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*Szombat*

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# *Hungarian Jews:*

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91 NOVEMBER

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# Bitter Restitution

In the spring of 1945, the Allied troops liberated the concentration camps and the few surviving Jews began their life anew with the help of their liberators.

As soon as the fighting ended, delegations from various countries began the painful search for their citizens to take them home. The French, the Italian, the Dutch and other Jews had all left, but the Hungarian Jews waited in vain for someone to take them home. They set out alone, either back to Hungary, or to Eretz Yisroel or some other country, in search of a new homeland.

It was by then painfully clear to the Hungarian Jews that they were regarded differently, they would be treated differently by the Hungarian population and by Hungarian officials than the Jews in other countries and they also felt that world Jewry too viewed them with a strong measure of dislike. In spite of living in Hungary for several hundred years, in spite of speaking no other language but Hungarian, in spite of being devout Hungarian patriots, Hungarian Jews were not regarded as genuine Hungarians, while the Jews living in other countries considered them renegades, who had forsaken the faith, the language and the traditions of their ancestors, and had assimilated and become much too Hungarian.

There was still fighting in Hungary when the new Provisional Government repealed the anti-Jewish laws and attempted to restore, at least on paper, the assets that had previously been confiscated or seized from the Jews. A series of decrees were issued which, however, were never implemented.

According to a contemporary joke, a Jew returns from the deportation and meets his neighbour. "How are you doing?", asks the neighbour. "Don't ask me, my friend", replies the Jew, "I have nothing, except that shirt on your back."

The Hungarian Jews suffered immense property damages during the deportations. All of their movable property was confiscated. The state created a number of cen-



Dr. Péter Feldmájer is the President of the Alliance of Hungarian Jewish Communities (Mazsihisz). When the Communist system was over, he undertook an active role in the restructuring of Jewish communities. He was organizer and founder of more alternative Jewish organizations. At the foundation of Mazsihisz he was elected president, and he was elected again in 1995. He is 45 years old and as working as a lawyer. His wife is a county judge. They have got four children. He is living in Nagykőrös (a little town 50 miles from Budapest) where he is a member of the local synagogue.

tral collection points. The less valuable, everyday articles were simply distributed among the Hungarians, while articles of precious metal, gemstones and artworks were carted off and stored in various places. People had moved into the empty houses and apartments of the deported Jews, and the officials did not take the risk of evicting them. Even the Communist Party strongly advised against disturbing the peace of mind of the workers.

Surviving members of the Jewish community requested and demanded the return of their possessions and properties and a compensation for their damages from the very beginning.

In late 1946, Hungarian Parliament enacted a law according to which any properties left after families of which no one had survived would not devolve to the Hungarian state, but to the Jewish community, and so would any valuables brought back from abroad.

This law also stipulated the creation of a

Fund to manage these assets. Time was running out since negotiations over the peace treaty between Hungary and the Allies were well underway and the Hungarian government wished to demonstrate that there was a break with the former anti-Jewish period and that it was willing to pay a restitution and compensate for the losses. A few buildings and other assets were in fact handed over to the Fund. In the meantime, the time of the Communist take-over was drawing close.

The debate over the gold, jewellery and other valuables found in the American-occupied zone of Germany which had earlier been confiscated from Hungarian Jews was hardly beneficial to the activity of the Fund. The then leaders of Hungarian Jewry repeatedly requested that these should be returned to Hungary. This request, however, fell on deaf ears. The American officials in Germany claimed that these valuables had been handed over to international Jewish relief organizations.

The president of the Fund was – formally – the president of the Jewish Community; in effect, the Fund was supervised by Communist government officials, who made the decision on how to use the funds and the Jewish community actually benefited very little from this.

The Fund never received the properties and assets it was entitled to, and the little it did receive was not used for reviving Jewish life in Hungary.

When Hungarian Jewry learned that Germany would pay a compensation to the survivors, the claims were immediately registered with assistance from the state since the Communist regime hoped that it could thus acquire a substantial sum of hard currency.

Negotiations over these compensation claims were conducted from the late 1950s. However, they did not have any tangible results since the West German government was not prepared to pay compensation to the countries behind the Iron Curtain. The Jews of Eastern Europe felt cheated since others, with whom they had suffered in the concentration camps and who happened to live in the West, received compensation while they did not.

Following the political détente, an agreement was reached in 1971, according to which the German state agreed to pay a compensation of 100 million DM for

the personal belongings which deportees had taken to the concentration camps. This sum, however, was not distributed among the survivors: the state first defined an extremely unfavourable exchange rate – practically corresponding to the exchange rate of the East German mark – and each deportee received about 13,000 HUF which at the time corresponded to about six months' pay in Hungary.

During the Communist period, possible restitution or compensation from the Hungarian state was not even considered since this would have amounted to admitting responsibility for what had happened.

A letter written by Mátyás Rákosi, leader of the Communist Party in the early 1950s to a former deportee who requested aid illustrates the official standpoint of the period: according to Rákosi's letter, the living standard in the People's Republic is so high that there is no need for distributing extra aids.

Although the Communist officials in effect outlawed the activity of foreign relief organizations in Hungary, they nonetheless encouraged Jewish interest organs dependent on the state to attempt to negotiate further compensation from West Germany in the hope that the state would thus again acquire hard currency.

In the meantime, negotiations were begun behind the scenes between Hungary and Switzerland. These negotiations also touched on the issue of dormant accounts in Swiss banks, which had been opened by Jews during the Holocaust. The Swiss brought up the problem of former Swiss assets which had been nationalized and the two governments eventually reached a political – and rather cynical – agreement. The Swiss renounced their claim to compensation for the nationalized assets that had belonged to Swiss citizens and undertook to satisfy these claims, while the Hungarian government generously renounced any claims to the assets of the murdered Hungarian Jews.

In the late 1980s, the reform government led by Miklós Németh recognized, for the first time, that the state bears some responsibility for what had happened and the pension of former deportees was supplemented with a sum corresponding to a few dollars.

Following the political changes in 1990,

Hungarian Jewry hoped that they would at last be treated as equals and would be eligible for the German compensation given to the victims. They were overjoyed to hear the reports that the Claims Conference had reached an agreement with the government of unified Germany over the distribution of a further 970 million DM and they were thus understandably shocked to learn that although the Berlin Wall had collapsed and although democracy now reigned supreme, the fate of this compensation was to be decided by their Jewish brethren in New York and, also, that the Eastern European survivors would not receive anything. Survivors in Hungary also read the announcements that every survivor would receive a lump sum of 5000 DM and a regular monthly aid of 530 DM; what was not immediately clear was that only survivors living in the West would be entitled to this.

One of the first measures of the democratically elected Hungarian government was to offer compensation for the victims of persecution; however, the law was drafted in such a way as to exclude the victims of Fascism. Only after repeated rulings by the Constitutional Court did the Hungarian Parliament pass legislation which also included the victims of the Holocaust. About five to ten per cent of the confiscated assets were compensated for in the form of compensation coupons – which, however, were only worth about twenty per cent of their face value on the Stock Exchange –; this compensation, however, was only paid to former owners of landed properties or their descendants – but not to other relatives –, and only if they could substantiate their claims with the necessary documents (obviously, most people did not have such documents).

Another piece of legislation was enacted some time later. This offered compensation for the parents, the children and spouses of the deceased. This law, however, was formulated in such a manner as to exclude the deported Jews since only those were entitled to compensation who had been sentenced to death in court; the Jews, however, were simply rounded up, deported and murdered, without individual court sentences.

After several years, the Constitutional Court brought another ruling in favour of the MAZSIHISZ (the Alliance of Hungarian Jewish Communities) and compelled the

Hungarian government to new legislation. This ruling of the Constitutional Court was brought under the new, left-wing government – currently in office –, and it was hoped that the necessary legislation would soon be enacted. The new legislation, however, caused disappointment since it continued to exclude the relatives of the murdered Jews from the compensation by claiming that Hungarian authorities were not responsible for the deaths of the Jews who had been deported to and killed in concentration camps.

The Constitutional Court brought a new ruling, and finally a legislation devoid of any discrimination was enacted. However, Parliament failed to decree its implementation or to define the conditions and the actual amount of compensation to be paid after the victims.

Following the 1991 democratic elections in the MAZSIHISZ, the new leadership immediately began new negotiations with the Hungarian government concerning the activity of the Fund described in the above and over the conditions under which the Hungarian government would hand over the heirless assets to the Jewish community.

Following several rounds of negotiations, the WJRO (World Jewish Restitution Organization), dominated by the WJC (World Jewish Congress), also began to participate in these negotiations. An agreement was reached, according to which they would act jointly in all matters of restitution, with MAZSIHISZ representing the Hungarian claims and the WJRO all other claims.

The goal of this cooperation was to strengthen their position and to find a solution as quickly as possible. However, there was only partial success owing to the differences between the representatives on the Jewish side.

The leaders of Hungarian Jewry believed that the Hungarian Jewish community could be revived and therefore they insisted that this community restitution should be used in Hungary to aid the survivors and to promote a Jewish revival.

In contrast, representatives of the WJRO claimed that the days of Hungarian Jewry were numbered and that the Jewish future lay in Israel. They also argued that since most of the Hungarian Holocaust survivors and their relatives

lived in Israel, there was no point in keeping or investing this money in Hungary.

The WJRO regarded Hungarian Jewry as virtually non-existent and they tried, as latter-day commissars, to force their decisions onto Hungarian Jewish leaders, using all forms of persuasion, from carrots to sticks.

In the meantime, a bitter dispute also erupted among the various Hungarian Jewish organizations: publicly, the WJRO acted as if it wanted to smooth this dispute, but as a matter of fact the WJRO often kindled the bickering behind the scenes. This was all the more easy because the dispute between the Hungarian Jewish organizations was not devoid of political undertones.

After the 1994 elections, negotiations were continued in 1995, and the first results achieved in 1996. By this time, representatives of the WJRO accepted that the Fund set up by the government should be used for revitalizing Jewish life in Hungary and, also, that their representatives would not dominate the board of curators.

As a result of the agreement reached in the summer of 1996, the Hungarian government set up the Hungarian Jewish Heritage Fund, appointed its curators and handed over nine buildings, a few paintings and compensation coupons to the sum of 200 million USD, the latter to be used for supplementing the pension of the roughly 20,000 Holocaust survivors by 25-70 USD per month, depending on age. The Fund has started the regular payment of this pension supplement. The assets handed over to the fund represents about 0.1 per cent of the assets to which the Fund would be entitled to in exchange for the unclaimed Jewish properties.

The issue of German compensation is still on the agenda. Jewish leaders have rightfully requested and demanded that Germany pay a compensation to the Hungarian survivors of the Holocaust, but their requests continue to be refused. The WJC has repeatedly promised to intercede with the German government, but no results have been achieved as yet.

In the meantime, the German government has created special funds for the other Eastern European countries, but not for Hungary. The demonstration organized by MAZSIHISZ and the National Alliance of Forced Labour Battalions in front of the Dohány street synagogue on the occasion of President Herzog's visit brought a turn in this respect since the President promised that he would personally ensure that Hungarian Jews also receive a compensation.

Still, nothing seemed to happen until January, 1998, when we received news that the Jewish Claims Conference

*One of the first measures of the democratically elected Hungarian government was to offer compensation for the victims of persecution; however, the law was drafted in such a way as to exclude the victims of Fascism.*

reached an agreement with the German government over the establishment of a 200 million USD fund, to be used for aiding Hungarian Holocaust survivors. However, from the little that has been publicly announced about the conditions for entitlement to payment from this fund it is clear that the majority of Hungarian survivors would, as so often before, not receive a single penny.

Representatives of the Claims Conference did not consult with the representatives of Hungarian Jewry and they negotiated about the Hungarian survivors without an inkling of the actual situation – this being the reason that they gave erroneous figures for the number of survivors and, also, that they agreed to virtually impracticable conditions. One of these is that only survivors who had spent at least eighteen months in a ghetto would be entitled to received payment from this fund. The fact is that in rural Hungary the ghettos were only set up for a few weeks and that the inmates of these ghettos were deported within a matter of weeks.

The ghetto in Budapest, established in November, 1944, was liberated by the Red Army in January, 1945. Furthermore, many of the deportees spent less than six months in the concentration camps.

Very few people could rid themselves of the suspicion that the ultimate objective was to pay compensation to as few survivors as possible and as late as possible, rather than to as many survivors as possible.

The Swiss admission over the existence of the dormant accounts in 1996 resulted in the transference of about 8 million USD from the Humanitarian Fund – set up by Swiss banks and the Swiss state – to the Hungarian Jewish Heritage Fund, with the provision that each entitled person should receive a lump sum of 400 USD. This sum has by and large been paid out. As a matter of fact, this is the first larger sum received from a foreign government by Hungarian Holocaust survivors. It must here also be noted that this was the first occasion when representatives of the WJRO and the Hungarian Jewish community worked together in harmony, and this can definitely be regarded as a good omen for the future.

The Red Army troops liberated the Budapest ghetto fifty-three years ago. About as many years have passed since survivors of the concentration camps began to trickle back to Hungary after experiencing what the "final solution" meant in practice. They continue to feel a discrimination against them and the lengthy process of compensation has done little to allay their uneasiness.

The Hungarian state has tried to draw a distinction between one survivor and the other, between one dead and the other; compensation on a community level has just begun. In the meantime, time is running out, and the number of survivors decreases with each year. Time and over again, Hungarian Jews watching this process are made to feel by the representatives of world Jewry that they are not regarded as equals, that their interests are left out of consideration by international Jewish organizations.

And even though this is not entirely the case, it remains a fact that instead of bringing joy, the long-awaited, received and promised compensation is causing a growing bitterness.

**Translated by  
Magdalena Seleanu**

# Unofficial Statistics on the Hungarian Jews

Many of the following figures are not based on statistical surveys or official reports, since these are often not available about Hungarian Jews. Their sources are sometimes personal experiences, informal talks, estimations and the average of all these. Many dignitaries of synagogues, Jewish organisations, directors would exaggerate about their visitors' number, since low figures may decrease their reputation. However, even if the real figures are somewhat above or below our data, we estimate that they can give an insight into the everyday life of the Hungarian Jews, because the proportions would not change considerably. The highly secular and rather assimilated Hungarian Jewry does not excel in frequenting religious events, but its interest in secular events (especially parties and balls) is considerable.

Estimated number of Hungarian Jews 80-100.000

## ▼ life-cycle events

Registration of new-born children in the community	11 <sup>1</sup>
Bar Mitzvot	70 <sup>2</sup>
Religious weddings	15 <sup>3</sup>
Religious burials	504 <sup>4</sup>

## ▼ synagogue attendance

Number of synagogue visitors on an average weekday <sup>4</sup>	50-60
Number of synagogue visitors on an average Shabbat	5-600
Number of synagogue visitors on High Holidays	6,000

## ▼ social events

Friday night club of the Union of Jewish Students	
- number of guests	20-30
Friday night club of the Hashomer Hatzair movement	
- number of guests	20-30
Chanukah Ball of the Union of Jewish Students	
- number of guests	1,000
Purim Ball of the Federation to Maintain Jewish Culture in Hungary <sup>5</sup>	
- number of guests	200

## t Jewish periodicals

<i>Egység</i> (Unity) direct mail monthly of the Hungarian	17,000 copies
Chabad Lubavitch house	
<i>Gut Shabes</i> weekly of the Hungarian	
Chabad Lubavitch house	160 copies
(delivered only for subscribers)	
Newsletter of the Bálint Community Center	3,500 copies
(delivered for registered members)	

Newsletter of the Federation to Maintain Jewish Culture in Hungary  
(delivered for registered members) 1,200 copies

## ▼ informal education

Number of children in the Szarvas Zionist summer camp in a year	1,600 <sup>9</sup>
Number of children attending Talmud-Torah circles	60
Number of persons in the Maimonides weekly study group	20-30
of the Union of Jewish Students	

## ▼ formal education<sup>6</sup>

<i>Official Jewish Community (conservative)</i> <sup>7</sup>	254
Benjamin Kindergarten	84*
Anna Frank High School	170
<i>American Endowment School (orthodox)</i>	292
elementary school	81
high school	131
College of Modern Business Studies	80
<i>Lauder Yavneh Jewish Community School (secular)</i>	628
kindergarten	60
elementary school	267
high school	301
<i>Beth Menahem School (Chabad Lubavitch)</i>	35
kindergarten	32
elementary school <sup>8</sup>	3
<i>Jewish University - Rabbinical Seminary (conservative)</i> <sup>10</sup>	105
Rabbinical Seminary	11
Faculty of Social Workers	35
Faculty of Teachers of Religion	49
Faculty of Liturgy	10
<i>Altogether</i>	1,304

1 Figures marked with an asterisk are based on official data supplied by the respective leaders of the kehilla, schools, etc. Figures not marked are estimated by the authors and people familiar in the respective places.

2 Based on data supplied by the rabbis for a survey in 1994.

3 Based on data supplied by the rabbis for a survey in 1994.

4 Data of synagogue visitors include only Budapest, since 95 per cent of the Jews are living in the capital.

5 Federation to Maintain Jewish Culture in Hungary: the most influential secular Jewish organisation in Hungary.

6 Official data at the beginning of the school year of 1997/1998.

7 The inauguration of the new 12 class school of the community is scheduled at September 1998.

8 The school started its first class in the current school year.

9 Appr. half of the children come from foreign countries.

Registration of new-borns in the official Jewish Community (conservative)

Year	number of registration
1945	117
1946	514
1947	573
1948	506
1949	328
1950	214
1951	134
1952	106
1953	102
1954	105
1955	73
1956	52
1957	54
1958	54
1959	41
1960	22
1961	24
1962	11
1963	18
1964	9
1965	3
1966	10
1967	8
1968	6
1969	10
1970	12
1971	19
1972	21
1973	23
1974	23
1975	36
1976	33
1977	39
1978	47
1979	27
1980	41
1981	26
1982	23
1983	21
1984	34
1985	18
1986	23
1987	24
1988	18
1989	15
1990	16
1991	30
1992	18
1993	8
1994	11
1995	18
1996	11

IMRE KERTÉSZ

# The Holocaust as Culture

In the course of a walk one day in 1989 in Vienna where I visited for the first time in my life, I found myself in a picturesque square in the inner city. A flight of steps led towards the Danube, and the narrow, winding cobble-stoned streets were lined with quaint shops and gates. The spectacle could not have been more serene, except for a single unusual disturbing phenomenon: at the corner of a sloping passage I saw policemen on guard in berets and with machine-guns in their hands. Upon my enquiry I learnt that one of the buildings housed the offices of the Viennese Jewish religious community, and next to it was a synagogue. It was some fifty years ago, when I was a student, that I last attended a Jewish religious service – I suddenly felt the urge to go to the synagogue. The entrance was, however, blocked for me. Two well-built young men in embroidered round caps inquired about my intent. It is not so simple to enter here. A couple of years ago there was a terrorist attack against the synagogue; hence the policemen. They want to know why I want to enter and who I am. I tell them I am a Hungarian writer who has broached issues of Jewish existence in his writings. Can I prove this, they ask. No, I cannot. Can I say a few words in Hebrew? Not one comes to my mind. Do I know at least, they keep on interrogating me, what kind of an afternoon is this? I cannot come up with a reply, which is eventually offered by my escort, Austrian, blonde and Catholic: it is Friday afternoon, the eve of Sabbath. At last we are allowed to enter.

Just as I was standing at the entrance to the synagogue in Vienna, irrelevant, unrecognised, a stranger, so I am now standing, ladies and gentlemen, before you. I am about to speak to an audience that can hardly know my work. Maybe I



Imre Kertész was born in 1929 in Budapest. He was still a secondary-school pupil when in 1944 he was deported to Auschwitz. He was released in Buchenwald in 1945. He finished his secondary-school studies in 1948. Between 1949 and 1951 he was a journalist on the staff of *Világosság* which was later relaunched under the title *Esti Budapest*. He was sacked in early 1951. Between 1951 and 1953 he did his military service. From 1963 he has been a freelance writer and translator. Works: *Sorstalanság* [Fatelessness], novel; *A nyomkereső* [The Pathfinder], novel; *A kudarc* [The Failure], novel; *Kaddis a meg nem született gyermekért* [Khaddish for an Unborn Child], novel; *Gályanapló* [Diary on the Galley], diary novel; *Az angol lobogó* [The British Flag], *Jegyzőkönyv* [Minutes], short stories; *A holocaust mint kultúra* [The Holocaust as Culture], three essays; *Valaki más – a változás krónikája, 1992–1995* [Someone Else – Chronicle of a Change, 1992–1995], novel.

should begin with some kind of explanation and give justification of my competence or provide some evidence why I am in possession of the exceedingly dubious privilege of eligibility to speak publicly about existence branded by the Holocaust and of Jean Améry. The truth is, I do not mind irrelevance at all. What is more, I believe I recognise in this irrelevance an ever diminishing chance to speak up, a symbol of the obscure, transitory and unrecognised situation in which a survivor such as Améry must exist, and that this

existence is then elevated – through a tragic gesture perhaps, as in his case, or in some other way – and manifested as fate. The Holocaust has its saints just as any subculture has and if the living memory of what happened survives, it will be thanks to the martyred lives.

