Enigma
Selected Essays in Humanities

Author
Balázs Kántás Ph.D.
Senior Archivist, Senior Principal Research Fellow/Research Professor
National Archives of Hungary, Budapest, Hungary

Rubicon Publications

Published By: *Rubicon Publications*

4/4A Bloomsbury Square,
Bloomsbury Square,
London, WC1A 2RP, England
Email: rubiconpublications@gmail.com

Authors: *Balázs Kántás Ph.D.*

Edition: *1st*

Publication Year: *2022*

ISBN: *978-1-913482-04-6*

Book DOI: *https://doi.org/10.33545/rp.book.40*

Pages: *283*

Price**:** £ *18*

Contents

Chapter - 1

The Poem Is Alive, Just Like the Authors Themselves: An Essay on the Evolution and Definition of 'The Poem as Such'

So many people tried to define the criteria, function and essence of *the poem as such* that, in fact, it is perhaps superfluous to write down anything about this topic, and it is really difficult to state anything new. Certainly, it depends on whether one approaches the poem as a literary scholar, as a writer or only as a (n average) reader, trying to grasp and to define it. There are as many ways of (poem-) reading, (poem-) writing and definitions of the concept of the poem as many people there are in the world. Furthermore, there is as many times infinite, but at least innumerably many kinds of similar or even contradictory possible ways of reading, interpretation of a given poem as many poems there are in the world.

Certainly, the present short essay will not invent anything new. However, as for its intentions, it must make an attempt to conceive a subjective, but moderate opinion about what the poem can be, how it operates, what goals it should have, from the perspective of a professional reader of literary texts.

One thing for sure, the poem is a linguistic product. It is a kind of rhythmic text, a rhythmic piece of text that mediates something in a condensed manner, metaphors, medial contents of meanings. In the case if we speak about a poem that is *alive*, that is, it can operate, is valuable in the aesthetical sense of the word (we must stress the definition all of it is very subjective, and certainly, there are non-operating, that is, bad poems that are still poems, but they are not worth much - furthermore, perhaps the majority of poems being born belong to this category!), then the poem is a text that speaks in a more condensed way than the genre of prose, in a much shorter extent, and it does all of this in such a way that the all-time reader is impressed by it. In a better case, a poem is not didactic. In contrast to the genre of prose, the genre of poetry should be characterised by the fact that it conceives its messages in as many words as unconditionally necessary, and it makes the all-time reader think about and interpret it in some manner. In

general, we speak about texts of shorter extent, but certainly we do not have to define the concept of the poem based on its extent. The poem is a very high-level, complex and encoded form of communication - in general, especially sensitive persons who are able to see behind the words read and interpret poems; therefore, we might resign from making the statement that poems that are able to communicate on a higher level are understandable to everyone. Certainly, there are different layers of interpretation, and there are occasional poems that are sometimes written for propagandistic goals, but perhaps everyone can agree with the fact that the aesthetic level of such poetic texts can be very doubtful, although it is true that this kind of poetry can also be practiced on a very high level.

So what may define the concept of the poem? The topic, the form, the content? Probably none of them, since it is possible to compose very superb poems about any topic, in any form and with any content - we may speak much more about the original, individual, creative use of language. Certainly, there is no common, wide-spread, completely valid and exact way of composing poetry, not even if it is widely known that many technical aspects of poem-writing can be learnt. There are also poems that build themselves up of well-known commonplaces, but they are not worth being spoken about. Good poems – certainly, on different levels – speak in a way as no text before them has ever spoken, they conceive some message via new poetic images, figures and phrases that has never been conceived before by any other text in such a form. Certainly, we have still stated very little - in practice, the success (fullness) of poems depends on individual cases and individual reactions of the readers. That is, there is no exact and acknowledged way of composing a good poem that speaks in an original voice. A poet is either able to do so or not, however, so much seems to be justified from the practice that it does not matter *about what* we write, but it matters *how* we do that, and how much the individual way of language use created within the frameworks of the given poem is able to approach someone else about whom we suppose that they is able to receive works of art at a fairly high level.

But how does the poem evolve if we have at least some draft-like conception about what it is at all? Probably there can be several answers to this question, and the most traditional and most common statement sounds something like this: the poet, the person who is capable of the unique and creative use of language departs from the phenomena of the outside world perceived by them, from their own experiences, they finally takes a pen, or rather in the contemporary more and more ‘technicalised’ world, a notebook

and produces a text that contains fairly condensed, enclosed, indirect elements of meaning, for the purpose of recording their own thoughts / feeling and conceiving them toward others. In an optimal case, the text produced like this has an aesthetic function – that is, it delights the reader, and it also has a *didactical* function, that is, it 'teaches' the reader – certainly, not in the negative, strained sense of the word, as we established in above –, and even if it does not teaches the reader some kind of new knowledge, but at least it makes an attempt to open up some higher contents the learning of which, that is, thinking over the text makes the reader – intellectually and emotionally – more than before. Certainly, the aesthetical and didactical functions are not unconditionally present in the poem to the same proportion. It may occur that a poem is rather beautiful, that is, it rather delights the reader, but it is much more difficult to define *what message it conceives*, and in other cases, it can also occur that a poem mediates some fairly explicit message to us, and the real weight of the text rather stands in the strong way of conceiving a message, and at the same time we think the text to be much less *beautiful*, aesthetic than being a strong statement. When we state that a poem *teaches* us, we still do not have to think about poetry that carries only some current, occasional meaning, perhaps of political content, although the poetry of representation, the poetry of public life can also represent a very high level of literature, and it can also mediate universal truths to the reader beyond the contents of (current) politics. We speak about the fact *the poem as such* makes an attempt to tell us something about which we have already known, and it only reinforces our knowledge, some of our convictions about the world, or it even highlights some fact that has probably been there in front of our eyes, but we needed an accidentally found text, a *message in the bottle* – as the great modern Russian poet, Osip Mandelstam conceived, and from whom Paul Celan also borrowed the metaphor – to realise it. It can be either some kind of political content, some universal truth of life, some state of emotions or even some traumatic experience, and we could continue it up to infinity. The essence is evidently in the fact that the poet, the subject who creates the poem takes their material from the outside world and from their own emotions and experiences, and when they starts speaking / writing, perhaps they may rightfully suppose that the all-time reader has very similar experiences and knowledge of the world to their own. Perhaps one of the criteria of the good poem is that it mediates such a content or emotion, informs us about such a situation or experience in its form of existence filled with metaphorical layers of meaning with which the readers can identify themselves in some manner. For this reason, it may be established that under no circumstances does the poem come into existence from

nothingness, via the subject of language, but it is really an artistic product that comes into being from the feelings, experiences and mind of a human being, that is, it is the (result of the creative) work of an author, of a person, and although it can be separated from the author as an autonomous work of art made of language to some degree, but at the same time, to some degree, it is also inseparable from its author. The poem is not else but the linguistic trace of the life, emotions and world-view of the author that undoubtedly belong to *the author*, but meanwhile it may belong, it belongs to *everyone else* who reads, receives, thinks over and interprets it.

Naturally, all of this does not mean at all that we should return to the interpretation of poems based on mere biographical facts in a very old-fashioned manner, simplifying the possible interpretations of poetic texts. The reception, that is, the understanding and interpretation of the text take place first and foremost from the direction of the living text itself; however, perhaps only a few people would challenge the statement according to which it is useful to know the biography, the possible experiences and motivations of the author, the historical context in which the text was born if we would like to interpret a certain literary text. That is, the author is not completely *dead* as it is stated by the commonplace of literary studies that has already become empty by today - the author is very *alive*, namely, he lives within the text, in the same way as, at least in an optimal case, the text itself also lives an autonomous life and is able to speak as a living subject, calling to the sensitive reader.

Certainly, within the frameworks of the present short essay, we have not invented or discovered any important novelty. We have not done anything else but writing down some statements about the essence, the function and the way of evolution of the poem, which someone can agree, or they can even think the very contrary. Perhaps we are also fortunate, because *the poem as such* is a kind of text about which it is very difficult to make exact statements. Therefore, it can always seem a current problem to people dealing with literature to make an attempt to define, grasp or understand the essence of poem. Even if it is not possible to describe the poem with the methods of natural sciences, with objective formulas of truth, but perhaps, together with all of the statements made about it, we can get closer to the understanding of what type(s) of text(s) we must face. In the same way, when we encounter good, aesthetically valuable poems and we are able to hear out the message of them, we get closer to what we have been really searching for: the essence of the poem as a text, as a work of art made of language.

References

1. Borges, Jorge Luis (2002): *The Craft of Verse.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
2. Szigeti, Csaba: *Néhány szó a radikális archaizmusról.* In Nappali Ház, 1992/2, 65-71.
3. Wöeres, Sándor (1986): *A vers születése. Meditáció és vallomás.* Pécs: Baranya Megyei Könyvtár.

Chapter - 2

The Motif of Damnation in Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Raven'

Introduction

The aim of the present essay is first and foremost to examine and explore the motif of damnation in the well-known poem called 'The Raven' by the early 19th-century American poet Edgar Allan Poe, within the frameworks of an in-depth analysis. The starting point is that the poem can be interpreted as a poem of damnation; that is, damnation is one of the dominant motifs within the poem. I intend to define damnation as a state or situation from which there is seemingly no escape, as a hopeless and possibly final state of mind and soul that may even manifest itself at physical, not only at a psychical level. In the present context, this state of damnation mainly derives from loss. Furthermore, this state defined as damnation can also have different degrees and may be experienced at several different levels. As a first step, I would like to briefly explore the circumstances of the composition and make an attempt to establish connections between the possible biographical circumstances of the author and the writing process of the poem, presenting possible biographical motivations that the author might have had in composing one of the most prominent pieces of his poetic work.

After the short examination of the circumstances of the composition and the possible biographical motivations, I intend to examine the poem and its narrative structure stanza by stanza, and find motifs and references among the lines that may support that damnation is one of the key motifs of the work. In addition, I would like to provide several levels of possible interpretations and reveal what different kinds of damnation may be present in the poem; in other words, to analyse how many ways the narrator telling the narrative poem might be considered to be damned. After revealing several modes and grades of damnation supposedly implied in the poem, I intend to make an attempt to provide an interpretation that may bring closer the different aspects of damnation in the poem to each other, based on the text itself and on a few biographical data and / or accepted critical approaches.

Finally, after the in-depth analysis and the exploration of the motifs that imply damnation in the poem, I will make an attempt to reach some conclusion, making some concluding remarks on the analysis of the poem.

Possible Biographical Motivation and Circumstances of the Composition

Before attempting an in-depth analysis of the poem based on the text itself, it might be worth having a few glances at the possible biographical motivations of the author and the circumstances of the composition. The starting point is that the poet's biographical events, at least partly, may have influenced the creation of the poem, and the poetic narrator can be considered partly identical with the author himself. Although it may be considered evident to a certain degree, yet these aspects might have some relevance from the point of view of interpretation.

Poe supposedly wrote 'The Raven' in 1844. It was first published on January 29, 1845, in *The New York Evening Mirror.* It became his probably most prominent poetic work already in his life, and it was reprinted and published many times after the date of the first publication. Partly due to 'The Raven', Poe became a highly popular author within the contemporary American literary circles. 'The Raven' appeared in numerous anthologies, for example, in the anthology entitled *Poets and Poetry in America,* 1847, edited by Rufus Wilmot Griswold.

As it can be read in *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe,* the poem is now analyzed in middle schools, high schools and universities, almost creating a literary myth around itself. (Kopley 193). It was named 'the poem about remembering' by Poe's contemporary William Gilmore Simms, but it is interesting to examine what role 'remembering' could play in the composition of the poem, not strictly separating Poe himself from the poetic narrator of his work.

First of all, in his essay entitled 'The Philosophy of Composition', in which he, in fact, analyses his own poem 'The Raven' and discusses the circumstances of the writing and justifies his selection of the topic, Poe openly denies that the poem was mainly inspired by biographical facts and his own memories.

However, considering only the number of the people whom Edgar Allan Poe lost in his life (although I do not get immersed in the biographical events of the author in detail, due the limited extension of the essay, the people whom he lost and the personal tragedies of his life are well-known for biographers and literary historians) before writing his poem called 'The

Raven', it may seem evident that these losses could lead the poet to a very depressed and seemingly hopeless state of soul, which could play a serious role in writing a poem about loss and the hopelessness felt for it. The dark atmosphere of the poem is mainly created by the poetic narrator's loss of his beloved called Lenore, as it is well-known, and this loss of the beloved woman may lead to a mental and psychical state similar to or identical with damnation, damnation that can be defined as a situation that is seemingly final and from which there is no escape.

In 'The Philosophy of Composition', published in the April issue of *Grahams Magazine*, 1846, as mentioned above, Poe makes an attempt to present the analysis of his own poem 'The Raven' and also to describe the circumstances of the composition. The author claims that he considered each aspect of the poem and that he had a completely conscious conception about what to write.

Although in the present essay I do not intend to analyse 'The Philosophy of Composition' in detail, I attempt to use it in order to spotlight the supposed circumstances of the composition of the poem and the poetic intention depicted in it. As it can be read in the tenth paragraph of the essay, Poe himself strongly argues that the poem was the result of conscious poetic work and he had an exact concept about what and how to write:

'The initial consideration was that of extent. If any literary work is too long to be read at one sitting, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression — for, if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and every thing like totality is at once destroyed. But since, ceteris paribus, no poet can afford to dispense with any thing that may advance his design, it but remains to be seen whether there is, in extent, any advantage to counterbalance the loss of unity which attends it. Here I say no, at once.' (Poe)

That is, as a matter of fact, Poe himself concentrates on his poetic purposes and his intended literary achievement in a seemingly impersonal voice. In the essay, his style is rather analytic than emotional, he seems to consider himself a craftsman.

Nevertheless, several literary historians and critics doubt that Poe himself thought it completely serious what he wrote down in 'The Philosophy of Composition', and it is widely considered to be a pedantic writing towards the public audience rather than an honest confession about the composition of the poem. For instance, T. S. Eliot himself also dealt with the possible circumstances of the composition and argued that 'The

Raven' rather seems to be the result of personal motivations than the result of a conscious poetic concept. As he states it:

'It is difficult for us to read that essay without reflecting that if Poe plotted out his poem with such calculation, he might have taken a little more pains over it: the result hardly does credit to the method.' (Eliot, cited in Hoffman 76)

In addition, also one of the famous biographers of Poe Joseph Wood Krutch describes the essay as, 'a rather highly ingenious exercise in the art of rationalization than literary criticism.' (98) That is, it cannot be neglected that several literary scholars tend to treat the essay as a kind of posterior attempt to rationalize the writing of a poem that was supposedly induced, at least partly, by the authors real emotions and remembrances. Furthermore, as written in the literary-historical work entitled *A History of American Literature – from Puritanism to Postmodernism*, it does not seem to be very probable that Poe really wrote 'The Raven' so thoughtfully and methodically as he claims in his own essay – the authors rather tend to suppose that the narrator of the essay is one of Poe's 'maniac' narrators that can be observed in several of his short stories; for instance, in 'The Fall of the House of Usher', 'The Black Cat', 'The Mask of the Red Death', etc (Ruland and Brandbury 651).

The present essay also tends to accept the assumption that biographical motivations played a serious role in the composition of one of Poe's most significant poems, and he did not write it completely so consciously and analytically, since it strongly seems to be an honest confession about a state of soul in which he possibly really was in the period when he wrote the poem. Biographical events in themselves may seem unimportant from the point of view of analyzing the text itself; however, this aspect will be highlighted again in a further chapter of the present essay, since the supposable poetic self-confessional character of the poem might pave the way for examining 'The Raven' as a meta-poetic work that is also meant to express the necessary damnation of poets.

After the attempt to briefly outline the possible biographical motivations of the author, henceforth I intend to explore several levels of damnation in the poem, within the framework of an in-depth analysis.

Damnation as a General Aspect within 'The Raven'

As mentioned above several times, the main aim of the present essay is to interpret the poem called 'The Raven' by Edgar Allan Poe as a poem about damnation. I intend to define the concept of damnation as a state of

suffering from which there is no escape, or a situation for which there is no solution at all, either in the physical or in the mental and psychical sense of the word. Several leitmotifs of the poem, such as midnight, winter, solitude, mourn, loss, etc. refer to the fact that the fictitious world created within the literary work and the poetic narrator enclosed in this world are surrounded by, and actually exist in the state of damnation. In the present section I intend to explore some of the motifs that might be interpreted as references to the state of damnation of the poetic speaker, mainly based on the text of the poem itself, illustrating with textual examples, then in the following section I make an attempt to find several different possible levels of damnation within the poem.

It may sound like a commonplace that the poem itself begins with a very dark and ominous overture, as it can be read immediately in the first stanza, and this ominous atmosphere is created by words and phrases such as 'midnight dreary', 'weary', 'forgotten lore', 'rapping', 'muttered'. That is, the first stanza is full of words that contribute to the dark atmosphere, and this dark atmosphere is immediately created in the beginning of the poem:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
Tis some visitor, I muttered, `tapping at my chamber door -
Only this, and nothing more. (1-6)

As it is interpreted in the same way by several critics and literary historians who have ever dealt with Poe's 'The Raven' (e. g., Artúr Elek, Charles Kopley or Jay B. Hubbel), the narrator of the poem is supposedly a young scholar who has recently lost his beloved, and in order to forget a little about his grief, he tries to be immersed in (possibly scientific) books. It is midnight and December. The whole starting situation seems to be depressed, hopeless and gloomy. As written in the first stanza, the speaker nearly falls asleep. It may even be interpreted that he is near to death; in other words, this half-sleeping state is a transitory condition between life and death, although physically he is still alive.

Until the Raven itself appears, the situation within the narrator's room is nearly static and unchanged. He only hears knocking on the chamber door and remembers his lost beloved several times, but the atmosphere is not broken. As a matter of fact, in the first six stanzas, the first third of the

poem there is not much more than a static poetic meditation and a prelude to the real events of the narration. Closely examining the first six stanzas and their atmosphere, it may be discovered that the speaker tries to escape from his mourning for Lenore and hopes for a guest who will save him from his hopeless solitude behind the knocking on the chamber door, but he is disappointed every time when he attempts to check who is outside, and everything, every single noise makes him remember only his lost Lenore.

As the poetic narrative goes forward, the Raven suddenly appears in the room of the narrator, from outside, and the only one word, the later recurring refrain of the poem is pronounced by it for the first time. All of this is depicted in the seventh stanza that can be interpreted as a turning point within the narration:

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately raven of the saintly days of yore.
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door -
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door -
Perched, and sat, and nothing more. (43-48)

The static and hopeless nature of the situation is seemingly broken up by the appearance of the bird that lands on Pallass bust. Then, at least for a while, the Raven remains silent, and the poetic narrator seems to feel better, due to the presence of the unexpected and bizarre night visitor.

The key phrase of the poem, the recurring refrain closing down every single stanza from here is pronounced at the end of the eighth stanza:

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,

`Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou, I said, `art sure no craven.
Ghastly grim and ancient raven wandering from the nightly shore -
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Nights Plutonian shore!
Quoth the raven, `Nevermore. (50-56)

The Raven answers to the question about what his name is; that is, he may name himself and does not only repeat the phrase mechanically as the poetic speaker assumes it in the beginning. Even in the beginning, it may have a much deeper relevance within the poem than the persona himself or readers would think it for the first sight.

Whatever the poetic voice asks of the Raven, the answer is always the same: *nevermore*. Certainly, when he starts supposing that the Raven is, in

fact, a herald from the afterlife – all the same whether from heaven or hell – and he asks about his lost beloved Lenore, the answer is the same:

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.
'Wretch, I cried, 'thy God hath lent thee - by these angels he has sent thee
Respite – respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore!
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe, and forget this lost Lenore!
Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore. (79-84)

As it can be read in stanza 14, it suddenly runs through the speaker's mind that the bird sitting on the bust of Pallas may not be an ordinary bird, but some supernatural creature that was sent to him to bring news from over there. In the moment when the speaker realises that it is not an ordinary, earthly creature present in his room, at first it is hope that flashes up for a little while within the whole dark and seemingly impenetrably hopeless atmosphere of the poem and within the state of soul of the speaker.

However, when the Ravens answer is *nevermore* to the speaker's question whether or not he will see Lenore one more time, even if not in this earthly, mortal human life, but in his afterlife, his hopefulness and momentary good mood suddenly turns into fury and deeper despair than before. Nevertheless, once again he repeats the question in stanza 16, trying to control his fury:

Prophet! said I, 'thing of evil! – prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us - by that God we both adore –
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels named Lenore –
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden, whom the angels named Lenore?
Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore. (90-96)

Despite the fact that the Raven answers *nevermore* to any question, the narrator's hopefulness flashes up one more time, and he supposes that perhaps in another life, in a dimension beyond his present human and consequently helpless existence he will perhaps meet his lost beloved. He may know exactly what the next answer of the bird will be, yet he asks the question once again, deceiving himself in a certain way. Stanza 17 might be interpreted as another important turning point within the poetic narration, as a point of no return, where all of the hope flashing up before gets lost in the darkness, and nothing remains within the room and within the soul of the speaker but bitterness, hopelessness, and despair; that is, he finds himself in a form of damnation.

The last stanza in which the poetic narrator states that '… [his] soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor shall be lifted - nevermore!' may be interpreted as the vortex of damnation where the dimension of time that has been present and observable in the former stanzas seems to cease, and some endless, eternal damnation surrounds the speaker, both his physical body and his soul. The room becomes a place where the shadow of the Raven rules; furthermore, it is strengthened by the fact that the speaker condemns himself to damnation, since it is him who pronounces the last *nevermore* within the poem.

Having made an attempt to briefly explore the presence of some general aspect of damnation within the stanzas of the narrative poem, henceforth I will turn to the different possible levels of damnation that are behind the general impression made by the atmosphere and imagery of Poe's poetic work.

A Possible Approach - The Raven Itself as the Carrier of Damnation

The Raven, the key motif, and effectively the protagonist of the poem may be interpreted as an entity that carries damnation, and brings this damnation into the internal world of the speaker and upon the poetic speaker himself from outside. In this case, it should certainly be presupposed that the poetic narrator is not originally damned, and the internal literary world of the poem is not in the state of damnation from the very beginning.

The present section of the essay attempts to provide one possible interpretation about one certain level of damnation within the poem – damnation that is brought upon the poetic narrator by the Raven itself. In other words, in the present analysis it is supposed that the narrator is not in the state of damnation at the beginning of the narration, but he gradually reaches the state of damnation after the Raven appears in his room and lands on the bust of Pallas Athena, goddess of wisdom in Greek mythology. One possible interpretation of the poem, from the point of view of damnation is that it is not enough that Lenore, the beloved woman has died and the poetic narrator simply mourns her, it is not the only reason in itself for which he is slowly surrounded by the dark and impenetrable atmosphere of damnation.

Literary critic Granger B. Howell also argues that the atmosphere of the poem in itself foreshadows a state that is similar to damnation, or it can even be treated as identical with damnation, damnation in the Christian sense of the word. As Howell writes in his essay entitled 'Devil Lore in The Raven':

Its not simply that she is dead. It is that he has damned himself. It is no mistake that the month is 'bleak December' rather than an equally dreary November. The forces of darkness are never more powerful than during the high holy days of the Christian year, and December, with its share of the twelve days of Christmas, ranks foremost. The mention of 'each separate dying ember [which] wrought its ghost upon the floor,' is reminiscent of Coleridges 'Christabel' in which other embers reflect the presence of evil in much the same way.

Howell suggests that December and midnight, the time of the narration itself creates an atmosphere that is favourable for the 'powers of darkness' in the Christian sense; that is, the environment depicted in the poem surrounding the narrator is a completely suitable place for damnation.

Attempting to find the appropriate passage about Edgar Allan Poe within the book entitled *Az amerikai irodalom története* (*History of American Literature*, one of the most known comprehensive works about American Literature published in Hungarian), it is observable that the authors make nearly the same suggestion as Howells: the presence of the Raven gradually brings ultimate despair and darkness into the room and into the mind of the poetic narrator, and the refrain *nevermore* repeated time and again slowly but securely strengthens the sense of damnation, the sense of a state from which seemingly there is no way of escape. It is also argued that the final /r/ phoneme of the refrain (pronounced in the rhotic American accent after the long /o/, while usually unpronounced in Standard Southern British English) also carries some darkness and ominous character within itself, the symbolism of sounds, mainly that of the dark vowels apart from final /r/-s that predominates the poem also contributes to the dark, gothic and apparently hopeless atmosphere that surrounds the whole narration (Országh and Virágos 65-66).

One key argument for the statement that the narrator is not, at least not completely in the state of damnation until the Raven appears in his room may be the fact that in the first six stanzas, as mentioned above, in the first and apparently static phase of the poetic narration, the narrator is sad and mourns for his lost beloved, but no supernatural force is explicitly present within the room. He can be treated as only an average man, with average pains and sadness. In the present essay it may be accepted that although the atmosphere is ominous and sad from the beginning of the poem, in the first six stanzas only premonitory signs (e. g., the ominous knocking on the door, the howling wind outside, the whole mood generated by 'the bleak December', etc.) of damnation are present. As analysed above, the seventh

stanza of the poem in which the Raven suddenly flies into the room from outside, is the turning point of the poetic narration where the static state and motionlessness is broken up.

The sudden appearance of the Raven undoubtedly generates tension both in the mind of the poetic speaker and in the course of the narration. The speaker's monotonous mournfulness suddenly turns into curiosity and pale hopefulness. He is curious about the origin of the bird, and when he suddenly realises that the Raven is not an ordinary animal, but it may be in possession some supernatural forces, he wants to believe that there is maybe hope for him to meet his lost beloved one more time, if not in this world, then in some kind of afterlife. But when the Ravens answer is *nevermore* to any question asked of him, the hope that flashed up in the poetic speaker's heart and mind suddenly starts fading away. As it is written in the last stanza of the poem cited above, he realises that the bird has not brought news to him about his lost beloved, even if it is sent and governed by supernatural forces. On the contrary, the Raven was sent as an executor, in order to destroy even the last splinters of hope in the narrator's heart and mind, always and timelessly making him remember that there is no way out of the state of damnation. The narrator must realise that he will never see his lost beloved Lenore again either in his mortal human existence or in his afterlife. It is also suggested that he will not even reach any kind of afterlife, rather he will stay in his room for ever, in eternal grief and despair, in a transitory state between life and death; in fact, in the state of damnation that falls on him in the form of the Ravens dark wings.

At this level, damnation can be interpreted as a process, or at least the result of a process rather than a static and unchanged state. The persona goes through a process and gradually reaches damnation, due to the appearance and presence of the Raven, and the hopelessness and darkness generated by it. The soul of the speaker may not be lost from the very beginning of the poem, but it gets lost in the dark gyres of loss, hopelessness and unavoidable remembrances. The Raven is supposedly a supernatural entity who comes from outside – from outside, where there is only darkness, night and winter – and breaks in the poetic speaker's room; that is, the Raven penetrates into his internal world, into his ultimate lair where he might have escaped from his own loss, remembrance and dark thoughts resulting from them. But there is no escape – the Raven as the carrier of damnation, coming from outside, finds the narrator even here, in this enclosed environment, and makes him realise that he cannot hide from the pain of loss and cannot deceive himself into hoping that once he will

find his lost beloved again, if not here, then in some dreamland, Eden, anywhere else beyond his present human existence. The Raven, as the speaker himself suggests in the last stanza, will stay with him for ever to make him remember his losses and his hopeless situation. His room, where he escaped from the outside world, from damnation, becomes itself the place and prison of damnation.

Examining one of the possible aspects of damnation within the poem, the Raven as the carrier of damnation, in the following section of the essay I will make an attempt to explore another possible level of damnation present within the poem.

Damnation as an Original and Unchanged State in the Poem

As outlined in the previous chapter, although the aspect of damnation can be interpreted as a process, not situation or a state originally given, it may also be examined as an original and unchanged state. Having explored arguments for accepting the suggestion that the poetic narrator of 'The Raven' might not be in the state of damnation from the very beginning of the poem, in the present section of the essay I would like to examine another possible level of damnation in the poem from a different perspective, proceeding from the assumption that the speaker is perhaps in the state of damnation from the beginning. Now I make an attempt to examine the poem supposing that the Raven is not the carrier of damnation, but it is only something that makes the poetic narrator realise the truth.

As discussed above, the atmosphere of the 'The Raven' is clearly ominous and dark even in the first stanzas when the Raven is not yet present. This atmosphere of melancholy and darkness is created immediately in the very beginning of the poem, and it is sustained all along. The narrator is sitting in his room, mourning for his lost beloved Lenore and meditates about whether or not he will see her once again in some form, when the mysterious knocking from outside suddenly disturbs his meditative state of mind, and he wants to explore who is knocking on his door at any price. In the second stanza it is also mentioned by the narrator that he 'eagerly (…) wished the morrow'; in other words, he is waiting for the end of the ominous and dark night that strongly contributes to his sad and hopeless state of soul, apart from the pain of loss that he feels.

When the Raven appears, as discussed above, the poetic speaker wants to believe that the bird may give him some hope and can lead him out of his originally hopeless and dark situation. He may even see some saviour in the bird that has arrived to somehow redeem him from damnation. But when

the Raven repeats only *nevermore*, it becomes clear for the speaker that he *is* in a situation from which he can escape no more, and he does not reach damnation gradually, since there is nothing to reach, only damnation exists as an unchanged state from which it is impossible to break out.

John F. Adams also suggests that the Raven is in fact a kind of 'private symbol', as he calls it; that is, not a physical entity, but rather the projection of the grief of the poetic persona, an abstract entity that stands for the feelings and the state of soul of the narrator. (In his essay the author also compares the traditional folkloric and mythological properties and associations as for ravens and the properties and associations that are observable in and generated by E. A. Poe's poem and its title character. The author draws the conclusion that Poe uses the motif of the raven in a very individual way and creates a so-called 'private symbol' of it, rather than using it as an allusion to various folkloric and mythological sources in which otherwise controversial connotations are attributed to ravens.) As Adams writes it in his essay entitled 'Classical Raven Lore and Poe's Raven':

In the course of the poem, the Raven develops and modifies this and its other associations, becoming more and more a private symbol, more and more a dream or hallucinatory figure generated by the persona's emotional bankruptcy, increasingly symbolizing private spiritual dryness rather than personal lamentation for a specific loss.

Adamss argumentation seems to be supportable if I consider the basic atmosphere of the poem and the original state of soul of the poetic narrator that are, in fact, not drastically changed by the appearance of the Raven and the continuous repetition of the phrase *nevermore.* Certainly, the Raven can be interpreted as something that is not completely part of reality, a supposedly supernatural creature that appears in the environment of the poetic narrator in a physical form, but also a kind of mental entity that appears within the mind of the speaker. It is hard to decide whether its presence in the room is physical or symbolic, but the present approach seems to support that it is rather a visionary figure existing within the narrator's mind than a concrete physical entity.

If the Raven is treated as a 'private symbol', it is not necessary to interpret it as a mystic herald or a carrier of damnation, not even as an independent and physically existing character of the narrative poem. It can also be only the projection of the speaker's dark thoughts and unbearable sense of loss. When he talks to the Raven and hears the same answer every time - *nevermore*, the dialogue may not be between him and another living

character, but he may only talk to himself, gradually comprehending the fact that his beloved really died and nothing or no-one can resurrect her. Furthermore, considering the fact that the poetic speaker is supposedly a young scholar, a man knowledgeable about (possibly also natural) sciences; that is, supposedly a rational and intellectual person, the Raven may also be interpreted as nothing more than the awakening of his own rational sense of reality that suggests him that no-one may resurrect from death, however he loved Lenore, he inevitably has to resign himself to the fact that she is dead. However, he cannot work up the fact that the beloved woman exists 'nevermore' in any form, and even love cannot overwhelm human mortality. In vain does the speaker's mind know that Lenore is dead, his soul is incapable of accepting the cold, rational and, as a matter of fact, paradoxically natural truth. This realisation, this complete and ultimate loss of the last splinters of hope might lead the speaker to a mental state from which there is no way out; that is, into a state of mind and soul that can be treated as equal to damnation. It is not suggested at all that the speaker physically dies, but it is rather suggested that he has to resign himself to the fact that his beloved is dead, and no-one on earth can escape from death. Perhaps he will live for much more time, beyond the scope of the poetic narration and the frameworks of the poem, but since he has lost all of his hope by facing the death of someone whom he loved, the rest of his life will probably be unhappy and desperate. He will have to live in a kind of earthly damnation until his death, without any supernatural force that leads him to damnation, because surprisingly it is him who condemns himself to damnation by his own sadness and ultimate loss of hope.

After revealing two possible levels of damnation in the poem, in the next section of the essay I attempt to explore another, and maybe interesting possible level of damnation.

Meta-poetry in Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Raven' – the Necessary Damnation of Poets

In the present section of the essay, I make an attempt to provide one more and perhaps a little unusual interpretation of the poem, from the point of view of damnation. Several literary historians and critics who have ever written about E. A. Poe in some form agree that he was undoubtedly one of the most prominent and original figures in the history of American Literature, or at least during the 19th century. It is often argued that his poetic magnitude and poetic sense of the world that manifests itself in nearly all of his writings cannot be neglected within the analysis of his obviously most known poem of high aesthetic value.

As Hungarian literary critic Artúr Elek wrote in 1910, it is never to be neglected that Poe was *a poet* in every single piece of his works; therefore, his obsessive engagement to aestheticism and beauty cannot be ignored, no matter which piece of his literary lifework is being analysed. (67) (Although Eleks critical approach may seem old-fashioned today, comparing them to contemporary trends of literary criticism, it may be worth examining the same text from even highly different perspectives of different eras of literary history in order to explore as much possibilities of interpretation as possible.)

If the assumption is accepted that Poe was a *poet* in each of his works, and his being a poet is inseparable from the atmosphere and possible interpretations of any of his poems (or even his prose works), then it is possible to examine and interpret 'The Raven' and see the presence of damnation within it with a completely different eye.

As mentioned above several times, the poetic narrator is often interpreted as a young scholar; in any case, an intellectual who mourns her lost love Lenore. But would it not be possible to interpret the figure of the narrator as a poet, a man of letters who attempts to be immersed in literature in order to forget about his memories and pain for a while? If it is supposed that the poetic narrator is, at least partly, identical with Poe himself, and as discussed above, biographical motivations may also have inspired the composition of the poem, (although Poe himself argues in 'The Philosophy of Composition' that he had nearly no autobiographical inspiration and his only aim with the poem was to write a beautiful piece of poetry of deep content), it becomes more and more acceptable that 'The Raven' can also be interpreted as a meta-poetic work, a certain kind of poetic self-confession, a confession about a poet's sufferings resulting in the composition of an aesthetically valuable poem.

The opening situation of the poem is unchanged, even if it is accepted that the poetic narrator is rather a poet than a natural scientist. But it may also be audaciously supposed that he is writing a poem about the loss of his beloved Lenore when he suddenly hears something from outside that disturbs his melancholic and meditative state of mind. Going further, it also appears to be imaginable that the poetic narrator is writing his poem called 'The Raven', a poem in which the bird is a symbol of his personal pain and the loss of his beloved. Then suddenly the poem comes to life and becomes reality, at least for the poet himself, within his own room, and finally the Raven, the embodiment of his grief and unforgettable memories comes to life and appears in front of him – it can even be claimed it is the text itself

that comes to life via its own poetic power. If I consider this possibility of interpretation, then the statement that a (poetic) text comes to life and becomes independent of its creator at one level, but at another level it may become one with its creator, is not so far from the widely accepted postmodernist trends of literary criticism according to which the text lives its own life, introduced and accepted by the Deconstructionists and others. The persona / poet may face his own poetic visions, and through the presence of the Raven, which, in fact, may exist only in the poet's fantasies and in the physical reality at the same time, he becomes one with his poetry. It might be a possible approach that a perfect poem can be born only at the price of the deepest emotional shock that a human being can go through: the loss of someone, the loss of a beloved beautiful woman. A poet has to experience emotional and physical extremities of the highest degree in order to become capable of creating a perfect piece of literature, perfect in every sense, in order to be able to write a valuable poem similar to 'The Raven' by Edgar Allan Poe. In other words, it is necessary for the poet to experience and survive an extreme situation, a nearly unbearable state of soul and mind, a state close to damnation in order to gain the capability of achieving aesthetic perfection. In this sense, damnation can also be treated as a psychological state, bringing the concepts of madness and damnation very close to each other. Considering the fact that the key motif of several of Poe's short stories is madness, it may not sound so weird if madness and damnation are treated as similar to each other, or even accept the hypothesis that madness can be treated as a certain type of damnation.

In 'The Raven', the poetic narrator lost his beloved, and this loss is very hard to get through. This loss is what leads to a mental and emotional state that is close or identical with damnation. The narrator has to face solitude, hopelessness and probably everlasting grief. His room is a place for sufferings, and facing the creature of his own poetic imagination, the Raven that is meant to express all of his sorrow, pain and dark emotions, he undoubtedly experiences damnation within his own poetic mind. He hears the cruel refrain *nevermore* pronounced again and again, pushing him deeper and deeper into his own grief and pain, but from inside, not from outside. The room, as an enclosed environment, may also mean much more than only the poet's room in the simple physical sense. This room can also stand for his mind and soul within which the interaction between him and the Raven – that is identical with his own sorrow and remembrances which he is seemingly unable to get rid of – occurs. As a result of this interaction, the poetic narrator reaches a state of soul that is very similar to damnation and from which seemingly, as stressed above several times, there is no way

out. However, experiencing a state similar to damnation, in parallel with unbearable emotional pain and the darkest sorrow that a man can live through, he also gains the capability to write perfect poems, to see human existence from a higher perspective and produce pieces of literature that are everlasting and have some superior message to the all-time reader; pieces of literature that can cause aesthetical pleasure and make people think about their own existence at the same time.

In the last stanza, the poetic narrator condemns himself to damnation explicitly, and although the rest of his life after the loss of his beloved may be sad and nearly completely hopeless, having gone through a serious trauma and experienced damnation, now he possesses the capability of creating everlasting pieces of poetry, and for a poet it is maybe much more important than living a normal and happy life in the everyday sense. At least partly considering his biographical data and possible motivations discussed in the beginning of the present essay, even if this it seems to contradict postmodernist critical approaches according to which the biography of the author does not matter in the interpretation of a text, the author himself may have been completely aware of the fact that it is nearly necessary for a poet to experience extremities of life and states close to damnation in order to be capable of writing something that is more valuable and beautiful than any average piece of literature in the world, since the honest suffering of an artist may add something more to the value of the given work of art. In this sense, the meta-poetic character of 'The Raven' and the concept of necessary poetic damnation can be connected with the 19th century French literary tradition called the *poète maudit* (accursed poet), also considering the fact that Poe was nearly the contemporary of Charles Baudelaire, one of the French poets traditionally named *Les Poètes Maudites* and had a serious influence on several French symbolist poets. French Literary historian Pascal Brisette even states that Poe himself was one of the authors called by this name, despite the fact that he was American, just like John Keats, whose life and poetry also show features referring to damnation and cursedness (Brisette 36).

This way, the meta-poetic interpretation of 'The Raven' and the introduction of the concept of *necessary poetic damnation* within the poem, for the sake of creating everlasting poetry, may seem to be a supportable approach that brings closer older traditional and postmodernist readings to each other, among the several other possible approaches and interpretations of this well-known poem written by one of the prominent canonised American poets of the 19th century.

Concluding Remarks

Literary historian Charles Feidelson Jr. claims that E. A. Poe was a poet who apparently seriously believed in the 'physical power of words' (37). Making an attempt to examine probably one of his most prominent poetic works entitled 'The Raven', this statement may be seen justified. The complexity, the multi-layered character of the poem obviously proves to both literary critics and readers that the author might have been one of the prominent and most original poets within the history of American Literature.

In the present essay, I examined and explored the aspects of damnation within the poem. Examining only a few possible levels of interpretation from the point of view of damnation, it became clear that several possible ways of interpretation may prove to be acceptable, several ways that can even be seen as controversial approaches, yet somehow they complete each other, and together they constitute a whole. Damnation can be a process initiated by or a state carried by the Raven. Simultaneously, it can be seen as a state that is unchanged from the beginning, and the bird only makes the narrator realise that he has been in the state of damnation for long. Furthermore, beyond the loss of the beloved women, being a poet identical with being in the state of a kind of damnation also arises as a possible manner of interpreting 'The Raven' by Edgar Allan Poe. Different types of damnations are revolving within the same kaleidoscope, different levels of interpretation appear to be valid for the same poem, and these different approaches may present a complete picture about the poem as a whole. Damnation, state or process, poetic or just simply mental and emotional, is the very state within which the narrator of Poe's 'The Raven' suffers, and the Raven itself is the physical embodiment, the incarnation of this damnation within the poem. By reading 'The Raven', Edgar Allan Poe invites the reader to a journey, a journey to a world where damnation rules – but even if this poetic world of Poe is ruled by damnation, it is not to be forgotten that it is *poetic.* And this poetic quality is what gives a wonderful character to the gloomy and melancholic atmosphere created in 'The Raven' by Poe, and via this poetic quality, the author becomes capable of making the reader experience different aspects and levels of damnation; but at the same time, he also saves the reader from this damnation, via 'the physical power of words', as quoted above from literary historian Charles Feidelson Jr.

Certainly, the present essay, due to its extension, is not able to explore and discuss all possible dimensions of damnation within the poem.

However, examining a possible leitmotif of it and offering a few possible approaches and levels of interpretation from a certain perspective, it may have highlighted a few main aspects of the complex and multi-layered character of 'The Raven', which makes it a nearly legendary poem even at an international level and has been arresting the attention of several literary scholars and readers time and again in the past 160 years.

Edgar Allan Poe: *The Raven*

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
'Tis some visitor, I muttered, 'tapping at my chamber door –
Only this, and nothing more.

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow; – vainly I had sought to borrow
From my books surcease of sorrow - sorrow for the lost Lenore –
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore –
Nameless here for evermore.

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me – filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating
'Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door –
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door; –
This it is, and nothing more,

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
'Sir, said I, 'or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you – here I opened wide the door; –
Darkness there, and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the darkness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, 'Lenore!
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, 'Lenore!
Merely this and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.
'Surely, said I, 'surely that is something at my window lattice;
Let me see then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore –
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore; –
Tis the wind and nothing more!

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately raven of the saintly days of yore.
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door –
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door –
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
'Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou, I said, 'art sure no craven.
Ghastly grim and ancient raven wandering from the nightly shore –
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Nights Plutonian shore!
Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
Though its answer little meaning - little relevancy bore;
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door -
Bird or beast above the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
With such name as 'Nevermore.

But the raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only,
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.
Nothing further then he uttered - not a feather then he fluttered –
Till I scarcely more than muttered `Other friends have flown before –
On the morrow he will leave me, as my hopes have flown before.
Then the bird said, 'Nevermore.
Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,
'Doubtless, said I, 'what it utters is its only stock and store,
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful disaster
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore –
Till the dirges of his hope that melancholy burden bore
Of 'Never-nevermore.'

But the raven still beguiling all my sad soul into smiling,
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird and bust and door;

Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking
Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore –
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore
Meant in croaking 'Nevermore.

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosoms core;
This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining
On the cushions velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated oer,
But whose velvet violet lining with the lamp-light gloating oer,
She shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor,
'Wretch, I cried, 'thy God hath lent thee – by these angels he has sent thee
Respite – respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore!
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe, and forget this lost Lenore!
Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.

'Prophet! said I, 'thing of evil! - prophet still, if bird or devil! –
Whether tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted –
On this home by horror haunted - tell me truly, I implore –
Is there – is there balm in Gilead? – tell me – tell me, I implore!
Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.

'Prophet! said I, 'thing of evil! – prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us - by that God we both adore –
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore –
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden, whom the angels name Lenore?
Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.

'Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend! I shrieked upstarting –
'Get thee back into the tempest and the Nights Plutonian shore!
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!
Leave my loneliness unbroken! – quit the bust above my door!
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!
Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.

And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demons that is dreaming,
And the lamp-light oer him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;

And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted – nevermore!

References

1. Adams, John F. 'Classical Raven Lore and Poe's Raven'. *Poe Studies*. Vol. V, no. 2. 1972. 10 Nov. 2008 <Eapoe.org, 2000. URL: www.eapoe.org/pstudies/ps1970/ 26/11/05.>
2. Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, New York: Cambridge UP, 2001. Vol. 2. 651.
3. Brisette, Pascal. *La Malédiction Literaire*. Montréal: Presses de lUniversité de Montréal, 2005. 36.
4. Elek, Artúr. *Edgar Allan Poe – Két tanulmány (Edgar Allan Poe – Two Studies)*. Budapest: Nyugat, 1910. 67.
5. Feidelson, *Charles Jr. Symbolism and American Literature*. Chicago and London: The Universitiy of Chigacago Press, 1983. 37.
6. Howell, Granger Byrd. 'Devil Lore in 'the Raven''. *Poe Studies*. Vol. V, no. 2. 1972. 13 Nov. 2008 < www.eapoe.org/pstudies/ps1970/ 26/11/05.>
7. Hubbel, Jay B. 'Poe.' *Eight American Authors*. Ed. Floyd Stovall. New York: Norton &˙Company INC, 1963. 1-46
8. Kopley, Richard, and Hayes, Kevin J. 'Two Verse Masterworks: The Raven and Ulalume'. *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe.* Ed. Kevin J. Hayes. New York: Cambridge UP, 2002. 191-204.
9. Országh, László and Virágos, Zsolt. *Az amerikai irodalom története (History of American Literature)*. Budapest: Eötvös József Könyvkiadó, 1997. 65-66.
10. Poe, Edgar Allan. 'The Philosophy of Composition' Graham Magazine (April 1846) Rpt. in *Heath Anthology of American Literature*. 4th ed. 2 vols. Ed. Paul Lauter et al. Boston: Houghton, 2002. 1417-27.
11. Poe, Edgar Allan. 'The Raven' *Spirits of the Dead: Tales and Poems*. London: Penguin Book Ltd, 1997. 15-19.
12. Ruland, Richard, and Brandbury, Malcolm. *A History of American Literature – From Puritanism to Postmodernism*. New York: Penguin Books, 1991-92. 651.

Chapter - 3

Creation, Imagination and Metapoetry in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Paradigmatic poem 'Kubla Khan'

Introduction

Kubla Khan is one of the best-known works by the famous romantic English poet Samuel Taylor. Many interpretations of the poem are possible, different critics have represented completely different opinions about the message of the work in the past more than 200 years. The aim of the present essay is to approach the poem from one of the numerous points of view, within the frameworks of an in-depth analysis

One of the possible interpretations is *meta-poetry;* that is, poetry written about poetry itself. But before we attempt to explore in detail what motifs seem to support that that the poem is a kind of meta-poetic self-confession, it is worth having a glance at the circumstances under which the work was written, and what comments the author himself later added to it. Henceforth we attempt to summarize what biographical motivations played what roles in the creation of the poem, before we start the in-depth analysis and the exploration of the motifs referring to the meta-poetic character of the work.

Possible Biographical Motivations

Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote his poem called *Kubla Khan* in the autumn of 1797, allegedly in a farmhouse near Exmoor, but since it was published only in 1816, it seems to be probable that the author revised it several times before the publication. Coleridge himself claimed that the poem was inspired by and opium-induced dream, as it is implicitly referred to in the secondary title of the poem: *A Vision in a Dream.* Furthermore, it is also supposed that the imagery of the poem is partly inspired by Marco Polo's reports about his journey to China and the description of the area called 'Shangdu' (which is identical with the poems spot called Xanadu), where Mongolian ruler Kubla Khan really used to have a palace in the 13th century. The description by Marco Polo was included in Samuel Purchass book entitled *Pilgrimage* (Vol. XI, 231).

As Samuel Coleridge him self writes in his note to the poem:

'In the summer of the year 1797, the Author, then in ill health, had retired to a lonely farm-house between Porlock and Linton, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire. In consequence of a slight indisposition, an anodyne had been prescribed, from the effects of which he fell asleep in his chair at the moment that he was reading the following sentence, or words of the same substance, in Purchass Pilgrimage…'

Since the poet himself commented on the composition of the work, it is really probable that he wrote, or at least started to write it under the influence of drugs, or the vision described in the poem was originally really caused by intoxication.

True, Coleridge commented on his own poem after it had been published, he himself gave no explicit interpretation about the message of the work. That is why the poem is debated by many critics, whether it is just a kind of visionary poetry without any kind of previously planned message, just in order to cause aesthetic pleasure to the reader, or although the author himself left no kind of explicit interpretation, there was an underlying conception behind the creation of the mysterious lines, and there is really a kind of very well-developed message under the surface.

From here, as mentioned above, after having a glance at the circumstances under which the work was supposedly composed, we will make an attempt to interpret the poem as a kind of meta-poetry, a poetic interpretation of poetry, art, and the assignment of the poet himself.

A Possible Interpretation of 'Kubla Khan'

The poem is divided into three paragraphs by the author. It starts with the description of a wonderful palace built by Mongolian and Chinese ruler Kubla Khan in Xanadu, a really existing geographical area situated in China. However strange it sounds, a loose historical background is observable behind the dream-like vision set into poetry, since the Khan was a real historical personality, and the palace described in the overture of the poem really existed in some form. Outside the visionary palace a holy river, the Alph is flowing into the dark, 'sunless sea', as Coleridge writes. Then the poem continues with the description of the 'fertile grounds' near the palace, and it also turns out that the building is surrounded by ancient forests and hills. To sum it up, the first paragraph describes a historical, but at the same time seemingly supernatural and mythical, majestic world, dominated by Kubla Khan and his 'pleasure dome'. This world seems to be a static picture where everything is unchanged, like a timeless, painting-like

place, where the dimension of time does not exist, or at least it cannot be observed, a kind of empire of eternity. It must be mentioned that in the first paragraph the poetic speaker describes the sight as a spectator from outside, he is not an active character, is not present in the world where the dream-like settings exist.

However, in the second paragraph of the poem a drastic, dramatic change of view can be observed:

'But oh! That deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! As holy and enchanted
As eer beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!...'

That is, a little further from the fairy-tale like, majestic and idyllic palace of the Khan the speaker describes a hell-like, mysterious and ominous environment, 'a savage place', which is beyond the boundaries of the area that is dominated by Kubla and his 'pleasure dome'. Pagan-like, supernatural forces appear in the poem, breaking out from the depth, disturbing the idyll of the world outlined in the first paragraph. A source of a fountain is described that feeds a river that floods through trees and rocks, and this river finally inundates Kublas gardens. As the last lines of the second paragraph describe:

'And mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!'

That is, as the water inundates Kubla Khans wonderful domain, the ruler hears voices, 'ancestral voices', supposedly the voice of the spirits of his ancestors who remind him that the flood is just a kind of prognostication, and he will soon have to face war against something or someone. Summarising it, the second paragraph is a kind of contrast to the first, in which the destruction, the annihilation of the idyllic and seemingly perfect land described by the first paragraph is outlined. However perfect and visionary the domain of Kubla Khan was, it was destroyed by a flood, probably motivated by mysterious, supernatural forces that might have been envious of the Khans power, as he was a mortal human, despite what he had possessed and what he had achieved, he could not reach as much power as certain supernatural forces, maybe gods who punished him for having wanted too much.

In the third, last paragraph of the poem the speaker continues to describe what happened after the palace was destructed by the flood, he claims that:

'The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!'

That is, the shadow of the dome was reflected by the water, and in vain it got destroyed, some kind of wonderful sight emerged from the water, and in some form the palace (and possibly the ruler himself) re-created itself (and himself) in another dimension of existence.

Finally, suddenly the poetic speaker shifts into first person singular, starts to narrate in a much more personal voice, appears as not a simple narrator, but as a kind of character of the poem. As Coleridge writes: 'In a vision once I saw…', that is, the speaker acknowledges in a way that all that he described in the first two paragraphs was a kind of poetic vision, as was the 'Abyssinian maid' playing a dulcimer mentioned in the further lines of the poem. The speaker claims that if he had the capability to recall the music played by the mysterious maid, then he would be able to reconstruct Kubla Khans visionary palace from mere music, and he would be able to become as enormous and powerful as Kubla Khan himself. The very last lines of the poem:

'And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.'

That is, it is described how powerful and fearful the poetic speaker himself would become if he were able to reconstruct the palace and gain the power of Kubla Khan. A possible interpretation is that he could even become one with Kubla Khan in some kind of supernatural, timeless dimension, he himself could become the mythical ruler.

Concluding Remarks - Meta-poetry in the Poem

The poetic speaker himself could become much more than he is in mortal, human reality, and if we attempt to interpret the poem as a kind of meta-poetry, a work about the creative power of poets, we might even risk the statement that Samuel Taylor Coleridge (and all other great poets in his world view) are all Kubla Khans, who have the power to create and

dominate within the world of imagination. Since the poem itself is a mixture of dream and vision, as the author himself claimed, everything is possible in the world described in it. Although Kubla Khan is the powerful ruler of a seemingly perfect and dream-like world, he has to face the destruction of his domain, but somehow all of it resurrects in a new form. Poets, who are all creators and rulers of their own imaginary worlds, may have to face the destruction of what is important to them. But on the other hand, if they are real artist, they have the power the re-create their own worlds, their own works of art, even if they are destructed time by time. But no matter how many times one's imaginary world is destructed, the eternal power of art is somehow outside the dimension of time, and poets must be able to possess this kind of power. The destruction of Kubla Khans palace and the flood can also be interpreted as the destructive power of time that shows no mercy towards anything mortal. But since the Khan / the poet (?) is a man of exceptional artistic abilities, he has the power and the courage to fight against time and resurrect from total destruction and finally reach a kind of eternity via his creative power and works of art.

Since the search for eternity and the cult of geniuses were amongst the key characteristics of the period of the Romantics, Coleridges poem may be read as a kind of *romantic guideline* for poets, a meta-poetic work that reminds artists that eternity can be reached if they are really talented enough and brave enough to fight against the destructive power of time and human mortality, not merely as a vision-dream-like poem that perhaps causes aesthetical pleasure to the all-time reader, but its real message is hard or even impossible to decode.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge: *Kubla Khan*

Or, a vision in a dream. A Fragment.
In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round;
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As eer beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momently was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the threshers flail:
And mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momently the sacred river.
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean;
And mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!
The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.
Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,

And close your eyes with holy dread
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

References

1. Barth, J. Robert. Romanticism and Transcendence. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003.
2. Beer, John. Coleridge the Visionary. New York: Collier, 1962.
3. Burke, Kenneth. 'Kubla Khan: Proto-Surrealist Poem' in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1986.
4. Knight, G. W. 'Coleridges Divine Comedy' in *English Romantic Poets*. Ed. M. H. Abrams. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.
5. Rauber, D. F. 'The Fragment as Romantic Form', *Modern Language Quarterly*. Vol 30, 1969.
6. Wheeler, Kathleen. *The Creative Mind in Coleridges Poetry*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.
7. Yarlott, Geoffrey. *Coleridge and the Abyssinian Maid*. London: Methuen & Co, 1967.

Chapter - 4

In the Shadow of Different Types of Deaths, That is, The Motif of Death in William Butler Yeats's Poetry After 1920

Introduction

William Butler Yeats the well-known Irish poet wrote more and more about death (not only about the possibility of his own personal death) in the late period of his life, after 1920.

The motif of human mortality appears in many poems from the late period of his poetry. The aim of the present essay is to select and analyse a few pieces from among his most important works, supporting the statement that death, passing of life and destruction together with it became a key motif in his late poems. But before we start the in-depth analysis of separate poems by the author, it is worth having a glance at the general tendencies and changes that are characteristic of Yeats's poetry, mainly after 1920.

General Changes in the Poetic Style of W. B. Yeats's Late Poems

Yeats is considered to be one of the most significant poets writing in English by many literary critics. In the beginning of his poetic career he wrote his poems mainly in classical verse forms. He is considered to be one of the latest romantic and one of the first modernist authors at the same time. His earlier poems are 'conventionally poetic', as it can easily be proven by examining his first volumes. His early poetry is considered late-romantic in many senses, since it is largely based on Irish folklore and Celtic Myths. Nevertheless, in his three volumes titled *In the Seven Woods*, *The Green Helmet* and *Responsibilities* that are from the middle period of his poetic lifework he uses a more direct approach to his themes and writes in a much more personal voice. The experience of getting old is a determining motif in the last twenty years of his poetry; for example, in his poem called *The Circus Animals Desertion*, he describes what inspired his late works:

'Now that my ladders gone
I must lie down where all the ladders start
In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart'

In his works after 1920 Yeats deals much more with contemporary problems than topics deriving from myths and folklore, and he mentions his son and his daughters in his late poems more and more frequently.

Some literary critics also state that the author spanned the transition from the 19th century into the 20th century and he created a kind of bridge between romanticism and modernism. All in all, nearly all of literary critics agree that Yeats's poetic world view derived from a wide range of sources, just to mention a few from among them, Hinduism, Christianity, Voodooism, Romanticism and Modernism, many social and political trends, etc. Such a mixture of ideas served as the basis of his late poetry as well. W. H. Auden criticized his late works as the 'deplorable spectacle of a grown man occupied with the mumbo-jumbo of magic and the nonsense of India'. Yeats did not trust in human intellectuality anymore in his last twenty years, he rather turned to a kind of mysticism and conceived his otherwise very straightforward and deep thoughts in visions, imaginary worlds and timeless pictures. His volume published in 1925, titled simply A Vision illustrates his delusion of cold intellectuality in a very spectacular way. A kind of dramatic transformation can be observed in the change of his style. His last poetry volumes (*The Tower* – 1928; *The Winding Stairs* – 1929; and *New Poems* – 1938) contained some of the most significant images of the twentieth-century poetry, and his Last Poems are considered the best pieces of his lifework.

Although the signs of anti-democracy and the sympathy with Fascism and other political extremities are observable in some of Yeats's late works, his last lines undeniably visualize the rise of Christianity and the coming of a better world after the total destruction of the frail and delusory mortal human world.

As for the motif of death in his poetry, from his late period maybe two poems deserve special attention: *Sailing to Byzantium*, as a vision of his personal death, and The Second Coming as a kind of vision about the decline and the collective death of the European civilisation. Henceforth we will make an attempt to discuss the two poems mentioned above in detail, focusing on the motif of death and destruction as the key motifs of Yeats's poetry after 1920.

Sailing to Byzantium - Yeat's Vision of Death and Afterlife

Sailing to Byzantium is one of W. B. Yeats's best-known poems, first published in 1928, in the poetry volume titled The Tower. The poem consists of four stanzas, each one is made up of eight ten-syllable lines. It is

the description of the poetic speaker's imaginary journey to Byzantium, the capital of the ancient South-Roman Empire, a kind of homeland of eternity in the poem. It is a kind of vision about what can happen to an elderly artist after his death, whether or not he can achieve the dream of probably all artists in the world, eternity. Many critics parallel this one of Yeats's poems and John Keatss classical romantic poem called Ode on a Grecian Urn, since both of them are based on the contrast of human mortality and eternity that may be reached by becoming one with art.

The first stanza of the poem is an introduction in which the poetic speaker describes the mortal world and his former life which he is soon to leave for the sake of another, probably much better and higher form of existence. The speaker describes his mortal life as a land that he does not like and has no more place within it. 'That is no country for old men…', writes Yeats immediately in the first line, as a kind of delusion of the whole mortal existence.

'In one anothers arms, birds in the trees
– Those dying generations – at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.'

Yeats depicts his whole existence as a kind of seemingly happy, but superficial and declining world in which the circulation of life and death is permanent, but everything must die and nearly nothing represents an eternal value; besides, the 'monuments of unaging intellect' are not respected at all, they are 'neglected' in the 'sensual music'; that is, it is much easier for everyone to think of momentary joys and enjoy life as long as possible instead of thinking about what is valuable and what is not, what is worth dealing with and what is not. Physical joys are much more important than intellectual values, and the poet is disappointed at this kind of world view in his old age. It is also possible that Yeats described not only the human existence in general, but the situation of his own Ireland and his own age. As it can be read in Encyclopedia Britannica:

'[The poem] is grounded in literal meaning as well, for in 1924 the ailing Yeats left Ireland, no country for old men, to view Byzantine mosaics in Italy'

The second stanza of the poem describes the aged man as 'a paltry thing, a tattered coat upon a stick'; that is, as a pitiful and helpless creature who has no more power and is subjected to the ignorant and unfair world.

According to the poetic speaker, the only chance of an old man to rise up from his pitiful situation is to create artefacts and trying to redeem himself with the power of poetry from his mortality. But in order to be able to do so, an old man has to 'learn' a kind of magical song from the monuments mentioned in the first stanza. That is why the elderly poet confesses that, as he writes at the end of the stanza:

'And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
to the holy city of Byzantium.'

That is, the elderly poet finally arrives at Byzantium, the holy place where it becomes possible to get rid of his tired, mortal human body and liberate his soul, and finally become one with his own art, gaining a kind of eternity and immortality. Concerning Byzantium, Encyclopedia Britannica writes:

'For Yeats, ancient Byzantium was the purest embodiment of transfiguration into the timelessness of art' (Britannica). While Byzantium has historically been known to be the art and cultural successor of Rome, the speaker also refers to this place as a 'holy city'.'

The third stanza describes the poetic speaker's vision after he finally arrived at Byzantium. He asks 'the sages', the wise men of Byzantium to come down to him from Gods 'holy fire' and become the 'singing masters of his soul', and he begs to them to liberate his soul from his dying body at the same time. The 'holy fire' represents the supernatural and timeless character of Byzantium, the power through which one can liberate himself from his or her mortal constraints and enter into a higher form of existence. It can be seen as a metaphor similar to the Purgatory in the Holy Bible, in which the soul is cleansed, in this case not unconditionally from its sins, but from everything that bound it to its former world, making it capable of reaching eternity. The motif of the fire can also be treated as a similar motif to the fire of the Phoenix, a mythical bird that is consumed by fires time and again, but always resurrects from its own ashes. The poetic speaker also wants to be annihilated on the one hand, but on the other hand he wants to gain the capability of resurrection in another dimension of existence. He is 'fastened to a dying animal', his own mortal and tired human body, and he evidently has to break out of it if he really wants to belong to the supernatural existence, the eternity of Byzantium. Encyclopedia Britannica writes:

'The old man of Sailing to Byzantium imagined the citys power as being able to gather him into the artifice of eternity – representative of or

embodying all knowledge, linked like a perfect machine at the centre of time.'

The fourth stanza is a kind of continuation of the poetic speaker's prayer for being granted the capability of reaching a higher form of existence. He expresses his desire that once he was finally transformed by the 'holy fire', he would never like to return into any kind of 'natural form', but would rather become a kind of mechanic golden bird that is able to entertain 'the drowsy Emperor' (of Byzantium) 'keeping him awake', singing about 'what is past, passing or to come'. That is, he wants to become something that is able to sing the song of time itself, some kind of embodiment of eternity against human mortality, even if it is something lifeless, something mechanical, as if he wanted to somehow unite the features of organic, biological (and necessarily mortal) life with the features of timelessness, eternity and majesty, but if it is not possible to achieve in a form similar to organic life, then let it be mechanic and inorganic. The motifs of 'hammered gold' and the 'Grecian goldsmiths' strongly resemble to the imagery of Keatss Ode on a Grecian Urn, as mentioned above. The ancient land of Greece and Byzantium appears in both poem as some kind of embodiment of a higher form of life, existence and culture that survive human mortality, but only artists can reach this kind of existence via their works of art, which is in Yeats's case is mainly poetry, whereas in Keatss case all manifestations of art are covered. Furthermore, in the last stanza Yeats identifies himself as a kind of seer who can see the events of the past, sees through the events of the present and is also capable of predicting the events of the future; but since he is in possession of the state of eternity, time is already only a relative category for him.

To sum it up, *Sailing to Byzantium* is one of the most significant pieces of William Butler Yeats's poetry after 1920. It is one of the key poems as for the motif of death in his poetic work from the examined period. Although the poetic speaker, as an elderly man, predicts his death in a certain way, it is not simply the prediction of physical death, but the vision of an artist about what is possible after death and how it is possible to escape from death and complete destruction. In the poem Yeats does not see his personal death in the future as something that must be feared of, but as a kind of possibility to leave a frail and valueless world at which the elderly poet is already disappointed in order to enter a new reality dominated by perfection and eternity, where only the chosen ones, that is, only artists can reach after their death, becoming one with their works of art. As an artist, Yeats optimistically thinks that his death will not be the death of a simple

mortal human, but he will finally become one of the chosen ones who can experience a higher form of existence beyond the mortal human world and finally enter the gates of Byzantium, the holy city where artists can unite with their art, as a kind of reward for their lifelong work in the mortal earth.

Having attempted to make an analysis of the presence of the poet's personal death in Yeats's poetry via examining Sailing to Byzantium, henceforth we will make an attempt to discover the motif of collective death in his lifework, via the analyses of his poem The Second Coming.

The Second Coming – The Vision of Collective Death

The Second Coming was first published in November 1920, in The Dial, and afterwards in Yeats's poetic volume entitled *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921). Strong religious symbolism is used in the poem in order to pinpoint the decline of the European culture and visualise the prediction of the collective death of the western culture or the whole humanity. It is based on a belief that civilisation is nearing to a turning point around the second millennium, the second coming of Jesus Christ, according to the Holy Bible.

The poem was supposedly written as a kind of aftermath of the First World War, and also strongly inspired by the French and German revolutions, and the Russian Revolution of 1917.

'Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world…'

The poem, as we can see, starts with an in-medias-res-like overture, a vision-like description of what is in process at the (timeless) moments of the poetic narration. The first passage of the poem is not else but a series of chaotic, ominous pictures, according to which nothing is the same as used to be, something has drastically changed and the world is breaking into pieces, is sinking into anarchy. It is to be mentioned that Yeats uses the word 'gyre' in the first line of the poem, a word that is also used in Sailing to Byzantium and several of Yeats's poems. According to Yeats's own explanation, by 'gyre' he means two conical spirals, one of them situated within the other. The term is to express Yeats's theory of history, which is present in his 1925 poetic value titled *A Vision*.

In the beginning of the second passage the speaker of the poem stops and establishes the following:

'Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming!'

Yeats speaks about some revelation that turns out to be the Second Coming. Then the series of chaotic and ominous scenes is continuing, a sphinx or sphinx-like beast is outlined within the lines of the poem:

'...somewhere in the sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds....'

As Yeats himself claimed it, the notion of such a beast had long captivated his mind even before he wrote The Second Coming, around 1904, but later he finally wrote it down in his poem. Litarary critic Yvor Winters writes about the poem:

'...we must face the fact that Yeats attitude toward the beast is different from ours: we may find the beast terrifying, but Yeats finds him satisfying – he is Yeats judgment upon all that we regard as civilized. Yeats approves of this kind of brutality.'

That is, the beast described in the poem can be interpreted as a kind of executioner of human civilization who comes to punish instead of Jesus Christ, and the Second Coming, as the title says, is his arrival to earth. A creature that will cause the total destruction of humanity, but in order that a higher form of existence can evolve after everything frail and mortal has perished.

Yeats himself writes in his notes to the poem:

'The end of an age, which always receives the revelation of the character of the next age, is represented by the coming of one gyre to its place of greatest expansion and of the other to that of its greatest contraction. At the present moment the life gyre is sweeping outward, unlike that before the birth of Christ which was narrowing, and has almost reached its greatest expansion.'

The poem is closed down with a question:

'And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?'

That is, maybe even the poetic speaker himself does not really know

what is coming and what will really happen, but evidently something that must happen out of human will. All in all, it is evidently a kind of vision of complete destruction and collective death, but similar to Sailing to Byzantium, a kind of optimistic end is possible even after collective death. If everything mortal is destroyed, perhaps a new world can evolve after the old one is finally judged, punished and annihilated. Annihilation is the precondition of a new beginning, and just like in the case of his own death, he also hopes for a better and higher form of existence after the collective death of the whole humanity.

