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Imre Madách

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József Katona's *Bánk bán* and Imre Madách's *Az ember tragédiája (The Tragedy of Man)* are both masterpieces of Hungarian drama. The latter—more a dramatized poem than a play—is by a poet who never published anything except the *Tragedy* and who did not participate in literary life except in the years immediately before his death.

Men in controversial times often feel obliged to camouflage their personal or ideological problems and doubts. They make a statement easier if they find a mode of expression sufficiently enigmatic and implicit helping it to remain latent, moreover the theme which they choose as a pretext allows them to omit issues, they themselves are uncertain about. Writers may well play hide-and-seek concealing their real views and we must be aware of this when we interpret their achievement.

Az ember tragédiája is an enigmatic work indeed, it well needs deciphering and explanation. It was written in a critical era of Hungarian history, the decade after the failure of the 1848 war of independence. (The poet started writing the *Tragedy* in February 1859 and finished it in March 1860.) His work displays the effects of a political crisis as well as an ideological one. Almost ten years after losing the war of independence the nation still lay prostrate, moreover its moral reserves were further put to the test under totalitarian Austrian rule. The Vienna government aimed at suppressing Hungarian self-rule and attempted to make German culture preeminent in Hungary. Hungarian literature suffered under censorship, the activity of scientific organizations was suspended: the nation was stripped of political, and human rights. The generations initiating the war of independence were fanatically idealistic and cultivated virtues and activities of public utility: a faith the Era of Enlightenment had created and to which romanticism and liberalism in the first half of the century had given further impetus. These generations had a strong faith and, consequently, illusions.

The failure of the 1848—49 movements crushed these hopes and illusions. Great ideas are slow in turning real, they may have to endure self-contradictory transfigurations, blood and dirt may bespatter their light. Man, the idolized

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demi-god of Romanticism, proved frail in the perspective of History. History and historic revolutions are swept along by human masses, but like the sea, this movement has its ebbs and tides. The *Tragedy* came to be written in such a fluctuating period.

The bitter lesson was accompanied by a no-less bitter experience: the idealistic generation got to know a new philosophical trend, mechanistic materialism, a German philosophy. Büchner, Moleschott and their associates held materialistic views of an infantile and extremist nature; the technical revolution of the era implied a moral of curt and final answers to the ever-so complex issues of philosophy. The soul is a "mirage"; the ideas, "the kitchen fumes"; morality, "an artifice"; man is at the mercy of circumstances, his fate is determined by blind material forces, statistical probabilities, the tyranny of nature; man cannot alter his predestination. The 1848 generation imbued with romanticism and idealism suffered a blow not only because of the political events but also because its ideological footing was destroyed. The achievements of the scientific revolution could not be ignored, but these achievements seemed to prove the attitude of mechanistic materialism right. This is the historical and philosophical crisis that lurks in the *Tragedy*, moreover Madách suffered an emotional and an economic crisis.

The scene where Imre Madách lived his life (1823–1864) was a manor-house at Sztregova, on the family estate, situated among the hills of Nógrád county, a picturesque spot of old Hungary; he inherited the property from his parents and wealthy lineage. The Madách family belonged to the most aristocratic landed gentry families in the county, and providing a good education for their sons had been a tradition in the family for generations. Madách's education was in accordance with the mentality of the nobility of the pre-1848 era: no luxury or waste, but a homogeneous social environment of equals: the members of powerful families. Young Madách took an active part in the political life of the 1840's, and he was the follower of the so-called centralist party which consistently tried to develop a bourgeois Hungary, and to adapt various French and English institutions and laws to the Hungarian conditions. Already then he tried his hand at poetry but literary circles ignored him. Madách's drama attempts to reveal a romantic's approach: most of them are historical dramas. But among his lyric poems there are some which prepare the outlook, the basic lyric material of the *Tragedy*.

In 1845, at the age of 22, Madách married Erzsébet Fráter, whom he met at a ball. His mother was against the marriage, thus probably bringing on its failure. The first years of the marriage were undisturbed though in the lyric poems of the young husband the notion Eden is a recurring motif. Memory of and nostalgia for undisturbed happiness of the golden age are worded in the heavy, awkward poems of young Madách. The same nostalgia will appear in the *Tragedy*, only with much greater dramatic and lyric force.

1848 came to be an ordeal for the Madách family. Though Imre, a sick man, did not take part in the fighting, he remained a life-long supporter of Kossuth. Soon after the defeat Madách was sent to an Austrian military prison because of giving asylum to an insurgent. His marriage broke up during this time; on his return from prison Madách put his wife on a carriage and sent her away; he remained alone in the empty Eden and he started to write the *Tragedy* after some years. The *Tragedy* aroused interest all over the country: János Arany, the greatest poet of the nation presented the work in the first literary society of the country, and Madách immediately rose to fame. He wrote another drama on Moses; in his character he tried to portray Kossuth and in the history of the Jews he tried to represent the history of the Hungarian nation. By this time he was seriously ill, the doctors of the day knew no remedy for the disease they termed "tubercular heart trouble". The poet nevertheless was still present at the Diet of 1860–61 where a reinstatement of the lost achievement of 1848 was attempted, he was still alive when the *Tragedy* was published in 1862; but at the age of 42 he died in the family manor-house at Sztregova.

A very important development took place in Hungarian poetry before the *Tragedy*, and Madách's work also shows the results of this development and the new orientation developed in poetry. After the culmination of the romantic trend in Vörösmarty's poetry, the new generation of poets headed by Petőfi and Arany turned to popular poetry; they made its outlook and mode of expression general, valid for the whole of the nation. The poetry of the 40's communicated a deeply humane and important message to a whole nation, and owned up to the outlook and forms of popular poetry. This poetry of national character, based on popular poetry (hence both popular and national) was the starting point of Petőfi's revolutionary poetry, which in fact went far beyond it. After 1848 Arany still tried to communicate with the nation as a whole and employed forms of popular poetry, but instead of the folk song he turned for instruction and impulse to the great works of world literature which he and some of his contemporaries considered the manifestations of "popularism" (Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, etc.). Bourgeois ideals claimed a more differentiated poetry than naive popularism, and world literature offered more inspiration than popular poetry. In order to launch a cultural attack on Austrian absolutism poetry had to come up to the level of development of world literature; a synthesis of popular, national and world literature (with the word of the age: "of humanity") became necessary. The *Tragedy* is a particularly fine example of this synthesis.

