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György Granasztói

Central Europe: Myth and Reality

Central European co-operation is an old myth and an old reality. The political desire to establish such a co-operation has existed ever since the Middle Ages, and has occasionally been successfully realized. Thus George Podebrad, the Jagello Dynasty, the Angevins and Matthias Corvinus in Hungary, or later the Habsburgs, all established some kind of Central European integration. The history of attempts at combining and integrating the countries and nations of Central Europe into larger units is a long and highly varied one with various degrees of success. That by the Ottoman Empire failed, that by the Habsburgs succeeded. There has also been the short period of German rule, the Warsaw Pact and Comecon created by the Soviet Union.

Yet, trade between the Danubian countries is still negligible, mutual travel, apart from local cross-border traffic, is insignificant, and the Visegrád co-operation, initially very promising, has slowed. Its potentials are limited since it is seen as a means to assist the Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries involved rather than as a means to form a new power bloc.

Nevertheless, *Mitteleuropa*—which the old Bohemia, old Poland, old Hungary and old Austria represented—has been a major myth in European thinking. The concept, the nostalgia, is still with us. At the beginning of the 1990s Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary made an attempt to establish a co-operation similar to that between the Benelux nations. Politicians and political decision-makers in the European Union and even in America showed considerable interest in this Visegrád co-operation.

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The Realities of the Central Europe Myth

The term "Central Europe" cropped up first around 1849/1850 when, basically for customs policy reasons, all German states along with those German speaking areas of the Austrian Empire which did not belong to the German Customs Union were meant to be combined into a single, large economic area. This Central European grouping would have had seventy million inhabitants. The idea was effectively blocked in its realization by the resistance of Prussia. It kept turning up, though, time and again, for example in 1879 when Bismarck showed a marked interest in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, or during the First World War between 1914 and 1918. Friedrich Naumann's much-debated book *Mitteleuropa* interpreted the term as a Central European Union which would have included the Western part of the Russian Empire, Poland and the Baltic states. A feature of his concept was that it was aimed at establishing a supranational political order in which the various nations and ethnic groups would have been permitted to live according to their own legal systems.

During the the First World War, however, this concept came to be identified with the Central Powers, and was thus seen as an ideological expression of continental imperialism by the future victors. Consequently, following the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian and the German Empire, the concept lost its significance, indeed was forgotten. Under the impact of the post-war peace settlements, however, a new concept arose, that of an *Eastern* Central Europe, which—because of Germany's territorial losses, the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the crisis of the Russian Empire—was understood as a special new zone consisting of sovereign nation states. Thus East Central Europe emerged in a peculiar power vacuum originating from the weakness of the three Great Powers in the region. This zone, stretching from the Baltic to the Balkans and consisting of small and medium-size states, received the special attention of French security policy by being given the role of *cordon sanitaire*. From the aspect of intentions (although not the means) some of today's questions were raised at that time.

By creating a security zone of this kind, the French meant to counterbalance the German and Russian threat and to ensure that the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was final and irreversible. Clémenceau's security zone, however, relied not on French military presence but on the desire of the Quai d'Orsay to use its influence to create and render effective such a counterbalance by political means. In reality, this kind of equilibrium could be brought about by provoking disputes between the parties involved. This system of alliances could not really be regarded as Central European, if only because of the related German policies and the memory of them, nor could it be East European because in that case it would have involved Russia and have the shadow of Russian influence cast over it.

That was how the term East Central Europe began to gain prominence, and came to be used by politicians and journalists with increasing frequency. Then, in the 1930s, another new term emerged, intended to be free of political bias. In between Europe *(Zwischen-Europa).* The agricultural scientist Max Schering, Albrecht Penck the geographer or Giselher Wirsing, in the title of whose book the term was employed for the first time, made every effort to use it mainly in a geographical sense, free of political implications. By *Zwischen-Europa,* they meant the long belt of territory reaching from the Baltic to the Balkans. This was actually the same zone as that of the *cordon sanitaire* but the users of the term wanted to rid it of any belligerent overtones.

After 1939, East Central Europe as *Zwischen-Europa* lost its significance. First it was made irrelevant by the Nazi conquests, then, under the impact of the events of the Second World War, either as Central Europe or as East Central Europe it ceased to have any role as a geographical concept with a political content. It had no relevance any more. When the Iron Curtain came down, a new border was established, which did not conform to any earlier concept. However, it was precisely at the time when East–West confrontation was growing—roughly when the need to create a Western system of alliance after the war was raised for the first time—that the Central Europe issue emerged in a new form among the East European exiles who had fled from Communism to the West, mainly to the United States. The birth of the highly influential *Journal of Central European Affairs* was also due to this.

In the first issue of the journal, in 1941, a political programme was published under the title *A New Central Europe* by Eduard Beneš, the Prime Minister of the Czech government-in-exile. Beneš wanted both to establish a federation between the old and new states of the region and to include more East Central European states. Learning the lessons of the two World Wars, in order to prevent more catastrophes, he wanted to create a new political order for East Central Europe by uniting the nation states in the region into a federation. However, that illusion, a Federation of the Free Peoples of East Central Europe, lost its meaning in a few years after 1944/1945 due to the power relations and political events. After 1945 it soon became clear that the Western world, and mainly the United States, did not possess the military strength to guarantee even a neutral zone in the region *vis à vis* the Soviet Union. The political reality, effective also in 1956, made raising the Central European idea impossible, since the two worlds divided by an Iron Curtain were incompatible with the existence either of a Central Europe or a *Zwischen-Europa.*

It must be clear from the above that the concept of Central Europe should be regarded as a modern idea which, willingly or not, is extended by its user to a politically defined region. Consequently, anyone wishing to put this modern concept into a wider historical context, and attempting to explain past structures and relationships through a concept suited to describing the current situation, faces a difficult task.

If that is true, then the history of Central Europe is associated with the characteristic views of history as interpreted by the current national and ethnic movements. Even the same concept of Central Europe, or perhaps East Central Europe, may receive a variety of different interpretations. In other words, it is precisely because of its political nature that the political content of the concept should be understood in many different ways. On the other hand, history may also give guidance, and a historical viewpoint may help in orienting ourselves in the problems of myth and reality.

A political interpretation of national history fails to get us closer to understanding it. The historian must find new viewpoints, viewpoints which make long-term research and comparisons possible, and which are free of the various biased approaches inherent in the writing of national history. As a historian, I am convinced that the safest starting-point for such an approach to Central European history is offered by regional history. The first historian to call attention to this was Werner Conze, whose book on East Central Europe was first published in 1993 (*Ostmitteleuropa. Von der Spätantike bis zum 18. Jahrhundert.* München, Beck).

The key importance of regional history in understanding Central Europe lies in its capacity to take account of the beginnings while also placing the processes of the past into an integrated perspective.

In Central Europe, unlike, for instance, in the Rhineland, there was no Roman continuity, or at most a continuity of ruins. Another important factor is that the Slavs were present already around the year 800 in this region, in which the settlement in the 9th and 14th centuries of Hungarians, Germans and Jews played a crucial part since these ethnic groups, bearers of widely different cultures, all exerted a major influence on social and political structures. These structures can also be studied in terms of the system and history of settlements, whether they be villages or towns.

The Magyar conquest or the *Drang nach Osten* of the Germans are relatively well known elements of this history, but much less emphasis is laid on the role of the Jews, even though they, too, played a decisive role. The Jewish migration became especially intense between the 13th and 15th centuries in the wake of persecutions that pushed large numbers of them eastwards. Jews found especially favourable conditions for commerce and trade in Poland, where they were allowed to settle by Casimir the Great who, in 1364, granted them privileges over the entire territory of Poland. From that time on, they constituted an ethnic minority of their own in Poland, Lithuania and, to a lesser extent, Bohemia and Hungary, where they enjoyed special privileges in cities and market towns, paid special taxes, and kept their cultural autonomy as they performed tasks vital for the country.

By the end of the Middle Ages, as the result of a long process, Central Europe had become a multi-ethnic region owing to the presence of Slavs, Hungarians, Germans, Jews and others. In the forms of settlement as well as the political,

legal and economic organization of the settlement system, the region was dominated by European-type rationalism. The same goes for the technological innovations that, from mining to handicrafts and from urban manufacturing to agriculture, had also been taken over from Western Europe by the inhabitants of the region, and disseminated in similar forms all over the area. Trade and manufacturing developed a little later but in ways astonishingly similar to those in Western Europe, consequently parallel processes took place in the various national kingdoms. The cultural role of the various larger ethnic groups resulted in a peculiar convergence which was independent of national frontiers and, indeed, cut across them.

That is the reason why the settlement conditions prevalent in the Western parts of historical Hungary clearly showed the same features as those in the Vienna Basin, whereas settlement conditions in adjacent Northern Hungary were much more reminiscent of conditions in Southern Poland or Bohemia. There are many more examples. There are marked differences regarding the settlement structure between Transylvania, the Great Hungarian Plain or Southern Hungary despite the fact that these regions fell under the same government authority, and did not undergo the regional development of neighbouring Austria. These regional differences in the settlement structure naturally also extended toward the Balkans and the Mediterranean areas.

Despite these marked differences it can be safely said that in Central Europe, up to the Carpathians, the same European-type communal organization was predominant. This was characterized by a high degree of similarity not only in the forms of urban and rural autonomy but also in space utilization, legal forms, techniques of administration and exercise of authority, and a similarity could even be seen in the ground plan of village houses. The antecedents can all be found in Western Europe. The political order of the region, on the other hand, was characterized by the fact that in the eastern part of Central Europe, only the Poles and Hungarians became nobility-based nations and both remained ethnically mixed.

The end of the early Modern Era was a period of dilemma for the great new empires. The question was, how should Prussia and Austria divide Central Europe between them, and what should be the role of the Russian Empire in the East?

In fact, Central Europe became visible only when Europe itself did. This fact has to do mainly with Christianity, since the dividing line between East and Central Europe was the border between the Roman and Greek Church mission zones. This line carries major cultural differences up to this day. Another highly important factor was the establishment of Polish and Hungarian bishoprics independent of the German bishoprics, and this can be regarded as a special phenomenon in Christian Central Europe. This resulted in the emergence of two kingdoms, Poland and Hungary.

An understanding of the history of Central Europe requires a brief interpretation of those concepts which are rooted in attitudes to the region's history. They were influential precisely because no one was any longer satisfied by the conventional, politically motivated definitions of the term.

In the seventies, two theories aroused great interest within a relatively short time. One was Milan Kundera's who, in an influential essay, written at a time when the Central Europe issue was still in a state of what may be called suspended animation, called attention in a very powerful manner to the special yet deeply European roots of the region's culture. Denying political uniformity, Kundera put the emphasis on cultural similarities, on sensitivities and coincidences so subtle as to be grasped only by the arts, features that, in one way or another, have a peculiar effect on every visitor who has a genuine interest in Central Europe. Such features included the prominent part played by music, receptivity to and the ability to swiftly adapt to European models. Kundera's study provoked much discussion, mainly behind the Iron Curtain, and especially in samizdat-publishing circles in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary.

The other theory, published roughly at the same time, met with a rather different reception. This was most markedly formulated by Immanuel Wallerstein, and, in a simplified form, came to be called the "centre versus periphery theory". Wallerstein made an attempt to describe the operation of the world economy in a way that created great interest among Marxists. Kundera did not but Wallerstein did become a part of "official" scholarship.

According to Wallerstein, ever since the 16th century, the world economy has had a centre and a periphery, where capitalization differed in both extent and in character. The difference originated from the fact that the profits of capitalist growth in the periphery served as a source of accumulation for the centre. It must be added that Wallerstein saw Central Europe as a kind of intermediate zone and termed it "semi-periphery" (a definition which he was unable to support either theoretically or empirically). Even his Marxist critics heavily censured him for this.

The determinist view of Central Europe suggested by Wallerstein conforms to earlier concepts which, from the 1910s onwards, were widely held especially in Germany, and would later be adopted by Marxist historians. These ranged basically from the theory of *Gutsherrschaft—Grundsherrschaft* to the so-called "second serfdom". The Hungarian historian Jenő Szűcs started out from different premises when discussing what he called "the three regions of Europe", including our own, but his attitude was no less deterministic. His work was one of the most influential expressions of the pessimism of the intellectuals in the period of the changeover from "Socialism" to a market economy and political democracy. Without undertaking to refute Wallerstein or Szűcs here, I would like to point out that a historical interpretation of the Central European region may also be attempted in a non-deterministic manner, by an open, hermeneutic approach.

The two complementary socio-geographic models may be described briefly as follows: they developed roughly at the same time in Europe from the beginning of the Middle Ages, and their co-existence does not necessarily mean that one was "developed" and the other "undeveloped", as determinist interpretations maintain. The one characterizes the conditions of Central Europe completely, the other the opposite pole, and by doing so, helps an understanding of the special character of the Central European model. In a geographical sense, this means that the centre of the region defined by earlier views as East-Central Europe or *Zwischen-Europa* constitutes the part of the continent farthest from the sea and therefore from shipping. That region covers Bohemia, Slovakia, South Poland, Austria and South Germany as well as Hungary.

Shipping, whether by sea or river, played a relatively minor part here. This is obviously not a characteristic exclusive to Central Europe but here it was most marked. Shipping was most characteristic of the Atlantic and Mediterranean regions, connected to each other by the Rhine. That makes it easy to understand why such a huge role was played in world trade by England, the Netherlands, the Rhineland and Northern Italy with Genoa and Venice as its centres.

The difference between the two models consisted in the fact that one was based mainly on long-distance trade, the other on local markets. As far as Central Europe is concerned, in a historical sense this means—and the effects are present up to this day—that the settlement system and settlement structure is one of centres with a hierarchy of their own, that is of towns of varying importance and size, and by settlements situated in rings around them, making up empires or nation states. In contrast to this, the other model, the region describable by shipping, features a network-like structure. The order of settlements here plays a different role and it has a different form. It is also typical that no large continental empires were able to develop in this region.

Central Europe Today: "Embourgeoisement" or Civil Society as a Challenge

Summing up what has gone before, let me make clear once again that by Central Europe we understand the broad zone stretching from the Baltic to the Balkans, which was previously called East Central Europe or *Zwischen-Europa*. This is the region where, probably not by accident, the three new NATO member states, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, are located, and the region also covers the states which have the best chance of early accession to the European Union. From a historical point of view it may be observed that the region's legislative authorities and nation states rarely developed in the same way, and were rarely united in their policies. They existed side by side and were often each other's rivals in the region. From the aspect of social history, how-

ever, they display many similarities, especially when the forms of day-to-day life are studied and compared. This duality is the source of the oddities of Central Europe as well as of the contradictions of the Central Europe myth.

Beyond the economic indexes, the coordination of legal systems, the criteria of Agenda 2000 and the other requirements of integration, the process of convergence in the region is, above all, a cultural process, which has intensified in the past ten years. The process has both historical antecedents and its features are easily observable in the similarities of the problems of political life.

The problem of Central Europe today is what stage civil society has reached and what opportunities exist for it. The citizen, as a moral being, accepts the existence of relationships based on mutuality, and cares about the fate of others. He or she is always sensitive to the problems of minorities, weaker communities and underprivileged individuals. That concept of the citizen originates in Western Europe, and is also specific to what may be called European civilization, which also means that it is antagonistic to the traditional nation-state or Soviet-socialist type concept of the subject and the state.

The intensifying discussions over the terms "bourgeois", "citizen" and "civil society" have been connected with the great social changes of the 1990s. These have included the so-called "citizenship debate" and the discovery of multiculturalism in Western Europe. An additional feature that has appeared in Eastern Europe to conjoin these not entirely thought through problems is something which has been stronger here than in Western Europe: a general hostility to the state and, along with that, a rather special interpretation of civil society. A common feature of these new approaches to the problem has been that they study the relationship of the community and the individual. It must be pointed out, however, that two extremes, mutually excluding each other, have already been surpassed in these debates. According to one traditional extremist view, the individual realizes his civil rights in the "social field", and does it to the maximum. According to a well-known saying by a famous Hungarian personality: "I am a guest here (i.e. in Hungary) which means I am entitled to the best part of the meal." This view can be described best by the metaphor of the jungle. The other extreme views the citizen as a member of a holistic community, a being acting for the common good, best likened to an ant. In East Europe these two may be identified with the traditional Left *(the ant)* and its opposite, Neo-liberalism *(the jungle)*.

What is interesting in these new debates is that the young taking part in the political disputes involved have already gone beyond these extremes. There is a greater sensitivity today regarding moral principles and their observation than was present earlier. Today's young are opposed to traditional authoritarianism, and they insist on a number of post-materialistic values, such as environmental protection, human rights or sexual autonomy. All this has, in Central Europe, led to a re-thinking of the notions of a community and of society, and to a new emphasis on related ideas.

In such a sense it may be said that the citizen today is a moral being, not a sociological or class category. Anybody can be a citizen who is able to reconcile his or her individual, group or cultural and ethnic interests with those of the state as the realizer of the common good. The civilizing of society is, in this sense, equal to the progress toward democracy, based on the tradition of European culture, on rationalism. The relationship of citizen and state is determined by the fact that the state is seen as the bearer of the nation's interests, but the concept of "nation" is in sharp opposition to the nationalistic view.

That terms like citizen, bourgeois, civilization or civil society can be discussed in Central Europe at all is explained mainly by historical tradition, by culture. Thus the Hungarian word *polgár* is of German origin, and was taken over by Hungarian in the 13th century. From the very beginning it meant an inhabitant of a town with full rights, just like the German word *Bürger* or the French *bourgeois.* The process of *embourgeoisement* was delayed to a greater or lesser extent all over Central Europe, as compared to the West. Still, backwardness in this sense is hard to speak of since European *embourgeoisement* has no universal formula. Every country has had its own road in one way or another. That special route was very much dependent on the ratio and even more on the relationship between the nobility and the bourgeoisie in the country in question. This resulted in different roles. The so-called *Sonderweg* (special road) of German *embourgeoisement* or evolution of civil society was characterized by the relatively high number and power of doctors, lawyers, scientists, engineers, teachers and highly qualified bureaucrats, as opposed to the merchants, factory owners, industrial magnates, entrepreneurs and managers. On the Hungarian road, the strong European traditions of community organization are clearly discernible, including the role of the nobility in the counties. The latter was also characteristic of the marked efforts related to a nascent bourgeois society in 1848–1849. This was the background of the development Hungary's parliamentary structures, lending, in certain respects, a somewhat German character to Hungarian *embourgeoisement,* but also to that of all Central Europe.

The most important feature of bourgeois development in Hungary is not the previously overemphasized backwardness, but certain elements, observable over the long term, that enabled Hungarian society to rapidly adopt the novel, especially as regards institutions. There have been numerous examples of this ability to adjust and catch up ever since the foundation of the state in Hungary, just as there are for Poland and Bohemia. One of these examples, from the aspect of the long process of *embourgeoisement,* was the development of communal organizations and local autonomy, originating from the Middle Ages, which survived up to the recent past, and then the series of reforms carried out in 1848–1849. Another peculiar feature of the history of Central Europe, however, is that the evolution of civil society was broken by the decades of the one-party state. Another, and by no means negligible, factor is that the Marxists had a very

different vision of globalism, which they intended to bring into being, and that they treated the nation with a great degree of suspicion.

A special feature of the region is—as I pointed out above—that, from the 1970s on, civil society took on a special meaning, different from that usual in traditional democracies. Civil society turned into a form of civil disobedience, the expression of a societal alternative distinct from, and opposed to, the one-party state, which led directly to an opposition to all kinds of state authority. The human rights objectives of civil society, when viewed in this manner, constitute an important tradition in the Hungarian democratic transition. Still, the same means, when employed today, in business life as well as in certain communal effects, intensify the tendency to fragmentation or disintegration with respect to the nation and to the state.

There can be no dispute over the justification for the new kinds of civic organizations based on Central European civil society, nor can there be a dispute over their high moral value in some cases. However, they cannot really counterbalance the tendency towards fragmentation. Therein lies the special dilemma of Central European civil evolution: in a paradoxical way, in this region the centrifugal tendencies working against the development of civil society meet with much less resistance than in those societies where *embourgeoisement* has been continuous. The state and the political institutions are still in a state of transition in many respects, and this, in itself, raises the question as to what kind of interactions exist between them and the special post-communist conditions.

This is an important issue, because this region has become especially fertile ground for neo-liberal ideas one-sidedly advocating a society totally dominated by the principles of the market, which neglect or reject the problem of civil development. As for the other factors halting the process of *embourgeoisment* in Central Europe, I would just like to briefly mention a few. One of these is the social division which puts those living at or below the poverty threshold into a hopeless position with regard to the *embourgeoisement* process. But the development of an elite whose wealth increases rapidly must also be regarded as a product of the same division. Neo-liberalism has very different effects on these two strata. There is also another kind of division, one involving culture and national identity, which has highly different but equally serious consequences. This creates an ever-widening gulf between a disowned or no longer known past and a present experienced in a fleeting way, which becomes utterly meaningless, preventing therefore the evolution of a sense of community.

Among the factors affecting the evolution of a civil society in the public area of culture, special mention must also be made of those attitudes regarding the extent to which relations are being controlled. "Order", in principle, means something transparent and based on rational argument which may turn into moral principle. It was part of the European heritage that the old historical tradition of the bourgeois order existed, an order in which there was a consensus

regarding morality and reason, all under the aegis of the rationalism which provided a basis for the uniqueness of European culture. In current conditions, this means the acceptance of hierarchical relations and authority, but in a very special way: civil order requires a system of institutions provided by the community and controlled and run by the community. It is in this sense that the principle that there are no rights without obligations is valid.

It is the legacy of the civil society grown out of the Soviet-type systems that the opposite of all the above is frequently observable. Many believe that freedom means unlimited self-realization, a view which regards order as the outer framework of the assertion of individual interest, a technical and legal aspect, divested of the communal element, which involves compromise, self-limitation and self-discipline for the sake of others.

Finally, the deficit of national consciousness is another typical Central European problem. These deficits—shortages or hiatuses—today involve tragic or horrible social catastrophes. One of these in Hungary is that the Holocaust in this country has never been properly discussed or understood, nor has its place in the nation's memory ever been clarified. The victims of the Second World War or of Communist terror have not been properly buried, and the Revolution of 1956 has not been accorded its place in the nation's history. The tragedies of the recent past barely constitute a part of collective consciousness today, and worse, these tragedies still often turn people against each other because they have not been understood within a national framework. One of the typical absurdities of the situation, one that is also connected with the large number of problems left without clarification, is that the terms *nation* and *nationalism* ring the same to many ears: they are regarded as variations on the same dangerous, destructive, populist slogan.

I have made an attempt to put in a historical perspective all that can be regarded as characteristic of Central Europe and which is in no way in conflict with European traditions. The current chances of the evolution of a society of citizens have to be viewed in terms of these perspectives. ❧

Gábor Klaniczay

Rex iustus: The Saintly Institutor of Christian Kingship

The king spoke to them, saying: 'Why did you transgress the law ordained by God? Why did you punish the innocent and know no mercy?... As you have done, so shall the Lord do unto you through my person.' Having received their sentence, they were led away, and perished, hanged two by two along the roads of every province of the country. Thus it was that he wanted to make people understand that the same would be done to whoever did not abide by the just law promulgated by God. The people of the earth heard the judgement that the king had passed, and were filled with fear.

The *Legenda Minor* of St. Stephen

The typical early-medieval holy king would have been appalled by St. Stephen's severity, even the Bohemian St. Wenceslas, the least removed from him geographically and chronologically; in Wenceslas's days, what distinguished a holy king was his living by the dictum: "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matt. 7:1). But the century between the reigns of the two—and between the works of their hagiographers—had wrought a great many changes in how the religious role of the laity was perceived, and altered the basically negative early-medieval position on the possibility of lay sanctity.

This was the century that would reap the fruits of the Carolingian clergy's efforts to educate the laity by setting up models of Christian virtue specifically for their benefit. Presenting religious models to the laity would also appear among the objectives of the Cluniac reformers, who would determine the intellectual course of the eleventh century: around 930 already, we find Abbot Odo taking the unusual step of writing a *Life* of a pious layman, Count Gerald of Aurillac, for the edification of posterity.

These changes were reflected also in the way that saintly rulers were portrayed. On closer scrutiny, however, we find that the early martyr kings' hagio-

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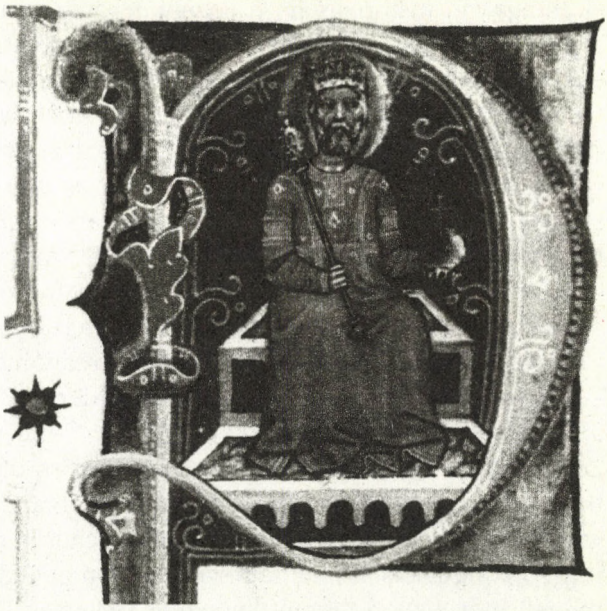
graphers—the Venerable Bede, Abbo of Fleury, Gumpold and others—had already been feeling their way toward the new model, one in which the exemplary Christian conduct of a secular prince formed the basis of a presumption of saint-hood. The trend, as we have seen, was in the direction of defining an ever wider set of royal functions in terms considered worthy of emulation from the Church's point of view—a trend reinforced by several particulars of the various Carolingian "Mirrors of Princes" another genre which reflects the evolution of the concept of the sacrality of rulership.



The enthroned Saint Stephen.
An initial in the Illustrated Chronicle *(14th century).*
National Széchényi Library.

The Canonisation of Five Hungarian Saints in 1083

The late-twelfth-century *Annales Posonienses*, one of the most valuable of our sources on early Hungarian history, has the following laconic entry for the year 1083: "In carcere missus et dominus rex Stephanus et Henricus filius eius et Gerardus episcopus revelantur et Salomon rex fugit". The "incarcerated" individual—as we know from the context, and from other historical sources—was the legitimate ruler, King Solomon (1063-1074), who fled the country after the canonisations of the new saints. This brings us to the central question that I should like to address in connection with these proceedings, namely, how the episcopal canonisations of the new Hungarian saints strengthened the position of King Ladislas (1077–1095), Solomon's cousin, who had, by then, been ruling, uncrowned, for seven years. The question, in short, centers on how Ladislas introduced to Hungarian politics the use of this form of sacral legitimation, i.e. the creation of new cults of saints to strengthen his claim to the Hungarian throne.

Hungarian historians have keenly debated certain unclarified details of the legends, for instance, whether these canonisations took place with papal endorsement or without (a problem we, too, shall discuss below), the fact that Ladislas should initiate these proceedings at all was taken to be in the natural course of things, being treated, at most, as a sign and/or consequence of his consolidating his hold on the country, or as indicative of his unique religious sensibilities (Ladislas himself would be canonised in 1192). My own research has placed the event in a different light. Ladislas's initiative fit into the arsenal of ideological weapons that were deployed in the eleventh-century struggles for succession to the Hungarian throne, with precedents elsewhere in Europe.

If we go on the assumption that all the canonisations took place in the year 1083, then—based on the chronological order of the various feast days—the following "timetable" emerges: On July 16-17, the relics of two saintly hermits, Zoerard-Andrew and Benedict, contemporaries of St. Stephen's (who had had their legends written fifteen years earlier by Bishop Maurice of Pécs), were elevated and translated to new tombs in the church of St. Emmeram in Nyitra. On July 25, King Ladislas and Laurence, Bishop of Csanád attended the elevation of the relics of Bishop Gerard (known as Gellért in Hungarian), the first martyr of the Church in Hungary. But by far the most spectacular event was the elevation of King Stephen's relics from the tomb where he had been laid to rest forty-five years earlier in Székesfehérvár (Alba Regia). A sort of Diet was convened to meet at his tomb on August 15, the anniversary of his death. After three days of fasting and prayers, they found that the gravestone could not be moved until King Solomon had been freed from his prison in Visegrád; this effected, a series of miraculous healings followed on the night of August 19. On August 20, the stone casket was opened, Stephen's "balsam-scented" remains were removed from the rose-colored water that filled the casket, and placed with due ceremony into a silver chest. (It was not until May 30 of the following year that St. Stephen's Right Hand, which had been appropriated sometime earlier by a cleric named Mercurius, was discovered in Bihar; a new church was soon raised there to house the precious relic.) Finally, on November 4, another synod meeting in Székesfehérvár elevated the relics of Stephen's son, Emeric.

Bishop Hartvic's legend of St. Stephen, written quite a few decades after the above events, tells us that this impressive series of canonisations was prompted by the fact that "the Roman See sent out an apostolic letter ordering the canonisation of the remains of all those who had, with their preaching or their injunctions, sowed the seeds of Christianity in Pannonia, and had converted it to faith in God." The *Major* and *Minor Legends* of St. Gerard speak of a papal legate come to Hungary to see that the directive was carried out, with the latter even mentioning that what initiated these canonisations had been a decision of a papal synod.

These ecclesiastical and canon law matters have been the subject of a great deal of historical speculation in Hungarian historiography. Did Pope Gregory VII,

hard pressed at the time by Henry IV and his armies, endorse the Hungarian canonisations? If so, what form did this take? Or did he, in fact, disallow them? We simply do not have sufficient evidence either way. What we do know, however, is that in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the cult of a new saint was still fully valid even if it was only a local cult, with the canonisation taking place at the initiative of the local Church authorities. From the end of the tenth century on, it was customary, in the case of the more important saints, to ask for the pope's endorsement and that of the Synod of the Holy Roman Church; more and more, we hear of papal legates present at the ceremonies, with the Church subjecting the saint's life and alleged miracles to more and more exacting formal scrutiny. But it would still be some time before a canonisation would *require* the pope's endorsement, and a regular "canonisation trial" of the candidate saint conducted by the Holy See. For a long time, it was thought that the papal monopoly of canonisation dated back to Alexander III in the second half of the twelfth century. Though Alexander III's encyclical, *Audivimus,* did, in fact, make claims of this sort, André Vauchez has shown that the centralization of canonisation dates to the early thirteenth century, to the papacy of Innocent III. From the point of view of my argument, however, the canon law status of the saints canonised in 1083 is quite indifferent (and though it may be disputable, there is no better term to describe the ceremony itself as "canonisation"); what matters is that they were pronounced saints, and at Ladislas's initiative. It would not have made much difference had their sanctity been recognised nowhere else save at the cultic centers where their relics were housed, and at the royal court. For the function of the cults of the saints in this era hinged on two factors: the locally-attested miraculous power of the relics, and the motives and goals of those promoting the cult.

We have very little reliable information on what spontaneous cults might have grown up around those canonised in 1083 in the years prior to the elevation of their relics. That bloody traces of St. Gerard's martyrdom had reddened the cliff that now bears his name over seven years is mentioned by the fourteenth-century redaction of the eleventh-century *Gesta Ungarorum,* but this reference is probably a later interpolation. Though a number of reputable historians have argued at length that the *Major Legend* of St. Gerard that has come down to us in a fourteenth-century manuscript is, in fact, of eleventh-century origin, I myself find the legend's later, thirteenth or fourteenth-century dating more convincing.

The formation of dynastic cults of saints was often reflected in the names given in baptism. On reviewing these, however, we find no indication that the Árpáds had any such thing in mind before 1083. Though Andrew I (1046–1060) had broken with the family tradition, and sought names of Christian connotation for his sons—Solomon and David—these were names from the Old Testament

(mediated, perhaps, by the *Exhortations* attributed to St. Stephen). Béla I (1060–1063), who, at baptism, had received the name of the Bohemian and Polish national saint, Adalbert, gave one of his sons—Lambert—a name that called to mind the Lotharingian upbringing of his Polish wife, Richeza; the names of his other two sons, Géza and László (Ladislas), were reminiscent of the dynasty's pagan ancestors (St. Stephen's father and his cousin). The names that Géza I (1073–1077) gave his sons reflect the influence of two diametrically opposite value systems: Coloman, obviously, was named after the Scottish pilgrim saint; but the name Álmos recalls the dynasty's pagan founding father, with a hint, perhaps, at a possible renaissance of his memory. Coloman "the Learned" (1095–1116) would be the first—nearly two decades after the year of the canonisations—to give one of his sons the name Stephen.

The fact that there is no evidence of a spontaneous cult either of Gerard, or Stephen, or Emeric makes it quite obvious that the canonisations of 1083 were a deliberate innovation on Ladislas's part. Ladislas's throne and the Christian Church and state were to be shored up with not one, but five domestic saints. That this series of canonisations had been carefully planned is apparent from the *Legenda maior* of St. Stephen—presumably completed before 1083—which contains direct references to the other candidates for sainthood. Zoerard-Andrew, we read, "has merited, by his confession of faith, to join the choir of angels"; Benedict "has spilled his blood for Christ, and has wondrously won his crown"; Emeric was "of a saintly nature"; while Gerard, "through the gift of spiritual grace, has been made worthy of the fellowship of martyrs".

Though the conspicuously political motivation of the canonisations has been pointed out by several historians, it needs stressing yet again. Ladislas descended from the Vazul branch of the Árpáds. Vazul was a cousin of St. Stephen's, who, as the senior male of the ruling house, had a fair chance of succeeding him. He was blinded around 1031 to secure the succession for Stephen's son, Emeric (who, however, died shortly thereafter). Vazul's three exiled sons, Andrew, Béla and Levente, were called back to Hungary in the wake of the ensuing succession conflicts and the pagan uprising of 1046, and became the immediate ancestors of the Árpádian kings of the following three centuries. Their relationship to St. Stephen, however, and his institutional legacy, the Christian state, was more than ambivalent. The struggle between the heirs of Andrew I and Béla I was reminiscent of the rivalry between St. Stephen and Vazul; ultimately, the princes Géza I and Ladislas I defeated and deposed Solomon, the legitimately crowned and anointed king of Hungary. It was after succeeding his brother Géza as king of Hungary in 1077 that Ladislas initiated the cult of St. Stephen, the founder of the Christian monarchy, as an astute strategic move calculated to offset the multiple illegitimacy of his own position.

Prince Emeric's inclusion amongst the new Hungarian saints was probably similarly motivated. In Chapter 69 of the *Gesta Ungarorum,* we find an impres-

sive characterisation of St. Stephen's designed heir, invested, like his father, with the full catalogue of Christian princely virtues: justice, prudence, fortitude, temperance, wisdom, knowledge, gentleness, mercy, benignity, largesse, humility and patience. The chroniclers tell us that these same virtues were, for the most part, lacking in St. Stephen's successors, up to the appearance of St. Ladislas, who was said to be the very embodiment of the full array of these virtues. Clearly, he had to be St. Stephen's sole true heir. The implication was that Stephen himself, the presumed author of the *Exhortations* (whence the list of virtues in the *Gesta* was derived) would have chosen Ladislas to succeed him. The importance of being able to claim Emeric as a saintly forebear is underscored by the fact that just before the canonisations, Ladislas had taken Adelaide, the counter-Emperor Rudolf's daughter, for his second wife, and had thus established ties to the family of Giselle, Emeric's mother, of the same order as those of his rival, King Solomon, who had married Judith, the daughter of Emperor Henry III.

The political edge of Bishop Gerard's canonisation was directed primarily against the memory of the pagan revolts and the pagan religion. It served to consolidate the position of the Church in Hungary in the same way as the canonisation of the Árpádian saints served to consolidate the position of the Hungarian state. The example of the cult of St. Adalbert, claimed as their patron saint by both the kingdom of Poland and Bohemia, must have been another important consideration in favour of the martyr bishop's canonisation. This, at any rate, is what is suggested by the somewhat exaggerated role in the country's conversion ascribed to Adalbert in the legends of St. Stephen. Ladislas, whose father, Béla, had been raised in Poland and had been baptized Adalbert, was clearly aware of the significance of the martyr bishop's relics for the Polish state: Emperor Otto II had instituted the first Polish archbishopric centered in Gniezno on the occasion of Adalbert's canonisation in the year 999; it was at Adalbert's tomb that he had made Boleslav I the Brave a "patrician"; Mieszko II, Béla's father-in-law, had been crowned King of Poland in 1025 at Adalbert's tomb. It was a great blow to the Polish national cult when, in 1039, two years before Ladislas was born, the Czechs snatched Adalbert's relics, and took them to Prague. That Prague rose to distinction as the new centre of the cult of Adalbert was something that Ladislas was certain to know about, being a close relative of the Přemyslids, who were also his allies. And then there was a more recent event around 1083 that was bound to conjure up the formidable memory of the martyred bishops: Boleslas II, his cousin, had sought refuge at Ladislas's court, after having ordered the assassination of Bishop Stanislas of Cracow, Poland's future national saint (who, in fact, was not canonised until 1253).

Of the canonisations of 1083, it is only for those of Zoerard-Andrew and Benedict that we can show no political motive. This, perhaps, is why the Synod

of Szabolcs of 1092 designated feast days only for Stephen, Emeric and Gerard, and why we find positive evidence of the cult of the two ascetics only in the *St. Margaret Sacramentary* preserved in Zagreb and dated to c.1092, which contains three supplications to each of the two new hermit saints.

In addition to ideological and political motives, the introduction of a new cult always owed a great deal to cultural transmission, to borrowing mediated by dynastic contacts and contacts between churchmen.

Ruling families used these cults of saints not just to consolidate their power at home, but also to boost their standing abroad. A saint in the family was an envied treasure, and fostering his cult was considered something to emulate in eleventh-century Europe. This being so, we can assume that Ladislas, too, came by the idea of the canonisations of 1083 through his extended family ties.

It is possible that news of the Anglo-Saxon royal saints reached Hungary as early as the first half of the century, through the sons of Edmund Ironside, Edmund and Edward, who, to escape their father's murderer, Canute the Great, first fled to Kiev, and then (presumably travelling on with Andrew) were educated in Hungary from 1046 on. Certain English sources have held Edward's wife, Agatha, to have been St. Stephen's daughter, but this can be ruled out on the basis of more recent genealogical research. (Subsequent to their return to the British Isles in 1057, their daughter Margaret became Queen of Scotland, and later still, one of Scotland's most important national saints.)

What probably served Ladislas as a more immediate example were the Bohemian and Moravian national cults. For Otto I, Duke of Moravia, was his brother-in-law; they fought on the same side against King Solomon in the battle of Mogyoród. Presumably Ladislas noticed the counterfeit of Wenceslas on the Bohemian and Moravian coins, and might have heard that the Bohemians attributed their victory over the Polish army to his miraculous intervention. He might have heard Wenceslas spoken of as the country's patron saint, and seen churches dedicated to him.

But probably the most decisive influence came from Kiev. The dynastic ties between the two countries are well known: in the tenth century already, Ladislas Szár got himself a wife from Kiev; Vladimir I's son, Svyatoslav, in turn, took a Hungarian princess for his wife. He was killed trying to cross the Carpathians to get back into Hungary, pursued by Svyatopolk, after he had done away with Boris and Gleb. Stephen had been on good terms with Yaroslav the Wise; and Andrew I had married his daughter, Anastasia. All these ties of kinship and alliance, the Gesta tells us, were what led Ladislas to seek help in the court of Kiev prior to the battle of Mogyoród (1074), i.e., precisely at the time of Boris and Gleb's ceremonial canonisation, or just after. We will, thus, not be far wrong if we conclude that the secret weapon that Ladislas brought home with him from Kiev was the idea of instituting cults of Hungarian saints.

So much for the political background of the canonisations. But it would not be right to try to reduce the new saint cults to the ideological purposes that they served. Particularly not the cult of St. Stephen, whose legends introduce a great many innovations as compared to the hagiographies of royal saints of that time.

The New Image of the Royal Saint

Stephen was the first saint-king to earn his title not through martyrdom, but simply by virtue of his having converted his people to Christianity, and having ruled as a Christian prince. What is novel in the *Legenda Maior* framed for the occasion of Stephen's canonisation is precisely this focal fact. The image of the Christianising king that had already figured in the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian models, and the pious, charitable *rex iustus* archetype are given a new twist, with Stephen being presented as the apostolic organiser of the Hungarian Church. For Stephen, "though he did not himself assume the duty of evangelizing, was the leader and overseer of the preachers of the faith". It was not just that he supported, and supervised, the priests' and monks' missionary work; the *Legenda Maior* sets Stephen before us at the head of an entire troop of familiar saints and saints-to-be. Mention is made of the other saintly men who would be canonised in 1083: Zoerard-Andrew and Benedict, the two hermits of Zobor, Bishop Gerard, and Prince Emeric. Bishop Adalbert figures emphatically in the story. But the *Legenda Maior* also speaks of Blessed Gunther, the "nearly-martyred" Astrik, Emperor Henry II (whose cult, by that time, was definitely on the rise), and does not forget to mention the virtues of the pious Gisella, King Stephen's wife. We learn that the saintly king enjoyed the protection of St. Martin and St. George, and had the Blessed Virgin on his side, so much so that on his deathbed, he left the country in her charge. Stephen's apostolic function is made evident not just in his patient winning of converts, and his supervision of the holy men working for the good of the Church, but also in his readiness to crush the internal opposition to his new policies with an iron hand. This militant feature adumbrates the new type of holy king: in contradistinction to the other holy kings before him, Stephen is the victorious *miles Christi*.

It is in this regard that the *Legenda Minor* supplements the *Maior* with a great deal of graphic detail: surprisingly realistic, and, for a work of hagiography, singularly ruthless descriptions of Stephen's forced conversions and his eradication of those in his inner circle who dared oppose him. We read that Stephen "razed to the ground the scum of wickedness"; "bent the mass of his assailants under the yoke of his rule"; and condemned his recalcitrant, inhospitable servants—the scene described in the epigraph to this chapter—to be "hanged two by two along the roads", so that his subjects might be "filled

with fear". The *Minor Legend* recounts the particulars of Vazul's conspiracy, and tells of how the conspirators were blinded, and "their destructive hands cut off".

But how authentic are these self-styled "chroniclers", who cite "credible individuals" as their informants? János Horváth is inclined to see in these legends King Coloman's warning to Álmos, his brother (whom he had blinded, along with his son Béla, in 1115, for much the same reasons as St. Stephen had blinded Vazul); György Györffy, for his part, finds that the modes of punishment listed in the legend are more characteristic of Ladislas's rule, than of Stephen's time. From our point of view, what is most noteworthy in the *Minor Legend* is that its author, bypassing the early-medieval model of the saint-king who would rather pray than rule, has arrived at the other extreme: there is, as he sees it, no incongruity between sanctity and the "rightful" use of force.

Naturally, the new saint-king paradigm was in need of further refinement. It was to this end that Bishop Hartvic combined the *Major Legend* with the *Minor Legend* at the beginning of the twelfth century. Not surprisingly, the ruthless punishment of Vazul and his fellow conspirators is one of the passages that he chose to leave out of the new version; as for the roadside execution of the inhospitable servants, he found it necessary to add the following commentary: "We believe that he did this out of a love of justice, so as to put fear into the hearts of the others; for he wanted his country to be an open place of refuge to every visitor, so that everyone might enter freely; he wanted that whoever entered, no one should dare injure or molest him in any way".

But Hartvic also made an important contribution of his own to the new paradigm: he added the liturgical-sacral dimension, a form of the ruler's divine legitimation that went back to the Imperial Holy Roman traditions of the Ottonians and the Carolingians. This was the dimension introduced by his story of the Pope himself having sent Stephen his crown and the "apostolic cross"; and by the liturgical-sounding description of the ultimate parallel to Stephen's ritual coronation, his public—i.e., ritual—death, complete with his dedication of the country to the Virgin Mary with his last breath.

The St. Stephen legends opened a new chapter in the legends of holy rulers as a genre, formulating with an unprecedented single-mindedness an approach to royal sanctity which saw it not as something that one might acquire despite one's royal status, but as something that one comes by as its logical consequence. It was an approach that would acquire a special place in the ideological climate of late eleventh-century Europe, divided as it was by power struggles between the Church and the secular rulers. Essentially, it provided both sides with some new ammunition. To kings and princes, it offered the potential for holiness in the very exercise of secular power; to the Church, it offered an opportunity to define the terms of this holiness.