Interestingly, an article was published in the near past, in New York Times that paralleled the imagery of the poem and the permanent wars in the Middle East. That is, it is possible that the prediction of Yeats from 1920 seems to become reality in some way, at least partly, if it is interpreted as the prediction of a destructing war that once will break out in the Middle East; namely in the ancient land of the Holy Bible where Jesus Christ was once born.

Concluding Remarks

Although many of the motifs of death appear in several poems of William Butler Yeats after 1920, in the last period of his oeuvre, *Sailing to Byzantium* and *The Second Coming* are amongst the best known and the most salient poems in which death and destruction appear as key motifs. As the poet started growing old, death and passing became more and more important topics for him in his poetry. But he did not treat death – at least not in all of his poems – as simply the end of life, but as a necessary prerequisite to a new beginning, the gate to a new existence that might be much higher and much better than the mortal, human existence in which all of us have to live and the constraints of which all of us have to face every day. As a poet, he believed in the idea that man can break out of the constraints of human existence – body, mortality, old age, frailty, weakness, the barriers of time and place, etc. – and gain the capability of entering a new, supernatural world via the power of art. As a matter of fact, Yeats is not at all the first poet who writes down his thoughts about how one can reach immortality through arts, but as one of the most significant poets of the twentieth centuries, he writes about it in a very original and eloquent manner, setting an example to other poets and artists about the power of arts and talent that can even overcome death and passing, if one strongly believes in it.

It is also worth mentioning that although the strong artistic self-awareness is apparent in several of Yeats's poems written before his death,

as in the two works discussed above, he did not call himself in each of his works a prophet or artist. In his last poems written not long before his death he does not deal with afterlife so much, but as an old man, reconciles himself to the fact that he must die, just like others.

As he writes in one of his short, haiku-like final poems that was allegedly written down as his own prospective epitaph:

'Cast a cold eye
on life, on death.
Horseman, pass by!'

References

1. Croft, Barbara L.: Stylistic Arrangements: *A Study of William Butler Yeats A Vision*, Bucknell University Press, 1987.
2. Foley, Declan J., ed.: *Yeats 150: Essays in Commemoration of the 150 Anniversary of His Birth, 13 June 1865*, Lilliput Press, 2015.
3. Jeffares, A Norman: *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*. Stanford University Press, 1968.
4. Jeffares, A Norman: *A New Commentary on the Poems of W. B. Yeats*. Stanford UP, 1984.
5. Jeffares, A Norman: *W B Yeats: A New Biography*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989.
6. Harper, George Mills, ed.: *Yeats and the Occult*. Macmillan of Canada and Maclean-Hunter Press, 1975.
7. King, Francis: *Modern Ritual Magic: The Rise of Western Occultism*, 1989.

Chapter - 5

Reading 'Birthday Letters', That is, a Personal Essay on Intertextual and Personal Relations Depicted in ted Hughes's Poem 'Wuthering Heights'

The poem called *Wuthering Heights* by English Ted Hughes was published in the volume *Birthday Letters* in 1998. The last poetry volume of the author is a kind of correspondence to his dead wife, American poet Sylvia Plath, who committed suicide in 1963. *Wuthering Heights* is one of the 88 poems addressing, in fact, Sylvia Plath's spirit after her death. That is why it may not be so hazardous in the case of such a personal and biographically motivated collection of poems to state that the poetic speaker of the texts is not fictional, but *he* is in essence identical to Ted Hughes, the authors biographical self.

Wuthering Heights by Ted Hughes shows many characteristics of intertextuality, because it is also partly based on the novel by Emily Brontë; furthermore, Sylvia Plath herself also wrote a poem under the same title, and Hughes's final volume of poetry is also partly treated by literary critics as the mixture of the two authors poetry, an explicit personal and poetic dialogue between them and their literary works, since *Wuthering Heights* is not the only poem within the volume that has the same title as one of Sylvia Plath's poems.

The poem opens with a simple statement: '*Walter was guide*.', then it turns out very early to the reader that the poem is, in fact, a kind of narrative text, recording an event from the common life of Hughes and Plath, narrating it from the point of view of Hughes. As the text goes on, it becomes clear that the poetic speaker is remembering his and his wifes journey to the Yorkshire moors, the land where Emily Brontë's romantic novel takes place and where Brontë herself grows up. The setting is the ruin of a house, probable the ruin of *the* house that is documented as Wuthering Heights in Brontë's novel. The event narrated in the poem probably took place in reality and it is not only the product of Hughes's poetic imagination, that is why it can be stated that the writing of the poem (as the

majority of the poems included in *Birthday Letters)* had strong biographical motivations. Hughes's speaker speaks to *Sylvia Plath directly*, that is why the poem shows similarities to a letter, a monologue, or to a conversation of which only one party can be read / heard by the reader. The speaker compares the addressee to novelist Emily Brontë herself and meditates on what her life was like in the moor before she died and what motivations she may have had to write her immortal novel *Wuthering Heights*. He supposes that Plath, as a female author and fellow poet, had the same ambitions and the same feelings as Brontë had had once, when they visited the scene of the novel. '*Werent you twice as ambitious as Emily*?', asks Hughes's speaker from his dead wife.

The alter ego of Sylvia Plath described and spoken to in the poem seems to be a young, energetic and ambitious woman author who is meditating at the birthplace of her literary predecessor (?) and, at the same time, at the scene of her world-renowned novel. The scene of the poem is a group of ruins, '*among the burned out, worn-out remains of failed efforts and failed hopes*'. These lines probably refer to Emily Brontë's tragic personal faith, since she died at young age and became an appreciated, canonised author only after her death. According to Hughes, his wife probably did not want to have the same destiny as Emily Brontë, on the contrary, she wanted to become and appreciated woman author in her life. (Examining the biographical data of Plath, it seems to be completely true, she always wanted to spasmodically become a professional writer.) '*The future had invested in you*', claims Hughes's speaker in the text, acknowledging that he himself knew that time that his wife was a really talented poet, just like he himself, and had the chance to become one of the greatest poets writing in English language in the 20th century. He also remembers how quickly Plath became inspired and with what a heave she wrote her poems. Comparing to Emily Brontë, Sylvia is described in the poem as a strong, decisive, ambitious representative of the literature of the present, whereas Brontë appears as a ghost-like, bitter, shadowy figure representing the past. The poem narrates that Plath had a great chance to achieve what Brontë had never managed to achieve in her life as a woman author, under the social circumstances and oppression over women intellectuals in the 19th century. Not only two biographical people, two woman authors are contrasted by Hughes's poetic speaker, but also two ages, the literatures and the circumstances of the 19th and the 20th centuries, the present and past.

The environment described in the poem, the whole gloomy landscape of the Yorkshire moors, the wild and romantic scene of the dramatic novel

Wuthering Heights gives a very dark and ominous atmosphere to the whole poem. Intertextuality also shows very spectacular and demonstrative power inside the poem, recalling and borrowing the atmosphere and impressiveness of Emily Brontë's novel (and as mentioned above, also intertextually referring to Sylvia Plath's poem having the same title, and having a similarly strong, obscure and dark atmosphere.)

Towards the end of the poem Hughes / the poetic speaker even explicitly refers to Emily Brontë's spirit, supposing that she was envious of Plath's poetic ambitions there, that time: *'What would stern / Dour Emily have mode of your frisky glances / And your huge hope? (…) And maybe a ghost, trying to hear your words, / Peered from the broken mullions / and was stilled.* (…)'. That is, Hughes's speaker meditates in the poem what Brontë's ghost (who was evidently *there* might have thought about Plath and her ambitions as the poet of the future and aliveness. Similarly to the novel *Wuthering Heights*, Hughes consciously presents a ghost in his remembrance / meditation-like poem in order to create the same gothic, oppressive, dark atmosphere for the reader – seemingly nothing happens on the surface, but it maybe stated that in the deep structure of the poem ominous powers are hiding and waiting for the emergence.

There may be another possible interpretation of the poem that is far beyond the supposition that it is a mere remembrance, a letter- and / or dramatic monologue-like poem written by Hughes to his dead wife, just for the sake of remembrance or dialogue with Plath. It must be mentioned that it is very characteristic of the poems published in the volume *Birthday Letters* that they are very suggestive, ponderous works of art with strong subjectivity of the speaker within them, opening several possible layers of interpretation, apart from mere biographical facts or events recorded within them. It is common knowledge that the marriage of the two poets ended tragically, and – mainly due to the nervous disease of Sylvia Plath – they lived a scandalous, dissonant and extremely passionate life, and Plath had several attempted suicides before her final one causing her death. Hughes may have selected the title for his poem in order to deliberately refer to the contradictions and passionate character of his and Plath's marriage before Sylvia's death, because *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë is also a story about a contradictory, extremely passionate love that has a very tragic ending. It might not be a very exaggerated assumption to suppose that Ted Hughes deliberately wanted to parallelise his and Sylvia Plath's contradictory, passionate and tragic love relationship with the romantic relationship of Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw narrated in Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* - expressing that he and Sylvia had their own 'private

Wuthering Heights', and their personal, emotional life was very similar with the strong, extreme emotions resulting in bitterness and tragedies. As it is well-known, in the novel Catherine Earnshaw also dies, and Heathcliff becomes an extremely bitter and vengeful, nearly demonic man, taking a lifelong revenge on the whole Earnshaw family for the loss of his love. It is an interesting biographical fact that although Hughes himself married again some years later following the tragedy, he could certainly never work up the death of Plath. Reading his oeuvre, The traces of guilty conscience and sense of responsibility are also observable in his poetry written after Plath's death – the letter-like poems published in *Birthday Letters*, a few months before Hughes death, can be considered as the peak of Hughes's confessional poetry about his relationship with Plath and its contradictions, these 88 poems including *Wuthering Heights*, the poem analysed in the present essay, are the most explicit and confessional pieces of Hughes's poetry, exploring his own personal attitude towards Plath's suicide. Therefore, it can also be stated that the poetry and the private life of two individuals are mixed within the poetic world created by *Birthday Letters*, the poem called *Wuthering Heights* among them. Perhaps due to the strongly personal tone of the poems, as mentioned above, it is also hard to decide on whether the poem analysed is to be considered as a *letter*; that is, a mainly written piece of text, or rather a sort of poetic / dramatic *monologue* addressing (the ghost of?) Sylvia Plath; that is, a piece of text that can also be a manifestation of *spoken poetry* of full value that does not only exist in a written form, and is not only to be *read*.

Wuthering Heights might be considered as one of the most impressive pieces within the volume *Birthday Letters*. It refers to two other pieces of literature with the means of intertextuality; offering several possible layers of interpretations, as mentioned above, far beyond the biographical background of the author, despite the fact it is definitely a personal, confession-like work of poetry in which the poetic speaker and the biographical self of the author can be considered to be nearly identical. The poem ends up with a gloomy, multi-layered and obscure closure, raising a sense of *unfinishedness* in the reader's mind, probably consciously increasing the suggestive aesthetic power of the text. The unfinished character of the text also gives several possibilities of interpretation of different depths, making the reader be involved in the world of the poems, completing the details that are only implicitly referred to inside it.

Within the frameworks of the present essay, certainly, we do not have the chance to discuss Ted Hughes's poetic lifework in detail, but focusing on the poem called *Wuthering Heights* we may have managed to get an

overview about the probably most prominent piece of Hughes's lifework, his final poetry volume entitled *Birthday Letters*. Furthermore, we may also see how a love with a tragic ending can produce wonderful pieces of poetry, and how a personal tragedy like the love of Hughes and Plath, the two maybe greatest English-speaking poets of the 20th century could serve as a background to great and valuable poetry volume, constituting a part of world literature. Moreover, parallelising the real events of Hughes and Plath's biography and the story narrated in Emily Brontë's novel, it may also become clear that literature is not always so far from life – as it is often said by people of letters, it is not always literature that imitates reality, but on the contrary – reality may also imitate literature, and although such cases can be very tragic, at least it may become clear that literature is not, should not be something completely abstract and unintelligible. On the contrary, literature is about, is based on our everyday human life, serving as an inherent constituent part of our own reality.

TED HUGHES: *Wuthering Heights*

Walter was guide. His mothers cousin
Inherited some Brontë soup dishes.
He felt sorry for them. Writers
Were pathetic people. Hiding from it
And making it up. But your transatlantic elation
Elated him. He effervesced
Like his rhubarb wine a bit too long:
A vintage of legends and gossip
About those poor lasses. Then,
After the Rectory, after the chaise longue
Where Emily died, and the midget hand-made books,
The elvish lacework, the dwarfish fairy-work shoes,
It was the track from Stanbury. That climb
A mile beyond expectation, into
Emilys private Eden. The moor
Lifted and opened its dark flower
For you too. That was satisfactory.
Wilder, maybe, than ever Emily ever knew it.
With wet feet and nothing on her head
She trudged that climbing side towards friends –
Probably. Dark redoubt
On the skyline above. It was all
Novel and exhilarating to you.

The book becoming a map. 'Wuthering Heights'.
Withering into perspective. We got there
And it was all gaze. The open moor,
Gamma rays and decomposing starlight
Had repossessed it
With a kind of blackening smoulder. The centuries
Of door-bolted comfort finally amounted
To a forsaken quarry. The roofs
Deadfall slabs were flaking, but mostly in place,
Beams and purlins softening. So hard
To imagine the life that had lit
Such a sodden, raw-stone cramp of refuge.
The floors were a rubble of stone and sheep droppings,
Doorframes, windowframes –
Gone to make picnickers fires or evaporated.
Only the stonework – black. The sky – blue.
And the moor-wind flickering.
(Indentation) The incomings,
The outgoings – how would you take up now
The clench of that struggle? The leakage
Of earnings off a few sickly bullocks
And a scatter of crazed sheep. Being cornered
Kept folk here. Was that crumble of wall
Remembering a try at a garden? Two trees
Planted for company, for a child to play under,
And to have something to stare at. Sycamores –
The girth and spread of valley twenty-year-olds,
They were probably ninety.
(Indentation) You breathed it all in
With jealous, emulous sniffings. Werent you
Twice as ambitious as Emily? Odd
To watch you, such a brisk pedant
Of your globe-circling aspirations,
Among those burned-out, worn-out remains
Of failed efforts, failed hopes –
Iron beliefs, iron necessities,
Iron bondage, already
Crumbling back to the wild stone.
(Indentation) You perched
In one of the two trees

Just where the snapshot shows you.
Doing as Emily never did. You
Had all the liberties, having life.
The future had invested in you –
As you might say of a jewel
So brilliantly faceted, refracting
Every tint, where Emily had stared
Like a dying prisoner.
And a poem unfurled from you
Like a loose frond of hair from your nape
To be clipped and kept in a book. What would stern
Dour Emily have made of your frisky glances
And your huge hope? Your huge
Mortgage of hope. The moor-wind
Came with its empty eyes to look at you,
And the clouds gazed sidelong, going elsewhere,
The heath-grass, fidgeting in its fever,
Took idiot notice of you. And the stone,
Reaching to touch your hand, found you real
And warm, and lucent, like that earlier one.
And maybe a ghost, trying to hear your words,
Peered from the broken mullions
And was stilled. Or was suddenly aflame
With the scorch of doubled envy. Only
Gradually quenched in understanding.

References

1. Brain, Tracy (2001): *The Other Sylvia Plath.* London and New York: Routledge
2. Samson, Ian: *'I was there, I saw it'*. In London Review of Books, 1998/4, 8-9.
3. http://www.lrb.co.uk/v20/n04/ian-sansom/i-was-there-i-saw-it
4. Wagner, Erika (2001): *Ariels Gift. Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath and the Story of 'Birthday Letters'*. London: Faber & Faber.

Chapter - 6

The Poem locked in itself: On Paul Celan's Poetics and Poetry

Paul Celan, originally named Paul Antschel, the German-speaking Jewish poet from Bukovina was evidently one of the most prominent figures of the post-war European literature. Although he is frequently called the poet of the Holocaust, many literary historians agree that apart from his well-known poem entitled *Deathfugue* (*Todesfuge*) and his early, by and large understandable poetry, his late and much more mature, clearer poetry is more interesting for literary studies.

According to Jacques Derrida Celan was one of the most important poets of the 20th century, because all of his poems were *dated*; i. e., they were in a sense separated from the dimension of time and place, reaching some artistic eternity (Derrida 1986: 46). Furthermore, the hermetic and mysterious poetry that Paul Celan wrote mainly after 1960, as it is also mentioned by one of the most prominent Hungarian translators of Celan László Lator, Celan's poetry was completely appropriate for the ways of analysis of the new trends in literary scholarship spreading in the 1960-70s, such as Deconstruction, Hermeneutics or Discourse Analysis. Although Lator appreciates Celan's literary importance, but it may seem that he also sees Celan's poetry too theoretical as for his concepts about language and the expressibility or the lack of expressibility via language (Lator 1980: 94).

According to Imre Oravecz, another Hungarian poet and literary critic who also translated some poems by Celan into Hungarian, Celan's poetic reality is not based on experience, and it can be grasped only from a philosophical perspective. Oravecz defines Celan's poetic language as a meta-language, a language about language, poetry about poetry itself (Oravecz: 1970: 292).

I myself believe that Celan's literary importance is constituted by the fact that he managed to create a kind of poetry that did not exist before, although certainly he, just like other authors in literary history, had his predecessors and sources; that is, his poetry is not completely original, but completely original poetry, due to the continuity in literary history simply does not exist.

Celan's late poetry – speaking about the volumes and poems published after his volume of poetry entitled *Atemwende – Breathturn* is mainly constituted by short, hermetic, hardly decidable poems containing several intertextual and cultural references. The system of references and the recurrent, but difficultly interpretable motifs of this poetry create a poetic world within each poem in which the meanings in the traditional sense may overlap, or even contradict each other, and the concept of meaning in the traditional sense may even disappear in certain poems, making the interpretation difficult or even impossible.

Although, as mentioned above, Celan, due to his strong Jewish identity and his controversial relationship to the Jewish religion and traditions, is considered one of the most important poet of the Holocaust, according to the point of view of most of the analyses about his work it is not only to be considered a poetic lifework about the tragedy of the Jewish people, and his poetry has a much stronger character that derives from deeper, from more abstract lyrical and spiritual depths, giving a more universal message and a sense out of certain contexts to this kind of poetry. As Hungarian Celan-scholar Béla Bacsó states it at several places in his monograph, Celan's poems cannot be evidently included in some category of literary history or theory – the poems have their own world enclosed into themselves, and this world is really hard to be discovered by the readers (Bacsó 1996).

Although in his early poems Celan uses many poetic images and easily decidable references (e. g., in the volumes entitled *Mohn und Gedächtnis – Poppy and Memory, Von Schwelle zu Schwelle – From Threshold to Threshold, Der Sand aus der Urnen – Sand from the Urns, Sprachgitter – Speech Grills*), around the end of the authors life, in the 1950-60s the extension of his poem decreased, their contextualising elements gradually faded away, and only the nucleus of the poems remained for the reader. In his early poems Celan knowingly and deliberately made poetic confessions about the Holocaust, the controversies of Jewish, the horrors of the Second World War and the social-spiritual breakdown after the war. It is testified by his probably best known poem entitled *Todesfuge – Fugue of Death* that would be hard not to symbolically interpret as a poem about the horrors in Hitler's Germany. However, as Celan's poetry made headway, concreteness and easy interpretability gradually disappeared from his works. Undoubtedly, *Todesfuge* is one of the most significant poems of the 20th century written in German; however, the later products of Celan's poetry from which metaphors and lyrical material nearly vanish may be much more interesting for literary analyses.

Postmodern trends of literary studies like Deconstruction, Discourse Analysis and Hermeneutics became widespread around the date of Celan's death in 1970. Although Celan himself is not or only party to be considered a *post-modern* author, it is doubtless that Deconstruction, the most known literary trend that nearly or completely ignores the context of a literary work rather concentrating on internal structures of the text itself proved to be the best one for the posterior analysis of Celan's (mainly late) poetic works.

One of the key term of Deconstruction is the ignorance of context, the existence of the text as and independent entity, the other is the instability of meaning, including its permanent re-explainability. If we only examine a few poems of Celan's shorter, fairly late works, we can easily see that they are in fact enclosed structures, poems enclosed into themselves. By poems enclosed into themselves I mean that under one certain layer of meaning of a given poem there is always another, and this way these enigmantic, bizarre poems that most of the times possibly generate associations in the sensitive readers, creating another text, another poetic world, another system of associations within themselves, even up to infinity.

The lean and hermetic minimalism the semantic depths of Celan's late poetry may highlight the fact that in certain cases the number of possible readings can be very high, even infinite. If we have a glance at, for example, one of Celan's emblematic poems entitled *Unlesbarkeit – Illegible*, we may see that the same poem can be interpreted as a poem of the Holocaust, a decadent poem criticizing the given age, a philosophical poem about the aspects of life, etc., and in many cases, Celan's poems can also be seen as meta-poetic works, poetry bout poetry.

John Felstiners English Translation

IllEGIBLE this
World. Everything doubled.

Staunch clocks
Confirm the split hours,
Hoarsely.

You, clamped in your depths,
Climb out of yourself
For ever.

The Original german text of the poem:

UNLESBARKEIT dieser
Welt. Alles doppelt.

Die starken Uhren
Geben der Spaltstunde recht,
Heiser.

Du, in dem Tiefstes geklemmt,
Entsteigst dir
Für immer.

If the world is *illegible*, then the poem itself is also practically illegible – at least in the sense that in vain we *read* the poem, we cannot be certain about the whole sense of the small signs constituting the poems. If the text is, according to the Deconstructionist view, amorf, then practically the poem is able to create new poems within itself – as many new poems as many times we read or re-read, re-think, re-interpret the same text, deconstructing it, dividing it into small elements, then mentally reconstructing it. In the second half of the 20th century, in a world spiritually destroyed, in Europe after the Second World War – but even ignoring the context of time and space, considering the general loss of human ideas and the finite character of obtainable knowledge – poetry does not want to *teach* (docere) anything to people any longer, it does not want to didactically tell what it exactly *means*. Poems rather offer possibilities to the reader for thinking about, creating further poems concealed within themselves, for the continuous revision and re-thinking of everything in the world. In my opinion, it is one of the key points of Paul Celan's poetry, at least as for his semantically deep, short, hermetic late poems. Hermetism and semantic depth can be seen as the poetic embossments of this poetry. Can an artwork have a more universal value if it intends to tell the *untellable* out of the context of time and space, enclosed into itself, creating a poetic world independent of reality? The celanian poetry locks a poem within the poem, but there is another layer under every single poem, giving possibility for permanent re-thinking and re-interpretation of the same texts, granting intellectual and aesthetic experiences to the sensitive reader that was succeeded by few European poets in the 20th century. The weight of the poem is constituted by the fact that its meaning is not stable, it is not fastened to something or somebody – partly in accordance with Deconstruction, but in fact independently of this given theoretical approach, the poems secede from the author, the age, the culture and the space. It

becomes an independent whole withdrawing to its own existence, becoming complete within its own hermetic textual reality within which the sensitive reading is able to generate newer and newer poems, exploring more and more possible semantic layers. It is true that the universal character of these poems appears in abstract and complex form, and the understanding of the texts may require increased attention and sensibility, but if the poem enclosed into itself is finally able to open up to the reader via the reading process, then the semantic richness of the layers opening up, the productivity of the re-interpretable character of the poems is effectively infinite. Celan's short late poems can constitute the nucleus, the starting point of a potential mental textual universe the existence of which is maybe a prominent cornerstone of modern European poetry.

Due to the multi-layered character of Celan's poetry and the hermetism of his poems, however, the translatability of Celan's poetry – unfortunately – becomes questionable, at least up to a certain degree. The question whether or not these complex poems originally written in German can be translated into any other language successfully becomes important and justifiable.

Certainly, as every other poem, Celan's poems can be transliterated from the source language into a given target language in a certain form, as it is discussed by Noémi Kiss in her doctoral dissertation as for the comparison of the different Hungarian translations of Celan's fairly well-known poem *Tenebrae* (Kiss 2003). The problem is rather the fact that in the case of hermetic, enclosed poems, the given translation nearly automatically becomes a certain reading of the translated poem in the given target language – that is, we do not only speak about simple transliteration in the traditional sense. In this case, if a translation is at the same time a reading, an interpretation of a source-language text, the question arises whether the reproduced, translated poem is able to transmit the same poetic power as the original one, however strong, faithful and aesthetic a translation it may be. Although I do not want to go into details about the Hungarian philological reception of Paul Celan and the translation history of his poems into Hungarian, since the author of the present essay is Hungarian, it may be mentioned that examining some of Celan's poem if they exist in several Hungarian translations, it can be concluded that there can be significant differences between them. The translators do not only translate, but necessarily *interpret* the poetic text in their own native language, and in the case of such a complex, multi-layered poetry the interpretation, the result of the translation process is not always the same. The question is whether the poems enclosed into themselves can be

transliterated from one language into another, or the translated poem is already another, partly independent text creating new layers of meaning within the original one, making further readings, mental re-thinking and re-writing possible. Is it language-specific that the poetry of a prominent poet can be transposed to the reader with another native language without or with minimal loss, creating an infinite, or at least nearly infinite textual universe of potential mentally re-formed poems? In my opinion, if I consider the philological facts available in my native language, Hungarian as for the translation of Paul Celan's poetry, Celan's poems considered significant or less significant exist in several good translations by prominent Hungarian poets (László Lator, Gábor Schein, Imre Oravecz, etc., just to mention a few of them), and for the Hungarian-speaking reader the answer of the question asked above is that this lyrically enclosed character of the poem, this hermetism and productive re-interpretability that can be considered on of the cornerstone of Celan's poetry can be mediated between the given languages to a certain degree. Celan's poems enclosed into themselves are not completely lost in translation, but they evidently change, in a way as they are changing via reading.

And if the poem enclosed into itself can be treated as a universal concept, it is independent of the context of time and space, even of the linguistic context. That is, it can be re-created, becoming more universal, and it can be mediated between different cultures.

However, I do not think that what seems to be valid in a German-Hungarian context is necessarily universally valid in a German-English relationship. The main aim of the present study is to examin John Felstiners English translations of Paul Celan's poem. But before I start examining the concrete English translations, I think that mentioning one thing may also bring as closer to the understanding of the problems deriving from the translation and translatabilty of Celan's hermetic poetry – and this is the poet's concept about the entity that makes it possible for poems to write – *language.*

References

1. Bacsó, Béla (1996): *A szó árnyéka – Paul Celan költészetéről.* Pécs: Jelenkor.
2. Celan, Paul (1967): *Atemwende.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
3. Celan, Paul (2001): *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*. London and New York: W. W. Norton Company Ltd. Translated by John Felstiner.

4. Derrida, Jacques (1986): *Schibboleth. Für Paul Celan.* Edition Passagen.
5. Kiss, Noémi (2003): *Határhelyezetek – Paul Celan költészete és Magyar recepciója.* Budapest: Anonymus.
6. Lator, László (1980): *Paul Celan.* In Új Írás 1980/10. 94.
7. Oravecz, Imre (1970): *Celan versvilága*. In Nagyvilág, 1970/2. 292.
8. Tamás, Róna (2008): *Eltemetett könyvek*. In National Geographic Magyarország, 2008/1, 144–148.
9. Tamás, Róna (2016): *A möszászekolás, avagy a halottmosdatás törvényei*. In Keresztény-Zsidó Teológiai Évkönyv, 2016/1, 206–208.

Chapter - 7

Possible Problems around the Translatability of Paul celan's Poems in the mirror of John Felstiners English Translations

The translatability of Paul Celan's poetry has been a current problem in literary studies arresting the attention of literary translators and scholars about since the 1980s, not only in Hungary and Europe, but also in the United States.

If we have a glance at George Steiner's opinion about the translatability of Paul Celan's poems, we may see that he approaches the issue with serious doubts. Steiner claims that it is also doubtful whether Celan himself wanted his readers to *understand* his poetry, conceiving his statement connected to the analyses of the poem entitled *Das gedunkelte Splitterecho – The darkened echo-splinter (?)*. Steiner writes that meaning is a temporary phenomenon, and the poems can be understood only momentarily, since another interpretation of the same poem will decode the text in a partly or completely different way, exploring different layers and structures of meaning. Literature wants to break out from the frameworks of everyday human language, becoming the authors own idiolect, heading for untranslatability, unrepeatability in another language (Steiner 2005: 158-159).

In her doctoral thesis Noémi Kiss refers to the approaches of Paul de Man and Walter Benjamin (Kiss 2003: 76-77). According to Benjamin, translation is only the temporary dissolution of the alienation of language; at the same time, historically it becomes more canonised, since in an optimal case a translated text cannot be translated further. Translation is a text that has its own identity, serving for *reading* together with the original artwork, constituting the metaphor of reading (De Man 1997: 182-228). However, according to De Man the situation of the translator is ironic, since the danger of mis-translation, misinterpretation is hiding in every single translation; i. e., translation itself automatically makes re-translation(s) necessary. Translation is not a progress that has a final goal, it has no final result, but each translation is a new station towards the more complete

understanding of a given text written in a foreign language, interpreted by the given translator.

According to Noémi Kiss in case of a translation the translator and the reader evidently have to consider the possible differences between the two languages, and in the analysis of a translated poem the text cannot automatically be treated as identical with the original source language poem, and the possible similarities and differences of the source text and the target text must also be examined in a literary analysis (Kiss 2003: 69). The question may arise how much Paul Celan is still *Paul Celan* in a given translation. Would be a more exact statement that a given translation is the common artwork of the poet and the translator, since the translator always necessarily adds something to the original text, and he or she also takes certain elements from the content and semantic structures of the source text, mainly if the literary translator is also a poet who forms the translated text according to his/her own notions, integrating it into his/her own artistic works.

Jacques Derrida claims that the radical differences between languages necessarily mean serious problems for literary translators (Derrida 1997: 119). Noémi Kiss, referring to Derrida quotes the so-called Babel-metaphor according to which translation, at least the exact translation saving every single element of the meaning from one language into another is almost impossible, since different human languages after their evolution constitute enclosed structures, and the passing between them is not completely possible. This approach is very similar to Paul Celan's concept of language – human language generally has its limits and is not able to express everything, then why would it be possible to *translate* something said or written in a given language into another, similarly imperfect and limited language?

However, if we accept the supposition that translation in the traditional sense is nearly impossible and we had better speak about interpretations, re-writings of a given poem, it may also be stated that translating poetry itself is also poetry, since it does not only transliterate the foreign authors work into the literature and culture of the target language, but it also re-thinks, re-interprets, rewrites the given work, creating another poem that is close to the original one, but it is not identical to the source text. It raises the question whether or not poetry translation can be treated as an intertextual phenomenon, since the translated text evidently refers to the source text, a discourse evolves between them, but the two texts – and it may be agreed by most of literary scholars and translators – cannot be treated as identical structures.

Hans Georg Gadamer states that no-one can be bilingual in the hermeneutic sense of understanding – ones own native language plays a more serious role in understanding; that is, translation should necessarily be a kind of trans-coding of the source text into the mother tongue of the translator (Gadamer 1984: 269-273). Noémi Kiss states about Gadamer's and Benjamin's approach of translation that Gadamer describes understanding, our universal wish to defeat the alienation of language as a permanent act of translation – understanding and translation are a compromise with the alien character of language, recognising that everything can be *understood* only up to a certain degree (Kiss 2003: 155). According to Gadamer's approach the task of the literary translator is to create a third language as a bridge between the source language and the target language, and this bridge language somehow should integrate both of them. Via this process, translation also becomes a historical phenomenon that makes it possible to understand a given text in a given historical age up to a certain degree (Gadamer 1984: 271). Walter Benjamin's concept of translation is very similar to Gadamer's notion – translation gives the chance to a given text to live on, not only to survive. As the sentences of life are harmonised with the living themselves, without meaning anything for them, the translation of a given text is evolving from the original one (Kiss 2003: 66).

Perhaps the above cited pieces of scholarly literature reveal that the translation Paul Celan's poetry into any language from German is not a simple task for a literary translator, and it may hinder the complete understanding of the texts that they were written in German, in the poet's mother tongue to which he had a controversial relationship and from which he wanted to break out. Is it possible to *translate* poems that intend to destroy even the standards of their own language, heading for something outside human language?

Different scholarly literatures by and large agree that the translations made from Celan's poems, due to the multiple coding, the frequent intertextual references and the obscurity and hermetism ruling between them nearly always have some interpretative nature; that is, the translation of a given text written by Celan also necessarily becomes a reading of the poem.

Hungarian poet and literary historian György Rába states that a kind of beautiful faithlessness can be observed in certain poetry translations comparing them to their original source text, and the translator's own poetic voice frequently speaks from translated poem, combined with the poet's

original voice (Rába 1969: 12). That is, a literary translator does not only mechanically transcribe words based on the use of a dictionary, but makes an attempt to decode and understand the text written in the foreign language. Since translation often involves interpretation, the translator has to make decisions – on these grounds, the result of the translation of Celan's or any other authors given poem can be considered as the result of poetic activity, and the translation is not only the authors, but also the translator's artwork that may be integrated into the oeuvre of the translator. A poem can be understood differently by different translators, if a poem exists in several translations in parallel, then it is nearly necessary that the readings of the same poem in the target language shall also be slightly or completely different.

After examining some aspects of the possible problems around the translation of Paul Celan's poetry, now I attempt to examine some concrete examples of translation within the sphere of the English language – John Felstiners English transcriptions, beginning with a few earlier poems by Celan, but mainly selecting from the authors more mature late poetry that may be more interesting for scholarly analysis. I would like to begin with one of Celan's emblematic poem entitled *Tenebrae*, which is a reference to the biblical darkness falling upon the world after Jesus Christs crucifixion.

John Felstiners translation:

Tenebrae

Near are we, Lord,
Near and graspable.

Grasped already, Lord,
Clawed into each other, as if
Each of our bodies were
Your body, Lord.

Pray, Lord,
Pray to us,
We are near.

Wind-skewed we went there,
Went there to bend
Over pit and crater.

Went to the water-trough, Lord.

It was blood, it was
What you shed, Lord.

It shined.

It cast your image into our eyes, Lord.
Eyes and mouth stand so open and void, Lord.

We have drunk, Lord.
The blood and the image that was in the blood, Lord.

Pray, Lord.
We are near.

The original german poem

Tenebrae

Nah sind wir Herr,
Nahe und greifbar.

Gegriffen schon, Herr,
Ineinander verkrallt, als wär
Der Leib eines jeden von uns
Dein Leib, Herr.

Bete, Herr,
Bete zu uns,
Wir sind nah.

Windschief gingen wir hin,
Gingen wir hin, uns zu bücken
Nach Mulde und Maar.

Zur Tränke gingen wir, Herr.

Es war Blut, es war,
Was du vergossen, Herr.

Es glänzte.

Es warf uns dein Bild in die Augen, Herr,
Augen und Mund stehn so offen und leer, Herr.

Wir haben getrunken, Herr.
Das Blut und das Bild, das im Blut war, Herr.

Bete, Herr.
Wir sind nah.

The above cited poem entitled *Tenebrae* is one piece of Celan's fairly early poetry, full of biblical and other religious references. First of all, the title probably refers to the darkness that fell upon the world after Jesus

Christs death on the cross. It can be interpreted as a so-called counter-psalm or anti-psalm, since it is written in the traditional psalm form (a prayer to God), but it is turned upside down, since it is the poetic speakers, a group of people wandering in the desert who calls up God to pray to *them.* Probably, the poem intends to express the controversies of the world after the Holocaust and the Second World War, suggesting that the traditional order of the world simply turned upside down, and nothing can be considered as holy anymore.

Comparing Felstiners translation and the original German poem written by Celan it can be seen that the first two lines of the poem are nearly literally identical in the original text and in the translation, the translator even preserves the inversion Nah sind wir… – Near are we… What can be spectacular as for comparison, in my opinion, at first appears in the seventh line of the poem. Pray, Lord… – Bete, Herr… in itself may mean in English that We pray to us, God…; i. e., in English this traditional form is not unconditionally imperative, whereas in German it is evidently a second person singular imperative form (or a first person singular declarative form, but it lacks the obligatory grammatical subject ich.). Furthermore, the verb beten in German does not only mean pray in the religious sense, but it also means beg to someone without even any religious connotation – beten and beg, since it is spoken about closely related Germanic languages, may also have some common etymology. In the ninth line of the poem, in my opinion, it can be questioned whether the German compound windschief is evidently wind-skewed in English, since it may also mean something like chased by wind or hindered by wind, but the translator had to make certain decisions. It may also be one of the remarkable characters of the translation that in the thirteenth line of the poem, while Celan wrote Zur Tränke gingen wir…, Felstiner wrote Went to the water-trough…, simply omitting the grammatical subject present in German, and it could certainly be also present in the English translation – i. e., the omission of the subject does not seem to be justified, although it may mirror the translator's intention to preserve Celan's fragmented poetic language. In the fourteenth and fifteenth line it seems also that the translator manages to remain faithful to the original version – in German, the lines Es war blut, es war, / was du vergossen, Herr. May either refer to the blood of men that God shed as the punishing God of the Old Testament, or Gods, i. e. Jesus Christs blood that he shed for the salvation of men. As we can see in Felstiners translation: It was blood, it was, / what you shed, Lord. Makes the same interpretation possible, not deciding whether it is the punishing God who shed the blood of probably pagan / disobedient men, or it is God who shed his own blood

for the salvation of men. In the twentieth line of the poem it is also interesting that the line Wir haben getrunken, Herr. is We have drunk, Lord. in Felstiners translation; i. e. the translator even wants to preserve the tense of the original version of the poem – the so-called *Perfekt* is the German counterpart of the English Present Perfect Tense, although little differences may occur; e. g., in German where there is *Perfekt*, in English there may also be Simple Past in many cases. In the last line it is also interesting that although it is nearly the same as the first line of the poem, there is no inversion: Wir sind nah. Felstiners translation also preserves this lack of inversion with the very simple sentence we are near.

It may be stated that Felstiners translation of *Tenebreae* is a fairly exact, form- and content-faithful English transcription of the original poem that can rather be treated as a *translation* in the traditional sense than an interpretation / adaptation. The main reason for this fact may be that this poem is one of Celan's early, linguistically simpler works which I intended to use as an example of this period of the authors poetry, but henceforth I would like to examine with a few later, more mature poems by Celan, comparing them with their English translations.

John Felstiners Translation:

IN RIVERS north of the future
I cast the net you
Haltingly weight
With stonewritten
Shadows.

The original german poem

IN DEN FLÜSSEN nördlich der Zukunft
Werf ich das Netz aus, das du
Zögernd beschwerst
Mit von Steinen geschriebenen
Schatten.

The above poem is one of Celan's much later and much more hermetic poetry that probably means a much larger challenge to any translator. It was published in the volume entitled *Atemwende – Breathturn* in 1967, only three years before the authors tragic suicide.

I am aware of the fact that the poem above cannot simply be *analysed* in the traditional way, since it has its own hermetic poetic world; therefore, I only mention that the poetic speaker symbolically casts his net in the

rivers in some imaginary country where someone that he calls as you weights his fishing net with stonewritten shadows. Stone is a traditional element of Jewish Mysticism that may have several connotations; e. g., Jewish people often put a stone on the grave of the dead to express their respect and memory felt for them. The shadows may refer to the fact that what appear in the net are not real, only their shadows can be perceived by the speaker – it can be a reference to one of the greatest dilemmas of Celan's poetry, the incapability of language to communicate or express any explicit content. It can be mentioned German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer deals with the topic of the relation of you and I in Paul Celan's poetry, but in the present article I would rather concentrate on the similarities and differences between the original and the translated version of the poem (Gadamer 1993: 421).

It may be a spectacular difference between the original version and the translation of the poem that while Celan starts his poem with the beginning *In den Flüssen – In the rivers*, Felstiner translates it only as In rivers…, omitting the definite article present in German, annihilating (!) the definite character of the poem, placing it into an indefinite landscape. Seemingly it is only one little word, one little difference, but it may change the whole atmosphere of this otherwise very short poem. It is also questionable whether the German very aus/werfen meaning to cast out is simply cast in English, since as if in the German version it were stressed that the poetic speaker casts out his net in the rivers. Whether the German word zörgend is the most appropriately translated into English with the word haltingly may also be a question. It is also interesting that while Celan does not use a compound neologism in his original poem in the penultimate line while neologisms are very characteristic of his poetry, Felstiner translates the expression von Steinen geschriebenen literally meaning written by stones into a compound neologism stonewritten as if he would like to become *more celanian* than Paul Celan himself.

After the short examination of the otherwise also short poem it may be established that there are spectacular differences between the original version and the English transliteration of the same text; i. e., they cannot be considered identical, and their separate analysis may even lead to slightly different readings. Felstiners English translation has a strongly interpretative character that digresses from Celan's original text, making certain decisions within the process of reading and translation.

John felstiners Translation

TO STAND in the shadow
Of a scar in the air.

Stand-for-no-one-and-nothing.
Unrecognized,
For you
Alone.

With all that has room within it,
even without
language.

The original german poem

STEHEN im Schatten,
des Wundenmals in der Luft.

Für-niemand-und-nichts-Stehn.
Unerkannt,
Für dich
Allein.

Mit allem, was darin Raum hat,
Auch ohne
Sprache.

The above cited poem is one of Celan's emblematic work from his late poetry that was also published in the volume entitled *Atemwende – Breathturn*. Although it is also a hermetic and hardly decodably poem, it may be stated that in fact it refers to the task of the poet – to stand, under any circumstances, to stand, fight and write, without any reward.

Examining the first two lines it can be spectacular that while Celan writes im Schatten des Wundenmals that literally means in the shadow of the scar, Felstiner translates the German definite article into an indefinite article - in the shadow of **a** scar. The definite Wundenmal – scar created by becomes indefinite in the translation, and vie this little modification the whole poem may lose its definite character.

However, despite the seemingly little difference between the original and the translated text, in the second paragraph of the poem the translation and the original version seem to be nearly completely identical. The neologism by Celan Für-niemand-und-nichts-Stehn is translated by Felstiner into Stand-for-no-one-and-nothing, although the Stehn – stand

element of the original and the translation are in different places, Celan's original texts ends in Stehnn, while Felstiners translation begins with stand, but this difference probably derives from the grammatical differences between German and English.

The third paragraph of the poem may show differences in its first line – while in German Celan writes Mit allem, was darin Raum hat, Felstiner translates this line into With all that has room within it. However, Celan's original line may also mean with all for which there is enough room / space within. Felstiner made a decision, but this decision is not unconditionally the best one and the meaning of the two lines in German and English, although they can meany approximately the same, they can also be interpreted differently. It is not evident whether the German noun Raum should be translated into its German etymological counterpart room, since it may rather mean space in this context. Nevertheless, there may be no doubt about the fact that the lines auch ohne / Sprache are well-translated into English with the expression even without / language.

Similar to the previous poem compared in original and in translation, in the case of the present poem it can also be established that the translation has a strongly interpretative character, and the translator digressed from the original version at several places. The lack of a definite article, as seen above, may modify the whole atmosphere of a given poem in translation compared to the original text. That is why I think that it would rather be more exact to speak about adaptations / interpretations instead of translations in the case of the transliterated versions of Paul Celan's certain, mainly late and mature poems.

John felstiners translation:

THREADSUNS
Over the grayblack wasteness.
A tree-
High thought
Strikes the light-tone: there are
Still songs to sing beyond
Humankind.

The Original German poem:

FADENSONNEN

Über der grauschwarzen Ödnis.
Ein baum-

Hoher Gadanke
Greift sich den Lichtton: es sind
Noch Lieder zu singen jenseits
Der Menschen.

Fadensonnen: *Threadsuns* is one of the emblematic and well-known pieces of Celan's late poetry. The poem is not so hard to decode as several of Celan's late texts, since it seems to mirror the authors philosophy of art. The short piece consisting only a few lines is probably a vision about the *language beyond human language*, a system of representation that may be able to tell the untellable beyond the limits of human language and sing the songs beyond humankind. However, this vision can also be interpreted in a negative way, since it is possible that in the world in which the songs are to be sung humankind exists no more – the question whether or not human beings are necessary for the existence of art and poetry may arise.

Analysing the translation and the original text, it can be observed that the beginning word of the poem is a neologism that probably means late autumn sunlight, but it is questionable in the case of Paul Celan's word creatures. The unusual neologisms in Celan's poetry may be treated as the elements of an independent, new poetic languages in which the words get rid of the limits of their traditional meanings. Felstiners translation of Celan's neologism may be treated as precise, since the German word Faden means thread in English, although other interpretations are also possible.

It is also an interesting character of Felstiners translation that the german compound adjective grauschwarz is translated into English as grayblack, which is an exact translation, but it may also be considered that the German adjective grau – gray has a common stem with the noun Grauen – horror. Certainly, this semantic fact cannot be translated into English, but something is necessarily lost in translation. The compound adjective baumhohe (baumhoch in an undeclined form) is translated into English as tree-high, and Felstiner even preserves the poetic hyphenation of the word in his own text.

Another difference between the original and the translated version of the poem can be that while in the original version Celan uses the verb greift sic that approximately means grasp something, in Felstiner translation we can read that the tree-high thought strikes the light-tone, and this verb creates a much stronger poetic imagery than Celan's original verb use. In this sense, Felstiners translation is rather interpretative, creating the texts own reading in English. Furthermore, the last word of Celan's original

poem is only Menschen that means only men, humans, while Felstiner translates it into humankind, which gives a much more solemnly connotation to the English version of the poem, digressing from the athmosphere of the original.

It may be established that the English translation of one of Paul Celan's classic poems by John Felstiner strongly *interprets* the original one, creating its own poetic world in English; therefore, reading the English counterpart of *Fadensonnen* demands the analyst to consider the fact that not each translated text can be treated as identical with the original one, mainly when it is spoken about poetry translation.

John felstiners translation

WORLD TO BE STUTTERED AFTER,

In which Ill have been
A guest, a name
Sweated down from the wall
Where a wound licks up high.

The Original german poem

DIE NACHZUTOTTERNDE WELT,

Bei der ich zu Gast
Gewesen sein werde, ein Name
Herabgeschwitzt von der Mauer,
An der eine Wunde hochleckt.

The above cited poem was published in the volume *Schneepart – Snow-part* in 1971, one year after the authors death. It is also a poem that mirrors poetic and epistemological problems. The poetic speaker claims himself to be only the guest of the world, identifying the world (or himself?) with a name that is sweated down from the wall. The hermetic, visionary world of the poem may even be terrific – the world is to be stuttered after; i. e., no knowledge can be conceived, communicated by human language. The limits of human language and the wish to create a new poetic language is one of the main topics of the celanian poetry – the present, fairly well-known poem may reperesent the same approach to language.

Comparing the original text of the poem and its version translated into English it can be seen that the strange tense structure, the Future Perfect in German, bei der ich zu Gast gewesen werde is preserved in the translation – Felstiner writes by which Ill have been a guest, suggesting that the poetic speaker *will have been* a guest in some point of the future; i. e., the unusual

temporal dimension of the poem is not lost in translation. However, what is a compound participle in German – nachzutotternde cannot be translated into English with a similar compound, only with the expression to be stuttered after. This solution, on the other hand, means that the unusual composition of words that is one of the main characteristics of Paul Celan's poetry is lost in this case of translation, the translation adds and takes certain elements, but this untranslatability of the compound structure derives from the differences between English and German. If we have a glance at the German compound herabgeschwitzt which really means sweated down from somewhere in English, we may see that it is not translated into English with another compound either. However, Felstiner maybe could have translated the compound into English as downsweated which would certainly sound strange, but since Paul Celan is a master of the creation of strange, unnatural poetic compounds, it might even be preserved in English – i. e., what sounds strange in German should also sound strange and unnatural in the English translation, although it is merely a supposition.

Concluding Remarks

Hungarian literary historian Mihály Szegedy-Maszák examines the issue of untranslatability and the chance of traslateability in a general aspect (Szegedy-Maszák 2008: 235-248). It may seem evident that in case of translation the issue of the differences between languages and the question of temporality arise; that is, the phenomenon of untranslatability must exist to some degree, as it is impossible to create completely form- and / or content-faithful translations. Certainly, reading the English translations of Paul Celan's certain poems it becomes evident that as it is mentioned by Imre Madarász that in parallel with untranslatability, translatability also exists to some degree, rather it is worth dealing with the question how much the translation of a given text is able to represent the atmosphere and references of the original text (Madarász 2005: 86-88). As it seems to be justified by the translations above, the translation of a given artwork in the target language is an independent literary entity, and the parallel translations of the same source text may not be considered identical to each other either. Perhaps it is not an overstatement that there can be as many Paul Celan as translators within the literature of a given language into which certain works of the author were translated – all translations speak differently, mediating certain elements of the original poem in a different proportion being a reading in itself, and it may depend on the attitude of the analyst which translation he or she chooses or whether he or she draws back to the original text of the poem avoiding the translations. Certainly, it has to be done if a

given work to be analysed has not yet been translated into the native language of the analyst, but if a text was already translated into a certain language, in my opinion, the translated text should not be avoided and ignored by the analyst, since it is an already existing reading of the source text that is part of the literature belonging to the target language. I do not think that it would unconditionally mean a problem in interpretation if a given text exists in translation, even if in several different translations, since a translation may add more aspects to the analysis of the same work. Although meaning may really be enclosed in language, and Celan's complex, self-reflexive, hermetic poems evidently mean challenge to literary translators, their translation, if not even completely faithfully, but is possible and is able to contribute to the success of understanding them.

Although as if some scholarly literatures in Hungary and elsewhere had mystified the issue of the translatability of the celanian poetry, it seems that the hermetism, obscurity and self-reflexive quality, at least in the majority of the cases, can be transliterated from the source language into several target languages including English. However, when analysing a poem by Celan in translation it cannot be forgotten that the given text is a *translation / interpretation*; i. e., it is worth knowing and examining the original German version of the given poem, buti t does not evidently mean that the translated quality of a given text leads to incorrect interpretations. In my opinion, on the contrary, the translated and the original version of a given poem may even complete each other, adding extra aspects to the analysis and interpretation. The celanian poetry and its transliteration in any language require especially sensitive reading, but the original poem and the translated version do not unconditionally disturb each others interpretation, they rather add something to each other, supporting each others textual structures. A *good translation* (I use this term very carefully, since it is a very subjective judgement which translation of which poem is good and how) may be able to legitimise a foreign text within the culture and literature of the target language, and even a higher, more complete interpretation may evolve from the interaction of the translated and the original text. In my opinion, John Felstiners interpretative English translations of Paul Celan's poetry evidently added something to Celan's Anglo-Saxon reception, supporting the fact that on the one hand, all texts of the world literature are translatable to some degree; on the other hand, Celan's textual universe, since it does not always intend to be unambiguous even in its original German language, via the translations richer, deeper, more complete interpretations can evolve than only in German. All national literatures into which he was translated can have *their own Paul Celan* that

makes the segments of unusual and richly whirling poetic world sound from different points of view, not falsifying the original version for the readers.

References

1. Celan, Paul (1959): *Sprachgitter*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag.
2. Celan, Paul (1967): *Atemwende.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
3. Celan, Paul (2001): *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*. London and New York:. W. W. Norton Company Ltd. Translated by John Felstiner.
4. De Man, Paul (1997): *Schlussfolegrungen. Walter Benjamins 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers'*, In Alfred Hirsch (Hg.): *Übersetzung und Dekonstruktion.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
5. Derrida, Jacques (19997): *Babylonische Türme. Wege, Umwege, Abwege*. In Alfred Hirsch (Hg.): *Übersetzung und Dekonstruktion*, 119-165. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
6. Gadamer, Hans Georg (1984): *Igazság és módszer*. Budapest: Gondolat.
7. Gadamer, Hans Georg (1993): *Wer bin ich und wer bist Du?* In Gadamer, Hans Georg: *Ästhetik und Poetik II. Hermeneutik im Vollzug. Gesammelte Werke*. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) Verlag.
8. Kiss, Noémi (2003): *Határhelyezetek – Paul Celan költészete és Magyar recepciója.* Budapest: Anonymus.
9. Madarász, Imre (2005): *Irodalomkönyvecske.* Budapest: Hungarovox.
10. Rába, György (1969). *Szép hűtlenek*. Budapest: Akadémiai.
11. Steiner, George (2005): *Bábel után – nyelv és fordítás I.* Budapest: Corvina.
12. Szegedy-Maszák, Mihály (2008): *Megértés, fordítás, kánon*. Bratislava-Budapest: Kalligram.

Chapter - 8

Paul Celan's Speech the Meridian as a Manifest of Art and Poetry Theory

Paul Celan's well-known speech The Meridian can be interpreted as a manifest of a complete theory of art. If we depart from the text itself and less from the critical reception, then we may state that poetry, the production of beauty via language, according to Paul Celan, is evidently a lonely and bitter, excruciating activity.

Celan, although he does it in a little obscure and esoteric way, evidently separates the categories of poetry and art from each other. As if poetry, this way of language use of exceptional power took place at a much higher level, as the embodiment of (an idea of) beauty standing in itself, cleaned up from any external factor, outside any system of reference.

For Paul Celan beauty, in the aesthetical sense of the word can be – and here we should think of something similar to words spoken by God, some type of sacralised poetic speech – what is free of every kind of ornament or external reference, and authentic beauty is created in this completely naked state of existence. It is enough if we think of Celan's poem entitled Stehen – To stand. Celan in his speech The Meridian makes an attempt to destruct the hierarchical systems of reference (first and foremost, those of artistic and aesthetical nature), or at least to ignore and / or by-pass them.

As for the idea of beauty circumscribed in the speech, it seems certain that the text can be connected to Martin Heidegger's paradigmatic essay The Origin of the Artwork, even because, as testified by mere philological facts, Celan might have read this work already in 1953, together with the other items of Heidegger's collection of essays Off the Beaten Track (Holzwge). According to Heidegger, authentic artistic beauty is created without artificial human factors, without the dominion of technology over art. The result of this creation process is not some static, unmoving content of beauty and truth in the artwork, but it is rather event-like (Ereignis), close to the ancient Greek philosophical conception of aletheia. Aletheia does not mean some factual truth, it is not an answer to a question to be decided that can imply the dichotomy of true or false. It is not a static fact whose content

of truth can simply be checked in the external reality, it is rather an event, truth taking place via which something that earlier was concealed becomes visible to us. Under no circumstances is this content of truth related to the scientific sense of the word, since the truth of art and the artwork helps man to become more in some sense than earlier, reaching a higher level of existence. This type of truth shows itself, opens up via the artwork – for example, via a poem, the artistic use of language – and reaches the receiver.

Heidegger evidently had a powerful impact on Celan's thinking, as testified by the text of *The Meridian.* The speech can be read as an implicit conversation with the philosopher. For example, Celan conceives objections against technology and the technicalisation of human society, and these notions can be related to another of Heidegger's paradigmatic essays entitled Die Frage nach der Technik (The Question Concerning Technology) that was evidently read by Celan, true, only after the composition of The Meridian, around 1968 (K. Lyon 2006).

If we read Celan's text cautiously, then we can see that he speaks about automatons at several loci, in a very negative voice (and at the same time, referring to Georg Büchners work, since The Meridian was written on the occasion of receiving the Georg Büchner Prize):

'Please note, ladies and gentlemen: One would like to be a Medusas head to … seize the natural as the natural by means of art!

One would like to, by the way, not: I would.

This means going beyond what is human, stepping into a realm which is turned toward the human, but uncanny – the realm where the monkey, the automatons and with them …oh, art, too, seem to be at home.' (Celan 2003: 42-43)

*** * ***

'The man whose eyes and mind are occupied with art – I am still with Lenz – forgets about himself. Art makes for distance from the I. Art requires that we travel a certain space in a certain direction, on a certain road.

Andpoetry? Poetry which, of course, must go to the way of art? Here this would actually mean the road to Medusas head and the automaton!' (Celan 2003: 44)

Celan imagines authentic art as being independent of technology. Perhaps he also refers to the neo-avantgarde trends of arts spreading in the 1960s (here we may mention Walter Benjamin's prominent essay about the

degradation of art to consumption and the reproducibility of the artwork) (Benjamin: 2006), together with Heidegger's concepts of existential philosophy Technikpessimismus (technological pessimism) and Machenschaft (the wish to dominate the world via technology) (Heidegger 2006). That is, the artwork, mainly the artwork existing in / via language should be free / independent of technology that depraves the human being, the Dasein and alienates him or her from being. Based on it, Celan sees the essence of the truth and beauty of the linguistic artwork in its uniqueness and irreproducibility.

For Paul Celan, poetry (Dichtung) is not only the art of placing words beside each other, that is why art (Kunst) is used in *The Meridian* in a very restrictive (and sometimes negative, bound to social systems of reference?) sense. Returning to Heidegger's and Celan's intellectual relationship, although Heidegger himself never strictly separated the notions of *Dichtung* and *Kunst* in his writings, in his post-war essays he seemingly tries to define the artwork as an entity outside the artificial frameworks of human society. According to him, it is also a realistic danger that modern society may deprave language itself – considering Celan's well-known concept of language, mainly of his mother tongue German violated and abused by the horrors of the Second World War and the Holocaust, the poet is seemingly afraid of the same, or he even considers this thought as a fact that already came true.

In contrast to Celan's negative opinion about modern (ist) poetry (despite the fact that literary history thinking in epochs considers him as one of the last poets of the paradigm of late modernity), there is a conception according to which real (meaning free of artificial elements) poetry is similar to the concept of the absolute poem conceived by Mallarmé, also mentioned by Gottfried Benn in his ars poetical essay Problems of the Lyric (Probleme der Lyrik) written in 1951 (Benn: 2011). Implicitly debating with Benn, Celan conceives his aversions in The Meridian against the neo-avantgarde trends of literature like concrete and experimental poetry which, according to him, seem to be too artificial:

'Ladies and gentlemen, what I am actually talking about when I speak from this position, in this direction, with these words about the poem, no, about THE poem?

I am talking about a poem which does not exist!

The absolute poem – it, certainly does not, cannot exist.

But every real poem, even the least ambitious, there is this ineluctable question, this exorbitant claim.' (Celan 2006: 51)

In Georg Büchners drama referred to by Celan *Dantons Death* the exclamation Long live the king! Is pronounced after the king's death. This absurd verbal manifestation is, according to Heidegger's philosophical terminology, a counter-word (Gegenwort), which is not else but an action deriving from mans instinctive desire for freedom. It cannot be excluded that in this certain counter-word Celan also sees the possibility of the realisation of politically motivated poetry – although he himself did not write so many poems of explicit political content, but he produced text that allow political interpretation, for example his poem beginning with the line *In Eins.*

For Celan, Counter-word is the manifestation of real poetry, a manifestation of language that is clear, free of interests and true – that is, beautiful in aesthetic sense of the word, a type of language use that is free of the distorting, rhetorical and artificial characters of language. Celan's The Meridian contains even more radical and provocative elements than Heidegger's philosophy of destruction, intending to re-evaluate the whole history of human thinking. His concept can be related to the pair of notions Rede (speech) and Ge-rede (babble) from among which Rede may also refer to the clear, pure (poetic?) way of language us, while Ge-rede can serve in order to deceive the other and conceal the truth (K. Lyon: 126).

In contrast to Heidegger, Celan accentuates in The Meridian that it is the poem itself that speaks and states itself, not the person of the poet. Although Heidegger states it at several loci in his writings that it is not else but the subject language itself that speaks vie human beings, according to Celan, the poem is an artwork bound to a certain time and place – referring to Georg Büchners short story Lenz. Büchners Lenz lives in an enclosed, very narrow state of existence, in a type of exile, and he always speaks out of this state. This experience of being locked up, being exiled entitles him to pronounce the truth. The poem exists thrown into, locked within the dimensions of time and space in the same way, being defenceless, and this defencelessness can encourage it to pronounce contents that may not be pronounced via other forms of utterance of language.

Despite the similarities, we may state that Celan's *The Meridian* conceives a theory of lyric poetry, and more generally, a theory of art that is very different from Heidegger's and Gottfried Benns. Poetry, as both Heidegger and Benn states, basically has a monological nature. Nevertheless, according to Celan, the poem exists in a state similar to the monologue only at a certain level of its creation process.

Although Heidegger writes about answers given to utterances (Entsprechen) at several loci, Celan seems to interpret it in a different way. According to *The Meridian* the poem becomes present (Präsens), as if it, as a product of language, became also personalised, individualised, giving some answer itself. The poem is pre-sent in the present tense, in the temporal dimension of a certain moment of time, but it speaks out of the present (K. Lyon: 131).

As Celan states, the poem is lonely and underway, as he conceives it, being en route, and it is also possible that Celan adjusted Heidegger's thoughts to his own thinking, even if he did not misinterpret the philosopher's complex system of thinking. The poem is not else but a message in a bottle tossed in the ocean, sent to an unknown addressee – as Celan borrows this notion from Osip Mandelstam –, and it either reaches the potential addressee / receiver or not. However, Celan does not only suppose some encounter, but also dialogue, conversation with the other, based on reciprocity, realised via the poem. Although the poem exists in a lonely state, it is not to be forgotten that it is permanently en route, moving towards someone (the receiver?), and this movement, this dynamism is much less accentuated in Heidegger's writings on language.

That is, Celan evidently refuses the monological nature of language / pronounced words / poems, since the poem, as mentioned above, always has a (potential) addressee and a destination. The poem is not else but a performative type of language use that also has an aesthetical function – if it reaches the undefined addressee, the Other, and it is not only words shouted into nothingness, it becomes an artwork of language. For Celan, poetry is the path of voice in the direction of the 'you', a metaphorical meridian connecting two – or more – subjects.

Art is not else but homage to absurdity, a dissonant secession from the monotonous context of weekdays, but at least an attempt to get out of this context. Art is the phenomenon that distances man from his own self, placing him in the context of the unknown, the terrific, the Uncanny (Unheimliche). As if artistic beauty, in Celan's interpretation, existed in symbiosis, or at least in a complementary relationship with horror. With the horror that we, human beings are forced to control in some way. The horror (Entsetzen) and silence (Verschweigen) also mutually suppose each others existence, since the poem carries so ponderous contents that are nearly impossible to pronounce – it implies that Celan's late poems written in the period around the composition of The Meridian also show a powerful tendency towards the poetics of silence:

‘It is true, the poem, the poem today, shows – and this has only indirectly to do with the difficulties of vocabulary, the faster flow of syntax or a more awakened sense of ellipsis, none of which we should underrate – the poem clearly shows a strong tendency towards silence.

The poem holds its ground, fir you will permit me yet another extreme formulation, the poem holds its ground on its own margin. In order to endure, it constantly calls and pulls itself back from an already-no-more into a still-here.’ (Celan 2006: 49)

Conceiving the aesthetics of dialogue, according to The Meridian poetry means Atemwende, breath-turn, as also referred to by the title of one of the late volumes of poetry by the author. It is the return to a primordial, natural state of existence that existed before art, and in a certain sense it is free of every kind of art, since in Celan’s interpretation, art is a constructed, artificial formation, and poetry of artificial nature only deceives us and conceals the truth:

‘Poetry is perhaps this: an Atemwnende, a turning of your breath. Who knows, perhaps poetry goes its way – a way of art – for the sake of just such a turn? And since the strange, the abyss and the Medusas head, the abyss and the automaton, all seem to le in the same direction – it is perhaps this turn, this Atemwende, which can sort out the strange from the strange? It is perhaps here, in this one brief moment, that Medusas head shrivels and the automatons run down? Perhaps, along with the I, estranged and freed here, in this manner, some other thing is also set free?’ (Celan 2006: 47)

Perhaps the poem is created from the recognition of some danger (Bacsó 1996: 71-83). From the danger that prevents the lonely artwork that is thrown into the ocean like a message in the bottle from reaching the addressee/the other, from fulfilling its aesthetical function, from initiating a dialogue. The poem undertakes an endangered mode of existence (Bacsó 1996: 81), even risking to be thrown out of time and space, but at the same time, it finally becomes free. Celan asks the question whether or not the task of the linguistic artwork is to enlarge, to expand the frameworks of art?

‘Ladies and gentlemen, I have come to the end – I have come back to the beginning.

Elargissez lart! This problem confronts us with its old and new uncanniness. I took it to Büchner, and think I found it in his work.

I even had an answer ready, I wanted to encounter, to contradict, with a word against the grain, like Luciles.

Enlarge art?

No. On the contrary, take art with you into your innermost narrowness. And set yourself free. I have taken this route, even today, with you. It has been a circle.' (Celan 2006: 51-52)

As The Meridian suggests it, we can speak about much more. The goal is rather to create a (poetic) space that is so narrow that implies horror and fear, and within which there is no place for circumlocution.

As for the notion of the author, reading The Meridian in its textual reality, less based on the critical reception, we can see that Celan has a very specific concept about the role of the author – although he personifies and individualises the poem, he also claims that the poem is the travelling companion of the poet.

The poem is an entity bound to a given date, and as an utterance it speaks for itself, but it is also able to speak for someone else – interestingly, Celan perhaps does not even question the validity of poetry representing others:

'Perhaps we can say that every poem is marked by its own 20th of January? Perhaps the newness of poems written today is that they try most plainly to be mindful of this kind of date?

But do we not all write from and towards some such date? What else could we claim as our origin?

But the poem speaks. It is mindful of its dates, but it speaks. True, it speaks on its own, its very own behalf.

But I think – and this will hardly surprise use – that the poem has always hoped, for this very reason, to speak also on behalf of the strange – no, I can no longer use this word – on behalf of the other, who knows, perhaps of altogether other.' (Celan 2006: 47-48)

The poem that is beautiful in the aesthetical sense of the word, the poem that carries and / or generates aesthetical beauty holds its ground somewhere on its own margin, and shows a strong tendency towards silence – it pronounces only as much as unconditionally necessary. At the same time, the poem behaves as the extension of its author (perhaps similar to the Dasein in Heideggerian sense?), and it is evidently searching for the chance of encounter.

The poem is searching for the other like a person, an individual, and in the sense of the aesthetics of dialogue it makes the receiver to turn to the

other; that is, to initiate a dialogue, a conversation. The poem becomes the property of the receiver, the receivers own, and evidently makes him or her think it further:

‘The poem becomes – under what conditions – the poem of a person who still perceives, still turns towards phenomena, addressing and questioning them. The poem becomes conversation – often desperate conversation.

Only the space of this conversation can establish what is addressed, can gather into a you around the naming and speaking I. But this you, come about by dint of being named and addressed, brings its otherness into the present. Even in the here and now of the poem – and the poem has only one, unique, momentary present – even in this immediacy and nearness, the otherness gives voice to what is most its own: its time.

Whenever we speak with things in this way we also dwell on the question of their where-from and where-to, an open question without resolution, a question which points towards open, empty, free spaces – we have ventured far out.

The poem also searches for this place.’ (Celan 2006: 50)

Celan’s statement according to which there is no absolute poem has a paradoxical nature. The poet may rather conceive a kind of requirement, claim, expectation towards the poem that does not, cannot be completely met with.

The poet / reader who follows the poem as a travelling companion goes on by-passes, detours, and although he or she can also reach someone else, as Celan autobiographically refers to it in The Meridian, finally one gets closer to oneself, returning to oneself. The Meridian is circular geographical formation that connects places that are very far from each other, but compassing the whole Earth it also returns to its own starting point. As we can read in the final paragraphs of The Meridian:

‘I shall search for the region from which hail Reinhold Lenz and Karl Emil Franzos whom I have met on my way here and in Büchners work. I am also, since I am again at my point of departure, searching for my own place of origin.

I am looking for all this with my imprecise, because nervous, finger on a map – a childs map, I must admit.

