

A Pandora's Box of National Hostility? The Széchenyis and Aristocratic Donations in Nineteenth Century East-Central Europe¹

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Introduction

In a mental asylum near Vienna where he had been hospitalized since September 1848, Count István Széchenyi (1791–1860), a former cavalry officer in the Austrian army and one of the major landowners in the Kingdom of Hungary, looked back on his political career only to find that in all his decades of patriotic agitation and social and economic reformism he had been nothing else but the harbinger of destruction, a political Antichrist, ‘the Beast of Apocalypse’. With the falling of the Hungarian war of independence in the background, driven by the clash of imperial interest and rival national aspirations within the Habsburg Empire, Széchenyi reckoned that it was his immense 1825 donation, a year’s revenue from his landed estates, for the establishment of a Hungarian Academy that had opened ‘the Pandora’s Box of the current national hostility’ (‘die Pandora-Büchse der jetzigen National-Zewürfnisse’). He believed his gift to the nation, a widely celebrated act of patriotic generosity, had served as ‘the tool of diabolic forces’, leading to turmoil, violence, bloodshed, and the demise of all prospects for peace and political and social progress.²

Interference between the emergence of nation-states and that of capitalism has been explored from both ends.³ But, as the case of Széchenyi and countless other patriotic benefactors at the time demonstrate, at the roots of modern nationalist movements one also finds a markedly non-capitalist economy, one determined by *gifts*, given publicly in the form of donation, offering, or subscription, to foster various national causes. The patriotic fervour for public giving not merely responded to rising national consciousness; in a sense, this was what *signalled* the appearance of a nationally defined collective self-awareness. In turn, these gifts further intensified political identification or re-identification by lending their ethical and emotional appeal, as well as their symbolic prestige, to national movements.

The vast anthropological literature produced since Boas, Malinowski, and Mauss has shown that among native populations the ritualized giving away (or the spectacular destruction) of valuables were to create and maintain social bonds as well as to negotiate clan rivalry and gender relations. In their intricate circularity of giving, receiving and returning, gifting practices established social systems based on the mutual obligation of generosity.⁴ Albeit a modern and therefore essentially

¹ The paper was written with the support of the ‘A 19. századi magyar irodalom politikai gazdaságtana’ Lendület-research program.

² For the ‘self-confessions’, ‘last words’, and letters that Széchenyi wrote in this vein, mostly in German, between March 1849 and August 1851, see Árpád Károlyi (ed.), *Gr. Széchenyi István döblingi irodalmi hagyatéka I.* (Budapest, 1921), 425–46.

³ On the one hand, nationalism has been seen as a social consequence of capitalist economic transformation inasmuch as modern nations were integrated by the forces of industrial economy, marketization, and the technologies of ‘print capitalism’; on the other, capitalism has been seen to have emerged in a system of territorially unified nation-states that enabled the free movement of capital and the mass market distribution of large-scale production, based on a workforce of linguistic homogeneity provided by mass education. See, for example, Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism* (London, 2002), 166–81; Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (London, 1998), 47–69.

⁴ For critical surveys of gift theories see Maurice Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift* (Chicago, 1999); David Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams* (New York, 2001); Olli Pyyhtinen, *The Gift and its Paradoxes: Beyond Mauss* (Farnham, 2014).

different phenomenon, nationalism too relied on peculiar dynamics of expenditure and gain, material or symbolic, collective or individual. Despite taking shape in economic environments increasingly in favour of endless accumulation, national ideologies presented the nation as to be maintained by selfless giving from its members with the expectation of only symbolic rewards. Gifts mediating national sentiment reciprocated (or, rather, created the idea of) an intrinsic and never fully repayable debt to the Nation, while, in turn, made the community symbolically indebted to givers.⁵ Following the early-modern ethos of individual loyalty to the patria, from the early nineteenth century ‘altruistic willingness to sacrifice oneself for a greater, public cause’ became ‘the collective action of a people’.⁶ These conjunctures of nationalism and gifting not only demonstrate the modernity of an archaic praxis but also the persistence of atavistic cultural and social features in modernization.⁷

The late-eighteenth, early-nineteenth-century surge of patriotic donations was not uniform or homogeneous. Temporally, it was cut across by the transition from feudal traditions of patronage recast in patriotic terms to a new philanthropy entangled in capitalist rationales and practices. Socially, the predominantly high-profile donations were increasingly accompanied by contributions from minor donors: the paternalistic tendencies of the former gradually channelled into bourgeois philanthropy in a more democratic public sphere. One might also differentiate between two distinct, albeit interconnected, types: one comprised material or financial donations to institutions identified as serving national interest; the other encompassed more existentially charged acts of self-sacrifice, in spiritual or in physical form. In the case of concrete and tangible patriotic donations, the redistribution of material wealth accumulated symbolic capital both individually (converting material loss into the social prestige of the donor) and collectively (converting material gain into an enhanced awareness of national grandeur). In the case of abstract and intangible ones, unrewarded work devoted to, or life wasted for, the Nation mediated self-destructive contributions to a Bataillesque economy of excess.⁸

In their social functions, indigenous gifts could secure cooperative solidarity and peace (an example being the Melanesian *kula* ring) or stage the affirmation of social status in competitive exchanges (for example the *potlatch* rituals of the Pacific Northwest). Negotiating peace against the background of potential war, gifts were forms of ‘symbolic violence’ meant to tame physical collision.⁹ Accordingly, just as much as it contributed to political, cultural, or ethnic integration, patriotic minded public giving was also framed by internal and external conflicts. Benign

⁵ On ideas of indebtedness to one’s patria in antique and early-modern republicanism see Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1995), 1–40.

⁶ Stuart Wolf, ‘Introduction’, in Stuart Wolf (ed.) *Nationalism in Europe. 1815 to the Present: A Reader* (London, 1996), 2, 11.

⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss placed modern (Christmas) gifting practices in parallel to their archaic counterparts, yet without looking into their potential relevance for nationalism: *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer, Rodney Needham (Boston, 1969), 56. Marcel Mauss pointed to rituals modern nation-states and tribal societies shared such as their respective cults of flag and totem: ‘Nation, Nationality, Internationalism’, in Wolf (ed.), *Nationalism in Europe*, 85. Mauss’ parallel work on nations and the gift were both seeking cooperative social models (see Jean Terrier and Marcel Fournier, ‘Zur Einführung’, in Marcel Mauss, *Die Nation, oder der Sinn fürs Soziale*, trans. Christine Pries (New York, 2017), 25–7), but he did not consider national sentiments as having the logic of gift-reciprocity

⁸ Georges Bataille based his ‘general economy’ on abundance as opposed to political economy’s principle of scarcity. He claimed that both living organisms and societies tend to produce more than they need for their survival. As energy is always in excess, the surplus that cannot be absorbed by growth needs to be squandered (spent unproductively) to avoid catastrophic imbalances of accumulation and expenditure: *The Accursed Share. An Essay on General Economy. Volume I. Consumption*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1991).

