



One Thousand Years of Hungarian Culture

For centuries, the Hungarians wandered across the steppes of Eastern Europe before they came to the Carpathian Basin, the site of the former Avar empire, which was to become their homeland. Following the Hungarian Conquest in 896 under Prince Árpád, the Hungarians rapidly left behind their nomadic lifestyle, dominated by animal herding, for the cultivation of land. When the defeat at Augsburg in 955 at the hands of Otto the Great (later Holy Roman Emperor) forced them to abandon their western forays, the Hungarians – this time on the initiative of Grand Prince Géza – began to turn towards the nations and culture of Western Christendom. In 973, Géza, whom Western chroniclers referred to as king ('rex'), sent a high-ranking delegation to the German Estates at Quedlinburg; invited to his court St Adalbert, the bishop of Prague, who was later killed by pagan Prussians—members of a western Slavic tribe—on the Baltic coast; made a contribution to the founding of the Benedictine monastery in Pannonhalma, named after Saint Martin. Géza had himself christened, while at the same time maintaining existing pagan rites.

His son Vajk, who received the name of Stephen (István) in Christendom, was brought up to be a Christian monarch, and Gizella, sister of Henry II, the King of Bavaria, was chosen as his bride-to-be. Stephen had himself crowned in 1000 with insignia of royalty granted by Pope Sylvester II, and completed the state-building process started by his father. Stephen founded ten episcopates and several monasteries, had churches built, set up the administration of royal counties, crushed those tribal leaders who were seeking to maintain paganism and opposed Europeanisation, but also defended his country from attacks from the west. Stephen led his people to become a nation of Christian Europe and created the Kingdom of Hungary: his successor, King Ladislas (László), made him – together with the



Mihály Munkácsy: *The Hungarian Conquest*



The Benedictine Abbey in Pannonhalma

early-deceased crown prince Imre and Bishop Gellért, who died as a martyr in the pagan uprising of 1046 – saints of the Christian Church.

The birth of Hungarian national culture and literature, comprising both oral tradition and the earliest examples of written culture, is obscured by the shadows of antiquity. A large number of historical legends has come down to us about the origin, wanderings, and conquests of the Hungarians. The beginnings of Hungarian written literature also probably go back to an earlier date than surviving documents would suggest, because Hungarian church and court culture looks back on a history of nearly a thousand years. From the time Saint Stephen, the first Hungarian King, and his people joined Western Christianity, the number of scribes in monasteries, chapters, and royal chancelleries increased steadily (as was customary in Medieval Europe, they used primarily Latin, rather than the vernacular). At the same time, examples of ancient pagan runes carved in stone (for instance, in some Transylvanian churches) have also survived. Hungarian texts in Latin script also appeared very early on. Following a

number of sporadic examples, the first piece of Hungarian prose – the Funeral Oration, a Hungarian translation of a funeral sermon in Latin – dates from the mid-twelfth century. The first piece of Hungarian poetry, dating from nearly a century later, is the Lamentations of Mary, also written on the basis of a Latin original. These were followed by a number of Bible translations, legends about the lives of Hungarian saints, sermons, and other religious texts. The language of secular writings, such as historiography and charters, continued to be Latin for a long time.

The Hungarians created their own national culture at the crossroads of two major cultures: they originated in the East, and originally derived their traditions from the archaic culture of the Eurasian steppes, while the true Christian devotion and acute political awareness of the first Hungarian kings led to the adoption of Western culture: only a century after their settlement in the Carpathian Basin the Hungarians established themselves among the nations of the Western world.

Hungarian belongs to the Finno-Ugric family of languages, and relations of the Hungarian people include the Finns, the

Estonians, and a number of smaller nations which today live on the territory of Russia, in the region of the Urals and along the Volga River. In terms of ethnic origins, however, the Hungarians are linked partly with the Turkic nations of Asia Minor: for example, their primary melodies and decorative arts are Turkic in origin. Under the strong influence of Western culture, and having adapted to the spirit and values of Christian civilisation, the cultural heritage which the Hungarians brought with them from the East lived on only at the deep structural level of culture, primarily in the Hungarian language itself, which is linked with Eastern cultures not only in terms of the origins of its basic vocabulary and grammar, but also its mythological poetry.

