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Ferenc Békássy, Rupert Brooke and Noel Olivier
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The Eight and the European Avant-garde

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Hungary Prepares for Adulthood in the European Union

The 2011 Council Presidency

In January 2011 Hungary will assume the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Its six-month term will be an interesting period for Hungary and the EU alike. Hungary will coordinate the Council's vast bureaucratic and decision-making apparatus while not being able to rely on any significant wealth of accumulated knowledge about some of its workings due to the novelty of the Lisbon institutional framework currently being implemented. The EU itself faces a series of intractable but essential policy decisions about the new financial perspectives for 2014–2020 and the "2020" goals, promoting the bloc's competitiveness, sustainable growth and social cohesion. It must deal with the periodically re-emerging challenge of financing agricultural policy while also setting the pace in external relations in areas as diverse as the Eastern Partnership for post-Soviet states and the thorny integration process of the Western Balkans. Accordingly, Budapest and Brussels share an interest in a successful presidency. Success won't be measured in breakthroughs or permanent solutions but in terms of progress made in various knotty areas. As a result of the complex and lengthy policy-making processes currently underway, the Hungarian presidency will be mostly concerned with "rolling policies" (inherited issues) and providing follow-up to the mainly Spanish initiatives, since the current Belgian presidency has limited capability and political will to add to the already crowded agenda.

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Recent institutional changes

Ordinary Europeans see the rotating presidency as an opportunity for member states to leave their mark on EU policies. Political analysts, however, tend to see a pattern of fragmented policy advocacy and supervision. Originally, the presidency's job was to set the strategic course but it soon became enmeshed in decision-making and micromanagement.[1] Two recent institutional innovations serve as correctives: the top tier of EU governance has been overhauled as part of the Lisbon Treaty and the Council presidency has undergone structural reform as well.[2]

The 2011 Hungarian presidency will operate in an incomplete institutional setting: one innovation will be already in place while the implementation of the other will likely be approaching completion. The new structure of the Council presidency is the simpler affair. Rather than having semi-annual changes in administration and programme at the helm of the Council, a more robust framework of 18-month programmes is overseen by three member states (the presidential trio). This fosters cooperation and aims to diffuse potential disputes and forestall fractured policies at the strategic level of governance. This move towards a more unified framework is a definite bonus for a new member state such as Hungary, whose experience and bureaucratic resources are limited.

In practice, however, the new team presidencies have proven challenging. The first of these trios, Germany, Portugal and Slovenia, fared relatively well, partly owing to revitalized German participation in European affairs after the derailment of the draft constitution. It presented the draft of the Reform Treaty and launched the ratification process, thereby helping European integration along.[3] The French-Czech-Swedish trio, however, demonstrated the new structure's pitfalls. The Franco-Czech haggling over the programme, their diametrically opposed strategies and visions, and Prague's partial self-incapacitation during its term left the Swedish government with the added burden of restoring a sense of normalcy to the presidency at the end of the trio's term.[4]

1 ■ For an overview of the emergence of current structures: Adriaan Schout, *The Presidency as a Juggler.* Epaiscope Working Paper 1998/2, pp. 2–3 and Philippe Schoutheete – Helen Wallace, *The European Council Notre Europe Research and European Issues* 2002/19, accessed 17 August, 2010. For a recent assessment of presidency functions: Robert Thomson, "The Council Presidency in the European Union: Responsibility with Power". *Journal of Common Market Studies* Vol. 46. (2008) pp. 593–617.

2 ■ A separate internal reform was adopted by the Council in 2006 reinforced by the Lisbon Treaty. See Attila Ágh, "Team Presidencies and the New Member States". In Attila Ágh – Judit Kis-Varga (eds.), *The Prospect of the Team Presidencies: Integrative Balancing in the New Member States.* Budapest: Together For Europe Research Centre, 2008, pp. 9–12.

3 ■ Cf. Jürgen Dieringer, "Assessing the German Council Presidency of 2007", in: Ágh – Kis-Varga: *The Prospect...* pp. 113–130. For an overview cf. Sebastian Kurpas – Henning Riecke, *Is Europe Back on Track? Impetus from the German EU Presidency.* CEPS Working Document. No. 273, 2007.

4 ■ The Czech presidency was to start out with a "low profile", but its programme immediately provoked heated discussions so that it is unclear how it could have been expected to remain such. Contrast the events with Ivo Slošarcik, "The Czech Republic in 2009: Low Profile Presidency with High Profile Challenges?", In Attila Ágh – Judit Kis-Varga (eds.), *New Perspectives for the EU Team Presidencies.* Budapest: Together For Europe Research Centre, 2008, pp. 89–104.

The new rotating presidency structure is far from failsafe. But the current Spanish-Belgian-Hungarian (SBH) trio looks certain to avoid repeating the Franco-Czech fiasco. Whereas the joint programme proposal drafted by an expert panel in 2008–2009 has not been adopted by governments in its entirety, the latter have accepted its most important elements, establishing the required degree of coherence for the presidency. This unofficial "core" programme largely outlines a vision for an EU which is fiscally and economically more robust, focusing on budgetary reform and the competitiveness agenda while maintaining the pace of foreign policy. So the SBH team presidency has so far appeared reasonably committed to the strategy of both deepening and widening integration. These two dimensions will be treated slightly differently: the deepening of internal reform will take short-term precedence over enlargement and integrative partnerships without bringing the latter to a halt. This formula is a sound compromise, which is unlikely to alienate a large number of member states. Yet, in the spirit of the original informal proposal, it also bequeaths Hungary with the task of revitalizing EU external relations, especially as regards the Western Balkans and post-Soviet states, both somewhat neglected recently as a result of economic concerns dominating the EU agenda.

The Reform Treaty presents a more complex set of issues. The institutional innovations which it lays down are widely seen as a sustained attempt to tighten policymaking in the EU. The Treaty introduces a number of new offices and refashions existing ones. But it is also a classic case of incomplete contracting: details concerning routine functions and responsibilities have been left to the implementation phase.[5] Of these, the new position of the (permanent) President of the European Council will have the most direct consequences for the Hungarian rotating presidency since the new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy will operate in more autonomous issue areas, where the important players are her office with the Council Secretariat, the Commission and large member states as informal policy co-shapers. So far it seems that the permanent President, Hermann van Rompuy, has skilfully cooperated with the Commission and large member states to oversee the past year's hot topics (the Greek crisis and post-crisis management strategies) leaving the rotating presidency with long-term (and less glamorous) tasks. This may be a loss keenly felt by an ambitious European statesman such as Spanish PM Zapatero, yet it actually makes it easier for a more bureaucratically minded rotating presidency to concentrate on its pre-set programme, while emergent issues are left to the nimble permanent President. Given Hungary's limited resources and her commitment to moving forward in areas involving complex bargaining processes, van Rompuy's presence in the

5 ■ Graham Avery – Antonio Missiroli, "Foreword", in: Graham Avery et al. (eds.), *The People's Project? The New EU Treaty and the Prospects For Future Integration*. Brussels: European Policy Centre, pp. 6–8.

institutional framework turns out to be more of a boon than something negative (even if this entails more fine-tuning of responsibilities).

Furthermore, the recent trend of close cooperation of large member states and the Commission, which van Rompuy seems to complement so well, also limits the playing field of the rotating presidency. It is clear that these strong players expect the incoming rotating presidencies to leave some contentious issues—including the changing of euro-zone fiscal rules—well alone. In sum, the influence of the rotating presidencies has been diluted. But this also contributes to the ability of smaller member states like Hungary to efficiently manage and potentially influence the issues on their agenda. Hence the net effect of recent changes to the institutional structure of the EU can be seen as limiting the weight of the rotating presidency while enhancing its ability to realize its programme—a deal Budapest should have no qualms accepting.

The trio programme and Hungarian priorities

Spanish-Belgian-Hungarian representatives have shown a commitment to turning the Presidency into a meaningful tool for tightening the cohesiveness of community governance. They present themselves as the "team presidency", insisting that the individual six-month strategies should be encompassed by a common programme with the 18-month ownership of some (very limited) duties, while also attempting to agree on some common positions in areas where preferences may diverge.[6]

Presidency programmes are traditionally interpreted as composites of ongoing undertakings, often referred to as rolling policies, combined with an individual presidency's own initiatives. Rolling policies make up the biggest slice of the cake. As regards Hungary, an 85–15 per cent ratio was mentioned early on, which also suggests that there is a sense among experts and politicians that, come 2011, the EU will still be in the midst of its potentially most significant institutional overhaul since the Maastricht treaty. Most recently, the new state secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs responsible for the presidency, Enikő Győri, has even gone as far as to set the share of rolling policies at 95 per cent, showing the commendable caution of the new Fidesz government as regards trying to use the six-month term as a showcase opportunity. This of course does not exclude leaving a distinct "Hungarian mark" on the events and decisions of the period, but it does signal a commitment not to cram the agenda with items that are not relevant to or acceptable for the majority of member states.

6 ■ Cf. the "Protocol of the First Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian Trialogue on the Presidency". In Ágh–Kis-Varga, *New Perspectives...* pp. 461–472.

Another common approach is to divide presidency responsibilities according to their nature. In this perspective, the presidency is a complex bureaucratic leadership challenge that comprises a number of roles. Clearly, there is the need for assuming a "management" role that involves mainly coordination and overseeing the agenda and timing of work in the Council. As regards the latter, "brokerage" is also required—in fact, the "honest broker" role is the most frequently mentioned and analyzed aspect of presidencies. A further role that some feel is currently threatened by becoming overly absorbed in policy micromanagement is that of "strategic guidance", which should ideally help the whole of the EU to embed initiatives in larger, forward-looking strategies that take account of emergent challenges as well.[7] A closely related task is to lend impetus through innovations or new items added to the agenda.[8] Finally, the presidency is also expected to carefully introduce a limited set of national priorities where state preferences meet those of the EU.[9]

The series of preparatory meetings attended by Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian experts and government officials in 2008, called the Lillafüred Process, produced a "Strategic Framework for the SBH Presidency". The original framework included a number of initiatives, most of them now under way, helping the incoming Hungarian presidency to gain a better understanding of the possibilities of (and limits on) progress in respective areas.[10]

The first priority was defined as "implementing the new treaty", a signal that the experts involved in the preparatory work expected the Lisbon Treaty to be ratified by 2010, but far from implemented. Working towards "a peaceful and constructive cohabitation" between the new offices and the rotating presidency was seen as essential. In this area, the Hungarian presidency will have little to do. It is clear that implementation is making good progress (with the notable exception of the European external service, a thorny issue which is in any case treated outside of the rotating presidency framework).

The second was to give "new impetus" to the original, fledgling, Lisbon agenda. This meant contributing to the draft of a new ten-year comprehensive

7 ■ Kietz, op. cit. pp. 10–12.

8 ■ Daniela Kietz, "The Presidency in the Council System: Functions, Scope for Manoeuvre and Room for Improvement". In Daniela Kietz – Volker Perthes (eds), *The Potential of the Council Presidency: An Analysis of Germany's Chairmanship of the EU.* Berlin: Stiftung für Wissenschaft und Politik, 2008, pp. 9–12.

9 ■ Adriaan Schout – Sophie Vanhoonacker, "France: Presidency Roles and National Interests". In Finn Laursen (ed), *The Treaty of Nice: Actor Preferences, Bargaining and Institutional Choice.* Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2006, and Adriaan Schout – Sophie Vanhoonacker, "Evaluating Presidencies of the the Council: Revisiting Nice". *Journal of Common Market Studies,* Vol. 44. (2006), pp. 1051–1077, esp. pp. 1053–1056, Jonas Tallberg, "The Power of the Presidency: Brokerage, Efficiency, Distribution in EU Negotiations". *Journal of Common Market Studies,* Vol. 42 (2004), pp. 999–1022, esp. pp. 1019–1020.

10 ■ The following section is based on: "Protocol III: Strategic Framework for the Presidency". In Ágh – Kis-Varga: *New Perspectives...* pp. 487-496.

sustainable growth strategy. In its final form, the 2020 strategy received a seven-tier structure in 2010 under the Spanish presidency. It is now clear that any major reform of the oversight mechanism is out of the question: the strategy will (or will not) be carried out by the individual member states through the relatively flexible mechanism of "open coordination". This avoids policy deadlocks, as all states have the chance of adopting their own programme in order to realize common goals; but it also reduces expectations, given the lack of the means of enforcement. The Spanish presidency has done its work in finalizing the draft and added more emphasis to the social dimension, linking the fight against poverty and exclusion to growth. What the complementary 2011–2015 Social Agenda will look like, and whether it will have a serious impact, is still unclear however. As a result, the Hungarian presidency is between a rock and a hard place: there exists an all too "soft" growth strategy for the next decade, which will have to be pushed forward, and a nascent sub-strategy, which would in all likelihood divide member states into opposing camps depending on how "liberal" their overall approach to managing the European economy is. Based on the priorities of Hungary's current conservative government, it seems reasonable to assume that the government's ambitions will be limited to making the most of the existing 2020 Agenda while not aggressively pursuing the further integration of the Social Agenda into the strategy. It is also unclear to what extent the original SBH focus on climate change, energy and sustainable development—a clear nod to the previous decade's major emerging areas—will be pursued. Hungary has little to offer in terms of innovative know-how. In any case, the Copenhagen fiasco in early 2010 hardly helped to strengthen the EU's commitment to further pursuing sustainability in the economy given that the EU is already the greenest large economic area in the world. These will not endanger movement towards the already ambitious goals, but there is little sign of serious political will and also little real possibility to leave a strong imprint on this sector during the presidency term.

Budget reform was another priority in the informal joint programme. This anticipated movement towards a policy-driven financial perspective and greater focus on linking expenditure to a tangible outcome as well as increased reliance on "own resources". This constitutes a neat programme which most EU experts and economists heartily support. Still, politicians are wary. Launching the budget talks will be a daunting task for Hungary, as member-state governments will be reluctant to negotiate an agenda which could see them challenged at home for pouring more money down the Brussels drain— even if it would be just such a reformed financial perspective which would go farthest in making community expenditure more efficient. In its presidential role, the government will have to engage in very complex brokering while at the same time representing Hungarian preferences as one of the 27 member states. Given

Hungary's limited clout, appearing as only a moderately self-interested player and adopting a "soft bargaining strategy" could be the only way to increase bargaining power and add to the efficiency of brokering by Budapest.[11]

The priorities of the trio programme related to the European "area of freedom, security and justice" (justice and home affairs) were summed up in the commitment to pursue the idea of a "Europe of citizens". Despite its simple name, this is bureaucratically challenging, especially since the SBH trio is faced with putting the 2009 Stockholm programme into practice. The programme contains a complex set of goals for the next five years. It is already clear that work on European human-rights protection and intensified cooperation in harmonizing prosecution procedures in the EU (pointing towards a future European Public Prosecutor's office) will be high on the agenda during Hungary's term. One of the most sensitive areas within this area concerns the common procedures for European asylum policy, planned for 2012, where, given the sensitivity of the issue, any measurable progress by the Hungarian presidency should be considered a success.

EU external action policies are clearly in a critical phase where a *relance* appears necessary to politicians and analysts alike. Such a relaunch would involve a new partnership and cooperation agreement with Russia, promoting a new and revitalized transatlantic dimension and, perhaps most importantly, an overhaul of the relations with EU neighbours, be it rethinking, realigning or even redesigning the institutional framework through which these relations are conducted. In this area, the Spanish presidency has achieved little, given the reluctance of the Obama administration to engage with an EU in the midst of a transition with an unclear power structure and Israeli–Arab tensions which prevented any significant progress in the Mediterranean. Belgium is widely seen as having little vested interest in pushing any of the items on the agenda. So the Hungarian presidency has the opportunity to bring added dynamism to some relatively neglected areas.

For Hungary, moving forward with the Europeanization of the Western Balkans will be the most important priority. It will include an attempt to finish the Croatian accession negotiations, start the substantive phase of the Serbian and Montenegrin integration processes and potentially help Bosnia-Herzegovina out of the domestic political deadlock between Muslim Bosniaks and ethnic Serbs. The last item would certainly not be among the official responsibilities of the presidency, but the Spanish foreign service has already experimented with working in tandem with Catherine Ashton, proposing a model for the future in which national diplomats cooperate

11 ■ Jonas Tallberg, *Bargaining Power in the European Council.* Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies Report 1/2007, Andreas Dür – Gemma Mateo, *Bargaining Power and Negotiation Tactics: Negotiations on the EU's Financial Perspective 2007–2013.* Dublin University Institute Working Paper 2008/2, pp. 15–17.

with the European external relations bureaucracy, bringing in know-how and added resources where needed.

Less clear are the opportunities for the Hungarian presidency to contribute to the reframing of the old-new Common Security and Defence Policy, where the new High Representative will hopefully be proposing a new European Security Strategy after years of work on it started by Javier Solana and promoted most vocally by the French presidency of 2008. Similarly, the Eastern Partnership, proposed by Poland and Sweden and launched by the Czech Republic in May 2009, holding out the promise of deeper, more targeted and more equal cooperation between the EU and its eastern neighbours is obviously in need of attention, but there is uncertainty as to the ownership of the project.

While the above overview of the metamorphoses and afterlives of the items on the agenda assembled by SBH experts has its share of question marks, a picture emerges in which the main elements are falling into place. It is evident that the programme will focus on rolling policies, a virtue out of necessity as well as political choice. In its original incarnation, the proposal by the expert panel was conceived in the spirit of a "productive membership" in the EU more than by any ambition to summarily define what the EU is or should be about—a preference that has largely been preserved and adopted by the trio members, including Hungary. The ongoing essay series published in the Foreign Ministry's integration journal *Európai Tükör* (European Mirror) also suggests an approach which emphasizes thorough bureaucratic preparation and a commitment to making headway on existing issues rather than showering other member states with overly ambitious propositions.[12] In particular, this attitude seems to dominate the areas of immigration/asylum and police/judicial cooperation, treaty implementation, defence and the relationship with major global players, certainly as far as Hungary is concerned. These represent "management" areas, where a number of tasks await, but which do not require giving major impetus or securing grand bargains (at least not in early 2011). This admirable self-restraint is in contrast to the two opposing ambitions characterizing the French and Czech presidencies—one concentrating on consolidating, the other on opening up Europe across a range of issues from foreign policy to the internal market.

Apart from the above items, which form part of the common trio programme, the new government has, via senior Foreign Ministry officials, emphasized that it will be looking to add two items to the agenda. One concerns water-resource management, which is to be embedded into the Danube strategy, originally an initiative of the German government intended to establish a multidimensional framework for cooperation among Danubian states, thus linking up members

12 ■ All issues of the periodical are available for free download, but only in Hungarian at http://www.kulugyminiszterium.hu/kum/hu/bal/Kulugyminiszterium/Kiadvanyaink/Európai+Tükör/

and non-members. It has to be admitted that, at present, it is hard to see how the Danube strategy and water-resource management can be listed as a single priority. The Danube strategy is a very innovative proposal to link up states in a series of low-policy areas which would ideally contribute to the enhancement of economic ties, yield additional growth, foster dialogue, contribute to knowledge-transfer and the spread of European norms and standards: in short, it is a cunning, relatively low-profile attempt at transformative diplomacy with both members and non-members looking to benefit from it in a number of ways. It has the potential to produce pay-offs for the enlargement of the Western Balkans and border states of the EU, as well as in the struggle against (mainly environmental) public bads and growth-hampering transaction costs in the respective economies. Water management is certainly another innovative proposal well worthy of inclusion in the presidency programme, but in order to be a viable EU initiative, it needs to extend beyond the Danubian area, and is thus more a separate policy area with strong links to the Danube strategy proper, which holds the potential to integrate non-member states into this nascent EU policy. In an ideal world, the Hungarian government will have the resources to pursue both initiatives as full-fledged and autonomous projects, since letting either of them stagnate (as is currently happening with the Eastern Partnership, another complex and innovative proposal) would be a definite loss for the presidency and the EU as a whole.

The other Hungarian "item" will be the preservation of cultural diversity with special regard for small cultural communities. This is clearly the single point on the agenda where specific Hungarian preferences dominate. It is not hard to see the link between the existence of numerous Hungarian minorities in neighbouring states and the initiative to produce EU guidelines on the preservation of cultural diversity directly targeting communities rather than guaranteeing the rights of individuals. This area could reveal itself to be a minefield should centralized but historically diverse countries (France, Romania, etc.), or states with large immigrant communities, be made to feel threatened in their existing policies. Yet careful diplomacy emphasizing the intimate linkage between the emerging European system of human rights and the development of cultural communities which suppose each other could in fact succeed in making modest inroads into this territory hitherto largely neglected by most EU institutions (with the exception of the Parliament) and community regulation.

A final, if less formal, item on the agenda which has been added due to recent developments in the European Union and a favourable intra-EU climate as evidenced by initiatives by for instance Jacques Delors and the Paris-based think-tank Notre Europe is that of energy security, which seems to have gained a more pronounced role if contrasted with the original planning phase. In the case of energy security, there is a natural synergy between Hungarian national interests

(being largely dependent on imports of natural gas) and overall European concerns in the field. Hungary stands to gain a lot from any broadening of the common energy policy agenda which started to crystallize mainly around market regulation during the term of the first Barroso Commission, and so it should work in tandem with the experts and various lobbies in the EU that have been increasingly vocal about energy security. With or without the presidency, Hungary alone does not have the clout to push for any meaningful new initiatives in the field, but the recent climate of opinion should serve as an important catalyst for action. Hence, even if resources are limited, it would have been a grave mistake for Hungary not to put energy security on the Council agenda, as this would represent an almost ideal coalescence of community and national interests in an area where progress seems possible.

Finally, the neglected "strategic guidance" role of the presidency should also be given consideration. Enlargement policy, so far the most successful external relations instrument of the EU, is an obvious candidate for such policy-shaping, given the state of affairs and the intensity of Hungarian preferences related to the integration of the Western Balkans. The latest round of enlargement has drawn very mixed reviews and, coupled with "enlargement fatigue" and an overall loss of dynamism in the EU, threatens to freeze the enlargement dynamic for quite some time. States with a formal accession outlook include Croatia, Turkey and Macedonia. Of these, Croatia enjoys widespread support.[13] Macedonia and Turkey, however, are both contentious, while other Western Balkan states are, at least in formal terms, even further from accession. For many, these official and potential candidate countries represent a hard boundary for EU enlargement in the sense that once Europeanization hits home in these states, stable and deeply rooted basic social customs (the black market and illicit trade, clientelism, ethnopolitics etc.) would have to be transformed or replaced. As a result elite resistance to EU influence is expected to rise accordingly.[14] In sum, what enlargement policy needs most is a rethink of how to deploy existing mechanisms and what sort of political will to put behind getting to the point of accession with new candidate countries. The previous two rounds have seen expectations being informally watered down in order to facilitate enlargement, but this trend has come under serious criticism and has lost its momentum.

In this situation, Hungary has to try to prevent the enlargement process from freezing altogether. This can only be achieved by sticking to rules fixed in advance about how to evaluate and reward progress achieved by candidate countries. Such a consensus can only be reached in the Council (possibly with

13 ■ John Palmer, "Beyond EU Enlargement: Creating a United European Commonwealth". In Ágh and Kis-Varga: *New Perspectives...* pp. 369–398, esp. pp. 370–371.
14 ■ Daniel Král – Vladimír Bartovic, "The Future of EU Enlargement: Challenges, Pitfalls and Opportunities" In Fabry – Ricard-Nihoul, op. cit. pp. 314–319., esp. pp. 316–318.

the aid of the permanent President and the High Representative). The basis for this will definitely remain the "Salzburg bargain" (the principle of no new conditions applied to applicant states on the one hand and no preferential treatment on the other). It is very clear that the EU needs an enlargement policy if it is to complete its grand project of securing stability for the continent in the long run. The Hungarian presidency and others can contribute ideas and much else if this ambitious goal is to be achieved.

Conclusion

Any preliminary evaluation of Hungary's presidency can take two previous ECE member states (Slovenia and the Czech Republic) as points for comparison. Budapest appears to want a "Slovenia-plus" presidency: a solid managerial effort with modest increases in the "strategic guidance" roles concerning the financial perspective, the Danube strategy and cultural diversity. There are no signs of such ambition as that suggested by the Czech presidency programme. But its more realistic agenda at least enjoys the solid support of Parliament at home and greater internal cohesion than the Czechs did during their presidency. Even if the fate of some initiatives is difficult to foretell, the managerial duties/rolling policies will in all likelihood be adequately seen through the six-month period. It is also important to note that experts are pointing towards an overarching constraining factor that merits further analysis. This factor is the (reputed) limited willingness of (large) member states to move towards positions and propositions which do not originate with them. Currently, the view predominates among experts, and is also indirectly supported by some research, that any amount of Hungarian planning and preparation will be in vain if a group of large member states does not support a given initiative and that such states tend to support only what they have planned, or at least partially planned, themselves. In light of this, it may actually be a sound idea not to concentrate on large initiatives, but focus instead on constructively adding to longer, ongoing policy tasks, thus preventing deadlock. The Danube strategy for instance enjoys extremely strong German backing, making Hungarian entrepreneurship possible in the field, as long as this is done in dialogue with the currently most influential large member-state government headed by a very ambitious Angela Merkel. While the current Fidesz government, due to a somewhat different philosophy of handling the presidency, may turn out to be more pro-active than their Socialist predecessors would have been, the basic ratio of management and innovation is unlikely to change. And, to be sure, even this largely managerial presidency with its responsibly added own initiatives will be a daunting task of which no real assessment can be given until the actual test takes place. ❧

Edina Szvoren

On Intimate Terms

Short story

Let the light slip on the row of spikes mounted on the windowsill. Let the sun shine straight ahead, from the tennis courts by the church, so that when she looks out of the window it is hard to read the temperature. Let's suppose there are smears of cooking oil on the windowpanes that obstruct the view. Let her open the window. In her carelessness, let her catch the palm of her hand on the spikes that were mounted to deter pigeons. Let her mutter under her breath, the way people do when they have been on their own for a long time, that it's eleven degrees. If springtime herbal fragrances flood the kitchen on the afternoon of New Year's Eve, let songbirds muster up the courage to chime in with sounds resembling pocket calculators. Let flowers reminiscent of snowdrops poke their heads out on the islands of grass on the tobogganing slope in front of the nine-floor tower block. She shouldn't notice them. Let these plants, already wilted when they bloom, be as if trampled on by children's feet. And in closing the window let her have the feeling that it is not just the sodden earth outside that stinks but also the garbage can inside. She may lift the lid and peek in, then take out the bin liner bag, even though it is less than half full. The lemon peel, ash, and canned mackerel will reek; let the whole thing be gross.

Have her dust, mop over the passage floor, iron the spare bed linen. Have her tidy up in reverse order, repulsed, as if she never had. Let's suppose it springs to mind that one can't see out of the kitchen window due to the grease smears; have her set to these smears with a nailbrush for want of better. Let her polish the dining table her husband has left behind with a box of furniture wax never used before, then with fingertips strained white let her press back

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teaches music theory and solfeggio in a secondary school in Budapest.
Her first short story collection, Pertu *(On Intimate Terms), reviewed by János Szegő on pp. 125–31 of this issue, was published in 2010.*

the loose screws on the wobbly table legs. Let her think that there is no screwdriver in the household. Let her put a bottle of alcohol-free beer in the fridge to cool down for Daddy, but forget to put out the lentils to soak. When all that's done, have her sit down to a supermarket advertising mag. Let her shudder at the term gastric nerve. After leafing through the foodstuffs and holiday drinks let her notice the furniture offers, jump up and then hobble hastily in her own slippers. At the last moment let her toss pullovers and underwear onto the couch in the children's room as if it were a dirty-clothes basket and the room a walk-in closet. Let her try to arrange the piles of clothes in such a way that the tip of the red ladybird cushion should just poke out.

Let Mummy and Daddy be the kind of people who always show up everywhere precisely at the appointed time, all but arousing twinges of guilt with their punctuality. Let them ring a brisk single buzz on the front-door bell as if they had been standing there for minutes waiting for their daughter to let them in. Have you got ear muffs on, they might well say. *Hello Mummy! Hello Daddy!* Let us suddenly look up. Daddy should be carrying a houndstooth bag with artificial-leather handles, a zippered sports bag slung over one shoulder. Mummy will arrive empty-handed, but with a fur-trimmed overcoat draped over her depilated arm. Let her be bronze like someone who tans herself on the veranda in the summer and in the solarium next to the Csáb post-office in the winter (let's make Csáb Čebovce, a village of one thousand souls ten miles beyond the Slovak–Hungarian border) and let Daddy be pallid and sallow, like a liver patient, except that actually he has lupus. Let's say Mummy is the stricter one, more of a worrier, and also sensitive to smells. Let's suppose Daddy is being eaten up by a disease that has not been checked out medically, that he has a jealously guarded, carved hiking stick, and does yoga every day at daybreak with his face turned towards Kamenný vrch, before the doctors work out why his hand trembles. Let Daddy call the hill by its Hungarian name, Kőhegy, 'Stone Hill', and Mummy just say Kamenný vrch.

Another year gone by, let them sigh instead of offering a greeting. Once the ritual pecks are over, let their daughter have to walk backwards to the dining-room door because passages in tower blocks on housing estates are so narrow that even a perambulator won't fit without the bolts sticking out from the wheels and rip into the wallpaper. Let's say Mummy's laugh-wrinkles are sweating; let her fan herself with the supermarket advertising mag. Let's suppose she chronically suffers spells of breathlessness and doesn't like sleeping with socks on. Let her rip off her scarf even in the hardest of frosts. Let her cry out 'it smells like a lion's den' after hanging up her fur-trimmed coat. Let her dash to the kitchen window as if she were at home, her stiletto-heeled shoes clacking on the floor tiling. Let her have shapelier calves than her daughter, and let the bad smells and shapelier calves awaken in her daughter twinges of inexplicably intense guilt. Let Mummy forget herself for a few

minutes in the spring scents of New Year's Eve; let her listen to the calculator chirruping while Daddy slowly unpacks. Let Mummy catch the palm of her hands on the spikes mounted to deter pigeons. Let Daddy stow the bottles in the houndtooth bag—champagne and some Tokayska—notice the cool alcohol-free beer, not cool quite yet, fill the ice-cube tray with cold water, put it in the deep-freeze, and look, entranced, at the way the door tightly seals, emitting a hiss with its concertinaed plastic strip. Let there be sentences that can be repeated an infinite number of times. *Your Father is just like a child.*

After this let them sit around the dining table now gleaming with furniture wax, around which on New Year's Eves of old five people used to sit. They should slip on the worn-down Csáb slippers. When a blow-by-blow account of the vicissitudes of the train journey has been delivered, let them lapse into silence, like when the food in a shallow bowl, which everyone had thought to be deep, suddenly runs out. Not a word is to be said about the divorce, even after they have stared into thin air for minutes on end. At most let an *in the old days* slip out past their lips. Let them not talk about the child's weekend visits, the empty couch, or the red ladybird cushion buried under the clothes, though Mummy and Daddy are itching to know. What does a mother have to do to make her child choose his father? Naturally let the only thing that shows of all this be that Mummy tidies her chignon with the palm of one hand and Daddy picks at the fingernails of his left hand with the fingernails of the right.

Let the pop of balls bouncing filter in from the covered tennis court by the church. Let the smell of the hillock, sodden from yesterday's rain, drown the fragrance of furniture polish; let the noise of children seesawing with open overcoats and the squeaking of unoiled fittings drown out the sound of Daddy picking his nail. Have Mummy gently smack Daddy's hand. Let Daddy get up to take the beer from the fridge. *Your Dad's got a headache,* Mummy might say, to ward off the silence. Let their daughter look for painkillers in the cabinet in the closet, then sit down back at the table and place the pill in front of Daddy. Let him put it on his tongue, raise the bottle of beer to his lips, and take a few sips, but then let Mummy snatch the bottle from him. Get a glass for your Father. Let her daughter reluctantly, with a grimace, set a glass down in front of Daddy. Your wife is intolerable, Daddy, she might say to Daddy. Let's suppose Mummy is sucking a sweet; let her stare at her daughter's face from the side instead of saying anything. Any time the sweet clicks against her teeth, let Mummy and Daddy think of the ladies with lace gloves who attend morning concerts of classical music. Make Mummy obnoxious, ringed by a cloud of strong perfume, a Polish fragrance with a French name and an odour that does not dissipate even twenty-four hours later. Let her fondant melt under her tongue.

Let Mummy bang on the table, get to her feet and say, *alright, then.* She's had enough of zipping her lip. Let her unpack the vegetables she has brought from the kitchen garden in Csáb. Carrots, kohlrabi, celery, onions. While she

praises the merits of produce that has had no exposure to chemicals, let her search in the drawers for a knife suitable for peeling vegetables. Let those drawers be untidy, chaotic. Let the knob of one drawer come off in her hand; let all of the knives be blunt; let her daughter's household be disorderly, the cleanness only apparent. Mummy is to see a connection between her daughter's attitude towards cleanliness and her divorce. Daddy is to pick up a newspaper, unfold it, and set it down on the table that was left her by her husband. Let him roll up his shirt sleeves: let his daughter be fond of that gesture, let her look tenderly at her Daddy. Let her remember the time when an ant climbed up Daddy's arm. Let them chat about their youth and their daughter's childhood as they make a start on peeling the vegetables, let the onion skins fall to the floor. Let the family have its own language, to which Mummy sticks more firmly than any of them. Let happiness arise through remembrance, but equally let there be words that—by now—send a chill down the daughter's spine. Let her remember what Mummy said when she opened the door and found her masturbating: let Mummy be one of those people who turn aggressive when they are flustered.

At this point let them realize that the lentils have not been set to soak. Let Mummy slam down her knife on the table, pour boiling-hot water into a plastic bowl, look for the packet of lentils and empty them into the bowl to soak. Let's say Mummy sees a close connection between her daughter's ineptitude in the kitchen and her divorce. Let her think that her daughter is a neglectful mother. Let her make a blunder. Let Mummy begin speaking in Slovak when she is nervous. Let her fall silent in such a way that everyone notices that she has fallen silent. Let Daddy try to relieve the tension by recommending yoga exercises to counter forgetfulness. He can even get up to demonstrate. Let him step on the onion skins. Let's suppose it's not all the same at what point one breathes while moving the head round in circles, and whether the state of anaerobia is produced in the lungs, brain or stomach. Let him ask: get it? and let his daughter nod. Let Daddy's nose all of a sudden start bleeding due to the yoga exercise. Let's make Mummy half-Slovak, and let the thought that Mummy too was a child once make both Daddy and his daughter uneasy. Let Mummy jump over next to Daddy and stuff a tissue into his nostrils. Let Daddy tolerate this; let him be just like a child.

Let's suppose it grows dark abruptly and they don't notice that they have been sitting in semi-darkness for a fair while. Let the beams of the headlights of cars gliding in front of the tennis courts sweep along the strip of aluminium spikes mounted on the windowsill. But, if possible, let's not say "glide". Everything outside which previously had loosened, thawed and unfurled in the springlike sunshine should now begin to shrink and freeze. Let a pigeon searching for a clawhold on the spikes plunge two feet when it loses its balance. Let animals relate to human beings, their ugliness being very human,

let's suppose. Let youths setting off bangers take possession of the playground built at the foot of the tobogganing slope: let them clamber up into a miniature fortress, constructed in accordance with EU standards, tramp up and down the slide in their boots, and wind the chains of the swings round the cross-strut of the framework. Let's say Mummy's insides are given a turn by the first banger to explode. Let her fear the second and the third too, but unlike in the proverb, don't let it be better to fear than to be surprised. Let her hurry to the window (her shapely calves losing their shapeliness in slippers), curse the yobbos in Slovak and Hungarian. Let Daddy look at his daughter, trying to find any of the wife's features in her face. Let him fail to find any.

Let Mummy put the lentils on to cook. Let her look at the clock. Let them all look at the clock hanging on the dining-room wall. Let's say midnight is approaching, the time for telephone calls. Let anyone inclined to worry worry. Let Daddy yank from his nostrils the remaining bloodied tatters of the paper handkerchief. Let the neighbour upstairs bellow out his favourite music and hold a full sparkler-chucking dress rehearsal. Let the joy of others be painful; indeed, let high spirits be mistaken for joy. Let Mummy take out the bottle of Tokayska Lipovina and get Daddy to uncork it. Let their daughter bring long-stemmed, fluted glasses and roll her eyes when she sees that Mummy lifts them up to inspect them. She may come out with *another year gone by.* Let them not pour a glass for Daddy. Let them count up collectively, the way one does with coins found by chance or the days when a period is late, how long it's been since Daddy had his last drink (let's have surprising associations of ideas). Let's say it has been some nine years since Daddy quit drinking. Let that coincide with the time when their daughter settled in Hungary, and let Daddy feel a touch of guilt on that count. Let him open another bottle of alcohol-free beer. Let them raise their glasses of Lipovina to clink against his. Let them recall the son-in-law when he still had a beard, and when both Daddy and Mummy were smokers. Let them recall their grandson, who chose their son-in-law because their daughter was disorderly, cooked badly, and could not control her temper. Let Mummy notice the trampled onion skin on the floor and let her bend down to pick it up. Let them remember the red ladybird cushion under their daughter's piles of clothes. Let the glint of light on the spikes mounted on the windowsill shimmer like saliva on dentures.

Let Mummy rap the table again and say: *alright, then.* Let her switch on the radio so they do not miss the national anthem, and let her start talking politics. Let her be well aware that her daughter votes for right-wingers. Let Daddy see all too clearly the outcome of the debate, so let him try his best to get Mummy to belt up, and let Mummy sweep his hand, which trembles even at rest, off her thigh and carry on talking, reviling racists, Guardists, those obsessed by Trianon, in ever-more unbridled terms. Let's say that perhaps commas might be deleted between the items of the list. In the apartment above let cataclysmic rumbles

signal that the mood has reached a climax, with men straining their tonsils as if they were having a whooping fit. Let Mummy pour herself another glass of Lipovina and wind herself up to the point of shouting, with the tendons in her neck bulging, let her laugh-wrinkles bead with poorly absorbed face cream, the sparklers burning behind the kitchen window come tumbling down, and guttural laughter howl coarsely in the comedy programme on the radio. Let Mummy yank up the kitchen window like someone who is about to choke and breathe deeply. Let her gestures be stagy. Let Daddy close his eyes to let the air-starved cavities fill up with air, paying attention to the right order. Let their daughter sit mutely, and let no one say retrospectively what arguments should have been made to prove that she was right. Let there be no difference between opinion and person, and if either is struck down let the other fall too. Let's say that this time Daddy's nose does not bleed from the yoga breathing exercise, let's say only his hand trembles incessantly, whether he places it in his lap, under his armpit, on his knees, on his daughter's shoulder, or simply clutches the cold bottle of beer. Let Mummy calm down, if she is able to. Let her think of Kamenný vrch.

Let them get to their feet when they hear the national anthem. Let the rowdiness above take a break and the whole block quieten down. Let the national anthem find Mummy in the kitchen, Daddy and their daughter in the dining room. Let this be the point at which the pressure cooker starts whistling. Let them snatch up their glasses and search for a neutral object on which their gazes can rest, but there will be no such object. Let their wandering eyes fall on the craters left by nails and drawing pins removed from the end-borders of the panelling. In the meantime the pressure cooker should be whistling and the smell of smoked ham should spread. Let them recall how once their grandchild was seized by a laughing fit during the national anthem, but it should remain undecided whether in the end their daughter slapped his face or her fingers did no more than leave a mark on his arm. Let the pressure cooker scream incessantly. Let there be some difference between the insulting and the painful. Let the shadow of a smile lurk at the corners of Daddy's mouth, and on Mummy's pride. Let their daughter cling to the back of the chair when she notices the coloured crayon marks on a scrap of a child's drawing caught under the head of an unretractable drawing pin. Let her lips turn purple. Let the boy be called "the child", and the national anthem, the National Anthem. Let Mummy's presence be offensive, Daddy's painful. Let the final bars of the orchestral postlude be drowned out by explosions of fireworks and the tooting of cardboard trumpets.

Let Mummy switch the radio off the moment she hears the voice of the president of the republic. Let there be somewhere left for the nation to retreat to, after all. Let Mummy prop up the whistle on the pressure cooker with a fork and turn the gas off. Let Daddy take out the champagne, promising as he does every year: *it won't make a pop.* Let Mummy trust no one, let her get on Daddy's nerves with that pessimism of hers which hardly dampens her zest for

life, let her anticipate the pop of the cork with her eyes narrowed to slits and her neck strained backwards. Let Daddy manage to open the champagne noiselessly. Let their daughter be seated apathetically on her chair; let her heart be hammering, her temples throbbing. Let her be dreading the idea that she might not hear the sound of the telephone ringing in the New Year's din. Let her fail to notice that Daddy and Mummy have plans afoot and are searching for additional glasses in the kitchen cupboard. Let Mummy, as an exception, allow Daddy to drink two fingerbreadths of champagne. Let Daddy, hand trembling, hand his wife a full glass, pick up the other two and take them into the dining room. Let Mummy proceed ceremoniously behind Daddy and come to a standstill in front of her daughter like a living statue of herself. Let what Mummy says always be less than the way she says it, and let her hold one foot always a little bit in front of the other. Even in slippers. Let a commonplace be called a rite; habit, intimacy; the calf, a shank. Let Mummy be holding back on the tip of the tongue an *another year gone by*.

Let the telephone ring at six minutes past midnight, and let there be a sort of low point here at which the sentences, setting off from the high ground, finally trickle together before coming to rest in a dark lake with no surface. Let Mummy and Daddy's daughter leap up in such a way that her shoulder knocks the hand with which Daddy is holding his glass, and the champagne is spilled on Mummy's dress. Suppose that even on an ordinary weekday Mummy wears the sorts of dresses that her daughter would not put on even for a high day or holiday. Let her daughter trot to the telephone. Let her forget the impression she was seeking to arouse with the clothes heaped on the child's bed so that the tip of the red ladybird cushion should only just be poking out. Let her snatch up the receiver. Let the telephone be in the bedroom, so that Mummy must sneak up to the door in order to eavesdrop on what her daughter is saying. Let Daddy make an attempt to hold Mummy back by grabbing her arm. Let women be physically stronger than men as well; let them be unvanquishably more powerful. Suppose women are more like childless mothers, mothers men without male genitals. Let reference be made to the fact that at school PTA meetings Daddy, for the most part, said nothing, while Mummy had theories about *laissez-faire* upbringing, the meaning of some of Attila József's poetry, and the relationship between the loudness of a sneeze and the quality of an orgasm. Let a woman be a wound that is identical with the object that caused it. Let Mummy rip herself from Daddy's tingling hands and press herself to the wall and door frame.

Suppose their daughter's stooping posture is an expression of intentness stretched to breaking point. Let her turn towards the wall and rest her forehead on it. Under no circumstances let the wall be cold and her forehead blazing hot. Let their daughter clasp her hand over her free ear; let her hold her breath in order to hear every single word. Let the telephone cord pinch her under her

arm and the telephone receiver become slimy with sweat in her grip. Let the sight of the dusty cable sheathing on the floor carpet later cross her mind as a symbol of this first New Year's Eve spent without her son.

Let her six-year-old son's voice be stupid with sleep; let him speak softly, as if he had not fully woken up. Let him clumsily suppress his yawns. Let it be painful that her son wants to be well-behaved, tactful and disciplined. Let it be a disappointment that he recounts his experiences in short sentences, as if he had already read about them in a manual of child psychology. Let there be a newfangled note of sappiness in her son's voice, a melancholy savagery that he has not shown anyone. Let the whisper of his flannel pyjamas be audible. Suppose it is credible that a telephone receiver transmits odours: the odour of the mouth, tightly shut for hours, of a person suddenly woken from a deep sleep, the scalp's fragrance of tallow creeping onto the forehead. Let it outstrip every pain known so far that her son is being taught how to decipher letters by his father, not her. Let it become clear within three minutes that a blood relationship is not sufficient to yield a conversation topic, and there would be nothing to talk about if, against her better judgement, she did not ask her son for forgiveness. And let her son not absolve her, let him only say, when he wants very much to get back to bed, *it doesn't matter now, Mum,* as if he knew better than she did what sort of material his mother's aggression was made of, and that there are indeed situations when a person has to defend herself even against her own son, otherwise—otherwise she would melt away like the sweet in Mummy's mouth, and at such times one can even strike, indeed, it's better to strike than not to, just as it's better to speak out loud than not to the sentences that come to mind, as if she had never thought them, although they had not come to mind for years precisely because she was always thinking of them. Let these sentences be the lowest points of that dark lake with no surface. Finally, like someone who has learned how to fake things before he has learned how to experience them, let her son say in his newfangled sappy voice: *Happynewyear, Mum.*

Let her ready her finger to hang up before her ex-husband can reach the phone. Let her go over to the window, look out at the street, and, as has become her habit, toy with the idea of suicide. Let her notice a stray dog lurking by the tennis courts, trailing its dog collar behind it, its feet every now and again becoming entangled in the snare fashioned for its owner's hand. Let the light from the rockets exploding high up in the sky sweep over every single spike like the colours of overdiluted water paint. Let her return to her parents.

Let Mummy sneak into the dining room and moisten the champagne stains on her blouse at the kitchen tap. Let Daddy be standing about, wringing his hands and whispering in Mummy's ear, *not another word about politics.* Let Mummy nod and pass out the glasses of champagne. Let her not ask her daughter anything, but let her betray, precisely by not doing so, that she was

eavesdropping. Let them stand in a circle, smiling at one another. Let it be irksome for each to look at the others. Let Mummy notice that Daddy is again holding the glass by the fluting, and let's suppose she has an aversion to certain gestures, like the aversion the early dodecaphonists had to the repetition of notes. Let Mummy raise her glass and say, radiating an unearthly happiness: *šťastný nový rok,* and let Daddy wish Happy-New-Year in Hungarian, nudging Mummy with his elbow. Let Mummy strive to mask her unease by involuntarily raising her voice. Let her clear her throat, let her shapely calves start to itch, let her run the tip of her tongue over her upper lip, or else pout unconsciously, as she searches for the right words. *It's like this, my girl* (let her start off finally when she sees that the forty-year-old girl's attention is flagging). *Your father and I thought... that it's high time to switch from the polite to the familiar form of address.* Let Daddy fervently nod his approval. High time. Let Daddy reach out his glass to his daughter's. Suppose Mummy clinks glasses first with her daughter, then with Daddy. Let her kiss her daughter on the forehead, her husband on the lips. Let their daughter allow herself to be jostled from one hug to the other, but, over her parents' shoulders, let her not take her eyes off the needles and drawing pins pushed into the end-borders of the panelling. Let her down the champagne in one gulp, set her glass down on the table, and go to fetch a knife from the kitchen. Let her pull away the dining table. Let her press the knife blade under the head of one of the drawing pins and attempt to prise it out of the wood. Then the others—all of them. Let her push the table back into place, paying no heed to the fact that the screws have been loosened and the legs are again wobbly. Let her toss the nails and scraps of paper bearing traces of her son's drawings into the bin. As happens before an attack, let Daddy's parchment-coloured facial skin turn pale under the cheekbones. Green as grass, let a New Year streamer get caught on the row of spikes mounted on the windowsill. Let God be dead, and the odour of Daddy's mouth noticeable. Let a yellow rocket burst dandelions onto the sky over the housing estate. Let's see before our eyes the green of Modry Kamen, the undulating landscape often described as feminine; let's be homesick for never-seen villages tucked away in the troughs of valleys, dirt paths leading to the Kamenný vrch, and the blotchy strips of land on the flatland stretching out before Spaní laz. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Dénes Krusovszky

Poems

Translated by Jonathan Garfinkel

As If We Were Talking

(Mintha beszélgetnénk)

When the soup bowls are stacked
they make a sound like
a slow train
I don't want to be anywhere near.

Not because I'm afraid,
but in suburban afternoons
it is very difficult to keep
the balance between anger and boredom.

As if both my hands were ending in shopping bags.

