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HUNGARIAN LITERATURE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Dieter Lotze discusses a West German opera adaptation of Imre Madách's *The Tragedy of Man*. Marianna D. Birnbaum writes about the novelty of Endre Ady's language and style. Emery George presents an explanation for the lack of a Sixth Eclogue in Miklós Radnóti's oeuvre.

Review Articles

Robert Finch critiques four volumes of modern Hungarian poetry in the translation of Ivan Halasz de Beky.

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Imre Madách is Alive and Well and Dying in West Germany: Peter Michael Hamel's Opera "Ein Menschentraum" ¹

Dieter P. Lotze

Much of Hungarian literature—and thus a major aspect of Hungarian culture—is beyond the reach of the majority of foreign observers. The most obvious reason is linguistic: the comparative inaccessibility of the non-Indoeuropean language of a small Central European country impedes the first-hand acquaintance with a rich cultural heritage for all but a few specialists.

Numerous translations of some of the works of major (and even minor) Hungarian writers into other languages are available, to be sure, but many of them, especially attempts to recreate Hungarian poetry, convey little more than approximations or blurred reproductions of the originals. Thus, some well-read non-Hungarians of our times may be familiar with the name of Petőfi, who, mainly through his political involvement and his death for the cause of his nation's freedom, had become a symbol for liberal Europeans of the nineteenth century, such as German poet Heinrich Heine. Even philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche was inspired to set some German versions of Petőfi's poems to music. Yet few foreigners can truly appreciate his lyrical genius.

There is, however, also another factor which has contributed to this lack of appreciation. Hungarian literature is the artistic expression of a small and isolated country that has its linguistic and ethnic roots in the East, but that has for centuries—ever since embracing Christianity—considered itself part of the culture of the West. Furthermore, Hungarian writing reflects the experience of a tradition of continuous struggle to maintain national and cultural autonomy in the face of overwhelming pressure from without. It is no wonder, then, that literature and writers in Hungary have been playing a role that has differed

from that in most other, especially larger, countries or cultural entities. Hungarian authors frequently not only echo in their works that specific national experience, but also define both their mission and their audience in a way that differs from that of their counterparts in other nations. Again, Petőfi in his political engagement and in his use of poetry to appeal to the patriotism of his fellow countrymen could serve as an example. This tendency, in turn, may make much of Hungarian literature appear to the outside world as somewhat provincial, or, to state it in more neutral terms, as hard to comprehend for readers who have never shared those experiences.

If we view *The Tragedy of Man* (*Az ember tragédiája*) of 1859-60 by Imre Madách against this background, it is all the more astonishing that what Hungarians consider their greatest philosophical drama has been little noticed beyond their national and cultural borders. Part of the reason for this phenomenon may again be the numerous rather mediocre translations of the play, although there are notable exceptions.² But most Madách scholars will readily admit that the drama's significance lies much more in its philosophy than in the beauty of its language. And here Madách clearly differs from the vast majority of nineteenth-century authors in Hungary. His play, while considered by most Hungarians as reflective of their national experience, certainly defies the label of "provinciality." He seems to have deliberately avoided all specific references to matters Hungarian, except for a fleeting mention of János Hunyadi and a few oblique hints at Hungarian customs or Hungarian history. Ancient Egypt, classical Greece and Rome, Constantinople during the Crusades, Renaissance Prague, Revolutionary Paris, nineteenth-century London, and finally the science-fiction world of the future (including an egalitarian utopian society, an excursion into outer space, and a cold and barren area on a dying earth) are depicted as the significant stages of the rise and fall of mankind and society. Given this universality in scope and the fact that many of his dramatic scenes appear much better suited for the technical possibilities of modern film and television than for the theatre of his century, it is surprising that—apart from occasional (and not necessarily always successful) productions on European and American stages and a few doctoral dissertations and monographs³—there has been little public notice of *The Tragedy of Man* outside Hungary.

An unusual and noteworthy attempt to acquaint a larger European audience with Madách took place in West Germany recently. On June 27, 1981, Peter Michael Hamel's opera *Ein Menschentraum* (A Dream of Man) premiered at the Kassel *Staatstheater*. Based on a libretto by the composer's father, the late Kurt Peter Hamel, and by Claus H. Henneberg, the work attempts to confront the twentieth-century viewer and listener with Imre Madách's life, achievement, and philosophy. What is classified by Hamel as "Musical Theater in Two Parts for Actors, Singers, Chorus, and Recording Tape,"⁴ it presents selected scenes from *The Tragedy of Man* in operatic form. Thus, Imre Madách seems indeed to be alive and well on the West German stage. But Hamel juxtaposes these dream visions from Madách's drama with realistic scenes set at the bedside of the dying playwright who discusses his life—including the failure of his marriage—and his world view with his strong-willed mother, Anna Majthényi, and with his friend Pál Szontágh. In the end, reality and vision can no longer be separated, and Imre Madách expires in the arms of his creation, Adam.

It goes without saying that any discussion of an operatic work must remain lopsided without an adequate emphasis on its music. Peter Michael Hamel's comments indicate the importance he places on this aspect of his work:

The music in *Ein Menschentraum* is a looking glass in which an ultimately unchanging reality is presented in an always new and seemingly different fashion, in which it is mirrored, refracted, and reflected. Dream conditions become accessible and sound conditions, the repetition compulsion of the world resounds in repetitive movements, tonal centers become the subject matter of dreams, become sounds of dying.⁵

But there is no definitive score readily available, and the only existing tape recording of the Kassel production, made by the *Hessischer Rundfunk* radio network, is not accessible at this time.⁶ Therefore, the following discussion will focus mainly on the literary and theatrical aspects of *Ein Menschentraum*. This task is made somewhat more difficult by the fact that, according to the composer, "no complete libretto exists since the dramatic texts were reworked by the director."⁷ Yet the available information about the opera and its impact appears sufficient to allow certain conclusions.

Hamel's opera owes its existence to his father's preoccupation with Madách's drama, an interest that went back all the way to 1937 when he first attended a German production of *Az ember tragédiája* under the direction of Antal Németh, then in charge of the Budapest National Theatre. Kurt Peter Hamel, a theatrical director himself as well as a writer, later had the opportunity to visit Madách's birthplace at Alsó-Sztregova. This visit triggered in him the desire to use the ancestral home where the Hungarian playwright was born, where he had worked, suffered, and finally died, as the setting for a dramatic work. In 1975, Kurt Peter Hamel sketched out a plan for an opera. The final emotional impetus was the death of his wife in 1976. But the text remained a fragment when the writer died in 1979. Claus Henneberg, artistic advisor to the Cologne Opera, endeavoured to complete the work.

The composer, Peter Michael Hamel, was born in 1947. He combines an outstanding musical talent with interests in psychology, sociology, theatre, film, radio, and television and is the co-founder of the Munich *Freies Musikzentrum* which explores the role of music in social work, education, and therapy. It was his father's death that motivated him to compose *Ein Menschentraum*. He persuaded the Kassel theatre to commission the work whose completion was made possible by a scholarship from the German Academy "Villa Massimo" in Rome. His comments on his choice of topic, as recorded by Hans Joachim Schaefer, are revealing:

My decision to compose a work for the musical theater sprang not so much from theoretical and esthetic considerations, but rather from the fact that I was struck by a subject matter. I selected the subject of *Ein Menschentraum* because it touches on two experiences which I consider decisive in any human life: the experience of dying and death, and the experience of love. Both are very natural – but at the same time supernatural – events that have profound impacts on our lives. Both experiences mean the crossing of frontiers.

The experience "death of my mother" led my father to write the libretto. The experience "death of my father" caused me to compose *Ein Menschentraum*. Thus pervasion and spiritualization of a profoundly moving experience: a work of mourning. Death and love can guide us to a new consciousness, to

a deeper understanding of life, of the world, to a “religio” beyond any denomination. I am searching for this spiritual experience that gives man a new consciousness of meaning.⁸

For Hamel, the depiction of the death of Imre Madách becomes a vehicle to expand personal experiences—his own and those of the dying poet—into more general concerns, into a vision of struggling mankind.

At the centre of the events: a man is dying. In his agony, he experiences visions which take the form of dramatic scenes. Archetypal dream experiences, simultaneity of events that no longer have any logical connection with one another, hallucinations, and visions merge into a “panorama of life” which immediately before one’s death contracts an entire life in its essential experiences into a sequence of freely associated images.

The “death zone” in which this “dream of man” takes place is not only connected with the life and death of Imre Madách, not only with his *Tragedy of Man*. The death zone concerns all of us. It is a general human phenomenon: that frontier region where a soul, under excruciating pains, begins to separate from its body. The intensive care unit, the death room, is an area of frightening experiences. I witnessed that when my father died.

The images that the dying man sees before his mind’s eye, his visions, dreams, and hallucinations, are archetypes of human history, transferable in a general sense.⁹

How, then, does this experience translate into a concrete work for the musical theatre? Hamel treats the five scenes at Madách’s bedside as straight drama. In contrast, the six scenes adapted from *Az ember tragédiája* are presented as opera. Yet the two spheres cannot be neatly separated. Madách sees himself as Adam, his former wife, Erzsí Fráter, as Eve, Pál Szontágh as Lucifer, and his mother as the Earth Spirit.

The poet, on his deathbed, demands from his mother, Anna Majthényi, a letter which Erzsí has written, asking him to forgive her unfaithfulness and begging for his understanding. Anna is very reluctant to give the letter to her son. She had always been opposed to his marriage because she did not want to relinquish her control over his life. This control, she claims, was necessary because of Imre’s inability to cope with life’s problems by himself.

Pál, too, comments on his friend's lack of self-confidence.

As the playwright is reading Erzsí's lines, Eve appears in his visions in ever changing forms: projections of Erzsí, and at the same time the ideal woman, embodiment of Goethe's "eternal femininity."

A fevered dream takes him out of the realm of his earthly existence; his bed changes into a space vehicle, and—as Adam—he attempts to rid himself of everything that ties him to his physical and psychological misery while traveling in the metaphorical sphere of pure thought. Even though he denies the attractive powers of his native planet, he is pulled back from death by the Earth Spirit, but is left with a feeling of inner emptiness.

It is this emptiness that the dying poet in the third scene recognizes as characteristic of his entire life. He accuses his mother of having caused his lifelong indecision. What to her was loving sacrifice, her son experienced as paralyzing interference which kept him from making his own choices. Pál announces Erzsí's visit, but Anna tries to prevent the encounter with Imre who is ready to forgive his wife. Doubts about himself and about the destiny of mankind continue to plague him.

In the next scene, he is Adam in the Ice Region, watching the last human beings in their struggle for a meaningless survival. This depressing experience reflects Imre's own situation: the world and his life end, in T.S. Eliot's famous phrase, (not with a bang but a whimper."¹⁰ Mankind does not perish in one last great heroic effort, but, as Rolf Ronzier puts it in his program notes, "it suffocates in its own filth."¹¹ The last representatives of the human race have sunk to the level of animals, and in this setting, even the dream of Eve is reduced to a disgusting spectacle of grotesque animalistic sexuality. Adam wants to prevent this "tragedy of man," but is keenly aware of his own helplessness.

Meanwhile, at the poet's deathbed, Anna Majthényi blames Erzsí and Pál for Imre's self-doubts and for the deterioration of his health. Madách worries about his children who are growing up without the benefit of a healthy family unit. His son Aladár is likely to become as fainthearted as he has been, living under the same strong influence of Anna. He observes Aladár at play who, dressed as a Roman, rescues his sister Jolán from the clutches of a powerful enemy. To the play-

wright, his son's game is symbolic of Hungary's struggle for liberation. But Pál, the cool uninvolved intellectual, tries to convince him that his dream of human freedom can never be realized, just as the hope manifested in Christianity as the religion of love is ultimately in vain.

The two scenes that follow are patterned closely after Madách's drama. Featuring Adam as Sergiolus in Rome and as Tancred, the idealistic crusader in Constantinople, they seem to confirm Pál's nihilistic world view. Again, Madách sees his own emotional problems connected with the fate of mankind. In Rome, Adam and Eve exist side by side without any inner relationship just as Imre and Erzsi had in their marriage. The Constantinople scene ends with a nightmare: Lucifer has a swarm of witches set upon Adam in order to demonstrate the absurdity of separating love and sexuality. Significantly, Hamel connects the two scenes through an orchestral interlude whose music "has as its theme the perversion of the Christian symbol of the cross."¹²

In the struggle between Anna Majthényi and Pál Szontágh over the dying poet, Anna eventually realizes that she lost her son. Resignedly, she consents to Erzsi's visit. Pál continues his argument with Imre, criticizing him for having always been interested in theory only. He did not contribute in any practical or tangible way to the Hungarian Revolution. Throughout his life, he had been a loner, incapable of contact with the people. In his feverish phantasies, Madách hears a mob screaming for his head as the scene switches to Revolutionary Paris.

In his fight for the new ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, Adam, as the professional revolutionary, reflects the ambiguous role played by Imre, the aristocratic revolutionary in the events of 1848-49 in Hungary. As Danton, he relinquishes his principles as he eventually grasps the possibility of a worthwhile life beyond ideology. It is characteristic that Eve appears here only in the single role of the young aristocrat, not in her second incarnation as the coarse, blood-thirsty "woman of the people" of the original scene in *Az ember tragédiája*.

The next dream vision reveals the grotesque world of the London *petite bourgeoisie* of the early nineteenth century, a world that resembles a lunatic asylum. Only money is of value in this society where man has become merchant and merchant-

diser. Eve, too, is now merely an object that can be bought. Everybody is eventually sent to Hell by Lucifer who remains alone with Adam to discuss the downfall of this society.

The final encounter between Madách and his wife shows how strongly they are tied together, how dependent they are on each other. But it is too late for a new beginning. Imre never understood Erzsi and never made her a part of his life. Each spouse had been blind to the other. As death approaches, all the real persons who had been close to Madách assemble around his bed, along with the characters from his drama. Eve, speaking for Erzsi, mourns the lost contact with her children. A last nightmare confronts the playwright with the technological society of the future where life is produced artificially, from where all human emotions have been banned, and where man has become a faceless being with no individuality. In the poet's agony, his relatives and his friend become blurred, shapeless figures, while the creations of his imagination accompany him to the very end. The viewer is left with vexing questions: what did the life, the work, the death of Imre Madách really signify? Was the creator of the "Hungarian *Faust*" blind until the very end, just as Goethe's hero is symbolically stricken with blindness shortly before his death?

Thus Imre Madách is dying once again—this time in an experimental opera on the West German stage. But, to return to (and to call into question) the statement made in the title of this essay, is he truly "alive and well?" Is Hamel's work an appropriate vehicle to acquaint a German audience with Hungary's greatest philosophical dramatist, to foster understanding and appreciation of him and of the culture he represents? The answer can only be cautious and qualified. Reviews of the Kassel premiere have pointed out that *Ein Menschentraum* would be puzzling or downright confusing to anybody not already familiar with Madách's life and work—which would apply to the vast majority of the audience.¹³ Furthermore, while many of the biographical facts alluded to have a firm foundation in the poet's life, there are distortions and one-sided interpretations, for instance with respect to Pál Szontágh's alleged stifling influence on his friend, or concerning Madách's position in the 1848-49 War of Liberation. And certainly Hamel's fainthearted and indecisive poet is not the fiery and determined political orator, elected to the 1861 Diet in Pest as a representative of Balassagyarmat.¹⁴

While most Madách scholars would readily concede that much in, *Az ember tragédiája* is autobiographical in nature, we should not forget that this is only one—and not necessarily the most significant—level of his dramatic poem.