None of these places can be found. They do not exist. But I know where they ought to exists, especially now, and… I find something else.

Ladies and gentlemen, I find something which consoles me a bit for having walked this impossible road in your presence, this road of the impossible.

I find the connective which, like the poem, leads to encounters

I find something as immaterial as language, yet earthly, terrestrial, in the shape of a circle which, via both poles, rejoins itself and on the way serenely crosses even the tropics: I find … a meridian.' (Celan 2006: 54-55)

If we make an attempt to read Celan's speech with the technique of close reading, by and large ignoring the constant references to Georg Büchner's works, we can see that it conceives essentially simple statements – it formulates the aesthetics of dialogue and the aesthetics of the return to ourselves and self-understanding, in some way following the thinking of the philosophers of the German hermeneutical school Wilhelm Dilthey and his 20th century successors Heidegger, and finally his disciple Hans-Georg Gadamer. It is not to be forgotten, as mentioned above, that among other possibilities of interpretation Celan's speech can be read as in implicit conversation with Heidegger. Furthermore, it is also a well-known philological fact that Gadamer wrote a whole booklet on Celan's poetry, finding the poem cycle Atemkristall – Breath-crystal to be the most appropriate example to apply his hermeneutical method of interpretation, also conceiving a dialogical aesthetics of poetry (Gadamer 1993). As we can read it in The Meridian:

'Is it on such paths that poems take us when we think of them? And are these paths only detours, detours from you to you? But they are, among how many others, the paths on which language becomes voice. They are encounters, paths from a voice to a listening you, natural paths, outlines for existence perhaps, for projecting ourselves into the search for ourselves … A kind of homecoming.' (Celan 2006: 53)

Finally, it may be a risky, speculative statement, but Celan's *The Meridian* perhaps does not only conceive the aesthetics of dialogue and self-understanding, an art theory very close to the German hermeneutical tradition, but, since this tendency is strongly present in Celan's poetic oeuvre, the text also seem to conceive the desire to by-pass media and mediality, the wish to reach immediacy, mainly in the linguistic sense of the term. Basically, the poem is not else but a medium, a vehicle of a message and a message at the same time, but in a certain moment of the encounter the receiver / addressee gets closer and / or returns to himself or herself. The poem and the receiver nearly become one, united, and the receiver is

allowed, via the (personified?) linguistic artwork, to glance into a privative, enclosed reality within which the dichotomy of *mediatedness* and immediacy has already nearly no sense, since this reality exists enclosed in itself, at a certain level in an immediate way, but at least without multiple *mediatedness*. Certainly, this immediacy might only be an illusion – an illusion that the receiver can experience only during the (short) time of the encounter with the poem / the other, and for a moment he or she can become part of some higher, less mediated, purer and more essential poem-reality / art-reality: the autonomous reality of the artwork.

References

1. Bacsó, Béla (1996): *A szó árnyéka – Paul Celan költészetéről.* Pécs: Jelenkor.
2. Benjamin, Walter (2006): *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
3. Benn, Gottfried (2011): *A lírai költészet problémái*. In Gottfried Benn: *Esszék, előadások*. Budapest: Kijárat.
4. Buhr, Gerhard (1976): *Celan's Poetik*. Göttingen: Vanderhoeck / Ruprecht.
5. Celan, Paul (2006): *The Meridian.* In Paul Celan: *Collected Prose*. Translated by Rosemary Waldrop. New York: Routledge.
6. Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1984): *Igazság és módszer.* Budapest: Gondolat.
7. Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1993): *Wer bin ich und wer bist Du?* In Gadamer, Hans-Georg: *Ästhetik und Poetik II. Hermeneutik im Vollzug. Gesammelte Werke.* Mohr (Paul Siebeck) Verlag.
8. Heidegger, Martin (1997): *Kérdés a technika nyomán.* In *A későújkor józansága II*, ed. J. A. Tillmann, 111-134. Budapest: Göncöl.
9. Heidegger, Martin (2006): *A műalkotás eredete.* In Martin Heidegger, *Rejtekutak*, 9-68. Budapest: Osiris.
10. K. Lyon, James (2006): *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger – An Unresolved Conversation*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Chapter - 9

The Illusion of Immediacy: Medial Aspects of Paul Celan's Poetry

Introduction

In the present research paper, I intend to examine one of the very important aspecst of Paul Celan's poetry – namely *mediality*, the problems of mediality and immediacy, highlighting how the problem of *mediatedness* by media and the impossibility of immediacy, and the fight against the medial nature of the world appear in several works by the poet.

Nowadays, we may speak about a number of types of media that is why I think that it is worth examining poems that permit interpretations from the direction of mediality. First and foremost, perhaps it is worth investigating what Paul Celan could think about one of the most primordial media that were also considered an imperfect means of communication even in the age of the poet – a few words about language.

Language as Medium by Paul Celan

Paul Celan's view about language is very controversial, and it has a dual nature. On the one hand, the poet wished to demolish the limits of human language considered as an imperfect medium for communication; on the other hand, Celan's poetry permits an interpretation according to which he wanted to create a new poetic language that is beyond the human language used in everyday communication, even if not ceasing, but perhaps somehow reducing the *mediatedness* and mediality of the world. To illustrate this view of human language, one of the authors well-known, programme-like poems entitled *Sprachgitter* – *Speech-Grille* may serve as a good example, in which Celan makes an effort to cease the limits of human language:

John felstiners English translation

'***Speech-Grille***

Eyes round between the bars.

Flittering lid,
Paddles upward,

Breaks a glance free.
Iris, the swimmer, dreamless and drab:
Heaven, heartgray, must be near.'

The orginal german poem:

'Sprachgitter

Augenrund zwischen den Stäben.
Flimmertier Lid rudert nach oben, gibt einen Blick frei.
Iris, Schwimmerin, traumlos und trüb: der Himmel, herzgrau, muß nah sein.'

Metaphors: At least according to Celan's concept – increase the distance between two subjects; that is, they increase the *mediatedness* by language, and it may be the metaphorical nature of language because of which there can be no clear communication mediating messages over the everyday language. If we have a glance at the above cited lines, we may see that the poetic images lack the reference to something, which would be the gist of the traditional definition of metaphor. As it is mentioned by Celan himself, it was the above poem in which he tried to conceive that he was bored with the permanent hide-and-seek game with metaphors. (Felstiner 1995: 106-107) Although the American monographer of the poet John Felstiner writes that at the time of writing *Speech-Grille*, in 1957 Celan did not yet completely cease the use of metaphors in his poems, but he did his best to divide them into an internal and an external reality. This way, symbolically, the *mediatedness* by language is not ceased, but it may be decreased, and words are perhaps able to speak to the reader in a more immediate way.

Celan's fight against metaphors may be read as an experiment of the clearance of the language and the decrease of the *mediatedness* by language to some degree (Mihálycsa 1999). In the poems written later than *Speech-Grille* the words do not function as metaphors, do not refer to anything, only *stand* alone, constituting poetic realities (Bartók 2009: 29). The wish to clear language from metaphors also appears in one of Celan's late, fairly known poem entitled *Ein Dröhnen – A rumbling*:

John Felstiners english translation

A RUMBLING: it is

Truth itself
Walked among
Men,

Amidst the
Metaphor squall.

The Orignal german poem

EIN DRÖHNEN: es ist

Die Wahrheit selbst
Unter die Menschen
Getreten,
Mitten ins
Metapherngestöber.

That is, human language is not more for Celan than a *metaphor squall*, a chaotic medium lacking any sort of system. Some transcendent *Truth* walks down, among men amidst this chaotic squall of metaphors, and it may make us remember Nietzsches theory about metaphors (Kiss 2003: 112). According to Nietzsche – and it is no novelty for Linguistics – even linguistic commonplaces are metaphorical. Thinking after Celan, the language of our everyday life is an inadequate medium to mediate unambiguous information, because it is too medial and mediated. May there be *Truth* only if we conceive it in a language that is free of metaphors? The question evidently has no adequate answer, but based on Celan's above poem it may seem that a language cleared from metaphors could be able to express truths, and the cessation of *metaphoricalness* may decrease the multiple *mediatedness* and mediality of human pronunciations and experiences.

In some of Celan's poems, the poet perhaps tries to demolish, or at least by-pass the excessive *mediatedness* of human language by the method that certain poems are not written in one of the concrete national languages, but the poet borrowed words from different foreign languages – that is, it is hard to establish in which language the given poem speaks, unless we do not count the words of different languages on a statistical basis. The poem entitled *In Eins – In One*, or at least the beginning verses of the poem can be a good example to this tendency:

John Felstiners english translation

In One

Thirteenth February. In the hearts mouth an
Awakaned shibboleth. With you,
Peuple
De Paris. *No pasarán.*

The Original German Poem:

‘**IN EINS**

Dreizehnter Feber. Im Herzmund
Erwachtes Schibboleth. Mit dir,
Peuple
De Paris. *No pasarán.*’

The above extract was originally written in German (The English translation of the German elements also tends to cease the borders between languages), but foreign expressions can be found in it nearly in the same proportion. The word *shibboleth* (originally meaning river, but in the Bible it was a secret tribal password used at border-crossing) is from Hebrew, the expression *Peuple de Paris* (people of Paris) is from French, while the expression *No pasarán* (they will not break through) is borrowed from Spanish. As for the poem, Derrida says that in the text a border-crossing takes place between different languages (Derrida 1994: 23-24). Although there is no doubt that the text of the above extract *is* a pronunciation in human languages, it is not easy to define in *which* language the poem speaks. The cessation of the medium of a concrete human language can also be interpreted as a poetic experiment to cease, or at least decrease mediality and *mediatedness*.

It may also seem that Celan’s poetry treats the natural human language as a disaster (Lacoue-Labarthe 1996: 193–213). The poetic word wishes to demolish the limits constituted by the language of the everyday life, and necessarily, it wants to transgress these limits. The non-conventional words of Celan’s poems and their new, surprising meanings also serve as the basis of this intention, since Celan ignores the earlier forms of poetic behaviour, and experiments to re-define the concept of *poeticness*.

There can also be a radical notion according to which poetry is not else but the cessation of language itself, and poetry *takes place* at the spot where language is already absent (Lacoue-Labarthe 1996: 199-200). This language certainly does not mean natural language, since if the poetic word is an autonomous entity, then poetry is not else but the liberation from limits. When the word *takes place*, that is, it is pronounced, the continuous speech is suspended, and the word as an autonomous entity rises above the system of the language, in a similar sense to Hölderlins notion of *caesure* and *clear word* (Reines Wort). Celan’s compound words created only in poetic constellations exist outside natural language; therefore, they may be treated as *clear words.* Poetry is constituted by the word that testifies human *being*

and *presence.* This type of word is called by Celan *counter-word* (Gegenwort) in his speech called *Meridian*, after Georg Büchners drama *Dantons Death* (Paul Celan 1996). Poetrys intention is to pronounce existence, mainly human being within it. The gist of the pronunciation of existence is that although poetry cannot reverse the tragedy of the imperfection of human language and mans scepticism about language, but at least it writes down and archives the tragedy of language (Lacoue-Labarthe 1996).

Despite the fact that language can be experienced as a tragedy, it may seem that written, mainly literary texts and poetry is trying to fight against the extreme mediality and languages tendency to distance subjects from each other. Language may lose its accentuated role and become one medium among many, and maybe it is languages main tragedy (Lőrincz 2003: 164). That is why I think that it is worth examining how written texts are represented in Celan's poetry as media.

Writing as Medium in Paul Celan's poetry

Writing and written texts, literary texts within them are recurring motifs in Paul Celan's poetry, and writing seems to appear a somewhat clearer medium than any other one.

Thinking with Gadamer, knowing Celan's cycle called *Atemkristall – Breath-crystal* the poem can be the medium of the encounter of 'I' and 'You' (Gadamer 1993). Although a poem is a medium consisting of language, the written text is evidently beyond the spoken language, since it is more imperishable – and at the same time, more material. This materiality, however, implies that a written text can place itself outside of its own historical existence, and a literary work may become a classical work (Gadamer 1984) that is historical, past and present at the same time – a material, that is, mediated entity, but at the same time existing outside the dimension of time, becoming immediate and in some sense transcendent.

Derrida highlights the primacy of the medium of writing and, despite the Saussurean paradigm, its original nature that may have been existed even before the appearance of language (Derrida 1991: 21-113). For Celan as a poet, writing is evidently a primary medium, several poems by author refer to it, and although he apparently does not believe in the exquisite capability of mediation of language, following Derrida's thoughts it is imaginable that poetry / poetic texts can function as media beyond the spoken language, as according to Derrida writing can express any message much more clearly than a spoken text.

Poetry is the possible medium of the expression of superior messages. The truth value of the messages may remain undistorted, and beyond all of this we may think about non-linguistic, electronic and optical media, to which Celan's well-known poem entitled *Fadensonnen – Threadsuns* may refer (I will deal with it in detail later on).

One of Celan's late poems entitled *Das Wort Zur-Tiefe-Gehn – The word of in-depth-going* can also be interesting for us, since it contains strong references to the motif of writing:

English Translation:

The word of in-depth-going

That we have read.
The years, the words, since then.
We are still the same.

You know, the space is endless,
You know, you do not need to fly,
You know, what wrote itself in your eyes,
Deepens the depths to us.

The Original german poem:

Das wort vom zur-tiefe-gehn

Das wir gelesen haben.
Die Jahre, die Worte seither.
Wir sind es noch immer.

Weißt du, der Raum ist unendlich,
Weißt du, du brauchst nicht zu fliegen,
Weißt du, was sich in dein Aug schrieb,
Vertieft uns die Tiefe.

In the closing lines of the poem something is *written*, writes itself to the poetic addressee, and this undefined entity *deepens the depths* (vertieft … die Tiefe); that is, it is able to open up deeper spheres of sense. Eye is the medium of sight – based on the last verse of the poem above, we may conclude that writing, written text is a phenomenon that *written in the eyes of someone* is able to mediate messages that may not be mediated by spoken language. The writing of the text into the eye is an important motif, because one decodes any text through one's eye. Writing, written texts are primarily optical media which we are able to decode based on our sight.

We may even risk the statement that human life is organised by linearity and continuity because of the continuity of phonetic writing

systems (McLuhan 1962: 47). Starting from this thesis of McLuhan we may presume an opposition between verbal and written culture, just like between visual and acoustic media.

Certainly, it is worth mentioning that one of the monographers of McLuhan completely doubts that writing would be a primarily visual medium, since it can operate as a reflected sight if the reader, for example, reads foreign texts, and these times he or she comprehends the meaning of the text without decoding the form (Miller 1971: 10). The phonetic alphabet does not only separate the sight and the sound, but also separates each meaning from the phonemes signed by the letters, which results in meaningless letters referring to meaningless phonemes (McLuhan 1962).

Considering the same problem, we may cite George Steiner, according to whom the system of the phonetic alphabet and the printing that uses moveable letters based on it are not metaphysical inventions that are able to express transcendent messages – the reasons for their inventions is to be sought in the linear structures of the syntax of Indo-European languages (Steiner 1998: 253–257). However, this way writing would be degraded to a completely material level, while literature and literary texts may be able to express transcendent messages, even if the medium containing the message is physically tangible. As McLuhan states it, it is possible that writing makes texts uniform, but this uniformity concerns only the physical appearance, the medium of the work of art, but the artwork itself is able to remain unique.

Among others Walter J. Ong deals with the history and spread of printing and with the dominance of sight that in the history of humanity gradually replaced the dominance of hearing (Ong 1998: 245–269). Due to printing one has a different relation to texts already written by someone, since although handwritten texts counted as irreproducible, unique objects, in some cases artworks created by their author, printed texts are distanced from their author, are uniform in some sense, and can be reproduced in an unlimited number. Speaking about lyric poetry this revolution can lead to the conclusion that certain literary texts are able to mediate their complete message only in a printed form – for example, let us just think of the typographic image poems by E. E. Cummings. Apart from handwritten texts, printed texts can be treated as finished works, since they cannot be written any further. As for Paul Celan's poetry, it may have importance in the case of the late, hermetic poems by the author – these short poems consisting only of a few lines or words in many cases are evidently finished texts, as for their printed form. In Celan's work even punctuation marks

play an important role and may modify the opportunities of interpretation. Some poems, as Derrida emphasises, are even *dated*, and the appearance of the date in some editions below the printed poem may also accentuate their finished character (Derrida 1994: 3-74).

Gadamer emphasises that written, literary texts can have some specific truth value. According to the traditional definitions, a text is poetic if it lacks the factor justifying the truth value of the utterance (Gadamer 1994: 188–201). Literary / poetic texts can be adequately *heard* only by the so-called interior ear. However, when Gadamer speaks about the interpretation of an artwork, he metaphorises it as *reading.* All artworks in the world must be *read* so that they should become *present* in the Heideggerian sense. As for Paul Celan's poems, we may state that a poetic text always carries some message and has some truth value – even if in a negative way. In Celan's case, the message is perhaps pronounced by its *withdrawal*, its negative form of pronunciation. In the 20th century literature a new norm of truth appeared that belongs to the essence of poetry (Gadamer 1994: 200). Celan's poems tell the truth to the reader in a way that by their hermetism, hard interpretability and self-enclosed nature *withdraw* themselves from the reader and from the word. The truth is expressed in a negative form, seemingly withdrawing itself from the poem, not explicitly stating itself. Connected to the metaphor according to which the whole understanding of the world is not else but *reading*, it may be worth having a glance at one of Celan's late poems entitled *Unlesbarkeit – Illegible*:

John Felstiners english translation

ILLEGIBLE this

World. Everything doubled.

Staunch clocks
Confirm the split hour,
Hoarsely.

You, clamped in your depths, climb out of yourself for ever.

The Original german poem

UNLESBARKEIT dieser

Welt. Alles doppelt.
Die starken Uhren geben der Spaltstunde recht, heiser.
Du, in dein Tiefstes geklemmt, entsteigst dir für immer.

Based on this poem the *illegibility of the world* means that things, phenomena of the world in their complex relations cannot or can hardly be

interpreted, understood in any way. The nature of all phenomena is *doubled*, on the one hand, they are visible and tangible, but there must be some hidden essence behind everything – and this hidden essence, this *behind* is not reachable or tangible. The only way to *read* the world, says Celan poem, may be that the subject should *climb out of oneself*, alienates oneself from ones own identity. In the sate of this ecstasy one may experience the world in a more immediate, deeper way, at least in the world of Celan's poem. It is, certainly, only one of the possible interpretations of the poem above, and it can be acceptable only in a poetic context, since it contradicts the hermeneutical principle according to which no form of understanding is possible without mediation and mediality.

Perhaps it is an acceptable reading of the text that literature, the literary text is some kind of partaking in some experience that would otherwise finally deny us itself. The art of the past, due to mediality and material representation, may serve the needs of the men of the present (Stierle 1996: 286). Following Gadamer, it is possible only through media – one cannot step out of historical time, and one's existence in time has its end. Certain artworks can become permanent within time, becoming classic works, and – even if it is not an adequate statement within scientific frameworks – they may place themselves out of space and time, becoming eternal.

Literary text can be an eminent example of the phenomenon when something is not an answer to some question, but the representation of real things within imaginary frames. Lyric poetry may be the best example of the often debated relationship of artworks and media. Poetry can also be interpreted as the transgression between the schemas of literary genres (Stierle 1996: 270). A literary text through the written / printed material mediates much more towards the reader than just itself. The 'You' appearing in lyric poems, the addressee of a given text can always refer to several subjects, can have an inter-subjective character. Considering Celan's late poems often referring to themselves, it can be an interpretation that not simply the poetic speaker speaks to the reader / addressee, but the text becomes the speaker itself, and this way, the degree of *mediatedness* between speaker and addressee may be reduced. Even if the text of a poem is a phenomenon of language, something mediated by the medium of language, the artwork-character and literariness of the work fills the whole medium. After McLuhans notion, in a poem the message and the medium may be able to become one, and speak to the addressee in a more immediate and less mediated manner, even if mediality cannot be completely ceased. However, it seems that poetry, and in the present case Celan's hermetic poetry makes an attempt to cease the mediated nature of reality.

Possible References to Optical and Electronic Media in Celan's Poetry in the Mirror of the Poem Fadensonnen – Threadsuns

As stated above, writing, written and printed texts can be treated as optical media, it is only a question of approach. Paul Celan's poems permit the interpretation according to which written texts may be considered as a kind of primary medium, at least for the poet, and written texts are able to mediate and archive information and meanings which are lost or incompletely mediated in spoken language.

One of the fairly well-known poems by Celan may refer among others to the technicalising culture and optical and electronic media of our present. This poem is called *Fadensonnen – Threadsuns.*

John Felstiners english translation

THREADSUNS

Over the grayblack wasteness.
A tree-
High thought
Strikes the light-tone: there are
Still songs to sing beyond
Humankind.

The Original german poem

FADENSONNEN

Über der grauschwarzen Ödnis.
Ein baum-
Hoher Gedanke
Greift sich den Lichtton: es sind
Noch Lieder zu singen jenseits
Der Menschen.

The above poem, similarly to other minimalist and hermetic poems by Celan, permits several possible interpretations, even if the number of possible readings is not endless. The text consisting of only seven lines turned the attention of literary scholars to itself a number of times during its history of reception. We may presume that the text speaks about not more than the transcendent character of poetry, and the *songs to sing beyond humankind* refer to transcendent meanings that cannot be mediated by everyday language, only by art, namely poetry (Gadamer 1997: 112). In parallel the poem permits an ironic interpretation, according to which nothing more exists *beyond humankind*, reaching the transcendent in any

way is impossible, and the poetic speaker is only thinking about it in an ironic manner (Kiss 2003: 175–177), and this way under no circumstances can we take the statement of the last line serious.

The phrase *beyond humankind* and the songs sung there / from there may refer to the transcendent, metaphysical world beyond the visible universe (either the world of platonic ideas or the underworld in the religious sense), but it is also possible that this *beyond* is to be understood in time, in an age from where *humankind* has already disappeared in the physical sense.

Is it possible that Celan's poem does not only refer to mystical, transcendent entities and meanings, but also to the quickly evolving technical media of the poet's own age? It cannot be decided whether this interpretation is legitimate or arbitrary, but if we read Celan's poetry from the direction of mediality and *mediatedness*, it can evidently prove an interesting approach.

Examining the opening line of the poem the poetic text makes the reader *see threadsuns* (the suns radiation through the clouds?) over a certain *grayblack wasteness*. A landscape is presented to the reader; that is, the poetic text is based on the sight, the imaginary sight created by the power of the words before the eyes of the reader. As we read the text further, we may *read a tree-high* human *thought* that *strikes* the *light-tone*, which is an acoustic and optical medium at the same time. Light-tone, as John Felstiner translates it, *Lichtton* in German is not Celan's neologism, but an existing technical term used in film-making; that is, the name of an optical medium.

The technique called *Lichtton*, namely *Lichttonverfahren* in German, translated in English as *sound-on-film* (apart from Felstiners possible misunderstanding / poetic interpretation of the text) refers to one of the oldest film-making technologies. It implies a class of sound film processes where the sound accompanying picture is physically recorded onto photographic film, usually, but not always, the same strip of film carrying the picture, and this process did not count as a very new technology even in Celan's age, in the middle of the 20th century. As the poem suggests, the human thought is *recorded on film* – mediated by light, an optical medium, and sound, an acoustic medium at the same time. The dual usage of these media may also make us remember the more developed technical media of the present days, for example DVD-player, television or the multi-medial, virtual world of the internet. Is it possible that this *striking* of the *light-tone* is, as a matter of fact, equal to the *songs beyond humankind*? The mystery

of the connection between the opening and the closing lines of the poem may be solved by this interpretation.

Medial cultural techniques and the incredibly quick development of electronic technical media in the 20th century provided completely new types of experience to people, and in the modern age it also led to the radical change and re-formation of poetry (Ernő Kulcsár Szabó 2004: 166–178). Mechanical archiving systems and discourse networks were invented, discourses multiplied themselves, and it is not clear at all to whom messages – if we can still speak about messages at all – are addressed in the seemingly chaotic context of human culture that is mediated multiple times. Medial changes also caused changes in the field of literature, and Celan's poem which has been interpreted many times, may be considered as the imprint of these changes.

It is Friedrich Kittler who states that no sense is possible without some kind of physical carrier, medium; that is, our human world and culture are necessarily mediated and medial. However, the notion of noise introduced by Shannon nearly always enters the process of mediation, disturbing factors never can be excluded (Kittler 2005: 455-474). Poetry is maybe one of the clearest manifestations of language, a use of language that in principle should not be disturbed by any noise. The gist of poetry is that it creates its elements as self-referential elements, and it was the well-known model of communication by Jakobson that increased the distance between sign and noise as large as possible. Poetry is a medium, a form of communication that defends itself against disturbing factors called *noises.* If we consider the hermetic poetics of Celan's works and their wish to place themselves out of space and time, out of all networks that can be disturbed by noises, then it can be interpreted as a wish for a kind of immediacy.

Despite all of this, nowadays, numberless kinds of noise shadow the communication in our culture. Today noise can also be technically manipulated, and it is even used to mediate secret, encoded messages, as it can be observed in secret technologies of military communication (Kittler 2005). The relationship between noise and sign has been gradually blurred since it became possible to manipulate their relationship and since the mathematically based communication systems became able to change the nature of noise. It may even lead to the conclusion that it is not certain at all that the addressee of certain messages can be called *man.* By and large it seems to be compatible with the possible interpretation of Celan's poem according to which the addressee of the songs that are sung *beyond humankind* we necessarily cannot call man / human.

The conquest of the electronic and optical media and the strong tendency of technicalisation in our society make it possible to conclude that we can gain knowledge about our own senses only via media. Art and technical media can serve the goal to deceive human senses. The technical media of our days, similarly to Celan's poetry and the above cited poems, create fictional worlds, illusion. Furthermore, in some cases this illusion may be so perfect that even the definition of *reality* becomes questionable (Kittler 2005: 7–40). These medium are first and foremost optical, and only secondly acoustic, since for the man of the present day the sight, the vision is becoming more and more primary.

Optical and electronic media, compared to the historical past, treat symbolic contents in a completely new manner. While the human body in its own materiality still belongs to the (physical) reality, media are more and more becoming the embodiment of the imaginary, the unreal existence and bring this unreality closer and closer to man. Paul Celan's above cited poem may also turn our attention to this tendency. Perhaps it is worth speaking about technicalistaion and the new types of media in a neutral manner, not judging them, but the extreme presence of technology in our society and the possible disappearance of *humankind* as such, the message, the songs *beyond humankind* in a temporal sense may be a fearsome thought. We are not to forget that the poem entitled *Fadensonnen* speaks about a *grayblack wasteness* (a landscape burnt to ashes?), a deserted waste land, in which we may see only a *thought striking the light-tone* – but no human being. Due to the extreme presence of technology in the (material) human culture, certain phenomena can be liberated that cannot be dominated by man anymore. Celan's poem, and the possible negative utopia that it suggests can be read as a warning. Citing Georg Simmel, the tragedy of human culture (mainly in terms of mental values) is in the fact that after a while it may cease itself – man means the greatest danger to oneself, and not some external factor (Simmel 1999: 75–93).

The Illusion of Immediacy

We may presume a tendency in Paul Celan's poetry according to which the poetic texts intend to cease, or at least decrease *mediatedness* and mediality, mainly the medium that has been proved to be imperfect for communication by these days: language. However, if art is not able to overcome the *mediatedness* by language, then it may experience to withdraw itself from all systems and laws of human world, creating its own reality. As it was mentioned above, art frequently mediates the world of the imaginary.

As if some of Celan's poems also tended to make art completely *privative*, ceasing or defying mediality and *mediatedness* by resigning from any type of mediation. Poems do not *mediate* anything more, only *stand* in themselves, beyond everyone and everything. This intention may be conceived in the late poem entitled *Stehen – To stand*.

John Felstiners english translation

TO STAND, in the shadow

Of a scar in the air.
Stand-for-no-one-and-nothing.
Unrecognized,
For you,
Alone.
With all that has room within it,
Even without
Language.

The Original german poem

STEHEN im Schatten

Des Wundenmals in der Luft.
Für-niemand-und-nichts-Stehn.
Unerkannt,
Für dich allein.
Mit allem, was darin Raum hat,
Auch ohne
Sprache.

The poem places itself out of the dimension of time – it is also testified by the infinitive form of the first word of the text, lacking grammatical aspect or tense. This *standing* does not takes place sometime, even the *where* of the poem (*in the shadow of a scar in the air*) is questionable. We may not even state that it is some poetic speaker who *stands* – no more speaker, no more subject exists, it is merely the poem itself that withdraws itself from everywhere, into its own reality where nothing else exists beside it. This standing is also imaginable *even without language*, as the poem says – no more language, no more medium is necessary anymore, since nothing more is mediated. McLuhans statement according to which all media contain another medium (McLuhan 1964) is suspended in this poetic context, since the poem refers to only itself without mediating any linguistic or non-linguistic message, placing itself out of technical media, meanings,

or anything tangible. From outside the poem is not graspable anymore, and anything can be valid only in its enclosed world. This way, the enclosed and seemingly unreachable world is able to create the illusion of immediacy, lacking any kind of mediation and mediality. Certainly, we can ask the question how understanding is possible if the poem speaks merely within its own reality, mediating, carrying no more meaning. This statement is evidently valid only within imaginary, artistic, poetic frameworks, and just for a certain time, since the reader, nevertheless, is *granted* something from the poetic world of the poem defining itself unreachable and free of mediation by reading and interpreting the text, at least receiving the splinters of this poetic reality, remaining at the level of intuition and suspicion, even if complete understanding does not seem possible anymore.

Essentially, the same idea of the cessation of mediality may be conceived in one of Celan's last poems entitled *Schreib dich nicht – Dont write yourself*:

John Felstiners english translation

DONT WRITE YOURSELF

In between worlds,
Rise up against
Multiple meanings,
Trust the trail of tears
And learn to live.

The orginal german poem

SCHREIB DICH NICHT

Zwischen die Welten,
Komm auf gegen
Der Bedeutungen Vielfalt,
Vertrau der Tränenspur
Und lerne leben.

In the above poem the metaphor of understanding the world as *reading* repeatedly appears – the poetic speaker / the poem itself calls itself on not *writing itself between worlds*; that is, is should not take the role of the medium or experiment to mediate anything between the different dimensions of existence, for example between man and man, subject and subject, since due to the *illegibility of the world* and the extreme *mediatedness* the exact mediation of meanings is maybe impossible. The tragedy of language – and of other media – is in the fact that after a while

they tend to eliminate themselves. Human culture evidently needs media (Pfeiffer 2005: 11-49), and medium can even be the synonym for art in certain contexts. However, a question arises: what sense does it have to try to mediate anything, if nothing can be perfectly mediated? Certain pieces of Paul Celan's oeuvre lead to the conclusion that they give up the intention of any form of mediation. The poem *rises up against multiple meanings* and does not intend to mediate anything from the chaotic and dubious flow of meanings, departing to a lonely travel (Celan 1996) and reach a world where *mediatedness* and mediation is no more necessary. This world is concealed within the poem itself. The poem can only trust *the trail of tears* – the tears shed for the pain of the lack of immediacy and the multiple *mediatedness* of the world. The poem can *learn to live* only if it reaches the self-enclosed state of immediacy, standing for itself alone, where it is not exposed to language or any other technical medium. Certainly, this poetic withdrawal is only illusionary, yet for a moment, perhaps, we may feel as if the experience of immediacy became possible.

It may be an interesting observation that after the gloomy decades of the linguistic scepticism the desire for immediacy gradually recurs in the discourse of literature and literary studies of the present days (Kulcsár-Szabó 2003: 272-307), as it also seems to appear in some of Paul Celan's late poems. Although we know well that our culture and all human experience are originally mediated, and mediality belongs to the essence of human existence, the immediate experience of phenomenon seems to be impossible, it is good to hope that somehow it is possible to bypass mediality. Art and poetry within it as a way of speaking clearer and perhaps more immediate than everyday language – as Celan's poetry intending to demolish linguistic limits – may grant us the hope that we can experience certain phenomena in an immediate way, accessing their substance.

References

1. Bachmann, Ingeborg (1978): *Frankfurter Vorlesungen: Probleme zeitgenössischer Dichtung*, in *Werke*, 4. v.d. Christine Koschel et al. (ed.), Piper Verlag.
2. Bacsó, Béla (1996): *A szó árnyéka*. Pécs: Jelenkor.
3. Bartók, Imre (2009): *Paul Celan – A sérült élet poétikája*. Budapest: LHarmattan.
4. Celan, Paul (1959): *Sprachgitter*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag.

5. Celan, Paul (1963): *Die Niemandsrose.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
6. Celan, Paul (1967): *Atemwende.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
7. Celan, Paul (1971): *Schneepart.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
8. Celan, Paul (1976): *Zeitgehöft.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
9. Celan, Paul (1996): *Meridián.* Trans. Gábor Schein. Budapest: Enigma, 1996/6.
10. Celan, Paul (2005): *Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
11. Celan, Paul (2001): *Selected Poems and Prose.* Trans. John Felstiner. London-New York: W. W. Norton.
12. Derrida, Jacques (1991): *Grammatológia*. Budapest-Szombathely: Életünk-Magyar Műhely.
13. Derrida, Jacques (1994): *Shibboleth – For Paul Celan.* Trans Joshua Wilner. In: *Word Traces – Readings of Paul Celan.* ed. Aris Fioretos. Baltimore-London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 3-74.
14. Felstiner, John (1995): *Paul Celan – Poet, Survivor, Jew.* New Heaven-London: Yale University Press.
15. Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1993): *Wer bin ich und wer bist du?.* In: *Aesthetik und Poetik II. Hermenautik Vollzug. Gesammelte Werke.* J. C. B. Mohr Verlag.
16. Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1994): *A szép aktualitása.* Budapest: T-Twins Kiadó.
17. Gadamer, Hans-Georg (2003): *Igazság ésMódszer.* Trans. Gábor Bonyhai. Budapest: Osiris Kiadó.
18. Kiss, Noémi (2003): *Határhelyzetek – Paul Celan költészete és magyar recepciója.* Budapest: Anonymus Kiadó.
19. Kittler, Friedrich (2005): *Optikai médiumuk.* Trans. Pál Kelemen. Budapest: Magyar Műhely-Ráció.
20. Kittler, Friedrich (2005): *Zaj és jel távolsága.* In: *Intézményesség és kulturális közvetítés.* Ed. Tibor Bónus, Pál Kelemen, Gábor Tamás Molnár. Budapest: Ráció.
21. Kulcsár Szabó, Ernő (2004): *Költészettörténet és mediális kultúrtechnikák.* In *Szöveg, medialitás, filológia.* Budapest: Akadémiai

Kiadó.

22. Kulcsár Szabó, Ernő (2007): *Az értekező beszéd irodalma.* In: *Az olvasás rejtekútjai.* Ed. Tibor Bónus, Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó et al. Budapest: Ráció.
23. Kulcsár-Szabó, Zoltán (2003): *A közvetlenség visszatérése*. In: *Történelem, kultúra, medialitás.* Ed. Ernő Kulcsár Szabó, Péter Szirák. Budapest: Balassi Kiadó.
24. Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe (1996): *Katasztrófa.* Trans. Viktória Radics and István Szántó F. In: *Paul Celan versei Marnó János fordításában.* Budapest: Enigma Kiadó.
25. Lőrincz, Csongor (2003): *Medialitás és diskurzus.* In: *Történelem, kultúra, medialitás.* Ed. Ernő Kulcsár Szabó, Péter Szirák. Budapest: Balassi Kiadó.
26. McLuhan, Marshall (1962): *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
27. McLuhan, Marshall (1964): *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man.* New York-Toronto-London: MacGraw-Hill Book Company.
28. Miller, Jonathan (1971): *McLuhan.* London: Collins-Fontans.
29. Ong, Walter J. (1994): *Nyomtatás, tér, lezárás.* In: *Szóbeliség és írásbeliség*. Ed. Kristóf Nyíri, Gábor Szécsi. Budapest: Áron Kiadó.
30. Pfeiffer, K. Ludwig (2005): A mediális és az imaginárius. Budapest: Magyar Műhely-Ráció.
31. Simmel, Georg (1999): *A kultúra fogalma és tragédiája.* In: *Forrásmunkák a kultúra életéből: német kultúraelméleti tanulmányok II.* Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó.
32. Steiner, George (1998): *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman.* New Heaven-London: Yale University Press.
33. Stierle, Karlheinz (1996): *Aesthetische Ratinalität.* Munich: Fink Verlag.
34. Szondi, Peter (1972): *Celan-Studien.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Chapter - 10

Passing Through the Borders of Language: On the Theory and Practice of poetry Translation

Since the practice of poetry translation is not homogeneous, that is, in fact it is dependent on language, historical age, culture, and, above all, it is also translation-specific, views on the substance and the limits of its possibilities are very divided. Here and now, we shall attempt to briefly compare 'conservative' and 'liberal' poetry translation practices, insofar as it is possible to apply such an extreme typology to the boundaries, since, as we have already stressed, these boundaries often blur, they are practically very flexible.

In general, it is difficult to make definite statements about conservative and liberal translation practices, but at most some characteristics can be listed, some of which may or may not be true for a given translation of a given poem or other literary text. The essence of 'conservative' poetry translation is obviously that the given translator tries to follow both form and content as faithfully as possible, and does not give much ground in this determination. Sometimes this is good, sometimes it is not good, as the balance between form and content is very difficult to strike and find, and in practice one is often at the expense of the other. In fact, it is perhaps superfluous to call a particular trend in poetry translation inherently conservative, since, on a case-by-case basis, it is possible to observe both 'conservative' and 'liberal' features in a given translation, with almost total fidelity to the content being accompanied by a disruption of the original form.

The literary translator's 'liberalism', on the other hand, can mean that the translator is free to use form and content, making more concessions to himself, breaking away from the original poem and using it only as a basis, or even creating a new artwork that is completely independent of the original text in all respects. Liberal translation can range from a minimal change in content and form to paraphrase or adaptation. As mentioned above, it is possible to produce a partly liberal and partly conservative translation of a given poem by the translator making almost no concessions in one aspect, and being very permissive in another.

The literary translator's conservatism and liberalism may also clash in the case of what exactly does the poet–translator consider himself or herself to be? Does the translator define themselves as an author, or as a servant of the foreign-language author, who tries to translate the poem from one language into another, free of inspiration and without putting his own personality into the translation? Does the translator want to faithfully mediate from the source language to the target language, or intends to create a completely new creative literary text based on the original one?

Like other questions of poetry translation, it is also very difficult to find a complete and satisfactory answer. It might be a limitedly valid point of view that the poet–translator cannot in any case completely banish his own individuality from the text of the translation, since it is they who creates the translated text in the target language, and for this they must have the capacity of using language creatively and individually. The literary translator has to *create* a poem, which they is unlikely to be able to do independently of his own tone, literary voice. A certain degree of liberalism is, therefore, essential if one is to translate a given poem from one language into another. Whether this should be done in a slavish, uninspired way, or whether one should strive to re-create in some way the same thing that the author wrote, while at the same time creating something new and independent of it, is again a matter of rather divided opinion…

As poetry translation is not a practice that can be defined by precise, exact guidelines, but it is rather art rather than simple craft, unlike traditional translation, there are arguments for and against its practitioners, both conservative and liberal. Settling the debate is by no means easy, and perhaps it is not even possible, and both trends of literary translation can and do have their legitimate place in the discourse.

There are undoubtedly many controversies surrounding the translation of poetry in any language, since there are concepts that cannot be translated from one language to another without paraphrasing it within the framework of a poem. This is not necessarily related to the conservative or liberal nature of the practice, but it is certainly worth mentioning and is closely linked to the nature of translation practice. In fact, to simplify it, *everything can be translated* from any language into any language, but in the case of poems, because of the very strict length criteria in the majority of cases, this is in most cases not feasible without loss of content or the partial or total disruption of the original form. This is a point on which both conservative and liberal literary translators must agree with each other, at least in part.

Having roughly outlined the extremities between which the practice of translating poetry can move, the question still remains to us: is translating poetry an artistic activity, or is it no more than workshop work, a craft that can actually be learned? There are countless arguments for and against this question, and everyone who comes into contact with poetry translation in any form is forced to take a position on one side or on the other. We are forced to do the same, and the present essay will therefore treat poetry translation as rather artistic activity than craftsmanship. In the following sections, therefore, we will therefore discuss the arguments that can be made for the fact that poetry translation is not merely a mechanical task and action of translation, but is artistic activity, part of which, like other artistic activities, can be learned, but without a certain artistic talent one may never become a good poetry translator. There are, therefore, several arguments for considering poetry translation as an artistic activity rather than as a set of partly schematic stages of mental work that are entirely similar to traditional translation practice and which depend on knowledge of the source and the target language.

However, despite all of the arguments in its favour, the question arises again and again in the history of poetry translation, whether it is in fact an artistic work that creates an artefact, an artistic creation, or whether it is nothing more than a very difficult form of translation, which, although it requires a high level of training and a lot of practice, is somewhere below art in the hierarchy. Another frequently asked question is whether, in fact, translating poetry is more or less than writing original poetry, and if so, in what way is it more or less than creating poetic texts?

Well, first of all, since poetry translation is emphatically only learnable at a certain level and judging whether it is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ is nearly a completely subjective judgement, it probably deserves to be called artistic activity. After all, most translators of poetry are usually practicing creative poets themselves, that is, artists who are unable to separate themselves and their talent of art from their own poetic voice. Therefore, they are forced, wittingly or unwittingly, to incorporate it into their translations. In the majority of cases, there is not much to be said about the mechanical character of literary translation, since every foreign-language poet and every foreign-language poem has a completely different content, atmosphere and literary world, and every poem is a new challenge for the translator who takes the task to translate it from a source language into a target language. Although the translator’s scope is in some respects narrower than if they had to write their own poems without any guidance, they still cannot rely on

knowledge of the source language and a dictionary alone. They has to have something more that cannot be grasped, cannot really be defined with scientific and scholarly notions. It is not really possible to *grasp* clearly how a poetry translator works and should work, since linguistics and literary studies can at best only grasp and describe certain aspects of it clearly, as far as we believe. For example, editorial work, which in the case of translation in the traditional sense may be a guarantee of the quality of the translation, is no serious guarantee of anything in the case of poetry translation, except fidelity of content. Artistic quality, if it is possible to speak of artistic quality within any clear framework, cannot be guaranteed by editorial work, by the editor's taste, since the editor themselves is usually not a practicing artist, but is able to form an opinion on a given translation of a given poem on the basis of certain precise and clearly describable aspects of its content.

But can an editor simply check that form and content are in perfect, or at least in nearly perfect harmony in a given translation of a given poem? Perhaps only if they tries to examine the work in question not from an editorial, that is, professional point of view, but as a recipient of an artwork. After all, there have been no clear criteria for defining art since its existence, and the compilation of literary canons, including the canons of poetry translations, is nearly entirely arbitrary, the product of subjective judgements of individuals who judge works of a given period to be good or bad according to certain criteria. And it is not uncommon that what is accepted by the literary canon is not appreciated by the reading public, and the reverse may also be true in certain cases. Since literature, like all human activities, is a social construction, it is full of subjective factors.

Obviously, the goals of each literary translator vary, and very often they are combined. Man by nature enjoys recognition, but the artist is almost always attracted by artistic challenges, and the practitioners of a given field of art are often also consciously seeking to delight the recipient through artistic creation.

Going even further, it could also be argued that poetry translation is in fact no less an artistic activity than writing poetry or making music. The analogy between the translator and the musician is often mentioned in professional literature. On this basis, music can also be considered a kind of translation, since the composer creates it in a form inaudible to the human ear, in the musical score, and the musician interprets it through the instrument in a form audible and enjoyable to the recipient. Yet it is not usually argued that the act of making music in itself, without the musician

himself being a composer, deserves the title of art. If the translator makes the work of the author of a poem in a foreign language intelligible in the target language, as it were, 'rearranges' it, then translation of the poem can be fully considered an activity fully equal to any other form of literature, and not even a lower form of art. Since the tradition of literary history testifies that, in general, and in a very large number of cases, the poet-translators who are (considered to be) significant have, in addition to their work as translators, also an outstanding poetic oeuvre, their oeuvre as translators is often considered to be part of their poetic oeuvre. Although there are some excellent poet-translators who have written very few poems and whose poetic work is not so significant in comparison with their translation work, the reverse is more likely to be the case: poets who are considered to be great in world literature can often boast a significant oeuvre as literary translators, but their translations are sometimes far fewer in number than their own poems.

Of course, there are very special cases, such as Jorge Luis Borges. The Argentine literary genius was legendary throughout his life, and he handled his mother tongue, Spanish, with the confidence of a poet, as well as Portuguese (which is very close to Spanish), and also French, German and English. Libraries are now filled with the critical reception of Borges's work, since he wrote outstanding poems in all the above mentioned languages, and also translated a large number of poems from one to another. For instance, it was him who translated Beowulf into Spanish, and this is just one example of the major works of his extensive oeuvre of literary translation. In Borges's case, there can hardly be done a clear distinction between poetry and poetry translation, and the work of an author who works in and within several languages and jumps between them with the dexterity of a cat is the evidence of how close writing creative poetry and poetry translation really are to each other.

We are talking about two similar, but in some ways two completely different artistic activities: writing creative poetry and poetry translation. It is undeniable, however, that poetry translation itself requires poetic skills from its practitioner, and therefore it is no different, and cannot be considered anything other than an artistic activity in the strictest sense of the word.

Having argued that poetry translation is an artistic activity within the field of art of literature, and perhaps no less than writing creative poetry, it is now worth making a few remarks about its significance as a form of fiction, and thus as a form of art. Since poetry translation is essentially an

attempt to introduce the audience of the culture of the target language into the work of an author who, without knowledge of the language, would be inaccessible to the majority of the audience, and its primary role may be to mediate poetry between, through languages. After all, most people who speak a foreign language usually know at most one or two languages at the level at which they can read fiction, let alone poetry, and even the most linguistically gifted people usually know at most four or five foreign languages at the very high level at which they can enjoy lyric poetry, which is usually a different genre to read and interpret. Therefore, only a small percentage of the world literature, without translation, is only accessible to even those who have mastered a number of foreign languages at a fairly high level.

Therefore, it is perhaps not an exaggeration to state that without poetry translation, *world literature* as such does not exist, cannot exist, but only lyric poetry in national languages, separated from each other, creating no network, and this statement can also be extended to all forms and genres of literature. Poetry translation, in this view, has no less than a *role of constituting world poetry*, for without it, it is impossible to get to know the poetry of other nations to any degree. At the same time, poetry translation becomes, in a certain sense, part of the literature of poetry of the target language in the national culture as well, and therefore, it does not only create the world poetry, but also constitutes a significant part of the poetic literature of each nation. World poetry is not merely composed of the poetic literature of individual nations, but can perhaps be treated as something more than the sum of the national lyric poetic literatures, as something that exists above them.

In every historical age, every human society and in every literary environment, there has been, is and possibly will be a great need to translate foreign-language literature, and within it, foreign-language poetry into the target language of a given nation. The poetry translator is, therefore, no less than a mediator between national literatures, and thus between cultures. Consequently, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the poetry translators deserve more recognition than they usually receive within the given national literatures. The credit usually goes to the author first, and the translator of the poem only second, but the translator does much more than simply translate a text from language A into language B. If poetry translation is a poetic, creative and artistic work, then perhaps we can also conclude that its importance should be given more attention in all respects than is generally given to it in contemporary discourses of literature and literary criticism…

References

1. Borges, Jorge Luis (2002): *The Craft of Verse*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
2. De Man, Paul (1997): *Schlussfolegrungen. Walter Benjamins 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers',* In Alfred Hirsch (Hg.): *Übersetzung und Dekonstruktion.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
3. Derrida, Jacques (19997): *Babylonische Türme. Wege, Umwege, Abwege*. In Alfred Hirsch (Hg.): *Übersetzung und Dekonstruktion*, 119-165. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
4. Madarász, Imre (2005): *Irodalomkönyvecske.* Budapest: Hungarovox.
5. Rába, György (1969). *Szép hűtlenek*. Budapest: Akadémiai.
6. Steiner, George (2005): *Bábel után – nyelv és fordítás I.* Budapest: Corvina.
7. Szegedy-Maszák, Mihály (2008): *Megértés, fordítás, kánon*. Bratislava-Budapest: Kalligram.

Chapter - 11

A Scholarly Attempt of Close-Reading of Walter Benjamin's Essay 'The Task of the Translator' and Paul De Man's Commentary in Parallel

Walter Benjamin: The task of the literary translator

(Scanning the primary text)

Right at the beginning of his well-known and paradigmatic essay, Walter Benjamin rejects the notion of the ideal recipient, as if he were to consider poetry as existing for its own sake rather than being addressed to the reader in particular – he calls it pure language (*Reine Sprache*).

According to his thesis, the translator must go beyond conveying the message of the literary work. A translation that only conveys the message of the work is not a good translation. Linguistic expressions are in some respects untranslatable, some works are essentially translatable, while others do not yield to the intention of translation.

A translated text is a text that has a life of its own in relation to the original work, since it was written later than the original text. The translation owes its very existence to the glory of the original work, i.e. its exceptional aesthetic value, since the original work is a text that has been found worthy of being lifted out of its own linguistic and cultural environment and transplanted into a foreign culture by means of translation.

Benjamin argues that languages are related to each other in what they want to say, and that translation expresses this. That is, despite superficial differences, human languages function in a very similar way, and it is this similarity of function, as a kind of anthropological unity that makes the phenomenon of translation itself possible.

A translation is not a work that can be considered definitive, as the original work it is based on changes over time. By this Benjamin surely means that it is the way in which the work is received that is changing over time, and the texts take on new and new meanings. The translator's mother tongue itself also changes, so that at certain intervals a re-translation may be

necessary, since some older translations may appear linguistically outdated, making it difficult to receive them in the target language.

Benjamin introduces the notion of *so-understanding* to show that, although languages are distinct in their external structure, they are very similar in their intentions. Two words in two different languages, e.g. French *pain* and German *Brot*, mutually exclude each other, yet their meaning is essentially the same, since they refer to the same entity.

Translation is only a temporary way of fighting the alienation of languages. Benjamin reiterates that no translation can claim permanence because of the temporal aspect.

The author seems to lean a little towards mysticism when he claims that there is a layer of the literary work that no translation can convey. On the other hand, he makes a sober, considered statement when he claims that the translated text can no longer be translated, and it is therefore much less capable of being lifted out of its place than the original work.

Benjamin argues that the tasks of the poet and the literary translator are basically very different, since the literary translator need not necessarily be a poet – a claim he supports by the fact that many great translators, such as Martin Luther and Friedrich Schlegel, were poor or at least mediocre poets in relation to their epoch-making literary translations. The translator's task is distinguishable from that of the poet because, unlike the poet, the translator's task is not directed at reality, but solely at language. The poet's intention is original, reflecting reality, whereas the translator merely encounters the original work, which exists through language, and merely creates an echo of the original work through the process of translation.

Another of Benjamin's claims, perhaps containing a bit of a mysticism, and perhaps not scientific enough to our contemporary minds, is that the literary translator tries to integrate the many languages into one single true language, but what he means by a single true language is not explained in any further detail, perhaps because of the limitations of his essay. Translation, like philosophy, has 'no muse'; that is, unlike poetry, it is not an inspired activity, but rather a kind of craft that requires knowledge rather than inspiration.

Translation, according to Benjamin, is itself a form, and the fidelity to form required by literary translation can sometimes make it difficult to be faithful to the meaning. Strangely enough, a translation, especially in its own time, has little virtue if it appears to be a creation of its own language, that is, if it does not show any foreignness, if it does not feel like a

translated text, with an original work written in a language completely foreign to the target language behind it.

According to Benjamin, freedom of translation seems to be justified for one's own language. The aim is to achieve a kind of *pure language*, but Benjamin does not give any further analysis of this in the last section of his essay, but merely describes the task of the literary translator as being nothing other than to redeem *pure language* as an exile, to free the language captured in the original work from the reproduction in the target language. Perhaps this actually means that the translator's task is to make visible and comprehensible in the target language text, in the translation, the content that is hidden, implicit, in the original work. It should be pointed out, of course, that Benjamin's text, which later became the subject of great controversy, as his later interpreter Paul de Man points out, is, like most works of fiction, itself resistant to understanding and allows for multiple interpretations.

At the end of his paradigmatic essay, Benjamin states that the extent to which a given translation is able to fulfil the essence of translation as a form is determined, in an almost objective way, by the translatability of the original work. Translatability and untranslatability are therefore obviously not the same for all works, and if it is not measurable, then it is perhaps still intuitively perceptible. The more a work is a communication; that is, the more it is intended to express some kind of explicit message or content, the less it is worth translating, whereas the more highly structured and complex a work is, the more it is untranslatable. Benjamin is perhaps also thinking here of the word games in some literary works, of references deeply encoded in the culture of the source language, or of the deliberate concealment of meaning, which obviously make it difficult to integrate the work into another language and to make it intelligible to another culture.

Friedrich Hölderlin's translations of Sophocles are good examples of the great harmony between languages, since they try to remain true to the form, in them the German language moves more towards Greek than Greek towards German, but at the same time they are all the more difficult to receive and understand. Nevertheless, these translations of Sophocles are a kind of archetype of literary translation, and perhaps in some way they serve as a model for contemporary literary translators as well.

Benjamin goes so far at the very end of the essay to say that some great literary texts, such as sacred texts like the Holy Bible contain their own virtual translation; that is, they are so true that their content can be

reproduced for anyone in any language. The interlinear version of sacred texts, a translation written between the lines, which follows the syntax of the original text to such an extent that it does not even take into account the syntactic specificities of the target language are imagined by Benjamin as the idea of translation. It should be noted, however, that this view seems obviously idealistic to our postmodern eyes, and it is probably not feasible in practice for all texts.

An interesting observation about the text is that Benjamin seems at times to be trying to formulate his message with the precision of exact science, and at other times to be assuming certain transcendent elements that do not need explanation or cannot be explained in words, and his text seems to be speaking out of religious frenzy.

For example, it is common sense, which even today seems scientific, that different literary works can be translated from one language to another at different levels, so there are evidently degrees of translatability. It may also be argued that, while the poet (and by this we probably mean the prose writer or dramatist in the modern sense as well; that is, the author of any genre of literary text) draws the meaning of his work from reality, if we assume the legitimacy of referential readings, it is the task of the translator, his/her activity is first and foremost a linguistic one, enclosed in language, since he/she does not create his/her work entirely inspired by reality, but on the basis of another work written in a foreign language, which is itself a linguistic expression, and translation therefore refers to another text. This obviously anticipates the current view of literary scholarship that translations can themselves be treated as intertexts, since they are texts that in some way refer to and derive from a literary work that preceded them.

However, the existence of *pure language*, *reine Sprache*, by which Benjamin obviously means the language of poetry (?), but does not explain it, does not make it tangible, is a mystical and inexplicit claim, and *pure language* certainly cannot be interpreted and defined within the scholarly, literary theoretical frameworks of our time.

This constant alternation of scientifically verifiable and metaphysical claims makes Benjamin's text itself very similar to a literary work, in the way that it resists comprehension and obviously allows for multiple readings, making it difficult to decide whether, in contemporary terms, we should read *The Task of the Translator* as a text with scientifically substantiated claims, or as a work of fiction that is at least partly fictional and imaginary? Certainly, in the case of texts on literature it is not so easy to decide…

*

Paul De Man: Walter Benjamin on the Task of the Translator

(Scanning the Commentary)

Paul de Man, in his equally well-known lecture on Walter Benjamin's essay, begins by saying that it is impossible to translate from Benjamin, as the various translations of Benjamin's essay attest. He follows Hans-Georg Gadamer's suggestion that the task of 20th-century philosophy is nothing less than to reassess earlier concepts. In Gadamer's view, Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the philosophers of the German tradition who were paradigmatic until the age of modernity, represented a degree of naivety that we have now moved beyond. Compared to Gadamer's conception, Benjamin's essay may at first sight seem to be a step backwards, as if a kind of messianistic world view could be read out of it. In de Man's reading, Hölderlin, George or Mallarmé appear almost as saints in Benjamin's concept of poetry, he sees poetry as a kind of sacred language, which is not really addressed to the audience or the reader. The essay is therefore, according to de Man, is a step backwards to the messianic world view, and it is no wonder that it is criticised by many, but praised by others precisely because it restores the sacred status of literary texts, which has been challenged by the destructiveness of metaphysics.

De Man's presentation asks the question what does Benjamin's essay actually tell us? The answer to this question is that scientific discourse is not capable of reaching any kind of common agreement. Even the various translators of the text are not fully aware of what Benjamin is actually saying, and even when translating simple statements they go astray. But de Man also raises the question whether Benjamin, under the pretext of examining the task of the literary translator, is not doing nothing more than poetics, that is, a theoretical approach to poetic language? Benjamin originally intended the essay to be as an introduction to his own interpretations of Baudelaire, and so the text could be a kind of self-legitimation. But de Man sees more than that in the essay, and one of the main reasons for this is that, ironically, Benjamin believes that the translator, unlike the poet, is necessarily doomed to failure, since the translated text he creates can never be as good as the original work it is based on. The title of the work is tautological in de Man's reading, since *Aufgabe* in German means both task and abandonment, giving up/resigning from an intention; that is, it implies that the translator is in some way forced to abandon his own mission. (This, of course, implies in a way a

deconstruction of the text, since we do not know whether Benjamin really intended to include this plane of interpretation in the title of his essay – the author's intention, of course, cannot be fully reconstructed afterwards, but we must not forget that De Man's reading is itself an interpretation of the text under examination, and is therefore by no means objective.)

De Man points out that Benjamin makes a cardinal distinction between the poet and the literary translator, and even points out that many great literary translators were poor, or at least mediocre, poets. In de Man's reading, the poet works primarily with meaning, which does not strictly speaking belong to language; the translator, on the other hand, is closely related to language, his relationship to the original text is similar to that of one language to another language, and translation cannot be placed outside language. Translation, according to Benjamin, is more like philosophy, in that philosophy is not a representation of the world, but has a different relationship to the world. In his reading of Benjamin, de Man also sees translation to be similar to criticism or literary theory, and he writes this mainly on the basis of Schlegel. It is also ironic that the translated text is in some cases more canonical than the original work, since the original by its very nature does not require canonisation or translation. Only the original work is translatable, a translated text cannot be translated further under any circumstances, and its place is in practice more static than that of the original text. The activity of translation is also similar to literary criticism in the way that it reads and canonises the translated text. Obviously, translating a text into a foreign language has some significance if it is an attempt to transpose it into another culture by lifting it out of its own national literature, but at the same time translation is also necessarily interpretation.

De Man also points out that, according to Benjamin, translation is also like history. We should not imagine history in terms of dialectics, but rather understand natural changes from the perspective of history, not the other way round. It is the same in the case of translation – we are able to understand the original work from the perspective of translations. Translation is not some kind of mapping or paraphrase. But de Man draws attention to the metaphorical sense of the German verb *übersetzen*, which is in fact an exact translation of the Greek word *metaphorein*. In de Man's interpretation of Benjamin, metaphor is not really metaphor, which is why *The Task of the Translator* is also a rather difficult text to translate. The translation is not metaphorical in the sense that the translated text does not resemble the original, which is, in de Man's view, a paradox.

In the same way, philosophy, criticism and literary theory are not similar to what they are derived from, since they are activities within a language. But de Man argues that Benjamin points to the fact that it is in one's own language that one feels most alienated, as opposed to the idealistic assumption that it is in one's own language that one feels most at home. This is also shown by the various translations of Benjamin's text, in which de Man points out various, both minor and major misunderstandings.

Translation, as a process, gives the illusion of life, but in de Man's view it is more a kind of life after death, since translation also reveals the deadness of the original text. In de Man's reading, Benjamin is not talking about the suffering of individuals or subjects, suffering of human beings, but rather suffering of language that takes place exclusively in the world of language. Benjamin's text is itself a fine illustration of this phenomenon, since, as de Man repeatedly emphasises, even the most excellent translators cannot cope with it, nor can the interpreters and commentators who attempt to analyse it – the text is the best example of what it says about itself, and speaks of itself and the problems of translation and understanding that it manifests as a meta-language.

According to de Man, Benjamin conceives a whole theory of language in the space of a few sentences by distinguishing between *the thought* (*das Gemeinte*) and the *mode of thought* (*Art des Meines*), between the signified and the mode of meaning of the statement. In the case of French translations, the transposition of these words also proves to be rather problematic. But de Man acknowledges that Benjamin is right that the problem of translating certain words into another language is a purely linguistic one.

According to Benjamin, the translator cannot really do more than translate literally, and in some cases ignores the syntactic relations of the target language and follows the syntax of the original text. But are grammar and meaning compatible at this level? De Man points out that Benjamin cites the example of Hölderlin's translations of Sophocles, which are both literal and almost incomprehensible. The meaning of a word is so elusive that even grammar cannot capture it.

In Benjamin's view, there is a kind of original, pure language, which in de Man's reading is in fact not more than a religious thesis about the unity of human language. This is exemplified in Benjamin's essay the simile of the dish, where he says that in order for the pieces of a broken dish to fit together, they must fit together down to the smallest detail, but not be

similar in form. According to Carol Jacobs's commentary also cited by Paul de Man, Benjamin does not say that the pots are assembled into a whole, but that the assembling of the broken pots only produces another broken pot, that is, that the idea of the whole is in fact a kind of illusion.

But de Man also points out that it is not at all clear in the various translations whether Benjamin is referring to the broken pots of a single vessel, i.e. whether he is assuming some kind of integrity in the metaphor. Here again, Benjamin's text, which speaks of an inerrancy in a certain sense, is itself a prime example of this inerrancy. De Man argues that every translation is a type of fragment of the original, but that the original work is also a fragment of the language – the translation is, therefore, a fragment of the fragment.

The supposed fidelity and freedom of translation are both aporias. On the one hand, it is useful if the translation faithfully conveys the content of the original text, but on the other hand, given the idiomatic nature of the target language, freedom is obviously a requirement. However, translation pushes the original work even further towards disintegration, towards fragmentation, and *pure language* exists only as a collection of all languages, but in de Man's reading, this is the real tragedy of the fact that for man, the language he believes to be his own becomes the most alien.

History is not entirely a human phenomenon either, since it also belongs to the dimension of language. Benjamin calls history the aberration that takes place through language. Pure language and poetic language are to be separated, since poetic language does not resemble pure language that Benjamin postulates. Benjamin's view of history is not, in de Man's opinon, messianistic, since some kind of coming of the Messiah would not complete history, but would rather abolish it.

Finally, de Man concludes that the chapter of Hegel's Aesthetics on *the sublime* is much closer to Benjamin's in The Task of the Translator than to Gadamer's, since he derives the category of the sublime from the separation of the philosophical categories of the sacred and the profane...

*

Concluding Remarks

Paul de Man deconstructs Benjamin's text in a way that is characteristic of him and the school of literary theory to which he belonged; that is, he attempts to re-read it in a radical, provocative way and to draw attention to its contradictions. The deconstructive/deconstructionist was reading is also

characterised by the fact that de Man reads the text as a vivid example of his own claim; that is, the existence of translation itself is in some way tragic and ironic in the light of the ambiguities of Benjamin's essay and the misunderstandings found in the various translations. Another deconstructive feature of the commentary is that de Man reads out of the text word plays not originally or not explicitly used by Benjamin; e.g, he interprets the word task (*Aufgabe*) as both a *task* and the abandonment of/giving up of something, or he substitutes *the political* for *the poetic* in the text, taking Benjamin's view of history as a starting point.

The understanding of the Hungarian translations of the texts (and here it should be noted that the author of the present research article, given that Hungarian is his native tongue, has started from mainly the Hungarian translations of the two texts, sometimes referring back to the original, source-language texts of the works as well) is of course complicated by the fact that, following the argument of Benjamin and de Man, they are themselves translations, with their own necessary imperfections. De Man, for a twist, cites, among other things, English and French translations of the original German text, which in places appear in the Hungarian text in Hungarian translation, and thus essentially contradict Benjamin's thesis that translation cannot be translated further (of course, in the field of humanities, the contrary is often proved by practice, depending on what foreign languages the given researcher knows, but we will not go into the topic of this here and now in detail).

Reading the theoretical texts on translation in translation, however, also makes them inherently more difficult to understand and interpret, which is why I myself believe that reading them in, for example, in Hungarian makes it even more difficult for the reader to know what Benjamin is actually saying about translation and the task of the literary translator, whether in the original text or in de Man's reading. Both Benjamin's text and de Man's text are in some way and to some degree resistant to understanding, and in both of them ambiguities can be detected, which of course can generate interesting many – and in some cases perhaps even self-serving – further interpretations, if not an infinite number...

References

1. Walter Benjamin, A műfordító feladata. trans. Csaba Szabó. In: Walter Benjamin, A szirének hallgatása. Válogatott írások. Osiris, Budapest, 2001. 71-83.
2. Carol Jacobs, In the Language of Walter Benjaminm Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1999.

3. Paul de Man, Walter Benjamin *A műfordító feladata* című írásáról. Trans. Edit Király, Átváltozások, 1994/2. 65-80.
4. Hans-Georg Gadamer, Wahrheit und Methode, De Gruyter Verlag, Oldenbourg, 1999.
5. Barbara Johnson, the Task of the Translator, in Barbara Johnson, Mother Tongues: Sexuality, Trials, Motherhood, Translation, Harvard College, 2003, 40–64.
6. Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, Megértés, fordítás, kánon, Kalligram, Budapest-Bratislava, 2008.

Chapter - 12

The Flood of Decay - Already So Close? : On a Poem by István Géher

'... A víz a leggonoszabb ...'
Micsoda beszéd? Fél év – s már kiárad,
Hömpölyget lombkoronát, tetemet,
Mossa a partot, s ami rajta száradt,
Beszívja magába, levet ereszt
A gát alá, lazítja, átszivárog
A réseken, kő kövön nem marad,
Ha csábítják sustorgó vallomások,
Ilyen vízen hajózni nem szabad.

Eveznél? Jó dolog, de csónakázás
Asztaltól ágyig? Örvénylik szobád.
Elúszik Minden, mert ez nem beázás,
Ez árvíz, ennek nincsen ne-tovább...

Folyjon tehát? az életeden átereszted?
Ám pusztítson /ha kell/: övé kurafi tested.

The Literal Translation of the Poem into english

'…your water is a sore decayer...'
What speech is it? Half a year – and it floods out,
Drifting away leaves and carcasses,
Eroding the river bank, it sucks in
What dried upon it [the bank],
Seeps under the dam, undermining it, leaking through
The breaches, no stone remains upon another stone,
If it is tempted by whispering confessions,
It is forbidden to sail on such waters.

Would you row? A good idea, but is it possible to
Boat from the table to the bed? Your room is whirling,
Everything drifts away, it is not some little leak,
But it is a flood, it cannot be stopped…

So shall it flow? You let it run through your life?
Let it destroy /if it is a must/: now it possesses your whoresome body.

The opening poem of the volume entitled '*Új Folyam*' [New River / Stream] by the contemporary Hungarian poet István Géher (1940–2012) written in 1998 was composed in a classical Shakespearean sonnet form – which is very characteristic of the author, mainly of his late works. The text consists of three units, of an eight-line, then of a four-line stanza, then of the two-line final unit, the so-called *coda*. These units are not only the metrical and strophic components of the poem, but they also constitute finely composed units of thoughts.

