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A work of art need neither be good nor well received to be politically significant. In some historical contexts it is indeed the ambivalence of art that expresses the spirit of the age. When M. Sartre speaks of the spiritual void in which no code of values applies, advising us at the same time to remember that we are responsible for our actions, he is reacting against the de-personalization of our age. Ibsen's *Brand* (1) is ambivalent on a different level. For East Europeans, and especially those who vanquished their captors but suffered defeat at the hands of their friends, the existential drama operates between national values and ordinary human dependencies on the one hand, and the continuing though less offensively obtrusive presence of Soviet power on the other.

In 1956 the issues were clear cut. The cruelty and cynicism of Stalin have certainly earned him a place among Hungary's benefactors, for a people once split and turned in upon itself, deficient in its strength, and deficient in self-respect, was cemented overnight into a monolith every bit as powerful as Stalin's and, as events showed, stronger. In the national confrontation (for the 1956 revolution was essentially that) there was no need and no room for ambivalence.

The last three years, however, have seen a liberalization free above which makes it more difficult for Hungarians to indulge in the spiritual comfort of ignoring or rejecting Kadar and his works. In October 1956 the Hungarians could say with perfect justification that they had nothing to lose but their chains. But when the chain-breaking was over and retribution had run its course, Kadar and his Government began to veer back to the concessions of 1955-56, not only because they were under public pressure, but also because they realized that in their bid for the support of Hungarians Stalinism was their worst enemy. The kind of national unity that could be had under Rakosi was not the one they wanted.

Of all varieties of Communist policy with which Hungary has had to contend since 1949 Kadarism is, without doubt, the smartest and, some would say, the most insidious. For what we see here in that country lends itself neither to "the worse the better", nor to any other black and white presentation. Kadar is, to use

(1) "The Journey", Kortz, May 1962.

Mr. Churchill's (as he then was) colorful phrase, a puzzle wrapped inside an enigma. Or is it that our minds are so conditioned to the composite image of lie-monger, croak, generalissimo and war-thunderer that the home-spun phrase and ordinary low ranking of a former metal worker seem as reassuring about looking for some mysterious key to his actions whereas, in truth, it is the simplicity that deceives? However this may be, the treachery of the man in 1956 is almost forgotten and there is a very vocal feeling both inside and outside the Party that, given the historic situation on 4 November 1956, worse could have happened. The reasons for this feeling are too well known to need repeating here. The point where they cease and matter for our present purpose is that they inhibit the flow of robust responses to which we have been used since 1947, and invite others of a more sophisticated kind.

Kadarian presents a choice of evils, for the question is no longer whether the nation should cooperate with its rulers, but what form that cooperation should take and how much of Hungary's interests and integrity may be preserved until such time as Communism will have receded and independence restored to Eastern Europe.

It would probably be an exaggeration to say that the Hungarians feel that their situation is hopeless, but it needs no special capacity to see the world, and especially the political preoccupations of the Western world, as they see it. For the plain truth is that in the Hungarian view no operetta princeling is too quaint and no tribal king too venerable in his loyalties but to take precedence over the fate of a hundred million Europeans. No wonder that they have allowed the shatters on their political window looking west. If light they cannot get, they may be forgiven for hoping that they can keep the noise out.

There is, of course, no question that the Hungarians have suddenly decided to go Communist or to turn their backs on their spiritual heritage which is entirely Western. Indeed the opposite is true. The books they read, the plays and films they see (and are allowed to read and see) display an almost childish anxiety to escape from provincialism and pile up reserves for a protracted siege. Nevertheless the political alienation is there, more in regret perhaps than in anger. The search for a formula of coexistence has begun and Mr. Neemeth's play poses all the vital questions.

Before going into the ambivalence of "The Journey" a word ought to be said about the danger of Kadar's policy to Kadar. For it would be idle to imagine that the regime's bid for respectability and its effort to bring Communism in through the back door are not strewn with pitfalls. There is more than superficial truth in the sectarian argument, sternly rejected by Kadar, that if the regime succeeds in securing the cooperation of the majority of Hungarians and gives them access to the levers possibly of power but certainly of administration, the Party will be fatally diluted and "socialism" will regress to the amiable reformism Imre Nagy had in mind when the coalition parties. Given the small number of real communists and the size and temper of their wards it is difficult to see what else could happen.