With this I have more or less drawn the outlines of what I am about to speak on to you here. From the first moment, when it was far from being revealed to the world, when it was as yet unnamed, taking place as it was in the cover of nameless depths from day to day, a secret shared only by the participants, victims and henchmen – from the very first moment, there was a terrible anxiety, a fear of forgetfulness attached to the Holocaust. Anxiety extended beyond the horrors, individual lives and deaths, beyond the eager thirst for justice; *Beyond Crime and Punishment* (*Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*), to quote Améry's book that is the topic of our talk today. This anxiety was, from the very beginning, informed of some metaphysical sense characteristic of religions, of religious feelings. And yes, it can most appropriately be described by a biblical quotation: "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." When I said before that the Holocaust is a subculture, i.e. a mental and emotional communion united by some kind of spirit, one may perhaps say cult spirit, I did so on account of this passionate fight against oblivion. I took this need for my point of departure, a need that is increasing in time, rather than diminishing; and whether culture in the wider sense will eventually recognise, accept and incorporate it, depends on the extent to which this need is justified.

Well, you see, our words have channelled us into a certain context unawares. We said 'subculture' and then we fitted it in world consciousness, more precisely in the European-American civilisation to which, in the last analysis, all of us who have gathered here to speak about Améry, belong. And yet, what has a lonely outcast to do with all this? What concern is it to the stranger, the branded one whose "trust in the world" (*Weltvertrauen*), a natural right of all humans, was beaten out of him with black-jacks? In the first chapter of his book, entitled "On the Borderline of



Intellect", Améry makes a radical reckoning with intellect and with the 'intellectual', the 'spiritual man' as the embodiment of the cultural phenomenon. "In its essential, reduced form as it forces itself on us, the question is this: Did spiritual education, an intellectual attitude, in any way help the inmate of a concentration camp at the decisive moment? Did it make it easier for him to stand suffering?" he asks. And his radical answer is: No. No, it did not, because, among other reasons, "intellectual and aesthetic assets have passed into the possession of the enemy questionless and unquestionably." "The German Jewish prisoner at Auschwitz had to give up the entire German culture, from Dürer to Reger and from Gryphius to Trakl, for the benefit even of the most beastly SS man." An intellectual's position was in any case aggravated by education, Améry says. The most severe temptation of thinking, however, into which historical knowledge and education could have driven the intellectual, was self-denial: What if the enemy is right? For is not power always right? What if the power of the SS was so "terribly", so "unconquerably" towering over the prisoner of Auschwitz that he eventually felt its logic was "rational"?

These are inevitable thoughts, ladies and gentlemen. All the prisoners of Auschwitz, all who were not dependent on some religious, racial or political idea, all who had neither faith, nor people nor calling, no more than a fate and sheer existence – all lonely intellectuals put these questions to themselves. They all compiled an indictment of culture in themselves. Hegel's statement that the intellect is universal proved to be gravely erroneous; nor is culture universal. Culture is privileged consciousness: such consciousness objectifies, and the right to objectify belongs to privileged consciousness. Hence the terrible anxiety that culture will eject from itself the knowledge of the Holocaust, the knowledge of Auschwitz. "Can you remember how I loved Plato?" another prisoner of Auschwitz, the Polish Catholic Tadeusz Borowski wrote in an immortal short story. "Now I know he lied. For it is not the idea that is mirrored in earthly things; blood and sweat-soaked human labour is." And he goes on to say: "What shall the world know about us if the Germans

win? They murder our families, the sick and the old. They butcher children. And no one will know about us. Poets will shout us down, as shall lawyers, philosophers and priests; creators of beauty, goodness and justice; founders of religions." Jean Améry's words twenty years later echo this feeling: "All recognisable omens show that the moral demands our *ressentiment* has posed will in the natural flow of time be diverted and eventually obliterated ... We victims will appear as truly incorrigible and implacable, anti-historical reactionaries in the strict sense of the word, and the fact that some of us have survived will appear a defect, an accident."

These are inevitable thoughts, I repeat. Nothing could be more foolish than fighting, challenging or labelling them. What you do have to label is the situation that provokes the inception and formulation of such thoughts. And once we do so we realize that these thoughts are not only inevitable but also fully justified and rightful. On the other hand, we cannot but notice that these thoughts and their mode of appearance are, in the last analysis, manifestations of culture or cultural products even. Améry turns to the denied intellect. He was far too witty to have been able to hide this paradox. The very title of his book – *Beyond Crime and Punishment* – refers to Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche at the same time. Another of his books bears the title *Unmeisterliche Wanderjahre*, a reference to *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, thereby summoning Goethe as witness. His language is the finest literary German, his style chiselled fine on French essays. In Auschwitz, the intellect was no help for him at all; after Auschwitz, he called the intellect to help articulate the charge he held against it. He moved from culture to Auschwitz and from Auschwitz to culture as he did from one camp to another, and was surrounded by the linguistic and spiritual world of the given culture just as he was by the barbed wire of Auschwitz. He survived Auschwitz, and if he wanted to survive his own survival, if he wanted to give it meaning, then he had to recognise the only chance to do so, being a writer – self-documentation, self-examination, objectivation; in other words, in culture. "Just like a dog," K. said, and thought that his shame may survive him." However, if he

really wanted to survive it, he had to articulate his shame cleverly, and put what he had articulated into a lasting form; i.e. he had to become a fine writer.

The paradox may be carried to the extreme. If he wanted to combat mortality and amoral time, then he had to stake his life on writing – until he cast it off too. Whether his suicide belongs in his work or not, is another question which we can only tackle perfunctorily and timidly now. "In seiner Niederlage findet der Gläubige seines Sieg" – "In his defeat the believer will find his victory", Kierkegaard says. Even more telling is the subtitle Améry gave his book: *Bewältigungsversuche eines Überwältigten*, which translates approximately as "A Prostrate Man's Attempt at Conquering". But how can a writer get the upper hand? By taking over power? Yes, in a certain sense he does so. We have said that the right of objectivation is a right of the privileged, it is a power of sorts. A man branded and condemned to death, whom power had defeated, now reclaims the right of objectivation. This may be the hidden message lurking deep in the famous chapter of his book "Ressentiments". In a novel another Auschwitz survivor writes: "... in the end I can find no other explanation for my persisting passion – I may have started writing in order to take revenge on the world. To take revenge and win back from what it had excluded me. My adrenal gland, which I had rescued from Auschwitz in a healthy state, may be producing too much adrenal. Why not? After all, representing something entails power, and in its course it may lull aggressive instincts and bring about compensation, a transitory peace. I may have wished that perhaps, yes, I wanted to capture reality, if only in imagination and by artificial means, which holds me in captivity and very realistically too; I wanted to change my eternal objectivity into a subject. I wanted to become a name-giver, instead of being named." This Auschwitz survivor is standing before you now. The title of his novel is *The Failure*, and at the time he wrote these lines he never even heard the name of Jean Améry.

In the chapter entitled "Torture", Améry challenges a definition "totalitarianism" that washes together party dictatorships of all hues, especially Hitlerite and Stalinist party dictatorships. By

equating Hitler with some "obscure" notion, such as "totalitarianism", rather saying he was the executioner. Wary of making a detour towards political essay, may I point out emphatically that I thoroughly understand Améry's distinction. A tortured man bearing the burden of the fate he has undertaken, with the weight of his personality and its consequences, refuses to bargain with a general principle. Where would his liberty remain? His Fate? His personality? And on the other hand: who shall he square accounts with? Against whom shall he feel and practise his *ressentiment*, if everything is as understandable, simple and impersonal as the abstract concept of totalitarianism? Améry found himself *vis-à-vis* "hostile men" (*Gegenmenschen*); it was not totalitarianism beating him up with a black-jack and hanging him up by the chained hands; it was a lieutenant speaking with a Berlin accent, called Praust. Moreover, whatever they said of him and he of himself by way of a description, he was above all a German writer and philosopher, and it was German nazism that looked atrocious in his eyes; for him, Russian Bolshevism could only be a runner-up. This is as it should be, and no serious man could put a mark of equality between the two phenomena. "I am convinced that torture was not accidental to the Third Reich: it was its essence," Améry writes. It needs to be added though that torture was not an accidental element of the sickle-and-hammer type of state totalitarianism either; it was its essence. In any case, torture is essential to all exclusions raised to state level, to dictatorships that swell power to tyranny. Améry acknowledges that too. Yet in certain questions he appears to dig in his heels. He is ready to speak of anti-Semitism as though it were the same prejudice as it was in our grandfathers' time. This is exactly what the Nazis – and all those who follow them to this day in East or Western Europe or anywhere – wanted people to believe. However, it is our duty to recognise the difference of

quality. 19th-century anti-Semitism could or would hardly have conceived *Endlösung*. Auschwitz, therefore, cannot be explained in terms of the common or archaic, shall I say classic, anti-Semitism – this is something we have to understand very precisely. There is no organic connection whatsoever. Our age is not an age of anti-Semitism, it is of Auschwitz. And the anti-Semite of our age no longer loathes Jews; he wants Auschwitz. Eichmann confessed at his trial in Jerusalem that he had never been an anti-Semite, and though the audience at the trial burst out laughing he may have been right; I find this quite possible. In

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order to kill millions of Jews, the totalitarian state in the last analysis needs good organisers, rather than anti-Semites. We have to see clearly that no totalitarian party or state can do without discrimination; and the totalitarian form of discrimination is by necessity mass murder.

I needed to make this detour in order to return to what Améry had specified with a painful precision as "accident". No man could have been more aware of his own accidental existence as someone "prostrate" because of his Jewishness, who tried to perform his attempts at "gaining the upper hand" under the so-called socialism. The proletarian dictatorship disliked any mention of the Holocaust; and since it dis-

liked it it suppressed such voices too or else channelled them into conformist euphemistic clichés. If anyone was bold enough to think that Auschwitz was the greatest event for Man since the Crucifix – for man who got over European ethical culture traumatically, and if he wanted to approach these questions with proper seriousness, well, then he had to reckon with being condemned to total loneliness and isolation. His books were printed in a limited number of copies, if at all, and himself banished to the margins of literary and intellectual life, into the deaf silence of controlled criticism as into a solitary cell; in other words, his work was then condemned to death just as he himself had been condemned to death at a time.

Why the sickle-and-hammer type of totalitarianism identified itself with the swastika type in respect of the Holocaust has obviously had good reasons, some of them not so mysterious either; however, now I want to speak about its use. For some time now I have given much thought to the fact that the Holocaust reached its intended victims not only in the concentration camps but also decades later. The liberation of camps merely postponed the verdict which then those selected for death had executed on themselves: Paul Celan, Tadeusz Borowski, Jean Améry committed suicide and also Primo Levi, though he had challenged Améry's determined existential radicalism in a pamphlet. If I confront my fate with theirs, so demonstrative from several aspects, I have to think that I had been helped to get over the past decades obviously by a "society" that after Auschwitz, in the form of the so-called Stalinism, proved that there was no possibility for liberty, liberation, great catharsis, etc. – everything that in more fortunate climates intellectuals, thinkers, philosophers not only spoke of but also obviously believed in; that guaranteed a continuation of a prisoner's life for me, thus excluding even the possibility of erring. This is clearly the reason why I had not been affected by a wave of disillusionment that those with similar experience living in freer societies had fled from and which reached their feet first and however much they tried to speed up their steps it slowly reached up to their throats. Since I was a captive and so was the nation in which I lived, I had no prob-

lems of identity. Now that the prison walls have come down, amid the din amongst the ruins the hoarse wailing of post-Auschwitz anti-Semitism, i.e. anti-Semitism demanding Auschwitz, is heard again. I greet the cries of hatred as brotherly voices, just as the hero of Camus's *L'étranger* did. What have I to do with them? The post-Auschwitz, programmatic anti-Semitism is today a private matter which might destroy me still, but this would be anachronism itself, a mistake in which, as Hegel would have put it, there is no world spirit present; it would be provincialism then, lack of culture – "entirely a matter for the anti-Semites, their shame or their sickness," Améry writes. On the other hand, it opens up my eyes to my genuine position, should an ephemeral illusion of recaptured freedom make me forget about it for a passing moment.

This situation in itself would not deserve much attention. It is the situation of a survivor who tried to survive his own survival and, what is more, interpret it, and who belongs in the last generation of survivors and as such knows full well that, with his generation gone, the living memory of the Holocaust will disappear from the world. His being here is a mere accident, it is incidental, something that calls for constant justification, even though it is unjustifiable. Yet does not the situation resemble Man's general and cosmic condition, as we have been accustomed to it in the interpretation of modern philosophy and anthropology? When he analyses his alienation, loss of his "trust in the world", his social loneliness and his plight as an existential outcast, Améry surpasses the confines of his work, I believe, in the strict sense, and speaks simply about human condition. The survivor is but an extremely tragic upholder of contemporary Man's condition, who has experienced and suffered the culmination of this condition – Auschwitz, which is looming up in the horizon behind our back like a vision of the world conceived in a deranged mind, and as the distance grows between us, paradoxically its outlines seem to be expanding and growing, rather than fading. Today it is obvious that survival is not a personal problem for survivors: the long, dark shadows of the Holocaust are projected onto the entire civilisation in

which it took place and which has to go on with the weight and consequences of those events.

I exaggerate, you may say, for you can hardly meet any traces of these consequences; the world has for long been speaking about something else. The importance of such issues will be decided by whether they are vital issues or not. If we examine whether the Holocaust is a vital issue of European civilisation and European consciousness, we find that it is because the same civilisation must respond to it within whose framework it had been carried out – otherwise itself will become an accidental civilisation, a disabled protozoan drifting helpless towards its own destruction. Consequently, it cannot avoid coming to a decision about it. What do I mean by that, when it seems to have brought its decision already? It seems that Améry's and Borowski's fears that the murderers will be right proved to be groundless: annihilation, state-controlled genocide, has no culture in Europe, it only has a practice. This practice is unjustifiable though, and should it once become justifiable morally, that would mean the end of life, and everybody is aware of this. A host of social scientific and historical works tried to "process" the phenomenon of the Holocaust. The widest possible range of interpretations were offered, from the banality of murder to demonological works. I even read, in a study by a lady philosopher, that the Holocaust cannot be fitted into history – as though history were some chest of drawers and whether something fitted into it or not depended on the size of drawers. However, in one respect the lady philosopher was right: the Holocaust, by its essence, is not a historical event, in the sense that the Lord giving Moses two tables of stone with letters engraved in them on the Mount of Sinai is not a historical event.

I wonder if the outlines of what I want to say have now emerged. All the while I have spoken about one question, and it is something that is not usually posed openly, maybe it is something that is "not done"; and yet this question should be settled along that mysterious and lengthy way and mode in which great ethical questions are eventually settled. And the question is this: Can the Holocaust create

values? For as I see it, the process that has been going on for decades, in the course of which it was first suppressed and then documented, is now grappling precisely with this question. Being documented proved to be insufficient; as I said, we have to decide about it, and this involves judgment of value. If we are unable to confront our past, we are condemned to repeat it forever – we have learnt this from Santayana. A viable society must keep alive and renew constantly the knowledge and consciousness of itself and of its own criteria. And if the decision is that the grave, black funeral ceremony of the Holocaust is an inalienable part of this consciousness, the decision rests not on some compassion or atonement but on living judgment of value. The Holocaust is value because it has led to immeasurable knowledge through immeasurable suffering; therefore it has an immeasurable amount of moral reserves in it.

The tragic knowledge of the world possessed by morality that has survived the Holocaust, if preserved, may as yet fertilise the crisis-hit European consciousness, just as the Greek genius confronting barbarism and fighting the Persian war created the drama of the Antiquity, an eternal model. If the Holocaust has by now created a culture, as it has and as it is undeniably happening, its literature may take inspiration from these regions – the Bible and Greek tragedy, the two main sources of European culture – in order that irredeemable reality gave birth to atonement: spirit and catharsis.

It may well be that you will think this is an Utopian view and say that you cannot see a trace of it in real life. Moreover, in real life you see the opposite: indifferent masses, cynical ideologies, amnesia, murder and chaos. However, important events are not always reflected in contemporary, direct reality. In any case, I am speaking about a process whose outlines I can see, I think, but whose outcome is naturally unknown. As I said at the beginning, we live in the context of a culture, and in this context we cannot see Jean Améry's body elsewhere than in a memorial of the Holocaust which is constantly being built and in which he placed it as though a blood-soaked flower.

*Translated by Tünde Vajda*

ANDRÁS KOVÁCS

# Anti-Semitism and the Young Elite in Hungary after 1990

It would be difficult to say whether anti-Semitism suddenly increased after the collapse of Communism, or whether previously existing anti-Semitic attitudes and ideologies simply resurfaced openly with the introduction of civil and political rights. Although the open manifestation of anti-Semitism is a significant change compared to the previous period, we can nonetheless claim that anti-Semitic groups have until now hovered on the margin of society. An anti-Semitic political ideology has until now been rejected by all authoritative political powers, including the major national conservative powers, even if only after some hesitation and conflict. The small, openly anti-Semitic and fascist political groups today vegetate on the periphery of political life.

Be as it may, the open appearance of anti-Semitism has caused quite a headache to the approximately 100,000 Jews living in Hungary who fear that what happened at the close of World War I after the half-century long "golden age" of emancipation might happen again. At the time, to quote Ezra Mendelsohn, Hungary had been "a unique example of how a country previously 'good for the Jews' is transformed, almost overnight, into a country wracked with pogroms and permeated with anti-Semitic hysteria."<sup>1</sup>

This fear is legitimate, even if there are no signs of any anti-Semitic hysteria. It is legitimate since the open appearance of anti-Semitism has broken the taboo which – owing to the Holocaust – enveloped anti-Semitism in most European countries. In Germany, Poland and Hungary quite a few opinions can be publicly voiced which would have been unimaginable even a few years ago. It is quite possible that anti-Semitism will remain a marginal phenomenon in Hungarian society, but – in view of the traditions of Central and Eastern European history – it is equally possible that in a



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society in which the transition following the collapse of the Communist system has imposed heavy burdens on quite a high number of people, and even those whose economic and social conditions have not deteriorated dramatically now grapple with previously unknown situations and conflicts, the public appearance of anti-Semitic views paves the way for political movements and groups for which anti-Semitism is a convenient ideology for

explaining the world, creating an identity and motivating actions.

There can be no doubt that anti-Semitic prejudices thrive in present-day Hungary. In 1995 we conducted a national representative survey to examine to what extent anti-Semitic prejudices are widespread in Hungary. We found that about 8 per cent of the adult population of Hungary is extremely anti-Semitic: they tend to think of Jews according to prejudiced stereotypes, they feel themselves at a great social distance from the Jews and they are ready to accept anti-Jewish discriminations. A further 17 per cent of the adult population too harbours many anti-Semitic prejudices, although they would not support anti-Jewish discrimination.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the potential for anti-Semitism is present in Hungary, but what are the chances for the growth of political anti-Semitism in Hungary? The post-Communist countries are currently experiencing processes whose consequences have much in common with the conflicts arising from 19th-century modernization. Not only has the previous political system collapsed, but formerly acquired positions and the associated identities have been undermined, the chances for social groups to rise or fall on the social scale have also changed. Earlier social norms and rules have lost their validity and in many cases the consequences of social actions, which were easily calculable, have become unpredictable. It has become painfully clear that ideologies which were thought to be long extinct still thrive and, also, that attitudes and behavioural forms which are a "heritage" of the four decades long Soviet rule have a decisive influence on the course of events. The question, then, is whether the economic and social conflicts of the transition will once again pave the way for political anti-Semitism in Hungary.

Traditional and new anti-Semitic preju-

dices have, with greater or smaller intensity, been continuously present in all modern societies. The psychological conditions for the emergence of personalities which respond to anti-Semitism have similarly existed at all times and in all places. Even so, these have not proved enough to elevate anti-Semitism to a dominant ideology even in times of economic depression and social upheavals. In the past one and a half decades, anti-Semitism only became a key element in shaping political events when it was transformed into a "cultural system".<sup>3</sup>

One of the fundamental criteria for anti-Semitism to become a "cultural system" is that individuals in search of some point of orientation in the world accept anti-Semitism as a set of views which offers a rational explanation for situations and conflicts, as well as a solution to these situations and conflicts, in which Jews have no part. Another distinctive feature of anti-Semitic views ordered into an "ism" is that it appears as a legitimate concept for explaining the world even among individuals who do not personally hate Jews and who, in many cases, have no personal contacts with Jews.

A number of historical circumstances need to coincide for anti-Semitism to emerge as a "cultural system". Yet, as Shulamit Volkov has noted in her analysis of the emergence of German anti-Semitism,<sup>4</sup> the explanation for the phenomenon that large groups of individuals accept anti-Semitism as a rationale for explaining the world does not lie in actual conflicts, but rather in the cognitive process spanning the two extreme points – conflict and anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism became a code, a symbolic "abbreviation" of a certain well-defined cultural identity in Germany during the last third of the 19th century, as it did in Hungary during the same period and, more significantly, after World War I. Anti-Semitism simultaneously expressed political, social, ethical and cultural ambitions which in themselves had little, if any, association with the "Jewish question", but were nonetheless linked by their rejection of capitalist modernization and a critique of its consequences. In the countries of modern Europe, anti-Semitism became the symbol of a cultural system. One's attitude to an anti-Semitic Weltanschauung also expressed

one's relation to the cultural camp of modernity and anti-modernity.<sup>5</sup> This is why an anti-Semitic world-view is not necessarily coupled with hatred of the Jews. Proponents of an anti-Semitic Weltanschauung may even be telling the truth when they claim that personally they have nothing against the Jews.