Having said that, the Hungarian people developed into a Western nation in the fullest sense, a process which was completed by the highly educated and strong-handed successors of Saint Stephen: Saint Ladislav, Coloman the Possessor of Books (Könyves Kálmán), Béla III, and Béla IV. Monarchs of the Anjou Dynasty – Charles Robert (Károly Róbert) and Louis the Great (Nagy Lajos), who was also the Polish King and as such ruled over an enormous empire – played a similar role, and what is more, are credited for making medieval Hungary into an international power.

Historical Hungary, which was once embraced by the Carpathian Mountains, was the borderline and last bastion of Western civilisation: in the south it was bordered by the Byzantine empire representing Eastern Christianity, and later the Mohammedan Turkish empire which grew up on its ruins, while in the east lay the Mongol khanates, and later the Russian empire. At this time, Hungary was a highly influential bastion of Western Christianity: the dynasty established by Árpád, the chieftain who spearheaded

the Hungarian Conquest, gave more saints to the Church than any other Catholic dynasty; Hungarian knights and kings participated in the Crusades to the Holy Land, and to a certain extent the country played the role of missionary and cultural mediator in relation to the east and the south.

The Hungarian kingdom was important as a defensive bastion of Western Christendom during the Middle Ages, and indeed the country's eastern and southern borders marked the borders of the Western world. This is well

illustrated by the fact that Hungary marked the boundary for Romanesque and Gothic church architecture: the Saint Martin Cathedral in Bratislava, the Cathedral of Saint Elisabeth in Kosice, the Church of Our Lady in Buda, the Saint Michael church in Cluj, and the Black Church in Brasov, continue to mark the eastern edge of Western civilisation today. Medieval Hungarian architecture, painting, and sculpture were largely brought into being on the initiative of the Church, with the heavy involvement of monastic orders, such as the

Benedictines and Cistercians. On the other hand, the monarchy also commissioned some magnificent architecture, landmarks of which have survived first of all in Esztergom, Székesfehérvár, and Buda.

Despite making clear overall progress, the medieval Hungarian state from time to time faced periods of serious decline, mostly as a result of the repeated destruction of previous achievements by hostile powers attacking Hungary from the east. In the middle of the thirteenth century, for example, the Mongol (Tatar) tribes flooding the eastern parts of Europe – which in 1241 defeated the army of King Béla IV at the Battle of Muhi – laid Hungary waste, as a result of which the king himself had to flee. On his return he had to carry out virtually a 'Second Founding of the Homeland' (honalapítás). In the fifteenth century, however, a new and more dangerous enemy than ever before appeared at Hungary's borders: the Ottoman–Turkish Empire, with its great military might, was expanding rapidly at this time. This expansion was successfully curbed for a number of decades by the great Hungarian soldier János Hunyadi, who in 1456 at Nándorfehérvár (today: Belgrade) dealt an unprecedented defeat to a Turkish army. His victory, which ultimately saved Christian Europe from Turkish expansion for a longer period of time, made it possible for his son, Matthias, after his elevation to the Hungarian throne, to have to contend with only smaller-scale wars with the Turks, as a consequence of which he could concentrate his forces on building an empire in the West, and standing firm against the Ottoman Empire.

The Hungarian kingdom, firmly embedded in Western civilisation, rested on secure economic foundations: in the Middle Ages the country was a European centre of precious metal mining, and the revenues of the Hungarian



The library of King Matthias had 2500 Corvinas (codices)

king rivalled those of the English monarch. The foundations of the state were also secure and Hungary had a rich cultural life, as evidenced not only by the many magnificent creations of European level Hungarian Romanesque and Gothic architecture, painting, and sculpture, but also by the growth of medieval Hungarian literature: the collection of codices written in Hungarian, which regrettably have been largely destroyed by wars over the centuries, constitute a 'virtual' library of great consequence. In the second half of the fifteenth century, during the glorious reign of King Matthias, the king's palaces in Buda and Visegrád emerged as influential centres of European Renaissance learning. The influence of the Italian Renaissance had reached Hungary a long time before the other countries of Central Europe. The gems of Matthias's library in Buda, the Corvinas, continue to be regarded as cherished examples of the Renaissance book maker's art.