⁹ See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice (Palo Alto, 1990), 126.

patriotic gifting introduced antagonisms both within particular political communities and in their relations to rival nationalisms. The cult of patriotic self-sacrifice not only fed into symbolic competition but also had destructive or self-destructive potentials, for example in suicide or voluntary death as the ultimate patriotic gift. The nationalist uprisings, revolutions, civil wars, and wars of independence in the era staged orgies of self-sacrifice for the nation.¹⁰ Thus, if indigenous gifts to external groups were meant to prevent war, the nationalist gifting of one's own community, occasionally, prepared for war.¹¹

This chapter examines these tendencies as they gained prominence in East-Central Europe between the 1790s and 1850s. Surveying their symbolic and material economies, I will outline the social, political and theological frames in which they were embedded, the various notions of nationhood they came to serve, and their interference with capitalist transformation (i.e. the mingling of gifts and investments). While looking at similar patterns in the Habsburg Empire, especially in Bohemia, my main focus will be on two Hungarian aristocrats, Count István Széchenyi and his father Ferenc. Their activities as high-profile patriotic benefactors exemplify much of the pivotal role public giving came to play in systematic nation-building as well as the dangers (from social resentment to individual psychological crises to military conflicts) that were unleashed by it.

From Feudal Social Obligation to Sacrifice for the Nation

Formal or informal, private or public channels of gift exchange (from charity to bribery) continued to organize social relations, diplomacy, politics, family, and professional life even amidst burgeoning capitalism.¹² Under the aegis of eighteenth-century enlightened patriotism, however, a peculiar type of public giving occurred. Unlike in humanistic alms-giving or traditional patronage, the intended recipient of this kind of political philanthropy (*gift-patriotism*) was not a social or religious group or a particular person but an abstract subject, the patria or the nation.¹³ Donations to this newly re-imagined collective entity sought to advance the welfare of the country as a political community, and, over time, to foster cultural and political nation-building. Perceived as 'gifts to the Nation' or 'sacrifices on the altar of the Fatherland', donations of this kind had a significant impact on national movements by providing them with an infrastructural basis and financial and institutional resources.¹⁴ Helping to erect national monuments or to establish cultural institutions with national profiles from museums to libraries, theatres, academies, schools, art collections (and, once established, to maintain or extend their operations), patriotic gifts created highly visible and permanent reminders of nationhood. In the

¹⁰ See John Hutchinson, *Nationalism and War* (Oxford, 2017), 65–72.

¹¹ Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (New York, 1972), 149–83; Jean Helen Quataert, *Staging Philanthropy: Patriotic Women and the National Imagination in Dynastic Germany, 1813–1916* (Ann Arbor, 2001), 4–6, 177–250.

¹² See, for example, Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-century France* (Oxford, 2000); Irma Thoen, *Strategic Affection? Gift Exchange in Seventeenth-century Holland* (Amsterdam, 2007); Felicity Heal, *The Power of Gifts: Gift-exchange in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2014).

¹³ See, for example, Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe* (Amsterdam 2006), 71–81; Teodora Shek Brnardić, 'Modalities of Enlightened Monarchical Patriotism in the Mid-eighteenth Century Habsburg Monarchy', in Balázs Trencsényi and Márton Zászkaliczky (eds.), *Whose Love of Which Country? Composite States, National Histories and Patriotic Discourses in Early Modern East Central Europe* (Leiden, 2010), 631–62.

¹⁴ Orsolya Rákai, 'A magyar nyelv ünnepe? (Tiszteletadás a magyar irodalmának – a Marczibányi-jutalom első két kiosztása)', *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények*, 102 (1998), 5–6, 708–28 discusses the oscillating terminology of 'gift' and 'sacrifice' in early-nineteenth century Hungarian patriotic texts with regards to the Marczibányi Foundation, established in 1815 to reward scholarly works written in Hungarian.

form of grants and prizes, donations sponsored and encouraged scholarly, literary, or artistic work on what was increasingly considered a national culture.

As a site for the production of political identity, philanthropy was put in the service of nation-building agendas all over Europe. Elsewhere in Central Europe the proliferation of public gifts was more intimately linked with the rise of a bourgeois civil society, the philanthropic praxis of which not only complemented but also intensely competed with aristocratic and dynastic patronage.¹⁵ However, in early-nineteenth-century East-Central Europe patriotic donations came predominantly from the aristocracy and the higher clergy. These benefactors continued a rich history of feudal obligation, recasting it in patriotic terms. Their pursuit of national agendas through public giving overlapped with traditional poor relief or religious cultivation as several benefactors were active in both fields. Although the institutions thus established, or the funds thus raised, served as forums of a burgeoning civil public sphere, they remained framed by feudal social hierarchies and rituals.¹⁶ In the Habsburg realms, the most prominent donors of cultural institutions included Count Ferenc Széchenyi (1754–1820), the founder of the Hungarian National Library and Museum (1802), and his son, István Széchenyi, the principal donor of the Hungarian Academy (1825); Count Kaspar Maria von Sternberg (1761–1838), the founding donor of the Bohemian *Landesmuseum* (1818), along with Franz Sternberg and a handful of other patriotic aristocrats who established the first public art collection in Prague (1796); Archduke Johann (1782–1859), the founder of the *Landesmuseum Joanneum* in Graz (1811); the Serb noble-born merchant Sava Tekelija/Thököly (1761–1842), the patron of the cultural organization *Matica Srpska* (1826) and the founder of the *Collegium Thökölyanum* in Pest; bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer (1815–1905), the advocate of the University of Zagreb (1874) and the principal donor of the Yugoslav/Croatian Academy (1866) along with the art gallery that its palace came to house from 1884.

Aristocratic *gift-patriotism* had its heyday between the 1790s and 1830s. With the rise of romantic nationalism and its emphasis on vernacular languages and cultures, collectivism and national-organicist historicism, it gradually faded away.¹⁷ However, gift-patriotism was not confined to higher social circles. Patriotic-minded public giving permeated a wide spectrum of society and increasingly gathered momentum in the course of the century. It took various forms including subscriptions for national monuments and literary publications, or for the families of deceased national icons such as the orphans of the poet Mihály Vörösmarty in 1850s Hungary. Gift-patriotism of this low-profile kind had an extra appeal, but also faced extra difficulties in the absence of a unified nation-state or in polities under foreign hegemony as the Walter Scott Monument in Scotland, or the proliferation of statues of ‘national poets’ in East-Central Europe demonstrate.¹⁸ The contribution of minor donors was also significant to institutions that had been established by high-profile patriotism. Additional donations to national libraries (books or

¹⁵ Thomas Adam, *Philanthropy, Civil Society, and the State in German History, 1815–1989* (Rochester, 2016), 13–47; Quataert, *Staging Philanthropy*, 1–20, 54–89.

¹⁶ Mauss identified modern-day aristocrats as Western counterparts of indigenous gift economies, but emphasized their ‘purely irrational expenditure’ and not their contributions to the systematic rationality of nation- or state-building: Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Halls (New York, 1990 [1925]), 76.

¹⁷ See Leerssen, *National Thought*, 105–71, 186–203; Joep Leerssen. ‘Notes toward a Definition of Romantic Nationalism’, *Romantik: Journal for the Study of Romanticisms*, 2 (2013), 935.