Moreover these never-ending questions,
like now, how should I figure out
what I have in common with this
rusty pipe jutting out from the empty wall?

Collapsed movements. A foot
or a body part sticking out.

To feel the smell of another human being
is almost like
we were talking to each other.

Dénes Krusovszky
is a poet, critic and translator. A member of the group of young poets called Telep *(Settlement), he has published two volumes of poetry and has received several literary prizes.*

Forest Belt

(Erdősáv)

Something is still missing,
I can only show its empty space,
the marks of nails on a big white wall,
trees with white-washed barks.

*

I have a cage at the end of the garden,
but I don't have a dog in it,
a bit further off there's a forest belt,
at night, when the wind blows
it is audible even from here the garbage
caught between branches whispers.

*

If I wasn't afraid of the next line,
I would not continue.

*

He sits on the bench across the way and
does nothing, doesn't even
move, eyes
closed, but under the stretched skin

and the thick fat I can still
recognise the body of the young man.
How should I address you?
Father of remorse.

*

This was the place, exactly here.
We lie in the same bed,
back to back,
we are inhaling,
skins touch,
exhaling, separate.
Touching. Separating.
I will use up
your face like a soap.

Cheat Sheet #5

(Könnyített változat)

In a moment like this I should at least
say something reassuring,
because the way I look at you now,
it has something to do with nourishment.

But instead I only confuse the words.

To deceive you I compare you to
something that you cannot recognise,
and even if you could, I would deny it,
and when you are shouting, I still won't stop.

Dead Animals

(Halott állatok)

Until then, he loved those afternoons. The silent building, the empty corridors, and mostly that one room. Then that all went wrong too. He stepped in and knew something had changed. He looked at the glass cabinets, but had almost no strength left to open them. It's like when the first bad mood falls upon us: we feel it but cannot name it yet. Only this much: now, for the first time, forever, he saw many dead animals, pathetic. Nevertheless he started, wavering, the way we visit the places of lost joys. He stopped at the platypus, took it out of the case and blew off the dust. He passed his hand over its back, but nothing happened. Not this time. He read it out in vain: Ornithorhynchus anatinus, it did not help. Then he stepped over to the birds but suddenly there were too many of them. He could not understand why he cannot be glad. A hunter who feels remorse for what he's done. The hyena's eyes were two marbles, not dreadful, much worse. And suddenly everything was different, the school biology specimen collection, and himself as well, though just a little. The feeling that he cannot forget is this is all good for nothing. He sat on the floor and looked slowly upwards, two eagles fastened with a screw to the ceiling circled overhead. On his palms the last unsuccessful attempt, he started for the exit with the memory of an unbearably dry body. And he did not look back, because there was nothing to see.

István Kerékgyártó

Milán Trüffel,
or the Fortunes and Misfortunes of an Adventurer

Excerpt from the novel

The Diamond Necklace

It had been a year since I first met Zelma, and it was more out of guilty conscience than love that I equipped myself with a gift for the anniversary. By then I was bored with her. I was not truly in love with her even early on in our relationship; at first I was enthralled by her docility, then by her very wildness, for she turned wild in bed. I became her captive so to say, when I saw her nipples burst out of their pod, her clit emerge, and when I nibble on her calves she turns me into a savage male with her passionate cries, the averting of her eyes and, later on, her deep moaning. All the same, time and habit... In the course of my travels increasingly often I sought (and found) country beauties, and there were times when I did not go near the theatre for days on end. Zelma mutely tolerated this with never even a single word of reproach, and when I returned to her she would look up at me with tear-filled eyes and embrace me. So I equipped myself with a nice gift for the anniversary, which, in strictest confidence, I also conceived of as being a parting gift.

I took the morning train to Budapest and in a jewellery boutique in Haris Passage I picked out a necklace richly encrusted with diamonds.

"I'll pay by cheque," I said to the jeweller, who ran his eyes over my immaculate tails and glossy top hat before nodding and pushing an inkstand

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István Kerékgyártó
studied law and philosophy, taught history of philosophy as assistant professor at the University of Pécs (1977–87), then switched to business. He started to write at the age of 47—his first novel was based on his experiences in the business world—and has been a freelance writer since 1999. He has four novels to his name including Trüffel Milán avagy egy kalandor élete *(2009) from which the above excerpt is taken.* *It is reviewed by János Szegő on pp. 125–131 of this issue.*

before me. While I made out the bill of exchange, he retired to his office at the rear of the premises.

When he came back with a sour look on his face I realized that he must have tried to phone through to the bank to check if my account held three thousand crowns. But after all it is 1 o'clock on a Saturday afternoon; the banks are closed, but you can relax, my friend, the cheque is covered, I smiled to myself. The jeweller accepted the duly completed banker's order without a word; I pocketed the jewel and bill and left.

"May we have the pleasure of serving Sir again in the future," said the jeweller with a note of uncertainty in his voice.

Once on the train to Szolnok, I cautiously raised the lid of the box and marvelled at the sparkle of the diamonds. Then I suddenly snapped shut the lid on the velvet box, but with such force that the noise woke up a squire who was snoozing in one corner of the compartment. I sprang to my feet and looked out of the window before pacing uneasily in the corridor. I had got wind of something and now could not rest easily. I had myself taken from the station to a tavern; I picked out from among my costumes some raggedy working clothes that I donned when in the role of an apprentice miller, then I got out the frock coat that I wore as lead in the Gergely Csiky play, and after some deliberation stuffed this into my calfskin valise, along with a sheet of brown wrapping paper and ball of twine. First I asked the cab driver to take me to the central post office, where I telegraphed my friend, Ármin Komlós, then had myself taken to the railway station. Since the next train was headed for Cegléd, it was to there that I bought a ticket and went to the buffet to order a glass of beer. In the men's room I put on the frayed tails and left via the other exit onto the platform with a parcel wrapped up in paper, which I then deposited at the left-luggage office.

I reached Cegléd at six o'clock that evening. I found just one jeweller's shop on the high street—admittedly a fairly classy establishment. The jeweller had by then already removed the more valuable sparklers from the shop window and was pulling down the grille when I slapped him on the back to entreat, would the gentlemen be so good as to let me into the shop as I had a serious business proposal to make.

The shopkeeper sizes me up uncertainly, but when he steps behind the counter I pull the item of jewellery and the receipt out of my jacket pocket, set these down in front of him and launch into a lengthy explanation.

"I bought this pretty piece in a boutique in Haris Passage for my fiancée in Cegléd, but not long ago I caught the lady in question red-handed with someone else, and don't ask me, Sir, who the lady might be, because as a true gentleman I cannot reveal her identity under any circumstances. All I will say is that never again will I set foot in this sinful town because while the grain business is not exactly a finishing school for young ladies, I have never been gulled so badly even in that."

"Do I take that to mean that you are in the grain business, Sir?" the jeweller interrupted while eyeing me from head to toe several times with his left eye, the right still clenching the loupe through which he had been examining the necklace.

"Milán Trüffel, grain merchant, at your service, resident of Golden Duck Street in the Tabán District of Buda!" I give a bow.

"So, you purchased this piece in Haris Passage, Sir, at... Gyarmati's," he reads the gilt lettering on the lid of the box.

"Yes, by your leave," I reply readily.

"And you have a receipt for it too, I see," the jeweller takes the loupe off his eye, flicks a glance at the paper before his gaze fixes on the grubby lapel of my tails and then my immaculate top hat resting on the counter, nods as though he had cleared up the mystery: he was obviously dealing with a con man who had switched his worn titfer for this elegant number.

"Paid by cheque, I suppose?" he finally asked.

"Naturally, but what's that got to do with you?" I go onto the attack. "I don't want to buy from you, but I am looking to sell a necklace now that my fiancée has disgraced herself. I would make do with two thousand, even though, as you can see, I paid three thousand."

At this juncture, the jeweller's spouse steps out from the back of the shop and takes over from her husband the task of attending to me while he closes the door to his office behind himself. I imagine the first thing he did was to ask the switchboard girl to connect him with the shop at Haris Passage to ask if any check was run on the validity of my bank transfer as I now want to get rid of the piece of jewellery, and when he learns that they haven't, the next thing he'll do is ring the police—so that they can pick up a dangerous passer of fraudulent cheques.

When the police arrive I protest angrily that they will be making a big mistake to arrest me now. I mould the character in whatever way the mood takes me: I may entreat, but not as far as bursting into tears; I may raise my voice, but not shout. A student of verismo would be proud.

"This will cost you a pretty penny, Sir, if you don't withdraw your false and slanderous accusation right away! It will cost me a fortune to be arrested," I snarl into the proprietor's face.

He just laughs and rubs his hands: see what a smart invention the telephone is, dearest. "Didn't I tell you we should get connected! Right away we've unmasked this dangerous crook!"

The senior officer gets the proprietor to sign a piece of paper to the effect that he suspects me of passing forged cheques and I am then escorted to the local police station.

For the official record I then told the officer the story about how I came to purchase the jewellery, and I acknowledged that the purchase was made after

the banks had closed for business, but I vigorously assert that the balance in my account will amply meet the price, and I warn him emphatically that if I am not released, then I shall be unable to get back to Budapest, with horrendous losses.

"A contract to deliver fifty railcars of wheat from the Banat is waiting for me in Seehmann's coffee house, which, as I'm sure the officer is well aware is where the biggest grain deals are done, and if I'm not there by 10 o'clock on Sunday morning, the business will be lost and that will cost somebody dear!"

"Not me, that's for sure!" the officer grumbled, assiduously dipping his pen in the inkwell as he wrote down my statement. "A well-grounded complaint has been lodged against you based on reasonable suspicion. Until the matter is cleared up you'll be staying here."

I was fully aware, of course, that this meant I would have to kick my heels until ten o'clock on Monday morning, when the banks would next be opening for business.

How different now the click of the key locking the cell door from the time, eight years ago, when I was confined in that transit slammer! At that time I was overcome by immense anguish, whereas now I stretched out contentedly on the doss. At nine o'clock that evening I rattled up the duty officer to offer him fifty Crowns if he would get a hot dinner sent over from the inn in the market square.

"If possible a locally shot hare with a sauce on the sour side and dumplings—and not just one but three portions so we can both tuck in and anyone else on duty. Choose whatever you care for to drink, Sergeant!"

The sarge was dubious of taking custody of such a large sum of money—almost a month's pay for an ordinary policeman—but half an hour later the door of the cell was opened and I was asked to come along to the duty room, the supper had arrived. Rabbit with a chasseur brown sauce, and beer to go with it from a five-liter jug, if that was alright by me. It was.

Nothing remarkable happened in the duty room the next day, on the Sunday, unless you count the fact that for breakfast we ate grilled black pudding with fried onions and scalding-hot white liver sausages with grated horseradish and English mustard, again with beer to go with them, after which the sergeant had a menu brought over from the Crown restaurant for us to take our pick of lunch.

"But gentlemen! Gentlemen! Don't be shy! Don't look at the prices! After all, we only live once, is that not so?" I slapped the corpulent sergeant on the back. He had cast his eyes over the fare on offer while tiny bubbles of saliva appeared in the corners of his mouth.

During the day I whiled the time away in the office, leafing through some interesting police newspaper, and after lunch I asked to be able to retire to my cell for forty winks of a siesta. There I was reminded of my old mate, Komlós, who had talked me into trying my hand with dodgy cheques. I can heartily recommend breaking with a girl like this, Ármin, you old mucker, I chuckled to

myself. Just before the evening change in shift the two duty sergeants locked the door to the clink, but they soon asked me to come along so they could introduce me to the pair of coppers who were relieving them. They said mournful farewells before setting off home, where the milted remains of their Sunday lunch were no doubt awaiting.

The cell door swung open again at 10.30 on the Monday morning. I stood, washed and freshly shaved, by my kip and, head craned forward and with angelic patience, awaited the police officer's contrite explanation.

"Sir," he started off, "we are all victims of a terrible misunderstanding. Your bank, Sir, has communicated to us that there is ample surplus of cash in your account to cover the cheque in question. I humbly beg your pardon, and can only hope you were treated well. You are of course free to leave at once a building that is now, no doubt, associated with bad memories for you." He clicked his heels and handed me the necklace.

I asked for a copy of the official report, to which all I said was:

"You have some fine men, lieutenant. I have no problem with the police force, and I am not going to claim compensation from you for the huge losses I have incurred, unlike the jeweller who lodged the false accusation."

The officer spread his hands before stiffly saluting me by way of parting.

I took a train back to Szolnok, withdrew my parcel, changed, had myself driven to my quarters, where I took possession of a telegram with a Saturday date from a certain Ármin Komlós. It was addressed to Milán Trüffel Esq. c/o Count Sigray. After that I went over to Zelma's place and presented her with a gift of a necklace richly encrusted with diamonds. Her tears of joy plopped onto the blue velvet box.

"But that must have cost you a fortune, my love!" she sniffed.

"A mere bagatelle, I can assure you!" I retorted. "I may even have turned a profit on the transaction."

We both had a good laugh on that; Zelma sat on my lap, her calves delicately trembling, and when I noticed that I began drawing shorter, deeper breaths.

It was not until the Wednesday that I travelled back to Cegléd, by which time I could be sure that the story of the jeweller's mistake would have been spread all round town and his friends duly scared him out of his wits. After all, a prosperous trader has no greater enemies than envious friends. First of all, I rapped on the front door of the solicitor who flaunted the flashiest brass plate on the high street, showed him the receipt and the official police report as well as a telegram in which I had received an offer to purchase a considerable quantity of wheat that would expire at 10 a.m. on Sunday.

"The forfeiture of that deal has cost me around six thousand crowns, and given time I shall be able to append suitable expert opinions to that effect," I told the solicitor. "I wish to seek that amount by suing the Cegléd jeweller in question for punitive damages for slander and making a false accusation."

The legal eagle read through the documents after which we strolled over to the jeweller's shop.

I nodded reticently, with the jeweller being astounded to clap his eyes on my dapper tails before my legal adviser suggested they have a talk in the back room. Later on the solicitor drew me to ask,

"Is there no other solution, your Honour, because a lawsuit of this nature, particularly if punitive damages are sought, can ruin the jeweller, even if not financially then at least in regard to his reputation."

"I have no rooted objection to a settlement outside court," I replied. "A trial might carry on for years, and even though I have no doubt I shall win, and any award would be payable with interest, that will be of no use to me in buying any grain tomorrow. Compared with that, seeing the jeweller convicted is of little interest to me."

It took three rounds of negotiation by the legal eagle before we agreed on a sum of eight thousand crowns.

I took delivery in cash, plucked out a one-hundred crown piece and handed it to the solicitor before signing a declaration that I had no claims, nor outstanding matters of honour or legal redress, against the jeweller.

When the solicitor had left the jeweller could still not get over staring at me. I rapped my silver-capped walking cane on the counter before him and declared:

"You're too hasty to judge, my friend! Reckless even! To chuck eight thousand crowns out of the window like that," I shook my head and left.

I paused for a moment in front of the shop door before making a barely perceptible nod towards the street. I pinned my ears back for the sound of applause, but there was only a many-petticoated washerwoman, basket on head, to take a quick glance at me before hurrying on. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Miklós Vajda

Scenes from Adolescence in a Minefield

A Memoir

In memoriam Béla Abody

Part 2

The gambler

During our last two years at grammar school, in the more boring lessons, wild card games would be played in some of the desks—poker and chemin de fer for penny-ante stakes. Béla however played cards outside school as well, and for far from piddling stakes; he also went to the races. He owed much money while still at school, which, needless to say, he was in no position to pay back, and the meter of that debt kept ticking for much of his life—maybe to the very end. He was born unlucky at cards, being a thoughtless, impulsive and garrulous player, so that anyone with an ounce of sense could easily tell from his expressions, his behaviour and his spiel what kind of cards he held and what he was aiming to do. His partners would, of course, take full advantage. Notwithstanding the constant losses, while playing he was as happy as a child, or perhaps—to be more accurate—a drug addict who has got his fix. To him gambling was a constant expectation of some kind of miracle, an irresistible, eternal fifty-fifty chance of winning and getting rich. He worked out any number of strategies and systems in settings where blind chance beat any logic. During a game he would feel he was in his element, and the outside world, along with all its troubles and woes, would simply cease to exist.

He began trying to patch over the bottomless drain with small loans from friends, then, after his father's death, he sold off the substantial library volume by

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Miklós Vajda

an essayist, critic and literary translator, was the literary editor of this journal (1965–1990) and its editor (1990–2005). In addition to translating a great number of works by British, American and German authors including about five dozen plays for the theatre, he selected and edited anthologies of Hungarian writing in English and British/American writing in Hungarian. An excerpt from the memoir Anyakép, amerikai keretben *(Portrait of a Mother in an American Frame, 2008) was published in* HQ, *No.191. The book was reviewed by John Batki in* HQ, *No. 198.*

volume, and later on the furniture in the Abody home which, I imagine, contained a fair number of valuables and objets d'art. As the years went by, the villa at Leányfalu and even a block of flats in Vienna fell victim to this gambling addiction. For all that, he was quite incapable of kicking the habit even when he was a husband and father. In the mid-fifties, when I worked for a big literary publishing house, he would sometimes show up at the office and, hat in hand, do the rounds of friends' rooms, literally begging, truly begging, and he was irresistible. There was in these displays everything from his grotesque determination in gym classes through 'Boarding' and 'Sniffing' to 'Biting a Hat' and 'Flat of the Sword'—all his early successful paranoid manifestations. He was more than ready to sing for money, or pray, dance, get down on his knees, kiss our hands, undress, eat paper, drop ashes on his head, or spout any sort of nonsense. We would put in an order for whichever production we fancied, tossing as much money into the hat as we could afford, that is, very little. At the back of the clowning (which was just as much a drug for him as the gambling) serious worries weighed him down. Right then he was unemployed, and I was soon to learn for myself what that meant even without being a gambler deep in debt. In 1958, during the reprisals of the Kádár regime in the aftermath of the 1956 revolution, I too got the sack for political reasons and spent six years "freelancing", that is without a job. I made a living by translation, by writing for juvenile radio, doing reviews of the foreign educational literature, etc., and scavenging for any scraps of literary work going. Those were dangerous times and it was hard to retain one's self-respect and stay politically clean. Always in the shadow of the pawnbroker's, one was at the mercy of various bosses and the speed of work of bookkeepers and cashiers. Béla also lost his job, and he did not manage even then to kick cards. On more than one occasion this resulted in destitution for his family.

An undated letter on Magvető Publishing House stationery was presumably written after 1957, the year after the Revolution, when Béla was sacked as Literary Director. He is asking for money, but he is clowning even then:

> Dr. lib. sex. Miklós Diodor Vajda, (by the Grace of God) lawful Tsarevitch and Responsible Editor. Affectionately Esteemed Coz Miklós, Szépirodalmi Publishing House and Everyone in General! Here I am, totally bereft of all luck, on 600,000 units of penicillin a day and running a temperature of 38.5–40°C, on indefinite certified sick leave and all that. In this connection I hereby plead: there is not 1 farthing here at home, and from today we shall be forced to desist from cooking. As I am immobilized, I am unable to chase any emoluments that are owing nor can I sell anything. I entreat you to drum something up: send me tomorrow via Beezer approx. 100 forints for prompt repayment on recovery. As said, not 1 brass farthing! By pooled contributions if need be! [...] A Hungarian cannot abandon another Hungarian in his hour of need! A thousand years' memories commit us! [...] In the event that perchance I should predecease or leave the country before reimbursement of my outstanding debts,

the publication rights of my works, together with my library—except for the works of Béla Illés,* which I would ask you to be so kind as to bury in my grave (provided the Church administration puts no obstacles in the way)—shall pass to my friends, the body of editors of the Szépirodalmi Publishing House. To which end I wish you similarly and in addition embrace you,

Your Coz and friend, Béla

PS. I can assure you that the money will be devoted solely to the most necessary subsistence owing to the very fact that I shall be bedridden for the foreseeable future.

The amoroso

We knew that after our upcoming school-leaving exams our paths would diverge, and there would be no more loafing around The Poster of an afternoon to discuss everything that interested us. The happy era of 'Boardings', 'Sniffings' and 'Dustings Downs' had come to a close. Tomasz was preparing to study Natural Sciences, Béla and I Arts at the Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest. Those magically dazzling autumnal early afternoons would petrify into a painfully beautiful past. There would be no more strolling round in Móricz Circus. It was imperative, therefore, that we make good use of the time that was left us in the break before the exams.

It started with telephone pranks. One day at around three o'clock in the morning (I have no idea where and for what reason we were knocking around together at three o'clock in the morning) Béla on behalf of the local fire station rang up Bubi, a popular vibraphonist. We had long been fascinated by that nickname, as well as by his line of work: how could anyone dare call himself Bubi, and what possible connection could this have with playing the vibraphone? And anyway, what the heck was a vibraphone, and what demand was there in Hungary for a vibraphone player, particularly one by the name of Bubi, in these historic times? Béla informed the sleepy-sounding musician that they had several times taken a false fire alarm from that building, including one just beforehand, but they didn't want to scramble again to attend a house fire that had never been. That was a costly business, so Béla was calling to ask him to check in the loft to see if it was truly on fire. Bubi protested that he had been working the whole evening and had only just got to bed and begged them to get someone else to go up and check, at which he passed on the names of a few other tenants. "I imagine we were playing the vibraphone, weren't we?", Béla switched

* Béla Illés (1895–1974), one of the Hungarian Communist exiles in Moscow, a dilettante writer. He returned to Hungary in 1945 as a high-ranking press officer (strictly behind the front line) in the Red Army. His dreadful novels about the fighting in Hungary—in which he did not take part—were published in huge print runs. A street in central Budapest was named after a fictitious Soviet soldier who was the hero of one of his novels. The name survived right up to the end of the Communist regime.

ominously to pleasantry. "I'm very sorry, sir, but we have to insist on you personally because you are a well-known musician, and we trust you. The safety of the whole block of flats, indeed the whole street, might be hanging in the balance, yourself included. Would you please go up to the loft at once to check and I shall call again in a quarter of an hour to hear your report." A good half an hour later Béla called the same number. This time it was a woman who answered—obviously Mrs Bubi—in somewhat of a panic because she had not seen her husband since he went out to check the loft, but she hadn't dared to go up for him because she had been expecting us to call back. Clearly, the master of the vibraphone, out of sheer weariness, must have flopped down and gone off to sleep somewhere in the loft. "That means there really must be a fire!" was what Béla shouted excitedly. "We'll be there!" at which he put down the phone.

Tomasz fed us a tidbit he had picked up that on the terrace of a neo-Baroque villa next to the nearby Eötvös College a fair young lady, who was said to answer to the nickname Hopi, was in the habit of sunbathing in the nude early in the afternoon, when the sun was in that direction. The students of the College would trample over each other to cluster around the windows that overlooked the terrace in order to get a peek at her. Béla immediately decided that he would effect an approach which was worthy of him, using his own devices. Mobilizing his entire verbal armoury and irresistible self-deprecating irony, he wrote a whole series of long, ardent love letters on a practically daily basis and would drop them into the villa's letter box (though not before reading them out to us, of course). The letters were the equivalents, in brilliant modern prose, of the troubadour poetry of the Middle Ages, and it's a great pity that none have survived. He would recount to the lady the monotony of his own life, which was only made tolerable by the reveries he wove about her, although he knew the dreams were in vain. He was well aware that with him being a student and of a somewhat disadvantageous external appearance, but nevertheless blessed in several respects with talents that were out of the ordinary, he had little chance of winning the lady's favours, but that did not douse but rather inflamed his fervent sentiments and impelled him to prove his devotion in every possible way. Whatever she desired, he was ready to carry out, whatever the nature of the wish. All he asked was that he be granted just a single glimpse, even if it be for a gesture of dismissal, in a single brief encounter of just a minute at the garden gate—that would last him until he died. He signed the letters and furnished them with his real address, but he never received an answer.

There came a point beyond which it was possible to sense that he had worked himself seriously into the affair, making it a matter of prestige to get some sort of reaction out of fair Hopi. Who knows, he may even have fallen in love with the lady, whom he had never seen. He was unable to reconcile himself to another failure. As he had no money to spend on presents, in the evenings he was reduced to tossing over the fence—like sacrificial objects on the altar of love—books of his own that had already been read to tatters by him and which he supplied with

impassioned inscriptions. Hungarian writers, Thomas Mann, volumes of Schopenhauer, Abody's own early efforts—all flew over the fence with a swish or flutter of the wings to land with a thud on the lawn, though by the next day they would always have disappeared. He took that to be a good sign. It was impossible to withstand a siege of this kind for any length of time, he would assert: in the end, any woman would succumb, he declared, as if he possessed abundant experience in this domain. One had to stick at it and success was bound to come. At that point he had only sold off a few of the books of his deceased father's library, so there was a sizable selection to choose from. He tried various genres, so that volumes of poetry, novels and memoirs were among those that took wing. In the end he reached a point where he decided that each day he would throw over an item of his own clothing. Having no sense of shame, and being impervious to the cold, he would have been quite capable of returning home in his underpants, or even without them. From that we managed to dissuade him until finally a grand idea, a plan for an unrivalled gesture of love, came to him.

At the time, the Simplon cinema on the corner of the Circus was featuring *The Soil Under Your Feet,* a new Hungarian film set in a peasant milieu. Late one evening, after the last showing of the film, our gang, with a few volunteers to support us, turned up outside the now dark and closed cinema and, looking like people with a real job to do, set about dismantling from over the front the huge canvas with the title and portraits of the leading actors. The most agile among us clambered up the wall and unhooked and handed down the successive panels. Having done this, within a few minutes we were ready to make off with the fairly heavyweight token of love, and in the sparse night traffic, calmly as you like, without the least commotion and with one of us even grumbling loudly that the cinema should make us work this late, we were able to cut across the Circus and carry the panels over to Ménesi Avenue to the College. There each panel in turn was lifted over the fence of Hopi's villa, and one of the lads made so bold as to climb over the fence into the garden and arrange them most effectively in a way that, on Béla's reckoning, the first thing the fair Hopi's glance would fall on when she looked out of the window in the morning would be the gigantic portraits of Ádám Szirtes and Ági Mészáros, the happy couple in the story.

By the next day even that peerless gift had vanished from the villa's lawn.

The disamorist

Mr Miklós Vajda, Former Director of the Genithalia Society.
(Miklós)!!

It is possible that I shall partner you in mourning women!! Women = faeces + urine + vagina. Not that that's a problem, so said Hans Heinz Ewers, since the first two components, being part of us too, are negligible, whereas the latter may be procured or may possibly be produced mechanically! Survive!! If I am to go into partnership with

You, You shall be my lover, you being reliable and possessing a better quality of feelings than women do, that is to say. You may even bear me pretty little children. Learn how to cook—I insist! Another method in connection with women: fix their pubic hair to a propeller, start up and meanwhile place in their anus eight or ten bullfrogs (of more mature years!) and raise them there. Wind the entrails of Sándor Gergely* round their nose and screw that until it bleeds (then wash the blood off). Run a trotting race on their brow, and in those races place a 10–20 forint bet on Simkó. Split their kneecaps in two with an axe, place in them two of the older annual volumes of *Magyar Futár***, stitch them back together, bake till done. [...] To be more serious, Kipphardt's plays outgrow the spectrum of intransigent cosmology as can be seen from the Feuerbach theses (Gieseking, Kubelik, Slachta, Czibor, Erdős etc.) where you ought to read what I underlined. One can also find ready solace. My suggestions (NB the DISZ*** organization knows about this): have her clitoris photographed, hang that up in the pantry, switch the light off, sit at the foot of it and eat bacon and onions. Or even pals' marriage with a kindred girl from Finland, a dowry is of no importance. Still good value: masturbation, religion, suicide, reading Dante, etc. I will even draw how I picture a woman's fate in Hungary. [...] Like that, then.

My embraces, Béla Abody, certified field guard.

The illustrated letter stems from our first year at university. It was sent at a time when I was going through the first big crisis in my love life and offered friendly solace and solidarity. We were very close friends and still shared our troubles, joys and woes in the field of love. Due to a strict religious upbringing, which included any amount of sermons and edifying literature praising the heroic self-sacrifice of mothers, I was under the impression that for women the sexual side of life was a painful, ignominious and disgusting matrimonial duty, and it was only out of self-sacrifice, obsequious love for their husband and an instinctive desire to bear children that they allowed a man to have his pleasure. Why otherwise would Jesus's mother have remained a virgin? The answer was clear: this is how the Heavens had spared her humiliation, though not the pains of childbirth—those were not humiliating but joyful. Joy through humiliation—that is Heaven's reward to women. I was strengthened in my belief by Béla's summary of a misfired romance, in which, as he related, "some naturalism" did occur, but the affair foundered in the end on the girl's unwillingness and, later on, her outright resistance. To me that was readily

* Like Béla Illés, Sándor Gergely returned to Hungary as a member of the exiled Hungarian community in Moscow. He wrote a quantity of dire novels.

** *Magyar Futár* [Magyar Messenger], founded in 1941, was an illustrated weekly magazine of the home-grown far right.

*** DISZ was the Communist youth organization fashioned after the Soviet Komsomol. Membership was obligatory for university students.

understandable: both were still at secondary school and the thought of having children was out of the question. I could understand Béla's raging jealousy, but at heart I felt the girl was right.

Those conjectures seemed to be fully vindicated when, a bit later, already as a first-year student of Hungarian literature at university, I volunteered to coach the phenomenally pretty, slender, blue-eyed, brown-haired daughter (for whom I secretly harboured tender feelings) of an acquaintance's family for her approaching school-leaving exams. One afternoon—a warm autumn early afternoon, of course—she was the only one at home and received me lying in bed, complaining that she did not feel well and was very tired. I was eagerly reeling off some explanation, quite possibly about the interesting theoretical and historical background behind the practice of metrical classicizing prosody and its significance in the work of the early nineteenth-century poet Dániel Berzsenyi, when she suddenly grabbed me by the wrist and placed my hand on her breasts under the blankets. I stopped breathing. She closed her eyes and, her face contorted, pulled my hand round and about on her breasts, meanwhile emitting loud panting sounds and taking deep breaths. It wasn't exactly an unpleasant sensation, but I felt truly sorry for her on seeing her suffering. Poor girl, this was her self-tormenting way of debasing herself to try and recompense me for my voluntary help—her way of thanking me, a crude, lustful, insensitive male dolt. I was sincerely moved. Before long she pulled my hand lower down, lower and more inwardly, which was more than interesting, and she even murmured something I didn't catch. Her anguish then reached its climax: she threw her head back, whimpered from the pain, made tiny squealing noises and began to toss around. That was more than enough; I could not be party to such pain, so after a brief hesitation I withdrew my hand from under the blanket. Instead of regarding me with the gratitude I had expected, the girl put on an aggrieved expression, looking at me scornfully, without a word: so I was unwilling to express my appreciation for her mortifying self-sacrifice. Distraught, I carried on with Dániel Berzsenyi, but she paid no attention. A few days later, she telephoned and told me that she was ready for the exams and thanked me for my valuable help. Béla, as a sympathetic friend, listened to my account with knowing nods of the head: he had undergone experiences of a similar kind, almost exactly the same thing had happened to him in the back row of a cinema. He had taken the girl several times to the Opera, he recounted, he had talked to her a lot about Verdi, music and singing, and that it was on that account the girl had sought to show her gratitude. Lost in thought, we hummed and hawed for a while before Béla quietly commented that "In my modest and humble opinion, my dear Mr Pussycat, world literature would seem not to bear out our conception, nor, it stands to reason, the opera literature." He cited examples, but he was telling me nothing new, I was already acquainted with all of them, but the girl's symptoms still seemed more convincing, more tangible, one might say: that was true Life, not literature or art,

I said. Some big secret was lurking about here that only women knew about, we concluded. "In your shoes, however, I would have made use of the opportunity, my Prince, once the girl, of her own accord, had determined on sacrificing herself," said Béla, ever the opportunist. Perhaps covertly he even laughed at me.

Years later a far bigger disillusionment in the arena of love was intensified almost to the pitch of intolerability as my beloved's behaviour showed me beyond doubt that women have absolutely no objection to intimacy—far from it as more often than not it was they who took the initiative. I could have banged my head against a brick wall for having passed up that ravishing girl, but now I was head over heels in love, and that love was fulfilled until, for extraneous reasons, it came to an end. A new advice-strewn letter from Béla reached me when I was still in the realms of happiness.

1. One cannot expect the betrothed to make themselves available biologically to one another at every stage of the day (work, menstruation, phimosis, newspaper reading, heavy breathing, etc.).

[...]

3. Protect yourself against alcoholism on the part of your affianced not by administrative measures but by peaceful persuasion (e.g. unscrewing of the clitoris, placing a classified ad in the Party press, having her declared a crocodile before a public notary, etc.).

[...]

11. Love and the religious life are not opposed but categories which complement each other. The soft parts should be bound by a rosary while applying friction with a toe. With major divergences the parties should simply agree to combine the differences, after which agreeable oral coitus, if at all possible in a wide circle of friends.

[...]

15. Married partners would do best to counter any homosexual temptations by seeking protection from members of the opposite sex—if need be one another, but that is boring.

[...]

17. So that a husband should always be able to recognize his wife even in the dark, it is most expedient to place a flask in the sexual organ containing the most essential data relating to the woman (name, place of birth, age, the usual time of menstruation, academic record, party membership) in several languages (to exclude any misunderstandings). In the dark the flask simply has to be pulled out and the data can be checked even by the light of a match in order to spare ourselves many unpleasant mistakes.

We stand ready to offer these and similar advice and information on request by word of mouth if wished, and will pay house calls if invited. For a trivial advance we are prepared to investigate the sex life of the married partner. In flagrante situations, scenes and grounds for divorce at favourable prices by special request. Love letters undertaken. A wide range of substitute gratifications. English spoken.

The usual clowning, but I detected a touch of envy. For a long time he considered himself as being "a starving member of the suppressed sexual proletariat," who "like a twentieth-century Icarus, attempts to reach heaven by a manual propulsion vehicle", and who was struggling for liberation under the slogan "sexual proletarians of the world unite!"

On the occasion of a shared summer holiday by Lake Balaton after leaving university, in the mid-fifties, we scraped together the money to rent a room over the butcher's shop in Balatonszemes. One night we lay in the butcher's matrimonial bed, above our heads a wedding photo of the young butcher couple and a sombre-featured Christ, who held his flaming heart crowned with thorns in his hands. Somehow we started talking about Béla's disappointments in love when at school and in particular the deceitful addressee of the *Otello* record. "Permit me, my Prince, to set forth for you the essence of my disamorizing method. One might equally name it an amoriphagic therapy, it comes to the same thing. One day it may come in handy for you too, as you will not be a phallic triumphalist forever. And don't you take offence at that, Mr Pussycat, rather as one of the rare manifestations of my secretely harboured, heartfelt envy. You in point of fact are the sole phallic triumphalist with whom I am willing to share the same bed."

I was curious, because at the time Béla had seemed to get over his unhappiness remarkably quickly. I myself had felt sick for months on end for much the same reason, as if I had been banged on the head. The next time I was hit even more cruelly.

"The purpose, is it not, is the radical elimination of a strong bondage, the self-liberation of an emotional slave. There was the poet Attila József, poor chap, who in his great 'Ode' tried at one and the same time to experience both the extensive and the intensive totality of love, which of course is completely absurd and may, at most, produce great poetry but takes one no closer to the essence which our hypocritical society and our literary language, hence he too, shrinks from calling by its rightful name. As you may recall, he describes with transfigured ardour certain presentable parts of the adored woman's long-craved body and their functions. What he did not write down, but no doubt thought, his psychiatrists could tell us a thing or two about. So anyway, my Prince, what you need to do is to put all your might into concentrating on the less exaltable or, one might equally say, ordinary and repugnant functions of the loved body. Not forgetting, of course, the technique as well as processes which are exclusively typical of the female gender—devote special attention to these. Given that you, like me, possess a highly developed imagination, it cannot present a great problem for you to picture before you her...," and at this point I tried to interrupt, object and get him to can it, but in vain. With his matchless verbal skills he began to describe colourfully and suggestively, in a didactic tone of voice and in merciless detail, all the things that I had no wish to picture, witness or take any cognizance of. Using my highly developed imagination, I tried in horror, desperately, to hang on to the idea of all

the women who were beautiful, clever, desirable, brilliant and worthy of respect, whom I had ever loved in life, and those I had not, even the ugly ones, the evil and the little dunces, any woman at all in the whole wide world, because I was not prepared to let them be disgraced by this monstrous insanity. In the end, they themselves, the darlings, rescued me so I should be able to fall in love again with a girl whom I could idealize and adore. Fortunately, I managed to occupy myself doing this, because Béla meanwhile switched from the female sex to his own extensive and intensive totality with an equally bloodcurdling detailed analysis.

"'*Homo sum, nihil humani a me alienum puto,*' we learned the adage at school, if you still recall, in other words nothing human is strange to me, my dear Prince, including the functions of my own body. So much so that once, out of sheer curiosity I looked at the one thing a mortal is unable to see with his own eyes. I squatted down in the bathroom and, to put it crudely, I shat on a mirror. My poor, dear departed father's shaving mirror it was—you know, the sort with a magnifying mirror on one side. The spectacle was, how can I put it, revelatory; it would have been a great sin to omit that! One might compare it to childbirth, but whereas the latter is positive, joyful and a process which points ahead, to the future, given that it means arrival, this is departure, that is to say, negative, a sort of dehumanized, solid essence of the past taking leave—although that departure, as we know, can sometimes itself be joyful too. In any event, I kept on watching in the mirror as long as the mirror itself was still visible...," but at this point I went through the motions of being bored, yawned and turned to face the wall, but he did not let himself be put out even by that. I could have strangled him, but then he was bigger and much heavier than me. Eventually he finished by saying "at the end I wiped the mirror clean, of course." "Glad to hear it, I was getting worried," I said and switched off the light.

The hunger artist

The next summer, in 1954, the three of us made a trip to Balatonszemes: this time Pál Réz, a mutual friend, a colleague of mine at Szépirodalmi Publishers and one of Béla's regular partners at cards, also came along. Right at the start, Béla wanted to start a rumour on the train about it being such a pity for the Balaton, one of Europe's largest and loveliest lakes, that work on draining it was imminent: it was going to be turned into rice paddies. In fact, by the end of the Five-Year Plan, alongside heavy industry, rice would guarantee the bulk of the exports of the Hungarian people's economy and a speedy rise in living standards. In a period of "gigantic Soviet nature-transforming constructions" the notion was not as inconceivable as it was bullshit. He started talking about it loudly in the corridor, but I managed to shut him up by mentioning my mother. She, poor thing, spent several years in Rákosi's prison on account of precisely such alarming rumours she never even spread. Béla was in irrepressible high spirits thanks to

the summer holiday which lay before us and never stopped shooting the breeze. He proposed that we play cards and produced a deck. By the time we reached Balatonszemes we had won all his money and he was left with not even a penny for the holiday. He played as inattentively as a small child might, constantly clowning, so we found ourselves winning even when that was not the intention, even cheated in order that he would win back at least some of what he had lost, but to no avail. He was not even willing to pack it in—it was quite useless our protesting that we considered the whole game null and void and would return the money, he was even unwilling to accept it as a loan. "I resent the offer as being humiliating and deeply insulting to my honour as an officer and gentleman, and I reject it out of hand. You are requested to forbear from similar provocations in future, or failing that I shall be forced to resort to more drastic means such as castration, singing baritone arias, duelling, switching to the polite form of address, taking diplomatic measures, et cetera, and so on." Far from the high spirits deserting him, he couldn't contain himself; the holiday promised to be an even bigger adventure than we had imagined. All he asked was for us to purchase for him a large pot of mustard and a large bottle of Bambi orange syrup as that would suffice, and at least he would shed a few pounds.

We bought him the mustard and the appalling artificially flavoured, artificially coloured concentrated chemical concoction, the only soft drink you could buy at the time. To drink it one was supposed to dilute it considerably. Béla dandled the two heavy bottles in his arms, dipping an index finger alternately into the one, then the other, and licking his finger with relish. In the evening, when Réz and I sat down in the station's outdoor restaurant to have supper, he stayed off the premises and in a loud voice complained about us to passers-by. We had perfidiously stripped him of all his money, he explained to total strangers, pointing to us, for all that he was an honest working man, and now he was starving, having been left without a penny, he was unable to buy supper, hadn't even had lunch. Before scandal broke out, Réz called over: "Alright, young Béla, now come inside like a good little boy. There, there, now be a good little boy and sit up and beg!" Béla got down on his knees by our table, opened his mouth wide and begged like a huge dog. We tossed him bits, and if he was not able to catch them in his mouth, with a big racket he would gobble them up from the ground. "Take it for granted that I'm gratefully wagging my tail," he said, "only sadly, there are technical and other constraints that I beg to be permitted to refrain from enumerating," we heard coming partly from under the table. It was a resounding success, people laughed and thought he was merely playing the fool, though in reality he must have been ravenous by then, but even so he wanted to stand by his word. It was much the same sort of paranoid manifestation as the begging at the publisher's. He secured momentary help without doing anything, of course, about his problems.

To save money, we again rented the matrimonial bed above the butcher's shop in Balatonszemes, with Réz finding a room a few doors away. Béla and

I walked him there when it was time to go to bed. Of an evening, in keeping with village ways, the locals were sitting out in front of most of the houses, chatting. Béla's voice, though, could be heard a long way off as we took leave of Réz: "Sleep tight, Paulie, and no playing with your dingaling, mind, or you'll be really poorly and you won't be able to come with us to the beach!" What he was not counting on was that Réz, on the spur of the moment, would hurl back a riposte in true Bélaesque style to the effect of: "And don't you go on molesting poor Miklós again, he's had enough trouble from you as it is! That's pretty sick too!"

That had never happened to Béla before. He was winded and suddenly he was left unable to cap that. The two of us, or three if you count Tomasz, were old and trusted friends and only rarely did we pull the leg or have a dig at one another, and never in front of others. A shared adolescence, the surrealistic magic of sunny, autumnal early afternoons, school-day mornings and Móricz Zsigmond Circus evenings had developed a different kind of solidarity, a fraternal sort of bond between us. Réz, by contrast, had come from an environment which was foreign to us, bringing a harder-hitting, more earthy, tough-guy sort of humour. A person would find himself constantly under scrutiny by him with his ever-alert, sharply critical character and unmerciful humour, and if you did not watch out, he would pitch into you quite ruthlessly.

This time when Béla and I sat down on the bed and started to undress, I produced a couple of slices of bread that I had managed to slip into my pocket without rousing Réz's attention. "There you are, doggie!" I said tenderly because I was well aware that he must be starving and I felt sorry for him: "Eat that!" "And you left three slices there in the basket!" he said reproachfully, almost bursting into tears. "Réz was keeping an eye on it," I explained. "Oh, I see!" said Béla, snatching the bread from my hand and, muttering to himself, wolfing it down at lightning speed.

The next day he carried on his fast. He took to the beach the jar of mustard and bottle of Bambi syrup, their contents by then much diminished, and still dipped a finger into now one, now the other, before voluptuously licking it clean, eyes closed (it was nauseating just to watch). "Anyone who's that stupid deserves whatever's coming, and can lose a bit of weight while he's at it," Réz declared. Béla did not permit himself to be put out, and indeed was in boisterous high spirits again. On the steps leading down to the water he played for Réz (as well as those who were endeavouring to get into the water) the idiot of 'Boarding', who in this case didn't dare go in. Then in the knee-deep water with an enormous bellowing like a ravenous and hairy sea monster he performed a "fish-catching ballet", roaring out snatches from *Rigoletto* and *Aida*. He ate seaweed and reeds, and leapt and squawked in his efforts to snatch after birds until in the end, pounding on his hairy chest, he marched past the sunbathers yelling *"Ya vengerskii pisatel'! Ya vengerskii pisatel'!"* At the time everyone understood at least enough Russian to know that he was saying: "I'm a Hungarian writer!" A grateful public laughed right to the end of this particular show.

That's how long our magical, happy youth spent in the political minefield of postwar Hungary lasted.

In 1952, one of the darkest years of the Stalinist dictatorship, Béla Abody, still a university student, driven by an irrepressible desire to appear centre stage and hungry for success, one fine day took the floor during a blood-curdling dispute at the Writers' Association, and speaking modestly, cunningly, cautiously and entertainingly, defended Tibor Déry, an outstanding older writer, against attacks directed at his new novel. The omnipotent commissar of all that went under the name of culture in Hungary wanted to induce Déry—born into a wealthy middle-class family but a Communist since his early youth—to radically rewrite his work in progress, *Felelet* (Answer), a trilogy, spelling out the Party's wishes in detail. Déry had suffered many hardships for his convictions in the twenties and thirties, and was after the war naively still toeing the party line, but also starting to realize the true nature of the system. In a few years time he was to find himself among the intellectual leaders of the 1956 revolution, for which he was afterwards imprisoned. No wonder the cycle was never finished.

Abody, in a style that radically differed from the dreadful language of the Marxist critical liturgy, walking a tightrope, spoke up as an "insider", in the interests of socialist literature, in this way, as a matter of fact, choosing to serve the dictatorship. The great majority of writers stayed silent, or else translated or wrote fairy tales or verses for children to make a living. Béla's contribution to the discussion created a considerable stir, and from then on, in witty critical articles he took issue with the overzealous, dilettante sproutings of a literature that glorified the "building of socialism", the Party, the working class, Stalin, and his "best Hungarian pupil", Rákosi. He made them look ridiculous, showing that they did not serve but harmed "the Socialist cause". His apparent outspokenness ultimately helped legitimize the regime, which showed itself grateful, and he progressed unstoppably along the line of least resistance.

He was undeniably brilliant, but his gifts were of little use to him in the absence of a higher goal, a coherent view of life, firmness of character and endurance. He also lacked a capacity for serious self-criticism. What he wanted to do was to be present, to publish, longing to play a public role. True, at the time none of the conditions which a writer needs to do his work were present. Later, when these became more and more available, in the second half of the sixties, as a popular writer and TV and radio personality, he spoke, and also wrote, as a committed supporter of the Kádár regime. No such commitments were expected anymore. He could have made a start then, producing an oeuvre worthy of a writer and his talent. But mines kept on exploding under his feet. As a gambler he accumulated huge debts, more than once reducing his family

to destitution. He married twice and raised four children, two of them his own, but even so he could not stop gambling. A substantial library inherited from his father, a professor of aerodynamics, and all the furnishings of the family home, a summer cottage on the Danube bank and a block of flats in Vienna were all lost at the card table. He had to accept that his short stories and plays were not up to much as he could not create credible characters, set them in motion or make them speak. He sensed that he had not found a genre as a writer that was right for him, or perhaps the genre had not found him, and that he was trapped in a spiral of lies and self-deception. Friendships cooled, and his own high hopes did not come true, not even when the dictatorship grew soft and, pace the few surviving ideological taboos—socialism, Soviet Union, one-party system—albeit at the price of minor compromises, immaculate oeuvres were created and allowed to be published.

What he needed was instant success and noisy applause. A full-blooded bohemian and ever hard-pressed debtor, he devoured easy success with a huge appetite, in this way selling out and subjecting his own self to degradation. Given the precarious state of his finances, the system helped the respected critic and popular humorist providing sinecures and unlimited opportunities to publish. He finally achieved the grade on the political scale of values which ensured that state-run publishing houses accepted anything by him. He entertained huge audiences on radio and TV with ever cheaper jesting, his ideas or texts never reaching the standard of the phenomenal surrealist productions of the schoolboy candidate genius. In the eyes of those of us who had long known him and loved him, who expected him to go far, he turned into a pitiful figure. He drank and lived through periods of serious depression and psychosis, after which he always continued his self-destruction as a writer and man where he had left off. He died at the age of 59 at the time of the change of regime, a pathetic wreck, minus one leg, amputated because of neglected diabetes. At his last appearance on TV, immediately after the regime change, he professed to be a self-respecting and grateful supporter of socialism and Kádárism, and he did so unasked. That much can be said in his favour: at least he did not deny himself as so many did at the time.

