kleist and Walter Benjamin.*

disfiguring through the irony of the language. Sensitivity, however, should not be thought of as some sort of passive quality, and even less so as a phenomenon lacking strength: these volumes reveal it to be a major constituent of the power of linguistic creativity.

The collection by Tóth contains fifty story sketches arranged in five cycles. It does not take much arithmetic to work out that this means each is an average of four or five pages long. Very short prose pieces of this type (which even when they are satirical are too poetic to be akin to István Örkény's well-known "one-minute stories") are difficult to sustain. Imbalances in the inner proportions of the narratives are particularly conspicuous given the brevity of the texts (unlike in a novel, in which some particularly unfortunate solution or gross disproportion can be counterbalanced by the multiplicity of viewpoints). This is Krisztina Tóth's second volume of narrative prose, and it displays a deft, assured touch. She is in full possession of all a writer needs to write short fiction and is able to retrieve from her personality—her province as a writer, if you prefer—the ingredients (subjects, locations, character traits) needed to keep the short text alive without overburdening it.

The best pieces attest to more than just this. The double change of perspective in the story "Sand Aquarium"*, which opens the volume, mirrors the movement of the sand, suspended in a coloured liquid and trapped between glass plates: the text at first promptly and briskly broadens its horizons, only just as promptly and briskly to narrow them, and meanwhile "The details keep being redrawn, from time to time some mysterious line of force appears." This sentence, the concluding line of the story, describes both the "sand aquarium" that has been spotted in the hands of homeless people and the afternoon rush-hour traffic jam while the first sentence, with its unusual yet expressive adjectival phrase, precisely denotes the spatial structure of the writing: "The tram is crossing the city, its walls waist-high in graffiti." At the plot level all that happens in between these points is that it rains and a woman almost buys a pair of boots, but then doesn't after all.

There are at least another ten pieces that could be characterized as both concentrated and light as air. Krisztina Tóth is at her very best when, with unexpected vigour, she discerns (and thus depicts) either horror or beauty in banality. The process of naming and the energy of linguistic formulation give rise to small miracles. In the story "What Was Her Blondness Like" the narrator, having quoted a grotesque conversation verbatim, suddenly notices a mass of orange flower petals by the exit to the underground (petals which turn out to be the tiny scraps of paper from stamped tickets accumulated in a faulty ticket punch), while at the same time providing a frame for an ironic evocation of an emblematic love poem by Gyula Juhász. The piece entitled "The Soul" gives a short, accurate, harrowing dissection of a personality change (including repeated alienation from one's own body). In "Panning for Gold"** the fictional life assembled from unreal pipe-dreams for a moment perfectly camouflages yet equally verifies an

* ■ See p. 37 for its translated version.

** ■ See p. 40 for its translated version.

unfortunate postman's mundane dereliction of duty. "Fishing Line" turns a situation, in itself a bit kitschy, inside out. A young couple is feeding swans. As it turns out from their conversation, their relationship has been wrecked by jealousy and poor communication. One of the swans, with a fishing line dangling from its bill—evidently it has swallowed a hook—becomes a symbol of irretrievable misfortune.

Several of the stories are genre pictures, including the cycle "Paranormal Household Phenomena" (among these is a highly poetic piece entitled "Santa's Three Lives"). Other pieces have something of a whiff of expedience about them as they originally appeared in newspapers and magazines and thus had a different target readership. This shows in their style, though it does not detract in the least from the unity of the book. A volume of short stories is good not because each individual narrative is equally concentrated—this is a rare occurrence, and such a collection would be likely to befuddle the reader with its density anyway—but rather because the stories reinforce one another, with the lighter texts pointing towards the meatier ones. *I'll Take You Home, OK?* more than fulfils this desideratum: it gives the reader much more than it appears to offer.

Enikő Darabos's *Go Jolánka!* is her first volume of prose narratives. When reading the work of a writer who is making her debut, one cannot help but wonder whether it bears promise as the first work of a lifetime career as a writer, or whether it will remain an isolated episode. There are notable books by authors who only published a single work, and by definition they were also debut volumes in their time. Enikő Darabos's book emphatically does not fall into this category.

One senses, in the more successful stories in the volume (ten or a dozen of the seventeen all told), such energy and drive, and Darabos experiments with so many possibilities even in the course of a single narrative, while nonetheless maintaining the unity of the collection as a whole, that it seems quite clear: this is just the starting-point of a longer career as a writer.

At this juncture, it is worth keeping three aspects in mind. First, is there any evidence of the emergence of a distinctive fictional world or a striking take on the real one? Second, can the author deal with the issues that she has raised, with special regard to the narrative form, and of what importance are these issues? Third, what is the creative potential of the language she has used or developed?

Enikő Darabos, like Krisztina Tóth, favours a first-person narrator—or not so much 'like' as seemingly like. Tóth invariably designates a specific point in a given story's ambit which is then identified as the narrator's point of view: for her this is where the 'I' comes from. Darabos, on the other hand, seeks to incorporate the current objects of her attention into the author's stance (personality, body): her 'I' is receptive rather than expansive. For this reason the stories, above all those in the first half of the book, give the feel of being fragments in a fictional autobiography, even when they all have different protagonists. "Betrayal", the first story in the volume, and "Mother's Body", the last, seem to be about the same episode in the life of the same character (rejection by the father, a cannibalistic longing for the mother), though the two tales do not even take place in the same period, and perhaps not even in the same country, and one of the

first-person narrators has a sibling, while the other does not. The receptive narrator's relationship to the objects of her attention (or fantasising) is ambivalent: the soliloquies simultaneously express both longing and repulsion. The insect in "The Moth" and the root in "The Hole" seem emblematic. While the first-person narrator, who is suffering from insomnia and sexual frustration, tries to kill it, the moth gradually becomes part of her illusions and even her body: "It flaps and flutters its pollen-powdered wings; it tosses about and worms its way in, pupates with mute ostentation in my body." One does not have to be a psychiatrist to identify this diminutive, repellent living creature as an aborted foetus and sense in this repulsion the pangs of a guilty conscience. By contrast, the root in the story entitled "The Hole" is connected with the notion of ancestors and the dead. Here the yearning for lost or even unknown persons relates to the narrator's fear of being pulled beneath the soil by the dead.

Most of the stories outline a single psychogram. Resorting to an old but ever-renewable narrative trick, Enikő Darabos gets her characters to describe in their own words not so much character traits or complex personalities, but forces acting on a personality that is given. Here the narrator's passion becomes apparent quickly and forcefully in the language of the narrative, the sentence structure, and, from another angle, the setting. The situation, which is usually dire, is counterbalanced by a kind of self-irony, or a markedly grotesque sense of humour. Another technique exemplified by Darabos is the projection by the narrator of her own psychological state, and sometimes physical symptoms, onto the surroundings: "as if the town had goose bumps", one reads in "The Hole". Equally, there seem to be times when she cannot make up her mind (and she is not assisted by the nature of the genre) whether to steer the writing towards a deeper analysis of the psychological state or confirm the reproachful rhetoric of a person (a woman) who is closing in on herself. "This Is Your Due" and "It May Easily Be" are examples of the former, "I'm in Love" and "Morning" the latter. Yet other stories—"China Figurines" and the eponymous "Go Jolánka!"—dabble with the lyrically grotesque through their use of language. Finally some of the narratives do not fall into any particular category, either because they seem to lack closure (for instance the recruiting scene at the close of "Strangers", which begins intriguingly and seems to promise a longer narrative, breaks off unexpectedly and gratuitously and likewise the conclusion of "Stones" feels unfinished), or in a few cases because they are simply weak, as is the case with "Gin Fizz" and "Autopsy". In this volume the less successful stories do not enhance or set off the better ones so much as detract from the overall effect. For this reason alone, it would have been better to have weeded out the two last-mentioned pieces (and perhaps one or two others). That said, the volume as it stands is a bit slimmer than it should be. A sensitive and firm editor might have advised the author to add another four or five good stories. Nonetheless, it is a measure of Enikő Darabos's talent that this collection, its weaknesses notwithstanding, is a noteworthy piece of work.

Zsuzsa Rakovszky's book, to use a sporting term, is in a different weight division. Her virtue is not brevity, let alone an arresting lightness. Even in relatively

short narratives, hers is a rich, multi-layered, complex prose in which fundamental issues are raised. This approach represents a continuation of her work as a poet, but it is also a condition and litmus test of her development as a prose writer. Over the past three decades, Zsuzsa Rakovszky has produced an impeccable and completely integral body of verse, as may readily be confirmed by the collection published a few years back entitled *Visszaút az időben* (Return Journey in Time, Selected Poems 1981–2005). It was not purely out of a penchant for experiment that over the course of the last decade she began writing narrative prose, but rather was a consequence of her inner creative development. She has spared no effort in retraining herself as a writer of prose. In her first novel, *A kígyó árnyéka* (The Shadow of the Snake, 2002, see *HQ* 170), the 17th-century setting allowed her first-person female narrator to speak openly and passionately about the dark side of life and at the same time make precise observations concerning herself employing the sort of extended soliloquy on which Rakovszky has been working since a 1994 cycle of poems *Hangok* (Voices). With her second novel, *A hulló-csillag éve* (The Year of the Falling Star, 2005, see *HQ* 179), the business of constructing a smoothly functioning narrative structure was complicated by the palpable autobiographical element on the one hand and, on the other, the transfer of the colourful pageantry and luxuriant suggestiveness of her verse into prose (one of the fortes of the novel, as it so happens).

The writings that make up the latest volume, *The Moon in the Seventh House*—eight short stories and a longer novella—provide evidence that Rakovszky is able to preserve the manifold layering and the descriptive power of the language of her novels in prose of a shorter span, while at the same time she is able to keep a much tighter grip on how the plot evolves than in both the earlier novels. Another way of putting this is to say that although the stories are more tautly spun, they are nevertheless more epic in character than the two novels, while at the same time they have an internal energy that is imbued with a poetic sensibility.

Precisely because of the diversity of their layering and their inner profundities, it is hard to evoke and essentially impossible in a short review to illustrate or describe the devices that the writer brings into play in the stories themselves. There are two tales in the collection, the eponymous one and "Chance", in which the passage of time is at the centre of attention: the barely discernible but continual shortening of the temporal perspective increasingly gives a summary character to the events described. (One of the stories concerns the break-up of a marriage and then the futility of it all when the two, each lonely in their own way, meet again. In the other story the wasted life of a woman working in an office in the country is observed through the eyes of a girlhood friend). The ever-faster passing of the years and decades is in a strange tension with the insubstantiality of the lives described. Events (including fateful ones) just happen, but they do not become events in a psychological sense.

"Maya's Veil" presents the lives of three woman friends, Csilla, Helga and Betty, with jumps in the point of view. The reader comes to know the three characters from the perspectives of the other two. The story also shows the poverty of their life strategies, the

repeated failure of their ever-renewed illusions. "Triptych"* acquaints us with the physical and mental degeneration of two old women and an old man from the perspective of, in each case, a first-person narrator (a younger relative). Here too the wrecks of consciousness provide a recap for narrator and readers alike of the accumulated futility of the lives people lead, but also the richness of detail of what constitutes a life, as well as confronting us with basic questions of human existence (the old man asks in the closing sentence of the story: "You don't remember, do you... You don't happen to know... who I am?").

The structure of "The Zebra Finch" is close to that of a stage play: it is an exact and merciless, yet at the same time highly sympathetic analysis of the relationships between four individuals—an elderly woman, a daughter who has fled back to her from a marriage that has gone wrong, her six-year-old granddaughter, and the man who lives with them as a lodger. That sympathy for the figures (which at times is more like love or pity) prevents this story, as it moves towards its cheerless final dénouement, from being cheerless itself. Rakovszky almost always presents bleak and desolate fates. Yet her understanding as a narrator of the world and of human nature and its fallibility (an understanding, glimmers of which sometimes enlighten the characters, leading them to moments of cathartic illumination) renders her prose almost cheerful, or at least invests it with a broad horizon that also admits consolation. "The Zebra Finch" suggests (not as a moral but as a result of its structure) that we can make another person just as unhappy through unselfishness, goodness, love and tender attentiveness as we can through hatred or envy. As the narrator, the young woman's mother, says: it is impossible to be a saint and at the same time belong to another person.