Prejudices are not moulded into a Weltanschauung spontaneously. The creation of the "vocabulary" of modern anti-Semitism,<sup>6</sup> the forging of a meaningful link between modernity and the "Jewish question" and the establishment of a closed system of anti-Semitic ideology was a prerequisite needed for anti-Semitism to function as a Weltanschauung. By propelling this system into the realm of "versunkene Kulturgüter", the cultural meaning of the anti-Semitic Weltanschauung had to be made familiar, self-evident and unchallengeable. The creation of this anti-Semitic Weltanschauung and its association with concrete social conflicts was done by intellectuals.

Historical examples prove that the chances of whether or not anti-Semitism became a political factor always depended on social élites. Anti-Semitism could only hope to gain serious political influence if one part of the social élite seriously propagated anti-Semitism, and another part of the same élite accepted anti-Semitism, as well as the political alternative and ideology offered by anti-Semitism as a valid interpretation for the perceived social and political conflicts. If, however, anti-Semitism was strongly opposed by the social élite, it could never rise to become a serious political threat. In other words, the chances of anti-Semitism becoming a serious threat essentially depends whether the social élite accepts, tolerates or opposes anti-Semitism. One of the main questions in Hungary today is whether there exist larger groups within the social élite which would be willing to wake the dogs of anti-Semitism and would be willing to undertake the dirty work of anti-Semitic intellectuals. This problem led us to conduct a research on the existence, strength and mobilizability of anti-Semitic prejudices among an important group of the élite, namely among Hungarian college and university students.

In December 1992, we conducted personal interviews with 1000 college and

university students. The interviewees were chosen with a view to obtain a representative sample of Hungarian college and university students according to age, gender, place of residence and college/university type.<sup>7</sup> We found that about 43 per cent of all respondents had no anti-Semitic prejudices, 32 per cent were inclined to accept prejudiced anti-Semitic stereotypes, 18 per cent were anti-Semitic and 7 per cent were extremely anti-Semitic. Grouping our respondents according to other criteria, we found that the ratio of militant anti-Semites was 3 per cent, while those who would be willing to openly take a stand against anti-Semitism was 20 per cent.

Our research showed that certain anti-Semitic views do indeed thrive among university and college students. The relatively low ratio of extreme and self-assertive anti-Semites and the relatively high ratio of non-anti-Semites would suggest that anti-Semitism has still not assumed alarming proportions among the students. Anti-Semitism, however, is a dynamic phenomenon and its danger primarily depends on the internal structure of anti-Semitic views and on its position within the set of views accepted by the group in question.

During our research we could distinguish two types of anti-Semitism among the young élite, one type dominating among students coming from families with a low social position, the other among students with a high social background. These two types of anti-Semitism differ markedly in terms of intensity, content and function, as well as in terms of the set of views in which they are embedded. The anti-Semitism of students coming from a lower social background is stronger and is expressed in traditional prejudices, as well as in anti-Jewish and xenophobic views which reflect a downright rejection of the "stranger".

We found the anti-Semitism of students from families with a high social background to be less intensive and primarily directed against a rival group perceived as the "other", with an obvious function to create a self-identity in group conflict situations. This type of anti-Semitism could be linked to political opinions and attitudes, and we found that it was most frequent among students who rejected liberalism and liberal views in general. This

would suggest that an associative link between the anti-Semitic and the political code of group conflicts has already been forged. This blend of "low"- and "high"-class anti-Semitism is a dangerous combination already known from history: in a given situation, latent xenophobic prejudices can be effectively mobilized by the groups of the élite which express group conflict through political symbols.

While seeking an explanation for this anti-Semitism, we found that this anti-Semitism can be best explained by the students' xenophobic attitudes. Xenophobic anti-Semitism is a direct descendant of traditional Christian anti-Judaism.<sup>8</sup> The transition from anti-Judaism to modern anti-Semitism can be traced to the spread of secularization and rationalism. Medieval theological doctrine which defines Jews as an inferior group was succeeded by ideologies which conformed to the norms of the Enlightenment, but nonetheless retained their function of maintaining and legitimizing the Jews' former social status and position.<sup>9</sup> A critical turning point came with emancipation, the acceptance of the Jews into the community of citizens by the majority. From this time, the antagonism towards the "destructive Alien" served to preserve the situation preceding emancipation under the new circumstances, with the function of upholding the medieval consensus on the pariah-status of the Jews and to enlist, if need be, mass support for the political forces that were determined to abolish the achievements of emancipation. Hungarian political and cultural anti-Semitism during the 19th and 20th centuries followed this pattern. The propaganda against emancipation centered either on the image of the Jew who was reluctant to assimilate or around the image of the Jew who, under the guise of assimilation, strove to colonize the country.

Our survey showed that Hungarian anti-Semitism has preserved this pattern. In contrast to post-war Western Europe, where anti-Semitism appeared in a form which could be cast in a "legitimate" light even after the Holocaust – such as the denial of the Holocaust, anti-Zionism, refusal to shoulder responsibility for the persecution of the Jews, the debates over compensation and restitution –, anti-Semitism in Hungary is still centered on xenophobic anti-Semitism and anti-liberalism.<sup>10</sup>

Although in terms of its content and structure, Hungarian anti-Semitism appears to be continuous, the ratio and role of Jews in present-day Hungary differs fundamentally from preceding periods. In contrast to the pre-war 4-5 per cent, Jews now make up less than 1 per cent of the Hungarian population. At the same time, Hungary is unique in that it is the single country not only in this region, but in all of Europe, which still has a sizable Jewish population. This fact can hardly be ignored in the analysis of Hungarian anti-Semitism.

According to one major trend in research on anti-Semitism, the actual number of Jews and their social position and status play no role whatsoever in the emergence of anti-Semitism. Suffice it here to mention one of the best-known examples: Adorno and his colleagues, Sartre and the various neo-Marxists trends concluded that anti-Semitism can only and exclusively be understood from a study of the anti-Semite. The function of anti-Semitism is the anthropomorphic venting of social frustrations among certain personality types.

Even though there has been a proliferation of studies on the authoritarian personality and the mechanism of creating scapegoats, it still seems that the purely projective theory of anti-Semitism is unsuitable for a satisfactory explanation of modern anti-Semitism. Most critiques of these views have noted that if the arguments proposed in these views are not complemented with historical elements, the actual choice of scapegoats could be incidental and in this case, the groups would be interchangeable in terms of their scapegoat function.<sup>11</sup>

This is why another major trend in the theory of anti-Semitism – including Bibó's renowned study – claims that modern anti-Semitism cannot be explained without an analysis of the historical situations characterized by group conflicts and social competition between Jews and Gentiles. These conflicts are "interpreted" through anti-Semitic prejudices, leading to an accumulation of tensions which enable certain political forces to mobilize prejudiced groups.<sup>12</sup>

One type of anti-Semitism which we detected among college and university students, namely xenophobic anti-Semitism, represents the continuously

present substrate of anti-Semitic prejudices which can be traced to theological anti-Judaism. This type of anti-Semitism is apparently independent of the actual number and social role of Jews, and would no doubt be present to the same extent even if there were no Jews at all in Hungary.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast, the anti-Semitic prejudices we found among students from a high social background can hardly be divorced from the fact that in spite of the end of assimilation in the sociological sense, in certain situations Jews are regarded as a reference group both by Gentiles and by the Jews themselves.<sup>14</sup> Among the young élite these prejudices are directed towards an "out-group" which is perceived as a rival, and the dynamics of these prejudices are hardly independent of the interrelation between the groups in question.<sup>15</sup>

The nature of the relation between Jews and Gentiles in Hungary will undoubtedly be strongly influenced by one specific change in the everyday interpretation of social phenomena which, together with other changes, will transform the group studied by us into a generation. Besides individualism, competitive thought and behaviour, and, to a certain extent, anomic anti-authoritarianism, the most important element in the common attitudes creating a "generational context" is that ethnicity and ethnic belonging plays a conspicuously important role in orientation in political events and social conflicts than earlier. Most students regard the ethnic border drawn between "Jews" and "Hungarians" as self-evident, much more so than the older generations. While 70 per cent of the respondents in a national representative sample believed that Jews had characteristic and distinctive traits, 75 per cent of the respondents in the student sample claimed that there exist distinctive Jewish traits. Only 30 per cent of the respondents in the national sample said that Hungarian Jews did not have more in common with Hungarians than with Jews living elsewhere in the world, while this ratio was 35 per cent among the students.

This difference is even more striking in the case of ethnic attitudes: in contrast to the 23 per cent ratio of the national sample, only 9 per cent of the respondents in the student sample believed that people

who keep track of who is Jewish is an anti-Semite, and in contrast to the 51 per cent ratio in the national sample (which also included respondents from the older generations), only 40 per cent in the student sample believed that those who would not marry a Jew are anti-Semitic.<sup>16</sup>

Obviously, there are several reasons why ethnicity has become a generally accepted framework of reference for reflection about social and political issues among the young élite. This can, to a certain extent, be seen as a general phenomenon: sociologists studying attitude changes among generations have noted similar tendencies in Western Europe.<sup>17</sup> The growth of ethnicity as a frame of reference in Hungary can no doubt be attributed to the unusual circumstances of the political changes, namely the collapse of the Soviet empire and the Eastern European alliance system, as well as the conflicts which followed in the wake of this collapse. The importance attached to the ideal of independence, the emergence of new states in Eastern Europe, the minority problems and emerging ethnic conflicts, the concept of Europe and the debates over "joining Europe", the rapid collapse of the earlier collective identity – which was often fictitious and upheld by ideological means –, and, lastly, the new political élites' search for an identity have created a new "social semantics" in which ethnicity gradually assumed a self-evident meaning and role in drawing the boundary between "us" and "them". Well-intentioned attempts to re-define a collective identity based on various logical solutions which do not contain or even exclude ethnic elements will probably remain futile.

Another important point is also often neglected, namely that the vocabulary of ethnicity can be used in several ways. It is suitable both for the symbolic preservation of dominance relations and for their re-defining. The liberal and radical proponents of ethnocultural pluralism who have called for a re-interpretation of power relations, status differences and the conventional techniques of conflict management between ethnic groups also use the vocabulary of ethnicity. Ethnocentrism and ethnocultural pluralism are the two ends of the same continuum.<sup>18</sup> The prospects of anti-Semitism in Hungary are largely dependent on

towards which end of the continuum the future élite will move.

The spread of the vocabulary of ethnicity has created a new situation also for the Jews living in Hungary. The rise of ethnocentrism has understandably stirred up intense feelings of danger. However, ethno-pluralist arguments which encourage Jews to accept a Jewish collective identity – 28 per cent of the respondents in the student sample agreed that Jews should be regarded as a national minority<sup>19</sup> – can also generate conflicts since it undoubtedly challenges the century-long policy of assimilation.

Even if the single criterion of a group is that it is regarded as such by the outside world, this is sufficient for creating behavioural and communication forms within the group – ranging from various defense strategies to efforts proving the "mistakes" of the out-group and the concealment of signs which are perceived as being suitable for identification with the group –, which members of the group will eventually learn, practice and which will, in certain situations, make belonging to the group recognizable both to the "outside" and the "inside" world.<sup>20</sup> The maintenance of the double – outward and inward – system of communication generates increasingly more tensions and becomes the source of increasingly more conflicts with the spread of thought in ethnic categories and the open appearance of anti-Semitism, and this, in turn, leads to incomprehension, antipathy and suspicion. This recognition triggered a process among the younger Jewish generation which was not unlike the one already noted by American researchers of ethnicity during the 1930s among the new, "native" generations of immigrants who hoped for complete assimilation in the "great melting pot", namely that the grandson wants to remember what the son was so eager to forget.

It is too optimistic to believe that the renewal of Jewish identity will magically solve all perceived tensions and eliminate anti-Semitism. It is a warning sign that Hungarian Jews are encouraged to accept their identity not only by the proponents of ethno-pluralism – groups with anti-Semitic leanings also warmly support the Jews' self-definition as a minority and the demand for a minority status. The reasons for this are painfully clear: insofar as

Jews "admit" that they form a national or ethnic minority which differs from the majority, the anti-Semites' advice – which is ultimately based on the claim that "aliens" should have no say in "Hungarian" issues – that Jews should exercise self-restraint in occupying certain positions and voicing an opinion on certain issues becomes more marketable. The path leading from ethnic thought to racial policies is extremely short: one alarming indication is that 39 per cent of the respondents in the student sample agreed that Jews should only have as much influence on the future of the country as their overall proportion within the Hungarian population.

At the same time, Hungarian Jews also have to face serious conflicts if they decide to follow the "American" path of organizing themselves into an ethnic group. Efforts for a Jewish "revival" are viewed with growing distaste by those who adhere to the traditional assimilationist standpoint since they fear that – as a result of the declared programme of accepting a Jewish identity – they will be considered as Jews in situations in which they consider this to be irrelevant and, at the same time, they will be regarded as "bad" Jews in certain other eyes, in spite of the fact that they tend to embrace their Jewishness.<sup>21</sup>

Self-definition as an ethnic group also involves other conflicts. The interpretation of ethnicity as a modern phenomenon is based on the observation of social conflicts arising from competition between rival ethnic groups, such as the one between certain Jewish and Hungarian élites in the later 19th century. In these situations, the dominant ethnic group will strive to define the set of norms for "social acceptance" by placing the rival group in a lower status – for example by defining the boundaries which separate "Hungarian" from "aliens". The discriminated group will concentrate its efforts on "re-defining" these norms if they do not want to remain in this stigmatized role. As shown by examples from the US and Europe (e.g. blacks and Basques), their greatest chance in this is to organize themselves into a purely political interest group. The internal cohesion of this group is created by the emotions which are nourished by the expression of common origins in a symbolic form, i.e.

by an ethnic identity. Herein lies the strategic efficiency of ethnicity as an organizing principle.<sup>22</sup>

By accepting the liberal assimilation paradigm of the 19th century, Hungarian Jews concentrated their efforts on securing a foothold on the other side of the boundary, rather than on changing the definition of that boundary. The struggle against the anti-Semites who did not want to accept them was fought not by the Jews, but by the liberal proponents of assimilation. Today, however, if a small Jewish group decides to set out on the symbolic and institutional path leading to self-organization as an ethnic group, and promotes a programme of group integration instead of individual assimilation,<sup>23</sup> they cannot leave the struggle for acceptance to political allies, but have to fight it themselves. This will undoubtedly provoke numerous conflicts in Hungarian society since most people still order their ideas about the Jews within the framework of assimilation. It is to be expected that as a result of these conflicts, élite groups will shift towards the extreme points of the continuum between ethnocentrism to pluralism. Although the direction and extent of this shift will ultimately depend on numerous other factors, but there can be no doubt that this shift – in both directions – will be the strongest among the younger generations.

One commonplace of sociology is that attitudes do not necessarily spur to action and that anti-Semitic feelings do not necessarily engender political anti-Semitism. Neither is it predestined that people harbouring anti-Semitic prejudices will be organized into anti-Jewish political movements and parties as a result of radical social changes and crises. These circumstances are perhaps necessary prerequisites to political anti-Semitism – and can, in hindsight, offer a better understanding of the emergence of political anti-Semitism and the behaviour of various social groups once it has appeared on the scene. However, Nazism also needs Nazis. The Jews cannot be persecuted unless there are people who – irrespective of whether they personally hate Jews or not – feel that they can only achieve their political goals with an anti-Semitic policy.<sup>24</sup> Once these appear in Hungary, they will find the vocabulary with which they can further their cause.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1983, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> The research was based on a 1500 large representative sample of the Hungarian adult population. The face to face interviews were conducted by the Gallup Public Opinion Poll Institute. The research was supported by OTKA, the Soros Foundation, the MKM, the Budapest Municipal Council, the Budapest Bank Foundation and the American Jewish Committee.

<sup>3</sup> For anti-Semitism as a world-view, cp. Reinhard Rürup, *Die 'Judenfrage' der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft und die Entstehung der modernen Antisemitismus*. In: *Emanzipation und Antisemitismus. Studien zur 'Judenfrage' der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt/M. 1987, pp. 93-119 and pp. 114-116 for a detailed discussion; Shulamit Volkov, *Antisemitismus als kulturelle Code*. In: Shulamit Volkov, *Jüdisches Leben und Antisemitismus in 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. C.H. Beck, München, 1990, pp. 13-37; Shulamit Volkov, *The Written Matter and the Spoken Word. On the Gap between pre-1914 and Nazi Anti-Semitism*. In: F. Furtet (ed.), *Unanswered Questions. Nazi Germany and the Genocide of the Jews*. Schocken Books, New York, 1988, pp. 33-54. For cultural systems as a system of elements expressed through symbols with a specific meaning for members of society organized into action-orienting models, cp. Clifford Geertz, *Ideology as a Cultural System*. In: *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books, New York, 1983, pp. 187-233, and Religion as a Cultural System. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-125.

<sup>4</sup> Shulamit Volkov, *Antisemitismus als kulturelle Code*. In: Shulamit Volkov, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-26.

<sup>5</sup> Shulamit Volkov, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-26.

<sup>6</sup> For the characteristic features of this process in Germany, cp. Hans Rosenberg, *Grosse Depression und Bismarckzeit*. Walter Gruyter, Berlin, 1967; Shulamit Volkov, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-31.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed analysis of our research results, cp. András Kovács, *Az antisemitizmus és a fiatal elit*. Cserépfalvi Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1997 (in print).

<sup>8</sup> Cp. Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times*. New York, 1961.

<sup>9</sup> Cp. Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700-1933*. Harvard University Press, 1980, VI, Chapter 20.

<sup>10</sup> According to the results of another survey conducted on a national representative sample, only about 3 per cent of the adult population of Hungary would deny the fact or the extent of the Holocaust; in contrast, we found that, similarly to respondents in the student sample, ignorance and perplexity were the norm as far as Zionism was concerned (52 per cent of the respondents had not heard this word).

<sup>11</sup> For a critique of projective anti-Semitism theories and of the anti-Semitism theory of the Frankfurt School, cp. Helen Fein, *Explanations of the Origin and Evolution of Anti-Semitism*. *Op. cit.*, pp. 20 ff.; Martin Jay, *The Jews and the Frankfurt School: Critical Theory's Analysis of Anti-Semitism*. In: *New German Critique* No. 19, 1980, pp. 137 ff.; Erhard Bahr, *The Anti-Semitism Studies of the Frankfurt School: The Failure of Critical Theory*. In: *German Studies Review* No. 162, 1978, pp. 125 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Cp. Helen Fein, *Explanations of the Origin and Evolution of Antisemitism*. *Op. cit.*, pp. 20 ff.; Eva G. Reichmann, *Flucht in der Hass*. EVA, Frankfurt/M, 1968, pp. 27-36. For an overview of conflict theory and anti-Semitism, cp. Albert Lichtblau, *Anti-Semitismus und soziale Spannung in Berlin und Wien 1867-1914*. Metropol, Berlin, 1994, pp. 9-21.

<sup>13</sup> For an analysis of anti-Semitism without Jews, based on the example of present-day Poland, cp. Józef Niewiadomsky, *Judenfeindschaft ohne Juden*. Antisemitismus in Polen. In: Günther B. Ginzler (ed.), *Antisemitismus. Erscheinungsformen der Judenfeindschaft gestern und heute*. Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1991, pp. 220-234.

<sup>14</sup> Several studies published over the past few years have been devoted to the question of how Jewish group-identity and the boundary drawn between Jews and Gentiles have survived in Hungary, in spite of the fact that the differences which can be described with "hard" socio-statistical and sociological indexes and which defined these social boundaries between Jews and Gentiles prior to World War II appear to have faded by today. Cp. Viktor Karády, *Szociológiai kísérlet a magyar zsidóság 1945 és 1956 közötti helyzetének elemzésére*. In: *Zsidóság az 1945 utáni Magyarországon*. Paris, 1948; Viktor Karády, *A Shoah, a rendszerváltás és a zsidó azonosságtudat válsága Magyarországon*. In: Mária M. Kovács, Yitzhak M. Kashti and Ferenc Erős (eds), *Zsidóság, identitás, történelem*. T-Twins Kiadó, Budapest, 1992; Viktor Karády, *A magyar antisemitiz-*

mus történetisége. *REGIO Kisebbségstudományi Szemle*, 1991:2; Péter Kende, *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon 1994-ben. Világosság*, 1995:2; András Kovács, *A zsidókérdés a mai magyar társadalomban*. In: *Zsidóság az 1945 utáni Magyarországon*. Paris, 1948; András Kovács, *Identitás és etnicitás*. In: Mária M. Kovács, Yitzhak M. Kashti and Ferenc Erős (eds), *Zsidóság, identitás, történelem*. T-Twins Kiadó, Budapest, 1992; András Kovács, *Asszimiláció, antisemitizmus, identitás*. A zsidóság a modern magyar társadalomban. In: Mónika Vig (ed.), *"Hogyan éljük túl a XX. századot?"*. Századvég Kiadó, Budapest, 1992. In his study on the formation of the 1994 government, András Körössényi concluded that Jewish intellectuals can, under given circumstances, act as a political pressure group. András Körössényi, *Kényszerkoalíció vagy természetes szövetség?* In: Csaba Gombár et al. (eds), *Kérdőjelek: a magyar kormány 1994-1995*. Budapest 1995.