He was a fatalist. He must have known that he would die soon, and that he only had himself to thank for the failure which his life turned out to be. Twenty or more volumes, that's what he left behind, in them no more than a few dazzling and witty reviews, essays and autobiographical fragments, and no one reads even those today. Looking at the bottom line, his life and work were the paranoid manifestation of botched genius. A terrible sadness for me, a cautionary tale for us all. ❧

(Concluded)

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

CITYSCAPE

Pál Lővei

Outperforming

Expo 2010 Shanghai

"I really like the Gomboc," an Indian said to my wife after visiting Hungary's pavilion at the Shanghai World Fair. He should have said *Gömböc,*[1] the term for a brilliant invention by Hungarian scientists Gábor Domokos and Péter Várkonyi, but innocently used the Hungarian word for dumpling instead. The Gömböc, discovered in 2006, is a homogeneous body with one stable and one unstable point of equilibrium—think of the Weeble, a self-righting toy immortalized by the slogan: "Weebles wobble, but they don't fall down." If you believe what the curmudgeonly Hungarian press has written, however, the Gömböc showcased inside Hungary's pavilion is an apt symbol for the country's entire Shanghai effort: it capitalizes on its clever scientists yet get the details of the overall plan wrong, it wobbles and turns dough-like. Thankfully, unlike Humpty Dumpty, another mathematical confection, it hasn't fallen down.

Coming on the heels of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, the Shanghai extravaganza is, of course, another chance for the authorities to demonstrate to the Chinese people and the world at large that China ranks as a global political and economic power. And more than any other world fair before it, Shanghai laid down the gauntlet to participating countries to add their glittering tuppence-worth. Inevitably the competition for hi-tech baubles gives richer and slicker countries the upper hand and puts pressure on poorer ones to find smart ways to make a little go a long way.

In other words, the Shanghai shindig is not unlike past expos which have always reflected the political and economic zeitgeist, posed a challenge to diplomacy and provided a showcase for architectural experiment. Risks abound.

1 ■ Zoltán Barotányi, "Turtles, Eggs and the 'Gömböc'," *The Hungarian Quarterly,* Autumn 2007, pp. 43–47.

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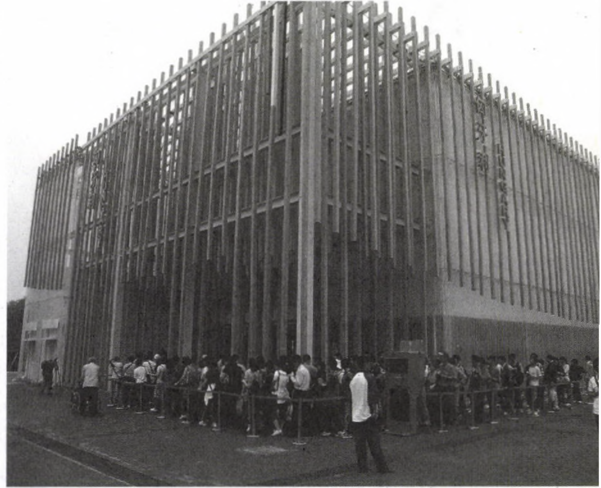
Hungary burnt its fingers in a vain attempt to stage a world expo in 1996. (Two years before its scheduled opening, preparations were aborted.) At the Paris Exposition of 1937, the magniloquently competing pavilions of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, placed opposite each other, dominated, while at the 1958 Brussels fair the neighbouring Soviet and American modernist buildings were both used to poster the early days of the space race and Cold War rivalry. At the 1939–40 New York fair in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park the pavilion of the American car manufacturer General Motors featured a futuristic car-based city. This was not mere prophesy. They showed the administration and the people what kind of future the American automobile industry wanted in their own interest, and the whole of the country proved to want the same.



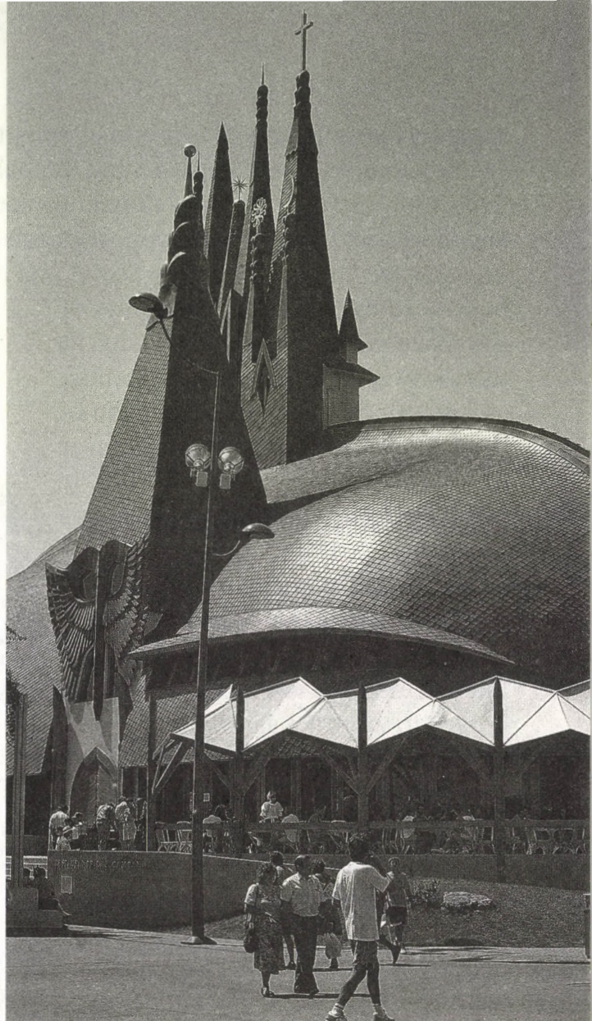
PÁL LÖVEI

The Hungarian Pavilion at the Expo 2010 Shanghai

Whereas initial planning for the Shanghai spectacle preceded the global economic calamity, Expo 2010 takes place at its tail-end (or at least this appears so). It is perhaps fair to say, however, that no other country in the world is in a position now to stage such an ambitious event as China. On one side of the equation, the Asian nation is keen to be in everyone's good books; the other is that staying away from the Shanghai party was not an option for any country taking its ties with the rising powerhouse seriously. Fully three countries withdrew compared to 26 in Hanover (2000); only six of the 192 UN member states stayed away. Hong Kong and Macau put up pavilions of their own directly besides the Chinese one, and separated from the Chinese Pavilion by a wide promenade (adding visual symbolism to delicate diplomatic nicety) was a building representing Taiwan. Hungary, assiduously wooing the People's Republic, scored an early diplomatic goal as the second country to officially sign up to participate. From then on

Hungary's task was to live up to its early promise and create something eye-catching using a modest budget.

Hungary's presence at world exhibitions has been a matter of pride, and successive architects have risen to the occasion. More recently at the Seville Expo in 1992, Hungary's doyen of organic architecture Imre Makovecz devised an edifice reminiscent of a fortified church with seven steeples stretching along the double walls. Snow-white towers, their decorations reminiscent of those in medieval churches, rose above the monumental curves of the glittering slate-grey roof over the Pavilion. The skeleton of the building was made of natural materials only, its wooden structures assembled on the spot by Székely joiners from Transylvania who only used traditional instruments. Makovecz managed to summon up the past while serving the present and his pavilion promptly featured in international journals of architecture. So did the wooden "Pavilion-ship" devised by György Vadász at the millennium Hanover Expo. Both these structures stood out from the hi-tech edifices around them with their distinctive sculptural shaping, stunning exteriors and beautiful interior spaces. Even if nothing of note was displayed inside, the pavilions themselves successfully represented a country which longed for renewal after the political changes of 1989–1990. (On occasions world fairs are hijacked for propaganda. After the bloody suppression of the 1956 revolution, the Brussels Expo of 1958 offered fertile ground for Hungary's regime, and Lajos Gádoros rose to the occasion, winning (deservedly) one of the main prizes with his design for the Hungarian pavilion.)

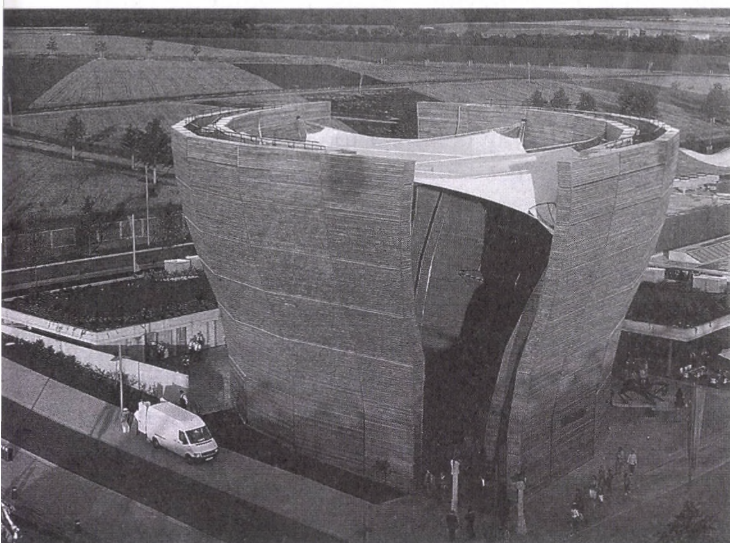

Pál Lővei

The Hungarian Pavilion at the 1992 Seville World Fair
Architect: Imre Makovecz

As the Makovecz and Vadász examples show, Hungary is capable of cannily getting a bigger bang for its buck. In Shanghai, making it onto the illustrated

key of the official Expo map with a pavilion of the country's own design is regarded as the non-plus-ultra. Apart from the host country, 41 countries feature. Sadly, Hungary was not among them.

Economic ties with China have clearly had a strong influence on the design of the various national pavilions. Australia's, for instance, evokes the appearance of the red monolith of Ayers Rock, though its rusted iron cladding is also a reminder that the country is China's biggest supplier of iron ore. Germany supplied the technology behind the maglev monorail link to Shanghai airport and hundreds of kilometres of high-speed railway track unveiled at the start of 2010, and Saudi Arabia has an obvious interest as an oil supplier to China; both had huge pavilions in order to drum up publicity. At first America decided to be restrained. Its planning for the Brussels Expo in 1958 was similarly austere until news came that the Soviet Union, which had put up the first satellites towards the end of 1957, was planning to make a big splash there. This time there can be little doubt that China's strength in the global money markets proved a major consideration when America revisited its austerity plan this time round too. New Zealand was crafty in marrying green architecture to its "national" plant life, while the hill-and-valley appearance of the Spanish hall, sheathed as it is in variously tinted wicker canes, is strikingly pictorial. Norway's building is supported by elements stuck together from Norwegian pine and Chinese bamboo. The South Korean Pavilion is assembled from characters of the Korean alphabet. The gilded metal plates covering the United Arab Emirates' Pavilion give an impression of hi-tech sand dunes.


PÁL LÖVEI

The Hungarian Pavilion at the 2000 Hanover World Fair
Architects: György Vadász et al.

Arguably the most exciting construction in the whole Expo is Britain's 'Seed Cathedral'. This sits on a slightly bent base designed to look like a creased piece of wrapping paper. On top rests what looks like a flattened ball of wool—the whole meant to be taken as an unwrapped gift to the Chinese people. Its walls were constructed

from 60,000 slender, transparent, acrylic-tipped rods suspended in a timber frame which drew on daylight to illuminate the interior; the outer surface suggests the axes of the Union Jack. At night, light sources at the interior end of each rod allow the whole structure to glow, lending it a mysterious quivering quality. By daylight the dense bundle of protruding rods throw abstract patterns in the black-and-white of shade and light onto the outside of the six-storey inner space, and, on closer inspection, the square end of each rod is found to contain the contrasting roundness of one or more plant seeds.

The basic concept of Hungary's Shanghai attempt is lovely enough: a steel Gömböc taller than a man occupies the centre of the space enclosed by illuminated timber beams of varying length which elegantly "reflect" its bright curved surfaces. (Ten huge plastic Gömböc were also presented as art objects in Shanghai's Museum of Contemporary Art as part of a two-week Hungarian Art Forum.) So far so good. But the pavilion's exterior is a dreary rectangle—hardly inviting. And unlike superb projections in other pavilions, the Hungarian effort promoting the capital is little more than a string of silly fantasies (rejected by an advisory panel in Budapest but shown anyway) about what the city could look like if, presumably, a juvenile graphic artist moonlighted as a town planner. Hence, with the click of the designer's mouse, you see a multi-storey footbridge lined with shops superimposed on the real cityscape and huge see-saw like structures running up Gellért Hill to the Citadel, which would each raise and lower transparent balls that would serve as look-outs overlooking the Danube. This was presumably a sop to the World Fair's theme: "Better City, Better Life". Another gripe by highly critical Hungarian journalists and politicians is the pricey pavilion's cost-to-outcome ratio. Hungary's economic woes dictated its choice of pavilion in Shanghai. It has rented an industrial hull provided by the Chinese, spruced up on the outside with some wooden bits and pieces, and the colours of the Hungarian flag are just about discernable. Still, it has ended up being far too costly; much more could have been done with a smaller budget—luminous coloured boxes cover Serbia's pavilion, the red-and-white checker of the state's coat of arms clads the Croat pavilion. (Brazil chose to cover the building with planks painted a vivid green, the irregular pattern of a net; Angola's Pavilion was shrouded in wavy bands of characteristic African colours. Imaginative and resourceful, they offered visitors much more memorable sights.) But perhaps the biggest shortcoming of the Hungarian show (since the average Chinaman doesn't even know the country's name) was the paucity of information about Hungary itself. The team running the pavilion provides the stable point of equilibrium, however, helping to save the day. (The Gömböc turned out to be symbolic of a kind of *yin* and *yang*: Hungarian vitality—an ability to find your feet in any situation—is coupled with dark elements of desperation, the former righting the latter.)

A Challenge to Architects

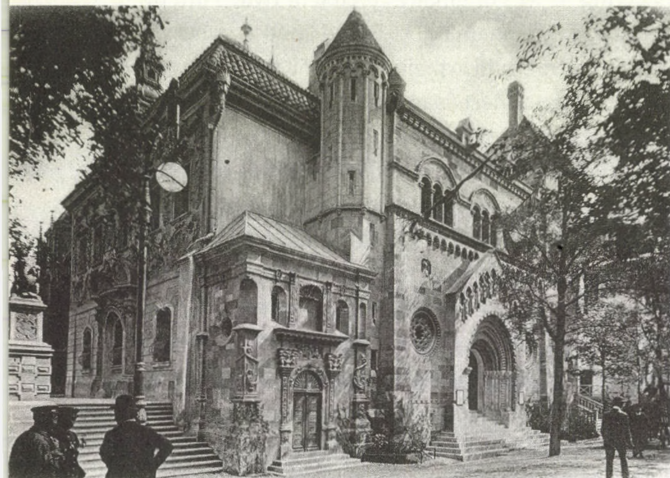
The 1851 Exhibition is still remembered for its Crystal Palace, a vast iron-and-glass structure regarded as a founding landmark of modern architecture boldly initiating extraordinary innovations of civil engineering. It was originally erected in Hyde Park by Joseph Paxton before being moved to the top of Sydenham Hill in South London, where it burned down in 1936. The grand halls at successive world exhibitions after it were to break one record after another in vying for the title of the widest span without internal columns supporting it, and, from time to time, they played key roles in the history of modern architecture. The significance of that role is now memorialized in the sole example which is still left from the latter half of the 19th century, the Royal Exhibition Building in Melbourne, Australia, the monumental Great Hall of first the Melbourne International Exhibition in 1880, then the Centennial Exhibition in 1888. In 2004 that Hall, with its surrounding Carlton Gardens, became the first building in Australia to gain UNESCO listing at a World Heritage status (and we need hardly mention the Eiffel Tower built for the Paris Universal Exposition of 1889). Since then some of the greatest creative spirits have made their mark at world fairs and as of big international exhibitions: photos of pavilions suited to house complicated displays by the likes of Eliel Saarinen (Paris, 1900), Konstantin Melnikov (Paris, 1925), Le Corbusier (Paris, 1925 and Brussels, 1958), Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (Barcelona, 1929), Alvar Aalto (Paris, 1937 and New York, 1939), Moshe Safdie (Montreal, 1967), Richard Buckminster Fuller (Montreal, 1967) and Kenzo Tange (Osaka, 1970) regularly figure in albums dealing with architecture and its history. ❧

Statistics can be misleading: the vast, spectacular and lavishly stocked German and Saudi Arabian structures have, apparently, attracted no more than the million visitors to have thus far passed through Hungary's tiny pavilion. The latter, however, takes little more than about four minutes to look around.

Hungary, a fair nation

Shortly after losing the war of independence against Habsburg Austria, Hungary was represented only by individual exhibitors at the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, and it was there that Herend Porcelain secured the first of its gold medals and grand prix for its celebrated wares. Thereafter, world expos were all about presenting the best of the country as a whole. In Hungary's case this had to be done within an overall framework supplied by Habsburg Austria. By the time of the Vienna International Exhibition *(Weltausstellung)* in 1873, after the 1867 Compromise with Austria and the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, Hungary was among the biggest exhibitors. But it was not until 1900 that Hungary was able to

present, completely separately from the Austrians, its own pavilion in the Avenue des Nations at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900. The designers Zoltán Bálint and Lajos Jámbor planned the display in a variety of styles characteristic of the country's architectural monuments—in many ways similar to Ignác Alpár's Vajdahunyad Castle, the assemblage of replicas of historical Hungarian buildings built four years earlier in Budapest's City Park for the Millennial Exhibition in 1896. The fanciful edifice was planned as a temporary structure, but was rebuilt in 1902–7 due to popular demand.



The Hungarian Pavilion at the 1900 Paris World Fair
Architects: Zoltán Bálint and Lajos Jámbor.
Contemporary picture postcard. Property of Pál Lővei

One of the very first foreign pavilions to be built on the site of the Venice Biennale (the first was Belgium's in 1907), Hungary was one of three countries alongside Germany and Britain allowed to set up its own for the eighth Biennale of 1909. The Hungarian Pavilion designed by architect and sculptor Géza Maróti is used for the country's official competitors to this day. Two years later the Hungarian pavilion at the Turin International Exposition of Industrial Art was the work of Emil Tőry (1863–1928), Móric Pogány (1878–1942) and Dénes Györgyi (1886–1961), one of Hungary's pearls of exhibition architecture which conjured up the tent of Attila the Hun in Art Nouveau style. Györgyi was to go on to make his mark on the whole interwar period. The Hungarian pavilions that he built for Barcelona in 1929, Brussels in 1935, and Paris in 1937 increasingly broke with historical forms to offer a moderately modern and tranquil framework with the primary aim of displaying the best of the country's officially approved fine and applied arts—a trend that was carried on by the small-scale showing at the 1939–40 World Fair in New York. After Brussels in 1958 Hungary opted out of the next fairs in Montreal (1967) and Osaka (1970), and it was not until the 1980s that

2 ■ Pál Lővei, "Expo Nonexposure," *Budapest Review of Books,* 5/2, 1995, pp. 5–11.

3 ■ A non-specialist compilation of articles, also in English, was published on the occasion of the Seville Expo 1992. See György Diószegi and József Gáti, *A Multitude of Spectacles: Hungary's Role in the History of World Exhibitions.* Budapest: B+V Publisher, 1992. The exhibition put on by the Hungarian Museum of Architecture in 2000 broke ground as it gave a well-researched survey of Hungarian pavilions at various Budapest International Fairs as well as Hungarian Pavilions at world expositions during the 19th and 20th centuries. A wide selection of plans and

it returned to world expositions: Knoxville (1982), Vancouver (1986) and Brisbane (1988). With the exception of Expo 2005, Hungary has made a showing at every fair since.[2]

The Hungarian Pavilion at the 1911 Dresden International Hygiene Exhibition. Architect: Alfréd Jendrássik. Contemporary picture postcard. Property of Pál Lővei

Recent Hungarian research[3] has led to the discovery, in an archive in Paris, of 150 blueprints relating to the Hungarian Pavilion at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900. By making use of archival documents and contemporary articles in the foreign press, it has been possible to shed a subtler light on Hungary's participation at several international expos that were organized in Italy prior to the First World War, and an analysis has been made of the propaganda issued in support of Hungarian art at the Paris Exposition of 1937 (Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne). Further ground-breaking work was covered by a book, published in 2008, which covers the history of world fairs generally, and the major points of special Hungarian interest in particular—again backed up with lavish illustrative material and intended for a general readership. Popular demand led to a second edition, which has been expanded to cover the lead-up to Hungarian participation at the Chinese Expo 2010 and to present the Hungarian Pavilion there.[4]

The Hungarian Pavilion at the 1935 Brussels World Fair Architect: Dénes Györgyi. Contemporary picture postcard. Property of Pál Lővei

documents plus a number of mock-ups were on show. See Zoltán Fehérvári, Virág Hajdú and Endre Prakfalvi, eds., *Pavilon építészet a 19–20. században a Magyar Építészeti Múzeum gyűjteményéből* [Pavilion Architecture in the 19–20th Century from the Collection of the Hungarian Museum of Architecture]. Exhibition catalogue. Budapest: OMvH Hungarian Museum of Architecture–Pavilon Foundation, 2000).

4 ■ Vilmos Gál: *Világkiállító magyarok 1851–2010* [Hungarians Exhibiting to the World, 1851–2010]. Budapest: Holnap Kiadó, 2010.

Cynics will tell you (correctly) that the culprits for expos are politicians who find town planners and architects as willing accessories. Their yardstick is visitor numbers, and politicians are under the pressure of public opinion to deliver thereby. The majority of visitors nowadays can't be bothered to read even a few captions, and apart from technically impressive filmic stunts will go, at best, for refined computer wizardry. Not surprising, then, that baubles and razzmatazz often win out over more considered content. On this score the participants in Shanghai are outperforming. China is also smashing other records. It can boast of the biggest site ever—half of which was rundown area stretching 5.28 sq/km along the Huangpu River—for a world fair with a record number of participants. It is safe to predict that the number of visitors will comfortably leapfrog the current record—the 64 million attracted to Expo 70 in Osaka—and hit the planned 70–100 million (lots of free entrance tickets have been distributed to Shanghai's countless students and pensioners). At the halfway point of its six-month duration it had already drawn close to 35 million visitors. Spread over both banks of the Huangpu River, with its graceful parks following the river line, the premises are much more appealing compared to the monotony of the grid layout of the Expo 2000 site at Hanover, for instance.

China's financial outlay is huge, but even in the short term much of this is proving beneficial. The transport network alone has gained six new subway lines, a fleet of new buses, a monumental bridge spanning high over the river and running on piers above the exhibition to feed motorways at each end—this alone has been a major help for the 20 million or so inhabitants of this megacity. The three subway stations of the Expo line and the tunnel under the Huangpu River are used solely to serve the bus routes to the site. But they will not be superfluous once the exhibition has closed: alongside new roads criss-crossing the site, elements of a whole new urban district are to be constructed along the riverbanks, including the Chinese Pavilion, the main Theme pavilion, an office block and the culture centre with its vast disco. Also to be preserved is the "Expo Axis", a towering multi-storey structure built around a boulevard and about a thousand metres long and a hundred metres wide, which consists of six funnel-shaped framework shells of steel and glass covered by a membrane roof. It houses shops and a restaurant, which are lit up spectacularly at night. All this promises to serve as a focus for future architectural and town-planning projects.

Some national pavilions have been better than others at addressing the theme "Better City, Better Life". In keeping with most expos, however, it was the Theme Pavilions supplied by the host country which reflected real depth of thought. The seventy-some cities from all points of the compass that came up with case studies for presentation were also something of a new departure.

They were housed in their own individual pavilions at one end of the site or else installed in model houses and former factory halls that were refitted as exhibitions to display ideas about sustainable urban development.

The subject is of fundamental interest to China, of course, not least because it must work out ways to encourage many hundreds of millions of its former peasant populace to stay in their rural communities in order to relieve pressure on the cities while making sure that life for the inhabitants in the growing number of megacities is made both more tolerable and efficient. The city of Shanghai is not a bad example in this respect. My impressions during a flying visit are that the authorities are getting a lot right, not just on account of the transport network and up-to-date parking facilities, but also because it seems that increasing success is being met with measures to protect buildings of historic significance, while the standard of modern architecture often easily surpasses the (admittedly not particularly high) Chinese average.

The Expo theme therefore sought answers to one of China's central problems. The visitor got to see the various solutions or plans that were regarded as either exemplary—or at least worth putting on view—in the five Theme Pavilions ('Urban Footprints', 'Urban Planet', 'Urban Dwellers', 'Urban Beings' and 'Urban Dreams') and also in exhibitions put on by the various Chinese provinces. The target audience was quite obviously China's own middle class, including tiers of politicians who are in a position to exert influence on decision-making.

At European or American expos, the host country does its utmost to attract as many foreign punters as it can to its own pavilion and the surrounding area. Oddly Shanghai is an exception in this respect. I used the time spent queuing up to get into the various pavilions to do a rough check of my own, which suggests that well over 90 per cent of visitors were from the Far East (China, Japan or South Korea), leaving just a few per cent from other parts of Asia or from other continents; or in other words a few thousand a day. Nothing could more clearly demonstrate that this expo was not addressed to that three per cent than the Chinese Pavilion—the most monumental construction on the whole site. It might be reasonable to expect the Chinese state to show off its own face as well as China's rich historic and cultural traditions—where it is today and its ideas about where it is heading—to foreign visitors who demonstrate their interest in China by their very willingness to undertake long and costly journeys. The Chinese Pavilion, however, was essentially a no-go area for foreigners. We ended up naming it the 'Forbidden Pavilion'. The building that was apparently designed to cope with 40,000–50,000 visitors a day could only be entered by showing a special (free) ticket, and two-thirds of these were given to organized groups of Chinese; the remainder was distributed when the gates were opened in the morning. As a result, many people joined queues early at daybreak in hope of obtaining a ticket. Anyone

who was just five or ten minutes late in getting past the security gate could not count on getting one. One should bear in mind that the vast bulk of foreigners were in any case travelling in an organized foreign tour group or else they booked inland flights and railway tickets, as well as accommodation and Expo entrance tickets, through the state-accredited tour operator CITS. So it was known well in advance precisely which foreign visitor would attend.

In Shanghai what the historian Pierre Nora called "the acceleration of history" was palpable, indeed, the present became history before our eyes. Expo 2010 entered China's 'museologized' past as it was incorporated in the audiovisual display of the the *tout-ensemble* of 19th- and 20th-century artefacts in an Expo Museum Pavilion alongside the emblematic buildings and mascots of previous expositions.

Postscript

Visitors had another opportunity to encounter Hungarian mathematical engineering and design ingenuity: young Chinese stewards shepherding the long queues were playing with Rubik cubes. The undiminished popularity of this invention, now three decades old, was also demonstrated by the fact that in Beijing at the end of the Chinese leg of our round trip, on the main thoroughfare of the traditional quarter of the city, we came across a shop called "Rubik's Cube Pastry". One wonders if the Gömböc, with its supposed appeal to the Eastern sense of harmony, will ever gain the same foothold in China. ❧

"Rubik's Cube Pastry". Summer 2010, Beijing

János Gerle

The Resurrection of László Hudec

The Hungarian architect László Hudec (1893–1958) is a name to be reckoned with in China where he settled for a long period, but he is almost unheard of in his home country beyond a tight circle of architectural historians and his extended family. Quite a bit has been written about Hudec outside Hungary: Luca Poncellini, an architecture student from Turin, recently completed a study which is soon to appear as Volume 13 of Holnap Kiadó's architecture series. It's odd that he has vanished from collective memory, as *tér és forma* ('space and form'), the mouthpiece of modern architecture in the interwar years, featured one of his buildings, and Hudec kept in touch with a number of important Hungarian architects. I first came across his name decades ago when, searching the database of the Research Institute for Art History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, I stumbled across a newspaper article from the 1930s: a "Hungarian architect designed the first skyscraper in Shanghai, the first in Asia."

Until recently, the Chinese paid little attention to their architectural heritage, particularly the architecture of the "bourgeois era". The remarkable pace of China's growth and the radical transformation of its cityscapes, however, have led to an upsurge in interest. As the old urban framework is swept away, much of what remains is now seen as precious. The work of László Hudec, too, is the subject of research, films and exhibitions. He is considered a pioneer of Chinese modernism, the most productive and flexible

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János Gerle

is an architect and an art historian, editor of the architectural magazine Országépítő. *His publications include books on turn-of-the-century and contemporary architecture including* Palaces of Money—Bank Buildings of Budapest *(Budapest: Városháza Könyvek, Our Budapest series, 1994, also in German, Italian and Hungarian) and* The Architecture of Historic Hungary *(Cambridge, Ma. – London: MIT Press, 1998). He curated numerous exhibitions both in and outside Hungary.*

representative in the process of its Europeanization, or Americanization, between 1920 and 1940.

The question of Hudec's citizenship caused him many headaches. He was born in Besztercebánya-Banská Bystrica, then a part of the Kingdom of Hungary. His education, in particular his years at the Budapest Technical University, created strong ties with Hungarian culture in his lifetime, and he wanted to opt for Hungarian citizenship when the Uplands became a part of Czechoslovakia. Ongoing litigation within his family made this impossible for him for a long time. As a result he was sometimes called a representative of 'Czechoslovak culture' in China. In his last few years, he was known as a 'Magyar' or 'Slovak' architect. His rediscovery, too, has taken place at much the same time in Hungary and Slovakia. He put his own views on the matter on several occasions. In one letter sent home he wrote: "As to whether I am 'Magyar' or *'tót'* (Slovak) I have no idea, and I don't want to know; I can't cut myself up as my native land was cut up, and I remain what I always was. No one in the old Hungary of St Stephen asked me whether I was Slovak or Hungarian. I am fond of both given that my mother was Hungarian and my father Slovak; and I am what I am." In another letter he wrote: "My true homeland is the mountains and valleys of what is now called Slovakia, with everyone at once becoming Slovaks and forgetting they ever spoke a word of Hungarian—all of which has contributed to my feeling like a lost person. I am all too ready and delighted to speak like a grassroots native, a *'tót',* to use the familiar term that the novelist Mikszáth once used. Indeed I feel the idiom tripping off my tongue when I speak that language; after all, that is what my paternal ancestors were..." He became a Hungarian honorary consul in Shanghai in 1941, looking after the interests of the local Hungarian community and risking his own life and liberty. He also protected citizens of countries threatened by the Japanese occupying forces.

Characteristically, his 'Eastern Europeanness' was a feature of his professional work. Shanghai's development during the interwar period was defined by the interests of the US, Great Britain, France and Germany, present in a semi-colonial role. The emergent Chinese bourgeoisie, with which Hudec came into close contact, was none too willing to commission work from citizens of any of the Great Powers. For Hudec this meant that he could not count on protection or support from the treaty courts in the event of a dispute, and so he was at the mercy of his Chinese clients. In a city where mafia-like conditions and corruption prevailed, this called for an exceptional adaptability and nimbleness, key factors of Hudec's genius, as well as his immaculate architectural standards.

How he ended up in Shanghai in the first place is in itself a long adventure story. He was a prisoner of war in Siberia and worked for a number of months

on the Trans-Siberian Railway using a false Russian passport. Although he wanted to return to Hungary due to the unstable situation, he decided to flee across the Chinese border. He had barely arrived in Shanghai when he found employment with the local office of the highly respected American architectural firm R.A. Curry. His new boss lacked design skills and so Hudec covered up for him at a time of extraordinary expansion in the city. Hudec was an accomplished architect, who was fluent in the historicizing style very much in demand for elegant private homes. In Besztercebánya as a child he had received rigorous practical training from his father, who ran a construction business there. Hudec followed his example throughout his life.

University of Victoria, Canada, Hudec Archive

The Park Hotel (1931–34) now

In 1924, in possession of the necessary references and contacts, he set up his own practice and was soon known for his innovative and elegant style. His first major commission was the Margaret Williams Hospital, the first to have central air-conditioning, which attracted lots of attention. Hudec's future projects would employ a number of ambitious, high-tech innovations, making him a pioneer even by Western standards. In Asia, his Shanghai projects were consistently ground-breaking. In his letters Hudec complained that he was isolated professionally, but he kept an eye on the architectural literature and maintained personal contacts while seizing every opportunity to travel. He was determined to keep in touch with the latest technological developments in Europe and America, and showed courage in trying them out.

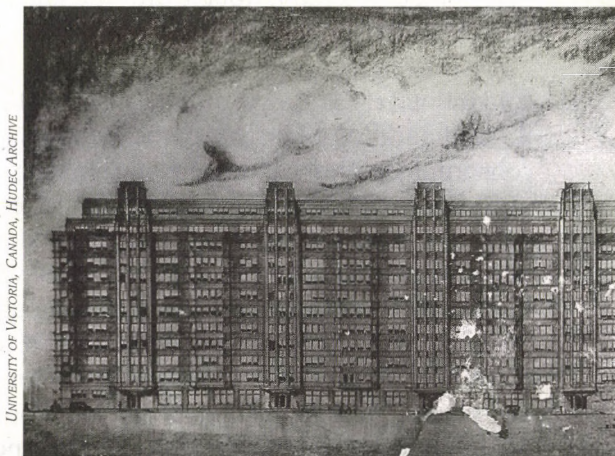
Park Hotel (1931–1934), arguably the most sensational of his buildings, and a landmark of Shanghai, was commissioned by the biggest banking consortium in China. It was the first skyscraper to be built outside America and until the early 1980s it was the city's tallest building. Quite apart from its height—a modest 22 storeys above ground—it rivalled other buildings of the period in every respect, including its express lifts, the glitter of Hudec's Art Deco fittings, a range of banquet halls and luxurious suites and a retractable roof over the penthouse nightclub. Indeed, it was executed with bravura. Given that the ground on which Shanghai is built is alluvial, it had been the rule until then to make allowances at the time of construction for any subsidence, and to build everything that much higher. Thus, the entrance of Park Hotel at the initial stage of its construction seemed to be floating at a height of a yard and a half. In

PÁL LŐVEI

The Grand Theatre (1931–33) now, interiors

Shanghai subsidence never stopped. Hudec's skyscraper was the first building not to sink either during or after construction because he took advantage of the latest German technology with which the reinforced piling for the foundations was laid. (The building work was followed throughout with open-mouthed wonder by a Shanghai boy by the name of Ieoh Ming Pei, who was then inspired to take up architecture and eventually found fame for the large glass pyramid which since 1989 has formed the main entrance to the Louvre in Paris.)

By the end of the 1920s Hudec had shown copious evidence of his stylistic virtuosity. He had designed a housing estate for 75 building sites with mobile units with essentially identical ground plans. Details and space configurations could be altered even during construction to meet clients' needs. Then, starting with the early 1930s, Hudec introduced other contemporary Western architectural trends to China. The Brick Expressionist architects of Northern Germany and their preference for facing bricks became a particularly strong influence. Among Hudec's Shanghai buildings, the headquarters for the China Baptist Publication Society and the China Christian Literature Society (1930–32) stand besides Fritz Höger's public buildings in Hamburg as models of the trend. He was able to respond with great speed and sensitivity to shifts in style, and his oeuvre embraces many other trends of the first half of the twentieth century, both conservative and progressive.



UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA, CANADA, HUDEC ARCHIVE

Design for the façade of the Ambassador Apartments, 1931

Before finishing work on the vigorous skyward sweep of the Park Hotel, Hudec made a start on another emblematic work, the Grand Theatre (1931–33), known today as the Grand Cinema. As in America and Europe, in Shanghai, too, the thirties were a golden era of the cinema. Cinemas catering to the needs of various social classes and types of film were built in quick succession. The Grand Theatre was the largest and most elegant of Shanghai cinemas. With the Park Hotel, it immediately put Shanghai on the architectural map and both promptly featured in leading Western architectural periodicals such as *Baumeister* and *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*. Although primarily designed to show films, the theatre, seating 2,400, also had a stage suitable for live performances; it was even big enough to accommodate a full symphony orchestra. (On one occasion, fire broke out while a film was being shown; a new sprinkler system planned by Hudec ensured that the public were able to escape with their lives.) Hudec set a record for the sheer size of the concrete structure with its huge balcony. The gigantic grand staircase and foyer are masterpieces of a style of interior architecture which blended Art Deco with modernism. From the outside, the theatre is of the type called "poster building" as its structure and protuberances featured as eye-catching devices in their own right, often unrelated to the interior spaces. Its glass tower, internally illuminated at night, was an outstanding early example of the self-promoting light effects which have since become dominant in the entertainment industry.

The wide range of Hudec's work includes residential blocks (his name is associated with the first functionalist multi-tenant block of luxury apartments in China), schools, churches, offices and a number of extraordinary industrial complexes, including the Shanghai waterworks andthe biggest brewery in China of the time, the Union Brewery. A residence for Dr D.W. Wu (1935–38) marked his last significant project there (the escalation of the Sino-Japanese War after the Japanese army's attack on and occupation of the Chinese-administered parts of Shanghai in 1937 limited Hudec's activities to a few commissions by the Churches). The press referred to it as the most modern and luxurious residence in the whole of the Far East, incorporating as it did the formal prin-

Design for the side elevation of the Moore Memorial Church, 1926

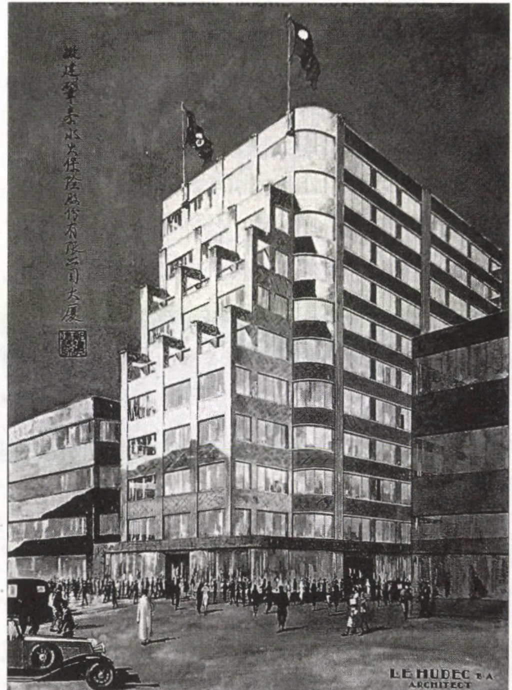
University of Victoria, Canada, Hudec Archive

University of Victoria, Canada, Hudec Archive

Design for the Avenue Apartments. Perspective, 1932

ciples of Erich Mendelsohn and Le Corbusier. The building, at the request of Wu's wife, included a traditional cultic space—the ancestor's shrine —alongside reception rooms for the highly influential businessman's guests, and a classroom where their many children were tutored. Hudec gave precedence, within the formalistic world of functionalism, to arched forms for closed balconies, entrances and staircases as they were employed by contemporary Hungarian architects in their designs for private residences as opposed to a rigidly rectangular, strictly modernist, geometry. Virgil Borbíró, the editor of *tér és forma,* featured Wu's house in an article. On visits to Hungary, Hudec kept in touch with colleagues such as his old teachers, Iván Kotsis and Virgil Nagy, as well as the likes of Jenő Kismarty Lechner and Ervin Ybl.

In 1947, as a "panderer to bourgeois circles", Hudec was again forced to escape. He even bribed a prison guard and fled the Communist takeover in China. Though all his life he wished for nothing more than to return to Hungary, after the war, this was not an option. After a brief stint in Lugano he moved to Rome to participate in the excavations then being undertaken on an early Christian necropolis under St Peter's. Even as a student Hudec had shown great interest in archaeology and religion, which he kept up to the end of his life. During his years



University of Victoria, Canada, Hudec Archive

Design for the central office building of the Chao Tai Fire and Marine Insurance Company. Perspective, 1936

in China he had read up on the archaeology of the Roman Empire and he also learnt Italian from Italian priests who had been active (as emissaries of the Vatican) in Shanghai. It was due to his studies and his exceptional contacts with the Church that he was received at all, let alone guided through the secret excavations of Saint Peter's tomb. He was also given an opportunity to take photographs as well as to help with the ordering of documentation as a result of which he was able to give a lecture on the subject at the University of California, Berkeley. It attracted a great deal of interest, as his was a first-hand account of a project no one had known about. Hudec was ultimately able to settle in the United States, but his architectural career had come to an end. He had created his huge oeuvre in less than two decades. In 1958 he died at the age of sixty-five of a heart attack.

The International Savings Society, 1920

University of Victoria, Canada, Hudec Archive

Estrella Apartments, 1927

The cradle of Asia's modern architecture was rocked by more than one Eastern European: the Czech architect Antonín Raymond mainly worked in Japan. Hudec maintained close relations with him. For years, he and his family spent their summer holidays at Raymond's country home. While Hudec, unlike Raymond, did not found a school, and even if the Park Hotel is now dwarfed by a mass of skyscrapers—the tallest skyscraper in the world, sixty times higher than the Park Hotel, is being built in Shanghai—he is still seen as the single most important formative influence on architectural modernism in China. ❧

Esther Vécsey Mattyasovszky Zsolnay

Adding Sheen to Art Nouveau

Architectural Ceramics and the Zsolnay Factories in Pécs

When people hear the word Zsolnay, beautiful sinuous iridescent-glaze ceramics, table settings and various decorative items come to their minds. Few realize that the gleaming tile roofs of the Matthias Church up on Castle Hill, its flooring and the Madonna over the main west portal are Zsolnay as are the colourful pitched roofs and salt-glaze chimneys as well as the cookie-cutter-like decorative ceramic strips along the brick walls of the Main Market Hall. The stunning blue ceramic roof of the National Geological Institute, its façade inlaid with blue ceramic decorations in the forms of paleolithic molluscs; the twisted blue chimneys issuing from the experimental labs; the awesome multi-colour pitched, tile-covered roofs of the National Bank building on Hold Street are all from the Zsolnay Ceramics Factory of Pécs.

All in the family—the factories

It all began with Miklós Zsolnay, who bought a pottery in Lukafa, near his hometown of Pécs in southern Hungary in 1852. In 1865, his son Vilmos (1828–1900) took over management and moved the works to Pécs where he very quickly developed it into the largest factory complexes of the fine ceramics

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Esther Vécsey Mattyasovszky Zsolnay

left Hungary with her parents at the age of five, fleeing from the Soviet army. She studied at the Accademia di Belle Arti, Rome, at UCLA in Los Angeles and UC, Berkeley, taught Museum Studies, also directing the museums of the colleges and universities where she taught. While in Budapest on a Fulbright Scholarship in 1990–91 she met and married Tamás Mattyasovszky Zsolnay and has since devoted all her time to the study of Zsolnay, first as his research assistant and, since his death, as his literary executor in charge of his papers and photographs. She is co-author of Zsolnay Architectural Ceramics in Budapest/Zsolnay épületkerámiák Budapesten *(Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 2005).*

industry in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy—and Central Europe—during a period of economic growth and social transformation. He was a versatile, practical and exacting person blessed with artistic talent. He started his career as a merchant, and it was only in midlife that he began to devote all his energies to the personal management of his factory. Owing to the free flow of labour he employed foreign skilled workers as well as village potters, and he propagated his own team of experts in the vocational school of the factory. He produced his own base materials, rented or bought up a series of claypits as later he also dealt with the mass production of industrial porcelain. He had terra cotta, tableware and stove departments, but for Vilmos Zsolnay and his talented family members, designing individual pieces were closest to their hearts. Inspired by all sorts of cultures and styles, their flamboyant decorative pieces are on display now in museums, or are treasured collector's items. Numerous technical inventions, the development of special formulas, pastes and glazes and various decorative technologies are credited to Vilmos, including the porcelain faience type of ceramics, which he developed during the 1870s. Of a light colour with porous body it is decorated with lustrous enamel paint which unites with the body, producing a three-dimensional effect. Zsolnay's famed trademark eosin is the iridescent Zsolnay glaze produced by a complex process of several glazings and high-firings, and a final plunge into an acid bath before the vari-coloured, matt and/or shiny object is complete.

Vilmos Zsolnay was among the ten top taxpayers in the country, not only as the owner of the Zsolnay factories, which at the time of his death in 1900 employed nearly 1000 workers, but because he also held interests in coal mines, in the sources of water from the Mecsek hills, and he bought nearly all the land surrounding the factories in Pécs. He had housing built for the workers (all decorated with Zsolnay architectural decor and tiles) and had an interest in forests and in the railroad, opened in 1857 from Pécs to Budapest. He called himself humbly "the potter of Pécs", in spite of the Légion d'Honneur (twice awarded to him) and the Gold Medals won at various World Exhibitions starting with Vienna in1873.

Vilmos' charismatic management style won the collaboration of workers, architects and business partners. He had a special way of dealing with his highly trained staff whose adulation and respect he well deserved. Under his management the factory broke out of obscurity and followed the leading international stylistic and technological directions, yet the Zsolnays and their artists did it in a highly individual fashion. Through personal cooperation with the most significant Viennese and Hungarian architects of his age (such as Otto Wagner, Max Fabiani, Imre Steindl, Ödön Lechner and many others), Vilmos Zsolnay managed to give an extraordinary performance in the field of building ceramics as well.

Along with the employees of the factory his two daughters, Teréz and Júlia designed, his son Miklós attended to customers and business matters generally,

The three Terézes in three generations.
Left to right: Terike; her mother Teréz Zsolnay, married to Jakab Mattyasovszky; and in turn, her mother, the wife of Vilmos Zsolnay, Teréz Bell, of Scots ancestry
Pécs, cca. 1900. Photograph by Károly Zelesny

and from the early 1880s on his sons-in-law Tádé Sikorski, architect and applied art designer, and the geologist Jakab Mattyasovszky also worked at the factory. The company's chief designer during the Art Nouveau years and beyond was the very talented Tádé Sikorski (1852–1940), a Polish architect and artist who trained in Vienna and had a hand in the building of that city's State Opera House. During a study tour in 1882, he visited the Zsolnay factory and met Vilmos' daughter Júlia, whom he married a year later. In his work, one finds many floral themes, such as sunflowers, tulips, plants and bees that are common in Hungarian folk decoration. From 1900 to 1940, Sikorski oversaw the architectural division of the company, too. Jakab Mattyasovszky was conducting raw material research all around the country, helping his father-in-law to enhance the quality of building materials and trying to find the most perfect clay. Vilmos's descendants carried on, remaining simple, conservative folk dedicated to the factories, where hard work took all their time. Holding public office was considered a duty, Vilmos' son Miklós (1858–1922) served on 89 committees, and Teréz's son Tibor (1883–1976), the last family owner and director of the factories, was a Member of the Upper House of Parliament in Budapest.

Between 1919 and 1948 the factory was headed by the descendants of Vilmos Zsolnay in a joint family enterprise by members of the third,

Tibor Mattyasovszky, Teréz Zsolnay's oldest son. Pécs, cca. 1900
Photograph by Károly Zelesny

*The first, second and third generation of Mattyasovszky Zsolnays all together.
Taken by Tamás Mattyasovszky Zsolnay in Pécs; in time of war, in 1943 on the terrace
in the rear of their house at today's 15 St Stephen Square.
From left to right: Péter with his son László; his wife Maritta Sulkowski; to her left is
the elderly Tibor; in front of him, seated, is his wife, Marga Nádosy. In front of her is the
over 90 year-old Teréz; behind, standing is Tibor, Jr., son of Tibor Zsolnay Mattyasovszky;
and in front of him, seated, is his maternal grandmother, née Fornseck, also a nonagenerian.
It was this house the Mattyasovszky Zsolnays left when they fled from the Soviet troops
in November 1944, but they returned a year later to suffer the consequences together with
their third son, Tamás Mattyasovszky Zsolnay.*

fourth and even the fifth generation until nationalization and dispossession of the family, in 1948, and subsequent expulsion or imprisonment on trumped-up charges, opened a less than glorious chapter.