¹⁸ Ann Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move* (Oxford, 2012), 171–2; Marijan Dovic, ‘Prešeren 1905: Ritual Afterlives and Slovenian Nationalism’ and John Neubauer, ‘Mácha, Petőfi, Mickiewicz: (Un)wanted Statues in East-Central Europe’, in Joep Leerssen and Ann Rigney (eds.), *Commemorating Writers in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Basingstoke, 2014), 230–1, 250–61.

smaller sums for the library's fund) came in from men as diverse as literati, the common gentry, the lower ranking clergy, craftsmen, public servants, and military officers.¹⁹ This wider social pool of contributions entailed political integration beyond the sphere of representative publicity. Myriad acts of small-scale generosity coming from all over the country generated a structurally different public sphere, unified by a shared ardour for national culture. With this partial democratization of cultural capital, what had started as the condescending generosity of the privileged few became open to common citizens, many of whom took pride in contributing to institutions they were likely never to visit, let alone use. Nevertheless, this new symbolic economy of collective belonging remained asymmetrical inasmuch as minor donors strove to take their share of the prestige that was displayed on a stage dominated by big donors. In the course of these transformations, enlightened patriotic ideals were often retrospectively co-opted or 'hijacked' by nation-builders seeking to advance ethno-linguistic notions of belonging: Sternberg's Bohemian *Landesmuseum* was increasingly presented as a Czech national institution.²⁰ Towards the fin de siècle cultural and political nation-building increasingly came to be financed through state-subsidized projects, and the upper classes turned back to social charity. Nonetheless, their early-nineteenth-century gift-patriotism was to have a long afterlife: iconic donors have been attributed with foundational roles in East-Central European national histories, and their legacies are still celebrated today. Where gift-patriotism surfaced later in the century, it was more informed by ethno-cultural nationalism. For instance, bishop Strossmayer, while being a patron of traditional ecclesiastic art, also spearheaded Yugoslav pan-nationalism.²¹ Transnational in its praxis but national in its goals, gift-patriotism in East-Central Europe was interrelated in both supplementary and conflictual ways. During his 1787–88 European Grand Tour, Ferenc Széchenyi was inspired not only by the British Museum but also by the Prague university library, to which Count Franz Joseph Kinsky (1739–1804) – also a patron of the Society of Sciences in Prague and the sponsor of the chair of Czech language at the Military Academy in Wiener Neustadt – had donated both his personal and the family's library in 1777, as Széchenyi noted in his travel journal.²² When giving his own donation for the Hungarian national library in 1802, Széchenyi modelled the Latin inscription of the memorial tablet commemorating his gift on the model of the one in Prague commemorating Kinsky's;²³ in turn, the committee preparing the Bohemian *Landesmuseum* contacted its counterpart in Pest to examine its charter.²⁴ On the other hand, high-profile patriotic donations could also work *against* rival aspirations: bishop Strossmayer pursued Croatian nation-building markedly in opposition to Magyar cultural expansion and the political subordination of Croats within the dual monarchy. Gift-patriotism, therefore, not only triggered emulation among donors within a single political community but also gave rise to transnational conflicts over gifts throughout the region. What was locally celebrated as supremely beneficial, in the neighbourhood was watched with resentment, jealousy,

¹⁹ On the Hungarian National Library/Museum, see Jenő Berlász, *Az Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár története 1802–1867* (Budapest, 1981), 119–126.

²⁰ Robert J. W. Evans, *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs: Central Europe c.1683–1867* (Oxford, 2006), 201; Rita Krueger, *Czech, German, and Noble: Status and National Identity in Habsburg Bohemia* (Oxford, 2009), 184–7.

²¹ Dragan Damjanović. 'Bishop Juraj Strossmayer, Izidor Kršnjavi and the Foundation of the Chairs in Art History and Ancient Classical Archaeology at Zagreb University', *Centropa: A Journal of Central European Architecture and Related Arts*, 9 (2009), 76–84; Dubravka Oraić Tolić, 'Kroatische kulturelle Stereotype – Dissemination der Nation', *Neohelicon*, 33 (2006), 207–17.

²² Evans, *Austria*, 43, 95; Krueger, *Czech*, 121.

²³ Richard Pražák, Eszter Deák, and Lujza Erdélyi (eds.), *Széchenyi Ferenc és Csehország. Levelestár* (Budapest, 2003), 18–19, 201.

²⁴ Krueger, *Czech*, 174–5.

or suspicion: bishop Strossmayer's activism earned him the epithet 'cantankerous agitator' in the Hungarian press. And, as gift-patriotism paved the way for fully-fledged nationalisms later in the century, generous giving, however indirectly or inadvertently, came to trigger combatant antagonisms.

Gift-Patriotism: Its Socio-theological Context

The activities of the two Széchenyis are telling cases of the symbolic and material economies of gift-patriotism.²⁵ (Although István Széchenyi differentiated himself from his father Ferenc Széchenyi by slightly modifying his family name, for the sake of readers less familiar with the intricacies of accentuated letters in Hungarian orthography, from now on they will be referred to as *père* and *fils*.) Inspired by the 'national awakenings' of the 1790s, in 1802 Széchenyi *père* presented his vast collections of 15,000 books and codices, 1,200 manuscripts, 140 volumes of maps and copper engravings, 2,000 gold coins and other antiquities, sculptures and portraits for the purpose of a National Library (upgraded into a National Library and Museum in 1808). Encouraged by this highly publicized and widely celebrated act, other donors quickly followed suit, and, in time, chains of donations were built up. The flow of gifts from the aristocracy and the high clergy remained continuous in the following decades; the main donors to the Library/Museum included Countess Júlia Festetich (1752–1824), Széchenyi *père*'s wife, who donated her mineral collection in 1808; archbishop Johann Pyrker (1772–1847), who donated his art collection in 1836; and Count István Illésházy (1762–1838), who bequeathed his vast collection of codices, books, and manuscripts. Even the construction of a building to house the collections, along with the site on which it was to be erected, were financed by further public gifts. In 1836 funds for the building were offered by the Hungarian Diet, the parliamentary assembly, to be gathered (or painfully extracted) in the following years from the 'noble counties', that is assemblies of the provincial gentry, and the 'free royal cities'. A valuable parcel of land in downtown Pest was offered in 1808 by another donor, prince Antal Grassalkovich III (1771–1841). In the emulative logic of gift-giving items, properties, and sums making up this sequence of donations in part supplemented each other and in part competed for symbolic prestige. If not quite counter-gifts in the classic understanding of the term, all further donations nevertheless responded to, and in part served to reciprocate, Széchenyi *père*'s initial offering by augmenting its status, and by extension, his reputation. More broadly, other institutions also competed for the patriotic generosity of the public: after the establishment of the Hungarian Academy and its own library, the number and volume of donations for the National Library/Museum significantly dropped.²⁶ One factor in the process was likely that vogue and the appeal of novelty conditioned patriotic generosity like any other social movement. New institutions tended to re-channel, or fully absorb, the social energies to donate.

Patriotic gifts from the upper classes were given and received in the political framework of representative publicity, organized around the symbolic display of status and grandeur.²⁷ The

²⁵ See Vilmos Fraknói, *Gróf Széchenyi Ferenc 1754–1820* (Budapest, 2002 [1902]); George Barany, *Stephen Széchenyi and the Awakening of Hungarian Nationalism, 1791–1841* (Princeton, 1968); Andreas Oplatka, *Graf Stephan Széchenyi: Der Mann, der Ungarn schuf* (Wien, 2004); György Gömöri, 'Széchenyi, István 1791–1860', in Christopher John Murray (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era* (London, 2004), 1118–20; Ferenc Hörcher, 'Enlightened Reform or National Reform? The Continuity Debate about the Hungarian Reform Era and the Example of the Two Széchenyis (1790–1848)', *Hungarian Historical Review*, 5 (2016), 22–45.