István Géhers poetic speaker starts speaking in a contemplative-meditative, subjective poetic voice, combining it with the figure of *self-apostrophe*, calling to himself, which is also very characteristic of his poetics. Although at first sight the text of the poem is not more than some kind of subjective poetic meditation, perhaps a little too philosophical contemplation about human existence *as such*, a text that does not need any much deeper or much more multi-layered interpretation, superficial readers can easily be disappointed. Namely, although the text consists of fairly simple lyrical 'bricks', its message, if it has one at all, and the system of literary references and allusions concealed within it are much more complex, and we cannot close the interpretation down with so few words… [Although the literal and rough English prose-translation of the Hungarian poem cannot really mirror or give back the strict metrical composition of the text, but it may mediate something from its message.

The central poetic image and symbol of the poem, with noble simplicity, is *water*; that is, *flood*, the flood that drifts away and destroys everything, manifesting in a nearly apocalyptic extent. It is and absurd and surrealistic flood that reaches the poetic speaker in his very home, breaking in the most private places of his life: in his room, in his bed. As the poetic speaker who speaks using the first person singular declares it, calling to himself, together with not just a little self-irony, it is impossible to row or to boat in such a situation, since here the room is flooded by such water that drifts away everything; water which cannot be stopped, against which it is impossible and useless to defend ourselves. It is not some kind of tiny leaking, as the speaker ironically contemplates in the end of the second stanza. It is much more some incontrollable and unstoppable flood that is nearly identical with the Genesis flood narrative of the Bible that breaks in the room that symbolises the personal space of life of the speaker. The destroying flood does not mercy anyone or anything, and the room, and

together with it a whole life disappears into nothingness amidst the whirling water, and the experience of decay, even if the poet himself is not forced to face it at once, comes very near to him…

If we make an attempt to interpret the text from the point of view of lyrical rhetoric, the figure of climax that can be observed in the three structural units of the poem that gradually consist of less and less lines due to the metrical characteristics of the Shakespearean sonnet is very spectacular. The first eight lines are the phase of conceiving the questions, of meditation, of the exact description the situation – the speaker is still fairly calm, but at the same time, he is also sceptical: '*micsoda beszéd? Fél év – s már kiárad…*' – *'what speech is it? Half a year – and it floods out*' – the alter ego of the poet within the poem asks the question, and then he establishes with the same (certainly, only relative) tranquillity the fact that the flood washing and eroding the river bank will drift away everything. He knows it exactly that decay, death is dangerously near to him, but at the same time, he also distances himself from the threatening danger, and philosophising about the phenomenon he wisely states: '*ilyen vizen hajózni nem szabad*' – '*it is forbidden to sail on such waters*'. But how could one avoid sailing upon the waters of life? Namely, the flood that is mentioned in this context is probably not only the water of death that drifts away and destroys everything, but also the water of life that flows into unknowable directions, since, as the ancient Latin proverb says, *navigare necesse est*, that is, *it is necessary to sail*, however dangerous waters we speak about… After the recognition follows the second phase that is encompassed only into four disciplined lines: here the poetic speaker can no longer distance himself from what necessarily has come very close to him. '*Eveznél*?' – '*Would you row*?' – He asks himself, trying to mock the situation, since poetic irony is also perhaps a way of survival. Certainly, it is impossible to row or to boat, since the flood is already flowing there within the room, drifting away everything, as it is also stated by the speaker, still with relative tranquillity, but realizing the closeness of the threatening phenomena: '*ez árvíz, ennek nincsen ne tovább…*' – '*it is a flood, it cannot be stopped…*'. It is a stoic statement, but at the same time, it is also the brave recognition of the situation. Namely, it demands much bravery not to escape from something that directly threatens our existence, but to take notice of its closeness, or even to turn against it. This turn of István Géhers poem is some kind of stoical bravery, and this is the point where we step into the third phase in a lyrical rhetorical sense: the last two lines of the coda do not speak anymore in a stoic, but rather in a rhapsodic voice, concealing not little, but at the same time, not too much pathos either within itself. In the last two lines the

lyrical subject asks himself a cardinal question, and perhaps this question is the most important moment of the poem: '*folyjon tehát? Az életeden átereszted?*' – '*so shall it flow? You let it run through your life?*', and with this question, he permits the destructive flood to flow through his life. The answer, even unspoken or half-spoken, is in fact 'yes'. The frail, '*whoresome body*' of man is evidently at the mercy of flood, of decay, either one wants it or not – the poetic speaker of István Géher's poem is able to accept this fact with dignity, but the dignified acceptance is, it seems, mixed with much defiance. The poetic subject has no other choice but give in to the flood that is much stronger than him – but it does not mean at all that, together with the acceptance of the unavoidability of the phenomenon, he does not make an attempt to resist destruction and decay, since sometimes the human instinct of survival can prove to be stronger than anything else. This strategy of climax and the controversial ending of the poem, the mixture of stoicism and resistance give exceptional power of lyrical rhetoric to the text.

If we make an attempt to read the text from the direction of the techniques of composition of poetic images, we can see that that the scale of poetic images enumerated in the poem is very traditional, and for the first sight it is perhaps less inventive. The flood is a literary topos, a well-known and frequently used poetic image – practically, it demands no deeper explanation. At a primary level, the image carries the very same meaning – it can be interpreted as the symbol of decay, of annihilation, and finally, as the symbol of death. However, the poem that seems to be very easy to read on the surface also has further deeper layers of meaning(s), and the system of images and symbols is much more complex than we would think it for the first sight. Although it is not very conspicuous, and István Géher's poetry is not so strongly characterised by the presence of intertextual references, the reader can easily pass over it, the poem is in fact not else but a paraphrase of Shakespeare, but at least it is in a very a strong intertextual, or namely in this case, in a hypertextual relation with one of the best known works of the great English playwright and poet – *Hamlet*.

The genre, the metric form itself is also an allusion to the oeuvre of the great English writer without even referring to any concrete specific work by Shakespeare – as it was already mentioned above, we do not need to be very knowledgeable about metrics and strophic forms to establish that we are reading a Shakespearean sonnet. István Géher really liked this form that demands an immense degree of discipline. The Shakespearean sonnet encompasses the poetic message in very strict metrical frames, there is no

place for poetic circumlocution, and the author of the above sonnet who was also a prominent literary scholar and researcher of Shakespeares oeuvre knew it very well, as the text itself testifies it. The form itself alludes to the author from whom it borrowed its name even without involving the concrete works by Shakespeare in the space of interpretation. It is a kind of intertextuality generated by the mere metrical form, we could say. However, beyond the mere '*how*' of the pronunciation of the poetic message, in this case, the elements of meaning and content are much more interesting.

In Shakespeare drama it is one of the gravediggers who pronounces the sentence that includes both the title and the closing sentence of the poem by István Géher: '*…your water is a sore decayer of your whoresome dead body*'. The whole text of the poem refers back to this only one sentence as a hypertext, certainly, re-interpreting it to some degree, since water does not only appear as the '*decayer*', the enemy of the dead body, but also as the enemy of the still living body. The intertextual system of references of the text that is not so spectacular for the first reading is the most important point that also opens much deeper dimensions of lyrical rhetoric than the rather traditional image of the flood drifting away everything or the self-calling poetic voice that can also be considered a very traditional form of poetic speech. That is, if we examine the poem more carefully, due to the intertextual references to Shakespeares *Hamlet*, the poetic speaker of the poem written by the poet who was also a prominent Shakespeare-scholar, we are the witnesses of the transfiguration of both the poetic speaker and (to some degree) the biographical author himself into a Shakespearean hero within the internal world of the poem – and absurdly, here and now, in this moment locked in a poem, it is the (never-existing) *old Hamlet* who speaks to the reader, a literary hero who, with his stoic and meditative voice, has already resigned himself into the necessity and irreversibility of decay…

The self-apostrophe that is so characteristic of István Géhers poems is essentially not else, but the verdict of the poet on himself, a verdict which is not unconditionally more serious than the verdict above any human being, and the pronunciation of this verdict does not mean at all that the intention of resistance, the instinct of survival that can prove to be stronger than anything else is not there in the speaker at all. Namely, this instinct is even able to fight against time, this flood drifting away everything, the natural and necessary process of human aging and decay, even if it is necessarily impossible to overcome aging and death. Although within the world of the poem the destructive flood of decay is very close to the poetic speaker, it has not yet defeated him at all. The acceptance of the unchangeable facts

does not mean giving up the fight immediately, here and now. It is the poem of the dignified acceptance of reality, but under no circumstances is it the poem of immediate, unconditional and undignified surrender to death…

As for the final message of the poetic text, taking it all round, it can seem to be very pessimistic. However, since we are reading a multi-layered poetic text, this is only one of the possible messages against which we can also conceive radically different interpretations. Finally, the personal, subjective and the universal perspectives fuse, and *the old Hamlet*, this strange, from a literary point of view, paradoxical, absurd and (self-)ironic figure turns the absurdity of his own (textual) existence against decay that once reaches everything and everyone. Although he does not overcome or avoid decay, since no-one is able to do so, but perhaps temporarily he defies it. And those who gain time also gain life (perhaps also gaining some kind of eternal life through the eternity of literary texts?) – And this possible interpretation of the poem may immediately give us the reason for much more optimism than the reader would think it for the first reading…

References

1. Dávidházi, Péter (1982): *A modern Magyar költészet átrendeződése. Egy új verseskötet nyomában*. In Mozgó Világ, 1982/8. 83-95.
2. Horgas, Béla (1998): *Ajánlat merülésre. Géher István: Új folyam*. In Liget, 1998/12. 92-93.
3. Lázár, Júlia (2013): *Prospero pálcája. Géher István költészetéről*. In Jelenkor, 2013/5.
4. Szabó T., Anna (2012): *Rítus és rutin*. In Jelenkor, 2012/7-8. 780-785.
5. Szepes, Erika (2002): *Anakreón-variációk: vágyott életminőség vagy sorsközösség? Gondolatok Géher István: Anakreóni dalok című kötete kapcsán*. Budapest: Orpheusz Kiadó.

Chapter - 13

Silenced Past, Silent Present: A Poem by József Bíró as a Monument of Hungarian History

I dedicate the present essay to the 70th birthday of József Bíró.

BÍRÓ JÓZSEF

PAX VOBIS … PAX VOBISCUM

- az 1956os forradalom és szabadságharc mártírjainak emlékére –

röptet ... a szél ... kócpihéket
... - *jegenyék csúcs – magasában* - ...
festek egünkre – ... – álomi – kéket
... s - *átkelni* - … csónakot ... százat ...
cellája mélyén kushad ... *a **NYÁR***
... áristomában ... *az **ŐSZ** is* ...
EGYIKNEK ... - *megváltó* - golyó – halál
... **MÁSIKNAK** ... bitófa ... (- *kőris* -) ...

lelövetettek – ... – felköttetettek
... – : jeltelen – sírjaik ... *sírnak* ...
s ***ti*** ! ... ha *'* kik gyertyát gyújtani mertek ! ?
… – : ... *hány arca van még ... a … kínnak … **?***

(**1986**)

PAX VOBIS … PAX VOBISCUM

—— in memory of the martyrs of the revolution of 1956 ——

the wind … is blowing … flocks of tow

… – in the high sphere of fir – trees - …

I will paint our sky – … – in daydream-blue

… and – a hundred boats … to traverse …

in the depth of his jail … SUMMER is couching

… and even AUTUMN … in his dungeon …

redeeming headshot … - for ONE of – them

… for the OTHER … gallows … (- ash-tree -) …

Those who were shot dead – … – and hung up

… –: their – unmarked graves … are crying …

and even you! … who now dare to light candles ! ?

… – : torture has … so many … faces …?

József Bíró's poem *PAX VOBIS ... PAX VOBISCUM – Peace to you ... peace with you* is a stunning, unique gem of contemporary Hungarian public/political poetry. Although the text was written in 1986, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence of 1956, the past thirty-five years have not eroded it, nor has it lost any of its power or relevance.

At a first reading, the opening stanza of the poem seems to present the reader with a nostalgic-idyllic picture, although the vision of the herringbone in the top of the eaglewood trees could be interpreted as a gloomy omen – perhaps the wind is blowing the remnants of the ropes used for hangings, and the eagles are nothing but hanging trees. This is not clear, however, so the interpretation is left to the recipient. After the incredibly concise opening two lines, the lyric speaker speaks in the first person singular: painting the sky into daydream-blue in the sky, and boats for the crossing. This dream-like blueness is posited as a counterpoint to the dark (ling?) sky – here the poetic speaker himself acts with the intention of changing the facts/images. The boats are obviously the means of (silent) passage to another world. The poetic speaker enters this mysterious, peaceful, but second-third vision of existence, which appears sinister, by exercising mercy – he overrules the sentence pronounced over the victims, and in a kind of sacrilegious gesture, an unexpected act of creation, grants them the final honour in death that they have for long deserved. He is rehabilitating them. He changes the face of the sky which has shown its wrath in the wake of the outrage of their premeditated judgments, and metaphorically provides them with the symbolic means of crossing over to the afterlife, to Heaven. The representation of the hundred boats thus further thickens the atmosphere – it suggests mass executions, raging massacres, but those who were thrown to the prey, because otherwise, through the creative power of poetic speech, are given the dignity of the memory and mourning.

If we attempt to conceive a simple referential reading, we might say, making perhaps a little banal statement that the poem is already about the

martyred heroes of the Revolution and Fight for Freedom of 1956 in the first stanza, since the poet programmatically declares that he has written his work openly for the thirtieth anniversary of the Revolution. Yes, this interpretation is of course correct on its own primary level, but the poem would say very little if the interpretative possibilities were exhausted here. However, now we are dealing with a much more complex and profound message, not to mention the fact that the poem had very different connotations when it was written in 1986, and that it can also claim other important secondary connotations, partly different from those of the poem, in the interpretative horizon of the present, 31 years after the change of regime in Hungary (?), decades after its writing.

However, in order to explore the interpretative possibilities in more depth, after this introduction, let us now move on to examine, reflect on, and unravel the second stanza.

The anthropomorphised and typographically highlighted topos, the SUMMER and the AUTUMN are stylistically in a cell and in a dungeon – one is executed with a bullet, the other with gallows (made of ash-tree). Death in this case is, not surprisingly: a type of redemption. József Bíró's poetic speaker does not over-explain things. He says just as much as he needs to tell. Two anthropomorphised seasons, two simple poetic topos, SUMMER promising blossoming, new beginnings, youth, hope, fulfilment, and the AUTUMN, that is, the slow passing, decline, completion, but at least the calming of the processes are both sentenced to death and await in the depths of their cells for the two stereotypical methods of execution that is so characteristic of dictatorships (and indeed of world history in general): the rope and the bullet. Here we must disregard the simple fact which suggests a referential reading that the Revolution of 1956 was broken out, as we know from our historical studies, by mainly the Hungarian youth (SUMMER) and that the events took place in October-November (AUTUMNK). This is also the case, since the poem does not tell us anything by chance or by accident, and of course the primary level of referential reading is as true here as elsewhere. However, the deeper structure of the text also tells us something else, something more: the two extremities, not just two simplistic and well-known toposes, but the generations, the young and the old are also embodied in the noble simplicity of the text. On a more general, universal level, the anthropomorphised toposes of the text suggest that the burden of the historical trauma is not the exclusive preserve of a single generation. That is, it is not the exclusive stamp of on the lives and worldviews of a single generation, just as the fall of the Revolution of 1956 itself was not, and still is not, dealt with in the

way as it should be. Viewed from a historical perspective, the situation in 1986 was radically different from that of today, – but the inability to talk about it in its entirety is still a characteristic feature of the present day, while the ineradicability of historical memory and the example shown by the heroes still living among us continue to make authentic speeches topical, indelibly etched in our collective memory. Martyrdom can be absurdly interpreted as a type of redemption, because perhaps the historical experience of distortion, falsification and lying during the decades of dictatorship was even more traumatic than the fall of the revolution itself. In the poem's interpretation of history, it was grotesquely better for those who faced their fate as revolutionaries or even later as prisoners sentenced to death than for those who survived the persecution and, after being released from captivity, were forced to see and interpret the events of their personal history which can be interpreted in a very clear context at a given time and place, in a much different way, and were forced to contradict their experiences and memories. In the majority of cases, only those who died for what millions of people sincerely believed remained pure and deserved rehabilitation.

The sin of those who hunted the participants of the Revolution and the War for Independence to death is still a crying sin, but the sin of those who falsified Hungarian history for more than thirty years, forced people to accept vulgar lies and confess to uncommitted acts should not be neglected. The truth did not matter, it all depended on the light in which the facts of history were to be placed. Certainly, there is no question for a moment in whose hands the threads of the mass media of the time and of the informal intelligence system of the Communist party state were intertwined.

In my interpretation, the poem draws attention to this much larger-scale, more vicious, more inadmissible conglomerate of facts beyond the mere commemoration of the Revolution and its fall as a national tragedy, and this flood of lies which has defined more than a lifetime, and the well-oiled dictatorship apparatus have done enormous damage to the collective memory of Hungary. After all, these few minimalist lines of poetry are not only about the individual fate of the victims, but also about how the Hungarians were deprived of the chance to openly mourn the deaths of their heroes.

This possibility of interpretation – in the most emphatic words, with a masterly poetic intensification – is, in my opinion, thematised and concretised in the third stanza of the poem, that is, in the last four lines. Let us then take a moment to look at the final lines as closely as possible.

The unmarked graves of murdered persons. If, once again, we want to bring the referential reading into play at first, in order to explore a deeper meaning and message beyond it in the text, we can mention as common knowledge that the bodies of those who were executed for political reasons were usually buried in unmarked mass graves during the decades of Communist dictatorship. These unmarked graves, the graves of the victims, are still crying decades later, that is, they do not let the tragedy be forgotten, they keep the memory of the victims awake and still alert us. However, the penultimate line (and here we must emphasise the date of its creation: 1986) contains an unexpected twist. Suddenly, the poetic speaker uses an almost furious apostrophe - he addresses those who dare to light a candle for those who lie in unmarked graves. "You!" – That's all we learn about them, and the poetic apostrophe has no more specific addressees or direct references. It is up to the reader to resolve the meaning of the pronoun.

In 1986, at the time of the thirtieth anniversary of the Revolution, and in the calculated hours of a dictatorial regime that was clearly agonising, it was possible to speak of and remember the so-called counter-revolution, but very cautiously, and they began to emerge, to come forward, those who, chafing at the prospect of possible change, denying the principles that had hitherto defined their lives, considering their role in the dictatorship to be absolutely null and void, unashamedly, uninhibitedly, brazenly joined the ranks of those who remember, ad absurdum, the surviving real revolutionaries.

Thus, at the dawn of the change of the regimen (a referential reading becomes indispensable here) and the evolution of Hungarian democracy, there was a sudden and suspicious proliferation of admirers of 1956, of voluntary heirs, of self-proclaimed heroes who had never been seen before. It is to them, the desecrators and the sacrilegious, guided by their well-considered interests, that the impassioned, justified account is addressed, and at the same time the resigned address. So this is the line which, in my interpretation, gives the text an exceptional power and actuality, even now, thirty-five years after the poem was written. This poem speaks across time to those whom it addressed even back then, since in the Hungary of the 2020s, too, there are still among us people who proclaim themselves participants, depositors, rehabilitators and reappraisers of the Revolution and War for Freedom of 1956 in every respect, while at the same time, the number of authentic witnesses and survivors is decreasing, time does not mercy anyone, this is the nature of human life and history, and the indisputable facts are necessarily fading on the screen of remembrance.

József Bíró's poem, in addition to the need for clarity and respect, also warns us that the events of 1956 in particular, but also other fate-transforming events in general can always and everywhere be used as a means for individuals to impose their private interests on communities without being asked, thus legitimizing them. To illustrate the point, one needs only refer to the controversial street riots in 2006 in Hungary which have been marked by violent debates since then, and the controversial, brutal police action. Of course, politicians did their best to put the violent events that took place on the 50th anniversary of the Revolution in parallel with 1956 itself, and history is always used as a basis of contemporary political ideologies…

The poetic speaker in the last line of his poem rightfully asks the serious question which, of course does, not require a reply: torture has so many faces? In other words: is it not enough that events unfolded as they did, and is the pain and anguish of remembering not enough of a burden? ... – etc. However, when there was a slight chance of rehabilitation of the (real) events and the victims, for some ([not so few]) the obvious manipulation of the past with the usual naturalness clearly took precedence over the obvious self-interested manipulation of the past? Among other things, József Bíró's poem posed this question in 1986, in the period before the regime changed, when, paradoxically, it was still impossible to see the future and foresee what was to take place twenty or thirty years later. According to its original intention (the question remains, of course, whether it is fortunate to include the author's intention in the interpretation, especially from such a relatively long perspective of time), the text certainly wanted to remember *then* and *there*, when power was limited to a certain extent, but it was at least possible to make a general statement, and only secondarily referred to those who had already *then* and *there* shaped and formed the history of the recent past to their own convenience, so to say, 'interpreting it in their own way'. In the perspective of almost thirty years, full of great changes, the poem consisting of only twelve lines goes far (almost prophetically) beyond the textual self and the time of its creation.

'Torture has so many faces?' – The question arises here and now, in 2021, Hungary, in the present, contemporary Central European reality. József Bíró's poem entitled *PAX VOBIS ... PAX VOBISCUM* is not just a bold commemoration of the martyrs of the Revolution of 1956 in the years before the change of the regime, but it is demonstrably much more than that. It is an unrelenting historical document, a poetic (pre-) note of honesty on the margins of the so-called change of the regime, and its validity, power and actuality remain undiminished to this day. Moreover, seeing the

fissures, abrasions, distortions and occasional conscious (distortions) of the historiographical memory, and the peculiar (re)interpretations of events documented and clarified by sources, and their conversion into momentary, personal and political advantages, the last lines of the poem, the stone-hard apostrophe and the unanswered-unanswerable final question can certainly be said to carry perhaps more painful topicality today than …

To speak about something, a subject that at the time of writing seemed more elementary, forbidden, seemingly presupposing a more acute topicality, in such a way that the text is enriched with more shockingly serious, more powerful meanings decades after the philological fact of its creation than even before, is certainly a very significant artistic achievement. We can therefore state with analytical responsibility that this is a literary work that sets a standard for the poetic claim to universality, and it at the same time fulfils it in a self-referential manner.

József Bíró is undoubtedly an outstanding artist of Hungarian neo-avant-garde poetry, and in my opinion, the above analyse poem is one of his most precise, penetrating and powerfully resonating texts which decades after its creation still has every right to be read as an outstanding work of Hungarian political/public poetry, which is otherwise experiencing a renaissance in the 2020s.

Selected Bibliography of the Critical Reception of the work of József Bíró

1. Tamara Archleb-Gály, *Kísérlet a kísérletezésre*, Irodalmi Szemle, 1989/9, 751-753.
2. Tamara Archleb-Gály, *Szlovákiai kísérlet a kísérletezésre*, Művészet, 1990/2, 60-61.
3. Tamara Archleb-Gály, *Az alternatív művészet alternatíváiról*, Irodalmi Szemle, 1991/3, 323-329.
4. Tibor Baán, *Fűre lépni szabad – nem szabad. Bíró József: Vénusz légycsapója*, Új Forrás, 1990/1, 108-111.
5. Tibor Baán, *Pamuttartalékaink ürügyén. Bíró József: Szájzár*, Pannon Tükör, 1999/1, 79-80.
6. Tibor Baán, *Fűre lépni szabad – nem szabad. Bíró József: Vénusz légycsapója*, in uő, *Fények a labirintusban*, Budapest, Hungarovox Kiadó, 2000, 226-232.
7. Tibor Baán, *Avantgárd alkímia. Bíró József: Szájzár*, in uő, *Nagylátószög. Művek, utak, irányok*, Budapest, Hét Krajcár Kiadó, 2010, 217-225.

8. Tibor Baán, *Kommunikáció. Bíró József költészetéről*, Vár Ucca Műhely, 2011/4, 60-64.
9. Tibor Baán, *Kommunikáció. Bíró József költészetéről*, Búvópatak, 2012/11, 16-18.
10. István Bakonyi, *Bíró József: Térérzés*, Dunatáj, 1988/4, 73-74.
11. István Bakonyi, *Bíró József: Vénusz légycsapója*, Árgus, 1990/3, 91-92.
12. Thomas Berghuis, *Performance Art in China*, Hong Kong, Timezone 8 Limited, 2006.
13. Erzsébet Berkes, *Azok a szép nagy verseskönyvek, avagy egy Normálhauptmann vallomásai, midőn az újabbkori poézissel találkozik. Vénusz légycsapója, avagy az ötlet fényei*, Mozgó Világ, 1989/12, 112.
14. Zoltán Bertha, *Magyar költői antológia Portugáliában*, Alföld, 1986/4. 98–99.
15. Béla Bodor, *Acélkaros aritmia*, Irodalmi Jelen, 2008/10, 20.
16. András Bohár, *Aktuális avantgárd. M. M.*, Budapest, Ráció Kiadó, 2002.
17. Ferenc Bozók, *Bíró Józseffel Újpesten, a Petőfi-tanya étteremben*, Pannon Tükör, 2013/3, 48–55.
18. Ferenc Bozók, *Kortársalgó. Beszélgetések 21. századi magyar költőkkel*, Budapest, Hét Krajcár Kiadó, 2013.
19. Miklós Csűrös, *Bíró Józsefről*, Somogy, 1989/6, 41–43.
20. Miklós Csűrös, Bíró József és a Szájzár, Életünk, 1998/10, 936–940.
21. Miklós Csűrös, *Bíró József: Trakta – Asia*, Műhely, 2006/2, 77-78.
22. Miklós Csűrös, *Nagy(on) fontos (Bíró József: Kisfontos*), Palócföld, 2013/1, 93–95.
23. Emőke G. Komoróczy, *Ezer arccal, ezer alakban. Formák és távlatok Petőcz András költészetében*, Budapest, Magyar Műhely Kiadó, 2015.
24. László Gyimesi, *Három különleges fogás bíró József konyhájából. Bíró József: Trakta*, Ezredvég, 2005/2, 116-118.
25. László Gyimesi, *Tizennyolc kiáltás. Bíró József: Kisfontos*, Napút, 2012/5, 99–101.
26. László Gyimesi, *Bíró József: Backstage*, Ezredvég, 2013/4.

27. László Hekerle, *Jelleg-adó. A Ver(s)ziókról*, Éeltünk, 1984/6, 589–591.

28. László Hekerle, *A nincstelenség előtt*, Budapest, JAK-füzetek 32, 1988.

29. Gábor Hushegyi, *Studio RT 1987-1997. A Studio RT helye, szerepe és jelentősége a (cseh)szlovákiai művészetben*, Kalligram, 1997/9, 81–93.

30. József R. Juhász, *Studio Rt*., Irodalmi Szemle, 1989/4, 751–753.

31. Balázs Kántás, *A paradigmák fölé emelkedő költő, aki néven nevezi a dolgokat: Bíró József Kisfontos című verseskötetéről*), Vár Ucca, 2012/2, 101–108.

32. Balázs Kántás, *Fantomképek. Kötetkritikák a kortárs magyar irodalom paradigmatikus szerzőiről*, Budapest, Napkút Kiadó, 2013.

33. Balázs Kántás, *A paradigmák fölé emelkedő költő. Bíró József költészetéről három tételben*, Dunaharaszti, NAP Alapítvány, 2013.

34. Balázs Kántás, *Pontos pillantás a valóság mögé: Bíró József Backstage című verseskötetéről*, Folyó, 2013/9.

35. http://www.folyo-irat.hu/aradas/recenzio/892-kantas-balazs-pontos-pillantas-a-valosag-moge

36. Balázs Kántás, *A történelem mögöttes tartományai – akkor és most?: Értelmező sorok Bíró József PAX VOBIS... ...PAX VOBISCUM című verséhez*, Agria, 2013/3, 205–210.

37. Balázs Kántás, *Költő a paradigmák felett: Bíró József költészetéről három tételben*, Kurázsi, 2013/12.

38. http://archivum.kurazsifolyoirat.hu/index.php/home/2013-december/339-kantas-balazs-kolto-a-paradigmak-felett-biro-jozsef-kolteszeterol-harom-tetelben

39. Balázs Kántás, *Fordulópont. Esszék, tanulmányok, kritikák*, Budapest, Napkút Kiadó, 2014.

40. Balázs Kántás, *A szenvedés spiritualitása és rejtjelei: Bíró József Kontextus című verseskötetéről*, Vár Ucca, 2015/2, 90-98.

41. Balázs Kántás, *„ ... szolgálj mindazoknak ... ”. Bíró József* Trakta *című kötetéről*, Holdkatlan, 2015/43.

42. http://holdkatlan.hu/index.php/bemutato/kritika/3490-kantas-balazs-szolgalj-mindazoknak-biro-jozsef-trakta-cimu-koteterol

43. Ákos Kele Fodor, *Figura Tanatologica. Bíró József: Halálom halála*, Eső, 2009/4.

44. Zsolt Koppány, *Bíró József*, in uő, *Az öreg tölgy és vastag ága*, Budapest, Biro Family Kft., 2004, 173.

45. Pál Nagy, *Az irodalom műfajai*, Budapest, ELTE Magyar Irodalomtörténeti Intézet – Magyar Műhely, Budapest, 1995.

46. Dorota Niedziałkowska, *The Road to Self-Discovery is Paved with Mary Sues*, in *Graduate Student's Conference. Conference Proceedings*, ed. Kinga Földváry, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Piliscsaba, 2013, 35–39.

47. https://btk.ppke.hu/uploads/articles/9088/file/IRUNUP%20Conference%20Proceedings%201127.pdf

48. Balázs Nyilasy, *„Nemversek." (Bíró József: Térérzés)*, Élet és Irodalom, 1987. I. 16., 10.

49. Tibor Papp, *Kassák hatása a mai magyar irodalomra*, MadiArt Periodical, No. 4, 91–96.

50. Tibor Papp, *Avantgárd szemmel. Költészetről, irodalomról*, Budapest, Magyar Műhely Kiadó, 2004.

51. András Petőcz, *Szubjektív jegyzet a 80-as évek magyar irodalmáról, költészetéről. Egy előadás lejegyzett változata*, in uő, *Idegenként Európában*, Budapest, Orpheusz Kiadó, 1997, 95–103.

52. Géza Perneczky, *Egy európai művészkönyv-kiállítás. A művészkönyv lelke, vagy a „harmadik generáció"?*, Mozgó Világ, 1988/6, 95–110.

53. János Sebeők, *Születésnapodra*, Magyar Nemzet Online, 2011. június. 21.http://mno.hu/migr_1834/szuletesnapodra-191053

54. Dóra Sós, *„A senkiföldjén levés állapota". Beszélgetés Szombathy Bálinttal*, Szépirodalmi Figyelő, 2014/2, 75–82.

55. Erika Szepes, *Avantgárd szintetizáló humanizmus: Bíró József Trakta és Asia című öteteiről*, Eső, 2005/4, 78–94.

56. Erika Szepes, *Köszöntöm az 55 éves Bíró Józsefet*, Ezredvég, 2006/5.

57. Erika Szepes, *A szenvedés méltósága. Bíró József: Tükörmágia*, Műhely, 2007/2, 78–82.

58. Erika Szepes, *Az éltető oxigén. Bíró József: Stromatolite*, in uő, *Polifónia*, 189–203.

59. István Szerdahelyi, *Műfajelmélet mindenkinek*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1997.

60. Csaba Szigeti, *Bíró József próteuszi operája*, kézirat, 2014.

61. Endre Szkárosi, *Mi az, hogy avantgárd?. Írások az avantgárd hagyománytörténetéből*, Magyar Műhely Kiadó, 2006.

62. Bálint Szombathy, *Küzdelem a nyelvvel. Bíró József költői törekvéseiről*, Magyar Műhely, 1991/8. 60–61.

63. Bálint Szombathy, *Húsz év után. A multimediális költészet magyarországi pályája*, Alföld, 1992/1, 63–70.

64. Tamás Tarján, *A parodizált Babits, avagy a paródia fogalmának változatásai*, Tiszatáj, 2007/11, 63–68.

65. Katalin Tímár, *A Studio RT harmadik fesztiválja. „Annyi baj legyen!" (Tsúszó Sándor)*, Belvedere, 1990/6–7, 35.

66. Béla Vilcsek, *Haiku-varázslat. Ezer magyar haiku*, Kortárs, 2011/5, 104–108.

67. Béla Vilcsek, *Költőportrék*, Rím Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 2013.

68. Zoltán Zsávolya, *Tanulmánykötet a nyitottság felé fordulás jegyében. Lényegre törő bekezdések Kántás Balázs* Fordulópont *című tanulmánykötetéről*, Kurázsi, 2014/04.

69. http://archivum.kurazsifolyoirat.hu/index.php/home/2014-aprilis/619-zsavolya-zoltan-tanulmanykotet-a-nyitottsag-fele-fordulas-jegyeben-lenyegre-toro-bekezdesek-kantas-balazs-fordulopont-cimu-tanulmanykoteterol

70. Zoltán Zsávolya, *Ifjonti életmű?. Kapcsolódó tanulmány Kántás Balázs négy irodalomtudományi szakkönyvéhez*, ÚjNautilus, 2014. november 09.

71. http://ujnautilus.info/zsavolya-kantas-negy-konyv

72. Zoltán Zsávolya, *Gyújtópont. Válogatott tanulmányok*, Budapest, Napkút Kiadó, 2014.

Chapter - 14

Militiamen, Putschists, Terrorists: A Brief Outline of the History of the Activities of Radical Right-Wing Secret Organisations and Paramilitary Formations Connected to them in the First Years of the Horthy Era in Hungary, 1919–1925

Introduction

The present research article is in fact the extract of a monograph published in Hungarian by the author, and examines the operation of the secret and semi-secret radical right-wing paramilitary movements in Hungary in the 1920s, closely interlinked with the regular army of the state [1]. As it is widely known, the first years of the Horthy Era were one of those turbulent periods in Hungarian history that abounded in secret social associations, societies and alliances – mainly organised along right-wing, irredentist lines – which also had a certain influence on political life. These secret organisations sometimes had a legal front organisation (legally registered associations were not allowed to engage in party political activity under the laws of the time) in the form of a social association, but sometimes they carried out their activities informally, based only on verbal discussions and instructions between members. As Miklós Mester, a historian, a Member of Parliament and cultural politician, one of the great historical witnesses of the Horthy Era, who him self was a member of several such secret organisations, writes vividly in his memoirs:

"*There existed a dozen secret, half-secret and very exclusive societies with exclusive memberships, in whose circles it was essentially decided who would fill the leading positions, how the governing party would be put*

1 Balázs Kántás, *Milicisták, puccsisták, terrorfiúk. Mikrotörténeti esettanulmányok és levéltári források a Horthy-korszak első éveiben működő radikális jobboldali titkos szervezetek és a hozzájuk köthető paramilitáris alakulatok tevékenységéről, 1919–1925*, Budapest, Művészeti és Irodalmi Jelen Kft., 2021.
http://real.mtak.hu/123884/

together, who could run for parliament, who would be the lords, deputies, slave magistrates, gendarme commanders, who would be included in the narrow circle of advisors to the Regent Governor [2].”

The operation of the large number of secret and semi-secret, irredentist organisations and the right-wing paramilitary formations that were active in the 1920s and closely overlapping with each other can best be understood in their complexity and intricacy through concrete examples and events that can be linked to them, i.e. through micro-historical case studies. Paramilitary activities and organisations, which were present in almost all European states in the years after the First World War with varying degrees of intensity, are generally defined in the international literature on the subject as military or quasi-military organisations and actions that complemented or replaced conventional military formations. In some cases this was made possible by the temporary or even permanent disintegration of the state, in others by the state itself, and in others by paramilitary formations acting against the existing state [3].

The aim of our thesis is to examine and present the complex and contradictory relationship between the (paramilitary) functioning of the early Hungarian radical right and the (armed) far-right organisations and the State/Government, as well as the wider socio-political context of these phenomena. Our aim is to discuss in short the history of early paramilitary far-right movements in Hungary along three major thematic units, which can best be understood along the lines of the trinity of *militiamen–putschists–terrorists* trinity in the title.

Under the title *Militiamen*, we will attempt to uncover the history of the Hungarian militia movement of the first years of the Horthy era, which can only be reconstructed in fragments, by presenting the history of the specific clandestine military formation called the Double Cross Blood Union, which

---

[2] Oral History Archives of the VERITAS History Research Centre, Budapest, Veritas OHA–45. sz. 53. Interview with Miklós Mester, made by János Gyurgyák–Tamás Varga, 1986. Cited by Nóra Szekér, *Titkos társaság. A Magyar Testvéri Közösség Története*, Budapest, Jaffa Kiadó, 2017, 78.

[3] Robert Gerwarth–John Horne, *Paramilitarizmus az első világháború után*, transl. Péter Várady, in *Háború béke idején. Paramilitáris erőszak Európában az első világháború után*, ed. Robert Gerwarth–John Horne, Budapest, L’Harmattan Kiadó, 2017, 13–32, 13–14; Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished. Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917–1923*, Farrar, Straus and Girou, 2016.

operated as a state, or at least quasi-state organisation, and a controlling body of the Hungarian right-wing militia movement, integrating them into the Hungarian army as secret and semi-secret reserve forces.

The radical right and the various paramilitary circles were associated with a number of coup plans in the period. Most of them seemed to be ridiculous, but the coup plot of 1923 by Dr. Ferenc Ulain, a radical right-wing, so-called Race-defending member of the parliament who had left the governing United Party, and his associates, which was to be carried out in conjunction with the German National Socialist movement at the same time as the Bavarian beer coup, deserves the most attention under the heading of *Putschists*. However, in addition to the 'Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch', [4] there were also other frivolous pub-table coup plans in the 1920s, like, for example, the so-called *Három Kapás – Three Hoemen* coup plan and the *Csocsó Bácsi – Uncle Csocsó* conspiracy.

Closely linked to all this, of course, are the *Terrorists*, or as they were often called in the press of the time, '*terror boys'*, since the radical right was associated with a number of terrorist acts that attempted to shake up and undermine the consolidation achieved by the Government led by Prime Minister Count István Bethlen. The majority of these attacks originated from the paramilitary wing of the *Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete – Association of Awakening Hungarians*, [5] the highly influential and increasingly violent radical right-wing organisation of the time. Among these acts, the bomb attack in Erzsébetváros on 3 April 1922, which killed eight people, the anti-Semitic assassination attempt in Jászkarajenő, which was also planned in 1922, but luckily was not finally carried out, or the bomb attack in Csongrád on 24 December 1923 in which 3 people were killed stood out. Under the heading of Terrorists, we will try to describe these three incidents, their protagonists and the criminal proceedings that followed, with special emphasis on the highly publicised bomb outrage in Erzsébetváros, and to explore the conclusions that can be drawn about the relationship of the early paramilitary radical right-wing organisations to the Government and the Hungarian Army.

---

[4] On the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch see: Balázs Kántás, *The Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch*: The Szemere-Bobula-Ulain Coup Plan, 1923, ANGLISTICUM, 2021/6, 32–45.
https://www.anglisticum.org.mk/index.php/IJLLIS/article/view/2217/2614

[5] On the history of the Association of Awakening Hungarian and its political activity see: Tibor Zinner, *Az ébredők fénykora, 1919–1923*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989.

Micro-historical case studies that are necessarily fragmented, but perhaps still coherent and fit into a narrative, are followed by historical sources of almost the same length as the studies. Since the history of the early Hungarian radical right paramilitary movements can – ironically – researched the best through the archival sources of criminal proceedings initiated as a result of serious atrocities committed by individual members, a very large part of the documents published are criminal proceedings, produced by judicial bodies – police, prosecution or courts. The majority of these sources are held in the custody of the Budapest City Archives and come from the archival fonds of Hungarian judicial bodies.

At the same time, since the early Hungarian radical right-wing paramilitary movements, whose leaders included a very large proportion of active military officers, were keen to establish foreign relations, with the knowledge and consent of the Government for a time, the archival sources of their activities can mainly be found in the Central Archive of the National Archives of Hungary, mainly among the records of the Political Department of the Royal Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

(MILITIAMEN) – The Double Cross Blood Union, a peculiar secret military formation in the 1920s

The emergence of paramilitarism [6] after World War One was a natural phenomenon in the defeated states, including Hungary, which at the same time became independent of Austria, and the representatives of paramilitary activities were still primarily active or demobilised soldiers, or possibly members of other armed organisations. Such formations were closely intertwined with the new, independent Hungarian State and its strongly right-wing, authoritarian conservative Government, as well as with the so-called *Nemzeti Hadsereg – National Army*, the new, right-wing armed force of the independent Hungary. The National Army, from 1920 on, operated within very narrow limits as a result of the restrictions of armament imposed on the defeated states, and was (re)organised partly from former paramilitary formations and free corpses. The *Kettőskereszt Vérszövetség – Double Cross Blood Union* is prominent among Hungarian free corpses, because it was not just a kind of self-organising movement, a kind of veteran association, but it was rather a secretly operating state, or at least quasi-state organisation, which was established by the Government and the military leadership, partly for the purpose of carrying out military

6 On paramilitarism see: Uğur Ümit Üngör, *Paramilitarism. Mass Violence in the Shadow of the State,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020.

operations that did not fit into the framework of traditional warfare in the Hungarian territories annexed under the Peace Treaty of Trianon [7].

Although the organisation was very much present in the public consciousness in the first half of the 1920s, and many illegal actions (e.g. political and simple robbery murders, assassinations, coup attempts, etc.) were attributed to it in the press and other sources of the time, it did not produce many documents, so we know fairly little about its activity. However, this little is still much more than nothing. DCBU was, to simplify matters somewhat, nothing more than the military or paramilitary wing of the secret political organisation known as the *Etelközi Szövetség – Union of Etelköz*, although it may have been active in its own right. Despite its secrecy and secretiveness, relatively much is known about the Union of Etelköz, the right-wing political secret society of the period with extensive influence, formed in opposition to Freemasonry and functioning as a nationalist version of it, and which was a politicising secret society, mainly from the memoirs of one of its founders, Military Bishop General István Zadravecz [8]. The Union of Etelköz, as a strongly pro-government organisation, indirectly controlled most of the Hungarian irredentist legal and illegal associations, and can therefore be considered their umbrella organisation. It was probably founded in Szeged in November 1919, with the participation of politicians of the right-wing, so-called Counter-revolutionary Government and officers of the National Army, its armed force. It should also be mentioned that, although the literature often refers to the Union of Etelköz far-right/radical right, the organisation itself was politically very heterogeneous. Although its objectives did indeed include radical right-wing elements, it cannot be treated simply as the peak body of early Hungarian right-wing radicalism, since its members included representatives of the moderate right wing of the governing party and the radical right as well as the legitimists and the those who wanted to freely elect a king, united by the idea of restoring the territorial integrity of a country that had suffered collapse, civil war and then severe territorial annexation. It would be an exaggeration to describe for example, Count

[7] It turns out from several archival sources, for example, from the documents of the Erzsébetváros bomb attack in 1922, in custody of the City Archives of Budapest. HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923.

[8] István Zadravecz, *Páter Zadravecz titkos naplója*, ed. György Borsányi, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1967. The original source can be found at the Historical Archives of the State Security Services under the reference code HU-ÁBTL-A-719.

István Bethlen, Count Pál Teleki or Count Miklós Bánffy as right-wing or radical right-wing, as they were prominent conservative politicians of the period who played a fundamentally positive role in Hungarian history and were also members of the Union of Etelköz. At the same time, the association was also led by radical right-wing politicians such as Tibor Eckhardt, who from December 1923 also served as president of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, the most influential nationalist mass organisation of the era, and was gradually taken over by Captain Gyula Gömbös, later prime minister, who left the ruling party in 1923, establishing the so-called Race-defending Party (its official name was *Magyar Nemzeti Függetlenségi Párt – Party of Hungarian National Independence*) and was known for his political radicalism. Until the end of 1944, the Union which later numbered around 5,000 members, was run by the 7–12-strong *Vezéri Tanács – Council of Leaders* in close cooperation with the Hungarian National Defence Association (MOVE), which mostly comprised former and active soldiers, and held its meetings in its headquarters in Budapest. The Union of Etelköz sought to resemble the Freemasonry which it hated in its rites and appearance, ironically even setting up its headquarters in the Podmaniczky Street headquarters of the banned Hungarian Symbolic Grand Lodge, confiscated for the MOVE, with the *Magyar Tudományos Fajvédő Egyesület – Hungarian Scientific Association of Race Defence* as its front organisation. Through its network of contacts, the organisation had a significant influence on political life, as its members included important political and military leaders of the time [9] However, the head of the state Regent Governor Admiral Miklós Horthy, contrary to popular legends, was a pragmatic, somewhat down-to-earth politician and probably not a member of any secret societies, but since many of his confidants were members, he was able to impose his will in these organisations. Those who were invited to join the *Union of Etelköz* took a life and death pledge to serve irredentist and nationalist causes in a ritual designed for the purpose. The Council of Leaders discussed important issues affecting the fate of the country, though it may not have taken decisions directly on national matters. During the Second World War, Baron Berthold Feilitzsch, an influential background politician of the time and the chief administrator and chairman of the

[9] On the union of Etelköz and its archival sources see: Balázs Kántás, *A Magyar "fehér szabadkőművesség"*: Adatok és levéltári források az Etelközi Szövetség, a Horthy-korszak politizáló titkos társaságának töredékes történetéhez, Budapest, Horthy-korszak Történetének Kutatásáért Társaság, OSZK Magyar Elektronikus Könyvtár, 2021.
https://mek.oszk.hu/21900/21979/

organisation eventually came to support the Arrow Cross movement and gradually took control of the organisation, which by then had become less influential [10]. The house at 45 Podmaniczky Street suffered considerable damage during the siege of Budapest in 1945, so it is possible that the lack of resources relating to the association's activity is due not only to its clandestine operation but also, to a very large extent, to the wartime destruction of documents [11].

That is, much is known, albeit sporadically, about the Union of Etelköz, but the situation is worse for the Double Cross Blood Union, its military wing. If the scattered sources are to be believed, the organisation was in all likelihood also set up in the autumn of 1919 to defend the counter-revolution against communist and other left-wing political forces. After the signing of the Peace Treaty of Trianon, it also included irredentism and the restoration of the territorial integrity of the mutilated country among its aims as well. Its commander was Colonel (later, from 1923 General) Tihamér Siménfalvy, a hero of World War One and former Chief of Staff of the Transylvanian Székely/Szekler Division, who also maintained close links with far-right organisations abroad, especially the Austrian and German nationalist paramilitary movements. Furthermore, the leaders of the organisation also included notorious figures of the White Terror, such as influential paramilitary commanders of the era like First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas and Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay. Iván Héjjas was also deputy commander of the organisation in the 1920s, and other leaders may have included the later Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös, László Endre, Military Bishop István Zadravecz, General Károly Csörgey and Colonel György Görgey, commander of the Regent Governor's Bodyguards. The members of its militarily organised units were bound by a very strict oath, and its front organisation for a time was *the Nemzeti Múltunk Kulturális Egyesület – Our National Past Cultural Association*, which was formed much later than the secret military organisation itself, its constitution being approved only in 1922. According to some sources, the secret meetings of the DCBU which overlapped closely with the various officer detachments (such as the military unit at the Hotel Britannia during 1920) were held in the Nádor Garrison, closely overlapping the by Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay's

[10] Hungarian historian Miklós Zoltán Fodor also wrote a summarising research article on the history of the Union of Etelköz: Miklós Zoltán Fodor, *Az Etelközi Szövetség története*, Nógrád Megyei Múzeumok Évkönyve, 2007/XXXI, 118–156.

detachment [11]. The members of the DCBU were mainly gendarmerie and military officers, as well as landowners and administrative officials who had military past. In addition to the Budapest headquarters, sub-organisations operated in every major city, and its members were active in the state apparatus, primarily in the surveillance of individuals with communist leanings and the mapping of left-wing organisations. The name of the DCBU was also there behind such highly publicised crimes as the anti-Semitically motivated bomb attack on the Democratic Circle in Erzsébetváros in 1922, [12] which claimed eight lives, the bomb attack in Csongrád in 1923, [13] which killed three people, and the allegedly irredentist Hungarian assassination attempt on the Romanian Royal Couple in 1923. The documents of the 1922 Erzsébetváros bombing trial are also very important archival sources for the history of the DCBU, since according to the testimony of the Minister of Defence General Károly Csáky before the Royal Criminal Court of Budapest, the organisation was really established around 1919–1920 as a paramilitary umbrella body under the control of the National Army with the aim of bringing paramilitary organisations in the capital and the countryside under unified military control and of creating anti-communist law enforcement troops after the fall of the Soviet Republic of Hungary [14]. In this sense, it was indeed a secret military formation, a state organisation, even if some of its members committed serious illegal acts on their own initiative [15].

All of this closely coincides with the notes written in 1948 by General István Ujszászy, later head of the Hungarian military secret service, while in

---

11 On the detachments of the Hungarian National Army see: Tamás Kovács, *A Nemzeti Hadsereg és a tiszti különítmények*, in *Csoportosulás, lázadás és a társadalom terrorizálása. Rendészettörténeti Tanulmányok 2.*, Ed. Orsolya Ilona Jámbor–Gábor G. Tarján, Budapest, Rendőrség Tudományos Tanácsa, 2019, 151–172.

12 On the bomb attack in Erzsébetváros, Budapest see: Balázs Kántás, *The Bomb Outrage in Erzsébetváros:* An Action of Political Terrorism in Hungary, 1922, ANGLISTICUM, 2021/6, 71–79.
https://www.anglisticum.org.mk/index.php/IJLLIS/article/view/2220/2616

13 On the bomb attack in Csongrád see: Balázs Kántás, *The Bomb Attack in Csongrád: A Case Study of Radical Right-Wing Paramilitarism and Political Terrorism in Hungary in the 1920s*, ANGLISTICUM, 2021/7, 31–39.
https://www.anglisticum.org.mk/index.php/IJLLIS/article/view/2226/2621

14 HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923. The trial of József Márffy and his associates.

15 HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923.

the custody of the communist State Protection Authority after World War Two and the Soviet occupation of Hungary. According to these documents, in the 1920s, a group of military officers led by Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy was working secretly within the frameworks of the army, but with the knowledge and consent of the Government and the Regent Governor, to plan and carry out sabotage and subversive actions abroad, mainly for irredentist reasons. The Siménfalvy Group was based in the building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Buda Castle, and its activities were directed at the Little Entente States (Romania, Czechoslovakia, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes), preparing in the medium term for the possible military reconquest of Hungarian-inhabited territories. The plans of militarily reconquesting the territories annexed from Hungary in the beginning of the 1920s were mainly concentrating on the Hungarian Highlands (Felvidék) which region was incorporated by Czechoslovakia [16]. The unit was later called the Press and Propaganda Department of the General Staff, and contrary to its name, it did not only serve the propaganda purposes of the Home Army, but also prepared and carried out sabotage and sabotage operations in the Little Entente states in close cooperation with the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Siménfalvy Group, later the called Papp Group under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Dezső Papp which later evolved into the 5th Department of the Hungarian Defence Staff undoubtedly existed, and from their activities and from General Siménfalvy's activities as a leader and organiser we can infer either a close overlap with the DCBU or, with some simplification, a partial or complete identity of the two organisations [17]. The DCBU bears strong similarities to the German 'Schwarze Reischswehr' ('Black Army'), whose various free corpses – closely linked to radical right-wing movements, including Adolf Hitler's National Socialist Party – were also treated by the German Government as semi-official reserve units of the restricted army [18].

---

16 About the Hungarian military operation plans to reconquest the Hungarian Highlands see: Lajos Olasz, *Tervek a Felvidék visszafoglalására 1920-ban*, Közép-Európai Közlemények, 2020/4, 89–114.

17 István Ujszászy, *Vallomások a holtak házából. Ujszászy István vezérőrnagynak, a 2. vkf. osztály és az Államvédelmi Központ vezetőjének az ÁVH fogságában írott feljegyzései*, ed. György Haraszti–Zoltán András Kovács–Szabolcs Szita, Budapest, Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára–Corvina Kiadó, 2007, 356–359.

18 See: Robert G. L. Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism. The Free Corps Movement In Post-War Germany 1918–1923, New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 1969.*

As for the otherwise not very abundant historiography of the early Hungarian radical right-wing secret organisations, ideologically biased Marxist historiography in the Kádár Regime tried to magnify and emphasise the importance and activities of the right-wing social associations and secret societies of the Horthy Era, which had real influence, and the paramilitary formations associated with them, sometimes even portraying them as a kind of shadow government; This is no different in the case of the DCBU. For example, in his monograph on the right-wing counter-revolution, the Marxist party historian Dezső Nemes writes that the DCBU was one of the most significant secret organisations of the first period of the Horthy era, founded in July 1919 by the so-called Szeged Captains, the first detachment commanders of the National Army. The organisation was said to be under the control of the army, and its medium-term aim was indeed to create tension and rebellion in the Hungarian-populated areas annexed to neighbouring states after the signing of the Peace Treaty of Trianon, especially in the Hungarian Highlands, which had been annexed to Czechoslovakia and where, following the outbreak of unrest, the regular Hungarian Army would have marched in to restore order and recapture the territories [19]. In addition, the DCBU was also engaged in counter-espionage activities and the execution of government-consented domestic terrorist acts, and Dezső Nemes, citing the memoirs of Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay, also claims that the organisation had been established before the formation of the Union of Etelköz, even though it was later somehow under its control because of the significant overlaps and the 'secret government' character of the UoE – with some simplification, the Union of Etelköz was the secret government of the country and the DCBU was the secret army [20]. Nemes makes some rather strong claims about the DCBU, but he cites few sources, so his statements have some truth to them, but they should be treated with careful and considered criticism.

The source base of the DCBU is unfortunately very scattered, and the information available to researchers on the activities of the organisation is a little contradictory and vague. However, the fact that in the 1920s, at the beginning of the Horthy era, following the civil war after the collapse of the

---

19 Dezső Nemes, *Az ellenforradalom története Magyarországon 1919–1921*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967, 155–160.

20 Pál Prónay, *A határban a halál kaszál. Fejezetek Prónay Pál naplójából*, ed. Ervin Pamlényi–Ágnes Szabó, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1963. The source can be today found in the custody of the Hungarian Archives of Political History and Trade Unions: HU-PIL-IV-973.

Soviet Republic, there were a number of shockingly serious and sometimes fatal crimes, both secret and less secret, linked to the radical right-wing associations and paramilitary formations of the era, which received a great deal of publicity. From time to time, the DCBU was understandably associated with these in public discourse, in the press and in parliament. The most notable of these were the anti-Semitically motivated murders of Iván Héjas's paramilitary unit, the so-called *Alföldi Brigád – Brigade of the Great Hungarian Plain*, the murders of social-democrat journalists Béla Somogyi and Béla Bacsó, [21] and the crimes committed by the detachment that settled in Hotel Britannia after the National Army invaded Budapest in 1919 [22].

Meanwhile, in the spirit of consolidation, the right-wing paramilitary formations and national defence militias still operating in various areas of the country, such as the Brigade of the Hungarian Plain led by Iván Héjjas and the armed units of the Association of Awakening Hungarians (ÉME) were gradually regularised and partially disarmed after 1921–1922. In parallel, the *Nemzeti Munkavédelmi Hivatal – National Labour Protection Service*, an auxiliary police organisation under the control of the Ministry of the Interior was established, primarily to suppress strikes and labour movement conspiracies and to provide security for the factory, which, somewhat anachronistically, could be described as a kind of white workers' militia, and into which the Brigade of the Hungarian Plain, the national defence militias of the Association of Awakening Hungarians and other militias were absorbed – so under much tighter government control, but the organisations and their members could retain their paramilitary character and continue to operate.

PUTSCHISTS – The 'Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch' of radical right-wing MP Dr. Ferenc Ulain and similar coup plans

The early years of the Horthy era, as we have seen above, were characterised by a social and economic situation that favoured political extremism. The various radical nationalist political groups, dissatisfied with the work of the Bethlen Government in consolidating the country's foreign and domestic policies, and some of the paramilitary groups associated with

---

[21] On the murder of social-democrat journalists Béla Somogyi and Béla Bacsó see: Ernő Gergely–Pál Schönwald, *A Somogyi–Bacsó-gyilkosság*, Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 1978.

[22] Béla Bodó, *The White Terror. Antisemitic and Political Violence in Hungary, 1919–1921*, London, Routledge, 2019.

them, even toyed with the idea of attempting a coup and taking power by force. Such an adventurous and essentially frivolous coup plan, which nevertheless attracted a great deal of political and press attention, was the one proposed by Dr. Béla Szemere, hospital director, the commander of the auxiliary police militia called *Állambiztonsági Megbízottak Szervezete – Organisation of State Security Agents (ÁBM)* (by then also under the control of the National Labour Protection Service, the right-wing strike-breaking auxiliary police force of the Government), originally under the control of the Budapest State Police Headquarters, the Hungarian-born, American architect Titusz Bobula, and Dr. Ferenc Ulain, a lawyer and race-defending member of the parliament who had left the ruling United Party and was a well-known far-right politician of the time, were planned in the autumn of 1923. Given that the three men planned to remove the Bethlen Government, which they believed to be excessively liberal and pro-Entente and pro-Jewish, by force, with the armed support of the Hitler–Ludendorff-led German National Socialist movement, their plan of coup d'état to be carried out at about the same time as the Munich Beer Hall Putsch and dependent on its success, is perhaps most aptly termed as the 'Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch' [23].

We can also infer the involvement of the Double Cross Blood Union (the involvement of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, which was closely connected and overlapping with it, can be proven), since it was the leader of the DCBU, Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy, who was in close contact with the German and Austrian radical right-wing paramilitary movements with the support of the Hungarian political leadership [24]. Preparations for the coup plan must have begun sometime in early August 1923, when a young German man named Friedrich 'Fritz' Döhmel appeared in Budapest, claiming to be a representative of the Hitler–Ludendorff-led Bavarian National Socialist movement, and, with letters of recommendation that appeared to be credible, contacted a number of Hungarian far-right organisations and public figures. One of Döhmel's first trips in Budapest was to the headquarters of the Awakening Hungarians which had previously had links with Bavarian nationalists, where he wanted to meet members of the organisation's leadership. He got to one of the association's leaders,

---

[23] See: Mária Ormos, *Egy magyar médiavezér. Kozma Miklós*, Budapest, PolgArt Kiadó, 2001, 549–571.

[24] See: Katalin G. Soós, *Magyar-bajor-osztrák titkos tárgyalások és együttműködés, 1920–1921*, Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József Nominatae. Acta Historica, 1967/XVII, 3–43.

Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay, but he gave little credence to the German young man's claims. Döhmel, however, did not give up, and soon contacted Titusz Bobula, the wealthy Hungarian-born architect who had returned from the United States of America with confuse radical right-wing principles in his mind, and his friend, Dr. Béla Szemere, a hospital director. Szemere, as the de facto commander of the State Security Agents which continued to operate with some intensity, and Bobula, who provided financial support to the Hungarian far right, had been thinking for some time about how to remove the Bethlen Government, but their activities were limited to planning. The Hungarian parties believed that Döhmel was indeed an agent of the Bavarian nationalist organisation, who was visiting Hungary to make concrete cooperation agreements with similar Hungarian far-right formations. The negotiations were conducted in German, with Bobula translating what Döhmel was saying for Szemere, who did not speak German. Döhmel asked how many people Szemere, as the former commander of the ÁBM, could call to arms in the event of a takeover attempt, to which Szemere replied that although the ÁBM had not previously been set up for the purpose of conspiring against the state at all, but rather to defend the state, there would certainly be people willing to support the cause. What is certain is that Szemere was not backed by a serious armed force, but soon afterwards the racist member of the National Assembly Ferenc Ulain, who had long been associated with Bavarian nationalist organisations and knew Hitler personally very well, was brought into the organisation [25]. On Döhmel's initiative, the parties also drew up a German-language agreement on how the Bavarian State (which was to be created as an independent state) and the Hungarian State (which would be led by a new, radical right-wing government after the removal of the Bethlen Government) could cooperate in pursuing their irredentist and anti-Semitic goals. The document was drafted by Döhmel in German, and its essence was that the newly created Bavarian state would recognise the newly created Hungarian state with its borders of 1914, before the First World War and the entry into force of the Peace Treaty of Trianon. The contracting states would also try to help each other militarily in every possible way – in particular, they will join forces against the Little Entente Czechoslovakia and provide each other with military assistance if it attacks either Bavaria or Hungary. The treaty was signed by Szemere, Bobula and Ulain on 5 November 1923, and was scheduled to be signed by General

[25] City Archives of Budapest, HU-BFL-VII-18-d-1923-03/0610. Ferenc Ulain and his associate's trial.

Erich Ludendorff and Adolf Hitler in Munich on the German side. Ferenc Ulain left by train, but never made it to Munich and was unable to meet the Bavarian nationalist politicians who were preparing for the Munich Beer Hall Putsch at the time. Namely, at Hegyeshalom, on the Austro–Hungarian border, he was detained by the police, told that the authorities had been aware of the plot and had the parcel addressed to Hitler confiscated. Soon afterwards, all the three conspirators were captured by the police [26].

It was here that it became clear to the conspirators that the coup plan had not escaped the attention of the police, and that the authorities had been monitoring the group's activities for weeks when Ulain departed to Munich. The details of Döhmel's stay in Budapest between August and October 1923 are unclear, but it is certain that he was not the only agent of the Bavarian National Socialists in Budapest at the time. In fact, in the autumn of 1923, the Hungarian State Police identified dozens of young German men in the Hungarian capital who, as agents of the Hitler–Ludendorff-organisation, had letters of recommendation addressed to the Association of Awakening Hungarians. Most of them were finally detained by the police and deported from Hungary [27].

Szemere, Bobula and Ulain were finally suspected and accused of forming a conspiracy to incite rebellion, and the case of the immunity of Ferenc Ulain was discussed by the Immunity Committee of the Hungarian Parliament in the last days of November 1923, and a thorough investigation was carried out. The race-defending members of parliament tried to excuse Ulain and his associates, tried to play down the case and stressed that Ulain and his associates were victims of an agent provocateur hired by the police, and made accusations primarily against bourgeois liberal patriots, whose aim, they said, was to openly discredit radical right-wing politicians [28].

On 24 January 1924, the Royal Criminal Court of Budapest pronounced the first instance verdict in the case, sentencing all the three defendants to one month and fourteen days in prison. The defendants were released on bail in December 1923, and their sentences were deemed to

[26] HU-BFL-VII-18-d-1923-03/0610. Ferenc Ulain and his associate's trial.

[27] A nemzetgyűlés mentelmi bizottságának jelentése lázadás előkészítésére létrejött szövetség bűntette miatt gyanúsított és tettenkapás folytán 1923. november 6-ika óta őrizetben, illetve előzetes letartóztatásban levő dr. Ulain Ferenc nemzetgyűlési képviselő mentelmi ügyében, Nemzetgyűlési Irományok, 1923/331, 135–142.

[28] HU-BFL-VII-18-d-1923-03/0610. Ferenc Ulain and his associate's trial.

have been completed. They exercised their right of appeal and were acquitted by the Court of Appeal of Budapest shortly afterwards on the second instance, which was very typical of the prosecutions of radical right-wing perpetrators of the period and may lead to deeper conclusions about the links between the authoritarian conservative Government and radical right-wing paramilitary organisations closely interlinked with the state armed forces themselves [29].

Although the coup plan was undoubtedly frivolous, it is ironic and at the same time somewhat frightening that the representatives of the Hungarian far right sought to contact and expect help in implementing their political ideas from the very German politician who, less than twenty years later, would become the most notorious mass-murdering dictator of the 20th century. This preparation for a coup, which seemed frivolous then and there, seemed to have foreshadowed Hungary's mournful political and military involvement in the 1940s and its commitment to National Socialist Germany's policy of aggression in the Second World War. Interestingly, at an individual, micro-historical level, the same can be told of the leader of the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch conspiracy: in the 1940s, Dr. Ferenc Ulain eventually joined the pro-German Armed Cross Party led by Ferenc Szálasi, which, in the final months of the war, brought a pro-German puppet government to power through a de facto coup coordinated by the occupying German forces, causing incalculable losses to the country, which was in any case losing the war [30].

TERRORISTS – Anti-Semitic political terrorism in the first years of consolidation

A series of events far more serious and frightening than the frivolous plan of the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch, which could be linked to right-wing paramilitary organisations operating under secrecy, disrupted the 1922 parliamentary election campaign, and at the same time gave the Government a new opportunity to take stronger action against political extremism, although the investigating authorities were only able to solve the case by 1924. Despite the Government's measures to disband the various armed groups in several stages, the Association of Awakening Hungarians

[29] HU-BFL-VII-18-d-1923-03/0610. Ferenc Ulain and his associate's trial.

[30] Balázs Kántás, *Milicisták, puccsisták, terrorfiúk. Mikrotörténeti esettanulmányok és levéltári források a Horthy-korszak első éveiben működő radikális jobboldali titkos szervezetek és a hozzájuk köthető paramilitáris alakulatok tevékenységéről, 1919–1925*.

was still operating armed paramilitary units, which were virtually without effective state control and which functioned as a paramilitary wing of the Association, similar to German free corpses [31] and Austrian *Heimwehr* militias of the era [32].

In the spring of 1922, the members of such an uncontrolled militia, the National Defence Department of District 9 of the Association of Awakening Hungarians to commit a bomb attack against the headquarters of the liberal political-social organisation Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros, led by the liberal opposition Member of Parliament Dr. Vilmos Vázsonyi, at 76 Dohány Street during a large-scale event, and thus kill several people whom they considered enemies of the nation. The assassination and the subsequent trial of the alleged perpetrators were one of the most shocking and publicised events of the 1920s, and was largely referred to in the press as the 'bombing trial' or 'Márffy trial' after the name of the first accused, young paramilitary commander sergeant József Márffy. The bomb finally exploded at a meeting of the Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros on 3 April 1922, killing eight people and seriously wounding twenty-three others. During this period, there were a number of attacks on Jews and on persons and institutions perceived to be pro-Entente, including the hand-grenade terrorist attack in Jászkarajenő planned in early 1922, [33] but fortunately not carried out, and the bomb attack in Csongrád on 24 December 1923, which killed three people. Behind each of these events, there was the emergence of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, the politically most influential far-right social organisation of the time, and the paramilitary commanders First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas and Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay who also acted as emerging, ambitious radical right-wing politicians.

The Erzsébetváros bomb attack was finally not tried alone, but the indictment was eventually linked it to other anti-Semitic and anti-Entente crimes committed in Budapest. The charge of the bombing of the Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros was thus merged with an attempted

---

31 See: Nigel H. Jones, *Hitler's Heralds. The Story of the Freikorps, 1918–1923*, Dorset, Barns and Noble, 1995.

32 See: Lajos Kerekes, *Olaszország, Magyarország és az osztrák Heimwehr-mozgalom*, Történelmi Szemle, 1961/2, 199–216.

33 On the bomb attack attempt in Jászkarajenő see: Balázs Kántás, *Consolidation with Grenades, that is, the Assasination Attempt in Jászkarajenő, 1922:* A Chapter of Political Terrorism in Hungary, ANGLISTICUM, 2021/8, 26–31.
https://www.anglisticum.org.mk/index.php/IJLLIS/article/view/2227/2622

pogrom against the synagogue in Újpest, which was finally not carried out, a bomb attack attempted against the Koháry Street Courty Palace and the French Embassy, and a similar attack that was planned against the Czechoslovak Embassy, and it was only by luck that these bombs finally did not explode. Andor Miklós, a liberal journalist and newspaper owner, and Károly Rassay, a member of the parliament and well-known liberal opposition politician of the time, were furthermore sent packages containing hand-grenades that were set to explode, and it was also only by luck and the vigilance of those present that these packages did not explode. At the same time, the Budapest Commissioner of the Hungarian State Police, the Speaker of the Parliament and the French Embassy received a life-threatening letter signed by the senders as 'Committee 101'. The Royal Prosecutor's Office in Budapest accused the young militiamen of 'deviating from the central national defence objectives, preparing anti-social attacks and making it impossible for citizens of the Israelite religion to remain in Hungary by means of so-called Jew-bashing and bombings' [34].

