

The second set of sources that the author examines are poems written into autograph albums dating from this century. Keszeg has examined about fifty manuscript albums of this kind from the area around Torda, marginal forms of the album *amicorum* genre, as he rightly points out. Formally, they resemble their prototypes of old: each entry starts on a separate page, there are "social" pages and "funny" pages, a lot of "secret" messages (usually written so as to be concealed by folding over the top right-hand corner), and there is generally a pocket at the back of the album for "keepsakes". That the albums were, in fact, in "use" is indicated by the high incidence of retorts and rejoinders. One is surprised by how naturally the bilingual texts flow. Unfortunately, the author gives no indication as to what percentage of the texts examined were bilingual, nor is one's curiosity satisfied on the score of the kinds of illustrations the albums contain. Still, what Vilmos Keszeg gives us of these albums will prove a meticulously presented treasury for anyone interested in Transylvanian cultural history.

The author also presents the texts found on two hundred and seventy splash-guards, printed or embroidered textile wall hangings. (In Hungary, thanks to the efforts of Ákos Kovács, his exhibits in Hatvan, Eger and Budapest and the catalogues published in connection with them, the pictures and texts on hangings of this type have become virtually paradigm topics of research for sociologists and ethnographers.) Keszeg's account of these texts, too, is absolutely scrupulous. It is, however, with some satisfaction that he notes the declining popularity of the genre, for which he feels a surprising degree of disdain—not quite the spirit in which one would expect an empirical researcher to approach his material.

The final set of data is introduced in the short chapter entitled "Other Genres". A miscellaneous sampler of amateur verses found on grave-stones, in letters home from soldiers, in eulogies, and in homespun parodies, the chapter is just enough to

make one hope that the author will soon have enough material for a more thorough presentation, and that this will be placed in the context of his findings to date.

The penultimate chapter, "The Written Word as Speech Event", is a discussion of the material introduced in terms of speech act theory. The "Conclusions" chapter contains the author's views on folk literature, and would benefit a great deal from his ad-ducing empirical illustrations of his points. The Bibliography at the back of the book is of interest primarily as an indication of which works the author has had access to, and which not.

To sum up: The volume shows the author to be a fine observer with no pet theories to mar the lucidity of his presentation. The generalizations he does make—mostly in the last two chapters—are helpful, and do not obtrude.

There is, however, one more point that needs to be made about his entire enterprise. If we understand the title of the book—"On the Borderline of Folklore"—metaphorically, then, naturally, we can have no quarrel with it. If, however, we take it literally, we might well have second thoughts about just where this "line" has been drawn. For while we might concede that the autograph album entries penned by children today bear very little resemblance to traditional folklore texts, on what grounds do we locate the collections of rhymed exhortations spoken by best men at weddings or the verses inscribed on headstones on the borderlines of folklore? If folk hymns and folk prayers are the subjects of folklore proper, then why not the texts worked onto splash-guards—given, of course, that they originate in the same social milieu. Written folklore of this kind, I would suggest, is every bit as much mainstream folklore as a lament or a ballad. For folklore is much more complex, much more vigorous and much more dynamic than we are wont to think. Particularly in Transylvania, where its traditional forms—stories, ballads, dances and traditional wedding rituals—are so alive, there is a temptation to regard written forms as secondary, or even

peripheral. This, however, would be a mistake.

Most of the material Vilmos Keszeg introduces can thus safely be considered to be folklore proper. He is right, however, in reminding us that as written sources, they are akin to non-folklore data. When, about a decade ago, Hungarian folklorists began to investigate student customs and rites, graffiti and other contemporary phenomena, critics maintained that this was only because there was no traditional folklore left in Hungary. Vilmos Keszeg's data from Aranyosszék will, I trust, make them think again. The genres he speaks of are legitimate folklore with a past, and most likely, also a future.

VILMOS VOIGT

## Reading in Eastern Europe: Publishers' Anxieties in Hungary

A translation of Miklós Tamás' article, "Glaube, Liebe, Aufstand. Lesen in Osteuropa: Sorgen und Note der Verlage in Ungarn" (Faith, Love, Rebellion. Reading in Eastern Europe: Publishers' Anxieties in Hungary)

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 15 January 1992

The West seems to be fed up with Eastern Europe. Enthusiasm fanned by the peaceful fight for freedom in Leipzig, Bucharest, Tiflis or Vilna has, confronted by growing nationalist tendencies, been replaced by perplexity. One would be happy to turn one's back on an Eastern Europe that had been frivolously awakened, and to put Sleeping Beauty back in her glass coffin. But the glass coffin lies in pieces, the fair complexion of the maiden turned blotchy in her long mortal sleep, and her smile is toothless. And yet it is this maiden who now longingly embraces her fair prince. They belong together.