²⁶ Berlász, *Az Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár*, 230–2.

²⁷ See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, 1989), 5–14.

donors came from the highest social strata while those symbolically representing the receiving end, the nation, were also members of the feudal body politic. In the case of Széchényi *père*'s Library, it was Francis II, king of Hungary and the Emperor of, then still, the Holy Roman Empire, who gave his sanction to the donation; it was the Hungarian Estates, represented by the Diet, that in 1807 ceremonially accepted the gift by a decree and called for further contributions. Francis II's younger brother and representative of the sovereign in Hungary, Palatine Joseph, came to serve as the protector and curator of the Library/Museum (of which he was also a major donor) and the noble counties officially celebrated Széchényi *père*'s donation by their announcements of gratitude.²⁸ Characteristic of this kind of publicity, the sovereign (however remotely connected to the act of giving) was at least as much celebrated as the donor, the donor was more admired than the donation, and the donation itself more valued than the language and culture that it gifted.²⁹

Firmly grounded in traditional sociability, the notion of community that underpinned gift-patriotism was markedly differed from the ethno-linguistic criteria of modern nationhood. The collective belonging it was meant to represent remained essentially *class-based* (with the feudal body politic embodying the nation) and/or *territorially* defined. Again, Széchényi *père*'s donation is a case in point. The representative publicity in which it was given and received was that of the *natio hungarica*, a political community 'consisting only of the *nati*, the "natives" of the houses with a pedigree – that is, the nobility'.³⁰ The donation mainly contained historical documents *about* or *by authors from* the Kingdom of Hungary, that is, a predominantly Latin-language scholarship that expressed and celebrated a political geography of national belonging based on dynastic territoriality.³¹ When sending out the two-volume catalogue of the Library to a carefully selected group of literati (a *direct* and *personal* gift added to the *indirect* and *collective* gift of the Library itself), Széchényi *père* observed another characteristically premodern concept of nationhood, that of the *hungarus* identity, which embraced all the inhabitants of the *Regnum Hungariae* regardless of ethnicity, language, or religious denomination.³² In return for the gift of the catalogue Széchényi *père* invited letters of acknowledgment in the language of the recipient's choice. Responses came in German, Latin, Hungarian, Serbian, Czech, lauding the donor. Archduke Rainer Joseph, the Emperor's younger brother, welcomed the founding of what he deemed an 'Imperial Library', while the literary historian Paulus Wallaszky wished to see more Slavic titles in the catalogue, and Franz Sternberg expressed his willingness for a similar donation in Bohemia. More broadly, the letter writers' words of gratitude, reciprocating the Count's gift, alluded to a wide variety of political concepts they thought the library was meant to serve from Magyar linguistic nationalism to a hoped-for emancipation of non-Hungarian erudition, from the culture of the Kingdom to that of the Empire, in the latter case referring to the nation's library as a *Reichsmuseum*.³³ These ideas were conspicuously incompatible with one another. Indeed, the

²⁸ On the similar process of the impetus and the funds for a museum coming from the aristocracy, gaining the support from the Estates, and getting royal sanction, in the case of the Bohemian *Landesmuseum*: Krueger, *Czech*, 173–8.

²⁹ See Rákai, 'A magyar nyelv ünnepe', 726.

³⁰ László Kontler, 'Foundation Myths and the Reflection of History in Modern Hungary', in Sima Godfrey and Frank Unger (eds.), *The Shifting Foundation of Modern Nation States* (Toronto, 2004), 135.

³¹ In a similar fashion, the Bohemian *Landesmuseum* also started as a collection of natural and historical *bohémica*, representing territorial nationhood. See Krueger, *Czech*, 170–1.

³² See Moritz Csaky, 'Die Hungarus-Konzeption: eine "realpolitische" Variante zur magyarischen Nationalstaatsidee', in Anna-Maria Drabek and Richard G. Plaschka (eds.), *Ungarn und Österreich unter Maria Theresia und Joseph II: neue Aspekte im Verhältnis der beiden Länder* (Vienna, 1982), 223–37.

³³ See Eszter Deák and Edina Zvara (eds.), *Levélben értesítsen engem! Kortársak Széchényi Ferenc könyvtáralapításáról* (Budapest, 2012), esp. 150, 163, 179.

responses revealed an inherent ideological danger invested in Széchenyi *père*'s gift, that of being open to potential appropriations for various political agendas and rival ideologies of belonging. Any kind of public generosity needs to rely on the correspondence between a generous habitus, that is, a system of learned dispositions, internally predisposed to giving and a specific social world appreciating and rewarding that habitus.³⁴ In gift-patriotism incentives making generosity conceivable were manifold. The aristocracy's sense of feudal duty, inherited with social position and adapted to the political climate of rising patriotism, harked back to Cicero's *De Officiis* and the Roman republican idea of civic virtue pursuing the public good (*utilitas publica*) at the expense of individual interest.³⁵ In the Habsburg realm, Johann von Sonnenfels's concept of an enlightened 'nation of patriots' was also formulated along these lines: the wealthiest landed nobles should bear the greatest burden of public responsibility in exchange for a corresponding share in public esteem.³⁶ Informed by the enlightened belief in the possibility of rationally engineered social progress, the inclination to give was also enhanced by the philanthropic leanings of freemasonry with which nearly all patriotic aristocrats were affiliated.³⁷ Inspiration for patriotic gifts could also be religious. In 1817, having abandoned his early Josephinism and increasingly immersed himself in Catholic mysticism, the aging Széchenyi *père* exhorted his son to:

Consider money a deposit in your hands, and by no means your own possession; one day you will have to carry your balance sheet to His [God's] court...Attached to this money are the sweat and tears of your subjects, many of whom live in illness, scarcity, without food and water. In order to dry up their tears a considerable part [of your wealth] ought to be reciprocated to them, in the name of the Father of all sufferers.³⁸

If earthly opulence stems from a divine economy, then wealth is not a property, in the sense of modern contractual societies, but a donation from God, temporarily entrusted to the individual along with the duty of forwarding this divine grace to those under his guidance. An aristocrat giving something away is therefore a counter-gift to both providence and society, reciprocating what a divine gift economy has bestowed upon him. This theology of the gift also lends legitimacy to the feudal social structure: as much as the privileged individual (the wealthy landowner) is humbled by the divine gift(s) he receives from God, as a donor he rightfully subordinates others in return for taking care of them and preserves the social hierarchy. Symbolically, this paternalistic gift-patriotism was anchored in feudal social status; materially, it was based on the inherited wealth of landed nobles. Artefacts donated to public collections were in good part heirlooms or if purchased, the financial means enabling acquisitions came from feudal and ecclesiastical revenues. By turning private possession into public property, aristocratic donations no doubt redistributed cultural and economic capital, but they did so in a specific and limited way. Addressing the patria or the nation, donations (that is, feudal wealth on public display) were to an extent invested in legitimizing the given distribution of wealth, along with the political and social hierarchies, and the ensuing economic inequality that underlined it. By performing feudal social duty, aristocrats made the order of corporate privileges more conspicuous. For example, given their exemption from taxation, *optional* donations by the

³⁴ Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, trans. Randal Johnson et al. (Stanford, 1998), 75–91.