The golden years

Zsolnay architectural ceramics were widely used throughout the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and in other countries as well. *Pirogránit,* developed by Vilmos Zsolnay in the 1890s, is usually best seen in symbiosis with *klincker,* the finest, most compact brick. It is an extremely dense, high-fired ceramic for exteriors, meant to harmonize perfectly with brick, the most popular building material of the second half of the 19th century. Pyrogranite withstands frost and fire, making it an exceptionally adept

Documenting Zsolnay Architectural Ceramics

In the 1890s Vilmos Zsolnay established a huge plant on Öv Street in Budapest's 14th district (Zugló), which produced porcelain sinks, bathtubs, bidets and interior cladding tiles, as well as a wide range of industrial porcelain ware including brown-glazed porcelain electronic isolators for the telephone lines and the railways. These brown isolators are still in use on the Pécs–Budapest line and many other lines throughout the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, their shining brown sinuous outlines making them collector's items. Zsolnay sanitary ware, a great commercial success, was exported the world over. The Pest factory's earnings "maintained" the labour-intensive activities—the production of decorative faience ware and luxury items—of the Pécs factories employing nearly 700 workers. The Pest factory was where Tamás Mattyasovszky Zsolnay lived and worked, together with his maternal cousin, Dr Francesco Gilli.

Tamás Mattyasovszky Zsolnay was born in Pécs in 1915 and died in Budapest in 2008, leaving behind a huge quantity of photographs and study notes. Trained as a mechanical engineer, he was co-owner and manager at the Öv Street factory until its nationalization in 1948. In 1951 the family was relocated to Hajdúhadháza on the Great Plain. The Zugló Factory was razed to the ground in the mid-1990's.

Tagged as a "class enemy", Tamás was totally marginalized and had to move from job to job during the fifties and sixties. However, he never abandoned photography, which he had started at the age of 12 when he received his first camera from his grandmother Teréz Zsolnay, the oldest of Vilmos' three children, who married the geologist Jakab Mattyasovszky. (Her sister Julia, also a designer in the factory, married the Polish architect Tádé Sikorski, who went on to head the architectural ceramics division.)

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sheathing material for buildings. It was made either unglazed or with glazed majolica or salt glaze. In addition, they also utilized the colour effects from their trademark eosin glaze. Zsolnay laboured on developing further refinements on his special formula—*plutonit* and *siderolit*—all to help architects complete their buildings made of brick, which is the same basic terra cotta, and to substitute for the expensive marble or wood and the extraneous *gesso* as accessories.

Architects went to the Pécs factory complex to discuss their building plans and how to use pyrogranite or *plutonit* to clad entire buildings and surfaces. The details were designed at the factory according to the architects' sketches or chosen from the Model Books as the factory had its own team of sculptors and designers. In other cases, architects ordered decorative elements from their own designers. Pyrogranite afforded unlimited opportunities for creativity and opened the way for the birth of a new architectural idiom, as seen particularly in the repertoire of the leading

With the softening of the regime, in the 1960s Tamás returned to Budapest where he found work at the SZIKTI Standards Office of the Silicate Industry Laboratory. All this time he took photographs. He joined Mihály Ráday's "Photo Group" in the 1980's, and helped pioneer the documentation of endangered buildings of Budapest.

The Mausoleum/Chapel of the Zsolnay Family in Pécs had been looted and desecrated in the 1950s. The first of the family to enter the horrid place, in 1981 Tamás took shocking photographs of the conditions he found when entering what had been the family's former resting place. The once beautiful, entirely Zsolnay tile-clad interior and the eosin altar were broken into and defiled. Bones were yanked out of the niches by those seeking treasure, who spread garbage and excrement everywhere and played football with the skulls. They knocked the tiles off the walls, and tried to break into the huge eosin glazed pyrogranite catafalque of Vilmos Zsolnay, but never succeeded.

As he settled in to life in Buda, Tamás started focusing on a subject closer to home—the Zsolnay pyrogranite which he encountered at every turn in the city. Relying on factory records which he had barely managed to lay his hands on, he compiled a list of the ceramics produced, by whom, when, where they were delivered, and how much they cost. His exquisite photographs, shot with his sensitive Zsolnay eye are now being copied right and left, as is the fruit of his work, the only complete book on pyrogranite, the bilingual *Zsolnay Architectural Ceramics in Budapest/Zsolnay Épületkerámiák Budapesten (*Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 2003). The book's other authors are Dr Esther Vécsey, author of this article and Tamás Zsolnay Mattyasovszky's widow, and László Vizi. Unfortunately, claims Dr Esther Vécsey, the English text was purposefully left out of the catalogue section, the layout and the graphics are horrid and the beautiful photographs are printed blurry, distorted and discoloured. ❧

architect of the era, Ödön Lechner, and his followers. They were eager to utilize the new materials on all their buildings.

Ödön Lechner (1845–1914) worked closely with the Zsolnay factory. "He believed ceramics to be the material most suitable for creating the true architectural style of a modern city. His main argument was that glazed ceramics could resist urban pollution without losing the original colours. Zsolnay's wares had a resounding international success for the first time at the Vienna World Exhibition of 1873. These architectural elements—consoles, entablature units, garden wares —were exhibited for the first time to be used on arches, ceilings, niches, and outdoors. The invention of pyrogranite was a real breakthrough," explains Ákos Moravánszky.[1] As a widower, Lechner became a part of the Zsolnay household, spending his holidays with the Zsolnay family in their home on the factory premises in Pécs.

1 ■ Ákos Moravánszky, "The Birth of Modern Architecture and Zsolnay Architectural Ceramics," in *Competing Visions, Aesthetic Invention and Social Imagination in Central European Architecture, 1867–1918,* London: The MIT Press, 1997, pp. 100–101.

Zsolnay ornaments adorn the public buildings of towns throughout Hungary, the most notable are the magnificent City Hall on the main square of Kecskemét, also by the great Lechner (1892–96), who used Zsolnay on the roof and all over the façade, and the Cifra Palace (Géza Márkus, 1902), once a palatial residence, now a museum, whose sensually undulating lilac and yellow glazed ceramic inset decorations are true Art Nouveau with a Hungarian flavour.

The façade of the Neo-Baroque City Hall of Kiskunfélegyháza (József Vas – Nándor Morbitzer, 1909–19) is covered with Zsolnay, using the extravagantly florid motifs of the Hungarian needlework of the Great Plain area. At Kaposvár you will find a Zsolnay fountain, with pyrogranite peasants in beautiful fancy dress dancing around the source of the water. Then there is Zsolnay in Győr, Szeged, and quite a lot in Upper Hungary, now Slovakia. Another outstanding Art Nouveau building is the Raichle Palace in Szabadka (Subotica, Serbia, Ferenc Raichle, 1903). Nearby, two monumental acquamarine pyrogranite vases designed by the Austrian Art Nouveau architect Friedrich Ohmann grace the grounds of the Public Park of Palics Spa. In Vienna the most notable are the Palais Equitable for the life insurance society at the Stock-im-Eisen at the Kärntner Strasse–Graben corner and the Allgemeine Poliklinik in the 9th district (both by Andreas Streit, 1891 and 1891–92). The entire façade of the fascinating orientalizing Zacherl Factory, built in Vienna's outskirts at the turn of the century by the insect-exterminating company Zacherl, has the form of the Blue Mosque of Isfahan, and is Zsolnay pyrogranite.[2] In the Banat and Dalmatia, in Fiume (Rijeka) and Abbazia (Opatija) as well as the RR Station of Pécs, not only buildings but all the railroad stations along the route in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy were designed by the Hungarian Ferenc Pfaff, built according to a uniform plan and covered with Zsolnay pyrogranite.

We find Zsolnay pyrogranite all over the world: in Venice on the arched entranceway and on the Hungarian Pavilion (Géza Nikelszky, 1909) in the Biennale Gardens. The eosin tiles gracing the arch are eerily similar to Andy Warhol's "Daisies"—was he possibly influenced by the Zsolnay daisies on the Hungarian Pavilion which he surely saw on his many visits to Venice? He was after all Ruthenian—his family emigrated to the U.S. from what was then Hungarian Upper Hungary, now Slovakia (and I myself spoke to his mother in Hungarian in New York); furthermore, there was a huge amount of Zsolnay pyrogranite on the Ruthenian Church of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, U.S. The dramatic ceramic and glass *scenae frons* of the Teatro y Museo de Bellas Artes in Mexico City was produced by the Zsolnay factories in conjunction with Miksa Róth, the artist in glass, dating from before WW I.

2 ■ Zsuzsa Mendöl, "A Zsolnay épületkerámia egy évtizedes bécsi sikertörténete" [A Decade of Successes in Vienna for Zsolnay Architectural Ceramics]. In *Magyar Műemlékvédelem XIII. A* Műemlékvédelmi Tudományos Intézet Közleményei. Budapest: National Office of Cultural Heritage, 2006, pp. 295–306.

The Budapest heritage

Coming into Budapest from Ferihegy Airport along Üllői Road, you simply cannot miss the majestic Museum of Applied Arts with its shining bright green-tiled Zsolnay roof. Many actually think this is an Indian Mosque or a Rajah's Palace. Designed by Lechner (1893–96), it is a prime example of Hungarian Art Nouveau, whose architectural elements and decoration dip into the rich wellspring of the traditional Magyar folk art repertory. The entire façade of the Museum, down to the socle zone of pink marble, is Zsolnay ceramics, more exactly, pyrogranite.

Lechner completely sheathed the walls of the spectacular lobby entrance in a pattern of yellow-framed red-violet-peach eosin tiles. The lobby's ceramic ceiling, which again strangely reminds one of India, is a rhapsody of yellow and white ceramic, with colourful Hungarian folk-art patterns taken most probably from Kalocsa needlework and textiles. The ceramic railing of the main stairway has a striking bright yellow sinuous form, ending in a cock's head, with a pattern of cut-out hearts, all inspired by Hungarian folk art. Thus Lechner could realize his dream of creating a "Hungarian style" in architecture.

It is said that at the inauguration ceremonies of the building in 1896, the conservative Emperor Franz Joseph stopped dead at the sight of the curious, gleaming yellow ceramic railing and asked, "Was für eine Omelette ist das?" But the old Emperor graciously transcended his initial antagonism and dutifully signed the document of the building's establishment with a pen-and-ink set decorated intricately with Hungarian motifs celebrating the Hungarian Millennium and made for the occasion by Vilmos Zsolnay himself. It is now on display in the Museum of Applied Arts.

The Postal Savings Bank dated 1911, now part of the Hungarian National Bank, at 4 Hold Street was deemed by Nikolaus Pevsner when he visited Budapest in the early 1960s Lechner's outstanding masterpiece. But for a thin horizontal median line, the wall rises uninterruptedly to the roofline creating a modernist "curtain-wall" effect. The building is crowned by a pitched-roof pavilion-like ornament, all covered with tiles. The spectacularly decorated roof of the classical Chinese palette of egg-yolk yellow and spinach-green coloured Zsolnay tiles is rimmed by undulating battlements whose curves are outlined with pale-coloured bricks and bright yellow pyrogranite edging. Rich motifs adorn the roof, all taken from the fabulous 8–9th-century gold Treasure of Nagyszentmiklós; there are also copious symbols of the Greco-Roman god Mercury-Hermes-Apollo, god of commerce and banking, with the ubiquitous beehives and busy little bees (symbols of saving and Hermes' attributes) crawling up the façade decorating its pillars. Here Lechner, using what he thought were pre-Conquest tribal motifs, aspired to fully realize his wish to incorporate Hungarian motifs with symbols of Antiquity to create a genuinely "Magyar" Art Nouveau style.

How many use the No. 1 Underground—the first in Continental Europe—and do not even notice the elegant cream-and-chocolate ceramic sheathing of the walls and the finely designed signs of each station? These too were originally Zsolnay but since the factory had shut its pyrogranite sector in 1991, they were replaced by non-Zsolnay tiles in the 1996 restoration. Originally there were small charming barrel-roofed buildings all covered with colourful Zsolnay tiles above the entrances but unfortunately these were torn down as being a hazard to traffic along Andrássy Avenue in the inter-war years. Alas, the beauty, harmony and utility of this originally historic underground line is not intact any more.

Those who visit the Budapest Zoo (Kornél Neuschloss-Knüsli, 1911–1912) pass through the exotic cone-shaped main entrance, decorated with near-life-size Zsolnay bears and tiles—arguably the most beautiful Zoo entrance in the world! People are further amazed by the unusual concept of the eosin-decorated and roofed Elephant House built in the form of a mosque featuring antediluvian animals and cavemen climbing along the friezes of the various entrances, as well as the huge eosin heads of other-worldly rhinos, hippos and imaginary beasties that would make Stephen Spielberg stop in wonder.

Similar antediluvian creatures creep up the elegant curve of the beige-coloured pyrogranite arch of the the portal of the "Parisienne" Department Store at 70 Andrássy Avenue by Zsigmond Sziklay (1909–1911), who daringly placed a lifesize pyrogranite statue of himself on one side of the huge arch on the second story, opposite the statue of Samuel Goldberger, owner and commissioner of the building, who surveys his kingdom from this lofty place on Budapest's most elegant boulevard.

The entire arcade or interior hall (as well as all the cladding and accessories of the kitchens and bathrooms) of the recently renovated stately apartment house, the Gresham Palace (now the Four Seasons Hotel) were originally Zsolnay. The tiles of the hall were a beautiful mother-of-pearl eosin-like pinkish-grayish coloured glaze that made the elegant interior space reverberate with light and muted colours. (Unfortunately the restoration, by a German company, was carried out neither with proper information, nor with sensitivity or care.) Over 300,000 Zsolnay tiles were knocked off the walls and replaced, so that the dominant colour of the interior is now a cold lime green. Gone is the charm and mystery created by the mystic shimmering of tiles while the new ones serve as a dead green background to two huge abstract paintings in glaring bright green acrylic dominating the entrance.

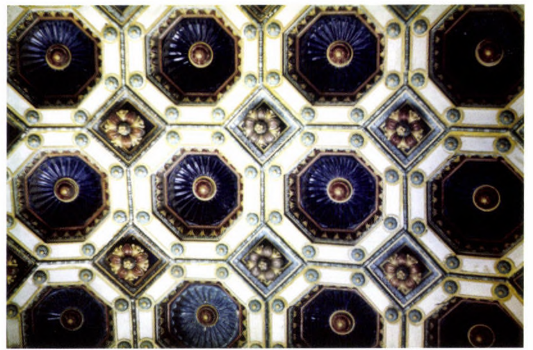
The huge entablature, frieze, gold capitals, window and door frames, the figure holding the Hungarian coat of arms over the west gate and the large square decorative panels with cherubs on the façade of the Műcsarnok (Palace of Arts, Albert Schickedanz, 1895) on Heroes' Square are Zsolnay—but unfortunately in "restoration" these have all been painted over, ruining forever the character of the

Tamás Mattyasovszky Zsolnay

The Church of Our Lady of the Assumption – Patrona Hungariae, commonly called the Matthias Church
Trinity Square (1st district), Budapest
Restoration by Frigyes Schulek 1874–96, on the World Heritage List

Tamás Mattyasovszky Zsolnay

Museum of Applied Arts
33–37 Üllői Road (9th district), Budapest
Ödön Lechner, 1893–96



Decorative inlays and terracotta sculptural elements (clockwise):
Putto holding a camera. Hungarian House of Photography in Mai Manó House, 20 Nagymező Street (6th district), Budapest. Rezső Nay and Ödön Strausz, 1894 • Coffered majolica ceiling of the Castle Garden Bazaar. (1st district), Budapest. Miklós Ybl, 1874–82 • Prónay Mansion (today Hotel Mercure). 2 Trefort Street (8th district), Budapest. Lóránt Friedrich, 1890 • St Stephen University, Faculty of Veterinary Science. 2 István Street (7th district), Budapest. Imre Steindl, 1880–81 • Steiner Apartment House. 17 Ulászló Street (11th district), Budapest. József Steiner, 1914–15

Tamás Mattyasovszky Zsolnay

Boglárka Katona

The Men's Thermal Baths in the Gellért Baths
1 Szent Gellért Square (11th district), Budapest
Ármin Hegedűs, Artúr Sebestyén and Izidor Sterk, 1911–18

St Ladislaus Church
25 St Ladislaus Square (10th district), Budapest
Ödön Lechner, 1900

Tamás Mattyasovszky Zsolnay

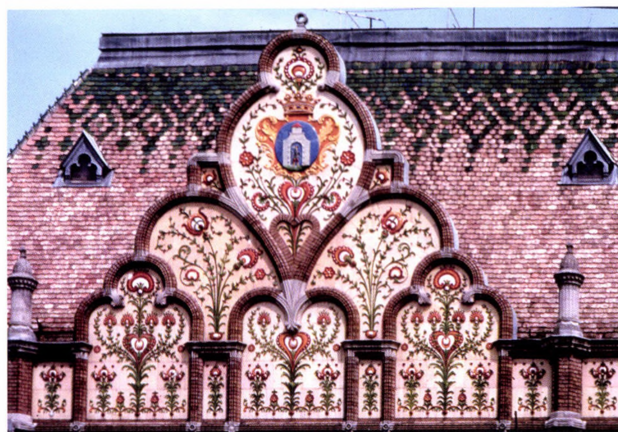
Royal Hungarian Postal Savings Bank, now part of the Hungarian National Bank
4 Hold Street (5th district), Budapest
Ödön Lechner and Sándor Baumgartner, 1900–1901

Tamás Mattyasovszky Zsolnay

Royal (National) Geological Institute of Hungary
14 Stefánia Road (14th district), Budapest
Ödön Lechner, 1898–99

Pyrogranite relief designed
by Tádé Sikorski (1893)
on the Vasváry House
19 Király Street, Pécs

Cifra Palace, 1 Rákóczi Avenue, Kecskemét
Géza Márkus, 1902



City Hall
Kiskunfélegyháza
József Vas – Nándor Morbitzer,
1909–19

Tamás Mattyasovszky Zsolnay. Database of the Institute for Art History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Central Post Office. The Hungarian coat of arms flanked by angels
5 Jókai Mór Street, Pécs
Ernő Balázs, 1903

St Emeric, son of St Stephen, King of Hungary, on the County Hall
Széchenyi Square, Pécs
Unknown Architect, 1898

Tamás Mattyasovszky Zsolnay. Database of the Institute for Art History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

ceramics and the uniqueness of the building. Originals of the panels can be seen on the Vasváry Villa in Pécs, which is all covered in Zsolnay pyrogranite.

Yet there are plenty of well-restored Zsolnay buildings. The arches of the 2nd-story windows of the Faculty of Humanities of the Eötvös Loránd University by Imre Steindl (1881–1883) are decorated by Ármin Klein's symbolic figures of the liberal arts; the entire façade of the Hungarian House of Photography in Mai Manó House on 20 Nagymező Street (Rezső Nay, Ödön Strausz, 1894) is sheathed in Zsolnay, and there are many others. Just stroll up Váci Street, to No. 11/a, where you will find plenty of oglers. Even though most do not have a clue as to what the building is, nor its materials (Zsolnay pyrogranite) nor who built it (this is an early Lechner from 1889–90), they just stop across from the striking building on the narrow street, gaze up and photograph. The recent restoration brought out the original blue background of the "curtain-wall" ceramic tile façade with its grayish-cream trellis-patterned medieval-like pyrogranite meander, interwoven with the letter "T" for Thonet, the bent-wood furniture manufacturer who commissioned it. With WW II Thonet closed its doors, left Hungary, and its business building was expropriated.

At 10 Franciscans' Square, we find the palatial former Inner City Savings Bank building, known as the Paris Bazaar (Henrik Schmal, 1909–13); further down Petőfi Street there is Béla Lajta's "Rózsavölgyi/Leitersdorfer House", 1911–1912, on Szervita Square, the latter a prematurely modernist masterpiece all covered in pyrogranite featuring arresting yellow and orange geometricized ceramic decorations in huge horizontal strips along the balconies, their motifs taken from the Croat-Sokác headdresses and recorded in Teréz Zsolnay's famous notebooks of her folk art collection. Lajta also uses folk motifs in the 8th district Széchenyi István School of Commerce of 1910–1911, on the pyrogranite dado on the first floor and the walls of the gym/exercise room.

The former towering Árkád Bazaar by the Vágó Brothers, József and László (44 Dohány Street, 1908–1909), was originally designed as an exclusive children's toy shop with the entire façade clad in large oblong off-white pyrogranite tiles fixed at the edges with eosin keys and featuring the figures of charming children at play over the entrances. The building has suffered untold damage, and is now hopefully under restoration.

Venturing out to suburban Kőbánya, there is the spectacular Church of St Ladislaus, also by Lechner (St Ladislaus Square, 1896–97). The entire creamy white façade, with the surface of each brick incised to break the blinding sunlight hitting the surfaces and decorated with a working clock and the magnificent over-lifesize angels—symbols of the Cardinal Virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity—makes an arresting sight on the horizon. Even the interior decor—the christening font, the pulpit and the screen—are sheathed in cream-coloured Zsolnay tiles, with soft coral, bright turquoise and gleaming (real) gold decorative touches. Spectacular.

Perhaps the most elaborate interior is Buda's Gellért Baths, impeccably restored in 2009. The Men's Thermal Baths are resplendent with bright turquoise Zsolnay pyrogranite, the puttos over the arches, water-spouting masks, every fine detail elicits wonder in all who go there. Even the bubble-bath swimming pool is resplendent with Zsolnay—the huge stone-coloured columns with spiralling marine decorations, all of the former Winter Garden, are Zsolnay pyrogranite, as is the base and the figure of a graceful nude girl perched above a gaggle of geese.

To conclude this modest selection from a list of items with pyrogranite, about 200 Budapest buildings, the New Jewish Cemetery in Kozma Street contains several Zsolnay treasures, including the striking bright turquoise-glazed Schmiedl Family Mausoleum by Lechner and Béla Lajta, an exuberant piece of Hungarian Art Nouveau, and the pink pyrogranite-covered mausoleum of the Gries Family. Further, there is Zsolnay cladding on what little remains of the mausoleum of the Törley family, the famous manufacturers of champagne. The huge ceramic wall picture of the "Apotheosis of Champagne" by Zsolnay artist Henrik Darilek, 1904, is happily intact in the Marketing Hall of the Törley Winery.

Pécs and the factory complex

Pécs, hometown of the factories, is alive with music and activity. Having been nominated European Capital of Culture for 2010, the city achieved the peak of its glory in September 2010 when the exhibition of the renowned Gyugyi Collection of Zsolnay Art Nouveau decorative wares was opened in the Sikorski House on the factory premises. Once the residence of Tádé Sikorski and his wife, the talented designer Júlia (Zsolnay) and their numerous children, the house is full of replicas of the ceramics delivered by the factory, such as the classicizing statue group gracing the arch of the entrance of the 1885 Műcsarnok in Budapest. The house has rich Islamic-inspired ceramic cladding, the result of Miklós' trip to the Middle East in 1887.

Zsolnay collector Ferenc Gyugyi of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S. having sold his Zsolnay collection to the city of Pécs, took up residence there before the crates containing his precious collection arrived, so he could oversee preparations for the installation in the Sikorski House. Six hundred spectacular items are on show, and the meticulous engineer wanted everything to be picture perfect.

Currently, 700 employes of the Renaissance Restoration Company are working night and day on the Zsolnay Cultural District, the greatest investment of the EU Capital of Culture 2010 project. Five hectares of the original factory areas and gardens must be brought back to the state they were in originally. This is where the Zsolnay family lived and worked; the huge territory includes the precinct walls, the former Eosin Depot, designed by Tádé Sikorski, and the so-called "Green House", as well as the small outdoor multi-colour tile-roofed depot for the Islamic Ceramics collection and what was called the Ice House.

They are being turned into museum and gallery spaces and premises for the Faculty of Humanities of Pécs University, its library and various educational and entertainment centres. It is here that the Hungaria Nostra Foundation of Los Angeles, Inc. is slated to award US $15,000 for the restoration of an entire wall with pyrogranite cladding in honour of Tamás Mattyasovszky Zsolnay and his pioneering work in documenting, photographing and publishing the Zsolnay architectural ceramics. The tennis court, one of the first in Hungary, installed by the Sikorskis, will be covered over.

The formidable Mausoleum of the family high up on the hill behind the factory has been accurately restored. What hoodlums destroyed in the 1950s has now been renewed by accurate restorers from top to bottom. The original massive fence, with terra cotta plaques showing the five-tower logo of the Zsolnay Factories, now embraces the choragic monument-like central-plan building to keep out further offenders. Unfortunately the horrid concrete panel houses constructed in the area to obscure and denigrate the Mausoleum and the family's chapel are inhabited, and therefore there to stay. The famous steep pathway leading up to the chapel is lined on either side with massive low fencing on which 42 dramatic brown pyrogranite lions, replicas of the two remaining originals in the Zsolnay Museum, crouch in fearsome array.

Pécs has been bitten by Zsolnay fever! Indeed it was mainly on the strength of the Zsolnay that Pécs was selected EU Capital of Culture for 2010!

The Mausoleum and its interior

Crowds teem into the Zsolnay Museum. The rich display begins with splendid examples of architectural ceramics, including nearly the entire beautiful monumental altar of the Church of Mariasdorf in Austria. The famous Géza Maróti-designed Duck Fountain of 1904, originally made for the World Expo in Milan, is entirely reconstructed in the third room downstairs. There are also items from the "St Stephen's Room" once in the Royal Castle in Buda, the victim of wartime bombing. Fragments remain in pyrogranite of the monumental figures of King Béla and St Stephen, and drawings attempt to give an impression of the original monumental pyrogranite fireplace and rich ceramic wall sheathing of the entire room.

The streets and squares of Pécs have been refurbished, all covered with an even cladding of a smooth beige stone with intermittent rivulets where children float little boats downstream, and in other spots, spouts of water shoot up in different colours, much to the delight of the children who shed their clothing to enjoy the city's generous shower of fresh water in days of turgid heat. Adults take off their shoes to wade in the waters, smiling and chatting. As I stroll through the city there are concerts and activities galore—jazz festivals, folk dancers, huge crowds gathering on Dóm Square in front of the Cathedral; strollers fill the chestnut-tree lined Corso, families sit atop the Barbican drinking a beer or a spritzer and gaze out over the panorama of the city.

Nearly every house in the old city centre has Zsolnay terra cotta decorations—mostly unfortunately painted over. One spectacular example is the Vasváry House on Király Street, with nearly every available space on the façade covered with huge pyrogranite plaques depicting commerce and industry. This is where presently there is an excellent exhibition on one of Pécs' vanished industries—the family-founded and managed Angster Organ Works, nationalized and entirely destroyed in 1949. They were working on their 1307th organ when Joseph and Imre Angster, of the third generation of the most important of Hungarian organ makers, were arrested and imprisoned in 1949 on trumped-up charges. The Vasváry House is now a museum/gallery, but has a room with all the rich hangings and interior furnishings of the Vasváry family, wealthy dealers in iron, including two spectacular Zsolnay vases designed by Júlia Zsolnay.

The new financial partner of Zsolnay Porcelánmanufaktúra Rt., now located at the back of the property, is the Real Estate Holding Co. SCD, which has clearly expressed the wish that the focus be on the production of pyrogranite. Hopefully there will be talented architects and sculptors who, using state-of-the-art digital technologies, will create façades and interiors as spectacular as the Zsolnays did a century and more ago. ❧

Tamás Torma

Halfway Between Turkish and Nordic Steam

Not long ago I was luxuriating in the steam room of the Rudas Baths. Even the hard-boiled, after several hours of alternating between hot, tepid and cold pools, succumb to a delightful torpor, a state which combines "restful inertness, languorous recumbence, weariness and renewal, this indulgence of indolence," as one of our great forebears, an émigré who also passed through Turkey after the 1848 revolution, put it.

Sunbeams filter through coloured glass holes in the dome. In the spring and summer, when their slant is high, these shafts can strike deep into the water of the central pool, dancing in holographic play on the surface and flickering on the vaults. Only the gurgling of the water outlets occasionally intrudes over the lulling echoes of lapping water. On the other side of the sturdy Turkish-era walls, dins the usual bustle of the city. On the inside, however, the hubbub of the outside world is shut out. Idling in the water, even mundane cares recede. Here you feel you might be wiser, and capable of detached contemplation.

And here I am, together with a friend of mine—a graphic artist who has just returned from Luxembourg—sitting in the middle of the city in water and timelessness (it is he who suggested the venue longingly).

"Whenever I'm abroad, the thing I dwell on most when I think of Budapest is the enchanted air of these baths," he exclaims. "Just look at the miraculous space the Ottoman Turks were able to construct from simple forms: the walls are massive, and yet, thanks to the vaulting and the concentricity, they have a light and airy effect." The architects and builders, he says, were not striving for monumentality; the scale is utterly human. The same can be said of any functionally efficient building, he adds, but here the harmony and balance

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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.

derive from a higher beauty. In the centre is the large dome with its stained glass firmament, with a completely cosmic effect, and the central basin beneath it is flanked by smaller basins in each corner, the whole making for a structure which is symmetrical, lucid and satisfying.

After the Trianon Peace Treaty, Hungary lost not only two thirds of its pre-war territories, but most of its mountainous country and medicinal spas. Holiday habits changed thereby. After a lengthy search for a new identity as the centre of tourism, Budapest came up with one of its earliest slogans, aiming to attract foreign tourists: "Budapest, the spa city". That is exactly what Budapest has become, even for the masses.

The thermal springs which bubble up to the surface between the hills of Buda and the Danube no doubt influenced ancient tourists too—the many tribes who passed this way over the centuries: Celts, Huns and Avars, not to mention the Romans before them, who made Aquincum the seat of the province of Pannonia centred on the Danube fords. The Roman town, a few miles further north of the Turkish baths (the name Aquincum probably derives from a Celtic or Illyrian word for 'water' or 'river'), was served by many public and private baths. To this day you can see the excavated ruins; one of them is situated under the Buda end of the overpass to Árpád Bridge at the northern end of Margaret Island.

In the Middle Ages, after the Tartar invasion of 1241, the first large fortress was built on Castle Hill in Buda, encouraging people to flock to the Roman-era thermal springs. The neighbourhood of the Császár (Emperor) and closely adjoining Lukács (St Luke) Baths, on the Buda side at the southern tip of Margaret Island, was later on the location of various hospitals, while the more southernly baths, which lay closer to Castle Hill (and were the precursors of the Rudas and Rác—in Hungarian a generic term for Serb—Baths) became the arenas for social life linked to the royal court. Thus, when the expansion of the Ottoman Turkish Empire into Europe reached Buda in the 16th century the city had baths that had already been operating for a long time.

Earthly paradise

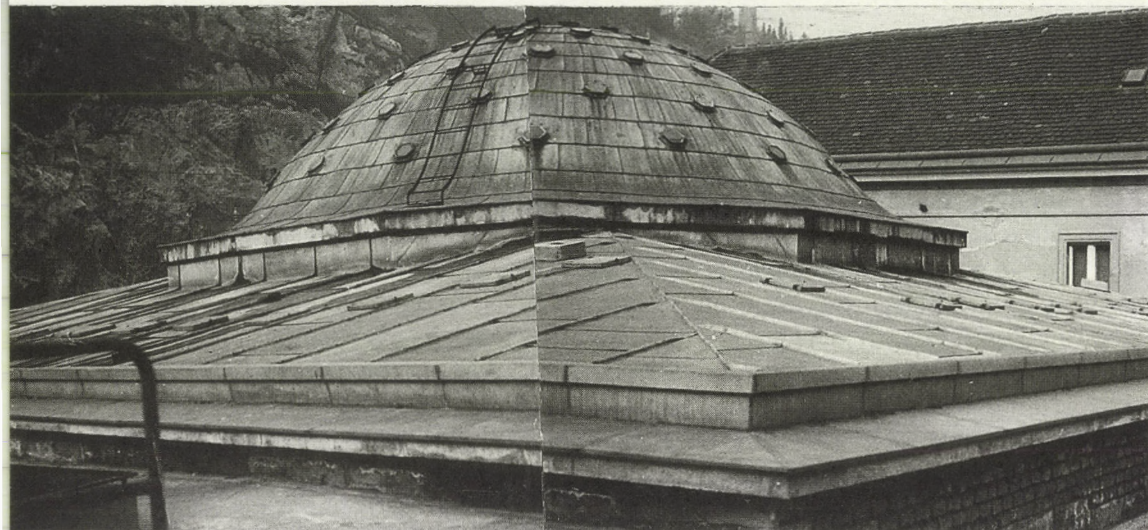
According to the Koran there are "three personal impurities" and therefore a person must be cleansed in three ways. In the first ablution the hands, mouth and beard must be washed, and in the second, before praying, the arms from the elbows to fingertips, the brow, the face, the neck and again the mouth, moustache and beard must be washed—all three times over. The third purification requires immersion of the whole body. Beauty and cleanliness were integral to a harmonious life, and this was all part of Muslim thinking about the wholeness of the world. The Koran says: "Allah sends... the raindrops trickling down from the clouds... revives therewith the earth after its death." This water,

so the largely desert-dwelling first Muslims think, is given a favoured role when it comes to the idyllic state of affairs in Paradise. For that reason, alongside the private baths of the wealthier classes, the communal Turkish bath, or *hamam* (from the word for "warmth-giving") evolved as a social institution. These baths often developed as part of a bigger complex of religious buildings alongside a mosque, school and hospital. They could be used by anyone, irrespective of age or gender; indeed, they were often served as venues for ceremonies ranging from circumcisions to marriages, even funerals, as well as instruction in beauty treatment. (Baths were among the few public places women were allowed. Though there were few baths reserved for women, they had special social significance: apart from their role in ritual ablution, they also became centres for beautification and Islamic cosmetics. The baths were places where the details of a dowry could be debated, and they were also where, the day before her wedding, a bride could have her body smartened by a female attendant.)

Bath-takers thus experienced refreshment in all senses: a symbolic rebirth and the participation in divine harmony. That was why baths were designed as expressions of the universe, the world both as an entity and in its details as it was created by Allah. Bathers came into contact with the heavens as they were being cleansed. Every basin and dome, often the stellated form of their windows, the patterns on the tiling and the temperature of the water had a symbolic meaning; the distinct sections of baths had to be attuned to the various phases of ritual cleansing and brought into correspondence by the language of architecture.

Baths became a part of Turkish culture five hundred to a thousand years ago even as the Ottomans, invading and conquering Anatolia, adopted and reshaped the formal designs of the baths of the Byzantines and the Roman *thermae* in the former eastern provinces of the Roman empire, reshaping these to their own taste. By the Middle Ages a highly sophisticated culture of bathing developed in the Ottoman Empire.

A person seeking to bathe on entering the building found himself in an ante-room capped by a dome. Low couches were placed along the walls so one could disrobe and also rest after going into the sweat room. In the best instances this lobby featured a fountain and was also a place to smoke a hookah, drink coffee and possibly to eat snacks. The room for rest and relaxation opened into a central hall, which in turn led to an even warmer one, then further on to the innermost, hottest and also most humid chamber, the *hararet* or *caldarium,* which had a marble floor and benches. The marble was heated from inside. Steam was produced from water that trickled over the floor. By the wall, generally placed in the corner, were smaller basins offering water at various temperatures. The low marble benches were among the key elements of a *hararet* as it was on these that the sweating bathers lay, and the attendants would rub them down and massage them. Others in the chamber would constantly sprinkle cold water over each other.



The court of the Rudas Baths showing the dome, cca 1930.
Unknown photographer. Photo Archives of the Municipal Szabó Ervin Library

After this was the rinsing of hair and beard. In times past the more rigorous adherents to the faith had their skulls and armpits shaved there. This was where the warmer part of the bathing, often lasting several hours, would end: from here onward the bathers would progress backward through the second chamber, the warm-water *tepidarium,* then the colder *frigidarium,* where they would be given a blanket and bathrobe and could again recline on a couch.

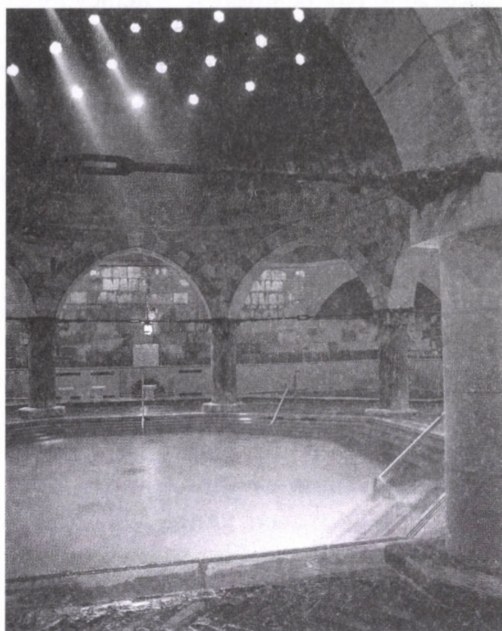
The *hamam,* not surprisingly, had both sacred and profane associations in Islam, testified to by the huge number of rules which sought to keep behaviour there at all times within the bounds of respectability. Despite all the rules, homosexuality and exhibitionism were rife—tradition has it that Allah set 72 angels, or *malaika,* to act as guards at the gateway of each bathhouse in order to curse those who entered with their heads uncovered. Being places of ill repute, one was not permitted to pray in a bathhouse; moreover, superstition had it that these places, whether or not they might be considered earthly paradises, were most certainly the seats of demons and evil spirits. Apologists of the *hamams* routinely cited Mohammed as having called public baths marvellous buildings (hence they were earthly paradises after all), and according to another tradition the Devil declared that when he had asked Allah for a dwelling, he was allocated a *hamam* (an earthly hell, in other words).

Rudas Baths

This, the finest of Budapest's Turkish baths, is also the first municipal facility: when the combined imperial forces retook Buda in 1686, all baths, ferries etc. came under the administration of the imperial treasury. What was to become the Rudas Baths ceded control to the municipality. Nearly a century

and a half before, in 1566, Sokollu Mustafa Pasha rebuilt the first baths established here in 1550. It has remained essentially unchanged over the 460 years since. Under the 'celestial' dome, 10 metres in diameter, is the octagonal central basin. The dome itself is supported by eight barrel-vaulted columns. At the four corners of the square ground plan of the building are four pools of varying temperatures.

In the 17th century the baths were barely tolerated as the appendage of a water mill since, at that time, it was held in Europe that bathing was unhealthy. Soon enough, however, under the influence of the louche nearby entertainment district of the Tabán, it became a favourite with the lower classes—not least because the sexes were only separated by a plank partition wall. Prostitution flourished, and even one hundred years ago the cashier at the front desk would ask as a matter of course, "With or without?" According to an eye-witness any good soul who actually said he wanted to bathe created a sensation.



The central space under the dome in the Rudas Baths

At around 1900, given the fashion for sports, the reputation of Turkish baths also changed. The Rudas Baths gained in prestige: a terraced

swimming pool and a hotel were attached to it. These vanished completely with the subsequent construction of the first Elizabeth Bridge and war damage during the Second World War.

I have been coming here for thirty years, and there's no denying that the Rudas stands at the head of my personal list. In my view, it is the most elegant of all the Turkish baths in Budapest. A few years ago it underwent a complete facelift, and though one may be in two minds about the end result, fortunately the old atmosphere has been preserved—at least internally, though the exterior could do with some improvements. The section lovingly called "The Steam" was until very recently men only, but Tuesday is now ladies' day and at weekends both men and women (in bathing costumes) may use it.

As it happens the Rudas has the best steam bath, with separate wet-steam and hot-air chambers. The only trouble is that the cold-water plunge pool lies a fair distance away, so one loses a lot of body heat just walking across to it. Nonetheless it is at the Rudas that in all Budapest one finds the biggest temperature difference between the steam and the cold water (42 and 16 °C), and that is what steam baths are about: temperature differences and their beneficial effect.

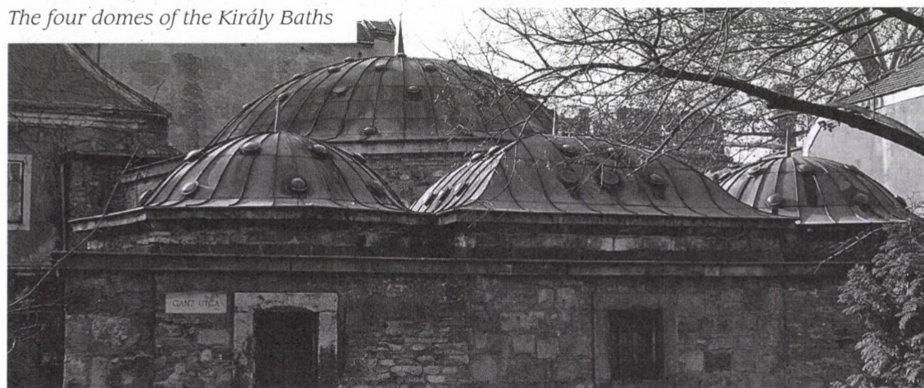
The Turkish baths tradition used to be handed down from one generation of men to the next, and it is the Rudas which has the most folklore. One legend has it that the reason for the colourfulness of the dome's tiny and originally white glass 'eyes' is that foreign film crews are always covering them with coloured foil in the interest of achieving better lighting effects. Another is that the gay community (gay in Hungarian is *meleg,* or 'warm') avoid the Rudas, preferring the Király or Gellért Baths owing to a battle of yesteryear. Another is that the thermal waters of the Rudas are rejuvenating. Indeed, the baths are fed by several springs in the slopes of Gellért Hill looming behind them, including the Hungaria and Attila springs, and the name of one of them, "Juventus", is cited as evidence.

Ever-growing numbers of party-going youngsters familiar with cinetrips into hyperreal, fantasy worlds know about the Rudas, as it is from here that the so-called cinetrip Sparty (as it is now termed) set off on its triumphant march around Europe. Cinetrips grew from a shindig on 1st January 1998 when a group of friends hired much of the Rudas Baths to put on a performance at which swim-suited musicians and DJs recreated soundtracks to old, mostly silent movies as the party-goers bathed, ate, drank and danced. These venerable walls were thus witness to the birth of a new and continuously evolving audiovisual genre, which is a curious cross between a special location, music and film show. The cinetrip is now a travelling spectacle inasmuch as the organizers have shown that they are able to transform various venues into terrains for similar one-off, utterly unrepeatable celebrations.

Király Baths

A Turkish bath in Hungary is not a *hamam* as it uses the mineral waters of a spring, whether cold or hot, primarily for their medicinal properties and is therefore termed either a *kaplidje* or *ilidje* (thus the Rudas Baths were referred to as the Rudna *ilidje*). Not that the use of thermal springs for bathing was unknown to the Turks, but that gave rise to another type of baths. Most of the springs in Budapest had their source outside the Castle walls so that the Király Baths, situated at what is now 82–86 Fő utca (High Street) at the foot of Castle Hill, may have had some strategic significance. The Király Baths also were situated near to the Khoros (Cockerel) Gate, except that they were built on its inner side, whereas the water was led there along larch-wood pipes from baths constructed next to a powder mill in the environs of what is now the nearby Lukács Baths. A decade and a half after Buda Castle had fallen into Turkish hands in 1542, Pasha Arslan, the man who was made the Beglerbeg of Buda in May 1565, set in motion work on building baths on the outer side of what was then the Khoros (Cockerel) Gate. Within a year, however, he had lost favour with the sultan and in August 1566 he was offered the silk rope. The

The four domes of the Király Baths



succeeding beglerbeg, Sokollu Mustafa, was longer-lasting (1566–78), and indeed became renowned for the many major building projects he commissioned. He completed construction of what were then called the Khoros (Cockerel) Baths around 1570. Here, too, there is a central hall under a dome, with a single octagonal pool, but in this case deep niches with pointed arches are set into the wall on four sides of the octagon, with squat pillars between the niches. Evliya Çelebi, the 17th-century Turkish traveller and author of a compendious work on his travels, described these as "small and useful baths", though, in his opinion, the water of the central pool was "so hot that one cannot get into it." Thus the Khoros *ilidje* began life as an unimportant Turkish bath, but it survived the battles to liberate Buda in 1686. All romantic

suppositions aside, the present name of the Király Baths has no royal connotations (*király* means king in Hungarian) but merely refers to Fritz König (king in German), the 1796 tenant who undertook its reconstruction and added the Classicist wings which surround the Turkish core.

With its amazingly genuine Turkish-era exterior and interior, the Király probably comes as the greatest surprise package of all the baths, though, at present, it is fairly rundown. These baths have long been popular with gays from home and abroad and are open to men only and women only on more or less alternate days and both sexes on Sundays. The tub baths, still in operation and reminiscent of an era when urban houses did not have bathrooms, are favoured trysting places for couples. Here however the maximum time allowed is the shortest: one hour and a half.

Veli Bey's *ilidje* (the old Császár—Emperor—Thermal Bath)

Rózsadomb (Rose Hill) is a name inherited from the Turks, having been named after Gül Baba—the Turkish for 'Father of the Roses'—a dervish whose *turbeh* or sepulchre is a place of pilgrimage. In a narrow strip between the River Danube and the steep hillside where the Felhévíz ('Upper Hot Spring') supplies the Király Baths and several other popular baths, lies one of the best-hidden of all Budapest's Turkish baths. The massive block of the hospital of the Misericordia, or Brethren of Mercy, virtually totally obscures it. Built by Veli Bey in the 1570s–1580s, at a place where the Knights of St John had operated a hospital three centuries earlier, it was built at more or less the same time as the Király Baths, but weathered subsequent centuries in a considerably better state. In the early part of the 19th century there was no official protection for buildings of historical and/or artistic merit which is how it reached its final shape in 1844. The reconstruction by József Hild (1789–1867) simply added a new set of buildings, including a Neo-Classicist combined hospital-cum-baths block and a splendid interior courtyard which became one of the centres for the fashionable society of the day.

Thus, these Turkish baths stand as something of a secret gem between the Lukács Baths and the modern Komjádi Béla Sports Swimming Pool. At the time of writing it is not open since it has been undergoing complete renovation, which means getting to the underlying archaeological strata; however, by the time this article is published it will be possible to visit it. It will perhaps most nearly resemble what a Turkish bath in Buda truly looked like: the walls have regained the original brickdust-red colour of the Turkish era; the basin of the central pool has been laid out in light Carrara marble, and the compact dome above with its tiny windows—mere points of light—look truly like a starry sky at night. The baths will be used both as such and as the Rheumatism ward of the Misericordia Hospital, which has also been renewed.

The Rác Thermal Spa

Today's Rác Baths lie close to the Rudas but slightly to the north, on the other side of the Buda end of the Elizabeth Bridge. It is attractive, but any speculation that at one time a covered walkway led there from the Royal Castle is totally baseless. The Turks were again responsible for building the original baths in the 16th century, and the domed chambers of that period have been spectacularly restored in the course of recent renovation work. Thus, the dome of the largest hall, rather like the Pantheon in Rome, has a pierced roof, so that it will be possible to watch the snow falling from the hot-water pool.

In 1864–70 the baths were more or less totally rebuilt and expanded according to the designs of the renowned architect Miklós Ybl (1814–91). This added a women's section and a reception building as well as shower rooms. At the time showering was still a novelty, and various ways in which it might be done were presented: not just the standing showers which have since become standard but also cubicles for seated showering.

It is more than likely that the Rác will become the most imposing thermal spa in Budapest. A modern hotel has been added, and a new Gellért Hill Funicular will start there. The Turkish baths sound like nothing out of the ordinary but it is a fair bet that the modern Rác Thermal Spa will best suit those looking for luxury.