Due to the identity of their main figures and the evolution of the mother–daughter relationship, the stories entitled "The Swedes" and "Kalkutta liegt am Ganges" (Calcutta lies on the Ganges) are closely interrelated. The two tales also further amplify the world of *The Year of the Falling Star* and its autobiographical elements. In "The Swedes" the character named Johanna is still a young girl, while the mother (presumably recently divorced) is a young woman who has moved from Budapest to the country. The experience of being a stranger is depicted as a severe humiliation, and the interdependence of two people and their inability to help each other project the acts of emotional blackmail that are drawn accurately and in detail in the other story. The Johanna of "Kalkutta liegt am Ganges", arguably the finest and most intense story in the volume, is now a teenage girl (with a swiftly awakening but as yet unfocused sexuality). This story shows the parallel dead ends of a life which is about to unfold and one which is about to come to a close, providing a description of life in Hungary in the mid-sixties that has a strong, memorable period flavour. The descriptions meld love for the object of attention with a delicate but unsparing irony, which yields an evocative power with the ability to illuminate for a split second, with a blinding flash of light, a given spectacle (a painting, a street scene, the interior of a room, a TV screen, trees and bushes, clothing, body parts, one's own or someone else's), thereby investing

* ■ See p. 51 for its translated version.

it with its own explanation and a justification for its existence.

The shift of viewpoint strengthens the narrative structure and helps give depth to specific elements insofar as the changing perspectives remain within a chain of events and the point of view pertains to an emotionally committed individual. The insertion of an external observer, on the other hand, hampers the operation of the narrative form and relativizes the story structure. For this reason, I don't find the change of perspectives in "The Dream" to be entirely fortunate. This story, narrated in the first person, is about a young woman who is being ground up between her father and her husband. It is interspersed with the reflections of the psychiatrist who is treating her, but they seem a bit jumbled and distractingly explanatory in nature. The story itself, though, a drama of a guilty conscience and the provocation of remorse, is strong enough for the piece to hold its own in the collection.

A good deal more problematic, and likewise due to the interpolation of an external observer, is the most ambitious piece, the novella "The Unknown Factor". This is composed of two textual layers—one the diary of a university student by the name of Gábor, the other a report by an elderly lady who reads the diary—and there is a disturbing difference in quality between the two. The diary excerpts, in themselves, have the feel of fragments of an impressive novel, redolent of an extraordinarily strong creative force and courage. The external observer (a woman friend of the young man's great-aunt) who intrudes between the diary and the reader, however, is so plainly a subsidiary construction that for this reason alone this textual layer is unable to create a counter-voice on the same level as the diary. When faint echoes of the writer's world, familiar from the other stories, make themselves felt in passages of the text that relate to the woman, they strike one as pallid tokens as compared with the diary. This is not to say that the work is weak (on the contrary, it carries a big punch) but that it is not quite finished as far as its form goes. Zsuzsa Rakovszky has built a scaffolding on which to create a real construction, and that phase of work can be judged on its own merits, but this does not seem to be the goal designated by the text. The scaffolding should be dismantled, and the author needs to shape the novel which is suggesting itself—Gábor's awakening, his emotional traps and games, his breakdown—into an artistically complete, integral whole. In contemporary Hungarian literature Zsuzsa Rakovszky is in the best position to shape the vital questions raised in this and the other stories into a large-scale epic. ❧

István Deák

Heroes from Hungary

Tibor Frank, *Double Exile: Migrations of Jewish-Hungarian Professionals Through Germany to the United States, 1919–1945.* Oxford: Peter Lang (Exile Studies, Volume 7), 501 pp.
Kati Marton, *Enemies of the People: My Family's Journey to America.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 288 pp.

During the 1930s a story was told about a sign outside the entrance to a Hollywood film studio: "It is not enough to be a Hungarian; one must also have talent." Another story was about a meeting of top US atomic scientists at which, when Enrico Fermi has stepped out of the room, the others sigh with relief: "Now, at last, we can speak Hungarian." Much heard at the time was the joke: "How do you recognize a Hungarian? He enters a revolving door behind you, but leaves ahead of you."

The Hungarian historian Tibor Frank has devoted five hundred pages of engrossing stories and learned analysis to a collective portrait of the most talented and most successful émigré Hungarians. Kati Marton's book, an often charming and just as often heartbreaking report on her childhood in Budapest, combined with a biography of her parents, also has much to say about Hungarian geniuses. Moreover, Marton's earlier book *The Great Escape: Nine Jews Who Fled Hitler and Changed the World* does for nine distinguished Hungarians what Frank is doing for hundreds.[1]

Marton's nine Jews include four nuclear scientists, two photographers, two film directors and a writer. What both Marton and Frank demonstrate is that such Hungarians as the scientists Leo Szilard, Eugene Wigner, John von Neumann and Edward Teller, the biochemist and sociologist Michael Polanyi, the photo-

1 ■ Simon and Schuster, 2006. [See *HQ* 187 for a review by Ivan Sanders.] Of similarly great value are three other books dealing with Hungarians in exile: Lee Congdon, *Exile and Social Thought: Hungarian Intellectuals in Germany and Austria, 1919–1933* (Princeton University Press, 1991) and, by the same author, *Seeing Red: Hungarian Intellectuals in Exile and the Challenge of Communism* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2001), as well as István Hargittai, *The Martians of Science: Five Physicists Who Changed the Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

István Deák

is Seth Low Professor Emeritus at Columbia University. His books on Weimar Germany's left-wing intellectuals, the 1848 Revolution in Hungary, the officer corps of the Habsburg Monarchy and Hitler's Europe have appeared in English, German and Hungarian. *This article first appeared in* The New York Review of Books, *19 November 2009, and is here republished with their kind permission.*

grapher Robert Capa, the writer Arthur Koestler and others have together altered the ways we think, act and work.[2] And unlike many of their predecessors, the two authors do not shy away from admitting that, with very few exceptions, the world-famous Hungarians they discuss, including mathematicians, physicists, photographers, architects, musicians, conductors, comedians, film directors and courageous journalists, such as Kati Marton's parents, were Jews by religion, or at least converts of Jewish origin.

The question thus arises whether the books being reviewed here are about famous Hungarians or about talented Jews who considered themselves Hungarians—sometimes over the violent objection of their non-Jewish compatriots. Indeed, the ethnic and national identity of Theodore von Kármán, Karl Polanyi, Karl Mannheim, Lord Kaldor of Newnham, Eugene Ormandy, Sir Georg Solti, Joseph Szigeti, Antal Dorati, George Szell, Fritz Reiner, Ferenc Molnár, Joe Pasternak, Sir Alexander Korda, Michael Curtiz, Brassaï, André Kertész, Marcel Breuer, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and hundreds of other illustrious expatriates presented a dilemma to anti-Semitic and rightist Hungarians before and during World War II and, to a lesser extent, to Hungarian Communists after the war.

Ironically, too many Hungarians who like to boast of the numerous Hungarian geniuses also insist that to be a Jew is a question not of religion but of race, and that, therefore, the Jews from Hungary are not really Hungarians. Yet there were also many Hungarians who befriended and defended their Jewish compatriots or ex-compatriots. As for the émigré Jews, they proved their attachment to the home country by becoming the main sponsors of Hungarian cultural events in the US and elsewhere and by their predilection for consorting with one another while claiming to have become thoroughly cosmopolitan.

The key to this fascinating situation lies in history. Jews had long been living in the area of what is today Hungary when the conquering Magyar tribes arrived from the east in the ninth century, but they gradually became integrated into Hungarian society only in the nineteenth century as part of a nationwide drive for modernization. Because the members of the landowning nobility—which was central to the nation's identity—were loath to engage in commerce and industry, they needed the services of the Jews. And once the ideas of nation and nationality took root during the nineteenth century, the same nobility became painfully aware that Hungarian speakers formed a minority in the country; the majority spoke German, Yiddish, Romanian, Serbian, Slovak and other languages. Accordingly, the noble elite fostered the acceptance of the Jews,

2 ■ With regard to names, I have followed Tibor Frank's practice of citing them the way each person tended to spell it when abroad. Thus, for instance, diacritical marks are often missing. Also because late in the eighteenth century, the Habsburg authorities gave the Jews of Hungary German-sounding family names, many were later converted to Hungarian-sounding family names, and then again, when abroad, to German-, French-, or English/American-sounding names. Thus Manó Kaminer became Mihály Kertész while still in Hungary and Michael Curtiz when in the US. The actor who played the waiter in Curtiz's famous *Casablanca* began as Sándor Gärtner, continued as Jenő Gerő, became the actor Szőke Szakáll (Blonde Beard), and was finally known in Hollywood as S. Z. Sakall.

who combined their economic usefulness with a willingness to become patriots.

Of course, acceptance was a matter of degree; still, no country in Europe was more hospitable to Jewish immigration and assimilation and no country had more enthusiastic support from its Jews than the pre-World War I Hungarian kingdom. One might even say that there existed a tacit agreement between the ruling gentry and the educated Jews for a division of labour in modernizing Hungary. The Jews—as well as many skilled non-Jewish immigrants from Western Europe—would contribute their know-how, dynamism and diligence; the landowning elite would provide the legislative and administrative assistance necessary for economic expansion.

The resulting success of Jews, and of immigrants, was dazzling. Although they made up less than 5 per cent of the population before 1914, Jews created, owned and managed the majority of Hungarian heavy industry and mining, and nearly every one of the great banks. They were equally successful in commerce, small entrepreneurship, the liberal professions and all aspects of culture and the arts. By the beginning of the twentieth century they had also made significant inroads into the state bureaucracy, the judiciary, the officer corps and large landownership. Assimilation for the Jewish elite increasingly took the form of conversion and intermarriage.[3]

There was a reaction to all this. Those who had profited less from the economic boom—the ethnic minorities, including Romanians and Slovaks, the impoverished gentry, the clergy as well as some small shopkeepers and artisans—tended to blame the Jews for their perceived misfortune. There were a few relatively minor pogroms, but the Hungarian government and the dominant liberal press firmly rejected what they considered a return to medieval obscurantism. Meanwhile, Jews did not even consider creating a separate Jewish political organization. Although Theodor Herzl was born in Budapest, his case for a Jewish state was categorically rejected by Hungarian Jewish leaders and in the press. For educated Jews, Judaism was no more than a religious denomination; therefore, Zionist nationalism amounted to treason. Few people paid attention to Herzl's warning, in 1903, to a Hungarian Jewish politician:

> The hand of fate shall also seize Hungarian Jewry. And the later this occurs, and the stronger this Jewry becomes, the more cruel and hard shall be the blow, which shall be delivered with greater savagery. There is no escape.[4]

In the early chapters of his book, Tibor Frank reminds us that nearly all the famous Jewish Hungarians were born under Emperor-King Francis Joseph's Dual Monarchy. They belonged to the second and, even more, to the third generation of Jews who had made successful careers. The Marxist-Leninist philosopher Georg Lukács's grandfather

3 ■ By 1900, one out of every five reserve officers in the army of Austria-Hungary and in the Hungarian National Guards was a Jew by religion, not counting those who had converted to Christianity. Fifteen per cent of the large landed estates in the country were owned by persons of Jewish origin, and the vast majority of those who rented large estates were Jews.

4 ■ Theodor Herzl to Ernő Mezei, who was a Jewish member of the Hungarian parliament, on March 10, 1903. Quoted in T.D. Kramer, *From Emancipation to Catastrophe: The Rise and Holocaust of Hungarian Jewry.* Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2000, p. xii.

was an illiterate quilt-maker, his father a banker on whom the king conferred the honour of including in his name the word Szegedi, a reference to his place of birth that was a mark of nobility. János/John von Neumann's ancestors came to Hungary from Russia; his father, a lawyer and a banker, was also ennobled as were, incidentally, hundreds of other Jewish families; there were also some twenty-five Jewish Hungarian baronial families.