Hungary not only adopted the culture of Western Christianity, but also took on itself the defence of its values, at great self-sacrifice. This difficult struggle led, on several occasions, to defeat at the hands of enemies from the East. The most tragic development in the centuries-long history of the Turkish wars came in 1526, when the Turkish sultan won a victory which was to prove disastrous for the Hungarian nation at the Battle of Mohács. In 1541, the capital of the kingdom, Buda, was also taken by the Turks, leading to the division of the country into three parts: the Habsburg Dynasty took control of the western part, the centre of the country came under Turkish rule, while in the south-east, in Transylvania, an independent Hungarian principality emerged, marking the final outpost of national continuity. The Turkish occupation lasted for 150 years, and the state structure of the Hungarian kingdom was

slowly restored only after the reoccupation of Buda in 1686.

After a series of historic defeats, over long years, the Hungarian people managed to regain their vitality from Hungarian national culture, primarily literature. This vitality was also promoted by the Reformation of Luther and later Calvin, which led to the further development of learning in the Hungarian language – the same purpose was also served by the Catholic Counter Reformation, which also recognised the importance of national culture. The Protestant version of the complete Hungarian language Bible (the Vizsolyi Bible), translated by Gáspár Károli, reformed preacher, was published in 1590. The Catholic version of the Bible, published in 1626 is related to György Káldi, Jesuit monk.

In the age of Turkish wars and the struggle for Reformation the Hungarian creative spirit manifested itself in the works of Bálint Balassi, the outstanding figure of Hungarian Renaissance poetry; Péter Pázmány, university founder and excellent homilist, who spearheaded the Catholic Counter Reformation in Hungary; and Miklós Zrínyi, the successful military leader and author of the Baroque epic, *The Peril of Sziget*.

During the Turkish Conquest, the Habsburg government viewed Hungary as a frontier zone of the Habsburg Empire, and therefore suppressed Hungarian attempts to gain independence from Austria. Independence was the principal policy of the Princes of Transylvania: István Bocskai, who waged war against the Habsburg monarchs, Gábor Bethlen, and, later, Ferenc Rákóczi II, who was chosen as their prince by the Hungarian estates.

Its dividedness and lack of independence prevented the full-scale development of the institutions of Western culture in Hungary. Unlike in previous centuries, Hungary had no royal court of its own, an institution which in all European countries was a major driving force behind cultural development. National culture found refuge at the court of the Transylvanian princes, and in the palaces of the high nobility, the courts of the bishops, church schools, monasteries, and vicarages. The literary and national cause continued to be closely intertwined: the learned Transylvanian encyclopaedist János Apáczai Csere launched a programme to promote schools teaching in the Hungarian language, and Transylvanian memoir writers gave a personal



Medieval representation of Buda, the Hungarian capital



Library of the Reformed College in Sárospatak

interpretation of historical events – for example, the memoirs of Prince Ferenc Rákóczi II give us an insight into the inner struggles of that monumental human being, while Kelemen Mikes, a reformer of Hungarian prose, enjoyed the hospitality of the Prince's court and later accompanied his master into exile in Turkey.

When the Turkish wars and independence struggles died down, eighteenth-century Hungary enjoyed decades of relatively peaceful development. For this, great credit should be given to Queen Maria Theresa, whose tolerant policies and love of the people made her the first member of the Habsburg Dynasty to find her way into the hearts of Hungarians. The country was once again rebuilt from a state of devastation: Hungary's skyline was for a long time defined by the Baroque architectural ensembles built during this period. Palaces, cathedrals, libraries, and schools were built, and this was soon followed by the revival of literary culture. Young Hungarian guardsmen at the Viennese Court were the first to become acquainted with the ideas of the French and German Enlightenments, and

they were to become the driving force behind the development of belles lettres and academic literature written in Hungarian. Although Hungary was a kingdom with its own state administration and self-government, as a part of the Habsburg Empire it did not have full independence.

The son of the highly popular Queen, Joseph II, sought to establish a centralised monarchy, and although he introduced valuable reforms in the social and religious spheres, he brushed aside Hungarian endeavours to cultivate their own language and culture. His successor went on to cancel even the reforms started by Joseph II. Therefore, the republican movement which was brought into being in Hungary under the influence of the French Enlightenment and the Revolution in Paris in 1789 sought to introduce very radical changes – without success – and it ended in the execution or imprisonment of its leaders.