The political gravity of the bomb case is well illustrated by the fact that Minister of Defence Count General Károly Csáky and Prime Minister Count István Bethlen were also examined as witnesses at the first instance trial. As General Csáky explained in his testimony on the Double Cross Blood Union mentioned above, in the civil war after the collapse of the Soviet Republic of Hungary, the country had no unified regular army, but there were about fifty civilian militias in Budapest alone in addition to the National Army organised by Admiral Miklós Horthy and his military circle. Among these were the National Defence Departments of the Association of Awakening Hungarian which were indirectly under the control of the DCBU. The new right-wing Hungarian Government, which was consolidating in a chaotic situation, needed these irregular, armed paramilitary units to maintain an unstable order, and the Chief of the General Staff Béla Berzeviczy sought to bring these militias under the control of the Army in 1919–20. However, it was precisely because some of its members had committed serious crimes that the government had to formally dissolve the Double Cross Blood Union in 1923. At the time of the bomb assassination Erzsébetváros, the national defence militia of District 9 of Budapest commanded by József Márffy was already operating without any serious state control or instruction, and what they did was of their own free will.

---

34 HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923. The trial of József Márffy and his asscociates.

Prime Minister Bethlen himself appeared as a witness before the court less because of the political implications of the case than to clear himself as a private citizen, as József Márffy claimed that he had a personal acquaintance with the incumbent Prime Minister and his family, and that he often travelled in the Prime Minister's car. Bethlen, on the other hand, flatly denied in court that he or any of his family members knew Márffy even superficially [35].

The 'Márffy trial' was probably necessary primarily because of foreign pressure, in order for the Hungarian State to demonstrate to the Entente powers, especially to France that the revolutionary and civil war years following World War One were finally over, that political and social order had been restored, the Government had accepted the territorial losses recorded in the Peace Treaty of Trianon, and that the process of consolidation had finally begun. Although József Márffy was sentenced to death in the first instance, neither he nor his accomplices, who were also sentenced to death, were finally executed. The trial continued at the Royal Court of Appeal in Budapest and at the Royal Hungarian Curia (Supreme Court), and ended with much lighter sentences. The armed formations of the of the Awakening Hungarians were then however disarmed, the paramilitary wing of the association was clearly stripped of its vigilante-like authority, and the right-wing paramilitary formations, although they did not completely cease to exist, were brought under much closer state control and their activities were reduced [36].

The Bethlen Government finally succeeded, with great difficulty, in achieving relative consolidation in the social, economic and political spheres. On 21 January 1923, Hungary was finally admitted to the League of Nations, its rehabilitation in foreign political sense was essentially complete, and from then on the Association of Awakening Hungarians was merely a kind of loyal far-right opposition to the ruling party. Although it remained a social association until its dissolution in 1945, its political influence declined significantly with the emergence of new radical right-wing parties. Between 1924 and 1945, the emergence of various far-right, Hungarian fascist and national socialist parties mainly modelled on German, Austrian and Italian movements, severely eroded the influence of the Awakening movement, and its membership declined, although there was still considerable overlap in terms of personnel between the radical right-

[35] HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923.
[36] Tibor Zinner, *Az ébredők fénykora, 1919–1923.*

wing parties of the 1920s and 1930s and the membership of the Association of Awakening Hungarians [37].

Conclusions of a research – the decline and disbandment of Hungarian radical right-wing paramilitary formations after 1923

For Count István Bethlen's Government which was striving for consolidation in domestic and foreign policy as well, the bomb raid of Csongrád on 24 December 1923, which caused a great outcry and claimed the lives of three people was one of the last drops in the glass. Bethlen promised at the parliament on 3 January 1924 that he would personally interrogate paramilitary commander First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas about the Csongrád bomb attack among other things, and if his responsibility was to be found, he would be treated in the same way as anyone else.[38] Héjjas was also interrogated by the police in connection with the Csongrád bomb explosion and the conspiracies of nationalist secret societies and paramilitary groups in general, in the presence of the National Police Commissioner Imre Nádosy himself, but in the end it was not proven that he was personally involved in any criminal activity.[39] Of course, this was certainly nothing more than a bargain between the paramilitary commander and the Government, possibly including Regent Governor Miklós Horthy himself.[40] Besides Horthy, Gyula Gömbös, who later, in 1932 became Prime Minister of Hungary, must have played a major role in the fact that Héjjas was never brought to trial during the Horthy Era, and was never seriously prosecuted for the acts committed by him and others under his command, even though his crimes were obvious to many people [41]. The example of Iván Héjjas tells us a great deal about the relationship between radical irredentist-nationalist associations, secret societies and the paramilitary units with countless links to them and the Hungarian Government. Not only did the former paramilitary commander not have to

---

[37] Rudolf Paksa, *Magyar nemzetiszocialisták. Az 1930-as évek új szélsőjobboldali mozgalma. pártjai, politikusai, sajtója*, Budapest, Osiris Kiadó–MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézet, 2013.

[38] Nemzetgyűlési Napló, 1922–1926/XVIII, 337–338. Lajos Serfőző, *A titkos társaságok és a konszolidáció 1922–1926-ban*, 36.

[39] Lajos Serfőző, *A titkos társaságok és a konszolidáció 1922–1926-ban*, Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József Nominatae. Acta Historica, Tomus LVII, 1976, 3–60, 36.

[40] Béla Bodó, *The White Terror in Hungary*

[41] Ibid.

answer for his actions before the judiciary system, but he later received Vitéz's title,[42] a kind of specific Hungarian knighthood that provided certain social advantages, earned a doctorate in law for his book on aviation law, became a member of parliament and was later a well-paid and respected official of the Hungarian State.

Of all the paramilitary commanders who shared a common past and common crimes, and once practiced formidable power, it was Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay who was the most unable to achieve any kind of consolidation. Because of his failure to show sufficient loyalty to the Regent Governor on the occasion of King Charles IV's second attempt of return, and because the brutal activities of his detachment, his arbitrary assassinations and adventurer-like political actions he became increasingly burdensome for the Bethlen Government,[43] and he was eventually force to retire, become sidelined, and was also expelled from the Union of Etelköz, the pro-government political secret society of the era [44].

In the spirit of consolidation, the paramilitary formations and national defence militias still operating in various areas of the country, such as the Héjjas Brigade of the Great Hungarian Plain and other armed units of the Association of Awakening Hungarians were then essentially disarmed and/or regularised, and their law enforcement and military powers which could be traced back to the period of the turbulent civil war, were definitely and unequivocally abolished. At the same time, a paramilitary organisation, the above mentioned National Labour Protection Service was set up under the control of the Ministry of the Interior, primarily to break strikes and labour movement organisations. It was a type of white, strongly right-wing volunteer workers' militia whose members were equipped with handguns and while on duty had the same powers of action and use of weapons were the same as those of the police, but it was rather an auxiliary police rather than a military force [45]. The majority of its members practiced their civilian professions, but occasionally were called into duty.

---

[42] Ibid.

[43] Péter Konok, *Az erőszak kérdései 1919–1920-ban. Vörösterror–fehérterror*, Múltunk, 2010/3, 72–91, 84.

[44] Prónay, op. cit. 322–324.

[45] Central Archive of the National Archives of Hungary, HU-MNL-OL-K 26-XXII-6010; 5.818. M. E. számú rendelet a nemzeti munkavédelmi intézmény fegyverhasználati jogáról, 1923. augusztus 2., Magyarországi Rendeletek Tára, 1923, 274.

The Brigade of the Plain, the State Security Agents and the national defence militias of the Awakening Hungarians were also integrated into this organisation, so they were under much more serious government control, but could essentially continue to operate [46]. The Double Cross Blood Union also continued its activities within the framework of the National Labour Protection, but it is interesting to note that General Kálmán Shvoy wrote in his diary that the DCBU was founded under this name in 1923, as a kind of successor organisation to the Brigade of the Great Plain led by Iván Héjjas, and that it allegedly continued its activities under the codename *Főtartalék – Main Reserve* [47]. as a secret special operations military unit, formally within the Ministry of the Interior and the National Labour Protection, but in reality subordinated to the Ministry of Defence. General Shvoy thus dates the genesis of the organisation itself to this period, to the end of 1923. This is evidently a mistake made by the General, since the Double Cross Blood Union really ceased to exist under its former name by 1923–1924. There is also an archival source about the integration of the DCBU into the Office of National Labour Protection: a confidential circular from the Ministry of the Interior from 1926 which forbids the members of the National Labour Protection to refer to the new strike-breaking auxiliary police force as the 'Double Cross Blood Union' even among themselves, as it is associated with rather bad public memories [48]. The National Labour Protection was a strike-breaking auxiliary police force and a de facto covert military reserve force at the same time. Although it obviously had no significant combat value, its tens of thousands of members who were otherwise civilians in their daily occupations, but who owned firearms and were trained and could be mobilised to a certain extent, made a significant contribution to circumvention of the serious military restrictions imposed by the Peace Treaty of Trianon. In this way, it also helped to pacify the former (in some cases irregular) soldiers of the National Army, which had once numbered over 100,000 and was reduced to a maximum of 35,000 after 1921. In this strange, voluntary auxiliary police and reserve military status many people still felt useful and being in the service of the state. That is, the

---

46 Rudolfné Dósa, *A MOVE. Egy jellegzetesen Magyar fasiszta szervezet*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972, 151–152.

47 *Csak szolgálati használatra!. Iratok a Horthy-hadsereg történetéhez, 1919–1938*, ed. Tibor Hetés–Tamásné Morva, Budapest, Zrínyi Katonai Könyv- és Lapkiadó, 1968, 499–500.

48 Central Archive of the National Archives of Hungary, HU-MNL-OL-K 149-1926-6-3473.

Hungarian radical right-wing militia movement thus continued to exist partly within the framework of this organisation, in a, so to say, domesticated form [49].

The testimony of General Count Károly Csáky, Minister of Defence in the bombing trial of József Márffy and his associates, one of the most important archival documents of the history of the Double Cross Blood Union already cited earlier also testifies that the DCBU was established after the fall of the Soviet Republic with the aim of bringing paramilitary organisations operating in the capital and the countryside under unified (State and military) control in order to restore the order, presumably sometime around 1919-1920, on the initiative of General Béla Berzeviczy, Chief of General Staff. It was then dissolved in 1923 in the form in which it had previously operated, and Minister Csáky presumably meant the integration of the DCBU into the National Labour Protection which officially took place towards the end of 1922, but in practice perhaps it happened somewhat later, in several steps [50].

In parallel with the integration of the different militias into the National Labour Protection, the Government Decree No. 7502 of 19 October 1923 prohibited the participation of state employees, including members of the armed forces and law enforcement agencies to be members in associations whose activities were against or incompatible with the lawful order of the state, or which did not have a constitution approved by the Minister of the Interior. That is, it was essentially the membership in secret societies that become prohibited for state employees.[51] In reality, of course, it was still not easy for the state to check – if it really wanted to check in the case of right-wing, pro-government organisations – who was a member of what kind of association or with whom, how and for what purposes cooperated, especially if the given secret organisation produced no written documents for conspiratorial reasons. In this way, although the Double Cross Blood Union officially ceased to exist in 1923, its members, in some form, were still partly in the service of the state, and they could continue their activities to achieve the goals which they thought to be patriotic.

---

[49] Rudolfné Dósa, *A MOVE. Egy jellegzetesen magyar fasiszta szervezet*. 134.

[50] City Archives of Budapest, HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923.

[51] Budapesti Közlöny, 24 October 1923.

Works Cited

1. Béla Bodó, *Héjjas Iván. Egy ellenforradalmár élete*, 2000, 2010/10.
2. Béla Bodó, *the White Terror. Antisemitic and Political Violence in Hungary, 1919–1921*, London, Routledge, 2019.
3. Béla Borsi-Kálmán, *Kisfiúk a nagy viharban. A temesvári „Levente-pör" – AZ első román „irredenta per" története, 1919–1922*, Budapest, Kortárs Kiadó, 2020.
4. Miklós Zoltán Fodor, *Az Etelközi Szövetség története*, Nógrád Megyei Múzeumok Évkönyve, 2007/XXXI, 118–156.
5. Ernő Gergely–Pál Schönwald, *a Somogyi–Bacsó-gyilkosság*, Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 1978.
6. Robert Gerwarth, *the Vanquished. Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917–1923*, Farrar, Straus and Girou, 2016.
7. Robert Gerwarth–John Horne, *Paramilitarizmus az első világháború után*, transl. Péter Várady,, in *Háború béke idején. Paramilitáris erőszak Európában az első világháború után*, ed. Robert Gerwarth–John Horne, Budapest, L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2017, 13–32.
8. Katalin G. Soós, *Magyar-bajor-osztrák titkos tárgyalások és együttműködés, 1920–1921*, Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József Nominatae. Acta Historica, 1967/XVII, 3–43.
9. Nigel H. Jones, *Hitler's Heralds. The Story of the Freikorps, 1918–1923*, Dorset, Barns and Noble, 1995.
10. Balázs Kántás, *A Magyar, fehér szabadkőművesség"*: Adatok és levéltári források AZ Etelközi Szövetség, a Horthy-korszak politizáló titkos társaságának töredékes történetéhez, Budapest, Horthy-korszak Történetének Kutatásáért Társaság, OSZK Magyar Elektronikus Könyvtár, 2021.
11. https://mek.oszk.hu/21900/21979/
12. Balázs Kántás, *The Bomb Outrage in Erzsébetváros*: An Action of Political Terrorism in Hungary, 1922, ANGLISTICUM, 2021/6, 71–79.
13. https://www.anglisticum.org.mk/index.php/IJLLIS/article/view/2220/2616
14. Balázs Kántás, *The Double Cross Blood Union*: Outline of the History of a Secret Military Organisation of Hungary in the 1920s, ANGLISTICUM, 2021/10, 52–70.

https://www.anglisticum.org.mk/index.php/IJLLIS/article/view/2218/2615

15. Balázs Kántás, *the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch*: The Szemere-Bobula-Ulain Coup Plan, 1923, ANGLISTICUM, 2021/6, 32–45. https://www.anglisticum.org.mk/index.php/IJLLIS/article/view/2217/2614
16. Balázs Kántás, *the Bomb Attack in Csongrád*: A Case Study of Radical Right-Wing Paramilitarism and Political Terrorism in Hungary in the 1920s, ANGLISTICUM, 2021/7, 31–39. https://www.anglisticum.org.mk/index.php/IJLLIS/article/view/2226/2621
17. Balázs Kántás, *Consolidation with Grenades, that is, the Assasination Attempt in Jászkarajenő, 1922*: *A Chapter of Political Terrorism in Hungary*, ANGLISTICUM, 2021/8, 26–31. https://www.anglisticum.org.mk/index.php/IJLLIS/article/view/2227/2622
18. Balázs Kántás, *Milicisták, puccsisták, terrorfiúk. Mikrotörténeti esettanulmányok és levéltári források a Horthy-korszak első éveiben működő radikális jobboldali titkos szervezetek és a hozzájuk köthető paramilitáris alakulatok tevékenységéről, 1919–1925*, Budapest, Művészeti és Irodalmi Jelen Kft., 2021. http://real.mtak.hu/123884/
19. Lajos Kerekes, *Olaszország, Magyarország és az osztrák Heimwehr-mozgalom*, Történelmi Szemle, 1961/2, 199–216.
20. Tamás Kovács, *A Nemzeti Hadsereg és a tiszti különítmények*, in *Csoportosulás, lázadás és a társadalom terrorizálása. Rendészettörténeti Tanulmányok 2.*, Ed. Orsolya Ilona Jámbor–Gábor G. Tarján, Budapest, Rendőrség Tudományos Tanácsa, 2019, 151–172.
21. Dezső Nemes, *Az ellenforradalom története Magyarországon 1919–1921*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967.
22. Lajos Olasz, *Tervek a Felvidék visszafoglalására 1920-ban*, Közép-Európai Közlemények, 2020/4, 89–114.
23. Mária Ormos, *Egy magyar médiavezér. Kozma Miklós*, Budapest, PolgArt Kiadó, 2001.
24. Rudolf Paksa, *Magyar nemzetiszocialisták. Az 1930-as évek új szélsőjobboldali mozgalma. pártjai, politikusai, sajtója*, Budapest, Osiris Kiadó–MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont

Történettudományi Intézet, 2013.

25. Pál Prónay, *A határban a halál kaszál. Fejezetek Prónay Pál naplójából*, ed. Ervin Pamlényi–Ágnes Szabó, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1963.
26. Nóra Szekér, *Titkos társaság. A Magyar Testvéri Közösség Története*, Budapest, Jaffa Kiadó, 2017.
27. István Ujszászy, *Vallomások a holtak házából. Ujszászy István vezérőrnagynak, a 2. vkf. osztály és az Államvédelmi Központ vezetőjének az ÁVH fogságában írott feljegyzései*, ed. György Haraszti–Zoltán András Kovács–Szabolcs Szita, Budapest, Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára–Corvina Kiadó, 2007.
28. Krisztián Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege. Diszkrimináció, szociálpolitika és antiszemitizmus Magyarországon 1914–1944*, Pécs, Jelenkor Kiadó–Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár, 2012.
29. *Uğur Ümit Üngör, Paramilitarism. Mass Violence in the Shadow of the State, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020.*
30. Robert G. L. Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism. The Free Corps Movement In Post-War Germany 1918–1923, New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 1969.*
31. István Zadravecz, *Páter Zadravecz titkos naplója*, ed. György Borsányi, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1967.
32. Tibor Zinner, *Az ébredők fénykora, 1919–1923*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989.

Archival Sources

1. City Archives of Budapest – Budapest Főváros Levéltára
2. HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923. The trial of József Márffy and his asscociates.
3. HU-BFL-VII-18-d-1923-03/0610. Ferenc Ulain and his associate's trial
4. Central Archive of the National Archives of Hungary – Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára
5. HU-MNL-OL-K 26-XXII-6010.
6. HU-MNL-OL-K 149-1926-6-3473.
7. Historical Archives of the State Protection Services – Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára

8. HU-ÁBTL-A-719. Report on the Union of Etelköz.
9. Hungarian Archives of Political History and Trade Unions
10. HU-PIL-IV-973. Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay's memoirs and diaries.
11. Oral History Archives of the VERITAS History Research Centre – Veritas Történetkutató Intézet és Levéltár, Oral History Archívum
12. Veritas OHA–45. sz. 53. Interview with Miklós Mester, made by János Gyurgyák–Tamás Varga, 1986.

Chapter - 15

The Crimes of the Irregular Military Detachment Commanded by First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas in the Danube–tisza Interfluve During the wave of Paramilitary Violence in Hungary Called the 'White Terror' in 1919–1921, and Extracts from the Afterlife of a Radical Paramilitary Commander

In the years following World War One, in the 1920s, paramilitarism and paramilitary violence [52]. Mainly committed by demobilised or still active soldiers was an almost natural phenomenon in Hungary, just like in many other countries of Central Europe [53]. After the dissolution of the Austro–Hungarian Empire, Hungary sank into civil war, three revolutions followed each other in two years, and after the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the short-lived communist dictatorship, [54]. a the new right-wing government establishing its power with the help of the Entente states could only difficulty rule the quasi anarchistic conditions of the country. In 1920–1921, Budapest and the Hungarian country were terrorized by irregular military formations that were formally part of the National Army, the new, right-wing armed force of the Government, but often operated completely independently. This 2-year-long wave of paramilitary violence which was delivered by mainly detachments

---

52 On paramilitarism see: Uğur Ümit Üngör, *Paramilitarism. Mass Violence in the Shadow of the State,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020.

53 Robert Gerwarth, *Harc a Vörös Szörnyeteggel. Ellenforradalmi erőszak Közép-Európa vereséget szenvedett államaiban*, transl. Péter Várady, in *Háború béke idején. Paramilitáris erőszak Európában az első világháború után*, ed. Robert Gerwarth–John Horne, Budapest, L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2017, 71–92.; Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished. Why the First World War Failed to End*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016.

54 On the history of the Hungarian Soviet Republic see: Pál Hatos, *Rosszfiúk világforradalma. Az 1919-es Magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság története*, Budapest, Jaffa Kiadó, 2021.

subordinated to influential paramilitary commanders First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas, Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay or Major Gyula Ostenburg-Morawek is popularly called the Hungarian White Terror [55]. Radical right-wing irregular soldiers exploiting the weakness of the government committed several serious crimes like robbery, plunder and even murders, frequently by anti-Semitic motivations, and they did it in the disguise of law enforcement measures, since in this period the military authorities possessed police jurisdictions over civilians as well in order to restore the order [56]. It was finally the government led by Prime Minister Count István Bethlen who gradually ceased the White Terror in 1921, and disbanded/regularized irregular/paramilitary troops and formations. The otherwise strongly right-wing, authoritarian conservative Hungarian Government finally really did its best to tranquilize the radical right-wing forces and create some kind of social and political peace at last, after the long years of war and civil war, but before that, a 2-year-long period was defined by paramilitary violence [57].

Iván Héjjas, a key figure of post-WWI paramilitary violence in Hungary, a young first lieutenant of the Air Force of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy from a well-to-do peasant family who returned home from the First World War quickly became one of the most notorious commanders of the counter-revolutionary reprisals after the fall of the Soviet Republic of Hungary, and perhaps he was the man who was responsible for the most arbitrary murders [58]. In the spring of 1919, as a soldier who had served on the front, he began to organise his detachment near his farming family's estate in the Kecskemét area, with the aim of overthrowing the Communist Government [59]. The core of his detachment was made up of members of his Air Force squadron, who had returned home with him from the war, but young people of peasant origin from the area also joined the formation [60].

---

55 Béla Bodó, *The White Terror. Antisemitic and Political Violence in Hungary, 1919–1921*, London, Routledge, 2019.

56 See Tibor Zinner, *Az ébredők fénykora, 1919–1923*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989.

57 Op. cit.

58 Béla Bodó, *Héjjas Iván. Egy ellenforradalmár élete*, 2000, 2010/10.

59 Ignác Romsics, *A nagy háború és az 1918–1919-es magyarországi forradalmak*, Helikon Kiadó, Budapest, 2018, 108–109.

60 Rudolf Paksa, *A fehérterror „logikája”. Események, olvasatok, kontextusok*, in *Terror 1918-1919. Forradalmárok, ellenforradalmárok,*

Most of these insurgents had been served inn the army. In April of 1919, the young reserve first lieutenant rose to become the leader of one of the major right-wing uprisings against the Communist regime [61].

Héjjas was also one of the founders and leaders of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, so this nationalist social association – which was increasingly organised along paramilitary lines at the time – could not have been left out of the rebellion, and in fact, due to the personal overlaps, its early activities were practically inseparable from the operation of the Héjjas's military detachment. After losing battle in Kecskemét against the Communist troops, Héjjas and his armed comrades – including, for example, Sergeant Major Mihály Francia Kiss, one of the most notorious soldiers who committed murders during the White Terror, and the later radical right-wing mayor of Kecskemét, Béla Liszka – eventually joined the counter-revolutionary government organising in Szeged [62]. In April 1919 Admiral Miklós Horthy, later commander-in-chief of the National Army and from 1920 head of state of Hungary, personally received Iván Héjjas and commissioned him to operate his detachment as an auxiliary police force of the National Army and to eliminate the remaining Communist groups in his homeland, the Great Hungarian Plain [63].

The Royal Romanian Army which occupied a large part of Hungary soon dismantled the remnants of the Communist Government, and in the summer of 1919 Héjjas's troops were also given permission by the military authorities of the occupying army to provide auxiliary police services in the Kecskemét area in order to restore the disintegrated social order. Héjjas proclaimed himself city commander in Kecskemét – also with the approval of the Romanian Army and the Szeged counter-revolutionary government – and thus soon began the internment and arbitrary execution of those who allegedly held positions during the Soviet Republic or even only sympathized with the short-lived Communist government [64].

---

megszállók, ed. Rolf Müller–Tibor Takács–Éva Tulipán, Budapest, Jaffa Kiadó, 2019, 217–245.; Béla Bodó, *The White Terror in Hungary. The Social World of Paramilitary Groups*, Austrian History Yearbook, 2011/42, 133–163.

61 Ignác Romsics, *A Duna–Tisza köze hatalmi-politikai viszonyai 1918–19-ben*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982.

62 Bodó Béla, *Héjjas Iván. Egy ellenforradalmár élete*. op. cit.

63 Bodó, op. cit.

64 Ibid.

During October and November 1919, when the Romanian military still kept the Great Hungarian Plain under occupation, the auxiliary police units of Héjjas murdered about a hundred people (and of course took and turned their belongings in their favour) most of whom had nothing to do with the Soviet Republic and the communist wave of violence called the Red Terror [65]. Iván Héjjas, if the sources are to be believed, took advantage of the nearly anarchistic conditions and operated an almost separate quasi-private state in and around Kecskemét during 1919–1920 under his own de facto leadership, whose peculiar order was maintained by armed men loyal to him as the National Army's auxiliary police forces. Héjjas's fiancée and later wife was Sarolta Papp, daughter of Dr. György Papp, the police commissioner of Kecskemét, and Héjjas as city commander together with his armed militiamen controlled the whole town and its neighbourhood. His father, Mihály Héjjas Sr., was the director of the Kecskemét Vineyard Company, an influential person in the region, and at the time he was driving a car stolen by his son's militiamen in full public view. The Héjjas family already had extensive connections in and around Kecskemét even before the White Terror, but after the paramilitary armed force was organised, they started to act like criminals, taking advantage of the anarchistic conditions, claiming themselves to be the representatives of the law and order. There are also indications that the Ministry of Interior and the State Police knew a great deal of details about the murders committed in the villages Izsák and Orgovány by Héjjas's militiamen, as well as other individual robbery murders by members of the detachment, but for some time they delayed taking action against the armed men [66]. It is also certain that the Kecskemét police knew about the murders committed by members of the Héjjas detachment as early as the end of 1919, as the Commissioner of Police of Kecskemét forwarded a list of about 40 missing persons to Government Commissioner Count Gedeon Ráday who also sent a copy of the same document to the General Command of the National Army [67]. The report of

---

65 Győző Drozdy, *Elvett illúziók. Drozdy Győző emlékiratai*, ed. Zoltán Paksy Zoltán, Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 2007, 408–416.

66 József Halmi, *17699/920 belügyminiszteri akta Héjjas Iványról. A Bécsi Magyar Újság munkatársától*, in *Magyar pokol. A magyarországi fehérterror betiltott és üldözött kiadványok tükrében*, ed, Györgyi Markovits, Budapest, Magvető Könyvkiadó, 50–53.

67 *Iratok az ellenforradalom történetéhez 1919–1945, I. kötet. Az ellenforradalom hatalomra jutása és rémuralma Magyarországon 1919–*

the head of the Royal Public Prosecutor's Office of Kecskemét to the Chief Public Prosecutor from November 1919 documents roughly similar conditions and the same events, emphasizing that Iván Héjjas's detachment was a relatively large and well-armed force, and therefore, attempts to bring the perpetrators of the atrocities to justice could even result in armed confrontations [68]. It can therefore by no means be claimed that the authorities were unaware of the atrocities committed by Iván Héjjas's detachment in the Danube–Tisza Interfluve. Thus, in addition to the exaggerated nationalism, obsessive anti-Communism and anti-Semitism, the desire for profit and perhaps the belief in the possibility of rapid social mobility also played a very important role in the actions of Héjjas and his militamen who invariably robbed their murdered victims and used their stolen goods for their own benefit. Their actions were accompanied not only by murders, but also by other acts of violence, such as numerous pogroms involving hundreds of small or large-scale beatings of Jews, most of which resulted in no deaths but serious injuries – one need only think of the well-known pogrom in Izsák on 17 November 1919 [69].

Even today, researchers do not have exact numbers and list of names,[70] but after the Romanian Army withdrew from the areas eastward of the Tisza in April 1920, between December 1920 and December 1922, Iván Héjjas's men, the so-called *Alföldi Brigád – Brigade of the Hungarian Plain* may have murdered about 400 people. The members of the Héjjas detachment/Brigade of the Hungarian Plain also took an oath, swearing to their leader, detachment commander Iván Héjjas. The wording of the oath was the following:

'*I, XY, a member of the Héjjas Brigade, swear and pledge to work with all my strength to create the greatest fraternal understanding among the members of the organization. I vow and swear that I will obey the orders of the Héjjas Brigade and of my superiors appointed by Commander Héjjas as*

1921, ed. Elek Karsai–Imre Kubitsch Imre–Dezső Nemes–Ervin Pamlényi Ervin, Budapest, Szikra Kiadó, 1956, 221–223.

68 *Dokumentumok az 1918/19-es forradalmak Duna–Tisza közi történetéhez,* ed. Ignác Romsics, Kecskemét, Bács-Kiskun Megyei Levéltár, 1976, 677–685.

69 Bodó, op. cit.

70 Máté Kóródi, *Adattár a Magyar Nemzeti Hadsereg különítményes csoportjai és más fegyveres szervek által elkövetett gyilkosságokról, 1919. augusztus 3.–1921. október 23*., Budapest, Clio Intézet, Clio Kötetek 2., 2020.

far as possible under all circumstances. I swear and affirm that I will keep all secrets concerning the corps, and that I will never betray the members of the corps or its commanders to any person. My obligation of secrecy shall survive the termination of the orps. I swear that I will do my utmost to promote the value and public esteem of our organisation through my talents and work. I swear that I am not and will not be a member of any secret or openly destructive association. I swear and affirm that while I am a member of the Héjjas Brigade I will not concern myself with politics or the issue of kingship. I swear that I will keep and maintain the utmost discipline among the members of the Héjjas Brigade. I pledge that I will never associate with our enemies openly or secretly. I will not leave my comrades under any circumstances, alive, wounded, or even dead alone, and I will help them under all circumstances. I submit myself to any punishment by the disciplinary and punitive committee to be elected by the members of the Héjjas Brigade. May God help me.' [71]

Iván Héjjas was thus surrounded by a cult of personality on the part of his sworn men, and the will of the paramilitary commander was equal to the law for them. They were bound by a serious obligation of secrecy, and if they broke it or disobeyed orders, they could face severe punishment, even death – just as they had to take an oath as members of the DCBU. The members of the Brigade of the Hungarian Plain, which operated as a separate unit of the Double-Cross Blood Union, undoubtedly committed serious crimes during the White Terror between 1919 and 1921. Iván Héjjas and some of his men then joined the uprising in West Hungary, where as the members of paramilitary group of active, reserve and demobilised soldiers, students and young people of peasant origin, known as the *Rongyos Gárda – Ragged Guard*, they played an active role in forcing the referendum in Sopron, as a result of which Sopron, the so-called city of loyalty, remained part of Hungary today, and finally was not annexed to Austria [72].

At the same time, in order to prevent vigilante justice, the Government of István Friedrich, with its questionable legitimacy, decided as early as 1919 that all persons who had been engaged in any political activity during the Soviet Republic of Hungary should be held accountable, in order to prevent increasing arbitrary atrocities committed by armed groups [73] The Government entrusted the prosecution to Deputy Crown Prosecutor Albert

---

71 HU-BFL-VII-5-c-198/1940; Idézi: Zinner, op. cit. 568–569.

72 Imre Tóth, *Két Anschluss között. Nyugat-Magyarország és Burgenland Wilsontól Hitlerig*, Budapest, Kronosz Kiadó, 2020.

73 Ignác Romsics, *A Horthy-korszak*, Budapest, Helikon Kiadó, 2017, 347.

Váry. Many reports were received, resulting in thousands of people being arrested between August and December 1919. From these confessions, reports, accounts and court sentences, the prosecutor compiled his book *The Victims of Red Rule in Hungary*, [74] first published in 1922, which sought to document the atrocities of the Red Terror in an unbiased way. According to this book, there were 587 proven deadly victims of the communist government. At the same time, Albert Váry also began to investigate the crimes committed by nationalist military units after the fall of the communist government. After Miklós Horthy's march into Budapest on 16 November 1919, various right-wing military units intervened in Albert Váry's work. It was mainly the detachments commanded by Gyula Ostenburg-Morawek, Iván Héjjas and Pál Prónay that unlawfully attacked civilians – mainly of Jewish origin – and tried to hinder the investigation.

There was a social protest against the White Terror, which resulted in the draft decree, also attributed to Albert Váry, being adopted by the Government on 12 June 1920 and published in the official gazette on the same day. The decree stated that all military units and detachments were to cease all actions against civilians immediately, and that any soldier who violated the decree was to be arrested immediately. Although the decree was effective, it was greeted with suspicion by right-wing politicians. As a result, on 26 October 1920 Váry was relieved of his position of President of the Royal Prosecutor's Office in Budapest.

The armed militiamen of the Association of Awakening Hungarians – who were also members of Iván Héjjas's paramilitary detachment and presumably of the Double Cross Blood Union – murdered Adolf Léderer, an Israelite resident in Solt on 16 August 1921. This caused a great public outcry, and the press demanded that the killers should be brought to justice. At the same time, Prime Minister Count István Bethlen announced in the Parliament that he would entrust Albert Váry with the task of apprehending the perpetrators of the murder in Solt. He also announced that in order to investigate the atrocities committed in 1919, 1920 and 1921 on the Danube-Tisza Interfluve and to prevent similar incidents in the future, he would send Váry to the Great Plain, reinforced by serious police and gendarmerie escort [75].

---

74 Albert Váry, *A vörös uralom áldozatai Magyarországon*, Vác, A Váci Királyi Országos Fegyintézet Kőnyomdája, 1922.

75 HU-BFL-VII-5-e-1949/20630. – Trial of Iván Héjjas and his associates at the the People's Tribunal p. 282.

In the archival records of the rather belated criminal trial of Iván Héjjas and his associates at the People's Tribunal from 1947–1949, practically one of the most significant documents from the 1920s, from the very period when the crimes really happened, about the investigations or the White Terror, is the 1922 summarising report of Albert Váry on the events that took place on the Danube–Tisza Interfluve. In his report of 1922, the prosecutor described much the same things as he told before the People's Tribunal in 1947, twenty-five years later, when he was an elderly man, in the criminal trial of the absent Iván Héjjas and his fellows. His testimony survived in the same case file. According to these archival sources, Albert Váry had indeed been commissioned by the Prime Minister to investigate the atrocities of the White Terror in connection with the murder of Adolf Léderer on 16 August 1921, in Solt. Váry was then the President of the Royal Prosecutor's Office in Budapest, and in the light of his investigations after the perpetrators of the Red Terror, which were largely unbiased, the Government rightfully expected him to investigate the serious abuses of the White Terror. Soldiers, or at least persons dressed in military uniforms who appeared to be soldiers, were also abducting civilians in Budapest, and the intervention of the Royal Prosecutor's Office of Budapest seemed increasingly justified, although most of the abducted people were later released by the military authorities in the capital [76]. Finally, the Government clearly abolished the right of the military authorities to take actions against civilians in 1921, and prosecutor Dr. Péter Kovács was also assigned as the deputy of Dr. Albert Váry to investigate the murders committed on the Danube–Tisza Interfluve, while the Central Investigation Department of the Ministry of the Interior – at that time operating independently of the Royal Hungarian State Police as a central criminal police force with nationwide jurisdiction – placed a number of detectives at the disposal of the prosecutors [77].

Dr. Váry arrived in Izsák on 29 August 1921 with a large police and gendarmerie escort, but the investigators soon reported to him that many of the individuals suspected of serious crimes had gone to West Hungary to take part in the Burgenland uprising. Policemen and gendarmes arrested 20-22 people, but none of them were later suspected of serious crimes. In Albert Váry's view, the murders of Adolf Léderer of Solt, and Zoltán Pánczél, Sándor Beck and Árpád Schmiedt of Izsák were simple robbery-

[76] Ibid. 284.

[77] Ibid. 284.

murders, where the alleged Communist sympathies or Jewish origin of the victims were merely a pretext for committing a crime of vile motive, motivated essentially by profit [78]. On 19 October 1921, Váry addressed a request to the Commissioner General of the Government of West Hungary, Count Antal Sigray, to hand over 50–60 persons who had fled there and were suspected of murder to the prosecutor's office. Although Albert Váry did not received any reply from the Government Commissioner, he initiated criminal proceedings and issued arrest warrants against the following persons, mainly demobilised soldiers: Mihály Francia Kiss, Mihály Danics, Ambrus Tóth, Mihály Nagy, Sándor Bán, Gábor Kállai, Rezső Schmidt, József Korom, Aladár Danics, Gábor Király, Nándor Pataki, István Juhász, Kálmán Papp, József Kenei, Gyula Kállai, Sándor Papp, Árpád Rád, Géza Korb, Gergely Tasi, Antal Makai, Lajos Baski [79]. The prosecutor was able to link the murders committed in the Danube–Tisza Interfluve with the activities of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, especially based on the name of First Lieutenant Árpád Raád, who was also one of the notorious soldiers of the White Terror killing several people [80].

During his investigations, Albert Váry focused primarily on the murders committed in Izsák, Lajosmizse and Solt, as he was convinced that in these cases there was less political motivation than the simple motive of financial gain [81]. The prosecutor could not, however, continue the arrests and on-the-spot interrogations that he had begun for long, since the amnesty order [82] of the Regent Governor of 3 November 1921 had virtually nullified his work, or at least reduced it to a symbolic one. At the end of the investigation, he decided to collect the names of the victims of the White Terror after the publication of the list of victims of the Red Rule, but he was

78 Ibid. 285.

79 Ibid. 285.

80 Ibid. 286.

81 Ibid. 287.

82 Laura Csonka, *Nemzetközi és hazai fellépés a népbiztosok megkegyelmezése érdekében*, ArchívNet, 2015/3. https://archivnet.hu/politika/nemzetkozi_es_hazai_fellepes_a_nepbiztosok_megkegyelmezese_erdekeben.html; Péter Konok, *Az erőszak kérdései 1919–1920-ban*. *Vörösterror–fehérterror*, Múltunk, 2010/3, 72–91, 84.; *Iratok az igazságszolgáltatás történetéhez 2*., ed. Ibolya Horváth–Pál Solt–Győző Szabó–János Zanathy–Tibor Zinner, Budapest, Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1993, 21–42.

unable to complete his work successfully [83]. Although he attempted to arrest Mihály Francia Kiss, Mihály Danics and others for simple public offences not covered by the amnesty order, he was instructed by his superiors to keep their arrests pending.[84]

Finally, Dr. Péter Kovács, the prosecutor previously assigned to be Albert Váry's deputy, was commissioned to complete the investigation, and since the armed militiamen who had served as members of the Héjjas Brigade in the Kecskemét region were legally considered soldiers, he referred the cases to the military authorities [85]. In most cases, the investigation was closed by the military authorities, [86] which had not previously shown much cooperation with Albert Váry, who had approached them in several cases [87]. There was only one case in which the soldiers, who were suspected of the murders and had served as auxiliary police troops mentioned the name of their commanding officer, First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas, during their interrogations [88]. In the end, there was no prosecution, and in 1922 only Mihály Danics, János Zbona and other lower-ranking perpetrators were sentenced to a few years in prison for various public offences [89]. Although his detachment had in principle been disarmed by this time, Héjjas initiated a press attack in the summer of 1922 and felt offended that he had been granted amnesty for his actions during the counter-revolution. He also declared that, although he would bow to the Government's will, he had not yet given the final order and that 'if lightning should strike anywhere in the Hungarian sky', he would be the 'God's arrow for Budapest' [90]. Then, on 20 July 1922, by the intervention of Prime Minister Bethlen, he was briefly detained by the police for attempting

---

83 HU-BFL-VII-5-e-1949/20630 p. 287.

84 Ibid. p. 287.

85 Ibid. 288.

86 HU-BFL-VII-5-e-1949/20630.

87 *Iratok az ellenforradalom történetéhez 1919–1945, I. kötet. Az ellenforradalom hatalomra jutása és rémuralma Magyarországon 1919–1921*, ed. Elek Karsai–Imre Kubitsch–Dezső Nemes–Ervin Pamlényi, Budapest, Szikra Kiadó, 1956, 225–228.

88 HU-BFL-VII-5-e-1949/20630. p. 287–288.

89 Zinner, op. cit 174.

90 [Anonymous author], *Héjjas Iván ügye a nemzetgyűlésben*, Népszava, 15 July 1922. Cited by Ignác Romsics, *Bethlen István*, Budapest, Helikon Kiadó, 2019, 270.

to organise and recruit a second uprising in Western Hungary,[91] but was soon released [92].

In parallel with the pacification of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, Iván Héjjas, a key figure of the Hungarian White Terror and the leader of the bloody atrocities committed on the Danube–Tisza Interfluve, who played a leading role in the DCBU, was also – apparently – consolidated and pacified. He was able to avoid punishment throughout the Horthy Era, mainly thanks to his relationship with Regent Horthy and Gyula Gömbös. From among all of the former detachment commanders involved in the White Terror, it was perhaps Héjjas who achieved the highest social and political status. Between 1927 and 1931, he was a member of parliament for the Kunszentmiklós constituency of Gömbös's Party of Hungarian Independence (commonly known as the Race-defending Party), that had earlier split from the ruling United Party. On 16 June 1929, in a grandiose ceremony held on Margaret Island, Regent Governor Miklós Horthy conferred the title of Vitéz on Iván Héjjas, his brother Aurél Héjjas, Gyula Gömbös and dozens of other former and active soldiers [93]. Iván Héjjas's and Gyula Gömbös's example illustrate well how (in the 1920s fairly) young, ambitious military officers could quickly become influential politicians of the radical right, rising to the level of the Hungarian political elite.

In the meantime, Héjjas had obtained a degree and a doctorate in law with his book on aviation law [94] at the Science University of Budapest in 1933, was appointed as a honorary professor of law at the same university, and as a former fighter pilot and otherwise competent aviation expert, he worked as a senior civil servant in the 1930s in the Ministry of Trade and Transport. From 1940 he was head of the Department of Public Aviation, adviser to the minister, later promoted to titular state secretary,[95] and at the same time a member of the board of directors of the state-owned Hungarian Air Traffic Company, and the governor promoted him from reserve first lieutenant to reserve captain. Officially, he was responsible for the supervision and organisation of civil aviation, but as a former fighter pilot

91 Romsics, op. cit. 270.

92 Zinner, op cit. 173.

93 Bodó, op. cit.

94Iván Héjjas, *Légi jog*, Kecskemét, Első Kecskeméti Hírlapkiadó- és Nyomda Rt, 1934.

95 HU-MNL-OL-K 27-1942. 02. 08.-26.

and expert of military aviation, he also played a role in the organisation and development of the Air Force of the Hungarian Home Defence Forces [96].

With the death of his friend and protector, Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös, in 1936, Héjjas suffered a great loss politically, but his position and influence remained stable as an unstinting supporter of the Regent Governor. In 1938, following in the footsteps of the former Race-defending Party, he founded a new radical right-wing party under the name of the National Association of Hungarian Race-defenders, [97] which, however, kept strictly aloof from the Arrow Cross Party and other Hungarian fascist and national socialist parties organised based on the Western model, and acted mainly as a loyal opposition to the authoritarian conservative government, thus failing to become a significant force on the Hungarian far-right [98].

With the Government's knowledge and consent, Héjjas, by then as a reserve captain of the Hungarian Home Defence Forces was also able to return to military/paramilitary activities for a time during the Second World War, when Hungary entered the war and committed itself to the German and Italian policy of aggression. In 1938, under the direction of former Interior Minister Miklós Kozma (an influential politician of the era and also a used-to-be soldier personally close to Regent Governor Horthy, at that time President and CEO of the Hungarian Telegraphic Office, later Governor of Transcarpathia), he participated as one of the leaders of the reorganised (second) Ragged Guard in the Transcarpathian subverting operation, which prepared the reoccupation of Transcarpathia which had been annexed to Czechoslovakia in 1920 under the Peace Treaty of Trianon, with the assistance of the German military [99].

Furthermore, Héjjas also probably played a role in organising the election of Miklós Horthy's son, István Horthy as Deputy Regent Governor

---

96 *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai*, ed. Miklós Szinai Miklós–László Szűcs, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1962, 33–38, 194–197.

97 The fragmented fond of the records produced by the party is in the custody of the Central Archive of the National Archives of Hungary: HU-MNL-OL-P 2249-81.

98 Bodó, op. cit.

99 Mária Ormos, *Egy magyar médiavezér. Kozma Miklós*, Budapest, PolgArt Kiadó, 2001, 549–571.

[100]. At the end of 1943, General Ferenc Szombathelyi, the Chief of the General Staff of the Hungarian Defence Forces entrusted Colonel Gyula Kádár to organise an irregular military force of 5,000 men, in which Héjjas also participated as a reserve captain and an expert in ungentlemanly warfare, on the Regent Governor's order [101]. Secretly, these times Héjjas served at the Special Operations Group of the General Staff of the Hungarian Defence Forces, and the aim of the establishment of this irregular military formation was to create a troop that is exclusively loyal to Regent Governor Horthy, to help Hungary get out of the world war, and to oppose the German invasion of Hungary in the event of a German invasion, which was foreseeable at the time. As a former race-defender, Héjjas was loyal to Regent Governor Horthy, and at the same time, he was gradually becoming strongly anti-German, who refused to join the pro-German Arrow Cross movement. Although he was a radical right-wing soldier and politician, he never became a Nazi collaborator [102]. His irregular military unit, however, ultimately played no role in the military events that took place in Hungary, and in 1945 Héjjas fled the advancing Soviet troops to Germany, and then to Spain, where he settled in Vigo, Galicia, with the knowledge and consent of the right-wing dictator Francisco Franco who was glad to give shelter to German war criminals and their allies.

Although Iván Héjjas was finally sentenced to death in absentia by the People's Tribunal on 25 August 1949, mainly for the murders committed in Orgovány during the time of the White Terror, in 1919–1921, the former militia commander and radical right-wing politician finally died in Spanish exile in 1950, aged 60, presumably of natural causes.

References

1. Béla Angyal, *Érdekvédelem és önszerveződés. Fejezetek a csehszlovákiai magyar pártpolitika történetéből*, Fórum Intézet–Lilium Aurum Kiadó, Dunaszerdahely, 2002.
2. Ákos Bartha, *Véres város. Fegyveres ellenállás Budapesten*, 1944–1945, Budapest, Jaffa Kiadó, 2021.
3. Béla Bodó, *The White Terror. Antisemitic and Political Violence in*

100 Lajos Olasz, *A kormányzóhelyettesi intézmény története*, *1941–1944*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2007.

101 Bodó, op. cit.

102 Ákos Bartha, *Véres város. Fegyveres ellenállás Budapesten*, 1944–1945, Budapest, Jaffa Kiadó, 2021.

Hungary, 1919–1921, London, Routledge, 2019.

4. Béla Borsi-Kálmán, *Kisfiúk a nagy viharban. A temesvári 'Levente-pör' – az első román 'irredenta per' története, 1919–1922*, Budapest, Kortárs Kiadó, 2020.
5. Iván T. Berend, *Magyarország gazdasága az első világháború után 1919-1929*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1966.
6. Rudolfné Dósa, *A MOVE. Egy jellegzetesen magyar fasiszta szervezet*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972.
7. László Erdeös, *A magyar honvédelem egy negyedszázada 1919-1944*, ed. Zoltán Babucs, Gödöllő, Attraktor Kiadó, 2007, 115–117.
8. Ferenc Pölöskei, *Hungary After Two Revolutions 1919–1922*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980.
9. Zoltán Miklós Fodor, *Az Etelközi Szövetség története*, Nógrád Megyei Múzeumok Évkönyve, 2007/XXXI, 118–156.
10. Jenő Gergely, *Gömbös Gyula. Politikai pályakép*, Budapest, Vince Kiadó, 2001.
11. Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished. Why the First World War Failed to End*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016.
12. Robert Gerwarth, *Harc a Vörös Szörnyeteggel. Ellenforradalmi erőszak Közép-Európa vereséget szenvedett államaiban*, transl. Péter Várady, in *Háború béke idején. Paramilitáris erőszak Európában az első világháború után*, ed. Robert Gerwarth–John Horne, Budapest, L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2017, 71–92.
13. Katalin G. Soós, *Magyar-bajor-osztrák titkos tárgyalások és együttműködés, 1920–1921*, Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József Nominatae. Acta Historica, 1967/XVII, 3–43.
14. Pál Hatos, *Rosszfiúk világforradalma. Az 1919-es Magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság története*, Budapest, Jaffa Kiadó, 2021.
15. Róbert Kerepeszki, *A politikai és társadalmi élet határán. A Társadalmi Egyesületek Szövetsége a Horthy-korszakban*, in *'...nem leleplezni, hanem megismerni és megérteni'. Tanulmányok a 60 éves Romsics Ignác tiszteletére*, ed. Sándor Gebei Sándor – Iván Bertényi Jr. – János M. Rainer, Eger, Esterházy Károly Főiskola, 2011, 373–388.
16. Géza Komoróczy, *A zsidók története Magyarországon II. 1849-től a jelenkorig*, Pozsony, Kalligram, 2012.

17. Máté Kóródi, *Adattár a Magyar Nemzeti Hadsereg különítményes csoportjai és más fegyveres szervek által elkövetett gyilkosságokról, 1919. augusztus 3.–1921. október 23.*, Budapest, Clio Intézet, Clio Kötetek 2., 2020.

18. Tamás Kovács, *Az ellenforradalmi rendszer politikai rendészetének genezise, 1919–1921*, Múltunk, 2009/2, 66–92.

19. Pál Nándori, *A hirtenbergi fegyverszállítás*, Hadtörténelmi Közlemények, 1968/4, 636–657.

20. Pál Nándori, *A Marseille-i gyilkosság nemzetközi jogi vonatkozásai*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972.

21. Dezső Nemes, *Az ellenforradalom története Magyarországon 1919–1921*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967, 155–160.

22. István Németh, *Német haditengerészeti és légügyi lépések a versailles-i békeszerződés kijátszására a weimari köztársaság (1919–1933) éveiben*, Acta Academiae Agriensis. Sectio Historiae, 2017/XLIV, 523–534.

23. Zsuzsa L. Nagy, *Szabadkőművesek*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988, 68.

24. Mária ORMOS, *Egy magyar médiavezér. Kozma Miklós*, Budapest, PolgArt Könyvkiadó, 2000.

25. Pál Prónay, *A határban a halál kaszál. Fejezetek Prónay Pál naplójából*, ed. Ervin Pamlényi–Ágnes Szabó, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1963.

26. Lajos Serfőző, *A titkos társaságok és a róluk folytatott parlamenti viták 1922–1924-ben*, Párttörténeti Közlemények, 1976/3, 79–80.

27. Kálmán Shvoy, *Shvoy Kálmán titkos naplója és emlékirata 1920–1945*, ed. Mihály Perneki, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1983.

28. Ferenc Szávai, *Az Osztrák–Magyar Monarchia felbomlásának következményei. Az államutódlás vitás kérdései*, Pécs, Pro Pannonia Kiadó, 2004.

29. Nóra Szekér, *Titkos társaság. A Magyar Testvéri Közösség története*, Budapest, Jaffa Kiadó, 2017.

30. Dmitar Tasić, *Paramilitarism in the Balkans. Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Albania*, 1917–1924, *Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020*.

31. István Ujszászy, *Vallomások a holtak házából. Ujszászy István*

vezérőrnagynak, a 2. vkf. osztály és az Államvédelmi Központ vezetőjének az ÁVH fogságában írott feljegyzései, ed. György Haraszti–Zoltán András Kovács–Szabolcs Szita, Budapest, Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára–Corvina Kiadó, 2007.

32. Krisztián Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege. Diszkrimináció, szociálpolitika és antiszemitizmus Magyarországon 1914–1944*, Pécs, Jelenkor Kiadó–Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár, 2012.
33. *Uğur Ümit Üngör, Paramilitarism. Mass Violence in the Shadow of the State, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020.*
34. József Vonyó, *Gömbös Gyula*, Budapest, 2012, Budapest, Napvilág Kiadó.
35. Robert G. L. Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism. The Free Corps Movement In Post-War Germany 1918–1923, New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 1969.*
36. István Zadravecz, *Páter Zadravecz titkos naplója*, ed. György Borsányi, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1967.
37. Miklós Zeidler, *Külpolitika és revízió – Mindent vissza?*, in *A Horthy-korszak vitatott kérdései*, Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 2020, 175–196.
38. Tibor Zinner, *Adatok az Ébredő Magyarok Egyesületének 1918. november–1920. március közötti történetéhez*, Budapest Főváros Leváltára Közleményei, 1978/1, 251–284.
39. Tibor Zinner, *Az ébredők fénykora, 1919–1923*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989.

Chapter - 16

The Crimes of the Irregular Military Formation Settled in Hotel Britannia, Budapest During the wave of Paramilitary Violence in Hungary after the First World War, 1919–1920

Introduction

After World War I, in the 1920s, paramilitarism [103] and paramilitary violence was a widespread phenomenon in Hungary, just like in many other countries of Central Europe [104]. Hungary was among the loser countries, and after the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918, the newly independent state practically sunk into civil war. The democratic left-wing revolution of 1918 was soon followed by a communist takeover in March 1919, resulting in the establishment Soviet Republic of Hungary [105]. In the meanwhile, different areas of the country were also invaded by Czecho-Slovakian, Romanian and Serbian troops as well. The short-lived radical left-wing Government soon nearly spontaneously collapsed in August 1919, while in parallel a right-wing counter-revolution broke out. With the support of the victorious powers of the First World War, the right-wing political forces won. However, for a long time after the fall of the Soviet Republic of Hungary, the new authoritarian conservative Government of the country, which was being established with the help of the Entente Powers, could only with great difficulty overcome the quasi-anarchistic conditions. Although leading Hungarian politicians feared a new left-wing takeover attempt, the restoration of order was by the end of 1919 severely hindered by paramilitary units and militias, formally mostly

---

103 On paramilitarism see: *Uğur Ümit Üngör, Paramilitarism. Mass Violence in the Shadow of the State, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020.*

104 Robert Gerwarth, *Harc a Vörös Szörnyeteggel. Ellenforradalmi erőszak Közép-Európa vereséget szenvedett államaiban*, transl. Péter Várady, in *Háború béke idején. Paramilitáris erőszak Európában az első világháború után*, ed. Robert Gerwarth–John Horne, Budapest, L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2017, 71–92.

105 About the history of the Soviet Republic of Hungary see: Pál Hatos, *Rosszifúk világforradalma. Az 1919-es magyarországi tanácsköztársaság története*, Budapest, Jaffa Kiadó, 2021.

belonging to the National Army, the new, right-wing armed force of the independent Hungarian State, mostly based on the enormous disbanded armed forces of the Dual Monarchy, but in practice several units operated without serious state control, and these irregular soldiers committed serious crimes, including political revenge against the communists or at least those whom they considered to be communists [106]. This wave of paramilitary violence that lasted roughly from 1919 to 1921 is popularly called *the White Terror* in Hungarian historiography [107]. Since archival sources testify that the semi-secret irregular military organisation called the *Kettőskereszt Vérszövetség – Double Cross Blood Union* [108] was founded in 1919 on the initiative of the military leadership as the paramilitary umbrella organisation for the unified military control of the right-wing militias, there are very good reasons to believe that a good part of the militia who committed serious atrocities were (also) members of this organisation [109].

Admiral Miklós Horthy, the Commander in Chief of the National Army, the used-to-be highest ranking Hungarian military officer of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (he had been the Commander in Chief of the Imperial Navy at the end of the First World War) and the *de facto* leading politician of the conservative forces, who was otherwise strongly supported by the Entente Powers as well, and his circle strongly relied on these military units in the beginning to strengthen their power. However, when in March 1920 Admiral Horthy was finally elected by the Parliament as head of state with the title Regent Governor (formally Hungary remained a kingdom, since the republican form of government was popularly connected to communism), the activities of these uncontrolled Hungarian Free Corpses caused serious damage to politicians who were trying to normalise life,

---

106 Ákos Bartha, *Az utolsó csepp a pohárban. Soltra József rendőr meggyilkolása*, in *Csoportosulás, lázadás és a társadalom terrorizálása. Rendészettörténeti Tanulmányok 2.*, ed. Orsolya Jámbor–Gábor G. Tarján, Budapest, Rendőrség Tudományos Tanácsa, 2019, 28–44.

107 See: Béla Bodó, *The White Terror. Antisemitic and Political Violence in Hungary, 1919–1921*, London, Routledge, 2019.

108 On the history of the Double Cross Blood Union see: Balázs Kántás, *The Double Cross Blood Union: Outline of the History of a Secret Military Organisation of Hungary in the 1920s*, ANGLISTICUM, 2021/10, 52–70. https://www.anglisticum.org.mk/index.php/IJLLIS/article/view/2218/2615

109 City Archives of Budapest, HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923. József Márffy and their associate's trial.

consolidate the country and return to constitutional frameworks of life after the war and civil war. The activities of some of these militias were now directed explicitly against the very order that they were in principle supposed to defend [110].

At the time of the march of Miklós Horthy and the National Army into Budapest, in November 1919, there were about fifty civilian militias operating in and around the Hungarian capital, including the National Defence Department of the *Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete – Association of Awakening Hungarians* (ÉME), [111] the influential radical right-wing social organisation of the time, and the paramilitary wing of the association. The officers' detachments of the National Army commanded by paramilitary commanders First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas, Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay or Major Gyula Ostenburg-Morawek operated alongside these units with state approval, but almost without real state control. (Héjjas and Prónay were also members of the ÉME leadership, functioning as ambitious radical right-wing politicians beside their military status, so there was a significant overlap between their detachments and the paramilitary units of the

110 Tibor Zinner, *Az ébredők fénykora, 1919–1923*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989, passim.

111 The *ÉME – Association of Awakening Hungarians* was the most influential nationalist social association in Hungary after the First World War and the revolutions, maintaining its own auxiliary police militias and paramilitary units in the early 1920s, and exerting a strong influence on party politics. Its members committed a number of notorious anti-Semitic and irredentist crimes, as well as acts of terror. Among its founders and board members there were many politicians and influential military officers such as Pál Prónay, Iván Héjjas or Gyula Gömbös, later Prime Minister. At its peak, its membership was in the hundreds of thousands, and its presidents in the early 1920s were György Szmrecsányi, Tibor Eckhardt and Dezső Buday, members of the parliament. Its importance gradually declined after 1923, with the emergence of the Hungarian National Independence Party (commonly called Race-defending Party) which had split from the governing Unity Party (officially called Christian-National Peasant, Smallholder and Bourgeois Party), and more significantly with the formation of the Western-style Hungarian fascist and national socialist parties in the 1930s, some of whose members were members of the association. The Awakening Hungarians continued to operate alongside various radical right-wing political parties until 1945. About its history see: Tibor Zinner, *Az ébredők fénykora, 1919–1923*; Tibor Zinner, *Adatok az Ébredő Magyarok Egyesületének 1918. november–1920. március közötti történetéhez*, Budapest Főváros Leváltára Közleményei, 1978/1, 251–284.

association.) There were also the Civilian Gendarmerie Reserve units and the National Organisation of State Security Agents [112] under the direction of the Minister of the Interior, a political counter-intelligence organisation of civilians whose task was to monitor individuals with communist bonds. Its members carried weapons in addition to their civilian occupation and had the same right to bear and use arms as the police in certain circumstances. In addition, the Hungarian State Railway Company and the postal service had their own temporarily established institutional police (railway and postal guard),[113] and the National Army also organised auxiliary police units made up of university students to support professional police forces. Until 1921, there was also a military investigative and secret service body, the so-called 'T' (T=*Tájékoztató*, roughly meaning Informative or Intelligence) organisation of the Hungarian Ministry of Defence, which had police powers even over civilians – and which also overlapped closely with the officers' detachments of the above mentioned paramilitary commanders [114]. That is, the military had its own independent police force, primarily for political policing, in addition to the police, the gendarmerie and other auxiliary forces. This period of confusion, rich in armed corpses for law enforcement purposes, although certainly interesting from the point of view of the history of law enforcement, and weak government power also provided an opportunity for self-proclaimed

112 The Organization of State Security Agents was a civilian auxiliary police force and secret service organization founded in August 1919, whose primary task after the fall of the Soviet Republic of Hungary was to monitor communist conspiracies and break possible workers' strikes. Under the control of the Ministry of the Interior, its members wore plainclothes, carried weapons and continued their civilian occupation as auxiliary police officers, and had powers roughly equivalent to those of the professional police. In October 1922, the organisation was formally incorporated into the auxiliary police organisation called the Office of National Labour Protection, but for a while it tried to retain its autonomy. See *Iratok az ellenforradalom történetéhez 1919–1945. II. A fasiszta rendszer kiépítése Magyarországon 1921–1924*, ed. Elek Karsai–Dezső Nemes, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1959, 187–188.

113 János Suba, *Karhatalmi formációk Magyarországon 1918–1920*, Rendvédelem-történeti Füzetek 2008/18, 131–142.; János Suba, *Polgárőrség szervezése 1919–1921*, Rendvédelem-történeti Füzetek, 2018/56, 131–144.

114Tamás Kovács, *A Honvédelmi Minisztérium „T" Szervének létrejötte és működése, avagy elhárítás és kémkedés az I. világháború végétől a bethleni konszolidációig*, Budapest, Nemzeti Közszolgálati Egyetem, 2020.

civilians and demobilised WWI soldiers to join various irregular military formations and at the same time to confer on themselves the powers of authority [115].

Among the military units operating without any serious state control, one of the most notorious was the detachment settling in the Britannia Hotel near the Western Railway Station in the downtown of Budapest, which formally defined itself as the investigative unit of the 1st Special Battalion under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay, but in practice, like other detachments, it operated without real government control, and its members informally regarded First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas as their commander. Moreover, the unit was not only made up of right-wing, so-called *white* soldiers, but also an increasing number of common criminals who saw the possibility of easy acquisition of different goods [116]. The Government had limited control over the units made up of soldiers who had been demobilised from the recently dissolved Monarchy's enormous military, and as a result, several units of the National Army operated in irregular and/or paramilitary frameworks, without strict military discipline, work culture or well-defined relations of subordination. Often the word of an influential commander with a good personal relationship with Regent Governor Admiral Horthy (who was a high-ranking military officer himself) or the current Minister of Defence, such as Iván Héjjas, Pál Prónay, Gyula Ostenburg-Morawek, Count Endre Jankovich-Bésán or Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy could be enough that a person should be considered a soldier with the rank assigned to him by his direct commander, 'brought with him' from his previous military service. At this time many things depended on the decisions and influence of the various paramilitary commanders [117]. This was the case even when armed men who had subsequently committed serious crimes and had been prosecuted by the police or the gendarmerie were sought by the military authorities, in order to protect the honour of the National Army, to establish why they were not actually military persons, and their cases were thus referred to the civilian courts. For months, the members of the unit settled in Hotel Britannia

115 Tamás Kovács, *A Nemzeti Hadsereg és a tiszti különítmények*, in *Csoportosulás, lázadás és a társadalom terrorizálása. Rendészettörténeti Tanulmányok 2.*, ed. Orsolya Jámbor–Gábor G. Tarján, Budapest, Rendőrség Tudományos Tanácsa, 2019, 151–172.

116 Zinner, *Az ébredők fénykora*, 103.

117 Bartha, op. cit. 28–44, 29.

colloquially simply known in Budapest as 'the Britannians' roamed the capital at night, committing extortion, looting, robbery, grievous bodily harm and even politically motivated murders [118] The situation was therefore quite absurd, with soldiers in uniform, supposedly doing police work, committing the most serious crimes under the guise of law enforcement activity, and sometimes literally reversing the roles of police and criminals. The crimes committed by the soldiers of Hotel Britannia were so much in the public consciousness in the capital that a few years later, in September 1924, the daily newspaper 'Esti Kurir' (Night Courier) published a series of fact-finding articles, based largely on anonymous reports by former detachment members, which included crimes that were probably never investigated prosecuted. The newspaper had to stop the series of articles, because the people involved had threatened to file a press lawsuit against the editorial staff [119].

During the beginning of 1920s the radical right, increasingly dissatisfied with Regent Governor Admiral Miklós Horthy and Prime Minister Count Pál Teleki, launched an attack on two fronts against the emerging political establishment. The aforementioned Association of Awakening Hungarians increased pressure on the Government through various actions (e.g. squatting, organising strikes and intensive political campaign), while the paramilitary units closely linked to it were mainly settled in Budapest. These armed men, who looted, kidnapped people for ransom and ran riots in the streets at night, were the paramilitary wing of the early Hungarian far-right movement, and their mentality, activities and overall operation were similar to those of the *Freikorps* [120] and *Heimwehr* [121] militias in Germany and Austria, which were mainly made up of World War I veterans. These armed units took advantage of the weakness of the young independent Hungarian State, which was recovering from the

---

118 City Archives of Budapest, HU-BFL-VII-18-d-8963/1925 – Károly Kmetty and his associates's criminal trial.

119 [Anonymous author], *Babarczyék a Britanniában. Az Esti Kurir cikksorozata – Megkezdjük a Babarczy-különítmény Britanniabeli életének és élményeinek pontos adatok alapján való közlését*, Esti Kurir, 3 September 1924, 3.

120 Nigel H. Jones, *Hitler's Heralds. The Story of the Freikorps, 1918–1923*, Dorset, Barns and Noble, 1995.

121 Lajos Kerekes, *Olaszország, Magyarország és az osztrák Heimwehr-mozgalom*, Történelmi Szemle, 1961/2, 199–216.

collapse of the war and the civil war, and were powerful and well-equipped units compared to the small and weak professional state armed forces. Not to mention that in a very confused legal and social situation, they built up a quasi-parallel law enforcement apparatus, and committed their illegal acts against citizens, mostly under the guise of official action [122]. Although the Prime Minister's Decree No. 4710/1920 ME of 12 June 1920 clearly stated that all military units and their investigators were to cease their actions against civilians and that the investigative corps were to be merged into the military judicial organisation, the de facto situation did not change much for some time.[123] Because of their large numbers, their armaments, strength and their good personal relations with the army's senior officers, the Budapest police also tried to avoid confrontation with the various detachments. At the same time, the conservative right-wing political group around Regent Horthy, mainly marked with the names of Count István Bethlen and Count Pál Teleki, believed – not without reason, given the many later coup plans of the period, mainly linked to military circles – that the radical right movement was slowly trying to aim a change of regime through the armed militias organised around Héjjas and Prónay.[124]

The actions of reserve First Lieutenant Károly Kmetty and his associates

One of the most notable figures in the series of crimes committed by the soldiers of Hotel Britannia was perhaps reserve Firs Lieutenant Károly Kmetty, who committed several serious crimes and served as the 'car commander' of Iván Héjjas's detachment in Kecskemét, which roughly meant that the paramilitary commander, who was a resident of Kecskemét but was also vividly present in the capital after Horthy's march into Budapest, entrusted him to requisition cars and petrol from civilians for the irregular military unit. From October 1920, about a dozen of cases were prosecuted[125] against Károly Kmetty and his associates, and it may be assumed that they committed many more crimes than the authorities discovered, since only a fraction of the victims dared to report and give

[122] Zinner, op. cit. 66.

[123] A m. kir. kormánynak 1920. évi 4.710. M. E. számú rendelete a katonai hatóságok és közegek, illetőleg katonai nyomozók polgári személyekkel szemben való eljárásának megszüntetéséről, illetőleg korlátozásáról, 1920. június 12., Magyarországi Rendeletek Tára, 1920, 233–235.

[124] HU-BFL-VII-18-d-8963/1925.

[125] Ibid.

detailed testimony against the soldiers who were receiving considerable government support and who were robbing and severely abusing them.[126] The young officer had already committed serious crimes even before the White Terror, if sources are to be believed, ha had shot a young teacher dead in December 1918, but somehow managed to escape punishment [127].