From the national point of view, on the other hand, it is easy to see Kadar as a sly seducer who, far from wishing to elope with the object of his desires, lures the stand-offish parents into a dreary acceptance of an otherwise highly intelligible matter. Undoubtedly the danger exists. Although they correspond to popular feeling, the regime's concessions are imposed and not, as far as one knows, elicited by conspiratorial writers and critics at the lower flights of the hierarchy. This need not invalidate them or make them less useful. But it does, on this showing, give rise to the linguistic kind of anxiety. Further, it is possible to argue that as soon as Hungarians of the decision-making caliber can be persuaded to accept responsible posts in the national machinery, their fortunes will be inextricably tied to those of Communism. In short, if the country goes along with Kadar accepting his concessions and toying with his line, there is a real danger that in ten or fifteen years' time smiles and backhairs will have smuggled Communism into a land which proved impregnable to the frontal assault.

How does Kadar stand to all this? As he sees it his courtship of the Hungarian people has been no more than an exercise in astute dialectics. Did the 1956 revolution not smellish Stalinism — a trifle too thoroughly perhaps, but relieving the regime of the necessity of going through the painful motions of a Khivry? Did the Government not decimate the ranks of the revisionists and the class-accusy in 1957-58? Was it, therefore, not right and politic to produce a synthesis and cause such winds to blow over Hungary to which the people in their disappointed mood could be reasonably expected to trim their sails?

Having suffered torture and imprisonment under Rakosi and burnt his fingers in 1956, Kadar is persuaded that, having a return

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of Stalinism, the principal mistake that has to be avoided is giving way under pressure, then too late and too little. Hence the paradoxical spectacle of Hungary's ace traitor foisting reforms on a recalcitrant Party, not, to be sure, anything that might jeopardize the long-range interests of Communism, but enough to neutralize resistance and allow the Government to get on with the job.

To the dogmatist argument that playing to the political gallery will engulf the regime in disaster, Kadar seems to answer with every appearance of sincerity that the alternatives would be so much less pleasant to contemplate. If (so he may argue) it is wrong for the Government of a "people's" democracy to play to the people which is the gallery, what else is there for it to do but return to Stalinism? Kadar has never publicly admitted that a dilution of Party and a dissipation of his program may be inherent in his policies. How could he? But this is, in fact, what they amount to, certainly in the short view, some would say more permanently. His hope is obviously that the watering down will be slight and that the cooperation he can purchase with it will worth the price. But will they?

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It is at this point that Mr. Semeth's play assumes significance whether we look at it from the dogmatic, the nationalist or the Government's point of view. For the question uppermost in the minds of thinking Hungarians is simply: is it now possible to sup with the devil, and if so, how long should one's spoon be to make the experiment profitable.

Semeth leaves the question open but not without having, first, shown the importance of trying, and then reminding us that, sincere as his hero's (Keradi's) search may be, the people's wounds are still too fresh and its distrust of doma foreigna too acute to make an understanding nationally acceptable.

For Keradi's journey has no happy or unequivocal ending. He leaves Hungary on a tour of good will representing a class that had most to suffer from Communism but is sophisticated enough to see, personally to hate, but historically to applaud the forces which caused its demise. This is the nub of the play and the spring of the existential situation. The signs are reversed, for here, unlike in Sartre's plays, the world has meaning, only the individual is driftwood if he happens to be on the losing side of history. Yet he is responsible for his actions because, once he has recognized the Law

which is larger than his own interests, death itself must be fashioned into a final confirmation of the march of history. This is Karadi's, and one may presume, the regime's message. But the tale does not end here.

Upon his return from Soviet Russia Karadi is met with incomprehension. He is an outcast in a society in which Communist rule has made no impact other than that of alienating it. His crime is that he accepted an invitation to visit the Soviet Union, but this is enough to undermine the respect he enjoyed in his community, and for some of his friends to question the soundness of his mind. Although he prevaricates on this point in his postscript, Mr. Kenneth is probably speaking from experience.

But he is also driven to desperation by the support and care of his freshly (and unwittingly) acquired well-wishers -- the two hacks on the local Party journal and the Party secretary. Unable to perceive the delicacy of Karadi's conversation, they kill him (symbolically speaking) with their kindness. A performing flea on the nostrils of the local club of intellectuals, Karadi is expected to go through the motions of bowtowing to his hosts and praising their country. Not he collapses in the performance having neither glorified nor debunked what he had seen, but simply spoken the revolutionary things: the dry but truthful commonplace.

