

The Hungarian Quarterly

Volume 43 • Autumn 2002 • €14.00 / \$12.00

167

Single-Person Groups & Globalisation

The Writer Who Believed in Miracles: Antal Szerb

On the Literaturexpress 2000

Letters to Sir Aurel Stein from Friends & Colleagues

The Smell of Prison, Part 3

Dohnányi Redeemed

Nikolaus Harnoncourt in Interview

The Pianists Zoltán Kocsis, Dezső Ránki & András Schiff

The Hungarian Quarterly

First published 1936

Miklós Vajda, Editor
Zsófia Zachár, Deputy Editor

Rudolf Fischer & Peter Doherty,
Language Editors

Kati Könczöl, Editorial Secretary

The Hungarian Quarterly

formerly *The New Hungarian Quarterly*

8 Naphegy tér, Budapest H-1016, Hungary

Telephone: (361) 375-6722 Fax: (361) 318-8297

e-mail: quarterly@mail.datanet.hu

homepage: <http://www.hungary.com/hungq/>

Published by The Society of the Hungarian Quarterly

Printed in Hungary by AduPRINT, Budapest,
on recycled paper

The Hungarian Quarterly, © Copyright 2002

HU ISSN 1217-2545 Index: 2684

Cover & Design: Roller29 (Péter Nagy)

Annual subscriptions:

\$40 (\$60 for institutions).

Add \$10 postage per year for Europe,

\$14 for USA and Canada,

\$16 to other destinations and \$25 by air
to anywhere in the world.

Sample copies or individual copies of back numbers \$12,
postage included.

Payment in \$ or equivalent.

Annual subscriptions in Hungary Ft 3,600

Single copy Ft 950

Send orders to *The Hungarian Quarterly*

P.O. Box 3, Budapest H-1426, Hungary

Articles appearing in this journal are indexed in
HISTORICAL ABSTRACTS;
INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL SCIENCE ABSTRACTS;
AMERICA, HISTORY & LIFE;
THE MUSIC INDEX;
ARTS & HUMANITIES CITATIONS INDEX;
IBZ (INTERNATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF
PERIODICAL LITERATURE);
IBR (INTERNATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY
OF BOOK REVIEWS)



The Hungarian Quarterly is published
with the support of the
Hungarian Ministry of Cultural Heritage

- 3 *Single-Person Groups and Globalisation*
Vilmos Csányi
- 19 *The Writer Who Believed in Miracles: Antal Szerb 1901–1945*
György Poszler
- 29 *A Dog Named Madelon (Short story)*
Antal Szerb
- 35 *Poems, translated by Daniel Hoffman*
László Bertók
- 40 *Ambaradan: On the Literaturexpress 2000*
László Garaczi
- 47 *The Return of Corneille (Illustrated)*
Gábor Pataki
- 53 *A Hungarian on the Silk Road*
Letters to Sir Aurel Stein from Friends and Colleagues
Ágnes Kelecsényi
- 77 *The Smell of Prison. Responses to Zsófia Balla. Part 3*
Ádám Bodor

MUSIC

- 100 *Dear Mici...*
An Unpublished Letter by Ernst von Dohnányi
Éva Kelemen
- 108 *Dohnányi Redeemed (Ilona von Dohnányi: A Song of Life)*
Alan Walker

- 115 *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso and Il Moderato*
The Pianists Zoltán Kocsis, Dezső Ránki and András Schiff
Kristóf Csengery

- 125 *Ideals, Dogmas, Passions*
A Budapest Interview with Nikolaus Harnoncourt
András Batta

OBITUARY

- 136 *A Joyful Economist: Tibor Scitovsky (1910–2002)*
János Kornai

BOOKS & AUTHORS

- 140 *Parallel Lives (Pál Závada, Iván Sándor)*
Miklós Györffy
- 147 *The Whirlpool Below (Antal Szerb: Journey by Moonlight)*
George Szirtes

THEATRE & FILM

- 150 *Something Has Gone Wrong (Sándor Weöres, György Spiró)*
Tamás Koltai
- 156 *The Unquiet American (István Szabó: Taking Sides)*
Erzsébet Bori

Cover: Dezső Korniss: *Key Holder, 1949, oil on canvas, 60x80 cm*

Back cover: Dezső Korniss: *Friends, 1949, oil on paper, 19.2x23.3 cm (top); Flutist II, 1950, oil on canvas, 40x30 cm*



*The colour supplement in this issue was made possible
by a grant from Nemzeti Kulturális Alapprogram
(National Cultural Fund).*

János Kornai

A Joyful Economist

Tibor Scitovsky (1910–2002)

Tibor Scitovsky, a pre-eminent figure in 20th century economics, has died. When Mark Blaug, the leading English historian of economic theory, compiled his book *Great Economists Since Keynes*, he placed Scitovsky among them, classing him as one of the true greats.