³⁵ Viroli, *For Love of Country*, 19–23; Leerssen, *National Thought*, 71–81.

³⁶ Evans, *Austria*, 68; Brnardić, 'Modalities', 640–5.

³⁷ For the Russian case, see Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is Not a Vice: Charity, Society, and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton, 1996), 99–118.

³⁸ Quoted in Fraknói, *Gróf Széchenyi*, 349. My translation.

aristocracy and the high clergy merely compensated for the lack of *obligatory* financial contribution to public expenses. Individual commitment to the collective good, therefore, remained enmeshed in the structures of political and economic domination, and in fact contributed to their reproduction. Some donors were aware that it was inherited family wealth that enabled them to step up as benefactors. In 1798 Széchenyi *père* stressed to a historian under his sponsorship that ‘I can’t stand laudations of richness even if appropriated for a good cause. There is no merit in that I have inherited wealth from my ancestors.’³⁹ A few rare dissident voices called attention to the fact that the surplus of wealth thus distributed had been extracted from society in the first place, thereby patriotic gifts only reciprocated what had been taken away. Mihály Stančić/Táncsics (1799–1884), a proponent of plebeian democratism (and later socialism) asserted that the magnates donating for the Academy ‘returned, out of grateful obligation, the abundant revenues received from the Fatherland’.⁴⁰ Still, while performing their status through donations, patriotic aristocrats also moved beyond social hierarchy and gave rise to a differently layered public sphere: giving wider access to what had previously been their private cultural consumption resulted in ‘an alteration in the norms of public life’ and ‘a redefinition of individual identity that could cut across traditional social divisions’.⁴¹ Consequently, aristocratic gift-patriotism, in the long term, led to the subversion of the forms of sociability in which their acts of giving had initially taken place. Revealing an inherently self-destructive tendency in aristocratic gift-patriotism, the ensuing political emancipation (equality before the law, the abolition of serfdom, the repeal of tax exemption etc.), achieved by the modern nationalist movements that their donations gave rise to, were to upend, from below, the very social hierarchy on which old regime political philanthropy had rested.

Receiving, *Cultus*, Counter-gifts

In gift-patriotism, just as acts of giving were surrounded by complex legal procedures and great ceremonial grandeur, elaborate complementary rituals occurred on the receiving end as well. Representatives of the patria readily fashioned themselves according to the rhetorical and conceptual frame thus defined. The vocabulary of the gift is ubiquitous in their public and private expressions of gratitude, from political decrees to newspaper articles to artistic and literary tributes.⁴² Such responses to major donations constitute the third main component of gift-relations, that is, the obligation to reciprocate.⁴³ There was no means by which the abstract entity of the Patria could directly offer a counter-gift to the donor, let alone similar objects in return at some unspecified future date. The logic governing counter-gifting in many pre-modern societies could therefore not apply to gift-patriotism. Rather, here the generosity of the donor was rewarded through a set of distinct gestures, rituals, and discourses which cumulatively bestowed cultural and political capital on the donor and enhanced his national (and international) prestige. At varying scales, every act of gift-patriotism was followed and compensated by counter-gifts of this sort. The names of donors were regularly publicized or, in the case of the most prestigious ones, were immortalized in the designation of the institution they helped to erect. Significantly, trying to determine the *meaning* of his gift, Széchenyi *père* himself stipulated that the Library, albeit a ‘publica commoda’, should be named as *Bibliotheca Hungarica Familiae Comitum*

³⁹ Quoted in Fraknói, *Gróf Széchenyi*, 198.

⁴⁰ Stancsics Mihál, *Kritikai értekezések. Második kötet* (Kolozsvár, 1835), 9.

⁴¹ Krueger, *Czech*, 5–7, 10, 128, quotation at 12.

⁴² See Rákai, ‘A magyar nyelv ünnepe’.

⁴³ For the classic interpretation see Mauss, *The Gift*, 6–45.

Széchenyi Patriae Sacra. This not only signalled the count's eagerness to convert his donation into the glory of the family, but also that gifts retained and commemorated the personality of the giver or that of his family. (It is still the *Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár* / National Széchenyi Library.) In symbolic counter-gifting, this personification of gifts permeated the semantics of urban geography: the nineteenth-century nationalization of street-names commemorated and honoured iconic donors throughout East-Central Europe. As further acts of tribute, portraits or statues of major donors were displayed on national sites or in the public buildings housing their donations. Kaspar Sternberg himself was included in the Pantheon of great Czechs within the new National Museum building.⁴⁴ Széchenyi *fi*ls recognized this reciprocity of gifts and counter-gifts when he enthusiastically noticed his father's portrait in the Hungarian National Museum.⁴⁵ Characteristically, decades later his own donation would also be reciprocated in the form of an even more conspicuously visible urban metonymy weaving together gifts and counter-gifts. In 1880 his statue, funded by public subscription, was erected in front of the main building of the Hungarian Academy (see fig. 1), an architectural epitome of his iconic donation (raised by further public donations in 1865), standing on what was renamed in 2011, in a gesture of late symbolic debt repayment, as Budapest's Széchenyi Square.

Reciprocity runs in full circles: a magnate's gift to the nation was repaid by honours from the nation. Throughout the nineteenth century, these gestures of tribute became increasingly institutionalized: the nation reciprocated her main donors through their immense cult. The *cultus* of donors pervaded politics, historiography, architecture, the arts, and literature all over East-Central Europe.⁴⁶ In a sense, national cultures in the region as a whole evolved as symbolic counter-gifts to founding donations, or as the medium or arena of this reciprocity. The idea that material gifts might be repaid by cultural work generated far-expanding chains of gifts and counter-gifts. The Hungarian poet János Arany's 1860 ode to Széchenyi *fi*ls revolved around the tropology of the nation's debt repayment to the Great Benefactor, and when in 1893 Arany's own statue was erected in front of Széchenyi *père*'s National Museum, it was, again, funded by public subscription. The novelist Mór Jókai (1825–1904) did more than anyone else to immortalize the generosity of patriotic aristocrats, in works such as *Egy magyar nábob* [A Hungarian nabob] (1853–54) and its sequel *Kárpáthy Zoltán* (1854). Ultimately, his efforts were duly reciprocated. When for the fiftieth anniversary of his literary career in 1894 his complete oeuvre was re-published in a hundred-volume deluxe edition (with king and queen firsts to subscribe, that is, in a framework reminiscent of representative publicity), he received the royalties after the copyrights he did not own any more as, again, a 'gift from the nation'.

The most extraordinary example of reciprocating gift-patriotism by literary tribute remains the case of the Königinhof/Králové Dvůr and Grünberg/Zelena Hora manuscripts. The collection of medieval Czech poetry allegedly discovered by Václav Hanka (1791–1861) in 1817–18 was, in fact, the forgeries of Hanka and a handful of other young Czech intellectuals and artists. It included a long epic poem *Jaroslav*, which depicted how a thirteenth-century Sternberg triumphed over raiding Tatars. With this Hanka not only created a prestigious yet fictitious literary heritage for his 're-awaking' Czech nation but at the same time elevated his own patrons, the Sternbergs, to descendants of a mythical figure. Meanwhile, the young historian František

⁴⁴ Krueger, *Czech*, 187.

⁴⁵ Gyula Vízota (ed.), *Gróf Széchenyi István naplói III 1826–1830* (Budapest, 1932), 100.