From martyr king to Christianizer king, just king, founder king, apostolic king, and finally, knight king—such is the progression of the royal saint ideal that emerges from medieval legends. What we see reflected here is "contemporary relevance" as it applies to the legends of St. Stephen, that is the beginnings of the warlike temper of the age of the Crusades.

But the appearance of the "*Miles Christi*" ideal as a hagiographic type is not the only thing that "dates" the legends of St. Stephen. Two other ideals of the age, an age replete with the reformist spirit of Cluny, come through the text no less clearly. In the *Major Legend* we read: "And so that the peace with which Christ has conjoined the world might have a progeny that appears in writing forever binding, he strictly enjoined upon his posterity that no one should ever invade another land with hostile intent; that no one should harm his enemy without a judicial inquiry; and that no one should oppress widows and orphans". It is not just the peace-loving tradition of the early saint-king legends and Mirrors of Princes that we see imprinted here, but also the very contemporary stamp of the *Treuga Dei* movement. It needs no saying how timely the ideal of the patronage of pilgrims was that Stephen was embracing. In the *Legenda Maior*, we find it conjoined to exhortations to succor "Christ's poor", the catchword of the new evangelical religiousness of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

The other contemporary ideal that we see reflected is that of the wise and learned ruler (at the beginning of the eleventh century, Otto III had no lesser a tutor than Gerbert of Aurillac, the future Pope Sylvester II). St. Stephen, the *Legenda Minor* tells us, learned to read and write, like St. Wenceslas; "as a boy already, he was thoroughly imbued with the science of grammar". "Heeding the words of Solomon, he had judiciousness and justice before his mind's eye", and "was highly esteemed among men for his wisdom".

Apropos of how far the St. Stephen legends mirrored the intellectual climate of contemporary Europe, it is instructive to consider a semi-hagiographic parallel dating to some forty years before the canonisations: Helgaud of Fleury's *Life* of Robert the Pious. Though no attempt was ever made to have Robert—the second of the Capetians—declared a saint (the new French dynasty preferred to be known for the hereditary ability of its members to cure scrofula by their "royal touch"), Helgaud's portrait of him not only follows the traditional hagiographic model of the royal saint, but also presages the modes of sanctity specific to "confessor" kings—to which, as we have seen, the St. Stephen legends owe their novelty. In France, of course, the apostolic-Christianiser role belonged to a bygone age. But Robert's involvement in the *minutia* of the liturgy, his attempts to moderate the excesses of ordeals, the details we get of his coronation, his ritualistic almsgiving (Robert had twelve paupers in his immediate entourage, in memory of the twelve apostles), his willing forgiveness of those of the poor who took unfair advantage of his munificence, and his generous endowment of the

Church and supervision of the new Church institutions are all elements which make Helgaud's biography very similar in tone to the St. Stephen legends, particularly the *Major Legend.*

(Parenthetically, I would note that one of the key scenes in Helgaud's *Life* is the canonisation, in 1029, of the rebuilt church of Saint-Aignan, one of Robert's greatest endowments. Helgaud himself wrote a hymn to St. Anianus. Timidly I hazard the question: Is there not, perhaps, the slimmest of chances that Helgaud of Fleury had had something to do with the St. Anianus relic in Hungary's Tihany Abbey, which Andrew I so cherished?)

Finally, the cult of St. Stephen can be considered to be "pioneering", or "modern" also in the dominant place that it assigns to the cult of the Virgin Mary, which would not be really popular in the West until the twelfth century, and whose early emergence in Hungary has been the object of much speculation among historians of religion. The putative "archaic roots" of the Blessed Virgin cult cannot be verified; what we do know is that already in Stephen's lifetime, it was of extraordinary significance, with all the most important churches in the country being dedicated to the Virgin Mary: St. Stephen's family church and burial place in Székesfehérvár, the cathedrals in Esztergom and Győr, the Benedictine Abbey in Pécsvárad, and the Veszprémvölgy convent. The Virgin Mary figures conspicuously in the *Legenda Maior* as Stephen's patron saint: it is she who—along with St. George and St. Martin—help him against Koppány; it is Mary he asks to protect him from Conrad; it is she he thanks for the humiliation he suffers one night out almsgiving (he had his beard plucked), grateful to her for sending him an indignity that has made him "deserving of eternal bliss"; and it is to the custody of the Blessed Ever Virgin Mother of God that he commends his country. Hungary's eleventh-century liturgical calendar, too, testifies to the extraordinary esteem in which Mary was held, the Synod of Szabolcs having appointed three distinct feast days in her honour: the feasts of the Purification (or Candlemass), the Assumption, and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Bishop Hartvic, according to some historians, had taken such pains to underscore Stephen's having charged the Blessed Virgin with his country's care (in Hartvic's version, he reiterates his plea for her guardianship on his deathbed) in an attempt to countervail the papacy's power play, more exactly, Gregory VII's emphatic affirmation of St. Peter's "patronage" over all the Church. This, certainly, is by no means inconceivable, but does not account for the extraordinary prominence of the cult of the Virgin in eleventh-century Hungary. Others have traced the cult to two sets of sources: two prominent clerics, and two religious currents. One of the clerics was St. Adalbert, whose devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary has been underscored by both Canaparius and Bruno of Querfurt, his two hagiographers: it was Mary, they tell us, who once cured Adalbert of a serious illness, and who announced to him his impending martyrdom.

The other, more immediate, inflence is likely to have been that of St. Gerard, whose devotion to Virgin Mary is attested in his legend, and is demonstrated by the churches and religious houses he founded, as well as the meditations on the Virgin in his *Deliberatio*. As for the religious currents that might well have promoted the Virgin's cult, one was the spiritual revival originating at Cluny (Abbot Odilo was one of the Virgin's most ardent devotees, and the author of four sermons and a hymn in her honour); the other was the influence of the Eastern Orthodox Church, whose impact on Hungary in the Early Middle Ages was probably greater than Hungarian historians usually maintain.

From the point of view of the cult of the Blessed Virgin, the latter influence is likely to have been the more significant. For the veneration of the Virgin Mary began in fifth-century Byzantium by way of an answer to the Nestorian heresy, and flourished there for over five hundred years before it became popular in the West. In the tenth century, Emperor John I Tzimisces—who was, exceptionally for an emperor, honoured as saintly in a manner exceeding what was due to a *basileos*—had a very special devotion to the Virgin. As we learn from his hagiography in Leo Diaconus's late-tenth century *Historia,* on his deathbed John I Tzimisces—to whom Mary had appeared on a number of occasions—tearfully begged the Virgin Mary to intercede with her Son for the forgiveness of his sins. (And well he might: for he had had his predecessor, Nicephorus Phocas, murdered; he, too, was subsequently venerated as a saint.)

Though we have no reason to think that it ever found its way to Hungary, we will not be wrong, typologically speaking, to regard Leo Diaconus's work as a hagiographic antecedent of the legends of St. Stephen. What does seem likely is that eleventh-century Hungarian Christianity was one of the links mediating the cult of Mary to the West. For in Hungary, a variety of catalysts from the West were able to crystallize, under Byzantine influence, into a unique synthesis pointing in the direction of the future *Regnum Marianum.*

That the St. Stephen legends were framed with an eye to contemporary relevance is best seen in Bishop Hartvic's composite version of the *Major* and *Minor* legends, amended with additions of his own. The most important of his political and canonical interpolations—on the gifts of the crown and apostolic cross—are found in Chapter 9.

Here we read of how Pope Sylvester—on the advice of an angel who appeared to him in a vision—sent to Stephen the crown meant for the Polish King Mieszko. He bid Bishop Astrik (Stephen's freshly-arrived envoy to the papal court) to take it back to his king, along with an "apostolic cross", a token of his entrusting Stephen with the "supervision of his churches and his people according to both laws". Clearly, this addition of Hartvic's was closely related to the power struggles that would continue to plague Church-state relations for much of the twelfth century; the question that historians are still debating, however, is

whether Hartvic was following the imperial model in his notion of Stephen's "apostolic legation", or was borrowing from the Sicilian Normans, the *Hadrianum* (eleventh-century anti-Gregorian forgeries), or even the Visigothic *Collectio Pseudo-Isidoriana.* The story of the "apostolic" origins of the cross of St. Stephen, it has been argued, might have served the purpose of expressly excluding any suggestion of its having come from schismatic Greeks. Just where the crown came from continues to be a perennial question of Hungarian historiography.

We have already alluded to that other significant interpolation of Hartvic's, the "apostolic letter" mandating the canonisations of 1083. Here I would simply add that as I see it, Hartvic invented the stories of both the "legation" and the letter, building, perhaps, on the information that the Danes had had St. Canute canonised by taking the innovative step of seeking papal authorisation for the proceedings. Hartvic must have seen this as an example to emulate, concerned as he always was to give the cult of St. Stephen a form that was maximally consonant with the latest definitions of papal prerogative. For though some of his minor interpolations had to do with the concrete needs of certain Hungarian church institutions at the beginning of the twelfth century, typically Hartvic expanded on those elements of St. Stephen's *Major* and *Minor* legends which most distinguished them from holy king legends as a genre: matters touching on questions of Church policy.

In Hartvic's work, thus, the cult of the holy king is no longer the internal affair of the particular royal house and the local Church subjected to it, but—in a precedent-setting move—is expressly calculated to influence Church–state relations.

It would be a mistake to think of the legends of the saints as everywhere receptive to popular mythology and folklore. It is more common to find the former—the vehicle of the new religious culture—seeking to supplant the latter. The dazzling new stories of the Christian holy kings were meant to pale the warm glow of the old epics, and of the pagan notions of the sacral ruler. The Bohemian tradition is a case in point.

In the Přemysl legend—told in the *Bohemian Chronicle*—when the matriarchate fell to the sorceress Libuša, and she was obliged to choose a husband, she entrusted the task to a horse. The horse led Libuša's attendants to a field near Stadice, where Přemysl was ploughing with two white oxen. "Let go your oxen, change your clothes, and get on the horse", the attendants told him. Přemysl had a dry twig in his hand: when he stuck it in the ground, it miraculously took root, and burst into leaves and bore fruit, thereby verifying his status as elect. The new cult of Wenceslas, more than likely, was meant to replace precisely this pagan notion of a sacral dynasty descended from the plough-man king.

We find much the same approach in the legends of St. Stephen. There are absolutely no folk motifs, nothing reminiscent of pagan charismatic beliefs.

The only particular of the legends in respect of which the very thought of such a reminiscence can arise is Stephen's mother's vision (recorded in Hartvic's version) foretelling his birth and the "heavenly crown" that would be his. Some historians contended that we have to do here with a Christianised version of the pagan Magyar origin myth, Emese's dream presaging the glory of her son, Almos, whom she conceived of the Turul bird. Apart from the fact that one can well question the pagan origins of the late twelfth-century story of Emese's dream (which is suspiciously reminiscent of Herodotus), the *topos* in the legend of St. Stephen was probably derived from similar Biblical stories and other hagiographic sources. The myths of the Magyars of the tenth and eleventh centuries found written expression not in the legends of the saints—written with a view to combating paganism—but in the chronicles of a few centuries later. The clerical authors of the legends modelled their work on cultural prototypes imported from abroad, and did not experiment with trying to make the new cults more palatable by spicing their writings with bits of local mythology or "folk" religion. Even the legend of St. Ladislas, as we shall see, was no exception: it proved as resistant to folk traditions as the legends of St. Stephen, in spite of the fact that more epic motifs would be attached to the person of Ladislas in the course of the Middle Ages than to any other Hungarian saint.

As regards the use of hagiographical *topoi,* the St. Stephen legends hold no real surprises. Besides the "young man of resplendent appearance" who appears to Géza in the *Major Legend* to foretell the birth of his son, Hartvic also has St. Stephen Protomartyr appear to his mother, Sarolt. A similar loan motif—probably adopted from Pope Gregory the Great's legend of St. Benedict—is the vision of St. Emeric's soul being "taken by angels to the heavenly mansion"; the elaborated form of this image would recur in the later legend of St. Emeric. The other loan motifs—Stephen's miraculous premonition of two enemy attacks, the levitating tent described by Hartvic, Sister Charity's pronouncement that they would not be able to move Stephen's tombstone until King Solomon was set free—are all familiar *topoi* of saint legends Europe-wide. We should note that they occur in the most "scholarly", and most "canonically correct" of the St. Stephen legends. What we are dealing with here is not the naive borrowings of "clerical folklore", but the learned bishop's attempt to use every weapon in his literary arsenal to bring his documentation of Stephen's sanctity up to international standard.

Hartvic's legend reflects well-known models also in its treatment of the story of St. Stephen's Right. The justification of *furta sacra,* the theft of sacred relics—the objects around which the new saint cults were built—came to form a distinct subbranch of medieval hagiography. Little wonder, given that several of the major cultic centers had a thief to thank for the relics to which they owed their fame: theft was how the relics of St. Nicholas got to Bari, and the statue of Sainte Foi to Conques, and it is even possible that coercion rather than com-

merce was what procured Venice the relics of St. Mark in the Early Middle Ages. Be that as it may, the story of the theft of St. Stephen's Right fits into the *furta sacra* tradition, and Hartvic leaves out none of the genre's special effects in telling it: adventures, proscriptions and visions color the tale of Mercurius's exploit.

What is striking about all the legends is how few miracles they record. A catalogue of the miracles worked by the saint's relics generally testify to a—not necessarily spontaneous, but definitely long-standing—popular cult, and bear witness to the supernatural power of the saint in terms specific to the local notions of the transcendental at a particular time. That is why the performance of miracles after death would become one of the criteria of canonisation, as documented by the lists carefully compiled from the thirteenth century on. In the *Legenda Maior,* we find barely a trace of all this; the *Legenda Minor* speaks of the many cures Stephen worked after his death but without one concrete example, and even Hartvic can detail only three cases. If we consider that the legend of St. Emeric speaks of only one miracle (which finally took place quite a while after the saint's death), we must conclude that the Christian belief in miracles must have been on a rather weak footing in late eleventh-century Hungary, with not even the promoters of St. Stephen's cult ascribing any particular significance to it. The belief in miracles would be slow to take hold, and it would be a long time before it would form a part of "popular" religion. Even a century and a half later, the relics of St. Ladislas in Várad (Oradea) were used not so much to effect cures and free prisoners, but to corroborate the judgement of ordeals, and to confirm oaths.

How, then, can we place the three legends of St. Stephen in the European hagiographic context? As a final analysis, we can see them as marking a turning-point in the development of the royal saint model (a resolution, of sorts, of the centuries of incongruity): from the eleventh century on, the criterion of sanctity in the case of royalty would be the Christian prince's performance *qua* ruler. But the *rex iustus*—founding father, legislator, patron of the Church, and paragon of Christian virtue—would be more than just a new hagiographic model. Though there is no way that St. Stephen could have foreseen this, his prestige as a royal saint would become the secure underpinning on which the code of law that he promulgated would rest. Conversely, the king's functioning as a legislator would become a prerequisite of the holy king model (adding a radically new dimension to the paradigm). But more than this: in virtue of his *Exhortations,* Stephen—the new model holy king—appears before us as the paragon who also makes a *theoretical* contribution to defining the new principles of Christian rulership.

The legends of St. Stephen document the major role that hagiography played in the elaboration of the new model of the Christian ruler, and in establishing this model as one that the princes of Europe could aspire to.

But the *Legenda Maior* offers more than just a paragon, the holy king in action; time and again we are told that Stephen expressly strove to achieve sanctity. Proceeding on the *do ut des* principle, he offered "everything he had to Christ", so that he would "deign to admit him among the blessed in heaven". With a bluntness that strikes the modern ear as odd, the author of the legend makes clear that Stephen's almsgiving was a long-term investment: he was, in fact, laying up for himself "treasures in heaven".

The new holy king, thus, insisted on the trappings of power even in heaven. This power-orientation followed not just from the dynastic/political motivation of the cult of St. Stephen, but was also consistent with the evolution of the royal saint model as such, and the dominant trends of eleventh-century Christianity. But the rather anemic religious thrust of the St. Stephen legends and the meagerness of their folklore motifs would have lasting repercussions for the cult as a whole. St. Stephen, whose canonisation was occasioned by state policy considerations, continues to be a saint for state and political occasions to this day. ❧

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Balázs Illényi

The Adventures of the Holy Crown of Hungary

Over a thousand long years, over thirty-five generations, much that is strange and wonderful can happen. This is attested to by a much revered relic, the crown of Saint Stephen, who founded the kingdom of Hungary, and christianized his people. For more than 700 years, this crown has had a sacral meaning and a constitutional power ascribed to it. A symbol of power, according to tradition received from Pope Sylvester II in the year 1000, it has had indeed an adventurous history; this history is also that of Hungary and is the stuff of a picaresque novel. The Holy Crown has not just been an essential part of the pomp and circumstance of coronations: it has frequently found itself in places and situations less than worthy of its importance. It has been stolen, lost, buried and even pledged against debt; in the century just passed it spent more than thirty years in a vault at Fort Knox in the United States. Historians now say that the crown, presently on exhibition in the Hungarian Houses of Parliament, never rested on Saint Stephen's head.

The very first chapters of the crown's history are the most obscure, since historical research has not been able to establish who Stephen actually received a royal diadem from. Pope Sylvester II, according to the chronicles, was the donor, but Otto III, then Holy Roman Emperor, has also been suggested. This is not beside the point, if for no other reason that in the Middle Ages vassalage depended on who the ruler received a crown from. Hungarian tradition holds, of course, that Stephen did not become the vassal of the Holy Roman Emperor but received his throne under the blessing of the Pope. Several documents, however, contain references that indicate that the crown, even if not directly received from Otto III, was granted with the Emperor's knowledge and approval, since he too was in Rome at the time. This question may not have been clarified, but what is certain is that the crown we have today consists of two parts that were fitted

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The Holy Crown in all its splendour.

together at a later date, that the lower band is of Byzantine origin and at the earliest it could only have been placed on the head of Géza I (1074–1077), the king who brought to Hungary as his wife the daughter of the Byzantine emperor Michael Dukas. The upper part of the crown, which shows western influences, can, according to scholars, only originate from a period not earlier than the end of the 11th century. In other words, neither part of the crown could have belonged to Saint Stephen. There is additional confirmation of this in the assumption that the crossband securing the hoop may originally have been made for Stephen's reliquary and thus became part of the crown only after his death. The cult of Stephen, the founder of the state and thus the period of creating relics around him, started only towards the end of the century, when Saint Ladislas the King (1078–1095) succeeded in having his predecessor cannonized in 1083.

Not that this means that in this early period Hungarian kings were wearing the Holy Crown of today: historians are still not fully agreed on when it took its final form. The most likely answer is that it was sometime in the 12th century, almost two hundred years after the coronation of Stephen (1000), presumably during the rule of King Emeric (1196–1204), who is represented on his coins

with a crown like the present one. Incidentally, Emeric's reign may be important not only because it was then that the lower and upper parts of the Holy Crown were united, but also for the fact that under the Árpád dynasty (which died out in 1301) it only once went abroad, directly after Emeric's death. What happened was that the queen mother fled to escape a pretender to the throne with Emeric's infant son, Ladislas III, to Austria, and took, naturally, the crown with them. The pretender was so incensed that he almost started a war against the Austrian Duke Leopold for the return of the crown. However, Ladislas died soon after and his body together with the crown was brought back to Székesfehérvár. There the crown was kept in the tower of the basilica. But only some years later, the Holy Crown again had to be removed, this time because of the Tatar invasion of Central Europe (1241–1242). On this incursion the Tartars ravaged the regions to the west of the Danube; accordingly Béla IV (1235–1269) had the crown taken to Dalmatia, then part of the kingdom of Hungary.

But the crown's real adventures only started after the House of Árpád died out in 1301. In the power vacuum that arose, there were three claimants to the throne; each of them had, through dynastic relationships, some connection with the kingdom of Hungary. The Bohemian prince Wenceslas (from 1305 Wenceslas III, King of Bohemia) succeeded first in having himself crowned king at Székesfehérvár; in 1304 Caroberto of the Neapolitan Angevins forced him to leave the country. This he did, together with the Holy Crown. Against Caroberto —who had already been crowned in 1301 in Esztergom with an occasional crown—there soon appeared a fresh contender, in the person of a relative of Wenceslas, the Bavarian Prince Otto, who had obtained the Holy Crown from his Bohemian ally and set out for Hungary with it. This was when the crown suffered its first, and almost final, accident: Otto had hidden the crown in a gourd hung to a saddle and one night somewhere on the road between Vienna and the Hungarian border, they lost the precious relic. Only the next day did they notice what had happened, and the contemporary chronicles ascribe it to a miracle that the soldiers succeeded in finding the gourd and its precious contents on this busy highway. In 1305 Otto was crowned at Székesfehérvár; not long after, he was taken captive by a Transylvanian magnate, László Kán, who took the symbol of power into his own possession. Meanwhile, Caroberto defeated, in succession, the insurgent barons who had been as dangerous as the pretenders to the crown; by then he also had the Pope's support and consolidated his position through the assistance of Cardinal Gentilis, the emissary of Pope Clement V. Gentilis (again) crowned him in 1309, and this time at Buda, with another crown. This was when the spiritual authority of the Holy Crown of the Árpáds became clear: this latter crowning at Buda was not held to be valid. Every diplomatic skill of Cardinal Gentilis was needed to wrest the Holy Crown from László Kán, so as—for the third time—to perform at Székesfehérvár in 1310 Caroberto's "true and valid" coronation. A new principle was put into words,

that only coronation at Fehérvár, with the Holy Crown, made for a legitimate King of Hungary.

A truly dramatic turn of events occurred 120 years later when Sigismund of Luxemburg, King of Hungary and Bohemia and Holy Roman Emperor, died after reigning more than half a century. He had intended his son-in-law, Albrecht of Habsburg, to succeed him but Albrecht unexpectedly died after a year and a half, and the magnates of the country invited Wladislaw I, King of Poland, to take the throne. However, Albrecht's widow, Elisabeth, who was with child when her husband died, would not resign herself to this. To ensure the succession for her child, she asked one of her retainers, Helene Kottanner, to steal the Holy Crown from Visegrád Castle. This risky undertaking, as described in the memoirs of Helene Kottanner, succeeded only through a series of events in keeping with a costume film. There was much noise but nobody was roused and the crown, hidden in a velvet cushion, was smuggled out of the castle at dawn. This was not the end of the story, however: the ice gave way under a cart when crossing the frozen Danube and the Holy Crown was almost lost.* They finally brought it to the queen mother, who had her new-born son, Ladislas V, crowned at Székesfehérvár when he was just 12 weeks of age. Yet the royal mother failed, because Wladislaw chased herself, her son and their retainers beyond the borders. Since Elisabeth had taken the Holy Crown with her, the new king was crowned with a copy taken from the reliquary of Saint Stephen.

Then began a near twenty year interlude in the history of the crown which can hardly be called glorious. According to the chronicles, Elisabeth was in dire financial straits after fleeing the country and thus had to pledge the relic, so precious to Hungarians, to the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III in return for 2500 gold pieces. Its new "owner" so liked his acquisition that only in 1463 was Mathias Corvinus (1458–1490) able to repurchase it from him. King Mathias was the ruler who propagated Renaissance ideas in Hungary and very much strengthened the power of the throne. One obstacle to the transaction was that a special tax had to be levied to raise the 80,000 gold pieces demanded by Frederick (more than thirty times the original collateral value); in addition, there was a fear that during the long time it was in his possession the emperor may have had a copy made, and thus it would not be the original crown that was returned. It took a considerable time to find somebody who in their youth had seen the Holy Crown.

Occasionally, quarrels over the crown were resolved peacefully. An especially good example here is furnished by the situation after Mathias's death (1490) when, just as two centuries earlier, the Hungarian throne again had three contenders. One was Johannes Corvinus, the natural son of Matthias; one of his great arguments was that the crown was in his possession. The high nobles, on the other hand, would have liked to see the nephew of Ladislas V, the Bohemian

* See the extract from her memoirs on page 43–49 (Ed.)

king Wladislaw on the throne; to complicate matters further, Frederick III had made it a condition to his returning the crown that, if Matthias were to die without a legitimate successor, then he could claim the throne. Out of all this, Wladislaw emerged victorious; he defeated in battle Johannes Corvinus, who decided not to again subject the country to a struggle for the throne and handed over the Holy Crown to the new ruler. Indeed, it was Johannes himself who carried the crown into the basilica of Székesfehérvár at Wladislaw's coronation.

Following the battle of Mohács in 1526, when Sultan Suleiman I destroyed the Hungarian host and King Louis II himself was drowned as he fled the field, both crown and country were subjected to torment. This began with one of the keepers of the crown, the man who had quelled the 1514 peasant revolt (the most threatening up to that time) John Szapolyai, the Voivode of Transylvania, who had himself crowned in November. But the magnates, siding with the Habsburgs, called to the throne Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria and King of Bohemia. Ferdinand was able to take possession of the crown because Peter Perényi, the other keeper of the crown and Szapolyai's former ally, switched his allegiance. Thus the country had two validly anointed rulers. The tribulations of the crown continued: in 1529, Perényi attempted to smuggle it to safety when the Turks attacked again but he ran into the arms of one of Szapolyai's generals, who then handed over the crown to the Sultan—who just then happened to be in alliance with King John. Suleiman returned it to King John. Historians always mention the humiliations the crown was subjected to in these adventures: in the Turkish camp, allegedly not only the Sultan but also all of his viziers tried it on. After two decades once again, this time for good, the crown came into the hands of Ferdinand and the Habsburgs: in 1551, Isabella, the widow of John I (who died in 1540 living in retirement in Transylvania) agreed to return the Holy Crown in exchange for the Silesian duchies, and in this way furthered the unification of the country. That, however, was not to be: a few months later Ferdinand had assassinated the great advocate of agreement and of unification, Friar George, an adherent of King John's, a former friar, skilful diplomat and administrator. Under the reign of Isabella and her son, John Sigismund, the separate status of Transylvania had become clear.

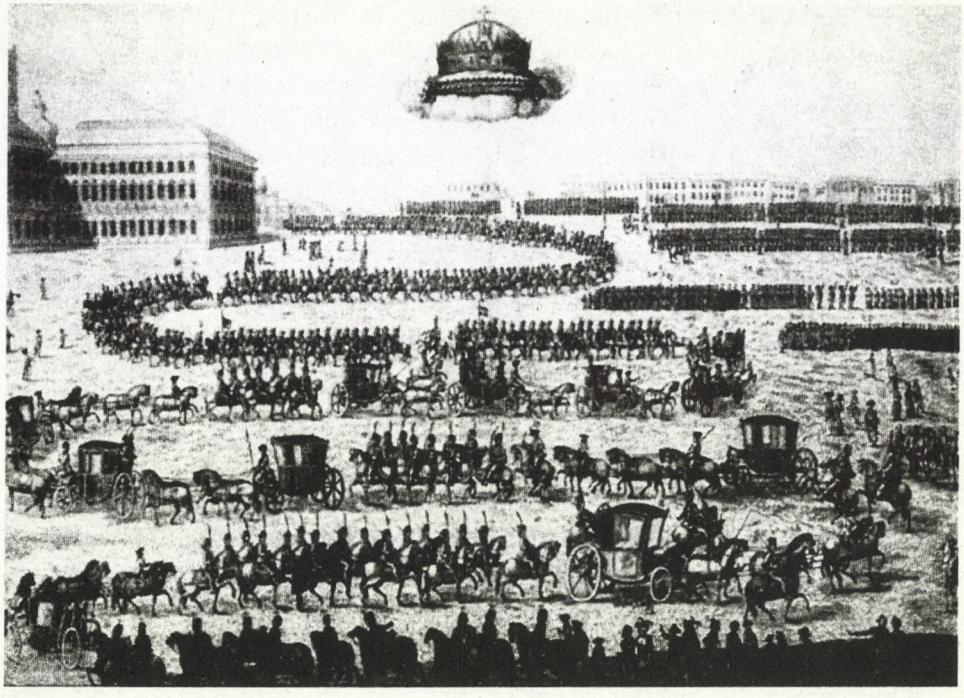
A new chapter began in the history of the crown, now in Ferdinand's hands. Seeing how strongly the Hungarian estates insisted upon their right to elect their king, he had his son Maximilian crowned while he himself was still alive, so that Maximilian's claim to the throne should not be in dispute. The ceremony (in 1563) was held for the first time, perhaps because of fear of the Hungarians, in Pozsony (Bratislava), which thus became and remained to the mid-19th century, a coronation city.

Under Maximilian's successor, Rudolf II, Emperor and King of Hungary (1552–1612), both the place of coronation and of the keeping of the crown changed. Once again the crown was removed from the country; historians con-

nect this to the ruler's growing insanity. To the greatest indignation of the Hungarian estates, Rudolf had the Holy Crown taken to Prague in 1580, where it remained for almost a generation. Even the treaty concluding the first anti-Habsburg uprising, under István Bocskai, at the begimming of the seventeenth century did not lead to its return, even though this was stipulated by one of its articles. It was finally his successor, Archduke Matthias, who brought the crown back; Hungarian troops had helped him to force Rudolf's abdication.

The Holy Crown, now firmly in the possession of the Habsburgs, travelled much in the next two hundred years, almost always to escape some external or internal threat. At the times of the various anti-Habsburg uprisings led by Transylvanian princes it had to be secured: for example in 1644 it was

The Empress Maria Theresa at her coronation as Queen of Hungary.



The crown being brought back home from Vienna to Buda in 1790.

taken to Győr, away from György I Rákóczi, to Vienna in 1703, during the War of Independence led by Ferenc II Rákóczi. In 1683, during an especially vigorous Turkish attack, the crown's keepers fled as far as Passau, and during the Napoleonic wars, it was taken eastwards twice (in the direction of Munkács and of Eger) away from the French armies. In 1784, for a completely different reason, the crown travelled to Vienna, for reasons of state: Joseph II (1780–1790), son of Maria Theresa, was Holy Roman Emperor as well as King of Hungary, but, as an enlightened absolutist, he did not have himself crowned. This was because he did not wish to take an oath to respect the privileges of the Hungarian estates, which he saw as an obstacle to his desire to centralize power in his own hands. (He is known to Hungarian history as "the hatted king.") Joseph deposited the crown in the Vienna treasury and no request by the Hungarian magnates could sway him. His generosity was proven, on the other hand, by the fact that a few days before his death he ceded, after all, to the request of the country, and the Holy Crown was taken home with true Baroque pomp, this time to Buda.

After half a century in the capital city, in 1848 new travails began for the crown. During the Revolution and the War of Independence, it first had to be taken to Debrecen, to secure it from the advancing imperial armies at the end of 1848; after its return to Buda in the spring, with the shadow of the final surrender looming, it was taken for safekeeping towards Transylvania in the summer of 1849. Bertalan Szemere, the Prime Minister of the revolutionary Hungarian government, escorted the crown on its route through Szeged, Arad, Nagyvárad, Lugos, and Orsova, farther and farther from the capital city. Here, more than a week after the laying down of arms to the imperial army and their Russian allies, Szemere and his associates buried an iron chest with the coronation regalia. This was no simple matter either: at first they hid the treasures under a floor of an unoccupied house, only to find the very next day that somebody had already attempted to tamper with the hiding place. They removed the chest and buried it in the fields, between two easily recognizable willow trees, taking an oath of silence. After a few years, one of the young soldiers who had been party to this, and who had gone into exile in London, spat out the secret for some gold to an imperial police informer. He, in turn, immediately notified his superiors who had been desperately looking for the crown. This was how, in September 1853, the Austrians found the chest and the untouched regalia. Whatever one thinks of the betrayal, it did, however, happen in the nick of time: the notes taken at the disinterring make it clear that, in these four short years in the damp soil, the sword was already completely corroded by rust, the robes were disintegrating, so too was the leather case of the crown, and its lining had completely rotted away. Still, no irreparable damage had occurred.

From then on the crown was kept at Buda; indeed, in 1900, a separate vault was made for it in the Royal Castle, where it was not disturbed up to the end of

the Second World War. Well, only slightly: on December 30, 1916 the last coronation of a Hungarian king took place, at Buda, when the great-nephew of Francis Joseph, the young King Charles IV—and Emperor Charles I (the father of Otto von Habsburg)—had the crown of the Árpáds placed on his head. A high point of the ceremony would have been the creation of new knights of the Order of the Golden Spur: traditionally, the new king uses the sword of Saint Stephen to knight a few worthy nobles and, on this occasion, a few military officers for their services in the war. But Count Miklós Bánffy, who was the organizer, had the idea of bringing home from the battle-front the crippled, the wounded, the limbless, and did not dress them up in ceremonial attire, either. The celebrating crowd was thus confronted with the horrors of the war, "let the battlefield, the muddy, wet nights, the thunder of cannons, and the shell-shock enter with them into the coronation church." According to eyewitnesses, it was a miracle that Charles IV could get through the ceremony, so much did the unexpected interlude shock him.

Many people consider it an act of Providence that the Holy Crown survived untouched, in the vaults of the Royal Castle of Buda, during the revolutions following the First World War, the passing through of the armies of intervention, the Red and the White Terrors, and that, all the way to the end of the Second World War—since the country was a monarchy without a king—there was no need to touch it. But a few months before the end of the fighting the symbolic power of the crown was again in play. On October 15, 1945 the Regent Miklós Horthy attempted to take Hungary out of the war; the Nazi troops stationed in the country succeeded in stopping him, and the next day the regent had to appoint as Prime Minister Ferenc Szálasi, the leader of the fanatically extreme Arrow Cross Party, who followed Hitler to the bitter end. Szálasi had the crown, which had been buried by its keepers a few days earlier in the cellar of the castle, brought out on November 6 and took on it an oath as "leader of the nation". The fighting was coming closer and closer to Budapest; the coronation regalia was, upon Szálasi's command, taken to the town of Veszprém in Western Hungary. Here the crown keepers discussed the idea of securing the precious relics in the Benedictine abbey at Pannonhalma. They only succeeded, however, in getting the robe there; Arrow Cross men retained control over the other coronation insignia.

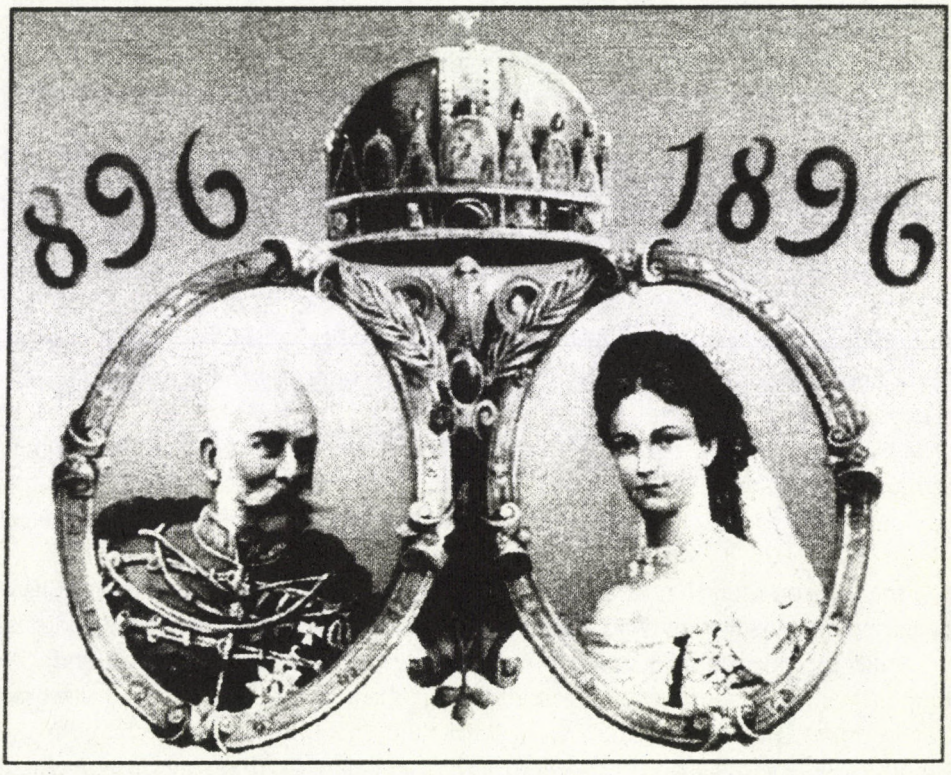
At the beginning of December the crown was transferred to the town of Kőszeg, and at the end of that month to the small village of Velem near the Austrian border, where it remained until early in 1945. By then, however, the strategic situation had become so bad that the keepers themselves also had to leave the country. On March 27, the crown started on its way to Austria escorted by Ernő Pajtás, the last commander of the Crown Guard, and six of his soldiers. This journey lasted until the beginning of April, when they found themselves in Mattsee, 25 kilometres from Salzburg. The journey had to be made under continual air attacks; at one time the van with the regalia slid into a shell-hole from which it was only towed out with difficulty. At the Mattsee station, Ernő Pajtás

decided that, on account of the perils of the situation, the relics had to be buried. One night, towards the end of the month, he put the treasures in a military petrol barrel cut in half and buried this several metres into the ground. While they were engaged in this, with Arrow Cross men also present, including the Arrow Cross Deputy Prime Minister Jenő Szöllősi, the crown keepers were digging with cocked guns in their pockets: they feared being killed by the Arrow Cross men after the work had been done. A few days later, they were taken prisoner by the American Army. Pajtás had given the keys to the chest they had taken with them, which contained only the sword, to the Arrow Cross men. The American officers therefore believed right until the keys were found, at the end of July, that they had taken possession of the Hungarian coronation regalia. Much was their astonishment when, upon opening the chest, they only found the sword. Pajtás informed them that the ruse had been necessary so that the buried treasures could be, until the keys were available, in the American and not in the Soviet occupation zone. The regalia were found just in the nick of time, because the petrol barrel had become completely impermeated by the clayey soil and the lining of the crown had rotted away—it had to be removed later.

The Americans promised to Pajtás to return the crown to the Hungarian people only when Hungary was completely liberated. During the harsh Communist dictatorship there could be no hope of this, at least not before and immediately after the 1956 Revolution. Kept in Fort Knox, the regalia were only to become the subject of serious discussion from the middle of the seventies, although the Hungarian authorities tried to raise the subject at just about every diplomatic meeting. A role was probably played in this by the fact that the case of the Prince Primate, Cardinal Joseph Mindszenty, who had taken refuge since 1956 in the American embassy in Budapest, was finally resolved in 1971: he was allowed, after lengthy discussions, to leave for the Vatican. By about 1976 the Kádár regime, which had put down the revolution ferociously, was so strongly consolidated that, according to the latest research, the US presidents had begun to consider improving relations and, thus, also the return of the crown. At the same time, they also had to quell the opposition of Hungarian exiles in America, most of whom were opposed from the very beginning to the government of the United States "crowning Kádár", as they said at the time. Although the US did not succeed in completely dampening this opposition, there was an attempt to work out a formula acceptable to everyone. According to this, the crown "is being returned to the Hungarian people"—and not to the Communist leadership—by the United States government, and it was to be exhibited in a public place. In addition, and this was, perhaps, the severest condition, János Kádár, the First Secretary of the party, could not be present at the handing-over ceremony. Since the Hungarian government very badly needed this international recognition and, especially, the financial help they assumed would follow, the

American conditions were complied with. On January 6, 1978, in the building of the Hungarian Parliament, the American delegation officially handed over to the Hungarian people their coronation regalia, which had been out of the country for 33 years.

But the wanderings of the Holy Crown still had not come to an end. The regalia had been placed in a separate hall in the Hungarian National Museum, where they had been on exhibition right up to the end of last year. On January 1, 2000, however, the present conservative government, amid heated opposition in Parliament, had the regalia transferred to the House of Parliament. The quarrel has not died down: it is still not known whether the relics were given a place in the hall under the dome of Parliament simply to express the unity of the nation, or whether the government intends them to have some role in constitutional law. If the latter is the case, the Hungarian republic would, following a break of half a century, again be linked to the crown of the kings of the House of Árpád. ❧



Francis Joseph I and his consort Elizabeth on a millennium memorial card.

I, Helene Kottaner, Was There Too...

An Account of a 15th-Century Theft of the Holy Crown

Sigismund of Luxembourg, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Hungary died in 1437. He was succeeded by his son-in-law Albrecht of Habsburg. After the coronation, the Holy Crown of Hungary remained in Esztergom in the care of Archbishop György Pálóczi and Albrecht only recovered it with difficulty after the archbishop's death, taking it to Visegrád Castle. Albrecht, making preparations for a campaign against the Turks, died of the bloody flux soon after, on October 27th 1439. His widow Elisabeth, the mother of two daughters, was with child again and her doctors had promised her that she would bear a son. She wished to obtain the crown for him. The magnates, however, opposed the idea of an infant king and invited King Wladislaw I of Poland to occupy the Hungarian throne. Thereupon Elisabeth entrusted Helene, the wife of Hans Kottaner, a Viennese burgher in her entourage, who had charge of the four-year-old-Princess Elisabeth, with the theft of the crown. The story of the theft, of the birth of King Ladislas V and of his coronation is told by Helene Kottaner in early Neuhochdeutsch *in her account which she dictated to a scrivener. The surviving seventeen sheets of the MSS are in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna. An added point of interest is that Heimito von Doderer, the Austrian novelist, author of* Die Strudelhofstiege *and* Die Dämonen *worked on the MSS as a young student after returning from a Russian prisoner-of war-camp after the First World War. He told the story in a newspaper article published in 1924 (included in a 1970 posthumous volume) and also worked it into the narrative of* Die Dämonen. *The two brief extracts from Mistress Kottaner's account which follow are translated from a 1971 Hungarian critical edition. (The Editor)*

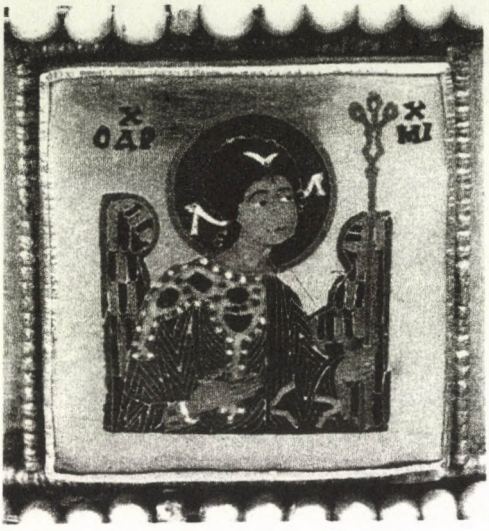
Let me tell you then that in the time which passed since then the Empress Elisabeth found herself with child again, and gave birth to an infant christened Ladislas.

When the negotiations concerning the Holy Crown had come to an end, the Emperor Albrecht sent his youngest daughter, the Princess Elisabeth, to Visegrád Castle and I, Helene Kottaner, went with her. The Emperor Albrecht with the Empress Elisabeth set off for Esztergom that very day, for the Holy Crown, which was handed to him. Afterwards His Majesty prepared to join his host in Szeged.

When he was ready he and his consort first journeyed to Visegrád, to their youngest daughter, the Princess, taking the Holy Crown, and a number of lords went with them, including Hungarian lords; they carried the Holy Crown and took it into pentagon-shaped vaulted premises, and I, Helene Kottaner was there too, with the Princess on my arm, and I could clearly see how and where they placed the Holy Crown. Then the vaults were locked and the door leading into them was sealed with many seals. At that time Visegrád Castle was in the charge of Count Nicholas Bazini and his son Count George. The Emperor Albrecht and his consort then went off to war, to the canebrakes near Szeged.

Everyone knows only too well what happened afterwards. Not long afterwards the Emperor took ill with the bloody flux. Sick as he was his chamberlain had him carried to Visegrád and bedded him in the lower palace and physicians came from Vienna to attend him. When His Majesty had somewhat recovered, his youngest daughter, the Princess, sent him a petticoat which she had worn on her own body. His Majesty sent it back to the ladies' bower with Vinsterel, a loyal holy man. His daughter sewed a hook for a pouch made of two holy pictures and containing a magic remedy. It was then that the Empress in great sorrow travelled to the estates of Banus Ladislas, beyond Buda, because the Emperor Albrecht would have liked to see her at his side. He sent her many messages, especially that if she could not be with him, let her at least come once before she moved on. Then they felt a great longing for each other. His Majesty also wanted to see his younger daughter, Princess Elisabeth, then he left for Esztergom, ill as he was. At Neszmély he took worse. That is where Albrecht, Emperor and Prince, died on the eve of the day of the Apostles Simon and Judas.