In the absence of definitive versions of the score and the libretto of *Ein Menschentraum*, it is, of course, difficult to do Hamel's opera justice. What was presented in Kassel was a complex work, combining not only Hamel's music and the text prepared by his two librettists—in part based on available German translations of *Az ember tragédiája* and on the views expressed in Wolfgang Margendorff's monograph on Madách¹⁵—but also an interpretation through the direction of Dieter Dorn and the settings and costumes designed by Hans Kleber. It is thus difficult to decide what was incidental to this particular production and its interpretation of Madách, and what is essential to Hamel's opera.

Madách's bed as a spacecraft, complete with blinking lights, obviously amused the audience rather than establishing a readiness to consider philosophical concepts.¹⁶ Some aspects of the production look like gimmicks, designed to emphasize the continued relevance of Madách's ideas, but they seem to have interfered with the unity of the work and with the clarity of its message. Viewers were startled by a disco scene in an Italian beach resort as part of the Rome vision, by a character obviously modelled after the Ayatollah Khomeini, riding in his jeep past Tancred's crusaders in Constantinople (who—in their blue helmets—were made to look like United Nations soldiers), or by Madách's London scene taking place in an asylum.¹⁷ It is to be hoped that future productions will help crystallize Hamel's contemporary concept of Madách and his world, so that the dying poet may continue to be "alive and well."

Certainly this controversial interpretation contains elements that shed some new light on the Hungarian play. Traditional Madách scholarship has considered his "Earth Spirit" as an echo—if not an imitation—of Goethe's *Erdgeist* in his *Faust* or perhaps as the one positive aspect of Madách's view of materialism (with Lucifer representing its negative, non-creative counterpart).¹⁸ Hamel's bold association of Anna Majthényi with this spirit emphasizes his concept of the overwhelming power of the maternal element as both a necessary tie to nature and a hindrance for man in his attempt to reach ultimate freedom.

Hamel emphasizes the significance of the relationship between the individual and his society, commented on by many students of Madách before, as a problem faced both by the playwright and by Adam, his creation. A society that dehumanizes man by elevating money to be the ultimate value will as its final consequence, turn into an insane world where no relationships among individuals are possible anymore. Thus, Hamel's symbolism in changing the London setting to a virtual madhouse may be heavy and all too obvious, but its logic can hardly be faulted. Madách critics occasionally stressed the importance of the fact that in this scene (as in all the scenes following the one depicting the French Revolution) Adam no longer plays an active role or represents an historical figure. For Hamel, this follows naturally from the de-emphasis of the individual in capitalism. In this respect the composer's views are quite enlightening:

I do not share the almost desperate pessimism of Madách. I am searching for a "positive utopia" which tends to be encouraging. To be more specific: to me that term signifies a "spiritual socialism" which truly recognizes the equality of all human beings. In an archetypal sense, we are all equal and therefore have a right to be treated equally. Each oppression runs counter to this right. The aim of the "positive utopia" is to free us from all pressures which do not allow us to become conscious of our own selves, to reach our own decisions, our own self-determination.¹⁹

It is quite consistent with this view that in the dying poet's final feverish dream of a technological utopia, human beings no longer have faces or other individualizing characteristics. Man has now become a replaceable cog in the machinery of society, rather than being encapsulated in his own self-centredness, as in the London scene. Under these circumstances both joy and sorrow have lost their meanings.

Perhaps it was Hamel's belief in a "positive utopia" that made him transform Madách's "Phalanstery" into a feverish and therefore distorted dream vision. For the same reason, he probably felt that the depressing Eskimo scene which, in the original play, had resulted in Adam's decision to commit suicide, had to be moved to a different spot in his opera, however tempting it may have been for him to leave it in its

final position as a reminder of man's technological capability in our atomic age to destroy his civilization.

But the most important change springing from Hamel's essentially secular views may be that in his opera there is no room for the metaphysical framework established by Madách. Thus, there is no Lord encouraging the despairing Adam at the end to have faith and to fight on. In this way, Hamel avoids the hotly debated incongruity between Lucifer's view of human history and the Lord's ultimate promise. But at the same time, through his emphasis on death and dying, he makes it harder for his audience to grasp and share his belief in a "positive utopia."

Yet the final scene of the opera makes one point about art and the artist that should not be missed. In the dying poet's last moments, his creations live and stay with him whereas the characters of his "real" surroundings are fading away. Perhaps Madách as a poet lives on through the work he created.

Az ember tragédiája has often been called the "Hungarian Faust". What Goethe wrote in a letter about Lord Byron's utilization of motifs from *Faust* for his *Manfred* is frequently quoted with respect to Madách's undeniable borrowings from the German poet. But Goethe's views seem also particularly appropriate—with certain modifications—when applied to Hamel's interpretation of Madách:

This unusual and gifted poet has absorbed my Faust... He has used every theme in his own fashion, so that none remains as it was: and for this in particular I cannot sufficiently admire his genius. This reconstruction is entirely of a piece, one could give most interesting lectures on its similarity to the original and its departure from it: I do not deny, however, that the dull glow of an unrelieved despair will become wearisome in the end. Yet one's irritation will always be mingled with admiration and respect.²⁰

NOTES

1. This article is the expanded version of a paper presented at the Seventh Annual Meeting of the American Hungarian Educators' Association at Montclair State College in 1982.

2. While the German translation by Julius Lechner von der Lech, *Die Tragödie des Menschen* (Leipzig, 1937) enjoyed wide distribution in German-speaking countries in the popular and inexpensive Reclam edition, the quality of its language is clearly inferior to that of Jenő Mohácsi's 1933 rendition, republished by Corvina in Budapest in 1957 and, in a revision by Géza Engl, in 1970. Jean Rousselot's French version, *La Tragédie de l'Homme* (Budapest: Corvina, 1966) is fairly faithful but not very poetic. None of the

English translations published to date gives a true impression of Madách's work, but the upcoming rendition by C. Thomas R. Mark, to be issued by Corvina Press in the near future, promises to fill a sorely felt need in this respect.

3. Enikő Molnár Basa's unpublished dissertation, "*The Tragedy of Man* as an Example of the Poème d'Humanité: An Examination of the Poem by Imre Madách with Reference to the Relevant Works of Shelley, Byron, Lamartine and Hugo" (University of North Carolina, 1972) contains much valuable information. My own Innsbruck dissertation of 1961, "Madáchs 'Tragödie des Menschen' in der Begegnung mit der deutschen Geisteswelt," similarly attempts to place Madách's drama in a wider philosophical framework. Some of the insights contained in it are elaborated on in the only book on Madách in English to date, my monograph *Imre Madách* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981). Wolfgang Margendorff's 1941 Jena dissertation, "Imre Madách 'Die Tragödie des Menschen'" was published in book form (Würzburg: Konrad Triltsch, 2nd ed. 1943). An adapted version of Géza Voinovich's classic study of 1914, *Madách Imre és Az ember tragédiája* was also published in Germany in a translation of Jenő Mohácsi.

4. See the program notes, "Ein Menschentraum," *Staatstheater Kassel*, June 27, 1981 (no pagination). This translation (and all others, except where notes) is my own.

5. Ibid.

6. Letter by Peter Michael Hamel to the author, October 15, 1981.

7. Ibid. Wolfgang Sandner's review, "Mit musikalischen Vorsätzen in die Hölle," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (July 1, 1981) lists some of those changes through which, he claims, Director Dieter Dorn turned real persons into stereotypes.

8. "Peter Michael Hamel im Gespräch zu 'Ein Menschentraum'," *Staatstheater Kassel* program notes.

9. Ibid.

10. T. S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men," *The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1971), p. 59.

11. *Staatstheater Kassel* program notes.

12. Ibid.

13. See Manfred Sack, "Musiktheater in Kassel: 'Ein Menschentraum': Philosophie mit Musik," *Die Zeit* (Overseas Edition, July 28, 1981). (The brief article by "doromby," "Madách, az operahős," *Élet és Irodalom*, August 9, 1981, the only Hungarian reaction to Hamel's opera of which I am aware, is based on this review.) A similar point is made by Sandner (loc. cit.). Vera Lumpke's discussion in "Geträumte Tragödie - tragischer Tod" (*Frankfurter Rundschau*, July 3, 1981) is more circumspect, promising "interesting experiences" to an audience which brings "composure and patience" to the performance.

14. It should be remembered that it was Madách's growing reputation as an outstanding parliamentary speaker that drew the attention of János Arany to the unknown dramatist.

15. See Kurt Peter Hamel, "Auf dem Weg zum Libretto 'Ein Menschentraum'," *Staatstheater Kassel* program notes.

16. See Bernd Müllmann, "Die Ideale sind verkommen," (*Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, June 29, 1981). Otherwise, Müllmann has high praise for Dorn's direction.

17. Jens Wendland ("Neue Naivität für die alte Oper," *Süd-deutsche Zeitung*, June 30, 1981) deals critically with some of these aspects of the Kassel production.

18. See István Sötér's study, *Alom és történelemről: Madách Imre és Az ember tragédiája* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1965) and my monograph, *Imre Madách*.

19. Conversation with Hans Joachim Schaefer, *Staatstheater Kassel* program notes.

20. Quoted in Fritz Strich, *Goethe and World Literature*, trans. C.A.M. Sym (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1949), p. 256.

Innovative Archaisms in the Poetry of Endre Ady*

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Literary archaization is always innovative, primarily because it is a conscious effort on the part of the artist to lend by it a new markedness to his text. Markedness is achieved by replacing the expected with the unexpected. The aesthetic effect of archaisms in a literary text depends on how clearly the action of *choice* is felt, namely how obvious it is for the reader that the lexical item or structure the author uses was selected *instead* of one that would have readily come to mind. Thus the effectiveness of archaisms is enhanced if the *absence* of the replaced item is clearly felt in the *presence* of the one replacing it. This in turn means that only *recognized*, (perceived) archaisms may function as a literary device.¹ In their alien-ness, archaisms interrupt contiguity between sequential items in the text, and the greater the gulf between the expected and the archaic usage of language, the stronger the disruptive effect of archaisms. Consequently, in its intratextual position a lexical archaism may be conceived of as a metaphor rather than a synonym, its effect sharpened by the reader's awareness of the lack of spatio-temporal proximity. While this holds true for lexical items only, both the insertion of archaic vocabulary and grammar create a *radiation* in the text, comprehensively rearranging and redirecting the links in the chain of objects and actions, in form and meaning as well.² Yet, there is one essential difference: archaisms, their temporal alien-ness notwithstanding, are chosen from a pool of *known* items, since their desired effect is based on reader recognition,

*Note: A shorter version of this paper, read in Oxford, July 1981, was dedicated to the memory of Professor Robert Auty, an expert in the Central European literary languages and a devoted reader and translator of the poetry of Ady.

i.e., on *tradition*. It is the “presencing” of tradition which operates in a successfully applied archaism.³

As in most European cultures, in Hungary too, early translations of the Bible, as well as the stock of proverbs and proverbial sayings are the most readily available fountainhead of archaisms. These properties also carry particular socio-cultural functions in our civilisation, and represent a special body of meaning. They are normally found in groups of texts marked by sets of distinctive features. Thus their transposition into a different type of text becomes, if momentarily, the most essential part of their new semantic content.⁴

In addition to quotations from the Bible and from the stock of proverbs, *any* recognizably archaic vocabulary creates an elevated atmosphere. Since the Neologist movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought about a qualitative change in the Hungarian language, vocabulary and grammatical structures drawing upon earlier sources are immediately felt as festive or at least quaint when found in a modern text. Almost always they contribute to an increased “lyrical state.”

In Hungary too, the Romantic Revival with its passion for medieval words was the chief exploiter of archaisms. It is therefore no accident that Endre Ady (1877-1919), whose poetry abounds with post-Romantic features, had a genuine penchant for archaization. Of course, in addition to drawing on a well-defined *body* of earlier literature, Ady also broached what was by then a well-established literary tradition. The appreciative audience of his work had been created by the Romantic poets of the mid-nineteenth century. Furthermore, his archaic vocabulary merely underscored his poetic self-image, that of the messianic poet, a function equally rooted in the ideology of Romanticism.

As in the case of most post-Romantics, Ady’s use of archaisms was more than just a renewed emotionalized stir of aesthetic imagination. Archaisms became an important poetic device by which he accentuated his modern ideas, expressing them in an older mode of consciousness. From the broadest, thematic, to the micropoetic and phonological level, Ady’s archaizations permeate his entire poetry. In the following I shall attempt to demonstrate the various means by which he moulded his language to make it fit his artistic needs, and present a selection of examples in order to illustrate his approach and ‘working process’.

His poem *A nagy Kéz törvénye* (The Law of the Great Hand) begins with the phrase, "...*Látjátok feleim...*" (Do you behold it, my brethren...). It is from the opening line of the *Halotti Beszéd* (Funeral Oration), the first continuous literary text in the Hungarian language, dating back to c. 1200. Being the earliest Hungarian linguistic monument, the *Funeral Oration* is taught in high school, and at least its first line is known to every Hungarian reader. Its evocative power sets the stage for the rest of the message in the poem, and enhances the role of the poet. As in ancient times it was the priest, performing the oration, 'now it is the poet who mediates between humanity and the inexplicable power above. The piece contains additional lexical archaisms, but the initial quote alone conditions the reader who will know that the most significant, existential issues will be treated in what follows.

On a more pedestrian plane, archaisms were used by Ady exclusively in order to state his own role in society, to identify his values and credo. For this purpose he drew on the vocabulary of some of the—historically incorrect—Hungarian origin myths. Most of those originated in the atmosphere of nineteenth-century feudal Romanticism, in the quest for finding the origins of the Hungarians, who were "orphans and without relatives in the center of Europe." Therefore, Hun, Avar, Scythian ancestors, as well as Protestant-influenced Hebrew-Hungarian linguistic parallels, found their way into the mainstream of Hungarian poetry, all in a pathetic search for a powerful national past. Ady exploited this tradition, but filled it with his own aggressive message, and frequently defended his own "Hungarianness" against the attacks of his conservative critics. A case in point is his *Az Avar-Domb kincse* (The Treasures of the Avar-Mound).⁵

Zengett az Avar-Domb	The Avar-Mound was singing
Őszi csendes éjeken	On quiet autumn nights
Apám kis földjén.	On the small estate of my father.
Zengett az Avar-Domb,	The Avar-Mound was singing,
Nekem zengett, csak nekem.	To me alone, alone to me.

Vad népe Bajánnak,	The fierce clan of Baján,
Véres fejű avarok	Avars with bleeding scalps
Nekem üzentek:	Sent word to me:
"Vad népe Bajánnak	"The fierce clan of Baján
Neked kincseket hagyott...."	Left its treasure to you alone...". ⁶

His *Góg és Magóg fia vagyok én* (*I am the Son of Gog and Magog*), with which he stormed the palisades of tepid academism in Hungarian lyrical poetry, is one of the most consistent examples of Ady's use of the national past (as well as biblical and pagan material) as tropes in his poetry:

Góg és Magóg fia vagyok én,
Hiába döngetek kaput, falat
S mégis megkérddtem tőletek:
Szabad-e sírni a Kárpátok alatt?