Frank, who is the author of many historical and cultural studies, in part on British–American–Hungarian relations, makes it clear that the nineteenth-century flourishing of Jews had been made possible by the near absence of a Hungarian urban middle class (cities were traditionally dominated by German-speaking guilds), by the government's vigorous assimilationist policy and by the liberal, anticlerical, secularist educational reforms developed by some aristocratic politicians and by middle-class teachers, often of Jewish background. Men of genius emerged above all from the high schools, which were modelled on the German Gymnasium. Two high schools in the Hungarian capital, the state-funded Mintagimnázium (Model Gymnasium) and the Fasori Evangélikus Gimnázium, a private Lutheran establishment, educated the scientists von Kármán, von Neumann, Teller, and the future Nobel laureates Eugene Wigner and John C. Harsanyi —all of them Jews or of Jewish descent. But dozens of other schools, some in the countryside, also maintained very high standards, employing teachers with doctoral degrees and scholarly publications. Most amazing of all was the lack of prejudice and discrimination. Try to imagine a Christian denominational school in the US, late in the nineteenth century, in which most students were Jews by religion.

The sufferings of World War I, the deaths of half a million Hungarian citizen-soldiers, and the defeat of the Central Powers brought about two successive revolutions, one democratic, the other Bolshevik. In both, but especially in the Republic of Soviets, led by Béla Kun, young Jewish reformers and social critics had a crucial part. For the first but not the only time in modern Hungarian history, men of Jewish origin but not of the Jewish religious persuasion occupied command positions in the government, the military, and over cultural policy and education. All this without the Communist leaders ever publicly referring to their Jewish background. Nor did they in any way favour the Jewish community, which mostly rejected the Communist experiment.

Some of the later celebrated Jewish intellectuals, such as Leo Szilard, happily agreed to participate in what seemed a great social experiment; others, such as the sociologist Oscar Jászi, fled abroad. The Republic of Soviets was replaced after 133 days by a counter-revolutionary group under Admiral Miklós Horthy. Needing scapegoats for the defeat and the dismemberment of the country, officers' detachments killed real or alleged Communists as well as Jews, irrespective of whether they had participated in the Soviet regime.

Interwar Hungary was full of contradictions. The White Terror ended in a few years and the government became again constitutional, but the White terrorists were never punished, and at the universities anti-Semitic students freely harassed and attacked Jewish students. Meanwhile, refugees from Transylvania and other territories grabbed by Hungary's neighbours inundated the country, clamouring for jobs. In response, the

parliament in 1920 adopted a law intended to reduce the presence of Jewish students at the universities to something approximating their proportion in the general population, which was a little less than 6 per cent. But this law was suspended eight years later; as late as 1935 the proportion of Jewish lawyers, medical doctors, journalists and engineers was higher than even before World War I, often approaching 50 per cent. The proportion of Jews among the professionals practising in Budapest was higher still.

Almost incredibly, as late as 1941, the majority of Hungary's biggest taxpayers and those with the greatest personal wealth were still Jews or converts of Jewish origin. These and similar statistics were made much of by the press and the politicians, but what they failed to say was that the absolute number of Jews was steadily declining because of emigration, a low birth rate and conversions; and once the economy began to improve, as it did in the late 1930s, there were lucrative positions for the newly educated Christian middle class as well. What counts however is that the old silent contract between gentry and Jews had come to an end, as had the rule of the gentry itself. Preoccupation with Jews seems in retrospect like a sickness that afflicted all strata of society, but especially the educated classes.

As Frank demonstrates, the emigration of Hungary's most talented Jews began in 1919 with those who abhorred the Red regime, and continued immediately afterward with those who had reasons to fear Horthy's antiliberal, anti-Semitic regime. The future Nobel laureate in chemistry George de Hevesy, who had accepted an academic position under the Red regime, was dismissed and denied the right to teach at the University of Budapest. He left Hungary for good in 1920. Other Jewish professors were also purged; but as Frank shows, many left not because the universities half-closed their doors to Jews but because of the flourishing cultural and scientific life in Germany, especially in Berlin, as well as in Zurich, Prague and Paris.

Following its early radicalism, the counter-revolutionary Horthy regime, and especially Count Kuno Klebelsberg, its minister of religion and education between 1922 and 1931, tried to lure the best of Jewish talent back to Hungary, and quite a few responded. Still, Frank is right to call attention to talented Jews who moved from Hungary to the scientific and artistic centres in Germany and from there overseas. Not all who came to the New World were refugees from Nazism; many simply profited from immigration laws that virtually excluded ordinary Hungarians but admitted outstanding scientists, provided that they could find a sponsor.

Besides devoting special chapters to the careers of Leo Szilard, Michael Polanyi, von Kármán, von Neumann and the mathematician George Pólya, Frank summarizes masterfully the accomplishments of Hungarian Jews in America. Here it should be enough to draw attention to the letter that Leo Szilard, Eugene Wigner and Edward Teller drafted in August 1939 to President Roosevelt, and that Albert Einstein signed. In it, the scientists requested that the United States engage in a race with Nazi Germany for the construction of an atomic bomb. One shudders at the thought of what would have become of the world if these men, and hundreds of other Jewish scientists, had been welcome to stay and work in Germany and Hungary during the war.

The émigrés were far away from Hungary when the first anti-Jewish law

since the one of 1920 was adopted in 1938. Partly in appreciation, the Führer enabled Hungary to regain a considerable part of the lands lost after World War I. In return, Hungary joined in the German attack on Yugoslavia and, in June 1941, on the Soviet Union. But Hungary never made a clear agreement with Germany regarding the war and the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question." By late 1943, for instance, Hungary was seeking a separate armistice with the Allies, and although nearly 60,000 Hungarian Jews had already been killed, around 800,000 were still alive, staying in their own homes, holding down jobs, frequenting theatres, concerts, cafés, hotels, swimming pools and public parks, all of which were open to Jews. Then came the German occupation in March 1944 and the late, sudden, catastrophic, but never complete Hungarian Holocaust.

Kati Marton's father was one of those whose life was threatened, yet his chances of survival were far better than those of, say, a poor Orthodox Jew in northeastern Hungary. Endre Marton came from a well-to-do Budapest family that had Magyarized their name to Marton at the turn of the century. He was baptized, spoke several languages, including English, and deliberately cultivated the image of a pipe-smoking British gentleman; he wore a signet ring bearing the crest of a former lover, an Austrian countess. Marton was an accomplished sportsman who excelled particularly in fencing (as did the converted Jew Ádám Sors in István Szabó's 1999 film *Sunshine*). He had earned a doctorate in literature, and he was never called up for labour service.

When the Germans invaded Hungary, in March 1944, Endre Marton and his wife, Ilona, chose not to wear the yellow star; rather, they moved from the home of one Christian acquaintance to another. Regent Horthy himself, who was indifferent to the fate of the unassimilated Jews of northeastern Hungary, and who allowed the deportation of nearly half a million Jews from the countryside to Auschwitz, succeeded in preserving the lives of the generally assimilated Jews of Budapest. Only the National Socialist Arrow Cross government, which took over from Horthy in October 1944, hunted down the Jews of the capital, but it did so haphazardly and with partial success. Survival was, at least in part, a question of class.

Ilona Marton, the author's mother, was less lucky because her parents had been deported from their country house and were gassed at Auschwitz. As her daughter explains, the tragedy of Ilona's parents remained a shameful secret even after liberation; the children were told that their grandparents had died in an air raid. Only when she was thirty did the author come across some documents that forced her parents to confess their Jewish origins. Not that this was unique; the case of Madeleine Albright, who was of Jewish Czech origin, is nearly identical, as is that of thousands of other assimilated Jews. Before the end of the war, children's questions were often dismissed with "we are Catholics, not Jews"; after the war, with "we are Communists, not Jews."

And why not, when before 1945 ignorance of your origins could save your life, and after 1945, under communism, the same ignorance could give you the illusion of melting into a great community united behind the socialist idea? Were these vain dreams? Yes, when viewing the tragedy of Kati Marton's maternal grandparents; no, when viewing the

success of the Marton family in Budapest in passing as Gentiles. Yet Marton writes that even though

> anti-Semitism shaped Papa's life choices... whenever [he] talked about those years, it was with a strange nostalgia for the era "before the catastrophe"—the catastrophe being the Communists, against whom personal initiative was useless.

The end of the war brought a semi-democratic regime to Hungary and then a Communist takeover. By 1949, in official propaganda, the Western powers had changed from respected anti-fascists into capitalist enemies; Tito, after his break with Moscow, had turned into a running dog of US imperialism, and the Hungarian émigrés had transformed themselves from our "dear compatriots abroad" into "fascist spies and diversants." Nearly everything was nationalized, hundreds of thousands were put in jail or in concentration and internment camps, and travel abroad became impossible.

What made these developments unique was that they took place largely under the leadership of Communists of Jewish origin who, as in 1919, never publicly mentioned their Jewish roots. Instead, they made sure that there would be a good number of Jews among their victims. Just as Jews were over-represented in the political police, they were also over-represented among the victims of the political show trials. And while the Stalinist brand of terror ended in 1953, with partial revivals both in 1955 and following the suppressed revolution of 1956, the presence of Jews in the Party leadership steadily declined over the years. Non-Jewish Hungarians, recruited mainly from the working classes, gradually took over command positions.

In this upside-down world, the Martons were able to behave as if they "belonged to another civilization." As correspondents of the Western news agencies AP and UP, Endre and Ilona regularly spent time at Western legations; they were fashionable, glamorous, active, seemingly unconcerned with their inevitable fate. They did not tell their daughters that they had unsuccessfully applied to emigrate to New Zealand in 1948 and had been considering other ways to leave. Arrested separately in 1955, they were accused of being American spies. Prisoners were no longer tortured, but under relentless interrogation, with secret police officials hammering on the tragic future of his wife and children, Endre made a despairing false confession that he had been an American agent, although a police officer wrote that he "did not compromise a single Hungarian."

Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' to the Soviet Party Congress in 1956 gradually improved matters, and after a grim, perfunctory trial and sentences of years in prison, the two were released in less than a year. It had been a harrowing experience not only for them but also for their two little girls, who in a desperate moment were left alone, with their parents kidnapped by the police, sitting and crying on the curb in front of their empty house. Later, they were farmed out to strangers.

All this is touchingly recounted by Kati Marton, whose main source of information is the many thousands of pages of reports that form the files of the secret police, which she was able to examine in Budapest. In fact, as in the German film *The Lives of Others,* the police knew much more about her parents than she was ever able to learn from them directly. It is no less disturbing that the police, in turn, obtained their information from relatives,

employees, neighbours and friends of the Martons, especially from the children's French nanny and from a US diplomat in Budapest who, although later unmasked as a spy for the Hungarians, was never punished by the American authorities.

For the Martons, it all ended well when they received permission to leave Hungary following the 1956 Revolution and—despite the strangely cold-blooded efforts of the Associated Press to keep them out of the US—were able to settle in Maryland. Now Hungarian agents made elaborate efforts to recruit them, and the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover continued to suspect them of working for the Communists. The family owed much, as Marton makes clear in her admirably calm and restrained prose, to American diplomats in Budapest who gave them shelter when the Soviets attacked Hungary in 1956 and who, at a time when Hoover's power was at its height, sought to "allay any concerns" that the Martons might be Communist spies.

Back in the nineteenth century, Jewish Hungarians helped to change an agrarian society into a more modern nation. In the years following 1918, when the remnants of Hungarian territory were impoverished, embittered, nearly monoethnic and overcrowded, many of the most talented Hungarian Jews moved west, especially to the United States. As Tibor Frank shows in his invaluable study, they were talented enough to contribute to the transformation of a still provincial country into a super-modern society, with hydrogen bombs, computer technology, and some of the most popular American and British patriotic movies of their time. ❧

Richard Zimdars

In the Footsteps of Liszt

Alan Walker, *Hans von Bülow: A Life and Times*
Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 510 pp.

Is Hans von Bülow's legacy significant for our times? Is there a need for a biography of Bülow in English?