Scitovsky had a perfect knowledge of his field, but that might equally be said of many others. What distinguished him above all from other highly qualified colleagues was his originality—his ability to see with fresh eyes a phenomenon that others had already discerned or a problem that many had already addressed, and think it out in a new way. Ideas, wit, premonition and inspiration are among the qualities associated with his thinking.

As an example, let me mention a well-known creation of his, one of the intellectual tools of welfare economics, which has entered the history of theory as the Scitovsky Criterion. It is rare for an economic policy to work to everyone's advantage, or at least, not to cause loss to anyone. As a rule, there are winners and losers. The test proposed by another figure

Hungarian economics can be proud of, Nicholas Kaldor (Miklós Káldor, later Lord Kaldor), became known as the Kaldor Criterion. Are the winners willing to reimburse the losers sufficiently to make them feel they have been compensated? For instance, if a new airport is built and the noise intrudes into the lives of people around it, the value of their property is reduced. Can the noise-induced loss to the people in the district be covered by the extra profit from air traffic generated by the new airport? Scitovsky put a witty intellectual twist on this question. How big is the "bribe" with which the potential losers can deter the potential winners from their intention?

This polemic says a great deal about the outlook of Scitovsky (and in the context of this debate, of Kaldor). Social welfare is not a formal category, not a W function whose maximum we can try to attain. Behind the concept of "social welfare" stand living people, groups, conflicts of interest, and distributive and redistributive battles. A general rise in welfare does not simply entail sacrifices. It is accompanied

János Kornai

is the author of, among numerous other works, Economics of Shortage, North Holland Publishing Co., Amsterdam, Oxford, New York, 1980.

for many people by suffering, upsetting of their way of life and injuries to their interests. Can these conflicts be settled in a peaceful, civilised manner, by financial incentives instead of furious demonstrations and political duels?

Another example of Scitovsky's innovative talent and originality was his contribution to price theory. Traditional microeconomics assumes that buyer and seller are partners of equal rank. Both the buyer and the seller make repeated attempts at price bargaining. An excessively high offer from a seller follows an excessively low offer from a buyer, and the two sides reach a symmetrical situation after successive attempts. Scitovsky introduced a pair of concepts: price maker and price taker. Few remember that this distinction derives from Scitovsky's theory. It was enough to identify, describe and name the phenomenon, and thereafter, everyone found it self-evident. "I already knew that," many said. They knew it in one sense and not in another. That is just where intellectual greatness lies. There is an important phenomenon under our noses. Everyone knows about it but no one notices it, until a truly scientific mind lights on the essence of the phenomenon and turns it into a usable tool of thinking. Scitovsky made it an important subject of price theory to clarify how there happen to be more active and more passive participants in price setting. Price setting follows different specific rules among price-making economic units from those that occur when those concerned cannot and often do not want to bargain over the price. They are forced to take the price offered because they have no alternative, or else seek another partner rather than indulge in price bargaining.

Scitovsky was not a combative intellectual revolutionary. He innovated simply by doing something different from other

people. As an illustration, let me recall the book that to my taste is his most exciting work, *The Joyless Economy*. This gives an idea of Scitovsky's radiant intellectual capacities as it were in condensed form. He "wonders" at American society. Here is this fantastically productive economy producing phenomenally rapid development and overwhelming competitiveness. This is said to be the truest embodiment of a "consumer society", where every technical change serves the higher demands of consumers. Yet somehow this is a joyless economy.

I remember having a private conversation with Scitovsky, in which, with the quiet irony habitual to him, he described a paradoxical phenomenon in the American way of life. People are constantly devising machines that spare them physical effort in their daily activity. There is no need to cut bread with a knife because there is a bread-slicing machine. There is no need to squeeze an orange because there is an orange press. There is no need to hand-grind coffee because there is an electric grinder, and so on and so forth. We move vertically by lift or escalator and make every horizontal move by car. Life really does become easier, but our muscles slacken and our organisms go soft. Then comes the work-out, physical training, if need be, with machines again, to simulate walking, cycling and the useful lifting of heavy weights, through the mechanical movements of a machine. Scitovsky in this book returns to the psychological base of economic theory. How weak and in many respects dilettante this base is, for instance in taking satisfaction to be the main criterion of joy, whereas at least as great a part or greater in the pleasure of life is played by what precedes satisfaction: feelings of preparation, stimulation and expectation of joy. The hope is often finer and more inductive of happiness than its fulfilment.

This remarkable book raises a range of exciting questions. How far do material welfare and happiness correlate? It cites surveys to show how the distribution of people declaring themselves to be happy or unhappy is fairly stable and rests little on their material standard of living. But it does depend on what the persons asked about their happiness and unhappiness think about their position in society. How do they stand in relation to others? To what extent do they gain pleasure from enjoyment of intellectual values as well as the consumption of material goods? Many cities in the United States are richer than European cities of a similar size, in terms of GDP per inhabitant or income per household. On the other hand, theatre provision per inhabitant in the latter is much higher.