Madách was not a great lyricist, and yet, his early lyrics ideologically anticipate the *Tragedy*; in his most successful strophes we can spot the poet who did not overestimate his talents when he undertook the *Tragedy*. An equally important idea is also revealed in his lyric poetry without which we cannot grasp the ultimate message of the *Tragedy*: his attachment to the cause of inde-

pendence, and the memory of the war of independence in particular; his uncompromising patriotism. 1848 has a decisive role to play in the idealism of the *Tragedy*, although the Hungarian revolution is not mentioned therein.

Lyric poetry of national sentiment

Affirmation of national identity—also emphatically proclaimed in *Moses* written at the end of his life—national independence is the only way to make sense of history; this statement leads Madách to the principles of *fight* and *hope*. If he had shared the views of the disappointed, according to whom the war of independence had been a superfluous and senseless sacrifice, wishful and reckless undertaking, the *Tragedy* should have ended with the absolute failure of Adam and no ray of hope whatsoever. It is indeed very important that Madách believed in the ideals of the war of independence, and not only hated Stroom's activities as a "civilizer", the Bach-regime, and Austrian absolutism. Thus we justly consider the patriotic poems evoking the war of independence important self-confessions, like e.g. the cycle of *Táborképek (Pictures of the Camp)*, the series of the anecdotic, genre poems probably written during the war of independence. The scene among the rocks in the poem entitled *Az előörs (The Picket)* evokes the memory of Pál Madách in the frame of the winter campaign. The beloved brother is present in several of Madách's poems on the war of the independence. *Az alföldön (On the Great Hungarian Plain)* evokes the "fairy appeal" of the war of independence and the vision of the field as a "market place of fighting" with flags, the assaults of the cavalry, the wood of the bayonets; *Nem féltelek hazám! (I Do Not Fear for You, My Country!)* depicts the "pile of rocks" of Branyiszkó and the wheat of the Great Hungarian Plain "irrigated with holy blood" as the evidence of the heroic age; *A nép szava (The Word of the People)* awaits the return of the "punitive comet" to "cast the earth out of its poles"; *A szabadságháború (The War of Independence)* sighs for the "bright and small" lightening; *Petőfi sírján (On the Grave of Petőfi)* is a tribute to the magnificence of a rhymed epitaph composed with the "boom of cannons"; *Az aradi sírra (On the Grave of Arad)* glorifies the thirteen generals executed and buried at Arad. Madách evokes the war of independence without any sign of disillusionment. The memory of the great times evidently never faded in his mind—on the contrary, it became more and more distinct in the evidence.

Lyric poetry in the "miniatures"

Madách's poems' lyric gift becomes really apparent in certain miniature-like plays, which in their liveliness and deep implications anticipate the art manifested in the scenes of the *Tragedy*. *Egy látogatás (A visit)* is an unusually

idyllic piece of village-life, a pastel-like short story. *Egy nyíri temetőn (On a Cemetery of the Nyírség)* is almost equally modern: here fine observation of the details of the landscape fade into tight generalization and reflection. The poem possesses great lyric evocative force and its concise finish shows a mature poet and reasoning mind.

Nem hirdetvén reményt, sem földi hírt,
Csak kérlelhetetlen számokban mutatva:
Hány élet foly a mindenség dalába,
Mely mint kitépett hang magába sírt.

(Not preaching hope nor news of this world,
Showing only in implacable numbers:
How many lives flow into the song of the universe,
Which as a torn-out voice cried alone.)

The lines of the *Tragedy*, like the one evoking the night in Byzantium — "a great heart, beats with love" — create poetic charm with similar unexpectedness. *Az alföldi utazás (Journey accross the Great Hungarian Plain)* must be mentioned among these surprising poems despite its awkward talkativeness. It has concise and exact parts, at times the evocative force of tangible simplicity, with appropriate references to the horses sweating "in the blinding light", to the wheel of the carriage "grinding sand", to the tail of the ox covered with dust, to the blue globe-thistle, etc. *Ősszel (In Autumn)* the roundish incarnation of lyric realism, is the picture of the every-day life of the noble mansion with the drenched yellow clusters of the leaves of the trees, with the wenches "dressed in linen" running "in the thin mud", with the people of the mansion gathering around the kitchen fire, drawing the coach up to the gate and with the evening spent by the fireside smoking a pipe, engaging in friendly small talk, interspersed with the noise made by the glowing embers and the chirping of crickets. Let us set these poems aside Madách's various lyrical effusions (e.g. *Őrüljek meg (Let Me Be Mad)*) and we shall immediately see that these are but two facets to the lyricism so successful in the best places of the *Tragedy*.

The motif of the lost paradise

Research on Madách has already marked the poems which can be said to anticipate the *Tragedy* (*A megelégedés* (*Satisfaction*); *Hit és tudás* (*Faith and Knowledge*); *Ó- és újkor* (*Ancient and Modern*); *Éjféli gondolatok* (*Midnight Thoughts*); *Visszapillantás* (*Looking Back*); *Gyermekeimhez* (*To My Children*); *Az első halott* (*The First to Die*); *Az angyal útja* (*The Angel's Progress*); *A nő teremtése* (*The Creation of Woman*); *A halál költészete* (*The Poesy of Death*), etc.) These poems warn us that certain themes of the masterpiece had already intrigued the poet earlier. The *Tragedy* is the ultimate, the

most perfect and highest synthesis of Madách's lyric message. Moreover, the appeasement of the basic conflict is brought on by a motif which had occupied an important place in Madách's lyric poetry. This relief at the end of the *Tragedy* can be understood from Madách's lyric poetry in the first place.

Eden, the memory of "paradise lost", i.e. of the state when God animated man with His direct word, is a recurring motif in Madách's *Tragedy*, his lyric poetry as well as in his aesthetic dissertations. After losing paradise, God's word is transmitted to us by love, the childish soul, and by poetry in the "solemn moments of our life". The "abundant poesy of human bosom", as Madách says is not only the source of poetry, but the reproduction of Eden in the midst of the triteness of everyday life. The woman who transmits the "heavenly appeal" to us "through her cardiac vein" is also the "bearer of the magic" of poetry, the magic which recollects the clearer and more generous sense of our existence in a bleak world. As he says in his dissertation on woman: "Woman is forever the most excellent and most rightful object of our aesthetic and poetic world. The relations she weaves into our fate gild the desert of our lives."