<sup>15</sup> The studies on anti-Semitism conducted in Austria and the Federal Republic of Germany – countries with a relatively low Jewish population – showed that prejudices are significantly lower among those whose personal acquaintances include Jews than among those who have no Jews among their acquaintances; in contrast, in our survey we found no correlation between the degree of anti-Semitism and the fact whether the respondent had any Jewish acquaintances (and if so, since when). One possible explanation for this may be that under the Hungarian circumstances, interaction is in itself insufficient for erasing prejudices and that a key role can be attributed to the reference system of the interaction, i.e. the perceived image of each other according to which individual gestures, actions and statements are interpreted. These images, however, are characterized by a high degree of suspicion. A study written from the results of our survey showed that both the Jews and the Gentiles in the student sample were mistaken in what they thought that the other group thought about them. (Cp. Barbara Hadházy - Zsófia Hamza, *Ahogy a "Másk" látja...* OTKA dissertation. Manuscript.) This divergence between 'social semantic systems' can in itself become a source of group conflicts.

<sup>16</sup> The difference of opinion between the two samples is enhanced by the fact that according to our results, the ratio of non-anti-Semites is smaller in the national sample than in the student sample, while the ratio of prejudiced stereotypes is higher.

<sup>17</sup> Cp. Claus Leggewie, *Die 89er. Portrait einer Generation*. Hoffmann und Campe, Hamburg, 1995, pp. 39-40.

<sup>18</sup> For arguments in favour of the compability of individualist liberalism based on the principle of equal dignity and collectivist multi- or ethnocultural pluralism demanding equal respect for cultural variety, cp. Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "the Politics of Recognition"*. Princeton University Press, 1992, esp. pp. 51-67.

<sup>19</sup> Although a significantly higher ratio of anti-Semites agreed with this opinion than non-anti-Semites, 26 per cent of the latter group also shared this view.

<sup>20</sup> Cp. András Kovács, *Identitás és etnicitás*. In: Mária M. Kovács, Yitzhak M. Kashti and Ferenc Erős (eds), *Zsidóság, identitás, történelem*. T-Twins Kiadó, Budapest, 1992; for double communication, cp. also Viktor Karády, *A Shoah, a rendszerváltás és a zsidó azonosságtudat válsága Magyarországon*. *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Cp. Anna Földes, *Vallomás a Duna és a Vörös-tenger partján*. In: *Hitel* No. 4, 1989, February, p. 62. For the debates over the national minority status in relation to the Minority Bill, cp. András Kovács, *The Hungarian Jews – A National Minority?*. In: *East European Jewish Review* No. 4, 1994, London.

<sup>22</sup> For ethnic groups as an interest group in modern political systems, cp. Nathan Glazer - Daniel P. Moynihan, Introduction. In: N. Glazer - D.P. Moynihan (eds), *Ethnicity*. Harvard University Press, 1975, pp. 1-29; Daniel Bell, *Ethnicity and Social Change*. In: *op. cit.*, pp. 141-177. For the process of the creation of an identity as the struggle for the definition of the norms of 'acceptance', cp. Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the "Politics of Recognition"*. Princeton University Press, 1992; Charles Taylor, *Nationalismus und Moderne*. Paper read at the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen in Vienna in May, 1995.

<sup>23</sup> Jewish activists and various smaller groups already set out on this path in the mid-1980s. Cp. Salom: *Nyílt level a magyar társadalomhoz és a magyar zsidósághoz*. In: *AB Hirmondó* No. 6-7, 1984, May-June, pp. 23-37.

<sup>24</sup> In her analysis of the continuity and discontinuity of anti-Semitism in Germany, Shulamit Volkov also examines this issue. Cp. Shulamit Volkov, *The Written Matter and the Spoken Word. On the Gap between pre-1914 and Nazi Anti-Semitism*. In: F. Furtet (ed.), *Unanswered Questions. Nazi Germany and the Genocide of the Jews*. Schocken Books, New York, 1988, pp. 33-54.



JÁNOS GADÓ

# Torah-reading Sociologist Wanted

## *Jewish schools/education in Hungary before and after 1989*

A comprehensive education system for Hungarian Jews, from kindergarten to university level, is currently being established. Hungarian Jews, who number only about a hundred thousand, have created, with significant foreign help, a more wide-ranging, up-to-date educational network than that which existed for the 1 million-strong Jewish community which lived here before 1918. At present, there are four kindergartens, four elementary schools, three secondary schools and a college of economics catering for Jewish school-children and students. The Rabbinical Seminar is being transformed, with considerable difficulties, into a university. But what kind of Jewish and secular education do these schools provide for their students?

### I. THE SITUATION...

#### 1.1 After 1945

Only the most assimilated of Budapest's Jewish population managed to survive the war in relatively large numbers, while the majority of the traditionalist East-Hungarian Jewish population perished. Of the survivors, those with a stronger Jewish consciousness left the country in larger numbers after 1945, than those who were more assimilated. Zionists were led to Israel by ideological imperative, while the remaining practising Jewish population, if it had any illusions left after 1945, realised in 1956 that the "people's democracy" offered them no opportunities for the free practice of their religion. Under the Communist regime, Jews were tolerated in Hungary only within a small ghetto, which resulted in the suppression of their religious tradition. Those who wished to remain in the country, however much they disliked the restrictions imposed, faced a choice between assimilation, or the more or less secret practice of their faith. The majority of the younger generation who



János Gádó was born in 1958, sociologist, editor of *Szombat*. As sociologist and columnist he wrote extensively about contemporary Hungarian Jewry. His study on the Jewish schools in Hungary had been published in *Szombat*. His main field of interest is the transitory period of the post-Communist era and its impact on the Hungarian Jewish Community. At the same time he tries to keep his readers informed about the major trends of the Jewish world and the Israeli society.

stayed at home – believing in redemptive Communism – took the road to assimilation. Although they retained their Jewish consciousness, those whose careers were important to them were unable to frequent Jewish communities. Any Jewish person wishing to keep up with the modern world in terms of education and work could not admit to being a Jew. While many preserved their Jewish identity, their social context deprived them of any channels through which such identity could be communicated. Those born after 1948 were not only deprived of a Jewish upbringing, even their Jewish origins were concealed from them, with many of them learning the truth about their ancestry in tragicomic circumstances at the age of 10 or 15. There was, then, a parting of the ways: the elderly, with a lower status, were able to stay in the synagogue, while the young and well-qualified were not able to declare their Jewishness publicly, and

could only discuss the matter in secret if it was important to them. The vast majority chose the path to assimilation.

#### 1.2 From the consolidation of János Kádár's regime to 1989

##### 1.2.1 The Jewish community

We will look first at the official institutions in terms of the divided context described above. The Jewish community, – which was, quite understandably, much less hostile about the country's turn towards the left after 1945 – was easier to bring down to the level of the system than other denominations. Their rituals have always involved the expression of gratitude to the Soviet liberators. The Jewish community from the consolidation of János Kádár's regime until 1989 was characterised by the following:

- the overwhelming presence of the generation which had lived through the Holocaust, a fundamental experience in terms of the identity and mentality of the community;

- secular leadership (which dominated the far from radical rabbis) which accepted the conditions dictated by the state involving a strict limitation on those subjects which could be discussed publicly, as well as a restriction on foreign contacts, thus cutting off Hungarian Jews from Israel and from the large Western communities, and even, to a great extent, from their own past;

- a lack of firm leadership in any issue, involving a refusal to back off any further, but at the same time, a subservient fulfilment of all the wishes of the so-called "State Office for Religious Affairs", including the selling off of synagogues, the sending of reports about unauthorised study groups or the passing on of unfavourable information about Sándor Scheiber, the head of the Rabbinical Seminar. Such actions were all intended to cut back

those parts of the Jewish community which were still viable. According to the hierarchical customs of the times, the public were excluded from decisions made by the leadership, who consulted only with the State Office. The lack of information meant that rumours soon started to spread about the leaderships' abuses, secret bank accounts, etc.;

– a deterioration of the community as a whole which was using up its own resources. The number of members was permanently decreasing with hardly any young people joining, and the number of churches was also falling. The limited amount of restoration carried out could not balance the general tendency to decay. (Major restorations were started, almost without exception, after 1989 when the assembly included in its constitution that no synagogue should be sold.) Activities in the area of academic publication suffered an irrecoverable loss with the death of Sándor Scheiber, for whom no replacement has been found. Young rabbis who have successfully graduated from the Rabbinical seminar, and who might have provided some kind of strengthening for the community, have mostly gone abroad. The gradually ageing leadership have been less and less able to react to the events of the ever-changing outside world. With the death of Sándor Scheiber, the official Jewish establishment has become "anaemic", weaker in terms of numbers, vitality and intellectual output, than at any time since 1867, the date of the emancipation of Hungarian Jews. When the writer of this article attended the community's historical assembly in 1989, he saw hardly anyone there younger than 60-70 years old.

### *1.2.2. The "desert generation" born after 1950*

When in the late 1960s and early 1970s, young people born after 1945 slowly began to be aware of their Jewish identity, they were given little guidance. Israel and Zionist ideals meant no more to them than the Jewish community, and there was nothing in their education to encourage them to look for guidance in that direction. Their identity was determined by the Holocaust, that being the only aspect of Jewishness which had been passed on to them by their parents (and often by means of silence rather than in

the form of information), and since in the expanding book market of the late 1960s it was the most readily available subject. They were "negative Jews", whose Jewish consciousness was fed only by the fear of anti-Semitism. These highly educated and erudite people read with keen interest whatever could be found in books and periodicals. The novels of Shalom Aleichem and Bernard Malamud, and various memoirs from the last century or the fifties were unable to impart any organised Jewish knowledge or a firm sense of identity, although they stimulated an interest and were the starting point of a certain "cultural identity".

In the 1980s, during the last decade of the so-called "goulash Communism", there was increasing room for manoeuvre in politics, and this generation began to reflect on its own, confused Jewish consciousness in a growing number of literary and sociological works. Young people examined their own identity more or less from the outside, from a distance, and this became the subject of their writing itself: how do Jewish people (or persons of Jewish origin) who have either totally abandoned or moved away from their traditional context, integrate, as individuals, into Hungarian society, and what happens then? This highly-qualified, research-minded post-war generation published hundreds of Jewish-related essays and dozens of books, and organised about twenty conferences within six years after 1988. Nevertheless, in terms of traditional Jewish knowledge these people lacked even the bare essentials.

### **1.3 1989 and after**

After 1989, the community's unworthy leadership was ousted and a more democratic constitution created. However, the renewal of the membership has been very slow: the over-sixties are still in the majority and their presence is decisive. Positive and successful efforts have been made in terms of management, and as a result the traditional community tasks (e.g. refurbishment of churches, maintenance of graveyards, care of the elderly, preservation of ritual institutions) are performed properly. This, however, consumes just about all the energy of the community, leaving no room for the intellectual problems faced by present-day Jews. Jewish consciousness is once again being determined by the expe-

riences of the Holocaust, experiences which are also regarded as their main moral capital. Jewish attitudes are characterised by a certain sense of superiority which is of no help in the unprejudiced acceptance of the progressive values of the outside world.

The cathartic moments of the 1989 revolution among Hungarian Jews occurred not so much within the Jewish community, as by means of programmes organised by the Federation to Maintain Jewish Culture in Hungary. This federation was brought to life by the "desert generation", characterised by the "cultural identity" discussed above. Audiences ranging from several hundred to up to a thousand attended lectures on Raoul Wallenberg, the Shoah, and anti-Semitism in the Communist system – subjects which were, until then, taboo. Many heart-felt and well-expressed statements received standing ovations, and several people spoke of how being a Jew had meant nothing but fear and anxiety for many years, and of how good it was to be part of a community without fear for the very first time.

These were the great moments of the "desert generation". The revolutionary days have passed, of course – more or less at the same time as the revolution in Hungarian society. The disappointment that followed was inevitable: the Federation to Maintain Jewish Culture in Hungary failed to become an authentic representative of the interests of Hungarian Jews and a substitute for the Jewish community.

The "desert generation" was unable to institutionalise the best of its erudition and Jewish commitment in the sphere of Jewish public life, although it is not "floating" as freely as it did in the 1970s. Nevertheless, most of that generation have remained outside the framework of Jewish institutions, using their creative energies outside Jewish society. Although they are beginning to fill in the gaps in their knowledge of the tradition, they will not be able to compete with their children in this respect. The academic and cultural evolution of this generation was not accompanied by a corresponding political self-organisation.

The "situation" is therefore as follows: the oldest generation of Hungarian Jews is gathered in a well organised, politically influential but intellectually weak commu-

nity. The "desert generation" – which can, by now, be called a middle-generation – has created a fragmented political institutional system which is still ineffective in representing its interests. The significant intellectual energies of the members of this generation are mostly channelled outside the community.

It is in this context that the issues surrounding the education of the youngest generation must be addressed.

## II. THE SCHOOLS

### II.1 The Jewish Community's Anna Frank Secondary School

The Anna Frank Secondary School was established in the "momentum" gained by the Jewish Community in the aftermath of 1989. As a result of the circumstances discussed in section I, the middle generation lost interest in the Community and its secondary school after 1956. With the death of the last outstanding teachers, the secondary school turned as grey as the Community itself. However, the counter-selected Community management which regarded political loyalty as the highest virtue, would not have allowed innovations or the introduction of new ideas. Teachers with any such aspirations would have felt no desire to teach in the Anna Frank Secondary School. Things reached their lowest point in the period between 1975 and 1985, when the total number of students fell below 20, and the level of education sank along with it.

When the ice in Hungarian public life began to melt in the mid-80s, and the Jewish population began to mean more than a few thousand old people lingering in a religious ghetto, interest in a number of aspects of Jewish life increased, and with it, an interest in the Jewish secondary school. However, the Anna Frank Secondary School which had suffered in the crippling social circumstances, was not numbered among the elite schools. The school was typically chosen by those parents who realised that children not admitted to any other school could still apply successfully to Anna Frank as Jews. (There were, of course, a few who were motivated by their Jewish consciousness, but they were the exception rather than the rule.) As a result, the counter-selective mechanisms of the 1960s and 1970s suddenly gained strength. Two decades of stagnation found

the teachers unprepared for handling the pedagogical problems which suddenly emerged in a context in which the ignoring, or even scorning, of serious study had become normal. Since 1990, the majority of the staff (including the director) have been renewed and today several members of the "desert generation" teach here. The school is now in the process of fighting counter-selection tendencies. Formerly catering only for secondary level students, the school will open new elementary classes in September 1998, when the whole institution moves into a brand new building constructed out of state compensation. Hopefully, the new building will mark a new beginning for the school, and the kind of negative tendencies described above will not be reproduced by the new intake in the elementary school classes.

### II.2 The "Msoret Avoth" American Endowment School

The strictly orthodox American Endowment School is dominated by the uneasy encounter between the weak Hungarian Jewish population and the far more dynamic Israeli and North American Jews.

Since the foundation of the school would not have been possible without foreign subsidy, the organisers turned for assistance to the multi-millionaire Reichmann family, who agreed to sponsor the school on the condition that it was run in the spirit of orthodox traditions. In order to establish the school's orthodox ethos, Israeli rabbis and teachers were invited who, almost immediately, got into serious conflicts with the representatives of the Hungarian middle generation.

The school's spirituality is dominated by representatives of the kind of rigid orthodoxy which, in the face of the ever increasing tensions which emerge when its strict values encounter the almost infinite liberty of the modern world, responds by seclusion. The eating of kosher food, dressing according to tenets of a hundred years ago, the strict isolation of teenagers and the rejection of the pluralism of the modern world with its often dubious content in order that nothing may disturb the imparting of the holy tradition – these are tasks which are most efficiently realised within the framework of a ghetto. The values of the two worlds clash at so many points that their integration is very difficult to conceive.

While the foreign orthodox teachers intended to establish this kind of spirituality within the school, the students and the Hungarian-born teachers were living the other half of their lives outside the school, and had no intention of being secluded in a ghetto.

The school which opened in 1990 advertised itself as "traditionalist", and parents were assured that the children were not obliged to follow an orthodox lifestyle. It has turned out in practice that the school's management *does*, in fact, expect them to do so. The representatives of orthodoxy who are living in the autonomous system of tradition found it only natural to expect students to live according to the Halakah even in Hungary. However, their strict persistence provoked aversion and hostility among many Hungarian-born teachers and parents who belong to the entirely secular middle generation. The encounter between these two entirely different worlds has inevitably led to serious conflicts.

Things that are taken for granted by one party may be seen by the other as strange rituals at best or, at worst, as blatant hypocrisy. Prescribing long skirts (which girls pull over their jeans at the school gates) or insisting on kosher catering (while children eat at McDonald's after school) is seen as both meaningless and pretentious by those unfamiliar with the tradition, but are obviously minimum requirements for the orthodox Jew. The Israeli and American teachers who arrived from the hermetically sealed context of tradition were shocked to see how brazenly their Hungarian-born colleagues ignore the most fundamental requirements of the holy tradition – while the same requirements are seen as entirely irrational rituals by the other side.

The often mutually exclusive values of the two separate worlds made even the most basic communication difficult at the beginning – apart from the actual language barrier caused by the poor Hungarian of most of the foreign teachers of religion. To answer a definite problem (e.g. the fact that the children are unable to follow lessons given by the teacher of religion due to his poor or non-existent knowledge of Hungarian) with a quotation from the Talmud is an appropriate and respectable response in the world of tradition, but is no more than a cheap excuse according to

the norms of the rational 20th century. Misunderstandings undermined even good faith, since both sides ignored each other's fundamental norms, often without even being aware of doing so.

The clash of values almost resulted in an "explosion". The religious management wished to make Jewish origin, as described by the Halakah, a condition for attending the school, and asked for documents of proof from certain students. Proving ascendancy by means of papers, however, has evoked the nightmare of racism in the Hungarian-born teachers, in whose political subconscious Jewish identity is connected with images of anti-Semitism and pogroms. This requirement, taken for granted by the orthodox management, was therefore met with deep resentment on the part of the Hungarian-born teachers. In an explosive situation, loaded with the tensions of previous conflicts, this move led to a strike by teachers in 1992 when tuition was suspended for a day. The conflict has led to the departure of the majority of Hungarian staff, and the frequent replacement of the foreign religious management. Those students who (along with their parents) were dissatisfied with the overwhelming presence of religious education, and who had had enough of the permanent conflicts and chaos which was also affecting the level of tuition, have also left the school.

The difficulties faced by the school are well illustrated in the table below, which shows the fluctuation in the total number of students.

year	students
1990/91	487
1991/92	517
1992/93	425
1993/94	382
1994/95	386
1995/96	335
1996/97	267

The conflicts have finally eased with the passage of time. The two parties have moved closer together. Staff who are more willing to compromise have replaced former members of staff who stood more firmly for their principles. At the same time the "Hungarian" party has become better acquainted with the tradition, while the foreign religious management have learnt (without compromising

their principles) to adopt a more flexible approach to circumstances. Newly arriving students and teachers are doubtless not faced with as big a surprise as that faced by their predecessors in the early days. Nevertheless, the school is still breaking new ground, and the two worlds are still co-existing, rather than living in creative harmony. For children coming from a context where the knowledge of tradition is poor or non-existent, a spirituality which demands uncompromising Jewish commitment is felt to be "too strong", often provoking extreme reactions. Accordingly, the children's attitude towards Jewishness is often controversial, taking the form of complete rejection or identification, while the two phases sometimes follow in succession even in the development of one child. The orthodox lifestyle which is strongly backed by the religious teachers might be a source of serious tension and constitute a psychological burden for families who are unprepared spiritually and practically. Some children might therefore experience the complete opposite of the harmony they hoped to find when joining an orthodox school.

### II.3 The Lauder Yavneh Jewish Community School

This school is the authentic product of the middle generation. It is organised according to those values characteristic of the middle generation: democracy, good performance and the rejection of authoritarianism. However, it also displays the well known symptoms of the middle generation: a superficial Jewish knowledge and consciousness.

The social position of the middle generation also means that the majority of the children come from "good families": their parents are highly qualified and well-to-do. This circumstance, combined with the teachers' skills and high academic level, might enable the school to be among the best.

Such positive selection mechanisms are somewhat counter-balanced by the fact that the school's liberal reputation often means that it attracts the parents of problem (e.g. dyslexic) children, who might slow down the pace of tuition.

In keeping with the middle generation's tolerant and laissez-faire attitude, Jewish studies are being taught here under the non-committal label of "tradition" – meaning Jewish tradition and history. The idea

behind the term is that tradition should only be known, not believed in or practised (although there is no obstacle to the latter), since making things mandatory would only alienate children. But since this very generation has grown up without learning about tradition (its representatives have just learnt or are just learning it), the passing on of tradition itself lacks commonly accepted traditions, although this somehow still takes place in the case of the two other schools mentioned above. The community therefore faces the impossible task of rescuing itself from a state of ignorance (and often a lack of motivation). Unlike Hungarian language or mathematics, the secular tuition of Jewish tradition has no established methods, and therefore a great deal depends on the instructor's own personality, commitment and faith. The secondary school's four instructors in Jewish studies are currently following four different, self-styled syllabuses.