⁴⁶ For a theoretical approach to the formation of nineteenth-century cultural cults see Péter Dávidházi, *The Romantic Cult of Shakespeare: Literary Reception in Anthropological Perspective* (London, 1998), 1–33. Marijan Dović and Jón Karl Helgason, *National Poets, Cultural Saints: Canonization and Commemorative Cults of Writers in Europe* (Leiden, 2017), 11–96 explores the *cultus* of poets in nineteenth-century nationalism.

Palacký, also on their payroll, compiled a genealogy of the family using Hanka's forgeries as historical documents. The manuscripts, which Hanka officially received as a donation from the Königinhof municipality and passed on as a gift to the Bohemian *Landesmuseum* where he afterwards earned a position as a librarian, came to play a substantial role in nineteenth-century Czech cultural and political self-awareness. In doing so, the manuscripts reciprocated the gift-patriotism of the Sternbergs with a fictitious national mythology and (invoking the old humanist ploy of generating preferable genealogical lineage for patrons) with a personal literary counter-gift to a great benefactor. The web of patronage around the manuscripts even helped to silence early doubts about their authenticity: the great Slavic philologist Josef Dobrovský (1753–1829), Hanka's mentor, refrained from publicly denouncing them as frauds because he worked under the patronage of the Sternbergs too.⁴⁷

Patriotic Donations, Patriotic Investments

Reportedly, Széchenyi *fils* kept his father's 1817 letter with him at all times.⁴⁸ Its considerations about wealth being a divine gift to be reciprocated by social duties are echoed in many of his writings, in religious or in secularized form. When in 1825 he offered a year's revenue from his landed estates to endow a national Academy, he played out the letter's prescriptions. Like his father he offered the donation on the stage of representative publicity, yet addressing the session of the Diet, not the king.⁴⁹ The theatrical spontaneity with which he performed the offering, to be countlessly recounted in national historiography, soon turned it into the image of the patriotic gift *per se*, making Széchenyi *fils* the most iconic donor in Hungarian national memory.⁵⁰

His political philanthropy, however, was entrenched in what otherwise would appear as the plain antithesis of the gift: credit economy and marketization. Being both a famed donor and an ardent supporter of various commercial and industrial ventures, Széchenyi *fils* grafted emulative gift-patriotism onto the competitive markets of rudimentary capitalist transformation. Gifts and money, as well as representative publicity and the commodity market, had already intermingled in his father's activities. The collection that Széchenyi *père* donated for the purpose of founding a national library was in fact not his family heirloom (he donated his personal library to the Library/Museum only in 1819) but the result of a decade-long systematic purchase of all available and relevant items from regional book and manuscript markets and auctions.⁵¹ The radical novelty of Széchenyi *fils*' position, compared to his father's stance, was that he deliberately wanted to conflate the role of an aristocratic donor and that of an entrepreneur, investing in both rising nationalism and nascent capitalism. Following his vision of interconnecting the country in both geographical and social terms, from the 1830s he initiated several large-scale infrastructural developments, from constructing the first railroad lines in the

⁴⁷ See Pavlína Rychterová, 'The Manuscripts of Grünberg and Königinhof: Romantic Lies about the Glorious Past of the Czech Nation', in János M. Bak, Patrick J. Geary, and Gábor Klaniczay (eds.), *Manufacturing a Past for the Present: Forgery and Authenticity in Medievalist Texts and Objects in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Leiden, Boston, 2015), 3–30. See also Robert J. W. Evans, "'The Manuscripts': The Culture and Politics of Forgery in Central Europe", in Geraint H. Jenkins (ed.), *A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg* (Cardiff, 2005), 51–68; Monika Baár, *Historians and Nationalism: East-Central Europe in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 2010), 181–6. I am indebted to Tamás Berkes for calling my attention to the Sternberg-element in the story.

⁴⁸ See Fraknói, *Gróf Széchenyi*, 349.

⁴⁹ On the politics of this difference in the shifting arena of patriotism see Hörcher, 'Enlightened Reform'.

⁵⁰ Károly Szász, *Gróf Széchenyi István és az Akadémia megalapítása* (Budapest, 1880), 110–18 meticulously reconstructs the event from the accounts of contemporaries.

⁵¹ His correspondence with his suppliers in Bohemia, among them, Franz Sternberg and the philologist and historian Jozef Dobrovský: Pražák, Deák, Erdélyi, *Széchenyi*, 119–130, 132–142, 169–170, 174–76.

Kingdom to establishing steam-ship services on the Danube and the Lake Balaton to the building of a permanent bridge between Buda and Pest. All of these ventures were carried out as business enterprises in the form of joint stock companies, with the Viennese Greek banker Georgios Sinas (1783–1856) acting as their main financier and the Count as one of the main shareholders.⁵² The fact that Széchenyi *films* was their moving spirit gravitated the public perception of these ventures towards the conceptual and rhetorical field defined by gift-giving despite his financial interest, an impression the Count was eager to maintain. Consequently, the phrase ‘gift to the nation’ became an elusive umbrella term covering both donations and profit-oriented ventures if the latter were perceived as to serve national interest of some kind. Completed in 1849, the Chain Bridge between Pest and Buda was decorated with a memorial tablet honouring both Sina and Széchenyi *films* (along with additional financiers baron Salamon Rotschild and Samuel Wodianer) as if it were the result of disinterested generosity demanding public gratitude and ‘God’s blessings on their memory’. Otherwise the result of a series of impersonal market transactions, the bridge was thus celebrated as the personalized gift of its financiers, even though it remained in the private ownership of the *Sinas* until the 1870s when the state bought them out. Conversely, Sina acted as a benefactor in his homeland Greece/Albania and also donated a considerable sum to the city of Pest after the 1838 flood, but had a public reputation as parsimonious.

Political philanthropy also intertwined with industrial or technological entrepreneurship among Bohemian aristocrats: a joint-stock company established in 1827 for the construction of railroads was headed by Kaspar Sternberg.⁵³ Besides the parallel involvement of individuals in gift-exchange and in capitalist ventures, the economic structure of gift-patriotism itself was also increasingly financialized. As charitable bodies, cultural institutions were latently modelled on the institutional organization of joint-stock companies, that is, pooled funds handled by elected officers.⁵⁴ These funds, including that of the Hungarian National Library, were regularly lent out to private borrowers.⁵⁵ With this, initially gift-like contributions metamorphosed into financial assets and started to circulate in the nascent credit market. Conversely, the credit economy determined the financial form in which patriotic donations were transferred. Donors were not expected to pay off the whole sum straightaway; instead, they obligated themselves to pay yearly interest, for an unlimited time, after their offer as virtual capital. That is, while donors were collecting the symbolic debt of society, in financial terms they became long-term debtors to the organizations they chose to support.

Gift-patriotism gave an emotional boost to national sentiments because its nature seemed not to be self-interested. Yet, its impact on collective identity formation was so overwhelming that it even pervaded the self-perception of those who chose to sell, rather than to donate, their cultural treasures to new national institutions. In 1832 the greatest Hungarian collector of the age, Miklós Jankovich (1772–1846) sold his enormous collection of c.60,000 books and 1,400 codices along with a large number of paintings, coins, and other antiquities to the National Museum. The contract was formulated so as to highlight that the seller’s offer generously lowered the estimated market price by thirty percent as a ‘voluntary gift due to filial piety towards the fatherland’.⁵⁶ Inserting the rhetoric of gift-patriotism into what was essentially a market exchange of commodities was a legal formality, practically unnecessary as far as the price was concerned. It is

⁵² See Antal András Deák and Amelie Lanier, *Széchenyi István és Sina György közös vállalkozásai* (Budapest, 2005).