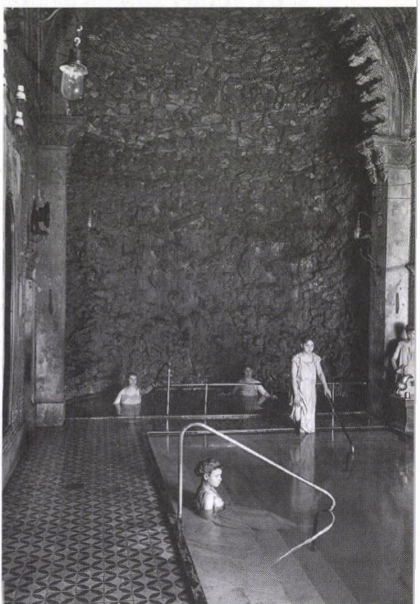


Photo Archive of the Municipal Szabó Ervin Library

Rác Baths. The Women's and Men's Sections. Photographs by György Klösz, cca 1900

Gellért and Széchenyi Baths

Down the centuries Budapest not only continued to make use of the Turkish bath facilities that it inherited but also supplemented and expanded them. Thus the original *hamams* gradually evolved into "bathing complexes", and this eventually led, around a century ago, to the emergence of Hotel Gellért, a splendid Art Nouveau extravaganza, which shares its building with a thermal spa and a swimming pool (it stands on a site where genuine Turkish-era baths had once functioned) and the Széchenyi in City Park, the best-known of the baths in Pest. Both well exemplify how the Turkish culture of sweat

baths was blended with various European practices: how the process in the *hamam* of first being gradually warmed up and then cooled down was enhanced by the Roman and, more recently, Nordic practices of sauna bathing. It is possible to be brought to sweat in dry heat and wet steam (a Roman tradition) and then to cool down either suddenly by plunging into ice-cold water (a Nordic tradition) or by working one's way back through basins with water of a progressively lower temperature. While steam baths and saunas are similar in some ways, a sauna is essentially a dry-steam section with a temperature of 80–90 °C but low relative humidity, whereas a steam bath provides a cabin temperature of 40–60 °C but may reach a relative humidity as high as 80 per cent, so that a sauna makes one sweat copiously whereas the not so hot but far moister steam bath does so more gently. Rising temperature allows the body a more gradual process of acclimatization, is easier on the heart and better for the circulation; moist heat improves blood circulation in the lungs and bronchial tubes. The use of dry hot air was a practice that the Turks adopted from the Romans, to which were added the steam chambers of north-eastern Europe (around the Baltic) and, of course, much else from the milieu associated with baths. This was a social setting in which it was possible to discuss anything from politics to yesterday's football match and where it was also possible to eat, drink and even sleep.

What until recent times—despite an ambience heavily charged with sensuality—had been a singularly closed masculine world, with a huge range of manly rules (that helped make a man of you), is also perfectly capable in a co-ed world of offering new opportunities—witness the outstanding success of mixed bathing (suitably swim-suited) at weekends. Nonetheless the truly striking characteristic of Budapest's Turkish baths is the medicinal effect they have thanks to the astonishing diversity of the thermal springs, which means that the effect is not only to encourage sweating but also the varying beneficial effects of their mineral content.

The Ottoman Turks were quite capable of spending sessions of as long as five or six hours at the baths, and that was still possible in Hungary even up to 10 or 15 years ago. After sweating profusely it was time for an indispensable half-hour massage. In the rest areas there would be lines of sofas, on which dozing and smoking a pipe were just as acceptable as drinking a cup of coffee and chatting. By now, all that has survived this, at least in Budapest, is the snack bar with soft drinks and salami rolls, which however you may only attend fully clothed, after leaving the steam-bath area, in the entrance hall. And then again, prices have not only shot up for users of the baths but the maximum times allowed for bathing have been cut back. There was a time when the steam-bathing ceremony would not be complete without a liberal breather on one of the sofas in the rest area; nowadays it is no longer possible to squeeze that into a rushed stay of an hour and a half. ❧

Alexander Lenard

A Few Words About Winnie ille Pu

Nothing more difficult than to tell when we met our best friends for the first time. I am quite sure I did not meet Winnie ille Pu (my companion in Gestapo-occupied Rome, in the forests of Brasil and now in the greenest valley of the world in the state of Santa Catarina) as a child. I am quite sure about it; he was not yet born when I went to school. We, Hungarian children of the pre-Winnie era, had quite a different bear whom we did not love less, but who did not reach Winnie's international fame, probably because his name was less suited for export. He was called *Dörmögő Dömötör* and his passion for honey and good food was absolutely Winnie-like.

Thus Winnie was—if I am allowed to vary a theme from many biographies—the second bear in my life.

We met at a dramatic moment. Even Nostradamus, the great prophet, could not have foreseen the situation of 1943. The city of Rome was defended by its arch enemy, the Germans, and attacked by its friends, the Anglo-Americans. General Kesselring sat in the belly of Mount Soracte, listened to his private Don-Cossac chorus and phoned into town when he wanted hostages shot. Arabs in French uniforms, Afrikaans-speaking bushmen, Texans and Californians fought their way from Naples up. Germans with emblems showing a jumping tiger and the inscription "Free India", Italians in newly invented fascist uniforms roamed the town. Nobody was really happy about it.

Those least happy were the refugees, hidden in Rome without bread tickets and defended by nothing but some forged document (an employee of the Royal Hungarian Legation, which represented no king at the court of none, changed its policy after the Salerno landings and furnished such a paper as a defence against head-hunting Gestapo men), and the British prisoners of war, freed on September 8 and waiting for the 8th Army.

■ Previously unpublished, written before 1960. On Alexander Lenard in *The (New) Hungarian Quarterly* see also "Man at the End of the World" by György G. Kardos, Winter 1962, No. 48, pp. 161–66 and "Who was Alexander Lenard? An Interview with Klára Szerb"; "A Day in the Invisible House" by Alexander Lenard; "Klara Szerb and Alexander Lenard, a Correspondence", Spring 2008, No. 189, pp. 26–61.

Small wonder if the least happy look for each other and finally meet. "They'll come in a fortnight", we used to say to each other for nine long months, every time we met. Sometimes we met on a rooftop, waiting for the German patrols to finish their search downstairs.

We had to live on something—and that's where the Bear comes in. We lived on teaching English. Everybody wanted to learn English. Some even promised a piece of bread and cheese for a lesson! There were no books to be had and we had to provide reading material for our pupils. My only English book happened to be *Winnie-the-Pooh*.

On a hungry autumn day I got a new pupil. He spoke the melodious accent of Venice and said, "I know no English at all. We had it in school and you do not learn languages in schools. I do not want to hear about grammar. I don't want to memorize words. But I want to know English well enough to talk with the Allied authorities, once they are in Rome."

"When do you think they will come?" I asked.

"In a month or so."

I was relieved to find a pessimist and said, "Yes, Sir."

"You have to get a suitable book for me."

"Yes, Sir," I said.

"We start tomorrow at eight."

"Yes, Sir."

When he was gone I dived desperately into *Winnie,* in order to see if I could use it. Soon I was relieved to see that I could. The book contains remarks about the present and expected weather, which I felt would be a perfect introduction to conversations with Allied officers—although I was not quite sure about the American attitude in this matter. The book contained information about the transmission of messages—by air, by means of bottles or whistling in a particular way. It contained a plan, general staff style, to capture something or someone by means of deception. An ambush was defined and an expedition explained. Finally there was the description of a banquet with an appropriate speech one might hold if honoured in a particular way.

"Here is the book I chose among many," I lied next morning at 8 o'clock sharp.

We started with the chapter on the heffalump, as I thought the conversation between Pooh and Piglet could prove useful in contacts with senior officers: "Piglet said: if you see what I mean, Pooh," and Pooh said: "it's just what I think myself, Piglet," and Piglet said: "but on the other hand, we must remember", and Pooh said: "Quite true, Piglet, although I had forgotten it for the moment". We made speedy progress. When we reached the cunning trap, I already knew that my pupil had come from Venice, sent by the underground, in order to obtain arms from the Allies. When Piglet saw the horrible heffalump I had already found a helper in improving my friend's accent: Major Darry Mander, parachuted behind the lines to organize help for the hidden P.O.W's.

Alexander Lenard (1910–1972)

was born in Budapest, he studied medicine in Vienna (1928–32) and lived in Austria until the Anschluss in 1938, when he fled to Rome. He spent the war years studying the history of medicine and learning languages. After the Allied landings he joined the Italian resistance and worked as medical adviser and consultant anthropologist for the US Graves Registration Service in Naples. On his return to postwar Rome he was appointed physician to the Collegium Hungaricum where he met many luminaries of the Hungarian cultural scene. Meanwhile he started to write and publish poetry in German, wrote and translated medical books and worked as an interpreter. He emigrated to Brazil in 1951. First he worked as male nurse in a lead mine, supplementing his meagre pay by teaching English, Latin and mathematics, then as an apothecary in a settlement at the edge of the Brazilian jungle. In 1956, using the money he won in a Bach competition arranged by São Paolo television he bought a dwarf holding and pharmacy there. In 1956 he completed his translation of Winnie-the-Pooh *into Latin, and published it in 1958 at his own expense. Translated "in rich, flexible 'humanistic' Latin", as praised by Robert Graves,* Winnie ille Pu *was taken up by publishers in Sweden, England and the US to become a bestseller overnight.* The Times Literary Supplement *published a review in Latin. Latin versions of Françoise Sagan's* Bonjour tristesse *(*Tristitia salve, *1963) and Wilhelm Busch's* Max und Moritz *(*Maximi et Mauritii malefacta, *1959) followed. Lenard was fluent in twelve and wrote in three languages: German, English and Hungarian. His best known works are* Die Kuh auf dem Bast *(1963), published in English in his own translation as* The Valley of the Latin Bear *(New York: Dutton, 1965) and* Römische Küche *(Stuttgart: Steingrüben, 1963), translated as* The Fine Art of Roman Cooking *(New York: Dutton, 1966).*

*Lenard left Hungary at the age of eight, but maintained contact throughout his life, translated contemporary Hungarian fiction into German and carried on a vast correspondence. He wrote his first book in Hungarian at the urging of Klára Szerb (*Egy nap a láthatatlan házban, *translated by him into German as* Ein Tag im unsichtbaren Haus, *1970) to be followed by his Hungarian version of* The Valley of the Latin Bear *and various other shorter pieces which appeared only in Hungarian.* ❧

The day Piglet took his bath Monty left the command of the 8th Army. The Americans were stuck at Cassino, very much like Pooh in Rabbit's door. My pupil's English improved rapidly, although it was we who were getting slenderer and slenderer. Eeyore's balloon exploded and the island of Leros fell to the Germans. Roo took a swim and Leipzig went up in flames. We lived in interesting times and General Maelzer, the town commander, as well as Gestapo chief Dollmann (today a happy citizen of Munich) tried to do their best to make life more exciting. Pooh had not yet received his pencil case when my friend said:

"I have to leave tomorrow."

I objected, "...the irregular verbs!"

He said, "I think my English is good enough by now."

We met after the war, after the ending, which was happy indeed for those

not shot and not deported. My friend Pietro Ferraro had really contacted the Allies, had received the arms, and was parachuted back to Venice where he had led the insurrection and hindered the Germans to carry out their sabotage plan. He was awarded the "golden medal", the highest Italian military distinction.

"I had no difficulty in treating with the British," he said. "On the contrary. They complimented me upon my English." Sure, I said—the plan to capture Baby Roo.

Bears sometimes sleep for a season. Winnie disappeared from my life when I worked as consultant physician to the U.S. Claims Service and then (as there were no more civilians hit by U.S. Army vehicles) as Chief Anthropologist of the U.S. Graves Registration Service. The supply of "skeletal remains"—that was the official name for bones—lasted longer. But finally there were only the isolated ones, with a little round hole in the skull, found here and there in Italy. By 1950 the service folded up.

I had passed my spare time during the dark years in the great libraries of Rome, reading old Latin medical books and writing essays on the history of medicine. The best defence against fascist propaganda was listening daily at 6 o'clock to the BBC and not touching printed matter unless it was 200 years old. Now I hoped to get a chair as professor of History of Medicine in Hungary. The Iron Curtain, however, did not hinder news coming out and I decided to try my fortune elsewhere. The International Refugee Organisation offered to send me somewhere. Brasil looked big and green on the map. So I chose it.

The IRO was a very big organization, financed by the UN. It is my conviction that the UN would have saved a lot of money if instead of organizing they would have paid for a first-class ticket on a luxury liner to every refugee who asked for it.

We were dumped into an old coal-freighter and marooned on an island in the Bay of Rio de Janeiro. This stinking spot of the globe got some publicity later on when the Hungarian freedom fighters were landed there. They protested, there was a sort of mutiny, quite a few wanted to return to Hungary and some illegally re-entered Great Britain. They told the island story and were allowed to stay.

As a pupil of the stoic philosophers I had learned to divide things into two groups: those which depend upon us and those which do not. To get away from the "Island of Flowers" as this tropical dustbin was (again: "officially") called did not depend upon me. So I waited.

One day, an agent from a lead mine appeared in quest of useful greenhorns. He wanted mechanics, miners, bricklayers and a doctor for the first aid stations willing to accept the pay and the title of a male nurse. Enthusiastically, I signed up.

The lead mine had the advantage of not being surrounded by water. Else it combined dangers and disadvantages of the virgin forest— such as spiders and snakes—with the smoke, noise and filth of an old fashioned factory. A matter-of-fact description of the place would sound like hackneyed ideological propaganda. The workers suffered from lead poisoning, their children were so

full of worms that they kept creeping out from their mouth and noses, and the Portuguese who owned the mine brought precious race horses for his stud from Argentine. The superintendent played the role of the man who wanted to help the workers, but could not. The French engineers suffered from the obsession of commanding an outpost of the Foreign Legion.

Every gambler (and every refugee) knows that Fate sets a limit to good luck. After that you lose. But there is an identical limit for rough luck. Once you have served your time of distress things change—and I had twelve years of utter misery on my account. Thus the tide turned. The French urgently needed a teacher for their daughters—somebody who was willing to teach English, Latin, History and Mathematics in French in the Brazilian forest—and that was my very humble self. Aside from working as surgeon, obstetrician, paediatrician and what not I taught, and even got paid for it.

My teaching experience was small—and that's where the Bear comes in again. I remembered what Winnie had done for freeing Venice and I started teaching English with Edward Bear coming—bump, bump, bump—downstairs. The young ladies liked the story and made rapid progress. They showed considerably less enthusiasm for the declination of Latin nouns.

Lead-poisoning, burns, explosion wounds and the rest kept me busy. I had to save time and simplify my teaching. "I'll translate *Winnie* into Latin and read a twin Bear", I decided, and started translating right away. I would not dare to say that the first version was any good, but it worked. *Les démoiselles* willingly accepted Cicero's words, as long as they were pronounced by Eeyore. I carried on. One of the Frenchmen, chief engineer Jean Watin, a brilliant humanist, who on the first occasion fled the place and flew to Paris, got so enthusiastic about the undertaking that he sent me Quicherat's priceless French–Latin Dictionary.

My idyllic existence came to an end when I was fired. I had suggested to the lead-poisoned miners and smelters to get the hell out of the place and that was not what the superintendent wanted me to do. I left the mine with my dictionary and the fragment of the Latin *Pooh* and went to São Paulo, the hope-city of all European immigrants in Brasil. My bad luck seemed definitely gone. Soon I worked as assistant to the excellent Brasilian surgeon Dr Egberto Silva. He paved my way back from a refugee's romantic misery into the agreeable, uninteresting existence of the average citizen.

The only reminder of the difficult start was Pooh, the Bear. I had caught him and he had caught me. I had not only a safe job, I also had a hobby. São Paulo has a public library. I read, slowly and with infinite pleasure, Horace and Petronius, Apuleius and old Cicero I had once considered so dull. Every one of them willingly furnished words and phrases for Mr Milne's zoo. After seven short years I was tempted to say that the translation was printable.

This view however was shared by but a few. Robert Graves, to whom I had

sent a copy, replied in elegant Latin that he was going to use it teaching his two boys. An expert on teaching Latin and eminent member of the Orbilian Society wrote: "children do not begin the study of Latin till they are 11 or 12, and certainly learn nothing about some of the constructions that you very properly use in your translation until they are 13 or 14 years of age. For instance the accusative-and-infinitive and the ablative absolute are not used in our Latin teaching till the end of the pupil's second year, the gerundive and gerundium not till the third year and some of your subjunctive uses not till the third or even the fourth. So at the time when pupils would be expected to understand your Latin properly they would already have reached the age when the subject matter would be of no interest to them". Publishers shared the latter view wholeheartedly.

By that time I loved the Bear so much that I did what hopeless poets do the world over: I decided to print the book at my own expense. Translating for an Inter-American Congress of Pathology I earned the money; the agents of the book sold me (for 3 cheap guineas) the right to distribute it free of charge—a right which I thought to possess already—and a Hungarian printer set the type on the machines of an Italian daily in São Paulo. My friends accompanied my undertaking by explaining what I should have done with the money. They widely disagreed in their suggestions, but agreed in one point: that nobody would ever read the book. Today I deeply regret that I refused to bet upon it. I could not only buy the astronomical telescope I am longing for, but could build a nice observatory too...

Printer's ink has magic properties. The small, white-covered São Paulo edition with its innumerable misprints and errors was well received the world over. Humanists from Australia asked for a copy, booksellers from Oxford for 50. At Christmas 1959, the great Swedish publishing house *Svenska Bokförlaget* published 2000 copies. Touching letters from Scandinavian Latinists and a run of 2000 more copies followed.

Now Methuen—who two years before had refused to run the risk— reconsidered their decision: Winnie got a sword and a helmet, and Piglet—*vexillifer Porcellus*—set out with him to conquer the world—or, at least the Republic of Humanists.

I am, of course, very proud, but feel rather lonesome now. "Just like him," Eeyore would say. "First, he left his father, good old Mister Milne. You were a good stepfather to him—but off he stumped again."

It is very nice to hear *Winnie ille Pu* is read and commented upon. *"At pulchrum est digito monstrari et dicier: hic est"* (it is wonderful to be pointed at and hear the people say: that's he), he probably quotes Persus. But what should I do without him? He won't come back. He might get a teaching job, exchange his warlike attires for cap and gown and forget me...

Perhaps I could catch him again by means of a trap. And it must be a cunning trap: I think if I started to translate him into Greek he would stay with me during my lifetime. After all I am past fifty... and it would take some time to get Pooh into the company of Achilles, Odysseus and the other Homeric heroes. ❧

Lynne Sachs

Alexander Lenard

A Family Correspondence

For over seventy years, a steady stream of letters was exchanged between Alexander Lenard and members of my family in Memphis, Tennessee. Most of these reflections on everything from stock market prices to family trips, to the legacy of war to the cost of cranberry seeds, were exchanged between Sandor (he was called in the family by his Hungarian first name, without the accent) and my great-uncle William (a.k.a. Bill) Goodman. Luckily for me, my prescient uncle had a heartfelt, insightful appreciation for the epistolary vision he saw in his cousin Sandor's missives. He kept every letter that he received from Lenard, as well as copies of his own correspondence.

In the mid-1980s, I became fascinated with Alexander Lenard's story, wondering to what extent it could give me insight into our family's heritage in Europe before and after the horrors of war. Aunt Hallie Goodman, Uncle Bill's wife, and later Eleanor, their daughter, knew that I had chosen filmmaking as my life's work. They appreciated my curiosity about and commitment to Sandor's story, and eventually offered me the entire archive to fathom what I could of this rich and troubling tale of hardship and survival. In 2009, I completed *The Last Happy Day,* an experimental documentary film inspired by the life of my distant cousin. By interweaving excerpts from these letters into the visual and aural fabric of my film, I embrace the whimsy and the

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Lynne Sachs
is a filmmaker (www. lynnesachs.com) making experimental documentary films since the mid-1980s. In the The Last Happy Day *she constructed a narrative triangle between Alexander Lenard, her great-uncle William Goodman and herself. While their presence in the film is grounded in a dialogue from the past, her participation is more temporally and geographically fluid, creating an evolving relationship of distance and intimacy through voice and text. The film (available from the New York Film-Makers Cooperative at www.filmmakerscoop.com) premiered at the New York Film Festival and was shown by Duna Television on March 16, 2010, the 100th anniversary of Alexander Lenard's birth.*

pathos that was Sandor Lenard. Always an exile, a victim of a kind of human 'continental drift', my cousin never felt 'at home' in the synthesized postwar euro-culture he found in Brazil. Building a harpsichord on which to play Bach, reading thirteen languages and translating *Winnie the Pooh* into Latin allowed him to stay connected to an old-world life to which he would never return. The two decades I spent researching, travelling, shooting and editing my movie allowed me to explore the implicit paradoxes of a life both thwarted and nourished by the contradictions of a troubled time.

Interestingly enough, the Lenards were the only branch of our extended family that remained in Europe during World War II. In 2003, I travelled to Düsseldorf, Germany to meet Sandor's son, Hansgerd Lenard, then in his late sixties. As I stood with my camera, he uncovered a trove of family diaries, letters and inscribed books from the 1920's and 30's. Inside each book, Sandor and his parents had meticulously transformed their obviously Jewish surname LEVY to a more Hungarian LENARD. Rather than destroying this direct reference to their hidden family identity, Sandor's family, my sole remaining European relatives, meticulously erased. In their minds, the key to survival in early-twentieth-century Hungary would be pristine assimilation.

My own family, during that time, also refused to grasp fully the catastrophe that was Europe. With far less to lose, their methods of confronting imminent danger were similarly subtle. The earliest letters of our family correspondence begin around the turn of the century, but for our purposes, I will start with a letter between William's father Abe offering help to Sandor's father Eugene, a polyglot just like his son, in post-World-War I Hungary:

> June 17, 1920, Dear Eugene, Our oldest son, William will graduate tomorrow at the University of Pennsylvania, the second is in military camp in Kentucky, the third is too small and is at home. Acting on your suggestion I am herewith enclosing you New York Exchange for $1,000 which from the figures that you gave me in your letter you can use to a very much better advantage in Budapest than having this amount converted into Kronen in this country. I am sending this to you to use or invest, returnable in two or three years without interest.—Sincerely, Abe Goodman

For the next 28 years, there did not appear to be a great deal of cross-Atlantic letter writing between the families, not until the end of World War II when William Goodman, now a successful Memphis attorney with four children, travelled with his wife Hallie to Rome where he made some remarkable discoveries about his cousin. Leaving Austria after the Anschluss of 1938, Sandor, a struggling doctor with Jewish lineage, had found refuge in Rome and had devised his own unique way to survive the traumatic world of occupied Italy. By 1948 he worked for the United States Army's Graves Registration Service reconstructing the bodies of American soldiers killed in combat.

In a letter dated September 26, 1948, William and Hallie Goodman have just met Lenard for the first time. Together, they write to William's mother Bobye Wolf who was directly related to the Lenard family through her mother Wilhelmina Levy, born in Worms, Germany in 1840. Here you will see Hallie refer to Lenard's first son Hans-Gerd, whom Lenard left in Germany with his German, Aryan, mother. She also refers to Lenard's second, Italian wife, Andrietta.

> (Hallie)... We went to Alexander's home to see him, his wife and child. He's a very intelligent man, but I am afraid not too practical. He doesn't seem very anxious to come to the US even though they are destitute, and can barely manage to get along. Bill gave him a suit of clothes, and we took his wife Andrietta all our extra soap, a few pairs of hose, and a five-pound box of candy. Lenard says his son, Hansgerd, is almost starving in Germany and we promised to ask you to continue sending him boxes...
>
> (William)... Lenard was very easy to get along with—didn't ask for a thing, which made me all the more anxious to try to help him. I arranged for the manager of Paramount in Italy to give him some translating work on subtitles.

While making my films, I travelled to São Paulo, Brazil to film Sandor's eighty-five-year-old widow, Andrietta. She described in vivid, almost dreamy, detail her husband's macabre medical work in Italy. I listened to her recounting his daily contact with the detritus of war, wondering to myself why we so rarely think about who is responsible for 'cleaning up' the dead. In *The Last Happy Day* her graphic, realistic recollections stir visual ruminations on her husband's futile act of posthumous, cosmetic surgery.

By the early 1950s, Sandor reaches out to William with a kind of forlorn intimacy one might not expect between two men who have only met once in their lives.

> March 25, 1950. Dear Cousin Bill, My conscience is the worst: I have still not completed the research (on our family), which is after all even more interesting for myself than for you... The fact is that after four years as a civil employee of the US Army I had to build a new base for my existence in medical writing. I wrote and published a book on children's diseases and started one on painless childbirth. ...It's the depressing present that renders looking into the past such a sorrowful undertaking. One hoped during the war that there would be a better world. It is hard to realize that the victims died so uselessly. Race hatred not only survived, but also came out stronger than ever. Europe and the world found a new and holy pretext for hate. I really hope that I am mistaken when I think the United States is becoming a dangerous place to live.

As Sandor's world fell into a wartime state of hunger and decay, he delighted in the absurd and the arcane. His love of literature and language was his life raft, his potent means of resistance. Speaking, reading and writing Latin kept him from what Natalia Ginzburg, another writer trapped in occupied Italy, called "the fury of the waters and the corrosion of (our) time."

Soon afterward, Sandor left for South America, never to return to the Europe that had so fed his imagination and his mind. In my film, I contrast the haunting confinement and violence Sandor experienced in Rome during the Nazi occupation with the verdant emptiness of his later life in remotest Brazil. I juxtapose Sandor's fearless introspection in his unpublished letters with my imagined visualization of his idyllic life in his house in the woods. The geography of his NOW simultaneously saddens and protects him from the threats he fears are still percolating on the other side of the Atlantic.

Correspondence with my family does not resume again until a decade later in 1961, when Lenard publishes *Winnie ille Pu,* his Latin translation of *Winnie the Pooh,* and enjoys surprising worldwide success. Goodman gets word of the publication and brazenly takes things into his own hands by writing this February 6, 1961 letter to the Editor of *Time Magazine* in the Time and Life Building in New York City, included here in full. Clearly, Goodman sees the story of his cousin as an intriguing mix of quixotic impulses and stubborn intellectualism.

In the spring of 1961, the two cousins finally make contact once again. Sandor writes a letter to Memphis, explaining his disappearance and his unexpected literary glory. Clearly, Lenard does not yet know that Goodman is not only well aware of his cousin's publication but may also be responsible for the press coverage.

> Dear Cousin William, ...On the long way from Rome into the forest of Santa Catarina, Brazil I had lost your home address and I had abandoned all hope of tracing you again. Now, by the strangest chance of the world, I have become a best-selling author—or at least translator. Thanks to *Winnie ille Pu.* LIFE magazine has published an article about my life and work. A reporter visited me and sent notes to the USA. They wrote the piece as an editorial, a success story and the result is a hopeless mess of misunderstandings, half-truths and outright inventions. On the other hand, more than 100 papers have published reviews about my Bear—which seems on the way to relieve American children of the menace of irregular verbs and defective nouns. For the first time since 1938, I dream about a settled life. At present, this is only a dream, because even after the publication of 84,000 copies in the USA, I have not received a contract for the book, let alone a cent. Please let me know how you are getting on! I remember you had twins. They must be beyond Winnie the Pooh age by now!—With love, your Sandor

Thrilled by his rejuvenated contact with his Hungarian distant cousin relocated to the forests of Brazil, my Uncle Bill responds immediately and practically to Sandor's concerns about money. In addition, he describes his travels to Berlin, Moscow, Leningrad, Helsinki, Amsterdam, London and Paris with the family, giving Sandor a window into a wealthy American's "if it's Tuesday, it must be Moscow" itinerary.

Dear Sandor, It was shocking to learn that your royalty situation has not yet been straightened out. If I could be of the slightest assistance in working out your difficulties with the publisher, please let me hear from you.—Sincerely yours, William

Months later, this letter arrives from Brazil on May 26, 1961, politely spelt in American English by Lenard:

Dear William, Traveling is wonderful if you do it on a voluntary basis. After having been shoved around half the globe, I got allergic to the outdoors. I think a travel agent would have an easier time selling a round trip of the Mediterranean to Odysseus himself than to me. The less I move from my hideout 80 miles inland from Blumenau (the nearest village) in the greenest most peaceful valley in the world, the more I enjoy letters which have traveled a long way. *Winnie ille Pu* has brought me in contact with Latinists the world over. I certainly never thought my Bear would reach the best-seller list, where he now enjoys his life for the 12th week running. I still have not received a cent from my publisher. Should I really receive royalties some day, I am going to become a sort of millionaire—or at least return to the middle class our family left in 1938. In 23 years of existence as a "have-not", I am ready to accept it for the rest of my life.

I have a wooden house, half way between cabin and castle, with such incredible objects as a bathroom and a piano (next bathroom: 20 miles away – next piano: 80 miles). The satellite I see flying occasionally across the evening sky is the only sign of the present. I am sure that you would enjoy the silence and the distance from worldly events. Translating modern books into Latin is not quite paradoxical here. Won't you come and see for yourself?—Your Sandor

Because William is an attorney and is able to arrange the legal matters pertaining to Sandor's royalties for his book, his next letter dated June 7, 1961 arrives with exactly the news Sandor wants to hear.

Dear Sandor, Your publisher confirms that you will receive the full 5% royalty and there will be no further arguments. Your valley certainly sounds attractive. As I get harassed by all the hour-to-hour difficulties of so-called civilization, your mode of living really becomes more inviting.—Sincerely yours, William

Sandor's subsequent July 12, 1961 letter, which is included here in its entirety, is a profound meditation on civilization and the ways Sandor has come to understand and perhaps reject it. In the letter he speaks about the joy of living amongst the flora, and his love of cranberries in particular. I remember hearing my Aunt Hallie's stories about putting packages of these seeds inside a roll of newspaper and sending it off to our distant cousin in the southern hemisphere. How charming and eccentric we all thought this was, at the time, not yet having a sense of our distant cousin's longings.

The early 1960s mark a time in the cousins' correspondence in which letters seem to flow almost monthly. Sandor finally receives a check for $8000 and

claims that he could now be the richest man in the valley, except for the fact that he cannot cash the check.

> Dear William, I thank you very much for the seeds and have sown them with care. I also enjoyed the papers the seeds were wrapped in! It is nice to hear sometimes about the outside world. I love Brazil for all the space and freedom it gives and the more I hear about neutrons and rockets the more I love it, but you can't ask for the advantages of uncivilization without some drawback. Absolute freedom and good bathrooms, space and chamber music are contradictions. I chose freedom and renounced the pleasures of a country where you pay with checks. Still, let me say to you again how happy I feel knowing that you represent my interests up there (in the U.S.). The bonds between our families outlasted the centuries and are still strong. — Gratefully and with good wishes, Sandor

By 1962, life is good for Sandor, his wife and his second son Giovanni.

> Dear William, The money arrived safely. Andrietta is refurnishing the house and I am buying a forest. I am busy writing an anti-fascist Roman cookbook, publishing a Latin translation of Françoise Sagan's *Bonjour Tristesse,* and writing a novel in a secret almost dead language called Hungarian. So you see, I am happily planning for 1963, as if my coronaries would be fit for long term projects and the world were waiting for humanistic and gastronomical literature. As to the heart, I trust that big doses of silence will have some dilating effects upon the arteries. Very much cannot be achieved by medical means. The fact is that bullets that do not actually touch the body also hurt. The only medicine against world events is distance, safe distance. We are busily typing a list of more seeds we would like, so my 'castle' will be surrounded by flowers. My Bach cantatas have already changed the atmosphere of wilderness into something else.—Your old Sandor

Sandor comes to live with my Uncle William's family in Memphis for a few months in 1968, a time of palpable racial tension, street protests and nightly curfews, the same year Martin Luther King was assassinated in a small motel in our downtown. Upon his return to his cabin in Santa Catarina, he begins a correspondence with my cousin Eleanor, Uncle William's daughter, then a senior in high school. His November 27, 1969 letter to Eleanor (here in its entirety) is an eloquent homage to youth, wonder and discovery.

In 1970, Sandor sends his own teenage son Giovanni to live for a few months with their American relatives in Memphis. Giovanni returns to Brazil relating that William's own adult children have each begun families in homes near that of their parents.

> Dear William, My son tells me that you are all living near to one another. Almost all of my life was a series of headaches and the rest was longing and homesickness. My headaches have passed but longing and homesickness are here more than ever and I envy those who can say 'We are all at home.'—Abrasos, Sandor

To Eleanor, he writes another letter, offering a frank description of his own health.

> Dear Eleanor, I am a very bad letter writer now. Though my right eye is far from good, I must finish the translation of my most recent Hungarian book into German. Despairing to get a new heart I'll certainly try to make the old one function, with all its burdens. As soon as you realize you have a heart, there is something wrong with it. Take care, do not ever realize it!—Sandor

On September 25, 1970, Sandor's own doctor writes a personal letter to the family, stating that for the past few months Sandor's working capacity has declined, and that he has lost his drive to write, study or read.

Soon afterward, he writes his own obituary and dies. ❧

Letter to the Editor February 6, 1961
Time Magazine, Time and Life Building
Rockefeller Center, New York 20, N.Y.

Dear Sir:

Your readers may be interested in something about Alexander Lenard, Brazilian, sensational translator into Latin of *Winnie the Pooh.*

Lenard, a cousin of mine, was born in Budapest and received his Doctorate in medicine at the University of Vienna. World War II forced him from pillar to post, until he arrived at the Vatican, where he spent some years as a translator in the library, working near the then ticket taker, DeGasperi, later Italian Premier. After the Americans occupied Italy, he obtained a job with the U.S. Army, using his medical knowledge to assemble bodies for the U.S. Graves Commission, as his foreign nationality prevented him from practising as a physician in Italy. In his spare time, he was writing (and publishing) poems in German, a book on children's diseases in Italian, and working on a history of the Levy family in English, starting at Colmar in Alsace in 1070.

We saw him in Rome in 1948, where he was living in a one-room garret with his wife and child and friend, and offered to arrange for his immigration to the United States. He declined, as he felt that the Russians would be here before long, that "Communism is mob rule and the mob thrives on race hatred." He asked our aiding his going with his family to the upper regions of the Amazon in Brazil, as he felt that his medical training would help him cope with the wild beasts there, where the "snakes would have no legs."

Fluent in at least ten languages, his active and original mind bears great promise. Perhaps The Pooh will be merely a start.

Sincerely yours,

William W. Goodman, Memphis, Tennessee

July 12, 1961

Alexander Lenard to William Goodman

Dear William,

Before coming to Brazil your letter took a round trip in the West Indian islands and finally reached me with a nice collection of inscriptions—the last of them from "Aruba, Netherlands Antilles". They sure get many missent letters there if they have a special rubber stamp for such occurrences!

Your suggestions are very good indeed. As to the Catholic Church it is surely an excellent organization for sales promotion, especially for Latin bears. The Jesuits were the first to make a lot of splendid propaganda: *America,* a New York Jesuit magazine wrote a splendid review and when I thanked them in Latin they printed my letter in full. The second most important Jesuit publication in this field, *Best-Sellers,* also recommended my book for teaching and to humanists. I have not sent a copy to the Vatican, to be reviewed by *Latinitas,* the most important classical review of the Church, because the book contained quite a few misprints. The forthcoming 11th edition I thoroughly revised is going to be perfect enough and I'll have one sent over.

On the other hand I do not want to ask for special favours—they might recognize me. The Church as a whole and the Jesuits in particular, have no particular reason to like me. My first book—on birth control—landed on the Index in record time. While Paul Blanchard lived in Rome I acted as his secretary and collected material for him... and later, I published a rather ferocious review of the *Italia Catholic Encyclopedia* in *Il Mondo* in Rome... finally I published an essay on prejudices, pointed out that Pastor Angelicus in reference to Pius XII could not possibly mean 'angel like' pope—he had given his consent to the deportation of Jews when Pétain asked for the opinion of the Vatican—and *angelis* could only mean *messenger nuntius.* Pastor Angelicus is simply the pope, who had been a nuncio.

The Jesuits did not like my interpretation at all. Anyhow, a very considerable number of Catholic schools have introduced *Winnie* into the curriculum. They know that the unity of the Church depends on the knowledge of Latin—and that Latin has been fading away rapidly, even among Roman Catholic priests. So they happily try all possible means to turn the tide and *Winnie ille* is one of them.

Incidentally, the last pope to know Latin was Pius XI—the last who knew Latin well was Leo XIII. Pius XII knew no language except Italian, German and a little bit of French, but was capable of memorizing a speech in a language he had no idea about, like English or Hungarian. The present pope is far more honest: he does not ever pretend. He spoke to the Archbishop of Canterbury through an interpreter.

It would be fine if you kept 100 dollars or so for the various dreams and wishes! (Or much more if Dutton[1] starts to pay seriously!)

Not that there would be anything I needed seriously. Everyone has a favorite daydream for the case he became awfully rich... but even dreams conform to certain realities. Twenty-five cents of flower seeds are a treasure in a country where 90% of the soil is untilled and 90% of the soil used for the production of foodstuff is used for corn. The only seed Brazil imports are potatoes. Rich men import orchids. But there is nothing—nothing indeed—between orchids and potatoes. Brazilians—85% illiterates outside of the towns—know nothing, not even plants. Foreigners would like to plant trees and flowers they know but if they want to follow the Brazilian rules and laws they never come so far as to plant cranberries.

Brazil has 15,000 miles of unguarded frontiers. Everything is smuggled into the country with utmost ease. Small smugglers bring an attaché case full of needles, the big ones three dozen Cadillacs at once. Now that the president changed it was discovered that high functionaries of different ministries in Rio ran their own port—the only one with modern discharging appliances—and ran a fleet of 'importers' for practically every firm which sold radios, TV, electrical equipment and spare parts. Airplanes fly in their wings full of watches... but don't try to get a dollar worth of anything through legal channels!

Theoretically, if I wanted a dollar of cranberry seeds I should ask for an import license, which I do not get, because I am no licensed seed merchant. Then if I bribe somebody into granting the license, I should buy the dollar on a goverment currency-auction. I can't, of course, the licitation being open to authorized agents only. So I have to buy the dollar on the black market—which is not black at all, because it bears a big sign: 'dollar-change'. Then I could ask for the seeds, but they would first land at the customs, as everything labeled 'parcel,' and I would get it from there after six months, paying let us say 20 cents customs and six dollars handling charge, seals, stamps, etc. After that I would still not get the seeds, they would be sent, upon my expense, to a government agricultural station, which should examine if they do not contain germs or insect so as to endanger the health of Brazilian cranberries—which do not exist. In case the seeds are not lost, used up in the experiment to state if they are harmless, etc. I'll get them when they are too old to grow...

That's the legal way, and it explains you why there are no cranberries (cherries, apricots, plums, lily of the valleys, maples, etc., etc.) in this country.

"Sheer madness" you'll say. I agree. Fortunately, there is another way of

1 ■ E.P. Dutton, New York. After the 1958 private edition of *Winnie ille Pu,* publishers of the new edition.

importing goods: you take an old copy of *Time* or *Reader's Digest,* put the seeds into it, and mail it AIR-MAIL—about the half of the copies arrive (unless they also go to the Dutch Antilles). I got my needles for the treatment of varicose veins this way—and a few watercolours from Europe.

Records may fly as registered letters or 'samples', seeds, colours, small items of all sorts in reviews and booklets. A letter costs more than a 'parcel', but it is worth while to pay the difference because they generally arrive.

There is only one way to find out if a plant thrives in this country: to plant it. Nobody knows what the average rainfall is as nobody ever measured it. Nobody analyzed the soil (agricultural institutes are staffed by illiterates with good government connections. They get sometimes financial aid from the USA—don't-know-what-program point four—and like it). It is difficult to state the temperature because thermometers are not manufactured.

All this has great advantage: the standard of life is so low that you may live on a dollar a day—as I do—and write books or paint. But you don't get cranberries for your pie unless you break the law and import the seeds and try an unheard-of experiment: put the seeds into the soil and wait a while.

The astronomical telescope may wait. The stars change very little. I have been reading astronomy for the past 1½ years and I would like to see the CHAOS a little better. If *Winnie* continues to reach the 5th place on THE LIST a 1000 dollar short-focus instrument will do... but I will wait. I hope Hansi's son, Jan Stael von Holstein, now at Toronto with Robert's family[2], is going to come down here in December (he wants to see the world and to study Hungarian!) He seems to be a very clever young man—and when we meet, we are going to explain at the customs in Santos that the telescope is an instrument to follow horse races. Then we will talk horses with the customs official, offer him 500 cruzeiros to bet on his favorite and we will get the telescope into the country. Maybe he could also bring cymbals (declaring it as a new toy for children who are fond of noise) and a pound of decent coffee—an article which cannot be obtained legally—the good coffee being exported and the one which is not good enough to be burnt in locomotives sold in the country.

Well, it's a funny place I happen to live in... but the more I read about willingness to fight for Berlin (Laos, Kuwait, Congo, Angola) the more I enjoy it. Brazil has no army—only generals—no navy (only admirals—and a 1942 aircraft carrier with no planes because the air force and the navy could not decide who should fly them), no air force, except air brigadiers and a jet plane for the president. (Janio[3] is modest and uses one. Kubicheck[4] has two—the first one flying ten minutes ahead with the official luncheon.) Janio was right

2 ■ Robert Lenard, brother of Jenő Lénárd, Alexander Lenard's father.

3 ■ Janio Quadros, Brazilian politician who served briefly as president in 1961.

4 ■ Juscelino Kubicheck de Oliviera, President of Brazil 1956–61.

when he said, Brazil is not even neutral, but another planet. A cranberryless, cymballess, telescopeless planet, of course.

I fear this letter became longer than you like it—Dutton got a much shorter cable asking him to pay everything directly to you—so let's hope.

Your old and grateful,

Sandor

Alexander Lenard to Eleanor Goodman

27 November, 1969

Dearest Eleanor

Can you imagine that your letter took 2 months to reach me? It sounds unlikely, but the fact is, you have overestimated the mental faculties of our mail service! You thought if you just put enough stamps upon your letter they would find out it was meant "air mail"... Well, they didn't. Please print AIR MAIL and VIA AEREA upon the envelope whenever you write to a place beyond Panama!

You wonder if I ever get bored! Very honestly: NEVER. I may be sad, depressed, tired, longing, homesick... but bored? Never! It is certainly impossible to be bored on a farm when new plants sprout every day, trees grow, when you have to fight parasol ants, feed pigeons, look for giant lizards and wait for orchids to open and rainbows to appear. And I still have to work to keep my Hungarian on a literary level and to play the Well-tempered clavichord a bit better. No—I could never be bored!

But I do not want to boast about it: the older one gets the less one needs entertainment from the outside. It would be tragic if you would already renounce the experience of ever-changing company! It takes long sifting if you want to separate gold and sand. And it takes MUCH longer (almost a lifetime) to separate people you need from the crowd. In this sense Bach and Mozart are certainly gold, Wagner operas sand.

Oh: did you get Mozart's flute + glass-harmonica quintet from Budapest? One of my (old) short stories was published there and I had to buy something from the royalties! So I ordered this Mozart for you... and I hope it reaches you. It is a very beautiful Checho-Slovak performance! And a Mozart you need, but will find in Memphis: Köchel 299 = the Concerto for flute and harp! Heavenly music.

In case one record action is successful, we will continue... Another short story is accepted for publication. And as soon as I finish my essay on Charleston I'll have even more music-money. You see, I cannot be bored:

5 ■ Lenard's first book to appear in Hungary, in his own translation, was *Valley of the Latin Bear* under the title *Völgy a világ végén* [Valley at the End of the World], published by Magvető in Budapest in 1967. In 1969 a volume containing also his 'Roman' stories and *Egy nap a láthatatlan házban* [A Day in the Invisible House, a memoir written in Hungarian at the urging of Klára Szerb] appeared. An except of the latter appeared in *HQ* 189.

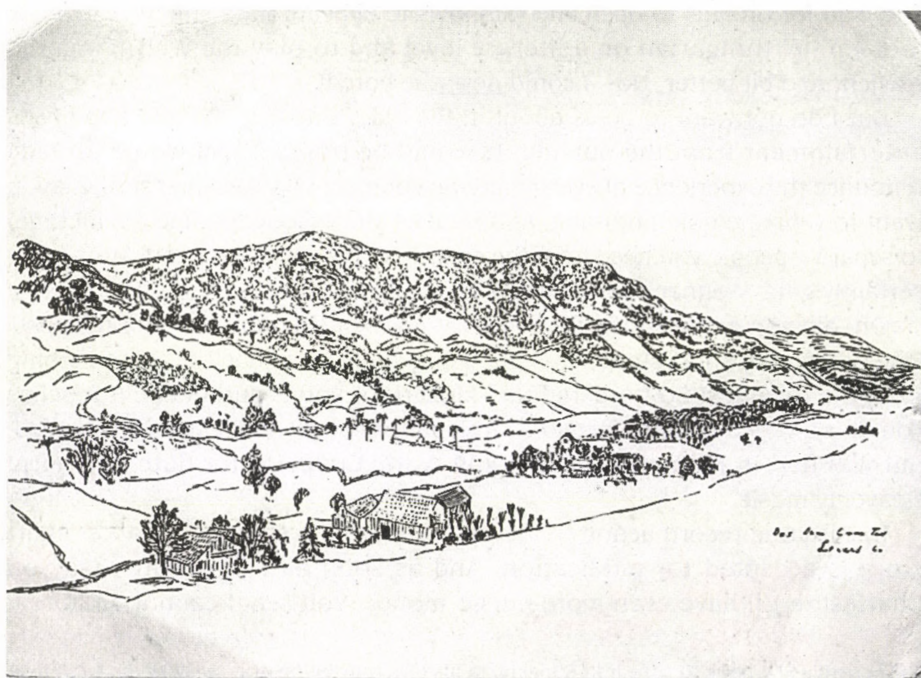
things happen every day. At the age of 60, with a very bad heart and a set of other troubles I became exactly what I wanted to become when I was twenty: a successful Hungarian author! My last book was what you may call a tremendous success: the first edition of 6100 copies sold out in a week before any review appeared. (Hungary has 20 times less potential readers than the USA.) Now they plan to publish my 3 books in one volume![5]

Being old is hard. But a certain amount of glory renders the disaster, which otherwise would kill, bearable. In fact, no other medicine does. To continue this topic: Ethel is planning to marry at Christmas. She is in Europe right now, and I think on her way home she is going to stop in Memphis and say hello to you!

I hope, I really hope, you come (with flute + musics) next summer! It will be winter here–but John[6] will take care of you in São Paulo and I promise not to be too old during your visit!

I include a drawing of my valley, so that you should find your way!

Love and FELICIDADES!
Your Sandor



6 ■ Lenard's younger son, Giovanni Lenard.

George Gömöri

Ferenc Békássy, Rupert Brooke, and Noel Olivier

On a side wall in King's College Chapel, Cambridge there is a memorial plaque commemorating all members of the College who died serving in the Great War. The second name is that of Rupert Brooke. On the opposite wall there is a small plaque with just one name on it, that of a young Hungarian who had also been a member of the college, Ferenc Békássy. It was the economist John Maynard Keynes, a close friend of Békássy, who had asked the college to include his name among those commemorated. However, as one of the Fellows of King's who had lost a son in the fighting objected to this on the grounds that Békássy had died fighting the Allies, the name was carved on a separate wall, near the entrance, in fact giving it far more prominence.[1]

Brooke and Békássy, though not contemporaries at King's, knew each other and were both poets. Coincidentally they courted the same woman, Noel Olivier, whom Békássy had known from his school days in Bedales and Brooke had met socially in Cambridge. It was to Noel Olivier that both men wrote one of their final letters from the front, just before they died: Brooke at Skyros, Békássy in Bukovina.[2] Due to the recent publication of the collected poems and prose writings of Békássy (*Békássy Ferenc egybegyűjtött írásai,* edited by Tibor Weiner Sennyey)[3], there is in Hungary a renaissance of interest in the work of the young

1 ■ This fact was already mentioned by the Hungarian poet Mihály Babits in his *Irodalmi tanulmányok* [Literary Studies], Budapest, 1924, also included in Babits, *Esszék, tanulmányok I* [Essays, Studies I], Budapest, 1978, p. 821. Objections raised against his College commemorating Békássy's death are related in L.P. Wilkinson, *Kingsmen of a Century 1873–1972,* Cambridge: King's College, 1981, p. 279.
2 ■ Rupert Brooke's letters to Noel Olivier were published by Pippa Harris in 1991 *(Song of Love).* The publication of Békássy's letters to Noel Olivier were made possible by the permission of Mrs.Tamsin Majerus, presently of Nottingham University.
3 ■ Budapest: Aranymadár Alapítvány, Irodalmi Jelen sorozat [Golden Bird Foundation, Literary Present Series], 2010.