Verecke híres útján jöttem én.
Fülembe még ősmagyar dal rivall,
Szabad-e Dévénynél betörnöm
Új időknek új dalaival?

Fülembe forró ólmot öntsetek,
Legyek az új, az énekes Vazul,
Ne halljam az élet új dalait,
Tiporjatok reám durván, gazul.

De addig sírva, kínban, mit se várva
Mégis csak száll új szárnyakon a dal
S ha elátkozza százszor Pusztaszer,
Mégis győztes, mégis új és magyar.

I am Gog and Magog's son,
Banging on your gates and walls in vain:
Yet I'm asking here everyone: may one weep
On the Great Hungarian Plain?

I entered Verecke's famous path,
Old Ugric songs still roaring in my ears,
May I now storm in from the South
With newer songs of later years?

Pour boiling lead into my ears!
The new bard, a new Vazul I'll be!
I am willing not to hear the song,
You may all beat and torture me.

Yet in pain and tears and without a hope

My song will soar on newer wings,
Though cursed and damned by Pusztaszer
A new Magyar glory it will sing.

The poem displays the fusion of Old Testament imagery with elements from early Hungarian history. The pounding last stanza, however, refers to the immediate political target of the poet: Prime Minister Count István Tisza, who is represented in the metonymic context of Pusztaszer, where he had his family estates. Ady's fury against that conservative politician was expressed in scores of poems, many of them overtly directed against him, while in some he appears, as above, couched in a transparent poetic device. Ady's 'pagan' source is the body of early chronicle literature, primarily Anonymus' *Gesta Hungarorum*, which is revealed by his symbolic use of names referring to pre-Christian origin tales of the Hungarians, recorded in that medieval historical work.

As opposed to those Romantics and post-Romantics who, on the basis of the revived origin tales, added further concoctions to a sentimental 'Magyar mythology,' Ady revolutionized the function of such archaisms by attacking with them the remnants of the very feudal system they were to mythologize.⁷ His idiosyncratic symbolic use of archaic names and placenames stripped the words of their earlier semantic content and filled them with a new, poised political message. This function of Ady's archaizations is clearly detectable in *Páris az én Bakonyom* (Paris is my Bakony Mountain, 1907).

Nagy az én bűnöm: a lelkem.
Bűnöm, hogy messze látok és merek,
Hitszegő vagyok Álmos fajából,
S máglyára vinne
Egy Irán-szagú, szittyá sereg.

Great is my sin: my soul.
My sin is that I can see far, and dare,
I am a traitor in Álmos's clan,
And they want me on the stakes
This musk-reeking, Scythian lot.

Each line furthers the effects of archaization, but at the same time reveals the opposite of a romanticized view of political

complacency. In the first, his sin is equated with his soul, a well-laid trap for the reader who thus expects a Christian confession, which is 'promised' to him by the contracted and inverted structure of the sentence. The second line's explanation, however, frustrates his expectation because in it the poet declares that his only sins are his 'vision' and courage and that he is more aware of reality surrounding him than his fellow-Hungarians. His admission, therefore, that he is a traitor among the self-aggrandizers who derive their *raison d'être* from past glory (Álmos, the father of Árpád, the 'Landtaker' and founder of Hungary, is his metaphor for past greatness), stresses his virtue, and not his sin. 'Musk-reeking,' which is meant by his phrase "reeking of Iran," refers to the old, fur-trimmed dolmans of the nobility who are stuck hopelessly in the past and are ready to destroy anyone representing a fresh idea. Thus the metonymic chain built in the last two lines, while lexically containing the properties of archaic Hungarian, succeeds in rendering their semantic opposite: it becomes the vehicle of the poet's radical message. The ambiguous title, introducing a mountain range in western Hungary, and equating it with Paris, can only be understood through Ady's biography, and the detailed knowledge of Hungarian history. Ady used his recurrent trips to Paris as escapes from the depressing and ominous realities of Hungary, as the Bakony Mountain was used as a hiding place by outlaws, runaway serfs, and after 1848, by Hungarian revolutionaries. The often romanticized stories of those are another aspect of a sentimental and conservative popular attitude towards the past which Ady challenged by having incorporated the concept into a forceful, activist poem.

This romanticized past, which only barely covered the nation's grief over yet another defeat, is recalled by a Hungarian mini-genre, the *Kuruc* folk song. The *Kuruc* songs, of the eighteenth-century are a readily identifiable sub-type of the Hungarian folk song. They were first sung by the *Kuruc* (insurgent) soldiers of Prince Rákóczi's national army, who were defeated in their effort to achieve independence from Austria in 1711. They are laments, reminiscent of the jeremiads influenced by the Old Testament, and deal with the misery of the homeless refugee, the poor exile, or the defeated patriot. Since it is primarily of lower-class origin, the *Kuruc* song draws mainly on the imagery and vocabulary of the traditional folk song.⁸ Ady

also used the format and vocabulary of the *Kuruc* songs but filled them with an unmistakably contemporary message. By using this archaic frame, he forced the readers' attention to the fact that the social and political aspirations of the poor, expressed two hundred years earlier, had still not been satisfied in the first decade of the twentieth century. In this case, archaization enabled the poet to voice a continued chain of demands, and link together the struggles of the past and present.⁹

These songs either follow the monologue format, or the message is presented in a dialogue, similar to the *Két szegénylegény beszélgetése* (The Conversation of Two Poor Lads), a *Kuruc* folk song from about 1706. Since some of these songs refer to historical figures (as Tamás Esze, Albert Kis, András Boné), Ady, too, chose his own 'historical' character Tyukodi, who appears in a number of his *Kuruc* songs, and is often the poet's mouthpiece. Ady probably 'borrowed' the name from Márton Tyukodi, a Protestant pastor and sermonizer, who was active in the seventeenth century, and who published his work in Nagyvárád (1641), in Ady's second hometown. Thus the appearance of the name Tyukodi in any Ady poem is a 'signal' alerting the reader to the *Kuruc*, but also to the anti-aristocratic content of the piece.

Much has been written of Ady's role-playing, of his changing poetic self-image (Jesus, the prophets, pagan songsters and earlier Hungarian poets). Owing to such identification, the poet also dressed his poem in the language of the period, and he did the same when he picked historical figures with or about whom he conducted imaginary conversations. In *Dózsa György lakomáján* (Feasting on György Dózsa), the followers of the sixteenth-century populist rebel speak to one another in the language of a contemporary chronicler, Tinódi. In *Ilosvai Selymes Péter*, Ady, while musing about a chance to meet the author of the *Tholdi* epic (1574), uses the language and rhythm of that sixteenth-century narrative. Similarly, paying homage to Mihály Táncsics, the nineteenth-century Hungarian patriot (1799-1884), Ady switches his language to fit the style of the times of Petőfi and Táncsics. Yet, in none of these cases does he engage in a formalistic exercise only. The linguistic immersion enables him to "presence" his ideas, to close the gap between past and present, and to emphasize his point that times truly do not change when the plights and sufferings remain unchanged.

Frequently Ady alerts the reader to his intentions by choosing a motto to his poem. Often, these are quotes from the *Book of psalms*, the *Book of Prophets* or the *Books of Kings*. *A gyülekezet sátorában* (In the Tent of the Congregation, or In the Tabernacle), bears the following motto:

And Solomon went up tither to the brazen altar before the Lord, which was the tabernacle of the congregation, and offered a thousand burnt offerings upon it. II. Chronicles 1.6

Ady indeed chose the reference as a kernel to his poem from which he braided his own ideas and to which he returned for a renewed contact in each stanza.

A GYÜLEKEZET SÁTORÁBAN

Áldozék pedig ott Salamon a rézoltáron az Úr előtt, mely a Gyülekezetnek sátorában vala; áldozék, mondom, azon tüzes, ezer áldozatokkal. Krónika második könyve I.6

A Gyülekezet sátorában
Vagyok galambokkal, kosokkal,
Csaknem tizenöt év óta már
Tüzes, ezer áldozatokkal.

Rézoltárod tüzét véremmel
Hiába öntöztem, nagy Isten,
Sem a te tüzed, sem az enyém
Nem lohadtak vad ereinkben.

És szerencséd elküldésére
Kegyelmedet hiába várom:
Aranykincset érő szép vérem
Ott pusztul el a rézoltáron.

A Gyülekezet sátorában
Nem szabad gyávának sem lenni
S tüzes, ezer áldozatokkal
Nem vagyok mégis semmi, semmi.

IN THE TABERNACLE

“And Solomon went up thither to the brazen altar before the Lord, which was at the tabernacle of the congregation, and offered a thousand burnt offerings upon it.” II Chronicles 1.6

Inside the tabernacle of the Lord
for almost fifteen years I stand
with turtle doves, white horses, rams,
and fiery offerings from the shining hoard.

I shed my drops of blood like boiling rains
upon your brazen altar, God,
but neither your keen fire nor mine
has waned the least within our pounding veins.

Your holy grace in full of fortune sent
I vainly wait these fifteen years,
while on your brazen altar there
the golden treasures of my blood are spent.

The insecure of heart have never wrought
a deed within this tented shrine,
but with a thousand burnt offerings
I still have come to nought, have come to nought.

There is no archaic grammar in the original: lexical items, as *tabernacle*, *offering* and the like, create the atmosphere of old. It is actually noteworthy, how many more archaic features the translation contains.¹⁰

Occasionally, merely one line would allude to a biblical connotation, as in *A szememet csókold* (My eyes you ought to kiss), where the initial words, “Inségemből hozzád/fohászodom sírással...” calls to mind the psalm, *Min hametzar karati ja...* (Out of my straits, I called upon the Lord....).¹¹ The poem is a love song in which search for happiness and gold are intertwined, and has altogether very little to do with faith. If anything, it has ties with witchcraft, since it features the motif of kissing the eyes of a person in order to make him see what he otherwise would not.

Of those archaizations which, instead of forming a particular whole in terms of form or message, appear as independent stylistic devices, Ady’s doubling of some prefixes and his using of anaphora should be mentioned here. The rephrasing and repeat of verbal prefixes, so popular in the sixteenth century but obsolete in Ady’s time, is revived in a number of his poems in which it serves to emphasize his message. In *Az ismeretlen Ada* (The Unknown Ada), he writes to the woman, “...egyszerre el-tova-tünsz” (...you suddenly disappear-away). Similarly in *Követelő írás sorsunkért* (Demanding lines about our fate); in

addition to his archaic use of *vagyon*, instead of *van* (there is), Ady says about God: “Az isten a szívemben vagyon/Csak néha el-kisétál” (God is in my heart/but occasionally he walks away and out). Repetition for the sake of emphasis, as *élve élek* (living I live) or *várván várva a véget* (waiting I wait for the end) evoke the mood of biblical language in the mind of the modern Hungarian reader.¹²

By the middle of the nineteenth century, replacing the Latin and German influenced usage, substantives modified by numerals or number-equivalents were used in the singular only. Thus, the following lines from Ady are striking for the modern reader, and he definitely conceives of the phrases as grammatically incorrect.¹³

...Két halottak lent feküdtek Two dead bodies were lying below
Két hajdani szeretők... Two lovers of early days,

For the same reason, “*minden árulókkal...*” (with *all* traitors...) in *Sírva gondolok rá* (I think of it weeping), the duplication of the plural sign is felt as an archaic remnant in the text.

The above quotes are still readily understandable, but the obsolete participle Ady used in the following quote, nearly obfuscates the meaning of the entire stanza:

Gyöngülnek ágaim	My branches are weakened
Húzza a sok igen	Pulled down by the yes-es.
S a megcsúfolt nemek	And the ridiculed no-s
Rozsdákkal megírvák	Written in rust
a leveleimen.	on my leaves. ¹⁴

In *Krónikás ének 1918-ból* (A Sung-Chronicle from 1918), the archaic language of medieval chronicles is recreated by the repetitive use of the third person plural at the end of each line. Here Ady only chose such verbs which contained front vowels. Thus, according to the rules of vowel harmony, each final syllable became *-nek*. To increase the effect of archaic repetition he used the verbs in the reflexive or with a reflexive meaning. Thus, each line ends in *-ülnek*. The first stanza reads as follows:

Iszonyú dolgok mostan történülnek
Népek népekkel egymás ellen gyűlnek
Bűnösök és jók egyként keserülnek
S ember hitei kivált meggyöngülnek.

Terrible things are happening these days,
Nations gather against one another,
Guilty and good suffer equally
Man's beliefs weaken especially.

In the case of *történni* (to happen), since the verb has no reflexive form, Ady simply made up one, and used it instead of *történnék*. In the sea of the following thirty-nine lines, his neologism impresses the reader as a genuine archaism. His "archaic" predication is entirely manufactured, it merely alludes to a kind of predication found in the sixteenth and seventeenth century chronicles, in which *vala*, the by then obsolete form of *volt* (there was), was customary. This was used by the most famous Hungarian chronicler, Sebestyén Tinódi, who in his *Cronica* (1554), describing Hungarian resistance against the Ottoman army, uses *vala* about a hundred and fifty times. It should be added however that his was already a conscious effort at archaization, since Hungarian poets have successfully employed rhyme and assonance since the mid-thirteenth century (cf. *Ómagyar Mária Siralom*, Mary's Lament).

One of the most frequent methods of archaization in Hungarian literary practice is the use of the obsolete conjugation *to be*. As shown above, this can be the repetition of *vala* in a poetic text, or the occasional injection of *vagyon*. Ady made ample use of these possibilities, mostly in order to create a special mood but at times also in order to design proper rhyme or rhythm. In *Elbocsátó szép üzenet* (Letter of Dismissal), the rhythmic function of *vala* is entirely clear:

...Ki előttem kis kérdőjel *vala*
Csak jöttömmel lett beteljesedve.

...that *you were* nothing but a little question
until with my arrival you became fulfilled.¹⁵

(One of the most exhibitionistic pieces of the entire body of Hungarian verse, this poem was not meant to have any archaic features. On the contrary, by its shocking self-revelations it asserted that, when it came to poetry, in Ady's mind there was no private subject or any need for privacy.)

In another instance, instead of conveying a festive atmosphere, the archaic past tense creates a grotesque and comic rhyme.

Szép öcsém - mi kevélyek *valánk*
S kár, ha a magyar *falánk*.

My dear brother - we have been haughty
And it's a pity when a Hungarian is greedy.