The nostalgia for Eden was to be a recurring theme of Madách's poetry in a similar sense, the splitting of the curtains of a pale and joyless existence, to remember and regain consciousness of long lost happiness, again within reach. At certain points in the *Tragedy* poetic prospects open suddenly in the course of the recollection of the paradisial past; Adam suddenly realizing "the unknown feeling" in the Egyptian scene, Eve's remembering of the "radiant palms" in the Rome scene, the fugitive dream on the spirits with brotherly kisses in the Byzantium scene: these are the poetic parallels in which Madách depicts the long lost Eden underlying the plot.

The theme keeps recurring in Madách's poems; *Hit és tudás (Faith and Knowledge)* cries for the harmony of paradise, the loss of which is shown dramatically in the Tragedy;

Mint szép álom emléke ha ébredsz
Édesen reng képzeteden által,
Úgy a lélek édenről li álmát
Is elhozza e földre magával.

(As the memory of a nice dream when you wake
Trembles sweetly in your imagination
So is the soul's dream on Eden
Brought along to this world of ours.)

In the Tragedy, this "dream of Eden" appears as a fleeting but significant motif which interrupts another dream sent to Adam by Lucifer. History as shown by Lucifer is a nightmare which is now and then eased when the memory of Eden interrupts it; at the end of the *Tragedy* this dream becomes the motif of the possibility and necessity of fight and hope.

The "Eden-sphere" in lyric poetry

Madách's lyric poetry helps us to understand the *Tragedy* because an idea is expressed in it with striking consistency, the idea of happiness, harmony which saves us from the dreariness and failures of our lives, which helps us to master them. The motifs which are incarnations of this idea in Madách's various works form a sphere, which we may call Eden-sphere. In the *Tragedy* this sphere is represented by Eve, the loser of Eden. This strange contrast already says very much about Madách's opinion and it is expressed dramatically in the contrast of Eve's different appearances. Eve is the character who comes up against her former selves in the various scenes of the *Tragedy* yet her dramatic function remains unaltered throughout.

The concept of the Eden-sphere expressed in Madách's various works can be outlined thus: the memory of former happiness and harmony lives on in man and the resuscitation of this memory beautifies the present and makes it appear more generous, gives a feeling of all being still unblemished and whole, and gives rise to a desire to restore lost harmony and happiness. So memory conserves the best in man's Ego and stimulates his undertakings. In the *Tragedy* the memory of Eden stimulates the restoration of Eden. The harmony for which Adam longs is not the mechanical harmony of heaven —Adam does not know that, only Lucifer was the one who knew it before he had cast it away. The harmony of paradise is a more childish and natural happiness than that of the heavens.

According to Madách the Eden-sphere is transmitted to man by love, poetry, the childish soul—the Natura—at the exceptional, solemn moments of his life.

Madách's poetry expresses a particular life-philosophy and this life-philosophy is also manifest in the *Tragedy* in Eve's character. Man's fall is the condition of his rise at the same time; the one who is not reached by the message of Eden now and again remains in the narrow prison of his existence, he cannot be a real man.

Madách read the message of paradise from the child's soul, the child is still the dweller of Eden, the grown-up split up with Eden just like Adam. The innocent happiness of paradise, the plain harmony of the child's soul are upset by "reasoning", this is what happens in the *Tragedy*, too.

Paradise lost, nature talking to the child's soul, the star, the blade of grass, the animal and cloud, in the legend, the popular song, the "forgotten music" which is suddenly intonated in our ears: these construct the lyric theme-formula in the series of poems which anticipate the spheres of the *Tragedy*, the sphere of Eden, represented by Eve. The *Tragedy* is the reflection of a great ideological struggle, but struggle is always appeased in a lyrical-emotional manner in the poems.

Madách's recurring lyric theme is the invocation of the warm, pacifying, ancient and gentle forces which redeem man lost in his hectic uncertainties sometimes as the voice of "lost Eden", sometimes as the voice of the "loving Mother Nature", as a "long forgotten melody". The presence of this theme is a characteristic feature both in Madách's thinking and in his poetry. All Madách's dramas, except the *Tragedy*, remained unpublished in his life. We cannot find works among these dramas which forecast the artistic accomplishment of the *Tragedy*; features destined to become fully fledged in the *Tragedy* appear only sporadically in the former dramas. The usual case with the dramas written before the *Tragedy* is that Madách is evidently unable to create a dramatic hero, the acts and conflicts of whom would round up a single plot. The scenes remain isolated, the poet's invention redeems them now and again, but he is unable to establish a dramatic pattern of them. We can see isolated scenes in the *Tragedy*, too, but this is different, because these miniatures are connected by the idealism of the frame-scenes.

In the *Tragedy* Madách's frailties as a playwright change into virtues. He has very little perception for the plot, but he does not need a homogeneous plot in the *Tragedy*: instead he can make use of his talent for compression and concentration in the loosely connected scenes.

The early dramas *Commodus* and *Nápolyi Endre (Endre of Naples)* which can mainly be considered "immature", teem with the peculiarities of the extreme romanticism. We can also find the devoted, exalted liberalism which fits in so well with Madách, filled with unconditioned faith in his ideas, in both works. The antipathy against the tyrant, the patriotism of *Commodus* expresses the view of the youngest generation of the Reform Era. In *Nápolyi Endre* we meet Hugo's and Shakespeare's reminiscences—extreme idealization, Endre's extreme character, his confrontation with the court and clergy, his pretended madness, then his tragedy: all of these things together show Madách's loyalty to the hero-ideal of romanticism.

The Heracles drama, *Férfi és nő (Man and Wife)* was written probably in 1843; it shows creative possibilities to which Madách wished to return after the *Tragedy*. *Férfi és nő* resorts to a source from which Madách, according to his several statements, hoped the renewal of the modern dramatic art, to mythology which together with the Bible and popular poetry is heritage to a wider sphere of society.

The plot is about Heracles' unrequited love for Iole and about Deianeira's revenge. Iole hates Heracles because he killed her father; she loves the Lute-Player instead.

Heracles burns himself at the stake in order to release his divine nature from the "body of mud" and achieve union to Hebe, the goddess of youth, and not fall back on earthly love. In Heracles' character Madách creates a hero similar to the Titans of romanticism, Heracles' personality and character,

being so different from the Adam of the *Tragedy*, make us aware of how alienated Madách became from the Titan-ideal of romanticism. The exaggerated antifeminism of the Heracles-drama hides an overwhelming desire: Madách, the boy can only imagine man's greatness without a woman—Madách, the man maintains that human greatness is attainable only with the help of woman.