In the morning a Hungarian nobleman came to Visegrád to the Princess and insisted on speaking to her mother the Empress. Since he persisted, he was told what is proper on such occasions. He finally succeeded to talk to Her Majesty, telling her that the Emperor Albrecht had arranged for the Holy Crown to be taken away from Visegrád. This gave a great fright to Her Majesty. Her Majesty wrote to Count Nicholas Bazini and his son Count George asking to be told if this was so or not. The two afore-named counts then came to me and took me into their confidence. Together we went to the door which led to the Holy Crown and found the seal whole, and they immediately wrote this to the Empress. Her Majesty wanted to see for herself, she came to Visegrád, and many Hungarian noblemen with her; they descended to the vaults and fetched up the Holy Crown in a chest, taking out the Holy Crown in its jewel-case. There were many seals on it. These were broken, the Holy Crown was taken out and they examined it well. I was present. Then they took it and placed it in a case, next to another crown with which Her Majesty had been crowned Queen in Hungary. The two crowns lay in a case and near to it was a bed on which lay Her Majesty with her heavy burden. Two ladies-in-waiting lay with her in the same room, one, Barbara, was the daughter of a Hungarian nobleman, the other was the Miss Fronacher. A wax candle was



KÁROLY SZELÉNYI

St George on the Greek part of the crown

there, for night-nursing, as is customary with princely ladies. At night one of the ladies-in-waiting rose and did not notice that the candle was knocked over, starting a fire in the room, which reached the chest with the two crowns in it, singeing it, a hole bigger than a span was burnt into a blue velvet cushion on the chest. It was a miracle. There lay the future king, still locked in his mother's womb, who would have to wear the Holy Crown. The two were no more than twelve feet apart, the devil would happily have hurt both through the flames. But God guarded them and woke the ladies-in-waiting in time. I slept in front, with the little Princess. The ladies-in-waiting came to me and asked me to get up quickly, there was a fire in the vaulted room in which Her Majesty lay a-bed. I was really frightened, I rose immediately, hurried into the smoke filled room, put out the fire, let out the smoke and scented the room so that the Empress could sleep there that very night. In the morning the Hungarian noblemen came in to Her Majesty and Her Majesty told them what had happened to her at night, how close the fire was to her and the Holy Crown and the other crown, which caused great consternation amongst the noblemen. They advised that the Holy Crown be placed back in its chest and taken back to the treasure-chamber where it had been before. That was done that very day. The door was sealed as before, but not with as many seals. As soon as this was done my mistress sent me to Count George Bazini, asking him for the keys to Visegrád Castle since that is what the Hungarian noblemen wanted, that is that the Castle should be hand-ed over to her kinsman, the Banus Ladislas Garai. And that is what was done. [...]

Then when the time truly came for God to perform his miracle, He sent us a man who undertook to fetch the Holy Crown. He was Hungarian and he went about his business loyally, cleverly, in a manly way. We had everything prepared that we needed, we obtained a number of locks and two files. He who was prepared to risk his life together with me, wore a black velvet dressing-gown and a pair of felt slippers hiding a file in each, concealing the locks under his dressing gown. I carried my mistress's small seal and also the keys to the very first door, there were three of those, there was a chain and a clamp at the hinge, to which we had attached a lock before we had left, preempting anyone else with like ideas. When

we were ready my mistress sent a messenger ahead to Visegrád telling Franz Pöker, the Castle Constable, and László Vajdafi, who were looking after the maids of honour, asking them to be ready when the cart came to fetch them, to take them to Her Majesty in Komorn (Komárom) since she intended to go on to Pressburg (Pozsony) and the whole of the Court had been informed of this. When the cart to be sent for the maids of honour was ready, and the sleigh on which I was to travel, and my helpmate was anxious, then two Hungarian noblemen were detailed to accompany me on horseback to fetch the maids of honour. We were off. That is when the news reached the Constable that I was going to fetch the maids of honour. He and others at Court were astonished that I was given leave to travel so far from my young mistress who did not really like me to leave her. They all knew that. The Constable was poorly but he nevertheless intended to lie down in front of the door which led to the Holy Crown. That is when, according to God's will, his illness got worse but he could not ask any of the manservants to sleep there since it was all inside the ladies' bower. That is why he covered the lock which we had placed near the hinge with a linen cloth, sealing it. When we arrived at Visegrád Castle (Plintenburg) the maidens were happy to travel to my mistress and got ready, getting a chest made for their dresses. There was much fuss, and they hammered right up to the eighth hour. The one with me also came into the ladies' bower and had his sport with the maidens. There was a little firewood in front of the stove which kept them warm and that is where he hid the files. But the manservants who looked after the maidens noticed and began to whisper. I heard them and told him immediately. He was really afrightened, he went pale, took the files and concealed them somewhere else. He said to me: "Woman, see to it that we have enough light." I asked an old woman for a few candles, I had many prayers to say, since it was Saturday night, the Saturday after the first Sunday in Lent. I took the candles and hid them on the way, within reach. Once the maidens and everyone else was asleep, then I stayed in the small room alone with the old woman who had come with me, who knew not a word of German and knew nothing about the whole thing, nor was she familiar with the house. She just lay there in a deep sleep. When the time came he who had come with me came anxiously through the chapel to the door and knocked. I opened it for him, and locked it again after

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St Dimitrios on the Greek part of the crown

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St Peter on the Latin part of the crown

him. He brought his servant with him, of his own Christian name, whom he had sworn in. I then went to fetch the candles for him, but they were gone. I was so afrightened, I knew not what to do, and the whole thing was almost abandoned because of the light. Then I had second thoughts and went and secretly roused the woman who had given me the candles and I told her the candles were lost and I still had much praying to do. So she gave me others. I was very glad and gave them to him and gave him the locks too which had to be put on afterwards, and also gave him my mistress's small seal, for the renewing of the seals, and I also gave him the three keys to the first door. Then he took the cloth with the seal off the lock, which the Constable had placed there, he opened the door and went in together with his servant, working hard on all the locks, so that the hammering and the sound of the files was too loud. The guards and the Constable's men were wide awake that night because of the great anxiety with which they were burdened, but it would seem that Almighty God stopped up their ears, and none of them heard a thing, because I clearly heard everything and I watched all the time in great fear and anxiety. I knelt most devoutly and begged God and Our Lady to stand by me and my helpmates. I was more anxious for my soul than for my life and I prayed to God, that if this were contrary to God's will, and I would be damned for it, or else if great misfortune would ensue for it for the country or the people, then let God have mercy on my soul, and let me die on the spot. As I was praying there was a great noise and clattering as if many men in armour were at the door through which I had let in my helpmate and it seemed to me that they pushed in the door, I was very frightened and I rose to warn them to cease working. Then I thought I ought to go to the door, and that is what I did. By the time I reached the door the clattering had finished and I heard noone. It occurred to me then that it was a ghost and I went back to my prayers, and I promised Our Lady to make a barefoot pilgrimage to Maria Zell, and until I would go on that pilgrimage I would not be featherbedded Saturdays and I would say special prayers to Our Lady Saturdays, as long as I lived, to thank her for the grace which she bestowed on me and I asked her to thank her son, our dear Lord Jesus Christ for the great grace which, in His mercy

He had so visibly granted us. While I was still at my prayers it seemed to me once again that there was a great clattering of armour at the door, which was the true entrance to the ladies' bower. I thought it was not a ghost after all, that while I had stood at the door to the chapel they had circumambulated so I knew not what to do. I watched and listened if I could hear the maidens. But I heard nobody. Then I slowly went down the stairs, through the maiden's chamber, to the proper entrance to the ladies' bower. When I came to the door, I heard nobody. I was happy then, and thanked God and went back to my prayers, and I thought to myself that it was the devil who would have gladly aborted the whole business.

KÁROLY SZELÉNYI

St Paul on the Latin part of the crown

Having finished my prayers I wanted to get up and go into the vaults to see what they were about. He came towards me, I could calm down, everything had gone well. They had got the locks off the door by filing but the locks were so firmly attached to the chest that the files proved of no use and they had to be burnt off which created a great stench, making me anxious that someone might enquire about the smell, but God guarded us against that. When the Holy Crown was completely free we closed the door everywhere and attached other locks instead of those that were broken and we reimpressed my mistress's seal, and we locked the outer door again and placed the small piece of cloth with a seal back on as we found it, just as the Constable had placed it. And I threw the files into the commode in the ladies' bower, there they will find them, when it is broken open, to serve as a sign.

The Holy Crown was carried out through the chapel where Saint Elisabeth rests, and I, Helena Kottaner will owe vestments and an altarcloth, which my gracious lord, King Ladislas, will pay for. There my helpmate took a red velvet cushion, placed the Holy Crown in it, and sewed up the cushion once again. By then it was just about daylight so that the maidens and everyone else rose so we could be off on our journey. An old woman served with the maidens. My mistress had ordered that she be paid her wages and left behind, so she could return to Buda. After the woman had been paid off, she came to me and told me that she had seen something odd lying about in front of the oven and she did not know what that could be. I was very scared because I knew only too well that it belonged to the

box in which the Holy Crown had stood, I therefore talked her out of it as well as I could, then I stole away to the oven and whatever padding I found I threw on the fire so it was all burnt and I took the woman with us on the journey. Everyone was astonished why I did this. So I declared that I accepted responsibility since I wanted to persuade my gracious mistress to have the woman looked after at St Martin's in Vienna, which indeed I did later. When the maidens and all who belonged to the court were ready to leave, he who was with me, sharing my anxiety, took the cushion into which the Holy Crown was sewn and entrusted it to his servant, who had helped him, to be carried from the bower to the sleigh on which I and he sat. The good fellow took the cushion on his shoulder and with it an old cow's skin, with a long tail that trailed behind and everyone looked after him and burst out laughing. When we reached the market town from the bower, we very much wanted to eat, but there was nothing but herring and we ate a little. They were about to sing High Mass, it was as late in the day as that and yet we had to get to Komorn (Komárom) from the Plintenburg (Visegrád) that same day, which we did, although it is 12 miles away. When we were ready to leave and we all mounted I took good care to see where the corner of the cushion was, where the Holy Crown lay, so I would not sit on it. And I thanked God the Almighty for his grace, but all the same, I frequently looked back to see if anyone was following. My anxiety in no way ceased, much went through my head, and I felt great wonder at what God had done or still intended to do. While in the Castle I did not have a single peaceful night because of this great cause with which I was entrusted, and I had many nightmares. One night I dreamt that a woman passing through all the walls went into the vaults and took away the Holy Crown. I was much frightened and rose immediately, I called on one of the maidens, a Miss Dachpeck and we went to the vaults together. I found it as I had left it before. This Dachpeck then said to me: "No wonder that you do not sleep well, surely you must have been entrusted with important business." With that we laid down to rest again. I thought of all those things on the way. When we reached the inn where we intended to eat, the good fellow grabbed hold of the cushion he had been entrusted with, and walked next to me to where we meant to eat, and put it down on a table opposite me, so I kept an eye on it all the time which we were eating. When we finished eating the good fellow took hold of the cushion and put it back on the sleigh, as before, and then we travelled well into dark night. That is how we reached the Danube, on which there was much ice, but here and there it had already grown thin. When we then went onto the ice, somewhere in the middle of the Danube, the ice broke under the cart of the maidens, the cart turned over and the maidens screamed and could not see each other. I was very frightened then, thinking that we would all perish in the Danube, together with the Holy Crown. But God came to our aid and noone got under the ice, but all other chattels that were on the cart, fell off, some in the water, under the ice. I took the Silesian princess and the noblest of the maidens onto the sleigh with me, and with God's help we crossed the ice, all the others as well. ❧

László Krasznahorkai

Dumb to the Deaf

(Short story)

I

A small boy is walking down the street, proceeding methodically along the concrete slabs of the pavement as if following some indefinable rule. On a closer view: he is taking care to step only into every second square, that is only into the even-numbered ones, and is humming softly to himself as he walks. A small boy, fair-haired, large-eared, very thin. He is wearing a tracksuit, blue trousers and a top, his favourite, with a tiny, hidden pocket at the waist, and inside it is his most treasured possession. He is holding an empy shopping bag in one hand, the exact amount of money he will need in the other: he has been sent to the corner shop to buy baker's yeast and vanilla-flavoured sugar. He is walking, humming to himself, obviously completely lost in the act of walking: his head is lowered, his body leans slightly forward, and his eyes are fixed on the concrete slabs of the pavement to make sure he steps only into every second square. If he sees someone coming, he stops in good time and waits for them to pass rather than make a mistake. He is very thin, large-eared, fair-haired, blue-eyed. The concrete slabs of the pavement are too wide for him so he has to lengthen his stride considerably in order not to step into the wrong square. Because only the even-numbered ones will do: the odd ones in between are out of bounds.

László Krasznahorkai

is the author of three novels and a collection of stories, all of which have also appeared in German. His first novel, Sátántangó *(Satan Tango) was made into a highly praised seven-hour film by Béla Tarr. The English version of* Az ellenállás melankóliája *(1989) appeared in 1998 as* The Melancholy of Resistance, *published in paperback by Quartet Books, translated by George Szirtes, and recently turned into a film by Béla Tarr.*

II

For it all began with Mr Kerekes, the tubby little Romanian cobbler and sexton, who stepped out of his house into Maróthy Square every evening around six o'clock and, ducking his head, would hurry past the window of the parsonage with his inimitable rolling gait, then entering the Orthodox church would climb up the narrow stairs into the tower in the dim light to ring the bells. And it began with Mr Csiszár, repairer of fountain pens, who drew up the iron shutters of the workshop door facing the statue of Ferenc Erkel, composer of the national anthem, every morning at eight o'clock, then glancing into the narrow shop-window to check whether everything was in order there, to make sure neither a pen nor a box of pencils had moved from its place during the night, would enter the shop and sit down behind his table in the high-backed chair specially adapted, in other words cut out and lined to accomodate his hump, light up his favourite brand of cigarette, a Terv, and when he slowly blew the smoke into the air and simultaneously extinguished the match with two quick flicks of the wrist, it was like a signal that announced to the town that the shop was open, they could start bringing their pens to be repaired.

And it began with Lajos Márkizay, the young, good-looking *gimnázium* teacher of mathematics and physics, who every Friday afternoon around three o'clock would take up a pubescent schoolgirl displaying an interest in the art of chess to the observatory at the top of the city water tower, where they would give themselves up entirely to this particular passion until about six o'clock in the evening, when they would lean out of the tower window and, smiling at each other contentedly, remark that everything was much too noisy down below, this was the only place quiet enough for chess.

And then there was the terribly fat Doctor Petrócky, regrettably addicted to drink, renowned for being able to soothe the most fretful, feverish child with just a few well-chosen words, but above all for refusing to cover the distance between patients any other way than on a certain Csepel make of motorcycle despite all well-meant advice and moving entreaties to the contrary, so it was small wonder that he ended up in a ditch with the aforementioned Csepel make of motorcycle at least once a week, for, though in a manner of speaking they had become inseparable companions, even this motorcycle could not keep the perpetually drunken man secure in the seat, as he did nothing along those dangerous roads but tilt, lean, slither, and slide from the seat towards the ditches, potholes and gutters, in other words towards the safety of the ground.

And then there was Uncle Gyula Kovrig, the Catholic priest of Armenian extraction, whose primary interest was stamp collecting; who kept stamp-albums instead of books on the shelves of the glass-fronted oak bookcase in the parlour of the presbytery, and corresponded regularly with sixty-three countries

significant from a philatelic point of view, to exchange a rare piece from his unique collection for an even rarer one.

And then there was Uncle Osy, the lanky, agile, always slightly restless owner of the Százéves pastry-shop, lord of cakes and caramels, who could find no rest among his wares except when he could escape them, before opening in the morning and after closing in the evening, when he would jump onto the saddle of his Czech racing bike, polished until it gleamed, and in the very same pink outfit in which in his youth he had once won a national amateur championship, would push the pedals for hours, making for an imaginary finishing tape.

And then there was Kálmán Nemes, Gyula's one and only true adventurer, who returned to Gyula from his adventures, came back after long years spent in Brazil with a gorgeous Brazilian wife, the black Nadir, who threw the entire town into a fever for months, no, for years, and these two let fly at each other regularly, practically once a week, and to the great consternation and disgust of Gyula, spent entire nights thrashing each other within an inch of their lives, screaming in an unrecognizable language, in other words in Brazilian until—generally towards dawn—they suddenly fell silent, and naturally no one ever understood what could have happened all of a sudden, for how could they have understood, in Gyula, the international nature of exotic passion.

And then there was Uncle Turai, the diminutive master tailor from Románváros, who, lacking the means to express and gratify his unfailing respect for womankind, immersed himself in the esoteric philosophies, and thus became the darling of the women of the town, for to achieve this, that is to become their favourite, their pet, it proved sufficient for these women to realize that Uncle Turai's peculiar, complacent speeches, delivered while taking their measurements, were his way of paying them unconditional and sincere compliments, and besides this it did not matter a scrap that they could not make head or tail of his meaning, could not fathom the direct, rough surface of his message, for how was a woman from Gyula supposed to resolve the question of which philosophical gap was the more unbridgeable: the one between Martin Buber and Angelus Silesius, or the one between Nostradamus and Rozenzweig.

And then there were the other dreamers, the romantic souls: Uncle Halmai, the hairdresser from Maróthy Square, who went about trailing the heaviest cloud of scent, though he could not protest enough that this was not by choice but an occupational hazard he was forced to endure; then there was Uncle Fodor, the rat-catcher, whose dog, a short-legged mongrel of indeterminate age, inspired fear in everyone who saw it crawling on its belly, whimpering and trying to catch people's eye with its own dim eyes blurred with cataracts; and Füredi, the tobacconist, with his legion of plastic toy soldiers and stern gaze, who every so often would sharply hush the noisy hordes of children standing in line in front of the shop; and there was Béla Szabó, the choir-master from Németváros with six exquisitely beautiful daughters, who all came into the world blessed

with an exceptional musical talent, and were brought up in a house where time did not exist, where neither relatives, guests nor friends were ever allowed to set foot, but from whose permanently closed windows music by Corelli, Vivaldi, Lully or Bach filtered out continually into the high street of Németváros—true dreamers all, in short, for all were caught in a strange, unfathomable, floating existence—and even then all this served as a simple background to something unparalleled, for nothing more dreamlike, inexplicable, and untraceable could ever have existed in Central Europe to compare with it.

III

And before the background described above, there were the most mysterious notables of the town, the truest dreamers of all; no one knew for certain where they came from, from what kind of legendary, lost worlds, no one really knew them at all as they had become one with their own legend, which was Gyula itself, for if the local citizens thought of András Herbály, the headmaster of the music school, András Sóky, the psychiatrist, professors Miskolczi, Banner and Páncél, the poet Imre Simonyi, or Gyurka Ladics, then they were actually thinking of Gyula; for it all began with headmaster Herbály, who charmed everyone with his knowledge of music and intelligence, and earned his living as a Scott Joplin-loving bar pianist in the neighbouring villages for years until he was suddenly appointed headmaster of the music school in Gyula; fat director Herbály, who was always short of breath, and went about in an old, shabby suit, and improvised elegant, scathingly sarcastic lectures on the unbearable burden of the so-called structure of life, and on the lethal disease threatening this structure, namely the lack of perfectionism in humans, and dragged himself along the streets so slowly as if perpetually dropping with fatigue, but whenever he came upon an acquaintance, he would stop him with a desperately polite gesture and conduct his greetings with much ceremony, then when the person wished to leave, would switch to an equally lengthy ritual of leave-taking, and dismiss his victim only when the ceremony was completed.

And there was Dr Sóky, chief psychiatrist at the hospital, whom no one in the town had ever dared to accost on account of his wearing his hair long, falling into his eyes, and of whose features it was impossible to decide which was the most alarming: his haircut, or the baleful flash of his eyes when anyone tried to glance into them, for both were truly frightening and raised Sóky to the highest rank on the social scale, though the fact of his living not in Gyula, but in the hospital with his patients was in itself sufficient to upgrade him, and in addition he leased a whole floor over the small shop of the stocking factory for his famous collection of paintings, and the collection worth millions hung there in the silence in the totally empty flat, the doors and windows locked up tight, for

forty years, and senior consultant Soóky visited his paintings only rarely, perhaps twice a year, and even then only in the middle of the night, undesignedly as it were, when the whole of Gyula was sleeping soundly beneath their quilted coverlets.

And then there was professor Miskolczi, who gave up a most promising career in scholarship on account of falling wildly in love with a first cousin; and disregarding the most emphatic moral pressure and general indignation, he moved to Gyula, married the woman who was born there, and had four children by her; the two healthy ones they brought up themselves, the two mentally retarded ones they placed in the local hospital, then both became teachers of English at the local *gimnázium*; professor Miskolczi, who in an age that misrepresented Petőfi and had hardened into national-socialist dementia, would teach nothing except the crisis of twentieth century modernism, and that without any sort of introduction, to the young people whose chosen mode of resistance was lethargic inaction; professor Miskolczi, about whom thousands of extraordinary anecdotes circulated in the city, the most memorable of these being the story of how he subdued the most uncontrollable *gimnázium* class, which he accomplished by going into their classroom, stopping before their desks, and fixing his gaze for a long minute on the top right-hand corner of the room until they fell silent, when with a theatrical gesture he pulled an early edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses* out of his pocket and began to read it in a loud, threatening voice, translating it into Hungarian as he went along, up until the moment the bell rang for break, when he stopped in the middle of the sentence, closed the book, slipped it back into his pocket, and fixing his eyes on the top right-hand corner of an imaginary classroom, walked out into the corridor without a word.

And it all began with Imre Simonyi, the last poet, who one fine spring day dumbfounded the young minds of Gyula collected in front of the Százéves pastry-shop with the intention of familiarizing themselves with the new trends in fashion by walking past them, stopping to break off a sprig of flowers from the acacia leaning over the pavement, walking on toward the Turkish baths twirling the sprig between his fingers, and telling them in passing that a poet was a person who was ready to sacrifice his life at any given moment for a single beautiful line of poetry, a single beautiful actress, or even simply for his homeland; it began with professors Banner and Páncél, assistant masters of Greek and Latin at the *gimnázium,* who gained admission into the Pantheon of Gyula through their custom of addressing each other, whenever one or the other was so inclined, in a friendly manner in Latin on their way back from class during break, a greeting which the other would self-evidently return in Latin, and thus they would proceed towards the staff-room, conversing most eloquently in Latin in their dusty, faded, hundred-year-old suits, between the rows of children struck dumb; that was the way it began, with Uncle Gyurka Ladics, who was a relic of the nineteenth century together with his house and everything that that house con-

tained, Gyurka Ladics who had become a typical representative, a symbol of the town as it were with his unsurpassable, huge German, French and Hungarian library, his exquisite furniture, lamps, piano, his great erudition, and his characteristic affliction of being unable to fall asleep unless he had first read a couple of pages of Goethe or Schiller in the original, for this truly was the way it all began, with Uncle Kerekes and Uncle Turai in the background, with the small streets turned green, the markets, the Mansion, the Castle and the most melancholic railway station in the world, and in the foreground the long line of the truest dreamers, beginning with headmaster Herbály and ending with Uncle Gyurka Ladics, it really did begin this way, they were there, then suddenly something absolutely dreadful happened, one day it all just disappeared, Gyula simply vanished without a trace.

IV

I tried several times to discover what had happened; returning as an adult after over two decades had passed, getting off the train after such a long absence, I noticed at once, at the very first moment that the town was not in its place, and not only was it not in its place, but it was not there at all, and I wandered like one driven and lost in a town that called itself Gyula but was not Gyula, walked up and down the streets and questioned people but in vain, no one knew anything, and no one remembered anything, or what was even worse, remembered wrongly, and tried to speak of a past from which something had been lost, but they either did not know what that something was, or believed it was no great loss, in other words they occupied the town, destroyed what had been and built themselves a new one, making the original one disappear off the face of the earth, then moved in, and pretended nothing had happened, and our of former poetic material created something obscenely, barbarically new, and declared that everything stood as it was, nothing had been changed, but they knew they were lying, and then not even that, for they forgot that they had lied, and in the schools they taught the children about Gyula in the past and in the present, I asked them whether they remembered Uncle Kerekes or Uncle Turai at least, and they said no, we don't remember them, I asked them whether they remembered Professor Herbály, or Gyurka Ladics, and they said no, we don't remember, then I asked them about the poetry that was this town, the culture that laid its foundation and gave it its adornments, the chamber concerts where they played Schumann, Chopin, Beethoven and Mozart, no, no, they said, then I asked them if they remembered Kovrig's stamp collection, or perhaps Soóky's private collection of paintings, no, couldn't I understand, no, they said, shaking their heads and smiling, and I realized that to them, the new inhabitants of the new city, it really would make no difference, it would be no loss, so I stopped asking questions, and found that a revolting disco, pinball arcade and second-

hand clothes shop had replaced the exceptional banqueting hall of the Komló Hotel where county balls used to be held, discovered that the famous Papsor, a shady avenue of legendary beauty running alongside the parish church, had been obliterated by cutting down all the trees, that the Mogyoróssy Library had been removed to the town hall, the town hall removed to the county hall, the county hall to another city and so on, I did not make a detailed evaluation, did not make a list, but one night during my last stay I suddenly found myself alone in the street between Maróthy Square and the former Casino, the streets were quite deserted by then, the silence was complete, there was just a light breeze blowing from the direction of the Castle, I was standing on the corner of Maróthy Square, incapable of moving on, staring straight ahead along the street leading towards the Casino and the old corner shop, when I suddenly registered some kind of movement, a tiny speck on the dimly lit street just beyond the former Casino building, a small dot advancing in a somewhat peculiar manner, but by then I already knew what it was, a small boy, proceeding methodically along the concrete slabs of the pavement as if following an indefinable rule, upon closer view I saw that he was taking care to step only into every second square, that is only into the even-numbered ones, humming softly to himself as he walked, a small boy, I thought, fair-haired, big-eared, very thin, wearing a tracksuit, blue trousers and a top, his favourite: with a tiny, a hidden pocket at the waist, and inside it his most treasured possession, holding a shopping bag in one hand, the exact amount of money he will need in the other: he has been sent to the corner shop to buy baker's yeast and vanilla-flavoured sugar, he is walking along, humming, obviously completely lost in the act of walking: his head is lowered, his body leans slightly forward and his eyes are fixed on the concrete slabs of the pavement to make sure he steps only into every second square, he is very thin, large-eared, fair-haired, blue-eyed, and the concrete slabs of the pavement are too wide for him so he has to lengthen his stride considerably in order not to step into the wrong square, because only the even-numbered ones will do, the odd ones in between are out of bounds, and in an indescribable daze, in unexpressible sorrow I see that there won't be anyone here to speak of him to, as he walks along, stepping only into the even-numbered squares, never into the odd ones— so it will be to you that I will tell what I came to realize in that daze: that even if I were to set off after him, I'd never manage to catch up with him to tell him not to go on. ❧

Translated by Eszter Molnár

György Petri

Poems

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri

A Smile

I'm going to die and pretty soon, too.
This makes me feel slightly dizzy—not unlike
what I felt as a lad when I'd just started smoking:
the first few drags I'd take at a cigarette
on the balcony in the morning. It's long since passed,
of course, as so many other things have.
Now, though, of all those things just one has stayed
and (God be thanked for it!) it is still there.
The keen, inquisitive hunger of the eye,
the pleasure of looking—everything seen pure joy,
each thing in its own way:
equally beautiful—clear honey and tar
and the intertwining pipes in a boiler-room
wrapped round in fibre-glass and silver foil.
Or the turquoise silence of a mountain lake
amid blue pines in glass-cold air. Or on the asphalt
a fag-packet, chucked away, that's aimlessly,
noisily, flapping about at the will
of the changing wind. The smile
of a small, pale, old woman with sunken gums,

György Petri

has had two volumes of poems published in English translation.
(Night Song of the Personal Shadow: Selected Poems, *1991*, Eternal Monday, *1999*),
both translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri, and both published by Bloodaxe.
The poet died on July 16 as this issue was going to press.

a teardrop like yellow resin in the corner of her eye,
as also the hint of a double chin
on a firm-fleshed young girl flashing white teeth
and doing so, perhaps, just a little too much.
But this does not matter: flaws
are the source and spice of beauty. Then, too,
the legs of working women embroidered with varicose veins
and the fishwife at the market, her frozen, purple hands
slimy with catfish mucus and carp blood...
For the angel is in the detail.

Epigram

It's time to die: I'm bored with the state of being.
I'd welcome stomach cancer or oedema of the lungs.
My time on earth is duller than words can say—
I've no taste for myself though I still have some self-respect.
I am clearing myself away.

*He Thinks of his Fellow-Poet, L.S.**

By now I've come to feel so bloody bored
simply with being here that, at the thought
of staying another week, I almost crave
the freedom just to rot in a mass grave.

How I got here I cannot understand.
You've got to keep on scoffing. A vast band
of cretins croaks around me. What a pain!
Better to put a bullet in my brain.

Yes, I'm like a watermelon on your name-day—
full of God's piss by then is what they say.
How long must I endure all this? Oh shit!
To have to wait for death in murderous heat.

You've made it, Lawrence, to the other world;
your teeming brain has turned into sheer mud.
When, quite soon now, the psalm is sung for me,
receive your fellow-poet up there kindly.

I don't believe that in any circumstance
the dead can meet, but let's suppose by chance
there did occur some mystical whatever
and we came back again like the hay-fever.

Then we'd both bitch about Illyés and Babits,
and in the fair Elysian fields pick poppies;
your Elizabeth on a cloudlet with your Clara,
my Maya on a storm-cloud with my Sarah.

Till then, alas, my Mary's not being here
seals me off as a cheese-dish does the cheese.
May Lethe surge and overflow its shore
and a voice from heaven call me to my ease.

* L.S. is Lőrinc Szabó (1900–1957), a poet Petri admires but could not have met. Lőrinc is the Hungarian form of Lawrence. Once St Lawrence's day, 10th August, has passed, watermelons are too watery to be good: "He pissed into it like Lawrence into a melon" is a popular Hungarian saying.

What a Shame

What a shame to die this way,
just now, when things could be OK—
though even like this it's not too *bad:*
I'll go quietly, almost glad
to mix with water, leafmould, clay,
thawed snow, showers of a summer's day
and autumn leaves that smell like booze.
The quiet hill waits for my repose—
and say, Will the muses of my song
rest there beside me before long?
(I'd go there right away, but who
will care for Mari if I do?
And who will bring her flowers home
when I am gnawed at by the worm?

Attila Vári

Aiago Eleonora

(Short story)

At that spot the river narrowed andquickened, but the forest fringing it had been cutdown a good while back so that from the water, with the piles of waste-rock around the gravel-pit, it seemed like a canal in the desert, the water rushing into sand-grey desolation.

We were supposed to produce two cubic metres of sifted gravel per day. The sifting served only to stop stones of the wrong size getting in the mixers, which the modern Italian machines would announce by grinding to a halt.

The protesting screech of the machines sounded exactly like Eleonora, the water-carrier donkey, braying after the foal that had been taken from her.

I think there were about eighty of us in the work camp. All fourteen years old, and if we wanted to fulfil the production target we had to shovel gravel from morning to night in water that came up to our knees.

A shingle-dredger worked alongside us, and the young recruit who operated the machine would send us to fetch him cigarettes or beer, but as he never gave us any money (where would he have got the money from) in return he would always scoop enough gravel onto the bank that there was never any trouble over the norm.

The shingle-dredger did little work, the men who mixed the concrete did not need that much raw material. For the most part it just stood there, puffing smoke like a steam engine, and when it was working it sent up such a huge cloud of steam into the sky that you could easily mistake it for a smaller stormcloud.

They did not make much progress with the road because the Italian machines ran on tracks and required only as much concrete as their huge rollers could spread over the crushed basalt, and in the meanwhile the roadworkers laid hot tar over the strips of paper on the macadam.

Attila Vári,

a Hungarian writer from Transylvania, Romania, is now a civil servant in Budapest.
He started by scripting and shooting television documentaries
but switched to writing and has published more than a dozen volumes of fiction.

For all that, we still had to fulfil the norm.In the beginning we slogged away like crazy, but soon realized that after lights-out the shingle-dredger always churned up the piles of gravel we heaped into regular pyramids before knocking off, and though the name-plates were there beside the tricolour on its pole stuck into the regulation piles, it made no difference, because at the evening lowering of the flag they named whoever they wished the outstanding worker.

Eleonora, the donkey, would nuzzle the boys standing stiffly at attention around the flag because she knew we would always give her something. Sweets or potatoes, but she loved cigarette-butts the best, and because she always bit us whenever she smelled a titbit in our pockets, we called her Aiago Eleonora.

Military order was maintained in the camp.

A bugle-call roused us at six, and after the compulsory morning drill, but before breakfast, we formed into a square to salute the colours. The flag was carried in by the outstanding workers in slow step. One of them held it aloft with stiffening arms while the other two kept their right hand raised in salute during the march-past, but what mattered was that the tricolour Romanian flag had to be guarded all day until it was lowered.

An outstanding worker could not serve as a guard.

An outstanding worker was given half a day off. Those who failed to fulfil the norm were supposed to make up for the time the outstanding workers missed, but Comrade Gerasim, the commander of the camp, contrived to make the selection of the colour guard the means of real punishment.

It was mostly soldiers who worked on the road construction, and soldiers who cooked for the youth camp, but it was generally the colour guard whom they sent to run errands for them.

They'd send him to fetch vinegar, or salt, or to take a message to the soldiers working on the road construction that there would be cabbage soup for lunch, as if they had not been having cabbage soup for lunch for weeks, and by the time the poor wretch got back, the flag would be gone, stolen off the pole, and at evening parade, when the flag would normally have been lowered with a fanfare of trumpets, the victim had to confess that he had not been vigiliant enough, and had caused damage to the people's democracy.

Eleonora became frolicsome as soon as she saw the flag, because beside her usual fare, colourful things were first on the list of delicacies her voracious appetite demanded, a rare treat.

She ate the cover page of the women's association weekly because it was in colour, the junior school reader from cover to cover because it had colour prints on every page, she chewed to bits the tricolour stuck into the piles of gravel, but the moment the bugle-call sounded for the hoisting of the flag, Eleonora quitened down.

For this was the commander's great moment, and perhaps Eleonora hoped that the crew-cut dictator would give her back Muci, her foal, so she never bit

him, not even when the commander, assuming the pompous pose of an orator, began to wave coloured postcards about in the middle of the square.

The post.

This was the time Comrade Gerasim meted out just punishment. This could be anything from an impossible three cubic metres of gravel to be produced the next day, or the peeling of potatoes for the whole camp; it was also the time for handing out the letters from home to those worthy of receiving them, but for the most part he withheld the news, saying that we were still undeserving of our family's affection.

But what he enjoyed most of all was stirring up trouble between the strong boys and the weaker ones.

That is why he introduced the aiago.

We were familiar with the aiago, but we would never have thought that it could be done in the square before the flag, in the careu. Because until then it had been something we did for kicks, a way to pass the time in the dormitories, and Varga, who was the first to undergo it in public as a means of punishment, wouldn't let well enough alone.

For the aiago you needed a loser and a handkerchief, and another person who would bite the victim's bum through the snotty handkerchief.

This other person was usually another loser, but we never took this seriously, as the one who bit was called names like bum-sucker or arse-licker, while the victim could make the most of his sufferings, pretend he could not sit because of the pain, and could order the others to "bring me a pillow to put under my bum".

But Comrade Gerasim did not tolerate subtle deception. With him, the aiago had to be done properly, until blood was drawn.

Little Adam, a bespectacled boy barely the size of a kindergarden child, was told to bite Varga, the strongest boy in the camp so hard that the blood should seep through the handkerchief.

And Adam cried all night, though we all tried to pacify him, even Varga, who told him that this was nothing compared to what Gerasim would be getting from him in the end.

And if Gerasim had had any sense he would never have picked on Varga.

If for no other reason, then simply because the camp was about two hours' walking distance from the town—the camp where we were obliged to work because anyone who could not bring certification of summer work could not enroll in secondary school—but even Gerasim should have known that Varga wrote letters every day, because everyone knew that Varga's purebred German shepherd came to the washery, which was our name for the gravel-pit, every morning, bringing a letter in his collar, and on the clean back of it Ivan sent back his reply in Cyrillic script, and if Comrade Gerasim had been smart enough to put two and two together, he should have deduced that in our generation only com-

mies christened their sons Ivan before the war, and even if he had had no other warning that Ivan Varga was the wrong person to pick a quarrel with, he should at least have asked himself whether this Varga might not be related to Comrade Varga, the general commanding the military garrison, who was known to be a Hero of the Soviet Union all over the town.

But Comrade Gerasim was a fool, he did not even check the personal files, which would have told him that Ivan Varga was born on May 5th 1944, in Leningrad, father's name Dimitru Varga, mother's name Jelizaveta, because then he would have realized that he, secretary of the Young Communist League, a small power, had picked a fight with a great power.

Though Varga had never made his power felt, had never let on that he had been on hunts with the comrades, and that his uncle, arriving from Moscow, was brought in from the station in a black limousine with curtained windows.

There were no such cars in the provinces. The armoured Chaika always came from Bucharest, and the driver, also a comrade, waited by the sleeping-car from which Uncle Serjiosha always emerged sleepy-eyed, raz-dva-tri, he would roar, waving his arms about, and the railwaymen were afraid of him because he had once spied a jackdaw strutting between the tracks, and had emptied his gun at it, but a glancing bullet had blinded one of the signalmen, and the investigation had established that Sergei Ivanovich had used his handgun lawfully, as he could not have seen anything in the morning mist but a dark shadow advancing on him.

We knew there'd be trouble over subjecting Varga to the aiago, but would never have guessed that Ivan was capable of things neither Jules Verne nor Karl May had ever described, though we'd read their books and knew all about Skipetar and Indian campaigns of revenge. Things adults had long forgotten.

Retaliatory action began the next day, but Gerasim believed it to be an accidental event.

Caesar, the trained German shepherd, jumped on him by the washery, brought him down into the sludge, and held him there, lying on the muddy gravel for over an hour. The führer as we called him could not move an inch, because the moment the snarling animal felt him give the slightest quiver, it sank its teeth into his throat. Then Varga, who had been watching events from a distance, handed Adam a bit of rag for the dog to scent, and this, coupled with the command "home", got him to leave his victim and set off towards the town at a slow trot.

In the evening we formed a square around the colours and Comrade Gerasim dragged Adam beneath the flag pole by the ear.

"The dog of this wicked boy, this hoodlum", he began to roar, for the secretary of the Young Communist League was accustomed to speaking solely in a roar, but at that moment Eleonora made a rush at him, because we had rubbed his shirt, which had been drying on the clothesline all day, with pipe tobacco,

and the donkey thought it would be getting a human-sized butt in addition to the appetizer of coloured flag, and the führer fell flat on his back, and Eleonora tugged happily at the flag. She tugged it left and right, vertically and horizontally. She was like a sailor giving flag signals, and no one expected Gerasim to take out his Mauser from its wooden pistol-case and begin shooting at random at the donkey he had deprived of her foal.

Maybe the first shot found its mark and killed Eleonora; that we were given donkey meat to go with the cabbage the next day is also beside the point.

This story is about the revenge of Ivan Varga.

About Ivan, who pried out one of the bullets from the flag pole with his penknife, then, stabbing a clamp nail disinfected with benzine into his thigh, made a hole big enough to slip the brass bullet beneath his skin.

The next day he hobbled out to the washery and Caesar took home the message in consequence of which, a couple of hours later, military police marched into the labour camp.

They took photographs of the bullet hole in the flag pole, the pool of blood left by Eleonora, and finally a civilian doctor asked for photographs of our aiagoed butts, and the ambulance took away three boys besides Ivan on whose butts the bite-marks had become infected.

Comrade Gerasim was sentenced to twenty-five years, and because he had heard that I was helping former political prisoners, that I had compiled a small archive of the testimonies of the victims of the autocracy, of their available case records, he paid me a visit and asked me to issue an official statement attesting that he was a victim of the Muscovite dictatorship.

"If you please, sir," he said, obsequiously crumpling his cap, probably not even suspecting that I still bore the marks of the aiago on my butt, and that during that summer he had represented Stalinism at its most barbarous for me, "I need it for the pension."

"Did you eat donkey meat in prison?" I asked, but the fearsome slave-driver of my teenage years, the stern upholder of principle, stared at me uncomprehendingly.

"I may have. They made us eat all kinds of rubbish in there," he said, and did not understand why I would not sign that statement unless it was drawn up by Ivan Dimitrievich Varga, currently living in Moscow. ❧

Translated by Eszter Molnár

György Csepeli

Transition Blues

The Roots of Pessimism

On November 3, 1872, the popular Budapest magazine *Hon* published the first pages of *Novel of the Next Century* by the celebrated writer Mór Jókai. The first lines relate that Árpád II, King of Hungary and of the House of Habsburg, woke up in his palace on Buda's Castle Hill on July 15, 1952 and prepared to take part in the celebrations commemorating his predecessor, Árpád, who had led the Magyar tribes into the Carpathian Basin in 896 AD. The novel's first readers were pleased to share Jókai's dream of a twentieth century in which Hungary was to become the centre of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and an overwhelming majority of Hungarians were to dominate the Carpathian Basin.

When the "silent", "non-violent", "velvet" or "negotiated" revolutions of 1989 occurred, people living in the various Soviet satellite countries probably thought that the issue at stake was political change. In fact, it was the closed circle of economic dependency that had to be broken, simply because there were no more resources left. The extent of the economic crisis was immediately shown by the rise in unemployment, in inflation, in the rapid dimunition of social welfare. In Hungary's case, the economic consequences of the defeat of her ally in the Cold War could righfully be compared with the losses she sustained as a result of the defeat of her previous ally in the Second World War. Other socialist countries were manifesting the same symptoms.

Through the change to a market economy and democracy, a long and painful restoration process has begun in Hungary and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Due to her earlier economic experiments, Hungary was in a slightly better position at the outset yet this made little difference to Hungarians who have become increasingly frustrated as time went by. According to opinion polls, 33 per cent of Hungarian adults responded optimistically in 1987; this figure dropped to 11 per cent in 1991 and ten years after Hungary's "negotiated" revolution it is still no higher than 18 per cent.[1] The attitudes of Hungarians toward a market economy and political democracy have been annnually examined by the Taylor Nelson Sofres Modus Agency. Initially the response to a market economy was favourable. Two-thirds of the popula-

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1 ■ *TÁRKI Monitor,* Budapest, 2000.

tion approved the idea of introducing a market economy and only 2 per cent expressed disapproval. In 1998 the approval rate had dropped to 41 per cent and the disapproval rate had actually risen to 32 per cent. The favourable response to democracy has been no greater. In 1991, 60 per cent of the population were dissatisfied with the pace of democratic development in the country and 30 per cent were satisfied. Nine years later there has been little change: dissatisfaction grew by four per cent and satisfaction grew by two per cent.[2]

In comparison with people in other former socialist countries, Hungarians seem definitely more frustrated. According to a survey carried out in 1995, 75 per cent of adult Romanians expressed satisfaction concerning the general economic and political course of the country. The corresponding figure was the same in Albania and considerably higher rates of satisfaction were recorded in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia. Among Hungarians, only 14 per cent were satisfied with the post-socialist economic and political course. (In that year the most dissatisfied respondents were the Bulgarians.)[3]

A tremendous change occurred in how and where Hungarians worked during the years of transition. Under state socialism there was no unemployment. Forty-eight per cent of the population were employed in 1970 and forty-six in 1988. In 1994, however, the employment rate had fallen to 38 per cent and in 1998 to 37 per cent. As a consequence, unemployment rose to 11 per cent in 1994 (and was between 7 and 8 per cent in 1999). The labour market has become increasingly constricted and those who dropped out of the market have had to resort to pensions or various other forms of welfare benefits, which have diminished in value. Due to Hungary's low birth rate, the population is decreasing and this decrease is accelerated by a low life expectancy. The only good demographic news is a fall in the traditonally high suicide rate, which up to 1989 was the highest in Europe.

The post-Communist societies were faced with two major novelties in their economies, both of which they were equally unprepared for: entrepreneurship and unemployment. According to a Household Panel Survey carried out in Hungary between 1992 and 1996, 43 per cent of households were not affected by either of these novelties. More than one-third of households, however, experienced unemployment. In 6 per cent of households unemployment and entrepreneurship both occurred but the entrepreneurs had failed. Equally, 6 per cent of entrepreneurs from housholds affected by unemployment proved to be successful.

Entrepreneurship and unemployment in Hungarian households (1992-96)

No unemployment, no entrepreneurship	43
Unemployment, no entrepreneurship	32
Unemployment, entrepreneurship with failure	6
Unemployment, entrepreneurship with success	6
No unemployment, entrepreneurship with failure	4
No unemployment, entrepreneurship with success	9

Source: Kolosi-Sági, p. 63

2 ■ *Magyarország Politikai Évkönyve.* Budapest, pp. 755; 751.