As a consequence, literary circles became the repository of national independence and social transformation, based on the ideas of West European Enlightenment and liberalism. After be-

ing burdened with the heritage of 150 years of Turkish occupation, Hungarian culture once again returned to the current of Western cultural development. The same ideas were professed by Ferenc Kazinczy, once a prisoner, who saw his mission as reforming the Hungarian language into a modern tongue; Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, who died young and introduced the Rococo sentiment into Hungarian poetry; and Dániel Berzsenyi, whose classicist poetical forms were a reflection of the Romantic world-view dominated by visions and philosophy.

The first half of the nineteenth century was a golden age in terms of both Hungarian history and Hungarian literature. The parliamentary sessions of those decades laid down the groundwork for social change: the emancipation of the serfs and the development of the civil society began; the Hungarian language was made the language of state administration; and Hungarian culture was able to catch up once again with the culture of Western nations. The work which was done during the so-called 'Reform Age' to build up the country economically and politically was spearheaded by Count István Széchenyi, a man of broad vision and well educated in Western culture – he was also an excellent diarist – whose thinking was strongly influenced by the British model. His selfless organising work led to the creation of the Hungarian Academy of Science, the construction of the Chain Bridge connecting Pest with Buda, the beginning of the construction of Hungary's railway network, and the regulation of the flow of the Danube and Tisza rivers.

In the field of Hungarian literature, writers in the style of National Romanticism recalled the country's heroic past, professed the ideal of freedom, and widened the Hungarian vision to include European horizons. The heroes of this age included Fe-

renc Kölcsey, poet, politician, and author of the words of the Hungarian national anthem, József Katona, the father of Hungarian drama, Mihály Vörösmarty, the voice of the mythical poetry of classic European Romanticism, Miklós Jósika, the writer of popular historical novels, and József Eötvös, who promoted the ideas of liberalism.

The longing for social and political reforms generated an interest in the culture and life of the peasantry, and poetry soon turned to the language and traditions of simple folklore for inspiration, and gave expression to their wishes and aspirations. Sándor Petőfi and János Arany were the classical authors of this school of folk-inspired poetry, and even their personal biographies underline their poetic credo. Both played a role in the events of the revolution, which broke out on 15 March 1848 and was dedicated to bringing to Hungary the demands of the French Revolution of 1789 for liberty, equality, and fraternity. The revolution aimed to accomplish the country's complete independence from the Austrian empire and to give its citizens equality under the law, in other words, to create a modern civil society in place of feudal estates.

This revolution was headed by Lajos Kossuth, outstanding political orator and thinker of international reputation. A bloodless revolution was followed by a bloody war of independence: first the Viennese court incited some of Hungary's ethnic minorities against the Hungarian people, and then intervened militarily. Ultimately, however, it was able to crush the Hungarian people only in alliance with Tsarist Russia, the most autocratic state in contemporary Europe. Petőfi gave his life in this war of self-defence, and Arany's elegiac poetry portrays the painful memory of the crushed war of independence.



Franz Liszt

After this defeat it was once again the turn of national culture – primarily writers – to keep alive the Hungarian nation's will to live and to furnish ideals to a disillusioned nation: János Arany's epic poetry depicts some of the most glorious pages in Hungarian history; Mór Jókai's novels are really heroic epics of the love of freedom of the Hungarian people; Zsigmond Kemény's historical novels and political studies express the need for national self-knowledge and rational realpolitik; while Imre Madách's drama *The Tragedy of Man* is a mythical vision of the history and future of the whole of humanity. National music played a similar role: Ferenc Erkel's operas and the music (and personal role) of Ferenc Liszt also contributed to a stronger national identity.

The Hungarian people did not break under the yoke of oppression, and when in 1867 the

joint efforts of the prudent reform politician Ferenc Deák, and of the Habsburg monarch, Francis Joseph I, who sought to make peace with the Hungarian nation, and his wife, Queen Elisabeth, who felt a strong sympathy for the Hungarian people, culminated in the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, and the dual Austro-Hungarian Monarchy – with one centre in Vienna and one in Pest-Buda – another age of progress dawned in the turbulent history of the Hungarian people, leading to a gradual increase in the importance of Hungary within the Monarchy, until, at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, which was meant to regulate relations between Europe's leading powers, the Monarchy was represented by the former Hungarian revolutionary, Count Gyula Andrássy.