A single feature of Heracles is carried on to Adam in the *Tragedy*. It is more important, however, that the dualistic-antagonistic conception of *Férfi és nő* anticipates the *Tragedy*; and this conception is the most significant heritage of romanticism in Madách's thinking, characteristic of Byron, Vigny and Lamartine as well. The Heracles drama expresses the tragic antagonism of body and soul, good and bad, heaven and earth, spirit and matter in the *Tragedy*; the tragedy is the contrast of idea and matter, greatness and frailty.

The Heracles drama cannot live up to its dualistic-antagonistic basic idea, mainly because the poet identifies himself entirely with his hero's basically romantic, fruitless antimaterialism and his yearning for intellectuality. In the *Tragedy* Adam gradually "recovers" from his Heracles-like behaviour; or else, the memory of Eden does not let him regard this behaviour as unambiguous. If we think of certain scenes of the Heracles-drama we can understand what view Madách had to get rid of in order to become a great poet. The view expressed in early dramas simplifies one of the most important questions of human existence with childish pathos, the *Tragedy* is a masterpiece because Madách, the mature reasoning mind rejects the pathetic-romantic pattern, turns his back on the easier way idealization would induce him to follow; he looks for real complexities, the sensation of which was deepened and sophisticated by his personal experiences and emotional crises.

Madách had to get rid of the Titan-ideals of romanticism, of an ideal which simplifies everything in an idealizing way, of this abstraction in order to become a great poet. Not only the literary fashion of the day induced him to "glorify", it was idealistic devotion satiated all too easily by reverie and illusion. His education, his carefree early youth explains this. His ordeals made him strong enough for more difficult thoughts and insights. The desire for harmony, fulfilment in life, happiness and perfection, which appears in the Heracles drama, returns in the Eden-motif of the *Tragedy* and weaves in and out of Madách's lyric poetry.

Romantic fashion rather disturbs and retards development in Madách's art. The poet of the *Tragedy* must get rid of romantic heritage to find his own voice in the *Tragedy*. His early drama, *Csak tréfa (Only a Joke)* from 1843, is extremely unstagelike and we cannot find the compression and finish of his early historical works in this contemporary social piece. Madách feels historical themes more real than contemporary ones. This drama is too lyric and it expresses the poet's most personal mode too directly; he cannot adequately

develop the characters, or lead a satisfactory, balanced plot. The oozing lyricism of the *Csak tréfa* was to gain organic and moderate expression in the *Tragedy*.

Moreover Romanticism in the work of young Madách is mainly apparent in scheme and requisites. Madách created only one masterpiece, and everything he had written before the *Tragedy* can be considered indispensible preparation in the course of which he had to rectify errors, dismiss the temptation of the easier way, the strained manner to which states and moods misled him, for which he could bring up only temporary and superficial concern. The *Tragedy* seems indeed exceptional for its unexpectedness as a masterpiece. This of course is mere appearance. Madách's genius is manifest in the unrelenting preparation and in his renewed efforts and attempts.

We should not weigh Madách's genius on how long and where he erred, but on the fact that he came to avoid all dead-ends. On the other hand, he never left a single good impetus in these failures unemployed. Genius is revealed not in his unfailingly impeccable performance, but in the fact that he could see his errors in time and could make the best of them. *Csak tréfa* is a dead end because its philosophical message is not adequately transmitted in the form of romantic social drama. Yet, this miscarried attempt contributed to the success of transmitting philosophical message in the *Tragedy*. We feel that Madách's historical dramas are failures, that even the ablest, *Csák végnapjai (The Last Days of Csák)*, is a failure because romantic social drama is unfit for the depiction of the turmoil and problems which were in the spotlight of bourgeois mentality after 1848. But Madách learned the method of depiction, marking and recollection of the historical eras in his dramatic attempts and this method was to be a great help in the historical scenes of the *Tragedy*.

Another skill he acquired in the course of his attempts is character-composition, most important for a playwright. *Mária királynő (Queen Mary)* dating from 1843 has successfully formed characters and a few concise scenes of evocative force. (Madách revised the play in 1855.) Apparently one of the poet's characteristics was this stubborn insistence with which he undertook the revision of his earlier works to train himself. He tried out the literary forms the contemporary literature offered him, and he settled at the "free" form of the dramatic poem, i.e. at a literary form where a somewhat loose dramatic structure can be united by a philosophical pattern of ideas. Literary fashions can be as much a help as a hindrance. As soon as Madách tried his hand at the dramatic poem: he found his medium. His attempts in the literary form of stage drama were unfortunate, and perhaps that is why even the best stagings of the *Tragedy* are unsatisfactory. A parallel between the *Tragedy* and *Faust* has often been drawn but philology did not prove it; similar echoes are not unusual in the romantic era. The prologue in heaven, the contract between Faust and Mephisto, the appearance of the Faust—Mephisto—Margarete—Martha quartet in the Byzantium scene etc.: these are motifs,

ideas, which do not influence the essential message of the *Tragedy*, and from their "adoption" we should not jump to the conclusion that the *Tragedy* is a mere imitation of *Faust*. Madách's work cannot only be linked to *Faust*, it can generally be linked to the literary form "dramatic poem", wide-spread in romantic poetry. Madách and Lamartine (and French romantic poetry in general) come to be juxtaposed. Remarkable analogies between Andersen's drama *Ahasuerus* and the *Tragedy* were revealed—it is beyond doubt that the sole parallel to the *Tragedy* where the vision of world history is identical is Andersen's work and there is yet another instance in Edgar Quinet's drama *Ahasuerus*.