Due to its tolerant attitude, the school's management makes no inquiries about the Jewish ascendancy of any teachers or students applying (this should be seen in the light of the negative example of the orthodox school discussed above). As a result, many non-Jewish students (and even more teachers) apply here. Such gestures of sympathy should, of course, be appreciated, although the majority of parents bring their children here not so much out of commitment to their Jewish faith or in pursuit of sound teaching, but in response to the school's tolerant and democratic reputation – or sometimes out of solidarity with fellow-minorities, such as the school's Greek students. (Members of a few small, pro-Jewish Protestant denominations are an exception, for whom sympathy with the Jewish faith is the main driving force.) Nevertheless, as a result of this tendency, most non-Jewish children understandably show little affection for Jewish studies, a situation which affects the whole atmosphere of the school. Lack of motivation is not sufficiently balanced by the Jewish children's thirst for knowledge, since genuine interest can only be based on some kind of existing knowledge. In circumstances such as these, it is not so much community spirit, as parental motivation which will make children responsive to Jewish tradition.

Interest may, however, be stimulated occasionally by "formalities". At Succoth,

Jewish studies lessons are held in a tent; at Pesach they make matzoth in accordance with the tradition; at Tu B'Shvat they plant trees and on Friday afternoons, light candles. These spiritual moments, however, remain within the "official" framework of the school: the celebration of these events takes place as part of the class time-table. At the Friday evening candle lighting at the secondary school, there is little spontaneous interest, and only a few students and even fewer teachers find it necessary to participate.



In Hungary, the performance of secondary schools in the teaching of secular subjects is measured by university application statistics, i.e. the percentage of students who go on to higher education. According to the averages over the past five years, the Anna Frank Secondary School is ranked 208th-211th of the 216 secondary schools in Hungary. (In 1996, of the 52 students who matriculated, 11 were successful in their application to university.)

Of the 58 students who matriculated from the American Endowment School, 7 were successful in university entrance exams in 1995, and 27 out of 60 in 1996. On the basis of these two years, the school would qualify as 148-154th. The Lauder Yavneh Jewish Community School ranked 78th on the basis of the average for these two years.<sup>1</sup>

The statistics quoted above do not take into account those students accepted in religious or foreign universities. Therefore, students accepted for the Pedagogical Institute of the Rabbinical Seminar, and those furthering their studies in Israel, were not included. Inclusion of these students might change the picture dramatically, since the Jewish schools discussed are particularly affected in both these categories, and their ranking might improve by 10-20 places if the calculation was made in this way.

### III. CONCLUSION

The Holocaust and its 40-year aftermath have significantly weakened the Hungarian Jewish population, separating it into two sharply contrasted parts: one centred around the Jewish Community, where the mentality of the oldest generation is dominant, who are familiar with the Jewish tradition but not matters of modern society.

## ANDRÁS MEZEI *Statistics*

*No cry of anguish, no manner of wailing  
is more heartrending than the sheer numbers:*

*147 trains*

*for the transportation in 51 days*

*of 434,000*

*provincial Jews by 200 SS troops*

*aided by 5,000 Hungarian*

*gendarmes and hundreds of volunteers –*

*they were detained at first in the ghettos,*

*they were then taken into the brick-works*

*already stripped of their family savings,*

*then caged in cattle-trucks, 80 in each, and*

*conveyed without water and food to Mengele*

*from the first day of the occupation –*

*processed by people obeying orders*

*who never outdid the German commands*

*but willingly obliged the commanders –*

*Some half a million provincial Jews:*

*some 10% of them stayed alive.*

**Translated by Thomas Land**



András Mezei. Poet, writer, born in 1930. He survived the Shoah in Budapest. After finishing his elementary schools he worked as a skilled worker. From 1949 to 1950 he lived in Israel. After his return to Hungary he finished his studies, later worked as the editor of various Hungarian weeklies and periodicals. In 1992 he established the Central European Times (CET) monthly and Editing House of which he is the editor-in-chief. His books: *A csodatévő* (The Miracle) *Kezdetben* (At the Beginning) *Szerencsés Dániel* (Daniel the Lucky Boy) *Zsidó versek* (Jewish Poems) *Adorno*

The other part is in direct contrast: the middle generation has been brought up in the way of assimilation. There is little mutual co-operation, and in Jewish public life they are dominated by Jews coming from abroad.

Three educational institutions have emerged from this context: the American Endowment School aims to instil a strong Jewish consciousness, but is weak in general knowledge subjects. A contrasting situation can be found at the Yavneh School, which was established by the Lauder foundation. The school of the Jewish Community stands somewhere between the two in terms of its Jewish consciousness, but its academic level is also low. (The Hungarian shaliyah of the Lubavitch Movement, following the creation of its kindergarten, has recently opened the first class of its elementary school – with three children for the moment. Opinions about this school may only emerge in the coming years.)

The past forty years has seen a marked separation between Jewish knowledge and consciousness, and modern erudition. This problem has likewise been reproduced in the Jewish schools during the first few years of their operation. The Jewish Community is currently busy rebuilding its infrastructure – the intellectual revival will take more time. The growth in numbers, however, may provide some grounds for optimism and will, hopefully, soon be accompanied by an improvement in quality.

Our ideal is the Jewish Secondary School between 1945-48, in which strong Jewish consciousness was combined with a high academic level, both in terms of teachers and students. Hopefully, we will not have to wait long for the appearance of Tora-reading sociologists, writers, engineers and businessmen.

<sup>1</sup> Source of data: Neuwirth Gábor: The Hungarian High School Database. (A középiskolai adatbázis) In: *Köznevelés*, 1997. 111. issue.

GYÖRGY KONRÁD

# Aphorisms on the Durability of Jews

Being a Jew is a several thousand-year-old challenge. The Jews are a global people, present almost everywhere, and what has been around a long time stays around.

Jews exist, and have for ages! This peculiarity is a fact, and almost everything follows from it. Is there another global people? The Chinese may be even older, but they have melded less with the societies of the western world, have had less of a role in forming them, and those living at home are much more numerous than those living in the Diaspora. Jews are everywhere, bridging spatial and temporal borders, obstacles is characteristic of them.

Grudging relatives: the religious, Zionist - nation-state and worldly-universalist options are held together by the shock of the holocaust as absolute negative for all three. This is the only people that has remained what it is through the most diverse of times and environments. It passed through the others, through the differing roles and disguises of adaptation. Its assimilation is kept within bounds by the secret conviction that being a Jew amounts to no less than being anything else.

Jewish reflection bridges, links, comprehends through distancing, and easily swings up from the concrete to the abstract and back: it oscillates.

I see as Jewish this transcendent, surpassing passion, the ability of individuals to break away from their environment, to achieve distance, and to be able to view their own world ironically.

Jews are transcendent in a realistic way. They are not afraid to go past the given borders of the given world, they know there is more to it, they know people live beyond the hills as well.

It is an accommodating, polite, law-abiding non-conformity.

The spiritual basis: individuals having godly dignity of equal rank, integrity, inviolability, the idea of the unity of humanity, every person's God is the same one.



György Konrád (1933, Debrecen), writer, essayist, sociologist, survived the Hungarian Holocaust in Budapest, graduate from University in 1956. After publishing a great number of studies in literary history and urban sociology he unexpectedly turned onto the literary scene with his first novel, written in the late 1960s. From the 1980s he is one of the most prominent figure of the Hungarian dissident movement. Following the political changes he becomes one of the leading figures of the Alliance of Free Democrats. He is the president of the International Pen Club between 1990-1993. His novels and essays has been translated into about 12 languages. Novels: *A látogató* (The Case Worker), *A városalapító* (The City Founder), *A cinkos* (The Looser), *Kerti mulatság* (The Feast in the Garden). Collection of essays: *Az értelmiség útja az osztályhatalomhoz* (Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power - with Iván Szelényi), *Antipolitika* (Anti-politics), *Az újjászületés melankóliája* (The Melancholy of Rebirth), *A láthatatlan hang* (The Invisible Voice).

For Jews, there is no intermediate metaphysical station between man and god, there is no god-man, no man become god.

That which is human should just stay that way.

Moses is a person, David is a person, Jesus is a person, all our fellow-men, all frail, and the truth of each one is partial.

And the messiah can let people await his arrival, he needn't hurry.

A Jew doesn't need to be religious; if he doesn't believe, well then he doesn't believe God, who is not human, but rather the eternal presence which sees and hears a person, even listens, God is spoken to by the religious.

Jews provided the biblical metaphor of the world.

Jews generally bring liveliness, they initiate, identities in friction are productive. They see from outside, not just from inside. The consciousness of Jews is generally paradoxical, others' is too, but that of Jews is in any case, as a rule. Contrary impulses exist, and they do not want to suppress either.

A trans-national people in nation-states! Which direction should its heart pull? Toward the nation-state, or world Jewry? This is the kind of question that doesn't need to be asked, because either answer is an undesirable constraint. A person's freedom lies in weighing concrete alternatives and deciding according to principles, heart, taste and mood.

There is a Jewish global people, which now more calmly considers itself Jewish, because it has less need to be frightened, yet still, everywhere in the world, it feels some uncertainty, because there is not only a Jewish global people, but global anti-Semitism as well. The Israelis cannot feel entirely secure either, there too, there are neighbors who would kill them just for being Jews. There was once a renowned, later deified Jew who was killed for his words. It is a Jewish custom to get into that kind of situation. It is a Jewish custom to give words such exaggerated significance, even to die for them. It is Jewish history that a person is killed for being what he is.

The Lord, who spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai according to the familiar narrative, said of himself, I am who I am. The Lord expects this godly identity from his chosen ones too. This terribly exhausting, groping identity. Who saw him? Who heard him? Moses, a Jew, who may not have even really been a Jew. Since then, the demand to be identical with ourselves has remained in force, as has the demand to honor the covenant which various fathers, and this - Moses - formed with the Invisible Voice. According to the prophets, it is a covenant with our conscience, with the voice of our soul. The secret of survival - say the prophets - is faithfulness to ourselves, to an undertaking.

The people of most nations can be melted in, it is relatively hard to do so with Jews. The *something* that preserves them unveils itself even on Jews who camouflage them-

selves - even if the disguise is long-standing and self-imposed. Following the Zionists, the Diaspora Jews are also beginning to resign themselves to being what they are, and are no longer even so dejected about it. They pop out of the box, here and there they appear with their portable God, embodiments of a peculiar strategy. Staying incognito has become less typical of worldly Jews, why should they conceal their Jewishness, sometimes they stray instead toward the tastelessness of boasting.



The person who *is who he is*, up to the level of civil courage, individually, is a type of person that can awaken ill-temper. Jews were most likely in advance of the Germans in modernization, in choosing Western values; to Jews, universalism was more self-evident. The revenge for this was Nazism. Actually, the Germans wished for the same thing: to enter the world at large. The European Jews lost, they were not watchful enough, and they weren't good enough strategists, had they seen more clearly, more of them would have escaped. They did not defend themselves resolutely enough. Today, Israel and world Jewry stand virtually behind Jews living in any country. Jewish consciousness is stronger and less paradoxical in Israel and America than in Central-Europe, not especially far from Auschwitz.



Worldly Jews select what to keep of the prescriptions. They reduce their duties, their ritual obligations, and believe they have more important things to do in the spring than to bum the homec. They give religious discrimination no room on their bookshelf. There is more to life than being Jewish, Christian or Muslim. Being human means more than any sub-group identity. The task of Jews is to practice their humanity, to understand and appreciate the other person in their own particularity.



Humanity? Respect for the particular.

One prays this way, the other that way, they all long for something higher, more solemn, more extraordinary, superhuman, they all reach upwards, they all believe the godly is a kind of demand, the demand for purity, the wish that you rise above petty interests and petty affairs.

You should be able to extricate yourself sometimes from the physical reality of the here and now, to free yourself from earthly gravitation, to fly the bird of spirit, to observe yourself from the top of a mountain, from a bird's eye view, to give a

farewell glance out of the train window at that which is tied to one place, immovable. In the biography of an individual, the city is an episode. In the biography of the city, the individual is an episode. We hear the exhortation to view our lives from a calming distance, during a tea ceremony, in a desert tent, in a European bar or pub, or in a Near-Eastern café. The level we reach then is conducive to religious thought. Everyone is endowed with states of detachment, when the dream carries us away, when in a hotel room we feel everything that was until then, is far away, somewhere else.



Are you different in the hotel room, when you step out of bed, and go into the bathroom, put on the white shirt, gray suit, black shoes, then go down to the breakfast room, where everyone behaves more or less similarly. The worldly Jew is like other people. There are life situations in which the children of all nations do more or less the same.



The Jew transcends, but to where? In the direction of the familial paradise. Continuation is the meaning of his life, and in general, his wife is his conscience. Jewish utopia is the friendly dinner table. Heaven and the chorus of angels is no better than this. Wife, children, grandchildren, relatives, friends, guests, locals, and travelers around the table set for a holiday. It is difficult to conceive of anything more attractive, Jews wish all others this same utopia. This is the other-world, other also in the sense that it is safe for the moment, that no one breaks in for the moment, that the soldiers' horses do not stamp under the window. Children remember this bit of warmth from the stove, familial happiness, when everyone loved one another, perhaps this was the other world, the one the Jew searches for here in earthly life, because he doesn't think he needs to die before he can enjoy it.



Jews do not much mention or promise the eternal life of the soul. They acknowledge death. They do not believe we are consoled for all suffering, they are able to reconcile faith in God with the acceptance of human fate, for this reason I would call them ethical realists. They do not postpone salvation to the afterworld, to the supposed eternal life following death. They do not believe there exists heavenly correction, compensation, reconciliatory reparation for the mistakes of earthly life.

What happened, happened and can no longer be changed. You may make mistakes, but there is no heavenly safety net.

The real happening is not over there, but rather here, this is it. And though this is sometimes a vale of tears and scandalous too, it is mainly the terrain of work and weekday joys and sorrows. Well yes, the Jew says, one has to work, it's been this way since Cain, we lost our innocence, we bit into knowledge, into sensuality and into sin, carefree childhood is no more.

The ethics of adulthood, that is what wiser Jews search for, it is evident in their estimation that learning is worth more than fighting. Jews concede the world is powerful, even too powerful, and that unpredictable forces rage within it, so one must adjust to it, take account of it, acknowledge it, understand it, and after negotiating, one must come to terms with it, to find the least deleterious among the possibilities, without illusions about the lesser evil, but all this is not enough, because to this one must add something more.

Being chosen means that we all suppose it of ourselves, because we may each be chosen for something, and we try to discover what it might be. We give ourselves tasks according to the voice of our conscience. Only with helpful self-discipline is the adult possible. Those who insult others instead of working are not adults. There are non-adult public opinions. Being offended is not a realistic spiritual condition, and does not favour prosperous survival.

Jews would have cause to be offended as an orientation, but more mature Jews counsel against it; one must not retreat into a shell, but rather initiate, so that such misfortune cannot happen again. Jews have work to do, the world is inter-connecting, being sewn together, the process must be promoted, because it is what prevents newer holocausts. The murder of anyone's child is unbearable, and it must be particularly unbearable to the Jews. The task of Jews is to learn from Auschwitz, and to reject everything that is like it, resembles it, validates and excuses it, regardless of who is presently threatened by genocide.

The galut, the Diaspora, is the field of reality, the galut is parallel to globalization, dispersal over the globe: this means that Jews - while remaining faithful to themselves - must learn, must come to know this planet and its inhabitants, they must help in the work of reminding humanity that it is related.

Transcendence is familial continuity, plus self-control, or I might say the humility that makes it possible. Life subordinated to self-discipline and purity laws, in which bodily habits gain religious significance, and thus sanctified, are lifted out of the sea of the profane, just as the holiday is an exception in the row of weekdays. The Jew wants to protect this realistically attainable worldly afterworld, or to help it to safety in the shadow of the menacing power, to help it survive. The outside should be modest, the inside rich. To smuggle the holiday into the world, so there can be a holiday. The compulsory Sabbath is the order of intellectual distancing, to reflect upon our life. The Sabbath is created and preserved for this purpose. We cleanse ourselves, eat well and look into the candle's flame.

Like the writer of these lines, many worldly Jews do not distinguish the Sabbath: they try to make a Sabbath out of every day. They do not distinguish the sacred and the profane, they like them to play into each other. They do not attend the synagogue, they read instead, and though it may be out of pride, or laziness, they rarely like to become entangled in collective rituals. All of world literature is theirs. Every good book, every work of art they admire constitutes a higher authority. Non-Jews should also regard as their own all of Judaica, from the Bible up to the present day. This text is also Judaica, and no less Hungarica. Every work of every Jewish author - regardless of the language it was written in, can be regarded as Judaica as well. The works of Jewish authors contain their way of thinking and their sensitivity, but if the work in question is really a work of art, then the nationality of the author is perhaps not irrelevant, but certainly not of primary importance. The significant work crosses borders, cultures, centuries. The worldly person chooses, and is interested in all kinds of sacred books, but the "sacred" books of worldly Jews are the ones they choose. Worldly Jews choose their own sacramental objects. Though they can see orthodoxy as beautiful, they do not spend as much time on ritual obligations as those require. Instead, they have personal rituals, they regard as their own that which appeals to them.

To be a Jew is an extraordinary obligation to study. One must be familiar with all the national civilizations with which Jews are involved, or have closer contact. This is especially true for the Diaspora Jew,

because Jews in Israel are just as apt as any other people to overdo national navel-gazing. They are so occupied with their own affairs that they have little attention left for the world at large, unsurprisingly, as the affairs of the neighborhood are often life and death matters. The Diaspora Jews also have their own subcultural egotism, but they are compelled to understand the other local sensitivities, and in order to prevent anti-Semitism from becoming a menace, they attempt to neutralize local xenophobic romanticism in their own way. To save their skin, they must influence public opinion, because if they do not perform this work, it may come to pass that they get killed, and of course this has happened even when they tried diligently to carry out the work, but did not succeed.

In the worldly Jew's circle of friends there are Jews, but there are non-Jews as well. They eat what the locals eat, everywhere. They do not suggest or imply the things the locals like are impure and unholy. They do not distinguish themselves by dress or hairstyle, because they would consider that pointless eccentricity. At most, they distinguish themselves unwittingly. Why only unwittingly? Are they afraid to identify themselves? Do they not want to acknowledge being Jews? I can hear the accusing question. But I never wear anything folkloristic anywhere. Actually, I consider even my immediate material environment accidental. The environment does not impede me in deeper thinking. I am loath to stand out willfully, I am not a concretist-animist. I do not wear my religion or world view on my person as an emblem, I have never worn any kind of badge in my lapel. Most likely, secularization will continue, people want to dispose of their free time themselves, and only occasionally to take part in collective church services they feel are too long. They are reserved in their appreciation of religious rituals, whose essence is that we obey, lower our heads before the eternal and bow frequently.

Jews come in as many kinds as there are people. What makes a person a Jew is saying they are one. If they say they are, then this state of affairs probably concerns them, they mull over it, even feel some communality with other Jews, living and dead. It is infrequent for someone of non-Jewish origin to declare themselves Jewish. Every other definition is uncertain, the only sure criterion of Jewish identity is if a person calls him/herself a Jew, and this is so even if neither mother nor father was Jewish.

Greater integration is good for Jews: they become one among many. Mass anti-Semitism is not normal in the EU, because the different being neighbors is increasingly normal. The relationship of worldly citizens of big cities to religions resembles their relationship to national cuisines, they enter alternately the restaurants of various nationalities, and do not eat the same dish (solet) every Saturday.

Autonomist isolation is not in the interests of Diaspora Jews. It is not to their advantage to descend from the major to the minor circuit, and to develop a minority intimate culture (which possibly comes to require positive discrimination). A more fortunate choice is to validate their own colors while being woven into the whole. Diaspora Jews have a stake in local integration, the prophet Jeremiah already saw it this way and counseled it. Jewish citizens living in various places wish to be a part of the society and culture of their country-city. What does integration mean? It means they respect the law, pay taxes, and participate in public life, they speak the local language either as their native language or as a learned language, they become familiar with the culture of the local majority, and try to augment it. On the other hand, Jewish communities are loosely connected parts of a kind of virtual world Jewish community, they are related to each other and to the Jews of Israel.

Being-in-the-world is accompanied by the obligation to tolerate unusualness. To unusualness and the accompanying discrimination, as a challenge, several responses are possible. One is escape, mimicry, termination of the distinction and with it, the - most likely disadvantageous - discrimination. Within this, a possible procedure was the re-direction of anger against Jews to another target, or rather to a particular group of Jews, the orthodox, the recent immigrants, the not yet assimilated, the strange and the conspicuous, the capitalists, or the Communists, then to the dissidents of Communist regimes. These endeavors at disguise do not fool the real anti-Semite and cannot successfully deflect genuine anti-Semitism, and what's more, they are morally suspect.