Earlier this year I dined with three members of the wind section of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. I showed them Alan Walker's new biography of Bülow. All attention to food vanished as these three great instrumentalists crowded around the book, immediately turning to its chapters on Bülow's years as conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic. Soon comments about their "roots," the "origins of their tradition," etc. poured forth.

The Berlin Philharmonic is consistently acknowledged as an orchestra whose standards are equalled by few, and surpassed by none. When listeners in the twenty-first century enjoy the quality of the world's great orchestras, they are in permanent debt to the conductor who launched the quest for this quality with the Meiningen Orchestra and took it to new heights in Berlin in the late nineteenth century, Hans von Bülow.

Alan Walker is the author of the definitive English-language biography of Franz Liszt. Walker's decades of research on Franz Liszt inevitably brought him in contact with the life of Bülow. Walker's existing knowledge on the sources relating to Liszt and Bülow had to be expanded to include the whole of Bülow's life. As he acknowledges, this was a daunting task, given that a considerable number of Bülow's approximately 5,000 letters still remain uncatalogued to this day. Nonetheless, Walker took on the challenge of a Bülow biography, and took his time with the project. The result was worth the wait.

Walker's table of contents centres around geography: Weimar, Berlin, Munich, Florence, Britain, America, Scot-

---

Richard Zimdars
is Despy Karlas Professor of Piano in the Hugh Hodgson School of Music at the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia and translator of The Piano Master Classes of Franz Liszt: The Diary Notes of August Göllerich 1884–1886 *and* The Piano Master Classes of Hans von Bülow: Two Participants' Accounts. *He is Artistic Director of the American Liszt Society Festival celebrating the bicentennial of the birth of Franz Liszt, February 17–19, 2011, to be presented at the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia. For more information on the Festival, please visit www.americanlisztsociety.net*

land, Meiningen, Frankfurt, Hamburg, and lastly, Berlin again. Bülow's youth and all-important time as a student of Liszt in Weimar are covered first. From then on, we follow Bülow's career as pianist, teacher, and orchestra builder and conductor.

After a chapter describing Bülow's youth, formative late-teenage years and the family conflicts about his choice of music as a profession, a chapter follows titled "With Liszt in Weimar." In Walker's biography of Liszt, a parallel chapter occurs titled "A Gathering of Eagles." An umbrella title for both chapters along the lines of "Present at the Creation" is appropriate. During this time Bülow received piano instruction from Liszt, observed Liszt's orchestra rehearsal techniques, enjoyed many hours of discussion about 'new' directions in music, and came in contact with Richard Wagner and Hector Berlioz. He also formed friendships of varying lengths with other young 'eagles' nesting around Liszt in Weimar at the time: composers and pianists Joachim Raff, Peter Cornelius, Felix Draeseke, Karl Tausig, Hans von Bronsart and Karl Klindworth. All of these people had telling effects on Europe's musical scene in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Support from Liszt always remined important for Bülow. It began as Liszt showed Bülow's mother his affection for her son, evidenced in a letter to her containing these words: "I love him as if he were my own son, and I regard myself as if I were his father. And it will be the same, ten years from now." Another strong example reads: "Hans is evidently gifted with a musical organization of the rarest kind. His executive talent will easily place him in the front rank of the greatest pianists..." Liszt also "promised to help Bülow build a repertoire 'that no other pianist could show.'" Walker describes the pianistic discipline to which Bülow subjected himself. Within eighteen months Liszt deemed Bülow ready to go before the public in major cities, and helped arrange his first concert tour. Its most striking success came, fittingly, at the Hungarian National Theatre in Pest. Bülow played Liszt's Fantasy on Themes from Beethoven's "Ruins of Athens" for piano and orchestra. Ferenc Erkel wielded the baton. The enthusiastic audience demanded ten encores and Bülow could only quell the crowd by playing Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 14 a second time. Eventually, Liszt referred to Bülow the pianist not as his pupil, "but rather my heir and successor."

The title of "heir and successor" was not restricted to Bülow's piano artistry. As in the case of his mentor, piano playing eventually became an insufficient musical outlet for Bülow. The art of conducting, then in its early stages, attracted Bülow, and an event in Weimar in August of 1850 proved pivotal for him. He heard Liszt conduct the world premiere of Wagner's *Lohengrin*. This sealed Bülow's almost fanatic love for Wagner's music, and the only satisfactory way for Bülow to perform this music was as a conductor. This devotion to and association with Wagner eventually led to the incredibly personal pain the severing of this relationship produced for Liszt, Bülow, Cosima and Wagner. The story is well known, and details are available in many sources. Walker, however, gives us the story for the first time in English with an emphasis on the point of view of Bülow. The story as Walker tells it remains gripping. The reader previously familiar with the situation will come away with new insights. Those approaching this sad

history for the first time cannot fail to be moved by these elements: its mix of contradictory pulls on the protagonists; betrayal in the face of artistic loyalty; and perseverance toward the artistic triumphs of the first performances of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in 1865 and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in 1868, conducted by the cuckolded Bülow.

Bülow's unquestionably necessary departure from Germany after the unbearable stress of the Wagner–Cosima situation in Munich takes the reader into less familiar territory—Bülow's residency in Florence from 1869–1872. Walker has unearthed documentation as a foundation for descriptions of Bülow's personal and artistic life during this period of healing. A significant effort that reached fruition was the publication in 1872 of two volumes of Beethoven's piano music containing Bülow's insightful interpretive recommendations. He did not, however, take sole credit for this edition. He dedicated it to "the Master Franz Liszt," declaring it to be "the fruit" of his study with Liszt. This Beethoven edition had a tremendous impact on pianists and teachers for decades. In a later chapter, Walker takes up the subject of Bülow the piano teacher in the context of the highly publicized piano master classes he taught in Frankfurt in the summers of 1884–1887.

Walker next moves to the years 1873–1879, a period of intensive touring for Bülow in mainland Europe, England, Scotland and America. The chief activity was appearances as pianist, including an extraordinary triumph in 1875 in Boston. In America, Bülow, a German, played the world premiere of the most famous Russian piano concerto, Tschaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat Minor. Invitations for Bülow's conducting expertise on these tours were numerous, and he accepted many. The huge programmes and taxing touring schedule of Bülow are well documented by Walker. Fortunately, in addition to the professional aspects of the tour, Walker weaves in documentation of personal events, often humorous, sometimes intimate. The balance thus achieved keeps the reader engaged and usually sympathetic with Bülow during these arduous journeys. Especially delightful are Bülow's recorded reactions from his American tours.

The last third of the book follows the career of Bülow the conductor, although he by no means abandoned piano playing. What does Walker tell us? Naturally, he must chronicle significant musical events, and does this well. But Walker describes Bülow as "...music's great reformer. He set out to make a difference." Thus, merely providing a Michelin Guide listing of Bülow's conducting and piano performances would be insufficient without recounting their lasting effect on the local musical environments. Walker does this, too, documenting how everywhere he appeared Bülow's rehearsals and concerts revealed new performance standards and, most importantly, how Bülow achieved them. Of course, these standards did not take root overnight, but seeped into the European orchestra scene via such conducting disciples of Bülow as Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss.

Bülow's stature as a conductor was aided by an appointment in an unlikely place, the little ducal court of Saxe-Meiningen, parallelling the manner in which the court of Weimar had provided a base of operations for Liszt earlier in the century. Duke Georg II gave Bülow total artistic control over the orchestra. Walker

provides a detailed background and narrative of these years, 1880–1885, in which Meiningen, a town with less than 10,000 inhabitants, became the orchestral capital of Europe. Descriptions of Bülow's rehearsal techniques and the standards to which he held the orchestra are especially vivid. Walker also addresses the important relationship Johannes Brahms formed with Bülow and the Meiningen Orchestra, and gives close attention to the world premiere of Brahms' Symphony No. 4 that took place in Meiningen on October 25, 1885. Among the many musicians inspired by Bülow and the Meiningen Orchestra was the young composer and pianist Ernst von Dohnányi, who later did much conducting in Hungary and elsewhere.

Walker describes carefully and in great detail the immensely important personal event that unfolded in Meiningen: Bülow's friendship with, whirlwind courtship of, and marriage to Marie Schanzer. Marie, an actress with the Meiningen Court Theatre, was considerably younger than Bülow. The well-documented story of their marriage, not always an easy union, brings the reader a sense of relief after having earlier experienced the misery of the Wagner–Cosima affair. Bülow deserved some personal satisfaction in his private life, and received this in abundance from Marie, who cared for him in many ways right to the moment of his death.

Throughout the book one finds many examples of Bülow's sharp wit and sense of humour. An especially entertaining incident occurred at an orchestral rehearsal of a new work by a young composer. The eager young man, in Bülow's presence, handed out seventy pencils to the orchestra so they could make detailed notes in the orchestral parts of his new work. He gave his advice, and the rehearsal proceeded. At the next rehearsal of the piece, Bülow handed out seventy erasers to the orchestra!

Bülow's appointment as conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in 1887 saw his career come geographically full circle. He spent a frustrating nine early years in Berlin, 1855–1864, and was glad to leave the city. His five years as conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic were a triumph. Walker vividly narrates these years, again artfully blending the professional and personal life of his protagonist. The power of Bülow as a German cultural leader and hero is especially brought home in incidents involving Bülow, Otto von Bismarck, and Kaiser Wilhelm II. About this I prefer to keep the potential reader in suspense!

When considering the career of Bülow, I often asked myself if an equivalent career could be found that had such an effect on the future of music. Bülow as pianist gave the first performances of Liszt's Sonata in B Minor and *Totentanz,* and Tschaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1. As conductor, he led the first performances of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg,* as well as preparing Brahms' Symphony No. 4 for its premiere. He fought for contemporary masterworks while simultaneously establishing the orchestral canon and moulding a performance standard for this canon. His piano repertoire was mammoth, his skills as an orchestra builder unprecedented. As a piano teacher he had an international reach. Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler worked with him as young men, taking him as the model for their conducting aspirations. Who since then can be compared to Bülow? Perhaps Leonard

Bernstein? Maybe Daniel Barenboim?

In English, Walker's book has no competition. Its sixty-three illustrations and programme reproductions add much to the reader's pleasure. Two publications in German must, however, be mentioned. *Musikalische Interpretation: Hans von Bülow* by Hans-Joachim Hinrichsen (1999) provides a massive source of information on Bülow's concerts and approaches to interpretation, among other topics. This valuable work, however, is not indexed, a serious flaw in practicality. Wolf-Dieter Gewande's *Hans von Bülow: Eine biographisch-documentarische Würdigung aus Anlass seines 175. Geburtstages* appeared in 2004. As might be expected, this book treats parts of Bülow's life in more detail than Walker's book, but at times slights episodes that Walker gives more thorough treatment. It does contain a valuable exhaustive 114-page timeline of events in Bülow's life.

No biographer would dare attempt to write a 'complete' life of Bülow. Because of the huge number of sources, the book would never reach an end. The last decade has given us Walker's, Hinrichsen's, and Gewande's volumes, providing a remarkable repository of information on Bülow. ❧

Anna T. Szabó

Consumed with a Book

David Hill, *Consumed*. Portland, Oregon: Ken Arnold Books, 2008, 139 pp.

As I was reading David Hill's book of poetry for the first time, I noticed a moth from the corner of my eye, flying towards my wardrobe, ready to consume my small but precious array of consumerist clothes. However sentimental I am, I usually crush these insects in mid-air by clapping my hands. I very much wanted to do so this time too, but I was in the middle of a poem, by chance titled "Butterfly", just at the line when a laughing young woman sits down near a "dusty" bachelor on the metro. I didn't want to interrupt my reading—I felt in the poem the tension of a black-and-white movie or an early verse by T.S. Eliot—so I tried to catch the moth half-heartedly with one hand, holding the book in the other.

Of course, the moth escaped and disappeared in the darkness of the room, but I, sitting in my lamp's pool of light, managed to read through the poem and forget all about the insect while brooding on poor Albert's fate, who in the following stanza was left alone in the compartment, thinking of the women-butterflies who flit in and out of his life.