3 ■ *Magyarország Politikai Évkönyve.* Budapest, p. 570.

Entrepreneurship was also an option for households where there was no unemployment. Some of these attempts succeeded, some of them failed. Finally, there are households which were not affected by unemployment, and entrepreneurship occurred, and the enterprise turned out to be a full success. These data refer to households where the husband or wife were young enough to work. Considering all households, the remarkable thing was continuity (lack of unemployment, lack of entrepreneurship) at no less than 63 per cent.

The losers and winners of the transition are easy to distinguish in sociological terms. The upper echelons of the new social structure consist of educated, young entrepreneurs, employees of multinational firms, those who were classified as intellectuals, who have shifted to the media or business and, of course, the clients of the political elite. The upper and the upper middle class make up 10 per cent of households. The middle class is made up of two subgroups. The difference between the two subgroups is the willingness or unwillingness to save and invest. Those in the first subgroup (14 per cent) do not spend all their income, they save and invest. The other subgroup (17 per cent) is readier for consumption, making *carpe diem* their slogan. The lower classes have little to save and even less to spend. As losers, we can list the unemployed (whether registered or unregistered), those employed by any organization financed by the central or local government. At the bottom of the social structure, there is an underclass in the making; it mainly consists of the Roma, who cannot cope with the negative economic consequences of capitalism and are, simultaneously, perceived as parasites and stigmatized as born criminals. Altogether, 59 per cent of the population is not participating in the benefits of the transition from state socialism to a market economy.

There is no real shortage of hard facts when we try to discover the causes of the frustration and anger felt by the majority in contemporary Hungary. Yet, the extent of the discontent, the extent of political alienation, is more widespread than would follow from the hard facts available. Foreign observers of the transiton process are in agreement in their positive judgment. They maintain that the economy has been privatized, Hungary has become a NATO member and, in a relatively short time, will be a full member of the EU. There are no insoluble problems. Earlier attempts to close the perceived gap with Western Europe were doomed to failure because Hungarians were in the grip of an illusion that they would be able to reconquer the Carpathian Basin. When this dream faded, a new utopia was imposed on Hungary by a foreign and occupying power. Once the Soviet troops had gone, Hungarians were alone, bearing the unbearable lightness of freedom. And they are again unhappy. What happened?

The socio-psychological legacy of backwardness

To explain the socio-psychological failure of the transiton process in Hungary, we have to turn to four categories of causes. The first is a set of socio-psychological causes which stem from Hungarians' experience of their past.

■ **Authoritarianism**. Those who live in the post-communist and democratic present were socialized in the socialist past and their families had grown up in a nationalist, authoritarian past. No experience of freedom and responsibility could have been inherited. Survival in Hungary depended upon roles and values which are opposed to those of democracy and a full-fledged market economy. The socio-psychological

legacy of backwardness still haunts the country. After all, authoritarianism had paid off. People inclined to behave as democrats were persectuted or forced into exile, with no place in the public sphere, being labelled as rebels or dangerous deviants.

■ **Paternalism.** Paternalism was greatly preferred to risk-taking and the assumption of individual responsibility. State, Church and other institutions, all beyond individual controll were considered as major agents for the wellbeing of the individual; the individual was not supposed to do anything in order to improve his or her lot. Generations were brought up experiencing the futility of achievement and motivation. Regularly repeated economic collapses (in 1918–20, in 1944–45 and in 1989–90) demonstrated that there is no way to escape. People came to learn that both curse and blessing stem from the state.

■ **Learned helplessness**. What developed was a sort of learned helplessness that made it impossible for the individual to believe in the possibility of controlling his or her own destiny through internalized drives, such as motivation, effort, knowledge or skills. The legal constituents of a national identity centred around citizenship have never been in place. Hungary had no written constitution until 1949. Although that paid lip service to human rights, it in fact took away these rights. There was no internationally recognized independent Hungarian state before 1920. Consequently, before 1920 there was no such thing as Hungarian citizenship. Even after 1920 the semantic content of the category of Hungarian was subject to arbitrary judgment; it was also dependent on the actual pattern of discourse on national culture and ethnic identity. This made possible the enactment of a series of anti-Jewish laws (in 1939, 1939 and 1941) and these made easier the acceptance of the exclusion of persons with Jewish origins from the national community. Universal suffrage was introduced in 1920 but the right to vote in national elections was severely restricted. Local government authorities were overwhelmed by the power of the central government.

■ **Culture of complaint.** The state had subjects rather than citizens conscious of their rights and duties. The tendency to be invisible to the state has developed as the most striking manifestation of the unbalanced relationship between the state and its subjects. Taxes were considered a tribute, an exorbitant charge levied by the state. Tax evasion was a virtue rather than a vice. As a consequence of the fear of retribution, people assumed a peculiar style of discourse, enabling them to present themselves more negatively then they really are. The socio-psychological benefits of complaint exceeded the costs stemming from depression and discontent. On the other hand, there were no financial institutions willing to provide credit. One of the greatest of Hungarian liberals, Count István Széchenyi, as early as 1830, pointed out the fatal socio-psychological consequences of the lack of credit: the complete lack of personal trust. Had institutions such as banks and markets provided credit, the patterns of complaint would have failed. Anyone interested in getting credit would have had to present him or herself in positive terms. Success, the drive to succeed or to dwell on eminent achievements, would have become leading motifs in a self-image. The tendency to a self-presentation in terms of failure, loss, trouble, suffering, catastrophe, illness, aloofness pays off only in circumstances where one has to constantly fear being coerced to pay by outside insitutions.

The strategy of negative self-presentation has developed as a means of survival.

Strategies of positive self-presentation could not develop because there were no incentives. Indulgence in negative self-presentation rather than pride or striving for succcess has permeated the dominant patterns of discourse on the individual and the collective identity. The proverbial Hungarian was someone able to cry and laugh simultaneously. Women were not involved in this discourse. Moreover, in the nature of a socio-psychological construct, the image of the self has a tendency to be internalized. Negative self-presentation on the individual and collective levels has become a self-fulfilling prophecy which made the worst nightmares come true.

■ **Enslaving liberation.** Strengthening the socio-psychological patterns of backwardness, state socialism added new elements to the behavioural stock of survival. Modernization was not an organic change but a series of forced and ill-fated acts of coercion. Elemér Hankiss was right to characterize modernization under state socialism as a negative process which was more successful in abolishing the remnants of a feudal social structure than in creating new institutions with a potential to produce intense economic growth. State socialism was based on redistribution of goods and resources. The design of redistribution was conceived as something rational. In this system of social reproduction no space was left for public control, individual responsibilty and initiative. No manifestation of autonomy of the actors was tolerated. Under János Kádár's leadership, however, a second economy emerged which was more flexible in fulfilling individual needs and provided a separation between reality and the system. Individualization was on the way. Because there were no autonomous communities, and civic society was not allowed to strengthen, individualization proved to be a trajectory where individual actors played their zero sum game according to the rules of the prisoner's dilemma. The Church was deprived of its earlier privileges and secularization took place. People living under state socialism abandoned God and, simultaneously, they were also abandoned by God. Values disappeared, transcendence was considered a liability.

■ **Negative identity.** As a result of negative modernization, social identity became negative, too. Confronted with the question "Who am I?" instead of referring to themselves in affirmative terms, people formulated negative statements. They knew only who they were not. Categories of self-identification such as gender, class, professional group, generation, religious affiliation, region, political value orientation, cultural preference were not to be communicated in public. Choosing official categories such as proletariat, Communist, worker, peasant and "socialist intellectual" was not appealing.

■ **Doublespeak.** The public world and the private world never met. The people living in these two worlds were of course the same and they learned how to switch from one world to the other.

The results of a study on political socialization illustrate the "doublespeak" of the age of state socialism. A representative sample of teenagers is Budapest was questioned on the evaluation of the words "socialism" and "capitalism". The teenagers echoed the official pattern of evaluation and, consequently, they characterized socialism in excessively positive terms while attributing negative traits to capitalism. After the completion of these questions the same respondents were asked about the countries where they would have liked to stay with their families for at least a year. They were also asked about those countries, where they would not have liked to stay at all. Ironicallly, the teenagers show-

ed a tendency to prefer capitalist countries. Socialist countries were mentioned as places where they had no desire to go.

■ **The enduring category.** The category of nation was an exception. People continued to identify with the nation. Because there was no public discourse on the concept of the nation the people, under the umbrella of a shared national category, were unaware of the diverse and profoundly conflicting images of the Hungarian nation. There were Hungarians who, referring to the nation, included the Hungarian minorities abroad and there were Hungarians whose national identity rested upon citizenship. The clash of ethnic and legal definitions of the nation gained importance only later.

■ **Patterns of behaviour.** The unexpected and abrupt change of system in 1989/90 found people completely unprepared. In fact, the socio-psychological legacy of backwardness and the socio-psychological patterns of behaviour developed under state Socialism were in conflict with the expectations of a new system which stressed entrepreneurship, risk-taking, achievement, responsibility and self-help.

■ **Passivity.** In the twentieth century, Hungarians experienced at least eight changes in their political system. All these changes were instigated from the outside. Systems have come and gone like the seasons. Hungarian political culture, as a consequence, lacked patterns of responsibility and individual causation. An individual can only be held responsible for those events which the individual had caused. The turning points in Hungarian history are embedded in narratives where the only actors are alien, mostly impersonal, powers. According to the dominant narrative, Hungarians suffer or feel happiness. The narrative undoubtedly gives much more room to the former than the latter. Neither of these states are perceived as the results of internal causes.

From 1989, the same pattern of experience was set in motion. As if by a miracle, Soviet troops left. The constitution was rewritten. For the first time in the history of the country the rule of law was established. Freedom arrived. People, however, had not experienced self-liberation. They may have felt liberated, but no sane Hungarian could claim that victory was the result of the efforts of Hungarians themselves. The heroes of the success were Gorbachev, Reagan, Kohl. Victory could not be called "our" victory. Freedom was again brought by others, just as it had been in 1945.

Because no causal relation was seen between people and freedom, there was no drive to reduce the cognitive dissonance resulting from the harsh economic measures introduced and the ensuing hardships. The new system was not chosen, it was given to the people by a stroke of fortune which turned into misfortune. Frustration and resentiment deepened and nostalgia for the good old socialist days (when everybody had a job, there was no delinquency, equality was the dominant value) developed. Security turned to be more important than liberty. People were increasingly anxious because of their living conditions. Anxiety repressed the desire to be free.

■ **Loss of security.** Under state socialism, there was a sense of security in both living conditions and in the epistemology of life. People did or did not believe in the official political and ideological formulations that propagated the superiority of socialism over capitalism and in the benefits of being occupied by the Soviet Army. At the same time, there was an alternative belief system that propagated the superiority of capitalism over socialism and the benefits of belonging to the free world. It was tak-

en for granted that one of these belief systems was true and the other one was false. No one was in doubt about the existence of Truth and people differred only as regards the belief system they considered to manifest Truth. Naturally, the truth perpetuated by the system was perceived as a lie by subjects, and what subjects thought as truth was labelled as lies by the authorities.

With the arrival of freedom of speech, competing values and ideas emerged in public; newspaper readers, radio listeners and television viewers were confronted by an embarrassing diversity of messages. Epistemological security was lost forever. People were irritated to discover that, except for the sciences, there is no belief which could be proven as false or true. It is up to the individual to choose among ideas and values.

■ **The frustrations of over-abundance.** There was hardly any experience of choice in the past. Under state Socialism, even the choice of goods and services was limited. Choosing between ideas and competing beliefs was unheard of. The outside dictatorship over society was internalized. Unable to choose, because of their past socialization, people became increasingly uncertain at discovering a world in the making which made them to choose between goods, services, values and ideas. An abundance of new questions were raised in the public sphere and no answers were found. These questions were of vital importance. Lacking the deeply-embedded political and ideological value systems that stem from mainstream European political ideologies (such as social democracy, liberalism, and conservativism), tendencies such as populism, demagoguery, ethnocentrism disguised as nationalism and racism developed and resorted to nationalism as a means to finding answers to all questions. People were forced to realize that there are no final answers to the historical and social realities which surrounded them. What is equality and inequality? Were Hungarians responsible for the deportation of Jews in 1944? Can Communism be compared with National Socialism? Should the Trianon Treaty be revised? These and many similar questions were raised; startingly enough people discovered there are as many stocks of equally valid knowledge as interests.

■ **Nationalism.** As already pointed out, nationalism was the only category which sustained itself all through the vicissitudes of the state-Socialist period. Those who lost in the transition found justification and explanation in the stock of knowledge that nationalism provided. National commitment was conceived as a shield against the dangers and threats unleashed by the political and economic globalization which was perceived as enemy number one. Those who won and those who lost during the transition from state Socialism to a market economy and political pluralism have created a polarity between parochial nationalism and openess to the world. Only the future will show which will be dominant.

The legacies of backwardness and state Socialism had much the same influence in Hungary as elsewhere in Central Europe. The socio-psychological balance of benefits and costs in all Central Europan countries was negative. The institutional and structural successes of the transition, however, were blurred in Hungary by two additional factors, which can be related to the national character.

■ **National Character.** The first was referred to earlier as the culture of complaint. Due to the lack of credit-oriented self-presentation, generations of Hungarians were socialized to present themselves in negative terms, in order to avoid paying tribute. As a result, a dominant pat-

tern of collective self-presentation has evolved which centered on misfortune, suffering, negative self-evaluation, discontent and criticism for its own sake. The transition to Europa will be complete when Hungarians discover how dysfunctional and harmful the strategy of complaint is as the dominant method of self-presentation.

A second factor has also been mentioned. Under state socialism, Hungarians were convinced that their country was, as the saying went, "the gayest barracks in the Gulag". Hungarians evaluated their standard of living, satisfaction with the socialist system, sense of justice, human rights, even freedom by comparing Hungary to other countries in the Soviet Empire such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania or Bulgaria. The comparisons in all dimensions and at all times were unequivocally positive. But with the collapse of the Soviet Empire, this Eastern frame of reference was no longer valid and was suddenly replaced by a Western frame of reference. This shift of frames of reference immediately caused frustration. The individual remained the same, his car remained the same, nor did his salary change. Comparing themselves to Austrians, Germans or to the Dutch, Hungarians could not help feel frustrated.

As against Mór Jókai's prophecy, the twentieth century was not a century that Hungrians could enjoy. The question is, however, what conclusions can be drawn. Unless Hungarians realize that what they have to reconquer and rebuild does not rest in the material dimension but in the world of the spirit, progress will be unlikely. They will have to recreate themselves to end the long downward trajectory imposed on them by history. Should they manage to do so in our new century, the result will certainly be of more interest than Jókai's vision of 1872. ❧

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The Danube embankment in the Watertown

Attila Batár

Transmitting and Denying History

The Watertown in Budapest

Now that the Tabán and Óbuda quarters have been demolished, Watertown (Víziváros) and the Castle District are the sole surviving quarters in which Budapest's rich past is still to be seen. The street pattern, that dates from the Middle Ages, ensures continuity even if the houses themselves have shed the traces of the centuries. The repeated ravages of time have brought new buildings, and the remnants of buildings of various ages are scattered here, there and everywhere in the quarter. The demolition that goes with reconstruction and the building of the new have also interfered with the visible linear chronology of historical development: buildings of the same age, especially the old, are rarely side by side. Eighteenth-century buildings stand next to recently completed ones, the Baroque next to the modern, and the following building may well be Neoclassical. History manifests itself in fits and starts. Vacant lots, the fruits of destruction, are likewise scattered here and there. These unsystematic absences have added to the heterogenous character of the quarter. Because of all this, no particular age, nor any sense of the process of history, creates the character of this district: it is rather the argument of contradictory parts, disorder, interruption and intermixture that prevails, with the only permanent thing being the street pattern. Watertown both transmits and denies history.

A panorama of waves

And yet, for all this, Watertown as seen from Pest, across the Danube, presents an integrated view. Differing forms, scales, colours, the many lively details from afar appear as playful elements in constant strife, combining to create a mosaic. Differences break up but also enrich the view of Watertown, framed as it

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is by the Buda Hills, the system of fortifications, the buildings on the river bank and by the Danube itself.

A hill defines Watertown, and beyond it are distant and higher hills. The contours of the Royal Castle surf in harmony with them. Yet Castle Hill stands alone between the steep sugar-loaf of Gellért Hill on one side and the rising slopes of Rose Hill (Rózsadomb), Mount Matthias (Mátyás-hegy), Hermit Hill (Remetehegy) and Three Limits Hill (Hármashatárhegy) on the other. Castle Hill (Várhegy), lower than its neighbours, is a stretched out plateau, broken off at the edges right all around. The slope that rises steeply from the river bank would turn it into an acropolis, even in the absence of buildings. Watertown, reflected in the Danube, stands out sharply from the more obscure distant background. The eye is attracted by the scintillating buildings, by a building density higher than that of the garden-covered green hills and by the glitter as the roofs, steeples and windows reflect the light. Ultimately this urban slope was given a crown: ramparts, palaces, the Fisherman's Bastion (Halászbástya), churches, and the residential quarters of the Castle District. This massive unity above has made possible for the heterogenous Watertown below it to carry on with its pranks.

Framed by hill and water

Watertown is pressed between two clear horizontal frames. At the top fortifications and ramparts create one, the base is the wide current of the Danube, and a dividing line is provided by the Margaret Boulevard (Margit körút) in the valley and its continuation, Bem József Street. The upper, the contours of the Castle, is solid in structure and material, a confirmation for which is the images associated with the stones of the fortress and the respect in which the palace is held. This horizontal is, however, frequently broken by irregularities due to a variety of forms—dome, bastions, towers—the varying heights of buildings and the gaps between them. At the bottom, the triple line of river, riverbank, and the houses on the bank create an enclosing line that is more even than that at the top. The conjunction of the two zones is furthered by the green belt that

stretches between Watertown and its fringes. The trees on the river bank and the park under the Castle ramparts above allow the quarter they encompass to breathe.

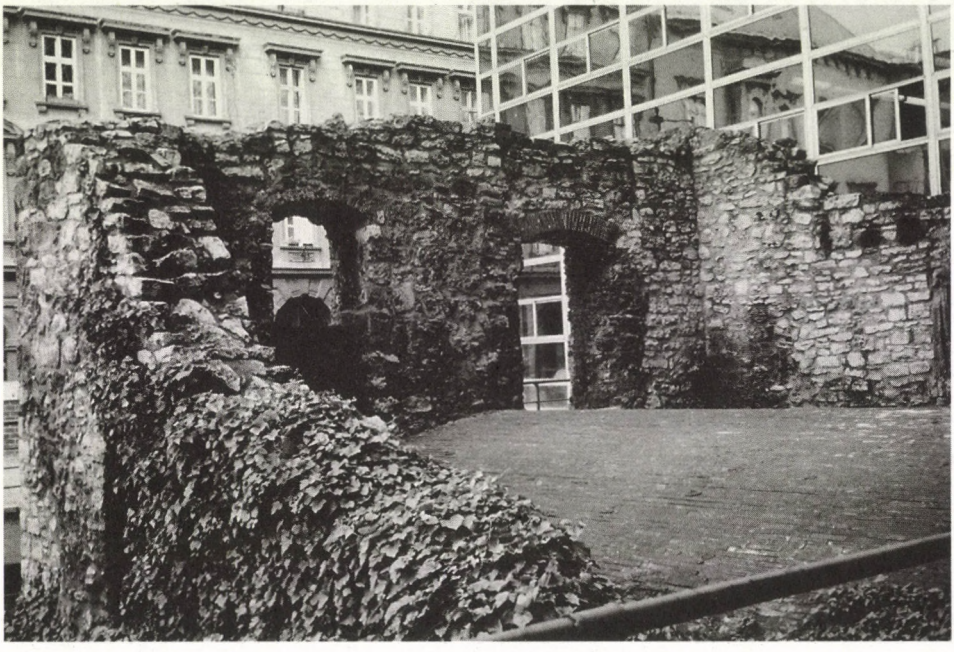
Relics from the past—an interlude

Excavations in Watertown indicate a Roman settlement that preceded Castle Hill. Indeed, a North–South road ran along the river at the edge of the terrain even before the Romans. At the time of the Roman Empire this became the limes, an important strategic highway which was the border of Pannonia and the eastern end of the Empire as well. The settlement we are familiar with had its inception in the reign of King Béla IV who, after the Mongol invasion (1241–42), transferred his seat to Buda, building a castle on the hill, called at the time the New Castle of Pest. Just around then the King moved Hungarians, Bavarians and Suevians from the Pest bank, hard to defend, to the slopes below the Royal Castle.

The Romans had favoured the plains and had built the camps of their legions there (Old Buda [Óbuda], Aquincum). In the Middle Ages, however, the arts of war changed and this change favoured hills. A fortress was needed and the location, shape, steep slopes and defensibility of the hill predestined it to be the site of a castle. In addition, the slower current of the Danube—before regulation—made the foot of Castle Hill a particularly suitable place for a ferry, although this was exploited only when river traffic prospered, that is, when a harbour was constructed there.

By the end of the Middle Ages, what was then called the Lower Town was entirely built up, except for the steep slope beneath the castle walls. The quarter was bounded by a town wall to the north and south. The northern stone wall was erected between Bem József Street and Margaret Boulevard, meeting the Castle fortifications at Moscow (Moszkva) Square. To the south, a wall extending from the Water Gate (the present Parade Place – Dísz tér) to the Danube provided a link with the Castle fortifications. A number of gates permitted access

between Watertown and its environs. The northern wall had openings wide enough in three places for a coach to pass through (Shambles Gate, Newgate, Cock Gate), but access to the Tabán district in the South was at one point only, close to the Watertower. Traffic to the Castle passed through the Vienna or Sabbath Gate, and through the Watergate near Parade Place.



Adjacent buildings of ages that differ by centuries: High (Fõ) Street.

The medieval street grid of Waertown consisted of horizontals taking their cue from the Castle ramparts and steep perpendicular streets conforming to the water flow. Parishes within the Lower Town were named after their churches. Thus Saint Peter's, built where Bear (Medve) Street and Nightingale (Csalogány) Street now cross, provided its name to its surroundings, while Saint Stephen's Church and convent, which stood near the present Corvin Square, also gave its name to a district. However, the area below the Church of Great Saint Mary was known as the Saint Michael district. In the course of time the southernmost area near the Danube came to be known as Fishertown, since many fishermen had settled there. The Slovaks gave their name to Slovak Village (Tótfalu) past the northern slope of Castle Hill. As the Lower Town was built, ethnic groups moved in. Serbs settled in Saint Peter's Town and Jews moved up onto

the Castle Hill and its slopes, initially in the mid-13th century. They had a synagogue there. Indeed, at one time Lower Town was also known as Jewtown. During the reign of King Matthias (1458–90) all these were incorporated into Buda.

Under the Ottoman occupation of Buda (1541–1686) another shift in population took place. At first the majority of those who lived in the Lower Town were still Hungarians, but they gradually left and were replaced by others, mainly by Turks, many of them soldiers, who called the area Town (Város). The population was mixed, thus Gypsies lived in the north-eastern part of the town, which was called *civitas cingarorum* or kopt *mahalle*. The medieval street grid was confirmed, since the Turks used walls and ditches to create courtyards, known as *bölmé*. Public buildings had a mixed fate. Some of the churches and chapels, with minarets added, were turned into mosques. Others that had been destroyed were replaced by new buildings.

Nine mosques are recorded for the territory of present-day Watertown, one more than on Castle Hill, plus a number of smaller Muslim meeting houses, Turkish schools and dervish tekke. Indeed, the first Buda pashas made their home there and only moved up later onto the Castle Hill because its ramparts offered better

1617 Turkish times Watertown panorama. Drawing.

protection against the successive attacks by Habsburg forces. Of the seven baths built in Buda, one predominantly constructed by Arslab Pasha and completed by Mustapha Pasha, was in the Town. It was later known as the King Baths (Király-fürdő), and is still in use. The Turks improved the waterworks, and tended to the scoop in the southern part of the town, which dated back to the reign of King Sigismund. Buckets fitted on a waterwheel shifted water from a fortified water-tower near the Danube up to the Castle. Early in the Turkish occupation many a slender minaret was erected, and domes too, to the enrichment of the skyline.

An earthquake in 1641, the successful siege of Buda in 1686 and the ensuing conflagration in Watertown, for which the pillaging soldiery was responsible, left the district in ruins. The zone of fortifications was extended at the expense of housing. All building was prohibited on the glacis below the walls. Buda took some time to recover. The Imperial War Council allowed only Roman Catholics (that is Germans) to settle on the Castle Hill, the Protestant Hungarians and Orthodox Serbs were allowed to return to Watertown. The Hungarian ratio in Buda dropped from 14 to 5 per cent at that time. Repopulation was delayed. Bavarians, Austrians and Serbs were settled there, and bit by bit also Hungarians from the Danube–Tisza interfluve. Croat Town, in the northern parts of Watertown probably got its name from Croat soldiery billetted there rather than from settlers. Around the end of the war, Croat Town (northern), Watertown (central), and Fishertown (southern) were the toponyms in general use.

Reconstruction after the siege made use of the earlier foundations. Thus the established building lots and street grid remained. The extension and establishment of new streets was only seen in the eighteenth century, when the military permitted the fortified area near the Castle wall to be parcelled up. There was not much chance of new construction in Fishertown (a place apart in Turkish times) south of Fisherman (Halász) Street, in a fortified, constricted terrain. Things were easier in the level areas of Croat Town, right up to the western defensive line, which was its boundary. Those parts suffered most during the siege and were used as gardens, orchards and vineyards for some time afterwards. When the wave of building reached that area there were no ruins in the way of the settlers. As no street grid survived from Turkish times, except for what is now Varsányi Irén Street, at the end of the eighteenth century, a system of more or less perpendicular streets was established in the level area. In some places building lots were handed out free of charge in order to speed up settlement. This was true, for example, of Hoe (Kapás) Street.

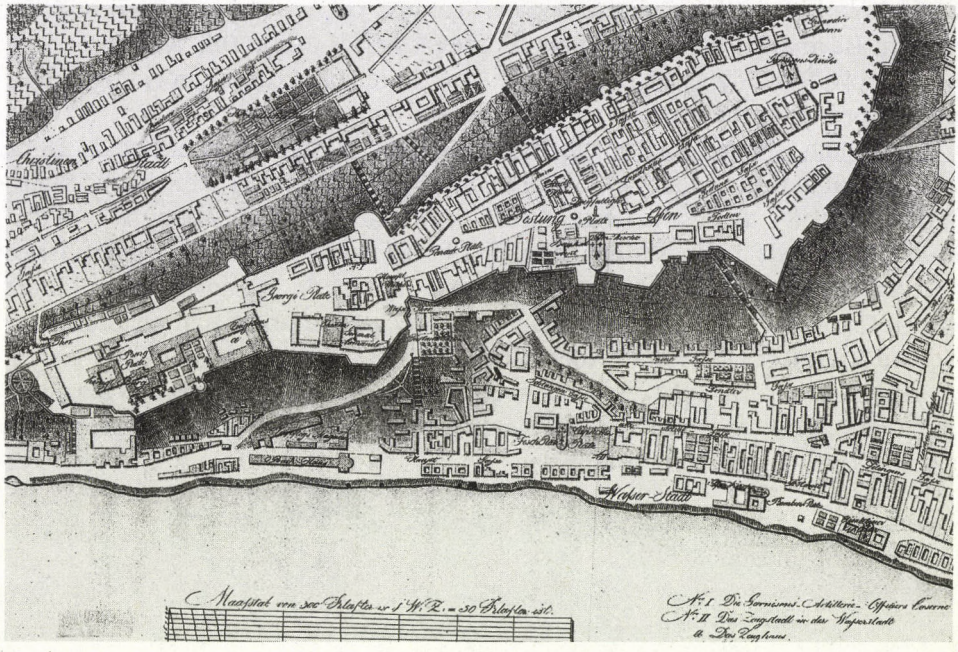
Urban open spaces became more important around the year 1700. Fairs were held on Bomb Place (now Batthyány Square) the upper market, while daily and weekly fairs were held in the lower market on Potter's Field (now Szilágyi Dezső Square). The location of the upper market was determined by the ferry and landing stage nearby: the upper and the lower markets were the centres of two

quarters within Watertown. The fish market was to the south, at the eastern end of the present Carp (Ponty) Street. The cattle market had to be moved within a few years because of lack of space, to an extramural location, in the vicinity of the present Bem József Square.

After the reconquest of Buda, it was the turn of the mosques to be transformed into churches and convents. Around the mid-eighteenth century they achieved their final form. Characteristically, all the surviving Watertown churches line up along High Street (Fő utca) on the flats. Their steeples are like a row of pins. The southernmost, the Capuchine Church (1716) and Convent (1776–77) somewhat clashes with its environs, the Baroque building having been given a Neogothic, romantic exterior (reconstruction in 1851–52). Turkish and even earlier medieval remnants form part of its fabric. St Anne's to the north has a Baroque exterior. Inns once stood on the site, on which a chapel was erected first, then the church 1740–1764). At first St Anne's belonged to the Jesuits. In time a presbytery was added and it became a parish church (1754–1936).

The Franciscans, later the Capistrano Order, constructed a Baroque ensemble on the northern side of the square. Work on the convent, which replaced a mosque with a minaret and a *tekke* built by Mustapha Pasha, was started in 1703. The church was erected between 1731 and 1757. In the course of time the

Watertown in 1824. A drawing showing the survival of the medieval street pattern.



Elizabethan Sisters took over and turned part of the convent into a hospital. In 1891 the sole steeple of the church was given a spire in keeping with the double steeple of St Anne's. The three identical spires provide an airy frame to the square. The smallest Baroque church, the Uniate St Florian's, is at the upper end of the High Street.

The shops and workshops of Watertown lent it its individuality. There, at the foot of Castle Hill they also catered to those dwelling on the hill, providing them with food, water and the products of artisans. The Proviant House, a multi-storey victualling warehouse, stood near the entrance to the present tunnel, until it was demolished in 1854. The Castle and Watertown, which it protected, depended on each other. The nobility tended to live on Castle Hill, the well-to-do bourgeoisie intermingled with the poor in Watertown. In Turkish times and initially after the reconquest, Watertown was home to the soldiery. As the fighting receded, normal urban life gradually returned. Artisans made up an increasing proportion of the population (40 per cent in 1695). Shopkeepers, cultivators and the clerisy were also well-represented. Shops were mainly found along the High Street, inns and booths on Bomb Place. The best known, the White Cross Inn (Batthyány Square) was given its present, Roccoco, form in 1770. The Emperor Joseph II was its most illustrious guest.

The nineteeenth century brought industry to Watertown: coach works, a tannery, a silk mill, steam turbine flour mills and the Ganz foundry. Nevertheless, Watertown enhanced its role as a residential area. Large apartment blocks were built after the 1838 flood and especially after the union of Pest and Buda (1873), at first along the High Street and, later, centred on Adam Clark Place and the present Haymarket (Széna tér), and on the slopes of Castle Hill. After 1860, the stately row of buildings on the Danube Bank were constructed, providing a multistoried zone for the waterfront of Watertown.

The Chain Bridge was built in 1839–1849, the Tunnel was finished in 1857, and the Cable Gravity Railway (Sikló) up to the Castle in 1868. New public buildings, especially along the High Street, included the Buda Redoute (Vigadó) (1900), the Buda Savings Bank designed by Miklós Ybl and since demolished (2 High Street) and Samu Pecz's Calvinist Church on Szilágyi Dezső Square (1894–1896), as well as the iron-vaulted, impressive Market Hall on Batthyány Square (1892). Miklós Ybl also designed the Castle Gardens Bazaar and Pavilion (Várkert Kioszk) (1875–1878) in the southern end of the quarter, on an axis with the High Street. Around the same time, four secondary schools were built on the slope of the hill and a fifth on the flats.

The Watertown High (Fő) Street

As the twentieth century dawned, it was clear that the metropolis had invaded the old quiet, somewhat provincial quarter with its Baroque, late Baroque, and neoclassical small houses. All the same, right in the centre of Watertown, houses recalling yesteryear survived in scattered groups, surrounded by bulky apartment houses. There was not much building between the wars, although some of it was of significance, such as István Janáky's and József Szendrői's Material and Prices Office at 68 High Street in 1942.

The Second World War brought out the contradictions of the quarter. Some buildings were destroyed and the emptiness they left behind in their place added to this dissonance. The gaps remained for a long time after the war, and not all of them were filled in. Some of the new buildings fit into the environs, acknowledging its atmosphere and confirming the existing character, as in Capuchine (Kapucinus) Street, although they are not copies. Elsewhere the new buildings brutally disrupted the environment, are different without justification and break up the existing milieu, as in Swan (Hattyú) Street.

The latest symptom is the overspill of offices from Castle Hill into Watertown. Numerous residential buildings are now housing offices. A new Buda office quarter is taking shape on the level terrain around Thrush (Csalogány) Street. Dispersed and left to itself, the nucleus of Watertown, pace the reconstructions and destruction, dispersed and left alone, protects the old. Within the frame formed by the Royal Castle, the apartments that replaced the walls and the Danube, the past is still breathing.

Uneven buildings

Entering Watertown it would appear that someone is having us on. As if giants had shaken the works of men in their fists like dice, then thrown them onto the terrain. The buildings rolled apart and settled according to their weight. The smaller ones mostly stuck in a place where they found purchase, and the heavier ones rolled on to the more level parts of the slope. Others tumbled onto each other and piled up, while elsewhere empty spaces remained. At first sight it all appears as if pure chance were at work.

In the mid-nineteenth century, large buildings started to replace the single- and small two-storey houses, at first only in the level areas. This was when Pest created the image for which it is still known, with all those quarters of splendidly eclectic apartment blocks. In contrast, in Buda the residential areas on Castle Hill retained their buildings, and thus their genuine historical ambience. Watertown, placed between them, was hybrid. Taller houses on level ground seemed obvious, but the slopes too saw a higher building density and apartment blocks. The impulse was not merely due to building costs. The beautiful view, social status and fashion all had their say. Rising ground prices pushed up the height of buildings in steep areas, that is why

The ups and downs of window heights in Capuchine (Kapucinus) Street.

there are particularly tall buildings in the upper zone of the hill, as in Szabó Ilonka Street beneath the Castle ramparts, or at the upper end of Siege (Ostrom) Street.

The new made a breakthrough but fortunately some survivors stayed on, wedged in between the tall buildings which had appeared on steep slopes. The forgotten small houses of the past still surprise us on level ground, such as the hem of Corvin Square or the lone, small-towered late-Baroque building at the corner of Shingle (Pala) Street and the High Street, or the row of small houses on School (Iskola) Street.

Steps on the slope

Much of Watertown was built on a slope, and a steep slope at that. Some of the streets nevertheless take the diritissima for the top. What is special about these steep streets? In their projection some of them follow the line of an exponential curve in their sections. Approaching the Danube, some of them converge to the level of the rivercourse, while their upper half bucks up at the Castle wall. Every steep street has a different way of approaching the Castle ramparts. Some reach the plateau by penetrating the wall. One such is Siege Street at the Vienna Gate (Bécsikapu). There are others that crane as they reach the wall, such as Shingle Street, in its continuation, High-up (Magas) Street. Similarly, the Castle ramparts break the back of Carp Street which, turning at a right angle,

The steep streets. The Hunyadi Steps and Ice-house (Jégverem) Street as their continuation.

transforms itself into the Boat Steps (Csónak lépcső). The high wall puts paid to this climb.

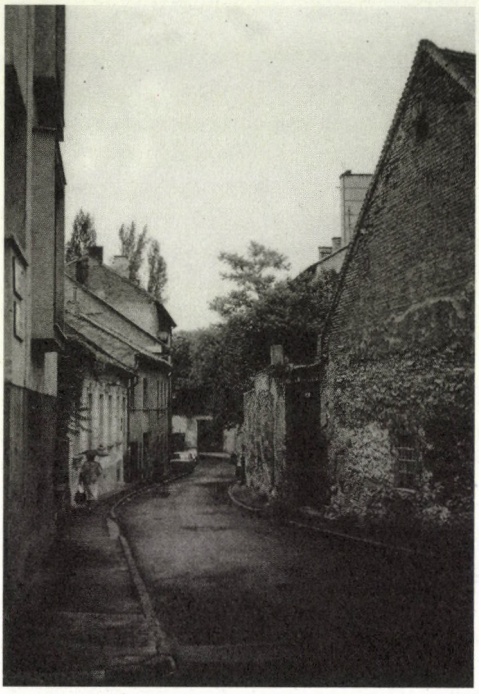
In most cases the steep streets are forced to become steps in the heights. First the steps only appeared on the footpath, but in the majority of cases they spread to the carriageway, prohibiting motorized traffic. The steps are also held up by the Castle. Some drill their way into the bastion, others continue on their way hugging the perpendicular wall.

The list of streets with steps is long: there are nine of them between the Linz Steps and Apor Péter Street, which is a respectable number given that this area is small. Every one of the steps is different, the slope differs, the steps differ and so do the banisters or handrails that hem them in. Or the shadows differ, depending on the type of house or vacant lot next to them. The flora at their sides differs too: bushes, trees, grassy slopes alternate, making some of the steps cool and shady, others sunny. Some offer a view, others block it. The Mulberry Steps (Szeder lépcső) are in the middle of a park, they are ample and calm, overflowing with peace. The High-up Steps are also coupled with a park but narrow and modest. Ice-house Street (Jégverem utca) shored up by walls and ballustrades is dignified, but the Linz Steps or the Hunyadi László Steps play hide and seek between bushes or under trees as they climb. The Jesuit Steps are different again. At their end they splendidly dive into the Fishermen's Bastion and merge with it. Once the Gimnázium Steps, which continue from Franklin Street, reach the fortification they falter and crawl up into the Castle. A roof guards these timber steps as they zig-zag under arcades hugging a stone wall. It is the most romantic of all the Steps. The most dignified, however, are the many-branched grandiose Schulek Steps which bear the name of the architect of the Fishermen's Bastion. They are festive and monumental, worthy of leading to the Royal Palace, and not, as they do, just to the Fishermen's Bastion and the back of Buda Castle's Great St Mary's.

The view from the steps is unparalleled. The backdrop differs, depending on whether we turn our eyes to the Castle Hill or to Pest on the opposite bank.

The covered School (Iskola) Steps at the foot of the Castle Wall.

Looking in one direction, a wall towers in front of us and a barrier shuts off the view, but should we turn around, the panorama spreads before us. One transports us to the Middle Ages, the other to the present and its world. The vision is shaped step by step.



The winding Capuchine Street.

Streets cued by contours

To allow the free movement of traffic on the slopes, roads had to be built along the contour lines. Almost level, these also follow the curve of the Castle ramparts, and thus rise or fall slightly from the horizontal, softly curling. The sweep of the road is broken by gaps like missing teeth. Sometimes we would wish for a continuity, a series of houses of identical character, sometimes we enjoy the view provided by the gap.

Because of the rise and fall of the slope, even on horizontal streets neighbouring houses rise from different bases, in many cases from behind a buttressing wall. In addition, on their two sides the streets following the contours are lined by houses built on a different scale. In the rising half of the street, the houses are multistoried, but once at the upper end they become single-storey buildings. On the other side of the street, the exact opposite happens, single-storey houses become multistoried at the lower level. Even where houses opposite one another rise from the same street level, they may end up somewhere else. This produces an odd assymetry within the same street. The hillslope and variations in the height of the buildings together set the cornices ajumping. The cornices and rooftops only roughly repeat the horizontals on

ground level. The higher we proceed on the steep slope the greater the deviation. The varying heights of buildings have a life of their own. Waves are created which sometimes appear synchronized and sometimes as in a canon. The streets above, and rooftops, are the repetitions of off-centre sine curves.

Gaps between the houses are a feature of Szabó Ilonka Street. Scrubby vacant lots and parks alternate with buildings standing alone. Most of the houses are cottages or duplexes with gardens. Terraces are comparatively rare and rarer too are buildings of any size. The Toldy Ferenc Gimnázium is an exception. The street is exposed rather than protected. What is important is not what we can see in the street, but what we can see from it. As one of the streets closest to the hilltop, there's always a chance to catch a glimpse of the view. Szabó Ilonka Street is a street of panoramas.

In School Street, at the foot of the hill, the contrast between its two halves is its specific feature. School Street is built on the level, yet its two sides give the lie to each other. Tall buildings of solid mass confront small houses. A metropolitan ambience faces a small town. There are other assymetries. Buildings of different ages are strung as beads, often there is a three-hundred-year chronological difference. Every style is represented, from the Baroque through the neoclassic to contemporary, in most cases without a connection, the rhythm of buildings is syncopated.

The High Street represents the 1900 *fin de siècle*. Much of it features a certain unity. The building masses, cornice levels, the rhythm of windows and eclectic façades are similar. A street of apartment houses. The monotony of neighbouring buildings is broken by interposed open spaces. The succession of six squares (or nine, depending on how you count them) creates a rhythm which, in some cases, is conjoined to the rhythm of towers. The rhythm is assymetrical, as the exceptions break up the unity. They include ensembles hemmed in by Baroque and neoclassical buildings breathing a unique historical atmosphere, such as Batthyány and

The big-city side and the small-town side. This way and that way: School Street.

Corvin Squares, or Saint Florian's with the park of the King Baths, or Szilágyi Dezső Square with the red-brick Romantic church right at its centre, which evokes the 1900 *fin de siècle.*

Streets on the hillslope are all also odd in one sense or the other. Ribbon (Szalag) Street and Rug (Szőnyeg) Street are secretive, seclusive, oldfashioned and steep. Capuchine Street, except for its southeastern end, is gentle and intimate. The cottages in Cockleshell Street suffer the embrace of the Castle ramparts. What is remarkable about Wartertown is that every step takes us into a peculiar atmosphere.

Scattered scheduled monuments

We rarely come across a house that still retains the form it was born with, what has survived perhaps are foundations, traces of the old defining forms, recycled building materials or odd details. Demolition has mostly led to a new building. A total of five medieval buildings survived the 1686 Imperial siege of Buda, of which only one still stands, albeit a ruin (16 High Street). Even at times and in places when rebuilding was a feasible option, our forebears chose demolition. That is why houses scheduled as ancient monuments stand alone and only rarely cluster together.

The King (Király) Baths, a Turkish survival.

The differences in forms, façade proportions and ornamention do not stick in the eye, since the many reconstructions they have all gone through have ironed them out. The inner kernel of Watertown stands for history, especially the mainly Baroque churches built after the time of the Turks. With their steeples rising high over their surroundings, they gather smaller buildings around them. Everyone of them became a nodal point. Some of the secular building ensembles similarly found themselves acting as the focus of their surroundings. Such are the already mentioned Corvin and Batthyány Squares and the row of houses on School Street. So too are some of the houses in Rug Street, Ribbon Street and Toldy Ferenc Street. Together and individually they do their part in adding something precious to the historical atmosphere of Watertown.

Saint Francis Church, with the twin towers of Saint Anna's behind it.

The gap. The Second World War bomb site between Corvin Square and the Donáti Alleyway.

Gaps

In the Second World War siege of Buda Castle, the bombing and shelling turned much of Watertown into ruins. Once the rubble was cleared, many of the lots were not built on. There were places where trees, ignoring the steep slope, managed to hang on, elsewhere thickets covered the vacant lots. Parks, playgrounds and benches found a home. Earlier building prohibitions contributed to the emptiness. Only part of the Schulek Steps, planned to lead from the Danube to the Fishermen's Bastion, was completed, the rest remained on the drawing board. A building prohibition order was issued to cover the site, and that has remained in force to this day. The green, unbuilt, zone can be discerned from afar, as it descends the slope, halting at the High Street, since nobody today would dare to demolish the eighteenth century building that stands in the way. For quite some time no construction was allowed in open ground around the Castle wall, the distance a musket would carry. That has not been built-up, and much of it has become a park.

A centre on the fringes

The ethnic diversity of Watertown is now a thing of the past, the occupational and economic structure has also changed. In the past the quarter was known for its shops and markets, lately, the professions and commercial offices have taken over. New office blocks have mushroomed, primarily on level ground, some of which house ministries and public institutions.