Altogether, it seems that Ady chose obsolete predication as his most favourite vehicle of 'partial' archaization. His *Szent Margit legendája*, (The Legend of St. Margaret) contains five stanzas, and in these are found fifteen different forms of predication. Only two, *veté* (instead of *vetette/cast* in past tense) and *áldozák* (instead of *áldozták/they offered*) are archaic endings. Similarly in the four stanzas of *Rózsáliget a pusztán* (Rosebushes on the fallow), of the thirteen predicates only one, *megkísérteték* (instead of *megkísértettek engem I have been tempted*), is archaic; yet it sets the tone for the entire poem. In several pieces, omission of the connecting vowels, which is mandatory in modern Hungarian, recalls the archaic forms in which consonant clusters were much more frequent. Such are *intnek* (instead of *intenek-they motion*), *megállítná* (instead of *megállítaná-he/she would stop it*), and the like.¹⁶ Since in the history of the Hungarian language—parallel to the introduction of connecting vowels—a process of contracting syllables can also be traced, Ady's using *szólott* (instead of *szólt he/she spoke*), *állanak* (instead of *állnak-they stand*), etc., serves the same purpose.¹⁷

Ady's choice of obsolete Hungarian words make up another fascinating facet in his poetic diction. At first reading, they all seem to belong to the oldest lexical stock, yet one glance into the Hungarian etymological dictionary will yield surprisingly variegated data regarding their history. For example, *gyilok* (instead of *gyilkosság-murder*), turns out to be a neologism of the late eighteenth century, but obsolete by Ady's time. In its contextual position in the grand, neo-Romantic poem *A Hadak Útja*, *gyilok* sounds truly archaic.¹⁸

Ágyú, gyilok, úri bitangság
nem fog a mi dús ereinken...

Cannons, murder, gentry depravity
will not conquer our opulent veins...

Next to the word *ágyú*, the reader expects another modern weapon or a more modern sounding word for murder. The

markedly archaic effect is enhanced by the adjective *dús* in the next line. *Dús*, meaning rich or plentiful, also appears archaic in standard Hungarian. It is not a very old word in the language: it derives from Doge (the chief magistrate in Venice or Genoa), and entered Hungarian by Serbo-Croatian mediation (*doze*). In its unexpected synecdochic combination, the newly created phrase, and the form *gyilok* of the previous line, 'archaize' the entire couplet.

Another group of lexical items which demonstrate Ady's deliberate choice of archaization are foreign words, many of which have long been replaced by Hungarian ones, and which therefore lend an aura of quaintness to the text. A number of those, such as *Iszter*, *hélota*, *fáma*, *évoé*, *historia*, *pátria*, *hérosz*, *Januárius*, *pietás*, *Olimp*—all used in Hungarian spelling—are of Graeco-Roman origin and were favoured by poets even into the nineteenth century who hoped to attest to their erudition by using them. In Ady's poetry, they have a decidedly archaic ring.¹⁹ On occasion, the insistence on a particular form of spelling is idiosyncratic to Ady. For example, *grimasz*, an international loan word which entered Hungarian about 1797, via the French form *grimace*, has never been spelled without a *z* in Hungarian. Thus the form *grimás* is Ady's own.²⁰ A different purpose is served, however, by his use of such foreign words which have sunk from the literary language into the dialectal sphere and are conceived of as old-fashioned, persisting only among the semi-educated. Thus, items such as, *ájer* (levegő-air), *forverz* (előre-ahead), *talján* (olasz-Italian), *náció* (nemzet-nation), or *cívís* (polgár-burgher), are all mildly contemptuous and emphasize the poet's ironic stance.²¹

Regional and obsolete words appear in Ady's poetry in the most unexpected, and precisely therefore, accentuated positions. *Ének a porban* (Song in the dust) provides an amusing example of this method. In it, Ady pokes fun at his own 'prophetic,' 'messianic' fate in Hungary. The next-to-last stanza reads as follows:

Mocsaras rónán bércekre vágytam,
Egy kis halomig hozott a lábam.
Forró, szűz lelkünk rakjuk a *sutra*,
Lalla, lalla,
Be megjártad itt, oh,
Zaratusztra.

On marshy meadows I was yearning for mountains.
My feet brought me merely to a mound.
We can ditch our flaming virgin souls,
Lulla, lulla,
You had poor luck here,
Zarathustra.

The members of the rhyming pair, *rakjuk a sutra* and *Zaratusztra* are taken from two entirely different areas of human experience. *Sut*, a sixteenth-century Hungarian word, originally meant the side-bench of a village fireplace (*Ofenwinkel*), where, according to folk tradition, old people, useless at work, would sit and keep warm. "Sutra dobni," a proverbial phrase, developed from this notion, and means: to discard, to ditch. Its appearance in combination with Zoroaster, the ancient Persian religious thinker, is rather unforeseen, and, therefore, highly comical, for the educated reader. The initiated, who would also know that Ady's poetic self-image was not immune to the influence of Nietzscheanism, derives additional enjoyment from this unexpected assonance.

Some regional words are totally unknown to the city person, who *is* the reader of Ady's poetry. Lack of familiarity operates in the case of *dancs*, in *Egy párisi hajnalon* (A Parisian morning). *Dancs* is a regional word of Rumanian transmission (*danci a gipsy boy*, from the phrase *den ci - give me something*, in Rumania). The word means *filthy*, and is obviously a racial slur (in Ady's time a Transylvanian dialect word). Thus the line *Gyűlölöm dancs, keleti fajtám...* (I hate my filthy, Oriental, race) was hardly understandable, and therefore conceived of as archaic by a reading public who was unfamiliar with the word.²²

A phonetic variant of a word may retain its status in the standard language, or it may fall into the realm of dialects. In standard Hungarian, the word for girl is *leány*. It is of Finno-Ugric stock and was first recorded in 1055 when it appeared in the *Tihany Charter*, a Latin document containing some place names and fifty-eight common names in Hungarian.²³ Its palatalized form, *lyány*, is found in the *Jókai Codex* of 1448. During the ensuing centuries, the two variants appear side by side until, by the end of the nineteenth century, *lyány* was reduced to regional usage. Having become a dialect word, its presence adds a special connotation to any literary text. In Ady's poetry, there is a consistently maintained semantic split

between *leány* and *lyány*. *Leány* or *lány* denote his objects of spiritual love, refer to young virgins and innocent emotions, while *lyány* alludes to an erotically charged feeling, a sexual infatuation. The following are but a few examples of this semantic bifurcation. In *Kérdés kék szemekhez* (Question to blue eyes) the subject is a new pure love to whom he appeals: *Édes kislányom, nyisd ki szemed...* (My dear little girl, open your eyes...). In *Túlsó part* (The other shore) the young girls “waiting” on the opposite shore are contrasted with the “available” woman in his room.²⁴ The first love, *Gizella kis zsidó leány volt* (Gizella was a little Jewish girl...), whose virginal lips (*leány-ajkad*), forever haunt the poet.²⁵ The first “kiss” is recalled, in *Heléna, első csókom*. The buxom Serbian girl (*Nagyttögyű szerb leány...*) is not innocent, only the young poet is. Thus *his* shy, first experience is captured in the word *leány*. In another poem, in which the aging Ady watches himself with a degree of self-irony, he writes, *Vén úrfi, hajh, ki, ki a rétre, /ott szállnak a lepkék, s leányok* (Old fellow, alas, get out, to the meadows /where the butterflies and young girls fly...). Youth and ethereal innocence are envied here, in stark contrast to the poems speaking of a sensual desire to relive the experiences of earlier years. The memory of *A nyári délutánok* (Summer afternoons) recalls an entirely different atmosphere.

Mikor az Ég furcsa, lila-kék
S találkára mennek a *lyányok*,
Oh, be titkosak, különösek
Ezek a nyári délutánok.

The pointilism of purple sky
and girls who steal to hideaways,
upon these summer afternoons
how clearly strange our spindrift daze.²⁶

In *Az úri szűz dicsérete* (Praise of the genteel virgin), his violent attack on the girl’s hypocritical behaviour is capsulized in the phrase, *vágyad több, mint az utcalányé...* (Your cravings are more than the prostitute’s). Ady’s use of the word *utcalány* is particularly interesting, since the compound is a calque, a translation from German. Originally a different combination was used in Hungarian: *öröMLEány* (*Freudenmädchen*), and later when the German *Strassenmädchen* became increasingly frequent in literature, *utcaleány* was coined. In neither case was the

second part of the compound used in a palatalized form, except in dialects. Thus Ady further ‘eroticized’ his message by opting for *lyány*, which for him carried a special meaning. In his highly archaized *Dul-kisasszonyok násza* (The mating of the young Dul-women) the man sing a ‘mating song’ to call the girls (*lyány-csaló nótát*). In the boldly erotic *Megölelném a lyányod* (I would embrace your daughter), desire for the mother is mixed with an urge to “have her” in her daughter. The daughter is perhaps still a child but since the poet’s desire is anything but innocent, the daughter is referred to as *lyány*.

De ha meghalnék bűnömért,
Fölgyújtanám egy éjjel a világot.
Húnyt szemmel gondolnék reád,
Átfogná két veszett karom
S megölelném a *lyányod*.

Although death followed on my crime,
tonight the world could not burn hotter.
I think of you with eyes shut fast
and reach out accursed arms,
I would embrace your daughter.²⁷

The act of defloration in *Fehér lyány virág kezei* (Flower hands of a “white” girl) is alluded to in the phrase, *omló szirmát egy fehér lánynak* (crumbling petals of a ‘white girl’).²⁸

The examples are too numerous to be even quoted by page number. Since Ady’s poetry has a strong erotic charge, it contains, as expected, many more instances of the by him sensualized form, *lyány*.

The kudos in Ady’s innovating archaization is his creating a new vocabulary in Hungarian by way of coining archaic-sounding neologisms. This he achieved by adding endings which were obsolete, or not used in connection with that particular word class. The following examples illustrate this technique: in *A nagy álom* (The great dream), he coins the phrase, *altatlan álom*, meaning sleepless dream, or dreamless sleep.

In Hungarian *al-* is the root to both sleep and dream. In

addition, *sleepless* in standard Hungarian is expressed as *álmatlan*, literally meaning dreamless. Owing to this ambiguity, the unusual ending, while strengthening the metaphor (death), also adds a quaint, archaic element to the meaning. According to the rules of Hungarian grammar, the superlative is marked by *leg* + *adjective* + *bb*, the latter often preceded by a connecting vowel. Ady's adding this affixation to a *noun* in the sentence ... *A tanító, a legrababb magyar...* (the teacher is the slavest Hungarian) is a nineteenth-century-type neologism of the kind which given its atypical formation, would not have survived, and would therefore sound archaic in a modern text. Similarly, when unusual frequentative endings are attached to a verb, *álldaltak* (instead of *álldogáltak* they were standing around), or *döfölt* (instead of *döfködött* he/she was butting repeatedly), even if they are modelled on existing endings, the reader used to the traditional forms, will find them, if not foreign, at least odd.²⁹

Ady also created such constructs as *majdanta* (instead of *majdan* someday), *éhedt* (instead of *éhes* hungry), *temeszt* (instead of *temet* he/she buries), *fölönte* (instead of *fölötte* above him/her/it), which were all new, yet appeared archaic, although vaguely familiar to the reader.³⁰

Inversion is often used by poets for emphatic reasons, but also for creating end-rhymes. In most literary languages inversion has an archaic ring and makes for disruption in contiguity. In Ady's highly romantic *Vízió a lápon* (Vision over the marshland), the mythologized self-image of the poet is emphasized by inversion, and the messianic quality of the message is enhanced by the method:

Vagyok fény-ember ködbe bújva,
 Vagyok veszteglő akarat,
 Vagyok láplakók csodája,
 Ki fényre termett, s itt marad.

Fény-ember *vagyok*, ködbe bújva
 Veszteglő akarat *vagyok*,
 Láplakók csodája *vagyok*,
 Aki fényre termett, és aki itt
 marad.

I am a man-of-light wrapped in fog,
 I am tarrying volition,
 I am a wonder among the people of the marshes
 who was born to light but remains here.

It is obvious from the above stanza that had Ady only used inversion in order to create an assonance he would not have to change but the second line. The incantation-like repetition provided by the three consecutive inversions add to the atmosphere of the entire poem, and increases the desired notion of the supra-natural.³¹

The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics states that “Archaism as a feature of literary style is especially associated with poetry and it was originally connected with meter” (enl. ed., 1965, 47). This is by the fact that archaization was most frequently manifested—at least in English poetry—by truncation, contraction or expansion of syllables in the metrical context. In Hungarian poetry, due to the agglutinating nature of the language, the possibilities for producing rhyme or assonance are much greater than in isolating languages, e.g., English. Nonetheless, in Ady’s poetry a high frequency of such archaizations can be observed. Several examples can be traced directly to the Bible, and to one particular translation of it. This is the work of Gáspár Károlyi (c. 1529-91), whose translation of the Old and New Testament (1590) has remained to date the standard Protestant edition which was read also by Ady’s family.

This source is tapped when Ady chooses the role of prophet. *Ellenségim*, instead of *ellenségeim* (my enemies) lends the poem a festive, biblical ring. In other instances however, it is indeed rhyme and meter which determine his choice. Yet, Ady would never contract or drop syllables, where the text otherwise would not benefit from the device.

The following three examples will illustrate his use of contraction as one of his methods of archaization, with the bracketed words showing standard modern Hungarian.

Itt régik a bűnök, itt régik az átkok (*régiek* are old) (old are the sins, here and old are the curses) in *Két kuruc beszélget* (Two Kuruc soldiers talk), where contraction makes the syllabic parallelism stronger.

Valakinek szeme ragyog... ‘Halleluja, szép aranyok’ (*valakinek a* — somebody’s...*aranyok* — gold, pl.) (Somebody’s eyes are sparkling...Hallelujah, pretty gold) in a *Gazdagság álma* (The dream of richness). Both the omission of the definite article and the use of a mid-vowel instead of the modern, open vowel (the beginning of this shift goes back to the thirteenth

century) conform to the metric needs of the stanza.

Én atyám, Mammon, szomorú szűzségem (szűzességem
virginity) (My father, Mammon, my sad virginity...) in *Psalm of the Monk of Mammon*, the contraction provides the desired hendecasyllabic line, but also contributes to the "increased lyrical state" of the text.³²

Thus, as was stated earlier, innovative archaisms extend in Ady's poetry from the sound to the word, from the word to the phrase, and from there to the entire line. Intertwined they create that special inimitable texture of his poetry. Owing to his singular language Ady had no genuine following. He only had epigones whose weakness lay precisely in the fact that their studied combinations could never reproduce the same highly artistic and unique amalgam.

NOTES

1. As Charles Bally put it, "L'impression d'archaïsme n'apparaît que chez ceux qui ont étudié les anciens textes français; et ce n'est pas là ce que suppose le fonctionnement naturel de langue." *Traité de la stylistique française*, 2nd. ed., Paris, 1921.
2. Cf. my paper discussing the function of metaphor and metonymy in "An Armchair Picaresque: The Texture and Structure of George Konrád's *The Case Worker*," *Fiction and Drama in Eastern and Southeastern Europe*, *UCLA Slavic Studies*, 1, 1980, 62-85.
3. Here, "presencing" is a term borrowed from Martin Heidegger who applied it in a partially different manner in *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. by Albert Hofstadter. (New York, 1972): p. 208.
4. Cf. Yury Lotman, *Szöveg, model, típus*. Trans. by Viktor Bánlaki *et al.* (Budapest, 1973): p. 57.
5. All quotations in the text are from Endre Ady. *Összes versei*. (Budapest, 1955). 2 vols. A 1 y page reference is to this edition. All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.
6. Baján was a pagan leader.
7. To this group belong his references to *Hunnia* (meaning Hungary), as in *Menekülj, menekülj innen* (Flee, flee from here), or in *A Hadak Útja* (The way of the armies).
8. Sung, accompanied by music, the genre became so popular that in the fervor of the Romantic Revival many such items resurfaced. Some were genuine folk songs, others of learned authorship. A typical example for the latter was the output of Kálmán Thaly (1839-1909), who in 1864, among a group of authentic *Kuruc* songs, also published his own compositions, and tried to pass them on as original pieces from the eighteenth century.
9. For the most typical examples of Ady's *Kuruc* songs, cf. I: 235, 239, 266, and II: 92, 97, 178 and 281.
10. Translated by Anton Nyerges. *Poems of Endre Ady*. (Buffalo-New York: Hungarian Cultural Foundation, 1969): 262. For further examples for Ady's use of mottoes from biblical literature, cf. I: 335, 435, 447 and II: 84, 105 and 269.
11. Psalm 118. v. 5. From the *Jewish Publication of Society*, Reprint ed., 1917.
12. *Északi ember vagyok* (I am a man of the north) and *Pénz a remeteségben* (Money in the hermitage).
13. *Két hajdani szeretők* (Two lovers of old).
14. *A Kényszerűség fája* (The tree of impositions).