The Romantic trait in the *Tragedy* is in the first place its literary form, the dramatic poem; also the motif of the fallen angel and, hence the romantic contrast of Good and Evil, the tragic, solemn confrontation of the "divine" and the "infernal" in the world. But we search the *Tragedy* in vain for *Manfred*'s extreme, demonic individualism. There is no dogmatic loyalty to French romanticism either. We might say that several romantic manifestations are present in the *Tragedy*, but the outlook of the poet who is sensitively aware of the anti-romanticism of the eighteen-fifties, changes their aspect. The eighteen-fifties saw the influence of French literature when positivism and mechanistic materialism, all in all a scientific outlook came to oust romanticism. Madách's dramatic art as a whole, but the *Tragedy* in particular, can be regarded as late romantic work, almost an epilogue. Madách's attempts at drama take on the pattern of the romantic ideals of the 1840s, but the *Tragedy* differs from the romantic pattern by the very fact that positivism and science come in the foreground to help the poet overcome the handicaps of a romantic attitude. The characters of the *Tragedy* cannot be counted among the real children of romanticism; nevertheless the dream-likeness, meditative character and poetic quality of the work derive from romanticism and are conserved in the midst of an era which spectacularly rejected romanticism. Contemporary European literature, and even more the literature dating from after Madách's death are imbued with the philosophy of positivism. Flaubert, Taine and Zola are its heralds. In the final phase of European romanticism the *Tragedy* being a dramatic poem as regards literary form is a romanticist bridge to a new literary era, for its antiromantic ideas. In certain literatures (e.g. French or Polish) this change took place earlier; in Hungarian literature it came only with a delay of some decades. Madách used the literary form of the dramatic poem at a time when it had already become a little outdated. The message of the *Tragedy*, however, was all the more up to date and gave new life to its literary form: the only literary form permitting the realization of its long mused complex aims.

These aims were occasionally less clear to Madách and especially the historical dramas fall far from the range of ideas of the *Tragedy*, yet they are

important experiments at characterization. The nation's agony is also expressed in *Csák* for instance, and this was the first step to a deeper, though less direct expression of the same in the *Tragedy*.

The revised version of *Mária királynő* presents two great characters; one of them is Queen Mary, who rises to some sort of ascetical greatness by heroic self-denial and endurance of her ordeals. This firm and pure character is perhaps an incarnation of Madách's mother. Palizsnay, the romantic rebel is the other character of the drama, whose anxiety and dissatisfaction have something of Adam's more complicated, and more responsible, though similar attitude. Palizsnay's anxiety is somehow abstract, but Madách evokes tangible historic tragedy in the revolt of *Csák végnapjai*. The theme carries many dramatic possibilities. Csák revolts against Charles Robert of Anjou in order to seat Erzsébet, Árpád's last descendent onto the throne. He proclaims a rebellion the "lawful cause" of which is lost when Erzsébet shrinking back from bloodshed, retires to a convent. The tragedy of Csák Máté is that he is abandoned by his people, while Erzsébet on taking the veil makes his enterprise prove futile and the justification of his temper impossible.

The plot of this historical drama is far more intricate than that of the *Tragedy*. Katona's *Bánk bán*, due to its supremacy, had made it impossible to use national history as source material for another significant drama. Madách had to break away from the tradition in order to create something equal to *Bánk bán*. Apparently the pattern of a single historical event promised to be too complicated to express the ideas he had carried in himself from his youth.

A civilizátor (The civilizer) (1859) is an ultimately glaring instance of experiment: it is a short satiric piece in the manner of Aristophanes, embracing the cause of the various non-Hungarian nationalities living in Hungarian territory. It is striking in this little play how expert Madách had already become in concise epigrammatic characterization of types and genre-characters. István, the landlord and his servants, the figure of Stroom the "civilizer": these figures are well drawn by their gestures and talk. A similar art of characterization lends life to the subordinate characters in the historical scenes of the *Tragedy*: the London marketplace is a fine example when the portraits, created with expressive laconism, are so evocative.

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The three protagonists of the *Tragedy* are: Adam, Lucifer and Eve. They are again and again transfigured almost always as historical figures as the dramatic poem progresses scene by scene. The *Tragedy* consists of 15 scenes; scenes I–III and XV make up a framework. Scene I takes place in heaven, scenes II and XV in paradise. Of the historical scenes, the IXth takes place in Egypt, where Adam appears as a Pharaoh and Lucifer as his "min-

ister". Adam gets to hate the power of the slave driver, he longs for democracy, so Lucifer makes him wake up in Athens (scene V). (These historical scenes are visions; that is why they also have a poetic-unreal atmosphere.) Adam is disillusioned by the democracy of Athens, he only longs for the pleasures of life and he wakes up as Sergiolus in the declining Rome (scene VI). His desire for Christianity awakes and is satisfied in Byzantium (scene VII), where he appears as Tancred. Scene VIII shows Adam as Kepler in the court of Emperor Rudolf in Prague (Prague I). This is a particular scene in the *Tragedy* operating with dream within the dream: the Paris scene (IX) where Adam is Danton at the guillotine. Scene X leads us back to the Prague of Kepler (Prague II) to terminate the series of historical scenes where Adam appears in the robes of various historical figures in critical constellations. Scene XI leads on to the days of Madách: the London fair; scene XII is the Phalanstery of the future; scene XIII is a vision of the times when the Earth becomes so cold that Eskimos dwell on the Equator; scene XIV leads on to outer Space, where Adam tries in vain to tear himself away from the Earth; and eventually in scene XV he wakes up from his nightmare and sets out to commit suicide, but Eve prevents him from doing so, by telling him she shall bring forth progeny. The *Tragedy* ends with the Lord's tirade, which show Adam's and Eve's contrasted truths in the work of the Creation, and enigmatically he sets man's future goals in *fight* and *hope*.

The *Tragedy* is a sensitive reaction to a range of ideas which engaged the attention of Hungarian public thinking passionately after 1848: determinism and the new outlook of the rapidly developing sciences.

There were two trendsetting scientific doctrines in the second half of the 19th century: the conservation of energy in physics and evolution in biology. Thermodynamic laws and the laws of evolution made their way into philosophy, they set moral values in a new perspective, inspiring desperate resistance on the part of idealism. Darwin realized the particular disharmonies prevailing among humans when he saw the competition in economic life. The mythical elements in biological reasoning were superseded by science, the theory of vis vitalis was refuted, the view of "natural philosophy" became out-dated. This radical change in sciences also affected our country: Hungarian biologists turned away from vitalism, turned to experimental research and got acquainted with Darwinism. The philosophical and moral world concept changing in the footsteps of the sciences had had an effect on Hungarian public thinking already in the 1850's in connection with mechanicist materialism and the polemies against it.