The locals do their shopping under the iron vaulting of the market hall on Batthyány Square, in the Mammut shopping mall on Haymarket or in the lavishly rebuilt Light (Fény) Street Market. All of these are on the fringe of the quarter. Trading streets have also shifted to the fringes. Once upon a time the High Street, which held together the quarter, counted as the centre, now as the quarter has spread in a crescent shape, it finds itself on the perimeter. This is now where the shops are, the restaurants, attractive meeting places, the former Buda Redoute, the Institut Français, the churches, the squares, the King Baths. The promenade along the river bank now belongs to joggers and cyclists rather than to the flaneurs. Margaret Boulevard (Margit körút), the other shopping street, is also a boundary. There shops, cinemas, gaming halls, restaurants and the mall, all cheek by jowl cater to all your wants. Life has been marginalized.

Waltzing on the fringe

By the second half of the twentieth century, it was traffic rather than building that determined the character of Watertown. The fringes of the quarter bear the burden of this rapid increase in traffic. The High Street, the Quay and Margaret Boulevard are about to cave in under its weight. The roads leading up to the Castle, which bound the quarter at its two ends, Hunyadi János Street and Rampart (Várfok) Street and Siege Street are similarly overburdened. Traffic flashes by noisy and fast. The cable gravity car alone is quiet. Traffic is what brands us these days.

The inner area is surrounded by traffic rushing through, but is itself spared. The steep slope of the hill is avoided by drivers in a hurry. The effect of this maze of steps and stairs, full of *cul de sacs* and winding steep roads, is that even those streets which are drivable are also avoided. There is no transit traffic in the inner nucleus. The lifestyle slows down, quiet spreads to the heart of the district. You only move about in Watertown if you live there, work there, or study there, or if you find yourself there by chance. Peace reigns, too much peace. The only movement through here is from those taking a shortcut to ascend into the past, to explore the Castle district, or to run down from there to the Danube-bank promenade and the river. The two traffic components of Watertown thus create a contradiction: quiet inside and a racket outside. You would imagine you were not in the same Water-town.

The view from Watertown, with a park in the foreground, the area where building was prohibited.

Order and undoing

Outside determinants provide the frame, internal systems such as repetition, identities, regularities obeying the laws of geometry define the quarter's character. The preponderance of small single- and two-storey houses is characteristic of the inner nucleus. This includes the uniformity of cornice levels in a given section, as well as the diminishing mass and height of buildings as we approach the Castle Hill, and also the fact that the scheduled ancient monuments stem from a relatively short period, the 18th and 19th centuries, and there is, of course, the eclectic row of apartment houses confined to the fringes or the towers, rising above the houses in their perpendicularity to touch the Castle Hill. These perpendicular steeples reclining on the horizontal waves of the street, draw the zig-zag of a cardiogramme through the sine curves, creating a dual system.

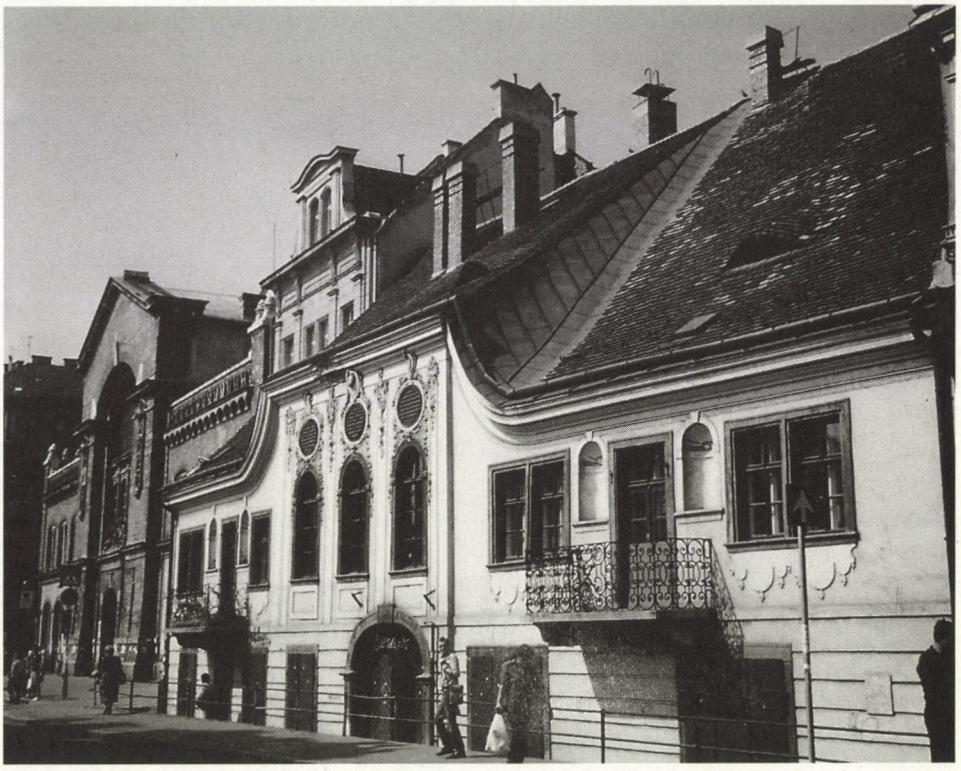
Watertown is dominated by nature. The hillslope, the steepness of the terrain, is ever present, at least as a view to be taken in. Consequently, what is outside, the view of the metropolis, is a systematically occuring element which determines Watertown as much as its internal characteristics. But we come across geometric systems as well. The flights of steps and the steep roads with steps radiating from Castle Hill are also system-creating, forming a star pattern. The parallel streets along the contour lines enrich this geometry. The two kinds of throughfares constitute a somewhat mishapen net.

Systems differing but adjusting

In Watertown an extraordinary variety of unique objects and solutions produce surprises. And this is the charm of the district. The eye of the casual passer-by is caught by the unique, by rhapsodical experiences and by the quarter's changes in rhythm. What is particular to Watertown is that, in its superimposed unique systems, even its surprises are different. In Watertown you must reckon on the unpredictable.

Surprise is provided by the heterogenous and fragmentary character of the quarter. Watertown devotees can discover the large-scale, and the shy and retiring, the finely carved at the back to the trivial, the unique after the repetitive, silence after brutal noise. None of these exists without the other. The contrasts make sure that every experience is significant. Watertown will invent something to please us wherever we go, a hue, a smell, a form, a breeze, a view—with *aide mémoires* evoking the past, with bluffs and walks, benches, quiet and peace. ❧

Centres on the fringe. Batthyány Square with the former White Cross Inn (originally 18th century) and the Market Hall behind it.



Elek Magyar

A Calendar of Treats

Easter on a White Table

Elek Magyar (1875–1947) used the name "ínyesmester" (gourmet master) for his writings on food. He was educated by the Piarist Fathers in Budapest, where he went on to study law. He joined the staff of Magyarország, *a daily, for which he wrote political reportage, urban history, horse-racing sketches, reviews on the fine arts and was responsible for the sports section. From 1917 to his retirement in 1936, he was managing editor of the paper. From 1928 he had a weekly column on food that occupied a full page in the Sunday edition of* Pesti Napló, *a rival paper for which he insisted on the* nom de plume *of* Ínyesmester. *These were collected an published as* Az ínyesmester szakácskönyve *in 1932 (in English as* The Gourmet's Cook Book, *Corvina 1970), which was the authoritative book on Hungarian cuisine for many years. The new Hungarian edition is reviewed by Károly Unger on pp. 135–139.*

This selection draws on his fond memories of the food and lifestyle of his younger days.

*

The poplar and catkin, the spiky, budding branch of the willow, make their welcome appearance on the streets of the towns and on the flower stalls. The week before Easter is spent under the sign of the catkin—and, of course, with preparations for the holiday feasts. The first traditional meal of the holidays falls on Holy Thursday, "green Thursday", a fitting name because this is when spinach, the first fresh spring vegetable, appears in the shops. It is made into a purée with the addition of milk, and is served with fried buttered bread rolls, known as *"pofézni"* or "rolls in a fur coat", fried in batter, that is. On Good Friday, the traditional meal consists of wine soup, stuffed eggs, and fish. On the evening of Holy Saturday, Easter ham is the star of the holiday menu.

Any Hungarian will tell you that there is no Easter without ham. However, this is not the lowly type that gets sliced for cold cuts at the delicatessen.

Easter ham is invariably of impressive proportions, well seasoned and well marinated (but not over-salted) and lightly cured. It is bought well in advance and is prepared for the holiday table with meticulous care. It is taken out of the pantry on the morning of Holy Saturday, and is cooked over a slow fire as its delicious aroma slowly fills every nook and cranny of the kitchen. The huge pot, which in the best homes is reserved exclusively for cooking ham, also contains several eggs cooked in their shells, so they can soak up the flavour of the delicious smoked meat. The ham is simmered under cover over a low heat until the protruding bone can be easily turned around inside it, and the rind pierced with a fork. When the ham has reached this stage, it is taken off the heat and left to cool in the cooking liquid. The long wait always pays off, for the ham will taste much better when allowed to cool in this way.

If the ham is served hot, however, the cooking must be carefully timed to coincide with the beginning of the meal. It must be removed from the cooking liquid and served promptly, accompanied by a purée of split peas, lentils, or potatoes, or possibly sorrel or spinach. Once the ham has cooled, it is never reheated, for it will lose much of its taste.

One favourite way of eating ham over Easter is cold. It is often chilled, then brushed with very pale melted aspic, which quickly congeals on it, making it shine like glass. It is then placed on a serving plate, surrounded by the quartered hard-boiled eggs, and the whole thing is enhanced by the addition of mild, grated horseradish, as well as pieces of quivering yellow and red aspic, which is not only for decoration but is eaten along with the ham. After this, all the proud cook has to do is cut generous slices of the ham for her grateful family and guests.

The other challenge for the Easter cook is the preparation of walnut and poppyseed Easter roulades. Since these are often baked in a semi-circular crescent

The terrace of the Pig Head's Restaurant, Zugliget, 1938.
Postcard depicting the garden of the Gundel (formerly Wampetics) Restaurant. 1910s.

shape, they are usually called "horse shoe" rolls. Between Christmas and Twelfth Night, housewives vie with each other to see who can make the very best of this much-loved holiday treat, just as they do at Easter.

For Easter Sunday, the *pièce de résistance* is baby lamb. By common consensus, it is best suited to the occasion. The soup tureen is filled with heavy, jelli-fied soup made from the head, while the large vegetable bowl veritably overflows with Transylvanian baby lamb heavily flavoured with tarragon. Baby lamb also appears on the holiday table in the form of *pörkölt,* a kind of thick stew, and lamb cooked with paprika and sour cream *(tejfölös-paprikás bárányhús),* prepared in the same manner as chicken *paprikás.* Still, nothing beats fillet of baby lamb fried to a light golden brown, and the saddle larded with bacon and baked to a crisp. Stuffed fillet and grilled cutlets are also delicious additions to the Easter Sunday table, especially when made from sweetly tender milk lamb. In late winter and early spring, nothing pleases the palate like the taste of young lamb.

Easter lamb dishes are beautifully complemented by *főzelék*—green vegetables cooked in a roux, as well as fresh green peas braised in butter, lettuce served Hungarian style in a water, oil and vinegar dressing, various fresh lettuces, or potatoes diced and roasted. The lamb can be preceded or followed by various festive courses. Clear soup, for instance, is often served with liver dumplings or sliced mushrooms, while the meal is launched with a serving of Transylvanian-style stuffed cabbage seasoned with dill. If there is any cold ham in aspic left over from the night before, it too finds its way to the table. And even if torte is served for dessert, the meal is invariably finished off with a serving of walnut and poppyseed roulades.

Easter Monday is also celebrated traditionally, with succulent fried breaded spring chicken, traditionally its first appearance of the year on the table.

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Ham baked in bread held a special fascination for me even as a child. I will never forget the excitement I felt every time I caught a glimpse of it in the display window of a well-known Budapest grocer, Ede Szenes in the Wurm Yard in Dorottya Street (he later moved to the nearby King of Hungary Hotel), Lajos Takáts on the corner of Hatvani (now Lajos Kossuth) and Magyar Street, in the house in which Sándor Petőfi wrote his epic poem, *János vitéz* (John the Valiant), and also Gyula Pintér's shop in Kecskeméti Street. On the other hand, I never once saw ham baked in bread at Kálmán Brázay's place in the "Spirits of Salt House" on Múzeum Boulevard, where the poet Gergely Czuczor once lived. The old man had the best of everything on his shelves but—more's the pity—he didn't feel any inclination to provide his customers bread with their ham. This pained me immeasurably, for my mother did her shopping at Brázay's, and so there was precious little hope of me tasting this unfamiliar delicacy, which always stood out in the shop windows just before the Easter holidays.

Landing produce on the Pest embankment, 1890s.

I was even late getting to school now and then, for I would lose track of time as I stood in front of the shops. On the other hand, even if only by sight, this turned me into quite an expert on ham baked in bread shaped in the round, whose yellowish-brown crust had a huge golden "scar" running across it, allowing a glimpse of the pink meat underneath.

It was many years, as a grown man, before I could actually taste the ham that had fascinated me as a child. This was thanks to that upright soul János Bauer, proprietor of the old Kranzli restaurant on Dísz Square in the Castle District.

Once he invited a small company to his cellar cut into the rocks of Calvary Hill in Budaörs, just outside the city, to try the new wine. Luckily, I was one of the company, and I must say that the wines of Buda and Budaörs, whether white or red, were excellent back then, but so was the amuse-guêule that came with it, nothing less than that ham baked in bread. There was no bone in the ham, of course, but it had been removed only prior to baking, for this was no run-of-the-mill "trussed" ham, which is just plain shoulder of pork, and which is marinated and smoked deboned, thus depriving it of much of its essence. Old man Bauer's ham retained its flavour and aroma to the full; the taste of the ham was not absorbed by the cooking liquid, nor did it disappear with the steam from the bubbling cauldron. The delicious white wheat bread kept it intact, soaking it up, especially the taste of the thin layer of bacon left on the skin that had first been removed, then used to cover the ham before it was baked. Nothing in the procedure deprived the ham of its delightful taste.

Ham baked in bread is the best sandwich any man could hope to eat, especially when accompanied by the wines of Sasad and Budaörs Calvary Hill, which we were treated to back then. Anyone who has only experienced boiled ham has no idea what a royal treat ham baked in bread can be!

The Cuckoo Restaurant, Tabán, 1930.

The Cat Tavern, Budafok, 1920s.

Virsli, frankfurters, & co.

Virsli, the Hungarian equivalent of frankfurters, *wieners (wienerwursts)* and hot dogs, has always been popular both in Budapest and in the refreshment rooms of the railroad stations of busy county centres (popularly known as *"resti"* from restaurant) and in great demand, especially around the time when trains were about to pull out of or into the station. But it was sold at other times of the day as well, for the local gentry liked to gaze at the colourful life of the local stations as they consumed a pair of succulent *virsli* accompanied by a mug or two of beer. Furthermore, *virsli* was highly esteemed in small country towns and villages, too, which I happen to know from my own experience, for I remember perfectly well that when my father wanted to please his relatives, he'd send them a small crate or two of the best *virsli* and *szafaládé,* or *knackwurst,* though naturally only in cool weather. The village fathers, who could indulge in *virsli* eating only when they visited Ferenc Szikszay's famous restaurant for a mid-morning snack on St Stephen's Day or some national fair, for such a treat was not available to them back home, were as happy with our packages as we were with their gifts of blood sausages, plain sausage, and other treats sent to us after a pig had been slaughtered.

Provided it came from the shop of one of the master butchers proud of their profession, the Budapest *virsli* deserved the high regard people had for it, for it was common knowledge that it was made from choice ground meat

and processed with water, kneaded with the addition of 25 per cent bacon, and seasoned to perfection with salt and pepper. It was smoked for an hour, then dipped very briefly in hot water that was not allowed to reach the boil, after which it was cooled down by submersion in cold water. This is the state in which it found its way to restaurants and household kitchens to be cooked and eaten.

Though it was many years ago, I remember that when I was still a child, this Budapest *virsli* was generally called a "frankfurter", as it is in Vienna. For instance, when you walked into Szikszay's, which was located on the corner of Kerepesi Road and Múzeum Boulevard in the handsome apartment building that served as the pension institute of the National Theatre (it has long since been demolished), and you asked for a pair of *virsli,* the waiter replied, "Yes, sir, one pair of franks coming right up!"

Frankfurt, which lies on the shores of the Main, is famous for its delicious frankfurters, but these were always different from the Viennese or Budapest variety. Frankfurters are traditionally made from pork from the Schwarzwald, seasoned with salt, white pepper and nutmeg, and are smoked for a much longer length of time than the custom in Austria and Hungary. They are set apart from their fellows not only in taste, colour and shape, but in size, too. In short, our frankfurters were never the sausages of Frankfurt.

This fact, however, in no way negated the pleasure of visiting Szikszay's during mid-morning, and ordering a pair of *virsli* swimming in delicious *pörkölt* gravy, or served with a generous helping of freshly grated horseradish, if that was your preference. In either case, it was washed down with a mug of light "Udvari" beer from Kőbánya, or a dark brown "Double March". When I emphasize that the horseradish was grated, I do so advisedly, because these days it is too often shredded. Restaurant chefs who shred horseradish know not what they do! Horseradish is tasty only when finely grated. If it is shredded, it tastes as dry and unpalatable as wood shavings.

If, however, you were not really hungry, just thirsty, you could always ask for half a pair of *virsli* which, translated from the Viennese *Einspänner,* was jocularly called a "one-horse carriage". On the other hand, though it was available by the glass, no one ever thought of ordering less than a pint of beer, for it was something to be enjoyed at one's leisure over a good chat, and not downed to quench one's thirst. Unlike today, in those days "piccolo" meant just one thing—a small demitasse of coffee—and oh, yes—a young apprentice waiter.

A mid-day snack of *virsli* was edifying in other places as well beside Szikszay's establishment. The Csalányi, located at the Bazaar of the Franciscans, was also well worth a visit. At Csalányi's they served *virsli* with Augustiner beer from Munich brought to the table in stone mugs with pewter lids, while at the Flower-Bush on József Square, they delighted their guests by serving a real treat in stone mugs—a light Bavarian beer from the brewery at Kulmbach. The Pilsen Beer Hall at the Thonet Court on Vigadó Square was also popular for its beer, it

The Pearl Restaurant, Hűvösvölgy, 1910.

being—in my humble opinion—the restaurant where they served the best Pilsen beer in the world. Its foamy head was so thick, you could stick a toothpick in it and it would stay stuck. Another time, one might visit the restaurant of the Hotel London on Váci Boulevard to try some excellent Crown beer with the *virsli,* brewed at Kőbánya. Indeed, the city could boast of innumerable restaurants and small *kocsma,* informal and inexpensive taverns and restaurants, where one could have a variety of *virsli* types for a mid-morning or mid-afternoon snack with first-rate beers, both home-brewed and imported. On the other hand, if you wanted to enjoy virsli in the privacy of your own home, you were well advised to look up the White Elephant grocery at the corner of Hatvani and Magyar Street, where Lajos Takács, the proprietor, stocked his shelves with the Viennese variety, whisked from the Imperial City to Budapest on the noon express. If you were lucky enough to get to the shop on time, you were in for a real treat at home once you placed the freshly-cooked *virsli* on the table. Since it tasted a bit different from its delicious Budapest cousin, it added a little spice to life. At one time, certain ill-disposed individuals started a rumour that Viennese frankfurters were made of horsemeat, for at the time it was allowed—within strict limits, of course—to take old hansom-cab horses to the slaughterhouse, and sell their meat. Luckily, not many people were taken in by these rumours—started, surely, by competitors—for it had no more basis in fact than the other current rumour

The Pig's Head Restaurant, Zugliget, 1913.

according to which the famous Italian salami, the Veronese, was partly stuffed with donkey meat. In short, none!

One *virsli,* however, went untouched by rumour, and that was the sweet, short *virsli* from Szepes in Upper Hungary; these weighed a mere fifty or sixty grammes a pair. You could always find them at the delicatessen of the renowned chef József C. Dobos in Kecskeméti Street next door to the Csekonics Palace. Ede Szenes's shop in Dorottya Street, in the building of the King of Hungary Hotel, also stocked *virsli* from Szepes, and it could also be found in the shops of other merchants of equal rank. Szepesi *virsli,* which, one might add, was made from prime pork, was always served with horseradish, for the simple reason that it already contained the fatty paprika *(pörkölt)* gravy to begin with. If, innocent of the fact, you stuck a fork or a knife into it, the hot gravy came spurting out of the *virsli,* and covered your tie and waistcoat with a rash of embarrassing red spots. You had to break it apart —with due caution, I might add—but you were amply rewarded for your effort.

I could finish my ode to the *virsli* at this point, but I can't help mentioning one other Hungarian specialty known throughout the world, namely, the Debrecen sausage. After all, *virsli* is a kind of sausage too, just smaller. The Debrecen sausage I am referring to was usually just called *debreceni,* and was stuffed into such a long casing that it could be wound round and round in a circle several times. That fine man Bánki, one of the best butchers in Debrecen, made it from the meat and bacon of young and tender *mangalica* hogs. He wouldn't think of mincing the meat and bacon, preferring the hard labor of dicing it by hand into pea-size pieces, then lovingly seasoning it with

salt, white pepper, sweet *paprika,* and a little marjoram. Once done, he then stuffed the mixture into thin pork casings, set it aside for a day to dry, then smoked it over "cold" smoke until it attained a lovely, reddish colour. When he was done, he sold it to us, the people of Budapest, on what is today's Rákóczi Road. He rented a small shop in the house that stood on the corner of Esterházy Street, on the site of the demolished Beleznay Garden, and weighed it out at ninety *krajcárs* a kilo, but it was worth it! This incredible sausage was sold in the 1890s, but I can still taste and smell it every time I think of it.

St Anne's Day's Kermesse

West of the Danube, many parish churches bear the name of St Anne, so it will come as no surprise that for many years, the first Sunday after St Anne's Day, which falls on July 26th, gingerbread vendors set up their booths all over the countryside. The locals of Somogy and Zala called them "puppet men", since their offerings included gingerbread hussars. But they also specialized in hazelnut macaroons, or *puszelli,* and gingerbread cakes in a variety of shapes, colours and sizes flavoured with jam, chocolate and almonds, as well as fruit cake and other delicacies. They also made a unique drink perfect for children and young men alike, who came to the fair in the company of village maidens. Called *márc,* this drink, which was always served ice-cold, was a godsend on a hot afternoon. It was a kind of unfermented bragget that the gingerbread makers prepared from honey diluted with water, and judiciously seasoned with a bit of nutmeg and coriander.

A long, long time ago—it must have been fifty-five or fifty-six years ago—when such things were rare in the countryside, the famous gingerbread man Ámon even made ice cream for the fairs, red from berries, white from lemon, yellow from apricots and, first and foremost, all sorts of cream-coloured ices from vanilla and egg yolk. I say first and foremost, because at that time the country ladies looked upon vanilla ice cream as the most distinguished of the lot, their opinion having been influenced in no small measure by the novels of Her Excellency Mrs Beniczky, *née* Lenke Bajza, in whose pages the women of the aristocracy ate vanilla ice cream to alleviate their soul's torment.

Thanks to his ice cream, gingerman Ámon was a welcome guest at Lengyeltóti, the charming county seat of Somogy County, where old Count János Zichy, may he rest with the Lord, the father of the eminent sportsman Count Béla, also deceased, had such a beautiful slender-steepled church built that alone made visiting the fair worthwhile, just to see it.

Another attraction was the traditional midday meal of the dearly departed parish priest. It consisted of a long line of Transdanubian specialities prepared to perfection—meat soup with pasta pockets stuffed with lights, goose-giblets sprinkled with baked blood and decorated with pieces of sliced goose liver

and cracklings, chicken *paprikás* with mushroom rice, and light-as-a-feather festival doughnuts. But if you think the meal was over with the doughnuts, think again, for after a short respite, they served roast goose and duck with braised marrow, cucumber salad with sour cream, and spiced red cabbage. Once this repast was consumed, the table was then laden with strudel filled with cottage cheese seasoned with dill, or apple or cabbage, not to mention the mixed iced cream beautifully shaped and topped with whipped cream, small tea cakes, imaginatively decorated tortes, and mouth-watering fruit of all kinds. And when everyone had their fill, aromatic black coffee was served to finish off the peer-less meal.

The wine usually came from the other side of Lake Balaton, from the rock-hewn cellars of the Pious Fathers of Dörgicse, who made the popular *Badacsonyi kéknyelű* from the grape of the same name, indigenous to the region, though there was also muscatel wine from Somló. The red wine, however, came from the "Small Mountain" of Somogy, namely, from the cellars of the famous lion hunter and independent member of Parliament, the Honourable Imre Szalay, who wore a Francis Joseph beard and who produced wine that was known far and wide in Europe.

Needless to say, the St Anne's Day dinner, which began at noon, and stretched late into the night, was heightened in popularity by the presence, at the head of the table, of the parish priest's widowed sister who, out of the generosity of her heart and her self-effacement, tactfully allowed her guests to choose what they wished to eat, and in what quantities, without forcing anyone to eat more than was pleasing to them. As a consequence, her guests always talked of her meals and the fair in the very highest terms, showering them with superlatives, as the above will have made you suspect with good reason.

Pressing cabbage in the Inner City

The cabbage boats arrived on the Danube in early October, anchoring on the Pest embankment, between Eskü Square and the Customs House. Their bows were turned up and curled back like a snail, just like Master Fanda's fishing boat. But instead of sturgeon, catfish and carp, they were filled with a multitude of round, flat, greenish white heads of cabbage.

The porters came running from the taverns frequented by sailors, and thanks to their efforts, the quay was soon filled with what seemed to be a whole mountain of cabbage. Meanwhile, in their Gamebart and cock-feathered hats and green breeches, the big-moustachioed and grim-visaged yeomen who had come from the Krain, or Tyrol for a brief autumnal guest role, lined the shore. They had huge shredders, shaped like a harp and containing a drawer, hanging from their shoulder, for it was their appointed task to shred all those thousands and thousands of heads of cabbage which, once they found their way into barrels, became the chief ingredient of the stuffed cabbage eaten by the citizens of Pest and Buda during the cold winter months.

The Hangli Beer Garden on Vigadó Square, 1934.

The merchandise was ready now for transport, and soon the former cargo of the snail-nosed boats was being carried around town on small carts loaded with large baskets of cabbage. We were able to buy about one-hundred heads ourselves, each hard and crisp to perfection. A large-moustachioed man from Krain came all the way to Újvilág Street just to shred the carefully cleaned cabbage into medium-thin strips.

Scrubbed to a gleaming white, the wide-mouthed, impressive barrel with a screw top was waiting in the kitchen. On one plate stood a pile of sliced quince, on another, thinly sliced horseradish, on yet another, salt ground into a near-powder consistency, and in the fourth, Hungarian peppercorn, in the fifth caraway seed, in the sixth dill and pepper-grass—a whole armada standing at the ready to give its all in order to produce potted cabbage, the perfect basis for many a winter dish.

The shredding was followed by pressing, for in accord with the old Hungarian tradition, the cabbage had to be pressed out by stamping on it with bare feet, leaving no shred out of the proceedings. Naturally, this honour fell not to the man from Krain, but the lord and master of the household. At least, this is how we did it in the small village from where we later moved to Pest. And so, in our house, it was our father's job to press out the cabbage. Once he tired of it, though, he'd

pass the honour on to me. I was twelve years old at the time, but heavy beyond my years, and since for years I had stood inquisitively by at such holiday proceedings as this, I had perfected the art of treading the cabbage—in theory, at least.

My mother sanctioned the transfer of responsibility, but supervised the preparations. I had to have a thorough scrubdown, put on brand new underwear, and only then could I climb inside the barrel, where two large bowls of shredded cabbage stood waiting atop a handful of horseradish and sliced quince, a bit of dill and pepper-grass. First it all had to be levelled, though, before I could launch into my dance, doing the rounds, brushing against the side of the barrel, and advancing from there toward the middle. Meanwhile, mother threw in a generous helping of salt, a bit of caraway seed and a couple of Hungarian peppercorns into the vat. And lo and behold, thanks to the salt and my efforts, the cabbage, still crunching under my feet, began to let out liquid. The first layer was done!

Another two or three bowls of cabbage were dumped into the vat, and the stamping continued as more salt, quince, horseradish and Hungarian pepper were added. Soon this layer, too, exuded liquid, which invited the addition of yet another large portion of cabbage and the requisite spices, with the procedure being repeated until all the cabbage was gone. However, from time to time my mother would add a whole head of cabbage, so that the stuffing for the stuffed cabbage would not have to go without a "coat". The vat was now full, the salty liquid threatened to overflow, we covered it with a white cotton cloth, lowered the lid on top, and screwed it tight.

I passed my initiation into stamping cabbage with flying colours. My muscles hurt like hell, the salt stung the soles of my feet, but the acknowledgement I received all around made up for it, not to mention the excellent dinner of roast pork with stewed cabbage and cottage cheese noodles. These were my favourite foods at the time, and still are.

As for the vat, when the cabbage liquid was frothing inside, my mother opened the vat, cleaned the white cloth and the wooden lid under running water, then replaced the lid. She repeated this process every three days. After three weeks, the cabbage was soured to perfection, we moved it down to the cellar, and stood it on sleepers so the vat would not touch the ground.

On winter Sundays, the potted cabbage made for delectable meals, while its liquid was delicious to drink, not like today's liquids, which are soured with what feels like caustic lye, tartaric acid, and God only knows what.

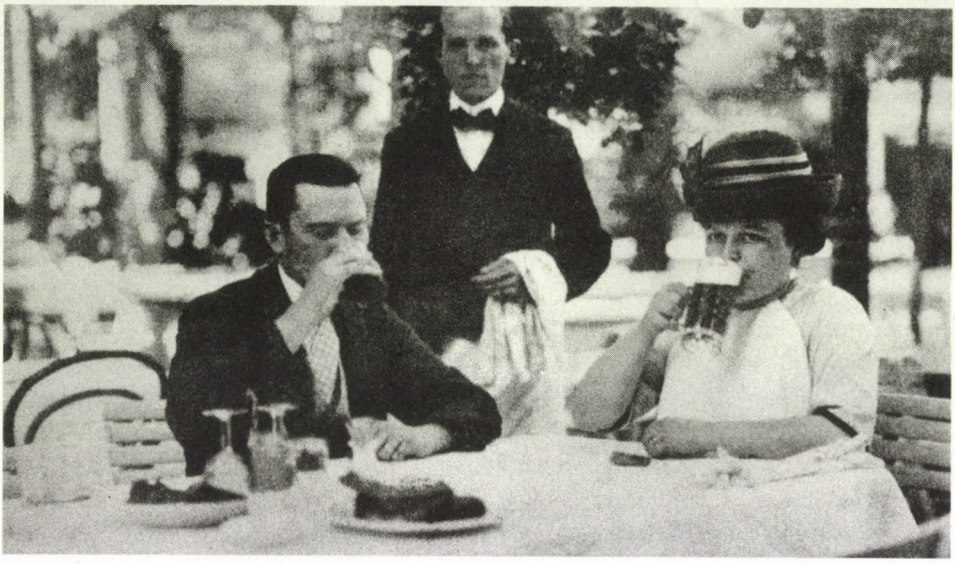
Autumn delights

Maróni with tart must, grape juice before it ferments completely, which the French call *moût*, is nothing to scoff at, especially when they're not trying to pass off must made with salicyl in the small taverns of the Tabán, but must made from grapes pressed out in the yard, where customers could hold their

glass directly under the wine-press. This must was sweet as honey, for it came from the renowned white *hónigli,* or honey-grapes indigenous to Buda, though after a couple of days it began to take on a tart flavour, and a nose-tickling aroma floated toward you through the open cellar door.

This was the season to buy a large bag of *maróni* chestnuts from the woman leisurely roasting them at the corner of the square, and head for the round, green tables that stood barren, without tablecloths, at the home of some friendly winemaker. The must, varying in colour from a light grey to a light brown, was waiting for them in half-litre bottles; it had not yet matured into the *heuriger,* which with its fermented alcohol led to overloud merriment; it was more gentle, and lighter, but with a foretaste of its future strength. Must loosens the tongue, and as the yellowish, baked meat of the chestnuts—stripped of their shells with a cracking sound, which were let fall to the ground—stood revealed in all their mouth-watering glory, the natives of Buda made friends with the newcomers from Pest. The consumption of chestnuts, however, was not limited to the drinking of tart must, which was soon gone from the bottles, but continued with the bitter-tasting *ürmös,* a kind of vermouth, which was prepared best just across from the Rác (Serb) Bath. It was not just called upon to make you feel thirsty; it got appreciable help from the *csája,* by which I do not mean the grog-like

The Dubarry Terrace on the Danube Corso, 1930.



The garden of the Gundel (formerly Wampetics) Restaurant, Postcard, 1912.

drink of the cafés, but the lovely, tall, cake-shaped, steaming, meat and pepper filled strudel offered by the slice on a wooden platter by the proprietor, who was himself a Serb.

Back then, ladies of refinement were more squeamish than today, they were afraid of tobacco smoke, and were generally unfamiliar with the pleasure attendant on eating chestnuts in the neighbourhood taverns of the Tabán and Christina Town. They preferred to visit the Russwurm patisserie on the Castle Hill, or sit at one of the tables of the Auguszt patisserie and enjoy a plate of chestnut purée topped with whipped cream, some *marron glacé,* chestnut cream, or chestnut cake.

The ladies are no longer afraid of tobacco smoke and even visit neighbourhood taverns which have been modernized beyond recognition; they call themselves restaurants, and the cult of the *maroni* has taken on new shapes. Some of these genteel taverns even have chestnut stew, chestnut salad and chestnut pudding on the menu, not to mention turkey fattened on walnuts and stuffed with chestnuts.

Meanwhile, the inimitable tart must has, alas, also disappeared, and never am I more saddened by this than at the time when the first load of chestnuts arrives from South Tyrol and Istria. ❧

(Translated by Judith Sollosy)

George Szirtes

Great Expectations

The Poetry of Attila József in Translation

Winter Night: Selected Poems of Attila József. Translated from the Hungarian by John Bátki. Corvina. 1997. 127pp. Pbk. • *The Iron-Blue Vault: Attila József, Selected Poems.* Translated by Zsuzsanna Ozsváth & Frederick Turner. Bloodaxe 1999. 160pp. Pbk. • *Attila József: Poems and Fragments.* Various translators. Argumentum / Cardinal. 1999. 159pp. Pbk.

Attila József, who committed suicide at the age of thirty two in 1937, was a great tragic poet, one of the key figures of twentieth century Hungarian, and indeed European, literature. As with many great writers, his art and reputation are so intimately connected that not only has he passionate and active readers in his own language, but a potential readership prepared for his presence by reputation in others. The myth precedes the work: not just the myth of the person but the myth of the work itself. There is, if you like, an Attila József shaped hole in the world waiting to be filled: normally sceptical readers come to the poems in translation expecting to discover a great poet.

The Maynooth based Hungarian scholar Thomas Kabdebo quotes Ted Hughes on the back of his critical biography of József to the effect that even a near-literal translation of József's poetry is enough to make one feel "the truth of the claim, which Hungarian poets make, that he is one of the most solidly and thoroughly original poet of modern times". But a "near-literal" translation falls far short of the experience of the verse itself as enjoyed by readers of the original. All a near literal version can do is to awaken interest, or draw attention to imagery that may prove attractive or exciting. This can sometimes happen with prose cribs from the classics or, more often, with prose renderings of narrative or epic verse such as *The Iliad* or *The Odyssey,* but even granted this limited success (I'd be interested to know how a mock-epic like Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* fares in Hungarian prose translation), the truth remains that poetry is that form of literature which is least susceptible to paraphrase. In fact, as paraphrase, most poems add up to very little, so it is difficult to see what Hughes might have been excited about or convinced by, unless it were expectation itself, which is, in effect, the old Pavlovian response to the bell that anticipates dinner. In the meantime, readers of the original experience a sense of responsibility. The work is too much for one language. It must get out. The expectation exists. The hole must be filled. Some kind of dinner must actually be served.

The appearance of three recent English language versions of selections from József's poems—not to mention a body of

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George Szirtes's
Selected Poems (1976–1996) *was published by Oxford University Press in 1996. His latest collection,* Portrait of My Father in an English Landscape, *was published by OUP in 1998.*

work by Edwin Morgan in his *Collected Translations*—demonstrates a general awareness of how far the near-literal in itself is doomed to fall short, and witnesses to the keen desire of some to satisfy the expectations that have been raised. It is certainly a beginning. The enterprise requires the work of poets and translators of a certain substance, and, I must admit, the number and reputation of the translators who have been enticed to attempt at least a verse or two is impressive: Vernon Watkins, Michael Hamburger, Theo Dorgan, Desmond Egan, Brendan Kennelly and Michael Longley, for example, appear in Thomas Kabdebo's *Attila József: Poems and Fragments* (I say edited by Kabdebo, as it plainly is, although there is no attribution to him in the text.) These people, being themselves fine poets, have succeeded in producing fine verse as a result. But the problem remains. These are passing fragmentary successes, each of which might do in an anthology of short verse, but few of them have attempted the longer major poems that are so central to József's poetic achievement, and none of them have produced enough translations to form a single coherent body of work.

There is, nevertheless, an investment of energy, a desire, in some cases a passion, to define and flesh out the poetic figure József makes. And this is all to the good. The translation of Attila József is a major task which, until something unquestionably better comes along (and nothing is unquestionable), entails a group effort. Translation—certainly the translation of great literature—always does. Translators do not appropriate their authors, they present them. They do not queer each other's pitches. Translators are only readers—albeit maker-readers—of the texts, and great texts generate many readings, some, no doubt, better than others. But all attention is welcome. It serves the raising of consciousness and in some way, if only by default, clarifies the shape and mass of the author in question. Of course, as many point out, a solitary bad translation can do short term damage if there is no alternative offered, but the publishing activity of the past five years is a useful tribute to the power of József's poetry. As Walter Benjamin pointed out, poems extend themselves, become more intensely themselves, through translation.

The three recent books naturally cover similar if not identical ground. Most of the major poems appear in all three and invite parallel reading. The earliest of them, Bátki's *Winter Night: Selected Poems of Attila József,* is offered to the memory of Allen Ginsberg and begins with an epigraph from Jack Kerouac. This gives us a clue to the literary parentage of the translations, which seek to lodge József's poems in North American experience, using the particular idiom of 1950s Beat poetry. This is a perfectly valid procedure: it draws from József, formally and in terms of diction, that which might be read into such a context, and presents it to a part of the potential readership. Not that Bátki's is a thoroughgoing strategy, but the reader can hear echoes of the voices implied in the introduction: Ferlinghetti, Kenneth Patchen, Gregory Corso, et al. The attempt, in terms of style, is to make József run clear and streetwise, and, at their best, the translations succeed in doing this; clarity and colloquial ease, if I hear the Hungarian right, is part of József's manner.

But it is far from all. There is not enough of the best to start with. Furthermore, József's society, his own particular circumstances and expectations of verse did not much resemble that of the Beats. The Beat reading establishes a reference point on the far more complex map of József's poetry but one shouldn't rely on it. All the more so as the translations often

show the strain of trying to accommodate tensions beyond their compass. Take "Summer" for example. For the third of the fourth verses: *"Ám egyre több lágy buggyanás. / Vérbő eper a homokon, / bóbiskol, zizzen a kalász. / Vihar gubbaszt a lombokon"*, Bátki offers: "More and more soft stirrings. / Blood-red berries on the sand. / Ears of wheat nodding and rustling. / A storm is perched above the land".

This has a syntactic clarity (four short individual sentences) and conveys simple images in direct language. It even presents us with a rhyme in lines 2 and 4. (The original has an abab structure.) But the berries and the wheat have lost their pressing lushness, and the wonderfully threatening storm is lightened to sparrow-weight. These are not incidental details—they constitute the emotional mass and texture of the poem, without which *"kaszaél"*, the scythe-blade of the last line, loses much of its force.

Bátki can give us a welcome element of raciness but he is not a particularly distinguished Beat poet and sometimes loses the very pace the Beats live by. What we do get from him—at best—is the sense of a democratic voice, a man talking in a society of equals. The Marxist reader might be satisfied by this. On the other hand, we miss the complexity, the personal turmoil, the pressure that raises the great poems to tragic level.

That texture is often supplied by Zsuzsanna Ozsváth and Frederick Turner's versions in *The Iron Blue Vault.* Turner is a noted American Formalist poet, a contributor to the New Formalist anthology, *Rebel Angels.* As with his earlier collaboration with Ozsváth, a selection from Radnóti, he provides a long introductory essay to József's ars poetica which accompanies Ozsváth's substantial biographical essay. Turner's interest in form involves a certain amount of tiresomely grandiloquent mysticism which seems inappropriate to me. A typical sentence such as: "In translating József's poems with Zsuzsanna Ozsváth, some of the greatest miracles occurred when I heard in Zsuzsi's voice the authentic voice of the Finno-Ugric Altaic shaman", implies a whole set of bigger and smaller miracles and the ability of the American poet to judge the "authenticity" of something of which he is doomed to remain relatively ignorant. It makes me long for Bátki's simple equations. There is something puffed-up and antithetical to the spirit of József in it. It's a sign of what might, and sometimes does, go wrong in the translations. To do it credit, however, as with Radnóti, the Mystic Formalist method yields results in precisely the areas neglected by Bátki: poetic texture, music, echo. Keeping with the same poem, "Summer", the third verse as rendered by Ozsváth/Turner reads: "Still more, still yet, the welling grows. / Strawberries blood-rich on the loam / drowse in the warm, the eared wheat blows. / Crouched in the boughs, a thunderstorm." For sheer sound as music and emotion this is way beyond Bátki. Certainly there are liberties taken, but liberties may be earned. We can accommodate the tautologous "Still more, still yet" and its echo in "welling grows" because the Keatsian sumptuousness assumes real emotional power. The storm that crouches in Turner is infinitely more threatening than the storm that perches in Bátki. There is a wholesale commitment to romantic density in Turner that corresponds to József's troubled sensuality. The problem occurs when this has to be cast aside. The plain-spokenness of the last verse *("Ily gyorsan betelik nyaram! / Ördögszekéren jár a szél— / csattan a menny és megvillan, / elvtársaim: a kaszaél")* is wholly missed in "So swift my summer is fulfilled! / On fly-

ing witch-balls rides the gale— / sky claps and flashes, sudden, chilled, / with fairy light from winter's pale." The first line has taken on some of the grandiloquence of the essay and the last misses the point by a clear mile. Where are the comrades *(elvtársaim)* and the scythe-blade of the last line? József the man, the political creature whose fate was in the balance, is lost. Instead we have a mystico-romantic sensibility with fairy light. The poem is drunk on its own rhetoric and music and cannot change gear. Bátki's last verse is at least accurate and human.

For all that there is no doubt that most of the time Turner and Ozsváth offer more than Bátki can. Turner is a more accomplished poet, albeit of a specific sort, and his music, though sometimes rather fusty, does catch the force of József's passion even while realizing it in a different context.

If one takes a major poem like "Night in the Outskirts", both Bátki and Turner have much to offer in the ways I have already described, but neither is as good as either Michael Hamburger in the version he offers in the Argumentum / Cardinal volume, or Edwin Morgan in Morgan's *Collected Translations,* published some four years ago. It is a great pity that Morgan's twenty-five renderings of József never made a book in themselves, because, for all the splendour of the mixed bag offered by his collected work, they are simply another item there, and get a little lost. Nevertheless, Morgan is one of the most gifted translators of the last forty years and I would certainly recommend any English language reader to consult his version beside the others. For lack of a Morgan, the spare, elegant voice of Hamburger's "Night in the Outskirts" is perhaps the core around which the other translations may arrange themselves. The stronger rhetorical flourish of the Turner / Ozsváth ending is more attractive and probably closer to the spirit of the original, and its richness of detail fills out the leaner narrative provided by Hamburger along the way, but Hamburger's is the version best able to define the starting point.

Talking of mixed bags, *Attila József: Poems and Fragments* is precisely that, a bag so mixed the reader must be prepared for several disappointments to each success. Kabdebo (the unattributed editor), Peter Sherwood and John Wilkinson are, for all their intelligence and passion, limited as translators, and their work occupies a considerable portion of the book. The five Longleys are well worth finding (if only there were more), as are the few short Michael Murphys that take minor liberties but compensate for this with freshness. Kennelly's two lines are no more than a passing gesture. Peter Zollman contributes some formally faithful translations and his "On the Edge of Town" *('A város peremén')*, but for one or two small slips, is a close rival to the Turner version, "On the Edge of the City". The Bátki suffers a few prosaic passages by comparison, but this is a poem that is worth looking at in all three versions.