15. A. Nyerges, trans., *Poems of Endre Ady*, p. 355.
16. *Álcás vén valómmal* (With my masked old self) and *A proletár fiú verse* (The proletarian boy's song), respectively.
17. *A nagy Pénztárnok* (The great bank teller) and *Ki elveszti harcát* (He who loses his battle), respectively.
18. The Hungarian folk tradition refers to the Milky Way as the 'Way of the Armies.' On it Attila and his army "will return and liberate the Hungarians from oppression."
19. The examples are from Béla Zsolnai, *Nyelv és stílus* (Budapest, 1957): p. 274.
20. Cf. *A megnőtt élet* (Matured life).
21. *Ájer* and *civis* (I: 194), *forverz* (II: 68), *talján* (I: 59), *fáma* (I: 415), *Iszter* (I: 90), *Januarius* (I: 102), *Hunnia* (I: 81 and 188), *náció* (I: 100).
22. Similarly, the dialect word *cenk* (young dog), in the otherwise chanson-like *Búcsú Siker Asszonytól* (Farewell to dame success), creates an archaic node in the text, simply by its "unexpected" occurrence in this kind of material.
23. *Tihanyi Alapítólevél*, a Latin document, chartered by King Endre I, pertaining to the founding of Tihany Abbey on Lake Balaton. For further information on the recorded history of the word, cf. *A magyar nyelv történeti—etimológiai szótára* (Budapest, 1970) Vol.2: 733-34.
24. "Túl a Dunán leányok...kis lányok, várakozók..."
25. *Az első asszony* (The first woman).
26. A. Nyerges, trans., *Poems of Endre Ady*, p.116.
27. *Ibid.*, 208.
28. In *Elindult egy leány* (A girl started out), where within the same poem the girl's changing from virgin into the poet's lover is also marked by the change from *leány* to *lyány* (and not woman).
29. *Szép magyar sors* (Fair Hungarian fate), and the opening poem of the volume *A Magunk Szerelme* (The love of our selves).
30. Some of the examples are from B. Zsolnai, *Nyelv és stílus*, p. 276, and Gyula Szemere, *Ady Endre költői stilisztikája* (Székesfehérvár, 1941). Pécsi Tudományegyetem, *A Magyar Intézet Értekezései*, 21, esp. 6-14.
31. For further examples of such inversions, cf. *Sem utódja, sem boldog őse...* (Neither descendant nor happy ancestor...), I: 233. Also, I: 135, 179 and II: 85, 317. It is noteworthy that Ady used inversion mostly when referring to himself. In *Ruth és Delila* (Ruth and Delilah), the word *látlak* (I see you) creates a drum-like, pounding impact. Each stanza contains three lines, of which two begin with *látlak*.
32. Cf. also I: 13, 18, 73, 89, 229 and II: 90, 306.

Why Is There No “Sixth Eclogue”?

Emery George

Among great artists of any period, Miklós Radnóti must be counted in the ranks of those whose careers came to a close during their tender years; nevertheless, as Emil Lichtenberg has written so aptly of Mozart, “the giant arc of his life makes a whole.”¹ The sole dissonant chord that disturbs the harmony of Radnóti’s great trajectory, and renders the wholeness of his life’s work problematic to this very day, is the lack of a poem number six in that distinguished series of eclogues in which the poet speaks of and to the times, with Vergilian naturalness, with a greatness transcending poetic diction. The lack of a “Sixth Eclogue” is not only disturbing; let us admit it freely: it is also painful. With hidden lyrical feelings we confront the mutilated series, and make attempts to fill the gap. Stillborn and yet alive, that “Sixth Eclogue” is hiding, it must be hiding somewhere among the eleven poems written between the “Fifth” and the “Seventh.” How very much Radnóti scholarship wishes to recuperate from this sense of hurt is clear from an essay by Imre Trencsényi-Waldapfel, in which the great classicist identifies as the “Sixth Eclogue” Radnóti’s poem fragment dated 19 May 1944.² My present paper considers all pertinent arguments; in fact, it calls attention to several additional poems not discussed in this connection to date. Its aim, however—and in this it departs, in substance as in method, from previous work—is not to determine which poem constitutes the “Sixth Eclogue,” but to attempt to answer the question put in the above title: why is there no such work?

In textual criticism of the modern period, symptoms of wishful thinking associated with aspirations of textual completeness show most readily in places where one sets about organizing any portion of a poet’s literary estate for book publication. Nothing that is fragmentary can or should become a book (with notable exceptions; with Sappho we have no choice). That it was most probably Radnóti’s own wish to realize, at some fitting point in

the future, a separate volume from his series of eclogues (as he indeed did from the series of his *Calendar* poems (1942)), seems evident from the fact that, almost as an afterthought, he wrote a poem to the series in 1942. This is the magically festive, yet tragically attuned “*Száll a tavasz...*” (Spring is in Flight). The presence in the series of this exuberant poem conjures the ideal of completeness to such extent as to render the continued absence of a “Sixth Eclogue” a patent, and in any event an unbearable absurdity. In the course of the years following World War II, 1961 saw the fulfillment of Radnóti’s wish; at this time, under the imprint of Magyar Helikon, the eclogues became a Lilliput volume entitled *Eclogues*, edited by Imre Trencsényi-Waldapfel and beautifully illustrated with drawings by Piroska Szántó. In the afterword to the volume, the editor writes of the problem of the missing “Sixth” as follows:

No poem bearing the title “Sixth Eclogue” has emerged from Radnóti’s estate; on the other hand, we cannot—knowing the marvellously careful manuscripts of poems he wrote even during the days immediately preceding his martyrdom—assume that Radnóti could have forgotten the series number at which, back home, he had interrupted the writing of the eclogues. Thus we must either believe the “Sixth Eclogue” to be lost, or—what is more probable—that the poet had intended as number six of the cycle that untitled fragment which survives with the dating 19 May 1944. This—in contrast to “Fifth Eclogue,” whose fragmentary nature is mere form, that is, a perfect instrument of expression serving the contents—is a fragment in the literal sense: it remained without an ending or a title, since on the day following, on 20 May 1944, he was called up for military labour service once again, a tour from which he did not return home. The total lack of bucolic symbolism in this fragment does not contradict our assumption; after all, hardly a trace of this could be found in “Fourth Eclogue,” and not the least evidence of it in “Fifth.” Supporting our thesis stands, however, its Old Testament allusion (to the prophet Isaiah in the last line), which to a certain extent connects it with “Fourth Eclogue,” and prepares “Eighth.”³

The poem dated 19 May 1944, known to us since the appearance of Radnóti’s posthumous volume *Tajtékos ég* (Sky

with Clouds) (1946) under the title “Fragment,” does in fact receive space in the *Eclogues* volume of 1961, as the lost “Sixth Eclogue.” Trencsényi-Waldapfel’s view and editorial practice are corroborated by those of Pál Réz, who, summarizing his predecessor’s arguments in the afterword to his own *Eclogues* edition of 1979, adds: “...important additional proof is constituted by the fact that—as Tibor Melczer has noted—the (poem) ‘I lived on this earth in an age...’ is in essence a further elaboration of the Vergilian motto heading ‘First Eclogue,’ that is, an application to Radnóti’s age, to the war years....”⁴ Tibor Melczer, in his 1974 Budapest dissertation, notes that in the penultimate line of “Fourth Eclogue” the phrase “your anger’s smoke” is likewise of prophetic impact and of biblical origin: it alludes to Chapter 30, verse 27, of The Book of Isaiah.⁵ Although Melczer’s observation dates from 1974, matters did not need to progress even this far in order for the view to find an echo in Radnóti scholarship done outside Hungary. As early as 1965, that is, four years following Trencsényi-Waldapfel’s edition of the *Eclogues*, B.S. Adams wrote: “The Sixth Eclogue is lost as such, although it is commonly held that it exists under the title of *Töredék*.”⁶ Although in the notes to my second Radnóti volume I wrote a reply to this view, I now feel it insufficient to answer merely, as I do there: “...the lack of a ‘Sixth Eclogue’ does not injure the existing series; in fact the position of the lacuna only certifies its sense of appropriateness.”⁷ For even if this is true, as it is also true that Shakespeare’s set of sonnets is not damaged by the fact that one of its members (Sonnet 126) contains only twelve lines, the best way we can investigate our problem is by considering, as directly as possible, the poet’s will and his fate. It is important for us to attempt to gain an insight into the shop secrets of the conscious artist.

The first secret of which I am thinking is that, if we must look for a “Sixth Eclogue” at any price, perhaps we could consider other poems as well. In order to do this with conviction, we must stress what I have felt for some time, namely, that the poem dated 19 May 1944 does not at all occupy a privileged position among imaginable—and defensible—candidates for the honour of being identified as the missing piece. However irreverent this may seem, I am sorry to have to report that Trencsényi-Waldapfel’s arguments do not convince me. The poem which bears the date 19 May 1944 is a fragment in historic

fact only; in form, it is anything but that. It consists of five perfectly constructed five-line stanzas, each beginning with an anaphoric refrain (a feature which, we must admit, brings the poem close to the sign system of “Third Eclogue”)⁸ As to the total lack of bucolic symbolism, this is not at all the case for either “Fourth Eclogue” or “Fifth”; we can find, in both these earlier eclogues, rich images of nature and suggestions of the pastoral. In “Fourth Eclogue” such features are prominent especially in the second speech by “Voice” and in the stanzas spoken by “Poet” immediately following; in “Fifth Eclogue” we need but read the lines mirroring the fate of Radnóti’s mourned friend, György Bálint: “Do you take walks in the leaves, in the forest muck; thick perfume, or / are you a fragrance yourself?” as well as the forest and blizzard images of the entire poem.

Over and against this, the impressive Isaiah allusion closing “Fragment” connects the latter not necessarily only with eclogues (there is, in any event, only one eclogue casting the role of a biblical prophet, the “Eighth”). Let us only recall the poem “Marginal Note to the Prophet Habakkuk” (in the verse collection *Meredek út* (Steep Road, 1938), as well as, in an even wider and more significant context, all of Radnóti’s poems and prose works containing biblical allusions.⁹ That, *in extremis*, in a poem written on the eve of his last reporting, the poet should permit himself a biblical reference, is understandable even apart from the logic and poetics of the work. The sole, really convincing, connection of the “Fragment” with the eclogues—something that Trencsényi-Waldapfel does not mention—is its addressing the times, the terrible historic age in which it is conceived. Here I agree with Melczer, namely, that the diction of “Fragment” relates it to Vergil’s *First Georgic* and with the motto, taken from it, to Radnóti’s “First Eclogue.” This rhetoric can, however, be found equally easily in the poem “Walk on, Condemned!,” as well as in numerous other poems which would truly deserve to be regarded as forerunners of the eclogues.¹⁰

If we look closely at the incomplete series—that is, only at “Spring is in Flight...” and the seven existing eclogues, entitled such by the poet—we may discover two dominant formal tendencies governing them. An eclogue “accepted” by Radnóti may be written in dialogue form only, but not in dactylic hexameters (“Second,” “Fourth”), in hexameters but not in

dialogue (“Spring Is in Flight...,” “Third,” “Fifth,” “Seventh”), or in both (“First,” “Eighth”). An eclogue satisfying neither of these two formal criteria—one written, for example, in alexandrines and not in dialogue—has not survived. All this naturally does not imply that such a poem could not have been written, had it occurred to the poet to add such an eclogue to the cycle. The decision not to write every eclogue in dialogue form has its source in Vergil, in whose series only the odd-numbered poems obey this law. Relaxing this constraint a bit further, Radnóti could have arrived at the point of view that the dactylic hexameter line—which tradition and courtly convention oblige Vergil to use—should itself find an alternate in some other prosodic pattern favoured by the twentieth-century poet. Evidence, however, points to Radnóti having drawn the boundary line between the permissible and nonpermissible at this point. Naturally, an imaginable objection to such an argument would be that such regularity can be very deceptive, especially since, statistically speaking, eight poems could hardly form the basis for a reliable computation of probability. In place of attempts at inductive logic, we would do better to consider the will and unceasing artistic experimentation of the living poet. If we switch to such a point of view, there opens before us the possibility of taking into consideration poems other than “Fragment,” as fully entitled candidates for the distinction of being named the crucial “Sixth Eclogue.” I am especially thinking of two poems Radnóti wrote during the early months of 1944: “I Cannot Know...” and “They Just Couldn’t Bear It....”

Both poems address the epoch, in their own ways; they say “no” to the poet’s age, as “First Eclogue” expresses it. That the world of “I Cannot Know...” is from several points of view a continuation and elaboration of that of “Second Eclogue,” that the two poems resonate in mutual sympathy, is observed also by Trencsényi-Waldapfel.¹¹ The poetry of “I Cannot Know...” is the language of the pained rhetoric of love of the fatherland. It pairs the guilt of a nation involving itself in tragedy with the world of feeling of the poet in love with the “tiny flutters,” familiarities, of home. It has been said of this poem that in twentieth-century Hungarian poetry it is the closest correlate of Vörösmarty’s “*Szózat*” (Oration), and it is surely no accident that in “I Cannot Know...” the home of Mihály Vörösmarty is so unforgettably mentioned. Besides this, one also seems to overhear

something from the “Hymn” of Ferenc Kölcsey, specifically in the closing lines of “I Cannot Know...”; I am thinking of the lines that speak of a people’s capacity for atonement, of that critical “This nation has already atoned/ for past and future as well” (“Megbűnhődte már e nép / A múltat s jövődöt”). Here, I believe Radnóti to have known Babits’s Dante translation too well, to decide unqualifiedly on Kölcsey’s side in the question of whether or not his nation has already atoned for the future. In canto 27 of *Inferno*, the Tuscan Ghibelline leader, Guido da Montefeltro, completing the tale of his conspiracy with Pope Boniface VIII, puts the following words into the mouth of his dark angel, the devil versed in logic: “Absolved uncontrite means no absolution; / Nor can one will at once sin and contrition, / The contradiction bars the false conclusion” (lines 118-120; trans. Dorothy L. Sayers).