There is some consolation. The bride does have some unexpected—or forgotten—charms. Thus the Hungarians—in spite of the economic crisis—spend more than two per cent of their annual income on books, placing them amongst the front runners in the world. Even social science tomes have print runs of three to fifteen thousand, the editions are often larger than those of similar volumes in English, French or German.

Literary clashes have ever been the avatars of the social struggle in Hungary. Early in the 19th century the literary élite of the Age of Reform initiated the social renewal of Hungary, language renewal acting as a sort of overture. The 1848 Revolution did not start with the occupation of public buildings or political speeches, but in a literary café, and with the recitation of a poem on the steps of the National Museum—like a literary soirée. A hundred years later, too, the rebellion against the Stalinist dictatorship got going as a literary movement, leading to the 1956 Revolution. Furthermore, the greatest controversy which split Hungarians this century also started as a debate between writers, and continues as the conflict of *narodnik* (conservative, étatist) and westernizing (modernizing, liberal) ideas.

The publication of serious books still meets with the heightened attention and traditional sympathy of the intelligentsia. The market for good books has not changed in the course of the years. It has neither grown nor shrunk. At first sight this gives rise to confidence, nevertheless the publishing of high quality books is in a serious crisis. Potential readers in Hungary are not the equivalent of the educated middle class in the West: demand is there, but it is not effective demand in the economic sense. In the past forty years the authorities could afford to satisfy this non-effective demand by publishing large editions of cheap, heavily subsidised, books.

The price that had to be paid was censorship—certain works could not be published—and publication in no

way related to market conditions. Copyright formally rested with the authors but they could dispose over it only within Hungary and, lacking an alternative, they had to accept the conditions set by the state publishing houses. In exchange they enjoyed a modest fee, membership of the Writers' Union, and the status of writer in an essentially feudal society. But state publishing houses had little scope for movement themselves. They had political duties and they had to use the finances allotted to them to fulfill a plan which was unrelated to the demand for books. The result was great quantities of books destined for early pulping but also valuable works which, given market conditions, would not have been accessible to impecunious readers. It was only natural that state publishing houses should be grotesquely over-staffed. Sometimes a publisher's editor had to look after no more than a single volume for a whole year.

The collapse of the single-party system and freedom of the press meant that publishing houses could be founded ad lib. There are about four hundred of them in Hungary today. The end of state censorship went with the end of state subsidies, and state publishing houses fighting for survival (some have already failed along with private firms) must pay their way. But quality literature does not pay: costs of production are also now "Western" and the financial resources of readers have stayed "Eastern". The above mentioned distinguished readership is not made up of upwardly mobile *nouveaux riches*, or of turncoat former party bureaucrats who managed to transfer state property to their own bank accounts, but of salaried intellectuals, students and retired people, people hardest hit by the recession and inflation. As a result quality books have disappeared from the shelves, for only cookery books, travel guides, thrillers and pornography can be cheaply and profitably produced in print runs of up to 200,000.

This led to the absurd situation that the key books of European learning disappeared precisely when dictatorship came to an end and sermons

about the return to Europe were being preached at every street corner. Some kinds of books have of course been sound business since the turn of events. The following three tides have so far flooded the shores of the Hungarian book market. The first was that of political literature. This included 1956 books, the literature of the Imre Nagy Group and of the Gulag, a delayed Kremlinology, revelations about the KGB as well as the memoirs of men prominent in the Kádár regime. This tide began shortly before the re-burial of Imre Nagy in June 1989 and lasted to the autumn of that year. Early in 1990 the boom looked like reviving thanks to books on Rumania and Transylvania but it all ended, together with the enthusiasm for politics, in post-coital tristesse and nausea.

The second tide was that of hitherto prohibited pornography, which went with the mushrooming of newly erected bookstalls. But bums and bosoms and other charms could only cover up the Christian National reality of the new Hungary up to the end of 1990. Then they were banished by decree from public display to special facilities where those interested are discreetly catered for. The third tide of books then irrigated the parched Hungarian wasteland with pious thoughts. Starting with the winter of 1990/91 the smell of incense rose from the subways where itinerant booksellers had found a temporary home. It goes without saying that these were not theological tomes but *bondieuserie* in print. High-tide was the time of Pope Woytila's visit in the summer of 1991, but the flood has since receded.