Károly Kmetty, a student of mechanical engineering in civilian life, who fought as a reserve firs lieutenant in the First World War, was in his twenties – who otherwise came from an family of intellectuals and was the nephew of the professor of law of European fame with the same name– and, together with the irregular soldiers under his command, for example, on 20 May 1920 kidnapped postal officer Lajos Pongrácz held him captive for days in the Albrecht Garrison, where the soldiers severely beat him and took away his valuables [128].

On May 22, 1920, István Tóth, a car driver – for reasons that are not completely clear – was also taken by the same military unit to the Albrecht Garrison, where he was brutally beaten with a whip [129].

Also in May 1920, Károly Kmetty borrowed a car from Máyás Perlesz, the director of Újpest Passenger Transport Ltd., which he eventually practically stole and sold to a certain Andor László, a resident of Szeged, for 70,000 koronas. In addition, the military detachment seized ten barrels of petrol from Mátyás Perlesz, and the soldiers took him to the Britannia Hotel, where Károly Kmetty blackmailed him into releasing him only if he employed him as a technical director of his company, for a salary of 50,000 koronas a year, without doing actual work. Like this Károly Kmetty, in addition to his military activities in the detachment, was nominally appointed technical director of Újpest Personal Transport Ltd., where he received a high salary and probably embezzled further 46,000 koronas from the company's budget [130].

József Doór, a transport enterpeneur and car owner bribed the Romanian soldiers occupying, and then withdrawing from Hungary who had previously seized his truck, to return the car to him when they left. However, Károly Kmetty and his associates, identifying themselves as

---

126 Zinner, op. cit. passim.

127 [Anonymous Author], *Megkezdték a Kmetty-féle atrocitásügyek budapesti tárgyalását*, Az Est, 4 March 1927, 2.

128 HU-BFL-VII-18-d-8963/1925.

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid.

military investigators forcibly seized József Doór's truck, while other agencies of the Ministry of Defence temporarily requisitioned it for the army [131].

Also on 3 May 1920, Károly Kmetty, accompanied by five non-commissioned officers, appeared at the garage of Miklós Feiler, a car mechanic, and as a military investigator, he apparently investigated the origin of the motorcycles in Feiler's possession, and when the car mechanic complained about his actions, they took him to Albrecht Garrison, where, according to his own testimony, he was not assaulted, but was released only on surrender of one of his motorcycles. The victim finally got his motorbike back on 10 May, presumably due to some intervention by the military authorities. However, Feiler's affair with the detachment soldiers did not end there, as Károly Kmetty, accompanied by a non-commissioned officer, appeared at his home the next day, on 11 May, with the pretext that he was visited because he had not handed back a valuable artillery periscope bac to the army. Kmetty then confiscated practically all valuables, including workers' and soldiers' uniforms, a bag made of leather, a small-calibre Flober pistol and its ammunition, a pair of boots, motorcycle tyres, etc., and had his men load them into his car. The artillery periscope in question was not however found, and car mechanic Feiler was taken by the soldiers to Albrecht Garrison, where he was locked in a cell for the night. Feiler's mother eventually found the artillery periscope and sent it to the garrison, but even then the mechanic was not released, and he was brutally beaten by the soldier. First Lieutenant Kmetty demanded one of the motorcycles he had seen in the workshop from Feiler in exchange for his release once again, but Feiler replied that, although it was not his property, he would try to arrange for Kmetty to receive the vehicle for his use. Miklós Feiler was finally released from the garrison after being beaten by the soldiers, without any meaningful interrogation or record [132].

On 28 July 1920, Károly Kmetty Kmetty went into Mrs. Ferenc Grigár's coffee shop on the pretext that he had heard that the coffee shop owner had some petrol for sale, and said that he would buy it, but the incident ended with the violent seizure of the available petrol, after which the victims lodged a complaint against the reclaiming and looting first lieutenant [133].

131 Ibid.

132 Ibid.

133 Ibid.

On October 2, 1920, First Lieutenant Károly Kmetty, in the night hours – presumably in an intoxicated state – drove a car with some of his fellow soldiers with his headlights off through the Buda Castle Tunnel, where he was stopped by Mihály Egedi, a police officer on duty, who asked him to turn on his headlights. However, instead of identifying himself, Kmetty pointed a revolver at the policeman, saying that he was a military officer of police duty, and that the police were under military control, so he was in fact the superior of the policeman, but refused to idenify himself. The policeman and the aggressive, drunken first lieutenant ended up pointing their weapons at each other, and the conflict did not end in bloodshed only because the noise caused a large crowd to gather around the car, including Dr. Kázmér Vay, a high-ranking police officer of the Ministry of the Interior who forcefully called on Károly Kmetty to put away his weapon, because, according to his legal knowledge, Mihály Egedi was acting legally against him and called him up to identify himself to the policeman in the name of the law. Shortly afterwards, police officers László Varró and Menyhért Kerekes also arrived as reinforcement, having noticed the grouping and the noise, and this created a police overwhelming force which the detachment officer did not dare to resist. Kmetty finally identified himself to the police with his military identity card, who then dismissed him from the scene, but the drunken first lieutenant threatened police officer Egedi and his colleagues who had taken legal action against him, once again, and openly swore revenge against them [134].

The cases briefly described above are only a selection of the criminal record of First Lieutenant Károly Kmetty and the irregular soldiers under his command. In almost all cases, the scenario was very similar – Károly Kmetty and his men showed up at someone's home, or even stopped the victims on the street pretending to act as authority, dragged them to the Hotel Britannia or the Albrecht Garrison, where they would usually assault them and take their money and other valuables, or demanded additional money or valuables (such as a car, vehicle elements, petrol, etc.) as ransom for their release. Most of the victims, having no other choice, handed over what they could to the soldiers, and only a few of them agreed to confess much later, when the criminal proceedings against First Lieutenant Kmetty and his minions were already in progress, and the prosecutors and the police were searching for the victims of the individual crimes. Persons who were genuinely Israelite or identified as Jews were treated with particular cruelty by the soldiers of Hotel Britannia. The abuse often caused serious and long-

134 Ibid.

lasting injuries to the victims, not to mention verbal humiliation, that is, in addition to material gain, the perpetrators' motives clearly included religious and ethnical hatred and anti-Semitism [135]. Károly Kmetty's men were also involved in the case of the murder of police patrolman József Soltra, on 10 November 1920, which will be discussed in a later chapter of the present monograph [136].

As for the afterlife of First Lieutenant Károly Kmetty, he, like many other radical right-wing soldiers who had committed serious crimes, escaped punishment. He fled the criminal proceedings against him to Italy, where, among other things, he worked for a time as a pilot in an aircraft factory for the Fascist Government under Mussolini, and the charges against him were gradually dropped, as the Regent Governor's amnesty decrees were gradually implemented. In 1925, however, he returned home, was arrested in become the subject of a series of new prosecutions, some for older offences and others for more recent ones. Finally, on 17 March 1927, the Székesfehérvár Military Court (interestingly enough, some of the offences he had committed were already under the jurisdiction of the military courts) sentenced him to two years and six months of imprisonment, of which two years and two months were already taken to have been completed by the time that he spent under arrest [137].

Little is known about the rest of Károly Kmetty's life, but it is certain that he settled in Szeged for a time, where he started various businesses (including the trade of insecticide and rodenticide) [138] that did not live up to his hopes. The former 'Brtinannian' soldier's career went down the river, and in 1930 he was prosecuted for embezzlement of a typewriter he had borrowed and then pawned – a typewriter he had allegedly borrowed to write his memoirs of Hotel Briannia [139]. In late August 1930, Kmetty called the editorial office of the daily newspaper Délmagyarország under his own name be telephone, presumably in a drunken state, and threatened that

---

135 Ibid.

136 Ibid.

137 [Anonymous author], *Két év hat hónapra ítélték Kmetty Károlyt*, Az Est, 17 March 1927, 7.

138 László Magyar, *Kétszáz pengős kereseti lehetőséggel beszegődtem poloskairtó ügynöknek a britanniás Kmetty Károlyhoz*, Délmagyarország, 15 July 1928, 3–4.

139 [Anonymous author], *Kmetty Károly sikkasztási pörében tanúkihallgatást rendeltek el*, Délmagyarország, 30 January 1930, 4.

if there was any disorder among the workers on 1 September, he would intervene as the head of an 1,700-strong armed militia. The newspaper's staff finally reached him in person at a pub, in the company of three decilitres of cheap wine, where he continued to cling to the seriousness of his claims [140]. In the middle of the 1930s, we may also meet a radical right-wing journalist of the same name in the newspaper of one of the Hungarian National Socialist parties, the Hungarian National Socialist Peasants' and Workers' Party led by Zoltán Meskó, the Nemzet Szava (Word of the Nation) [141]. Among other things, we know about the author's press lawsuits. Knowing the later life and extreme right-wing career of many radical right-wing detachment officers of the 1920s, one can strongly suspect that the very same person was involved.

The Double Murder at Club Café

The paramilitary political violence reached a new level on 27 July 1920, when an anti-Semitic mob fight provoked by young militiamen also linked to the detachment at Hotel Britannia tragically ended in a double murder. As mentioned above, anti-Semitically motivated street violence was common in Budapest at the time, and the young militiamen of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, at a propaganda meeting of the Association's local sub-organisation of District 5 of Budapest, decided – presumably several of them were drunken – to smash up the equipment of the Club Café and physically assault the guests whom they thought to be Jews and traitors of their homeland [142]. At the propaganda event of the radical right-wing association in the Berzenczey Street Elementary School on 27 July 1920, in the evening hours, a group consisting of 25–30 young men in civilian clothes and military uniforms gathered.The event was fundamentally determined by anti-Semitism, with speakers mostly making anti-Jewish slurs at the audience – probably including Gusztáv Meczner, the president of the local sub-organisation of District 5 of the Awakening Hungarians, a well-known political activist of the radical right of the time, who also inflamed the mood of the audience [143].

---

140 [Anonymous author], *„Halló, itt Kmetty Károly, a britanniás!"*, Délmagyarország, 30 August 1930, 5.

141 [Anonymous author], *Kmetty Károlyt a tábla is elítélte*, Népszava, 30 December 1936, 3.

142 HU-BFL-VII-5-c-8821/1920. László Illy and his asscoiates' criminal trial.

143 Ibid.

Most of the young people present were armed with sticks, some of them had handguns, and, according to archival sources of the case, a man wearing white clothing, who was never clearly identified, and slightly older than the audience of teenagers and men in their twentiess, allegedly appeared at the meeting and clearly started inciting violence against Jews. He claimed that an anti-national, anti-Hungarian, Zionist meeting was taking place in the basement of the Club Café, where people of Israelite faith were being organised against the Association of Awakening Hungarians and the National Army, and they were thus threatening the Christian Hungarian State. The person in white, who was allegedly the instigator of the action, introduced himself to members of the group as Gusztáv Meczner, the president of the 5th District sub-organisation of the ÉME, but was later identified by several as Károly Tőkés, a restaurant owner and reserve military officer [144].

The strikingly young László Illy who was then only nineteen years old, but had a significant criminal, military and militia background compared to his age, began to act as a spokesman of a narrower group, and, following the instructions of the man in white, and he told the young men in the corridor of the elemtary school that a big fight was being planned that evening in the nearby Club Café, and specifically pointed out that anyone who might be afraid of the consequences had better leave immediately [145]. László Illy's inner circle consisted of certain young men named Sándor Körmendy, Sándor Imre, Mihály Schwicker, László Fekete, Sándor Fekete, Lászlo Vanek, Ferenc Illek and György Rigóczky, of whom László Vanek was frightened and left the group, but the others, led by László Illy, started towards the Club Café at around 10 p.m. to carry out the violent act they had planned. It is a sign of careful planning that László Illym who was the spokesman, sent György Rigóczky, Mihály Schwicker and Sándor Imre ahead to cut the wires of the telephone at the Club Café so that the people there could not inform the police in time after the fight broke out [146].

The group of radical right-wing young men had already insulted a group of people sitting peacefully in Berzenczey Street, very close to the spot of the propaganda meeting, who did not provoke the militiamen, but were identified by them as Jews, and a man named Arnold Hofmann, was beaten and injured in the head [147].

144 Ibid.
145 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.

On the basis of contradictory sources, the testimonies of the witnesses and accused, it is unclear how the incident actually happened, but the self-proclaimed commander of the hastily formed anti-Semitic action group, László Illy later claimed that the group briefly entered the nearby restaurant of the man in white, Károly Tőkés, in Wahrmann Street (today Victor Hugo Street, District 13 in Budapest), to discuss the matter once more, and that the members of the group also consumed some alcohol there [148].

After the street atrocity and alcohol consumption, the group continued their way to Club Café as if nothing special had happened, and when they arrived, some of them went into the establishment at 8 Lipót Boulvard (now Szent István Boulvard) and ordered something, pretending to be simple guests, while others stayed outside as observers [149].

László Illy, the self-styled commander, went around before the action began, consulted with his fellows both in the café and on the street, and then shouted "Hit the Jew! ", whereupon the radical right-wing young men from the street poured into the Club Café, and those already inside became active and started beating the guests and the staff indiscriminately with sticks, belts and other café equipment they could get their hands on, vandalising the equipment. The owner of the café, Gyula Krammer who was otherwise of Christian religion, was also severely assaulted by the anti-Semitic young men, despite his repeated pleas and statements that he was not Jewish and that most of his customers were not Jewish either [150].

After smashing up the café and severely assaulting the customers, many of the young men fled the scene, split into several smaller groups and continued their rampage and violence in the surrounding streets. All of this resulted in the death of bank manager Arthur Verebély, who was stabbed in the chest with a bayonet by one of the radical young men, presumably György Rigócky, a volunteer soldier of Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay's battalion, and the victim died almost instantly [151].

Another part of the group got into an argument in Szemere Street with a group of wealthy citizens returning from a boat trip, and László Illy provocatively asked the lawyer Dr. Géza Varsányi who was walking with his wife and friends whether he was Jewish or Christian, to which Dr.

148 Ibid.
149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.

Varsányi replied that he was Christian and a lawyer. The presumably drunken László Illy was not satisfied with this and demanded that lawyer Varsányi pull down his trousers and show him his penis, because if he saw that it was not circumcised, he would believe him that he was not Jewish. Lawyer Dr. Varsányi replied that he would not pull down his trousers in the company of ladies, and the young men around him led him a few steps away and demanded that he should prove that he was Jewish or Christian in the very vulgar way mentioned above, which the lawyer refused to do a second time. Laszló Illy then aggressively slapped Varsányi, whereupon several of the young men present began to beat him. It is not clear what exactly happened in this case either, but – according to László Illy's testimony at the main hearing before the court at least – a young man called Ferenc Illek hit Varsányi on the head with the Frommer pistol he was carrying, the accidentally (?) fired, and the bullet wounded the lawyer in the head, and he died after being taken to hospital [152].

At the same time, in the nearby Baron Aczél Street, the militiamen stabbed a completely innocent bystander named Mihály Polgár in the side who escaped with relatively minor injuries. Due to the large number of people involved in the series of violent acts, the identity of the perpetrator could not be clearly established later [153].

The anti-Semitic double murder and the attempted murder in and around the Club Café quickly resulted in social outrage and prompted the authorities to act at last. The perpetrators, several of whom, including the spokesman László Illy, were members of the right-wing irregular military units active at the time, and sought refuge in Hotel Britannia Hotel at the detachment under the command of Pál Prónay, where they really received help. The Frommer pistol that took Géza Varsányi's life was taken by a certain Lieutenant Zgroch, and First Lieutenant Dénes Bibó, a notorious White Terror detachment officer acquired new clothes for László Illy, Ferenc Illek and three other volunteers. The young men spent the night at Hotel Berlin which was also occupied by irregular units of the National Army, and the next day they went to see Dr. Sándor Dániel, a trainee lawyer and member of the leadership of the Association of Awakening Hungarians to ask for his help in escaping. Ferenc Illek managed to escape, and for a time, with the help of First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas and other Awakening leaders, he was presumably hiding in the countryside, but László Illy was

152 Ibid.

153 Ibid.

soon caught by the police and became the first defendant in the criminal case that followed the actions against the Club Café [154].

The Royal Prosecutor's Office in Budapest classified the actions of the young men – most of them under twenty – as sedition, which, under the laws of the time and due to the uncertain situation after the war and the civil war, led to a trial by martial law. The Royal Criminal Court of Budapest, acting as a court of summary jurisdiction, held a trial after only three days of trial in 1920. In its verdict of 19 August, most of the accused were found guilty of the crime of sedition, and László Illy, the first accused, was sentenced to 13 years of imprisonment; Sándor Körmendy, the second accused, to five years of imprisonment; Imre Sándor third defendant to six years of imprisonment; Schwicker Mihály fourth defendant to ten years of imprisonment; Fekete László fifth defendant to ten years of imprisonment; and Fekete Sándor sixth defendant to six years of imprisonment. At the same time, Károly Tőkés, the instigator of the young men who had carried out the attack on Club Café, who already had a serious military background and, of course, an extensive network of radical right-wing military contacts, was acquitted of all charges against him, because his testimony was contradicted only by that of László Illy, claiming that Tőkés had been the man in white who incited violence against a supposed Zionist rally that was allegedly taking place in the café. The Royal Criminal Court of Budapest also acquitted Gusztáv Meczner, the president of the District 5 sub-organisation of the Awakening Hungarians of the charges against him, and even stated in its judgment that the bloody action probably took place without his knowledge or consent. The court took it into account as a mitigating circumstance for most of the defendants that their actions were not motivated by malice but by mere 'youthful blindness', but considered it as an aggravating circumstance that László Illy was a leading figure in the company that planned and carried out the violent atrocities, and that his actions were committed after deliberate planning. The court also considered it as an aggravating circumstance that the surprisingly young militiamen had given a negative public image to the Association of Awakening Hungarians and to the National Army [155].

György Rigóczky, who – at least according to the current interpretation of law of the military authorities – was an active duty soldier, was found guilty in the murder of bank director Arthur Verebély by a military court in

154 Zinner, op. cit. 74.

155 Ibid.

a separate military prosecution process, and his conviction saved Lászlóy Illy and other militiamen from being charged with murder and mutiny [156].

The military leadership did its best to keep the National Army out of the affair as well, although the overlap between the paramilitary units of the Awakening Hungarians and the army was obvious to many [157]. Hungarian historian of the period Tibor Zinner, among others, points out that in the Club Café case, the Intelligence Department of the Budapest Military City Command (one of the military intelligence services of the time, operating in a rapidly changing organisational framework) conceived the opinion that the censorship should not have allowed the press to link such atrocities in any way with the National Army and the officers [158]. Although there were attempts to portray the action as the work of hot-headed young men aged 18–20 who entirely civilian persons and in no way connected with the army, it was clear that the Intelligence Department of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, a quasi-state body under the control of military officers the member of which included László Illy and Ferenc Illek, and thus the National Army itself and its detachments were deeply involved in the event [159].

In order to understand both the social and political motivations of the radical right-wing young men who joined the paramilitary units of the Association of Awakening Hungarians and participated in various serious atrocities, and the complexity of the overlaps between the various irregular armed groups and the organs of the Hungarian State, it is worth examining in more detail the biography and social background of László Illy, the figure who emerged as the main character of our micro-historical case study.

László Illy was born in Szeged in 1901, the son of a poor, down-and-out lower middle class family, and he was the son of a trade school teacher and later a railway official who later became unemployed and a heavy drinker. He lost his mother at an early age, his father remarried, and it is also known that during Illy's adolescence practically none of the family members worked [160]. Illy’s father was a man of strong anti-Semitic sentiments, and anti-Semitism was practically the first political idea that Illy was introduced to as a child, as his father's life consisted of little more than

156 Ibid.
157 Zinner, op. cit. 74.
158 Ibid.
159 Zinner, op. cit. 74–75.
160 HU-BFL-VII-5-c-8821/1920.

drunkenly berating the Jews and blaming them, among others, for his and his family's bad financial conditions. Illy's mother and several of his siblings died of tuberculosis, and in the 1910s the family's only source of income came from piano lessons given by Illy's only living sister to her private pupils. However, László Illy once so severely assaulted a Jewish young man on the streets of Szeged. The family's aggressive anti-Semitism soon became known among the local residents, and finally no-one wanted to take piano lessons at Illy's [161].

The family lived through the First World War in extreme poverty. László Illy stole from his own family several times, for which he was briefly sent to a reformatory. Meanwhile, his father died of liver disease, presumably closely linked to alcoholism, and his relationship with his stepmother deteriorated as well. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, during the Soviet Republic of Hungary, the young man was finally forced to join the Hungarian Red Army, allegedly because he had beaten up the newsboy of the Communist Vörös Újság (Red Newspaper), and was threatened by the local representatives of the communist government that he would be tried by a revolutionary tribunal if he did not take military service [162].

It cannot be reconstructed to what extent László Illy's entry into the Hungarian Red Army was voluntary or forced, but it is certain that he was a prisoner of war in Romania and joined the National Army in his hometown of Szeged in 1919, during the right-wing counter-revolutionary wave. László Illy became a member of Liuetenant Colonel Prónay's detachment and served in the National Army as a military investigator/intelligence and counter-intelligence officer. The young man, who had led a lively sexual life, also learned in 1919 that he was suffering from latent syphilis, which caused health problems including frequent headaches to him. It was a sign of his unstable personality that he attempted to commit suicide with a pistol on 12 May 1920 because his military superior questioned the authenticity of his intelligence reports. Discharged from the National Army in April 1920 for syphilis-related corneal inflammation, he continued to be employed as a civilian military investigator, and at least according to his his own confession at the court, his intelligence activities in the first half of 1920 were mainly against the Romanians [163]. Illy had arrived in Budapest from

161 Ibid.
162 Ibid.
163 Ibid.

Szeged shortly before the Club Café murders, where he tried to rejoin Prónay's detachment, but for some time the question whether to take the young man back into the battalion remained undecided. In any case, accommodation and a livelihood were found for him: trainee lawyer Dr. Sándor Dániel, one of the organisers of the paramilitary National Defence Department of the Awakening Hungarian who had distant family ties to Illy, arranged for the young man to be recruited to the Intelligence Department of the Association of the Awakening Hungarians. In the confused social and political situation after the civil war, this organisation was an armed unit with secret service character an uncertain legal status, but led by influential army officers (Pál Prónay, Iván Héjjas). László Illy received a service identity card and a service gun here, and because of this and his previous military service of secret service and police character, he could rightly believe himself to be the legitimate representative of the then new, still fragile Hungarian State [164]. With this rather troubled past, a nineteen-year-old young man found himself in Budapest in the summer of 1920, controlled by the National Army and the militias associated to it, in a rather uncertain irregular military status that also opened up opportunities of social mobility and seemed to him a way out of his declassed social background. The forensic medical report on him also shows that László Illy, who had been through a number of negative and violent experiences in his youth, was a man of low intellectual and reasoning abilities, pathologically over-confident and was prone to grandiose whims and violence [165]. Given this background and his unique characteristics, there can be no doubt that as a member of an irregular military unit operating without serious state control, driven by intolerant, radical political ideas and armed with a gun, László Illy was a serious threat to the contemporary society. The threat represented by him and his fellow militiamen was finally fulfilled by a politically motivated double murder, a hate crime in which Illy, although he was not its sole perpetrator or executor, undoubtedly played a significant role.

Many of the young militia members of the Association of Awakening Hungarians who were later prosecuted for various violent crimes, had lower-middle or working-class background, and they could not rely on any significant social or financial advancement, especially in a period of deep post-war social and economic crisis. At the same time, they were often

164 Zinner, op. cit. 73–75.

165 HU-BFL-VII-5-c-8821/1920.

characterised by immense arrogance and sense of importance that presumably derived from membership of the radical right-wing militia movement and the firearms they were given. Robert Gerwarth vividly and precisely describes how the paramilitary violence of post-World War One Central Europe brought together a generation of veterans who were still young and the so-called war youth, who had not yet served as soldiers in the world war because due to their age, but who were very enthusiastic and become very brutal in the paramilitary movements that proliferated in the civil wars afterwards [166]. The accused in the criminal trial following the murders at the Club Café, including László Illy, and of course other young militiamen of the Awakening Hungarians certainly also suited to these conclusions.

As for the afterlife of the perpetrators of the Club Café murders, it should be stressed that László Illy, the main person responsible for the case, like the perpetrators of other similar crimes, did not spend a long time in prison. He had to enjoy the hospitality of the Hungarian prison service for only one and a half years of his thirteen-year-long sentence. In 1922, after several previous unsuccessful appeals of retrial, his case was finally retried following Regent Governor Horthy's amnesty order of November 1921, and on 19 January 1922 he was acquitted of all charges. The young man, like many of his fellow militiamen, was released from prison as a free man, and in the 1920s and 1930s he was prosecuted for a number of public offences, mostly for fraud [167].

The murder of police officer József Soltra by paramilitary soldiers

The action against the Club Café, which ended in a double murder, was not much later followed by the death of József Soltra, a policeman shot dead in the line of duty by individuals in military uniform. On Wednesday, 10 November 1920, at around 2.30 a. m., uniformed police inspector József Miklós, who was on duty in the Oktogon area, the downtown of Budapest, heard cries for help. On one side of Oktogon Square he noticed a group of

166 Robert Gerwarth, *Harc a Vörös Szörnyeteggel. Ellenforradalmi erőszak Közép-Európa vereséget szenvedett államaiban*, transl. Péter Várady, in *Háború béke idején. Paramilitáris erőszak Európában az első világháború után*, szerk. Robert Gerwarth–John Horne, Budapest, L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2017, 71–92.; Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished. Why the First World War Failed to End*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016.

167 Vö. [Anonymous author], *A britanniás Illy László újabb hazafias üzlete*, Népszava, 7 December 1930, 19.

young men in army uniforms assaulting and beating a printer. When the group noticed the policeman, they stopped beating the man and left in the direction of the Western Railway Station. The cries for help coming from the West were also noticed by József Soltra, a pedestrian police patrol officer, who encountered the same group of soldiers at the corner of Aradi Street and Teréz Boulevard. An exchange of words broke out between the policeman and the detachment officers, and Inspector Miklós rushed to Soltra's aid, trying to persuade him to leave the scene with him and not to confront the outnumbered soldiers alone. At this point, however, a group of three soldiers pulled out their guns, fired several shots at József Soltra and ran away. Soltra was lifted up by the inspector and laid down on a trolley in front of the Edison Café, where he the inspector started chasing the perpetrators. József Miklós fired at the fleeing soldiers, but they turned back and fired at him, and the police inspector was also seriously wounded. József Miklós also fell down to the ground as the soldiers gathered around him, wrested his service weapon from his hand and ran away after assaulting the wounded man. József Soltra was so badly wounded by several shots that he died before a doctor arrived. József Miklós survived the conflict with the soldiers with severe gunshot and stabbed wounds. There were several eyewitnesses of the murder who identified the perpetrators as members of the military unit settled at Hotel Britannia, and several witnesses also clearly saw the murderous soldiers running into the nearby hotel [168].

The murder of police officer Soltra caused great outrage and social protest, and Regent Horthy saw the disarmament of the various radical right-qing detachments as an urgent necessity after the death of the policeman. Imre Nádosy, the Police Commissioner of Budapest, and soon afterwards promoted to National Police Commissioner, and Deputy Police Commissioner Jenő Marinovich[169] took apparently decisive action, and the Budapest State Police began to investigate the perpetrators with large forces.[170] First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas, the influential paramilitary commander of the era, who after his activities in Kecskemét and Horthy's invasion of Budapest, partly moved his headquarters to the capital and was informally considered by the otherwise four, difficultly separable military detachments as their commander, was irritated to learn that his subordinates had murdered a policeman, and he was preparing to defend the buildings

[168] HU-BFL-VII-5-c-8821/1920.

[169] Bartha, op. cit.

[170] Ibid.

occupied by his forces even with arms. The gates of Hotel Britannia were barricaded, machine guns were set up behind them, and the soldiers were given ammunition and grenades. However, the regular units of the National Army that were loyal to the Government and a large number of police troops were deployed outside Hotel Britannia next day in the morning. The only reason why there was finally no armed conflict and gunfight was that Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay, commander of the 1st Hunter Battalion of Szeged, the members of which in principle the soldiers headquartered in Hotel Britannia were, who had played a key role in the organisation and recruitment Hungarian free corpses, and who was highly respected by their members, appeared on the scene and gave the decisive order to Héjjas and his units to cooperate with the authorities [171].

The police, together with regular soldiers of the army invaded the hotel where the identification of the persons involved in the murder of the police officer began. This was only partially possible, however, because some of the perpetrators escaped immediately after the events, aided by military leaders. However, police detectives were eventually able to pick out not only the gunmen involved in the Soltra murder, but also the suspects of long-running cases of robbery, torture, assault and kidnapping. Héjjas himself made a testimony in the case, and distanced himself sharply from both the gunmen who murdered József Soltra and the detachment led by Hussar Captain Jenő Babarczy, whose officers were accomodated in Hotel Britannia as welll. Although Héjjas admitted that during the Soviet Republic of Hungary he had organised a right-wing militia in Kecskemét to overthrow the communist government, which had participated in the counter-revolution as an auxilary unit of the National Army, he categorically denied that he had any control over his own detachment at the moment. In any case, the composition of the troops stationed in Hotel Britannia is illustrated by the fact that the vast majority of the people arrested were, at least according to the interpretation of law of the military authorities, no longer actual soldiers, but civilians wearing military uniforms, including a large number who had left the military after the First World War, but had continued to serve in some detachment voluntarily, possibly with the permission of paramilitary commanders [172].

Although the information about the composition of the group of three who clashed with the police is contradictory, the investigators identified

171 HU-BFL-VII-18-d-8963/1925.

172 Ibid.

Imre Mészáros, a demobilised soldier as a member of the three-man group who later beat the wounded police officer József Miklós, Lieutenant László Sesevics and a soldier surnamed Zólyomi, who, according to the sources, was identical to a well-known detachment officer of the period, Second Lieutenant Kálmán Zsabka, who pursued a romantic life and was otherwise active as an actor and poet in civilian life [173]. Zsabka was otherwise born in Zólyom county, this might have been the origin of the pseudonym he used at the time. Lieutenant Sesevics, who was of Serbian descent, managed to flee the country, and returned to his homeland which already belonged to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes [174]. Although the police inspector who survived the shooting, József Miklós clearly identified Kálmán Zsabka as one of the officers who opened fire on Soltra and himself, only Imre Mészáros was finally charged with the murder, who was judged by the military authorities to be no longer an active soldier, but merely a demobilised civilian still in uniform, and otherwise a tinker by trade. His case was therefore tried by a civilian court martial to save the honour of the army [175]. Imre Mészáros, who was hiding under the pseudonym István Hatala in the downtown of Budapest, was arrested by the police at dawn, on 22 November. At first Mészáros denied everything, then finally admitted that he had fired two shots at József Soltra. However, he defended himself by saying that his shots had missed and that the person who had shot at the policman slightly before him was probably the killer [176]. Antal Gellért, a medical student, Lajos Vágner, a private official, Aladár Micsinai, a student at the School of Applied Arts, who belonged to Kálmán Zsabka's circle of friends, and medical students Károly Váraljai Kővári and János Farkas also testified against Mészáros. Mészáros was sentenced to death by hanging with rope by the civil court martial on 18 December 1920, and was hanged a day later [177].

Of course, it cannot be excluded at all that Mészáros was merely a scapegoat in the case, even if he was really involved in the Soltra murder, since it was not one single soldier who was responsible for Soltra's death. We can agree with the assumption of Ákos Bartha, who has thoroughly researched the subject and published a detailed research article, that the case

---

173 On Kálmán Zsabka's adventurous life see: Ákos Bartha–Nándor Pócs–András Szécsényi, *Egy hosszan „ébredő" túlélőművész. Zsabka Kálmán pályarajza (1897–1971) I. rész*, Múltunk, 2019/2, 138–180.

174 HU-BFL-VII-18-d-8963/1925.

175 Bartha, op. cit. 36.

176 Ibid.

177 Zinner, op. cit. 103.

was investigated by the police under controlled circumstances, and that certain political and military circles tried to 'save the day' and sacrifice the less important person, and that the final outcome of the case was decided at the highest possible level (in the Ministry of Defence or even at the Regent Governor's residence?) [178].

It is a rather suspicious cirscumstance that the documents of Imre Mészáros's criminal trial have disappeared, at least they are not in the custody of the Budapest City Archives, where they should be, and we only know about the fact of the swift execution of the execution from the contemporary press and the Mészáros's prison records [179]. With some malice, we can even doubt the fact of the alleged police killer's execution, as there was a rumour in Budapest at the time that Imre Mészáros was seen 'walking freely and gladly' in the streets of the capital after his execution. Of course, all this is now a matter of legend, but in his memoirs, it is Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay himself who not only knew a lot about the crimes committed by some of the detachments, but in some cases could even have intervened in the administration of justice, expresses his doubts on this matter, although in his memoirs he inaccurately identifies the executed perpetrator of the Soltra's murder as a soldier named Horváth. Ákos Bartha notes with justifiable irony that in all probability Kálmán Zsabka, László Sesevics and Imre Mészáros themselves could not have told which of their guns fired the bullet that killed the Soltra – to say it colloquially, someone had to take the blame, and the person who was least important was certainly sacrificed [180].

Lieuteant Colonel Prónay realised the seriousness of the situation after the murder of the policemen, and he had no intention of taking an open conflict with Horthy or the Government, so he took personal responsibility for some officers, including Iván Héjjas himself, [181] but the others were disarmed by the police, and some of them were arrested [182].

---

178 Bartha, op. cit. 36–37.

179 Zinner, op. cit. 103.

180 Bartha, op. cit. 43.

181 See Béla Bodó, *Pál Prónay. Palamilitary Violence and and Anti-Semitism in Hungary, 1919–1921*, The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East-European Studies, No. 2101, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh, 2011, 27–28.

182 Pál Prónay, *A határban a halál kaszál. Fejezetek Prónay Pál naplójából*, ed. Ervin Pamlényi–Ágnes Szabó, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1963, 315.

In the following days, the police continued to raid hotels occupied by irregular soldiers, arresting around fifty persons and confiscating many weapons. At the same time, in Budapest, the regular units of the police and the National Army loyal to Horthy occupied the main intersections and traffic junctions, and started filtering the uniformed people. The police also visited the Budapest bars and pubs, where they also arrested a number of people. Thanks to the forceful action of the authorities, Iván Héjjas's paramilitary units began to disband, and many of the detachment soldiers changed into civilian clothes and tried to leave Budapest as quickly as possible [183].

At dawn on 12 November, the government troops also attempted to take possession of the Garrison at Ehmann-telep, a suburb of Budapest, where the free troops of the Hussar Captain Jenő Babarczy operating under the pseudonym of Jenő Bogáti, formally the workers' battalion of the Budapest City Command, but in reality a completely irregular and arbitrarily operating military unit of about 1,200 men were quartered. Here, however, the law enforcement troops met serious resistance, and a gunfight broke out which resulted in numerous casualties on both sides. The police and the regular military, however, eventually won the battle, and the surviving irregular soldiers were arrested [184].

Captain Jenő Babarczy escaped with the help of Héjjas and Prónay, and was hiding for a while in Kecskemét, where he tried to organise another detachment of local gunmen, but was soon captured by the gendaermerie of Adony.[185] However, most of the members of the irregular military formation in Ehmann-telep also escaped further prosecution, because on the orders of Minister of Defence General István Sréter, Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy, commander of the Double Cross Blood Union ordered the territorrially competent military command to release the members of the military formation which had been organised for irredentist purposes, primarily for an attempted break-in in the Hungarian Highlands that now belonged to Czechoslovakia. It was even suggested by Colonel Siménfalvy that irregular soldiers who had been unjustly treated by the police and

183 Zinner, op. cit. 98–101.

184 Zinner, op. cit. 98.

185 On the antisemitic attrocities of the period in Kecskemét see: Tamás Róna, *Judaizmus és közösségtörténet: Kecskemét rabbijainak működése történetszociológiai aspektusból*, PhD dissertation, Rabbinic Seminar and Jewish University of Budapest, 2010.

regular military units might later be compensated.[186] The controlling role of the Double-Cross Blood Union over the operation of the various irregular, sometimes self-organising, but still state-supported military formations and their close connection with the highest military leadership seems provable from this very fact.

At the end of the period of the White Terror, it was the first wave of the dismantling of the various irregular military formations which also realised two important political objectives of the Regent Governor and the Government. On the one hand, it clearly restored the monopoly on the use of force by the state and the organisations under its control; on the other hand, it prevented the Association of Awakening Hungarian from gradually becoming a modern radical right-wing political party supported by an armed paramilitary force which could even threaten the power of the incumbent Government [187].

József Soltra was then declared a hero and hearsed in the courtyard of the Mosonyi Street Police Garrsion. A number of public organisations and private companies sent wreaths to his burial. The policeman was buried with the highest degree of state reverence on 16 November 1920 in the Kerepesi Street Cemetery, in a special grave donated by the local government of Budapest. The ceremony was attended by the Regent Governor himself who personally expressed his condolences to Soltra's parents and his fiancée [188]. The event was of course covered in detail by the press.

Concluding remarks

Although the murder of policeman József Soltra and the subsequent investigation gave the Government a significant incentive to dismantle or at least bring the various irregular formations under closer government control, and at the same time to reduce the conditions that were reminiscent of a civil war, the activities of the various (semi-)military formations were indeed reduced, but not completely eliminated. For example, Iván Héjjas's paramilitary unit, the Brigade of the Hungarian Plain and the closely overlapping National Defence Departments of the Association of

[186] Hungarian Archives of Military History, HU-HL-HM-52110/Eln. C.-192.1. The source is cited by: Tamás Kovács, *A Honvédelmi Minisztérium „T" Szervének létrejötte és működése, avagy elhárítás és kémkedés az I. világháború végétől a bethleni konszolidációig*, 70–71.

[187] Zinner, op. cit. 99.

[188] Zinner, op. cit. 105.

Awakening Hungarians continued to operate, although they increasingly avoided publicity. However, the fact that the military units ceased law enforcement activities and lost the right to take official action against civilians was officially returned to the law enforcement agencies under the Ministry of the Interior, primarily the police and the gendarmerie, was an undoubtedly important step towards political consolidation.

As it was already mentioned above, irregular soldiers who committed and were prosecuted for various serious crimes were in many cases acquitted, or at least received light sentences in relation to the gravity of their crimes, which suggests that seemingly low-ranking, insignificant individuals had relatively high-level, influential patrons [189]. Among the paramilitary leaders of the period, we can once again highlight Iván Héjjas and Pál Prónay, who, in addition to their military activities, were also members of the leadership of the Association of Awakening Hungarians and ambitious politicians of the early Hungarian radical right-wing movement. Their merits in building up the counter-revolutionary regime and their political connections, including their personal relationship with the Regent Governor gave them some influence and several times protected them from prosecution, although their names were very clearly linked to a number of illegal actions, such as coup plots, crimes which claimed people's lives or sometimes even aimed at overthrowing the state. Their influence was by no means infinite, but they were not only able to escape punishment themselves, sometimes at the cost of compromise, but also to achieve impunity, or at least mild punishment in the criminal cases of many of their followers and subordinates.

It is a telling case, for example, that First Lieutenant Attila Rumbold, also an officer of Hotel Britannia who had committed serious crimes including robbery and assault and had been arrested in connection with the Soltra murder, was sentenced to death in the first instance, and in the second instance to 15 years of imprisonment by the Regent Governor's pardon [190]. However, after a short time of imprisonment, he was released as a free man following the amnesty proclaimed on 3 November 1921. From the end of the 1920s onwards, the radical right-wing Hungarian militia movement, closely overlapping with the Association of Awakening Hungarians, the Hungarian National Defence Forces Association and, of course, the still active Double Cross Blood Union which was founded on the initiative of

189 Zinner, op. cit. 103.

190 Zinner, op. cit. 106.

the Government, continued to exist in the form of various armed units increasingly operating in secret until the middle of the 1920s, and its relationship with the Government and the Regent Governor remained complex and ambivalent all the time [191].

Although Ákos Bartha calls the assassination of József Soltra the last drop in the grass in the title of his thorough research paper, we must unfortunately disagree with him about the fullness of this imaginary glass. We have to dispute that the right-wing paramilitary wave of violence that had been raging in Hungary since 1919 would have culminated in the death of police officer József Soltra, because although the activity of irregular military units, self-organising armed groups and detachments undoubtedly decreased as a result of the decisive government measures that followed, it was by no means completely eliminated. The Soltra murerd was followed by a number of other politically motivated crimes that caused great public outcry and received press coverage, such as the bomb outrage of Erzsébetváros on 3 April 1922, the bomb attack of Csongrád on 26 December 1923, the coup d'état plan of reserve Firts Lieutenant Viktor Apor, the head of the National Defence Department of the Awakening Hungarians and his fellows, the coup plan of the race-defending member of the Parliament and close ally to Gyula Gömbös, Dr. Ferenc Ulain, or the series of crimes committed by the former 'Britannian' officers, the Kovács brothers, who comminted their actions by irredentist and anti-Semitic motivations. These cases shall be discussed in the further chapters of our monograph.

The open street violence was followed by a period of radical right-wing coup plans that mostly aimed at military dictatorship and political terrorism, which briefly spread also in Hungary. It was only Count István Bethlen, who succeeded Pál Teleki as Prime Minister in 1921 and who was increasingly determined to consolidate Hungary's foreign and domestic policy, succeeded in dismantling the various irregular armed groups in several stages, around 1924–1925, and pacified the radical right for a time. Nota bene, the political crimes that followed the Soltra assassination had in common that the perpetrators were all closely linked to the Association of Awakening Hungarians and the influential paramilitary commanders who

[191] Central Archive of the National Archives of Hungary. HU-MNL-OL-K 149-1926-6-4250. Reserved Documents of the Hungarian Royal Ministry of the Interior – Police report about the activities of the secret and semi-secret radical right-wing organisations, 1926.

played leading roles in it, Iván Héjjas and Pál Prónay – and indirectly to the leading figure of the radical right, the later Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös, who acted as a political mastermind in the background –, and the criminal proceedings against them ended either with acquittals or surprisingly mild sentences in relation to the gravity of the actions.

References

1. Ákos Bartha, *Az utolsó csepp a pohárban. Soltra József rendőr meggyilkolása*, in *Csoportosulás, lázadás és a társadalom terrorizálása. Rendészettörténeti Tanulmányok 2.*, ed. Orsolya Jámbor–Gábor G. Tarján, Budapest, Rendőrség Tudományos Tanácsa, 2019, 28–44.
2. Ákos Bartha–Nándor Pócs–András Szécsényi, *Egy hosszan „ébredő" túlélőművész. Zsabka Kálmán pályarajza (1897–1971) I. rész*, Múltunk, 2019/2, 138–180
3. *A magyarországi zsidóság története*, ed. Tamás Róna–Mónika Mezei, Budapest, Szent István Társulat, Budapest, 2018.
4. Béla Bodó, *Pál Prónay. Palamilitary Violence and and Anti-Semitism in Hungary, 1919–1921*, The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East-European Studies, No. 2101, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh, 2011, 27–28.
5. Béla Bodó, *Pál Prónay. Palamilitary Violence and and Anti-Semitism in Hungary, 1919–1921*, The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East-European Studies, No. 2101, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh, 2011.
6. Béla Bodó, *The White Terror. Antisemitic and Political Violence in Hungary, 1919–1921*, London, Routledge, 2019.
7. Robert Gerwarth, *Harc a Vörös Szörnyeteggel. Ellenforradalmi erőszak Közép-Európa vereséget szenvedett államaiban*, transl. Péter Várady, in *Háború béke idején. Paramilitáris erőszak Európában az első világháború után*, ed. Robert Gerwarth–John Horne, Budapest, L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2017, 71–92.
8. Pál Hatos, *Rosszifúk világforradalma. Az 1919-es magyarországi tanácsköztársaság története*, Budapest, Jaffa Kiadó, 2021.
9. *Iratok az ellenforradalom történetéhez 1919–1945. II. A fasiszta rendszer kiépítése Magyarországon 1921–1924*, ed. Elek Karsai–Dezső Nemes, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1959.
10. Nigel H. Jones, *Hitler's Heralds. The Story of the Freikorps, 1918–*

1923, Dorset, Barns and Noble, 1995.

11. Balázs Kántás, *The Double Cross Blood Union: Outline of the History of a Secret Military Organisation of Hungary in the 1920s*, ANGLISTICUM, 2021/10, 52–70.
12. https://www.anglisticum.org.mk/index.php/IJLLIS/article/view/2218/2615
13. Lajos Kerekes, *Olaszország, Magyarország és az osztrák Heimwehr-mozgalom*, Történelmi Szemle, 1961/2, 199–216.
14. Tamás Kovács, *A Nemzeti Hadsereg és a tiszti különítmények*, in *Csoportosulás, lázadás és a társadalom terrorizálása. Rendészettörténeti Tanulmányok 2.*, ed. Orsolya Jámbor–Gábor G. Tarján, Budapest, Rendőrség Tudományos Tanácsa, 2019, 151–172.
15. Tamás Kovács, *A Honvédelmi Minisztérium „T" Szervének létrejötte és működése, avagy elhárítás és kémkedés az I. világháború végétől a bethleni konszolidációig*, Budapest, Nemzeti Közszolgálati Egyetem, 2020.
16. Tamás Róna, *Judaizmus és közösségtörténet: Kecskemét rabbijainak működése történetszociológiai aspektusból*, PhD-dissertation, Rabbinic Seminar and Jewish University of Budapest, 2010.
17. Tamás Róna, *Előszó*, in *A magyarországi zsidóság története*, ed. Tamás Róna–Mónika Mezei, Budapest, Szent István Társulat, Budapest, 2018.
18. Pál Prónay, *A határban a halál kaszál. Fejezetek Prónay Pál naplójából*, ed. Ervin PAMLÉNYI–Ágnes SZABÓ, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1963.
19. János Suba, *Karhatalmi formációk Magyarországon 1918–1920*, Rendvédelem-történeti Füzetek 2008/18, 131–142.
20. János Suba, *Polgárőrség szervezése 1919–1921*, Rendvédelem-történeti Füzetek, 2018/56, 131–144.
21. *Uğur Ümit Üngör, Paramilitarism. Mass Violence in the Shadow of the State, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020.*
22. Tibor Zinner, *Adatok az Ébredő Magyarok Egyesületének 1918. november–1920. március közötti történetéhez*, Budapest Főváros Leváltára Közleményei, 1978/1, 251–284.
23. Tibor Zinner, *Az ébredők fénykora, 1919–1923*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989.

Archival Sources

1. City Archives of Budapest – Budapest Főváros Levéltára
2. HU-BFL-VII-5-c-8821/1920. László Illy and his asscoiates' criminal trial.
3. HU-BFL-VII-18-d-8963/1925 – Károly Kmetty and his associates' criminal trial
4. HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923. The trial of József Márffy and his asscociates.
5. Central Archive of the National Archives of Hungary – Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára
6. HU-MNL-OL-K 149-1926-6-4250. Reserved Documents of the Hungarian Royal Ministry of the Interior – Police report about the activities of the secret and semi-secret radical right-wing organisations, 1926.
7. Hungarian Archives of Military History – Magyar Hadtörténelmi Levéltár
8. HU-HL-HM-52110/Eln. C.-192.1. – The Documents of the Presidential Department of the Royal Hungarian Ministry of Defence.

Chapter - 17

A Concise History of the Double Cross Blood Union, a Clandestine Military Organisation of Hungary in the 1920s

It is surely not a promising endeavour to write about secret societies, since these organisations generally produce few documents, or do not produce documents at all. Furthermore, the larger is distance in time, the harder it is to trace back and reconstruct the activities of an organisation. The so-called Horthy-era (1920–1944) was one of the tumultuous periods of Hungarian history that was full of – mainly right-wing, irredentist and nationalist, and often intolerant and strongly anti-Semitic – secret associations, federations and societies that often overlapped, and had some degree of influence on politics [192]. These secretly operating formations sometimes had a legal cover organisation in the form of an association the constitution of which was approved by the Ministry of the Interior, but sometimes they operated in completely informal frameworks, based on verbal discussions and instructions between the members.

The Hungarian military secret society/secret irregular military formation called *Kettőskereszt Vérszövetség – Double Cross Blood Union* is very peculiar among these organisations, because it was definitely present in contemporary Hungarian publicity in the 1920s, and several illegitimacies (for example, political murders, murders and robberies, assassinations, terrorism and coup attempts) were attributed to its members in contemporary newspapers and other sources, yet it produced very few documents, or at least is documents were not preserved in the custody of archives. That is, historians know only little about it, and its concrete activities can often be based on presumptions, guesses and the attribution of certain events to the organisation, which can be confirmed only partially.

Basically, the Double Cross Blood Union, if we can trust the sources and widespread information, was not else but the military or paramilitary wing/sub-organistion of the very influential Hungarian secret society of the

192 Krisztián Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege. Diszkrimináció, szociálpolitika és antiszemitizmus Magyarországon 1914–1944*, Pécs, Jelenkor Kiadó–Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár, 2012, 97–100.

Horthy-era called *Etelközi Szövetség – Union of Etelköz*, which included the members of the political, military and bureaucratic elite. Due to the memoirs of military bishop István Zadravecz, [193] the diary-memoirs of notorious paramilitary commander Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay [194] and the diary-memoirs of General Kálmán Shvoy [195] – these three basic documents that were also published in edited book form in the communist Kádár-era –, despite its secrecy and enigmatic character, we know fairly much about the Union of Etelköz, the politically influential secret society [196] that was established as a kind of 'white', nationalist counter-freemasonry [197]. The Union of Etelköz controlled the Hungarian irredentist and race-defending, legal and illegal assocations to some extent, or at least it tried to control them, so it can be considered as a kind of right-wing umbrella organisation. For conspirative reasons, its name was shortened by the members as EX, ET and X. The organisation was established in 1919, Szeged, [198] in the close environment of the Hungarian counter-revolutionary government, and later it had approximately 5000 members,

---

193 István Zadravecz, *Páter Zadravecz titkos naplója*, forráskiad. Borsányi György, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1967. The original source can be found at the Historical Archives of the State Security Services under the reference code HU-ÁBTL-A-719.

194 Pál Prónay, *A határban a halál kaszál. Fejezetek Prónay Pál naplójából*, ed. Ervin Pamlényi–Ágnes Szabó, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1963. The source can be today found in the custody of the Hungarian Archives of Political History and Trade Unions: HU-PIL-IV-973.

195 Kálmán Shvoy, *Shvoy Kálmán titkos naplója és emlékirata 1920–1945*, forráskiad. Perneki Mihály Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1983. The original source can be found in the custody of the Csongrád-Csanád County Archive of the National Archives of Hungary: HU-MNL-CSML-XIV-12.

196 The Constitution of the Union of Etelköz also remained in the records of Dr. József Minich's People's Tribunal trial in the custody of the Budapest City Archives: HU-BFL-XXV-2-b-8311/1947.

197 Hungarian historian Miklós Zoltán Fodor wrote a summarising research article on the history of the Union of Etelköz: Fodor Miklós Zoltán, *Az Etelközi Szövetség története*, Nógrád Megyei Múzeumok Évkönyve, 2007/XXXI, 118–156.

198 The Union of Etelköz certainly had some political influence, since high-ranking politicians, administrative officers and military officers were among its leaders and members. See: László Erdeös, *A magyar honvédelem egy negyedszázada 1919-1944*, szerk. Zoltán Babucs, Gödöllő, Attraktor Kiadó, 2007, 115–117.

led by the so-called *Vezéri Tanács – Council of Captains*, a 7–12-strong leading body until 16th October 1944. The Union of Etelköz installed its seat at the hall of the strongly paramilitary *Magyar Országos Véderő Egylet (MOVE)* [199] *– Hungarain Defence Force Association* which included mainly active and demobilised soldiers in Budapest, Podmaniczky street [200]. As for its rites and outlook, the Union of Etelköz wanted to resemble Freemasonry, detested and considered to be unpatriotic by its members, and ironically even the common hall of MOVE and EX was confiscated from the Symbolic Grand Logde of Hungary. Through its network of relations the organisation had a serious effect on the political life of the era, since influential politicians like Prime Ministers Count István Bethlen and Count Pál Teleki, ex-Prime Minister Count Gyula Károlyi, Minister of Foreign Affairs Count Miklós Bánffy, or Tibor Eckhardt, President of *Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete (ÉME) – Association of Awakening Hungarians*, [201]

---

199 The *MOVE – Hungarian National Defence Force Association* was founded on 15 November 1918 as a paramilitary counter-revolutionary association, and gradually became one of the largest mass organisations of the Horthy Era, with a large part of its membership made up of military officers. One of its founders was Gyula Gömbös, later Prime Minister. In the 1920s, together with the Association of Awakening Hungarians, it was one of the most influential anti-Semitic and revisionist associations of the period, with a majority of representatives of the Arrow Cross and other extreme right-wing parties (e.g. László Bánkúti, Gábor Baross, László Endre, Berthold Feilitzsch, etc.) in its leadership from the second half of the 1930s. From 1942 onwards, its leadership mobilised to unite Hungarian far-right organisations, and many of its members joined party milita of the Arrow Cross Party. After the German invasion of Hungary, the smaller radical righ-wing associations were merged into the *MOVE* by a decree of the Minister of the Interior. The fragmentary surviving records of the association can be searched in the Central Archive of the National Archives of Hungary: HU-MNL-OL-P 1360. About its history see the following monograph written in the Communist period: Rudolfné Dósa, *A MOVE. Egy jellegzetesen magyar fasiszta szervezet*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972.

200 Zsuzsa L. Nagy, *Szabadkőművesek*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988, 68.

201 The *ÉME – Association of Awakening Hungarians* was the most influential nationalist social association in Hungary after the First World War and the revolutions, maintaining its own auxiliary police militias and paramilitary units in the early 1920s, and exerting a strong influence on

the most influential nationalist mass organisation of the era [202] were among its members. Those who were invited to the membership of EX, had to take oath to life and death stating that they will serve irredentist and race-defending, nationalist goals. The Council of Captains discussed all important political issues. The cover organistion of the Union of Etelköz was *Magyar Tudományos Fajvédő Egyesület – Hungarian Scientific Race-Defending Association*, which was established on 28th September 1920, and the Minister of the Interior approved its constitution on the same day. The informal supreme leader of the EX was Minister of Defence, then finally Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös from 1932 until his death of 1936, [203] while in the 1920s he also played a leading role in the activity of secret and semi-secret associations and paramilitary formations connected to the ÉME and the MOVE, although he wore no formal position beyond being the President of the MOVE for a while.[204] Furthermore, Gömbös was not only

---

party politics. Its members committed a number of notorious anti-Semitic and irredentist crimes, as well as acts of terror. Among its founders and board members there were many politicians and influential military officers such as Pál Prónay, Iván Héjjas or Gyula Gömbös who later became Prime Minister of Hungary. At its peak, its membership was in the hundreds of thousands, and its presidents in the early 1920s were György Szmrecsányi, Tibor Eckhardt and Dezső Buday, members of the parliament. Its importance gradually declined after 1923, with the emergence of the Hungarian National Independence Party (commonly called Race-defending Party) which had split from the governing Unity Party (officially called Christian-National Peasant, Smallholder and Bourgeois Party), and more significantly with the formation of the Western-style Hungarian fascist and national socialist parties in the 1930s, some of whose members were members of the association. The Awakening Hungarians continued to operate alongside various radical right-wing political parties until 1945. About its history see: Tibor Zinner, *Az ébredők fénykora, 1919–1923*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989.; Tibor Zinner, *Adatok az Ébredő Magyarok Egyesületének 1918. november–1920. március közötti történetéhez*, Budapest Főváros Leváltára Közleményei, 1978/1, 251–284.

202 According to Hungarian historian Miklós Zeidler, the Hungarian National Defence Force Association, the Association of Awakening Hungarians, the Union of Etelköz, the Double Cross Blood Union Association and other nationalist societies basically defined the ideology and cadres of the counter-revolutionary regime. Miklós Zeidler, *A revíziós gondolat*, Pozsony, Kalligram, 2009, 105.

203 Jenő Gergely, *Gömbös Gyula. Politikai pályakép*, Budapest, Vince Kiadó, 2001, 208.; and Shvoy, ibid. 74.

204 József Vonyó, *Gömbös Gyula*, Budapest, 2012, Napvilág Kiadó, 100–101.

the informal leader of the radical right-wing movements of the era, but he might have known about the crimes planned and committed by different paramilitary formations, perhaps he even supported them,[205] while the Union of Etelköz operated as a mastermind/umbrella organisation of the different rightist movements. [206] Gömbös who left the governing party and established the so-called race-defending fraction in the Parliament in 1923, which not much later transformed into *Magyar Nemzeti Függetlenségi (Fajvédő) Párt – Hungarian National (Race-Defending) Party for Independence*, had a very active relation with paramilitary commander First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas who was one of the establishers of the ÉME and organized its local sub-organistaions in the Hungarian Plain. From November 1924 the local sub-organistaions of the ÉME and the Race-defending Party arranged their political assemblies in the Hungarian rural regions together, so it is unlikely that Gyula Gömbös did not know about the violent crimes committed by ÉME milita members and the paramilitary formations of Iván Héjjas.[207] After the death of Gömbös, during the period of World War II the Union of Etelköz was becoming a more and more extremist right-wing organisation, orienting itself towards the Hungarian National Socialist Arrow Cross movement under the leadership of Baron Berthold Feilitzsch, the influential, highly pro-German background politician of the era of German ancestry, while loosing its political importance in parallel [208]. However, it must be mentioned that in the 1940s the Union had a much more moderate wing under the leadership of conservative politicians, ex-Prime Ministers István Bethlen and Miklós Kállay which supported Regent Miklós Horthy during the unsuccessful attempt of getting out of the war in 1944 [209].

---

[205] Vonyó, op. cit. 101.

[206] Erről Zadravecz István tábori püspök is ír emlékiratában: Zadravecz, op. cit. 148–149.

[207] József Vonyó, *Gömbös Gyula és a hatalom. Egy politikussá lett katonatiszt*, Pécs, Kairosz Kiadó, 2013, 169–170.

[208] Baron Berthold Feilitsch, the leader of the Union of Etelköz, one of the influential background politicians of the Horthy Era finally joined and supported the Arrow Cross Party and its pro-German puppet government in 1944–1945. See Róbert Kerepeszki, *A Turul Szövetség 1919–1945. Egyetemi ifjúság és jobboldali radikalizmus a Horthy-korszakban*, Máriabesenyő, Attraktor Kiadó, 2012, 177.

[209] Nóra Szekér, Titkos társaság. A Magyar Testvéri Közösség története, Budapest, Jaffa Kiadó, 2017, 81.

That is, we know fairly lot about the Union of Etelköz, however, as for its (para) military brother organistaion, [210] the Double Cross Blood Union the situation is somewhat worse. If the sources are credible, then the Double Cross Blood Union was established in the end of 1919 in order to defend the counter-revolutionary regime and to fight Communist and other left-wing political powers; and later, after the ratification of the Treaty of Trianon the aims of the organisation were completed with irredentism, the intention of restoring Hungarys territorial integrity. The commander of the organisation was Colonel, later General Tihamér Siménfalvy, [211] hero of World War One, who were in contact with foreign radical right-wing organistaions, mainly Austrian and German paramilitary nationalist groups. The commander of the organisation outside the capital was artillery captain Imre Makkay/Makai, furthermore, the commanders included the notorious detachment leaders of the Hungarian white terror First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas and Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay, the later Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös, László Endre, military bishop István Zadravecz, Colonel György Görgey, General Károly Csörgey and Colonel József Sassy Szabó. Basically, the Double Cross Blood Union was strongly bound to the counter-revolutionary government of Szeged and the military forces commanded by Admiral Miklós Horthy, commander of the National Army,[212] and politicians and military officers who later became very influential and were those times very open to the idea of military dictatorship participated in the establishment of the organistion. In these very tumultuous times Admiral Horthy who was soon elected as Regent Governor of Hungary by the parlieament was also open to the introduction of military dictatorship, and the Entente powers and mainly moderate conservative politician Count István Bethlen could only gradually persude him of resigning from this ambition and make him return to parliamentary, constitutional frameworks of the state [213]. Horthy himself otherwise was not the member of Double Cross Blood Union or the Union of Etelköz formally, he did not participate at the rites of these secret societies or swore

---

210 Géza Komoróczy defines the Union of Etelköz a paramilitary organistaion. See Géza Komoróczy, *A zsidók története Magyarországon II. 1849-től a jelenkorig*, Pozsony, Kalligram, 2012, 380.

211 Lajos Serfőző, *A titkos társaságok és a róluk folytatott parlamenti viták 1922–1924-ben*, Párttörténeti Közlemények, 1976/3, 79–80.

212 See Ferenc Pölöskei, *Hungary After Two Revolutions 1919–1922*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980, 15.

213 Dávid Turbucz, *Horthy Miklós*, Budapest, Napvilág Kiadó, 2011, 66–92.

their oath, since as a pragmatic and down-to-earth politician and military officer he was not attracted by secrecy and mysticism. Nevertheless, both closely overlapping secret organistaion informally considered the Regent their real leader,[214] and Horthy could easily enforce his will and influence in the right-wing secret societies and openly operating nationalist organistaions strongly connected to them. [215]

The members of the militarily organised units of Double Cross Blood Union swore a very strict oath with the following text:

'I, XY hereby swear to the Almighty Lord and to everything which is saint to me that, if it is a must, I fought againsts all movements and provocations of red persons subversing my country, and if it is a must, I fight with arms in order to recapture the robbed territories of my 1000-year-old Hungaruin Homeland, and if necessary, I even sacrifice my own life. I loyally execute the orders of my commanders and superiors. If I break my oath, I am subject to the sentences of the Blood Court of the Double Cross Blood Union. So help me God.'[216]

The text of the oath otherwise remained among the documents of the suit of reserve First Lieutenant Gábor Jenő Kiss who was the deputy commander of the Department of National Defence of the Association of Awakening Hungarians which was a state-sponsored militia belonging to the Double Cross Blood Union and First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas's paramilitary *Alföldi Brigád – Brigád of the Great Hungarian Plain*. Gábor Jenő Kiss was involved in a serious embezzlement affair in 1923 and was sentenced to four months in prison. In 1940 he made an appeal of rehabilitation and wanted to become unpunished in a legal sense, and the most important documents of his suitcase 1923 were also attacted to his case file of 1940. From these archival sources it turns out that the operation of the Association of Awakening Hungarian, its military-like detachment of national defence, the National Association of Home Defence, Double Cross Blood Union and the Brigade of the Great Hungarian Plain cannot be strictly separated from each other, and according to Gábor Jenő Kiss, these were not simply self-organising militias, but semi-offical, secret military formations under the control of the General Staff of the Army which were organised mainly for anti-Communist and irredentist aims by the

[214] See Prónay, op. cit. passim.; Shvoy, op. cit. passim.; Zadravecz, op. cit. 130–132.

[215] Ungváry, op. cit. 98–99.

[216] Zinner, op. cit. 568.; HU-BFL-VII-5-c-198/1940.

Government. All of this, of course, is consistent with other available, scattered sources and seems to confirm the quality of the secret military corps as a state agency. At lower levels, of course, these irregular military units, largely composed of veterans, enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, and their commanders were bound by secrecy to avoid reprisals from the Entente powers for a country under severe restrictions of armament. According to Jenő Kiss Gábor, the Chief of Staff of the Double Cross Blood Union was General Károly Uhlig (later changed his name to Csörgey), which is also in line with other sources [217] However, Jenő Gábor Kis does not mention General Tihamér Siménfalvy as the commander of the Double Cross Blood Union, and it is obviously not known how much Kiss himself knew about the higher level operations of the secret military organisation.

Another version of the oah of the Blood Union is also known, which was also published by the illegal left-wing opposition press, which dealt much with radical right-wing secret societies, although we must treat it with careful criticism of the source precisely because of its uncertain origin:

'I, XY, swear by Almighty God, and pledge by all that is holy before me, that I will obey the commands of my leaders and their appointed superiors with the utmost fidelity, and will keep the events of the Double Cross Blood Union in the strictest confidence. I swear that I am under no obligation to any other irredentist organization, and that I will take such orders only from my superiors in the Double Cross Blood Union. I will not deal with any political questions or the issue of kingship within the framework of the Double Cross Blood Union, and if I become aware of any such case, I will report it immediately to my superiors. If I break this oath, I will acknowledge the right of the Double Cross Blood Court to judge over my fate.'[218]

Although the constitution of the organisation has not yet been found in archival documents, the nationalist-irredentist, anti-Soviet, anti-Semitic and, due to the over-representation of former and active soldiers and the paramilitary structure of the organisation, clearly militaristic spirit of the Blood Union can be inferred from the versions of the oath. The subtle differences between the three versions of the oath are not surprising either, since the organisation was probably founded in 1919 with an anti-Bolshevist aim, and irredentism became the guiding ideology of the

217 HU-BFL-VII-5-c-198/1940.

218 See [Szerző nélkül], *A Kettőskereszt Vérszövetség esküminta*, Az Est, 07. 05. 1926.

organisation later, after signing of the Peace Treaty of Trianon in 1920. The obligation of apoliticism is not surprising, since the ideas of irrendetism and territorial revisionism in Hungary in the 1920s brought together people of very different mindsets, so in this secret organisation legitimists, those who wanted to freely elect a king, or those who imagined an authoritarian, military state found their common goals.[219] There is nothing extraordinary about the fact that several versions of the oath have survived, since like all similar organisations, the DCBU had several local sub-organisations, so there was certainly a degree of decentralisation in minor issues. Especially if we assume that the clandestine irregular military formation was never under a completely unified leadership, and that the various paramilitary commanders – usually senior officers of the army – competed with each other to get as many members as possible to obey them. [220]

As for the number of members, it is rather uncertain, but in it is estimated to have been several thousands in the early 1920s. Endre Kürthy, a demobilised soldier and member of the Budapest battalion led by Captain Szigfrid Umlauf reported that he himself recruited around 300 members for the organisation – a figure which may of course be a gross exaggeration. The members of the association held their meetings in the gymnasium of the elementary school at 9 Nyár utca, which was made available to them by the local government of the capital. [221] In all likelihood, the cover organisation of the DCBU was Nemzeti Múltunk Kulturális Egyesület – National Cultural Association of our Past, which was formed much later than the secret society itself, with its constituion only approved in 1922. [222] According to a political police report that remained in custody of the Budapest City Archive from 1946:

'The Union was divided into territorial divisions in Budapest and in the countryside. Each division had general observers, chief observers and observers. These reported monthly on left-wing movements in their areas. If any data was needed on anyone, these observers were obliged to obtain it immediately. The political convictions of the members were not restricted within the anti-Semitic and anti-Bolshevik character of the right. Thus,

[219] Miklós Zeidler, *Külpolitika és revízió – Mindent vissza?*, in *A Horthy-korszak vitatott kérdései*, Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 2020, 175–196.
[220] Prónay's diary, HU-PIL-VI-973-volume III. p. 355.
[221] Serfőző, op. cit. 79.
[222] Serfőző, op. cit.; HU-BFL-IV-1407-b-XI. üo.–151/1922. cited by Zinner, op. cit. 564.

among its members one could find pro-Horthy, legitimists, race-defenders and national socialists.

Their aim was not only to monitor the left, but also to rally and arm reliable elements on the right. Their armed terrorist units worked mainly in the Great Plain.