Did the Moscow railway station impress him? Not really; it was very much like any other old-fashioned terminal, a bit 19 century, a bit shabby, all right as stations go but neither cleaner than most nor more covered in dirt. Did the Moscow teachers' committee receive them well? Oh yes, considering that the poor devils were being visited upon by so many delegations. Did he think that the sky scraper in which he was being put up was the last word in architecture? He had no views on the matter; someone in the delegation thought it was stupendous but their Russian guide said quite unceremoniously that he could think of no better target for a three-
-960 bomb.

Here the play culminates and the denouement which follows Karadi's strike carries the practical burden of Kenneth's message: reconciliation with the over-zealous, the middle-agers and dogmatists is impossible, but there is, via the person of young Nirese, a way open to a more tolerant and humane view. That the vehicles of this view are Esfar and his entourage coming, possibly, close an authorized version of Magyian -- of this we are left in no doubt. For Nirese puts forward a heretical thesis round which any Communist

critique of "The Journey" must in future revivise

I owe you the greatest thing on earth, Professor; my double insurance. Most of us have just one belt round our waists by which we hang suspended from the power. Round my waist there is a second one by which the people send me up like a mountain climber into the world of action to investigate its (the people's) possibilities.

This is Naggian written large, for Kirose's source for his second mandate is Karadi in his earlier and mildly progressive, but by Communist standards entirely reactionary, state. The popular element in his reinforcement which makes him feel so much safer on his expedition derives from what he learnt at the feet of this specimen of a presumably rotten and disappearing race.

In any case the antinomy itself is heretical. To postulate a powerful party and a powerless mass of ordinary people; an oligarchy which rules by remote control and a nation which is only now and only very tentatively beginning (in the play) to provide the second and vital part of Kirose's double equipment, challenges the work of the Hungarian Communist Party at its most sensitive point. Protesting that Mr. Nemeth's image bears no relation to reality, "Republika" said on 20 May 1951: "The Communists are not simply the representatives of power but the best of the people which is in power. They live deeply embedded in the people and not above it."

But this is not Mr. Nemeth's or (presumably) Hungary's reading of the situation. If the Karadis can come to terms with the men who speak for Communism, it will be only with this twice insured kind. But the compromise Mr. Nemeth envisages is very far from being full or convincing. When in Karadi's sick-room Kirose offers his former history master a post which would take him away from the scene of his tribulations and repair some of the injustices he suffered under Rakosi, Karadi refuses to go. The mind may be willing, but the body of the nation to which he belongs demands his presence in his home surroundings. The hand Kirose proffers in the name of the Party is not finally rejected, but time is needed to heal the wounds and to "dispel the fog in which my journey has enveloped me."

The therapeutic formula eludes the playwright, but by showing that the search need neither be dishonourable nor unprofitable, he holds out a hope for an understanding with the man who has two belts round his waist. Considering Hungary's heroic stance in 1955

Earlier and of the maturity of the public that the play has produced no trouble of the kind it would undoubtedly have sparked off in 1919 or 1918. If this is a safety valve, we should have more of it, for when letting off steam becomes a habit it is a very tricky operation to turn the screws on again.

There is, nevertheless, a point of major, and one is inclined to say, ugly concession in Mr. Keneth's play which transcends the limits of legitimate experiment and bears no confrontation with his own views of 1936. On the penultimate day of the Hungarian revolution Mr. Keneth published a moving and unequivocal article in "Irodalom Ujsag"; "A Nation on the Assault". A country, he argued, need not be completely free to bring out the best its people has to offer. Heroism, he wrote, with its paternal rule provided the right amount of irritation to help the nation produce its pearls. Bartok, Kodaly, Balits, Kosztolanyi and a host of others were reared in this atmosphere and even the country's economy had made remarkable progress. The 1956 uprising added the one missing element without which Hungary's nationhood would have been fatally lopsided: a sense of cohesion and self-respect. "Sitting behind my typewriter", he wrote, "I'm thinking of the young girl who fought from the roof-top of a block in Kalvin Square. One by one all her male comrades were killed off, but she went on fighting until her young head fell lifelessly to one side... This girl is my muse now and it is she who is telling me 'Go on you old candidate for the graveyard. If I could sacrifice my young life, what should prevent you, shadow of a man, from doing your duty?'"