George Gömöri
is a Hungarian poet, translator and essayist who left Hungary in 1956.
He was Lecturer at the University of Cambridge and is Emeritus Fellow of Darwin College.

poet as well as in his correspondence. Most of the surviving letters are in English and over a thirty of these, written between 1911 and 1915, are addressed to Noel Olivier, many of them filled with discreetly expressed but deep emotion. Other letters are informative both about Békássy's intellectual development as well as about his social life in Cambridge where he was a student of history at King's, and protégé of John Maynard Keynes.[4]

Ferenc Békássy's anglophile orientation and bilingual creativity came about due to his mother Emma Békássy's decision of sending him (and all his siblings) to Bedales, a progressive English school—an ambitious and unusual decision not only for Hungary but also for the Central Europe of the time. Apparently the multilingual Emma Békássy—who later contributed under a pen-name to the literary periodical *Nyugat*—was inspired to do so by an article by a Frenchman (identified as Edmond Demolins) praising the English education system and in particular, the new co-educational, progressive school of Bedales, near Petersfield, Hampshire. The school was founded by J.H. Badley, who had himself been at Trinity College, Cambridge and who was a great believer in a more modern, 'open' and healthy education. Ferenc Békássy, "Frank" or "Feri" to his friends, was born in 1893, so it was at the age of 12 in 1905 that he joined Bedales. One must presume that he had learnt some English earlier (the Békássys, an aristocratic family, were rich land-owners in Western Hungary and they often had foreign nannies for their children), but in any case, after his six years at Bedales he spoke and wrote English almost as a native speaker. When he entered King's College, Cambridge, as a fee-paying student in 1911, not only was his spoken English fluent, but as transpires from some of the Olivier letters, he was also a budding poet writing poetry alternatively in Hungarian and in English. In fact some of his poems written in English appeared in a Cambridge anthology in 1913.[5] The Hungarian poems were published in his native Hungary only posthumously.

Noel Olivier was the youngest daughter of Sir Sydney Olivier, later raised to the peerage as Baron Olivier of Ramsden, a politician who made his career in the British colonial administration, including a stint as Governor of Jamaica. When the Olivier family returned to England they bought property in Surrey and had a house built at Limpsfield Chart where they brought up their four daughters and entertained influential friends and colleagues. Noel, a first cousin of the actor Laurence Olivier, was born in December 1892 (she was only a few months older than Ferenc Békássy) and she became a pupil at Bedales School in 1908, joining in the third term of the year. According to the *Bedales Record* both Ferenc and his younger brother János were boarders at the school from early 1905. So by the

4 ■ For Békássy's friendship with Keynes see George Gömöri, "Ferenc Békássy's Letters to John Maynard Keynes." *The New Hungarian Quarterly.* No. 79. Autumn 1980, pp. 158–170.
5 ■ *Cambridge Poets 1900–1913,* ed. Aelfrieda Hillyard. Cambridge: Heffers, 1913.

time Noel arrived three years later Ferenc was already well established and respected by his contemporaries. He was a precocious scholar already in his teens, and we learn from the *Bedales Chronicle* (30th October 1909) that he gave a talk to his fellow pupils on Friedrich Nietzsche! If not his good looks and unusual background, at least his wide knowledge of foreign languages, history and philosophy must have impressed the young Noel Olivier.

She herself at the age of sixteen had already been noticed by the young and talented poet, Rupert Brooke. While her older sister Brynhild was stunningly beautiful, Noel, in the opinion of Nigel Jones, Rupert Brooke's biographer, "was to outstrip all three of her elder sisters in intelligence and achievement".[6] Brooke first met Noel Olivier in May 1908 at a Fabian Society dinner in Cambridge given in honour of Sir Sidney, Noel's father. Brooke, who was more than five years older than Noel, was still an undergraduate in Cambridge at the time and was involved successfully with the Marlowe Dramatic Society (with the production of *Comus*) and an acknowledged poet.[7] By the Easter Holiday of 1909 he was very much infatuated with Noel who, nevertheless, gave "a cautious response" to Brooke's advances.[8] She may have sensed that he was not to be trusted, not only because of his bisexuality (Brooke had had a homosexual experience while still at public school) but also because of the fact that for all his charm he was a fickle lover and a poseur.

This was at around the same time that Ferenc Békássy became acquainted with Noel at Bedales. It seems that at first she was just a friend—the relationship advanced slowly, but deepened after they both left Bedales. Their correspondence started in April 1911 when Békássy first wrote to Noel from Hungary. Noel showed this letter to Brooke, who realized that Békássy was a potential rival and a meeting at one of the summer camps organized by mutual friends led to outbursts of barely controlled jealousy on Brooke's part. When Noel moved to London to continue her studies in medicine at University College and Ferenc went up to King's College, Cambridge, to read history, their correspondence continued—at first not with love letters but ones displaying deep sympathy and common interests.

Ferenc Békássy was an extraordinarily well-read and precocious young man. His friend E.L. Grant-Watson described him as "at eighteen he had the mentality and culture of a man of forty".[9] Although according to one female contemporary he had "a weak chin", judging by his photographs he was reasonably handsome and according to another of his friends "loveable" enough to arouse interest in John Maynard Keynes, who was at the time a

6 ■ Nigel Jones, *Rupert Brooke, Life, Death and Myth.* London: Richard Cohen Books, 1999, p. 72.
7 ■ He won the poetry competition of the *Westminster Gazette* while still at school at Rugby: Jones, op. cit., p. 32.
8 ■ Ibid., p. 90.
9 ■ E.L. Grand-Watson, *But to What Purpose.* London, 1946, p. 155.

Fellow of King's. When Békássy was just a first-year student, (the bisexual) Keynes became infatuated with him to the extent of paying a visit to Békássy's family home a year later. This visit, in mid-September 1912, is amply documented by Békássy's travel instructions to Keynes spelt out in several letters now in King's College Archives, Cambridge.[10] It is hard to tell whether the Keynes–Békássy relationship remained "platonic" throughout their friendship. Keynes had a number of ongoing homosexual relationships with others during these years, but it is possible that the two remained merely close friends. Apart from Keynes, Békássy had other friends including James Strachey, youngest brother of Lytton Strachey, who admired Békássy enough to recommend him for membership of the Conversazione Society, better known as The Apostles, the most exclusive circle at Cambridge. He may have acted, however, on the instructions of John Maynard Keynes, who had great influence in the selection of new members, especially if they belonged to his own (i.e. King's) College. Like many public school boys of his generation, James Strachey was also bisexual, 'in love' simultaneously with Rupert Brooke, Ferenc Békássy and Noel Olivier. He kept up correspondence with the first two until their death, and remained friends with Noel, with whom he began a longstanding affair ten years after her marriage to William Richards, a medical doctor in 1920.

Békássy's letters to Noel Olivier are fascinating documents of a maturing young Hungarian "imbued with Englishness", a voracious reader and charming socialite who moved with equal ease in the best academic circles of Cambridge (rubbing shoulders with Bertrand Russell and E.G. Moore among others) and the artistic society of Bloomsbury. Rupert Brooke's name often crops up in his letters, showing Békássy's preoccupation with a man whom he admired more for his poetry than for his Fabian or 'Neo-Pagan' posturing. At the same time he is implicitly critical of Brooke's behaviour towards women. Interestingly, he never refers to the competition between them for the love of Noel Olivier.[11] Brooke's jealous nature as mentioned before was such that on one occasion when he visited Békássy in his College rooms he tried to pick a quarrel about Noel, but to his great disappointment Békássy would not rise to the bait. As Brooke confessed in a letter to James Strachey: "Frank [i.e. Ferenc]... turned up *such* a failure—from *my* point of view. Not a trace of a grievance! (...) Has *nobody* my guts?"[12] Soon after Brooke had several love affairs in Germany and Tahiti, so his attachment to Noel was perhaps not as serious as he would have himself believe, though a few months after the

10 ■ Gömöri, pp. 159–170.
11 ■ István Gál's view that "Békássy was... a friend of Rupert Brooke's" (*The New Hungarian Quarterly*, 41, Spring 1971, p. 189) considerably simplifies the difficult relationship between the two poets.
12 ■ Keith Hale (ed.), *Friends and Apostles: The Correspondence of Rupert Brooke and James Strachey*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998, p. 255.

confrontation with Békássy he still demonstrated his possessiveness towards Noel upon hearing that she had met her Hungarian friend in London. Brooke writes to her in a somewhat petulant manner in January 1913: "It was rather awkward, for I'd just then got rather fond of him [Békássy], &—for instance—he'd sent me his poems to read; & of course, I immediately hated him, & sent his poems back without comment".[13] While Békássy's feelings continued to evolve from friendship to love, Brooke's initial wild infatuation with Noel cooled down eventually to a friendship tinged with a mixture of nostalgic love and mild derision.

Ferenc Békássy's name even appears in Rupert Brooke's last letter to Noel Olivier written in January 1915. The context is the war—Noel must have written to him about Ferenc joining the Austro-Hungarian army and being trained for active service. Brooke muses about the strangeness of the new situation: "It's very bloody about Bekassy. Thank God, he'll be fighting in a different part of Europe from me. After all, there's a ten to one chance of him coming through. Dreadful if you lost all your lovers at once,—Ah, but you won't lose all—"[14] A few months later both Békássy and Brooke were dead.

The two letters published here are from different periods. The first is dated 1913, Békássy is relating his visit to the Cambridgeshire house of their mutual friends, the painters Jacques and Gwen Raverat; he speaks of the strong impression their paintings made on him. The second letter was written just before Békássy left for the front line in May 1915. Noel received this letter (while on holiday in Switzerland) only after Békássy's death, via Éva Békássy, Ferenc's younger sister. In this nostalgic, gently reminiscing letter Békássy comes closest to revealing his feelings for Noel. News of Ferenc's death must have moved her very much, and she sent on a copy of the letter (with just one, personal paragraph left out) to John Maynard Keynes. This incomplete version is in the Keynes archives in King's College, Cambridge.[15]

Rupert Brooke's untimely death started a legend. Due to the eulogies of Edward Marsh and Winston Churchill he became known, though misinterpreted, as the most patriotic English poet of his generation. Ferenc Békássy's death did not go unnoticed either. His friend the Cambridge poet Frances Cornford devoted a poem to his memory which later appeared in her *Collected Poems*.[16] Already in 1925 Békássy's English poems were collected in a slim volume and published by Hogarth Press entitled *Adriatica and Other Poems*. In Hungary from the 1970s onwards writers such as István Gál and Zoltán Sumonyi Papp started to take an interest in Békássy, publishing articles and making radio programmes about him, thus bringing his work to the attention

13 ■ *Song of Love. The Letters of Rupert Brooke and Noel Olivier.* London: Bloomsbury, 1991, p. 278.
14 ■ Ibid, p. 278.
15 ■ It was also reproduced in *The New Hungarian Quarterly,* No. 79. Autumn 1980, pp. 169–170.
16 ■ "Féri (sic) Bekassy". In Frances Cornford, *Collected Poems.* London: The Cresset Press, 1954, p. 50

of the public. Now with the publication of his collected writings, this poet who died young like so many of his contemporaries and of whom so much was expected both in his native land and in his much loved second home England[17] will surely receive the wider attention that he so rightly deserves. ❧

Ferenc Békássy to Noel Olivier

Postmark Cambridge 12 PM MR 6 13.
Verso – London, W.C. 5.45 PM MAR 6 3A

Addressed to: Miss N. Olivier,
The London School of Medicine for Women,
Hunter Street, Brunswick sq. London W.C.

Thursday March 6th/1913

Dear Noel,

To sound off the term in as pleasant a way as possible, I went to Croydon on Thursday, and saw Gwen & Jacques.[18] I wonder if you have seen their house yet: it is a splendid place all in the middle of fields, on a hill, with a vast view down Southwards, and the most violently boisterous wind blowing all the time I was there. It is hard to imagine how pleasant it must be for them, and they working hard and full of things to create. Gwen is painting pictures of which I hardly know how to speak. Especially one of Mary & Elizabeth, and a Christ in the Garden, and a portrait of Jacques' father; I have never seen any picture of whose greatness I felt so sure! And of course I was altogether moved by them. She already has the assurance which only really great artists have, who know that nothing else matters.—This makes me think of Keats' letters: the ones he wrote in his last two years; full of what one cannot call insolence, but pride coming from certainty, because he knows he is expressing ideas that make up the world, and that his poems are not merely expressions of his feelings, but are individual things.—This is a question of which I talked with Jacques, and was very glad to find he agreed with the conclusion I have only lately made, namely that theories of art have been absurd chiefly because they have not taken the picture into account; which may in a secondary way express the artist's feelings, or may have his character, but is primarily a Thing not connected with the artist or the onlooker—you may call it the expression of a metaphysical idea (I think a metaphysical reality is the same) if you like.—Jacques of course is rather restless because he can only work three hours or so a day; but he too is settling down,

17 ■ J.H. Badley, the founder of Bedales, wrote in his obituary of Békássy: "In him, though he died fighting for our enemies' cause, we have lost one of our very truest sons, and one from whom, had he lived, we expected great things." *Bedales Record, Year 1914–1915*.
18 ■ Gwen & Jacques Raverat, F.B's Cambridge friends, residents of Croydon, Cambridgeshire.

I mean becoming more certain of the ways in which he can work. Of course he is not like Gwen, but still good: and they both use such colours! I saw some dancing figures he had painted, and they are better beyond comparison than Duncan's[19] which you saw in Maynard Keynes' room. As you may guess, I have been reading poetry. When you said bad poetry was so very bad and there was so much of it, I wonder did you include "the bad poetry of great poets?" I find myself getting more and more lenient towards it, in this sense only, that I am reconciled to its existence because it has so many interests. In this March number of the *English Review,* have you read "Aphrodite at Leatherhead" by a new poet called Helston?[20] I hardly like to speak of it, because it somehow seems not to stand broad daylight, and I almost wonder how he published it. In a way I think it very very good but it is not at all, really; and whenever I think of it without looking at it, it seems hopelessly bad in sentiment. But—well, what would you have said of "Endymion" when it came out? Bad, no doubt, with dreadful faults of taste and dreadful sentiment. I think I would have treasured it up a good deal, and not talked about it, and looked forward to any other poem. This young man Mr. Keats might write, which would not be "a feverish attempt rather than a deed accomplished" (—But that is only supposing I had not read the 1817 poems, which—most of them—are really too absurd for words.—) I dare say you will just be disgusted at John Helston's "feverish attempt", but—well it is not profitable to prophesy.

Most of the poetry I've been reading is Hungarian, modern, and good—a great literary movement began some six years ago, which is creating quite a new poetry—and also classics and still better, namely John Arany, the one Hungarian poet whom I think as great as Goethe or Dante. His greatest poems are what he calls Ballads, and they are—well, can you imagine a lyrical poem which has the same effect as Shakespeare's Tragedies have?

I shall be at home very soon, thank God, and then when I am not continually hearing and talking a foreign language, I may be better able to write in my own. I am also intending to work, but ...! A week before Easter Sunday we move out of the town, and the rest is perpetual joy. But especially, if before I come back we are to get the usual hot week or two, and I can bathe the whole length of the river.

Next term General Shove[21] won't be up here, and I suppose Rupert won't come; so really (except for ordinary & accidental purposes) Bliss[22] and myself will be a good deal more dependent on each other than hitherto. You know, he is changing such a lot, and getting over his culturedness, so that one sees more & more plainly what a good character he has. Also I like him a great deal and can get on well with him—at least relatively to the way I get on with most Cambridge people.

19 ■ Duncan Grant, Scottish painter, friend of J.M. Keynes.

20 ■ John Helston, English poet, active before and during World War I.

21 ■ Gerard Shove, economist, member of " The Apostles", from 1926 Lecturer in King's College, Cambridge.

22 ■ Frank Bliss, student of classics in King's College, member of "The Apostles". He died in France in 1916.

I am now also finding it is very queer to imagine what things will be like when one's sister gets married, as Tonika[23] will do, though I am not sure how soon. In a way I am very glad, I like Him[24] very much,—though I don't know him well; and Tonika was so miserable about it before—but being at home without her will be strange.

I forgot to say what a walk back I had from Croydon,[25]—it is some 12 miles or so, as I came, straight across fields all the way. It was 6 o'clock before I started and dark soon: I did not know there was such uninhabited country round Cambridge. Miles & miles of footpath or track without a light visible: I met no one except in the villages I passed, and from Hazlingfield to Grantchester might have been in a desert but for one farm, which showed no signs of being inhabited.—I had never been that way & was very proud of finding my way (having merely looked at a map before I started)—

Another thing I am proud of is that yesterday I heard a paper by Mr. A. C. Benson[26] on Realism in Fiction, in which he disparaged Romantics and praised Realists; and he had to admit, in a discussion that followed, that by Realists he had meant Romantics who did not commit some faults common to all bad novelists! So I have had my share in destroying the Enemies of God!

— yrs. F. Békassy

Ferenc Békássy's last letter to Noel Olivier

Dear Noel,

May 1915

Very many thanks for your letter, really you don't know how good it was to get. I am going to the front in five days' time, and am already feeling quite detached from everything so that nothing interests me very much and the only vivid remembrances are: people.

A week ago I still thought a lot about how sad it was that 38 Br. Square[27] had broken up and that everything among you is changing, though I had felt it would never change, and, and how sad it is that I suppose things will never be quite the same again, and that the last four years were so splendid.

But now I can only think of you (and the others) and you know, Noel, it is all the times that we two met, that I most like to remember—from the time at Bedales when you wrote "Under a wide and starry sky" down for

23 ■ Antónia Békássy (1889–?), Ferenc's older sister, also a Bedalian from 1904 to 1907, in Slade School, London 1909–10.

24 ■ József Görgey (d.1945), Antónia's future husband.

25 ■ Croydon, near Royston, Cambridgeshire.

26 ■ A. C. Benson, Fellow of Magdalene College, Cambridge.

27 ■ 38 Brunswick Square, a meeting place of artists and writers belonging to the Bloomsbury group.

me,[28] to the last time we met, at Bedales; and not excepting any single meeting either! I wonder whether everything that happened before the war will seem quite far-away afterwards?

It's a year almost, since I've left—I was in Switzerland with Peter[29] last June. The time has gone so fast, I feel as though someone had robbed a year out of my life—because, though it has been very instructive of course (I got to know Budapest and Jews and business and women and the "social order")—it hasn't been my life. I think it will be, when I go.

I'm going gladly, I know it's very worth taking the risk, and I am sure to get something good out of the war unless I die in it. It's part of "the good life" just now, that I should go: and the sooner one gives up the idea that the world can be made better than it is, the better. I daresay one can make it happier, but then happiness isn't the main point, is it?

Since the war began, I have written poems again, I think they are good but it's no use writing for this public!—Everything is beautiful now, there are some evenings in which all the lovely things are heaped together, flower-smells, clouds, water, chestnut-trees, and young corn. There are very beautiful sunsets, and all this makes it somehow easier to go.

I've come to think everything is more important about lives than when they end; because, when I die, someone else is born instead, so it really doesn't matter, (but this is so impersonal that one can only think it when there's no occasion.)

I wanted to write much more about May and the country. Do you know I think there's a difference between poets (who write poetry) and other people, that poets take hold of the feelings they have and won't let go; and other people let feelings have their natural effects and so don't write poems.

I must be changing a good deal now—at any rate outwardly, and that's what seems to matter in one's relations to people. I can't believe I've altogether left all of you though it seems definite enough—and perhaps the war won't stop till everyone is too tired to be good for anything. People are getting so used to the war.

By the time I go, there'll be roses, and I shall go with a crest of three red ones on my horse's head because (but people won't know the reason) there are three over the shield in our coat of arms.[30]

This isn't at all the letter I meant to write, but I can't help it. I long to see you, and all of you again. I often think of you. And we shall meet, Noel, shan't we, some day?

Good-bye, yours

F. Békassy

28 ■ The first line of a poem by Robert Louis Stevenson.
29 ■ Peter Grant-Watson, Australian-born friend of Békássy.
30 ■ Békássy refers here to his family's coat of arms.

Krisztina Passuth

The Eight and the European Avant-garde

The group of Hungarian painters known as 'The Eight' was formed in Budapest, still at the time of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy just before the outbreak of the First World War, more specifically when their first exhibition opened on December 30, 1909. They were particularly active in 1910 and 1911 but by and large their endeavours had come to a close by 1914, the year that brought the end of the long 19th century. These were years of a social and intellectual upturn and an emergence of new ideas never to be repeated in Hungary. These were the years of the birth of avant-garde art groups right across Europe.

Stepping beyond the cultural climate of traditional institutional structures and modes of thought of the Monarchy, The Eight developed their own radical outlook. The programme of the group was twofold. They joined international artistic currents, but they also shared in the ideas for the renewal of Hungarian society. The group was comprised of Róbert Berény, Béla Czóbel, Dezső Czigány, Károly Kernstok, Ödön Márffy, Dezső (Desiderius) Orbán, Bertalan Pór and Lajos Tihanyi. Most of them were young men born in the 1880s whose views were not hidebound by Munich academic painting, though some of them, including Czóbel, Czigány and Pór, did spend some time at the Munich Academy. Unlike their older colleagues, they gave preference to Paris over Munich, as Paris attracted them with its bohemian lifestyle and the dynamism and innovation of its contemporary art.

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A new school of painting, the Fauves, appeared in 1905, the first and last time that young representatives of Hungarian painters found themselves on the scene of a radical international development in art precisely at the moment when the new trend and the new notions were taking wing. The Hungarian painters recognized the significance of the Fauves, who addressed connoisseurs or artists and not the general public from the start. Following closely from their first appearance at the Salon d'Automne the Fauves achieved their effects with strong colours. Fauvist compositions rejected the idea of the representation of perspective, preferring a two-dimensional surface of patches of violent colours which they highlighted with black or blue contours. By 1906, several of the Hungarian painters had begun painting in this style. It was equally characteristic of their work, most particularly that of the young Róbert Berény, to paint their nudes, landscapes and still lifes with loose, sweeping brushstrokes creating an impression of spontaneity. Even if this spontaneity is little more than an impression, it nonetheless constitutes one of the distinctive peculiarities of Fauve painting.

The Hungarian painters active in Paris at the time, including those who would later form The Eight, were not passive observers of the stir caused by the new movement. In many instances they worked with the French painters and strove to espouse their approach and their methods. Though they were not students of Matisse at his painting school, they were familiar with his works and ideas, and one often comes across motifs in their paintings reminiscent of his style. Matisse—his paintings, sculptures, even his theories—had a seminal effect on the painting of the young Hungarians. He liberated their imaginations, but they did not become Matisse epigones.

In 1905 Béla Czóbel and in 1906 Berény exhibited in the Salon d'Automne. In 1908 Czóbel had a one-man show on Montmartre in the gallery of Berthe Weill, the first person to exhibit Fauvist and Cubist works. But Berény, Czóbel, Lajos Tihanyi and the others did not really begin to develop and expand on the ideas and styles they had learnt in Paris until their return to Budapest and largely within the framework of their own artistic group, The Eight, which was formed in 1909.

Róbert Berény was the most talented member of the group, as well as its youngest member. At the second exhibition of The Eight, an ambitious show held in 1911, he presented a gallery's worth of works, some fifty paintings and numerous sketches. The second most gifted artist, at least in my view, was Lajos Tihanyi, who had also spent a considerable amount of time in Paris in 1907 and 1908. Tihanyi had never wholeheartedly espoused Fauvist painting, but his landscapes and cityscapes nonetheless bear strong affinities with some of Albert Marquet's on similar subjects, for example *Pont Neuf.* Béla Czóbel came perhaps closest to the Fauves, though regrettably we still know very few of his early works. Many have only come to light in recent years, after several

decades of obscurity.[1] Most were destroyed by the artist himself, while others simply vanished from his studio in 1914, when Czóbel, a citizen of a country at war with France, fled Paris by bicycle. Many of his works may have been lost forever.[2] The few paintings that survived, however, offer testimony of an unmistakable influence of Fauvism, with their vigorous brushstrokes and at times strident patches of colour.

Károly Kernstok and Ödön Márffy, the two oldest members of the group, were born in 1873 and 1878, respectively. Kernstok was already a mature artist by the time he first went to Paris and he often remained there for months. But it was not so much the works of the French painters that influenced him, but rather Fauvist paintings by Czóbel done in Hungary, around 1907. Fauvism figures only briefly in his oeuvre, and in relatively few works. Though the members of the group were striving for innovation and reform, and were eager to come on the scene, they thought it self-evident that Kernstok should lead them and should be entrusted with the task of articulating their principles. Kernstok at the time was already recognized as a painter and also as someone who was familiar with theories of art, he was well-connected and well-informed on social and political issues, was also active in these spheres and enjoyed the respect of his collegues and of progressive intellectuals. His principles marked out the place of The Eight in the artistic milieu of the time and assured a high degree of intellectual vigour and vitality. It was thanks first and foremost to him that immediate notice was taken of The Eight, and that their first exhibition in Budapest was a considerable critical success.

Social questions had a more important influence on the views and endeavours of The Eight than they did on the avant-garde elsewhere in the region. Their notions of art bore affinities with others in Europe, but it was identical with none of them. For one thing, at the time in Hungary all painting was still figurative. At the same time they drew on the innovative ideas of the time, without however maintaining personal contacts other than with the Fauves in France. A comparison with the various trends of the time naturally uncovers analogies, but one only rarely comes across closer ties or examples of direct influence.

At specific junctures, The Eight and Matisse and his followers show similarities, but the ways in which they differ are in fact more important. The palette of the Fauves of 1905, at the time of their emergence, transformed the world into an ensemble of saturated unmixed colours, whereas by

1 ■ Gergely Barki deserves credit for having done the most to discover and bring to light the works of The Eight. See for instance: *Hungarian Fauves from Paris to Nagybánya 1904–1914,* Budapest: Hungarian National Gallery, 2006.

2 ■ Paintings thought to have been lost were shown at an exhibition entitled "Wanted. The Eight" held in Budapest in the Virág and Kieselbach Galleries in June, 2010. The exhibition was organized by Gergely Barki.

1906–1907 the sculptural element had become more dominant (e.g. *Blue Nude* by Matisse). Later works by Matisse, such as *Music and Dance* (1909–1910), far from employing loose, spontaneous brushstrokes, emphasize the carefully composed, decorative plane, in which the rhythm of the contours of the figures defines the structure of the painting. In many of their larger, more monumental paintings the artists of The Eight also stressed the contours to create the rhythm of the composition, in works such as Bertalan Pór's *Sermon on the Mount* (1911), or his *Sketch for a Mural for the Folk Opera* (1911), Ödön Márffy's *Three Nudes* (1911), Károly Kernstok's glass window painting (1911–1912) and Dezső Orbán's *Decorative Composition* (before 1912).

In decorative paintings by Matisse colour continued to play an important role and the compositions often consist of large monochrome surfaces. After 1910, however, it becomes less and less prominent in the works of the Hungarians, who emphasized compositional elements, relationships between figures, their hierarchy, and the symmetrical or asymmetrical arrangement of the composition. As with Matisse, spontaneity gradually disappears from their works after 1907. In Matisse's, this was a logical consequence of his development as a painter, but with The Eight something else was involved. By depicting figures in calculated movement they wished to suggest the structured order of life, almost as if governed by the laws of nature. Moreover, their approach was intertwined with their involvement in social questions and their Utopian strivings, aimed at changing society and improving living conditions. In some cases this vision of Utopia donned religious garb, such as in Pór's *Sermon on the Mount.*

Sermon on the Mount was not unique at the time in its choice of theme. One finds similar works by Wilhelm Uhde and the Hungarian Károly Ferenczy, and both lend their paintings a Utopian overtone. Pór's strong, muscular men, however, suggest more distant sources and influences, too, namely the Italian Renaissance, of which Pór was a great admirer. The Biblical compositions of Luca Signorelli and Michelangelo crowded with figures may well have inspired Pór. But, as was noted at the time, *Sermon on the Mount* may well have been more than a Biblical scene. Christ appears as an agitator, albeit somewhat abstracted. This fitted in well with the mix of piety and Utopianism prevalent at the time, represented first and foremost among members of this group by Kernstok and Pór.

Albeit the Utopia envisioned by The Eight never came true, and indeed remained relatively unknown abroad, one does find analogous art outside Hungary. One thinks immediately of the Czech group Osma, which also means "Eight," in Prague, a city not far from Budapest and also in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Though the Hungarian group went by the same name as the group in Prague formed in 1907, interestingly enough, the two had nothing

to do with each other, at least as far as we know. The Czech group included Emil Filla, Vincenc Beneš, Bohumil Kubišta, Antonín Procházka, Otakar Kubin, Max Horb and Willy Nowak. What affinities did they have with the Hungarian artists, and in what ways were they different? The Czechs were strongly influenced by the Norwegian Edward Munch, having come into contact with his works when they were exhibited at a 1905 exhibition in Prague. One can discern the influence of Munch, the anxiety and the mystery, most clearly in the works of Filla. The Czechs came into contact with the works of Paul Gauguin rather late, in 1910, and somewhat later still they also discovered the Fauves.[3] The members of the Czech group nonetheless remained well within the strict framework of figurative art. They brought something new to Czech painting, but their endeavours hardly constituted a genuine breakthrough in the direction of the avant-garde. The real breakthrough came later, around 1910, when Kubišta, Filla and the sculptor Gutfreund, having familiarized themselves with French Cubism, embarked on their own foray into that new style. Their Cubism was forceful and crystal clear. Individual compositions seemed almost emblematic, characterized by both strict logic and expressivity.

The members of The Eight, the Hungarian group, found inspiration in some of the same sources, though they drew on others as well. They rebelled against entrenched conservative, academic art in Hungary, but they never ventured into the realm of abstraction, which was left to those who followed in their wake. Edward Munch had little influence on their work either, but Gauguin, on the other hand, did, as early as 1906. Gauguin's distinctive pallid hues of pink and some of his motifs, reduced to a two-dimensional plane and set off by strong black or blue contours to give structure to the composition, appear on early paintings by The Eight. They had ample opportunity to familiarize themselves with Gauguin and the Fauves, as they had seen him displayed not only in Paris but also in Budapest, in the monumental exhibition of French painters at the Nemzeti Szalon (National Salon) in 1907[4] and at an exhibition held at the Művészház (Artists' House) in 1910.[5]

Other influences widened their horizons. These included German Expressionism, the lyric variant of abstract painting, French and Czech Cubism, Italian Futurism, French Orphism, Russian Cubo-Futurism, early geometric abstraction and others. And while these various movements and schools were

3 ■ Miroslav Lamač, *Moderne tschechische Malerei.* Praha: Artia, 1967. Miroslav Lamač, *Osma a Skupina výtvarných umělců, 1907–1917* [The Eight and the Skupina Group of Artists]. Praha: Odeon, 1988. Lenka Bydzowska, "Prague". In *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–1930.* Cambridge, Ma. – London: Los Angeles County Museum of Art – The MIT Press, 2002, pp. 81–89.

4 ■ An exhibition of works by Cézanne, Gauguin and Post-Impressionists, held in Budapest in the Nemzeti Szalon (National Salon) in May, 1907.

5 ■ An international Impressionist exhibition held in Budapest at the Művészház (Artists' House) in April and May, 1910.

multifaceted and made up of distinctive and often divergent tendencies, observed from the distance of several decades they nonetheless constitute coherent trends. Still, while one can unquestionably discern their influence in the works of The Eight, no single tendency emerges as dominant.

It was first and foremost Paul Cézanne, a painter of an earlier generation, who became emblematic for them. Cézanne's distinctive art was discovered by the French and indeed the whole of Europe in 1906, the year of his death, and the impact of this discovery, much like the impact of Gauguin, was immediate and widespread. Later he was to decline somewhat in importance as an influence in Western Europe. In contrast, the Hungarian moderns were first seduced by the rich palette and spontaneity of the Fauves, and then converted to the more restrained, even austere style of Cézanne, who had a strong and enduring influence on their work in the early 1910s. His manner of painting was ideally suited to depict the new view of the world emerging around 1910 and to give expression to the Hungarian artists' desire for radical social change. His exploratory style, the intensity of his search, rigorous and rational, harmonized well with the intellectual currents espoused by them. In sum, Cézanne's manner of representation fundamentally determined their pictorial models, no matter what the actual theme might happen to be.

The Eight undertook essentially two tasks, to sketch the outlines of radical social reform on the one hand and to articulate visually similarly radical artistic principles. They had to make considerable efforts to get Hungarians to begin to accept these principles and the artistic styles in which they were expressed. The isolated space of the studio was hardly adequate to make known the emergent artistic innovations and to coax the public to view them with a sympathetic eye. Exhibitions better served this purpose, and the group ran three in Budapest, one in December 1909, one in April 1911, and one in November and December 1912. The artists knew that the press response was a crucial factor, and it was surprisingly significant, be it enthusiastic or dismissive, praise or ridicule, acclamation or caricature.[6] The Eight lacked a journal of their own but *Aurora,* a quality journal, regularly printed well-illustrated articles by critics who extolled their work, first and foremost György Bölöni, himself very much at home in France and things French. Other sympathetic critics and journalists, such as Géza Feleky and Géza Lengyel were also free with their praise. All this took place in Budapest and hardly went beyond the limits of the capital. The Italian Futurists were precursors, or even

6 ■ Árpád Tímár, *"Az utak elváltak." A magyar képzőművészet új utakat kereső törekvéseinek sajtóvisszhangja. Szöveggyűjtemény* ["The Roads Have Parted". The Press on the Attempts to Find New Approaches in Hungarian Fine Arts. A Reader], Vol. I. 1901–1908, Vol. II. 1909–1910, Vol. III. 1911–1912. Pécs–Budapest: Janus Pannonius Museum – Research Institute for Art History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2009.

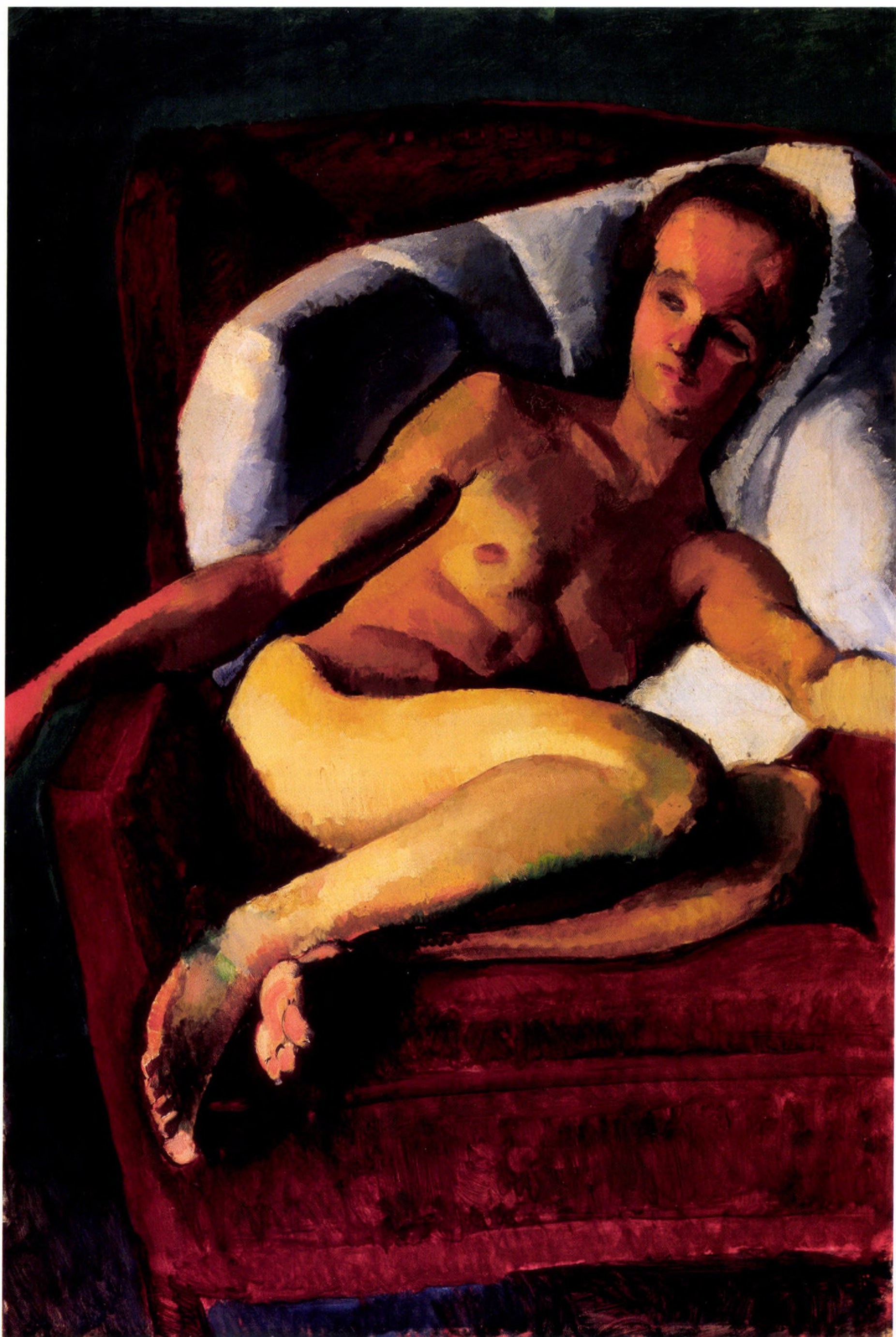
models, for The Eight in that they systematically and quite successfully organized an ambitious press campaign in roughly the same years, i.e. between 1909 and 1914. Although efforts to further the cause of The Eight can be likened to the publicity campaign of the Futurists, regrettably they did not dispose over effective organizers and coordinators like Marinetti or Prampolini, not to speak about the French Cubists, who had an influential advocate in the person of the poet Guillaume Apollinaire.[7] But no one of comparable stature figured in the Hungarian art scene at the time.

Expressionism, which was beginning to emerge, had an energetic and at times even aggressive advocate in the person of Herwarth Walden in Berlin. In 1910 Walden founded the journal *Der Sturm* and its offshoots, a publishing house and later a gallery, editing the journal, writing articles and also assuming responsibility for distribution and promotion. Initially Oskar Kokoschka had helped, and his illustrations had filled the pages of early issues. Walden helped not only the German Expressionist groups Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter, but also movements emerging abroad that represented ideas and styles he found congenial, propagating them as if they had been part of the Der Sturm movement. These included the Italian Futurists and the Czech Cubist group Skupina, whose works he exhibited in 1912 and 1913 in his own gallery. Walden spent some time in Budapest as well in 1913, clearly in the interests of making contacts and perhaps organizing an exhibition in Hungary. He had limited success, however. The only artist to gain international attention thanks to his efforts was Alfréd Réth, a painter born in Budapest who lived in Paris. Réth achieved international status when several of his paintings and collages, almost enough to make up a one-man show, were included in a Sturm exhibition.[8] The exhibition made it to Budapest, but neither Réth nor the Cubists whose works were on show created much of a stir.

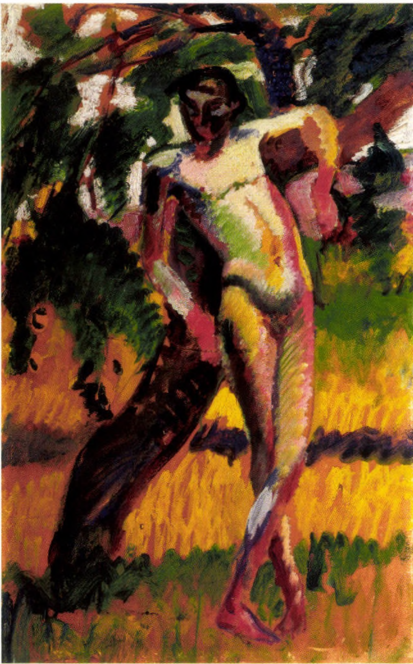
The failure of Der Sturm and The Eight to collaborate, in other words, the rejection by the artists of Der Sturm of the works and ideas of The Eight, was a clear sign. At the time the Hungarian artists had little hope of gaining recognition beyond the borders of their homeland. Then the outbreak of the war in 1914 created a rupture that made it impossible to establish further connections, thereby condemning Hungarian painters to work in isolation from international trends. The only opportunity that remained was to follow the work of the artists of Der Sturm from afar, at least with the help of reproductions and postcards (which the avant-garde periodical *MA* [Today], which started in 1916, obtained from Berlin and disseminated in Hungary). This, however, was a later development, and entirely one-sided, at that.

7 ■ Guillaume Apollinaire, *Chroniques d'art 1902–1918.* Edited, with an introduction by L.-C. Breunig. Paris: Gallimard, 1960.

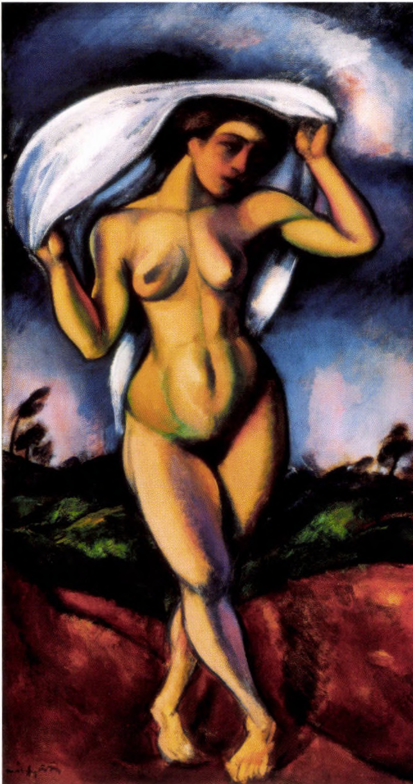
8 ■ Krisztina Passuth, "Alfred Reth's Painting in the Orbit of Primitivism, Cubism and Orphism." In *Alfred Reth: From Cubism to Abstraction.* Paris–Budapest: Makláry Artworks, 2003, pp. 81–93.



Róbert Berény: *Nude in an Armchair,* 1911
Oil on canvas, 128 × 80 cm
Private collection



Károly Kernstok: *Boy Nude on a Tree,* 1911
Oil on cardboard, 66 × 44 cm
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



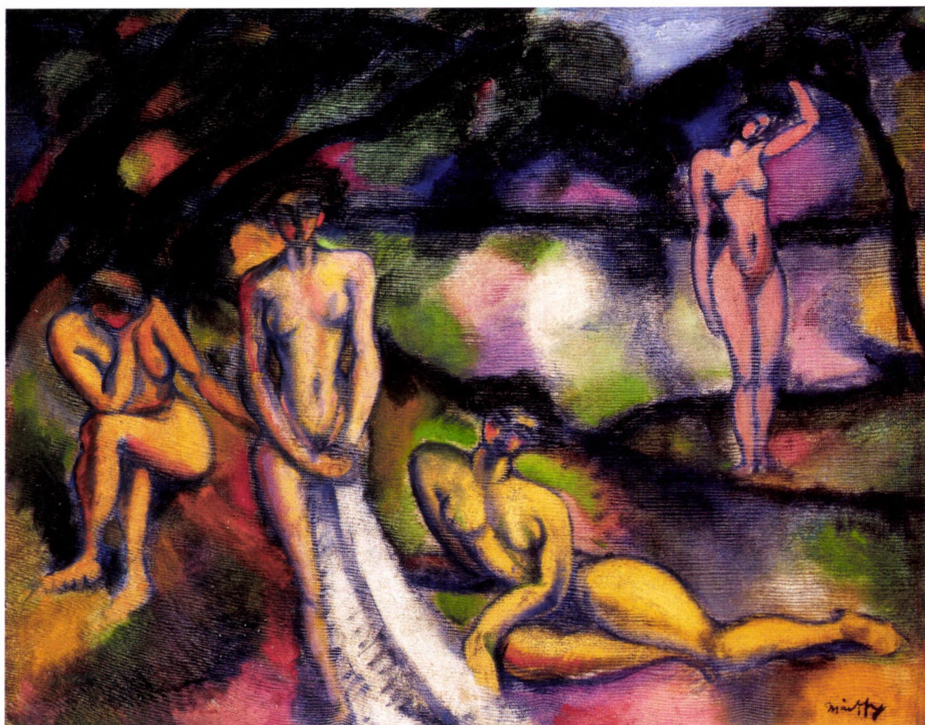
Ödön Márffy: *Female Nude,* 1911
Oil on canvas, 166 × 90 cm
Rippl-Rónai Museum, Kaposvár

Lajos Tihanyi: *Still Life with a Teapot on a Yellow Tablecloth,* 1909
Oil on canvas,
87 × 97.5 cm
Private collection

Róbert Berény:
Idyll, 1911
Oil on canvas,
49 × 62 cm
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Róbert Berény: *Still Life with Jug,* 1910
Oil on canvas, 50 × 63 cm
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Dezső (Desiderius) Orbán: *Books, Cactus, Cooking Pots,* 1911
Oil on canvas, 71 × 87 cm
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



Ödön Márffy: *Women Bathing,* 1909
Oil on canvas, 78 × 98.5 cm
Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs

Károly Kernstok: *Composition with Horses,* 1912
Oil on cardboard, 112 × 205 cm
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Dezső Czigány: *The Funeral of a Child,* 1910
Oil on cardboard, 60.6 × 77 cm
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Bertalan Pór: *Sermon on the Mount,* 1911
Oil on canvas, 245 × 445 cm
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Bertalan Pór: *Sketch for a Mural for the Folk Opera,* 1911
Paper, tempera, 296 × 109 cm
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Károly Kernstok: *Design for a Glass Window of the Schiffer Villa,* 1911
Paper, canvas, watercolour, ink, tempera
I– IV, 122 × 77 cm; 122 × 77 cm; 122 × 77 cm; 122 × 77 cm
Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs

Lajos Tihanyi: *A Factory Worker and His Family,* 1910
Oil on canvas, 114 × 90 cm
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

As far as The Eight were concerned, before 1914 they did manage to participate in a few exhibitions abroad, but only exceptionally after war broke out, though not thanks to Der Sturm. While they never became part of the mainstream and the individual painters rarely showed their works independently, nonetheless they were present as a group. A few months after their first exhibition in Budapest in December 1909 entitled Új Képek (New Pictures), Róbert Berény, Dezső Czigány, Károly Kernstok, Ödön Márffy and Lajos Tihanyi presented their work as part of an extensive display of works by Hungarian artists entitled Ungarische Maler (Hungarian Painters), held in the Ausstellungsgebäude in Berlin. The respected art critic Julius Meier-Graefe thought the Hungarians to be interesting and well-trained, and given their youth, he said he would keep an eye on their future work.[9] Their participation would have meant more doors opened abroad. This did not eventuate, but Kernstok, Márffy, Orbán and Tihanyi at least were able to participate in the huge Sonderbund Internationaler Kunstausstellung in Cologne in May 1912, and Berény presented embroidery and embroidery designs at the arts & crafts show at the Keller und Reiner Salon in Berlin two years later. Berény, Tihanyi, Pór and Vilmos Fémes Beck, a sculptor who was not one of The Eight but who collaborated and at times exhibited with the group, submitted works for inclusion at the Budapest Művészház March 1914 show in the Künstlerhaus in Vienna, but Művészház rejected Berény's and Tihanyi's, so the other two artists withdrew pintings in a show of solidarity. Together the four held a "counter-salon" calling it Brüko, in the Viennese Bruck Kunstsalon, also in March 1914. György Bölöni praised their works in *Nyugat* (West), the preeminent cultural journal in Hungary at the time.

Regrettably, to this day there has never been a truly representative exhibition in which the works of The Eight were presented as a group, and this has hindered their recognition outside Hungary as well. One could interpret the inclusion of works by the group in the international exhibition held in the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco in 1915 in which artists from France, Italy, Sweden, Norway and Hungary represented Europe as a sort of faint echo.[10] Among some five hundred works by Hungarian artists one finds paintings by Berény, Kernstok, Tihanyi, Pór, Márffy and Czigány. Thus while Czóbel and Orbán were not included, the others did manage to show as a group. Stylistically the members of The Eight continued to collaborate, at least until 1915, at which point their ways began to part.