Next to this unmistakable moral position, the fitness of “I Cannot Know...” for eclogue candidacy is further enhanced by its imagery. That person who flies over it in a plane is akin with the pilot who in “Second Eclogue” converses with the poet, even if the former has no opportunity to learn of the crucial difference between his map and the finely detailed nature of the real landscape. Toward the end of the poem people are “hidden away in dark cellars”; this lets one anticipate the horror of the bombings, as this is clarified in its full weight in the language of “Second,” “Seventh,” and “Eighth Eclogues,” in fact even in “First Eclogue,” where similar passages refer to the military conduct of the Spanish Civil War. True to the eclogues, “I Cannot Know...” also speaks to contemporary issues, of the poet’s fellow humans, of “workers here, and poets too, innocent, / and suckling infants in whom there grows intelligence”; the poet speaks, “in rebelling, of others, and (does) it selflessly” (“Not Memory, Nor Magic”).¹² Next to the identical metrics, the *Nibelungenlied* line, in which most of “Second Eclogue” and all of “I Cannot Know...” are written, the visual form of the text of the latter poem, written in a single block rather than being divided into stanzas, also follows the poetics of “Second Eclogue.” It is well known that of all the eclogues this early example contains the least number of speeches—both “Pilot” and “Poet” speak twice only.

Nor are the eclogue-like qualities of “They Just Couldn’t Bear It...” called into question by a single disturbing feature or

circumstance; if anything, this later poem seems an even more convincing contender than was its predecessor. "I Cannot Know..." does immediately follow after an existing eclogue ("Fifth"), whereas the distance between "Fifth Eclogue" and "They Just Couldn't Bear It..." is two poems, exactly the number that separate "Third Eclogue" from "Second." But something that is far more important, in fact shockingly apparent, is that, like "Fifth Eclogue," "They Just Couldn't Bear It..." is also a requiem poem. In it the poet mourns his close friend, the painter István Dési Huber (1895-1944). The series of images occurring in the dignified poem, which in this work refer to real pictures by the artist: "cattle, horse, worker, poet..., / church...in your home village of Dés" (lines 11-12), furthermore, "coffin, pitcher, / firewall" (lines 23-24), seem to conjure before us a bucolic effect felt through the achievements of painting.¹³ But bucolicism of this genre is no longer univocally the instrument of landscape mood, exclusive of environments created by man, any more than the bucolic presuppositions of "Third Eclogue" or of "I Cannot Know..." are that. After all, the innovative power of the bucolic poet in "Third Eclogue" is made manifest precisely in the fact that it is a question of an "urban bucolic"; the poet is sitting in a café and can make us believe that this is that appointed *locus amoenus* within which the pastoral muse can come to his aid. In this sense the painter's muse too was the creative spirit of village and meadow, as well as of city and factory.

Of an equal rank with bucolic allegiance thus won from the artist's vision, the capacity of "They Just Couldn't Bear It..." to address the age surpasses perhaps even that of "Fifth Eclogue." It is, of course, true that the moral significance of the latter resides precisely in that choked-off pain, owing to which the poet proves incapable of writing a "finished" poem about his dear friend, the journalist and writer, György Bálint (1906-1943), missing, then dead in the Ukraine. If we think of how very much Bálint was a man of the word, of creative feuilletonistics, and of how even in his motto: "I am outraged, therefore I am," he was a kin soul with Dési Huber, this pained silence, which causes the poet to carve his "Fifth Eclogue" into fragment, is all the more overpowering. "They Just Couldn't Bear It..." is, naturally, no fragment; it is, rather, a deeply-felt dirge, at the end of which the challenging voice calls to us and to the age from almost the height of Imre Madách, with the energy of his "Man: struggle" ("Ember, küzdj"):

Man: be on the lookout, observe your world;
this is the past, this the ferocious present—
carry them in your heart. Live the evil moment,
and always know what you must do for it
to make it different.

If my above arguments, either on behalf of “I Cannot Know...” or of “They Just Couldn’t Bear It...” sound convincing, so be it; conspicuously, I hope, I did on purpose discuss two poems, and I am sure it is clear that we could set up further criteria, on the basis of which we could let at least three or four additional “candidates” pass in detailed review. For this, to be brief, is not what is of the essence. What we are here aiming for is not positivistic, tangible “results,” as these are so often understood in traditional scholarship; our attitude is not that which American humour can at times so strikingly caricature: “Will the real ‘Sixth Eclogue’ please stand up?” No—anything like this is, of course, out of the question. Instead of this I would like once again to call our attention to that terrible, and terribly simple, fact which we already know, namely, that a “Sixth Eclogue”—does not exist. *Why is this the case?* This, in my opinion, is the real question.

In order to enable ourselves to discuss this question effectively, we must allow ourselves a brief excursus into the semantics of the word *why*. It is well known that in the natural sciences there is no such question as: Why? Such a question, for example: “Why does water consist of hydrogen and oxygen?” we can easily answer by saying: “Because the Lord ordained that it shall be so.” Needless to say, to provide such answers is the proper task not of physics but of theology. If, on the other hand, to the question: “Why do we have two eyes?” we reply: “So that we may see also in the third dimension,” we furnish an answer worthy of some note, yet unworthy of modern biology. In the course of the history of the biological sciences, the phenomena of evolution were often explained in such a goal-oriented, unscientific fashion. Neither question is worth taking seriously by scientists. Yet with the two above questions, about the composition of water and about optics, I touch on philosophy’s two favourite *Why?*’s, on mechanism and on teleology, on the *why*’s of cause and of purpose.¹⁴ We can ask our question concerning the missing “Sixth Eclogue” thus: “What caused it not to come into being?” or thus: “What purpose did the poet think to serve by seeing to it that it not come into being?”

The circumstances that caused "Sixth Eclogue" to remain unwritten already form, naturally enough, the subject of a very considerable literature. Not that the contributions to it necessarily touch on our phantom poem. Of the fact that Radnóti most probably simply did not have time to write a "Sixth Eclogue," we can remind ourselves even without making an attempt at identification, as this is done by Trencsényi-Waldapfel. We can also look at the datings of the poems. Radnóti completed "Fifth Eclogue" on 21 November 1943; the poem which eventually received the title "Fragment" he wrote, as pointed out above, on the eve of this last report for labour duty, on 19 May 1944. Between these two dates, in the course of almost exactly six months, Radnóti writes or completes ten poems. He orders a cycle ("Slips of Paper"); he writes an important poem for a sad occasion ("They Just Couldn't Bear It..."); he finishes a poem left unfinished the year before ("Dream Landscape"; beneath it the date: 20 October 1943—16 May 1944). Ten poems as the result of six months' work may not seem like much, until we consider that about this time Radnóti was also working hard on a commissioned translation, of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Next to his always rather slow, extremely careful, method of working we may well view as somewhat inconsistent the almost Mozartean speed with which Radnóti was able to translate even the first two acts of Shakespeare's comedy. The letter in which the poet promises the translation is dated 24 January 1944, and in that letter Radnóti assures the publisher, the Franklin Society, of a May 31 deadline with the final manuscript.¹⁵ We need not belabour the point that the real fragment the poet left behind is this beautiful translation. It could not, then, particularly surprise us to hear that Radnóti had neither the time left to devote, with the proper care and energy, to the composition of a "Sixth Eclogue," nor the nervous energy or attentiveness to do justice to a phase of his work which, over and above the business of datings (on which he at all times insisted), demanded of the poet the observance of a numerical order as well.

We must speak here a bit about the phenomena of forgetting, rather than entertain the possibility that in (very possibly) forgetting "Sixth Eclogue" the poet shows either relaxation of artistic discipline, or willingness to give up plans, worthily to round out and complete the oeuvre. Quite the contrary. From

István Vas, one of the late Radnóti's closest friends, we know that in those terrible days, when even the great poets were preoccupied in the main with going into hiding, and their attention was on the news over the radio, on the position of the front lines, and on the procurement of the necessities of life, Radnóti's energies remained unshakeably with his work.¹⁶ It is, on the other hand, also from what István Vas has told me in personal conversation that I know how forgetful Radnóti could be in certain matters. In this forgetfulness, numbers occupied first place. He was incapable of remembering a telephone number; and, who knows, in those days perhaps it is the number 6 that could have been banished from his consciousness. That we are not, here, discussing strictly literary matters does not change the fact that our focus is a creative man, about whose mental patterns we are making informed guesses. In formulating such conjectures, it is especially on the level of perceptual psychology that biographical data can be of some service. But an account of the poet sitting at his desk and working on his poem is also a part of his biography. Here I deem it important to speculate also on how ambiguous the structure and fragmentary nature of "Fragment" is. From Mrs. Miklós Radnóti I learned that those ellipsis dots, two rows of them following stanza four and one after stanza five, present in modern editions of the poet's works, are there in the manuscript as well, and, as we also well know, the poem remained without a title. Despite this, as mentioned above, the poem itself is complete. Here we can hardly talk about phenomena of forgetting or of absent-mindedness. Is it possible that those ambiguous dots were meant to serve only as symbols of the painful silence of poets in wartime, as this is mentioned in the fifth stanza?

In the realm of concrete data we come upon yet another mechanistic explanation for the absence of a "Sixth Eclogue." And that is that, very possibly, the poet's lines were present in his mind, and that he wished to retain them in his memory until a suitable time for writing them down in a fitting manner should present itself. The fact that "surfing time" (as he formulates it in "Fourth Eclogue") did not grant him the tranquility to do this, makes it possible, even probable, that when in Lager Heidenau he was working on "Seventh Eclogue," he had still not abandoned the idea of working on and rounding out this other poem. Such a possibility naturally embraces cause and purpose both.

Although, in one sense, we cannot here speak of documentation, the situation throws light on an important corner of the poet's workshop. Radnóti scholars who have examined manuscripts by the poet could observe how rarely we are confronted with drafts gone over several times; we never come across manuscripts that present serious difficulties in decipherment (as do, e.g., the manuscripts of Georg Trakl). Nor could those perfect poems at Lager Heidenau and elsewhere around Bor have come about under those conditions, had the poet had to rely on a creative method based on extensive draftings and redraftings. Much rather, Radnóti ipso facto belongs among poets who work holistically, straight from the mind, relying on the mood, the energy, the suggestions of the auspicious moment. The work then comes into being, regardless of whether the pastoral muse must help the poet at home, in a café, or at one of the camps.¹⁷

Turning to the purely teleological side of the problem, inquiring solely about purposes that the nonexistence of "Sixth Eclogue" might be thought to serve, we leave the fields of data and documentation. It is well known to all who work on Radnóti's life and oeuvre that a great deal of material pertaining to both has not yet seen the light of day. Despite this, I dare believe that even if the day should arrive when we have access to all extant manuscripts, the chances for coming upon a written statement concerning a "Sixth Eclogue" are slim. But the fine irony of the matter is that, even if we were to make such a find — imaginably, a letter, a diary entry, the transcript of an interview — it would, in our particular instance, not necessarily be convincing, or, more important, reliable. I am not even thinking so much of Radnóti's occasional, Apollinaire-like and good-humoured, mystifying tendencies (for, faced with the seriousness of the hour, he may possibly have foregone such); rather, of the principle that in the area of interpreting and critically evaluating poetic intentions, it is not the poets who are the most highly qualified. The literary historian who provides this service must, however, concentrate solely on the mute evidence of available texts and of circumstance.

Let us set up a hypothesis, one that I have not yet encountered in the literature on Radnóti. How defensible is the assumption that the poet intentionally left out a poem entitled "Sixth Eclogue"? I do not mean to suggest either that the text was lost or that the poet first wrote the poem and then destroyed it. Rather,

I would like to weigh one of two additional possibilities. Either Radnóti left out the number itself, it being, presumably, a matter of indifference to him whether he called the next eclogue “Sixth” or “Seventh,” or he actively and consciously renounced his aspirations to writing “Sixth Eclogue,” while it remained of decisive importance for him which eclogue in the series he assigns which number. Between the two possibilities I would like to decide in favour of the latter. Anyone who has read Radnóti’s eclogues with any amount of care could not help noticing the degree of importance of the ordinals that identify the individual members of the cycle; how impossible it is to interchange “First Eclogue” with “Second,” “Third” with “Fifth,” “Fourth” with “Eighth.” Totally apart from the traditional mysticism attaching to the integers from one through nine (by courtesy of which we could also explain the rightness of the arrangement by pointing to the “perfection” of the numbers one and eight as underlying the rank and dignity of “First” and “Eighth Eclogues”), we could state that the moral *steadfastness* of tone in the eclogues stands outwardly symbolized by their *steadfastly* adhering to the numerical order that the poet, with his artistic intuitions, has assigned them. To such a view, these place values are no more interchangeable than are the acts in a play. Could it be possible that the poet, after having said all that he was given to say in the first five eclogues, as well as in their forerunners, decided that “Sixth Eclogue” can best stand its post by not putting in its physical appearance at all? According to this, the poet would have confessed faith by a gesture of conscious artistic sacrifice.

It is not, then, the “Sixth Eclogue” which remained a “fragment” but the entire series; not a single poem, but the whole oeuvre. But let us note the quotation marks placed around the word *fragment*; also what Imre Trencsényi-Waldapfel says about the character, the “fragmentary” identity of “Fifth Eclogue.” It is a perfect instrument expressing the contents, an instrument serving the pain, the silence symbolized by and in the poem. In like manner, and mirroring precisely the method of “Fifth Eclogue,” the lack of “Sixth” is an instrument playing, as it were, the music of that pain, that symbolic act of growing silent, about which the poet so eloquently speaks in the closing lines of the “Fragment” of 19 May 1944. It is important for us to remember that Radnóti speaks (more properly: sings) of growing silent (as he did earlier, in “In a Restless Hour”); he himself does not

actually take that road. And he certainly does not renounce his rights and aspirations to completing his series of eclogues in a worthy manner. Yet we too seem to have some right to interpret the lack of a major eclogue as an act of personal sacrifice, given only that we are talking about the consequences of an artistic decision, rather than about a child of necessity. After all, Radnóti scholars of all time will be faced with the “fragmentary” nature of a cycle of poems which most assuredly seeks its equal in all of twentieth-century Hungarian poetry. Let this “fragmentariness” serve as a reminder that we can create fragments also by forcibly attributing a “wholeness” uncongenial to the nature of what is “fragment”; also of the truth that in the humanities it is often more important to ask the right questions than to attempt to furnish to them answers that seem possessed of finality.