For some of the other great poems— "Mother" for instance, the Edwin Morgan version is by far the best. The "Ode" is rendered equally well by Turner and Morgan and very poorly by Kabdebo. And so on. The reader of this review might, like a good consumer, want to know the comparative value-for-money of this or that translator for this or that poem, but there is a limit to the usefulness of the exercise. One must try to make broader judgments.

I want to recap a little. There is clearly passion involved in the work of translation where a poet of József's stature is concerned. But the very same stature resists the definition of the definitive translation.

The József shaped hole is only partly filled in. In fact, for foreign readers, it remains a rather notional hole. There is nothing of comparable size here: no persuasive shape. None of these books is fully convincing, but they are all helpful as cribs to each other. The ideologies of the Bátki and the Ozsváth / Turner are clearly defined at the beginning, and in such cases *chacun à son goût* is the rule. We are not yet in the position that we were in with, say, the J.B. Leishman version of Rilke, which supplied a generation with an introduction and a voice which, however much it might have been modified since by other translators, served very well then and still succeeds in retaining the reader's affection. None of the versions of József we have so far will quite do that. The hole in József's case remains largely empty, and, in my view, it is the off-stage Morgan who does most to fill it. József is just too big. His greatness comprises an element of the best of Turner's lushness and rhetoric and an equally important element of Bátki's common speech, but it is more than the sum of them. In my ear, József has something of D.H. Lawrence, something of Aragon, something of Desnos and a little of Hart Crane. Keats and Corso can sit in there with the rest of the chorus, but they cannot supply all the parts. None of this helps form a policy in translating, of course. No poet breaks down into constituent parts and great poets still less so. You catch at József as you catch at a strong wind down the city street: power, desire, fresh open air and the smell of damp walls thronging with the music of childhood and loss. The oeuvre is large: every poem is contained in every other poem, including the fragments with which the Kabdebo edited volume ends. Somehow one has to swallow him whole or breathe him in. In the meantime we take a sniff and breathe at each other. ❧

Nicholas T. Parsons

Hungary for Western Eyes

László Kontler: *Millennium in Central Europe: A History of Hungary.* Atlantisz Publishing House, 1999, 537 pages, illustrated with black and white plates.
Csaba Csorba, János Estók and Konrád Salamon: *The Illustrated History of Hungary.* Magyar Könyvklub, 1999, 247 pp. Colour illustrations throughout.

"Professional historians," writes R. J. Evans, "publish works that no sane person would attempt to read from beginning to end; works that are designed explicitly for reference rather than reading. They usually lack the kind of literary ability that would make their work rival that of minor poets or novelists. If they had it, no doubt most of them would be writing poetry or fiction."[1] Here we have two new histories of Hungary against which this coat-trailing remark may be measured, both of them ostensibly aimed at the "educated reader of average knowledge," as Kontler puts it. There, however, the resemblance between the two books ends, since *Millennium in Central Europe* is a densely written survey that eschews the colourful anecdote or provocative detail, while *The Illustrated History of Hungary* is teeming with vivid incidentals, its verbal illustration of a theme often being as lively as the many fine illustrations that accompany the text. In a sense, the books are complementary, the one offering a narrative dramatic enough to make the pulses run, the other scrupulously concerned with balance and restraint.

According to László Kontler, who teaches history at Eötvös University and the Central European University in Budapest, his target audience has hitherto contemplated "the history of Hungary in terms of convenient stereotypes. Even if the crudest associations of Hungarianness (*csikós, gulyás, puszta,* Gypsy music etc.) are discounted, schematic simplifications —partly inspired from Hungary itself— dominate the Western European and North American conception of Hungary's place in the world. In Central and Eastern Europe, Hungary's one-time status as a great regional power, her subsequent reduction in size as well as international importance, and the resulting impulses have evoked equally simplistic and emotionally coloured assessments of her role in the region's history. The model of "a nation making ceaseless (and perhaps laudable) efforts at emerging from (half-)barbarity to the fold of Europe," or "a small nation struggling and surviving against the odds", or "a nation of oppressors turned trouble-

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1 ■ Richard J. Evans: *In Defence of History,* London 1997, p. 70.

makers" and their likes offer stereotypes which the book intends to dispel or—since some of them, as most distortions, contain a grain of reality—develop with an eye to substantiation. These remarks in the Preface are quite a good indication of Kontler's general approach, an argument cast in the form of propositions both supported and disputed: stereotypes are bad because they misrepresent; on the other hand, the historian can indeed substantiate some of them, at least partially, so they can't be all bad. The layman may therefore be forgiven for believing, in the light of this, that the historian's nuanced historical judgement may sometimes turn out to be a respectably grounded and more carefully formulated version of the despised stereotype.

By contrast to the almost agonized caution of Kontler, we know exactly where we are heading as soon as we look at the inside flap of *The Illustrated History,* which features a long quotation from Gyula Illyés's 1938 contribution to a book entitled *Hungarians* (I retain the sometimes odd English of the translation): "Hungarians... owe their existence to their audacious struggles. These struggles were defensive fight from the beginning and became increasingly desperate as time went by. All hopeless. Surprisingly enough, these are the most hopeless at the moment they are launched: the enemy is always at least twenty times stronger, and sober minds would avoid such a venture. The nation, famous for its calm and objective way of thinking, is aware that its venture can only end in failure, but still, time and again it attacks Goliath. Our forebodings always prove right, but we never learn from the lesson. Our history does not teach us logic. It teaches us, and this is comforting and lofty, that such things like courage, audacity and insistence on ideas also have value in the life of nations. People can live thousands of years only through miracles, using the example of the phoenix."

These words (a better translation would communicate more of their nobility and less of their pathos) evoke not so much the historian as frustrated poet conjured by Evans, but rather more the poet as frustrated historian. Much of Europe's popular narrative history, like its romantic literature, has traditionally served and continues to serve as an assertion of national identity. There is nothing in the least wrong with that, if the history is thoroughly grounded in research and doesn't gloss over or suppress the awkward facts. *The Illustrated History* is not demeaned by being classed as such a work, and indeed this was probably inherent in the authors' commission, given that it was evidently prepared with the featured Hungarian presence at the 1999 Frankfurt Book Fair in mind. It boasts an introduction by the Minister of National Cultural Heritage (in Britain, this is roughly the equivalent of having an anodyne Preface written by minor royalty), which concludes: "On the anniversary of Hungary's 1000-year statehood, we can rightly be proud of ... our ancestors' preservation of independent statehood and of the specific Hungarian culture that we contributed to the joint cultural treasures of Europe". Here the book joins hands with Kontler's text, for the always implicit and not infrequently stated premise of both works is that Hungary, at least from the time of Prince Géza's more or less opportunistic conversion to Christianity, has always been an integral part of Western Europe politically and culturally. The perception of marginalization is comparatively recent and extremely misleading. True, Hungarians themselves may have contributed to that perception (large chunks of Hungarian history are devoted to implicit or explicit discussion of this),

but that does not alter the underlying reality: at an early stage in its history as a settled nation, an irrevocable geopolitical decision steered Hungary out of the orbit of potentially influential Byzantium and anchored her among the competing, but in crucial respects similar, kingdoms and empires of Catholic Christendom.

In view of this it is appropriate that Kontler begins his book with some *Reflections on Symbolic Geography,* which begin with the claim that "Hungary lies indeed at the geometrical centre of Europe", which is a slightly curious idea, but one that explains why the cultural geographer Jenő Cholnoky thought that if Central Europe truly exists, it could only be the territory of the historic Kingdom of Hungary. Kontler continues with a masterly analysis of the "subjective or emotional as well as objective or structural factors" that influence symbolic geography. As recent work in this field by authors such as Larry Wolff and Maria Todorova[2] has demonstrated, territories may acquire a particular profile in terms of symbolic geography that is as much imposed by external factors and political anxieties as generated from within the territory concerned. Thus Wolff has pointed out that the old cultural assumption of "refined" south (Rome, Florence, Venice) and "barbaric" north shifted in the course of the Enlightenment to a new conceptual division between "Western" Europe and "Eastern" Europe, whereby the "Orient" was a term no more discriminating than areas on medieval maps supposedly inhabited by dragons. "Prague," writes Kontler, "just north-west of Vienna, Warsaw, Cracow, Pressburg/Bratislava/Pozsony and Buda were often considered to be as oriental as St Petersburg, Moscow or Odessa: Bohemia, Poland and Hungary to be as non-western as Siberia." The term "Balkan" (which only means mountain) became even more indiscriminate, and the closer you were to the borders of its imagined territory, the more culturally (and negatively) charged was your use of the term.

Some less controversial and ultimately more revealing distinctions between the regions of 18th century Europe are usefully outlined by Kontler as follows: in the West and the North an "historical accident" had created large and relatively strong nation-states (England, Spain, France and [?] Sweden); In the middle zone, adjacent to the west, were the multistate nations (Italians and Germans); Next to (or beyond) them lay an area of multinational states, "where foreign dynasties and composite elites ruled over a great number of more or less populous ethnic groups among conditions of socio-economic backwardness which increased as one proceeded east and south-east: the Habsburg, the Russian and the Ottoman Empires". In our own age, this tripartite division has altered under the influence of Jenő Szűcs's famous article on the three historical regions of Europe[3], which postulates distinctive Eastern and Western Europes, the core lands of Central Europe (Poland, the Czech Lands and Hungary) lying in between them. These Central European lands were always strongly identified with the West culturally, but found themselves held back in certain well-known respects of their economic, social and political development.

Kontler's very balanced discussion of symbolic geography in the Hungarian con-

2 ■ Larry Wolff: *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map and the Mind of the Enlightenment,* Stanford, 1994; Maria Todorova: *Imagining the Balkans,* New York and Oxford, 1997.

3 ■ Jenő Szűcs: "The Three Historical Regions of Europe: An Outline", in John Keane (ed.) *Civil Society and the State* (London, 1988), 291–332. Full text in *Acta Historica Academiæ Scientiarum Hungaricæ* (1983).

text offers little support, however, for what he calls the "self-fulfilling prophecy" of those who mistake a potential or an aspiration for the reality. While "there is certainly a great deal of truth in the claim that there is an ultimate identification in terms of fundamental historical structures between the Occident proper and this central zone of the European continent ... it is also quite true that in many aspects this is mere wishful thinking, and the sharp distinction between this region and the ones east and south-east of it is over-emphasized: an outcome of prejudice, suspicion and contempt." In an age where once again nationalism has raised its head and scholars like Samuel P. Huntington are talking about the "clash of civilizations",[4] such topics all too easily occupy the battleground where the politically correct fight it out with the cultural chauvinists (both protagonists perhaps sharing more prejudices than they care to admit). Kontler is surely right to add the following: "The notion of Central Europe and the view of the nations and lands usually associated with it as Central European remains useful if we regard it, instead of a statement of fact, a heuristic device, as part of the modern self-reflection of the peoples concerned."

I have dwelt at some length on the matter of symbolic geography because it is so intimately linked to Hungarian self-perception and therefore must affect the way their history is written. In fact both books under review show a striking similarity in their choice of periodization, each with seven sections. The first chooses itself (from the origins of the Magyars to the Conquest), as does the second (the medieval monarchy from its inception to its demise at the catastrophic battle of Mohács in 1526), although Kontler splits this into two, the caesura being marked by the extinction of the Árpád dynasty at the end of the 13th century. The third section in the *Illustrated History* runs from Mohács to the end of the reform era, while Kontler splits this more manageably into a Chapter IV, called *Wedged between Empires (1526–1711),* and a Chapter V called *Enlightenment, Reform and Revolution (1711–1849).* Both then have a section *(Toward a Bourgeois Hungary and The Advent of Modernity)* that brings us up to World War I, followed by one that brings the story up to the end of World War II. The final two sections of the *Illustrated History* (*Under Soviet Rule* and *Back to Europe*) are dealt with by Kontler in Chapter 7 entitled *Utopias and their Failures (1945–1989),* to which he attaches a meditative epilogue surveying the events in Hungary since 1989.

This similarity in periodization, while it obviously indicates a near consensus regarding the turning points of Hungarian history, conceals considerable differences in the approach to the narrative. However, the authors of both books preface each major section with an overview of the period to be narrated which contextualizes the material and helps to keep the reader in mind of contemporary European developments. In the case of Kontler, these chapter prefaces offer valuable short essays that enable him to develop his intellectual sub-text or *leitmotif,* without obtruding upon the narrative. A good example is the following passage that precedes his Chapter III: "The impression that by the late Middle Ages Hungary had made up for her disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the West might even be strengthened by the contemplation of the fact that whereas the

4 ■ Samuel P. Huntington: *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York, 1997).

fourteenth century is supposed to have been a period of profound 'crisis' in Western Europe, it was, by and large, one of economic prosperity and political stability in Hungary, again in tandem with Bohemia and Poland. Upon closer scrutiny, this image proves false: to put it simply, Hungary remained unaffected by the crisis precisely because it was also unaffected by important aspects of the development that occasioned it in the West. The crisis was one of hyperbolic growth, and is now considered as a series of birth pangs of the modernity that Europe's dynamism between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries rested upon." By the introduction to Chapter IV *(Wedged between Empires)* Kontler is quoting Márton Csombor on the gap developing between Hungary and the West and remarking that the agrarian boom of 16th century Hungary "failed to generate a structural transformation leading to the capitalization of agriculture or the rise of industries linked with it". Nor can Habsburg mercantilism be blamed for this, since it was a phenomena that well predated the onset of absolutism in the late 17th century.

In the preface to Chapter V we learn how structural weakness was compounded by a century and a half of Ottoman occupation and partition, producing a country of contradictions with "proverbially fertile soil but vast areas of fallow and marshlands (less than 2.4 per cent of its territory was cultivated in 1720)..." To these problems were added the debilitating effects of the Rákóczi War of Independence (1703–1711), the price of whose political gains was the almost total subordination of the national interest to that of the nobility. In the 19th century the picture brightens with the rapid development of a middle class, economic expansion and the advent of a constitutional monarchy in 1867. There was, of course, a downside, namely "the mutual incompatibility of competing national movements", which may have been insoluble, even had the Hungarians been sooner alert to them during their brief spell of independence in the revolution of 1848–9. Finally comes the dissolution of historic Hungary, competing explanations for the cause of which are offered in the preface to Chapter VII: some continue to believe that it was the result of "rival nationalisms in the region with the complicity of western great powers", most others see it as the "inevitable product of centrifugal forces" (but surely these two formulations amount to nearly the same thing?). By the time we come to the preface to Chapter VIII, the external factors responsible for Hungary's plight are firmly (and, I would have thought, uncontroversially) in the foreground. As Kontler puts it: "1956 repeated the pattern of 1849, 1918–1920 and 1944–1948 in that international contingencies once again, and perhaps even more shockingly than ever before, deprived Hungary of the opportunity of lifting the limitations on its sovereignty and going the way it wanted."

It will be seen from these (admittedly selective) quotations that the spectres of the stereotypes against which the author has warned us at the beginning of his book have not entirely been banished. It is after all hard to write a Hungarian history that entirely avoids being either a study of supposed national failure or an apologia for the Magyars, often both at the same time. This makes the stubborn even-handedness of Kontler's writing even more impressive. It is interesting to compare his approach to one of the most disputed issues in Hungarian historiography over the years, namely the mercantilist system imposed on the country in 1754, with that of the *Illustrated History*. The latter simply states that this "stunted the growth of

Hungarian agriculture and industry" and made Hungary "the raw material and food supplier of the more developed industry of the Austrian and Bohemian provinces". Kontler supplies us with the background to these measures, which were part of a package aimed "at invigorating all sectors of the [imperial] economy, substituting for lost Silesia, and distributing the financial obligations of the subjects more equitably than before." He allows that the regulations, which imposed high tariffs on all Hungarian goods exported to non-Habsburg lands and on Hungarian manufactured products sold in western Habsburg provinces were "clearly discriminative", and might superficially seem to justify the label of "colonial economic policy", often applied to it. However, he argues that the policy "did not suffocate ... the growth of Hungarian manufactures, [because] there was very little to suffocate. ... The economic inequality between Hungary and the western Habsburg lands did not emerge as a result of the new regulations, and did not increase as a result of them." It was true that there were "damaging losses" in the former flourishing export trade of cattle to Venice, wine to Poland and Britain and grain exports elsewhere, but this did not alter the established fact that "Hungary had been an economic dependency of western regions." No doubt it was inconvenient for Hungarian purchasers to be forced to buy "somewhat inferior and more expensive articles" from the neighbouring Habsburg lands" instead of the "better and cheaper products from Silesia and Germany" of heretofore: "but for the Hungarian craftsmen and the few industrialists, the competition of these products [from the western part of the Empire] was less dangerous and consequently more conducive to progress, which despite the confinements, did take place in the number of capitalist factories and the sophistication of their products as well (though out of altogether merely 125 such enterprises, there were only seven that had more than a hundred employees in 1790)." Furthermore, Maria Theresa's motives were not those of specifically disadvantaging Hungary, but of closing the gap between the Empire and her more economically advanced rivals by "developing the established branches of the economy in both halves of her empire". The tariffs were also one of several money-raising measures intended to compensate for the tax exemption of the Hungarian nobility, although they did not in fact succeed in increasing state revenues from Hungary.

This argument is, to say the least, ingenious (to assert that the aggressive measures designed to keep Hungary out of manufacturing were anyway needed to protect the sector, because it was so weak, is a circular argument with a vengeance); but I have quoted it at some length to illustrate the author's lofty refusal to sully his text with slogans such as "colonialism" and his persistence in impartial explanation of the motives of those who influenced the course of Hungary's history for good or for ill. The same balance is evident in the treatment of the 1848 War of Independence (he even eschews the common phrase "lawful revolution" on a strict interpretation of the Diet's procedural requirements) and of the Horthy era. Both books indeed give an impressively detailed and clear account of the April Laws of 1848, including the implications of those laws for the status of ethnic minorities. It is to be expected, perhaps, that the *Illustrated History* presents a more robust Hungarian view of the Revolution, repeatedly stressing the lawfulness of the Hungarian government approved by the simple-minded Emperor Ferdinand: "the court ... abandoned all legality: it made Prime Minister Batthyány resign and illegally dis-

solved the Hungarian Parliament... the empire's government prepared for the annihilation of the legally established Hungarian bourgeois state", and so on. A similar robustness is apparent in its treatment of the fatal Trianon agreement ("the peace conference decided even on the most important territorial issues exclusively on the basis of statements from the representatives of the greedy successor states"). However, it is no less clear-eyed than Kontler on the simultaneous inevitability and impossibility of Horthy's policy of irredentism: "The victorious Western democracies would have accepted the rightfulness of the struggle for ethnically more just borders reluctantly. Hungarian revisionist policy, however, demanded full restoration of historical Hungary, that is, the re-annexation of the areas of non-Hungarian nationality as well, on the basis of historical right. No serious support could be won for this cause. And since not only Hungary but also the rest of the countries in the region harboured irredentist claims, they later became easy prey to the extremist political adventurism of Hitler's empire."

Enough has been quoted, I hope, to illustrate the difference in tone and narrative style of these two books, both excellent in their own way. *The Illustrated History* with its lively text aimed at the general reader who may or may not have much knowledge of Hungary. A major bonus is that it has quite the best selection of pictures I have ever seen in a book of this sort, often as many as seven or eight to a double spread, both black and white and colour. Some of these are familiar enough (it is obviously difficult to be very original in illustrating the earlier periods), but for this reader at least, many were fascinating discoveries. Particularly interesting are the illustrations relating to society and culture: I would single out some striking images, like that of a young Hungarian peasant woman singing into a phonograph at the time of the 1900 Paris World Fair (p. 170); or János Csonka's motor car (p. 160), which was successfully test-driven in 1905; or a splendid portrait of Josef Bem on horseback (p. 136). These and many other wonderful illustrations really do add an extra dimension to the book bringing individuals and events sometimes terrifyingly alive. Look, for instance, at Page 137, where the bottom right-hand corner has a moving and heroic depiction of the judicial murder of Prime Minister Count Lajos Batthyány, perhaps the most tragic victim of Austrian reprisals in 1849. Immediately above it is a chilling portrait of the psychopathic Austrian general, Baron Haynau, and above that a naïve representation of the capitulation of the Hungarian army at Világos. On either side of these pictures, the text relates the grim statistics: 13 military leaders executed ... 120 people sent to the gallows ... 1500 imprisoned ... over 40,000 Hungarian soldiers and officers forcibly drafted into the imperial army as common soldiers. It is a brilliant, almost cinematic, piece of bookmaking.

The keen student of Hungarian history could benefit from possession of both of these books. Those who are content with a good read accompanied by vivid and well chosen pictures will plump for the *Illustrated History*. Those who feel the need of a sophisticated and learned discussion of issues in Hungarian history embedded in a detailed and often dense narrative, will obviously plump for *Millennium in Central Europe*. At any rate, what with the recent publication of Ignác Romsics's *History of Hungary in the Twentieth Century* and Paul Lendvai's *Die Ungarn*, it would appear that Hungarian history-writing is enjoying a boom. Long may it continue. ❧

Johanna Granville

"Our Troops Are Fighting"

New Evidence from the Archives

Jenő Györkei and Miklós Horváth, eds.: *Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary, 1956.* Transl. Emma Roper-Evans. Budapest, Central European University Press, 1999. xv + 318 pp. Tables, photographs, maps, endnotes, biographical notes.

The *Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary, 1956,* edited by Jenő Györkei of the Military History Institute in Budapest, and Miklós Horváth, of the Hungarian Army's Political College, is a worthy addition to the series of books by Columbia University Press (Atlantic Studies on Society in Change) that surveys many aspects of East Central European society.[1] Originally published in Hungarian in 1996, this book consists of three essays, each about one hundred pages, by Györkei and Horváth, Alexander Kirov, and Yevgeny Malashenko, respectively.[2] All three selections primarily focus on Soviet and Hungarian military actions in the 1956 crisis, rather than the Soviet decision-making process, or the influence of other Warsaw Pact countries.

In the preface, Béla Király, the editor-in-chief of the series and himself a key participant in the 1956 events, poses—and then answers—four questions about the Hungarian crisis, which have preoccupied scholars from former Communist countries. First, was the 1956 uprising a revolution or counter-revolution? If it was a revolution, did it succeed or fail? As Király contends, "Without 1956 the 'lawful revolution' that commenced in 1989 and is still in progress would not have happened, or if it had, it would not have been what it is today." (xiv) (The Hungarian Parliament passed a resolution on May 2, 1990 classifying the events of 1956 as a "revolution" and "war of independence.") Second, was the introduction of Soviet troops an aggressive act, or did it constitute military aid to a beleaguered Socialist state that had requested it? Király confirms that the Soviet actions did amount to war by pointing out the size of the Soviet military force used in Hungary in the November 4 intervention (17 divisional units), the number of Soviet casualties (722 men killed, 1,251 wounded), and the number of decorations awarded to Soviet soldiers (26 "Hero of the Soviet Union" decorations, 10,000 combat decorations).

Király argues that if the Soviet Union had to exert such a great effort, this could not have constituted mere "aid" to Hungary. (Let us also remember Hungarian Premier Imre Nagy's last radio appeal at 5:20 a.m. on November 4, in which he said that the Soviet Union "attacked our capital

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with the obvious intention of overthrowing the legitimate Hungarian democratic government." In addition, on October 24, 1991, as reported by *Izvestiia,* the Soviet Supreme Council categorically condemned the Soviet troop intervention, acknowledging it as an interference in the internal affairs of Hungary.)

Thirdly, was there indeed armed conflict between "Socialist" states? Király asserts that Hungary had no intention in 1956 of completely abandoning Socialism, and therefore the Soviet Union did attack another Socialist state.

Finally, was the declaration of neutrality on November 1 the cause, or the effect, of Soviet aggression? Király states that Nagy's declaration was merely the effect; by November 1 Khrushchev and his colleagues were already informing other Warsaw Pact leaders in Bucharest, and on the island of Brioni the following day, of impending action[3]. Soviet tanks were already crossing the border into Hungary. (We know from the "Malin notes" that the Soviet leaders reached the decision to invade on October 30-31, well before Nagy's declaration.)[4] One should point out, however, that other Hungarian leaders and students had been calling for their country's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact much earlier, and this may indeed have influenced Soviet decision making. Certainly by October 27 and 28, the in-surgents included neutrality in their demands, along with a coalition government and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary (p. 65).

The book contains a wealth of new archival evidence. However, the only essay based exclusively on archival documents is by Alexander Kirov, a Russian military historian (born in 1956); Györkei's essay draws on Hungarian documents primarily published in document collections, and Malashenko draws on his own memory.[5] In addition to data on divisions and casualties, he provides three maps and two detailed tables. One table accounts for each division active in the October 24 operation (code-named Volna) and November 4 (codenamed Vikhr), giving the permanent base, time of combat readiness, and time of border crossing (pp. 202–3).[6] The second table provides the number of deaths, wounded persons, disappearances, and non-combat-related deaths in each division (pp. 204–5). In his introduction, Kirov provides information on his professional background. A lieutenant colonel in the Russian Federation Armed Forces' paratroop formations, Kirov gained access to the exclusive Armed Forces Headquarters Central Archive, which is still closed to most researchers. His experience will inspire Ph.D. candidates around the world. After being examined on it in 1994, his dissertation and notes were confiscated and he was discharged from the army. Amazingly, these circumstances did not deter him from writing this study. (One wonders how he was able to provide exact fond, opis', and delo numbers, other than from memory).

The essay by Györkei and Horváth, both Hungarian military historians, provides some interesting information. This section, like the other two, contains very little analysis of the events, and so the reader must draw his own conclusions from the data provided. One gains insight into the plight of the Hungarian political and military leaders themselves. Original Soviet documents and other accounts tend to portray them as vacillating and totally dependent on the Kremlin to make their decisions for them. Györkei's essay, on the other hand, contains actual quotes from individual Hungarian leaders, for example, from a Hungarian Central Committee meeting on October 26 (pp. 44–49). One then clearly grasps their predicament. They could not simply instruct the military

to shoot the insurgents, because they would lose the support of the population, and the military might not obey orders anyway. (As in the 1990 putsch attempt in Russia, most Hungarian soldiers did indeed refuse to shoot their fellow countrymen.) The Hungarian Politburo members had seen how the first use of force (by the Hungarian Security police) on October 23 merely exacerbated tension. On the other hand, if the Hungarian leaders did not take action swiftly by themselves, they risked a second Soviet invasion. Moreover, many Hungarians lost their lives in the post-Second World War "liberation" of Hungary from the Nazis; a failure to "restore order" now would imply that these men had died in vain. They elected Nagy as Prime Minister as the middle course, despite the disapproval of Molotov and other Soviet hardliners.

The Györkei essay also encourages a more complex view of the Hungarian military. In many cases, members of the armed forces sympathized with the "freedom fighters." Students from top military institutions such as the Zrínyi Miklós Military Academy and the Petőfi Academy, actually attended the student meetings and approved the 16 demands of the students. Several formations in cities like Székesfehérvár and Győr "agreed with the legitimate demands of the workers" (p. 43). In other cases, the Hungarian military was given conflicting commands which demoralized them and reduced their effectiveness. Military patrols would arrest armed civilians and then be ordered to release them, whereupon these same civilians would again shoot at them (p. 42). The Hungarian government initially imposed a curfew and banned demonstrations and then rescinded these orders, partly because Nagy argued that people needed to buy bare essentials. This complicated the military's task of identifying and disarming the civilian "rebels" (pp. 47–48).

At other times, the Hungarian military—particularly the National Guard formed by Imre Nagy and headed by Béla Király—strikes one as harsh and unyielding. According to Király's Defense Plan, "any armed individuals who are not part of the National Guard must be arrested." (p. 94) Hungarian officials who formed the National Guard (which was controlled by the Revolutionary Council for Public Safety) worried about "restoration" and "reactionary attempts" perhaps as much as Moscow did (90). Apparently the leaders of the National Guard were not always united either. If General Yevgeny Malashenko's interview with Pál Maléter can be believed, the latter claimed that Béla Király was planning to "start a counter-revolutionary regime" (pp. 253–4). (Considering the fact that he had just been arrested on November 3 by KGB chief Ivan Serov in the midst of military negotiations, Maléter, who was later executed along with Imre Nagy and others, may simply have been trying to save his skin.)

In their essay, Györkei and Horváth draw heavily on Béla Király's memoir, which prompts the curious reader to question aspects of Imre Nagy's actions (105–8). Király, commander-in-chief of the National Guard, spoke to Nagy several times by phone the night before the November 4 attack. As is well-known, Nagy refused to order the Hungarian troops to shoot, a decision which stemmed from the humanitarian desire to avoid an all-out war which Hungary could not win. However, he did not tell Király that he planned to seek refuge in the Yugoslav Embassy shortly after his 5:20 a.m. radio broadcast on November 4, essentially abandoning his governmental post. Király had thought that as long as the Nagy government existed, it was his duty to provide some kind of military organization to support it. As Király writes,

"If I had known that the Nagy government did not exist, I would have advised the freedom fighters to cease the hopeless fight and save what lives and public property we could" (p. 108). Why did Nagy not tell Király? Many lives might have been saved. Nagy's broadcast further misled Király; Nagy stated "our troops are fighting... the government is at its post."

All three essays provide background information (at times overlapping) on the origins, personnel, and positioning of the Soviet "Osobyi Korpus" (Special Corps) in Hungary (p. 5; p. 211). This small command centre in Hungary was named such at Marshal Zhukov's suggestion, in analogy to the Special Corps of Soviet troops in Mongolia that he had commanded in 1939 (211). The agreement of the Allied Powers, and later the Paris Peace Treaty (February 10, 1947), legitimated the stationing of the Special Corps in Hungary after 1945. The Soviet Union used the Special Corps to back up Soviet troops stationed in Austria, but after the Austrian State Treaty was signed in 1955, it was supposed to withdraw. To create an international legal basis for Soviet troops to remain in Hungary, the Soviet Union signed a new treaty, establishing the Warsaw Pact (May 14, 1955). headquarters in the capital (p. 212).

Although ordered to draw up a plan for the "Restoration of Order," as early as July 1956, the Special Corps did not seriously expect violence in the country. General Malashenko (a colonel and acting chief of staff of the Special Corps at the time) contends that relations were peaceful between the Corps members and the local Hungarian population. (My own research in the Russian Archive of Foreign Policy reveals, however, that a few minor episodes of violence occurred.)[7]

Given his key role, Malashenko's memoir is valuable. Some of his recollections have already been published in the Russian journal *Voenno-istoricheskii Zhurnal,* but other material, such as the interviews with Hungarian military leaders Maléter, Szűcs, and Kovács after they were kidnapped, is new[8]. The Special Corps was reluctant to "restore order." When Soviet Ambassador Yuri Andropov called Lashchenko on October 23 around 17:00 and asked him to send his troops in to put an end to disorder in Budapest, Malashenko heard Lashchenko reply that that was a task only for the Hungarian police, state security services and Hungarian soldiers. For one thing, intervention went beyond his authority, and for another "it was not desirable to bring Soviet troops into something like this" (p. 222). Lashchenko also told Andropov, "Our troops can only be ordered into action by the Soviet minister of defense and the chief of staff, by a decree of the Soviet government."

Undergraduate students would find this book difficult to read due to the abundant statistics and relative lack of analysis. Many parts (e.g. the "Mosaic of Resistance," pp. 109–114) resemble chronologies and lists of statistics and the lack of an index is rather frustrating.

The main strength of this book, of course, is that it draws on a wide variety of documents and documentary collections from several Hungarian archives and one Soviet archive, which were declassified after the collapse of the Soviet Union[9]. The "1956-os Intézet" (Institute for the Study of the 1956 Revolution) in Budapest has published a plethora of books and documents, but unfortunately, very few have been translated into English. Thus Györkei's volume is a good start and will serve as a helpful reference work, containing as it does, tables, maps, and biographical notes. Only two other books incorporating the new documentary evidence on the 1956 crisis have been published in English since the end of the Cold War:

1) György Litván's *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Reform, Revolt And Repression, 1953–1963,* trans János M. Bak and Lyman H. Legters (NY: Longman, 1996), and 2) Terry Cox, ed. Hungary 1956-Forty Years On (London: Frank Cass, 1997). Finally, I believe Malashenko is correct that this book helps to "contribute to the reconciliation of our peoples [Hungarian and Russian]." ❧

NOTES

1 ■ See, for example, György Csepeli, *National Identity in Contemporary Hungary* (NY: Columbia University Press, Atlantic Studies on Society in Change, no. 91, 1997). My review of this appears in *Nationalities Papers,* vol. 27, no. 4 (December 1999).

2 ■ See *Szovjet katonai intervenció 1956.* Budapest: Argumentum Kiadó, 1996.

3 ■ For more information on the Brioni meeting and Yugoslavia's role, see my articles, "Hungary, 1956: the Yugoslav Connection," *Europe-Asia Studies,* vol. 50, no. 3 (May 1998), pp. 493–518; and "The Soviet—Yugoslav Détente, Belgrade-Budapest Relations, and the Hungarian Revolution (1955–56)," *Hungarian Studies Review,* vol. XXIV, nos. 1–2 (1998), pp. 15–64.

4 ■ Vladimir Nikoforovich Malin, the head of the CPSU CC General Department during the entire Khrushchev period, took copious notes of all presidium meetings, although verbatim transcripts were not kept in the 1950s. (Tsentr Khraneniya Sovremennoi Dokumentatsii, or TKhSD), Fond 3, Opis' 12, Delo 1005–06. They were first published in Hungarian. See Vyacheslav Sereda and János M. Rainer, eds. *Döntés a Kremlben, 1956: A szovjet pártelnökség vitái Magyarországról.* Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 1996. The Russian version was published later that year. See "Kak reshalis voprosy Vengrii: Rabochie zapisi zasedanii Prezidiuma TsK KPSS, iyul'-noyabr' 1956 g.," *Istoricheskii Arkhiv* (Moscow), no. 2 (1996): 73–104, no. 3 (1996): 87–121, respectively. Extracts have been published in English: *HQ* 142 and 143.

5 ■ In addition to Sereda and Rainer, eds. *Döntés a Kremlben, 1956* (see note #4 above), these include *Hiányzó Lapok: 1956 történetéből: Dokumentumok a volt SZKP KP Levéltárából.* Budapest: Zenit Könyvek, 1993; *Jelcin-dosszié Szoviet dokumentumok 1956-ról.* Budapest, 1956-os Intézet, 1993; *TOP SECRET: Magyar–Jugoszláv Kapcsolatok, 1956;* and *1956-os Intézet—Évkönyv 1992.*

6 ■ Approximate figures have been published in Russian sources from the early 1990s. See, for example, G. F. Krivosheyev, ed. *Grif Sekretnosti Sniat: Poteri Vooruzhonnykh Sil SSSR v Voinakh, Boievykh Deistviyakh i Boievykh Konfliktakh, Statisticheskoye Issledovaniye.* Moscow: Voenizdat, 1993, p. 397.

7 ■ See Granville, "In the Line of Fire: the Soviet Crackdown on Hungary, 1956-1958," Carl Beck Papers, no 1307 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Center for Russian and East European Studies, December 1998). As General-Lieutenant Lashchenko informed Ambassador Andropov (who forwarded the message to the deputy minister of foreign affairs of the USSR, V. V. Kuznetsov), "Lately a series of attacks and beatings have been inflicted on completely innocent soldiers of the Soviet army by Hungarian citizens." He went on to describe how six Soviet soldiers on three different occasions were beaten with knives and rocks on their way home in the evening. In each case, Hungarian legal authorities did not hold the perpetrators ("hooligans") accountable. Further tensions were caused in another episode. The Soviet military official, Maj. A. N. Pliukhin, completely sober, was run over by a Hungarian truck driver breaking the speed limit. Rather than fine the latter, the chief Procurator Endre Szenvedi maintained that Pliukhin was at fault for being intoxicated. Russian Archive of Foreign Policy, F. 077, Op. 37, D. 18, P. 188, ll. 16–20, 25. "Ot General-Mayora Sokolova Rukovoditeliu Pyatovo Evropeiskovo Otdela Ministerstva Inostrannykh Del, Kuznetsovy, 7-ovo Avgusta 1956.

8 ■ Lieut.-General Evgenii I. Malashenko, "Osobyi Korpus v Ogne Budapeshta," *Voenno-istoricheskii Zhurnal* (Moscow), Nos. 10, 11, and 12 (October, November, and December 1993) and No. 1 (January 1994), pp. 22–30; 44–51; 33–37; and 30–36, respectively.

9 ■ In Hungary these archives include the Military Archive, the Interior Ministry Archive, the Historical Archive, and the Hungarian National Archive; in Russia: the Center for the Preservation of Contemporary Documentation.

George Gömöri

The Poet as Spokesman of the Nation

Gyula Illyés: *What You Have Almost Forgotten. Selected Poems.* Edited and with an introduction by William Jay Smith. Kortárs Kiadó, Budapest; Curbstone Press, Willimantic, 1999, 127 pp.

It is perhaps too early to tell whether Gyula Illyés, whom the text on the back cover of this poetic selection refers to as "one of Hungary's greatest poets of the 20th century", on a par, that is, with such giants as Endre Ady, Mihály Babits, Attila József, Lőrinc Szabó, Sándor Weöres, is deserving of such high praise. Illyés was indeed a central figure of Hungarian literary life for almost half a century, author of frequently-quoted poems, often-staged historical plays and of a famous village sociography *(The People of the Puszta)*, volumes of essays, translations, autobiographical writings and journals; as a poet, however, he is not as popular with the younger generation. This lack of interest may be attributed partly to a general post-Communist "reading inertia", but also to the absence of social and national commitment amongst the young, a common phenomenon in most East Central European countries. Though at one point he was regarded—and regarded himself—as an "unofficial spokesman" of the Hungarian nation, it now seems more likely that in a few decades Gyula Illyés as a poet will be remembered for some emblematic poems on the human condition, social and national issues, rather than on account of the innovations he introduced in Hungarian poetry. It is, however, to be welcomed that after nearly thirty years we have once again a selection of Illyés's poems in English.

What You Have Almost Forgotten is a collection put together by the American poet William Jay Smith, who has been associated with translating Hungarian poetry for many years. Nearly half of the poems are his own translations, the rest of the selection being shared between eighteen others, some British, others American and Canadian (of whom three are Hungarian-born). The translators' list includes accomplished poets—Donald Davie, Charles Tomlinson, Vernon Watkins and Kenneth McRobbie, as well as lesser known names whose work Smith has reprinted from Thomas Kabdebo's and Paul Tabori's 1971 anthology, *A Tribute to Gyula Illyés.* While Smith's and his Hungarian co-editor Gyula Kodolányi's standards are high, they failed

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to commission new translations which would have given a more comprehensive picture of Illyés's poetic achievement. In a sense this selection strengthens the image of Illyés as the author of poems informed by a kind of "grand rhetoric", and of a strong social and patriotic commitment, undoubtedly important in Hungary as well as beyond its borders. I have in mind "Fatherland in the Heights", "The Wonder Castle", "Bartók", "A Sentence for Tyranny" and, finally, "A Wreath" which stand out in this collection; on the other hand, the present book does not open up new vistas of Illyés's rich-textured and thematically extensive poetry.

William Jay Smith's introductory essay makes it clear that Illyés is not a poet who can be easily labelled. While he preserved his "closeness to his country roots", the importance of Paris in his formative years can hardly be underestimated. This led to an interesting paradox: in the thirties, a leading figure among the writers who came from a peasant background, he was also a friend and protegé of Mihály Babits, a poet and essayist of great erudition and authority. After Babits's death in 1941 Illyés started the journal *Magyar Csillag,* a worthy continuation of the leading literary journal *Nyugat,* of which Babits had been the last editor. At times he appears as a "smiling revolutionary", in another moment as the darling of the liberal literary establishment; a staunch anti-Fascist who worked as a bank clerk and had, for a while, illusions about the intended social reforms of the pro-German Prime Minister Béla Imrédy. (W.J. Smith does not mention this paradox, but it is common knowledge in Hungary). At any rate, the priorities of the pre-1945 Illyés were clear: he wanted to see social reforms which would raise both the status and living standards of the peasantry and would have no sympathy for political forces which denied or neglected this issue. After the collapse of conservative Hungary in 1945 and the radical Land Reform introduced by the democratic coalition (with the Communist Imre Nagy as Minister of Agriculture), Illyés's priorities changed—first subtly, and then substantially. As editor of the review *Válasz* (which, incidentally, had existed already before the war and was only re-launched in 1945) and a member of the left-wing Peasant Party he was a political fellow-traveller of the Communists until 1948–49, but once Stalinism gained the upper hand, even this relationship became tenuous and ambiguous. Between 1949 and 1956 he gained time by writing historical plays which the Communists, though critical towards them, could not ban—and while these plays, glorifying the democratic revolution of 1848, were widely staged, he wrote "A Sentence for Tyranny" (1951) for the drawer. Actually, William Jay Smith is wrong in thinking that the poem "The Roffers" (Cserepezők) was written "during the Stalinist period"—it was in fact written in early 1945, straight after Buda's liberation by the Soviets. At about the same time, Illyés wrote one of his great "reckoning" poems, "Nem volt elég" (It Was Not Enough), a litany of errors and omissions which led to the demise of the anachronistic (though not really fascist!) Horthy regime. This poem is not in the present collection; a pity, for in a sense it was this particular piece that gave Illyés the moral authority to write the equally grand condemnation of Communist autocracy, "A Sentence for Tyranny" which was first published during the 1956 Revolution.

The introduction mentions "a self-imposed silence" between 1956 and 1961. During this period Gyula Illyés demonstrated that one can eschew cooperation with a regime which (though making minor concessions to the non-Communist majority of the nation) imprisoned writers

and killed hundreds of political rebels who had taken up arms against Soviet-style Communism. In 1961, and in particular after the political amnesty of 1963, Illyés did return to the literary scene and enjoyed a double popularity, that of the readers and also of officialdom. In the following years he was awarded literary prizes and published many new books. Yet in the 1970s he once again clashed with Communist orthodoxy: as his priorities changed from social issues to national ones, he began to appear as a protector and spokesman of the Hungarian ethnic minorities which suffered discrimination in Romania and Czechoslovakia. His essays on this subject, collected in *"Szellem és erőszak"* (Intellect and Violence), were banned in Hungary in 1978 and were published only several years after his death, in 1988. This is not mentioned in William Jay Smith's introduction, though it could have provided an interesting context to such poems as "While the Record Plays" and "A Wreath".

As well as missing such relevant facts in the introduction, there are also several missing footnotes in this book of poetry. Being a paperback publication, one would presume it is intended for a wider readership; yet without footnotes no British or American reader would fully understand poems such as "Fatherland in the Heights", "Old Man Pursued" or "Ode to a Lawgiver". Illyés is deeply rooted in Hungarian tradition—that is history, culture and literature, and he often refers to (for Hungarians) well-known persons or events. While the average non-Hungarian reader might know who Gustavus Adolphus or Béla Bartók were, he would have no idea about Berzsenyi or let alone Tersánszky! Also, in the case of the poem "Rivers, Fjords, Small Villages", written in 1940, not three years later as the date under the poem suggests, a reference to Petsamo should have made it obvious to the reader that in this poem Illyés was protesting against the Soviet terror-bombing of the Northern Finnish town of Petsamo during the Soviet-Finnish war of 1939/40.

The fifty-odd poems in *What You Have Almost Forgotten* are mostly chosen from Illyés's post 1945 work, in fact there are twice as many poems from the 1945–1977 than from the 1928–1944 period. Translations of Illyés's later poems are often better than the earlier ones: for example, William Jay Smith is more reliable when translating the prose-poems of the nineteen sixties than the expressionist poems of the Twenties. I have found a number of lame solutions in "The Sad Field-Hand" and in "The Defeated Army"; to give just one example, why should the line *"véresen folynak az ablakok"* (literally: the windows are running with blood) be rendered as "drop by drop pus streaks down the windows" (p. 30, my emphasis). This poem, by the way, is written in quatrains, so it should not be squeezed into five parts of differing lengths in the translation.

Many translations are excellent. I, in particular, liked those by Vernon Watkins, Claire Lashley and J.G. Nichols, though John W. Wilkinson and Christine Brooke-Rose should also be mentioned as rendering some poems sensitively and with imagination. "A Wreath", by William Jay Smith, is outstanding. Finally, the typeface chosen by the publishers may be "modern", but it is very unpleasant. With a more attractive and easily readable print Illyés's verse could have found many more readers outside Hungary. ❧

András Gervai

The Lives and Faces of Miklós Jancsó

József Marx: *Jancsó Miklós két és több élete. Életrajzi esszé* (The Two and More Lives of Miklós Jancsó. A Biographical Essay). Vince Kiadó, 2000. 477 pp.