9 ■ Ervin Ybl, "Meier-Graefe véleménye a magyar festőkről. Rippl-Rónai levele Szinyei Merse Pálhoz az 1910. évi berlini kiállításról" [Meier-Graefe's Opinion of Hungarian Painters. Rippl-Rónai's Letter to Pál Szinyei Merse on the 1910 Berlin Exhibition]. In: *Művészettörténeti Értesítő,* 1959/ 3, p. 80.

10 ■ Gergely Barki was the first to write on the exhibition, see *The Hungarian Quarterly* 197, Spring 2010, pp. 85–99.

The distinctive features of The Eight are best perceptible if one considers the genres they favoured. Some of their finest paintings are decorative, monumentally large depictions of groups of nudes with Utopian overtones. (They later referred to works in this genre as Arcadian.) Works in this genre by different members of the group show significant affinities. A painting of Arcadian leisure by Orbán looks like the reverse, a kind of negative, of a similar painting by Márffy. The figures on either side stand in the painting by Márffy, in Orbán's they both recline. In the centre of the work by Orbán a female figure is standing upright, while in Márffy's painting there is a nude stretching on the ground. The composition of paintings by Orbán and Pór are similar in their emphasis on the centre axis and the arrangement of the figures on either side. Essentially their approach derives here from their own stylistic development, but they also conjure up large, symbolic earlier paintings by Ferdinand Hodler, such as *Der Tag* (Day) and *Die Nacht* (Night) and late compositions with female bathers by Cézanne, both painters representing an earlier phase in painting. In their schematic depictions of nudes, and also their landscapes and their interiors, they seem to assimilate the inner tensions and lines of force of the paintings by Cézanne. As Géza Feleky noted in the catalogue of the 1911 exhibition:

> four individual artists were able to give form to their vision, Kernstok, Berény, Márffy, and Pór, unquestionably with different degrees of force and acuity. But in essence their strivings meet: they do not seek to arrange the colourful cloak of the world so that one can guess what lies behind it. On the contrary, they are concerned with things in all their reality, they seek to portray everything as mass and shape to reveal all interconnections.[11]

Cézanne's influence on The Eight is even more apparent in the still lifes, a genre he reinvented. Still-life paintings by The Eight, first and foremost by Czigány, Berény, Orbán and Tihanyi, with the sparse use of distinct motifs and a strict, austere approach, clearly show this influence. In comparison with Cézanne, The Eight are less colouristic in this genre and the plastic spatial effects are stronger. Still-life painting, by its nature, emphasizes structure, even geometry. The world of Cézanne's still lifes is a closed world, as is the world of the still lifes of The Eight, an expression of their view of the world and the rationality of their thinking. The works which most closely resemble the still lifes of The Eight, apart from those of Cézanne, are paintings by the Czech moderns, in particular the Cubist works by Bohumil Kubišta, spare assemblies of clearly structured, emphatically plastic elements of almost metaphysical abstraction.

Berény's early, small *Still Life with Jug* (1910) stands out as particularly striking. It condenses its essential meaning to a single object, the jug, and

11 ■ Géza Feleky's preface to the *Catalogue* of the second exhibition of works by The Eight. Budapest: Nemzeti Szalon, April and May, 1911.

renders it with an extraordinary monumentality. Tihanyi's *Still Life with a Teapot on a Yellow Tablecloth* (1909), though of a completely different approach, has a similar monumental quality. The faded shades of gold have an almost baroque splendour. They set off the simple form of the teapot. In the works of The Eight the Fauves were the primary influence, followed by Cézanne and to some extent Cubism, most clearly discernible in the still lifes.

In the interiors and landscapes, on the other hand, the patches of colour are set off with dark contours, and the loose, facile manner of depiction coupled with the harsh colours characteristic of the works of the Fauves reappear, as do the pale shades of pink typical of Gauguin. At the same time these landscapes are often rigorously structured compositions. Czigány, for instance, favoured bright, plastic elements that seemed to fit together logically. Accordingly, he chose the imposing shapes of the world around him, such as roads, walls dramatically foreshortened with a bold use of perspective and rooftops clustered into rigid, regular blocks. Whatever happened not to be geometrical, plastic and clearly delineated, he simply transformed. Shadows stiffen into tight forms on his canvases, tree trunks become cylinders, and the boughs bunch into massive clumps. The motives and elements of his landscapes are as objective and carefully observed as the assemblies of his still lifes. Reductive and rigorous, Czigány's landscapes, much like his still lifes, bear affinities with the crystal clear compositions of Kubišta.

Nudes, a traditional genre, are in no way related to groups of nudes, a genre that came to be known as Arcadian. There is nothing erotic or emotional in the impersonal, faceless figures in the Arcadian compositions, but nudes by The Eight are usually highly personal and at times provocative and erotic, full of life and passion. The form of the female body by itself can become the organizing element of the composition, its diagonal arrangement often creating the spatial dimension of the composition. This is particularly true of paintings by Berény, Márffy, Orbán and Tihanyi, whose nudes are among the boldest and most shocking.

The rich imagination, sensitivity and versatility of The Eight found its fullest expression in portraiture. In this genre each painter followed an individual path. If one were looking for affinities with works by artists abroad, one might first think not of the French or the Czechs, but rather the Austrians, such as Oskar Kokoschka and Max Oppenheimer. Berény, Tihanyi and Czigány prodced superb portraits, each in his own manner. Berény's *Béla Bartók* of a gentle radiance and with its varied use of colour, is a work of unique expressiveness. Indeed one might go so far as to say even Berény himself never surpassed it.

The art of Tihanyi came to full fruition in portraiture. His psychological approach may remind of Kokoschka. It is often coupled with an almost Cubist division of space. In some of the portraits psychological approach dominates, in others a Cubist influence. As is often the case with Oppenheimer, Futurist

dynamism sometimes radiates from the portraits, at other times their gentle, pale shades and introspectiveness seem to suggest a comparison with Kokoschka and German Expressionism. Theoretical considerations, ideologies and Utopian notions play no part in Tihanyi's portraiture. Whatever the approach, they are always intimate and deeply personal. They belong in a gallery alongside the finest 20th-century European portraits.

The Eight were the most international, modern and avant-garde artists in the Hungary of their time. They did not develop a homogeneous style, much as the Expressionists and Futurists did not develop a uniform style. What they succeeded in creating was a blend of the many currents which they used as the foundation to create their distinctive painterly idiom. Their versatility, palette and innovative use of a wide variety of genres remained a source on which generations drew for decades, constituting a new point of departure in Hungarian art.

In the long decades of ideological constraints the achievements of The Eight were deliberately disregarded and forgotten by the public. When they were rediscovered in the 1960s, the whereabouts of many of their works were unknown. Now, a century after the inception of the group, compositions long thought to have been lost for good are coming to light. With a wider range of their paintings now available, we may finally hope to form a comprehensive picture of their art. ❧

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János Szegő

Pills, Tasty and Bitter

István Kerékgyártó, *Trüffel Milán, avagy Egy kalandor élete* (Milán Trüffel, or the Fortunes and Misfortunes of an Adventurer). Bratislava: Kalligram, 2009, 344 pp. • Edina Szvoren, *Pertu – elbeszélések* (On Intimate Terms—Stories). Budapest: Palatinus, 2010. 224 pp. • Gábor Schein, *Egy angyal önéletrajzai* (The Autobiographies of an Angel). Pécs: Jelenkor, 2009, 238 pp.

How does a narrator relate to his narrative? This is one of the oldest questions of imaginative literature, yet it remains pressing, a question both readers and writers must confront every time they begin a work of fiction. Each time the reader must instinctively decide where to situate the view of the narrator, somewhere between his or her own perspective and the text itself. What is the narrator's tone? Is it a tender, human voice close at hand, or an indifferent, monotonous recitation from afar? Literary works offer answers to this question in a variety of ways, often leading merely to further questions. The narrator can be a character in the narrative, of course, even the protagonist or hero, but he may consider the events from a distance, like the reader. And then there are the mesmerizing moments when the perspective of the narrator itself shifts, sometimes changing within the context of the tale itself, and sometimes stepping out of the sphere of the fantastic.

In each of the works under discussion here the reader must grapple with ambivalent and shifting narrative viewpoints. At times both narrator and narrative seem cheerful, while at other times the narrator guards his distance, and sometimes the reader is confronted with a complex, ironic mix of conflicting narrative stances.

One of the trickiest questions of a picaresque tale is the simple question of the reliability of the narrator. How is the reader to know when the narrator is lying? A reader may become something of an accomplice, but may be a victim, tricked like all the others.

István Kerékgyártó (1953) clarifies the circumstances for us at the very outset of his new novel. *Milán Trüffel, or the Fortunes and Misfortunes of an Adventurer,* adheres to the rules of the genre. The narrative offers a first-person account of the life of an adventurer named Milán Trüffel, which is to say the narrator is at one and the same time the protagonist. But we needn't fear that the shrewd rogue will deceive us. On the contrary, the account of the life of the 57-year-old man is honest and unvarnished. In the drowsy days of early summer, 1933, he seeks to commit the true story of the

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lies and self-deceptions of his life to paper. The cleverly constructed frame narrative of the story is as follows: having spent almost twenty years in South America, the scoundrel, an ambitious and audacious criminal, returns to the city of his birth to bid farewell to the world of his youth, the neighbourhood known as Tabán in Buda, which is about to be demolished. He also intends, in the course of his wanderings through the alleyways of his past, to write a detailed memoir, but he still finds time to cheat a few venturesome souls out of tidy sums of money with the help of fake bonds.

"Au fond, il n'est pays que de l'enfance," Roland Barthes comments. Tabán is one of the most enchanting neighbourhoods of Budapest, or rather it was, with its taverns, restaurants, inns, public baths, brothels, windy streets, hills and valleys, eccentric residents and old Serb and German-speaking natives. Walking its streets in 1933, the protagonist conjures up memories of the Tabán and Hungary of the 1870s, the golden age of Hungary's growth into a modern, bourgeois society, when the economic stability of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy improved apace. An enterprising soul with a bit of skill could make a fortune, while an inept bungler could lose his shirt. There is still something remaining of the intimate provincialism, the lazy reveries of earlier centuries, but the incursions of the modern world are transforming and effacing the traces of the past. The protagonist is writing his memoir in 1933, the year in which Hitler seizes power in Germany. Change is afoot not only in Tabán, but in the whole world.

Kerékgyártó has brought thorough knowledge of the era and careful structuring of the storyline to bear in the invention of the age, constitution and biography of his protagonist. The half-Serb, half-German Milán Trüffel is Tabán through and through, an emblem of the ethnically mixed neighborhood, a true Budapest citizen of the Monarchy. Had he not fallen victim to the allures of the life of a swindler in his youth perhaps he might have been a clerk in one of the ministries with a family, entitled to a pension and one or two drinking binges a month. When he chose the life of a crook, however, the world opened to him (though the novel leaves the question as to whether this was a free choice or his life was predetermined open). The principal virtue of the novel lies in the manner in which a world rich in flavours, scents and sights unfolds before the reader. As a narrator, Milán Trüffel writes most enthusiastically about food, drink, streets, dresses and women, and he does so at length, in great detail and with passion, with an array of attributive adjectives, as if he might be able to cook another pot of that wonderful fish soup, except that in order to cook fish soup you need fish, not words.

Trüffel travels the world in concentric circles. He journeys first to important cities of the Monarchy, Zagreb and Vienna, and then to major European cities, Paris and Hamburg, and on to New York, Africa and Argentina. But this is only one of the storylines of the novel. The other thread is an elegiac frame narrative. In his travels incognito to the sites of his exploits of yesteryear, Trüffel feels both joy as he savours the tastes of the past and dolefulness at the thought that everything that was once good has now gone in the ruins of time. This shift of moods follows the shift of seasons. The novel opens with the warmth of summertime, but in the final chapters the protagonist shuffles through

yellow autumn leaves falling at his feet in the park as he becomes increasingly immersed in his quest to retrace the footsteps of his youth. Like all hedonists, Milán Trüffel, the adventurer and master of the art of living, is in fact sad beyond measure. Beyond measure because he knows that in life all joys are both measurable and ephemeral. Gradually the reader begins to pay attention not to the exciting tales of adventures (conquests, political speculation, card games played with loaded decks, forged documents, genuine dupes), but rather to the intermissions, the travels between two escapades, and begins to wonder whether the protagonist actually finds any contentment in his jaunts or whether he merely endures them, like a modern, bourgeois King Midas.

One of the most intriguing incidents in the novel offers an interesting answer to this question. Trüffel, a young journalist, gets wind of a serious crime. A young civil servant at the city hall, a man who is a guileful right-wing politician, manages one day at work to embezzle an enormous sum. He flees the country the same day. Trüffel gets wind of the affair, and he is decidedly impressed by the man's boldness. He begins to work on the story, following the scent of the embezzler, and thanks to his intentness and his fateful good luck he tracks him down in Corsica. In the meantime he interprets all of the defalcator's actions – his decision to switch from one train headed for Berlin to another, to get off the Trieste express one stop early, to go to Venice, etc.—as a kind of bravura. He is, however, compelled to confront the fact that the great thief is nothing but a petty little man who in a moment of demoniacal audacity stole a fortune, but who is entirely unable to enjoy it, and his flight was merely a series of accidents. It was not carefully devised, but rather endured. In other words the figure of the mythical rogue invented by Trüffel as a journalist was not even half true. Trüffel resolves not to write about crimes, but rather to commit them. There is another ironic twist in the story when, after having committed innumerable offences and always escaping punishment, Trüffel is imprisoned in December 1913 under suspicion of having murdered his lover, though this time he is innocent. Some twenty years later, as a kind of chilling endgame of this thread of the novel, Trüffel seeks out the real killer, who has recently been released. He turns out to be a timid, good-for-nothing baker's boy, who had killed Trüffel's beloved at the prompting of a chambermaid.

In the meantime the frame narrative becomes increasingly complex. At the close of the memoir, the reader is presented with the correspondence between the investigators and informants who have been snooping around Trüffel, using fake names and behaving suspiciously. In these fictional police documents, Kerékgyártó cleverly mixes human feebleness, humour and history. In 1933 people in Central Europe, a region quickly succumbing to the spread of fascism, are quicker to spot a Communist subversive than they are to see a swindler posing as a real estate speculator. By the close of the novel the old world of Tabán no longer exists, and Trüffel has completed his memoirs, a literary monument to the life of a cheat. Trüffel concludes his manuscript with a painfully ironic prediction. He claims that some twenty years hence, in 1953, a little city of spas would blossom in Tabán, a place so full of "casinos, spa hotels, glittering nightclubs that

Baden-Baden would be put to shame." 1953 of course was one of the most brutal years of Stalinist rule in Hungary, as well as the year in which Kerékgyártó, now 57 years old, was born.

The author soberly remains aware of the borders and limitations of the genre. The background information about cultural history is never intrusive, and thankfully we are not confronted with an encyclopedia entry thinly disguised as a novel. The dry facts become part of a succulent story. Trüffel's leisurely, somewhat old-fashioned narrative tone, as it conjures up the prosperous early decades of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, is pure entertainment, but in the meantime the lines of a cultural and intellectual map are finely drawn. We eagerly anticipate Trüffel's next escapade, but also the recipes for fine dishes, the descriptions of the cityscapes, aware that sooner or later we will also encounter famous personalities of the age. Kerékgyártó creatively inserts references to real events and people into the fictional biography of his protagonist. Two episodes merit specific mention. Kerékgyártó interweaves into his narrative the scandalous, openly homosexual relationship between László Mednyánszky (1852–1919), one of the most original Hungarian painters, and a sailor named Bálint Kurdi. He makes use of letters and diaries in order to reconstruct this history of an intense passion that disregarded all social expectations. The other memorable intercultural reference involves the figure of Thomas Mann and his novel *Confessions of Felix Krull, Confidence Man.* According to Trüffel's memoirs, Mann holds a reading at the Music Academy in Budapest on December 6, 1913 (Mann did travel to Budapest in 1937). Trüffel reflects on Mann's reading of the novel:

> the writer broods over the idea that the real swindler dresses in opulent garb a living veracity that has not yet arrived in the empire of truth so that he will gain recognition and acknowledgment. That nothing matters but appearances, and the world is continuously longing to be cheated, it almost screams with the desire to be the victim of deceit. The life of the swindler is the struggle against his own talentless surroundings.

One comes across similarities between the stories of Trüffel and Krull at several points in the novel. They have similar adventures (in the theatre and the circus, hence the conflicts between appearances and reality, or rather the synthesis of appearance and reality as a philosophy of life). Indeed as a writer Kerékgyártó is so frivolous that his protagonist asks Mann about the continuation of the novel, which is being written at the time. It was some forty years later when Mann set out to complete his novel, and he worked on it until his death. By interweaving Mann into the plot Kerékgyártó clearly gestures towards the moment in artistic and intellectual history that served as source and context for his novel, namely the period before the First World War, the last few hours of liberal or even libertarian Europe, when the continent seemed to be dancing a danse macabre to the tune of a Strauss waltz towards catastrophe. Trüffel departs for Argentina immediately after the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. The happy old world, even if it consisted largely of lies and delusions, is hurdled headlong towards disaster, and Trüffel is a stranger in the new one that comes in its wake.

The essential theme of *Pertu* (2010), the first collection of short stories by Edina Szvoren, one of the most promising young female Hungarian writers, is also the sense of alienation. If in the case of Kerékgyártó's novel one can speak of the evident identity of narrator and narrative and a convivial directness, in the case of Szvoren's short stories we are dealing with quite the opposite. The narrative and the narrator are separated by unbridgeable chasms and cognitive and mental abysses. Szvoren also frequently uses the conventional first-person narrator, but in her stories, which all take place in the present or the recent past, the figure of the first-person narrator achieves radically different effects than those attained by Kerékgyártó's impostor, who is inclined to euphemism, embellishment and fawning. In the world of Szvoren's narratives, lies are not a matter of trickery, hoax or escapade. Rather they are part of the barren and bleak everyday experience of life, like the worn wallpaper in an apartment block that is supposed to cover the even uglier wall. Consequently, truth is also a different matter. In Szvoren's stories truth, which only comes to the surface for a brief moment in a sentence or two, is the token of catharsis. It is a moment of grace without any trace of grace.

Szvoren's prose is tragic and splendid in its simplicity and everyday tone. A few citations drawn from "On Intimate Terms", the eponymous story of the collection and which is included here in this issue, illustrate the ease of the prose and the complexity of the narrative perspective: "Let the light slip on the row of spikes mounted on the windowsill." "Have her dust, mop over the hall floor, iron the spare bed linen." "Let Mummy and Daddy be the kind of people who always show up everywhere precisely at the appointed time, all but arousing twinges of guilt with their punctuality." "*Another year gone by,* let them sigh instead of offering a greeting." How is the reader to interpret these statements? Are they demands? Orders? Implied sentences? What prevails, the will of the narrator or the terrible, natural order of the narrative? I am inclined to think the latter. The pitiless and relentless sentences, all phrased in the imperative tense, seem to suggest the inevitability of a fate without absolution, a "circumscribed plunge", to borrow a metaphor from the poet György Petri. We realize that in Szvoren's fictional world the characters and the setting are both trapped. There every word and gesture is predetermined. From this distance one senses an ice-cold irony in every sentence. We feel as if we were watching actors who are playing their roles in a staged production. Here is a situation, laden with drama. On New Year's Eve a divorced woman living in an untidy apartment in an apartment block, whose son chose to live with his father after the divorce, is visited by her parents, who live just north of the border in Slovakia. (To the best of my knowledge the inclusion of Slovakia is pure fiction, in other words the author herself does not have any ties to Slovakia.) The mood begins to become clear from the detached description, and the situation gradually grows familiar. The small family tries to bridge unspeakable emotional and linguistic distances while in the midst of the routines of New Year's Eve.

What is taking place is coping with grief and loss, a process that must be undertaken in order to survive. "Let a commonplace be called a rite; habit, intimacy; the calf, a shank." Instead of the sentences and gestures functioning as mere alibis, there is a despairing search

for gestures and words that bear meaning. "Let happiness arise through remembrance." But this is impossible. Szvoren's narrative can express depths so profound, even within the framework of a short story, that it seems reminiscent of Dezső Kosztolányi's novel *Skylark*. As we read the monotonous commands, we have the impression that a series of events that has been played out thousands of times is unfolding again, like watching a film taken by an industrial camera. The characters live under the compulsion of repetition. The familiar Hungarian habits for the New Year's Eve rites, lentils, champagne, drinking toasts, closely fit the stages of the process. Everything has its time. But one's life seems to flow in all directions, or to freeze like ice. "Let there be sentences that can be repeated an infinite number of times." Naturally the dramatic climax comes at midnight. The woman has to speak with her son on the phone.

> Let the telephone ring at six minutes past midnight, and let there be a sort of low point here at which the sentences, setting off from the high ground, finally trickle together before coming to rest in a dark lake with no surface.

The characters look into this dark, blind mirror, the woman, her father, her mother, even her son cannot escape. He too is a prisoner of this world. His actions too are ordained by some higher power. "Language is more powerful than its speakers," notes the aforementioned György Petri. It seems the story is more powerful than its actors.

> Let there be a newfangled note of sappiness in her son's voice, a melancholy savagery that he has not shown anyone. Let the whisper of his flannel pyjamas be audible. Suppose it is credible that a telephone receiver transmits odours: the odour of the mouth, tightly shut for hours, of a person suddenly woken from a deep sleep, the scalp's fragrance of tallow creeping onto the forehead.

In her most acute sentences Szvoren shows a depth and maturity surprising for such a young writer offering a sort of physiological, mental X-ray of her characters. She renders them transparent. She sees through the over-filled emptinesses. Not that her narrator is entirely lacking in compassion. Rather her compassion knows no absolution.

The critic Pál Réz writes of Edina Szvoren, "she is most attentive to the insulted and humiliated (whether she is among them or not). However, Szvoren goes beyond the compassionate stance of the great Russian novelists: she transforms human solidarity to an almost erotic essence, bringing it in close proximity to the body. This is both original and beautiful." One notices while reading *On Intimate Terms* how the bodies begin to attract one another, their repulsiveness notwithstanding, or perhaps precisely because of it. Perhaps in the eroticism of compassion there lies an escape as a distant but nonetheless real possibility:

> it's better to strike than not to, just as it's better to speak out loud than not to the sentences that come to mind as if she had never thought them, although they did not come to mind for years precisely because she was always thinking of them. Let these sentences be the lowest points of that dark lake with no surface.

These sentences, best said, are strangled in the depths. Szvoren avoids

clever, entrancing psychological explanations and heavy-handed analysis. She writes about bodies, distances and strangeness. She is nonetheless writing about souls, closeness and familiarity. This is her great achievement. Her language is not unadorned, but it is gaunt. Her narrative lens changes perspectives in an instant. Wide-angle shots and close-ups alternate, much as they might in a film.

The collection of short stories offers a sort of survey or map of the themes of family traumas, the dull holidays of childhood, missing fathers and solitude. Restrained, even smothered and cold, the stories are rich with emotion. They are reminiscent of the taste of a bitter pill when one has forgotten to swallow it whole and chews it instead.

Gábor Schein (1963) is a critic and translator who teaches Germanic studies. He started out as a poet, and only later, after having written, among others things, a history of world literature, began to write fiction and plays. This is evident in his diverse fictional oeuvre, never contrived or theoretical.

Behind the plot of *Egy angyal önéletrajzai* (The Autobiographies of an Angel) lie both concepts connected to the history of the novel and philosophical dimensions. The narrator of the novel is an angel who recounts the stories of two lives. These two biographies are distant in time and space, but given the similarity of their motifs they seem all the more close. One is the 18th-century biography of Johann Klarfeld. Having been expelled from his community, the young man of Jewish descent is compelled to leave his home and travel in Western Europe. The other biography is that of Berta Józsa, who was born in 1943 in a village near the city of Miskolc in northeastern Hungary. The first biography was written in a language predating the modern novel, a sort of Bildungsroman about the *Wanderjahre* of Johann Klarfeld. In the case of the second biography, which deals with 20th-century Hungarian history, the Holocaust, and the 1956 Revolution, Schein has invented a fragmented, mosaic-like approach to the novel that enables him to recount suppression, the traumas of silence and silencing, and the destructive effects and tragic consequences of coerced forgetting with shocking authenticity. Here there is no longer a language or perspective for psychology.

The two stories intertwine into a single novel that casts light on man and angel, the theology of man and the anthropology of angel, the familiar and the foreign, and history and freedom. All this is done in a language that is both precise and poetic. An outstanding and highly enjoyable novel of the past year, it is written with a truly angelic irony. ❧

John Lukacs

Past Imperfect

Balázs Ablonczy, *Trianon-legendák* (The Trianon Legends). Budapest: Jaffa, 2010. 158 pp.

In June 2010, almost exactly ninety years after the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, the newly elected government of Hungary chose to elevate its commemoration to the level of an annual event, together with the requirement of its solemn commemoration in Hungarian schools. Speculation about the motives and purposes of this revived emphasis of a previous national tragedy does not belong here. What belongs here is the recognition that in addition to its national and popular preoccupation, serious historical works concerning Trianon appeared throughout the last nine decades, including even some during the forty years of Russian occupation and one-party rule. Then, in 2001, a short and excellent study dealing with the origins, the conditions and the negotiations preceding that unfortunate treaty, written by Ignác Romsics (*A trianoni békeszerződés* [The Treaty of Trianon]), was published, and now we have before us another excellent, and much needed, work by the young Hungarian historian Balázs Ablonczy, with its precise and telling title: *The Trianon Legends*.

Legends! Ablonczy's prime, and most commendable, achievement is his peeling off, his scholarly dismissal of legends that have accompanied the popular Hungarian image of Trianon for ninety years—and, alas, current and widespread and nonsensical even now. Truly that may be the principal task of professional historians: to identify not only lies and legends but half-truths.., and their effects. There is of course a fallible—and natural—tendency of human beings to attribute their misfortunes to many matters, true or not; and perhaps we ought to remark that the Hungarian national psyche may be inclined to that. But the careful and serious elimination of half-truths and legends does not mean that the judgement of the entire event or events must now be reversed—because

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John Lukacs

is a Budapest-born historian living in the U.S. since 1946. He has written more than thirty books including Budapest 1900 *(1988),* Confessions of an Original Sinner *(1990),* The Duel *(1990),* The End of the Twentieth Century—The End of the Modern Age *(1993),* A Thread of Years *(1999) and, most recently,* Last Rites *(2009) and* The Legacy of the Second World War *(2010).*

the clarification of anything, like the physical cleaning of an old picture or portrait, does not reduce but adds to its authenticity and, yes, to its very meaning. And so Ablonczy's work is especially valuable not only because of its—moral and historical—purpose but also because of its careful documentation and precise exposition.

He begins, rightly, with judicious summaries of the multitudinous political and social effects of the catastrophe of Trianon—and with their political and ideological manipulations (past and, alas, present). Then he turns, in successive chapters, to disprove and to describe some of the accumulated legends. They include the attributions of conspiracies; the exaggerated attributions of the results of the last rhetorical effort of Count Albert Apponyi in Paris; the attributions of Georges Clemenceau's Hungarophobia due to his dislike of his Hungarian daughter-in-law; the sinister dealings of all kinds of Free Masons; of the legend that when drawing the new frontiers malignant and ignorant foreign experts defined and described small streams as navigable rivers. There is also Ablonczy's precise location and description of where this lamentable treaty was actually signed (in the Grand, not the Petit Trianon pavilion or palace).

History is, by its very nature, "revisionist." The Last Word on any of its subjects is not the equivalent to The Case Is Now Closed, to a final and unalterable truth. But the historian's search for truth is necessarily that of his hacking through a jungle of untruths. The revising of history must not be an ephemeral monopoly of ideologues or opportunists, who are ever ready to twist all kinds of evidences from a past in order to exemplify current ideas—and their own adjustments to them. In contrast: Ablonczy's modest achievement marks the fine quality of his historianship together with the integrity of his character. ❧

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Bob Dent

Digesting Difficult Times

Alex Bandy, *Chocolate and Chess*
Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2009, 476 pp.

In the last year of the Second World War, a small, secretive group of Communist enthusiasts, eager not only to interpret the world but also to change it, used to meet with their self-appointed leader in various safe locations in Nagyvárad (today Oradea in Romania, but at the time part of Hungary).

One of the group, 19-year-old Éva Izsák, found herself in a serious situation. Her 'comrades' had come to believe that, partly due to the difficulties she was having finding secure accommodation, she represented a potential danger in that if she happened to be picked up by the authorities she would as likely as not betray, or be forced to betray, the other members of the group. A decision was reached, under the guidance of the leader, that the unfortunate Éva should commit suicide 'for the sake of the movement'. Unbelievable though it may sound, Éva accepted her fate, travelled to Debrecen to be away from Nagyvárad and, amidst the trees of the Great Wood to the north of the city centre, swallowed the cyanide given to her by one of the group's members. The leader of the underground Communist cell in Nagyvárad, which was not officially recognized by any Party authority, was a young ideologue called Imre Lakatos.

Over a decade later, in the wake of the 1956 uprising, Imre Lakatos would leave Hungary. As a gifted (some would say super-gifted) scholar and sharp thinker, he became well-respected in Western academic circles as a philosopher of science and mathematics. On the staff of the London School of Economics for many years, in the late 1960s he took a firm stand against the rebellious students of his institution. He died in 1974 at the young age of 51. An obituary in *The Times* newspaper was full of glowing praise.

"When he lectured, the room would be crowded, the atmosphere electric," declared the anonymous author, "and from time to time there would be a gale of laughter." The positive commentary was echoed in an additional note contributed by Professor Ernest Gellner of the London School of Economics, who remarked that the brilliant thinker Lakatos would be sorely missed at the prestigious institution.

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Yet, despite positive testimonials from such luminaries as Karl Popper and Lord Robens, president of the British Academy, Imre Lakatos was refused British citizenship—twice. Was there something about his background which his academic colleagues at the LSE and elsewhere were not quite familiar with? Could that have involved even more than the death of an unfortunate youngster many years previously?

In Alex Bandy's *Chocolate and Chess* two interconnected subjects are put under the microscope—Imre Lakatos and his times. The bulk of the book is about Hungary in the period from the Second World War to 1956 and what, apparently, Imre Lakatos was up to during that time. In doing so Bandy has written what in many respects amounts to a 'thriller' in the form of a well-researched piece of historical writing.

The body of Éva Izsák was discovered in the Debrecen wood by a school pupil several days after her death. Although some questions would eventually be asked, in the chaos of the last months of the war and the immediate postwar period the incident was virtually forgotten—a case of one death among many thousands, on the eastern front and in the extermination camps. Over the years, Lakatos was able to rise in the party-state hierarchy, almost, but not quite, to the top.

Bandy paints a picture of a dogmatic, arrogant, unscrupulous character with an authoritarian personality who was a perfect intellectual bully-boy at the service of the political, cultural and security apparatus of the one-party state. It seems he was not only attracted by the opportunities of wielding power, but was also, in the words of literary historian Miklós Szabolcsi, who knew him, "in love with his own intellect".

Yet he was arrested in 1950 and taken to the infamous interrogation and torture centre at 60 Andrássy út in Budapest. Without giving too much away, suffice it to note here that he spent three years as a prisoner, mostly at the notorious slave labour camp at Recsk in northeast Hungary. After his release, he picked up the threads of his former life.

What was going on? What kind of society was it that produced hot and cold political winds blowing in different directions in quick succession? How did people survive? Why did the regime, as well as having many opponents, have many supporters? When did 'the penny drop', which made enthusiasts turn into critics? Why didn't it drop at all for some, even for some who fell victim to the system?

Alex Bandy's book deals with these complex questions and in doing so presents an insightful picture of Hungary in the post-1945 decade. As such, it is an invaluable guide for non-Hungarians. There are few works in English which deal with this period, and even fewer which do it in such a comprehensive way. A tremendous amount of research has gone into its writing. Bandy became interested in his enigmatic theme almost by chance, over twenty years ago, when the historian Lee Congdon asked him one day in the middle of Margaret Island what he knew about Imre Lakatos.

We read about how the Hungarian Communists coming from Moscow at the end of the Second World War found themselves in conflict with various elements on the ground. On the one hand, they had to deal with some of the old, die-hard left-wingers, who believed that now the chance had come to rush headlong into a fully-fledged Communist society. That wasn't what Stalin had in mind, at least not immediately. At the same time, they were faced with something potentially even more dangerous from their point of view—the emergence of spontaneous democracy.

As the Red Army swept through the country, driving out the German forces and what remained of their Hungarian allied units, a vacuum was created in which there was no proper, legally constituted civil authority or other administration. Initially, the gap was filled from below. Workers' councils in factories and town 'soviets' emerged and took over, not so much for ideological reasons but simply as bodies to get things moving again, whether that meant shifting the rubble from the streets or repairing damaged equipment so that the production of daily necessities could resume. Innocent though such local, self-governing bodies might be, they were repressed in every instance. Being out of the Party's control, there was no place for them in the new Hungary. Yet being under the control of the Party didn't necessarily involve party membership. Bandy gives examples of non-Party people being nominated for positions—it could look better that way.

The free and fair parliamentary elections of November 1945 resulted in an absolute majority of 245 out of 421 seats for the Independent Smallholders' Party, while the Communists and Social Democrats gained just 70 and 69 respectively. Nevertheless, the Communists and their Soviet backers insisted on the formation of a coalition government. Crucially, within that and from then on the Communist Party had control over the Interior Ministry, and therefore the police and the associated security organizations. From that base, it was able to launch an assault—sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly—on its political rivals. The Party's notorious 'salami tactics' involved demonizing, denouncing and dividing opponents who, thus weakened, could be sliced out of history, one after the other.

The 1947 election was rigged in that Party members were organized to 'vote early and vote often', using duplicated absentee voting slips. Nevertheless, the Communists still only obtained 100 seats, less than a quarter of the total. A turning point came in June 1948 with the manipulated merger of the Communist and Social Democratic parties, and by the time of the May 1949 elections a one-party system was virtually already in place. The newly named Hungarian Workers' Party swept the board, winning 285 seats, the remaining 117 being taken nominally by other parties, though they had all stood jointly as part of a 'People's Front'. Bandy covers all this in detail.

In the course of his exposition, we read about the 'infamous four'—Mátyás Rákosi, Ernő Gerő, Mihály Farkas and József Révai—four top leaders of the Party, who held most of the reigns of power in their hands as they sought to drive the country forward as if they were the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. While definitely not being divine, the devil was certainly in their detail. Thus, going beyond the simplistic picture of Rákosi as the real dictator—officially he was the Party boss—Alex Bandy provides evidence to show that, on many occasions at least, it was Gerő who wielded the actual power, if only because his ear was closest to the Kremlin's heartbeat. Perhaps that's not surprising. By late 1941, when Rákosi was released after spending many years behind the bars of a Hungarian prison, Gerő was already a well-seasoned Comintern operative with much experience under his belt in the service of Moscow, including tracking down 'dissidents' in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War.

Furthermore, Bandy provides examples of attitude and behaviour which together make up a rather intriguing portrait of József Révai, who became the 'cultural tsar' of Hungary in the postwar era. A literary avant-gardist and occasional poet in his

youth, the intellectual Révai had a certain feeling for national sensibilities which the others lacked. The story is told—though it may be apocryphal—about the time when, back on Hungarian soil after many years of exile, on first hearing the Hungarian national anthem being sung, Révai had tears in his eyes.

Was it for this certain 'softness', perhaps bordering on potential 'deviation' that there are indications pointing in the direction of a plot to oust Révai from power following the affair of László Rajk, the former interior and then foreign affairs minister who was executed in 1949 after a show trial? And was Lakatos involved in that plot? Did the abandoning of the plot lead, via the curious logic of the time, to the arrest of Lakatos in 1950—to 'get him out of the way', so to say. This is one of the issues which Alex Bandy has investigated.

Based on his many interviews and the obviously long hours spent poring over documents in formerly secret archives, Bandy suggests a composite image of the—in his view—six kinds of people in the Hungarian Communist Party after the war: true believers in The Idea; believers in power, knowing what to do to stay in power; those who actually thought that what was good for the Kremlin was good for mankind; those who joined to protect themselves and their families, harming no one; those out for revenge and/or nefarious gain, including elements out to exploit the situation; and those who joined as they would any social grouping, to be socially active while otherwise perhaps being quite apolitical. You don't have to agree with the categories, but they are certainly thought-provoking. The book offers plenty of examples to match each type and, indeed, mixtures of types.

Chocolate and Chess is a scholarly work, but it is by no means a dry, academic one. Application of the author's skills as a journalist—for many years Bandy was a Budapest correspondent for Associated Press—has resulted in a very readable text, full of snippets of memory, personal experiences, anecdotes and jokes, while also being crammed with documentary evidence, reflecting an amazing amount of digging. It is 'transparent' digging, too, letting us look into how history can be written. We follow the author down different tracks in his search for evidence concerning the doings of Lakatos. The trail sometimes comes to a dead end, but he admits that, occasionally pointing in the direction should others in the future wish to take up the search.

We read, for example, of how Lakatos, of Jewish origin and a convert to atheistic Marxism, once went through a baptism ceremony to become a Calvinist. Why he did this is not quite clear, though there is a hint of opportunistic reasons in that it might have put Lakatos in a position to ingratiate himself with someone who could perhaps in the future be lured towards the Marxist faith.

Bandy admits he has not been able to determine the exact date of the baptism, which some say took place in early 1945. In November 2007, the archivist at the Debrecen Reform Church College told him that information on such matters remains confidential until 60 years after the person's death. Bandy provides a precise address in Debrecen, should anyone wish to pursue the matter in 2034. It is touches like these—unusual, but at the same time quite human and wryly amusing—which add a subtle lightness to the book.

In many respects, however, this is a dark tale of evil deeds and evil times. Yet lest the reader might feel smug, the author is not averse to 'intervening' in the story to point out comparisons between certain

totalitarian practices of East European Stalinism and similar experiences elsewhere—be it the spread and acceptance of irrational propaganda, the application of torture or the use of show trials. As an example of the latter, he cites the bizarre case of Pope Formosus—the show trial *par excellence,* as he calls it.

Towards the end of the ninth century, soon after (as it happens) the arrival of the still non-Christian Magyar tribes in the Carpathian Basin, the corpse of Pope Formosus was disinterred from its burial place, dressed in full papal regalia and placed on the papal throne. The corpse was assigned defence witnesses and then 'interrogated' to prove that the now dead person had become pope under false pretences and thus his entire work was null and void. The corpse was found guilty as charged.

Such strange matters may not seem directly relevant to the story of Imre Lakatos and his era, but both the man and his times were indeed strange. As the author indicates—without ramming it down your throat—fundamentalism can be both religious and political and has existed for centuries. Indeed, when it comes to ideology, 'Church' can often be substituted for 'Party', and vice versa. And need there be mention of the parallel between the fate of the papal corpse and the Rajk case?

The 'Chocolate' of the title is a reference to a work of early Soviet fiction with that designation by Alexander Tarasov-Rodionov, one theme of which was the necessity for the willing self-sacrifice of the innocent, should the Party require it. The book, Bandy has discovered, was highly influential among Hungarian Communists in the pre-1945 period. That itself is tragically ironic, since by then Tarasov-Rodionov had himself fallen victim to the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s (as had Béla Kun and many other leaders and activists of the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic who had fled to Moscow to seek safety).

'Chess' refers to the metaphorical chess boards littering the hidden, secretive world of spies and counter-spies, where all the pieces are pawns. The reader is left to decide whether the spy masters and their apprentices on each side of the Cold War divide were essentially different or whether they were all playing the same Great Game, though in the service of different ideologies.

The density of the (dark) chocolate and the intense investigation of political chess-playing described in this book may not be to everyone's taste. In total there are over 300 pages of main text, followed by 100 pages of detailed, sometimes lengthy notes in smaller print (one 'footnote' is nearly five pages long!), a further 14 pages of biographical information about characters who appear in the story and then 20 pages of partly annotated bibliography. (A comprehensive index including subject matter, and not just a concordance of names mentioned in the text, would have been very useful, but is unfortunately missing.) Nevertheless, anyone delving into this interesting, unusual and informative work is almost certain to find it gripping, due to both the subject matter and the author's treatment of it.

At the same time, there is definitely a great deal of varied material to sink your teeth into, and occasionally it does require a degree of determination and stamina to digest some of the very detailed parts, for example the reports, towards the end of the book, giving an overview of the lengthy interviews members of the British intelligence services conducted with Lakatos in connection with his applications for UK citizenship. But, like a well-made chocolate cake, on the whole Bandy's work is deliciously captivating and can always—even to advantage—be consumed slowly, one piece at a time. ❧

Endre Szentkirályi

No Passport? Can't Go Home!

The Novels of Áron Gábor

Imagine being released after spending five years in the Soviet gulag, emaciated, weak and sickly. You report to the nearest Siberian village police station, asking to go back to your native Hungary. The local police official asks you where your passport is. "My passport?" you are incredulous. Five brutal and long years ago you had been arrested and sentenced to death, and later, when your sentence was commuted to a mere five years forced labour, you were taken by railroad cattle car, with thousands of others, to the vast reaches of Siberia. Passports? Who worried about passports, when simple survival was at stake. "Sorry", the local bureaucrat informs you. Nobody travels even within the great Soviet empire without a passport. Thus begins your protracted road to freedom, with another ten years of exile in a Siberian village before you are finally allowed to return to your native Hungary, fifteen years after being arrested in 1945. Too far-fetched to be true?

Just one of many scenes in Áron Gábor's novels, written as fiction, based on his own life.

Mention the name Áron Gábor to the average Hungarian and the 19th-century hero springs to mind, he who gathered bronze church bells and cast them into cannons to fight the Austrians during the Hungarian Fight for Independence of 1848–49.

The 20th-century writer Áron Gábor, a direct descendant, is hardly known in Budapest literary circles but he was widely read in émigré communities. Perusing any reasonably educated émigré's bookshelf in the 1970's and 1980's, whether in Buenos Aires, Sydney, Vienna, New Brunswick, Toronto, New York, Cleveland or Los Angeles, one would have found the usual assortment of classics, Arany, Gárdonyi and Petőfi, as well as the 20th-century Albert Wass, József Nyírő, Tibor Tollas, Sándor Márai, and of course Áron Gábor. His writing is hard-hitting and satirical, yet highly literary. Gyula Borbándi compiled a comprehensive account of Hungarian

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Endre Szentkirályi

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émigré literature, and Gábor figures prominently in it. It remains to be seen whether he will be accepted by the Hungarian literary canon with the passage of time. Émigrés, however, have long appreciated his writings.

Gábor's life story, as well as his literary career, mirrors some of the most crucial events of Hungary in the 20th century: the Second World War, Soviet occupation, the Siberian gulag and later Sovietization.

Born in 1911 in the Transdanubian city of Kaposvár, he obtained a law degree from the Pázmány Péter University in Budapest, and then became a journalist working for two liberal newspapers, *8 Órai Újság* and *Reggel.* He was a war correspondent during the Second World War, writing a book about his experiences of fighting on the Don river (*Túl a Sztálin vonalon* – Beyond the Stalin Line). This was journalism larded with anecdotes, frequently linking particular events and their broader sociological and historical implications. Gábor interviewed mayors, local newspaper editors and ordinary Russians and described villages, tours, hospitals, collectives and taverns, touching on the relationship between the Communist Party and the Russian people, as well as on the effects of propaganda on everyday lives. Characteristic of Gábor's style, it was laced with personal commentary.

During the German occupation of 1944, he crossed over to eastern Hungary, already occupied by the Russians, and reported for duty. He was appointed general secretary of the Red Cross in Hungary in 1945 and organized its Search Service, assembling reports about refugees and POW's. In August 1945, he was summoned to the Soviet commander's residence. Hoping to obtain information about POW's from him, he went, only to be politely arrested and imprisoned by the Soviet military authorities. Legend has it that news of his book about the Russian people had reached Stalin, and the dictator was incensed. As a result, a Soviet military court sentenced Áron Gábor to death.

The author's account of his seventeen months' imprisonment by the Soviet authorities while still in Hungary developed into his first novel, *Az Embertől keletre* (East of Man),[1] which later became the first of a four-volume series. The books were written as fiction, yet contained many autobiographical details.

His sentence was without an explanation. He was commuted to five years forced labour and exile for life and was taken to Siberia. Gábor later wrote his second novel, *Szögletes szabadság* (Freedom Framed), about his five years in the gulag. Following the scene described at the beginning of this article, he then spent an additional ten years as a legal resident in a Russian village in Siberia. Living amongst Russians was the topic of *Évszázados emberek* (Centenarians). His working skills were so noteworthy that he earned a Soviet Outstanding Worker award from the Trade Union of Siberian Forest Workers. He married a Russian woman and then, in 1960, was allowed to return to his native Hungary.

1 ■ **Works by Áron Gábor:** *Túl a Sztálin vonalon* [Beyond the Stalin Line]. Budapest: Stádium, 1941.; *Az embertől keletre* [East of Man]. Munich, Los Angeles: XX. Század, 1967; *Szögletes szabadság* [Freedom Framed]. Munich, Los Angeles: XX. Század, 1968; *Wohin Amerikaner?* Munich: Südwest Verlag, 1970; *Évszázados emberek* [Centenarians]. Munich, Los Angeles: XX. Század, 1971; *Ázsia peremén* [On the Fringe of Asia]. Munich, Los Angeles: XX. Század, 1974; *East of Man.* Toronto: Weller Publishing, 1975; *Túlélés* [Survival]. Munich, Los Angeles, Sydney: XX. Század, 1978.

After fifteen years of imprisonment and exile in Siberia, he attempted to reintegrate into the Hungary of 1960, a country which had experienced the 1956 Revolution and its crushing with the repressions to follow, and was just about to embark on a slow way to some normalcy and welfare under János Kádár. Gábor started writing for the photo journal *Ország-Világ,* a weekly published by the Soviet-Hungarian Friendship Society, then became the press secretary of the National Forestry Administration. Reintegration was difficult, and after five years of trying to fit in, he left the country for West Germany. He smuggled out the manuscript of *Embertől keletre,* which was published in Munich two years later.

He continued writing the other novels of the series, at the same time also publishing regularly in émigré periodicals such as *Új Látóhatár, Irodalmi Újság, Kanadai Magyarság* and *Új Világ.* He visited Hungarian communities dispersed around the globe including North and South America, travelling as far as Australia. He wrote a book about the United States in German, titled *Wohin Amerikaner?* (Where to, American?) in his characteristic style, somewhat ironic and always probing, focused not so much on Hungarians in America but rather on American life in general. He contrasted Ivan Ivanovitch, the Russian everyman, who survived the tsars and would survive the party secretaries (he wrote the book in 1970), with the average Americans Bill Jones and Joe Blow, examining them in the context of the materialistic American consumer society.

His commentary on Hungarians in Australia was entitled *Ázsia peremén* (On the Fringe of Asia). It was meant to be the first in another series dealing with the sociology, psychology and politics of émigré Hungarian communities. He never finished this second set although he continued writing until his death in Saarbrücken, on 28 December, 1982, just four years after publishing the last novel in his first four-volume series. Some of his works were translated into German, English, Spanish and Portuguese.

All the novels in the first series *(Embertől keletre, Szögletes szabadság, Évszázados emberek* and *Túlélés* [Survival]*)* are narrated in the 3rd person and share the principal character, the thinly veiled author, who appears in a dual role as the Citizen and the Prisoner.[2] The Citizen exemplifies the pre-world-war education, values, norms and manners that his psyche had internalized, and this idealist personality constantly argues with the Prisoner, the side of him that expresses base animal and pragmatic survival instincts.

The four-volume series culminates in *Túlélés,* a work of literary merit and nuanced social criticism, satirical, yet showing empathy for both the oppressor and the oppressed. Written upon his return after fifteen years of imprisonment and exile in Siberia, Gábor shows his attempts to integrate into society. In so doing, he manages to subtly display the survival mechanisms which help a people to endure, the values people cherish and the values they discard when under oppression.