NOTES

1. Emil Lichtenberg, *Mozart élete és művei* (Budapest: Rózsavölgyi, 1943), p.7.
2. Miklós Radnóti, *Eclogák*, ed. Imre Trencsényi-Waldapfel (Budapest: Magyar Helikon, 1961), afterword.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 96-98.
4. Miklós Radnóti, *Eclogák*, ed. Pál Réz (Budapest: Magyar Helikon, Szépirodalmi, 1979), p. 29.
5. Tibor Melczer, “Radnóti Miklós utolsó költői korszaka.” Diss. Budapest (ELTE), 1974, p. 137.
6. B.S. Adams, “The Eclogues of Miklós Radnóti,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 43 (1965): 396.
7. Miklós Radnóti, *The Complete Poetry*, ed. and trans. Emery George (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1980), “Introduction,” n. 42. (p. 46). This edition is quoted throughout the paper.
8. The poem written in five-line stanzas is a favourite form with Radnóti since his first verse collection, *Pagan Salute*; cf., e.g., “Tápé, Old Evening,” “Elegy on the Death of a Hobo,” “An Eskimo Thinks of Death,” “In My Memories...,” and “Á la recherche...”
9. In addition to a number of poems in the early books referring to icons and other portrayals of Christ, there are “And Cain Talked with Abel His Brother,” (in *Pagan Salute* (1930)), the uncollected poem “Marginal Note to Luke”; furthermore, his prose works “The Revelation of St. John the Divine” and “On Dániel Berzsenyi.” (The latter essay concludes with a reference to The Book of Daniel.)
10. Some suggestions (numbers indicate eclogues; titles following them their arguable forerunners): 1. “Peace: A Hymn”; 2. “Veresmart”; 3. “You Wonder, Dear One...”; 4. “End-of-October Hexameters”; 5. “As, Imperceptibly,...”; 7. “Fragment”; 8. “Á la recherche...” Trencsényi-Waldapfel (*ibid.*, p. 80) calls attention to Radnóti’s diary entry of 19 November 1940, in which he notes the Vergilian scene, at Szamosveresmart, that underlies the imagery of “Veresmart” (the poem bears the date 10 January 1941).
11. Trencsényi-Waldapfel, *ibid.*, pp. 86-87.
12. Imre Bori writes: “On the basis of formal inspiration and correspondences in style, I would prefer to enlist, among the ranks of the eclogues, ‘Not Memory, Nor Magic’ ” *Radnóti Miklós költészete* (Novi Sad: Forum, 1965), n. 33, p. 188.
13. See also the study by Béla Pomogáts, “Rekviem és ars poetica - Radnóti Miklós: Nem bírta hát...,” *Kortárs* 23 (1979): 780-83. A series of the pictures referred to in the poem are reproduced in György Horváth, *Dési Huber István* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1976).

14. Although theology's main preserve is questions with a teleological intent, it is not by any means confined to such. The above question on the chemistry of water, followed by its proposed answer, is strictly within mechanics. Were we to pursue the inquiry and ask the next question: "Why did the Lord ordain this?" the answer would have to be teleological.

15. See Krisztina Voit, "Radnóti Miklós és a Franklin Társulat," *Irodalomtörténet* 63 (1981): 486-87.

16. "On 9 May, under the title 'Hiding Out,' he wrote a perfect little song...this, precisely, was what was so arresting: that in the poems written during these days filled with the fear of death and with humiliations, no turbulence could be felt; just this sublime tranquility lends them their peculiar beauty. I told him this, but he fended off my praise. It would be terrible, he replied, if these were his last poems—they are not great enough for that" (István Vas, "Radnóti emlékezete," in: I.V., *Az ismeretlen isten. Tanulmányok 1934-1973* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1974), p. 808).

17. With the enumeration of home, café, Lager, cf. Radnóti's own catalogue of places where he listened to his "kin poems" (rokonversek) written in foreign languages, and to their possible translations: "...this line of theirs or that one accompanied me...at home, over my desk and in company, in strange rooms, on the road, in cattle cars, over snoring comrades, in the library, at a concert, in waking and in sleep" ("On Translation") Afterword to Miklós Radnóti, *Orpheus nyomában. Műfordítások kétezer év költőiből* (Budapest: Pharos, 1943), in Pál Réz, ed., *Radnóti Miklós Művei* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1978), p. 709.

A suggestive example for the amount of time over which the conception of a poem can reside in a poet's mind, may well be "Spring Is in Flight...", the "Proem" to the eclogues. Granted that this poem, dated 11 April 1942, is the product of an occasion; its most reliable allusion to the demonstrations of 15 March of that year, to which the poem responds, may be found in the poem's mood and imagery. This, however, does not answer two, somewhat unrelated, questions: For how long did Radnóti carry within him certain lines or passages of the poem? and : since when had he considered the idea of writing a prefatory poem to the eclogues?

Review Article

Four Modern Hungarian Poets

Robert Finch

Sándor Csoóri, *Wings of Knives and Nails*, trans. Ivan Halasz de Beky (Toronto: Vox Humana, 1981).

Mihály Ladányi, *Treeless, Stony Landscape*, trans. Ivan Halasz de Beky (Toronto: Vox Humana, 1981).

János Pilinszky, *Scaffold in the Winter*, trans. Ivan Halasz de Beky (Toronto: Vox Humana, 1982).

László Kálnoky, *Flash of Lightning*, trans. Ivan Halasz de Beky (Toronto: Vox Humana, 1984).

Sándor Csoóri, Mihály Ladányi, János Pilinszky, László Kálnoky are four modern Hungarian poets, translated into English by a fifth Hungarian poet, Ivan Halász de Béky. As the present reviewer is in complete ignorance of the Hungarian language, this article can only attempt to set down a reader's considered reaction to poems digested at one remove from the original

The four volumes of selected, and hence presumably representative, verse have what might be called a family resemblance. This, I believe, owes nothing to their having been translated by the same hand. All four poets clearly retain independence of mind, in spite of the cramping conditions brought about by Hungary's tragedy. Yet, undoubtedly as a result of those very conditions, the subject-matter of all four volumes is chiefly limited to major topics—life, love and art (i.e., poetry). There is no recording of visual experience, no description as such, no cultural nor anthropological narrative and, of course, no trivia since, practically without exception, the poems are speculative or philosophical meditations, rendered, however, at all degrees of forcefulness, from cold irony to explosive protest. In all four poets these varied intensities are fraught with an unmistakable significance, a significance

strikingly negative in tone, being based almost wholly on denial, absence, removal, exclusion and the like. The character of the contents of the four volumes is implied from the start by their titles: *Wings of Knives and Nails*; *Treeless, Stony Landscape*; *Scaffold in Winter*; *Flash of Lightning*.

For Sándor Csoóri, life's message, sent by the "enemy who stays far away today, too," is that we are defeated, this state being conveyed by means of striking figures, such as "our hand is a hand stuck in rock." Elsewhere, Csoóri represents life "collapsing like a board fence," gradually, or flying, on the "wings of knives and nails," something which is about to release or about to imprison but which never comes to the point of doing either. Despite such incertitudes, the poet prefers, however unprofitably, to linger on in time, while simultaneously seeing death as preferable to life. His constant attitude toward "life's inanities" is perhaps best summed up in *Maybe a Bullet*:

Maybe the cold tap-water would be good,
maybe the eternal life-tasting coffee: let me tremble,
maybe the cracking of snowstorm-shirt over my skin,
claw and iron filings on my eardrum,
maybe the lecherous hip-exhibition of the woman opposite in the
mornings,
the slow shake of the ocean-going breasts outside the window,
maybe the brotherly elbow's pressure in between my ribs,
maybe a bullet in the window-frame.

The two chief sanities that life affords are love, the amative force, and ambition, the creative force. We are torn between the two. Love gives us our emotional identity: "nobody's nobody," since we all exist thanks to another. Love also supplies the strangely diverse materials which the creative force transforms into poetry, the only permanent thing we possess. Yet to practise poetry is as difficult as to practise love, says this able poet, who unjustly rates himself as a poet of intention rather than of execution, since, we are told, his work is continually hampered: "Hungary's premature hoarfrost sits down again on my threshold." We know he is speaking for all poets when he writes that there is no such thing as an "unsullied poem," never anything but "partial participation in a feast." In the long run, poetry, like love, is as fragmentary as life itself. A kind of longing for temporary escape from fragmentation suffuses a number of

Csoóri's poems, nowhere so definitely as in *Amsterdam Ramble* (the sole approach to narrative poetry in the four volumes):

If this quarter is the colony of sin, then I have arrived,
if this is the steamy market place of love, then I am at
home.

On the other hand, Csoóri often provides his reader with a poem that stands entirely on its own:

Poetry's Bachelor

Even my friends are whispering too
I am not for you, Poetry, I should buzz off,
You are a beauty-queen,
great virgin and whore in one person,
your eyelashes fly to the North like wild geese,
I am only a drover
and I plod after you, muddy up to the neck...

there is no city...
would make you stagger
and tumble you wall-white into my arms,
although I ran for you from Warsaw to Havana....

With the shame of a downtrodden life
and with anger, I think of you
maybe in a jealous manner, though not accusingly:
you can show your uncovered, dark loins to whom you want,
from your excited thigh
you can send even more inferior boys to heaven,
your lime-blossom scent is enough for me
and the leaf-veined firmament, which your breath
chases into my face.

Mihály Ladányi's poetry is concerned with aspects of our hopeless horizontality. Life is a "treeless, stony landscape" because the redeeming feature, the bird (of verticality) is always killed and, whether we look backward or forward, there is either confusion or nothingness. The result is flat monotony for both blue-collar and white-collar worker, also for him who chooses to be a collarless outsider, refusing programmes, never knowing

when his time will be up. The remedy? reject our artificial sophisticated society of the few, in favour of the renewal of rustic simplicity for everyone. The realization of such a fairy-land is balked (a) by what Ladányi, with characteristic wry wit, names the Transmigration of Souls, that is to say, our elitist system, whereby the degrading tyranny of one establishment is replaced by that of another, in endless succession; it is also balked (b) by life's telephone, which invariably rings a wrong number; finally, (c) if a man consents to conformity, he is reduced to lowering standards:

I have measured the blood-pressure of the future
since I have to give a talk about the future's blood-
pressure at the Carrots' Conference,

and to making the ironical conclusion: "They could still be interested" (*This Morning*). Such predicaments might seem a pity, humans being a combination of dog and bird (submissiveness and aspiration) but what's the use when, "in the trains of the streets people are sitting, locked in the boxcars of houses" (*On Lateness*)? And whatever people do—sit, crouch or reach up—God remains either ineffectual (*Report*) or menacing (*The Birds' Desire*).

As for love, its refuge is desirable at any age, especially the older one gets, although ("like bread") it becomes decreasingly available, and increasingly expensive through demands it makes upon the lover, not the least of which involves the problem of children who, growing up, launch troubles that adumbrate war. In the special case of a poet, those same children endanger other offspring, his poems. Though not always, as is evident in *Drawing Contest*:

Little kids,
draw me
a beautiful day without swearing,
and that pretty lady, just as she comes this way,
and draw a moonlit evening
full of crickets for the lady,
who sits down, and watches
me make a fire in the courtyard—
Then draw for us
a bed, and finally
give me too a
clean sheet of paper.

The poet is indeed a special case, since, unperceived, he gives his life for many (*Inventory*). But his existence as poet is threatened by other things than the coming of children. He may be killed by attention (*Kidnapping*) or by indifference “Let Ladányi just write his anarchist little poems...” (*I Think No Doubt*); if he be condemned to take charge of a literature class, he finds the analysis of poetry results either in the metamorphosis, by those with sybilline breath, of a word into a bird, or that the analysis of poetry peters out in the unprofitable word-splitting of academic “scientists.” In any case, as Ladányi writes in *Those Old Epigrams*:

The centralization of our poetry industry
has not led anywhere:—

the ruling of the competition-conditions from above
finally has led to a quality-worsening.
Now didactical and technical
problems have come to the fore
and similarly

the fact that poetry is no longer of souls,
it has marched into the centuries
and may succeed as a literary-history.

Which carried one back to Ladányi’s own *Epigram*:

According to Christopher Caudwell
in Communism there won’t be any poetry.
Considering poetry’s present state
we could be
very close to Communism.

Yet Christopher Caudwell, neither in his *Illusion and Reality; A Study of the Sources of Poetry*, nor in his *Studies in a Dying Culture*, goes so far as to parallel Ladányi’s *Shrinking Stanzas*, a poem which not only foresees poetry’s demise but also its natural successor:

Is it worth while to put words together?
Already out of ten assembles sorrow,
out of thirty one can make a funeral
psalm.

Is there a more mournful occupation on earth?

But often for only one word too.
And between the lines the Argus-eyes.

Well, rather the song of the wind, tears of the rain,
and the sparrows' iambic steps.

The title of János Pilinszky's book sets the tone for its contents. A scaffold is a temporary platform or stage on which a criminal is executed. Winter is a rhetorical expression for a protracted period of affliction, distress, misfortune and hardship. Human life is thus our "scaffold in winter," and human life, in a variety of its aspects, provides the theme of most of Pilinszky's verse. *Crime and Punishment* (though abstruse in expression) suggests that we are guilty of crime and await punishment, but that our execution is delayed. Throughout this stretch of delayed execution, which we call life, our key is lost, our lock unopenable and our shoes mark time (*Comparison*). We are also deserted by those who gave us life in the first place (*It Is Difficult Though*); yet we make things worse by the practice of incessantly fragmenting the life they gave us (*Through A Whole Life*), while we simultaneously ask the useless question the dead ask, a question never answered. Our existence is a nadir, a lowest state of depression (*The nadir's Festival*), a veritable *Scaffold in Winter*, a combination of our unknowingness and of "perhaps, God's silence?" Such is no time for self-indulgence, possibly not even for natural nostalgia (as in *On a Nice Day*). We must look to the measuring of supernal time:

Metronome

Measure the time,
but not our time,
the splinters' immobile presence,
the drawbridge's grades,
the winter-scaffold's snow,
the paths' and clearings' silence,
in the fragment's setting
the Father's promise.

The meaning of supernal time is diversely expanded in a series of other poems on life. *Step by Step* defines it as the dialogue of man and God. Pilinszky's side of the dialogue consists in patiently recording the effects of pain and chance (*I Will Watch*), in realizing his unworthiness (*I Don't Count*), in being aware that

what he has forsaken proves that he is found (*The Search of the Prodigal Son*), that through the Mass all men become a collective offering (*As Only*), that solely insofar as one has the harmlessness of a little child can one be truly communicative (*Cradle and Not Coffin*), and that it suffices to take life as it is :

Enough

However wide is the creation
it is more cramped than a sty.
From here to there. Stone, tree, house.
I do this, do that. I come early. I'm late.
And sometimes though, somebody enters
and what is, suddenly opens out.
The sight of a face, a presence is enough,
and the wallpapers start to bleed.

Enough, yes, a hand is enough, as
it stirs the coffee, or as it
"withdraws from the introduction."
It is enough that we forget the place,
the airless row of windows, yet
that returning at night to our room
we accept the unacceptable.

At the same time, we know that, whatever we do, our deeds live after us and finally judge us (*A Secret's Margin*) (cf. *Van Gogh's Prayer*).

God's side of the dialogue, according to the poet, consists in ordering the meaning of our being (*Every Draw of Breath*), in providing direct flight through life's maze (*Straight Labyrinth*), a path to salvation and happiness (*Although My Colour is Black*), and an eternal city beyond (*Admonition*). Despite unanswerable queries (cf. *Omega*), unreconcilable contradictions (cf. *Parable*) and every other enigma, grace remains:

The Rest Is Grace

The fear and the dream
were my father and my mother.
The corridor and the
out-opening countryside.

I lived this way. How will I die?
What is going to be my destruction?

The earth betrays me. Embraces me.
The rest is grace.

The subject of grace is mystically (and, for this reader, hermetically) extended in *Yes, The Foliage*, which would seem to identify the leaves for the healing of the nations with the Giver of grace:

Yes, the foliage shines,
the foliage shines on
and you are hanging in the foreground
of its mould, as a fruit.
Although you are man, you were man,
wayside God.