For the most part, Jews speak the language of the country they inhabit, participate in its life, work for it, they are loyal citizens, even going beyond a routine pres-



ence to a more deeply sympathetic identification. However, they bring new elements into the discussion as well, the serious and ironic forms of critical self-reflection, for example. Jews are passive in the parlour game of hating the neighbors.

German Jews' hatred of the French, and French Jews' hatred of Germans was milder than that exhibited by the local majority. They were cooler about sharing nationalist public sentiment, though there are counter-examples in great numbers, but all together, they manifested an amount of neutrality in conflicts they saw as artificially pumped up, all the more so, as there were Jews on the other side as well, possibly even relatives. Why should a German Jew and a French Jew hate each another?

It is logical that the Jews were more interested in peace than others. They accommodated nationalist rancour with extreme reluctance, whether the hater was a great nation or a small one, for long-standing imperialist hatreds were nurtured not only by great powers, smaller nations also did their part in their own neighborhoods.

It is logical that a relatively high number of Jews participated in every sort of pacifist organization, and that they took the international workers' movement in this direction, but the Bolshevik Jews' deci-

sion to break with democratic constitutionalism was a perilous error, a suicidal mistake, they undermined their own security by exchanging formal freedoms for an ideological scheme they deemed substantive, essential, one which deified a certain group of people and demonized the others. The abandonment of the ghetto was made possible by enlightened liberalism, to turn on it was betrayal and self-destructive stupidity.



The people of every nation have a complicated and significant relationship with the Jews living there, some of the relationships are especially complicated and burdened, like the Germans'. Non-Jews can also say: "Jews are citizens just like us, let there be no racial distinction! And now Jews themselves initiate the making of racial distinctions? If the Jews stand apart, they will be made to stand apart by others as well. Do they really want this?" If they consider themselves a people, then they do the same as the other minority fundamentalists and autonomists. There are ethnic hard-liners in every community. Isn't it a more fortunate and safer choice to stay behind the fortifications of constitutional patriotism?



In the big cities, plural societies are being formed, with members mainly drawn from the majority nationality, but other groups are sewn in too, retaining some of their particularity, consciousness, language, unique civilization, and keeping contact with another country, where they came from, or where their relatives are, a country which most likely stands up in their defense. The limits of integration are blurry by nature; hard, sharp definitions do not fit, since there are many Jews throughout the world who are bourgeois, non-practicing, and possibly even avoid the life of the organized denomination, they may nevertheless have several Jewish relatives, friends and acquaintances, in other words, they are connected to Jewishness by real life bonds, connected to Jewish society, which can even be called a global society.



Following emancipation, ethnic nationalism expelled Jews from the community of those with equal rights. Zionism was a realistic response - another ethnic-nationalist solution. The nation-state is the key concept of this option, the sovereignty of the nation-state as the value of first rank. Seeing Israel, I believe this alternative was rightful and successful, as one solution.

ANDRÁS MEZEI

## *In their Place: A Daughter*

*My daddy's lost children: Eve and little Joe.  
My mummy's lost children: Stevie and little Paul.  
My daddy's marriage, a legendary love match.  
But mummy mourned at every river - I know  
she wished to die.*

*My daddy declared: his parents' graves lay here.  
And mummy declared that people should not forsake  
their parents' final resting place.  
And thus they merged their equal losses, although  
at first it was only  
beneath the canopy  
for the law took its time to confirm  
the death of mummy's husband and daddy's wife.*

*Mummy wanted no children  
after Stevie and little Paul;  
but after Eve and little Joe,  
my daddy yearned for babies more and more.*

*That is why I am here. I was named  
after daddy's late daughter. I live in their place.  
My mourning father was 54 years of age  
and my mother was 42  
when I was born.*

## *The A 20179th*

*Like ink on the blotting paper, the number  
tattooed in Auschwitz splinters and spreads  
on the inside of my lower left arm  
when I ride the tram in the summer  
and, forgetting myself, I happen  
to reach up in my short-sleeved shirt  
to hang on to the strap.*

\*\*\*

*May I never lift my right arm  
if I forget the mark on my left.*

**Translated by Thomas Land**

▼

For the Jews who remain in the Diaspora, another realistic response is a kind of worldly universalism compatible with western-type liberal democracies and with the position protecting human rights first and foremost, a position offering security to Jews, among others. Outside of the state of Israel, worldly Jews demand ethnic-national self-definition that is as non-restricting as possible. Talent transcends religious-ethnic circumscription. Important for the Jewish minority is the question of behavior it considers exemplary with respect to the non-Jewish majority. The societal-political-cultural existence and position of the Jews is plural, it is difficult for them to conceive of themselves as an homogenous national minority with common interests and positions. There are places where they represent themselves through one or more bodies, in some places they manifest themselves instead through professional or political associations, or as members of parties - not alongside issues or conflicts with ethnic dimensions. The interest of Jewry is for its conflicts to be decided within the framework of general fairness.

▼

There exists a post-modern re-nationalization, which obviously has a Jewish variant as well, but it should be known that this is the same mentality that was at work in the Balkans, the one that nurtures European minority conflicts, and slides from protection of rights to passionate separatism.

The analyst can bring together Jewish writers in his/her study, and if they are so inclined, Jewish writers can meet in person too, and think together, but they should not ally themselves in the "national interest", because doing so will unjustifiably change something implicit into something explicit.

▼

It is the natural interest of those Jews living outside of Israel, also, to consider the country they inhabit their home. The other pole says: they don't like me here, I don't like them either. Let's go into a shell, become an ethnic island. But the person who desires the foregoing probably goes to Israel. Furthermore, Jews living in the various nation-states seem to be less spending less effort on the repeated assertion that they are just like the members of the majority nationality surrounding them. They are not really the same, and everyone perceives this, by and by, so do they.

They may proceed from this truth, in consciousness of Auschwitz, but without offending the majority's sense of justice. The conscious position, however, compels the undertaking of strategic responsibility. If the majority has accepted liberal democracy, the minority should not stand away from it.

▼

I am not attracted to categorizing and cataloguing writers according to their religious-national affiliation. Most adjectives alongside the word literature are unnecessary, the more emphatic the adjective, we can be sure, the more insubstantial the noun, in other words, the literature in question is that much weaker. If one must have particular grouping, then according to the language of the original text is still the most self-evident and the least gratuitous method.

▼

It is a fact, an increasing number of Jews perceive they are members of a global people, this is due in part to the state of Israel, partly to the post-war Jewish intellectual surge and to globalization in general, or if you will, global *embourgeoisement*. It may be said that since the Second World War, Jewish consciousness and identity has grown somewhat stronger, moreover, it has done so in a spirit of realism: Jewry as a paradoxical people. They have bonds to the place they inhabit, and they require respect for this multilateral solidarity. Such multiple affiliation is characteristic of all peoples, of national minorities, and in every democratic country the majority must accept it. Mutual acceptance of the complexity of life and emotions is not compatible with radical forms of nationalism, because permeated by them, the majority does not approve of certain citizens of its nation-state cultivating solidarities which reach beyond the borders, or of certain citizens feeling they belong to more than one place, but the minority doesn't tolerate such complexity either, if it brims with the logic of radical nationalism, because that logic compels the individual to make sharp, either-or choices, decide what you are, Jew or (enter the name of the majority nationality here), if you are a Jew who happens to live in country *x*, then concern yourself mostly with Jewish affairs, and do not try to identify with one or the other interest, issue or group of the national majority, because that is crying and treason.

▼

Where the charge of treason can appear

in the discussion, the spirit of fundamentalism is at home, a spirit that straightforwardly abhors the idea of dual or multiple identity, and wants to prove one of the two is false, fake, that it does not exist. To me, the Diaspora Jews are more convincingly regarded as the experimental subjects of multi-level, dialogic consciousness.

▼

For a few minutes, let us allow ourselves to day-dream of utopian trends. The second millennium was the age of rigid consciousness in the ruling ideologies. It was possible to declare one or another way of thinking criminal, and to persecute it. Today, we don't know what will happen, but we open the door to the future. We imagine that the people of the third millennium will inform themselves more in the direction of learning, knowledge, information, the spirit/intellect, art, fantasy, free-time, individualism. From a growing number of building elements, people intuitively look for the combination which suits them. In the era of plentiful life-destiny choices, it will be normal for a person to know something others don't, and to be needed by several others, somewhere. The taste and egoism of talent will be defining, consequently, humility will not be typical, free choice will be, probably the free choice of humility, but curiosity will be typical in any case.

▼

There will be great liveliness on the intellectual/spiritual market, and within the spiritual/intellectual market of religions too; the branches will become richer in versions; denominations will compete for the favours of the faithful. Traditions will be in demand as well, but they will not have the force to compel, there will be those who stray to one or another side of the dilemma of tradition and individual choice.

▼

Can humankind live without enemies? How can humanity vent its impulse to kill? Probably aggression will become individualized too, because murder was and remains the most extreme act. Besides the individualization of aggression, the battle of religious fundamentalisms may also be anticipated, possibly connected to the underworld. I don't know where aggression will spring from its lair, but people will have cause to fear their fellow humans, of this I am certain. The only question is whether the killing will require some kind of moral-sounding explanation appealing to the common good.

▼

In the era of universalization (globalization), it becomes ever more logical, that humankind has a place everywhere on the globe. Greater mobility teaches one a modicum of ironic relativism: we see one person is wonderful in this way, another is wonderful in that way, one is unpleasant in this way, another is unpleasant in that way, but dialogical consciousness, the consciousness of the novel, can bear to like the imperfect as well, and to find it natural, because in amity, reverence and forgiving work together, because without the spice of our faults, it doesn't feel good to consume us.

▼

What is the first interest of Jews? That Auschwitz should not happen again! To stand up against legalized discrimination, to acknowledge respect for human rights. Auschwitz is impossible in a world which honors relation. For this reason, Jews' interests are in universalist points of view and within these, in European cohesion.

In other words, there is truth to the anti-Semitic charge that Jews are interested to a greater degree in non-hostile dialogue that crosses borders and being on negotiating terms with other forces in the world, there is also some truth to the notion that Jews view passionate local disputes skeptically and prefer to place themselves in the position of third party, or understanding mediator.

It is not libelous to state that by and large, Jews are sympathetic to cultural pluralism, and prefer to be active in areas where there is less rage, giving advantage to less knotted conditions, they place a higher value on possible compromise than on principled intransigence, though we know plenty of Jews whose thinking is monolithic, tenacious, and intransigent. The more dovish, however, believe truth is not in the triumph of their own position, but rather in compromise. It is not good to win leaving the other beaten, humiliated, and filled with a desire for revenge.

The Diaspora forced Jews to acquire a many-sided knowledge of the world, they knew, they had to know markets, life, culture, morality and customs existed elsewhere too, that the foregoing had to be considered, and that it was improper to disparage them just for being different. A greater degree of respect for others was an inescapable consequence of the Diaspora, along with skepticism about blustering self-praise.

They were also able to learn that differ-

ing interests, needs, and actors far from one another could be linked, they recognized the value of network organization and learned practical relativization, though they tended toward the pessimism of "nothing's new under the sun" and "everything bad comes back again", they were nevertheless able to value the world at large and to look toward the future with curiosity and confidence.

▼

Jews are, by necessity, carriers of globalization. Not all Jews are clustered on the land of Israel, which cannot be said to be especially large. As they are used to mobility, they need the whole of the globe in which to disperse. It is good for mobile per-

*To be a Jew is an extraordinary obligation to study. One must be familiar with all the national civilizations with which Jews are involved, or have closer contact. This is especially true for the Diaspora Jew.*

sons to be able to wander from the land of their birth, but retain the means and right to return from time to time; it is natural for them to have more than one residence, and to switch from time to time, either within the country or beyond its borders.

The duality and dialectic of the citizen and the traveller is generally familiar to Jews: those who leave like to arrive home as well; some of them can attribute metaphysical significance to national borders, others do not want to give themselves over to their impulse to settle, not anywhere in the world, not even in Israel. They come and go, and it is not possible to deprive them of this freedom.

If they achieve relatively well on the world market and in the most diverse local competitive fields, I would explain by referring to the surplus energy liberated on departing and entering, and of course to the advanced age of the Jewish people, its accumulated life-strategical experience, passed on, made into tradition in one way or another.

In the case of Jewry, it is not possible to disregard the link between contingency and substance, metaphysics couched in flesh, the inseparability of the physical and the spiritual/intellectual, accidental and imperfect individuals carrying within themselves something symbolic, something characteristic of the whole of world Jewry.

▼

Here is a people thrown into history, able to remain the subject of its own existence through nearly all its scattered life, and when the Jewish upper crust no longer wished to bear the self-designation and other, largely painful, consequences of being chosen, practically speaking, exclusion and persecution, it then had to suffer probably the greatest blow in its history, the Holocaust, which I do not bring into causal connection with the conduct of the Jews, but which possibly could have been avoided with more farsighted strategy by them, if, for example, Jewish radicals of the left had not attacked democratic constitutionalism, and hadn't thus provided example, argument, reference and validation for the counterrevolution and dictatorship of the extreme right.

▼

It is actually a fortunate and misfortunate people, lacking the calm of having always been where it now is, and for this reason, in a corner of their consciousness, Jews, themselves, distinguish themselves from the country they live in, from the majority surrounding them, and they are therefore more vigilant. Most Jews attribute less importance than others to objective, material reality, because they have experienced its temporariness, its perishability. The flowing, the portable, the value that liberates itself from the prison of materiality captivated their imaginations, that which cannot be captured, arrested, that which has relatively less chance of getting annihilated.

▼

This is a people that does not like being defined, and eludes every definition. Perhaps it feels they are a prison. Nor is it enthusiastic about those who are of it, the Jews, wanting to define it. It is a people that likes to keep open the possibility of decamping, because it knows the ground can suddenly start to burn under its feet, because it knows that insanity comes out in patches on the face of the globe, large-

ly unpredictably, because sometimes even the occasional crackpot is capable of driving mad the multitude of sensible people, and not even the greatest of wisemen can gaze into the distant future. The unpredictability, unforeseeability but conceivability of the blow made Jews familiar with networks. Knowledge is the property with which changing location is relatively least difficult, the one whose operation elsewhere is within the realm of possibility. There is no really secure place; the crack-brained are many around Israel too, perhaps even America is not a completely safe place, catastrophe prevention measures of some kind are necessary throughout the globe. We can be annihilated most readily in war, thus our stake is in peace everywhere in the world.

More than many others, European Jews are familiar with the prospect that a person can suddenly be killed by organized, armed hatred. The idea of democratic equality of rights, opposing the system of feudal prerogatives and discriminations, was originally a European idea, and brought with itself the emancipation of the Jews: if people have equal rights, then so do Jews. In the twentieth century, however, the notion of feudal prerogatives returned, this time in a collectivized version, in the fascist romanticism of the *herrenfolk* (ruler nation), which democratized the concept of nobility by extending it to the entire people, the whole majority nationality, supposedly entitled to trample other nations and peoples underfoot. The myth of the *herrenfolk* and the pernicious pariah nation presume and complement each other, one does not exist and cannot exist without the other.

Universalism - one of whose dimensions is European integration - frees Jews from their constraints, in other words, it is good for Jews. Before emancipation, these constraints were forms of feudal and religious discrimination, in the twentieth century, however, they were modernized, and now it was the nationalist-etatist spirit which restricted or totally excluded the Jews, using a few innovations in anti-Jewish phraseology. Livelihood and lifestyle tied Jews to Europe. In their hopes if not elsewhere, they did not believe Europe to be the land of bondage, and they were not here only out of obligation, but by choice as well. Europe, however, acquiesced to despotism, and twice in the twentieth century, America represented the spirit of

European humanism; it was done partly by those former-Europeans who had emigrated to America, and were beyond ethnic nationalism, those who saw swearing by the democratic constitution as the most significant symbol of belonging to the nation. I would call American nationalism not ethnic, but rather constitutional. America used force to insist on the idea of the state of law, and led the Europeans back to the discipline of the state of law. Protection of the lives of Europeans calls for international supervision of the individual nation-states, recognizing that protection of life, the injunction that the continent's inhabitants do not kill one another, is of a higher order than the idea of unlimited national sovereignty.

The lasting presence and dispersion of Jews in Europe demands metaphysical dialogue with the Christian societies of Europe. It demands renewal of the definition of European humanism, so that religions should not be inhibitors of free contact between people. The Biblical people also have a part in the shaping of modern humanism. The fundamental book partly held in common, along with the mobility, economic activity and understanding of the Jews reduced the authority of irrational barriers. If people recognize the humanness in each other, they do not kill each other. The first lesson of humanism - it is possible to live without enemies. The notion **thou shalt not kill** stands at the center of the humanist idea. As a substitute for killing, it suggests competition in sports, economy, the world of ideas and images. It is a fundamental European interest that every European nation be woven into European discipline, that it not be possible for the leaders of one or another nation-state to go insane and blunder into extreme aggression. European humanism is a defense against national hysteria and it aims at the minimization of aggression. The carrier of European humanism is embourgeoisement. Two ideas opposed one another: the unification of the continent under the rule of one nation, and the voluntary association of nations with equal rights. The idea of empire versus that of democratic federalism. The idea of a hierarchy of nations and peoples is quite abstract, but the mass murder that is its consequence is horribly concrete. European humanism is a vigilant critique of ideology, because it presumes reasonably that the national (religious, class...etc.) communities are

want to praise themselves too much, and to debase other communities, even probably to attempt to destroy them. Horrible acts are possible when abstract propositions suppress empathy, when empathy is outlawed. In contrast, worldly humanism is the very adventure of understanding ourselves and each other. The various forms of anti-Semitism regard Jews as the carriers of globalization, and not without cause. If we recognize plural identity, then local Jewish identities are connected naturally to distant ones, then it is normal for me to be at home in Budapest and to be present in San Francisco at the meeting of Jewish writers.

According to the fundamentalists, the purpose of life is to struggle against the bad, the improper. Within this framework, there is no place for paradoxical thinking. Marx, Darwin, and Nietzsche all built their philosophies upon struggle. They lifted to the rank of idea, even idealized something that is partial. I wouldn't build up a philosophy on the notion that my sons fight sometimes. The romance of combat is adolescent behavior, but it can of course become mass behavior. To disseminate the warrior-ideal, political monopoly over the media is necessary. When there was just one radio station, it could be occupied for the dictator. But if the electronic carpet crosses all borders, if technologies reach everyone, it is more difficult to feed people combat clichés. In larger, more complex bourgeois societies, it is already impossible.

The next millennium will be the millennium of dialogic. In place of combat, the millennium of dialogue and debate with each other and with ourselves. The morality of the novel will be the morality of the world. All the figures in a novel have their own truth. The author distributes him/herself among the figures, but is able to see them from above as well, to move them, like the chess-player. The art of balance actually supports present-day western civilizations. The art of balance draws the poles into the system, and integrates the extremes into the bourgeois middle, puts them into place, having understood them, and gets past them, having understood them. The great crimes stem from polarization, complete endorsement of one pole and complete rejection of the other. Radical distinction of the proper from the improper: execution. The warrior is being sublimated. Another type of soldier has

become fashionable, one who doesn't want to kill, the peacekeeper, the peacemaker, the one who protects humanity even from itself and its environment.



The individualization of responsibility proceeds. The individual may behave like the ambassador of a great power, even like the president of the republic. Why not, for goodness' sake? We have received the challenge to participate in the global exchange of ideas and to contribute to the shaping of the global rules of play. The world is full of fascistoid-localist regimes, we may give ourselves the moral goal to interfere in the internal affairs of other states and to protect the human rights of the citizens of other states. The heroes of our time travel, and learn the diversity of humanity. They travel not by tank, but by bank card. They conquer foreign lands, meaning they obtain some kind of picture of them and get relatively close to them. No matter where the enquiring heroes of our time go, they speak and act in their own names. They practice politics in the name of their own personal kingdoms.



Since success is only moderately predetermined, and anyone can be a winner in an increasing number of fields, the emancipation of talent is perceivable, here, at the turn of the millennium, it is connected to the third industrial revolution, the global-net, and that which we call the society of knowledge. The restlessness of talent may be behind the revolutions and societal changes. Talent opens a path for itself, and actors in the most diverse media try to become personalities, a transformation for which intention is not sufficient. The closer we come to the society of knowledge, the higher the value of talent. Embourgeoisement is accompanied by the emancipation of talent. The intellectual inequality of people can emerge if their legal-political equality is secured. This is actually the teleology of embourgeoisement: birth, feudal prerogatives, and sub-cultural prejudices should impede the emergence of individual abilities as little as possible. Talent is capable of making surprising appearances, accidental sparks ignite it. If the agenda is seduction instead of combat, then the many-dimensional person seems the most interesting. This is the age of unexpected, surprising, and apt ideas. The manager would like to be a wizard. Seduction competition. Behavior is transformed into art. All things considered, this change is not unfavourable for Jews.