Over the fifty years or so from the Compromise to the First World War Hungary underwent a

fundamental transformation: civil society grew stronger; industry and trade developed rapidly; the railway network increased in size; and the institutions of parliamentary constitutionality began to be put in place. At the same time, Hungary also had to face a number of difficult problems. Nearly half of Hungary's population consisted of non-Hungarian ethnic minorities – Germans, Romanians, Slovaks, Serbs, and Ruthenians – nations which were calling for rights of autonomy which the Hungarian government was unwilling to grant. At the same time, the country was in need of urgent social reforms: the system of large feudal estates (*latifundia*) was still in existence, while large masses of poor peasantry, well organised industrial workers, and civic and intellectual social groups were growing in strength and calling for radical changes. However, conservative Hungarian governments consistently blocked all attempts at reform. The pessimistic poems of Gyula Reviczky and János Vajda, and the ironic novels of Kálmán Mikszáth provide a vivid picture of this period, characterised by both increasing wealth and conflicts.

The ideals of free development, compromise between nationalities, and democratic transformation had to be taken up once again by intellectuals. The circle of writers centred around the periodical *Nyugat* in the early twentieth century advocated national and cultural revival, a movement which gave fresh impetus to the traditionally Western orientation of Hungarian literature and gave birth to leading trends in the intellectual and artistic spheres at the turn of the century. The mythical poetry of Endre Ady, the work of Mihály Babits, dedicated to high moral ideals, Dezső Kosztolányi's European outlook, Árpád Tóth's cult of beauty, and Gyula Juhász's lyric poetry fraught with inner conflicts, all gave voice to a

modernity which was both Hungarian and European at the same time, as did Zsigmond Móricz's realistic novels and the dream world of Gyula Krúdy, whose approach to time was just as innovative as any of his prominent West European confreres.

Hungarian composers and artists also played their part in this spiritual revival, including Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, who introduced the traditions of Hungarian archaic and folk music into modern musical culture, and József Rippl-Rónai, Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka, and Lajos Gulácsy, who created original Hungarian works based on the international ideals of Impressionism, Symbolism, and Art Nouveau. This Hungarian school of painting formed an integral part of the history of European arts, and Budapest was the most important centre of Art Nouveau alongside Vienna.

The spiritual revival which took place in Hungary in the early twentieth century virtually marked the beginning of a new 'Reform Age'. Yet these reform plans were interrupted before they could come to fruition, by the

outbreak of the First World War, in which the Hungarian people, along with the other nations of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, fought and lost on the side of Imperial Germany. Losing this war prevented the modernisation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its transformation into a federation. It also caused historical Hungary to fall apart. After the turbulence caused by the democratic changes in the autumn of 1918, which steered Hungary towards the development of a civil society – although this was restricted mostly to Budapest – came the communist coup d'état of 1919, orchestrated by Béla Kun, and then the 'white' counterrevolution, led by Admiral Miklós Horthy. The newly independent Hungary was thereafter reduced to only one-third of its former historical territory by the peace treaty signed at the Palace of Trianon, near Paris. In this way, Hungary lost over half of its former population, as every third ethnic Hungarian came under the administration of the government of another country, and thus became a minority.

The Hungarian economy was badly hit by the damage caused



Building of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences



Zoltán Kodály



Béla Bartók



Zoltán Kocsis

in this way, and the political system introduced under the regency of Miklós Horthy did little to promote social modernisation – on the contrary, it maintained the privileges of the traditional dominant social groups. Even so, by the 1930s some economic and cultural modernisation was unfolding, the latter being linked to the diligent

Minister of Culture, Count Kunó Klebelsberg. However, the Hungarian political elite and the Hungarian people could not reconcile themselves to the injustices imposed by the Trianon Peace Treaty, and reacted with bitterness also to the oppression now suffered by the three million Hungarians who had become minorities. In place of social

modernisation Hungarian politics was dominated by the grievances caused by Trianon and by territorial revisionism.

In an unfavourable historical setting it was once again the turn of literature to advance the ideals of social reform and European progress. The circle of the periodical Nyugat – Mihály Babits, Dezső Kosztolányi, Frigyes

The Budapest Festival Orchestra



Karinthy, Milán Füst, Jenő Tersánszky-Józsi – and the new generation of writers coming up alongside them – Lőrinc Szabó, Sándor Márai, Sándor Weöres, Miklós Radnóti, and Transylvanian writers Károly Kós, Sándor Reményik, Lajos Áprily, Jenő Dsida, and Zoltán Jékely – raised their voices against the barbarism of the period and represented European humanism against both extreme rightist and extreme leftist movements. The outstanding figure of the Hungarian avantgarde, Lajos Kassák, passionately demanded change, while Sándor Sík, who acted in the spirit of Catholicism, defended the universal values of Christianity. The literary left – Attila József, Lajos Nagy, and Tibor Déry – sought a new harmony of humanity in a community-oriented social order. One of the most powerful intellectual schools of the period was populism, committed to the interests of the peasantry: Gyula Illyés, László Németh, János Kodolányi, István Sík, and Áron Tamási (working in Transylvania, now annexed to Romania) linked the ideals of agrarian democracy and national revival with the poetics of a modernised literary realism.