David Hill has such an observant eye that nothing escapes his attention: he knows how a bachelor's meal is prepared *("any bits with fungus on, rejected")*, shows the passionate way a secret lover licks the cooking sauce off his own thumb crotch after talking to his woman on the phone ("The Other Man"), or presents an everyday scene of a party of people climbing into a car that unexpectedly turns into a Freudian dream when the man called Whistler sucks in the finger of the young woman he has just met ("Car"). These small moments cast light on repressed passion and all-consuming desire, and are as sharp as laser beams.

Love and the lack of it—these are perhaps the most important topics of a book that is full of snaps of lonely people: a lovesick thirty-nine-year-old translator who lives in his teenage bedroom and talks through the night with friends while his father, who *"fought for two world powers"* and survived *"two kinds of prison camp"*, is alone downstairs fighting death ("Deaf"); the man, just "one of many men", old before his time, who cannot

Anna T. Szabó,
a poet and translator, has published four volumes of poems and translated British and American poetry, fiction and essays.

restart his life without his love ("Before Your Time"); the widower who tries to restart with his deceitful "late thrill" ("Last Love"); the aging Romeo who works at a pizzeria and is bored to death with his Juliet ("Romeo and Juliet—Free Delivery"), or all the *"folks"* that *"say they've lost their way"*, and *"it bothers them a lot"* ("Find a Spot"). Life consumes these everyday people that try to *"move the way the music moves"*, and slowly wither away in the adaptation process.

Love almost always proves to be impossible. One of the most moving poems in the volume, "Silly Dog", talks about a stray dog, a wretched pariah always longing for love and the human touch, that the speaker of the poem hits accidentally with his guitar case right at the moment when he wants to stroke it— emotionally, both parties are hurt in the incident: good will is caught in the act and immediately punished. The poem "Snow" is more lenient: although complete forgiveness is impossible, still, for one moment snow, like love, turns the world into *"a small, soft and silent place"* for the night, although in the morning *"there will be traffic-jams, / Warnings, delays, deaths of the old and the homeless, / Hooters. / In a day or two there will be pack ice, / Impossible to walk on."*

"Long an admirer, I have been prepared to be amused by David Hill's new collection of poems" writes the former American editor of the *Times Literary Supplement* on the cover of the book. Likewise, those who have had the luck to hear David Hill, the co-founder of the Bardroom, the almost ten-year-old English-language poetry forum in Budapest, read out his own poems here in Hungary, might find it strange to see so much melancholy in his poems. Hill is a spirited performer of his own verses, a smiling, wide-gestured young man who knows how to capture his audience's attention. His poems, always musical and elegant, are never boring, and he likes to show his face and let his voice be heard to add to the effect—even on the cover of the book, his face appears in three different moods: one shouting, one angry and one smiling.

This range gives both lightness and darkness to the book. Hill is capable of many tones, although his main tone is dramatic irony, wit and fun, which provokes both laughs and bitter smiles from the reader. Although the things he writes about might sometimes seem surreal, he mostly sticks to the realities of this absurdly globalized world, but the quick cuts and video clip-like editing technique reveal the underlying emptiness of our everyday life. Still, the poems are not hard to understand: they are fast-paced, hot and and urgent, like rock songs, but also provoking further readings which then show their carefully constructed architecture.

"Basically, it's about life in the modern age, and the different things people consume and are consumed by. Food and drink, love and sex, globalization" says Hill about his book in an interview. In spite of—or perhaps because of—contributing to prestigious international finance and economic magazines, David Hill is never cheated by appearances and does not believe the promises of our consumerist society:

I remember it, the future
Was always about distances.
How we would cover them (...).
Look, what's actually happened.
Instead of finding new ways to cover large spaces,
We pretend to have made the spaces smaller
With communication tools.
(...) To think we would have become smarter—
How stupid!

("The Future")

The topic of globalization is all the more interesting because of the first-hand impressions Hill shares with us about his travels as a writer of travel books. He shows us the two radically different faces of the modern world, both chillingly familiar to the Hungarian reader: one is the post-socialist landscape with hotels *"where the red tap doesn't work, / And the blue tap delivers hot water"* and *"Forgotten towns will hoist blackened apartment blocks"* ("Entry Visa") and people live in *"a row of thin-walled proletarian hovels"* ("Spinster of This Day"); in countries *"between the mouths of Dnister and of Duna"* where towns *"were officially rebaptized"* ("Anecdote") and history is haunted by the ancient planet-eating monster "Vârcolac", later tamed into the form of the elegant vampire by popular culture; and where every city has war memories and is "Needing Bridges", as Budapest does, where *"wartime photos show those bridges down"*. The new face of this world may be more refined but is not less absurd: "Suburbiana", and the house in a *"town that could be anywhere from Swabia to Serbia; / The third street on the right from Jim's Pub"*, and the *"god-forsaken Swabian village"* where *"pan-European cool kids"* get off the school bus with *"cracking gum, flicked hair, designer goods"* to eat at the one and only local McDonald's ("Heron's Nest"). The two worlds, however, are getting closer and closer to each other, and "The Translator" working between *"the hearts of Europe and of Asia, / Or halfway from Sao Paulo to New York"* who used to be a *"tiny bore-hole through an iron curtain"* has to go global as well.

"These words are not my own" ("Philology"). David Hill is an excellent, versatile translator (he got his diploma from the Institute of Linguists, London, in 1999) with an enviable range of languages he can work in: in addition to his native English he reads and translates from German, Russian, French, Romanian and Hungarian (some of his translations can be read in earlier issues of *The Hungarian Quarterly*). He must have been influenced by all of these languages and poetries, and he has created a uniquely tender, sharp, funny style of his own, infused with witty word-play, self-deprecating irony and with searing punch lines. Hill has also written lyrics for songs. Musicality, together with humour, is a characteristic element of his poetry. Indeed many of the poems are songs that yearn for (and probably have been written to) music, from the Budapest blues titled "Loneliness Bridge" and the ballad "Cape York" to the bitterly funny "Law Break Girl" (I can't resist quoting: *"She grabbed my legs while I was swimming in the sea / Perhaps her way of showing her affection"*). He is also very good at writing shorter pieces of love poetry. There is wit in these poems and the tone is at the same time comical and tender: "Man and Boy" is a mere four lines:

"Are you a man", she asked, "or just a boy?"
And pinned him to the corner of the bed.
"Well, that depends on what you'd most enjoy."
She kissed him gently. "You're a man", she said.

Consumed contains almost seventy poems to read and enjoy. David Hill won't let us escape: we must sense the unbearable lightness of being, and what's more, we must laugh at it. When I finished the book for the third time and recalled my unfortunate moth-catching effort, I had to realize that in that moment I would have made a perfect topic for a Hill poem: a suburban wife obsessively hunting moths even while reading love poems. ❧

Tamás Koltai

Past and Present

József Katona: *Bánk bán junior* • Zsigmond Móricz: *Úri muri* (Gents on a Bender) • Béla Pintér: *Párhuzamos óra* (Parallel Lesson) • Balázs Szálinger: *Oidipusz gyermekei* (The Children of Oedipus)

One of the challenges faced by theatre is what to make of a dramatic tradition which is part of a country's cultural heritage, reflecting its shared past—thinking, way of life, views and history. Not long ago, a debate ran in the theatre magazine *Színház* about whether there was any need to put on classical plays at all, or whether the stage only has room for contemporary works.

The exchange of ideas was a little abstract since theatrical practice continues to stage dramatic classics. Theatres in countries worldwide mount new productions of them—arguably more often than contemporary works. The balance between past and present matters, though. The debate was started by novelist and poet Endre Kukorelly whose only play to date, *Élnek még ezek?* (Are These Still Alive?), was performed by the Katona József Theatre, currently Hungary's premier theatre company, at its studio venue (see *HQ* 181). Kukorelly was deliberately provocative and suggested Shakespeare and Chekhov had no business still being on stages: they wrote for their own ages. For a long time, indeed, theatre had no concept of renewing a production. As Kukorelly argues,

> They virtually only ever performed contemporaries, from the days of Aeschylus to Ferenc Molnár... Art is about the present: even the very greatest artists were instantly consigned to the dustbin once they were dead; Mendelssohn had to excavate Bach, or Lessing, Shakespeare.

Of course, the cult of the new reigned supreme for a long time; the revival and reinterpretation of classics came with modernity, and with stage direction becoming accepted as a self-standing creative art. Behind Kukorelly's complaint is the claim that the theatre—in Hungary even more than elsewhere—avoids presenting topical social problems directly on stage. Instead, it 'updates' classics. This approach may be no substitute for bringing new works to life, but it's a stretch to say that re-energizing dramas from the past is pointless. The classics became classics precisely because what they tell us about the drama of human existence is not only valid for their own time. Finding points of contact

Tamás Koltai,
editor of Színház, *a theatre monthly, is* The Hungarian Quarterly*'s regular theatre critic.*

between past and present, making classics speak to contemporaries, thus helps us to recognize our historical identity.

The National Theatre revived, again, József Katona's *Bánk bán* of 1821, that paradigmatic play of Hungary's Reform Era. In the hands of good directors, this much-cited and indeed much-performed tragedy—it has come up more than a few times in this column over the years (see e.g. *HQ* 170 and 186)—has gradually shed its accreted layers of national pathos and stylized performances. It makes no sense in this day and age to handle its historical subject—the murder of the consort of a medieval Hungarian king—as it did at the time the play was written, when it could stand as a symbol of Hungary's struggle for independence. (On the very day the revolution of 1848 broke out, on 15 March, the performance of the play at the National Theatre was interrupted, and much of the audience spilled outside to join the crowd setting off to release political prisoners being held by the Habsburg authorities.)

The premise of the play's plot is that while the country's king is away fighting abroad, his foreign-born (German) consort is wielding power, and her hatred of Hungarians and her moral and political depravity plunge the country into crisis. As long as foreign powers, whether German (i.e. the Habsburgs of Austria) or Soviet, denied Hungary independence, *Bánk bán* spoke powerfully. Otherwise however there is a real risk that it will be interpreted in a narrowly nationalistic sense. Even the line "we'll not take orders from a woman" has quite a different resonance these days. It was high time to construct a new relationship with the play, as Krétakör Theatre did a few years ago (see *HQ* 170).

What can a queen killed in the 13th century, used by a playwright to explain an early 19th-century concept of freedom, possibly have to say to an audience in a free, 21st-century country? That is the question that theatre director Róbert Alföldi posed to a group of actors in their twenties—it was the reason their performance came to be called *Bánk bán Jr*—and he left them for a while to reach an answer for themselves. They were allowed to make their own choice of a scene and work it up, then they put the whole performance together. They did not wear historical costumes, or carry heavy swords, there was no battlemented scenery, but stayed as modern young people, wearing jeans and t-shirts. The play was not twisted inside out, or the text rewritten (although an occasional word was altered to make it more comprehensible); no resort was made to either irony or parody. The ardour and passion of the characters were preserved, but as declamation was not their business, they switched their energies from pathos to vigorous physicality. There were chairs on the stepped stage to obstruct free movement so they swept them aside. In the "revelry at the court"—more like a reception with paper plates and paper cups—some in the seemingly homogeneous group of snacking youngsters broke into song, one in German, another in Spanish, while a Hungarian gentleman, out of cussedness, launched into a Hungarian song; polylingualism and multiculturalism no longer mean what they did a hundred and fifty years ago. In one corner stood a rock band's drum kit, and at some points when words were felt to be inadequate, the passions were vented in drumbeats and clashing cymbals. The stage designer also built onto the front of the studio's stage a large, aquarium-like basin into which the

characters often take a jump, whether fully clothed or in a bathing costume, or even tossed in objects, such as a baby's pram or a seat symbolizing the queen's throne. Water covers combatants, cools tempers, and even floats corpses; fiery temperaments are not overpowered by pathos but by water. Once cooled it is possible to sober up; our clothing and our thoughts can be tidied. By the end of the performance, the situation has forced antagonists to compose themselves and to consider that they must rely on each other.