2 ■ In the only English translation of any of his works, *Évszázados emberek,* these two characters are called the bourgeois and the captive. This translation is somewhat untrustworthy, mainly because the title is translated as *East of Man,* which is another novel in the series. In all his original works Gábor capitalized both "Polgár" and "Rab," so I have chosen to translate the two characters as the Citizen and the Prisoner.

How, in fact, does a population survive foreign occupation and a hostile social order, what are the values that survive with them and what do they discard? One way of survival is through language. Already on the first pages as the protagonist enters 1960 Hungary, he is shocked catching himself saying "Dosvidania" to the customs officer at the airport, thus starting an internal dialogue about what a travesty it is that a Hungarian speaks Russian in his own country. The internal dialogue continues: the travesty is that you just don't understand that the use of this foreign language is a defense mechanism, a tactic for survival.

Another linguistic way to survive an occupation is to use the mandatory fifty words. "What fifty words?" asks the Citizen, freshly returned to Hungary after fifteen years abroad. Words like "glorious liberation [of our country by the valiant Soviet army]" and "counter-revolution," and the other 48 words without which no journalist can get published, explains his boss (*Túlélés,* p. 131). Any survey of newspapers and magazines as well as the clichés of scholarly literature of the former Warsaw Pact countries from the 1960s through to the 1980s will show their prevalence: workers' paradise, glorious people's revolution, the proletariat and the common folk, the fascist aristocrats of the old regime, the greedy capitalists of the West, the progressive socialist worker's successes in overcoming the reactionary bourgeois counter-revolutionaries, the list goes on and on. Such phraseology was the staple of almost anything published in Communist Hungary. Most people paid only lip service to the vocabulary; it was simply a hoop through which one needed to jump whether one was a respected social scientist or a rank-and-file journalist.

Comparing the language of 1960 Budapest to the language of the country he left fifteen years earlier, Gábor remarks that people are "aggressive and rough, even the older ones." His protagonist witnessed a grandmother tell her grandson "that she doesn't give a sh... about his teacher, and if his teacher is such an animal, let him go to hell." The grandmother did not even notice how coarse her language was (*Túlélés,* p. 236). Gábor addressed the social acceptability of such speech, but also engaged in social criticism.

"The way Stevie and his classmates spoke on the banks of the Tisza river," he writes, "was not crude bad language nor was it acceptable in polite society." At this point Gábor displays respect and empathy for the unknowing victims of the criticized social order. "Does communism require this type of speech, or did it just start as play-acting and later became reality?" He fears for the children who cannot shake off communism and this coarse speech even when they are allowed to (*Túlélés,* p. 236).

Many émigrés of Gábor's era noticed the large number of Jews in leadership roles under communism, they turned to anti-Semitism, needing someone to blame for the injustices they had suffered. Gábor, on the other hand, offers a more nuanced view. In *Túlélés* he compares Katz, a Jew, with a nameless aristocrat, relating that Katz enlisted voluntarily and was wounded twice during the First World War as opposed to the aristocrat from whom he leased two thousand acres, who did not serve at all. Katz's three sons finished university, whereas the aristocrat's sons could only attain junior officer status through patronage. Gábor takes the analogy further, saying that while two sons of Katz's died in the

gas chambers and one is a village doctor in Hungary, the aristocrat's three sons fled to America and their children no longer speak Hungarian. Some of Gábor's characters do spew anti-Semitic rhetoric, but the overall lesson of his novels is one of inclusion and diversity, of valuing individual human beings. Much as Mark Twain has been falsely called racist, some words spoken by Gábor's characters can be construed as bigoted, when in fact he presents the good and bad of all people, as true writers and careful observers do.

Gábor's social criticism is often subtle, with empathy for the people and for their efforts to survive. In relating an almost comical incident, he explains how Károly, a successful businessman, achieved his success.

> How does he do it? The same way as [he survived] in the most savage fascist world! Using his brains. At the time of the Jewish laws he published the Christian Almanach, with biographies of the most prominent Christians in Hungary. And then in the new world [after WWII] his best deal was the production of flags for the Stakhanovists. The fact that Károly was able to survive was due to his ability to turn when the tide turned.

Károly not only survives, but prospers, as recounted, when his successful flag display at a party congress is noticed by János Kádár, who says, "For years we had the beginners taught in Moscow. How do you do it?" Károly could have told him that he learned stage decorating between the wars in Berlin under Reinhardt, writes the author, fully aware of the dramatic irony that had Kádár known about Károly's Berlin studies, he certainly would not have praised him. Running with the tide is a survival mechanism, or rather, an engine for prospering.

People survive because they shift and turn. In fact, Gábor uses one of these typical turncoat situations to point to a more general truth, a phenomenon evident in the Hungary of the 1940's but also evident today. Klára, another character, describes her father as a member of the Arrow Cross Party. He was not a fervent member, i.e. he did not wear a green shirt, but was only a party member of sorts. The character says, "...until [after WWII] when he became a good Communist... The Arrow Cross removed the obstacles that kept most older socialists away from the Communist Party". (*Túlélés,* p. 142)

Another survival mechanism is going back to the roots, to village life, to escape the city's problems. Imre, the party secretary of the company, invites our protagonist back to his village for Christmas:

> We'll drink with the old men and talk to the young. Black pudding, cooking pots, the rest will come on its own. Politics too, but don't worry, we won't fight. Somehow we'll always find the way, even if we have to move the goalposts... Or have you become so spoiled by Budapest life? I invited you to yank you out of this cologne-smelling communism. (*Túlélés,* p. 146)

In the concluding chapter Gábor asks,

> What kept our nation alive? To what did we cling? To our brotherless history? To our lonely idiosyncracies? To our scarred roots, or to the moments before they scraped earth over our eyelids, or to everything, because no other way is possible and because no other way can be possible?

In order to survive Hungarians had to distill

for the hundredth, even thousandth, time everything that steamrolls from East to West, or that goes from West to East. We experience our own selves when instead of giving up, we finagle a steadfastness, but we distill the easy moments and the difficult thousand-year inheritance as well. We distill it all: the tempting good, and the tempering bad, everything. As we always could and always must. (*Túlélés,* p. 358)

Adhering to a nation's roots is a recurring theme in *Túlélés,* and many of Gábor's characters refer to traditions and the lessons of history. Oszkár, someone who left Hungary for Chicago, warns the Citizen about too many material desires and needs: "I mean what the Germans and the Russians did not take, you should not use for excessive wants... You shouldn't sell the past for jeans, expensive nylon stockings, or even for cars". (*Túlélés,* p. 238) He is now back visiting: "You all here, and we over there, we both give up our past. Our people scatter as if we don't really want to go on living". (*Túlélés,* p. 239)

Gábor treats his subjects with respect and empathy and tempers his criticism with rhetorical distance. Oszkár lives in the USA, and the Citizen has just arrived from Siberia but Oszkár "is just like you; neither of you is at home and you judge using a different scale. He judges our lives from the top of skyscrapers, and you judge us from a Siberian hut". (*Túlélés,* p. 239) The character speaking those words meant to comfort the Citizen, to explain why Oszkár doesn't understand the Hungarians' predicament, but on a higher level, Gábor cushions his own social criticism by giving way, by backing off a bit. This steers the reader away from taking criticism personally. It is an effective rhetorical device.

Gábor has little sympathy for complainers. For those who blame their 1960 troubles on the war and the Soviet occupation, in a scene where the Citizen is undecided whether to stand for the values of the old regime or to join with the people and use the fifty mandatory words, Gábor has this response via the Citizen's internal dialogue:

Nothing remains, the war took everything. He spoke aloud because he knew it wasn't true. Even if there hadn't been a war, he still wouldn't be younger, and they still wouldn't pay him for work he didn't do. He earns only as much as the writing is worth to those who order it. The picture is clear. Either he assimilates the modern socialist values and joins them, or, or? (Túlélés, p. 245)

Gábor puts his trust in the inherent abilities of his people to overcome whatever fate may throw at them, whether it comes from the East, i.e. the Soviet occupation, or from the West, presciently alluding to the European Union. He uses everyday imagery to ram the point home, specifically addressing the future and its coming difficulties:

But: no matter how rickety that Moskvitch car, or no matter how ridiculous that Trabant car, it can still roll to the point at which the multiple interpretations of our thousand years [history] engenders a new millennium and ... that new millennium will be just as difficult as what went before. This is what we have become and this is why we endure. (*Túlélés*, p. 358)

Which brings the reader to the title of the book, as explained in the afterword, referring to the five years from 1960 to 1965 that the author endured: "Endured? And this word served as the basis for everything, good and bad, because both

are equally hard to experience so that one remains what one, both as man and culture, really is". (*Túlélés*, p. 357) Inherent in this explanation is the previous allusion to both East and West. For just as the Soviet occupation came from the East and was difficult to endure, so too is global capitalism difficult to endure, albeit it comes from the West.

Gábor's original intent, one can surmise, was to document his own experience of brutal totalitarianism. Still, he managed to distill life's most important, heady, philosophical societal issues, as well as the simplest, most base, animal interpersonal survival instincts into words that shock the reader into confronting his or her own assumptions, social mores and personal values in a brutally honest and jarringly straightforward manner. He offers the reader observations on enduring Soviet oppression, but this four-volume series can also be interpreted as a lesson on surviving our modern world. The hallmark of true literature is that it transcends specific eras, going beyond the narrow constraints of time and becoming applicable to other circumstances; if that is the measure, then *Túlélés,* as well as its companion volumes, does in fact endure. ❧

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Ferenc Takács

Shortchanged

Jack Thompson: *Breaking the Cross*. Bloomington, Ind.: AuthorHouse, 2008, 341 pp.

In various East-European languages, the expression "The Change" has served, in the last twenty years, as a shorthand (and, one might add, vague and unenlightening) description of the dissolution of the Soviet Empire and eventual collapse of the Soviet Union itself in and about 1989–90. The term has, of course, been adopted by Western observers, commentators and (now, considering the amount of time that has elapsed since, with justification) by historians. The very vagueness of the term, though, is an indication of the fact that, ever since, active players or passive sufferers of the process have been baffled by questions about The Change: why it happened, how it could happen at all, and, most importantly, what was it that actually happened. After twenty years of what at first seemed a glorious new beginning, but what now, to many, seems to have been a time of aimless drifting from one crisis to another, or, even, a steady, uncontrollable and irreversible decline into poverty, corruption, crime, violence and political extremism, accompanied by moral confusion and the fraying of the social fabric, we are still very much in the dark about the causes that set Eastern Europe on this course and, also, about the meaning and worth, if any, of what East-Europeans have had to go through since.

A rather specialized attempt to overcome this bafflement by making some kind of sense of The Change in the former Socialist bloc has been made by practitioners of popular fiction, especially by authors of political thrillers of international and national intrigue and crime. The Change, while depriving them of the grand old Cold-War scenario, provided them with fresh material: the spectacle of emerging "New Democracies" spawning their new elites of markedly kleptocratic and banditocratic cast; the emergence of organized crime, itself a new elite of sorts, accompanied by the various new horrors of prostitution, white trade, drug-trafficking, gun-running and

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universal graft, to name only a few of the less significant evils that were virtually non-existent in pre-Change days. Also, popular fiction has found another aspect of the post-Communist world emimently usable. This is the general sense or, indeed, widespread conviction among the ordinary citizens of this brave new world that, instead of glasnost or "transparency", Gorbachev's utopian promise, the new democracies are systems run by behind-the-scene manipulators, dark forces safely hidden behind the façade of democratic procedure, and they have the ominous power to make themselves undetectable, unaccountable and immune to criminal prosecution.

Old hands at treating this kind of scenario in popular fiction have been eager to make use of these new thematic opportunities, including such worthy practitioners of the political thriller as John le Carré (see his novel about the "troubles" in Chechnya, *Our Game,* 1995) or Martin Cruz Smith (with his "Arkady Renko" novels about the collapse of the Soviet Union, treated most memorably in *Red Square,* 1992). Jack Thompson now joins their ranks with his novel about The Change in Hungary, *Breaking the Cross*.

A journalist, one-time BBC correspondent in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, Thompson uses much of what he personally witnessed in Hungary in the early 1990s. He builds his fast-paced novel around items on a carefully drawn-up list of old and new social and political ills besetting Hungary in the first years of the newly instituted "rule of law, democracy and free-market economy" (terms, thought to be compromized by Marxist associations like "capitalism", "economic exploitation" and "social unequality" were studiously avoided in those early days). The items add up to a fictional fare unpleasantly familiar to Hungarians, though perhaps less obviously so to readers abroad. They include drugs, guns, corruption (both in high and low places), economic slump, the collapse of heavy industry, illegal immigration, anti-Jewish and anti-Roma racism and the resurgence of violent right-wing extremism (the "cross" in the title is a reference to the emblem of the pre-war Arrow Cross Party, members of which murdered Jews by their thousands in Budapest in the winter of 1944–45).

These themes are woven, rather skilfully, into two main plot lines of the tale, told, for the most part, by Charlie Barrow (a character that made his debut in Thompson's first thriller *A Wicked Device,* 2006). As a free-lance journalist he uses his contacts in the Budapest police force, and it is through his friend Captain Peter Kovacs (Thompson dispenses with all the diacriticals in spelling Hungarian names and words, for which, though, he offers a sensible excuse in an introductory note) that Charlie witnesses the initial event that sets the first plot line in motion: while Kovacs and his men are checking the identities of a group of foreign-looking characters in a bar, two armed Croatians escape, killing one of the police officers in a shootout. Charlie, himself receiving threats from brutal Arrow Cross characters, becomes part of Kovacs's increasingly desperate investigation into the background of the killing. Clues lead them to shady right-wing groups, skinheads first, then to persons that style themselves *nyilaskeresztes* or Arrow Cross, members of the resuscitated, though of course as yet clandestine, pre-war Fascist party and its paramilitary section of thugs.

Kovacs's investigation, however, is systematically hampered by his superior, Colonel Mihaly Kozma, a survival artist serving now about the fifth successive political regime or "system" of his country with equal ruthlessness. He even attempts to frame Kovacs for murder. After many surprising twists and turns, handled sometimes skilfully, sometimes a little clumsily by the author, everything converges on a spot in the north-eastern hills: a private prison-cum-concentration camp of the Arrow Cross gang where various undesirables are imprisoned, together with randomly abducted Gypsies who are "employed" as slave labour.

This camp is where the hero of the second plot line, a young Romanian Gypsy called Coro is taken to (he is eventually rescued by Kovacs's men in a clampdown on the camp). He grew up in the Transylvanian part of Romania. Fired by the hopes of the revolution that put an end to Ceauşescu's regime, he decides to leave his homeland and find a better life in the free "West". He slips across the Hungarian border and finds help, sustenance and love among the Hungarian Roma. Then, unfortunately, he is picked up by Arrow Cross thugs, and put into the camp.

There are further complications that involve a gruesome industrial accident, claiming half a dozen lives, in the foundry at Ozd (Ózd), a city that is now an increasingly derelict shadow of its former glory as a centre of "Socialist" heavy industry. The accident, an outcome of criminal negligence, brings investigative journalist Andrea Tar, Kovacs's girlfriend, to Ozd (she also ends up in the camp). Finally, in a dénouement that claims Kovacs's life, evidence of an ominous Arrow Cross conspiracy comes to light. Apart from misguided youngsters, more powerful manipulators like Colonel Mihaly Kozma or Professor Gyula Bokor, an influential historian are also implicated. Fortunately, the Arrow Cross is broken, the threat of a Fascist takeover is effectively countered—at least for the time being.

While an impressive array of accurately rendered fact and a great deal of acute social and political observation has gone into this realistic chronicle of a novel, its author is the first to admit that its core component—the existence of a clandestine Neo-Fascist organization complete with well-armed storm troopers, prisons, concentration camps as well as potential *Führers* and ideologues in the higher echelons of the political and intellectual elite—is "fiction, some might say fantasy" ("Acknowledgements" p. v) as far as the factual Hungary of the year 1993 is concerned. Still, it reads, to a considerable degree, as fiction of fantasy of the dystopian sort, a dire warning about things getting worse or even hopelessly wrong as time goes on. Well, some things have certainly got worse, though, luckily, we are still not quite there, not quite in that kind of future to which the dystopian thrust of Thompson's novel would direct our wary glance. But, apart from that, Hungary is still the kind of uncertain, confused, gloomy place it used to be in 1993, ever disappointed because it feels it was shortchanged by The Change—and this is the sense, shared no doubt by many Hungarians, Thompson's novel accurately and successfully conveys. ❧

Tamás Koltai

The Advantages of the Disadvantaged

Hungarian-Language Theatres in the Neighbouring Countries

Around a third of Hungarians live in a country neighbouring Hungary—the legacy of the post First World War Treaty of Trianon—and Hungarian-language professional theatres in the one-time Hungarian territories reflect a similar ratio. Ten companies are based in Romania (not counting the Hungarian Opera of the city of Cluj [Kolozsvár] and several puppet theatres), one in Ukraine, three in Serbia and two in Slovakia. Undergraduates receive Hungarian-language instruction at the university of dramatic arts in Târgu Mureş (Marosvásárhely) and Cluj, Romania and at the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Novi Sad (Újvidék) in Vojvodina, Serbia.

Before the regime change, only six Hungarian theatre companies and one Hungarian college of dramatic arts operated in Romania, a country with some 1.5 million ethnic Hungarians. Hungarian-speaking thespians forced to leave the country in the 1970s and 1980s were enough to make up three complete theatre companies. There were no replacements. At the Academy in Târgu Mureş the number of Hungarian students admitted to the acting section was limited to a maximum of three per academic year, but most of this small number usually left their native land at the earliest possible opportunity. Until the changes in 1990 minority theatres had considered their mission to be of service to the Hungarian language and Hungarian national identity. This made sense, but did not favour an enterprising spirit. Nonetheless, several very fine productions were mounted, most of them by György Harag (1925–1985), who could well have achieved international renown for his talents had he not lived in an isolated country brought to the brink of ruin by a dictator. He ushered in a golden age of the theatre in Târgu Mureş and Cluj, as well as in Novi Sad in what at the time was Yugoslavia. He died a mere five years before the sweeping political changes in Romania and the region would have broadened the horizon for his work.

There were no professional Hungarian-language theatres in the former Soviet Union. In 1989 around one hundred and seventy thousand ethnic Hungarians lived in what is Ukraine today. In the same year, a Hungarian department was established at the College of Film and Dramatic Arts in Kiev, to which sixteen students were

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admitted for study. In 1993, following completion of their studies, they founded the Illyés Gyula Hungarian National Theatre in Beregszász (Beregovo), which today enjoys an international reputation and has won numerous awards and invitations to festivals, but which nonetheless continues to function under extremely trying circumstances. The artistic director of the company is Attila Vidnyánszky, who at the time the theatre was founded was an art college student in Kiev. A few years ago he became the principal director of the Csokonai Theatre in Debrecen in Hungary. Several of the actors with whom he had worked joined him in Debrecen, but he kept his ties to the company in Beregovo. This shows in the influence of the Russian and Ukrainian approach and spirit apparent in his productions.

In the middle of the 1990s the Hungarian theatre company of Beregovo maintained a close working relationship with the Thália Theatre of Kassa (Košice, Slovakia), a theatre company with many young members and akin in spirit to the ensemble. It was a fruitful cooperation between these two companies with a number of successful productions jointly mounted, but it remained short lived. The Hungarian theatre in Košice, established as a depandance in 1969 of the theatre in Komarno (Komárom), became an independent company in 1990, but apart from that brief period in the mid-1990s it preferred to build up a light entertainment repertoire that suited an itinerant company. Far more exciting is the Jókai Theatre of Komarno, as it has been called since the separation of the two companies. Most of the younger actors from Košice moved there, and the theatre welcomes recent graduates from Romania and Hungary. Though it is first and foremost a theatre of a national minority that strives to cater to the interests of every layer of its potential audience, it nonetheless places great emphasis on artistic innovation and maintains a high professional standard. The theatrical traditions in Slovakia have a great deal in common with theatrical traditions in Hungary; it is therefore not surprising that directors from Hungary are frequent guests, and even the post of artistic director is more often than not filled by appointees from over the border on short contracts. Cooperation between actors, artists and directors on either side of the border has become much easier since the two states joined the EU in 2004.

Circumstances in the former Yugoslavia, or rather Serbia, the only one-time Yugoslav state with a sizeable Hungarian-speaking minority, are more complex. For some time their mere existence was at risk amidst a time of a civil war that never seemed to end. The Theatre of Subotica (Szabadka), founded in 1945, even formally ceased to exist for a time when the Serbian manager Ljubiša Ristić, a director of well-deserved international fame, launched an artistically and politically ambitious programme in 1985. As a consequence of the financial burden this initiative involved, the building of the theatre, a listed monument on the Main Square of the city, was not renovated and had to be closed, and with it both the Hungarian and the Croat companies which it housed. Thus the Novi Sad Theatre was forced for a time to fill their space and function as an itinerant theatre, performing on the road, which is ironic in light of the fact that it had been founded in 1974 to be an experimental theatre for Hungarians in Yugoslavia. The constant threats and dangers of the civil wars of the 1990s, as well as the attendant military mobilization—and flight from the country to evade it—soon made it impossible for

either theatre to continue to function. The companies were left with virtually no male actors. The void was filled with student actors, who thus appeared on a professional stage well before their time, a deficiency compensated by enthusiasm and zeal bordering on fanaticism.

After the Theatre of Subotica reopened, the Kosztolányi Theatre of Subotica, which had been opened to temporarily fill its place, became independent, growing into something of a studio for the experimental work of the younger generation. It is noteworthy that the theatres of Subotica and that of Novi Sad represent two distinctive and divergent styles. The former is more raw and realistic, while the latter is more interested in the far-fetched and the fantastic. Perhaps this is due to the influence of Balkan lyricism coupled with a bolder use of body language and expressionist dance which are at play in productions in Novi Sad, a city at quite a distance from the Hungarian border.

Following the political transformations of 1989–1990 the question of national identity faded for a while into the background. Directors and actors alike were able to turn their creative attention to the development of a dramatic language more responsive to promptings from abroad, while still preserving characteristics of their local traditions; a style enriched by the diversity of cultural influences in Central Europe. The Hungarian minority theatres wished to remain an organic part of Hungarian national culture but in the meantime they have become an inseparable part of the cultures of their home countries, with all the peculiarities and virtues that this double identity involves. With their indebtedness to and embracement of a variety of traditions they have been capable of creating an independent and special style within the larger context of the contemporary theatre. The challenge for minority theatres is to be national and international, or rather supranational—a challenge they have often met with resounding international success.

In September 2007, in a speech held in Lisbon at the first European Cultural Forum, José Barroso, the president of the EU at the time and one of the principal founders of the Forum, emphasized the unique diversity of European culture, noting the importance of intercultural dialogue in the multicultural life of European societies. Transylvania, the western province of Romania in which one finds the largest Hungarian minority community and most Hungarian-language theatres outside Hungary, has always been multicultural and open to the wider world. The first professional Hungarian theatre company was founded there towards the end of the 1770s in Cluj, then known as Kolozsvár, and it has been operating ever since. For well over two centuries it has striven to maintain an intercultural dialogue. In 1806 Baron Miklós Wesselényi organized a series of performances of works by Friedrich Schiller as a means of support for Schiller's widow. In the 1894–95 season, the manager Mór Ditrói himself directed a cycle of plays by Shakespeare for the first time, an extraordinary feat reported by *Life Magazine* in London. In 1993, a century later, English theatre critics selected the production of Ionesco's *The Bald Primadonna* by the Hungarian Theatre of Cluj as the best foreign production. In the autumn of 2007, audiences at the festival of the Union of the Theatre of Europe in Turin responded to the play *Long Friday* by the Transylvanian Hungarian writer and resident dramaturge of the theatre András Visky with ovations (the play was inspired by the novel *Kaddish*

Chekhov's *Three Sisters* at Cluj

The set for the *Three Sisters* performed by the Hungarian Theatre of Cluj, directed by Gábor Tompa, features two rafters at an angle to one another, a blind door built into walls arranged to give the impression of perspective, and a landscape painting functioning as a semi-transparent window, as well as an enormous lace curtain that disappears into the stage-loft above. The play begins with a chorus of soldiers encircling a puppet, at least four metres tall, which looks like Santa Claus. The soldiers fall silent while caressing the puppet-fetish—clearly the phantom of the late battery commander. Then Prozorov's daughters roll out their father's enormous uniform which is hung on a monumental clothes horse and try to jump onto it before throwing their shawls on it, merrily riding back and forth on its base.

Whenever this play is rolled out the question tends to arise: what on earth is the whimpering of these mothball-scented Prozorov sisters to do with us? Tompa manages to rid the play of any musty odour but also avoids drawing any pat correspondences with current events. Rather, he is in search of the grotesque and is unafraid of the absurd. He assumes a cutting playfulness and highlights the contradictions of the characters' inner and outer world; the difference between things felt and things shown. That this duality is the essence of the play is nothing new, but rarely is it worked into the fabric of the dialogue and the acting quite as smoothly. In his heated fervour Tuzenbach grabs a tall window-pane (which does not seem to belong anywhere) leaning against the wall and twirls it before setting it down between himself and Vershinin, thereby virtually dividing the room in two. In one part of the stage Tuzenbach and Irina converse, in the other Vershinin and Masha communicate, but both conversations are attuned to the other. Later the two men continue to set right the business of the world (as Solyony calls it) chattering rapidly as they sit close to each other on either side of the window-pane. In the fire scene a proper white hospital bed is centre-stage (as well as a pool of water let into the floor) and the sisters teetering between giggles and hysteria jump in and out. The farewell scene between Masha and Vershinin is already accompanied by the usual brass band music. Thus the passionate embraces and separations take place without words, in silence, like a comic gymnastic pantomime, while in his torment and despair the departing Vershinin tries to shake hands with Kulygin, who stands directly in front of him with flowers in his hand.

There is no intimate drama of mood here, neither is there any self-pity or self-adoration. The characters present themselves rough and raw. The girls' brother Andrei

for an Unborn Child by Nobel Prize-laureate Hungarian author Imre Kertész). Many of the most prominent Romanian directors of today, from Andrei Şerban to Silviu Purcărete, work in Cluj, staging productions that masterfully blend the psychological approach characteristic of the Hungarian tradition with the more expressive and playful traditions of the Romanian stage. Gábor Tompa, the theatre manager of the Hungarian Theatre of Cluj-Napoca since 1990, is a director of international fame (he was the director of both the aforementioned plays). He completed his studies at the Theatre and Film Academy in Bucharest in 1981 and has

is a timid creature who escapes from his sisters. One can tell at first glance that he will come to nothing; all he amounts to is being a local magistrate who steadily sinks into a relaxed indifference and drink (though without becoming a caricature of an "alcoholic"). Natasha is a tastelessly dressed bird of paradise. As a married woman she is a common tramp, openly showing her bare legs beneath her dreadful clothes. As she gets ready to go on a sleigh ride with Protopopov she stops in front of the mirror to reveal that all she is wearing under her fur is a slip. When drunk the elegant doctor Chebutykin resembles a mad King Lear. He runs in circles like a man deranged, with a laryngoscope around his ears and a stethoscope dangling from his neck. Solyony sits alone, idle, benumbed, occasionally leaping up to spout some stridently inane text. The prattling nurse Anfisa stands as if crucified in the white smoke of the fire, and the messenger Ferapont holds onto the official papers, standing with open arms, as if he were a stylite. Fedotik, who has lost all his possessions in the fire, leaps, moaning, into a cradle. The simple, plain, calm Olga is the most serious character, and one can hardly fathom how she manages to endure the brittle tension of her surroundings.

The sharp, distinct white, red and blue lights create the effect of laboratory lighting. Here there is no retreat into the shadows. The sound effects are frivolous. In the last scene a figure sings Gremin's aria from Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* without any accompaniment, and Natasha sings Lauretta's from *Gianni Schicchi* while gliding across the stage pushing a pram. Earlier the merry group improvised "Balzac Married in Berdichev" to the tune of *Katyusha,* the Soviet song about a girl awaiting her beloved's return from the war. In the background the soldiers of the brigade continuously regroup, sometimes butting in, eating the lunch leftovers (while the others stare with rapt attention at a spinning top), marching or tossing about the samovar, a present. Several times they gallop across the stage like comedy fire-fighters, and in the finale they ride off with little white angel wings in a convoy of bicycles behind a fluttering black curtain; the spectator will remember Tuzenbach, who has set off on bicycle to meet his doom in a duel. They set out who knows where, perhaps for the heavens, perhaps into the often proclaimed happy future. Clearly the group photos are also being taken in anticipation of this distant future, and the shrewd Rode strives to be photographed in the company of as many of the other characters as possible.

A production both laughable and agonizing: it shows little understanding for our illusions, does not wish to instruct or educate, and certainly not to be "realistic" in any traditional sense. Instead, the familiar is transformed into theatre with bizarre playfulness and visual imagination. ❧

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since also worked elsewhere in Europe and the United States. Since January 2007 he has been the head of directing at the Department of Theater and Dance at the University of San Diego, California.

László Bocsárdi, currently manager of the Tamási Áron Theatre of Sfântu Gheorghe (Sepsiszentgyörgy), was one of Tompa's students and is considered by critical opinion in Romania to be one of the foremost directors in the country today. His productions, which are profound, philosophical and imaginative (they have included ancient Greek tragedians, Shakespeare, Pirandello, Brecht, Gombrowicz and others) have garnered inter-

national attention. He has often participated with his company in prestigious theatre festivals and organized similar events in Romania, and he has won numerous awards. A few years ago his production of Irish playwright John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* was performed to great acclaim in Brussels. It was the first full-length play to be performed in Hungarian in what is now the capital of Europe.

In addition to the theatres in Cluj and Sfântu Gheorghe, there are three independent Romanian, Hungarian and German-language theatres in the city of Timişoara (Temesvár, in the province of Banat, southwest of Transylvania) using the splendid building designed by Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer, the architects who designed dozens of theatres in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The Hungarian-speaking community are only a small percentage of the population of the city, but in the 1990s András Demeter, a young actor and director, who in 1993 at the age of 24 became the first person to be appointed manager of a state theatre in Romania following an open competition, managed to transform the theatre then on the brink of closing into a theatrical studio with an international reputation. Of the many remarkable stagings, the production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* held in commemoration of the first performance of the Hungarian translation of the tragedy in 1793 in Cluj/Kolozsvár was particularly notable and also performed in Budapest—in the Western Railway Station.

Since 1989 Hungarian theatres beyond the borders have held an annual festival in Kisvárda, a small town in Hungary near the Romanian and Ukrainian borders. At the first festival they waited in vain for participants from Romania. Only companies from Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were able to attend. Today companies representing the Hungarian minorities in Ukraine and Serbia come to Hungary, itself now an EU member state, as do companies from Slovakia and Romania, also EU members. This show of praiseworthy local initiative has developed into an artistic event, functioning both as a professional meeting ground and a studio. Today the festival, one of a kind in Europe, fulfills the role envisioned by its founders in 1990. It has become an exemplary institution of European cultural richness, epitomizing the values of distinctive local tradition and cross-cultural influence and exchange. ❧

Erzsébet Bori

Hungarian Americans

Péter Forgács: *Hunky Blues* • Réka Pigniczky: *Incubator*

In 1910, *Szabadság* (Freedom), a Hungarian-language daily published in Cleveland, sent out a questionnaire enquiring: Why did you come to America? The majority of respondents said that they hoped for a better standard of living and more pay, whereas others were searching for an adventure. A few, however, were motivated by their civic conscience. One was John Szabó, who had left for America because "I was not a man who has the right to be... an independent and free person" in Hungary.

Péter Forgács's documentary, first shown last year in New York's Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), fills yet another blank in our collective memory. Hungarians have only a blurred picture of the huge population shift marked, in the words of the poet Attila József, by those who *"...staggered out to America / One million and a half of us"*.

Emigration to America began to swell at around the turn of the century and by 1913, 1.2 million had left Hungary. Of these, half a million were ethnic Hungarian; and that at a time when 52 per cent of the population was a member of a national minority. Most hailed from the north-east, the 'Felvidék' (Upper Hungary, now Slovakia), a poor area to this day. Landless peasants, burdened by the poor quality of their rented land and high taxes, received ample encouragement from the authorities should they want to emigrate. But as soon as the outflow began to have a harmful effect on the labour force and economy, from 1903, Parliament began a series of debates on the issue and the prime minister asked the counties to report on the situation.

Kálmán Török, the member for Heves County, a rural dean and a man of astounding arrogance and blockheadedness, made the following diagnosis in a country where three million were scraping by below the poverty line: "the canker of the *Zeitgeist,* unbridled materialism and artificially inflamed dissatisfaction" upset the psychological equilibrium of simple folk. The remedy is deterrent counter-propaganda and education in the patriotic spirit. Others, the future Prince-Primate of Hungary, János Csernok, showed more feeling for

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his fellow men, but Hungarian politics never came up with a solution for the symptoms that led to migration. It only managed to impose laws, such as a decree, reeking of corruption, that Hungarians were only to be allowed to embark at Fiume (Rijeka, Croatia, at the time a Hungarian possession and, the country's only seaport) with a specified shipping company, a route a great deal more expensive and longer (3 weeks vs. 9–10 days) than embarking at Bremen or Hamburg.

Forgács worked with a wealth of archive films and photographs, giving faces, characters, stories and voices to men and women, at once singular yet typical. Not only do they shed light on the America of the time but also the Hungary from which they set off. The director took an important decision to stick with the working man: to have featured Hollywood stars and big-buck capitalists would have compromised the film's real intention. (*Dollárpapa,* the black-and-white 1956 film comedy by Viktor Gertler took up the theme, depicting the rivalry between down-at-heel characters for the favours of a "rich" relative on a trip home from America.)

The film has several strands. One follows the whole process, starting out from Ellis Island to the final destination, which was usually the district of New York that came to be known as Little Hungary, or else some industrial or mining area or other in the eastern states. Another strand deals with conditions in America at the time and living conditions for immigrants in particular, and how they fitted in. Make no mistake: there would have been plenty of material to feed the counter-propaganda Török was pushing for. The American mining companies treated their men little better than slaves, and the situation was hardly rosy at steel mills or on other dangerous jobs. Then again the locals, especially at the depth of economic depressions, were hostile to the "Hunkies" and Central and Eastern European immigrants in general. Still, the overall balance was positive. Baron Lajos Ambróczy wrote a detailed report on emigration from Hungary to America, visiting all the sites he wrote about to ensure accuracy. His tour d'horizon closed with the conclusion that Hungarians over there not only earned more (four times, on average) but their outgoings were also lower, so their quality of life sharply improved.

For most immigrants from Hungary getting a job in America was transitional: they remitted much of their income to Hungary, paid their taxes there, purchased land and built a larger home. But the rise in income did not always prove long-lasting. Those who again found themselves debt-ridden would go back to the New World. Indeed, many commuted back and forth for decades, so it is hard to estimate just how many Hungarian Americans there were. But anyone who had learnt English, who became a citizen with full rights in this democratic community, who had taken on an office in a civic organization or was a member of a Church community they had helped found and sustain, had little tolerance for the servile role which he was forced to play if he returned to Hungary.

Hunky Blues offers a fascinating insight into a little known slice of Hungary's past, the world of grandparents and great-grandparents in the Old and the New World. A huge body of fact is marshalled: besides the director's own research, the anthropologist and linguist Elemér Bakó conducted interviews, oral histories and

surveys of the phenomenon of "Hunglish", which forms the backbone of the project. The life-paths and stories that were chosen illustrate typical episodes in the process of emigration and are accompanied by some memorable sequences of images. Forgács's films have never run the risk of boring people with talking heads. Still, the 100 minutes of this film might seem a touch too long for those used to the tauter, more economical editing of the series 'Private Hungary' (from The *Bartos Family* of 1988 to *The Bishop's Garden* of 2002) or *Danube Exodus* of 1998, were it not for the soundtrack.

This time, instead of Tibor Szemző's minimalist soundscapes, we are offered a smorgasbord of tracks, ranging from an Hungarian American folk song, through compositions by Károly Cserepes, to a song by János Másik ('Hungarian Foriner') in imitation of a Gypsy ballad, studded with Hunglish expressions, and what is a stylistically and brilliantly apt accompaniment by both composers with a select band of wonderful musicians.

Réka Pigniczky might well have picked up the thread where Forgács left off. One of the elderly subjects of *Hunky Blues* complains that he had sweated half a lifetime in America and brought his earnings back to Hungary all in vain: the Communists took all he had. Hungarians who emigrated after WWII felt much the same. The Iron Curtain had not closed off every exit to the West. It took a revolution for those borders to be re-opened (fleetingly), and in the 1956 exodus hundreds of thousands, mainly young people, left the country, 50,000 of them finding refuge in the US. The majority saw the speediest possible integration as the expedient route to happiness, but there was a stubborn minority who planned only a temporary stay in the New World, taking at face value the much ridiculed official description of "Soviet forces temporarily stationed in Hungary". It is this "hard core" of optimists which Réka Pigniczky's documentary, *Incubator,* focuses on. The frame is provided by a reunion: in 1984, at a scout camp in the Sierra Nevada in California, a group of American-born sons of Hungarian émigrés gave a performance of the rock opera *István, a király* (Stephen the King) by Levente Szörényi and János Bródy, two of the leading members of the hugely popular Illés group. *István, a király* was first performed in Hungary only a year earlier in 1983. The story then moves on 25 years to the summer of 2009, when the cast meet again in the exact same spot near Yosemite Valley to reprise their former roles.

Pigniczky, a television journalist and documentary filmmaker who has worked for Associated Press Television for over 10 years—mostly in New York City and Budapest—became involved in Hungary's emerging civil society for a few years after the change of regime. When her father died of cancer in 2002, acting on his wishes, his ashes were brought back to his native village. She and her sister Eszter began following up what was known of his past as one of the active '56 freedom fighters, which until then had been treated as little more than a family legend, summed up in a string of anecdotes. The story of that follow-up was told in *Journey Home: A Film About My Father,* Pigniczky's first film, which was released in Hungary towards the end of 2006. With a voiceover by the director herself, which is far from humourless and adds an edge to the personal tale of exploits, the film was refreshingly at odds with the usual pathos and tragic

seriousness which are generally obligatory in Hungarian historical documentaries.

In her most recent work Pigniczky again demonstrates his sensitivity to issues of current concern and his talents as a detective, both qualities essential for a documentary filmmaker. She is making a film about László Hudec, the Hungarian architect who left the indelible mark of his artistry on the skyline of the inner city of Shanghai. In preparation for the World Expo the city has renovated his extraordinary buildings, thus drawing attention, within the context of an event of international significance, to his work, still largely unknown in Europe and even in Hungary itself. During the First World War he was taken prisoner by the Russians. Following his escape, he endured many trials before arriving eventually in China. But his journey from a haggard refugee to an architect of the highest order in Shanghai was no less intriguing. He was able to put to use the knowledge and expertise he had gained at the Budapest Technical University, as well as his knowledge of the styles and successes of European architecture at the turn of the century. Versatile in various styles and approaches he is regarded now as the founding father of modernism in China. (On Hudec, see the article by János Gerle on pp. 57–63 of this issue.) Réka Pigniczky draws on a rich array of sources, including Hudec's letters, notes, photographs and 16 millimetre films, in her recreation of Hudec's extraordinary life and career.

A similar approach and tone are encountered in *Incubator.* The story is again avowedly personal (the commentary is first-person singular, and both Pigniczky sisters feature in the film), with the director using the authenticity of her own career, her face and own voiceover to represent a narrower community and air some questions of much wider validity about identity, multiple bonds and the sense of feeling at home. It is important that the "airing" does not occur in the film so much as in the viewer's mind and in a very diversified way, strongly depending on whether one is Hungarian-born Hungarian or American, possibly with links to Transylvania, Upper Hungary (Slovakia) or Vojvodina, or maybe Chinese (Russian, Jewish, Arabic, etc.) or American, though there is no question that people who grew up and were socialized as members of America's Hungarian communities will feel most directly that this is their story. That is to say, the children of parents who emigrated to America in the wake of the 1956 revolution, who grew up in two cultures, with the language of school, the surrounding world and daily life being English: the culture was American, but all the while Hungarian was spoken at home, the cooking was Hungarian, and at weekends and on holidays, instead of the usual Sunday school and scouts, they would attend Hungarian-language Sunday school and go to Hungarian camps in order to learn the language and study Hungarian culture, history, folk songs and folk dances. As far as political affiliations go, these communities were right-wing and implacably anti-Communist. On the one hand, they belonged to a modern society which espoused civil rights, democratic values and of which they were an organic part yet, on the other, as far as their Hungarian identity was concerned, these communities were profoundly and increasingly anachronistic, for what lived on in the parents was an unchanging imprint of

Hungary as the all-pervading Communist "present" from which they had fled, just as much as an image of an idealized pre-WWII Hungary. The savage reprisals that were visited on Hungarians after the 1956 revolution was stamped out were consonant with this picture, but the gradual transformation which came over the country in the wake of the Kádár consolidation of the sixties and seventies was a phenomenon this émigré generation found increasingly difficult to comprehend. Those in Hungary who were either born or grew up after the decisive change to a more democratic regime display a similarly simplifying, broad-brushstroke attitude to the entire half century of Communist rule from 1948 to 1989. An "incubator" is a good metaphor for this process, though one might with just as much justification call the lifestyle of these Hungarian Americans a "relic".

Stephen the King largely shattered the image of the Hungarian people groaning under the Communist boot; the genre of a rock opera sat uneasily, with an oppressed Hungary locked behind the Iron Curtain where membership of the Pioneers' League and the Hungarian League of Young Communists for students was compulsory and music was what you sang from the movement's corresponding hymn sheet. Thus, with its libretto based on a genuine historical subject and texts spiked with daring references to modern political realities, *Stephen the King* set off shock waves as it inevitably fed a suspicion in young Hungarian Americans that just maybe this Hungary of the eighties was not quite the beast that their parents had portrayed it to be. (The real culture shock, of course, was to come five years or so later when they felt able to first visit the country.)

At this point a slight digression is necessary, because here Pigniczky's own blog page (http://www.56films.com) gives an account of her experiences at showings of the films in America: "full-blooded Americans generally said that they did not get the story of *Stephen the King* (they have a need to have it spelled out in more detail)."

Looking back on the past quarter of a century, the musical is a genuine pop-culture icon of undiminished popularity in Hungary. Older people will remember that at the time of its premiere it was the equivalent of a Molotov cocktail, even though there had been a considerable softening of party censorship over the decades (albeit more in the area of high art, which in any case engaged only a small proportion of Hungarians, and films and exports to the West so that the establishment could show its good side to the world). Mass culture, by contrast, continued to be subject to strict controls, so that the recording of *Stephen the King,* which was originally conceived as a film musical, was preceded by a protracted bout of mud-wrestling with the various authorities—all, of course, one way or another under Party control—who had to give their assent. By attuning itself to the opposition between King (St) Stephen, the founder of the state in 1000, who brought his people to the Christian faith and himself turned to western Europe, and tribal leaders who clung to an independent "Magyar way" and their pagan religion, Levente Szörényi and János Bródy's piece grasped the archetype of the "populist–urbanist" clash, resuscitating controversy around the issue, the intensity of which was only fuelled by many allusions to the political situation at the time. Quite apart from the conflicting views of two opposed camps

within the Party—the "nationalists" and the "internationalists"—a radical anti-regime view that *Stephen the King* was in effect a Kádár-era apology with some "Magyar" flavours to make it more digestible had started to appear. By the time of the regime change at the end of the decade this had become the prevalent view in Hungary, but the time which has elapsed since then has shown that democratic change, far from making the "populist–urbanist" clash obsolete has if anything made it more virulent. This does a lot to explain the piece's relevance both then and to the present day, and at the same time throws light on why seeing it as an apology for the Kádár régime is just one possible reading. In truth *Stephen the King* captured a conflict of far more general validity.

A further turn of the screw is the reception of *Stephen the King* by young Hungarian Americans. Those who attended the scout camp in California in 1984 were broadly sympathetic to the eventually defeated pagans as against Western values, but, 25 years on, they can hardly get over their amazement at the irony of the thing—that is, those who are astonished at all, because even back then, when they were young, there were some Hungarian Americans who rebelled against life in the incubator as well as some who preserved the legacy intact and unquestioned. A division similar to that within this small group of Hungarian Americans can also be seen between Hungarians who live in the "Motherland" and ethnic Hungarians who live outside the country's borders. "There was a very nice teacher from Vojvodina who came to see the film in the Uránia Cinema, and he couldn't understand how I can talk about Hungarian Americans... Why do I put the two together because he would never say Hungarian Serbs. He was insistent on my making a choice between the two; I couldn't be both"—so noted the director after one of the Budapest showings.

Pigniczky makes no secret of where her personal views lie, nor is she judgmental about others. She presents them with empathy and with the same gentle irony as those she looks on as being on "her side". Hitching this approach to the questions of identity which we all face makes room for interpretation virtually boundless: those who represent the most rooted of antagonistic opinions will be able to recognize themselves and identify with whichever figures appeal to them. All the same, if we try to follow the director's intentions, then it may be more rewarding to question our own identity and to accept, without comment, the multiple identities that others claim for themselves. ❧

USTAV KLIMT
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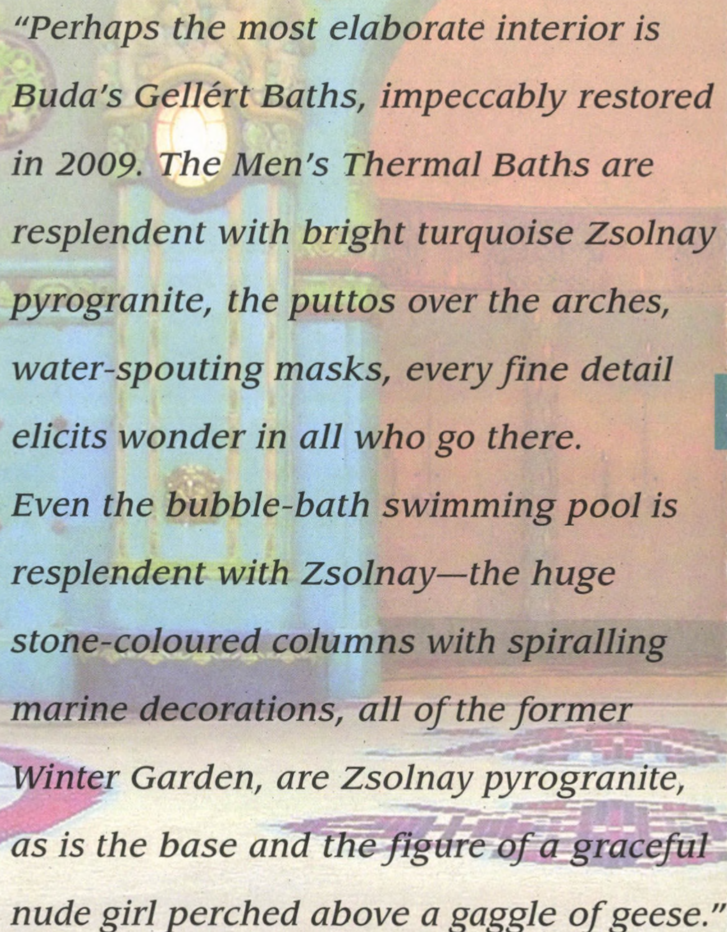

"Perhaps the most elaborate interior is Buda's Gellért Baths, impeccably restored in 2009. The Men's Thermal Baths are resplendent with bright turquoise Zsolnay pyrogranite, the puttos over the arches, water-spouting masks, every fine detail elicits wonder in all who go there. Even the bubble-bath swimming pool is resplendent with Zsolnay—the huge stone-coloured columns with spiralling marine decorations, all of the former Winter Garden, are Zsolnay pyrogranite, as is the base and the figure of a graceful nude girl perched above a gaggle of geese."

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