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ÁGNES GERGELY

## Sign on my Door Jamb

*In memoriam my father*

*I do not cherish memories  
and those I have I do not safeguard.  
I do not seek forgotten graveyards.  
Bio-chemistry does not move me.*

*Yet at times like this towards November  
when fog-damped windows seal my room  
and I gasp for air and long for relief,  
beyond a sense of space I sense your rise  
as from the waters of the mind  
and odd gestures of yours re-emerge.*

*I sense your long and nervous fingers  
arranging a Thermos flask and pocket knife  
with a Bible and warm underclothes  
and an old can opener in the gaping  
green knapsack; and under the weightless load  
you can carry, I sense your back's suprise.  
I sense your departure, elegant tramp,  
from the house;  
you'd never go away, you just set out,  
and look back laughing, aged 38 years,  
and you nod and you gesture, I'll soon return  
(tomorrow should have been your birthday)  
while your tears dribble inwards whining  
and you wave – and bow you wave!*

*Sign on my door jamb, you've remained: the march,  
the bars, the bridge, the sludgy road,  
the gorging of grass, the fatal empty weakness  
were only freak inventions of the mind;  
for I have lied, I often see you  
beneath the stifling, low November sky;  
you set out with me, you breathe, and your tears  
I let your tears go dribbling down my throat;  
and above, where it has no business, that thin  
Memphis cigarette struck from your mouth  
has burnt through the skin of a star.*

**Translated by Thomas Land**

GÁBOR T. SZÁNTÓ

# Being a (Hungarian-) Jewish Writer

## *The anatomy of a paradox*

**1** I call somebody a writer who records stories, shapes characters, and builds lives and destinies into parables even if their raw material is taken from characters and events of the reality outside the literary work. It is not the enumeration of things that never happened that makes a text fiction but the way it handles its material, and rearranges its elements, in other words the very quality of creative formation. It cannot be summarised, it cannot be "told", or communicated in a transformed fashion, since its effect is mediated by its entirety through the economical harmony of its plot, structure, atmosphere, and style. I can write it in the first person singular, I can place my hero into a co-ordinate system that correlates with my life story and yet a story will be born. Or I can write a "fiction" in the third person singular which is objective, dispassionate and loaded with alienating effects and yet everything in it can be a truly lived personal experience. All this is contingent. What grants writing credit is that it could happen outside the book as it has happened inside the book. The reality of the work is equivalent with the reality of life. What distinguishes literature from essayistic non fiction and journalism is that while a reporter writes *about* something the writer *creates* something. No matter how sophisticated, the former is a reproduction while the latter builds from the writer's self, or in the case of truly great works calls into existence that which seems to have been waiting already in some pre existence. If it is good then it is literature without further qualifications even if it is based on a report-like factual investigation or an experience that was lived through down to its last and most detailed element. The writer depicts with the power of original creation, they illustrate, orient, provide viewpoints, this



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becomes primary over the events of the story, beyond narration, style, condensation and linguistic precision it is this that distinguishes it from event-centred reportage no matter how exciting or lyrical is the subject matter of the latter.

A Jew I call somebody who is a member of this community through origin or conversion, but from a literary point of view I would also include those who, although converting to other religions, or hiding, have the referential component palpable in the tissue of their work.

By Hungarian-Jewish literature I mean that group of works which comes from a writer as defined above or is thematically connected to that segment or is rooted in the multifarious history of that group which nonetheless shows identifiable trends, shows the psychological peculiarities of that group or simply reflects the life experiences of the community nar-

rower than the language community itself in an unspoken, latent fashion, through reflexes working even against the authorial intention.

By being included in this group, works do not lose their entitlement to belong to the wider sphere of Hungarian literature, since they also carry the legacy of the latter but their shared characteristics also support the definition above and presuppose an inner history which also fits them into a different, horizontal context that exceeds linguistic boundaries, justifying the logic of diasporic existence. Writers and works of this community which repeats typical life stories in the conditions of dispersion are connected by central axes of experience, by a kinship of mental habits and ways of thinking and this includes the medium and characters of prose fiction, most descriptive from our point of view, which are often related to the milieu and person of their author.

Being a Hungarian-Jewish writer, however, means more than an accidental choice of subject matter, a few give-away signs or the passive acceptance of the description of one's works as such. To be a Hungarian-Jewish writer and to create such literature is a task in the future tense. The mission means more than the purposeful creation of works relating to this theme but also the fulfilment of an active role in forming the new image of this cultural enclosure, in representing it within the Hungarian intellectual scene and integrating it with the Jewish world at large. It means an orientation and a commitment which does not limit a writer's credit and freedom but serves to channel attention.

There is a sharp caesura between Jewish writers who accept the above categorisation and those who protest against it. For the latter it is unacceptable to place any form of a filter between the author who is engaged in battle with the absolute and his/her subject, a filter which might in some way diminish the writer's individuality, their impressive Don Quixotian solitude.

There is also a caesura between Jewish society in general and the writer, as the writer depicts, criticises, gossips while the former could only learn from its errors or smile at its own distorted mirror image, mis-drawn features, *post historiam*, if it had an unusual amount of sophisticated intelligence.

There is a further gap between Europe

and the United States since the latter was untouched by the age of terror, its shadow only reached there in the form of refugees, immigrant survivors and the guilt of those contemporaries who were born out there and were consequently never touched by the events.

And finally there is a gap between East and West represented by the Communist dictatorship which cast its shadow over the second half of the 20th century. Its policy of forced assimilation rendered a full Jewish life impossible even beyond the decades of its rule (as it did any other free and un-intimidated self definition). Since by breaking up continuities it paralysed for a long time to come this segment of autonomous intellectual existence. This is something that is built on and is rooted in a form of life which is passed on from generation to generation. Thus the breach of one link in the generational chain after the voluntary assimilation that took place in the first part of the century, and after the shock of the *Shoah*, threatens to have consequences which are as yet unpredictable.

Thus it is easy to draw up on paper the type of the Hungarian-Jewish writer but in reality he is extremely difficult to find.



Being a Hungarian-Jewish writer today has to mean that one goes beyond all that caused the anaemic impoverishment, or hindered the expansion, of this area before the Second World War.

In the last decades of the nineteenth and the first third of the twentieth centuries the mass of slowly secularising Yiddish-speakers in Poland, Russia and, after mass emigration, in the United States meant a market which received and stimulated the literature that dealt with it, in its popular self-consciousness, its loosening religious frame and its emerging reading public. (In the Russian areas some community remained even after the linguistic transition, obviously as a result of the stiffer reserve of the landowning class, and thus authors who often published in Russian as well as Yiddish opened the way to literature written in the new language but maintaining its characteristic Jewish subject matter and approach.)

In Hungary this faction never emerged. National-communal consciousness was declining together with religious life and the assimilating strata whose practice of the tradition was becoming more and more fragmented and superficial, failed

both as subject matter and as primary consumer public to ferment an emergent Hungarian-Jewish literature which thus lagged far behind the examples just mentioned. All the negative signs of its national (often religious) and social assimilation, its uncertain, mobile self-image which was changing according to external circumstances would have warranted a satirical authorial attitude best of all, but this approach did not become widespread. This was probably due to the feeling of being excluded from the taste of the time and thus from audience reception, as well as to the inevitable intellectual circumstances of the background, to the new type of anti-Semitism and to the fact that writers' ambitions always took into account the expectations of the reading public.

Ultimately, the writers emerged from this circle of assimilants and even if in theory they were enabled by their alternative vision, their enhanced ability of self-reflection and their in-born or acquired critical eye to write about their milieu, they rarely built an oeuvre on this subject matter. Writers were usually put off this theme by paralysing inhibitions, by the lack of a broad publishing scene and by the reservations of the Jewish reading public who were assimilating even in their choice of reading, and followed the contemporary Hungarian taste, but also by the lack of feedback from a wider audience. The few exceptions (works by Károly Pap, novels by Béla Zsolt, Lajos Hatvany's *Masters and Men*, András Komor's *The Offspring of S. Fischmann*, to mention only the most important) received understanding and attention but not from the Jewish press which sank into silence or rejected the criticisms directed against Jews. The best of the contemporary Hungarian writers noticed the works of these authors who possessed and used in their work a deep inside knowledge of the micro-community, and some of them were totally unprejudiced in encouraging Jewish writers to depict their background in a conscious and emphatic manner and thus introduce it to be included among the topical themes of Hungarian literature. This encouragement however was still not enough to inspire a broad-ranging Hungarian-Jewish literature which could produce great works.



Understandably but regrettably Jewish writers did not strive to create works in this area or they turned away from it as a result of unappreciated efforts. This may

have been a sign of their own assimilation or it may have been a part of their ambition to achieve a wider reputation and success, or it may have been a hurt response to the critical rejection or even more upsetting, indifference, that they encountered in their own "religious press".

Thanks to short story writers of the second and third division or to those who because of a consistent choice of subject matter, never made it to the first rank and never achieved eminence in the literary world, there never used to be a shortage of lightweight shorter fiction in Jewish newspapers and magazines. These really did present Jewish society, allowing a glimpse of its social stratification, religious habits, and everyday life. (During the era of terror their career was disrupted but some of the few survivors continued their work in Israel, creating a linguistically isolated emigrant literature with all its customary difficulties. Added to these difficulties is the fact that even if the writers themselves found a new home, the tone of their writing, which evokes the old home, the good old days of peace, and which is often dusty and old fashioned is a tell tale symptom of the homeless wandering Jewish destiny.) A general characteristic of the shorter fiction earlier referred to is that apart from a few exceptions its texts do not go really deep. It is not merely a generic peculiarity if they do not depict their heroes with a thoroughness, with an objectivity even in situations of conflict, or in interaction with members of the receiving society, as do the seminal works of the few authors who we talked about earlier. Apologetic and inbred, self-defensive and self-glorifying, with its painful futility and infelicitous tone, their legacy fails to provide a complex many-sided view or objectivity. What these writings lack is the initiated outsider's insight into the most essential features, trends and systems of relations. The writings which we named earlier and which tower above the mass currently under discussion offer this insight in such a way that their strict creative form also reflects the author's empathy and compassion.

Empathy and compassion combined with merciless objectivity is opposed to the saccharine superficial solidarity literature of the "religious press" which is ruled by schematic features journalism, and which offers sympathy but no objectivity and no complexity. This too has to be added after the compulsory memento.



After the period of terror the works in question mainly treated Jewishness as a memory, the requisite of an irrevocably bygone past. The proud self respecting part of the community left the country in the autumn of 1956 at the latest, and in the best case continued its existence on the peripheries of the Hungarian linguistic body. Those who remained, the remainder, were silenced by the dictatorship and prevented from saying they would have wished to add in this respect. Four decades were almost enough to silence them entirely.

Authentic Jewishness is conspicuous by its absence in the Hungarian-Jewish literature of the period after the Second World War. Although there have been and still are models, there has not been one religious hero in the fiction of this country in the last half a century, not one subtle psychological description, one deciphered metalanguage, not one attempt to describe a way of thinking that has tried to bring the word from this world.

Speaking of this question in the present tense we find an increasing hollowness in intellectual content, a persecuted self-image, a feeling of escape regardless of the presence or absence of persecution and an inability to live in organic harmony with this identity. True, the hard times, the life of the pariah, the long shadow of trauma resulted in such unignorable oeuvres as Imre Kertész's, in poetry Ágnes Gergely's, Magda Székely's and András Mezei's. Jewish life and thinking of the post-holocaust period were reflected in, among others, György Dalos's, György Konrád's and Mihály Komis's books, but still this imbalance is disturbing. There has only been one great work which, approaching the theme of decline from a distance, embedding it in an appropriate background, raising it to the level of a life philosophy and, in the *how* as well as the *what*, depicted it with astounding and elevating dramatic quality and this is Péter Nádas' *The End of a Family Novel*. There are a few other important novels however, which approach the complex conglomerate of questions in a one-dimensional fashion, and there is György G. Kardos's trilogy of singular vision and unique importance. But the achievement of this last as a Hungarian-Jewish novel is secondary compared to its relevance to the Israel of his time. The rest is silence.

Even what could have been did not become subject matter: the relics of the Jewish remnant communities of Eastern

Europe did not become integrated into works of literature, this slowly disappearing world of the last half a century has left hardly any traces; only its end result. The letters of tombstone inscriptions, synagogue carvings, or remnants of prayer books say nothing to the new generations and everything is avoided that could indicate or appear as if they felt a phantom pain about this. In the best case Jewishness turns out to be nothing other to them but a disquieting black hole which however does not encourage intellectual exploration, a closed zone surrounded by anxiety and unadmitted guilt, the *terra incognita* of the soul.



There used to be and there still could be a chance for the deserving and the daring to submerge themselves and absorb something of this world which will sink into complete oblivion soon after the end of this millennium. What follows after might serve for the regeneration of the community and might still carry the past in its unconscious resonances but it will not bear an organic relationship to it. On account of the lost link, in the next one and a half to two decades, Hungarian-Jewish continuity will sink into its grave. Where the organic continuation of the vaguely emerging literature of the first third of this century should be there is now a gaping space which cannot be filled in. None the less, we should rescue what we can and pull ourselves out of oblivion by our own bootstraps. What we need is self-demonstration so that all those who know hardly anything about Jewish life should see what there is to see. We need to mediate like interpreters between this waning culture which is never to be resurrected in the form here described and its potential heirs. To be a Hungarian-Jewish writer today must also mean fulfilling this interpreter's function. Loyalty to the literature and loyalty to the civilisation whose sleep, we hope, is only that of a Sleeping Beauty.

**2** Six decades ago, András Komor gave a three-part lecture on a similar theme and in a similar tone, entitled "Jewish Problems in Modern Hungarian Literature", at the Open University of the Pest Jewish Community, in the Goldmark Hall. The text deals with a partial problem, two works written under the blackening skies of the mid to late 1930's: Károly Pap's *Jewish Wounds and Sins*, Béla Tábor's *The Two Ways of Jews*, as well as several occasional arti-

cles and the thorough and broad-ranging essays by the young Aladár Komlós. Yet these lectures present the most important Jewish intellectual dilemmas of the age, and these have survived perennially ever since. Perhaps the emphases are different from those of the current text but the direction is the same and many of the statements apply with surprising accuracy to our own time.

Jewishness is a topic surrounded by silence and falsification, which does not figure, or only figures in distorted forms in the works of authors of Jewish origin. They do not present their real essence, only the features characteristic of themselves, "Hungarian writers do everything to avoid Jewishness", says Komor about the "main trend" of the beginning of the century. In the agitated, anti-Semitic atmosphere of the years after the First World War no answer emerged. What Komor called for, i.e. that "Jewish writers should in some form or other declare their own opinion" did not happen. But no matter how hard they tried to avoid the matter, the matter did not avoid them, it remained forcefully present in their everyday reality.

The "new Jewish literature" which was emerging in the twenties "dared to touch upon the topical problems of Jewish people more truthfully and with a clearer approach". This minority self-criticism is at the same time a social criticism on behalf of the bourgeoisie. They pronounce a severe but affectionate and responsible criticism of the Jewish community on its way to assimilation and embourgeoisment.

"The Jews do not like these writers. They do not read them willingly, just as one does not like that sour face which, looking in the mirror in the morning shows one to be unshaven and old. These writers are annoying in the same way in which it is annoying to have the truth spelled out to our face."

"A Jewish writer should never deny his Jewishness. He should never try to appear non-Jewish. Which does not mean that he should limit his subject matter to Jewishness. He can write about anything but always in such a way that if his Jewishness happens to be asking for expression even in a single sentence, in one adjective then he should not deny his Jewishness that outlet. And if he was born to see the world through Jewish eyes then he should not try to wear spectacles made for different eyes."



Komor's basic question is, even today, waiting to be answered and will be waiting as long as Jewishness and literature fail to strike a balance in the life of these authors. "But the Jewish writer's mission is not fulfilled by depicting the Jewish environment, Jewish life. No, it is not, and even less so as this would mean a limitation and, like all other limitations, would go against the basic principle of authorial freedom... It is not in this that I see the true mission of the Jewish writer. But in providing an expression of the Jewish idea.

Now, it sounds very good to say, the expression of Jewish idea. Perhaps I could even say what I mean by this Jewish idea; nothing other than what our priests preach: to remain faithful to the legacy of the ancestors, to the laws, customs and commandments. Surely, it would be most beautiful if this commandment of the Jewish idea could be adhered to literally."

In the following section Komor excuses himself and other transgressors of "the physical regulations" of the tradition (keeping Sabbath etc.) with reference to modernity, diasporic existence and economic necessity. Then he goes on to say, "But we writers feel excused from these regulations so long as we can say to ourselves that we have fulfilled the law in its intellectual and spiritual implications." Humanitarianism, fraternity, liberalism, democratic spirit, internationalism, the respect for reason, intellectuality, the will to continue human culture - these are the elements he posits as parts of this spirit, emphasising that his approach is tailored to Hungarian conditions.

Back to Jewishness; Komor announces the direction and the aim but he leaves unclear the how and the how far. He concludes that we need "the ethical commandments of the Jewish idea", the programme of "live and write as a Jew" if we wish to see an end to the schism between Hungarians and Jews, and if we wish to see the latter occupy their rightful place in Hungarian culture .

Segregation and the consequent universalism. Do not marry strangers, do not cook the lamb in its mother's milk, divide the holy from the everyday, the clean from the unclean, be strictly different - and identical with yourself, separate and keep separate, choose so that you may be chosen but your separation as part of the chosen nation should shift into a universal salvation when the sheep is to graze with the lion. This is the Jewish

paradox. This is that stimulating world view which emerges from the traditional texts. Behind its all-encompassing, hair-splitting system of regulations Primo Levi claimed to hear the self-ironic laugh of the sages who made the law. He was wrong.

The mode of thinking inherent in the model is far from being characterised by humour. It was the necessity of survival that sealed this potentially hermetic system of prohibitions and commandments apostrophised as religious laws so unbreakably tight. Yet it always kept the freedom of interpretation in the dialogue

*A Jew I call somebody  
who is a member of this  
community through origin  
or conversion, but from  
a literary point of view  
I would also include those  
who, although converting  
to other religions, or  
hiding, have the referential  
component palpable in the  
tissue of their work.*

of commentary attached to the main text in the undisturbable frames of the main theses. The assumption of trying to make easy for consumption that which is hard to digest characterises not its object so much as the secularised intellectual.

Artistic truth and the norms of religious law do not necessarily coincide in modern works of literature. The deliberate, black and white moral view of the latter cannot be held as a measure to the text which is built out of that which is. Writers depict and confront and their attitude can only indirectly mediate moral values even if it is a lack, an absence that is represented. Through the device of catharsis our sympathy and pity go to them who fall but through their destiny they also suggests to us, who, too, are fallible: "Change your life!"

The desire to mend the world, to glue together its broken truth is known in Jewish tradition as *tikkun olam*. When András Komor talks of fulfilling the com-

mandments "in their spiritual implications", then beside his self-justification he is also trying to justify this detour. To resolve that paradox of artistic freedom and religious truth which a Jewish author suffers from. Instead of (the letter of) the law he only considers the spirit of the law worth keeping even though the spirit of this law includes the norm of literal adherence. It demands the body as well as the spirit, practice as well as principles. The name and that which is named make up one whole between them. And if only one aleph is lost from the four Hebrew letters of *truth* what we are left with means only: *death*.

Those who hold the integrity of the work important but also respect the tradition and look on themselves in spite of the creative sovereignty as members of the community become caught in a conflict. In psychology the coexistence of incompatible contents in consciousness is called cognitive dissonance, which the mind can only process with a degree of self-deception.

There is no doubt that Komor touched on the most difficult questions with a healthy instinct but it is also undeniable that he falls short of fulfilling the task he set for himself.

It is an understandable expectation that between the creative author and the absolute there should be no other authority. Nothing and no one should be able to limit the sovereignty of the author or the autonomy of the work. Nothing should chain the author down when facing the blank sheet of paper, neither collective expectations, nor the network of religious laws. What the author has to say cannot be subjugated to either of these even though the background community in our case often confronts the person who is depicting it.

In a writer the will to freedom is understandable. For a Jewish writer living in diaspora the main obstacle is not so much the disapproval, resistance or, in the worst case the exclusive rejection of their environment but the deep experience of dilemmas that emerge more keenly as a consequence of their situation, their personality, their mutually limiting, rival commitments.

At first sight, the absolute boundary of their activity coincides with the boundary

of public morality based on the tradition. To restore a disturbed order in the world is a moral act. But a literature aiming at a direct justification of commandments or a display of moral fables is poor literature. And in the time of modernism, moreover, post-modernism, in the age of deconstruction, the work does not necessarily suggest a moral truth or health or any unease at the lack of a solid order. It does not restore anything but rather it talks about disintegration, dissolution, or simply considers the whole of this framework irrelevant and its attention is only occasionally devoted to an emblematic signalling of this absence. But after a while textual literature becomes exhausted, empty, comes to an end, because when the subject of representation is itself or its medium, i.e. language, this contemplation of the navel gives a cramp to the neck. This then could be the *caesura* which puts a limit to the Jewish literature and those who cultivate it because in this literature the subject matter is still man, even if the stylistic devices have been touched and influenced by post-modernism.

How could this gap be bridged? How could the writer justify to himself of herself that approach which is most painful to those to whom and about whom it is written, for whom it is primarily produced? How will the writer break their own chains so that it becomes possible simply to concentrate on the subject matter and to create the conditions for producing literature that is good and true even when measured with a universal standard?