The symbolic Hungarian *puszta* of *Gents on a Bender*—likewise put on at the National Theatre—is not standing in water but on a deep morass. It would still be symbolic even if the stage were representing the Hortobágy or a similar tourist spot on the lowland making up the Great Hungarian Plain. Zsigmond Móricz chose that steppe country as the setting for his 1928 novel,* and the stage adaptation of it he made later that same year, with quite deliberately symbolic intent. This superb novelist was a realist; no one knew better than he what a peasant's life entailed, but *Gents on a Bender* is much more than a true-to-life portrayal of provincial ways of drowning in wine and song. It is about a certain Hungarian mentality, the claustrophobia, produced by the fear that there was no escape from what Móricz's poet-friend Endre Ady termed the *"ugar"*, the "fallow", and the exceptional person who rebels, and tries to break out but is always defeated in the attempt. Szakhmáry, the main character, wants change, and he sets up a model farm on his estate, introducing foreign agricultural methods, but he encounters only indifference, incomprehension and hostility. He runs out of money, his estranged wife does not support him, and the peasant girl who has been his lover leaves him. In desperation, he puts his farmstead to the torch and blows out his own brains. This is a world built on illusion, on a bog, condemned to sink without trace, as is signalled by the stage design for this production: a swamp surrounded by a bed of reeds.

The novel, and the play which emerged from it, also have another symbol: the "bender" of the title, the impetuous, unbridled and increasingly lunatic ritual with Gypsy fiddlers, thigh-slapping dance and drunken crooning that Hungarian denotes by the sentimental cliché of self-pity, "tearful merry-making", which expresses unbridled high spirits accompanied by despair and anger. Many Hungarians consider it part of the national character, but that is an exaggeration. It has become a literary *topos,* expressing an inability to cope. It marks the way many Hungarians have reacted to the string of defeats that the country has suffered throughout history.

Recent productions of *Gents on a Bender*—the work is still popular and is quite often revived by theatres—have tried to create a kind of ritualistic theatre which has been missing from the Hungarian theatrical tradition. In that attempt they can only count on the original stage adaptation to a limited degree, which the author, conceding, against his own best convictions, to the perceived commercial demands of the theatre of the time, distorted into a conventional, even convivial, comedy. For one thing, he gave it a happy ending. That stage version is often rewritten, as a rule returning to the grimmer, clearer-eyed outlook of the

* ■ *Very Merry,* translated by Bernard Adams, Budapest: Corvina, 2007.

novel. This production did the same. The innovation of Zoltán Bezerédi's production was that it was not naturalistic, but much more condensed, abstract and symbolic. The production was threaded through by music, but here, in contrast to recent practice, the band was not made an integral part of the play. The band members, instead of becoming characters, made up a kind of chamber orchestra on a platform, which was sometimes lowered, sometimes raised, at one side of the stage. Nor did they play rhythmic accompaniments to the most widely known popular songs 'inviting' foot-tapping by the audience as are common to this day at real rural shindigs or in pubs or some variety shows on the television. Instead, they produced re-composed, re-orchestrated, stylized versions of popular tunes, musical effects which had their own dramaturgical function. Nor was the acting naturalistic. It was simple and straightforward, stripped to the essentials and the gestural. Dance movements were guided by a grotesque choreography, as was the singing, and the very height of the spree, usually presented as an episode of chaotic disintegration, was sung by the characters in strict canon. By these devices the whole production was turned from a play which usually presents "national characterology" as a conventional entertainment into one which successfully condensed it into valid signals.

Béla Pintér, writer, director and actor of the internationally acclaimed Pintér Béla Company (see *HQ* 172), has created an original piece from much the same 'national mythology'. "Our Lord the Leopard" of this play visited us two thousand and nine years ago in order to redeem us, since when he has been adored as an idol. That idol, objectified, is elevated into an altar-cum-throne in Szkéné Theatre's auditorium. There is no way of knowing precisely what it portrays—a leopard, fox or mouse, or more likely an amalgam of all three. The idolatrous people are us, Hungarians, whether the idolized person is a king, or a páty secretary or president—the distorted geographical names declaimed in *Parallel Lesson* leave one in no doubt about that: we recognize ourselves in the individuals who genuflect before the false gods in this story. A history lesson is in progress; the characters are off on a school excursion and preparing for a school leavers' ball. They thank their teachers for the four-year 'cycle'—it is clear that the four-year electoral cycle is meant—in which there has never been even one, so far, to be grateful for. Class war is raging between the serfs and the lords; the lords profess democratic rights and at the same time it is prohibited to give their children low grades. The intelligentsia are impotent, which is to be understood in the literal sense (the teacher-protagonist, in whom a serf-girl pupil is hopelessly in love, is unable to satisfy his wife ever since he bedded the high priest's daughter on a class trip), and the bear prince who is heir to the throne marries for convenience the daughter of the high priest of the leopard cult. The evil eye which resides in the teacher cannot be expelled with enemas of wild asses' milk or trials by fire, leaving no choice but to execute him on the cultic site of the Vérmező (Field of Blood) in Budapest (a place where, as every Hungarian schoolchild is taught, those implicated in the so-called Jacobin conspiracy, led by Ignác Martinovics, were executed in 1795).

With Pintér's company it is not that simplified story which is of interest, but

its sensitive resonances for the present day. They have turned the now twenty-year-old history of post-Communist Hungary into an ongoing soap opera, and in the process they present an unsparing simulacrum of social relations and conflicts in Hungary today. They are not after "literature" or "art", but they have something basic to say and are on the hunt for ways of doing so. On this occasion they have hit on a parodic amalgam of the sacred and the profane, the mundane and the sacral, the pagan and the Christian. There is accompanying music played on folk instruments plus an organ and drums. The music itself evokes here a pagan ceremony, there a Roman Catholic mass, and sometimes both switch into a party mood (a party where the youngsters have a heavy-metal or hip-hop version of a Móricz-style 'bender'). The acting combines teacher-knows-best teaching methods and an emphasis on manipulated lessons allegedly taught by history itself as claimed by the world around us. Just as in our world, we make a fetish of the vulgar commonplace, and base religion and ideology on ranting. And behind it all is unctuously disguised naked self-interest.

Universal drama and universal myth are no less appropriate for exposing the connection between past and present than the heritage of national drama. The young writer Balázs Szálinger has drawn on tragedies by Aeschylus and Sophocles to suggest modern-day parallels. In *The Children of Oedipus,* as performed by the Budapest Radnóti Theatre, a modern home is turned into the scene of ancient drama and also into an arena for modern-day politics. Myth moves into the living room of a family's tower-block apartment after stepping out of school texts being studied by Girl. Oedipus's two sons, Polynices and Eteocles, seated at opposite ends of the sofa, carry on a battle of words about which of them holds power, and meanwhile the members of the family watch the civil war in the street from the window. Jocasta, who wants to reconcile her sons, comes by with the two blind men, her son Oedipus and the soothsayer Tiresias, along with the sisters Antigone and Ismene, the daughters of Oedipus and Jocasta, arguing about the burial of their brothers, who have died by then at each other's hand. Eventually we have Creon, who succeeds Oedipus as king and takes revenge for the burial of Polynices against his orders: his speech is shown on TV. There are also messengers who show up as couriers from time to time, and a Neighbour who pops over also gets mixed up in the events, as well as the three members of the family, who act as witnesses and commenting chorus: Father, Mother and Girl, wearing cothurnuses, platform ankle boots, to emphasize the parallel.

The basic idea came from director Péter Valló. Myths once formed part of quotidian life—conflicts and tragic events took place against the backdrop of politics, power struggles and manipulations, both legal and illegal—and they continue to work today in an adapted, more humdrum, distorted and simplistic form. We are also witnesses today—whether in real life or in the media—to the way that the custodians of power sort out the affairs of the *polis* (that is, play politics). There are more than a few well-known performances which touch on this. Thus, in the six-hour marathon production of Shakespeare's three plays (*Coriolanus, Julius Caesar* and *Anthony and Cleopatra*) making up what the

Toneelgroep of Amsterdam collectively entitle *The Roman Tragedies,* a contemporary political arena is created in a forest of cameras and TV screens, with the audience, which moves around among them, becoming the people. In the Radnóti Theatre production the family is the *people* who weigh in on affairs. Father, as head of the family, is rightly offended to be sent out of the room for trying to stop rival politicians going for each other's throats ("After all it's my living room").

That could stand as a motto for the performance, presenting a political elite, which without so much as a by-your-leave, permeates our daily lives and takes up abode in our own homes. Yet at the same time it leaves us out, as it manipulates above our heads. To make it work the family would need to be placed at the centre (making the principal parts part of the supporting cast) in order that the powerful should 'act things out' for them (but only on the surface, of course). Creon, for instance, in his TV speech tries to get himself, as well as the wider public, to believe that the villainy he is carrying out is proper and just. He is speaking to the public, which is left at a loss for what to do, locked out of its own drama. By the end of the performance the family chorus has been pushed into the background, and so the ancient Greek drama becomes detached from the present. Perhaps this separation is what we are meant to notice most. ❧

Ballad Woven from Dreams

Peter Strickland on His Award-winning Film

Katalin Varga, a British-Romanian-Hungarian co-production shot in Transylvania, won a gong at the Berlinale against all the odds: Peter Strickland put his inheritance into making the film of his dreams, but almost gave up in despair before striking it lucky.

Ágnes Szabó: *You chose to spend your inheritance on making a film. Why?*

Peter Strickland: Making films was always what I wanted to do. My jobs paid the rent. I made my first short films in 1992. After graduating in 1998, I did soul-destroying admin work. I'd just stare out the office window and dream of what I really wanted to do. My uncle's death was very strange: I lost someone very close, yet I also felt like a caged animal set free. I had so much frustration from those years that it fuelled the energy to make *Katalin Varga*. If you've been denied something you've deeply wanted for a decade, it doesn't seem crazy at all to spend 30,000 euros to get it done. On the other hand it was very scary. When it appeared that the film was a lost cause in 2007, I just sat in my bedroom thinking: what the hell have I done?

At what stage of the story-writing did you decide to shoot the film?

The script was done. I had been stopping and starting pre-production for a number of years. I had one good guy from Budapest called András Dávid who helped, but we couldn't get the money. At this stage I didn't want to use the money I had inherited, but by the beginning of 2006, I realised that whatever happens—no matter how badly it goes wrong—making this film is going to be an adventure. Just take the risk. Life is too short. I remember one film student envying me, saying not everyone has 30,000 euros in their pocket. What he didn't consider was that I had money because of sacrifice. I chose not to buy a car or an apartment. If that student had sold his SUV or his apartment, he would have around 30,000 euros of his own to make a film.

At that time I lived in Slovakia. My boss in Slovakia allowed me one week of unpaid leave each month to visit Transylvania and make preparations. I had amazing help from people there—Zsolt Páll, Anikó Bordos, Zsolt Kiss, Béla Pál

---

Ágnes Szabó
is a journalist and film critic on the weekly Magyar Narancs *and* www.magyar.film.hu.

Vendel, Traian Lupu and others. I owe them everything. They helped so much with locations and negotiations. We wouldn't have been able to start shooting without their help.

Transylvania was not your original intended location.

I first considered Albania. I went there in 2003 and I have some incredible landscape photographs taken there. It is one of the most beautiful countries I've

ever seen. But it was just too difficult and expensive to travel there by train. I don't know what Albania is like now, but in 2003, there wasn't much of a train network, so I took buses. What was great about buses in Albania is that if you see one coming when you're walking, it will stop for you if you stick your hand out. But the roads were so bad and windy that it took hours and hours to get anywhere.

Why did you decide to shoot in the Carpathians of Transylvania? Did the setting and the Hungarian language influence your ideas?