The decisive change in Hungarian ideological life came about however when the new scientific achievements like the thermodynamic laws, the principle of the conservation of energy and material, became universally known, and invoked a new physiological outlook. Thompson and Helmholtz were introduced

into Hungarian literature partly by physiological transmission. The go-between was Ludwig Büchner, whose book, *Kraft und Stoff* (1855) created a great uproar. Büchner's thoughts left an imprint not only in Madách's notes, but also in some of the poetic tirades of Lucifer. At more than one instance Lucifer is the mouthpiece of Büchner.

There lies a debate in the background of the *Tragedy* that took place between the idealist Rudolf Wagner and the mechanistic materialist Karl Vogt at the congress of naturalists in Göttingen in 1854. Materialism and science in general triumphed. Madách seems also to have drawn on Oken's natural philosophy when in the *Tragedy* Lucifer is being refuted. In the third scene of the *Tragedy* there is great emphasis on the first law of thermodynamics (the principle of conservation of energy), and the Eskimo scene which shows the cooling of the globe can equally be linked to the second law of thermodynamics (the principle of the direction of the conversion of energy). The theory of magnetism elaborated by Faraday between 1830 and 1850 appears in the poetic metaphors of the *Tragedy*. Philology satisfactorily traced Büchner in the *Tragedy* and pointed out the ideas of Moleschott, a participant of the Wagner–Vogt debate, which engaged Madách's attention; there is proof that Madách had a copy of Feuerbach's *Wesen des Christenthums* in his library.

Madách's notes are the evidence, however, that his interest in philosophy and science was of quite unusual nature.

From the point of view of the *Tragedy* it is unimportant how deeply Madách was absorbed in the new scientific and philosophical views. Madách's motor force was the ambition he shared with a group of his Hungarian contemporaries: to create a syncretism between the "ideal" and "real", i.e. between morality and science, offering so brilliant a new world, yet contradicting the sainted ideals. Even more important: Madách was affected by the determinism which was distorted to extreme pessimism by mechanistic materialists. The *Tragedy* brings instances to prove this principle in the presentation of human history—and yet it is out to refute it.

Madách depicts the principle of determinism primarily in the figure of Lucifer who tries to persuade Adam of the futility of human action in the historical scenes. Madách has been said to have regarded the masses responsible for the hopelessness of history; he fell prey to an "aristocratic contempt" for, and horror of, the masses thus failing to offer a realistic perspective of history.

His Titan-theory made Madách susceptible to accept the solitary Titan of romantic philosophers who alone is the maker of history, as opposed to the still "childish", "blind" mass—generally the notion of the confrontation of the "great individual" and his "uncomprehending age" (*Csak tréfa*). In Madách's thinking a fictitious factor is very important setting the individual against the mass, but not denying the possibility of progress; he thinks that only the

"great" can fight for great ideals, and in doing so they, as individuals, represent the masses. These, however, look on uncomprehendingly—they may even turn against their own cause and against those who fight for them. So in Madách's opinion the incomprehension, suspicion, and irresolution of the masses do decisively contribute to the failure of the ideas of progress. We must add, however, that Madách declares this with self-criticism: the criticism of the enthusiastic, idealistic liberalism of his generation, of the idea that great causes are self-sufficient and need no action to be furthered. Only after 1848 does it become evident that sloth and indolence blur the noblest ideals in the eyes of the masses. Thus the dualistic contrast of idea and matter appears and the idea should reckon with reality, and reality become susceptible to the idea. And we must also see that Madách sees the reason for the frailty of the masses in their servility. Miltiades condemns the people of Athens because they are "branded servants by poverty". There is indeed an excuse for their inadequacy.

The ideological frame and the dramatic structure of the *Tragedy* are both based on the principle of the unity of contrasting elements. Adam's and Lucifer's relation is simultaneous conflict and interdependence, Adam's faith and Lucifer's doubt. There is interdependence and conflict (at times appeaseable) between Adam and Eve, while the complete, last relief is brought on by Eve's prospective motherhood. The conflict of Eve and Lucifer is inconsequent and not to be resolved ideologically or dramatically; we must remark, however, that Eve is Lucifer's agent when the drama is launched. Madách resolves the organic philosophical conflict in the *Tragedy* by unity in the contrasts of matter and idea, and he creates this unity of contrasts by the acts of the three protagonists. Dramaturgically Adam and Lucifer are abstractions as well as representatives of the "idea" and "matter" while Eve represents life and lifelikeness (i.e. the unity of idea and matter as opposed to the abstraction). In Madách's thinking matter, whose existence is the condition of reality, appears twofold naked, as in Lucifer's negation of the idea—and "imbued with idea", as Eve's warm, natural, benevolent energy (in other words: the coupling of idea and matter, the balance of ideal and real).

Three protagonists represent three spheres—thus the characters of the *Tragedy* move in three spheres: in the spheres "purely ideal", "purely material" and "natural", the latter a synthesis of the two previous ones. Lucifer fundamentally represents material, but he is ideologically abstract, he is related to Adam. Adam is the representative of the "purely spiritual", but subject to the laws of nature (both in a good and a depreciatory sense). And Eve may equally threat with undermining greatness and offer an escape as double-faced nature.

These three spheres mingle and become separated, this being the dramatic pattern of the *Tragedy*. Yet all three are manifest only if we view the "plan"

of the *Tragedy* as a whole: in the frame scenes (I–III and XV) this conception comes out sharply; the historical scenes can be more misleading. Eve always appears as the main character of the "natural" sphere together with her helpmates (e.g. the Spirit of Earth). The uncertainties in the two other spheres were surely brought on by dramaturgical problems: Adam or Lucifer cannot be presented as contrasting abstractions due to the necessity of individualization and historical reality. Adam is the representative of the idea of faith, Lucifer that of doubt: this formula runs through the dramatic plot, but always with certain modifications, with additions made necessary by character portrayal.

What is the essence of Adam's main conflict, producing dramatic tension in the Tragedy? In the drama "matter" and "reality" always refuse Adam and his ideals, the problem is not Lucifer, but the incomprehension and blind, incompetent resistance of the age, of the masses, etc. Thus the main conflict of the *Tragedy* is the confrontation of ideas, represented by Adam, and of the respective age and the masses refusing these ideas.