Their anti-Bolshevik objectives gave them considerable political influence, but this began to fade during the Bethlen-era, as did the importance of the whole Blood Union in the 1930s, especially due tu other modern right-wing movements. They were replaced by the Union of Etelköz.'[223]

According to the above cited political police report, which is probably largely speculative and tries to exaggerate the past role of the organisation, Miklós Horthy's membership in the organisation cannot be proven, but he undoubtedly exerted his influence in it. Among the members of the DCBU leadership we find such prominent, mainly right-wing persons as: Baron Károly Than, General Kamilló Kárpáthi, General Jánky Kocsárd Jr. István Horthy, Lóránt Erdélyi, the chief notary of the county, Iván Héjjas, Lieutenant Colonel Szigetváry, Counts Mihály and Béla Teleki, Countess Vass, Dr. Petrányi Rezső, Count Teleki Tibor, MP, Chief Notary Vilmos Ernst, School Director Kálmán Ferentzy, Baron Lajos Hatvany, Captain Helle, Chief Notary János Kemény, Kunó Klebelsberg, Pál Prónay, Bishop Ottokár Prohászka, etc. Perhaps the most surprising in this list of names - which includes mostly right-wing historical figures, but also seems random – is the person Baron Lajos Hatvany, the member of an assimilated Jewish bourgeois family, who can hardly be accused of Horthyism, exaggerated nationalism or anti-Semitism, and who the best demonstrates that this source should also be treated with careful criticism.

According to Krisztián Ungváry, the organization held its secret meetings in the Nádor Garrison (one of the headquarters of the Prónay detachment, which suggests a close personal overlaps with the paramilitary corps of Pál Prónay), and its members were mainly gendarmerie and military officers, landowners and administrative officials. In addition to the Budapest headquarters, there were sub-organisations in every major city and county seat, and the members of the DCBU were mainly involved in

[223] HU-BFL-VI-15-c-205/1945. Report of the Political Department of the Budapest of State Police to the Mayor of Budapest on the data of the dissolved Double Cross Blood Union, Budapest, 3 December 1945.
[223] Ibid.

the state apparatus in order to identify and prevent individuals and organisations with communist tendencies [224]. At the same time, the DCBU also included a large proportion of demobilised and therefore decommissioned officers from the enormous army of the dissolved Habsburg Monarchy, [225] who were struggling with existential problems [226].

An encyclopaedia article on the organisation which is often quoted in a number of publications, says:

'The Double Cross Blood Union was a covert intelligence and terrorist organisation directly subordinate to the Union of Etelköz. Founded in July 1919, it supported the irredentist and race-defending policies of the Hungarian leadership through camouflaged assassinations, the organisation of free troops carrying out subvertive actions in the Hungarian-populated areas of the surrounding countries, and intelligence activities (e.g. in 1938 its members also took part in the actions of the Ragged Guard Operation in Transcarpathia). The leadership of the organisation was never unified. During World War II, this was particularly evident when a legitimist group of the organisation joined the parties of the Hungarian Front under the name Double Cross Alliance, while another group joined the Arrow Cross Party.'[227]

The notes written by General István Ujszászy, the head of the military secret service and later of the centralised intelligence agency called *Államvédelmi Központ – the State Protection Centre*, while in the custody of the ÁVH, the Communist *State Protection Authority* in 1948, coincide with this publicly circulating information, and among them we can find a very interesting document. According to this document, in the 1920s, a

---

224 Ungváry, op. cit. 98–99.

225 On the dissolution oft he Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and its consequences see in detail: Ferenc Szávai, *Az Osztrák–Magyar Monarchia felbomlásának következményei. Az államutódlás vitás kérdései*, Pécs, Pro Pannonia Kiadó, 2004.

226 Iván T. Berend, *Magyarország gazdasága az első világháború után 1919-1929*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1966, 13.

227 *Magyarország a második világháborúban. Lexikon A–Zs*, ed. Péter Sipos, Budapest, Petit Real Könyvkiadó–Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Történettudományi Intézete–Honvédelmi Minisztérium Hadtörténeti Intézet és Múzeum–Zrínyi Miklós Nemzetvédelmi Egyetem–Magyar Hadtudományi Társaság, 1997.

secret group of officers – mainly irredentistically motivated – were operating illegally within the Hungarian Defence Forces, but with the knowledge and consent of the Government and the Regent Governor. The group was led by Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy, director of the Double Cross Blood Union, and later by Lieutenant Colonel Dezső Papp. The Siménfalvy Group was based in the building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Buda Castle, and its activities were primarily focused on the Little Entente states, with the goal of preparing the reconquest of the Hungarian-inhabited territories. According to Ujszászys note, Iván Héjjas detachments, and from 1932 the so-called (second) Ragged Guard were also subordinated to the same organisation, and in 1936 the 5th Press and Propaganda Department of the General Staff of the Hungarian Defence Forces, now under the command of Colonel Sándor Homlok, grew out of this secret military group. This department did not only serve the propaganda purposes of the Hungarian Defence Forces, but, like the previous secret group, it also prepared and carried out sabotage and sabotage operations in the neighbouring Little Entente states, and did all this in close cooperation with the Prime Ministers Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [228]. The Siménfalvy group, later the Papp group, and finally the 5th Department of the General Staff led by Colonel Sándor Homlok undoubtedly existed, and from their activities, as well as from the organizing activities of Tihamér Siménfalvy (until his death in 1929), we can conclude that there were close overlaps with the Double Cross Blood Union. The planned establishment of a secret intelligence, sabotage and subersion group under the joint control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence is also documented in a brief archival record written in 1920:

'Agreement on the organization of the irredenta in the annexed terrotiries: for the supreme leadership of the irredenta, a secret body under the control of the Government is to be established, under the leadership of one civilian and one military individual. This body shall receive instructions on general directives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in political matters and from the military leadership in military matters, but shall act in

228 István Ujszászy, *Vallomások a holtak házából. Ujszászy István vezérőrnagynak, a 2. vkf. osztály és az Államvédelmi Központ vezetőjének az ÁVH fogságában írott feljegyzései*, ed. György Haraszti–Zoltán András Kovács–Szabolcs Szita, Budapest, Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára–Corvina Kiadó, 2007, 356–359.

agreement with the Minister for National Minorities in political matters. As executive organs of this central secret body, social organizations (leagues) shall be established separately for each national minority group. Financial support for irredentist purposes may be provided by the Government or by individual resorts only through the secret organisation.' [229].

The document quoted above is certainly not a mere draft, as the Archives of Military History do indeed contain documents on the activities of a military unit of intelligence nature under the command of Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy. For example, the Siménfalvy group was involved in the Hungarian irredentist diversionary activities in Transylvania in 1919-1920, which, among other things, resulted in the so-called Timisoara Levente Suit, based on largely fabricated accusations, but which nevertheless had some real basis [230] In this case, young Hungarians from Timisoara, mostly high school and university students were brought before the Romanian Extraordinary Military Tribunal for plotting against the Romanian state power (at the time when the future borders of Romania and Hungary had not yet been clarified by international peace treaties and the status of Romanian-occupied Transylvania was still in question) and for acquiring large quantities of firearms and explosives. It is difficult to clarify to what extent the Hungarian military intelligence service of the National Army of the time were behind the Hungarian student conspiracy, which did not mean a serious threat to the Romanian state. However, a certain intelligence officer named Lieutenant József Mike was involved in the case, and documents relating to the Timisoara student conspiracy and the criminal trial were also sent to Colonel Siménfalvy. The officers of the Hungarian military secret service probably started organising an irredentist conspiracy on their own initiative, without any higher orders, or at least they were involved in a spontaneously evolving movement, and Colonel Siménfalvy initiated the prosecution of Lieutenant József Mike József at the Hungarian General Staff [231] It would be a mistake, therefore, to simplify

---

229 HU-MNL-OL-MOL-K 64-1920-2-60. Record without title or signature, 1920. 04. 06. Cited by Béla Angyal, *Érdekvédelem és önszerveződés. Fejezetek a csehszlovákiai magyar pártpolitika történetéből*, Fórum Intézet–Lilium Aurum Kiadó, Dunaszerdahely, 2002, 50.

230 About the levente trial at Timisoara see Béla Borsi-Kálmán's monograph: Béla Borsi-Kálmán, *Kisfiúk a nagy viharban. A temesvári 'Levente-pör' – az első román 'irredenta per' története, 1919–1922*, Budapest, Kortárs Kiadó, 2020.

231 Borsi-Kálmán, op. cit. 113–114.

the Timisoara student conspiracy to a covert operation of the secret military unit known as the Double Cross Blood Union which operated for irredentist aims. However, based on the sources, it is certain that the military formation under the command of Colonel Siménfalvy played some role in this case, and its members influenced the events.

However, it is worth treating the above mentioned sources with thorough criticism, because on the one hand István Ujszászy, for example, wrote his own notes at least partly under the influence of communist state security bodies, and on the other hand, no sources about the Siménfalvy-group called the Double Cross Blood Association by its name. However, legal historian Pál Nándori, in his highly Marxist but still usable monograph on the international legal aspects of the assassination of King Alexander I of Yugoslavia and the French Foreign Minister Barthou in Marseilles, which resulted in death, clearly described half a century ago that the Siménfalvy-group was identical to the DCBU, and later the Hungarian military secret services, of which the DCBU can be regarded as a kind of predecessor, were also in close contact with various Croatian paramilitary groups [232]. Referring to archival sources, Nándori claims that from the very beginning the DCBU was under government control, and was not a self-organising organisation, but a state agency, a clandestine military formation, whose primary objective was indeed to prepare terrorist attacs, sabotage and subversive actions against the Little Entente states, and in the medium term, territorial revision of Hungary [233]. According to a Foreign Ministry draft, the military commander of the organistaion was really Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy while the political leader was diplomat Kálmán Kánya, later Foreign Minister. The sabotage and diversionary activities were planned to be directed mainly against Czechoslovakia, Romania and especially Yugoslavia. Another submission passed to the Foreign Minister describes in great detail how acts of diversion, sabotage and terrorism were to be carried out beyond the borders [234].

According to the testimony of the sources, the Double Cross Blood Union/Siménfalvy group did not only prepareacts of sabotage in the territory of the Little Entante states, but also actively sought contacts with German and Austrian far-right paramilitary organisations, including the

[232] About paramilitarism in Yugoslavia see: Dmitar Tasić, *Paramilitarism in the Balkans. Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Albania, 1917–1924*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020.

[233] HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1921-41-187.

[234] HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1920-41-515.

militas named ORGESCH (Organisation Escherich) and ORKA (Organisation Kanzler). In 1921, at a meeting in Graz, the possibility of a joint Hungarian-German occupation of Czechoslovakia in the event of a future war was negotiated about [235]. In addition, the aim of the DCBU was not only to carry out diversionary, and sabotage terrorist operations,[236] but also to circumvent the restrictions of armament imposed on the defeated states of the First World War, since it allowed a large number of people to be recruited and trained in secret military status [237]. The Blood Union in this sense may have been very similar to the *German Black Army* (*Schwarze Reichswehr*). Among the militias within the German Black Army, there was also a paramilitary unit, the so-caled Organisation Consul, under the command of senior navy officer Corvette Captain Hermann Erhardt, which operated as a secret society and had a secret service character, and to which several political assassinations were attributed, and whose members often carried out diversionary activities against the Entente states. With some simplification, it can be said that this irregular military unit which operated clandestinely and far exceeded the limits of the law even at home, gradually grew up into the military secret service of National Socialist Germany, the Abwehr, under the command of Admiral Wilhelm Canaris [238]. Based on international, mainly European examples, the Double Cross Blood Union can therefore be compared with other secret, quasi-state paramilitary organisations after the First World War. Nevertheless, Pál Nándoris monograph cited above also acknowledges that the sources of the Hungarian irredentist secret military formations [239] are rather scarce, so we can only draw some general conclusions about their actual activities from

---

235 HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1921-41-221.; HU-MNL-OL-K-64-1921-41-199.; Katalin G. Soós, *Magyar-bajor-osztrák titkos tárgyalások és együttműködés, 1920–1921*, Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József Nominatae. Acta Historica, 1967/XVII, 3–43.

236 Pál Nándori, *A hirtenbergi fegyverszállítás*, Hadtörténelmi Közlemények, 1968/4, 636–657.

237 Pál Nándori, *A Marseille-i gyilkosság nemzetközi jogi vonatkozásai*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972.

238 Robert G. L. Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism. The Free Corps Movement In Post-War Germany 1918–1923*, New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 1969.

239 S. d. N. C. 518.M. 234. VH. Requête du Gouvernement Yougoslave en vertu de l'article paragraphe 2, du Pacte. Communication du Gouvernement Yougoslave, 34–41. 1. Cited by Nándori, op. cit. 88.

the sources rather than make definite statements about them. [240] Of course, not only Hungary, but also the Little Ententa states, like the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, operated intelligence services, and for understandable reasons, they were most suspicious of Hungarian activities. A Serbian intelligence report from 1926 started that in addition to the right-wing umbrella organisation *Társadalmi Egyesületek Szövetsége – Federation of Social Associations* [241] and the banned *Területvédelmi Liga – League for the Protection of Territory*, [242] there were some twenty secret irredentist-terrorist organisations operating in Hungary, whose members were engaged in intelligence activities in the Little Entente coutries:

'*From these organisations come the so-called Christian Socialist workers who replace socially organised workers wherever possible. These Christian workers work in factories where war material is secretly produced. They were used to counterfeit French francs, as well as passports, banknotes, revenue stamps and the seals of certain military commands of the Little Entente states. In addition, Hungarians living in the Little Entente states are used to obtain official documents, proclamations or instructions from the authorities on how to behave towards local non-national elements. On the basis of these proclamations or instructions, they produce false documents in which they accuse the governments of the Little Entente and send them to London, America, Rome and Paris*.'[243]

These lines could certainly refer to the Hungarian paramilitary auxiliary police organisation called *Nemzeti Munkavédelem – National Labour*

---

240 Nándori, op. cit. 88–89.

241 *The Társadalmi Egyesületek Szövetsége (TESZ) – Federation of Social Associations* was a right-wing umbrella organistation in the 1920s which included all the influential irrendentist social associations like the Association of the Awakening Hungarians and the Hungary Defence Forces Association as well. It was presided by the influential politician Baron Berthold Feilitzsch, but it was really controlled by its vice president, later Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös. About its history see: Róbert Kerepeszki, *A politikai és társadalmi élet határán. A Társadalmi Egyesületek Szövetsége a Horthy-korszakban*, in *'...nem leleplezni, hanem megismerni és megérteni'. Tanulmányok a 60 éves Romsics Ignác tiszteletére*, ed. Sándor Gebei Sándor – Iván Bertényi Jr. – János M. Rainer, Eger, Esterházy Károly Főiskola, 2011, 373–388.

242 Nándori, op. cit. 90.

243 *Délszláv levéltári források 1919–1941*, ed Áprád Hornyák, Pécs–Bp., Kronosz Kiadó–MTA BTK TTI, 2016, 126–127.

Protection, which, according to some notable sources, was a form of survival of the Double Cross Blood Union, and which will be discussed later in more detail.

We have already discussed the overlaps of personnel between the various nationalist-irredentist associations, secret societies and the armed forces and other state bodies in the beginning of the Horthy Era. In addition, in the early 1920s, the various (right-wing) civilian militias claimed and/or exercised authority in the manner conferred on them by the (then still fragile) state, or by arbitrarily exceeding the powers conferred on them by the state, so it is not at all to be excluded or surprising that the members of the Double Cross Blood Union in the 1920s closely overlapped with the apparatus of the later Hungarian secret service agencies. [244] Gyula Gömbös, later prime minister and chairman of MOVE, often stressed that he was in possession of much secret information and gave the impression to his military and political colleagues that he exercised considerable influence over the armys intelligence and counter-intelligence apparatus, which was not without any basis at all. Namely, in 1919-1921, there were close informal links between the National Army, the military intelligence and counter-intelligence services and the MOVE, which were formed in Szeged, and the secret societies had a great influence on their operation [245]. In contrast to the Union of Etelköz, which was not just a secret political organisation with pragmatic aims, but a mysterious, mystical, philosophical-esoteric organistaion of spirituality, which wanted to create a kind of special Hungarian nacioanlist religion for its members, it is not known whether the DCBU had any mystical rituals apart from the very strict oath which threatened the members even with death penalty for members in the event of treason/insubordination. The UoE, although its meetings presumably resulted in political decisions, or at least exerted real influence on them through its senior public officials, can be described as a political speculative secret society. Its members did not gain their influence by becoming members, but the other way round, the society tried to recruit people with a certain level of influence, who were considered trustworthy and loyal to the right-wing political regime. Certainly, however, as is the case with any man-made organisation, the personal connections made here did not necessarily hinder anyones career [246]. The DCBU, on the other hand, was

---

244 Tamás Kovács, *Az ellenforradalmi rendszer politikai rendészetének genezise, 1919–1921*, Múltunk, 2009/2, 66–92.

245 Gergely, op. cit. 80–83.

246 Zadravecz, op. cit. 140–141.

an armed paramilitary organisation, mostly composed of active and ex-soldiers, and its aim was to carry out operational activities (intelligence gathering, data collection, even armed repression if necessary) against left-wing movements, and later to prepare the revision of the Paris Peace Treaties and restore the countrys territorial integrity. The DCBU was therefore much more a clandestine military formation and intelligence service, operating with the knowledge and consent of the Government, although sometimes arbitrarily deviating from its objectives at the level of individual members or groups, than a self-organising secret association.

In line with all this is István István T. Ádáms memoir-monograph on the West Hungarian uprising, written in 1935 partly for propaganda purposes, based on the memories of the insurgents, and thus politically rather biased, which also devotes a short chapter to the DCBU, mostly about the organizations participation in the uprising.[247] According to the author, the DCBU was a patriotic, disciplined military organisation whose members took a strict oath to serve their country, and membership gave them essentially no rights, only duties. Their meetings were held in the gymnasium of the Szalag Street Primary School in Buda, they closely overlapped with Pál Prónay's detachment in the Nádor Garrison, and in 1921 they participated with the greatest enthusiasm and honour in the defence of Burgenland on the Hungarian side, since the Entente had decided that the area would be annexed to Austria. In the Communist Kádár Éra, Marxist historiography tried to oversimplify the importance and activities of the radical right-wing social associations and secret societies of the Horthy Era, which really existed and were influential, sometimes even portraying them as a kind of shadow government. [248] This is the same in the case of the Double-Cross Blood Union. In his monograph on the counter-revolution, which is useful in terms of its data content, but highly propagandistic in tone, party historian Dezső Nemes, for example, writes that the DCBU was one of the most significant secret organisations of the first period of the Horthy Era, and it was founded by the so-called 'twelve captains' [249] of Szeged, the later commanders of the National Army in July 1919. The organisation was all the time under the control of the Hungarian military, and its medium-term aim was to use its paramilitary units to break

[247] István T. Ádám, *A nyugat-magyarországi felkelés története*, Budapest, Külpolitika Kiadása, 1935, 115–118.
[248] Rudolfné Dósa, op. cit. 84–132.
[249] Tamás Kovács, op. cit., 64–92, 75.

out tension and rebellion in the Hungarian-populated areas annexed to neighbouring states after the Treaty of Trianon (mainly in the Highlands, which had been annexed to Czechoslovakia), where the regular army would then move in to reoccupy these areas with the pretext of restoring the order. According to Dezső Nemes, the DCBU was also involved in counter-espionage, internal counter-reaction and the commission of domestic terrorist attacks allowed by the Government, and he also claims, referring to Prónay's diary, that the organisation was established before the formation of the Union of Etelköz, even though it was later somehow supervised by the political secret society [250] Although Dezső Nemes makes rather strong statements about the DCBU, he refers only to press sources, apart from Pál Prónay's diary, so although his statements have some truth, they should be treated with thorough criticism. Prónay himself also writes in his notes – obviously with some exaggeration, in order to emphasise his own historical role - that he himself organised the irredentist military units, including the Double Cross Blood Union. Prónay names as the leaders of the organisation, among others, officers and senior officers György Görgey, Sándor Teleki, Imre Makay, Jenő Ranzenberger (later Ruszkay), General Pál Nagy, Commander-in-Chief of the Hungarian Defence Forces, and General Károly Uhlig (later Hungarianised his name to Csörgey), Chief of the General Staff of the Budapest Law Enforcement Troops those times. The number of members of the KKVS in the 1920s was relatively large, considering that it was not an ordinary, self-organizing association, but an irregular military unit (mostly consisting of armed members) – it could reach even 15–20.000 men [251]. As we can see, the source base of the DCBU is very scattered, and the information available to researchers on the functioning of the organisation is still contradictory. However, in the 1920s, at the beginning of the Horthy Era, following the civil war after the fall of the Soviet Republic of Councils of Hungary, there were a number of shockingly serious crimes, sometimes demanding several peoples lives, committed by the secret and less secret social associations and paramilitary formations of the period. The Double-Cross Blood Union was associated with them in public discourse, in the press and in parliamentary debates.

For Count Bethlen Istváns Government who were striving for consolidation in domestic and foreign policy as well, the bomb raid of

250 Dezső Nemes, *Az ellenforradalom története Magyaror-szágon 1919–1921*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967, 155–160.

251 Zinner, op. cit. 173.

Csongrád on 24 December 1923 which caused a great outcry and claimed the lives of three persons was one of the last drops in the glass. Bethlen promised at the Parliament on 3 January 1924 that he would personally interrogate paramilitary commander First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas about the Csongrád bomb outrage among other things, and if his responsibility was to be found, he would be treated in the same way as anyone else [252]. Héjjas was also interrogated by the police in connection with the Csongrád bomb explosion and the conspiracies of nationalist secret societies and paramilitary groups in general, in the presence of the National Police Commissioner Imre Nádosy himself, but in the end it was not proven that he was personally involved in any criminal activity [253]. Of course, this was certainly nothing more than a bargain between the paramilitary commander and the government and possibly Regent Governor Miklós Horthy himself.[254] Besides Horthy, Gyula Gömbös, who later became Prime Minister, must have played a major role in the fact that Héjjas was never brought to trial during the Horthy Era, and was never seriously prosecuted for the acts committed by him and others under his command, even though his crimes were obvious to many people [255]. The example of Iván Héjjas described earlier tells us a great deal about the relationship between radical irredentist-nationalist associations, secret societies and the paramilitary units with countless links to them and the Hungarian government. Not only did the former paramilitary commander not have to answer for his actions before the judiciary system, but he later received Vitézs title, [256] a kind of specifically Hungarian knighthood, earned a doctorate in law for his book on aviation law, became a member of parliament and was later a well-paid and respected official of the Hungarian state. He owed his political rise to Gömbös who became Prime Minister of Hungary a few years later, in 1932.

Of all the paramilitary commanders with a common past and common crimes, and once with formidable power, it was Lieuenant Colonel Pál Prónay who was the most unable to achieve any kind of consolidation. Because of his failure to show sufficient loyalty to the Regent Governor on the occasion of King Charles IVs second attempt of return, and because the brutal activities of his detachment, his arbitrary assassinations and

---

252 Nemzetgyűlési Napló, 1922–1926/XVIII, 337–338. Lajos Serfőző, *A titkos társaságok és a konszolidáció 1922–1926-ban*, 36.

253 Serfőző, op. cit. 36.

254 Bodó, op. cit.

255 Bodó, op. cit.

256 Ibid.

adventurer-like political actions he became increasingly burdensome for the Bethlen government, [257] and he was eventually force to retire, become sidelined, and was also expelled from the Union of Etelköz, the pro-government political secret society of the Era [258].

In accordance with the spirit of the consolidation, the paramilitary formations and national defence militias still operating in various areas of the country, such as the Héjjas Brigade of the Great Hungarian Plain and other armed units of the Association of Awakening Hungarians were then essentially disarmed and regularised, and their law enforcement and military powers which could be traced back to the turbulent civil war of 1919 were definitely and unequivocally abolished. At the same time, a new paramilitary organisation, the Office of National Labour Protection was set up under the control of the Ministry of the Interior and the State Police, primarily to break strikes and regulate left-wing workers' movements and riots. It was a kind of white, strognly right-wing workers milita whose members were equipped with handguns and had the same powers of action and use of weapons when on duty as as those of the police, buit it was rather an auxiliary police rather than a military force [259]. The Brigade of the Plain, the State Security Agents and the national defence militias of the Awakening Hungarias were also integrated into this organisation, so they were under much tighter government control, but could essentially continue to operate [260].

The Double Cross Blood Union also continued its activities within the framework of the National Labour Protection, but it is interesting to note that General Kálmán Shvoy wrote in his diary that the DCBU was founded under this name in 1923, as a kind of successor organisation to the Brigade of the Great Plain led by Iván Héjjas, and that it allegedly continued its activities under the codename *Főtartalék – Main Reserve* [261] as a secret special operations military unit, formally within the Ministry of the Interior

---

257 Péter Konok, *Az erőszak kérdései 1919–1920-ban*, 84.

258 Prónay, op. cit 322–324.

259 HU-MNL-OL-K 26-XXII-6010; 5.818. M. E. számú rendelet a nemzeti munkavédelmi intézmény fegyverhasználati jogáról, 1923. augusztus 2., Magyarországi Rendeletek Tára, 1923, 274.

260 Dósa, op. cit. 151–152.

261 *Csak szolgálati használatra!. Iratok a Horthy-hadsereg történetéhez, 1919–1938*, ed. Tibor Hetés–Tamásné Morva, Budapest, Zrínyi Katonai Könyv- és Lapkiadó, 1968, 499–500.

and the National Labour Protection, but in reality subordinated to the Ministry of Defence. Shvoy thus dates the genesis of the organisation itself to this period, to the end of 1923. There is also an archival source about the integration of the DCBU into the Office of National Labour Protection: a confidential circular from the Ministry of the Interior from 1926 which forbids the members of the National Labour Protection to refer to the new strike-breaking auxiliary police force as the Double Cross Blood Union even among themselves, as it is associated with rather bad public memories [262]. The National Labour Protection was a strike-breaking auxiliary police force, but de facto it also operated as a covert military reserve force at the same time. Although it obviously had no significant combat value, its tens of thousands of members who were otherwise civilians in their daily occupations, but who owned firearms and were trained and couble be mobilised to a certain extent, made a significant contribution to circumvention of the serious military restrictions imposed by the Trianon Peace Treaty. In this way, it also helped to pacify the former (in some cases irregular) soldiers of the National Army which had once numbered over 100.000 and was reduced to a maximum of 35.000 after 1921. In this strange, voluntary auxiliary police and reserve military status many people still felt being useful and in the service of the state. That is, the Hungarian radical right-wing militia movement which was loosely controlled by the Double Cross Blood Union continued to exist partly within the framework of this organisation, in a, so to say, domesticated form [263].

The testimony of General Count Károly Csáky, Minister of Defence in the bombing trial of József Márffy and his associates, one of the most important archival documents in the history of the Double Cross Blood Union already cited earlier also testifies that the DCBU was really established after the fall of the Soviet Republic of Hungary in the end of 1919, with the aim of bringing paramilitary organisations operating in the capital and the countryside under unified (state and military) control in order to restore the order, on the initiative of General Béla Berzeviczy, Chief of the General Staff of the National Army. It was then dissolved around 1923 in the form in which it had previously operated, and by dissolution Minister Csáky presumably means the integration of the DCBU into the National Labour Protection which officially took place towards the end of 1922, but in practice perhaps somewhat later, in several steps [264].

262 HU-MNL-OL-K 149-1926-6-3473.
263 Dósa, op. cit. 134.
264 HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923.

The Government Decree No. 7502 of 19 October 1923 definitely prohibited the participation of state employees, including members of the armed forces and law enforcement agencies to be members in associations whose activities were against or incompatible with the lawful order of the state or which did not have a constitution approved by the Minister of the Interior. That is, it was essentially the membership in secret societies that become prohibited for state employees [265]. In reality, of course, it was still not easy for the state to check – if it really wanted to check in the case of right-wing, pro-governnment organisations – who was a member of what kind of association or with whom, how and for what purposes cooperated, especially if the given secret organisation produced no written documents for conspiratorial reasons.

In this way, although the Double Cross Blood Union officially ceased to exist in 1923, its members, in some form, were still partly in the service of the state, and they could continue their activities to achieve the goals which they thought to be patriotic...

[265] Budapesti Közlöny, 24 October 1923.

Chapter - 18

The Dream of the White Internationale, that is, Secret Hungarian–Bavarian–Austrian Negotiation and Attempts of Military Cooperation in Order to Revise the Peace Treaties of Paris, 1919–1922

After the end of World War One and the signing of the Peace Treaty of Versailles that formally ended the war as well, some politicians of the defeated states, mainly those in Germany and in the successor states of the disintegrated Austro–Hungarian monarchy were very unsatisfied with the defeat and the considerable territorial losses, and sought the possibility of revision, including the help of possible allies. From 1919 onwards, Hungary's new right-wing political leadership continued to actively seek contacts with German-speaking, mainly Bavarian and Austrian radical right-wing political forces and their associated paramilitary formations. On the Bavarian side, General Erich Ludendorff, Colonel Max Bauer and the then young and emerging far-right politician Adolf Hitler attempted to set up an international revisionist organisation at the end of 1919. The German radical right-wing politicians would have seen the possibility of changing the political situation mainly in the coalition of the Free Corpses, which were very numerous in both Germany and Austria and mainly consisted of First World War veterans. The plan envisaged by General Ludendorff would have consisted of an agreement between the Bavarian-German Free Corpses, the Austrian extreme right militias and the leaders of the right-wing counter-revolutionary Government and participants of the paramilitary wave of violence called White Terror [266] in Hungary, with the aim of a violent takeover of political power in both Germany and Austria as soon as possible. In the case of Hungary, it was already foreseeable that political power would permanently be in the hands of the right-wing politicians of the counter-revolutionary Government of Szeged and the commander-in-chief of National Army, Admiral Miklós Horthy who were strongly supported by the Entente powers. Otherwise Admiral Horthy was soon elected as head of state of Hungary under the title Regent Governor in 1920,

[266] Béla Bodó, *The White Terror. Antisemitic and Political Violence in Hungary, 1919–1921*, London, Routledge, 2019.

[267] since formally the country preserved its form of government as kingdom, although practically it was much more similar to the Republic of Weimar of Germany.

In the winter of 1919, General Ludendorff and Colonel Bauer sent Ignác Trebitsch, the Hungarian-born international spy and adventurer to Hungary with the mission to persuade Hungarian right-wing circles to support the so-called Kapp–Lüttwitz Putsch in Germany, a coup d'état formally led by Prussian civil servant and nationalist politician Wolfgang Kapp, but in reality mainly organised by General Ludendorff and his followers.[268] The contact with the Bavarian and Austrian radical right-wing organisations was sought primarily by a group of strongly nationalist military officers linked to the Double Cross Blood Union, the very influential Hungarian secret military organisation. Trebitsch and Colonel Bauer, for example, negotiated with Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay, one of the most notorious paramilitary commanders of the Hungarian right-wing counter-revolution during their first visit to Hungary.[269] Prónay also belonged to the circles of radical right-wing officers who commanded the Double Cross Blood Union, and at the time the secret military organisation and its commanders had some influence even on Hungarian foreign policy for a while, although moderate conservative politicians tried to prevent them from leading Hungary into hazardous political actions.[270]

The radical right-wing forces finally attempted to take power in Germany in March 1920, but the Kapp–Lüttwitz Putsch, due to the hesitation of the Army, which did not support the coup, but did not defend the legitimate German Federal Government either, initially led to the Government's escape from Berlin, but within a few days it was overthrown by the general strike that followed the coup and the resistance of the

---

[267] Dávid Turbucz, *Horthy Miklós*, Budapest, Napvilág Kiadó, 2011, 66–92.

[268] About the Kapp–Lüttwitz Putsch see in more details: *Der Kapp-Lüttwitz–Ludendorff Putsch. Dokumente, ed. Erwin Könneman–Gerhard Schulze, Berlin, Olzog, 2002.*

[269] Bernard Wasserstein, *Az igazi Trebitsch. Az átváltozóművész*, trans. György Molnár, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2016, 217–238.

[270] About the activities of the radical right-wing Hungarian secret military organisation the Double Cross Blood Union see: Balázs Kántás, *The Double Cross Blood Union. Outline of the History of a Secret Military Organisation of Hungary in the 1920*s, Anglisticum, 2021/6, 52–70. https://www.anglisticum.org.mk/index.php/IJLLIS/article/view/2218

bankers and the industrialists. In May 1920 Ignác Trebitsch together with Colonel Bauer and Captain von Stefany travelled to Budapest once again to deliver Ludendorff's letter, and they personally visited Admiral Miklós Horthy who had by then been elected Regent Governor of Hungary by the Parliament. The German radical right-wing politicians and the newly elected Hungarian head of state discussed the possibility of a possible German–Austrian–Hungarian right-wing alliance, mainly of military nature. It should be added that the parties did indeed negotiate with the serious desire to cooperate, and General Ludendorff considered it entirely feasible at that time, and he called the initiative of the cooperation between the right-wing forces of Central Europe the *White Internationale*. In his cordial letter, Ludendorff called Hungary the saviour of the nationalist idea and asked for financial support for Bavarian revolutionary organisations as well.[271]

The Germans offered Hungary a very detailed cooperation plan consisting of the following main points:

1. Secret irregular military units would travel from Germany to Hungary.
2. These men would be trained in secret camps in Hungary.
3. The Hungarian Government will raise the necessary funds for training by printing and distributing counterfeit Russian rubels.
4. Bavarian military units trained in Hungary secretly infiltrate Vienna and overthrow the Austrian social democratic Government in due course.
5. 5 After the capture of Vienna, the Bavarian-Hungarian-Austrian coalition troops attack Czechoslovakia.
6. The above-mentioned troops then occupy Prussia where Ludendorff establishes a military dictatorship.
7. Thus strengthened, the governments and armies of the White Internationale unleash a white revolution in Soviet Russia and overthrow the communist government.
8. After the successful right-wing restoration of Russia, the member states of the White Internationale declare war on the Entente, and

[271] *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai*, ed. Miklós Szinai Miklós–László Szűcs, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1962, 33–38; Ildikó Szerényi–Zoltán Viszket, *Buzgó Mócsing, az igazi Trebitsch*, Archívnet, 2006/3. http://www.archivnet.hu/kuriozumok/buzgo_mocsing_az_igazi_trebitsch.html

the winners redraw the map of Europe, returning the territories of Hungary annexed by the Treaty of Trianon [272].

It is also worth mentioning here that the Ludendorff and his companions had particularly high hopes for the participation of the monarchist Russian forces fighting against the Bolshevik Government in the White Internationale, since the outcome of the Russian civil war was not yet a decided in 1919, and hundreds of thousands of tsarists, or at least Russian citizens who were not sympathetic to the Bolshevik Government had left their country since the outbreak of the communist revolution. The largest group of the so-called White Russian emigrants had settled in Germany, and there were still many Russian prisoners of war who refused to return to Soviet Russia, and several tsarist Russian generals considered it possible to overthrow the Bolshevik regime with the help of the above mentioned soldiers [273] Ludendorff also contacted, through Ignác Trebitsch and Colonel Bauer, tsarist General Vassily Biskupsky who himself had visited to Budapest in June 1920 and took part in negotiations between the German, Austrian and Hungarian right-wing political forces [274].

The negotiations also resulted in memoranda of detailed plans, but actual cooperation with the White Russian forces fighting against the Bolshevik Army, which were otherwise very fragmented and poorly organised, could not really take place on the part of the planned participants in the *White Internationale* from Central Europe, mainly due to the great geographical distances [275]

The negotiations between the European nationalist forces, mainly based in Budapest, could not have been conducted under complete secrecy, of course, as the French and British intelligence services were also informed about them, and the Entente powers expressed their strong objections, which warned the Hungarian Government to be cautious in the field of

---

272 László Gulyás, *A Horthy-korszak külpolitikája 1. Az első évek, 1919–1924*, Máriabesenyő, Attraktor Kiadó, 2012, 42–43.

273 About the Russian aspects of the White Internationale see: Attila Kolontáry, *Alekszej von Lampe, Vrangel báró katonai képviselője Magyarországon*, Pécs, PTE BTK Történettudományi Intézet–Modernkori Oroszország és Szovjetunió Történeti Kutatócsoport, MOSZT-füzetek 1., 2015

274 Wasserstein, op. cit. 254–255.

275 Wasserstein, op. cit. 255.

diplomacy and foreign policy.[276] In parallel with Bavarian nationalist forces, the Hungarian Government also sought contact with Austrian radical right-wing political forces and paramilitary organisations in the 1920s, in the hope of establishing the same Central European white coalition. The Hungarian Government and military leadership, in close cooperation with them Hungarian nationalist social organisations, played a contradictory game, as their plans included assistance to overthrow Austria's elected left-wing government and to bring local right-wing and radical right-wing political forces to power, including even through Hungarian military intervention.[277] Hungarian radical right-wing military officers also drew up a plan for a military operation under the codename *'Remény' – 'Hope'*, which was certainly never realised [278] The Austrian right-wing paramilitary organisations were also in close contact with the Bavarian nationalist circles led by General Ludendorff, so the secret negotiations were not only conducted between the Hungarian and the Austrian side, but also involved the competent Bavarian politicians. The Hungarian General Staff, due to the weakness of the Austrian paramilitary organisations and the military preparations of Czechoslovakia, considered a possible intervention against Austria to be feasible only with the support of Bavarian irregular military units.[279] The Bavarian–Hungarian–Austrian secret negotiations, which were intensively conducted during 1920, were personally led by Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Count Pál Teleki and by Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy, commander of the secret military organisation Double Cross Blood Union and close friend to Regent Governor Horthy on the Hungarian side; on the Bavarian side, Rudolf Kanzler, leader of the right-wing militia ORKA (Organisation Kanzler),[280]and Georg Heim, a politician of the Bavarian Peasant Party; and on the Austrian side, mainly members of the radical right wing of the Christian Socialist Party, for example, by Prince Johannes von Liechtenstein. On 25 and 26 August 1920, the parties met at Hungarian

[276] Elek Karsai, *Számjeltávirat valamennyi magyar királyi követségnek*, Budapest, Táncsics Kiadó, 1969, 63–64.

[277] Katalin G. Soós, *Burgenland az európai politikában 1918–1921*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1971, 90.

[278] Archives of Hungarian Military History, HU-HL-VKF-1920-II-21197.

[279] G. Soós, op. cit. 90–91.

[280] As for the history of ORKA and other radical right-wing German paramilitary organisations see: John T. Lauridsen, *Nazism and the Radical Right in Austria, 1918–1934*, Copenhagen, The Royal Library–Museum Tusculanum Press, 2007.

Prime Minister Teleki's house in Budapest.[281] It should be stressed that while in the case of Bavarian and Austrian politicians the negotiators were mainly members of political movements aspiring for power, in the Case of Hungary, the representatives of the Government and the Army took part in the negotiations, although there were certainly tensions between the moderate conservative and the radical nationalist wings of the governing United Party and the political and military elite. However, in this period the Hungarian head of state Admiral Horthy, who was himself a high-ranking military officer and hero of the Great War very similar to General Ludendorff, strongly supported the adventurous plans of radical officers and politicians [282]

By August 1920, the Hungarian Government had abandoned their plans of the military intervention against Austria due to the international situation, but they continued to do its best to ensure that a right-wing government would come to power in the forthcoming Austrian parliamentary elections, so they tried to intervene in the internal affairs of the new Austrian State by conspiratorial means. At the same time, the Hungarian military intervention was no longer approved by the Bavarian paramilitary leader Rudolf Kanzler either. Furthermore, there were significant conflicts of interest between the Bavarian, Hungarian and Austrian sides, for example, they could not agree on the issue of the king and the future territorial status of Western Hungary, which was an important element of Hungarian–Austrian relations. In the end, the Hungarian Government only signed an agreement with the radical right-wing political forces in Bavaria on the supply of a substantial amount of arms, to which the Bavarian Provincial Prime Minister Gustav von Kahr who was also strongly right-wing and on good terms with Ludendorff, subsequently agreed [283]

In parallel, there were also lively negotiations between the Austrian and Bavarian right-wing forces in progress the main aim of which was the unification of the Austrian right-wing paramilitary organisations under German command and the unification of the German-speaking states with their cooperation. However, there were significant conflicts of interest and differences of opinion between the German-speaking parties as well. On 6 and 7 September 1920, further negotiations took place in Vienna between Bavarian and Austrian radical right-wing organisations, presumably with

281 G. Soós, op. cit. 91.

282 Turbucz, op. cit. 66–92.

283 G. Soós, op. cit. 92.

the participation of the Hungarian Ambassador in Vienna, Gusztáv Gratz where the parties agreed to mutually support each other's anti-communist aims, but at the same time Austrian Christian Socialist politicians abandoned at the last moment their plans to overthrow the Austrian Government by force. The leaders of the Austrian Heimwehr militias[284] said that they could not provide the armed forces that would have been necessary to overthrow the social democrat Government by military means, but that they would do everything in their power to ensure that a right-wing government of their own design would come to power in Austria in the forthcoming elections.

The Hungarian Government primarily provided financial support to the Austrian *Heimwehr* organisations, in the hope that it would be able to use them for its future foreign policy goals [285] At the same time, in Bavaria, General Ludendorff and his very radical circle were no longer willing to hear the much more sensible scenario agreed on at the earlier September talks. They committed themselves to military action in any case, by the rapid establishment of a military alliance called the *League of the Oppressed Peoples*, to be set up by the countries that had lost the First World War. Furthermore, Ludendorff once again requested financial support from the Hungarian Government, not for the first time and not for the last.[286] By this time, however, Teleki was explicitly opposed to the Hungarian financial support for the Bavarian radical right, and the Hungarian Government saw the participation in the *League of Oppressed Peoples* and thus a possible new military conflict as increasingly risky [287].

The Hungarian Government was, by this time, of course, cautious, and realistic political considerations finally seemed to prevail over the despair coming from the huge territorial losses and the resulting radicalism, but they did not explicitly reject the possibility of joining the *League of Oppressed Peoples*, which was rather only a conceptual cooperation, and in their reply to Ludendorff and his circle they wrote that they would continue to maintain good relations with the Bavarian nationalist organisations. Teleki also indicated that Austria, which geographically separated Hungary

[284] As for the history of the Austrian paramilitary Heimwehr movement see: Lajos Kerekes, *Olaszország, Magyarország és az osztrák Heimwehr-mozgalom*, Történelmi Szemle, 1961/2, 199–216

[285] G. Soós, op. cit. 93.

[286] HU-HL VKF-1920-II-23152.; G. Soós, op. cit. 94.

[287] G. Soós, op. cit. 95.

and Germany, should in any case be put at the service of their own political and military aims, but not by an immediate military intervention.[288]

The relations between the Austrian counter-revolutionary groups and the Hungarian Government were spoiled by the fact that the two largest successor states of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy failed to reach an agreement on the question of the belonging of Western Hungary, and the issue was to be decided by the victorious Entente powers, primarily by France.[289] The question remained unresolved for some time, but it worsened the relations with both the official Austrian Government circles and the Austrian radical right-wing movements which was fuelled by aspirations for power, and the parties tried to obtain a decision from the great powers that was as favourable as possible for them.

In October 1920, the Social Democrat Karl Renner was replaced by the Christian Socialist Michael Mayr as Chancellor (Prime Minister) of Austria, but the Hungarian Government, or at least the radical right-wing Hungarian military circles close to the Government were still secretly considering the possibility of military intervention against Austria again. In November, the Hungarians again contacted Ludendorff through their military attaché in Munich, Colonel Béla Janky, and in January 1921, on the orders of Minister of Defence General Sándor Belitska. The Hungarian General Staff, which was at the time operating under secrecy due to the strict limitations of armament of the Peace Treaties of Paris over the defeated countries, drew up a plan for military intervention against Austria in the event of a communist takeover in the neighbouring country and the coming to power of a radical left-wing government [290]. After the plan had been worked out, Count Gedeon Ráday travelled to Munich on behalf of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss the details of the possible action with Bavarian Provincial Prime Minister Gustav von Kahr and paramilitary commander Rudolf Kanzler. On 16 January 1921, at a secret meeting held in the presence of Regent Governor Horthy, the Hungarian Government decided that any military action against Austria could only take place with

---

288 Central Archives of the National Archives of Hungary, HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1922-20-1920/384.

289 Katalin G. Soós, *Magyar–bajor–osztrák titkos tárgyalások és együttműködés, 1920–1921*, Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József Nominatae. Acta Historica, 1967/Tomus XXVII., 3–43, 23.

290 HU-HL VKF-1921-1-266. Cited by G. Soós, op. cit. 25.

German (Bavarian) participation [291]. The Hungarian Government's decision also implied that if the Bavarian political forces saw the need for military intervention in Austria of their own accord and carried it out, Hungary would support them, providing them primarily with material support, equipment and munitions, and Hungarian irregular military units would also volunteer to help the Bavarian forces. These Hungarian units would have been provided by the secret irregular, reserve-force like military organisation, the Double Cross Blood Union under the command of Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy, [292] which, as it was already mentioned above, played a very important role in the clandestine revisionist negotiations, and in fact, from the Hungarian side, it was precisely the radical right-wing military officers of the Blood Union who were the main promoters of such a military cooperation.

The plan for military cooperation against communism in Central Europe was not looked upon too favourably by the Entente powers, especially France and Britain, mainly because the Austrian and Bavarian positions also strongly implied the intention of unifying Austria and Germany, the so-called Anschluss. At the end of January 1921, Gusztáv Gratz, the former Hungarian ambassador in Vienna, and by then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, had a great deal of diplomatic information and tried to dissuade the Hungarian Government from even the idea of participating in any reckless military action. He indicated that Britain and France would regard the Hungarian–German–Austrian anti-Bolshevik league as a pretext for the territorial revision of the peace treaties of Paris, and that in his opinion there was a real danger that in the event of any Hungarian military action against Austria, the neighbouring Little Entente states, Czechoslovakia, Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes would also intervene against Hungary [293].

Bavarian Provincial Prime Minister Kahr was increasingly losing ground against France in the international diplomatic arena, and the Bavarian side gradually passed the right to negotiate to Rudolf Kanzler. In February 1921, Count Gedeon Ráday and the Bavarian paramilitary commander also signed a cooperation agreement between the Hungarian Government and the Bavarian ORKA militia, but this was mostly a symbolic declaration. The parties agreed that if the opportunity arose, the

291 Ibid.

292 HU-HL VKF-1921-1-266.

293 HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1921-41-34.

ORKA would attempt to ‘restore order’ in Austria, with the Hungarian Government providing financial assistance, and that if the ORKA were successful, the Trianon Peace Treaty would be declared invalid. However, Kanzler asked the Hungarian Government for too much money, a sum of 4,5 million German marks, to organise the very risky operation, which the Hungarian side refused to provide, and for this reason no actual agreement was reached between the parties [294].

All in all, the idea of military intervention against Austria was unrealistic in the given political situation, and the parties finally realised this in the first half of 1921. Although Austria’s new Chancellor was a right-wing Christian Socialist politician, he belonged to the more moderate wing of the party, and the Hungarian Government was moving closer to the radical wing of the Austrian Christian Socialists. Very close links existed between the Austrian Heimwehr militias and the radical wing of the governing Christian Socialist Party, and the possibility of overthrowing the moderate Mayr Government was soon raised. Instead of a Hungarian or Bavarian military intervention, however, the new negotiations were dominated by the idea that the Austrian right-wing paramilitary organisations should themselves force a change of government in Austria, and the Austrian side was represented by General Josef Metzger and the later Chancellor Ignaz Seipel on behalf of the Heimwehr organisations of Vienna and Lower Austria. The Austrians expected the Hungarian Government to provide financial support for the major arming of the Heimwehr militias, and the Hungarian Government demanded in return that if the Austrian radical right-wing forces succeeded in bringing to power a government of their own design in Vienna, Austria should temporarily give up the territory of Western Hungary, and negotiations should continue until the new Austrian Government was able to settle the question of Western Hungary in a way that was favourable to the Hungarian side. Although the leadership of the Austrian Heimwehr organisations and the group led by Seipel were by no means free from the idea of royalism, the attempted return of King Charles IV of Habsburg to Hungary at the end of March 1921 also made the idea of a Habsburg restoration in Austria completely unrealistic. On 31 March 1921, the Hungarian Ambassador in Vienna, Szilárd Masirevich reported to Minister of Foreign Affairs Gusztáv Gratz that he had personally negotiated with Seipel who was deeply shocked by Charles IV’s decisive removal from Hungary. Certainly, the Entente powers did not allow any attempts of restoration of the House of Habsburg in any

[294] HU-MNL-OL-K 64-41-72.

successor states of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy, therefore, the Hungarian Government had decisively denied Charles IV to return to the throne of Hungary. Among other things, this was the moment that made Seipel realise the extent of the political and military influence of the Entente powers in the region, and that an armed change of government in Austria with the help of the *Heimwehr* militias was as unrealistic as the Habsburg restoration itself [295]. In Austria, the attempted return of Charles IV to Hungary was followed by vivid political debates, and Federal Chancellor Mayr expressed in Parliament his firm belief that he considered the republican form of government laid down in the Treaty of Saint Germain to be obligatory on Austria, and that he would defend it by all means against any legitimist-monarchist plotting [296]. Although Seipel came to power shortly afterwards, he himself was forced to adapt to the interests of international politics and to consolidate. Furthermore, the attempted return of Charles IV caused a domestic political crisis in Hungary as well, with the resignation of Gustáv Gratz, the Minister of Foreign Affairs who was a well-known legitimist on 4 April 1921, followed by the resignation of Prime Minister Count Pál Teleki on 8 April. Teleki was succeeded as Prime Minister by Count István Bethlen, and Gratz was replaced by Count Miklós Bánffy. Although the period of Bethlen's policy of consolidation had begun, the secret negotiations between Hungary, Bavaria and Austria on the establishment of a possible anti-communist and revisionist alliance still continued for some time. While the parties continued to agree on the main points of the earlier negotiations, relations between Austria and Hungary became even more negative, partly because of the attempted legitimist coup in Hungary. Alongside the Bavarian Kanzler, the Austrian radical right was represented at this stage of the negotiations mainly by politicians from Styria, such as the Styrian Provincial Prime Minister Anton Rintelen who later became Austria's Federal Minister of Education. During these negotiations, the leadership of the Bavarian ORKA organisation argued for the general invalidity of the Paris Peace Treaties and urged the Austrian and Hungarian sides to settle the dispute over the territorial integrity of Western Hungary within the framework of a friendly agreement [297]. However, given that Austria was then only represented in the negotiations by politicians with local influence, their position on the issue was of no importance as for international politics. Both the Austrian and German radical right-wing organisations asked for additional financial support from the Hungarian

295 G. Soós, op. cit. 35.

296 G. Soós, op. cit. 36.

297 HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1922-20-1921/198.

Government, and there was rivalry beginning between them. From May 1921 onwards, representatives of the Hungarian side – with the Government's knowledge and authorisation – were present at the negotiations, and Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy asked the ORKA militia to try to involve not only the Styrian radical right forces but all similar organisations in Austria, especially influential Viennese politicians, in the cooperation.[298] During the negotiations, the question was raised whether Austria would be prepared to make concessions to Hungary on the issue of Western Hungary if the ORKA succeeded in bringing a radical right-wing government to power in Austria, to which Styrian Prime Minister Rintelen could not give a definite answer. General Josef Metzger attempted to reconcile the differences between the parties, but he failed. In May 1921, Ervin Morlin, the official of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the Hungarian Government that even Anton Rintelen himself did not seriously believe that he could replace the Mayr Government with the men of the ORKA [299]. The activities of the Bavarian and Austrian radical right-wing organisations became more and more limited to obtaining more and more financial support from the Hungarian Government, but they did less and less political activity in their own countries that was of any use to the Hungarian Government. At the end of May 1921, Hungarian military diplomat Colonel Boldizsár Láng informed the Hungarian Government about the fragmentation and poor equipment of the Austrian Heimwehr organisations [300]. At the same time, Bavaria was experiencing a huge economic and social crisis, and the local government could less and less afford to pursue a foreign policy that differed from that of the German Federal Government, while there was also a disunity between the various radical right-wing paramilitary organisations, and their political activities were increasingly confined to the provincial borders of Bavaria. The rise to power of the Bavarian and Austrian radical right then and there was becoming more and more the simple daydream of a few politicians who unable to accept the changes that had taken place after the end of the First World War rather than a real political possibility.

Hungary was not able to reach a compromise with the Austrian side either through the secret negotiations with the radical right which was trying to rise to power or through formal diplomatic negotiations with the legitimate Government of Austria. The dispute over the status of the region

[298] HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1922-20-1921/199.

[299] HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1921-41-221.

[300] HU-MNL-OL-K 64-1922-20-1921/244.

of Western Hungary which had been debated since the disintegration of the Monarchy in 1918 was not solved. Although the peace treaties of Paris eventually awarded the territory to Austria, the Hungarian Government refused to evacuate and hand over the area called Burgenland by the Austrians as long as possible. Since peaceful negotiations reached no results, by the summer of 1921, irregular military units were already being organised, with the strong but silent support of Prime Minister Bethlen himself to break in the region shortly afterwards. [301] In the autumn of 1921, the so-called Uprising of Western Hungary [302] finally broke out, and Hungarian irregular military units, with the silent consent of the Government, marched in Western Hungary and prevented Austrian troops to occupy the region. This action finally deteriorated the otherwise tense relationship between Austria and Hungary to an unresolvable degree, both between official government circles and secretly negotiating radical right-wing movements. Apart from the international political situation itself, it was a further reason why the Hungarian–Bavarian–Austrian secret negotiations gradually became symbolic, and the political situation of Central Europe was completely determined by the Entente powers, mainly England and France by 1922.

[301] G. Soós, op. cit. 42.

[302] About the Uprising of Western Hungary see: József Botlik, *Nyugat-Magyarország sorsa, 1918–1921*, Vasszilvágy, Magyar Nyugat Könyvkiadó, 2012; Imre Tóth, *Két Anschluss között. Nyugat-Magyarország és Burgenland Wilsontól Hitlerig*, Budapest, Kronosz Kiadó, 2020.

Chapter - 19

The Hungarian beer Hall Putsch, a Strange Story of Hungarian Political and Diplomatic history, 1923

Although the domestic policy of Hungary was fully determined by British and French interests after the signing of the Peace Treaty of Trianon, secret negotiations with radical right-wing German and Austrian organisations, which went back to 1919, continued for a time in 1921 and 1922 with less intensity than before.The Bethlen Government continued to maintain moderate contacts with German radical right-wing politicians, including former Bavarian Premier and later Commissioner General Gustav von Kahr, General Erich Ludendorff and Adolf Hitler, who was then an emerging and very ambitious young far-right politician in Munich, the centre of the German radical right-wing movements. In the spring of 1922, Prime Minister Bethlen sent Miklós Kozma, then the director of the Hungarian Telegraph Office to Munich to negotiate and gather information and to revive Bavarian-Hungarian political relations, which had been declining since the end of 1921 [303]. Kozma also personally negotiated with General Ludendorff, a leader of the German radical right about a possible Bavarian-Hungarian cooperation initiative, in which the Hungarian Government circles would have bought weapons from Germany, for example. The German general complained to him that his political influence had recently declined considerably within the Weimar Republic, and even within Bavaria, the centre of the radical right, and that there was such a great disunity among Bavarian right-wing politicians that they essentially did not agree with each other on anything [304]. Bethlen, informed by Miklós Kozma and Gyula Gömbös, chairman of the *Hungarian Defence Force Association* (MOVE) and a prominent politician of the Hungarian radical right (who was then still a member of the governing party), concluded that the Hungarian Government could not hope for any useful cooperation with the Bavarians, and negotiations on such cooperation were temporarily

303 Mária Ormos, *Egy magyar médiavezér. Kozma Miklós*, 110–113.

304 Ormos, op. cit.112.

suspended.[305] Behind the negotiations, of course, the name of the secret military organisation, the Double Cross Blood Union was involved, since among others, Colonel Tihamér Siménfalvy, the head of the organisation was one of the influential figures on the Hungarian Government side who had previously encouraged the maintaiance of lively relations with the Bavarian and Austrian far-right movements [306].

As we have mentioned, from 1922 onwards, Bethlen's consolidation policy led to a decline in attempts of cooperation between the Hungarian Government and the German-Austrian far-right organisations. At the same time, the nationalist-irredentist organisations, which were increasingly opposed to the Hungarian government, though sometimes united with it in common interests, especially the then still influential Association of Awakening Hungarians which had considerable political influence and a large number of members, and the radical circles of military officers that were also part of its leadership, continued to actively seek international cooperation with organisations on a similar ideological platform. In 1921 the Awakening Hungarians represented the Hungarian radical right in the international anti-Semitic congress in Vienna where the possibility of forming an International Anti-Semitic League was raised. [307]

The first years of consolidation continued to be characterised by a social and economic situation that was very favourable of political extremism. Several political groupings also played on the idea of attempted coups and violent takeovers. The failed revisionist right-wing alliance, the White Internationale dreamed up by Ludendorff was the predecessor of such an adventurous and essentially frivolous coup plan, which nevertheless attracted great political and press attention, and was put forward by Dr. Béla Szemere, a hospital director, the used-to-be commander of the auxiliary police militia known as the *National Organisation of State Security Agents* (*Állambiztonsági Megbízottak Szervezete*, shortended as *ÁBM*) (by then under the control of the National Labour Protection, a right-wing workerss militia under the supervision of the State Police), Hungarian-born American architect Titusz Bobula, and Dr. Ferenc Ulain, a lawyer and race-defending member of the National Assembly who had left the governing United Party and was the confidant of Gyula Gömbös, the leading politician of the Hungarian far-right movements. Given that the three men planned to

[305] Ormos, op. cit. 113.
[306] Nándori, *A Marseilles-i gyilkosság nemzetközi jogi vonatkozásai*, 24–25.
[307] Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege*, 111.

overthrow the Bethlen Government, which they believed to be excessively liberal, pro-Entente and pro-Jewish, by force with the armed support of the German National Socialist movement led by Hitler and General Ludendorff, carrying out their plans at roughly the same time as the Beer Hall Putcsh, making their action dependent on its success, their coup plan is perhaps most aptly should named the plan of the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch. Ironicaly, the headquarters of the Association of Awakening Hungarians was located in Sörház Street – the name of which in English roughly means Beer Hall Street.

The preparations for the strange coup plan must have begun sometime in early August 1923, when a young German man named Friedrich Fritz Döhmel appeared in Budapest, claiming to be a representative of the Hitler-Ludendorff-led Bavarian National Socialist movement and the closely allied paramilitary organisation Kampfbund, and approached several Hungarian far-right organisations and public figures with various seemingly credible German-language letters of recommendation. One of Döhmel's first trips, whose motives were not entirely clear, was to the headquarters of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, which had previously maintained good relations with the Bavarian nationalists, where he wanted to meet members of the organisations leadership. He got to one of the associations leaders, Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay, but Prónay did not believe the German young mans claims. However, Döhmel did not give up, and he finally reached Titusz Bobula, a wealthy Hungarian-born architect who had returned from the United States of America and who held a confused radical right-wing perspective, and his friend, Dr. Béla Szemere, a medical doctor and hospital director, and his circle. Szemere, as the de facto commander of the above mentioned State Security Agents militia, which continued to operate with some intensity, and Bobula who provided financial support to the Hungarian far-right had been thinking for some time about how to remove the Bethlen Government, but their activities were limited to planning. It is not clear fom the available sources exactly when Döhmel contacted them, but it is likely that he was in contact with members of the radical right-wing association of the Hungarian Cultural League led by Szemere as early as August 1923 [308].

It seems, however, that Döhmel approached Bobula who rented a suite in the Hotel Gellért at the end of October 1923, and Bobula almost immediately he called Szemere to him as well. This may not have been the

[308] HU-BFL-VII-18-d-1923-03/0610. Ferenc Ulain and his associates' trial.

first time that Szemere and Döhmel met, but in any case it was at this time that the Hungarian parties believed that Döhmel was indeed an agent of the Bavarian nationalist organisation, who was visiting Hungary to make concrete arrangements for cooperation with similar Hungarian far-right formations. Negotiations began in German, and Bobula translated what Döhmel said to Szemere who did not speak German. Döhmel asked how many people Szemere as former commander of the State Security Agents could call to arms in the event of a takeover attempt. Szemere replied that although the State Security Agents had not previously been set up for the purpose of conspiring against the state, there would certainly be some people willing to join the cause. There is also contradictory information about whether the majority of the members of the State Security Agents had previously surrendered their anti-riot service weapons, but it is certain that the Szemere were not backed by a serious armed force, and could have fielded at most only a few hundred men with handguns. Soon afterwards, the race-defending MP Dr. Ferenc Ulian was involved into the plotting, since he himself had long been in contact with Bavarian nationalist organisations, including a close acquaintance with Hitler, and he also gave credence to the claims made by Fritz Döhmel. On Döhmel's initiative, the parties also drew up a treaty German on how the Bavarian state (which was to be established as an independent state that would separate from Germany) and the Hungarian state (which would be led by a new, radical right-wing government after the removal of the Bethlen Government) could cooperate in the realisation of their irredentist and anti-Semitic aims. The document was drafted in German by Döhmel himself and dealt with political, military and agricultural issues in eleven articles and three annexes. The essence of the document was that the newly created Bavarian state would recognise the newly created Hungarian state with its borders of 1914, before the beginning of the First World War and the signing of the Trianon Peace Treaty, and that the contracting states would do everything possible to help each other militarily. In particular, they decided to send forces against the Little Entente Czechoslovakia and provide military assistance to each other if either Bavaria or Hungary were attacked by the Czechoslovakians. The treaty was signed on 5 November by Szemere, Bobula and Ulain, and was scheduled to be signed in Munich by Ludendorff and Hitler on the German side. Ferenc Ulain otherwise knew exactly what was being prepared in Bavaria, how and especially when the the Bavarian far-right organisations, independently of Fritz Döhmel, and he envisaged the possible overthrow of the Hungarian Government in close coordination with the Munich beer coups. If Fritz Döhmel may have been an impostor/agent provocateur who may never previously have been in contact

with Bavarian revolutionary organisations in the way he claimed to be a phantasmagorical Hungarian conspirator, Ulain's previous negotiations and information may have told him certain things. It is therefore worth examining the Bavarian Beer Hall Putsch/Hitler-Ludendorff coup at least for a few sentences, so that we can place the activities of the Szemere-Bobula-Ulain group with all its absurdity and frivolity in international context.

As Ulain later confessed before the State Police, he had already held talks with Hitler and Ludendorff in the summer of 1923. Bavaria which had a high degree of autonomy within the Weimar Republic as a federal state was at this time in a very turbulent political situation with a devastated economy and social discontent that favoured extremist political formations. These included the NSDAP that is, the National Socialist German Workers Party, and its close allies, the paramilitary Kampfbund that mainly consisted of veterans. Political power was exercised by the former Bavarian Prime Minister Kahr who at the time was a Commissioner of the German Federal Government with provisory powers and had been given a mandate to solve the political and economic problems, together with Colonel Hans von Seisser, the commander of the Bavarian Police and General Otto von Lossow, the Reichswehrs district commander in Bavaria. The representatives of the executive who exercised special powers to solve the crisis were ideologically not very far from the political extremists and the group led by Hitler and General Ludendorff, but they would have sought to make political capital out of the crisis by excluding the National Socialists [309].

Hitler and Ludendorff feared that although Bavaria had been taken over by nationalist politicians, they would be ignored. That is why in early November 1923 they organised a coup détat and tried to seize power by force. The so-called Beer Hall Putsch began in the Bürgerbräukeller, the Munich beer hall where Gustav von Kahr was addressing a speech to his supporters, and where Hitler and his armed men stormed in on the evening of 8 November and declared the arrest of the politicians in power. To demonstrate the seriousness of the situation, the building was surrounded by some 600 armed SA-militamen under the command of Captain Ersnt Röhm, and Commissioner Kahr, under the threat of armed force, assured Hitler and his men of his support. Hitler, a politician with truly outstanding oratory skills, made an incendiary speech at the same venue, and within moments had persuaded the thousands of people gathered in the beer hall to stand by

309 Mária Ormos, *Hitler*, Budapest, T-Twins Kiadó, 1994, 73–86.

his side. The National Socialist militia then mounted an operation to seize Munichs main government buildings and public facilities, and later that night, Hitler and his men, believing they no longer needed Kahr and his associates, released the Commissioner [310].

The Nazi Partys free troops were rioting on the streets, but the coup attempt had the very serious shortcoming that the police did not stand by and support the Nazis at all. On the following morning, 9 November, Hitler and his gunmen took the Bavarian Provincial Government hostage, and at the suggestion of General Ludendorff a march of 2,000 men set out to occupy the building of the Bavarian Ministry of Defence, but at the Odeonplatz in Munich Hitler and his militiamen were confronted by the armed forces loyal to Gustav von Kahz and the Federal Government, and a gunfight broke out. Sixteen coup fighters and four policemen were fatally wounded in the clash, and Hitler and the coup leaders fled the scene. It was here that it became clear that the coup attempt miserably failed, and Hitler was arrested by the police within a few days [311].

The future German dictator was eventually sentenced to five years in prison for treason, while General Ludendorff, a great and highly respected hero of the First World War, was acquitted of all charges despite his leading role in the Beer Hall Putsch. Partly thanks to his growing popularity, Hitler himself spent only nine months in prison and wrote his memoirs *Mein Kampf – My Struggle*. The attempted coup made Hitler a nationwidely renowned and popular politician in the longer term, and ten years later, in 1933 he was constitutionally elected Chancellor of Germany, but soon became a bloodthirsty dictator [312].

Although the Bavarian beer coup, just like the Hungarian beer coup which had a much less serious background and was essentially devoid of armed forces, miserably failed, both – probably closely related – far-right political actions already pointed out in the first half of the 1920s, what crises and traumas that were at work in the societies of the states that had lost the First World War, and foreshadowed the subsequent, seemingly unstoppable rise of political extremism in the 1930s.

As for the Hungarian putschists, Ferenc Ulain left by train on the eve of the Munich beer coup as planned, but never made it to Munich, so he was unable to meet the Bavarian nationalist politicians who were preparing for

310 Ormos, op. cit. ibid.

311 Ormos, op. cit. ibid.

312 Ormos, op. cit. 196–321.

the beer coup. At Hegyeshalom, on the Austro-Hungarian border, he was stopped by the police, told that the Hungarian authorities were aware of the plot and confiscated the documents addressed to. Ulain was not detained on the grounds of his immunity as a member of the Parliament, but was kindly asked to visit the Budapest police the next day, where he was already arrested. Shortly afterwards, Dr. Béla Szemere and Titusz Bobula were also detained by the detectives.

It became clear to the Hungarian conspirators that the coup plan had not escaped the attention of the police, and archival sources make it clear that the authorities had been monitoring the group's activities for weeks when Ulain travelled to Munich. As already mentioned, Fritz Döhmel appeared in Budapest in August 1923 as a lobbyist for the Bavarian-German National Socialist organisation. The details of his stay in Budapest between August and October are unclear, but it seems certain that he was not the only representative of the Bavarian National Socialists in Budapest at this time. In fact, in the autumn of 1923, the police arrested no fewer than fifty-seven young German men in the Hungarian capital who, as agents of the Hitler-Ludendorff-led organisation had letters of recommendation addressed to the Association of Awakening Hungarians. Several of these German lobbyists were arrested and expelled from Hungary. Szemere, Bobula and Ulain were eventually suspected and charged with forming an alliance to incite rebellion. The case of MP Ferenc Ulain's immunity was discussed also by the Parliaments Committee on Immunity in the last days of November 1923, and a thorough investigation was carried out. The race-defending MPs led by Gyula Gömbös sought to excuse Ulain and his associates and emphasised their opinion that Ulain and his associates were victims of an agent provocateur hired by the police, and they made accusations primarily against the bourgeois liberal representative whose aim, they claimed, was to openly discredit the race-defending politicians. On 24 January 1924, the Royal Criminal Court of Budapest conceived the first-instance verdict in the case, sentencing all three defendants to one month and fourteen days in prison. The defendants were released in December 1923 and their sentences were deemed to have been completed in arrest. They exercised their right of appeal, and they were acquitted by the court of appeal shortly afterwards [313].