Hoping for redress in respect of the grievances incurred as a result of the Trianon Treaty, Hungary was slowly moving towards an alliance with Germany and Italy, and with their assistance was indeed able to regain control over some of its lost territories: the Hungarian populated section of the Felvidék in 1938, Kárpátalja in 1939, Northern Transylvania and Székelyföld in 1940, and the Bácska in 1941. However, these developments inevitably tied Hungary to the Axis powers, and so in 1941 Hungary became a belligerent. In the winter of 1942–43 its army was mostly destroyed in the fighting along the Don River. Neither the self-sacrificing Count Pál Teleki, nor Miklós Kállay after him, who pursued a very clear-headed and



Mari Törőcsik and Imre Soós, the two protagonists of Zoltán Fábry's film, the Merry-Go-Round



Klaus Maria Brandauer in István Szabó's film, the Mephisto, which won the Oscar award

tactical political course, could save the country from the baneful consequences of war.

Hungarian intellectuals took a very clear stance against the pro-war lobby, calling for 'spiritual resistance'. The cream of Hungarian literature also condemned Hungary's occupation by Nazi Germany in spring 1944, which led, among other things, to the deportation or murder of Hungarian Jews. Hungarian literature condemned the violence of war and, as soon as peace came, its writers and poets could once again play a leading role in serving the country's spiritual and moral revival. During a short-lived period of democracy – lasting no more than three years – literature flourished, and the older generation was joined by a number of talented young writers: alongside the successors of the Nyugat movement came the poets János Pilinszky and Ágnes Nemes Nagy, and the prose writers Géza Ottlik, Iván Mándy, and Magda Szabó, while the populist camp was joined by László Nagy, Ferenc Juhász, and István Kormos.

The communist dictatorship introduced into Hungary with Soviet assistance not only crushed the Hungarian people's desire for independence, but also put a stop to the freedom of thought. Tens of thousands of intellectuals were imprisoned or sent to labour camps, and the tyrannous rule of Mátyás Rákosi almost completely destroyed the intellectual foundations of Hungarian society. This dictatorship was swept away for a few days by the Hungarian revolution of 23 October 1956, to which Hungarian writers made a great contribution. The uprising started with a mass demonstration of university students, and was transformed into a freedom fight as a result of the intervention of special armed police units and, later, Soviet troops. Young workers and professionals/intellectuals played leading roles. The temporary success of the revolution allowed

Imre Nagy to be installed at the head of the government. He was the leader of the reform wing of the communist party and heartily supported the demands of the revolution. The revolutionary government restored democratic pluralism, shut down the State Security Authorities, the organisation in charge of national security, and quit the Warsaw Pact, membership of which had been

After the defeat of the revolution many fled Hungary, and the new political rulers condemned hundreds to execution, while nearly fifty writers were imprisoned, Árpád Göncz – later President of the Republic of Hungary – among them. The intelligentsia took a long time to recover, but by the late 1960s independent thought had re-emerged, and the general meetings of the Society of



The Diósgyőr Castle is the scene of rich summer cultural programmes

forced on Hungary by the Soviet Union.

The Hungarian revolution and its fight for freedom against foreign invasion was crushed by Soviet military forces. A new government under János Kádár was installed by the Soviets, and until the introduction of the so-called 'soft dictatorship' of the mid-1970s, this government pursued a similar course to the initial communist dictatorship.

Hungarian Writers provided a platform for social critique with an opposition edge.