Adam himself is sometimes alien from reality for his devoted idealism. There is some kind of abstraction in his thinking, decisions and even in his devotion. Adam on the whole remains in his central, active role until the London scene, afterwards, however, the active central hero changes into a contemplative, meditating witness of the events. He alternatingly experiences harmony and disharmony. Disharmony is the factor that drives him to new horizons. The alternation of harmony and disharmony, hope and disappointment, enthusiasm and disillusionment, enterprise and failure is the dramatic trait of the *Tragedy*, apparent in the progress of the historical scenes (starting with the Egypt scene and ending with the second Prague scene.) Compared to these scenes the series starting with the London scene appears less dynamic for Adam's being a mere witness. A dramatic cycle is regularly repeated from the Egypt scene to the second Prague scene: twice we see Adam enthusiastic (the Egypt scene, the end of the Rome scene)—twice we see his failure, his disillusionment (the Athens and Byzantium scenes)—twice his escape (in Rome: to hedonism, and in Prague: to the ascetism of science). The scenes of the series of the scenes of Egypt to Prague I alternatingly start in the tone of enthusiasm or disappointment and end in the contrastive mood. Disappointment changes into hope—or hope gives place to disappointment.

The abstract nature of Adam's character could bring the drama come to a standstill, if Eve were not present as his companion and a contrastive character, representing the "natural" sphere. Eve and Adam create the unity of contrasts both ideologically and dramatically. While homogeneity of character is apparent in the case of Adam, Eve is his opposite; her special metamorphoses, the continuous change in her character draws on our attention. We see her as a slave (Egypt), as a heroine (Athens), as a courtesan (Rome),

as a novice in a convent (Byzantium). Eve's is a fluctuating character: her relation to Adam is never stable, she is either on the approach, or is moving away.

The relation of Adam and Eve is sometimes characterized by devoted love (Athens), sometimes by ascetism (Byzantium), sometimes by triviality (Prague), but mostly it means inaccessibility (Byzantium, Prague, Paris, London, Phalanstery). She transmits an intimate warm message—the message of the sphere of life, of "nature"—to Adam who immoderately pursues his ideals and almost loses life because of them. An identical message is sounded in the paradise scene.

For indeed innocent, happy harmony of "idea" and "matter" had already existed in paradise and the "natural" sphere reigned in that perfect, radiant world. Can paradise be reborn in human life and in history? It is Eve who can bring back "paradise lost" momentarily, but all the more miraculously now and again. In the painful return of harmony at the end of the play we may read the possibility of a historical paradise. The sphere which we termed "natural" has a more important role in the *Tragedy* than either Adam's idealistic behaviour or Lucifer's materialism. Both the dramatic and ideological dénouement take place in the "natural" sphere in complete harmony that in Madách's eyes characterizes the Lord as well as his creation, which Madách considers identical with its Maker. ("Isn't the Lord identical with the world? Where are the limits?"—we read in Madách's notes. The Lord is the world itself, he is reality or the painfully regained harmony, a ray of hope in the last scene.

Man and nature are the heirs to paradise. Madách already expressed this thought in his lyric poems and he makes it clear in the *Tragedy* that Adam, and man in general, survived his expulsion from paradise with the help of Eve—forces of nature. Eve is to blame for Adam's failure, but she also saves Adam. Eve loses Paradise, but only she is able to retain its memory. The references to the memory of Paradise in the *Tragedy* are also in the "natural" spheres and this sphere is dramaturgically linked to the figure of Eve.

Lyric motifs of Adam's and Eve's courtship also belong to this sphere: expressed at the height of the dialogues in the most dramatic situations. And Lucifer, who does not tremble or waver in front of the gates of paradise, is forced to retreat when he sees love, which is life's and nature's answer to barren doubt. "I cannot tear it", he says in the Egypt scene and Lucifer shall have to bow to the "slender thread" (man's constrained identity with matter and nature) also in the suicide episode. In the Athen scene Lucifer is touched by the sight "of the ever rejuvenating, ever beautiful" or when in the London scene Eve steps over "the grave in glory", Lucifer's idea in this bleak and sad world, loses the argument.

Adam's drama is ended when Eve declares her oncoming motherhood, it is Eve who calls him back from the edge, not the Lord.

Adam had almost crossed the threshold of annihilation even earlier, although not to the extent of self-destruction, only self-assertation: in scene XIII, flying in the infinite space of the Lord. He is brought back to the Earth, to life, by the word of the Spirit of the Earth, and this word has the same function ideologically and dramatically as Eve's word in the last scene. The ideological-dramatical roles of Eve and the Spirit of the Earth are closely related; the same ancient and pacifying, muffled and indelible natural forces are conjured up, the ones Madách had invoked in his poems with such lyric intimacy. The Spirit of the Earth is also of the "natural" sphere, where Eve belongs to; in scene III the Spirit of the Earth shows his two faces, and these are as contradictory as Eve's two appearances in the Paris scene. The playful nymphs of the grove (an incarnation of the Spirit of the Earth) return as the protectors of Eve in the Athen scene.

The historical scenes do not show history itself, but the fate of revolutionary ideas in history. Madách dramatically weighs the "dominant ideas" which became so questionable for the liberal generation at the turn of the 50s and 60s. In the Egypt scene there is enthusiasm for the idea of liberty —in the Rome scene for the idea of fraternity. The deformed, disappointing creation, the deformed mutation of liberty in the Athen scene and of fraternity in the Byzantium scene disappoint enthusiastic Adam. The ideas of liberty, fraternity and equality occur together once more in the Paris scene. The Paris scene—with its corresponding scene, Prague II—create a synthesis like that in scene XV. Here the synthesis of matter and idea are created—there the synthesis of liberty and equality. At these "basic points" of idealism in the drama Madách always stresses the particular importance of his message—second Prague scene and scene XV are almost equally significant though one is in the middle, the other at the end of the work.

We have already mentioned that Adam becomes a spectator, a witness after the London scene—London does not have a Miltiades or a Tancred. The conflict so sharp in the drama until the second Prague scene appears to relax after the London scene. London and the Phalanstery are surveys, or tableaus. They are lively, but not in a dramatic sense. London and the Phalanstery have no hero who meets a tragic end.

There is an important reason for the fact why Adam's dramatic activity, and consequently that of Eve, decreases after the London scene. After the London scene the question of revolution and progress is overshadowed by determinism, i.e. the question of destiny and free will. Adam feels that destiny and history weigh on him more and more—Lucifer sets out to convert him to the principle of determinism with increasing swerve and powerful arguments. From here on their debate is the core of the drama; it comes to its climax

when Lucifer almost succeeds in pushing Adam into the abyss. The drama of determinism culminates in Adam's suicide attempt, the problem of fatality is solved in Eve's maternity; the Lord's last tirade is both a dramatic end and a closing word of idealism and morality.