⁵³ Krueger, *Czech*, 112–19.

⁵⁴ See Robert A. Gross, ‘Giving in America: From Charity to Philanthropy’, in Lawrence J. Friedman and Mark D. McGarvie (eds), *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History* (Cambridge, 2003), 37.

⁵⁵ See Berlász, *Országos*, 88–90.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Berlász, *Országos*, 214.

precisely the legal superfluity of Jankovich's eagerness to masquerade as a donor (by offering a discount as a gift) that demonstrates the appeal of gift-patriotism and its call for emulation. Jankovich faced severe financial difficulties at the time and was desperately in need of quick cash; yet he found having his share in the prestige capital that ceremonious donations allocated to donors just as important as balancing out his finances by selling his collections.

Similar conflations of calculation and ostensible disinterestedness have been described as the 'collective denial' of a hidden reality.⁵⁷ In our case, the ways that donations, investments, and market transfers intermingled, both in a rhetorical and economic sense, shows the extent that nation-building depended on a dual reliance on public gifts and capitalist enterprise. These intersections of calculative gifts and gift-like investments intriguingly resonate with a different sense of patriotism emerging from the late eighteenth-century: one which honoured individual assistance to the nation's overall economic growth.⁵⁸ The concept where the accumulation of private wealth qualifies as a patriotic duty appears to contradict gift-patriotism and its economy of selfless giving to the nation. Yet, both favour the enhanced circulation of wealth (and less, say, acts of military glory) in measuring patriotic contribution.

It is also hardly a mere coincidence that the surge of generous giving for national causes occurred in tandem with the profit-oriented entrepreneurial mentality gaining momentum in East-Central Europe. This duality in gift-patriotism intriguingly corresponds to developments in indigenous societies. In these communities, certain gift rituals arose or changed in contact with, and under the pressure of, colonization and the introduction of money economies.⁵⁹ Just as the intrusion of Western European capitalism shaped indigenous gift economies in the colonies, so did nascent capitalist transformation influence national gift economies in Europe's periphery. Indeed, we might consider the emergence of gift-patriotism as an unlikely counterpart of commercialization in early nineteenth-century East-Central Europe just as much as colonial and postcolonial marketization unexpectedly re-invigorated indigenous gift-economies.⁶⁰

The Donor as Antichrist: On Disequilibrium in Patriotic Gift-economies

In 1848, political conflicts with Vienna and ethnic hostilities within the Kingdom of Hungary escalated. Military confrontations with Croats, Serbs, Romanians, and, eventually, a full-scale war with the Austrian imperial army aided by Russian intervention left Széchenyi *fiils* with a shattered mind. In September 1848, he was taken to a lunatic asylum in Döbling, now a suburb of Vienna. The letters he wrote during his mental collapse feature hazy hyperboles. He portrayed himself as a political Antichrist or 'the Beast of Apocalypse' whose intervention into politics subverted an otherwise organic and benevolent progress. In his bizarre tropes of self-blame, it was especially his famed donation that he retrospectively held responsible for triggering nationalistic zeal and, eventually, physical violence. The gift that he, as 'the tool of diabolic forces', gave to the Academy opened a 'Pandora's Box of national hostility'. In addition, he came to condemn aristocratic gift-patriotism altogether: 'patriotism came into vogue and the richest only took part in it out of boredom, vanity, and for fun'.⁶¹

Alongside this radical and self-deprecating dismissal of public giving, the seemingly harmonious equilibrium of mutual reinforcements between givers and receivers in gift-patriotism were

⁵⁷ Bourdieu, *The Logic*, 110.

⁵⁸ See István Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), 121.

⁵⁹ See Eric. R. Wolf, *Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis* (London, 1999), 69–132.

⁶⁰ On colonial Papua New Guinea see Chris A. Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities* (London, 1982), 112–209.

⁶¹ Árpád Károlyi (ed.), *Gr. Széchenyi István*, 428.

saturated by other disruptive instances too. Disturbances included the negligent handling of donations. Some publicly announced donations remained unrealized: occasionally, after pocketing the prestige of the offering, donations never came in or interests were reluctantly paid. Quarrels about management rights in institutions raised by patriotic gifts were also common. When in the 1810s Széchenyi *père* wanted to exercise his right, stipulated in the letter of donation, to appoint staff members to the Library from tutors employed in his household, in return for further contributions, he was turned down by the director Jakob Ferdinand von Miller (1749–1823) on the ground that the Count lacked the expertise to make such appointments. Years later Miller was charged with embezzlement, but Széchenyi *père* remained excluded from the affairs of the Library/Museum.⁶²

Among numerous similar controversies (especially between the donated institution and the descendants or inheritors of donors), this particular case demonstrates the failure of gift-patriots to keep their donations within the frame of more traditional patronage, where the authority of the donor would remain uncontested. Attempts to reinforce the inalienability of patriotic gifts, ostensibly given away permanently, attest to the persistence of patronage mentality. In these controversies, the most intriguing is when the very meaning and purpose of national cultivation that donations were meant to support becomes conflictual. A conflict of this kind erupted in the 1840s between the Academy's directorate and the founding donor Széchenyi *fils*. He was convinced that in return for redistributing a part of his wealth he could rightfully expect public gratitude as a counter-gift from society. Yet he was also highly aware of the negative side of this dynamic, namely that gifts not only trigger admiration or emulation but jealousy and hatred as well. (He might have recalled his father's waning influence on the Library/Museum.) On the day when he made his offering to the Academy, in his journal he briefly summarized the event as follows: '3 Nov. Spoken at the session [of the Diet] and turned all my compatriots into my enemies'.⁶³ The ambiguity (rooted in his deeply ironic worldview⁶⁴) with which he initially perceived his own donation was only to intensify. With increasing anxiety he followed how the institutionalized cultivation of Magyar culture was leading to the estrangement of non-Magyar communities living in the Kingdom of Hungary, which comprised more than half of the population at the time. Trying to intervene into how his donation was used, in his 27 November 1842 plenary address to the Academy's general assembly, Széchenyi *fils* severely criticized the language politics that the Academy, in his view, had come to support. Reminding the audience that he had established a 'philological society' with the goal of 'improving' the Magyar language, not of 'spreading it' among non-Magyars, he also warned that aggressive *magyarization* would backfire and alienate non-Magyar ethnic groups, a prediction that he could, even in his mental collapse, justifiably find fulfilled in 1848.⁶⁵

After the Hungarian war for independence failed in 1849, the Academy's operations were suspended. When, following years of negotiations, they appealed for permission to resume work in 1858, the Habsburg administration demanded modifications to the Academy's charter. In particular, the phrase 'cultivating the arts and sciences *in Hungarian*', that is, the main

⁶² Berlász, *Országos*, 109–11, 160–5.

⁶³ Quoted in Gyula Vízota (ed.), *Gróf Széchenyi István naplói II* (Budapest, 1926), 642.