No writer of biographical essays could ask for a more exciting subject than Miklós Jancsó, perhaps the best-known abroad of Hungarian film directors. In Régis Wargnier's documentary *Lumière and Company,* the terminally ill President Francois Mitterand, when asked to name his most memorable movie experience, mentions the scene with the dancers from Jancsó's movie *Még kér a nép* (Red Psalm).

It is not only his feature films and documentaries, quite often intended to shock or provoke, that make Jancsó an ideal candidate for a biography, nor his directorial work in the theatre, festive/casual happenings and colourful oeuvre. His complex and imposing personality and his eventful professional career also beg for a biography.

And the biographer is not the only one who can count himself lucky for finding such an ideal subject; it is true the other way around to. The person who wrote a book on Jancsó has known him intimately for many decades now. They have been friends, not just professional associates. József Marx, a liberal arts graduate, drifted into the film industry in the early 1970s. He first worked as a scriptwriter at the Budapest Film Studio, and was the director of the Objective Studio later; at one time he was deputy director of Mafilm, the state film studios, and ran the Hungarian Film Institute, an establishment devoted to research into the cinematic arts. As a producer he was involved in István Szabó's film *Mephisto.*

Blending several genres and sources (critical reviews, diaries of eminent writers, news reports, interviews with Jancsó, etc.), the author ingeniously combines historical sources with his own recollections and subjective comments, his diary entries and other material connected with Jancsó's person and work, and his own opinions, thus sketching out a large tableau with his subject at the centre. This comprehensive and representative Jancsó biography, published only a few weeks ago but already leading the bestseller lists, not only reveals interesting facts, interconnections and intimate details about Jancsó and his oeuvre, but also allows us to take a glimpse behind the scenes of socialist Hungary, providing a picture of Jancsó's life and times.

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Jancsó brought his tolerance, his openness towards all ethnic groups, nations and creeds from home, almost as if he had had it in his genes. Bound to the region's history through innumerable threads, the Jancsó family of Transylvanian origin included nine boys and one girl on the father's side, and twelve children on the mother's side. Of simple peasant stock, the Jancsós were Unitarians and Sabbatarians (Christians converted to Judaism) who made their home in the Fogaras region, a remote area in Transylvania, sometime in the middle of the 19th century, possibly to escape the persecution of Sabbatarians. His father was an estate steward who lived the life of the gentry. His mother—who was married to his father at the age of sixteen and was pregnant at the time—came from the Popa-Radu family, which claimed to be descended from Radu, the brother of Vlad Tepes, the Prince of Wallachia, and alleged model of Dracula. Many Saxons married into the Popa-Radu family, and Miklós Jancsó's father was not the only Hungarian: one of his cousins, who moved to Transylvania after the First World War, rose high in the hierarchy after the Second World War—he became a member of the Romanian Communist Party's Central Committee and Prefect of Brasov County.

It was his ideals of solidarity and social equality that led the young Jancsó into the fold of the "populists" (the intellectuals of peasant or rural origins). In the 1930s and 1940s their conviction, that the peasantry provided Hungary's backbone and the country's only guarantee for a future renewal, meant both resistance to the Germans and sympathy for the have-nots. On March 18, 1944, just one day before Hungary's occupation by Germany, Jancsó received his doctorate at the Kolozsvár/Cluj University, then part of Hungary, today Romania. His numerous interests compelled him to have his dissertation written by a paid hack. For a while he worked as a junior partner at a legal firm in Kolozsvár. (The proprietor of this firm helped save the lives of many Jews.) In the last days of the war the Russians took him as a P.O.W to Raivola near Leningrad. He was lucky to be able to return home within less than a year, although seriously ill with incipient tuberculosis.

In 1946 he enrolled in the College of Theatrical and Cinematic Arts (his classmates included Jean Badal, the Frenchman who later achieved world fame as a cameraman). After graduating in 1950, he directed newsreels and documentaries in the Newsreel and Documentary Studio, in harmony with the spirit of the age, that is in a stereotypical and flattering manner. (Here are some of the revealing titles: *We Have Taken the Issue of Peace in Our Hands*—on the May 1 celebration in 1952; *Harvest at Orosháza Dózsa Cooperative; Travelling on our Shared Road*.)

Jancsó joined the Communist Party in 1946—he still believed that they could right the world, in the spirit of the *Internationale*. His belief in Communism was shaken by a show trial patterned on the Soviet model, in which the then Minister of the Interior László Rajk was sentenced to death along with several of his associates on the trumped-up charge of spying for Tito. "Perhaps because they were so good at manipulating people, I, too, half-believed that Rajk had been a secret agent. My credulity was ended a few months after the trial, when a journalist friend of mine who had known people in the Ministry of the Interior told me the exact details. He went on and on pouring them out. After closing time we staggered out of the bar, sat down on a bench and wept until dawn. From that moment I knew that Rákosi and his comrades were criminals, and

that the system had nothing to do with the new world".

His party membership was terminated in 1956, and he never considered joining the party afterwards. "Nobody ever insisted," he recollected, adding that one of the era's emblematic figures, the all-powerful cultural politician György Aczél, who was a personal friend of the First Secretary János Kádár, even tried to dissuade him. Complete disillusionment followed the crushing of the 1956 Revolution. "After that I always referred to our 'sweet' Stalinism as our so-called socialism".

He was abroad during the 1956 Revolution: from September to December he was accompanying the Art Ensemble of the Hungarian People's Army on a tour in China. Upon returning to Hungary, he was shocked by the sight of devastation, and also by the death of one of his best friends, the director Géza Horn, who was the brother of ex-Prime Minister Gyula Horn. In 1957 Jancsó decided, together with his first wife, a folk dancer, to immigrate to Israel, and perhaps even to convert to Judaism. Finally, they changed their minds because of their two children, Nyika and Katalin.

In 1958 he married again. His second wife, Márta Mészáros, was also a film director who rose to perhaps even greater fame than he did. For a while they lived in a rented room in extreme poverty. They occasionally earned money by making commercial clips and training films (*How to Grow Peaches; The Art of Selling in Shops,* etc.). In 1958, at the age of 37, Jancsó completed his first feature film, *A harangok Rómába mentek* (The Bells Have Gone to Rome), an insignificant movie of indeterminate genre. His second and third films, *Oldás és kötés* (Cantata, 1963) and *Így jöttem* (My Way Home, 1965)—the latter told the story of the involuntary partnership of a Hungarian and a Russian soldier turning into a friendship—brought down a barrage of attacks on him from the authorities. This was a critical period in his life. "We didn't know which way to go next," Márta Mészáros recollects, "Jancsó went into a depression, lying idly or sleeping much of the time. Everything seemed hopeless; we couldn't see which way to turn, what type of film to make. Nothing could be touched that had anything to do with Hungarian history, national self-examination or the Russians..."

Despite all the adversities, the great work *Szegénylegények* (The Round Up) was completed in 1965. Set in 1869 but actually describing the workings of an oppressive authority that consolidated its power after 1956, the film was well received both by audiences and by the critics, earning world fame for its author. (Twenty-eight years later, a young American producer approached Jancsó with the proposal that he re-make *The Round Up* in a Native American setting. That exciting plan never materialised.)

The comrades were not pleased with *The Round Up,* accusing Jancsó of pessimism for a film that rebuked "our" socialism. Jancsó had to struggle hard to make movies and to get them shown publicly. They were met by hostility and reservation on the part of both the cultural establishment and some of the critics.

Jancsó's great novelty was that he attacked three taboos—nationalism, a patriarchal concept of the people, and "naïve" revolutionary optimism—the mere mention of any one of which touched off a hysterical reaction in many people. His films not only claim that without overcoming the old historical reactions we cannot have a healthy present; they also suggest that the bad elements of the present feed the bad aspects of the past, keeping their evil poison alive. He refused to see twentieth-century history as the national idea's triumphant march to victory; rather, he saw the threat of the devastating and dehumanising forces, of irra-

tionalism and of the intimidating power of the state apparatus. It was the alienation of authority and the self-preservation of alienated authority that interested him, along with the emergence of the closed communities' morals and ethical attitudes, rituals and stereotypes, as well as their role in shaping structures.

Gradually he had enough of the attacks on his films *Csillagosok, katonák* (The Red and the White, a Hungarian-Soviet co-production, 1967; *Csend és kiáltás* (Silence and Cry, 1968), and most notably *Fényes szelek* (The Confrontation, 1969). He thought that he stood a better chance to make films and to achieve an international reputation abroad. An important contributing factor in his decision was that during the 1970s he spent a great deal of time in Italy, where he lived with the journalist turned scriptwriter Giovanna Gagliardo. He directed two films in Italy (*A pacifista,* The Pacificist, 1971, Italian-French-West German co-production; *Magánbűnök, közerkölcsök* (Private Sins, Public Morals, 1976, Italian-Yugoslav co-production), one television play *Technika és ritus* (Technique and Rite, 1971) and one documentary (about the Prato workshop of the theatrical director Luca Ronconi).

Portraying the love and suicide of Crown Prince Rudolph and Mária Vetsera, *Private Sins, Public Morals* was long considered a major scandal in Jancsó's career. It was shown in Hungary only in 1989, the year of the political changes. (Actually, Mussolini wrote a novel on the same subject.) The state prosecutor confiscated the copies of the film on the day after the première. After first sentencing him to four months in prison, the judge eventually acquitted Jancsó, declaring that his film was not pornographic. The leading actress Monica Vitti dissociated herself from the film after the premiere. Bertolucci borrowed the closing sequence of the film for his *The Last Tango in Paris.* Another interesting fact from the film's history is that the Polish Warszawianka, with Nanni Balestrini's lyrics, later became the marching song of the Red Brigades.

While in Italy, Jancsó passed through a neo-Marxist phase, but after another disillusionment—the Italian Communist Party, too, could not tolerate dissent among its rank and file—he developed links with the socialists. He made friends with Craxi, the general secretary of the party who later became Prime Minister, when he was still Pietro Nenni's secretary. Jancsó was seated next to him at the dinner party celebrating the latter's election to general secretary.

After the mid-1970s Jancsó began to spend more and more time in Hungary—out of adventurousness, one might say. Regardless of the manipulative practices of cultural politics, which subordinated everything to the actual balance of political power, and which required a great deal of tactical sense from an artist, Jancsó had a very productive period in the 1970s and 1980s. He completed nine feature films during that time, one of which was an Israeli-French co-production based on Elie Wiesel's novel *Hajnal* (Dawn). Through the story, which took place in the Palestine protectorate immediately before the establishment of the state of Israel, the film examined the moral problems in connection with the possible justification for terrorism. The French producer, who had a row with Jancsó about the right to the final cut, never paid him. Elie Wiesel took the producer to court for the violation of the author's rights. The court ordered the destruction of the negatives. The only surviving copy is in Hungary; it was given to a cinematic company in compensation for the cost of recording the musical score.

In addition to the films, Jancsó also directed a series for television, as well as producing a contemporary Korean play for

the Seoul Olympics. (From his fee he was finally able to buy a decent car, the cheapest make of BMW. Up until the 1990s he travelled to Yugoslavia for a regular summer vacation in his wife's Polski Fiat. Jancsó has never accumulated wealth; this is perhaps connected to the fact that he always insists on settling the bill when in company.)

In addition, he directed Verdi's *Othello* for the Florence Opera, as well as producing his good friend, Gyula Hernádi's farcical plays on stage. (The playwright, whose career started out brilliantly but later fizzled out, has been Jancsó's constant partner ever since *The Round Up.* One of his farces, *Mata Hari,* was performed in the nightclub of a hotel for lack of a better venue.) Jancsó also tried his hand at theatre management: between 1975 and 1985 he was a member of the management of two Budapest theatres (25. Színház, Népszínház) as well as one outside Budapest (Kecskeméti Katona József Színház). The scandal that followed his provocative and farcical interpretation of *Csárdáskirálynő* (Czardas Princess), Hungary's most beloved operetta, was one of the worst he managed to spark off.

Round about the time of the democratic changes in Hungary—partly in his capacity as the elected president of the Hungarian Film and Television Artists' Association—he took an active part in the negotiations about the reformation of the profession. Unlike most of his colleagues, he was of the opinion that the earlier centralist practices, including the bureaucratic re-distribution of the taxpayers' money, could no longer be maintained in any form. He thought that a new structure should have been set up, along with a new system of independent producers. Jancsó disagreed with the establishment of the Motion Picture Fund and its principles of operation. He made many enemies by holding to that view.

Indeed, the Hungarian movie industry was badly shaken up after the political changes. The production structure collapsed, there was no money, no audiences. The attendance at Hungarian films nosedived to just one per cent of the 1990 figure. ("Ever since the 1960s, when the Hungarian cinema began to assert itself, Hungarian movie artists, directly or indirectly, always talked about how it was possible to build a better world, to improve conditions—and it was not because they believed in the false façade of socialism. I, too, believed in this. And I went on believing in it even after the so-called democratic changes. This message interests nobody anymore," Jancsó says.

Most directors were struggling to make ends meet. The reason why Jancsó accepted a teaching post at Harvard was that neither he nor his third wife, the film editor Zsuzsa Csákány, had a job. (The Budapest Academy of Theatre and Cinematography apparently had no need for Jancsó, as the only time that institute used him was to teach a one-week course.)

Although Jancsó failed to get money from the curators of the Motion Picture Fund under the new system of financing, this could not discourage him. If he could not direct feature films, then he would make documentaries, about a dozen within a few short years *(Holocaust in Hungary I–II.; Imagined Peace; Unburied Corpses; Heroes' Square).* In the five-part serial *A kövek üzenete* (The Message of the Stones) he presented the surviving Jewish monuments and synagogues, mostly converted to some other function, in Hegyalja, Máramaros, Moldavia, Trans-Carpathia and Budapest. In Maradékok (Remnants) he portrayed the last Jewish couple living in Máramaros, along with their Gypsy friend. He made a Gypsy programme for public television for no fee. Using the same material, he later on put together a three-part

series *Zöld erdő, zöld a hegy is, a szerencse jön is megy is* (Green is the Forest, Green is the Mountain, Luck Comes and Goes).

He began to take an increasing interest in public life, which in his case was not an act of compensation; rather, it derived from his personality, his commitment to the community and his love of freedom. He lent his name to various causes: he helped to organize the Democratic Charter, which protested against the politics of Hungary's first democratically elected government, the Antall administration; he took part in the Anti-Conscription Movement's work, the Gypsy Civil Rights Foundation and the Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association. The Alliance of Free Democrats twice nominated him as a parliamentary candidate. He was vice president of the Happiness Party, a short-lived formation he established together with Gyula Hernádi in mockery of the political parties' loss of credibility and self-inflation. He twice directed the March 15th celebrations marking Hungary's most important national anniversary. He reads extensively, he knows about everything, he is everywhere—he is a one-man institution. According to József Marx, he would have been short-listed as President of the Republic, had Hernádi not written his largely fictitious book *Jancsó Miklós szeretői* (Miklós Jancsó's Lovers).

Then, in the late 1990s, a real miracle took place in the midst of the many notable events of the Jancsó legend. It was not just the mere fact that he was able to raise enough money for two films—itself quite a miracle in Hungary today! (The Motion Picture Fund as well as one of the commercial TV channels supported the second one, although two of Jancsó's friends also contributed 50 million HUF to the production costs, friends whose identities he refuses to reveal.) The real miracle was that Jancsó, at the age of 77-78, was still capable of complete regeneration. *Nekem lámpást adott kezembe az Úr Pesten* (God's Lantern in Budapest) and *Anyád! a szúnyogok* (Damn You! The Mosquitoes!)—two movies of undefinable genre, combining the elements of comedy, Beckettian absurd, surreal farce and parody—are vitriolic black comedies about contemporary Hungarian society, public morality and the subversive influence of money and power, rendered in a style abounding in visual and verbal gags and frolicsome improvisations. The embittered and passionate social criticism of the movies reminds us of Bunuel's later films attacking the hypocritical morals of capitalism.

This outstanding figure in the cinema, the winner of the special award for lifetime achievement at the Cannes and Venice Festivals, is 79 this year. He is still full of plans. Displaying an amazing intellectual vigour, he looks several decades younger. "I have never flirted with the so-called healthy lifestyle: I never played sports, I still drink red wine regularly, and I stopped smoking cigars only because it became too expensive. The secret of my youthfulness perhaps lies in my genes. I am probably just lucky."

He is lucky, because he has been able to submerse himself in a great variety of cultures, environments and life situations; he has had his share of success and celebration, failure and humiliation alike. And he has been able to put his experience to good use, incorporating it into his personality. This is how he has succeeded in preserving an open mind and fighting spirit, maintaining his belief that his task—or mission, if we are permitted to use this outmoded word—has been to speak the truth, to demolish myths and to serve the community.

József Marx has rendered great service to film lovers with this absorbing book. ❧

Károly Unger

The Flavours of Hungary

Elek Magyar: *Az ínyesmester szakácskönyve.* (The Gourmet's Cookbook). Budapest, Akkord, 2000, 341 pp. With illustrations.

Elek Magyar was born in 1875 in Budapest, a city that was soon to become a paradise of cafés and cosy little restaurants. Although he held a diploma in law, Elek Magyar felt more drawn to journalism. First he worked for *Telefonhírmondó* (Telephone Broadcaster), the precursor of radio broadcasting, then became a correspondent for a prestigious contemporary newspaper, *Magyarország,* eventually rising to the position of editor. He was a keen observer of life and society in Budapest, a city that was just then turning into a metropolis. His theatre and fine arts criticism brought him recognition and prestige. But he came to fame for his work in *Pesti Napló,* where he published his recipes and articles on gastronomy under the pseudonym *Ínyesmester* (Gourmet).

Károly Unger

has been the President of the Hungarian National Gastronomical Society for the past fifteen years. He has worked as a chef for a number of famous restaurants and hotels. He is the author of eight cookery books, some of which have been translated into German and English. In 1996 he received the highest accolade of the World Federation of Gastronomical Societies by being elected an Honorary Member.

The first collection of these articles was published in 1932 with the title Az ínyesmester szakácskönyve (The Gourmet's Cook Book, Budapest, Corvina Kiadó, 1970). The success and value of the book is shown by the fact that it was reprinted annually, and was translated into Czech, Russian and German. *Az Ínyesmester szakácskönyve* is not a run-of-the-mill collection of recipes. In addition to the recipes, the author also gives useful advice to housewives.

The past seventy years have taken nothing away from the book's usefulness or the freshness of its style. Apart from the author's writing skills, this is essentially due to its authentic recipes and to the fact that it covers the entire spectrum of Hungarian cuisine. Also included among the recipes are those dishes of foreign origin that have gradually taken root in our kitchen.

To appreciate this aspect of the book, one should know something about the history of Hungarian cooking. The memories of nomad people's wanderings and customs are still evident in Hungarian gastronomy, through the cult of pasta, for example. Our ancestors had a rather rudimentary method of making pasta. They mixed the granulated vegetable substance with water, then dried the resulting pasta in the sun. In the nomad age, before they

conquered the Carpathian Basin, the early Magyars fed their horses on the long journeys with the pasta stored underneath the saddlebow. Occasionally they put this dry pasta, a sort of a farfel, into boiling water.

This was the basis of the kneaded pasta, popular in subsequent centuries, for which eggs and wheat high in gluten were used. This is the origin of the fine vermicelli-type pasta Hungarians put in soups, eat with poppy seed or cottage cheese, soured cream and bacon, or jam.

Home-made pasta is still prepared in the same way that it had been for long centuries. Neither the basic materials nor the necessary kitchen utensils have changed. Some housewives still use a table and rolling pin to make their own, although most people now prefer to buy ready-made pasta in shops.

Kneaded pasta, with all its varieties, played a dominant role in the peasant kitchens and in shepherds' cooking. It needed little effort and cheap materials and was readily stored. In poor people's kitchens this pasta had the same function that tinned food has in today's homes. It was there in case of emergency.

The people of the *puszta,* Hungary's arid steppe-land, cooked soup with pasta in a cauldron. This was in fact plenty of boiling water with dried pasta added to it. The shepherds living on the puszta dried the meat of the slaughtered animal in the sun, then salted and smoked it by the smoke screen of the fireplace so as to preserve it.

Once the sun had gone down and the animals had settled for the night, a fire was started under the cauldron. The pasta soup was on the boil. It was customary among the shepherds to carve off a piece of the meat and slice it up into smaller pieces, which they could sew into the sleeve of their fur mantles. Whenever they came together by the boiling cauldron of pasta soup, the shepherds took out their preserved meat and put one piece for each man into the soup. This can be considered the origin of one of the most famous of Hungarian dishes, *gulyás,* which later gained popularity with the introduction of red paprika.

Once they settled in the Carpathian Basin, a land of pleasant climate with many water courses, a people of horsemen came to discover the culinary pleasures associated with fish. The historical sources above else mention *viza* (hausen), the giant of Hungarian waters. Also frequently mentioned in families' recipe books is pike, as a fish favoured by the aristocracy, along with pikeperch, sterlet and crucian carp, but a vinegary version of *tokkocsonya* (fish in aspic) seemed equally popular. Perhaps this *tokkocsonya* inspired the culinary artists of subsequent centuries in creating a Hungarian speciality *pontykocsonya* (carp in aspic).

There is archeological evidence from Buda Castle's mediaeval sections to suggest that shellfish and snails also enriched the contemporary diet. Naturally, salmon, herring and flatfish were not for the common folk, but crabs and snails once native to Hungary were probably served in most people's homes; these species have largely become extinct in Hungary's rivers.

We can learn much from those travel dairies that describe a colossal animal once indigenous to the Carpathian Basin. This was the predecessor of the great Hungarian ox, a robust beast growing to two metres in height, which had completely vanished by the late Middle Ages.

Several historical accounts and hunters' stories record the abundance of big game in the forests. Bears roamed the hilly region of the Bükk and wild boars, wolves, deer and even elk populated the Pilis Hills.

The diversity of meats available encouraged the development of the culinary arts.

Spices in Hungarian Cuisine

Seasoning is to stress the individuality, the peculiar character of each food, to make each course more enjoyable and different from the rest, and not to eliminate the characteristic flavours through excessive use of spices which will make everything taste the same, and also put our health to the test. This is something many spice fans tend to forget.

It is understandable, though by no means forgivable, that spices are sometimes dumped into the pan without being measured to make the guests thirsty and start drinking in earnest after the meal. (Though let's admit, a little suspicion is always raised by a dish savouring of nothing but fiery hot, aromatic spices: are they concealing something stale or perhaps even bad?) But at home it is nothing but a blunder to approach cooking in the seemingly easy way, and leave everything to the sharpness of the spices.

It is onions and paprika (and sometimes salt) which are most abused. It is fantastic how many onions some people put into a pan of Paprika Stew, though it is never the onions which give the gravy its thickness and body but the meats properly selected to produce a jelly-like juice. Then there may be an overdose of paprika, not of course of the milder varieties, but something which reminds one of concentrated caustic lye as it burns the throat, while the horrifying amount of onions ensure immediate heartburn. Another time it may be a pork chop coated in ground black pepper that brings a fit of coughing on the unfortunate guest, or the over-peppered soup will make him or her wonder: What on earth it could be made of? Garlic may also be a cause of complaints by emanating its smell—not exactly adored by everybody—in broad clouds all day long. Some speak about its "therapeutic effects", trying to make the thing presentable, but garlic is of no more use to our health than any of the other spices which help digestion and discourage bacteria. There were, in fact, experiments to cure arteriosclerosis and slow the process of aging by administering extract of garlic, but they had no success.

Fortunately garlic, widely used by the French, is not indispensable in any course of the Hungarian cuisine, and as general taste improves, it will gradually be ousted. It may perhaps remain for certain specialities, like freshly made pork sausages in which a few drops of juice pressed from a clove of garlic may taste pleasant. People with a more refined taste will anyway prefer sausages with lemon juice. Garlic may ruin an otherwise tasty meat loaf, spinach or French beans, and put by the clove into cold roasts will put some guests to rout. For when it comes to garlic all judgements are extreme; people who do not love it, will hate even a hint of its penetrating smell.

The gourmet's recipes avoid the extremities of spicing and garlic is scarcely mentioned. But anybody may any time use any spice according to his or her taste and the habits or patience of the family. Even garlic can be put into the soup, the sauce with vegetables or the courses of the pig-killing feast by the clove, or it can be rubbed on fried bread...

From: Elek Magyar: *The Gourmet's Cook Book*. Budapest, Corvina Kiadó, 1970.

The preparation of beef, pork, fowl, fish and crab tested the cooks' knowledge and ingenuity.

It is no exaggeration to say that a nation's food is closely bound up with the country's political and economic history. The characteristic dishes of a given period provide an accurate reading of the country's economic condition, the devastations of war, the weakening or strengthening of central—royal or state—power.

King Matthias, who was crowned in 1458, successfully centralized royal power. His famous and well-trained Black Army was held in awe throughout the region. After occupying Moravia and Vienna, the King was able to contemplate the creation of an empire along the Danube. This economic and political background provided a unique opportunity for Renaissance culture. More than anyone else, Matthias' second wife, Queen Beatrice, a Neapolitan princess, changed life at the Court. Through her, Renaissance luxury and the Hungarian people's natural inclination for pomp were combined. The lavish and elegant courts in the architectural gems of Buda and Visegrád provided ample proof for the successive generations.

Matthias showered the poets, writers, chroniclers and chefs with gold mined in Körmöc. Of the chroniclers of the age, Bonfini and Galeotto Marzio provide a vivid account of Matthias' table. The Court's kitchen was headed by the royal *sáfár,* the Chamberlain himself, who was responsible for both organizing the work of kitchen staff and determining their wages.

The Queen was spending more and more money on extravagant feasts. According to the literary men among the guests, beef, lamb, goat, poultry, deer and hare was served on these occasions. The procession of duck and other fowl was followed by a peacock of princely beauty. The "Indian chicken", or guinea fowl, arrived in Hungary via Italy. The consumption of the fruits of the sea, the traditional diet of people living by the sea, also left a mark on the Court's gastronomy. These Italian culinary influences were eventually assimilated into Hungarian cooking.

According to Bonfini, whenever the Queen had a craving for cheese, she wrote home, where the art of cheese making flourished. Instead of merely asking for a shipment of cheese, however, she insisted on bringing skilled cheese makers to Hungary in order to set up workshops near the palace. To give an idea of how extravagant these feasts were, we only need mention here the colourful sight of gilded cakes decorated with oranges, lemons, pomegranates and dried figs. Chestnuts and olives were also popular, with home grown fruits such as grapes, melons, cherries, plums and pears adding to the enjoyment of long hours at the table.

The Italian influence, the pleasure in extravagant luxury, continued to affect the development of Hungarian cuisine for centuries to come. The Roman patricians' fondness for sweets, such as marshmallows, came back into fashion: as a New Year's Day treat, the Queen's pastry cooks surprised the royal couple with a chessboard made of marshmallow.

Renaissance cuisine played a crucial part in the development of Hungarian cooking. Also important was the role of the peasant kitchen of 17th-century Transylvania. Hungarians, Romanians, Armenians, Jews and Saxons lived side by side in Transylvania for long centuries. Transylvanian cooking was always able to ignore fashion, proudly accepting its heritage, the experience and customs of ancestors.

The unique flavours and tastes of Transylvania were due to close contact with the natural environment. The salads and soups flavoured with herbs from the

meadows, pastry made using honey, meats seasoned with mushrooms from the forest, the stews all conjure up images of the soil, the wind, the fragrance of pinewood and sunshine.

The 150-year-long Ottoman occupation was one of the traumas in Hungarian history. However, as far as gastronomy is concerned, the country benefited from this period, too. The Turkish influence is evident in several lamb and mutton dishes, in the strongly seasoned spit-roasted meat known as *rablóhús* or robber's steak, today.

Pilaff, perhaps the best-known Balkan dish, also took root in the Carpathian Basin. Versions of this involving poultry and pork served with rice, are all descendants of the great family of pilaff, and are now important in the Hungarian repetoire.

It was during the Ottoman period that paprika, tomato and maize eventually arrived in Hungary from America. Who would have thought that the Turkish delicacies of vine leaf stuffed with meat or fig leaf with fruit and meat would, in the course of centuries, transform into stuffed cabbage, a famous Hungarian dish, of which the Kolozsvár (today Cluj) version is perhaps the best-known, to which pork chops and sausages are added.

In the Baroque palaces, constructed after the mid-17th century, hardly any Hungarian was spoken. French and German governesses looked after the children's education, and the aristocracy was also in the habit of marrying into German families. It became fashionable to employ foreign chefs, who naturally enough preferred to serve Viennese or French dishes. The French culinary arts undoubtedly had an influence on the Hungarian, with its flavours eventually finding their way into bourgeois kitchens. The marrying of French and Hungarian cuisine resembles the union of a weightlifting circus artist and a ballet dancer. The baby resulting from this marriage inherited the mother's charms and the father's strength.

Under the influence of French cuisine, Hungarian dishes became milder, with the appearance of the sauces, cream soups and pâtés, and the various modes of preparing the dishes.

The diversity of culinary cultures of Austria–Hungary's various peoples affected the further development of the newly styled Hungarian cuisine. The traditional dishes of the Saxons and Swabians as well as the Slovaks and Ruthenians all contributed their distinct flavours. By the end of the 19th century the use of red paprika became widespread, changing the character of Hungarian cooking.

So why has of all condiments, red pepper become the basic ingredient of the Hungarian kitchen and what makes the flavours of Hungarian cuisine quite unique? This is due to the fortuitous conjunction of three items: the sweet and spicy red onion of Makó, which only grows in Hungarian soil, and which acquires its distinct golden yellow colour only when it is fried in pure pork fat, rather than in vegetable oil or butter, and finally the sweet red paprika of Szeged or Kalocsa, which best dissolves in the fat of fried onion.

The lasting success of *Az ínyesmester szakácskönyve* is explained by its ability to continue Hungarian gastronomy's spiritual heritage. It documents Hungarian culinary culture in the first half of the 20th century, at a time when the simplest peasant dishes and the most sophisticated dishes based on game and the most difficult cakes and pastry were equally likely to be found on the dinner table of the better-off families, and when housekeepers, in search of basic material for their vegetable dishes could either turn to their kitchen gardens or the wonderful marketplaces. ❧

Tamás Koltai

DIY Myths

Péter Kárpáti: *Tótferi* • István Tasnádi: *Világjobbítók* (World Improvers) • Kornél Hamvai: *Hóhérok hava* (Executioners' Holiday) • Péter Müller: *Lugosi (A vámpír árnyéka)* (Lugosi [The Shadow of a Vampire]).

Modern plays set out time and again to regain the lost myth that used to be their origin. Many rewrite all the great myths, making use of the mythological figures of other genres or attempt to create mythical heroes for the modern age.

Tótferi, by Péter Kárpáti, is no less than a rewrite of the myth of Creation. Its raw material includes folklore, which provides its naive charm and the dialect of the text, with phonetic spelling, which represents quite a challenge for the actor. The genre of traditional mystery play allows for no plot. First we see the much-used motif of the search for a true man. God (called here My Father and Creator) and Saint Peter, both disguised in the attire of singing beggars, seem to find the good soul in the Poor Woman, who will share with them one of her last forints. In exchange, the holy men stay in her cabin and perform all kinds of miracles. They get food and drink, they turn her wholemeal flour into pure white flour, snowflakes into eggs, a handful of dough into a large mound, and a pile of snow into a thick blanket. Six fat swine appear in the sty from the blue, which soon turn into a dozen smoked flitches hung neatly in the loft. Later still the Old Woman recovers her husband, who was killed when he fell into a well fifty years ago. Moreover, as they have been much grieved by being childless, the guests even arrange for the birth of a belated baby. The child to be born—and here we are right in the middle of a Creation Myth—who is to become the saviour of mankind, is called Tótferi. (In accordance with folk tales, he bears the most common first and second name, written as one word, and even that in the diminutive, as if to say "Johnny-smith".) He is aware of his mission well before he is born: while he is making for his birth, wandering all over the universe, over the hills and all the seas and continents, he "happens to" kill the Antichrist, who was just about to boil the ocean. Tótferi thus prevents the Apocalypse, but as a result, he fails to appear at his own birth. Someone else is born in his stead. Tótferi, the potential Saviour, knows for what end he exists, but fails to fight his way to be born. For the average mortal who is born in his stead, being born is no challenge, but he has no idea as to what is his mission on earth. This is the message of this folksy Creation myth.

The play is full of surprises to accompany the naive surrealism of the plot. The

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Tamás Koltai,
editor of Színház, *a theatre monthly, is* The Hungarian Quarterly*'s regular theatre reviewer.*

characters, more than speaking in dialect, use distorted English ("Hunglish") words. God and Saint Peter tend to finish their exchanges with "Yes, Sir", while the choir of swine sings American worksongs and popular songs. (If we listen carefully, they sound like Pennsylvanian miners.) The explanation is simple. The ethnographer collecting folklore must have met some Hungarian-Magyars. (In the first quarter of the 20th century many Hungarians went to the New World hoping for more pay, and picked up some American city slang.)

Tótferi was staged in two theatres at the same time: the Bárka, in Budapest, and the Csokonai, in Debrecen. The two directors, Eszter Novák and Gábor Rusznyák, produced two different interpretations. In Budapest it was performed as a grand and theatric vision, but in Debrecen it turned into a naive mystery play. Both these interpretations are valid, considering the original implications of the play.

Another young playwright, István Tasnádi, who earned considerable success with his adaptation of Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas,* entitled *Public Enemy,* has now turned to one of literature's best known heroes, Don Quixote. His new play, *Világjobbítók* (World Improvers), is set in the present, with a main character, Géza Kriston, who is a modern reincarnation of the knight tilting at windmills.

Kriston is a librarian, who, in the first scene, defends his 8000-volume library with his own body when the factory is to be pulled down to make way for a public benefit, presumably a shopping mall. Kriston protests, he won't leave the premises, but the building is besieged by bulldozers and he barely manages to get away, taking with him a handful of books. This is the starting point of the *via dolorosa* of a modern knight fighting to protect culture. First he is arrested and remanded in custody, where he meets his Sancho, a young and always cheerful Gypsy. When they are released, they are off into "Hungarian reality", with the bag of books, which, of course, nobody wants. The employment agency wants them to become florists, since this is the only field where they can find employment. Then they encounter various typical street figures: peddlars, street preachers, a drug-dealer and a bank security man. They take them all on, as expected. When the dustmen snatch his books from him, he tries to regain his cultural capital with the aid of a coat hanger and cardboard armour borrowed from a sandwichman. He fails to overcome a gang of football hooligans, he falls in love with his Dulcinea, a billboard girl, who, in fact, is a dull slut living off her body. He is disillusioned, climbs a building and is fetched down by the fire brigade. His case attracts the attention of the media, and Kriston features on a popular talk-show as the knight of highbrow culture. The medieval knight of the Gutenberg Galaxy fights a duel with a modern star of the electronic counter-culture. The duel is fought in virtual space and the audience can watch the struggle on a giant screen. Knight Kriston, the winner, is absorbed by the media: as he is handed over the prize, the largest library of the world on CD-ROM, he is being recorded to feature in a commercial, saying, "Forget your windmills. Use an air conditioner."

As this summary shows, the play is a bitter satire on a commercialized age. It involves apparent yet not very deep social criticism, more of a *Zeitstück* with more possibility of being a hit than a drama of lasting influence. For the experienced actors of the Csiky Gergely Theatre of Kaposvár it is no challenge to turn it into thought-provoking vaudeville. The director, István Znamenák, himself an actor, has designed it as a spectacle. The back-

drop in the city scenes is that of a car rodeo. The hero ascends a safety curtain into the flies. The scene set in the TV studio is a faithful parody of real life: the audience is interactively involved as they respond to an "Applause" signal. That is, we are all participants in a game show and we are having a whale of a time—it seems that we don't miss much the values the play is supposed to mourn for.

Executioners' Holiday by Kornél Hamvai, at first sight appears to be a similarly lighthearted play. This young but already successful playwright has also gained a name as a translator—most recently with Caryl Churchill's *The Striker.* This time he tackles the myth of the French Revolution. He has thus adopted a rather odd perspective, here. Robespierre is present only in the form of an off stage yell before he is beheaded. Napoleon, aged 25, is trying to sell his memoirs to a publisher. Lavoisier sets up a scientific experiment based on his own beheading. This is not the French Revolution that supplied an ideology for Adam in Imre Madách's *The Tragedy of Man,* and not the one to disillusion the cynical Sade of Peter Weiss. This is the revolution of the onlooker beyond all disillusionment and deprived of all ideology. Its main characters are minor characters or not even that, while History, presented as some ridiculously grotesque absurdity, penetrates the life of the citizen who becomes its victim.

Executioners' Holiday was staged by the Katona József Theatre in Budapest. The central character is Roch, a provincial executioner, transferred to the city, where there is a shortage of executioners and many sentences to be carried out. Paris gobbles him up, he is passed from hand to hand, from bureaucrats and dreamers to thieves and all kinds of women, until he is completely lost in the whirlpool of events. "Paris has killed me," he states in an oral letter he is about to write and send to his wife, but he is illiterate and "by that time" (by what time? By the time he can dictate it to somebody? By the time his wife gets it? By the time it happens?), it will be a thing of the past anyway.

One of the threads to follow is that of the vicissitudes and metaphysical disappearance of the central character. The two are intertwined from the start, since the adventures of the law-abiding, dutiful and helpless Roch in the carriage, in the office which is all agog on the day of Robespierre's arrest, in the inn which is allocated to executioners and in women's beds all go hand in hand with transcendental thoughts—from the amorphous desire to quit reality to the question of to be or not to be. Roch talks about a secret dream of his right at the beginning: that of being carried away "to the sky" by a balloon and never to come back, which is what happens at the end, in Blanchard's balloon. The motif of disappearance is a recurrent one: it is present in the performance of Comus, the celebrated actor, who first spirits people away and then "swallows himself". A conversation with Madame Charpennet touches upon the same topic, extending the idea of "disappearance as stage performance" beyond one's death (not the death of the disappearing person, but our own), while Madame Sénac is very much concerned with the question whether those already dead can think of us or not. A group of executioners are brooding over their own death by drowning themselves in the Seine, Lavoisier wonders if the eye can wink and the brain can function as you are being beheaded, while Roch asks his confessor—on a purely professional basis—which part of the dismembered body might contain the soul. A kind of existential frivolity is being heavily emphasized here.

On the other hand, wherever the executioner goes, in the backdrop we can always see the madness of everyday life. The citoyen who petitions for the institutionalization of puritanism is running about stark naked. A woman submits a complaint following the death of her husband who was killed by an executioner falling over him. The very day when Robespierre is arrested, the official responsible for executioners' affairs is also dismissed. The condemned perform a play on their way to the guillotine: the beheading is but a performance in front of the theatre. Both the actor and the executioner work for an audience. It matters a great deal if the spectator renting the lorgnettes is satisfied with the performance, hence it is no surprise that the question arose whether these two types of professionals can be elected members of the National Assembly. In the meantime, Beaumarchais (who is a stranger to everyone) is given permission to go home, where he is arrested. Napoleon is unemployed but refuses to earn a living by providing sexual services to married women on purely physiological grounds, while Paris swarms with promiscuity. This layer of the play is a bizarre inventory of vignettes from life.

One layer is that of life's mystery—as Madame Sénac puts it, God vs Roch—while the other is the Kafka-style maze of everyday life. The two are interconnected and mutually reflective of each other, and are wrought into dramatic unity through an almost cinematic presentation. The end product is sober but opens deep philosophical perspectives. I don't like to sound over-enthusiastic, (especially as Hamvai is probably waiting to see what critics come up with this time, though all he wanted was to tell a story) yet the type of mocking, slightly childish arrogance with which he romps about with heavyweight notions in hand and makes fun even of his own bravura reminds me at least of the near-genius superbrats of cultural history.

The director, Tamás Ascher, is a theatrical virtuoso and poetic philosopher. What he puts on stage is a series of grotesque snapshots made up of stylized units. It is as if he has brought to life some of the engraved cartoons of the era using the collage technique of the modern theatre. Distorted figures become full-blooded characters, iron rods and wooden steps turn into carriages and office equipment. At first sight, everything is fake: the changing city backdrop, the interiors, the balcony as well as the light, black-and-white historical "working" clothes of the characters, the little black curtain that falls when the blade of the guillotine does, and the popcorn-munching audience who watch. In fact, everything is real, because our imagination supplies the missing bits of the archaic movie and recreates the structure created by the flickering and rhythm of the images and the evocative power of the music.

The actors play several roles each, which in this case springs from the style itself, as well as the implied role that it is forbidden to "be transfigured", as it is impossible to draw a character. There are no characters, there are figures drawn in a firm hand, role-sketches. Roch is the only exception. And he is the only one to realize—right at the beginning of the play—that it might be slightly unfair to assume divine power and arrange Judgement Day here on earth. Maybe this is why he dreams of flying high in the sky for good with that balloon—and fulfilling the mystery of existence which he cannot grasp any better than anybody else.

Péter Müller chose a more profane piece of mythology as raw material for his *Lugosi (The Shadow of a Vampire)*—the mythology of the actor. The eponymous hero is Béla Lugosi, the Hungarian-born Dracula

of the Hollywood horror films of the thirties, the play is concerned with how his own demons tortured a talented actor. The *via dolorosa* of an actor born in Transylvania, whose career took him to Berlin and then to the USA, where his success as Dracula confined him to that vampire's mask. The play shows him in a gigantic flashback, trying to tear off the mask and regain his reputation as an artist and as a tragic hero. Müller creates a macabre vision with images of thirties horror movies, waxwork figures of a Hollywood museum brought to life, where a gust of wind whirls the pages of the manuscript and a chandelier falls from the ceiling. The central character is an ex-Communist, wealthy egoist, a playboy, a drug addict, narcistic, whose lechery hides the soul of a whimpering toddler. The play, which won an international Onassis Award, certainly has some of the air of a commercial "artist's blues". It offers a wide variety of Americanized dramatic clichés, but it has been written for an international audience, and as such is rich in its raw material. All the banality, sentimentality, snobbery and obscenity is well calculated and calls for the grand spectacle, with popular actors, a kind of musical in prose, which is encoded in it.

Unfortunately, though, the Madách Theatre production is not good, even though Lugosi is played by one of Hungary's best actors, Iván Darvas (himself a sprightly 75). The problem is that this is a role for a middle-aged or younger actor who is capable of showing some of the youthful ideals in Lugosi, and of presenting a tough male in his forties (the Shakespearean buffalo quitting the much-hated Dracula role or the lion caged in self-destruction), but who is old enough not to need too many Hollywood tricks in order to seem an old man. Darvas, in contrast, is sophisticated, civilized and ironical, the old résoneur, playing not the role but its commentary— a West End Lugosi, whose resurrection proves that his having to play Dracula all his life spared the world another bad Shakespearean actor. The innate distancing and irony, ever-present in Darvas's acting, turns Lugosi into the sum of his actor's tricks. Darvas tends to speak softly and for this role he had to use a microport, which makes the most intimate situations sound like a public performance. This raises our suspicion that what we really see is in fact a musical in prose, Dracula Béla Superstar, from which the music has for some reason been omitted.

The director chosen for this purposefully international performance, István Szabó, turns out to be a good choice. He received an Oscar for his *Mephisto,* and his work has satisfied the Hollywood audience ever since. The latest example of this was *The Taste of Sunshine,* which has managed to make some of the Hungarian cultural elite believe that a movie created out of masterfully presented clichés can tackle 20th-century Hungarian history. In fact, it goes only as far as this history can be accommodated within the world of a not very highbrow audience receptive to historical myth-making. The play, in fact, relies on cinema mythology to sketch out the story of the fate of a Hungarian artist. Müller hints at a parallel with Bartók, employing the Concerto and *The Miraculous Mandarin* throughout the play. But this Madách production has neither the necessary professionalism in its elaboration nor the snob audience. The background to the Bartók music is lacking, provocative invective gives way to drawing-room theatre. The highly theatrical ending encoded in the text ends up as a stunted spectacle. People without shape against a black background: that's the paucity of the vision. Movie mythology stripped bare. ❧

Erzsébet Bori

Changing the Guard

Film Week 2000

Gergely Fonyó: *Kelj fel Jancsi* (Johnny Famous) • Frigyes Gödrös: *Glamour* • Krisztina Deák: *Jadviga párnája* (Jadviga's Pillow) • Miklós Jancsó: *Az anyád! A szúnyogok...* (Damn You! The Mosquitoes...) • Miklós Buzás et al: *A kis utazás* (Le Petit Voyage)

I cannot recall a Hungarian Film Week in recent years getting such an extreme range of responses as this year's. Some talked of a grey, poverty-stricken pattern, in which not even a decent work of larger format, let alone a masterpiece was to be discerned. Others, in contrast, were celebrating the final arrival of a breakthrough, a change in generation and of voices. The truth doesn't so much lie in the middle, but in the fact that both camps have judged the Film Week correctly—each from their own point of view. 1999/2000 brought no masterpieces or great movies. It was dominated, also in numbers, by debut directors; the middle generation, although still alive and working, found themselves in the also-ran column. Following a huge scandal over the unawarded prizes of last year's Film Week, this time the political scientists, previously over-represented, were left out of the jury for feature films; here the decisions were left strictly to the profession. Decisions unambiguously favoured those beginning their careers, those who tried something new, in contrast to the makers of the "well-made" that risked nothing. The feature film jury of the 31st Hungarian Film Week handed out two main prizes, one to Frigyes Gödrös, the other to Gergely Fonyó (who, to top things off, had brought his work home from America). Both of them were entering their first film.