During this period several great literary generations worked side by side. The continuity of revival was served by writers who appeared on the scene after 1956, such as the poets Sándor Csoóri, Ottó Orbán, Dezső Tandori, István Ágh, and György Petri; writers of narrative literature such as Miklós Mészöly, Tibor Cseres,

and Ferenc Sánta; the dramatist István Örkény; and later the writers who laid the foundations of postmodern Hungarian narrative, Péter Esterházy and Péter Nádas. Talented writers depicted the lives, hardships, and hopes of Hungarians forced to live as minorities, including the novelist and dramatist András Sütő, and the poets Sándor Kányádi and Domokos Szilágyi.

dat-publishing ‘democratic opposition’ – became more active and organised into movements. As a result of the general decline of the Soviet empire, a process of political change and democratic reform started in the late 1980s. This resulted in the revival of such traditional political parties as the Smallholders Party and the Christian Democratic Party. However, it was the new political

with Árpád Göncz as President, (Göncz was followed by Ferenc Mádl as President from 2000). In 1994, political power went to the centre-left under Gyula Horn; in 1998 another centre-right government was formed, this time under Viktor Orbán and the so-called ‘Young Democrats’; while in 2002 it was again the centre-left parties who won the elections, with Péter Medgyessy forming the government in their representation. All this demonstrates a process of political power rotation. The democratic institutions underpinning the rule of law were developed, in 1999 Hungary became a member of NATO, and in 2004 it acceded to the European Union.

The situation of the Hungarian minorities living in neighbouring countries has also changed significantly. 1.8–2.0 million Hungarians live in Romania – historically Transylvania, the Partium, and the Banat –, 600,000 in Slovakia, 200,000 in Kárpátalja (Sub-Carpathia, in Ukraine), and 300,000 in Voivodina (Hungarian-Vajdaság) in Serbia, making a total of some 3 million Hungarians. Having been liberated from the oppressive policies of the respective communist regimes, these national minorities are now trying to establish their own political and cultural institutions. Political organisations have been formed in all regions with a Hungarian population, and in a number of instances they have returned members to the national parliament and even participated in government. Many Hungarian schools, church organisations, and cultural institutions have been set up. Having said that, such organisations still encounter difficulties as a result of government attempts at centralisation.

The position of Hungarian emigrants in the Western hemisphere, traditionally imbued with a sense of national mission, has also changed: nowadays, Hungarians living abroad have unre-

Hungarian literature has always promoted the continuity of national existence: even during the decades of dictatorship, it promoted European cultural values, and it also played a leading role in the democratic transformation process which started in the late 1980s.

From the mid-1980s independent and opposition intellectuals – literary figures, reform economists, members of the samiz-

formations which proved really effective in generating mass support: the Hungarian Democratic Forum, the Alliance of Free Democrats, the Alliance of Young Democrats, and the Hungarian Socialist Party, created after the dissolution of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party, the communist state party. After multi-party elections in 1990, a centre-right government was formed under József Antall,



stricted access to their homeland and its institutions.

In the 1990s and following the millennium, Hungarian culture has intensified its presence abroad, and its representatives have had nice international success. Hungarian participation at World Exhibition 1992 in Sevilla was especially memorable. In 1999, Hungary was the Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair of international renown. In recent years, festivals presenting the whole of Hungarian culture have been organised in Belgium, France, Italy, and Great Britain, throughout these countries. The next place of presentation is Russia.

From among today's Hungarian writers György Konrád, Péter Esterházy, Péter Nádas, László Krasznahorkai, Lajos Parti Nagy and Magda Szabó have



Sándor Márai souvenirs

attained remarkable popularity in the German, French, Italian, and English language areas. It was an acknowledgement of universal

Hungarian literature that, in 2002, Imre Kertész received the Nobel Prize in Literature for his novel titled Fateless. There is also continuous interest in the Western world concerning Hungarian masters of literature in the 20th century, first of all relating to the works of Dezső Kosztolányi, Zsigmond Móricz, Gyula Krúdy and Antal Szerb. Sándor Márai's novels, with their unique character, are having quite a renaissance in numerous countries.

From among Hungarian contemporary composers, György Kurtág, György Ligeti, and Péter Eötvös are the best known abroad. Hungarian pianists like Zoltán Kocsis, András Schiff, Dezső Ránki, and Gergely Bogányi are always welcome in great concert halls throughout the world.

Hungarian movie directors of international renown include characters like István Szabó, Miklós Jancsó, Károly Makk, Péter Gothár and Béla Tarr.

Since 1 May 2004, Hungary is a member of the European Union. She did not join the community of the developed European countries empty-handed. One of the constituent elements of her variable "dower" is Hungarian culture, which besides showing individual colours, is the medium of universal values.