The *Tragedy* is a dramatic poem, but the drama is rather a pretext for the poem. The static spectacularity of some of the scenes having almost no dramatic elements, allow Madách to evolve personal lyricism that primarily led him to his theme. Some scenes in the *Tragedy* are un-dramatical; no matter how colourful and lively the London scene, we are affected by its evocative power, not its drama. We could see that in the scenes after the London scene it is not only Adam's activity which decreases, but Eve's character is also simplified to some traits. In spite of this, the *Tragedy* does not lose its swerve in the less dramatic places, its power lies not in its dramatic, but in its poetic quality expressing thoughts and states of mind. The real continuity of the *Tragedy* is not realized in the plot or in the logic of idealism forced unto the action, but in the gently tinged relation of Adam and Lucifer in Adam and Eve's "own scenes" full of nostalgia. Whenever the plot allows Adam and Lucifer or Adam and Eve remain on their own, their conversation, undisturbed by external factors, creates the continuity of poetic quality which unites the whole work more strictly than its structure. It is possible to understand the essence of Madách's message, reading only Adam's and Lucifer's, or Adam's and Eve's isolated scenes, conversations and ignore the dramatic events.

It is not negligible that the poetic quality of the *Tragedy* emerges from a delicately evoked dreamlikeness. This dreamlikeness sometimes gives an enigmatic and painful stress to certain repetitions and encounters and especially to Eve's appearances, her alternating approaches to and retreats from Adam. The network of these recollections, anticipations and intuitions is woven according to the particular logic of dreams and the dreamlikeness does not only allow the application of summary references, symbols and indications—helping the stylized concision of certain scenes in this way—but it is like a veil over the characters and scenes, endowing the tirades, the dialogues, and especially Adam's gestures with dreamy mystery. The wine that Adam drinks in the evening coolness of Prague ("it is an icy world, I must inflame it.") although nobody feels cold around him, and the arbours of the garden are full of people: this wine seems to prime Adam's words and acts with some kind of ecstasy even in the most active scenes. This ecstasy is very congenial with the spiritual restlessness of Adam in his dream; this continuity of ecstasy and restlessness also helps to create the unity of the work, hence this unity is not achieved by struggle or with the plot, but with the dreamy atmosphere, with the continuous presence of ecstasy and restlessness. Adam's transfigurations, his restless desire, and his moods now and again are involved not in dramatically elaborated, but rather in indicated processes: they follow a dream

logic. The repeated breaks in the plot and the deprival of their realizations also increase the dreamlikeness just like the melancholy with which Adam's consciousness sometimes becomes dominant with such an intensive lyricism. The *Tragedy* becomes poetic because of its dreamlikeness and this creates the possibility for the brilliant ease with which Madách is able to grasp essence evocatively while keeping off effusive mannerisms. His methods are always "direct", sometimes almost naive, thus his work is suggestive like dreams which are a concentrated, concise, emphatic echo of our waking lives.

Madách wishes to assert poetically and emotionally and to preach and emphasize lyrically the principle of free will, and the laws to which a fight for progress is subject by offering a "Thesaurus" of historical and natural phenomena. He preaches this lesson along with a momentous, almost depressing enumeration of counter-arguments. He is the first to fight these counter-arguments as a responsible human being with a desperate desire for faith: a characteristic gesture in his disturbed times. Madách abandons every dramatic situation to Lucifer's denial of the principle of free will. This denial was an important factor in the public mind of the age, and both history and the new natural philosophical consequences of science inspired desperation. Madách goes the way to the edge of the abyss, to desperation and annihilation together with the hero of the *Tragedy*; but the real pathos of the work lies in the fact that he makes himself and his hero return from the verge of the abyss.

Madách's last finished drama is *Moses* (1861), in which the Jews are to be identified with the Hungarian people, and under this guise the events of 1848 are being dwelt on. Madách's last finished drama merits our attention because of his answers to some of the questions appearing in the *Tragedy*. The hero of the drama, Moses, the "great individual" becomes a real hero because he achieves union with his people.

Moses carries on the concept of the people we find in the *Tragedy* in a clearer form but essentially unchanged. The reason for the "meanness" of the people is the same in the two works. The only medicine for this "meanness" is liberty! *Moses* expresses the belief that it is possible to guide the people to the "promised land", but only if the "great individual's" unselfish energy is sufficient to oppose the people's erring will.

The episode of the golden calf expresses in the form of a dramatic situation how the people can be made happy only against their will, and to what extent their childish moodiness is not to be influenced, just like in the Athens scene. All along the drama Moses considers the people a mere tool, at the end, however, he prides in the greatness this "frail, mean" device, the people, could attain.

Servility, the stigma—the "meanness" of the people is the consequence of oppression: here is the recurring thought of *Moses*, which clarifies Madách's view of the people. This view emerges from the disappointment which became

dominant in Madách's soul seeing the nation's incompetence against absolutism: "The slave remains a slave, only a better generation is worthy of liberty."—he writes in one of his notes. His only hope is directed towards "individual greatness" and he is waiting for the coming of a Moses-like leader.

The concrete political references in *Moses* have already been demonstrated long ago, e.g. the features of garibaldism and the references to various conspiracies. All this proves that contemporary reality is expressed in the theses and dramatic motifs of Moses, the drama is indeed Madách's interpretation of the age.

The *Tragedy* did not allow Madách's resolving the conflict of the "great individual" and the masses—but in *Moses* this conflict finds its solution, the "great individual" and the "mean masses" find each other, and this is expressed in a poetic-symbolic way in Moses' death and the rebirth of the nation. After a long internal struggle, confrontation, passionate *yeas* and *nays* Madách finally attained reconciliation with the people — a noble people —, and remained unfailingly loyal to the principles of 1848. But of course the justification of the people in *Moses* springs from a liberal notion of the people. *Moses* demonstrates that the aristocratic attitude of *odi profanum vulgus* is alien to Madách, that he formed his judgement on the "mean" masses because he saw them accepting servitude, and that the bitter and unfair motif of his view of the people can be explained by his disappointment after Solferino. This explanation is also valid for the theory expounded in *Moses* that the people can gain their liberty only against their will, by the self-sacrifice and heroism of the "great individuals". But Moses certifies that these views did not fossilize in Madách's thinking, on the contrary, they took on less agitated, more optimistic traits as the fruits of long struggle.