Perhaps it is not too late yet to confront that dark, provincial suspicion with which we usually receive the arts imported into this country. All this started with the actors, on the lines of this blessed Hungarian soil producing so many talented actors and actresses that there is no need to go abroad for players. This old complaint is slowly slackening; but that is just because we are compelled to identify even more outrageous injuries, even more villainous products appearing on the art market, no need to gawk around, but what will happen here if we cannot turn to nationality any more, after a while we won't even know what is Hungarian. For what is it that makes a film Hungarian? The producer? The director? The proper (two thirds, or 50 per cent+1) majority of the makers? The story? Or, perhaps, the money? Anything made with the contribution, moral or material, of Hungarian directors beyond the border—from Transylvania or the South—is not at issue here: they are accepted. A co-production involving a foreign director with Hungarians: flatly reject-

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ed. Every other configuration is being judged individually. István Szabó is the best example: since his *Mephisto* we don't know where to place either his works or his successes. Over the last few years, pieces of obscure origin have infiltrated the Film Week; first they turned up in the informational showings, then they impudently competed with the pure domestic products; in the end we had to live to see some of the prizes go to them. And this brings me to our topic: *Johnny Famous,* which shared the main prize this year. I am not claiming that the jury had any educational purposes in mind; yet it succeeded in taking a step on the rocky road of naturalizing films produced by mixed marriages.

Gergely Fonyó's film reminds me of another. At the beginning of the nineties there arrived, also from America, a young Hungarian filmmaker, Péter Reich. *On Me, Chick* did not have such an effect: it was received with the interest and the humming and hawing that curiosities tend to inspire; it went down well only within its own generation, indeed went down very well. With the passing of time, there were others following the Reich variation of the generational film, which as a genre rose in value and, when a few years later *On Me, Chick* was telecast, I was not the only one who saw something of a noble patina on it.

I would like to mention another, elder, relative of *Johnny Famous;* it is Jarmusch's second (for us first) film, *Stranger than Paradise.* A feeling of familiarity strikes us in the opening sequence, with its typical lower middle/blue collar Californian suburb and a typically American interior. This is the setting where this chamber drama with three actors is almost entirely played out. Here thirty-year-old Johnny and his elderly mother live — we learn later, she is an aunt who had adopted him. Johnny is somewhat backward, seen by his mother as a fifteen-year-old adolescent. Emotionally, that is; his intelligence has stuck at the level of a six-year-old. Feeling her death approaching, the mother attempts to arrange Johnny's future. She has no illusions: she would be content with a two-year respite if some good soul would be willing to take care of Johnny in exchange for a home and some money; giving Johnny the chance to get used to the absence of his mother and to the thought of having to move into a home. The price of the house could cover the expenses of his being taken care of in an institution to the end of his life. At first the right person seems to have been found: Amy Jo is kind and warm-hearted, and this offer is just right for her for the two years she still needs to finish college. All three are aiming low, yet it turns on small matters that they cannot succeed.

They cannot succeed, because these two small matters, the apparently modest desire and the hair in the soup are life itself. And, well, yes, life is such that young girls fall in love, plans, even the most modest, are thwarted, confusion and early and late grief follow. Let us not ask why Amy Jo doesn't settle for a clean-cut young man, we know that nice girls are attracted by the dangerous to know, and there is also the fact that Johnny simply cannot share her with any young man, no matter how attractive. Living in a grown-up body with the intelligence of a child and the heart of an adolescent, knowing nothing but feeling everything, Johnny cannot substitute care and good will for exclusive and unconditional love. We hate to say so but Amy's choice, Tom, is right: it is not normal for a young girl to shut herself off with a thirty-year-old, mentally deficient man.

I don't know how the actors (or whether they are professional actors) managed to do nothing. In a film like this, with a small cast, not spectacular, not

packed with incidents, using many close-ups, it would have been senseless to make the actors' technique invisible: the film flaunts their absence. The playing, the direction, the photography are similar in this way; it is perhaps the music, by László Dés, which is out of line here, not all the time, but there are places where the music seems to be independent of the image, separate and very distinct.

For fate to strike at the end of an everyday conflict, the quiet drama, a tragic event was needed. Amy Jo has to be made to disappear for a while for Tom to be able to sell the house and decamp with the money it makes. We shall never learn where she flew to; the telephone conversation with her mother on the day of her return dampens our hope that she went home. This is a small fault, but it is from this point that things take a bad turn and start towards the unresolved ending. Let us not ask how it is possible in a country built upon respect for private property and contracts to sell a house so easily, even if it's in a relatively poor neighbourhood and the purchasers are recently arrived Russian immigrants. This is a crime, hardly comparable to murder; yet when an author does this to his own creation, it can still be termed as such. An author can be omnipotent; but everything is possible does not mean that everything is allowed. The film, once started, must, of course, be ended; nor is there any dispute over giving a bright ending to the story. But let us kill a human being only if absolutely necessary. Or not even then.

If we were to ask how substantial a part of a film is its story, we would receive very different answers. (An example that comes directly to mind is that of the jury which, favouring the film's virtues, was able to ignore its arbitrary turns.) To my mind, it turns on the narrative mode and Fonyó has chosen a mode which needs epic credibility. However, it has to be said that if a young filmmaker suddenly appears almost fully armed and makes no more mistakes than—looking already forward to his next opus—those easily avoided or circumvented, then we do have something to rejoice over.

In the end, it is for its avoidance of screen manipulation and the desire for the minimal that we have to praise *Johnny Famous.* Its great virtue is that it contains no trace of forced exertion or strained will and, although we know how marketable the deviant or handicapped hero is in Hollywood, we do not even think of suspecting that Fonyó is jumping on that bandwagon when we see Johnny. The film creates its authentic atmosphere with its first frames and retains this so well to the very end that not even the stumblings of the story can harm it.

As against Fonyó, Frigyes Gödrös did not arrive from nowhere; indeed, not even his film is new to Hungarian audiences. Back in 1994 we saw an episode he directed together with Dr Putyi Horváth, *Privát-horvát and Friend Wolfram,* in which both of them put the history of his family onto the screen. The two stories were not lacking in humorous, grotesque and common elements, as both families had succeeded in surviving Hungary's proverbially eventful last hundred years. Gödrös returned now alone to the scene of the action, to narrate his favourite story, this time to full feature length.

Glamour shows interesting similarities with and contrasts to István Szabó's *Sunshine.* Both films focus on a Hungarian Jewish family in the tournament of survival which we simply call *entre nous* Hungarian history. The latest joust in this tournament started in 1914 and is still going on today, both for the nation and for the individual. But, while Szabó builds from the purest, almost abstract, mathematical elements,

Gödrös's strengthens the irregular, personal features which cannot be expressed by formulas. His principal character is fighting without rules: turning against family tradition, religion, the spirit of the times, and the existing laws he marries an Aryan girl, straight from Germany. This is a love match and long-range strategy, not a tactical move: in the short term (Nazism, world war, Holocaust) it does not save him from the tribulations of the Jewish fate. A significant difference from Szabó's film is that, according to Gödrös, there are no two different histories, one for the Jews and one for the Hungarians, but only the one made and suffered through by the people living here.

The faults of *Glamour* are also its virtues: the unkemptness, the kicking aside or ignoring the rules of the professional motion picture, and the overflowing love. The brilliant work of the actors, the disproportions of the narrative—leisurely tinkering with details contra slender hints at significant events—and the personal emotions keep the structure under continuous siege and the film can only escape by ending after 115 minutes.

Staying with the award winners, next comes Krisztina Deák's film singled out by the jury for an award for its authentic spectacle. The film version of Pál Závada's most effective and by now almost cult novel is a gift, money found, a pleasant surprise. The reader of this diffuse, multiply reflexive diary-novel might easily think it hopeless to make a film out of it, while the film audience might have been disheartened by the director's previous feature film, an adaptation of Elek Gozsdu, called *Mist.* (Gozsdu was an outstanding Hungarian short-story writer at the end of the nineteenth century.) Adaptation is a dangerous activity. A well-written story, full of incident and with figures that are alive and credible, attracts film-makers as lamps attract moths. They end quite often like the moths do, too, dizzy, with burnt wings, and shrivelled bodies. *Jadviga's Pillow* is not a masterpiece: it could not retain either the richness or the force of the novel; yet, in several substantial points—the telling of the story, the material world it creates, the psychology, the casting, the acting—it is convincing. Krisztina Deák co-authored her screenplay written by the author of the novel, and thought thoroughly through what can and, even more, what cannot transfer to the screen from such a complicated diary-novel whose action spans many decades. There is, to begin with, the diary form and the unavoidable, almost insurmountable narrative problems which go with it. Moreover, Ondris's diary is provided with marginal notes by two other persons, which create new points of view. Although the cinema has numerous and well-established means to make the passage of time felt, narrating a long and ramified story is strongly limited by the length of a feature film. Even if the most detailed written description can be conveyed by a single, well composed image, the dialogue parts and, the hardest of nuts, the depiction of the interior life of the protagonists cannot be omitted.

Krisztina Deák decided to grasp less, she abandoned the diary form and the reflections and developed only one—the most important and strongest—thread of the novel, the miserable marriage of Ondris and Jadviga. Every other character, just as the stormy historical events of the period, only serves as background to their relationship: this is justified, because the two central figures, their souls seething with anger, scarcely take notice of the world in turmoil around them. The perhaps greatest virtue of the film is the authentic picturing of the object world of the period, of the Slovak peasant and bourgeois milieu in Hungary. But that much

film would only amount to an illustrated book—the breakthrough was achieved by the fact that within the linearly told story, the film succeeded in representing the personal truths of both principal characters and even of the secondary figures.

Scarcely a year has passed since Miklós Jancsó presented his *The Lord's Lantern in Budapest.* That film caused three surprises: the first, that after so many years he had again made a full-feature film; secondly, that he had radically changed style; and finally, that the public loved it. In spite of the fact that there are only two prints of it (one for Budapest, the other for the rest of the country), nearly forty thousand have bought tickets for it up to now. And now here is the encore. *Damn You! The Mosquitoes...,* the continuation of *Lantern,* the principal characters return, Pepe and Kapa, and the precious wife, but now they are a little more intelligent, which causes them to be even angrier and to understand everything even less. Everything that is here, around them and around us. The film was made by the same team, and the director of photography, Ferenc Grunwalsky, has raised his camera even higher, from the top of Budapest's Chain Bridge to the Statue of Liberty on top of Gellért Hill. He had probably read somewhere that from up there the country still existed...

They had to hurry in order not to miss the great Hungarian success story of the century, the solar eclipse of June 1999. So the film shows a celestial phenomenon which is real and a suitcase of dollars which are counterfeit; and in addition to these everything that eye, mouth, or ear might desire: a poisoned apple, a grandfather believed to be rich and two grandchildren as heirs; one is very much anticipated but does not want to be born, the other was not expected by anybody, yet he shows up and then only causes trouble, lots of trouble, but who cares, as long as one can hear Kispál and Lajcsi Lagzi playing and the techno-punks of the Lyácint Lyuhász Deposit Company perform the song "One Bellflower" on a gas range and a Rakéta vacuum cleaner. The new film again only proves what the critics said after the premiere of *Lantern,* that Miklós Jancsó (who is eighty this year) is the youngest film director in Hungary.

Le petit voyage, a film for the young, deservedly won the Award of the Public. It successfully unites the elements of school theatre, amateur film, and a standard feature film telling a story. As to the story, it is enough to know that we are in the quagmire of the seventies, and that students from a country technical school are going, under an exchange scheme, for two weeks to a building camp in East Germany. A significant merit of director Mihály Buzás and his associates (Zoltán Kõrösi and György Pálos) is that they do not want to smash all balls—high or low—but, along with a depiction of the period, they let the students of today play the young of those days. And this is just right for making *Le petit voyage* not only a collection of jokes and commonplaces about a period which (now that it has gone) is a rewarding subject for mockery. ❧

Klára Hamburger

Madame Liszt

The Correspondence between Liszt and his Mother

Madame Liszt[1] has become a favoured topic since 1981 when I first started to write, and read, papers about her.[2] No one among the blue-blooded blue-stockings who swarmed around Liszt is as lovable as this simple unschooled woman, torn out of her nation, soil and language, who spent much of her life as a lonely cripple. She worshipped her son and her three grandchildren,[3] to whom she was father and mother[4] and home-maker. She was full of good sense, sound of judgement, of an honest and pure heart, self-sacrificing, noble in her thinking, tactful, respectful, but maintaining her *tenne* and dignity at all times and with everybody. She never complained when in a difficult situation, her gay disposition never let her down. Famous contemporaries such as Émile Ollivier[5] or Richard and even Minna Wagner[6] remembered her with affection.

Lately I have been engaged in preparing her correspondence with her son for the press, for a first critical edition, in their original language, true to the autographs. The letters are in the Richard-Wagner-Archives in Bayreuth, with a few letters in the Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv in Weimar. (Dr Sven Friedrich, the Director of the Wagner-Archiv and Evelyne Liepsch, who heads the music collection of the Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv have been of considerable help.) A large part of these letters are not immaculate. The letters Liszt wrote to his mother were published in 1918, in La Mara's arbitrarily amended and truncated German translation.[7] La Mara even changed the text of those that were written in German, and she did not indicate where she had left out passages. Lately a number of letters have appeared here and there, in part or whole, in a scholarly text true to the original and in the original language, but with spelling more or less modernized, as well as in a variety of translations,[8] and some have also surfaced as citations in Alan Walker's three volume biography of Liszt.[9]

The letters which Anna Liszt wrote to her son—like so much other material classified in the Bayreuth archives for close on a century—was only made accessible to Count Richard du Moulin Eckart, Cosima's besotted biographer, who made use of it in his own capricious way.[10] In recent years some have been published, in whole, or as citations, in the original or as translations.[11] Mária Eckhardt has chronologi-

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cally arranged all the correspondence between mother and son in Bayreuth.[12]

Nevertheless, a complete collected critical edition appears justified. It will appear in the summer of 2000, edited by Gerhard Winkler (Burgenländisches Landesmuseum, Eisenstadt), as a joint publication by the Burgenland (Austria), Liszt's native region (belonging to Hungary at the time), and Bayreuth (Germany), the town where he died and lies buried.[13] It includes 121 Liszt letters, 70 written by Anna to her son, 11 to Princess Carolyne Wittgenstein and two others. The 28 Liszt letters to his mother which are in Paris and which were published by Jacques Vier were merely listed, or referred to by me.[14]

Liszt's correspondence with his mother does not offer as much in family gossip or of musical interest as his letters to his daughter Cosima or to his granddaughter Daniela.[15] Yet I should report on how this collection of letters, given the authentic, original texts and the—albeit broken—reciprocity adds extra hues to the portrait of mother and son, the more so since their relationship was out of the ordinary. There is really no comparable documentation in the papers other great composers left behind.

Franz Liszt was a good son. He loved his mother. He mentioned her with tenderness and gratefully in a will dated September 14th 1860.[16] Anna Maria Liszt, née Lager, 39 years of age, moved to Paris after the sudden death of her husband, into an alien ambience, taking up an entirely new role. She turned into Madame Liszt, although she had no French, becoming the confidante of the young travelling performer of growing reputation, taking care of him and of his affairs. Liszt maintained his mother from his boyhood to her death at the age of 78. He corresponded regularly with her though rarely saw her. The majority of the letters he wrote his mother are intimate and loving. Occasionally their relationship was troubled, but that was due to his mistresses of rank. Early in the forties, at a time when his mother had charge of his three children, Liszt, incited by Marie d'Agoult, was about to send his mother home to Austria. In the event his relationship with the Countess cooled, and he continued to entrust his children to his mother, who enjoyed his full confidence.

Anna defended her son when *tout Paris* gossipped that he was living with a married Russian princess and that he was about to abandon his life as a virtuoso. She wrote to him, anxious at first, although she would have loved to see him settled at the side of a lady beyond reproach in every respect: "bleib noch *garçon* und laß dich nicht viel ein mit hohe Damen du hast ja Lehrgeld gegeben."[17] (Stay single and don't get mixed up with snooty ladies you have already paid your fees). But she wrote nicely to Princess Carolyne de Sayn-Wittgenstein, consoling her for her confiscated fortune, assuring her that it was love alone that was important.[18] The Princess did not reckon the "mother-in-law" as her chief foe, but Marie, the children's mother. At first she wrote fawning letters to Anna, signing them "loving daughter", but things changed as soon as more suitable means offered themselves to alienate the children from their mother. At times like that the musician and the Princess, in complete cahoots—without flinching—put their knives not only into those affected, but also into the loving Granny, as her letters show.[19] His complete letters reveal that in 1850, when Liszt asked his mother to come to Weimar, he did so at the instigation of the Princess, for purposes of a tough financial accounting.[20] At that time and in 1855, rightly considering the removal of her beloved grandchildren to be cruel, and then again in 1856/57 when Blandine Liszt

returned to Paris, "Madame Liszt" even dared to contradict her son, of course in vain.[21] Unpleasant confrontations between Carolyne and Anna also occurred, over which a deeply offended "Madame Liszt" complained to her son.[22] A few of Liszt's very strong letters to his mother, which La Mara omitted, were the fruit of this family conflict.[23] The old lady had to move from a home shared with her grandchildren to somewhere more modest and solitary, handing over her possessions. With a view to putting an end to the Paris connections, the Princess later invited her to move in with them in Weimar. In 1849 Anna Liszt still dreamt "und solltest du einst [...] die furstinn *legitimement* besitzen, dann hoffe ich auch daß du nicht mehr so entfernt sein wirst von diese Kinder als auch von mir. vielleicht auch selbst in einen Haus ich mit die Kinder wohnen und du mit deiner Gattin."[24] ("and should you in the future ... make an honest woman of the Princess then I hope that you will no longer be so far from these children and from me. Perhaps I shall live in the same house with the children and you with your wife.") When she became aware of the real aims and methods of the Princess, she preferred to give up her much missed son, choosing independent solitude in Paris for the days of her old age.

Anna Liszt's letters are as charming as she was herself. They are all in copybook Gothic, uniformly dated but the spelling and grammar are completely haywire. The use of capitalization and punctuation are idiosyncratic. What makes them irresistible beyond their content are the French interpolations in roman script. A French learnt purely by ear, when no longer young.

The letters in Liszt's hand are instructive, both formally and linguistically. Those of the 1830s are barely legible, the handwriting is a scrawl and there are interpolations in all directions. Ninety-six of the 121 letters are in French, the other twenty-five wholly or partly in German, for some time in gothic script. (At first the German interpolations were meant to ensure that noone except his mother should be able to read them). Anna Liszt found it increasingly difficult to read her son's gothic letters, in his youth she told him off because of his illegible hand. Later she asked him to write in French. These letters tell us a lot about Liszt's knowledge of German. Liszt never attended school and soon came to think of French as his first language. His German was at first what he had learnt from his mother, the demotic vernacular of his native region. It was only in his Weimar years that he felt truly at home in educated German, and even then the old laxities intruded into his letters.

The first letter by Liszt to his mother is a terror-struck call by a seventeen-year-old from his father's deathbed.[25] His later letters—especially in the pre-Weimar years—primarily concern commissions, and things to be arranged, since his mother looked after all his affairs. Those dated after 1848 were mostly written on festive occasions, as on each other's birth and namedays. It was the custom that you should write and give presents on your own birthday and nameday too.

Liszt reports on his own health and that of those near and dear to him (his mother's letters contain many questions in this respect and much good advice) and on his own successes. He writes more rarely about his plans. Blandine, Cosima and Daniel naturally always feature prominently in the letters of both. Once the occasions for confrontation past, Liszt's letters are gentle and full of anxiety. The two moving letters in which he tells his mother of Daniel's and Blandine's death are in Paris, hence they are included in the Vier volume.[26]

A close reading of the *Urtext* throws light on much that is little known or that was earlier misinterpreted. There are expressions which refer to the early intimate relationship between mother and son. Thus he sometimes signs his letters Frater which has been explained in terms of his links with the Franciscans. His own explicit explanation is more appealing. On May 8th 1858 he wrote to his mother that the Pest Franciscans had admitted him as a confrater, continuing (in his uncorrected spelling): "Dans mon enfance (qui si je ne me trompe se prolonge jusqu'à présent) je me souviens que vous m'appeliez souvent *'ungeschikter Frater'*! Eh bien c'etait un présage de ma nouvelle dignité qui ne me corrigera pas de maladresse à l'endroit de beaucoup de choses de la vie—entre autres celle de ne savoir amasser de l'argent pour de sages economies, et aussi celle de ne savoir comment m'y prendre pour que les gens ne disent pas quantité de betises sur mon compte etc etc"...[27] That year, on July 23rd, he wrote for St Anne's Day: "*Frater* (comme vous me faisiez l'honneur de m'appeler dans mon enfance) n'aura pas de distraction cette année et n'oubliera pas votre fête, très chère mère".[28] In a letter dated September 18th 1860, in German, Liszt adds another adjective obviously taken from his mother's "telling-off" vocabulary. "Entschuldigen Sie tausendmal den *schuseligen Frater,* ihnen noch nicht gedankt zu haben [...][29] ("A thousand pardons please for the harum-scarum fellow for not having thanked you yet.") Frater=fellow is therefore self-ironical, kin to the *Fainéant* with which he signs letters to Princess Carolyne.

Liszt was known for his sarcasm and irony. No other relationship shows however that he could charm with his wit as well. La Mara took good care to excise this. Anna Liszt was a gay, cheerful soul who radiated her good humour to her surroundings. Noone else could have written to Liszt as his mother did on August 7th 1848: "dein Schreiben an mich als dieses für die Kinder hat uns große freude gemacht, und die Kinder die nun seit 15 July schon bei mir in die *vacance* sind, überlasen deinen brief oft mahlen und lachten mit Thränen im Augen dabei."[30] ("Your letter to me as well as that to the children was a great joy to us and the children who have been on holiday with me since July 15th re-read your letter time and time again, laughing with tears in their eyes.") Or on May 25th 1858: "Ich wünsche dass du mir so heiter, selbst lustig in deinen Schreiben seyn magst wie dieß letzte mal. Ich habe von herzen gelacht bei Durchlesung."[31] ("I wish you were always as gay, even joyful in your letters as this last time. I laughed heartily as I read it.") La Mara excised those charming lines in which Liszt playfully mocks the way his mother, in her French, systematically confuses voiced and unvoiced consonants in the manner of her native German dialect. The passage, impossible to translate, runs as follows: "Schade dass Sie so eine ein-gefleischte Pariserin geworden sind 'barlez-fous vranzé, Matame? [="parlez-vous français, Madame"—:...] 'adentez et addenzion'— 'emprassez' les enfans et moi aussi avec, quoique je sois [...] un honteux—sans honte—mais très bon enfant et très attaché fils au fond."[32]

La Mara left out everything that did not fit in with an idealized Liszt, and she did so without in any way indicating the omisions. This included important messages related to "filthy lucre" as well as boorish abuse. The latter was meant for the impertinent hangers on who importuned the mother of the absent famous musician.[33] Both mother and son were large of heart. Many of these tiresome people asking for money or favours were, at least at first,

passed on to his mother by Liszt himself, who was also free and easy with loans and donations.

But there were troubles of a different sort as well. We hear about a Mme F., a German adventuress, who, in September-October 1848 tried to blackmail Liszt's mother.[34] Liszt had no secrets from his mother, he did not deny that he had an affair with *cette fichue drôlesse,* this wretched loose woman, but he resolutely denied that he put her in the family way. And he was right to do so since it soon turned out to have been a bluff.[35] This woman was but an unsignificant episode in Liszt's life, her existence might, however, refute his far too prudish biographers.

It is his mother's letters that let us know what trouble Bernard Latte, her son's highly regarded Paris publisher caused her. Liszt had given a guarantee to the publisher, but Latte was not able to clear off his creditors. Harrassed by them, he now approached Anna Liszt begging that Liszt should sign a bond with a view to delaying payment. Early in 1847 Liszt was in Russia. He had met Princess Wittgenstein around that time and so he in no way reacted to his mother's or Latte's anxious letters. So Latte, in his embarrassment, had to trouble Anna Liszt[36] until Liszt finally, already in Constantinople, took the necessary steps.[37]

Liszt, the grandseigneur, demanded that his children and pupils behave in a manner that befitted their estate. He also wished his mother to be ladylike, prescribing the kind of seal she should use,[38] and the newspaper she should take.[39] La Mara does not point the passage, dated February 21st 1851 in which he told his mother not to collect his quarterly draft on the Rotschild bank in person: "A votre âge, et dans votre position, il est inutile qu'on vous voie trotter pour quelques cents francs, comme une rentière du Marais [...][40]

Mme Liszt was fond of icecream and Liszt sometimes sent her extra money for the purpose. Schiller was her favourite poet[41] and she was much moved by *Les Misérables*[42]. She drew the attention of Liszt to pamphlets on Görgey, Batthyány and Kossuth by Bertalan Szemere, an exile who was a friend, and she sent them to him.[43] As long as she was able she attended recitals, always accompanied. Thus she heard Paganini and Rubinstein[44] play, and she wrote to Liszt about the Paris success of his pupils.[45] She sympathized deeply with the victims of war and revolution, writing to her son in 1849, after the defeat of the Hungarian War of Independence: "wie hättest du können gleichgültig bleiben mit deinen gefühlen?"[46] ("How could you have remained indifferent in your sentiments?") Her piety was great, nevertheless she opposed any commitment to the Church by her son, perhaps because her husband whom she loved and to whom she was true for forty years as a widow, had almost joined the Franciscans as a youth. In 1858, when Liszt became their *confrater* in Pest, she wrote him: "ich muss dir aufrichtig sagen, ich war gar nicht *enchanter* [...] was hast du denn mit die *Franciscains* zu thun [...".[47] ("I must honestly tell you, I was not enchanted in the least. What business have you with the Franciscans?") When, in 1865, she found out that Liszt had taken minor orders in Rome, she burst out crying. Here, as a conclusion to this short dual portrait sketch, is Anna Liszt's last surviving letter to her son, with the French words in italics, in keeping with the different scripts for different languages in the original.

Paris le 4 Mai 1865[48]

Mein liebes Kind,

Man spricht oft so lange von einer Sache bis sie sich in Wirklichkeit zeigt, so ist es mit deiner jetzigen Standes-Veränderung[49]—Öfter sprach man hier in die *journeaux* dass du den geistlichen Stand gewählt hast wo ich sehr dawider kämpfte, wenn man mir davon sprach. Dein Schreiben von 27n *avril*[50] welches ich gestern erhielt erschütterte mich, ich brach in Thränen aus. Verzeih mir, ich war wirklich nicht gefasst auf solche Nachricht von dir. Nach Überlegung (man sagt die Nacht bringt *Conseil*) ergab ich mich in deinen, als auch den Willen Gottes, und ward ruhiger, denn alle guten Eingebungen kommen von Gott und dieser Entschluss den du nun gefasst hast ist nicht ein Entschluss *vulgaire*. Gott gebe dir Gnade im zu seinen Wohlgefallen zu erfüllen. Es ist eine grosse Sache, aber du hast dich auch schon seit langer Zeit dazu bereitet *au monte Mario*[51] ich merkte aus deine Briefe an mich seit einiger Zeit, sie lauteten so schön, so *religieuse*, das ich oft sehr gerührt war und weihte dir einige Thränen *en lisant*. Und nun in diesen letzten mein Kind *tu me demande pardon—oh!* ich habe dir nichts zu verzeihen deine guten Eigenschaften übertrafen viel, viel deine Jugendfehler, du hast deine Pflichten immer streng in jeder Hinsicht erfüllt wodurch du mir Ruhe und Freude gewahrtest, ich kann leben ruhig und ohne Kummer, was ich nur dir zu verdanken habe. Lebe nun glücklich, mein liebes Kind, und wenn der Seegen einer schwachen sterblichen Mutter etwas bewirken kann bei Gott, so sey tausendmal gesegnet von mir. *Ollivier est touché de ta resolution et te tés quelques lignes si amicale a lui dans mon lettre, aussi, lui il restra toujours le méme pour toi*[52].

Baron Larrey[53] kam gestern mich sehen. Er las in die *journeaux* von dir. Er wollte wissen ob es wahr sei *il me charger des Compliement et d'amietiée sincere pour toi, Rominge*[54] aussi kam um zu wissen die Wahrheit. Ich werde nun viele *visites* haben jetzt über dieses *évenement*.

Adieu mein liebes Kind, du machst mir die Hoffnung dich dieses Jahr noch hier zu sehen möchte Gott dass dieses Versprechen in Erfüllung geht, oder gehen kann.[55] Ich befehle dich den lieben Gott und verbleibe

deine
treue Mutter
Anna *Liszt*.

Wenn du mir schreibst nihm schwarze Tinte und eine bessere Feder, meine Augen sind Schwach.

Paris, the 4th of May 1865

My dear child,

One goes on talking about something until it shows up in reality. That is true of your present change in status. There has been much talk in the papers here of your chosing to take holy orders and I always fought against it if anyone spoke to me about it. Your letter of April 27th which I received yesterday gave me a shock. I burst out in tears. Forgive me but I was really not prepared for such news from you. After thinking things over (as they say, night provides counsel), I was reconciled to yours and God's will, all good suggestions come from God and decision which you have now taken is not a vulgar decision. May God give you grace to satisfy his pleasure. It is a big thing but then you have prepared yourself for it for some time on the Monte Mario, as I noticed in your letters to me for some time, they sounded so beautiful, so pious, that I was often much moved and I devoted some tears to you while reading. Now, in your last, you ask me for forgiveness my child, oh! I have nothing to forgive you, your good qualities always exceeded by far the faults of your youth, you always did your duty to the letter in every respect, thus securing me peace and joy. I can live quietly and without grief, something that I owe only to you. Be happy, my dear child, and if the blessing of a weak mortal mother can achieve anything with God then be blessed a thousand times by me. Ollivier as well is moved by your resolution and the very amiable lines to him you enclosed in my letter. He as well will always remain the same to you.

Baron Larrey came to see me yesterday. He read in the papers about you. He wanted to know if it was true and he asked me to pass on his compliments and to assure you of his sincere friendship. Rominge also came to discover the truth. I shall have many visits now because of this event.

Good bye my dear child. You give me hope to see you here this year. Please God that this promise will be fulfilled or can be fulfilled.

I commend you to God and remain

your
loyal mother
Anna Liszt

If you write to me use black ink and a better pen, my eyes are weak.

NOTES

1 ■ Anna Maria Liszt, née Lager, 1788–1866.

2 ■ "Madame Liszt. Versuch eines Porträts auf Grund von bisher unveröffentlichten Dokumenten." In: *Anna Maria Liszt. Katalog der Ausstellung,* 24. 4.–30. 9. 1986. Stadt Krems, Historisches Museum, pp. 20–25. In greater detail in: *Studia musicologica Academiæ Scientiarium Hungaricae, [below: Stud. mus.]* 27, 1985. pp. 325–378; "Aus der Korrespondenz der Familie Liszt." In: *Stud. mus.*, 31, 1989, pp. 441–463.

3 ■ Blandine Rachel, Mme Émilie Ollivier, 1835–1862; Cosima Francesca Gaetana, 1837–1930, Hans von Bülow's, later Richard Wagner's wife; Daniel Henri, 1839–1859.

4 ■ Countess Marie d'Agoult, née De Flavigny, the mother of Liszt's children 1805–1876.

5 ■ Émile Ollivier, liberal French lawyer and politician, 1825–1913. Even after his wife's death her grandmother still lived in his household, and he buried her too. "J'éprouve un véritable plaisir à causer avec cette bonne vieille femme à l'esprit si serein et si naïf" (Émile Ollivier: *Journal,* T1–2, 1846–60, 1861–69. Choisi et annoté par Théodore Zeldin et Anne Troisier de Diaz. Paris 1961, n.p. 2. vol. pp. 70–71.) He wrote much the same thing to Princess Carolyne de Sayn-Wittgenstein. (Anne Troisier de Diaz: *Émile Ollivier et Caroline de Sayn-Wittgenstein. Correspondance 1858–1887.* Paris, Presses Universitaires, 1984, p. 74.

6 ■ Richard Wagner, 1813–1883. Minna, née Planer, 1809–1866, Wagner's first wife. Wagner wrote to Liszt on March 29th 1860: "I am on the best of terms with Mama. The old lady often moves me through her love and empathic insight." Minna Wagner: "I have got to know Liszt's mother who lives here alone as a dear old lady and friend, I often visit her and grow ever fonder of her. In: Julius Kapp: *Richard Wagner und die Frauen*. Berlin, Schuster & Löffler, 1912, p. 159.

7 ■ La Mara [Marie Lipsius] (ed.) Franz Liszts *Briefe an seine Mutter.* Aus dem Französischen übertr. Leipzig, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1918.

8 ■ E.g.: Jacqueline Bellas: *Liszt et le Département des livres,* in: *Stud. mus.* 28, 1986, pp. 89–97; Pierre-Antoine Huré—Claude Knepper (eds.) *Franz Liszt: Correspondance.* Lettres choisies, présentées et annotées. Paris, Lattès, 1987; Thomas Leibnitz: "Franz Liszt und seine Mutter". Zur Geschichte einer Beziehung in Briefen. In: *Anna Maria Liszt. Katalog der Ausstellung.* op. cit. pp. 9–19. Pauline Pocknell: "Franz Liszt à Bourges". In: *Cahiers d'Archéologie et d'Histoire du Berry,* No 113. (Mars 1993). pp. 23–48.

9 ■ Alan Walker: *Franz Liszt* 1. *The Virtuoso Years 1811–1847.* London, Faber & Faber, 1983. 2. *The Weimar Years 1848–1861.* New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1989. 3. *The Final Years 1861–1886.* New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1996.

10 ■ Richard, Graf Du Moulin Eckart: *Cosima Wagner.* Bd. 1: *Drei Masken,* München–Berlin, 1929.

11 ■ Klára Hamburger: "Madame Liszt" In: *Stud. mus.* 27, 1985, pp. 325–378.; Klára Hamburger (ed.) *Aus der Korrespondenz der Familie Liszt.* In: *Stud. mus.*, 31, 1989. pp. 441–463.; Klára Hamburger (ed.): *Franz Liszt: Lettres à Cosima et à Daniela.* Présentées et annotées. Sprimont, Mardaga, 1996; Thomas Leibnitz: op. cit.; Alan Walker: op. cit.

12 ■ Mária Eckhardt: "Une femme simple, mère d'un génie européen: Anna Liszt. Quelques aspects d'une correspondance." In: *Actes du Colloque International Franz Liszt.* Éd. Serge Gut. No. spécial de *la Revue musicale,* nos. 405–406–407. Paris, Richard Masse, 1986. pp. 189–196.

13 ■ The book will be sponsored by the Burgenland and by the city of Bayreuth, and published on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of their cultural partnership.

14 ■ Jacques Vier: *Franz Liszt. L'Artiste—Le clerc.* Paris, Les Éditions du Cèdre, 1950.

15 ■ Klára Hamburger: *Franz Liszt. Lettres à Cosima et à Daniela.* op. cit.; Klára Hamburger: "Liszt, Father and Grandfather. Unpublished letters to Cosima and Daniela von Bülow." In: *The New Hungarian Quarterly,* No. 121, vol. 32, Spring 1991; pp. 118–131; Klára Hamburger: "Zur Bedeutung der unveröffentlichten Familienbriefe für das Thematische Verzeichnis Franz Liszts." In: *Stud. mus.,* 34, 1992. pp. 435–443.

16 ■ *Franz Liszts Briefe,* hrsg. von La Mara, 5 vol. No 127. p. 55. Leipzig, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1909.

17 ■ The first letter in the volume under preparation: A 25, dated 1849, Feb. 13. In the Richard-Wagner-Archiv: RWA II Cg, 21. The second: A 18, 1847, Dec. 9., G[oethe- und] S[chiller]-Archiv, Weimar, 59/22,13.

18 ■ Carolyne de Sayn-Wittgenstein, née Iwanowska, 1819–1887. The letter's data: AW 4, 1849 March 8. RWA, II Cg, 67

19 ■ See A 31, 1855 Sept. 3., RWA II Cg, 27/1–2 and as listed in Note 21.

20 ■ See F 72, 1849. Oc t. 22. RWA II, Cb-1,45

21 ■ Note 19 and [in the volume] A 40, 1856. Dec. 29, RWA, II Cg, 36; A 41, 1857 Feb. 9, RWA II Cg, 37; A 42, 1857. Feb. 17, RWA II Cg, 38/1–2.

22 ■ Note 19.

23 ■ Jacques Vier, op.cit: XXVIII, 1850. March 25. XXIX, 1850 July 15. [In the volume under preparation:] F 87, 1856 Nov. 14, RWA II Cb, 120; F 88, 1857. Jan. 2, RWA II Ca-2, 58/1–2.

24 ■ A 29, 1849 Aug. 1., RWA II Cg, 25.

25 ■ F 1, 1827 Aug. 24. RWA II Ca-1,1.

26 ■ Vier, XXXI, 1859. Dec. 16., XXXVI, 1862. Sept. 27.

27 ■ F 94, 1858 May 8, RWA II Ca-,2, 64/1–2.

28 ■ F 95, 1858 July 2., RWA II Ca-2, 65.

29 ■ F 105, 1860 Sept 18, RWA II Ca-2, 75.

30 ■ A 20, 1848 Aug 7. GSA 59/22, 13.

31 ■ A 53, 1858 May 25, RWA II Cg, 46. It refers to: F 94, 1858 May 8, RWA II Ca-2, 69/1–2.

32 ■ F 82, 1854 Apr. 20, RWA Ca-2, 53.

33 ■ Liszt's expressions: archimisérable petit gueux (F 41), canailles, carottes, carotteurs, parasites, Auspumper (F 41, F 45, F 49, F51, F 62, F 65, F 66, F 69, F 70, F 73, F 77).

34 ■ A 21, 1848 Sept 15, RWA II Cg, 17; A 22, 1848. Oct 5, RWA II Cg, 18; A 23, 1848. Nov 18, RWA II Cg, 19.

35 ■ F 69, 1848 Sept 21, RWA II Ca-1, 44; F 70, after 1848. Oct. 5, RWA II Cb, 123/1–2.

36 ■ A 14, 1847 Jan 12, RWA II Cg, 12; A 15, 1847 Jan. 28, RWA II Cg, 13; A 17 1847 June 12, RWA II Cg, 15.

37 ■ Vier, XXIV, 1847 July 6.

38 ■ F 47, late in 1844 or early 1845, RWA II Cb, 115.

39 ■ F 51, 1845 May 6, RWA II Ca-1,27.

40 ■ F 77, 1851 Feb 21, RWA II Ca-1, 49/1–2.

41 ■ Friedrich von Schiller, 1759–1805.

42 ■ Anna Liszt's letter to Blandine Liszt–Ollivier, 1862. July 8.: Bibl. Nat. Paris, N.a.fr.25.179, tome V. Klára Hamburger: "Madame Liszt", *Stud. mus.* 27, 1985, p. 348.

43 ■ A 36a, 1856 March 12, RWA II Cg, 32/2; A 60, 1859 Aug. 12, RWA II Cg, 53. Bertalan Szemere, 1812–1869, Home Secretary in the first Hungarian Government responsible to Parliament. He and his family, in exile in Paris, were Anna Liszt's friends. His pamphlets on Count Lajos Batthyány (1806–1848) Lajos Kossuth (1802–1894) and Arthur Görgey (1818–1914) were published by Hoffmann in Hamburg.

44 ■ A 5, 1832. March 25, RWA II Cg, 5; A 44, 1857 Apr. 24, RWA II Cg, 39. Niccolò Paganini, 1782–1840, Anton Rubinstein, 1829–1894.

45 ■ Hans Bronsart von Schellendorf, 1830-1913. A 41, 1857 Febr. 9, RWA II Cg, 37; A 42, 1857 Febr. 17, RWA II Cg, 38; A 43, 1857 March 30, RWA II Cg II. Hans von Bülow, 1830-1894, A 58, 1859 March 29, RWA II Cg, 50. Carl Tausig, 1841–1871, A 58 as above. 66. Ingeborg Starck; v. Bronsart, 1840–1913, A 58 as above, 1860 Apr. 2, RWA II Cg, 59.

46 ■ A 24, 1849 Jan. 26, RWA II Cg, 20.

47 ■ A 53, 1858 May 25, RWA II Cg, 48.

48 ■ A 70, GSA 59/22, 13. This letter was written after a gap of almost four years, at least, the last letter before it was dated July 1861

49 ■ Liszt took minor orders on April 25th 1865

50 ■ He writes beautifully about this to his mother. Vier, XLIX, pp. 137–139.

51 ■ Since June 20th 1863 Liszt had been a resident of the Madonna del Rosario Convent on Monte Mario.

52 ■ In the same letter Liszt assured his liberal son-in-law Ollivier that his sympathies for him were in no way affected by this step. Ollivier in turn reciprocated also via Anna Liszt. He repeated his assurances in a letter to Princess Wittgenstein dated May 31st 1865 (in: Anne Troisier de Diaz op. cit. p. 56) adding that Liszt's step had not surprised him. What had really upset Anna Liszt (according to Ollivier) was the thought of Liszt wearing that dreadful tricorn.

53 ■ Hippolyte Larrey (1808–1869) Physician to Napoleon III, his father was a famous surgeon in the Grande Armée.

54 ■ An unknown acquaintance

55 ■ This wish was not fulfilled. Anna Liszt passed away on February 6th 1866. By the time Liszt arrived in Paris on March 5th 1866 (for the performance of the *Gran* Mass) he was only able to visit her grave in the Cimitière Montparnasse.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir,—

This is a short note of appreciation. I have read *The Hungarian Quarterly* now for more than four years, every issue, most from cover to cover. I am an editor myself and I peruse professionally many journals day by day. I want to say unequivocally that *The Hungarian Quarterly* is an outstanding journal, it has a high intellectual standard and it is interesting, moreover it is very well presented. I envy you for your proof-reader, it is hard to find a printing error in your publication!

What is particularly gratifying is the topic-mix. Poetry, literature, science, reportage, historical pieces... you really understand how to represent Hungary and Hungarian thinking. Thank you. I wish you and your journal many happy years!

Imre J.P. Loefler
Nairobi, Kenya

Sir,—

I enjoy your publication very much and have been buying it on the newsstand while I am in Hungary. Particularly fascinating to me are those articles which deal with Hungarian history prior to the nineteenth century.

The Pál Engel and István Riba articles were intriguing and informative in the Spring 2000 issue. While many persons of Hungarian descent have a fair working knowledge of nineteenth and twentieth century Hungarian history, it is the period prior to that which receives far less attention. By publishing articles dealing with recent scholarship in the period prior to the modern era, you provide those of us outside of Hungary with at least a familiarity with contemporary Hungarian scholars and their areas of research.

Needless to say, your entire publication is good reading, I look forward to your future issues.

Katalin Kádár Lynn
San Francisco, CA
USA

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Having finished my prayers I wanted to get up and go into the vaults to see what they were about. He came towards me, I could calm down, everything had gone well. They had got the locks off the door by filing but the locks were so firmly attached to the chest that the files proved of no use and they had to be burnt off which created a great stench, making me anxious that someone might enquire about the smell, but God guarded us against that. When the Holy Crown was completely free we closed the door everywhere and attached other locks instead of those that were broken and we reimpressed my mistress's seal, and we locked the outer door again and placed the small piece of cloth with a seal back on as we found it, just as the Constable had placed it. And I threw the files into the commode in the ladies' bower, there they will find them, when it is broken open, to serve as a sign.

From: I, Helene Kottaner, Was There Too...
A 15th-century account of a theft of the Holy Crown.
pp. 42–48.

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