The prophet's role model is given, acting against the outdated spirit of the times. In declining periods of civilisation, and it is indubitable that the current diasporic Jewry also bears marks of this, it is justified to speak out against smug public morality since it fails to fulfil its role, as it is lenient toward hollow forms. The prophet can paint an annihilating parable. He can accuse, criticise with open severity, he can practise devastating irony and sarcasm; positive thinking is no longer compulsory for him. He can destroy without even offering to put anything new in the place of that which he has destroyed. But today the role of the prophet and the knower of the law should merge. They should appear together, facing the indifference that the majority of existing Jewry show toward their own essence.



This is certainly a conservative view of literature, not from the point of view of

style but of the functional role of literature. In the totality of works it sees the (self-)portrait of a community and in its continuity and this means more than documentation: through its reflection it also shapes the features of the original. It is conservative in the same way in which the Jewish life style and mode of thinking also assumes a basic stance of protective loyalty to the tradition.

A traditionalist communal view and responsibility, the representation of typical existential dilemmas, an emphatic sociographic background, severe social criticism but also a protective anxiety. If all these features are present at the same time, it is no exaggeration to talk of a *ruralistic national literature* (in the Hungarian sense). It does not matter whether the majority of these people are today urban citizens and cosmopolitans, usually affluent middle class, self-supporting, liberal, individualistic agnostics and aspiring assimilants and thus want nothing to do with ruralism or if they are ghetto-dwelling deeply religious, unworldly, introverts who reject everything that is other than the (supposedly) holy scriptures, and rejects modern or fictional literature for this reason.

For the first set it is unpleasant that although they would like to merge and camouflage, their very attitude of hiding can turn them into subject matter and they will be forced to face those features in themselves which inevitably yield collectivity. For the second group contemporary depiction and tone are irrelevant if not blasphemous. The first group read it and find it outrageous, the second, even if they read it, would remain untouched by this literature. The former are not even interested in the past, the latter care for nothing else. We have gone through everything that could be gone through and we possess written memoranda of it all. It is verging on the impossible even to understand, comprehend, or to appropriate the past and its textual remains and what follows can only be tautology - thus the rejection by the latter group. Anyone who the act of literary creation commits partly to expression and publicity and partly to novelty is helplessly caught between these two extremes. The former are shocked that he reminds them what they want to forget and the environment from whom, too, they expect forgetfulness, while the latter do not in the least believe in progressive revelation, in the continuity of the Revealed Truth, in the

possibility that in our days text can be created which might add something, in its own peculiar way, to the canonised texts.

But authors are in pursuit of the new, it is in creative expression that they find the meaning of their lives. Their activity is a vanity of vanities when looked at from the point of view of tradition. Their work is an idol, a creation by a creation, *chutzpah*, blasphemous: the vainglorious apotheosis of the creator, transgression, scandal, sin. The law says, they are a created part of something, their existence a link in space and time, complete in itself, in its imperfection, in its fallible humility, destined for no more than to become a life's work, part of a community, to survive as one of the depositories of a horizontal and vertical continuity.

Literary creation definitely goes against this expectation. Not merely because it lifts man out of the passing moment and makes a creator of him, but also because it frees him from the chain, elevates him from actor to a reflecting contemplator who subsequently finds it difficult to abandon this new position. Even if later he sees himself as a part of this chain, his viewpoint is inevitably enhanced, his opinions are generated by a new set of points of view.

The writer steps out of the line (and of himself) and looks back with narrowed eyes. And of course sees everything differently than before. Only a most profound commitment can permit and oblige him to express himself in this context. For let us admit: the paradox condensed in his situation is irresolvable.



To be in and out at the same time. To respect and practice the tradition, to follow it until it begins to act as a restriction in the freedom of thought and speech that is necessary for creative existence. To respect it even then, but speak out openly against prohibition concerning creative work, to ignore the behaviour norms and taboos that seep down from religious spirit and practice to everyday thinking because the *is* designates a wider field than the *ought*, and literature is manifestly about the former while the latter usually just lurks behind the text or serves as a reminder through its absence. This is a profound conflict: the religious law designates an ideal state while creativity must reckon with the fallibility of the existing one. Rooted in the depth of the past, the prescribed order, the optimum of behaviour promises a part in the world to come, while

through its narration the art work tries to gain an understanding of the present and the way that leads to it. The former needs humility and trust, the latter, however, needs humility but also self-confidence.

To remain part of the community but to detach oneself as a creative individual from all prejudices, inhibitions and conventions and to show individual and community as they really are. To continue the story, the great narrative which is alive and is at the same time a fixing power. Can we really say that we have gone through everything that can be gone through?

In an ideal case art-works can be said to have causes while Jewishness has an aim. To chose and to be chosen are characteristic of both. But freedom and commitment are mixed in different proportions in the two. One must balance between them without self-deception, one should not use the commitment to the one for excusing shortcomings with regard to the other beyond the minimum that is necessary for an untamished existence.



No text must suffer because of the anxiety that makes the hand which writes tremble. The creation of the artistic imagination must not be damaged. Its aesthetic truth must never be doubted because the ghetto recognises itself in the mixture of reality and fiction. We are the ghetto, we live in it and it lives in us, and even if we have opened its gates and become integrated in the majority society, there is no shame in admitting: we exist through it.

It is possible to circumscribe a Jewish life knowledge and experience, but it is not possible to admit this without a sacrifice. Our literature destroys our idealised portrait of ourselves - this, too, is an idol - but through this it can help us gain a more disciplined and subtle self-image.



In the name of *achavat Israel* - the love of Israel - the ethos of the community must not eliminate individuality and criticism. It was the moral crutch of the unsupported, never clearly defined principle that Hannah Arendt rejected in her discussion with Gershom Scholem about the Eichmann trial. Is this a debate of urban versus rural, cosmopolitan versus national? It is, if you like, and both parties are right to some degree. We must not expect confessions from each of them. But if necessary, it must be: I love it *therefore* I criticise it.

Would anyone argue with the ency-

ÁGNES GERGELY

## *Beneath Pannonia's Sky*

*The road turns by the presshouse and a white mud village greets me budding to the right*

*I tread the hill roads polished blue and see with an intruder's curiosity*

*there's not a soul just trees and tidy lines of bumble homes with aerials and vines*

*past wine vaults and beneath Pannonia's sky a gray prophet, little donkey, ambles by*

*he waves back with a mother-of-pearl ear the prosperous plebeian class dwelled here*

*when carts of travelling merchants left a track along these gentle hills five centuries back*

*calm bakers of brown loaves and honey-bread they wached above the mounting thunderbead*

*behind them a castle resounded with music and dance the Renaissance with Italian elegance*

*and roads took root wherever their carts would ply their trundling trade beneath Pannonia's sky -*

*in his brown caftan tightly wrapped, one day my own forefather might have come this way*

*and where I stand, he might have glanced and slowed his pace to preach with caution by the road*

*perhaps that other one, more sober, plain made fancy saffian footwear by the lane*

*his wife with amber eyes surveyed the ground and kept her guard against a hostile bound*

*a toddler played about her gathering herbs from these very slopes and she would sing*

*their psalms and their tanned leathers' smell would fill the air and travel far beyond the bill*

*surviving winters, with the gales they flew and from the maggots' belly rose anew*

*these lands caress them softly like a shroud they came unasked and graceful like a cloud*

*they were, as I protect and hold to my own soil, protected by Pannonia's sky -*

*both ways the road winds blue beyond your span so leave this land and run, run if you can.*

**Translated by Thomas Land**

clopaedic inventory of sophisticatedly complex failings described with exemplary objectivity in the Tanach?

Innumerable cases of possessiveness, jealousy, fraud, hatred and violence, the total catalogue of human frailty is paraded in the scrolls. And do we need sources any clearer than the collections of laws and the commentaries? The text shows a mirror of moderate scepticism to its present and future reader: this is it, this is what we are like. In that place and at that time there was no taboo on speech, no *cherem* for the speaker, no writer's cramp as to what a Jew should or should not say about Jews and there was no dilemma: what will the audience think of all this?

Do not praise evil but show it. In order to change, first I must grow ashamed of my failings, must be made aware of my errors. In order to blush I must first understand them. And if I do not realise them by myself, or if I do not obey the benevolent word of warning, then throw it in my face when I do something wrong. Shame me, write about me as I am.

Is it paradoxical to assume these sentences? Certainly, it is. Who could, who would be so foolish as to utter them of his own accord? And who does not know in the bottom of his soul, that he should utter them?

A nation that carries the message of thousands of years of persecution in its common consciousness which it passes on, through inevitable distortion, from generation to generation is likely to assume a victim's self-image and to become lenient towards itself. It only expects a cure for its wounds, it becomes lazy, forgetting the obligational side of the original testament, no longer wanting even to be the chosen people. Instead of a mission they want redress in this world for the wrong they have suffered in this world. As the walls of the ghetto fall down, the people break out and as they have always been ostracised for *what* they are, now they want to know *who* they are, they want to be somebody. They want to prove themselves, to their people and the world. They hoard and make safe but with good reason because they are still frightened but know that sometimes money can buy life. Then in shame, and later in ignorance and in the

resulting indifference the bondage falls from their memory, and they become willing to forget the past and their own essence.

Even if their eyes are not blinded by obscuring scales and even if they stop in this mad haste and become aware of the typical shortcomings that history has bred in them, of those reflexes which are becoming mass personality marks, even so they believe that periodically repeated threats makes it unnecessary or even sinful to make self-critical utterances as this could encourage and support accusations from the outside world. With their taboos and mainly with the taboo that affects talking about these taboos they enhance the problem by covering it up. By virtue of this consideration they increase, as a matter of fact, they crown their contradictory features, they stigma-

*Hungarian intellectual life,  
in agreement with  
"international norms",  
is in a state of negation.  
The existence of modern  
secular Jewish literature is  
universally negated by  
Jewish and non Jewish  
writers and theoreticians.*

tise themselves and even those approaching them with empathy will recoil from their stiffness.

The evocative depiction of a mass that bears characteristic features even in its heterogeneity cannot do without a certain social critical angle and this inevitably creates a clash of interests between artistic creation and its object. Even though the reader knows that they have shortcomings, they are scared by their distorted mirror image, they feel fear and antagonism if they receive from one of their own people a representation that hitherto only came from exaggerated and evil-intended degrading campaigners and one that threatens to awaken their latent self-hate by the core of truth that they inevitably sense. Seeing dreadfully faithful details they lose all sense of reality. They smell

danger and cry traitor. But in fact this picture is far from being identical with that one, the entirety is about something totally different and even if *they* over there happen to read it, in itself it is insufficient to be used as murderous ideology. While the latter can be used deliberately to inflame hatred and mockery, the former tries to be the bitter pill of medicine needed for recovery.

A desanctified shrine is better demolished than used in its spoilt state. In its place a new one can and should be built at a later stage. At the moment the demolition is on the agenda, so that later we can build or, to put it more gently, some demolition is needed in order to be able to lay new foundations in place of the rubble that will be cleared away. We need to get rid of the worst of idols: we need to exorcise from our deepest souls the remnants of our own glorified self-image, our intact perfection, the remains of our martyr consciousness, so that we can become inheritors to that unselfishness that Béla Tábor talks about with such sublime humility in the pages of *The Two Ways of the Jews*.

The view of literature which assumes a (Jewish) literature ultimately didactic in its intent and would like to build it upon the central values of the tradition is a conservative view but it believes that the tone and the mode of representation need to be modern and radical in order to represent and map out as comprehensively as possible all the acute, perennial conflicts of the problematic. Need I remark that this, too, is a paradox?

When a Jewish writer writes or speaks or makes a public appearance, he must be aware that by his words the whole of the Jewish community is being judged.

A Jewish writer must compulsorily overcome the inhibition that follows from the fact that when he writes or speaks or makes a public appearance, by his words the whole of the Jewish community is being judged or at least his words are contrasted with the whole of the existing Jewry. He must not select his words or turn the way of his thoughts run with this in mind. He must achieve a first person narrative, relinquishing nothing of his Jewishness but shedding the entire super-ego of self-censorship according to the points of view of this Jewishness.

To live in a community, to practice *mitzvot*, to believe in and act for the sur-

vival of the legacy but at the same time to distance oneself from the paralysing chains of thought all the way to objectivity, to detach oneself from the suffocating expectations and concentrate on the core of the present, to present faithfully the visible and the invisible that is hiding in the mosaic stones of details, which can only be seen from the totality of the work that is wiser than the author, to present and confront with painful severity.

The resolution is scorched with a double seal of dual commitments. The loyalty of the individual to the ideals of the disintegrating community and of the writer to reality. Of the no backing down and of the not letting go. Thus it becomes possible to forge a virtue out of trouble, the permanent existential state of paradox as a source of a continual creative dilemma becomes elevated to an *ars poetica*.

**3** Hungarian intellectual life, in agreement with "international norms", is in a state of negation. The existence of modern secular Jewish literature is universally negated by Jewish and non Jewish writers and theoreticians. The trend of self assimilation manifests itself here too. Even writers who in their private life carry a positive identity and even take occasional part in Jewish public affairs, betray the feeling that it is an insult to their literary activity if it is adorned by the adjective "Jewish". To be a Jewish writer is not an attractive role and they are even reluctant to have their works characterised as such. Owing to its partly benevolent and misguided liberal recipient attitude, and fearing the possible accusation of anti-Semitism, but even sometimes even driven by national pride, non Jewish literary criticism is unwilling to form subsystems on the basis of shared identifying marks which go beyond language. This is in spite of the fact that if a text belongs to a subsystem that does not prevent it from being a member of the larger system also. Still, if somebody publicly and repeatedly appears in conjunction with Jewish subject matter, first they become subject to whispers on the agora of the polis of literary life, critical life begins to gossip about them, and finally, sub rosa, they become hemmed in, categorised, and stigmatised. Even this is of course, a self contradiction yet it is not a figment of the authorial imagination. Its reality is created by a distorted public consciousness.

The over politicised atmosphere in which the "rule of fidgety fears" is still

GÉZA RÖHRIG

# From the Fictional Hasidic Stories Series

## About truth

Once somebody turned to the Rebbe of Grujavitz and asked: "Master, why isn't everything reversed? Why isn't temptation written with tiny Hebrew letters in huge books? And why isn't the truth walking braless on the street?"

The Rebbe laughed at the pupil. "Why are you dissatisfied? The world is even better than you want. Don't you know that the truth is written with tiny Hebrew letters in the books and the truth is the one who walks braless on the street!"

## About cowardice

In 1946, the Rebbe of Grujavitz took the boat to America. After his daily prayers, he gazed at the ocean. "This is how it is, and as long as it is like this, we do not have any chance," he said once as he was leaning over the railing.

"The sharks knife the water and the dolphins should sew it together with their needle movements. That is how God ordered it. But tell me, my sons, why do the dolphins flee from the sharks? The face of the water is full of wounds, full of scars, full of blood."

## Confession

On his deathbed, the Rebbe of Grujavitz sat up suddenly, recalling a moment from his imprisonment in Buchenwald. "Once, when I fell down there, a Kapo leaped at me and began to hit my head with a vine stick. My stubbornness got the better of me, and I thought: "Beat me as much as you want. It's useless." Instead, I should have thought: "Maybe you will be successful, my son."



Géza Röhrig was born in 1967 in Budapest. The title of his first book of poems is *hamvasztókönyv*, which came out in '95, published by *Múlt és Jövő*. His second book of verses entitled *fogság*, came out last year, published by *Széphalom Könyvműhely*.

## Speech and action

One year before his death, the Rebbe of Grujavitz developed cancer. He lost his voice, so he had to use a throat microphone. "I am content", he often said in the metallic voice of his machine, "because, for the first time in my life, I can realize the true unity of speech and action. The Almighty provided that I cannot even say a word without moving my hands."

## The stone

When the Rebbe of Grujavitz was on his deathbed, his seven-year-old grandson asked him a question: "Grandpa, a boy from the neighborhood asked me in the park if there really is a God who can do anything. Can this God create such a big stone that even He himself cannot lift it up afterwards? Grandpa, what can I answer him?"

"Tell him that God can. And that stone is me now", breathed out the Grujavitzer.

often felt, does not provide an easy chance for clarification. The question itself regards more than pure literary art and teleological creative work. There are a number of works which provide give away signs precisely because of the intention to hide or through the unconscious resonances of a psyche influenced by its surroundings. Those who are frightened try to escape, those who are trying to escape are sublimating their anxieties.

Several writers who are Jewish by origin protest against such categorisation because they believe, in fact mistakenly, that Jewishness as a national identity and as a world view with one root but a number of branches can be negated. The term Jewish is in their eyes a term of privation which bars them from universal relevance. Their negative self-image is a compound of the person subject to persecution, of the survivor, and of the potential victim. Perhaps in secret they even see themselves through anti-Semitic spectacles, interiorising the distorted images of Jews which are common currency.

We are looking at a psychological wall which was erected from two sides and fixed with the mortar of the last half century. Schematic critical practises and the readiness to classify cause fastidiously individualistic writers to evade or even rigidly reject any labels whatsoever. They understandably fear that the adjective becomes an indelible stigma which can later be abused. Their later works might be viewed against the background of their earlier opuses and confessions, he always writes the same thing, has only one topic, go the dismissive whispers of imagined or real voices. If such writers divert from their original topic they are blamed again, saying that they should stick to their subject. They should only write about what they understand, what they have already found to be proven ground. In the history of Hungarian literature there have been examples of this latter expectation with the outright intent of creating a ghetto, with an excluding and "race protecting" intention, as opposed to the criticisms which we mentioned in the introduction, and which in the twenties and thirties of this century welcomed works with a Jewish subject and encouraged the authors to expand and deepen their knowledge of this unique area.

Exclusion and stigmatisation might frighten off those who waver. It encourages attitudes of camouflage and it coun-

teracts the natural state in which all writers excavate the innermost stratum of their personality, from the deep layers of their consciousness, and allow the densest of their existential experience to come to the surface.

It would be desirable if a Jewish writer wrote about Jewish themes on the basis of the experiences they undergo, hopefully with a deeper knowledge and with a functioning complexity of the experiential world, differently from the practice we find today in the literature of the Hungarian language. But for this it would be necessary for them to know the community, perhaps even, *horribile dictu*, live inside it, in order to have a view of its cross-section and to gain the courage to unveil its frailties - For we are guilty too, as others are, (Miklós Radnóti) -, and to maintain the courage to carry on living in it. As we have said earlier: to demolish and build at the same time.

If it is true that from a higher point of view the writer is writing one work all his life, running the world through the filtering system of his personality then in the case of a Jewish writer even those works which are not strictly speaking about Jewishness, voice a particular dialect of existence to those who interpret according to the Gadamerian interpretative principles which his uniquely characteristic of the author and are background. And in this case love and dying, shoelaces and constipation, careless laughter and broken sobbing, the tasting of a meal, or the smelling of a flower speak as confessions: this is how a Jew loves, this is how a Jew dies or ties his shoelaces or struggles with his constipation, is glad or sad, this is how a Jew eats a meal or smells a flower. This is a transcontextual surplus but at the same time an ultimate boundary. It assumes that though the work speaks to everybody, it still has an undercurrent which carries an untravelable metalinguistic surplus for those that share the same hinterland. It is not that they understand more of it but that to them it is self-evident. Even if, to quote a piquant source, "They don't know it, they just do it".

This, however, is not the Jewish writer's problem. The Jewish writer is busy struggling with the paradoxes. And also with the problem of how to carry over into practice all that has been sketched out in this text. How to present in a valid and up-to-date tone the world in which an ancient law presents the inhab-

itant of post-modernism with as weighty a moral dilemma as it did to those who lived two and a half thousand years ago, the citizens of the diaspora of those days, except that today it adds to these all of the doubts and new truths of the time that passed since then.

The answer is uncertain. But some time you should listen to the violin and the clarinet, the "hovering rhythms" of pain and mockery, mourning for death and boundless joy, the readiness to leap, the attendant contemplation and the way in which the two merge into each other in a change of tone and tempo so that millennia of prayer and the jazz from the end of this millennium assume a timeless expressing power and then we can give the name klesmer literature to that which can express all this with the power of the written word.

Loyalty, freedom, respect for the tradition and radical objectivity, commitment to the part but only to the whole. Who cares for all this and who has ever cared? Marginal problems, we could say. They were just as unimportant sixty years ago except to a few committed uncommitted people. The literature determined by this way of thinking has had very few writers and there are hardly any today. The discussion of this paradox has meant little to most people but its real tension is generated by the fact that it proliferates even when no more than one intellect is writhing in its grip.

In the Jerusalem Temple the *cohen* was allowed once a year, on the day of *Yom haKippurim* to utter the Unutterable Name before he entered the Holy of Holies.

The Jewish writer's task is none other but to know what the law of religion orders, that according to tradition he who utters the Name is struck dead except on the above named occasion. Thus the writer must guard his sanctity to the end and to strive for nothing else but to try again and again to utter the Name.

András Komor touched on the centre of the paradox with a healthy instance but he offered no therapy for it. We, today can do nothing other than go on refining and continuing his suppositions. His memory inspires us to apply all our strength to the question. As did Sisyphus against the rock or Jacob against the angel.

*Translated by Orsolya Frank*

\* Attila József, "Hazám" (My Country). Translator's note.