In the beginning it was about convenience. It wasn't so difficult to get to the heart of Transylvania by train and it's very easy to hitchhike. Transylvania also comes with its own mythology. As an audience, we come to the cinema with expectations when we see a film about Transylvania. Whether it's a western audience's expectation of Dracula or an eastern audience expecting something folkloric, what is great is setting up expectations either with location or genre, subverting them and forcing the audience into a different realm. The setting, language and culture certainly changed the script. The story remained the same, but it had to employ a different kind of rhythm. I would get into arguments about authenticity. Some people were very obsessive over every detail of Székely authenticity, and you get to a point where you could have everything correctly portrayed; but then you'd lose your inner world. I had to keep something of my world and my impressions as an outsider.

Is the story of Katalin Varga *based on real events?*

The script is personal, but not based on real events. I learnt in the past never to be directly personal when writing. Personal writing feels most effective when it's removed from experience by time and place. I think most of us know something about revenge, even if it's on the smallest scale. It can be two lovers playing mind games or at the other extreme: two countries bombing each other. Humans implicitly understand the motives of revenge on whatever scale it happens to be. Revenge is one of the few crimes that all of us can recognise inside ourselves. The story or plot of *Katalin Varga* is fairly traditional, and I am playing with genre as a starting point. But what I wanted to do was get underneath the genre and explore the messier psychology behind revenge, counter-revenge and redemption. The act

of revenge itself is not so interesting for me, but the psychological consequences are worth exploring.

Katalin Varga is a common name. Did you want to make clear in the title that this could happen at any time, anywhere, to anyone?

Not at all. I always liked film titles that had strange or exotic female names. Fassbinder had great film titles: *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant, The Marriage of Maria Braun, Veronika Voss* and *Lili Marleen.* Had I known the name Katalin Varga was so common, I probably would have chosen something else. To a Briton, Katalin Varga is very exotic and it can also be pronounced correctly. The British mispronounce so many Hungarian names. Some people in Britain didn't even know that the title *Katalin Varga* was actually the name of the character. But that's what is great about films. All these hidden levels or meanings are there that some people understand and others don't. Quite often it's us, the directors, who don't even see those hidden meanings until someone tells us.

You only add in Hungarian that this is a ballad, The Ballad of Katalin Varga.

This was an aesthetic consideration. I knew that Katalin Varga just sounded too prosaic to Hungarians. We needed to somehow make it more poetic. I can't remember who, but someone suggested we add *"balladája"* to the title and it worked. To me, the film is using elements of a ballad. I was using elements of maybe too many things and the struggle is to make it cohere.

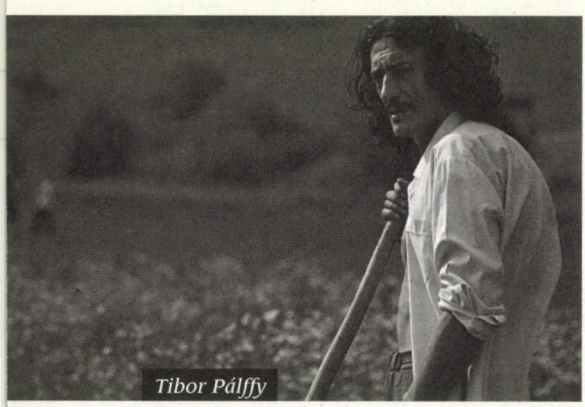
Shooting the film depleted all your funds. Since you had no one to rely on beforehand, where did you expect help to come from?

I was hoping that we could show a rough cut at festivals and then get a producer or distributor to put in the completion funds. The problem was that we couldn't even get into any festivals. London, Sarajevo and others all rejected us. Even the Bratislava Film Festival rejected us. I tried to find help from producers in Budapest, but I was rejected. One film executive in London refused to look at even one minute of the film because it was not in English. An awful period.

How did the film eventually get into the programme of the Berlinale last year after so many ordeals?

As a last resort, I took the film to the Thessaloniki Film Festival in November 2007. I applied to have the film in the Agora Market where unfinished projects can receive financing. I tried producers and distributors, but there wasn't any interest. It was very depressing and I just lost confidence. Ironically, as soon as I forgot about the film and just used the rough cut as a show reel, I had an offer. Towards the end of the Thessaloniki Festival, I gave the Romanian producer, Oana Giurgiu, a new script, and *Katalin Varga* as the show reel. She didn't like the script, but really liked the show reel. She and her husband, Tudor Giurgiu, agreed

to provide money to finish the film. By June 2008, we had a much better version and we previewed it at the Transylvania Film Festival, where it was seen by someone with connections to the French sales agent, Memento. Memento liked the film and bought it. This coincided with the final sound work and Memento knew how to promote the film, so we got into



Tibor Pálffy

Berlin. I realized that it's extremely difficult to get into festivals if you don't have any kind of representation. Not impossible, but very difficult.

You received your award in Berlin for sound engineering. Did you have an inkling beforehand that the film's sound & effects were so special?

The sound on *Katalin Varga* took a long time. We started making field recordings in 2004—crickets, goat bells, etc. We later edited these and slowly collected more and more things. I asked several friends to make small samples, ring tones, etc. I also took music from my record collection. Some of the music seems like sound design, but it's not. There is a suicide scene with very multi-layered birdsong. Sometimes we put three pieces of music on top of one another. I've been involved in this kind of sound-making since 1996 with The Sonic Catering Band and it was usually hated or ignored, so I was stunned when we won the award. When I worked with the sound team on *Katalin Varga*, it didn't feel as if we were venturing into anything new. I worked the same way as I did with the band. A few things had changed in terms of attitude. When we started making music, we were too concerned with making an impression and using every effect we could find. With some maturity as a band, we became less afraid of letting sounds just be and we didn't always have to force our own signature on everything we did. There is so much you can do with natural sound just by using juxtapositions, editing, volume and stereo positioning. What I found so strange was that when we made the same sounds as music only, most people complained that it was just noise, but when we did the same work in the context of a film, people reacted very positively.

Was your decision not to shoot or dub it into English deliberate?

One of the few concessions I made to authenticity was to shoot the film in the language of its location. I remember one English person was genuinely horrified when I told him that the film would not be in English. It would be ridiculous to have these characters speak in English. I usually have a problem when American or British films show other nationalities like Greeks talking in Greek-accented English or Germans speaking to each other in German-accented English. Are investors so afraid of using original language and English subtitles?

Is the fact that Katalin, a Hungarian girl, kills a Romanian man in revenge not misinterpreted abroad?

What I found interesting when the film opened in Britain was that most people thought the film was all one language, either Hungarian or Romanian. I never explicitly indicate when the language or nationalities change, so that the whole political ambiguity is neutralised. Also the subject of Trianon is not so well-known in Britain. Obviously that subject still has its scars in Hungary. What I also found interesting was the difference between Hungarian-Hungarian and Transylvanian-Hungarian reactions at festivals. Regardless of whether they liked the film or not, many Hungarian-Hungarians were troubled by the potential political and ethnic interpretations of the film. Most Transylvanian-Hungarian audiences didn't care about race or politics and just focused on the film as a universal story. It's actually a Romanian man who kills Katalin in the end. Katalin kills a Hungarian man. The actor, Giacomello Roberto, has an Italian name, but he's a real Székely. Ideally, I wanted any of the violence in the film to not involve race or nationality. I wanted a Hungarian to kill Katalin, but I just couldn't find the right face. After meeting the Romanian actor, Sebastian Marina, and discussing my fears with him and Hilda Péter (who plays Katalin), we went ahead. We feared that audiences might have a political or ethnic interpretation of this scene, but of course, we didn't want this. Okay, a Romanian does kill a Hungarian, but he's doing it in honour of his Hungarian brother-in-law. We also have a scene in which a Romanian couple helps Katalin.

Hilda Péter

The film will be shown to wider audiences in Hungary a few days after the Film Week in February 2010. How do you anticipate its reception?

I'm not sure if many people will like it. Because of history, some people in Hungary understandably have a protective idea about Transylvania—about what it was before Trianon and what it still should be. This film is not about Transylvania. It takes place in my world. Of course, I'm playing with certain elements associated with that region: the ballad, the calling for God and the strong relationship to the earth. However, the whole film itself is closer to opera than an authentic portrait of life in Transylvania. The film is dressed differently from the real Transylvania and what I hoped for was to find an inner realism as opposed to an outer one. ❧

Ágnes Szabó

Erzsébet Bori

A Woman's Revenge

Peter Strickland: *Katalin Varga*

If we could imagine a sort of subgenre of film about female vengeance, blended with the early neorealism of the Hungarian cinema of the forties, we might be a step or two closer to finding an appropriate label for *Katalin Varga*.

Peter Strickland's film, however, seems to evade classification. Even the rather broad category implied by the term "Balkan flavour" (i.e. "exotic"), which is regularly bandied about at European film festivals, seems inadequate. It has few characters, the plotline is straightforward, there are no disorienting ruptures in setting or narrative time, and the production is hardly overwrought, if for no other reason simply because of the remarkably low budget. Though apparently simple from start to finish, carefully dissected and mapped out it nonetheless retains some of its secrets.

It's possible, however, that the secrets attributed to the film in reality stem from Peter Strickland himself. One could follow the lead of Jonathan Romney, film critic for *The Independent* in London, and ask what impression the film would have made if its director had been Hungarian. That's out of the question, one would immediately reply; Hungarian filmmakers give a wide berth to anything that smacks of home—to such an extent that they will steer clear even of Hollywood genres like the vampire film, which is experiencing something of a golden age at the moment, clearly because the Transylvanian Hungarian reference is too obvious. But even the opposite is not true. There is in fact a long string of Hungarian films set in this part of the world, including for instance the film version of some of Ádám Bodor's short stories, such as Péter Gothár's *The Outpost* (1994), Kornél Mundruczó's *Delta* (2008; see *HQ* 192), Zoltán Kamondi's *Dolina* (2006; see *HQ* 186), which is based on a novel by Bodor, Csaba Bereczki's *Song of Fools* (2002; *HQ* 176) and *Song of Lives* (2007; see *HQ* 190), and the documentary work of Dezső Zsigmond, such as (with János Erdélyi) *With Blood and Noose* (1990; *HQ* 169); *Snail Fortress* (2004); *Sunflowers* (2008); and *Witch Circle* (2009)—to mention just a few of the more important works of recent years. So what, then, does a director of English (and partly

Erzsébet Bori
is The Hungarian Quarterly*'s regular film critic.*

Greek) stock, born and raised in Reading, England, have to do with the Székely lands?

Strickland is asked that question quite often, but he has yet to give a convincing answer. Obviously he cannot be entirely serious when he says that after seeing the films of Andrei Tarkovsky and Béla Tarr he longed to see the Carpathians of Transylvania, given that Tarkovsky's films are set in Russia and Tarr's on the Great Hungarian Plain, and neither has the least connection with Transylvania. But if we understand this as a reference to the influence of the conception of space of Eastern European (art) films, first and foremost those of Miklós Jancsó, we may have some grasp of the kind of film Strickland may have had in mind.

Strickland made no mention of István Szőts, but there are some striking parallels. Like Strickland, Szőts began as an outsider, with a naïve world view, an amateur whose approach ran counter to the trends of the day. Using a young, enthusiastic crew and unknown actors he chose to shoot a low-budget film with the feel of a ballad, the main protagonist of which is the landscape of Transylvania itself. "At once archaic and modern. Set in a precisely designated place (among the mountains of Transylvania) and time (the present at the time), yet nonetheless not simply 'there' and not simply 'then.' His images have an inner time and space." Gergely Bikácsy wrote this about *Men in the Alps* (1942), but the same applies to Strickland's *Katalin Varga*. One also notices an affinity between the two films on the level of contents; both address issues of escape, rape, revenge, an involuntary tragedy, and crime and punishment.

A secret fearfully guarded for a decade comes to light: Katalin Varga, who lives in a happy marriage with her husband and little boy, was raped, and her son is the child of that rape. The young wife and her "bastard" cannot remain in the judgemental village; she harnesses a horse to the cart and sets off. They make slow progress on the poor roads in the wild and beautiful countryside, through high mountains and godforsaken villages, past lonely sheepfolds and vast forests. Slowly it becomes clear where she is headed: Katalin is searching for the men who raped her in order to take revenge on them. When she finds and murders one of them, she becomes at once pursuer and pursued as she sets off after the other rapist with the relatives of her first victim already on her heels. Vengeance is not sweet, it gives no respite; it merely heaps new crimes and tragedies on the original violation.