Pilinszky deals mystically also with human love: though a combination of companionship and crucifixion (*To Jutta*) and an alternance of fear and trust (*I Think*), such love will be clarified and glorified at the last judgment:

Before

The Father takes back the cross
like a splinter,
and the angels, animals of heavens,
will turn up the last page of the world.

Then we say: I love you. We say:
I love you very much. And in the sudden tumult
our cry will liberate the sea once more,
before we can sit down to the table.

László Kálnoky's book, *Flash of Lightning*, takes its title from a poem which may indeed stand as indicator of all the others:

In the flash of lightning a standing figure.
Hail of contempt in his eyes,
on his lips unpronounced verdict.
Only this hot-tempered gesture
signals that we are guilty.
At the next flash
he is nowhere, not sending us to our deserved place
And we are rolling in the dust unsuspectingly.

Specifically, however, this poem exemplifies a recurrent leitmotif, that of the executioner. So does *The Visitor*, in which

the presence of an invisible executioner, though audibly confirmed, cannot be determined as either approaching or being approached. Similarly, in *Toward Darkness*, 'while the body is slowly undergoing the dissolution of age:

A hood covers the executioner's head,
he will not, he cannot look into
the reckoning eye of the one sentenced to death.

In *On My Birthday*, as body, brain and soul confront ultimate disintegration, the executioner is at last visualized:

You will be castrated by genderless angels
with stern silver faces.

These variants of the same motif typify life's apprehensions of death: the sudden premonition, the ambiguous, the reflective and the visionary. All four presage the cessation of creative power. In the face of such premonitions, *As A Work Method* sums up the poet's creative programme:

You should fit word to word as carefully
as someone who would be encouraged
to speak only by his own absence,
and as meticulously-exactly,
as death works on the plan of wrinkles...

You should look at the phenomena
as an unblindfolded prisoner
sees the trees, bushes
one second before the volley.

Summer Garden evokes the dangerous atmosphere in which the creative programme is carried out:

On a gunpowder barrel a frightened statue
stands in the centre of the garden,
at the moment before explosion.

In view of such contingencies, it is not surprising to find another recurrent, but unnamed, motif: that of desperation. Desperation is confronted in the vulnerability of middle age (*Midday*), in the tyranny of recollection (*Choking Memory*), in memory's deceptiveness (*The Reverse of The Light*), in the limitations imposed by inescapable obscurity (*In The*

Background), in the monotony of day-to-day activity (*Week Days*), in the reiterated numbing sensation that all is half-over but not yet done with (*Statements*), in the recognition of one's unimportance (*Instead of An Autobiography*), and in the stasis of aloneness: "I run at top speed where there is no forward or backward" (*Solitude*).

There are compensatory respites: when one's aloneness is shared with nature (*Just Like the Trees*), when there are intimations of immortality (*Rebirth*), when redeeming features of life's fiasco are perceived (*Roving On A Celestial Body*), when we are transported by the unexpected (*Surprises*), and when the uniqueness of individuality is assessed (*Wailing*):

What you have forgotten
cannot come into anybody's mind
Because you were who you were.

But such rewarding moments are outnumbered by moments of defiance, the other unnamed leitmotif which, like the motif of desperation, counterbalances that of the executioner. Thus there is the rebelling against life's predeterminations (*Memory of My Career*), the incessant albeit vain effort to recapture vanished good (*Gasping for Breath*), the rejection of man's stupidity and superstition (*I Lived In Such A World*), the hopelessness of all defiance (*Blind Alley*), and yet, in spite of everything, the defiance of whatever powers there be (*Hamlet's Lost Monologue*).

The four poets may congratulate themselves on having a translator who, by using no superfluous word, has obviously respected their love of economy and compression. While the lapidary style occasionally renders interpretation difficult, an attentive reader's efforts are fully repaid by the timeliness of the poems' content. These are flowers of suffering. Their perfume, in its own way, is headier than that of any *fleurs du mal*.

Book Reviews

Marianna D. Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius: Poet and Politician* (Zagreb: Opera Academiae Scientiarum et Artium Slavorum Meridionalium, 1981).

This is a broad and detailed account of the life, times and work of Janus Pannonius. In keeping with its subtitle, it places equal emphasis on the historical and literary importance of this Renaissance bishop. Little has until now been generally known about Janus in western countries, and so much, as this book demonstrates, is available to scholars on the subject, that this book is most welcome.

It is far more than a factual account. Birnbaum takes care, on occasion, to make us vividly conscious of Janus' emotions during the major crises of his life. His immersion in the cultural life of the Italian Renaissance, for example, began at the highly impressionable age of thirteen, when his uncle Joannes Vitéz, Bishop of Várad, sent him to be educated in Ferrara in 1447. This period is described together with a wealth of background material about the school of the great humanist Guarino Veronese (under whom Janus studied). Birnbaum does not neglect Janus' emotional response to this experience either, as evidenced in the following passage:

Without any doubt, Guarino represented the humane ideal for Janus...He deeply believed that Guarino incorporated the best qualities of a scholar and a human being, and to resemble him remained his keenest aspiration. (p. 28)

It is, of course, Janus' writings that make such statements possible, and Birnbaum, properly allowing for the necessarily filial tone of earlier poems addressed to the master, points out that even in later letters Janus still speaks of his former mentor as a humane model. Scholarship here is at the service of emotional empathy. And as the book progresses we develop an increasing awareness of how much Janus' Ferrara experience of Renaissance

Italy meant to him, and remained a cultural lodestone to him in his later career as an eastern European bishop involved in court-politics.

The book is, however, more than a sympathetic and scholarly biography. Janus was appointed Bishop of Pécs well before the age of thirty in the Chancery of King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary who was himself a young man. Birnbaum deals with Janus' career and studies the questions of foreign policy that were urgent at the time. Perhaps the most important one was whether Hungary should concentrate on keeping the Turkish threat at bay, or to plunge itself into power-seeking towards the west, ignoring the Turks. Matthias finally chose the latter, and Janus strongly disapproved, even to the point of conspiring against the king. Birnbaum is not afraid to take a clear political position on these events: that Matthias was wrong and Janus right, as Matthias' eventual failure demonstrates. The author at times writes as a historian as well as a biographer.

Similarly, she prefaces her treatment of how Neoplatonism influenced Janus' poetry with a compendious few pages on the place of Neoplatonic philosophy in the thought of the late Middle-Ages and Renaissance. In the end, however, Birnbaum returns to the subject of Janus (who in a trip to Italy in 1465 met the great Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino), and illustrates how, though influenced by the vocabulary and ideas of that school, our apparently secular bishop turned that system on its head, accepting re-incarnation, or pretending to, but hoping to return as an animal (regardless what kind) in the afterlife, provided it was not a human being. In this area as well Birnbaum is both a biographer and historian of the Renaissance.

Another passage that shows the breadth of this book and the adeptness of its author is the one analysing the change that came over Janus' poems praising Matthias:

The more displeased Janus grew with Matthias' policies, the stronger and more inflated his praise became. (p. 140)

Birnbaum suggests that the later, apparently sycophantic poems are actually an exercise in irony, but "irony meant for a man who would no longer appreciate irony"; a process similar, perhaps, to a chill interruption of politeness into the conversation of an estranged friend. This passage provides a good example of the

close relation between history and literary criticism. An overview of Janus' relationship with Matthias helps the critical elucidation of the poetry; and the hypothesis provided by Birnbaum's interpretation of these particular pieces of poetry helps in the more detailed reconstruction of Janus' relations with his kind at the time of the latter's negotiations with Frederic III (1470).

The book deals carefully with the difficult subject of Janus' relationship with religion which was problematic to say the least because for our information we rely on poetry that is frequently oblique and ironic on the subject, and commonly secular in orientation. Birnbaum sensibly emphasizes that very secularity as the key to the matter, insofar as a key exists, and disagrees with scholars who have labelled the poetry as heretical. For to be heretical the poetry would not only have to be incompatible with Christianity but at the same time profess to be Christian, which it does not.

Birnbaum is equally careful with the much-contended question of Janus' nationality. The author avoids partiality, and arrives at the conclusion that Janus was Croatian, but that nationalistic attempts to claim him for Croatia or for Hungary are misleading. Being a typical product of the Renaissance, Janus was international, he represented Hungary in the mature work of his career, but he was mentally committed to the ancient Latin world, using Latin as his language, and classical Latin metres for his poetry. In doing that he was, of course, playing the part of an Italian humanist of the *Quattrocento*.

On specifically literary matters the book is sound. For example, it confronts the duality of Janus' poetry (parts of it very immediate, giving a strong sense of a particular person in a particular condition, other parts thoroughly conventional and rhetorical) by sensibly drawing attention to the "gap between the image and the thing itself which the poets of the Renaissance had no intention of closing." This refers to the completely symbolic use of images such as the rose, inherited from the Middle Ages by Janus and other Renaissance poets. Still, the vividness of Janus' descriptions of his sufferings from consumption, for example, remains startling in contrast with his conventional and rhetorical passages.

As should be clear by now, the book is admirably multi-disciplinary. The only major criticism to be made is of the English style, whose faults clearly come from the author's not

being a native speaker of this language. Even this criticism must be moderated however, in light of the fact that in the English-speaking world it is precisely our poor knowledge, until now, of this major figure of the fifteenth century that makes this fine piece of scholarship so welcome.

Peter Burnell
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Paul Várnai, ed., *Hungarian Short Stories* (Toronto: Exile Editions, 1983).

The volume under review is a collection of fifteen short stories written by contemporary authors. When a new collection appears there are at least two questions that come to mind: 1. Is it a broad enough sampling of the literature the editor meant to introduce? 2. How does it compare to similar publications preceding it?

It should be stated right away that the volume falls short regarding selection. There should have been at least fifteen authors assembled, instead of thirteen, and each should have been represented by one short story only. Also, absent are such writers as Füst, Tersánszky, Veres, Szabó, Sarkadi, Fejes, Czakó, Bertha, Esterházy, Ördögh, Vámos—just to mention a few. There are no women writers included—Jókai, Szabó, Gergely, and a number of others, would have offered ample choice.

Dobai's opening piece is rather poorly conceived, introducing a filmscript style. Its shortcomings are amplified by a shaky translation. Mészöly's *Report on Five Mice* is, in turn, a very powerful story. Man's historical cruelty toward his fellowman has made us so callous that tragedies must be transferred to the world of animals and insects; from this new vantage point our feelings of pity and compassion may be elicited. Killing is made easier when distance is created between the murderer and his victim and especially when *life* is reduced to numbers. Killing a family of mice becomes a mathematical and not a moral problem when their fate is reconsidered in a geometrical progression. We have to read about mice in order to relive the horrors of Auschwitz. This kind of modern allegory was earlier used by Örkény in his *Honeymoon on Flypaper*. His *Requiem*—also performed on stage as part of *In Memoriam Ö. I.*—is included in this volume. The story is a perfect example of Örkény's preoccupation with memories, and our facing the past which seems invariably more important than the present. A contemporary echo of *The Return*

of *Martin Guerre*, Örkény's story, too, treats the horrors of war, prison and violence.

Déry, the doyen of Hungarian letters, chose children to portray man's cruelty toward the weaker, the unprotected. His tale is a softer variant of Csáth's *Little Emma*, a story which the American reader recently found on the pages of the *New York Review of Books*. The bully—no matter when and where—always finds accomplices, and the victim ultimately *becomes* the role that has been forced upon him. By the end of this story liberation arrives from the outside (just like in the *Lord of the Flies*) but the little fellow who had been locked in a cage is described as, “the sobbing ape...sitting in the dust.”

Karinthy is represented by two stories, a questionable decision because they are of the same type and because one—translated by the same person—already appeared in Alvarez' edition of *Hungarian Short Stories* in 1967. In addition, both could have been written in the 1930s, and by a “bourgeois-commercial” writer, to boot.

Moldova's *The Sixth Book of Moses*, an amusing pastiche, written in an easy journalistic style, and well translated by the Morrys, will have a predictable appeal to the general readership since it could have appeared in any popular magazine.

Csurka's piece, *Happening* is an honest story, slightly old-fashioned, because detailed naturalism is no longer trendy in Western literature, unless it deals with violence. Possibly therefore, this aspect becomes the story's most fetching quality. His characterization is, however, somewhat clumsy. A good writer would not state about his hero that he was “a well-educated cynic.” The reader should reach such a conclusion on his own.

More effective is Sántha's *There Were Too Many of Us*, owing to the surface-neutrality of narration, enhanced by the author's use of the first person singular. The story, which has also been made into a striking film in the 1970s, has its Japanese counterpart, *Snow-Land*, by Kawabata, demonstrating that poverty knows no country.

Kolozsvári Grandpierre appears with two stories: *Conditioned Reflex*, a plight for old-fashioned womanly virtues (the author cannot muster any irony when it comes to his male character), and *The Swing Door*, with its pseudo-modern, purple prose plot. Kamondy's rather weak, *The Student and the Woman*—which has been translated before—goes back to the same prototype of

feather-weight literature, appreciated mostly by middle-class housewives in prewar Europe.

G. Kardos' *You Must Like Théophile Gautier* reaches back to the years immediately following the war. At this particular juncture in life the question of how to distinguish the superficial from the essential appeared especially burning. With subtle irony the author shows how hard it is to identify the difference. Aston, who also translated Konrád's *Case Worker* into English, did an excellent job. His and Tezla's translation are the best in the volume.

None of the stories bear dates. This is a real shortcoming. In a country like Hungary, dates have a great significance. Between 1945 and the present, Hungary was transformed from a short-lived parliamentary democracy into a socialist republic, passing through such periods as forced nationalization and collectivization, Stalinization and Thaw, a heroic revolution and its bloody aftermath, followed by years of careful compromise, practised by both the government and the population. Therefore, depending on the date, the writing of a particular story could have demanded a great deal of courage, or none whatever.

After *Hungarian Short Stories* (Budapest, 1962), 44 *Hungarian Short Stories* (Budapest, 1979), *Hungarian Short Stories* (London, 1967) not to speak of *Landmark* (Budapest, 1965), the even earlier *Flashes in the Night* (New York, 1958), and the most recent *Ocean at the Window* (Minneapolis, 1980), to mention the best known collections only, this volume is not a significant contribution to a better understanding of modern Hungarian prose. The introduction of Kattan is full of truisms and generalizations, and the stories are of mixed quality, indeed. An inordinate number of them have their plots focusing on the housing shortage, whereas true love and trust seem to be absent from recent Hungarian topics. The notes on the contributors are sloppy (there is no information regarding the translators), and even the alphabetization is wrong. Works of import are missing from the bibliographies: for example, Karinthy's last publication is from 1976.

This volume is obviously the result of a noble effort but not all noble efforts are worthwhile.

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Articles in our Forthcoming Issue:

T. Kabdebo, "Some Jacobin Military Notions and Their
Roots in Constitutional Proposals in Hungary."

A. Varpalotai, "Physical Education and Socialist Ideology
in Hungary"

George Feuer, "Impact of Hungarian Scientists on the
Development of Biochemistry"

Review Articles

Janos M. Bak, "Trianon: Sixty Years After"

Laszlo Kürti, "A History of Hungarian Immigration to and
Settlement in the United States."

Books