Karadi's words in "The Journey" are a far cry from this message:

KARADI: "...there is also another way of looking at things. As a whole! ...Whether the nation rises or not in that framework...

ADWINE: "And does it rise in this?"

KARADI: "If we subtract and add up everything, I think, on the whole, it does. At least I shouldn't have the courage to allege, as you do that it doesn't."

This, coming after the suppression of the revolution and the judicial murders that followed it, weakens Mr. Keneth's whole moral position. He does not, to be sure, condemn the uprising.

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this may not be an elevating program, but it has a long, though often abused, pedigree in the nation's history. It does certainly not put Mr. Kenneth on the side of those who would sell out to the Russians or so weaken the nation's moral fibre that she would stumble into their embrace. Consistency in resistance is a luxury no land can, or should be asked to, sustain for long. Nor would this seem to be the most profitable way of bringing an unwanted rule to its knees. Both in 1943 and in 1956 the men who caused the influence of Hitler and of Moscow to be diluted were men close to the levers of power. There is no reason to think that now or in the foreseeable future any other method would be successful.

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What then is the lesson of Mr. Kenneth's play, and of the publication and staging of Mr. Kenneth's play? It is simply that, given the present openings, it is possible to win when provided that the regime, too, has something, or is led to believe that it has something, to gain in the process. And what does it appear to be gaining with this play? A response to its open-door policy from the class whose cooperation it needs and covets most. This is no mean achievement, for the spectacle of a class-alien school master overcoming his prejudices and subordinating his interests to the force that will ultimately crush him is, from the national point of view, no small price to be paid for the freedom of printing and staging all the things which must, on the Government's balance sheet of Mr. Kenneth's play, decidedly figure on the debit side. If one takes out Miroso with his Kadarite language but Magyar undertones, it is impossible to feel anything but contempt for all Mr. Kenneth's Communist characters. Blind, vile, opportunist or plain stupid they provide in their togetherness the portrait of a party which is incapable of attracting any but the scum and riff-raff of society. And has the idealization of the party and of Communism anywhere (in Eastern Europe) been depicted in more scathing terms than Mr. Kenneth depicts them in the first and second acts of his play? Red Karadi contracted leprosy on his tour of Russia he could hardly have been more effectively quarantined.

For the ordinary reader and the nightly audiences who watch the play in the Estaim Joseph Theater these are the most telling aspects of Mr. Kenneth's comedy. Add to this the abuse of the Soviet Union and the beating the AFD and even collectivization take a couple of times in the dialogue, and you have the makings of an explosive situation. It speaks well for the courage of

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At one point in the last act he comes, indeed, close to suggesting that Kirose himself had something to do with the fighting. But to assert as he does that "if we subtract and add up everything" the nation is still on the ascendant, is a slap in the face of the people whose sons and daughters made the sacrifices, and of Mr. Keneth himself. However large their perspective, few Hungarians would agree with the author that when all is said and done, there is, on the account of Communist rule in Hungary, more to be added up than to be subtracted. Socially, morally and in her economy, Hungary would be incomparably better off if she had been allowed to fend for herself as a free and democratic country. On this one but important point Mr. Keneth has come dangerously close to betraying his trust and playing havoc with his reputation.

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As a play Mr. Keneth's effort leaves much to be desired but it is superb as a documentary. One thing his critics will not be able to say of him is that he has freight any of wackling things as they really are in Hungary. Here is matter that should keep Sinologists and sociologists busy for a time and provide ammunition for almost any argument.

With all its faults and equivocations "The Journey" is a milestone. For the first time since 1945, Government and people can go to the theater and walk out feeling satisfied that justice has been done to their problem. On balance there is no doubt, at least in the present writer's mind, that the trend of which this play is the outstanding example is virtually irreversible. The fear that if the present that is allowed to continue long enough the nation, too, will melt away with it, would seem to be more than outweighed by the prospect that once they are inside the precincts of power, the Kadaris and their class will propel the country as far in the direction of a tolerably free society as the present international equation will allow. This may not be very far, but far enough to safeguard Hungary's vital interests and keep an equitable scale of values alive.

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