Although Béla Szemere, Titusz Bobula and Ferenc Ulain were eventually found innocent by the Hungarian Supreme Court even of the relatively mild charge of forming an alliance to rebel, the coup attempt they

313 HU-BFL-VII-18-d-1923-03/0610.

planned with Bavarian-German collaboration was undoubtedly frivolous precisely because it was no more than a mere plot, but it caused a major political scandal in 1923-1924. Furthermore, it raises many questions up to this day. The largest question mark is, of course, the identity and motives of Fritz Döhmel, the young German man who approached the coup plotters and tricked them into it, presumably to mislead everyone. The historical literature on the Szemere-Bobula-Ulain conspiracy is generally of the opinion that Fritz Döhmel was probably nothing more than an agent provocateur hired by the Bethlen Government to use him to discredit and politically isolate Gyula Gömbös's far-right race-defending group of MPs that left the governing party, [314] or historians are content with the even simpler explanation that Döhmel was in fact an agent of Hitler and his associates and that there was some real connection between the German and Hungarian far-right organisations [315] Even in the international literature, the Hungarian beer coup appears at the level of mention, and academic works written in foreign languages usually treat it as a fait accompli that there was a cooperation agreement between the Hungarian and German sides [316] Döhmel is referred to in various works as a diplomat, and agent, a swindler, an international adventurer and an agent provocateur, but since the works that mention the coup plan at all mostly do not discuss the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch in any great detail, nor do they really refer to its archival sources, they do not shed light on the apparent contradictions. It is undoubtedly true that Ferenc Ulain and the race-defending faction of MPs leaving the governing United Party which not much later became a

---

314 Lajos Serfőző, *A titkos társaságok és a konszolidáció 1922–1926-ban*, Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József Nominatae. Acta Historica, Tomus LVII, 1976, 3–60, 17–27.; Prónay, op. cit. 210.

315 Mária Ormos, *Kozma Miklós. Egy magyar médiavezér*, 113; Ungváry, op. cit. 111.; Romsics, op. cit. 128.; *Iratok az ellenforradalom történetéhez 1919–1945. II. A fasiszta rendszer kiépítése Magyarországon 1921–1924*, 7–120, 110.; József Zakar, *Fajvédők az 1920-as évek Magyarországán*, in *Tanulmányok a Holokausztról V.*, ed. Randolph L. Braham, Budapest, Balassi Kiadó, 2011, 52–111, 89.

316 Béla Bodó, *The White Terror. Antisemitic and Political Violence in Hungary, 1919–1921*, London, Routledge, 2019, 301.; Thomas L. Sakmyster, *Hungary's Admiral on Horseback. Miklós Horthy, 1918–1944*, Washington, Columbia University Press, 1994, 132–134; David King, *The Trial of Adolf Hitler. The Beer Hall Putsch and the Rise of the Nazi Germany*, London–New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 2017, 118–119.

party itself caused relative inconvenience to the Bethlen Government which was working on consolidation by the disclosure of numerous corruption cases connected to the Government. Ulain himself had interpellated in the Parliament on several occasions on various corruption cases, thereby discrediting Bethlen's Government.[317] Some senior government officials including Interior Minister Iván Rakovszky were bribed with free shares, and several state officials appeared to be implicated in the corruption case [318]. In the summer of 1923, the Hungarian General Credit Bank granted gift shares to several government and opposition MPs for a total of about 300 million koronas, and they also seriously violated speculation rules [319] Even under pressure from the ruling party, Justice Minister Emil Nagy refused to cover up the case and ordered the Prosecutors Office under his ministry to launch a serious investigation. This case was partly responsible for his resignation from the Ministry of Justice shortly afterwards in 1924, and his relations with Prime Minister Bethlen also deteriorated. Ulain personally had a great deal to do with the breakout of one of the biggest corruption scandals of the Horthy Ea, whic did not directly cause a government crisis, but discredited the Bethlen Government to some degree and led to a major press campaign against it. It may have been Bethlen's interest to discredit the race-defending MPs led by Gömbös, including Ulain Ferenc, but based on the archival sources it is doubtful that Döhmel was simply an agent provocateur hired by the Hungarian Government for this purpose, and nothing more.

If we look closely at the testimony of Imre Heténi, the deputy police commissioner investigating the case, the report sent to the Budapest police commissioner and the testimony of Detective Inspector Jenő Seibold, it becomes clear that Fritz Döhmel was probably in Budapest and was seeking contacts with Hungarian far-right organisations as a representative of Hitler's Bavarian nationalist movement before his activities came to the attention of the police. Döhmel did indeed become an agent of the Hungarian political police for a short time, as Döhmel and Heténi confessed the same. Döhmel reported to the authorities and some members of the Government on the activities of the conspirators, mainly in the hope

---

317 Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege*, 112.

318 Dezső Nemes, *Az ellenforradalom története Magyarországon 1919–1921*, 108–109.

319 *Iratok az ellenforradalom történetéhez 1919–1945. II. A fasiszta rendszer kiépítése Magyarországon 1921–1924*, 326–328.

of gaining financial benefits, but initially he seems to have sought contact with them independently, without the knowledge or involvement of the Hungarian authorities. There are also indications that Döhmel was indeed acting as an agent of the German radical right-wing political forces, but that he had already reported to the German state authorities in August 1923 that the Bavarian radical right was preparing to enter into serious international cooperation with its Hungarian counterparts [320].

We may ask the question whether it is possible that a strange situation could have arisen in which the political investigative department of the Hungarian police and Iván Rakovszky, the Minister of the Interior would have recruited a person who was apparently a native German speaker to act as a mole for the conspirators, by the authorities conspiratorially pretended that they had only learned of his activities later, after Döhmel had already incited the Szemere-Bobula-Ulain group, which really wanted to overthrow the Government, to some degree of action. Would the police have conspiratorially produced documents largely for internal use which prove that Döhmel had initially acted independently of them and only later cooperated with the authorities, even though he had been a hired provocateur for the state authorities from the beginning? The answer is, of course, this is possible, but hardly likely or realistic.

It is also possible that Fritz Döhmel may have been recruited by another Hungarian state agency, at the highest order of the Bethlen Government, and in the greatest secrecy, for example by the military secret service, the Department 2 of the General Staff of the Ministry of Defence, which was operating under secrecy at the time because of the restrictions of armament on Hungary, to discredit Ferenc Ulain and his associates with a conspiracy that he himself had practically incited them to pursue, but the likelihood of this is also very small. The idea sounds impossible and irrational because, if the sources are to be believed, Döhmel originally approached Béla Szemere and Titusz Bobula who were indeed thinking about the possibility of overthrowing the Government completely independently of Döhmel, and Ulain as an MP with some political influence and a person with real links to Bavarian nationalist circles was only involved in the conspiracy somewhat later. That is, when Döhmel contacted

320 PA-AA-(B)-R 30531-Bd. 1. Cited by: István Németh, *Német haditengerészeti és légügyi lépések a versailles-i békeszerződés kijátszására a weimari köztársaság (1919–1933) éveiben*, Acta Academiae Agriensis. Sectio Historiae, 2017/XLIV, 523–534.

Szemere and Bobula, there is a good chance that he did not know that Ferenc Ulain would soon become a key figure in the conspiracy. In fact, it seems that Döhmel was not originally the agent of the Hungarian Government, but acted independently, it is not known exactly on whose behalf, and only later did he start reporting to the political police.

It is also possible that Fritz Döhmel was originally an agent of the Bavarian nationalist organisations – it seems the most likely scenario –, but later he became self-employed man and literally sold out the conspiracy and the information he possessed, primarily for financial gain, while at the same time, he was trying to magnify the activities of the conspirators to suit his own interests. The contradictions in his repeated testimonies, the almost laughable elements in which he said, for example, that although he was originally linked to the German far-right, but as for his political beliefs he were in fact an idealistic communist and philo-Semite, and that he had exposed the radical right-wing conspirators in order to prevent the violent anti-Semitic acts they were allegedly planning also suggest that he may have been motivated by financial gain [321]. On the other hand, he deliberately sought to create as a large scandal as possible and confuse everyone as much as possible.

However, the first instance judgment of the Royal Criminal Court of Budapest conceives interestingly, saying that Döhmel's identity is a mystery even to the Hungarian state authorities, and although it is likely that the circles behind him are to be sought abroad, they are certainly not in Bavaria, and Döhmel badly misled both the participants in the Hungarian Beer Hall Putch and the Hungarian authorities [322]. Abroad but not in Bavaria could also mean – although we do not have to agree with the criminal court in the absence of written evidence – that the mysterious young man in question was an agent of the secret services of a foreign state who was instructed to try to sabotage the attempts of cooperation between German and Hungarian far-right organisations and to discredit them in the eyes of each other.

If we allow ourselves to speculate, we could ask the logical question of which state or states had an interest in preventing the emerging German far-right organisations from building international links during this period. The answer is obvious: France, Austria, or even the Weimar Republic itself. Indeed, in the relatively recent past, in 2009, a French intelligence report

321 HU-BFL-VII-18-d-1923-03/610.

322 Ibid.

was discovered in the custody of the the National Archives of France and received some press coverage according to which the French intelligence service had been monitoring the emerging National Socialist leader and his circle, and which painted Hitler as a politician with the oratorical qualities and charisma similar to that of Mussolini [323]. The same could also be true of the neighbouring Little Entente states which also clearly did not want Hungarian political forces to have serious foreign allies for the revisionist ambitions, so they cannot be excluded from such assumptions either.

Furthermore, there was also Austria there that had newly become and independent and as one of the successor states to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was struggling with serious domestic political and economic problems. The crisis after the loss of the First World War provided an excellent breeding ground for political extremism here as well, and the Government faced the real danger that Germany would eventually annex Austria in order to restore the unity of Germany, as the National Socialist German Regime under Hitler really did it fifteen years later in 1938. National Socialist-style, pro-Anschluss movements had already made their appearance here early, and it was therefore not in the interest of the Austrian state that the Hitler-Ludendorff circle should build successful international cooperations with politicians from other nations with similar ideological platforms [324].

Finally, there was the Republic of Weimar itself there, then under the leadership of President Friedrich Ebert and Federal Chancellor Gustav Stresemann, which, as the biggest loser of the First World War, was also struggling with huge economic and social crises as the empire was transformed from a monarchy into a republic. It was precisely these crises and the growing discontent that increased the popularity of demagogic politicians such as Hitler and the National Socialists who professed and promoted extremist ideas. It is certain that the secret services of the Weimar Republic had undercover agents in radical political movements, since it is a little known fact of Hitler's life that he initially came into contact with

---

323 Thomas Wieder, *Genre fasciste. Dans les années 1920, Adolf Hitler était surveillé par les services français. La fiche rédigée sur le futur Führer dort dans une armoire des Archives nationales*, Le Monde, 2009. november 20. https://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2009/11/19/adolf-hitler-genre-fasciste_1269349_3214.html

324 See: Róbert Fiziker, *Habsburg kontra Hitler. Legitimisták az anschluss ellen, az önálló Ausztriáért*, Budapest, Gondolat Kiadó, 2010.

National Socialism after the defeat of the short-lived Bavarian Soviet Republic in 1919 as an officer of the German armys intelligence and propaganda unit in Bavari. Hitler's task was to gather information on organisations and individuals propagating political extremism and to carry out vigorous anti-communist propaganda. One such radical right-wing organisation monitored by the German military intelligence service was the then insignificant DAP (Deutsche Arbeiterpartei), the German Workers' Party, which Hitler managed to infiltrate so well that he soon became its leader and, within a few years, had organised it into a nationwide political movement under the name NSDAP, the National Socialist German Workers Party. The predominantly liberal and social democratic Government of the Weimar Republic thus understandably had no interest that the National Socialist movement should build up significant international relations and fought against political extremism within Germany in much the same way as the consolidationist Bethlen Government did in the Hungarian context. There are also indications that Döhmel was in contact with the German state security services as early as August 1923, and that he reported to them that Bavarian and Hungarian far-right organisations were trying to re-establish contact and revive the cooperation that had been initiated earlier [325]. It also seems certain that Döhmel was indeed originally in contact with Hitler and his circle, as a Hungarian detective had followed him to Bavaria on behalf of Deputy Police Commissioner Imre Heténvi and checked if Döhmel had really in conecction with National Socialists. Although Hungarian historian István Németh has also published some German diplomatic documents in his extensive source publication in connection with the Ulain case as well, primarily from the correspondence between the Hungarian and German law enforcement and diplomatic services, these do not, of course, reveal the true identity of the key German figure in the conspiracy, Fritz Döhmel. All that is known is that in November 1923, Deputy Police Commissioner Heténvi informed the German embassy in Budapest that Döhmel had been under surveillance by the Hungarian police for some time and that dozens of young German men were in Budapest to initiate a cooperation agreement between the Hungarian and German far-right organisations [326]. The scarce German sources of the case reveal that Döhmel's motives were not known

[325] PA AA (B)-R 30531-Bd. 1. Cited by: István Németh, *A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország. I. rész*, 80.

[326] PA-AA-(B)-R-30531-Bd. 1.; István Németh, *Magyarok és németek*, 384; *A Wilhelmstrasse és Magyarország. Német diplomáciai iratok Magyarországról (1918–1934). I. kötet. Az 1920-as évek*, 346.

to German state authorities, and mention that Gerhard Köpke, an official of the German Foreign Ministry (Auswärtiges Amt) wrote to the Imperial Commissioner for the Supervision of Public Order (Reichskomissar für die Überwachung der Öffentlichen Ordnung) and asked information of him about the case. A few days later, the Foreign Ministry sent a summary of the case to the representative of the German Federal Government in Munich, requesting further information, in particular on the links between Hungarian and German radical right-wing organisations. However, the German Imperial Commissioner for the Supervision Public Order, who was practically the head of the German federal political police service interestingly confused the issue even further by not providing the Foreign Ministry with any relevant information, and in his reply expressed the opinion that Fritz Döhmel had really no connection with the National Socialists, and, referring to a rather unreliable press source, the daily titled Germania of 25 November 1923, claimed that he was in fact a Communist [327]. Although this is all in the realm of conjecture, it cannot be excluded that Fritz Döhmel, among his other motives and activities, possibly in conjunction with his earlier actual National Socialist involvement, was an agent of the German secret service whose aim was to disrupt the activities of the National Socialists, especially their international relations, and that the German political police and secret services were therefore not interested in exposing his true identity.

Although Hitler also issued a press statement in the Hungarian far-right newspaper called Szózat in which he categorically denied that Döhmel was his or his partys agent, and all of this was also stressed by National Socialist leaders Alfred Rosenberg and Anton Drexler, this proves absolutely nothing [328]. Hitler had just been arrested for an unsuccessful coup attempt, and he did not want to add to his already difficult situation by admitting that he would have wanted to carry out the Bavarian Beer Hall Putch with some international involvement if it had been possible or that he would have interfered in the internal affairs of another states if it had been successful. That is, Döhmel may well have been in contact with the Hitler-Ludendorff circle in some way, as his knowledge of the Bavarian domestic political situation and his ability to convince Ferenc Ulain who was indeed in contact

327 István Németh, *Magyarok és németek (1914–1934)*, 385.

328 [Anonymous author], *Hitler nyilatkozata az Ulain-ügyben. Sohasem akart beleavatkozni a magyar ügyekbe Döhmel, köpenicki diplomata*, Szózat, 23. 12. 1923., 7.

with Hitler would suggest. Fritz Döhmel's unusually high level of education and diplomatic skills may also be indicated by the fact that, according to the conspirators' testimonies, he put his somewhat absurd but nevertheless professional draft treaty about the Bavarian-Hungarian political cooperation on paper without drafting.

While it is also possible that Döhmel was a simple swindler driven purely by the prospect of financial gain, his high-level disinformation activities with which he deceived the conspirators themselves as well as politicians and policemen may suggest an international intelligence game in the background.

Of course, Fritz Döhmel's true identity will probably never be completely known, even after almost a hundred years, so we can only rely on what seems to be logical theories. Whatever the truth about the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch is, it is certain that, like the much more serious Bavarian Beer Hall Putsch, it failed from the very beginning. The White Internationale between the radical right-wing forces under General Ludendorff's leadership did not come into being, and just as the German federal government succeeded in marginalising the extreme right for a time, so by the end of 1923 the Bethlen government had succeeded in isolating Gömbös and his circle in parliament and in marginalising to some extent their political activities which were dangerous to consolidation.

However, it is ironic and at the same time somewhat frightening that the representatives of the Hungarian far-right sought contact with the German politician who was not taken too seriously at the time, and was even considered ridiculous by many, and expected him to help them realise their own political legacy who less than twenty years later, became the most notorious, mass-murdering dictator of the 20th century. It is perhaps an exaggeration to say such a thing, but nevertheless, the Hungarian Beer Hall Putsch, this attempted coup which at the time seemed so ridiculous somehow foreshadowed and predestined Hungarys mournful political and military involvement in the 1940s and its becoming one of Nazi Germanys most loyal allies in the Second World War. Interestingly, on an individual level, the same could be said of the Hungarian leader of the 1923 conspiracy: Ferenc Ulain who began his political career in the United Party and later was the MP of the Race-defending and Peasant Parties, finally joined the Arrow Cross Party led by Ferenc Szálasi in the 1940s, which, in the final months of the war, staged a coup with German help and brought to power a pro-German puppet government, causing enormous losses to a country that had already evidently lost the war.

Chapter - 20

The Bomb Outrage in Erzsébetváros, a grave Action of Political Terrorism in Hungary, 1922

After World War I, in the 1920s, paramilitarism and paramilitary violence was an almost natural phenomenon in Hungary, just like in many other countries of Central Europe. After the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the collapse of the Hungarian Republic of Councils, the new right-wing government establishing its power with the help of the Entente states could only difficulty rule the quasi anarchistic conditions of the country. In 1920–1921, Budapest and the Hungarian country were terrorized by irregular military formations that were formally part of the National Army, but often operated completely independently.

This 2-year-long wave of paramilitary violence which was committed by mainly detachments subordinated to influential paramilitary commanders First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas, Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay or Major Gyula Ostenburg-Morawek is called the White Terror. Radical right-wing irregular soldiers exploiting the weakness of the government committed several serious crimes like robbery, plunder and even murders, frequently by anti-Semitic motivations, and they did it in the disguise of law enforcement measures, since in this period the military authorities possessed police jurisdictions over civilians as well in order to restore the order.

The government led by Prime Minister Count István Bethlen gradually ceased the White Terror, and disbanded/regularized irregular/paramilitary troops and formations. The otherwise strongly right-wing Hungarian government really did its best to tranquilize the radical right-wing forces and create some kind of social and political peace at last, after the long years of war and civil war.

Although paramilitary violence finally ceased, and irregular military formations were formally disbanded, the radical right-wing Hungarian militia movements mainly consisting of World War I veterans, active and demobilised soldiers lived on the form of secret right-wing paramilitary organisations. The influential radical right-wing organisation Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete (ÉME) – Association of Awakening Hungarians

which sometimes operated in a similar way to a political party still had a strong paramilitary character, and it had its irregular militia called *Nemzetvédelmi Főosztály – Department of National Defence*. The government, mainly the army and the Ministry of Defence still used up Freikorps-like militia units consisting of veterans for two reasons. On the one hand, the right-wing political and military elite was still afraid of another possible Communist takeover attempt, and used the radical right-wing militias as auxiliary political police forces, keeping them prepared; on the other hand, the countries of the losing side of World War I were subject to serious limitations of armament. Therefore, the government and the military leadership did its best to circumvent limitations, and treated free-corps-like irregular military formations as secret semi-official reserve forces of the army, preparing for a war in the near future in which the territories that were truncated from Hungary by the Treaty of Trianon were to be reoccupied. Hungarian anti-Communist and irredentist troops were coordinated by the secret military organisation called Kettőskereszt Vérszövetség – Double Cross Blood Union in the 1920s, and thousands of armed people were kept in secret military status, waiting for deployment. The military and the radical right-wing political movements had very strong relations these times due to the historical traumas, and hyper-nationalism and exaggerated patriotism nearly necessarily coupled with violent anti-Semitism.

Some secret irregular military formations, mainly related to the Department of National Defence of the ÉME and Double Cross Blood Union started becoming concerned in political terrorism, like the luckily prevented bomb outrage plan in Jászkarajenő in 1922, the bomb outrage of Erzsébetváros that required 8 casualties on 2 April 1922, or the bomb outrage of Csongrád in which 3 people died on 24 December 1923. All the third grave terrorist incidents were committed by the members of the Department of National Defence of the ÉME who were at the same time irregular soldiers of Double Cross Blood Union, and paramilitary commanders First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas and Lieutenant Commander Pál Prónay arose in all the three cases as possible instigators, together with Captain Gyula Gömbös, later Minister of Defence, then Prime Ministers, in this period the leader of the oppositional Party of Hungarian National Independence (popularly called race-defenders).

The struggle of the parliamentary elections 1922 was disrupted by a series of events that also provided the state with another opportunity to take stronger action against political extremism. In the spring of 1922, the

members of the District 9 National Defence Department of the Association of Awakening Hungarians – despite the government's measures to disarm various militias in several stages, the Awakening Hungarians were still operating such armed paramilitary units, which were operating practically without any real state control – decided to commit a bomb outrage against the Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros, a liberal political-social organisation at 76 Dohány Street, presided by opposion liberal MP Vilmos Vázsonyi, thereby killing several people they considered enemies of the nation. The assassination and the subsequent trial of the alleged perpetrators was one of the most shocking and publicised events of the 1920s, and was largely referred to in the press as the bombing trial and the Márffy trial after the accused number one called József Márffy [329]. Unsurprisingly, the name of the Double Cross Blood Union also appears here, and the documents of the criminal tiral include one of the most valuable and fundamental archival sources of the secret military organisations activities. This document is the testimony of the Minister of Defence, General Count Károly Csáky [330].

On 2 April 1922, a bomb exploded at a meeting of the Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros, killing eight people and wounding twenty-three. Given the extremist political situation of the time, assassinations of Jews and of persons and institutions perceived to be pro-anti-Jewish, and the fact that behind them there was the Association of Awakening Hungarians in nearly each cases, and, more specifically, the figures of Iván Héjjas and Pál Prónay, the bomb raid of Erzsébetváros was no longer tried alone, but was finally tried in a triple indictment, together with other anti-Semitic and anti-Antisemitic crimes:

1. The explosion the Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros was linked to an allegedly attempted pogrom against the Újpest Synagogue, planned by two young individuals associated with the Association of Awakening Hungarians named Tivadar Péter and János Salló, but it was not finally carried out.
2. There was also an attempted bomb attack on the Courts Palace of Koháry Street and the French and Czechoslovak embassies in Budapest, and it was only by luck that these bombs finally did not explode.
3. Liberal newspaper owner and journalist Andor Miklós and Károly Rassay, a liberal politician and member of the parliament, well-

[329] HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923. Józef Márffy and his associates' trial.
[330] Ibid.

known opposition politicians of the time, were given packages containing grenades, and it was also only by luck and the vigilance of those present that these bombs did not explode when opening. At the same time, the Headquarters of the Hungarian State Police in Budapest, the Speaker of the National Assembly and the French Embassy received a life-threatening letters signed by some people under the name of the 'Committee 101'.

The investigation was personally led by József Sombor-Schweinitzer, one of the prominent leaders of the political police of the era, and the Royal Criminal Court of Budapest accused the yount national defence militimen on the basis of documents seized from the Awakening that the militiamen had deviated from the central national defence objectives, prepared anti-social attacks, and sought to make it impossible for citizens of the Israelite religion to remain in Hungary by so-called Jewish beatings and bomb raids [331]. József Márffy and his associates were also accused of organising a so-called blood court, an internal, arbitrary judiciary body of the organisation, which was to impose death sentence in the event of disobedience, desertion or any acts of treason by its members, József Márffy, in turn, used intimidation and death threats to persuade his accomplices to help organise and carry out the assassinations. This is however contradicted by the fact that, according to the documents, József Márffy only ordered the establishment of a blood court on 14 April 1923 when many of the crimes charged had already been committed. The political gravity of the case is illustrated by the fact that Minister of Defene General Count Károly Csáky and Prime Minister Count István Bethlen were called as witnesses at the main trial. As Károly Csáky told in his testimony,[332] after the fall of the Soviet Republic of Hungary, during the turbulent civil war, Hungary had no unified regular army, and in addition to the semi-irregular National Army organised by Admiral Miklós Horthy there were about fifty civilian militias in Budapest alone. Among these were the national defence units of the Association of Awakening Hungarians. In this chaotic situation, the consolidating new Hungarian government needed these armed paramilitary units to maintain order, and in 1919–1920 Chief of the General Staff Béla Berzeviczy tried to bring these militias under the control of the Hungarian Army. Among other things, this led to the creation of the Double Cross Blood Union as an umbrella organisation for the various irregular military

331 Ibid.

332 Ibid. p. 457–469.

formations under the control of the army. In order to preserve the honour of the army, the Minister of Defence also stressed in his testimony that although the various militias were under some military control, the army no influence on personnel matters, including the composition of the national defence militas of the Awakening Hungarians, and the members were not seriously trained and armed by the army, but they were rather treated as a kind of reserve military force which could be deployed if necessary to restore the very fragile order [333]. According to the Ministers interpretation, they basically had no authority in the legal sense, at most they had arbitrarily authorised themselves to do so, and the members of the various national defence militias were only actually called in one time, on 23 October 1921, during Charles IVs second attempt to return, and the militiamen mobilised were only given weapons and salary for that short period. After that, the Ministry of Defence no longer needed the various irregular military units. The restoration of the Soviet Republic of Hungary and a possible new Communist takeover were no longer a real threat by 1922, so paramilitary units such as the national defence militias of the Awakening Hungarians that mostly consisted of radical right-wing young men became superfluous for the consolidating Horthy-Bethlen government and the Kingdom of Hungary which was seeking to settle its relations with foreign countries after the Trianon Peace Treaty. It was precisely because some of its members had committed serious crimes that the government had to disband the Double Cross Blood Union in 1923. Of course, by the dissolution of the Double Cross Blood Union, Minister Károly Csáky most probably meant the dissolution and/or regularisation of the various paramilitary units and the creation of an auxiliary police force called the earlier mentioned National Labour Protection on their basis. At the time of the bomb outrage Erzsébetváros, the members of the National Defence Department of the Awakening Hungarians of District 9 led by József Márffy were already operating as a self-proclaimed civilian militia without any serious military control or instruction, and what they did was of their own free will.

Prime Minister István Bethlen appeared as a witness before the court less because of the political implications of the case rather than clearing himself as a private citizen [334] József Márffy, in order to show off his own

333 Tibor Zinner, *Adatok a szélsőjobboldali egyesületek megalakulásának körülményeihez*, Történelmi Szemle, 1979/3-4, 562–576; 566–567.
334 HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923.

importance and influence, had claimed at an early stage that he was on good personal terms with the incumbent prime minister and his family, that he had played tennis with István Bethlen's sons and that he had often travelled in the prime ministers car. Bethlen, on the other hand, categorically denied in court that he or any of his family members knew Márffy even superficially. The Márffy trial, in Tibor Zinners correct view, was primarily necessitated by foreign pressure for the Hungarian state to demonstrate to the Entente, and especially to France that the revolutionary and civil war years following the First World War were over.[335] The Government wanted to prove, that political and social order had been restored, Hungary accepted the territorial losses imposed by the Trianon Peace Treaty, and that the process of consolidation had finally begun. Nevertheless, we cannot and do not intend to claim that the bomb outrage the Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros was not organised and carried out by József Márffy and the militiamen of the national defence unit of District 9 of the Awakening Hungarians, as there is a lot of convincing direct and indirect evidence in this case, as the record of the main trial in the first instance testifies. However, it seems highly probable that the other crimes attributed to them were arbitrarily linked to them by the police for political purposes, and the prosecution and the courts also to linked these crimes to the horrific bombing perpetrated by Márffy and his associates under political pressure. Although Márffy was sentenced to death in the first instance, neither he nor his fellow prisoners who were also sentenced to death were ever executed. The trial was continued at the Royal Court of Appeal in Budapest and at the Royal Hungarian Curia, and ended with much lighter sentences.

The Budapest Royal Court of Appeal sentenced József Márffy, the first defendant, to 6 years of imprisonment as the main defendant and 1,500,000 koronas as a subsidiary penalty.

The Royal Supreme Court sitting in third instance, sentenced József Márffy to 8 years of imprisonment as the principal penalty and a fine of 1,500,000 koronas as a subsidiary penalty, while the other pleas of nullity were rejected or dismissed.

József Márffy died in 1971 in Kőszeg at the age of 73 as a pensioner [336]. He served most of his prison sentence in the prison of Vác.[337] He was

335 Zinner, *Az ébredők fénykora*, 172.

336 [Anonymous author], *Halálozás*, Vas Népe, 23. 08. 1971. Furthermore, the death records in custordy of the Vas County Archive of the National

released on parole in 1929 after being diagnosed with severe lung disease. He then settled in Kőszeg where he had family ties, first as local party secretary of the ruling United Party and later as a local leader of the Arrow Cross Party. Márffy never denied his identity or his past in prison, although he never publicly admitted to the acts he had previously been accused of either.

The afterlife of the bomber includes a propaganda publication in the form of a small booklet by the Associations of the Awakening Hungarian, published by the unknown author under the pseudonym Dr Benevolus (Dr Benevolent), entitled *The real perpetrators of the Dohány Street bomb raid*. The author of the publication has not been clearly identified, but we can only suspect László Budaváry, Ferenc Ulain, Mihály Kmoskó or another enthusiastic contemporary leader and propagandist of the far-right mass association. The severely libellous and provocative pamphlet, for which the Awakening Hungarians were granted a distribution licence for only three months, claims nothing less than that it was radical Jews who killed or had killed their own fellows of religiion in order to frame the assassination of decent, Christian Hungarians, and that behind the whole Dohány Street bomb raid there was nothing other than a well-organised Zionist conspiracy. As is typical of the anti-Semitic propaganda literature of the time, this piece of writing begins its own narrative with citing the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, while at the same time it calls on the Jews of Hungary to take action, to join with the Association of the Awakening Hungarians and help Hungary recover from the shameful situation to which their fellow believers had led it through the First World War, the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Soviet Republic of Hungary and the Trianon Peace Treaty. The scandalous pamphlet caused outrage among many and disillusioned many former supporters of the Associations of the Awakening Hungarians.

Although the police did its best to investigate several grave bomb outrage cases together with the bombing in Erzsébetváros, and these cases were closely related to each other via the Double Cross Blood Union and the Association of Awakening Hungarians, and lower-ranking paramilitary commanders like István Kető-Kucsera, József Márffy or János Piroska (all informally subordinated to First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas) and their minions

---

Archives of Hungary verify that the man called József Márffy who deceased in 1971 is the same person involved in the bomb trial.

[337] HU-BFL-VII-101-c–fegyenc-I–8184. József Márffy's prison record.

were committed to trial for their actions, it seems that influential military and political circles tried to save them from prison or even from death penalty. It is very curious that in the end only the young veteran József Márffy, the mastermind of the bomb raid of Erzsébetváros who was responsible for the death of 8 people was sentenced to 8 years of imprisonment. Although the evidences in all the three criminal suits seemed to be persuading, someone had the power to influence the judges and achieve that terrorists should be exempted from the charges or sentenced only to a couple of years in prison. Although Prime Minister Count István Bethlen did his best to create consolidation in Hungary in the political, social and economic sense of the word, radical right-wing political forces still had some influence, and for example Gyula Gömbös, the informal leader of the Hungarian radical right-wing movements of the 1920s, had a personal good relationship even with Regent Governor Admiral Miklós Horthy who had used to be a paramilitary commander himself in the civil war of 1919–1920 before elected by the parliament as Regent Governor with the strong support of the Entente Powers. The age of the bomb raids, as the press of the opposition sometimes called the period between 1922–1924 finally ended with the fact that murderous, radical right-wing, anti-Semitic terrorists remained at large, and many of them found their places in the authoritarian conservative, strongly right-wing regime of Hungary of the 1920s.

The present short essay was originally written as the introduction of source publication published in Hungarian language that makes an attempt to reconstruct certain serious, terroristic crimes committed by the members of irregular military formations that operated under the supremacy of the secret Hungarian military organisation Double Cross Blood Union via micro-historical case studies, mainly based on archival records of criminal suits in the custody of the Budapest City Archive and in the Central Archive of the National Archives of Hungary. Furthermore, beyond the introduction and analysis of the individual cases of three different, but interrelating bomb outrages from the period 1922–1924, it intends to draw general conclusions about the controversial and complex relationship between the early Hungarian paramilitary radical right-wing movements and the Government abd the military leadrship.

Chapter - 21

The Period of Bomb Attacks: Paramilitary Formations and the Wave of Political Terrorism in Hungary in the first Years of the Horthy-era, 1922-1924

Introduction

After World War One, paramilitarism and paramilitary violence, [338] mainly committed by demobilised or active soldiers was an almost natural phenomenon in Hungary, just like in many other countries of Central Europe – mainly in states that were on the losing side. [339] Paramilitarism and paramilitary activities are generally defined as military or quasi-military organisations and actions that complemented or replaced conventional military formations. In some cases it was made possible by the temporary or long-term disintegration of the state, in others it was the state itself that used paramilitary units to keep its powers, and in other cases paramilitary formations acted against the state [340]. In Hungary, a country that had suffered collapse, civil war and then severe territorial annexation, during the 1920s right-wing paramilitary formations operated as state/quasi-state organisations. After the dissolution of the Austro–Hungarian Empire, the

338 On paramilitarism from the recent literature see: *Uğur Ümit Üngör, Paramilitarism. Mass Violence in the Shadow of the State, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020.*

339 Robert Gerwarth, *Harc a Vörös Szörnyeteggel. Ellenforradalmi erőszak Közép-Európa vereséget szenvedett államaiban*, transl. Péter Várady, in *Háború béke idején. Paramilitáris erőszak Európában az első világháború után*, ed. Robert Gerwarth–John Horne, Budapest, L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2017, 71–92.

340 Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished. Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917–1923*, Farrar, Straus and Girou, 2016.; Robert Gerwarth–John Horne, *Paramilitarizmus az első világháború után*, transl. Péter Várady, in *Háború béke idején. Paramilitáris erőszak Európában az első világháború után*, ed. Robert Gerwarth–John Horne, Budapest, L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2017, 13–32, 13–14.

collapse of the Soviet Republic of Hungary, the short-lived communist dictatorship and wave of paramilitary violence called the Red Terror, the new right-wing government establishing its power with the help of the Entente Powers could only difficulty rule the anarchistic conditions. In 1920–1921, Hungary was terrorized by irregular military troops being formally part of the National Army, the right-wing armed force of the new Government (organised on the basis of the armed forces of the disintegrated Monarchy), but they operated independently. This 2-year-long wave of paramilitary violence demanding hundreds of lives delivered by detachments subordinated to influential paramilitary commanders such as First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas, Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay or Major Gyula Ostenburg-Morawek is called the Hungarian White Terror.[341] Far-right irregular soldiers exploiting the weakness of the state committed crimes like robbery, plunder and murders, frequently by anti-Semitic anti-communist motives, and they often did it in the disguise of law enforcement, since at the time military units possessed police jurisdictions over civilians to restore the social order. Paradoxically, police-type militias, formally in the service of the state, practically operated as criminal organisations [342]. The Government led by Prime Minister Count István Bethlen ceased the terror in 1921, and disbanded/regularized paramilitary formations. The authoritarian conservative Hungarian Government did its best to tranquilize the radical right-wing forces and create social and political peace at last, after the years of war and civil war [343].

Although paramilitary violence ceased, and irregular troops were formally disbanded, the radical right-wing Hungarian militia movement consisting of World War I veterans, active and demobilised soldiers lived on the form of secret paramilitary organisations. The main representatives of Hungarian paramilitarism were basically three organisations which are otherwise internationally not very well-known. The first of them is the *Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete (ÉME) – Association of Awakening Hungarians*, [344] the influential radical right-wing mass organization that had

---

341 Béla Bodó, *The White Terror. Antisemitic and Political Violence in Hungary, 1919–1921*, London, Routledge, 2019.

342 See: Béla Bodó, *Militia Violence and State Power in Hungary, 1919–1922*, Hungarian Studies Review, 2006/1–2, 121–156.

343 Op. cit.

344 On the history of the Association of Awakening Hungarian and its political activity see: Tibor Zinner, *Az ébredők fénykora, 1919–1923*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989.

a very close relation to the Government, operated similarly to political party and had strong paramilitary character, having its own armed militia called *Nemzetvédelmi Főosztály – Department of National Defence.* The second important organisation was the *Magyar Országos Véderő Egylet (MOVE) – Hungarian National Defence Force Associaton,* which consisted of mainly radical right-wing, active and demobilised soldiers and officers. The third, and perhaps most important paramilitary formation was the *Kettőskereszt Vérszövetség (KKVSz) – Double Cross Blood Union* that was a state-established, clandestine military organisation coordinating Hungarian anti-communist and irredentist troops which consisted of radical right-wing soldiers and veterans. The three organisations were closely interlinked. After signing of the Peace Treaty of Trianon in 1920, thousands of armed people were kept in secret military status, waiting for deployment, however, the state was not always able to control their operations. The Government used these *Freikorps*-like [345] militias basically for two purposes. On the one hand, the right-wing political and military elite was afraid of another possible communist takeover attempt, and right-wing militias were treated as auxiliary political police forces, kept prepared; on the other hand, the countries of the losing side of World War I were subject to serious limitations of armament. They operated in the same way as the German 'Schwarze Reichswehr' ('Black Army').[346] The Government and the military leadership did its best to circumvent limitations, and treated irregular troops as semi-secret, semi-official reserves of the army, preparing for a war in the near future in which the territories that were annexed from Hungary by the Treaty of Trianon were to be reoccupied. That is, the armed forces and the radical right-wing political movements had very strong relations due to traumas, and hyper-nationalism and exaggerated patriotism coupled with violent anti-Semitism [347].

---

345 On the German Freikorps militias see: Nigel H. Jones, *Hitler's Heralds. The Story of the Freikorps, 1918–1923*, Dorset, Barns and Noble, 1995. On the similarities between the German Freikorps and the Hungarian militias see: Béla Bodó, *The Rise and Fall of Paramilitary Violence in Hungary, 1919–1922*, East European Quarterly, 2004/3.

346 See: Jun Nakata, *Der Grenz- und Landesschutz in der Weimarer Republik 1918–1933. Die geheime Aufrüstung und die deutsche Gesellschaft*, Rombach Verlag, Freiburg im Breisgau, 2002

347 See Balázs Kántás, *Milicisták, puccsisták, terrorfiúk.* Művészeti és Irodalmi Jelen Kft., Budapest, 2021.
http://real.mtak.hu/123884/

Secret irregular military formations related to the ÉME, MOVE and KKVSz started becoming concerned in terrorist actions like the luckily prevented bomb outrage plan in Jászkarajenő in 1922, the bomb outrage of Erzsébetváros (8 killed) on 2 April 1922, or the bomb outrage of Csongrád (3 killed) on 24 December 1923. All the three terrorist incidents were committed by the militiamen of the ÉME who were also irregular soldiers of the Double Cross Blood Union, and paramilitary commanders First Lieutenant Iván Héjjas[348] and Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay, [349] at the same time emerging, ambitious far-right politicians of the era arose in each cases as possible instigators, together with Captain Gyula Gömbös (president of the Hungarian National Defence Force Association, later Minister of Defence and Prime Minister) in this period, the leader of the oppositional Party of Hungarian National Independence (popularly called race-defenders), the influential politician who was still close to the Government and had a very good relationship with Regent Governor Miklós Horthy [350]. The reconstruction of the above mentioned, less known terrorist deeds offers a micro-historical lens to investigate broader issues, to define or redefine the controversial relationship of Hungarian militias and the (newly created) Hungarian State in the 1920s.

The anti-Semitic assassination plan in Jászkarajenő

One of the instances of radical right-wing terrorism that spread in Hungary for a short time – uncovered in the preparatory stage – was the 1922 hand-grenade assassination plan in Jászkarajenő. István Keő-Kucsera, a farmer, innkeeper and paramilitary commander from Jászkarajenő, was the leader of the local sub-organisation of the Association of Awakening Hungarians and a well-known local activist of the radical right in the Pest County village, began to complain in February 1922 that another catering establishment in the village which happened to be owned by a Jewish person was generating more turnover than his pub. He decided to "teach the Jews a lesson", to intimidate them in some way, and in any case to carry out some unspecified act of violence. [351]

---

348 On the career of Iván Héjjas see: Béla Bodó, *Iván Héjjas. The Life of a Counterrevolutinary*, East Central Europe, 2010/2–3, 247–279.

349 On the career of Pál Prónay see: Béla Bodó, *Pál Prónay. Palamilitary Violence and and Anti-Semitism in Hungary,* 1919–1921, The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East-European Studies, No. 2101, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh, 2011

350 Op. cit.

351 City Archives of Budapest, HU-BFL-VII-1-d-10935/1924. István Keő-Kucsera and his associates' trial.

As the leader of the Jászkerajenő sub-organisation of the Awakening, Kető-Kucsera was a regular guest at the headquarters of the Awakening Hungarians at 3 Sörház Street in the downtown of Budapest, and in connection with this he also visited the pub at the bottom of the building. It was here in February 1922, that he met his friend Mihály Gyalay, a radical right-wing journalist and editor of the political newspaper of the Awakening movement called *Hazánk* (*Our Homeland*), and complained to him that, in his opinion, the Jews of Jászkarajenő were plotting against the local Awakening activists. That is, the local Jewish restaurant owner was spoiling his business – and Kető-Kucsera suggested that this should be tackled. The journalist agreed with his friend and Awakening brother, and the more wine the two men drank, the louder they became about their aversion to the Jews. Gyalay, in a wine-induced state, suggested that grenades should be thrown at the houses of certain Jewish people in Jászskarajenő.[352] The anti-Semitic rhetoric and the unfolding assassination plot caught the attention of a 21-year-old young man at the next table, József Kovács, a demobilised soldier who was in need of money, and of course, was also a member of the Awakening. He sat down beside the two men who were drunkenly hatching anti-Semitic plans. [353]

The radical gentlemen were now drinking wine in a threesome, and their determination to carry out the assassination seemed to be becoming clearer and clearer. József Kovács volunteered to carry out the assassination on behalf of Kető-Kucsera for a fee, and Kető-Kucsera accepted the offer. They agreed that Kovács would soon travel from Budapest to Jászkarajenő in order to inspect the specific house on which he would have to throw grenades. At the same time, Mihály Gyalay took it upon himself to acquire the grenades. [354]

A few days later József Kovács visited Mihály Gyalay at the Awakening headquarters, and asked him for the promised grenades. At Kovács's urging, Gyalay immediately went to the office of Géza Adorján, a student engineer and leading officer of the Awakening. Géza Adorján was an influential figure of the far-right movements of the time, involved in a number of political assassinations. He held a leading position in the paramilitary wing of the association, had close ties with the commanders of the notorious detachments of the army, including First Lieutenant Iván

352 Ibid.
353 Ibid.
354 Ibid.

Héjjas Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay, who were at the time one of the vice-presidents of the Awakening and also heads of the National Defence Department, changing each other.[355] Adorján handed two grenades to the journalist. [356] Gyalay then gave the grenades to Kovács to execute the assassination. [357]

Here events took a surprising turn, as József Kovács seemed to have lost his courage with two grenades in his briefcase, and a few hundred metres from the Awakening headquarters, he turned to a police officer, and told him that he had found grenades on a train, and that he thought they were dangerous and wanted to hand them over to the police.[358] However, the policeman became suspicious of the young man's story and brought Kovács to the police station of District 4 where he was interrogated. The grenades were seized by the police and handed over to the military body responsible for collecting military equipment left over from the World War. The military experts established that the grenades were functional, dangerous and unreliable, and destroyed them within a short time, drawing up a detailed report about their annihilation. [359].

At first, Kovács tried to maintain his earlier story that he had found the two grenades in the train during his journey, but later he broke down and confessed everything to the police, who soon opened an investigation for a conspiracy to commit murder. Kecő-Kucsera, Gyalay and Adorján were soon arrested in March 1922, and based on the detailed testimonies of Kovács who had been broken, had renounced the assassination attempt and had cooperated with the authorities to a great extent, they were soon suspected of forming an alliance to prepare the assassination [360].

József Kovács's testimony and functionality of the grenades were enough evidence for the prosecution to accuse all four radical right-wing men, and the indictment also included a conspiracy to commit murder.

After the indictment, the Royal Criminal Court of Budapest finally heard the case of the Jászkarajenő bombing plot between 11 and 18 June

355 Serfőző, *A titkos társaságok és a róluk folytatott parlamenti viták 1922–1924-ben*, 75.
356 HU-BFL-VII-1-d-10935/1924.
357 Ibid.
358 Ibid.
359 Ibid.
360 Ibid.

1924. The accused had been at liberty for some time, having spent only a few months, mostly between April and June 1922, in pre-trial detention.[361] During the trial, the defence tried to confuse the court, citing trumped-up charges and patriotic reasons, but could use only inconsistent arguments against the confession of the accused József Kovács and Captain Pál Reinhardt, Chief Artillery Foreman, according to which the German-made grenades were clearly functional and dangerous devices, capable of killing human life. The Criminal Court of Budapest finally accepted as true and credible the repentant and detailed confession of József Kovács and the opinion of military expert Pál Reinhardt. In its judgment of 18 June 1924, the court found István Keő-Kucsera István first, Mihály Gyalay second and József Kovács third guilty of the crime of conspiracy to commit murder, and finally sentenced Keő-Kucsera to four months of imprisonment, Gyalay to three months of imprisonment and József Kovács to two months of imprisonment. However, the court acquitted Géza Adorján, the fourth defendant of the charge of conspiracy to commit murder, since it was not clearly established that he had been aware of the fact that Mihály Gyalay had asked him for the hand grenades in order to carry out an anti-Semitically motivated assassination [362].

Finally, it may be seen as a symbolic gesture of justice that the Royal Hungarian Supreme Court also ruled that the far-right militiamen István Keő-Kucsera, Mihály Gyalay and József Kovács were guilty of the crime of conspiracy to commit murder, and it was only by luck that József Kovács changed his mind before it was too late and disclosed the preparations to the authorities in detail. In spite of this, the terrorists were not punished in any meaningful way, and the prison sentence of a few months imposed on the three defendants part of which the court of first instance took to be completed by pre-trial detention cannot be regarded serious punishment compared to the act of preparing for murder. There is no clear evidence or written source of this kind, but based on the very similar outcomes of similar criminal cases in the 1920s, we may perhaps allow ourselves some generalisations and draw some conclusions based on the network of contacts of the accused. Especially it is the socially highly mobile Géza Adorján and his acquaintance with paramilitary commanders Prónay and Héjjas that makes it possible to draw the conclusion that influential political and military circles may have been involved in the case of the terrorists of

[361] Ibid.

[362] Ibid.

Jászkarajenő, and they managed to ensure that the men with radical right-wing affiliations preparing for a serious crime received the minimum possible punishment, although it was legally proven that they had conspired to carry out murders [363].

The bomb outrage in Erzsébetváros, Budapest

The struggle of the parliamentary elections 1922 was disrupted by a series of events that also provided the State with another opportunity to take stronger actions against political extremism. In the spring of 1922, the members of the National Defence Department of the Association of Awakening Hungarians of District 9 of Budapest – despite the measures to disarm various militias in several stages, the Awakening Hungarians were still operating such armed units without any real state control – decided to commit a bomb attack against the Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros, a liberal political and social organisation at 76 Dohány Street, presided by opposition liberal MP Vilmos Vázsonyi, thereby killing several people they considered the enemies of the nation. The assassination and the subsequent trial of the perpetrators was one of the most shocking and publicised events of the 1920s, and was largely referred to in the press as the 'bombing trial' and the 'Márffy trial' after the accused number one called József Márffy.[364]

On 2 April 1922, a bomb exploded at a meeting of the Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros, killing eight people and wounding twenty-three. Given the extreme political situation of the time, assassinations of Jews and of persons and institutions perceived to be pro-Jewish, and the fact that behind them there was the Association of Awakening Hungarians, mainly Iván Héjjas and Pál Prónay, the bomb raid of Erzsébetváros was finally tried together with other anti-Semitic and anti-Entente crimes.

The investigation was led by Dr. József Sombor-Schweinitzer, the prominent leader of the political police of the era, and the Criminal Court of Budapest accused the young militiamen on the basis of documents seized from the Awakening that they 'had deviated from the national defence objectives, prepared anti-social attacks, and sought to make it impossible for citizens of the Israelite religion to remain in Hungary by so-called Jewish beatings and bomb raids.'[365] József Márffy and his associates were also accused of organising a so-called blood court, an internal, arbitrary

363 Zinner, op. cit. 159–160.

364 HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923. Józef Márffy and his associates' trial.

365 Ibid.

judiciary body of the organisation, which was to impose death sentence in the event of disobedience. Márffy used intimidation and death threats to persuade his accomplices to help organise and carry out the assassinations.

The political gravity of the case is highlighted by the fact that Minister of Defene General Count Károly Csáky and Prime Minister Count István Bethlen themselves were called as witnesses. The complex and controversial relation of the State and the militias was well explained by Minister Csáky's testimony,[366] in which he publicly told that after the fall of the Soviet Republic of Hungary and during the civil war in 1919–1920, Hungary had no regular army, and in addition to the semi-irregular National Army organised by Admiral Miklós Horthy (from March 1920 Head of State as Regent Governor of Hungary), there were about fifty militias in Budapest as well. Among these were the troops of the Awakening Hungarians. In this chaotic situation, the consolidating new Hungarian Government needed the paramilitary units to maintain order, and in 1919–1920 Chief of the General Staff Béla Berzeviczy brought the militias under the control of the Army. This led to the formation of the Double Cross Blood Union as an umbrella organisation for the irregular military formations under the control of the military. The Minister also stressed that although the militias were under military control, the army had no influence on personnel matters, including the composition of the national defence militias of the Awakening Hungarians, and the members were not seriously trained or armed by the regular military, but they were treated as reserve military forces which could be deployed if necessary to restore the fragile order.[367] Although the militias were not under strict state control, they operated as quasi-state armed organisations. However, according to the Minister's interpretation, these units had no real authority in the legal sense, but they had arbitrarily authorised themselves to do act as police-like forces, and the members of the various troops were only actually called in one occasion, on 23 October 1921, during King Charles of Habsburg IV's second attempt to return, and the men were mobilised, given weapons and salary for only that period. After that, the Government no longer needed irregular military units. By 1922, a new communist takeover was not a real threat, so paramilitary units consisting of radical right-wing young men became superfluous for the Horthy–Bethlen Government which was

366 Ibid. p. 457–469.

367 Tibor Zinner, *Adatok a szélsőjobboldali egyesületek megalakulásának körülményeihez*, Történelmi Szemle, 1979/3-4, 562–576; 566–567.

seeking to normalise Hungary's relations with foreign countries after signing the Peace Treaty of Trianon. It was because some of its members had committed crimes that the Government had to disband the Double Cross Blood Union in 1923. At the time of the bomb attack of Erzsébetváros, the members of the National Defence Department of the Awakening Hungarians were operating as a self-proclaimed civilian militia without any state control or instruction.

Prime Minister István Bethlen appeared as a witness before the court less because of the political implications of the case rather than clearing himself as a private citizen [368]. Namely, József Márffy, in order to show off his own influence, had claimed to his militiamen that he was on good personal terms with the Prime Minister, he had played tennis with Bethlen's sons and that he had often travelled in the PM's car. Bethlen, on the other hand, categorically denied that he or any of his family members knew Márffy.

The Márffy trial was necessitated by foreign pressure for the Hungarian State to demonstrate to the Entente, especially to France that revolutionary and civil war years following the Great War were over [369]. The Government wanted to prove that political and social order had been restored, Hungary accepted the territorial losses imposed by the Trianon Treaty, and that the process of consolidation had finally begun. Nevertheless, it cannot be claimed that the bomb outrage against the Democratic Circle of Erzsébetváros was not organised or carried out by József Márffy and the militiamen of the Awakening Hungarians, as there was a lot of convincing evidence in this case, as the record of the trial in the first instance testifies. However, it seems highly probable that other crimes attributed to them were arbitrarily linked to them for political purposes, and the prosecution and the courts also linked these crimes to the bomb attack perpetrated by Márffy's group under political pressure. Although Márffy was sentenced to death in the first instance, neither he nor his fellow prisoners who were also sentenced to death were ever executed. The trial continued at the Royal Court of Appeal in Budapest and at the Royal Hungarian Curia, and ended with much lighter sentences.

József Mártffy served most of his prison sentence in the prison of Vác.[370] He was released on parole in 1929 after being diagnosed with lung

[368] HU-BFL-VII-5-c-16193/1923.

[369] Zinner, *Az ébredők fénykora*, 172.

[370] HU-BFL-VII-101-c–fegyenc-I–8184. József Márffy's prison record.

disease. He then settled in Kőszeg where he had family ties. At first he worked as the local party secretary of the governing United Party and later, in the 1930s he became the local leader of the Hungarian national socialist, pro-German Arrow Cross Party. At the end of the Second World War, he participated in anti-Semitic atrocities as member of the Arrow Cross militia. After the war he was interned for a short time, but was not accused. Finally, he deceased in 1971, in Kőszeg at the age of 73 as a pensioner. [371]

The bomb attack in Csongrád

In addition to the bomb attack in Erzsébetváros, the bomb outrage Csongrád a little later was another highly publicised terrorist act committed by far-right militiamen, under the leadership of First Lieutenant János Piroska, a professional army officer. On 26 December 1923, the terrorists threw an explosive device into the ballroom of the Hotel Hungarian King in Csongrád at a charity event organised by the local Jewish Women' Association, killing three people and seriously injuring twenty-five others. Other people involved in the attack were Firts Lieutenant János Piroska's brothers István and György, and certain local farmers János Sági and János Kővári. Piroska himself had made the explosive device and had brought it from Budapest [372]

The assassination was carried out by Miklós Bölöni and László Sinkó, local farmers and WWI veterans, militiamen of the Awakening Hungarians and the Double Cross Blood Union. During his interrogation, Sinkó defended himself by claiming that First Lieutenant Piroska had told him that the bomb was only intended to cause alarm, but that its explosive power was not sufficient to kill a human being. Yet he was reluctant to throw it when they appeared outside the Hotel Hungarian King at midnight. Miklós Bölöni then called László Sinkó a coward, who finally lit the fuse of the bomb with his cigarette and threw it into the ballroom. The bomb exploded immediately, killing three people.

The police put serious efforts into collecting data, soon arrested the perpetrators, and the so much material evidence was collected that on 30

---

371 [Anonymous author], *Halálozás*, Vas Népe, 1971. 08. 23. Furthermore, the death records in custody of the Vas County Archive of the National Archives of Hungary verify that the man called József Márffy who deceased in 1971 is the same person involved in the bomb trial.

372 Lajos Serfőző, *A titkos társaságok és a konszolidáció 1922–1926-ban*, Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József Nominatae. Acta Historica, Tomus LVII, 1976, 3–60.

December 1923 the suspects confessed. The police also arrested their accomplices, almost the entire local group of the radical right-wing Race-defending Party, 25 young men in all. It turned out that most of the suspects were also members of the Awakening Hungarians. Being a professional officer, János Piroska's crimes were subject to military justice. He was handed over to the Budapest Military Court

The increasingly high-profile investigation also involved Dr. János Diószeghy, the head of the Public Security Department of the Ministry of the Interior,[373] and it was revealed that the suspects were members of the *Alföldi Brigád – Brigade of the Hungarian Plain*, a secret irregular military unit commanded by Iván Héjjas, part of the Double Cross Blood Union [374]. In the course of the investigation, János Sági was also found to have a document from Iván Héjjas appointing him the local commander of his militia's battalion in Csongrád [375]. Héjjas was also there behind the assassination, the Double Cross Blood Union was deeply involved in the case, and the Brigade of the Hungarian Plain was one of the secret reserve units of the Hungarian Army, the goal of which was of course to circumvent the limitations of armament.

Minister of Defence General Károly Csáky, to save the honour of the Army, achieved by creating confusion that Frist Lieutenant Piroska should not be officially considered a professional soldier. The military authorities argued that he had previously been the subject of ethics proceedings for private reasons and had been forced to retire from military service. There were various versions of where Piroska ended up working as a drawing teacher, but he was eventually tried together with his accomplices in a civil court. The case was finally heard by the Royal Court of Szolnok, where one of the defence councils was Dr. Ferenc Ulain, friend of Iván Héjjas and Gyula Gömbös, one of the leaders of the Association of Awakening Hungarians, and a race-defending member of the parliament [376].

The trial of the bomb case took place between 17 and 26 September 1924. The defendants spent little time in prison, as they were released on

---

[373] The position was very similar to the National Commissioner of the Police, in fact, it was the State Secretary/Undersecreatary of Law Enforcement.

[374] Csongrád County Archive of the National Archives of Hungary, HU-MNL-CSML-IV-401-a-24/1923.

[375] Serfőző, op. cit. 97.

[376] Nemzetgyűlési Napló 1922–1926/XVIII., 344–345. Cited: Serfőző, op. cit. 100.

high bail before the trial. Lawyers Dr. Ulain and Dr. Széchényi argued the patriotic merits of the defendants, in particular János Piroska in the establishment of the right-wing, counter-revolutionary regime, stating that it was him who, as a member of the paramilitary formation of Iván Héjjas reorganised the gendarmerie from volunteers in Csongrád after the fall of the Soviet Republic of Hungary in 1919, and as the local commander of this auxiliary police unit he had made major contribution to the restoration of state and social order. In his defence speech, Dr. Széchenyi went so far as to say that prominent members of the local Jewish community harboured grievances against Piroska who had expelled them from the volunteer gendarmerie because of their indiscipline, drinking and gambling. The defence lawyer also expressed his opinion that Piroska and his militiamen were not anti-Semites, and that the Jewish–Christian conflict was fuelled by the representatives of the Jewish community in Csongrád who had also tried to influence the investigation in order to shift suspicion to local Christian nationalists.

The defendants claimed that they had been beaten by the police during the investigation, and this was the only reason why they had confessed earlier. The Court of Szolnok found the witnesses mostly untrustworthy, the investigation insufficiently thorough, the evidence insufficiently conclusive, and tended to the conclusion that the defendants may have been tortured [377]. Consequently, on 26 September 1924 the court acquitted the accused of all charges. It is likely that influential military and political circles intervened to help the defendants, and the acquittal in this case was not a coincidence. [378].

The mastermind behind of the bomb attack of Csongrád, János Piroska, who was a drawing teacher and painter by his civilian profession, then started a political career [379]. He graduated in law in 1930, became the chief notary and then mayor of Csongrád in 1933, and during his tenure large-scale construction projects started in the town. In 1945, after the Second World War he was tried in the People's Tribunal for war crimes, but was

377 [Anonymous Author], *Egy felmentő és egy marasztaló ítélet*, Világ, 28 September 1924.

378 Kálmán Shvoy, *Shvoy Kálmán titkos naplója és emlékirata 1920–1945*, ed. Mihály Perneki, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1983, 97.

379 Péter Erdélyi, *Képviselőtestületi választások 1929-ben Csongrádon*, Múzeumi Kutatások Csongrád Megyében 2003, ed. Péter Erdélyi–Judit Szűcs, Szeged, Móra Ferenc Múzeum, 2002, 119–125.

acquitted of all charges.[380] Even so, all his family's property and estates were confiscated, and they were kept under constant police surveillance. In 1952 Piroska was also briefly interned in the forced labour camp at the Great Hungarian Plain, Hortobágy [381]. In 1956, he took part in the revolution against the occupying Soviet Union, and after the fall of the revolution and war for freedom he was briefly arrested again. Then he retired from public life and deceased in 1987 at the age of 92. János Piroska lived a very controversial life, and during his political career, he indeed did a great deal for the development of his hometown, where today the main square is named after him [382].

The transformation the quasi-state armed organisations into real state law enforcement bodies

For the Bethlen Government, which was striving for consolidation in domestic and foreign policy as well, the bomb raid in Csongrád in 1923, which caused a great outcry, was one of the last drops in the glass. Bethlen promised at the parliament on 3 January 1924 that he would personally interrogate paramilitary commander Iván Héjjas about the Csongrád bomb outrage, and if his responsibility was to be found, he would be treated in the same way as anyone else [383]. Héjjas was interrogated by the police in connection with the Csongrád bomb explosion and the conspiracies of far-right, quasi-state paramilitary groups in general, in the presence of the National Police Commissioner Imre Nádosy himself, but in the end it was not proven that he was involved in criminal activities [384]. Probably it was nothing more than a bargain between the paramilitary commander and the Government, and possibly Regent Governor Miklós Horthy himself [385]. Besides Horthy, Gyula Gömbös, who later returned to the governing party and in 1928 became Minister of Defence and in 1932 Prime Minister, must have played a major role in the fact that Iván Héjjas was not brought to trial during the Horthy Era, and was not seriously prosecuted for the acts

380 HU-MNL-CSML-XXV-8-5-d-NB-148/1945.

381 Martin Gulyás, *Az 1945-ös csongrádi földosztás vesztesei*, Emlékeztető, 2016/1–2, 52–68.

382 Attila Tóth, *Piroska János élete és festészete*, Csongrád, [Private Edition], 2009.

383 Nemzetgyűlési Napló, 1922–1926/XVIII, 337–338. Lajos Serfőző, *A titkos társaságok és a konszolidáció 1922–1926-ban*, 36.

384 Serfőző, op. cit. 36.

385 Bodó, op. cit.

committed by him and others under his command, even though his crimes were obvious to many [386]. The example of Iván Héjjas tells us a lot about the relationship between radical nationalist paramilitary units and the Hungarian Government. These troops were not only operating as state, or at least quasi-state organisations in the 1920s, but if their members were involved in crime and terrorism, they were even defended by leading military and political circles. As the personal example of Iván Héjjas shows, not only did the former paramilitary commander not have to answer for his actions, but he later received Vitéz's title, [387] a kind of specific Hungarian knighthood that entailed several social advantages, earned a doctorate in law for his book on aviation law, was promoted to honorary professor of the Budapest Science University, became a member of parliament and was later promoted a well-paid and respected official of the Hungarian State. He owed his political rise to Gömbös, who became Prime Minister of Hungary.

Of all the paramilitary commanders who shared a common past and common crimes, and once possessed formidable power, it was Lieutenant Colonel Pál Prónay who was the most unable to achieve any kind of consolidation. Because of his failure to show sufficient loyalty to the Regent Governor on the occasion of King Charles IV's second attempt of return, and because of the brutal activities of his detachment, his arbitrary assassinations and adventurer-like political actions he became increasingly burdensome for the Bethlen Government,[388] and he was forced to retire, become sidelined, and was also expelled from the *Etelközi Szövetség – Union of Etelköz*, the pro-government political secret society of the era [389].

In the spirit of consolidation, the paramilitary formations, such as the Brigade of the Great Hungarian Plain and armed units of the Association of Awakening Hungarians were then disarmed or regularised, and their law enforcement and military powers which could be traced back to the civil war, were definitely abolished. However, at the same time, a paramilitary organisation, the Office of National Labour Protection was set up, formally under the control of the Ministry of the Interior, primarily to break strikes

386 Bodó, op. cit.

387 Ibid.

388 Péter Konok, *Az erőszak kérdései 1919–1920-ban. Vörösterror–fehérterror*, Múltunk, 2010/3, 72–91, 84.

389 Pál Prónay, *A határban a halál kaszál. Fejezetek Prónay Pál naplójából*, ed. Ervin Pamlényi–Ágnes Szabó, Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1963, 322–324.

and labour movement organisation. It was a type of white, right-wing workers' militia whose members were equipped with handguns and had the same powers of action and use of weapons as those of the police. Officially, it was a voluntary, part-time auxiliary police force, but under secrecy it was under dual control, and the Ministry of Defence controlled it as secret reserve force of the Army under limitations of armament [390]. The Brigade of the Hungarian Plain and the national defence militias of the Awakening Hungarians were integrated into this organisation, so they were under much tighter government control, but could essentially continue to operate [391]. The Double Cross Blood Union, the influential secret military organisation also continued its activities within the framework of the National Labour Protection, within which there was a secret, elite special operations military unit called *Főtartalék – Main Reserve*, which was used up, among others, for sabotage and terrorist actions in the neighbouring Little Entente countries [392]. The former quasi-state paramilitary organisations which rooted in civil war were like this officially reorganised as a state law enforcement, (auxiliary police-type) agency, becoming part of the new, consolidated Hungarian State. That is, although the paramilitary formations involved in crime and terrorism officially ceased to exist, in fact, the quasi-state militias were transformed into a real state armed force. There is also an archival record about the transformation of the DCBU into the National Labour Protection: a confidential circular from the Ministry of the Interior from 1926 which forbids the members of the NLP to refer to the strike-breaking auxiliary police force as the 'Double Cross Blood Union' even among themselves, as it is associated with rather bad public memories [393]. The National Labour Protection was a de facto covert military reserve force. Although it had no significant combat value, its tens of thousands of members who were otherwise civilians in their daily occupations, but who owned firearms and were trained and could be mobilised to a certain extent,

---

390 Central Archive of the National Archives of Hungary, HU-MNL-OL-K 26-XXII-6010; 5.818. M. E. számú rendelet a nemzeti munkavédelmi intézmény fegyverhasználati jogáról, 1923. augusztus 2., Magyarországi Rendeletek Tára, 1923, 274.

391 Rudolfné Dósa, *A MOVE. Egy jellegzetesen magyar fasiszta szervezet*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972, 151–152.

392 *Csak szolgálati használatra!. Iratok a Horthy-hadsereg történetéhez, 1919–1938*, ed. Tibor Hetés–Tamásné Morva, Budapest, Zrínyi Katonai Könyv- és Lapkiadó, 1968, 499–500.

393 HU-MNL-OL-K 149-1926-6-3473.

made a significant contribution to circumvention of the serious military restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Trianon. In this way, it also helped to pacify the former irregular soldiers of the National Army, which had once numbered over 100,000 and was reduced to a maximum of 35,000 after 1921. In this voluntary auxiliary police and reserve military status many men still felt useful and being in the service of the State. That is, the Hungarian radical right-wing militia movement thus continued to exist within the framework of this organisation, in a domesticated form, even until 1938, when Hungary was involved in World War Two, and the state needed no more concealed military forces, since the armament of the Hungarian Army publicly began [394]. As Béla Bodó argues, Hungarian militias of the 1920s were as dangerous and incalculable as mafias [395]. By 1922–1923, they were endangering the safety of the very State that they should have formally protected. Yet the Hungarian State did not get rid of them completely and definitely, but rather integrated them into the new social and political order, so to say, 'sparing' the militias for its short- and long-term aims.

394 Dósa, op. cit. 134.

395 Bodó, *Militia Violence and State Power in Hungary, 1919–1922*, 156.

Balázs Kántás was born in Budapest, Hungary, 1987. He graduated at Eötvös Loránd University in BA English Studies in 2009, then in MA Literary and Cultural Studies in 2011. He obtained a PhD degree in Comparative Literature in 2015, at the same university. As a literary historian, his primary field of research is the oeuvre and Hungarian reception of Paul Celan. Furthermore, he is also a very active critic and scholar of contemporary Hungarian literature. Currently he works as a senior archivist in the National Archives of Hungary, and as such, he is also a researcher of the history of the radical right-wing paramilitary movements of Hungary in the 1920s, including their international relations with their German and Austrian counterparts. In parallel, at the moment he is working on his second PhD dissertation in History at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. He is the author of numerous monographs, collections of studies and source publications.