⁶⁴ Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, 'Romantic Irony in Nineteenth-Century Hungarian Literature', in Frederic Garber (ed.), *Romantic Irony* (Budapest, 1988), 205–9.

⁶⁵ István Széchenyi, *Válogatott művei II: 1841–1860* (Budapest, 1991), 19–57. Széchenyi *fils*'s position on assimilation was far from unequivocal: while he was attracted to the idea of an intellectually, economically and culturally superior ideal Magyarism, in early 1843 he met with Jan Kollár, the leader of the Pan-Slavic movement, to apologize for Magyar cultural expansion. See Oplatka, *Graf Stephan*, 320–1.

component of its nation-building agenda, was to be omitted. The directory board hesitated but, in the end, yielded. Széchenyi *fi*ls, still hospitalized but in a more stable mental condition, addressed the directorate in a private letter, referring to the Academy as the last sign that ‘our nation has not been wiped out yet’, and threatened to withdraw the yearly interest he was still paying after the virtual capital of his 1825 donation.⁶⁶ Eventually, he was persuaded to withdraw his protest but continued to circulate copies of his letter nonetheless. So much so that in 1859 the Viennese police intervened in order to prevent the aged Count from sending out incendiary writings from his shelter.⁶⁷

As this telling case of a high-profile donation demonstrates, the inherent conflicts arising out of public gifting could not merely be that of a donor questioning the way his donation was utilized in the long run but pertains to the heart of gift-patriotism: how to define the nation and what is to be achieved by nation-building? And what sorts of personal or collective dangers might be unleashed by the unintended consequences of benevolent giving?

From Sacrifice to Self-Damage: the Destructive Force of Gift-patriotism

On Easter Sunday 1860, Széchenyi *fi*ls took his own life in his private apartment at the mental hospital of Döbling. Perhaps to escape impending police persecution, perhaps still under the psychological burden of self-accusations for triggering nationalistic conflicts, perhaps because he came to realize that his iconic gift had been repeatedly ripped of its intended purpose, first by Hungarian liberal nationalism, then by the victorious Habsburg absolutism, or perhaps putting an end to a lifelong struggle with his inner demons and suicidal tendencies that, as he documented in his journals, had haunted him since his early adulthood.⁶⁸

In his 1831 pamphlet *Világ* [Light] Széchenyi *fi*ls asserted that ‘the countless benefits in life that are linked exclusively to higher birth rank and wealth will not turn into acrid, sometimes even venomous poison, only if earned by noble deeds of public utility’.⁶⁹ The way he ended his life clearly upended this argument. Rather than redeeming himself from the emotional burden of being one of the privileged few, he entered a vicious circle in which it was precisely the partial redistribution of his wealth that unleashed the self-destructive forces inherent in gift-giving. Széchenyi’s suicide remains an emblem of a complex web of conflicts, tensions, and dangers that patriotic gifts entailed. Conflicts between donor and donation, conflicts between various patriotic ideologies within the same community, conflicts among rival nationalisms, and unbearable inner conflicts within a donor himself. And also a conflict of the various economies in which giving for one’s national community might be channelled. The democratization of gift-patriotism through a wider social pool of public generosity occurred in tandem with profound changes in the very definition of nationhood. The move from territorial *amor Patriae* to ethno-linguistic nationalism was also driven by a transition between two distinct gift economies. While gift-patriotism traded in concrete material donations in the service of a rationalized process of nation- or state-building, in its more existential form it permeated the general economy of nationalist sentiments, embracing a Bataillesque economy of excessive expenditure through acts of deliberate *self-*

⁶⁶ Széchenyi, *Válogatott művei II*, 875.

⁶⁷ See Oplatka, *Graf Stefan*, 427.

⁶⁸ Széchenyi *fi*ls’s unstable mental health is discussed in Mihály Laczkó, *Széchenyi elájul: Pszichotörténeti tanulmányok* (Budapest, 2001), 27–92.

⁶⁹ Gróf Széchenyi István, *Világ vagy is felvilágosító töredékek némi hiba ’s előtétel eligazítására* (Pest, 1831), 56. Here he may tacitly play with the double meaning of *die/der Gift* in German, his first language, as ‘present’ and as ‘poison’, absent in the Hungarian term *ajándék* or *adomány*.

wasting away.⁷⁰ Whereas gift-patriotism revolved around a closed and limited economy of scarce material resources, the offerings of self-sacrifice under the aegis of romantic nationalism tapped a potentially infinite accumulation of symbolic capital that grew larger as more people participated in it.

What was donated in these cases of existential self-sacrifice was not financial means but intellectual and biological resources, resulting in emotionally more exuberant, therefore politically more explosive, offerings. On the one hand, much of the nationally-minded scholarly or literary work in the era was framed as addressing (and hoping for posthumous reward from) a future national community, which in the present lacked the public intellect or taste to recognise its importance. On the other, suicide or voluntary death became the ultimate form patriotic self-sacrifice.⁷¹ The cult of heroic death, from Thomas Abbt's *Vom Tod für das Vaterland* (1761) and Hölderlin's ode *Der Tod fürs Vaterland* (1799), deeply permeated the mental repertoire of romantic nationalism and, in most iconic ways, came to be exemplified by 'national poets' like the German Theodor Körner and the Hungarian Sándor Petőfi, who both died on the battlefield.⁷² Wasting away life force in a gift-like offering to the nation was hardly comparable to giving donations for a museum or the national theatre. Yet it was the emphasis on self-destruction as the means of giving that secured the democratism of this kind of generosity: when the nation called, anyone could give away their lives.

In the year of Széchenyi *fiils*'s collapse, three gift economies merged and collided: 1) paternalistic old-pattern donations, 2) modern aristocratic donations intertwining with capitalist financial forms, and 3) the discourse of voluntary death as self-sacrifice for the nation. In the spring of 1848, the main entrance of Széchenyi *père*'s National Library/Museum came to stage most of the revolutionary rallies. In the summer of 1848, the democratization of gift-patriotism culminated in the public contributions to the precious metal reserves that the short-lived Hungarian national government collected in order to back the paper currency it issued.⁷³ From the fall of 1848, heroic death found an unlimited outlet on the revolutionary battlefields.

These tendencies also intersected in Széchenyi *fiils*'s personal doom. The rise of mass-scale nationalist movements and the ways they turned the symbolic violence of gift-giving into physical antagonisms with other national communities frightened him away. Yet he could not resist being drawn into its economy of self-wasting away. Shooting himself in the head was the result of an inscrutable personal inner drama, but publicly it was received as a political act of self-sacrifice in the service of national resistance. Giving away his life after giving away some of his wealth, Széchenyi *fiils* was crushed by the clash of the various gift economies of rising nationalism.

⁷⁰ See Bataille: *The Accursed Share*.

⁷¹ On death as the ultimate gift and the general possibility of giving, see Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (London, 1995). For further discussion of this aspect, see Alexandra Urakova's paper in this volume.

⁷² Leerssen, *National Thought*, 116–18; On Petőfi, see my 'The Cradle that Rocked Him Hungarian: Making Petőfi a National Poet', *Arcadia*, 52 (2017), 29–50.

⁷³ As explored in more detail in my paper 'National Movements and Monetary Mobilization' presented at the University of Amsterdam conference *Cultural Mobilization: Cultural Consciousness-raising and National Movements in Europe and the World*, 19–22 September 2018.