A national publishing house, to be founded and supported by the government, was suggested as a way of coping with the situation. It would be headed by outstanding men and women who—enjoying the confidence of the government—would be the most competent to decide what would serve the spiritual hygiene of the nation. Furthermore a World Bank fact-finding mission appeared in mid-May 1991 and closely investigated the book-market. There was no natural law, it was said at the time,

which prescribed the existence of scientific, scholarly or literary texts in Hungarian. Hungarians could well do without for a while. Nevertheless there was a prospect of credits—not for publishers, but to support effective demand for books. Money was to be made available to students and libraries. Distribution would most likely be by people appointed by the government.

This well-intentioned idea, however, implied the threat of a centralized management of resources. There was no guarantee, what is more, that students and intellectuals in need would spend their book-allowance on books rather than on a meal. Supporting libraries is a good cause but Hungary is a small country. The acquisitions of a few libraries could not shore up the publishers of quality books.

What, then, can be done for quality books in Hungarian which cannot hold their own at present on a free market? Publishers should not be helped in bulk, particular projects should be supported instead. This would ensure a broadening of resources, and counteract the management of the money flow by politicians. A good idea might be an international foundation for intellectual exports and imports in Eastern Europe. Application could then be made to it for support for particular projected books. The trustees of such a foundation could possibly consult outside experts when allotting funds. Naturally such trustees cannot be perfect either and, whatever the decision, there are bound to be accusations of prejudice. However, since this would be an international foundation that made its decisions on merit and not exclusively on market considerations, the threat of a given national or ideological dominance would be minimized.

Another feasible way might be cooperation between publishers. The potential market in Hungary is large and stable. A growing proportion of Hungarians reads books in foreign languages. There is a kind of cooperation which might well demand investments by the Western party but which would prove profitable in the long run: they could arrange for the

translation of the most important works jointly with the Hungarian or other East European publishers, bearing part of the costs. What they would gain is publicity, for their authors as well, which would come in handy when demand grows later. A third way could be to make books available to a Hungarian and other East European readership in the language of origin but at greatly reduced prices, since selling at Western prices would be hopeless from the start.

It is important that we are able to persuade our friends in the West to invest in the intellectual infrastructure of Eastern Europe, even though such investments would not pay such quick returns as those in catering establishments. Such intellectual investments are of great importance. If ties with Western culture are loosened, and the arteries of the intellectual blood flow are clogged, the reforms might well find themselves in jeopardy, and with them all those forces which act as the motor of the process of democratisation. Swinging clubs and rattling machine-guns look ominously close. Paradoxically this threat is the best argument for good books and for a more intensive social osmosis between East and West. In the last resort those ideas will rule which also dominate the bookshelves.

## BUKSZ, Summer 1992.

The 1991 Summer issue of *BUKSZ* featured the article "Precision and irony" by Adám Nádasdy, a frequent contributor to both the Hungarian and the English versions of this journal.

On the surface his subject was a minor matter, the Hungarian pronunciation of great European names, but he really meant the relationship between great and local cultures. In the present issue, in a rejoinder to a reader's letter, he employs a metaphor to clarify his meaning. "International culture is like a fast train which only takes on passengers in cities. From one's own neck of the woods one has to take a local train to these city stations."

The simile is self-explicatory as regards Nádasdy's subject but not so as regards *BUKSZ* as a whole. The nature of the local train makes a world of difference. Is it a single track commuter train which only fortuitously links up with the Orient Express? The train which a dutiful railwayman can shunt onto a side track, coming to a dead-end at the command of a single telegram? Nádasdy's metaphor can be further extended. Of what use is it if local trains—after the endless delays of so many years—are suddenly accelerated? Can we make a connection we have missed once already? Culture cannot, of course, be compared to Grandpa's funeral. One may arrive late but one can still make something of it.

Let us return to the railroad metaphor. The distance which the international express trains and the slow local trains actually have to cover matters. That was the essence of a debate—reviewed in *Budapest Review of Books*, 1992/1, pp. 24-25 between Zsigmond Pál Pach, Péter Hanák and Gábor Gyáni. Pach's rejoinder now closes it. Unfortunately the discussion did not really prove fruitful. It is not just that participants had to agree to differ but that the question of the deviation of Eastern Europe cannot any longer

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