Which takes us back to the starting-point. István Szőts, himself Transylvanian by birth, was able to shoot his film in his native tongue and his native land, knowing its inhabitants like the back of his hand. That can't be said of Peter Strickland. It would be interesting to take a look at the original English screenplay, which he wrote while listening to endless musical loops of *Pornography* and *Suicide*. In any case, with that screenplay and his own money from an inheritance (which amounted to no more than one tenth of the modest financing that even Hungarian films generally secure) he turned up in Budapest to make a long-cherished dream come true: a genuine feature film after years of having made amateur shorts, years over the course of which those around him pegged him a well-meaning, harmless fool. The story first had to be translated into Hungarian

and then into the Székely dialect, though Strickland himself spoke neither. His inability to speak the language or understand what was going on in Hungarian (or Romanian) dialogues opened up a further dimension on the sound track. Music and the sounds and silences of nature (animal calls, the soughing of the wind) took on the same significance as the dialogue, and Gábor Erdélyi and Tamás Székely were awarded a Silver Bear for Artistic Contribution by the jury at the 2009 Berlin International Film Festival for their sound-design work on the film.

As far as the music is concerned, Geoffrey Cox and Steven Stapleton's score is a bit overblown, and in places it gives the impression of not having been composed for this film and this story, or even for this genre. Where the soundtrack uses original material, whether the performances of the Szászcsávás Band in the partying scenes or folk songs sung by children, it strikes the right tone. The actors, including Hilda Péter and Tibor Pálffy in the lead roles, mostly members of theatre companies in Transylvania, are uniformly excellent. Cinematographer Márk Győri is to be credited not only with some engrossing, memorable visual images but also with the stylistic unity of the film. I have already mentioned the admirable work done by the sound engineers (I should add György Kovács to the two names listed above). And even if he had done no more than put together this working crew and cast, welding them into a team, one would still have to take off one's hat to Peter Strickland.

Nevertheless, I personally see his principal strength and the surest sign of his talent for film-making in his approach to story-telling. He shows a fine touch in dealing with the narrative structure of a film ballad, which is rich with elisions, in places jumping ahead of the action, at other times only suggesting it, and gradually building up the tension. The film skilfully guides the viewer from the scene preceding the main title, in which the 'police' are searching for the heroine, through the opening sequences, in which the villagers fail to return Katalin's greetings, and the ever-darker stations of her journey to unveil the past to the climactic scene on Lacul Roşu, the "Murderer" Lake.

At this point, however, the film falters. There is a shift of gears and what, up till now, has been a slow-running stream is replaced, all of a sudden, by a string of rapid, hasty and essentially incomplete scenes. Going forward in space but backward in time, we get to original sin, but the question whether there is redemption is left open.

Its faults notwithstanding, *Katalin Varga* is a strong and highly promising debut, and since Peter Strickland no doubt still guards a few secrets, one looks forward to seeing how he will continue. ❧

Clara Györgyey

(1933–2010)

Hungarian-American Writer and Translator

The 1956 Hungarian emigration to the West produced a number of eminent scientists and a few talented writers and translators. Clara (Klára) Györgyey was amongst them, a young woman with a passion for the theatre and an interest in organizing literary activities, a very hard task indeed when dealing with such quarrelsome and self-centred customers as writers. Clara passed away on January 11, 2010 in Orange, Connecticut.

Born Klára Takács in 1933 in Budapest, Clara came from a middle-class family. As a student at the Academy of Foreign Trade, she spent one of her summer vacations on 'voluntary' harvesting and visited a labour camp where Jehovah's Witnesses were interned who had refused to do military service. Though Clara was not particularly political-minded, she smuggled in a letter to an inmate and was in consequence interned herself for six months. In 1956, after the Soviets suppressed the Hungarian Revolution, Clara escaped from Hungary and having spent some time with relatives in Milwaukee, won a scholarship at Yale University to study English literature and theatre. She graduated in 1959. It was also at Yale that she met her future husband, Ferenc Györgyey, an ex-prisoner of the notorious Communist labour camp of Recsk. They both became attached to the university for the rest of their lives, living in a rambling house in nearby Orange, Connecticut. In 1990 Clara became Deputy Director of the Program for Humanities in Medicine at Yale, also directing plays on occasion in the Yale University Theatre.

As a translator Clara's main interest was the theatre and she produced good translations of István Örkény's *Macskajáték* (*Catsplay,* 1976) and *Tóték* (*The Toth Family,* 1982), and also of a play by the first post-1990 President of the Hungarian Republic, Árpád Göncz. Apart from *Mirror to the Cage* (1993), a collection of Hungarian writers in English translation, she also wrote a book on Ferenc Molnár (1980); this was translated into Hungarian in 2001. In her native tongue she published only two collections of articles and theatrical reviews, both with characteristically catchy (or even provocative) titles:

Arrogáns alázattal (With Arrogant Humility, 1987) and *Szerelmes szurkapiszka* (Loving Pinpricks, 1997). Her articles were published in a number of American reviews, including the *Critique Magazine* and *World Literature Today* as well as the Chicago-based Hungarian-language monthly, *Szivárvány*. After the change of regime in 1990 she regularly visited her native country, taking back colourful reports of the theatrical scene in Budapest.

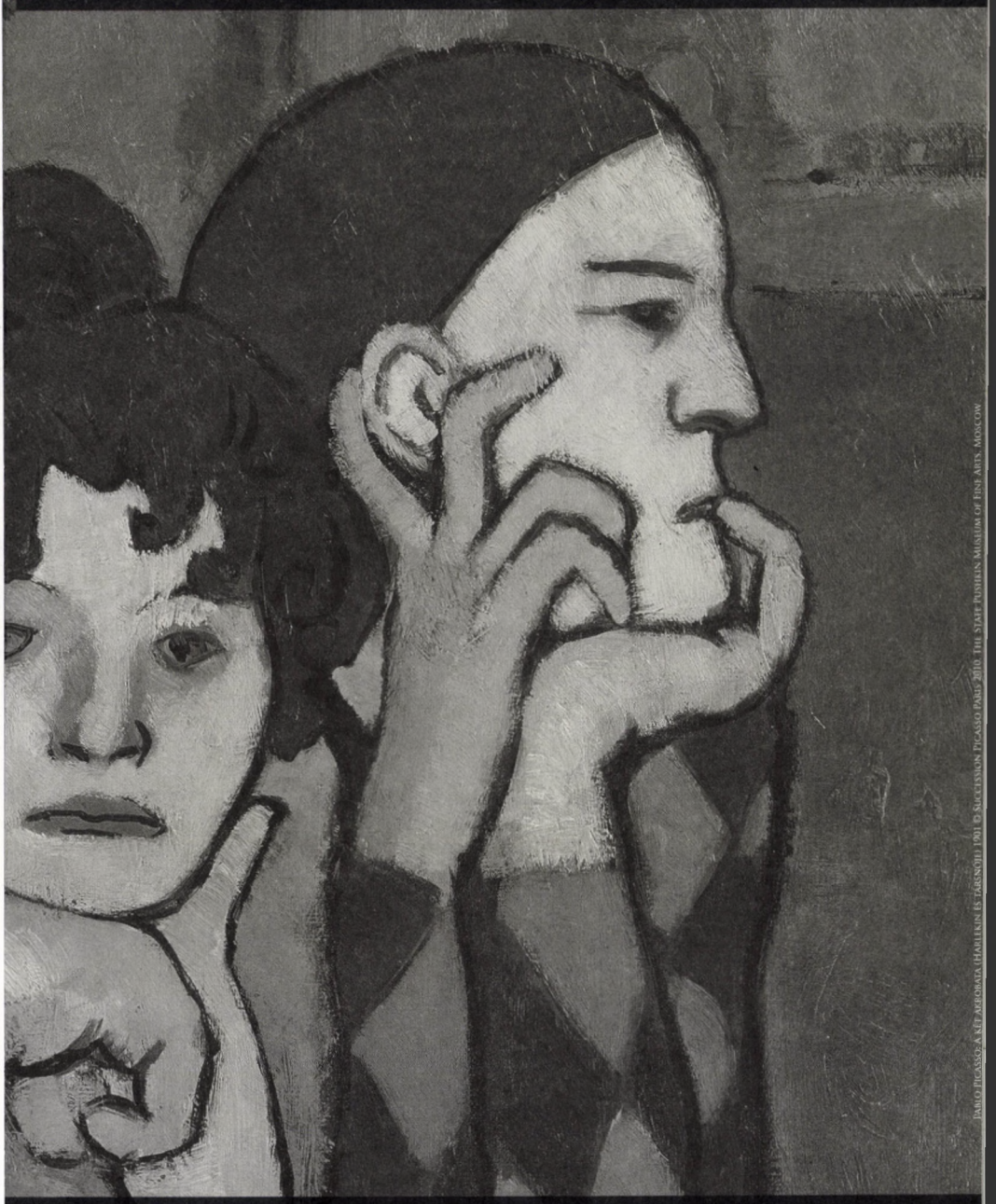
Clara Györgyey's organizational talents were proven in the 1970s when she became President for the American PEN Centre for Writers in Exile. She carried out this duty for many years to the general satisfaction of her fellow-writers of different nationalities. She also attended international PEN Congresses regularly and I can recall such an occasion in Hamburg, soon after the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl, when apart from diverse literary subjects we discussed the efficacy against radiation of the iodine tablets then being distributed. She received the Award of the National Endowment for the Arts (1986) and the Ady Medal of the Hungarian PEN Club (1992) both for her work in the PEN Club and her translations. In 1993 she was awarded the Cross of Merit of the Hungarian Republic. She was one of the members of an advisory committee of writers and editors who are asked to suggest names for the Nobel Prize for Literature.

I have known Clara for many years and she became a loyal friend, always full of energy and news from all parts of the world. Whether we met in Vienna or London, or in her own house in Orange (where I was privileged to be a house guest more than once), I enjoyed her vivacious talk, spicy gossip, also her unceasing enthusiasm for the theatre and interest in Hungarian writing both in Hungary and in the West. After the change of regime in Hungary she befriended some of the younger Hungarian writers visiting the United States, such as László Darvasi. Lately she complained about her own ill health and the health problems of her husband Ferenc, several years her senior; still, it was a shock when last autumn she was hospitalized with acute appendicitis, a condition that eventually led to her death. She will be missed by many friends in Hungary and by those in the West who believe in the international community and brotherhood of writers, represented by the International PEN. ❧

George Gömöri

DEGAS TO PICASSO

FRENCH MASTERPIECES FROM THE PUSHKIN MUSEUM, MOSCOW



PABLO PICASSO: A KÉT AKROBATA (HARLEKINEK TÁRSASÁG) 1901 © SUCCESSION PICASSO PARIS 2010. THE STATE PUSHKIN MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, MOSCOW

USEUM OF FINE ARTS, BUDAPEST

ANUARY – 25 APRIL, 2010

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS BUDAPEST

I was decorating the Christmas tree while my daughter watched Stuart Little, *an American film, on television. Through the branches of the tree I was shocked to recognize on the screen, for a fleeting moment, a lost Róbert Berény painting. I immediately got in touch with the Hollywood studio, and, after a long correspondence, tracked down the assistant designer who had worked on the film. She told me that she had bought the picture from an antique shop in Pasadena to decorate the Little family's sitting room and then bought it from Sony Pictures for herself. When I next visited Washington to discover the whereabouts of other lost paintings, I eventually met the owner. We got together on the National Mall, in front of the National Gallery. A hot-dog seller lent us a screwdriver and we took the painting out of its frame and found all the information on the back:* Róbert Berény: Alvó nő fekete vázával *(Sleeping Woman with a Black Vase), which, thanks to Hollywood, can now be regarded as the world's most viewed Hungarian painting.*

From: ***The Bermuda Triangle of Hungarian Art: The 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition*** *by Gergely Barki*

HU ISSN 1217-2545

1500 Ft