Economists initially received this splendid book of Scitovsky's with some aversion. The presentation of the problem was alien to them. So was the interdisciplinary approach. That approach was a characteristic of the author. He was primarily an economist, but not exclusively an economist. Political science, sociology, psychology, history, and within the last, the history of human culture and civilization—he utilized them all. If need be, he was not backward about studying new chapters in the corpus of neighbouring disciplines. He was not merely conversant with these disciplines, for he crossed between them, opening new doors, building new corridors and bridges between isolated accumulations of knowledge. Tibor Scitovsky was a true embodiment of the Renaissance scholar, all too rare these days.

The Joyless Economy reflects well the multiplicity of its author, not just in an interdisciplinary sense, but in terms of his national and international ties as well.

Scitovsky was born and bred in Hungary and then moved initially to Britain, where he completed his studies. If he had stayed there, he would certainly have joined the House of Lords as well, alongside his three Hungarian colleagues, Kaldor, Balogh and Bauer. Instead he emigrated further, settling in the United States in 1939. He was a loyal citizen of America. He received from the American Economic Society the title of Distinguished Fellow, its highest distinction, awarded to a single economist each year. But when he wrote his memoirs, he gave the Hungarian edition the title *Memoirs of a Proud Hungarian*.* The title blends devotion to his native land and that mischievous irony at his own expense that is typical of him. It refers to one of his stories about his childhood, when he was playing in a Berlin park under the supervision of a pretty nursemaid. The heir to the throne came into the park and would really have liked to get to know the nursemaid, but he thought it would be more proper to ask the little boy who he was. Thereupon the little boy, Tibor Scitovsky, replied (in German, of course), "A proud Hungarian."

Tibor Scitovsky was a typical example of what is usually called "multiple identity". He was Hungarian, but an American citizen as well. He was European and American at the same time. European values appear in his work when he writes about America, but his American experience prompted him to write more than one of his theoretical works. His receptive intellect imbibed English culture during long years in England and French culture over a long period in Paris. He was a true cosmopolitan, who felt thoroughly at home in London, Paris, Budapest and California.

Not that he lacked historical roots. He bore a historic name. Students of the his-

*See HQ 155, Autumn 1999.

tory of the Hungarian Catholic Church will have heard of his ancestor, Prince-Primate János Scitovszky, Archbishop of Esztergom. He was the brother of Tibor's grandfather. Tibor's father, Tibor Scitovszky, played an important role in public life between the two world wars. He was a man of a conservative frame of mind, one of the peaks in his career being the position of foreign minister and the other his post of president of the largest Hungarian commercial bank. His son was tied to Hungary less by the great name and his family tradition than by the language, Hungarian poetry, music, culture and cuisine. He was glad to speak Hungarian, which he did without an accent even after sixty years abroad, searching at most for a word here and there. He assembled his library with great discrimination, not sparing himself the trouble of long searches. This he has bequeathed to the Central European University in Budapest.

At the same time, he was deeply imbedded in the United States and in the life of his profession all over the world. This multiple affiliation did not trouble him. It brought joy to him and to those who came in touch with him.

Tibor Scitovsky was a charming, sensitive man of few words who was courteous to everyone. If the concept had not become debased in Hungary, I would say he was a true gentleman. What made him that was not his background, but his inner elegance and fineness of mind. He spent his youth in one of the finest and most splendid houses in Budapest, designed and furnished with excellent taste. (It is now the British ambassador's residence.) But he was happiest making friends with the chauffeur. His con-

servative father had a son with a liberal outlook, who felt deeply the plight of the poor and disadvantaged, and as a scholar, studied the economically more backward part of the world with great sensitivity. It can truly be said of him that he had the best nursery and knew what the etiquette of dining prescribed, but when he ate fine food, he never omitted to dip his bread and wipe the plate almost clean.

We have lost more than an inspiring scholar. His death is a personal loss to many people. I had the delight and honour of being tied to him by a kind, varied personal friendship. His personality stood out for me not only through his works, but through personal meetings as well. He was a stern critic of the "joyless economy" because he was a man who could enjoy life. He remained energetic even in his mid-eighties. His wife Erzsébet, also a Hungarian, was as cheerful and ever active as Tibor. Together they went on excursions, took long journeys, ate well and enjoyed the beauty of their garden. My memories are not just of our thought-provoking discussions, but of pleasant evenings in restaurants, and an image of how Tibor and Erzsébet would tuck into their Szeged fisherman's soup and eat up their curd-cheese pasta to the last morsel of bacon.

It is a great loss also for those who knew him only from his works as a bright intellectual reflector, which could shed light repeatedly on points that remained obscure, and has now been extinguished. And for those who knew him and loved him personally, Tibor Scitovsky, the man will be irreplaceable, as a fascinating conversationalist and as a kind and attentive friend. ❦