

Why did I return to Hungary, after the war, after having spent the war years in the United States? Well, I only left Hungary ^{temporarily} ~~in 1938~~, in 1938, because C.A. Macartney warned me to leave unless I wanted to be hanged secretly. I was in trouble with the Horthy regime and that's the only reason I left Hungary before the war. Also I felt that I could serve my country better from the outside. When I was in Alaska with the United States Army, I began to dream in English. I became scared. I even wrote an English poem. I asked myself, what does a Hungarian poet do abroad? I would have felt that my ~~life~~ life was ruined if I had stayed in America. I never even asked for ^{U.S.} ~~my~~ citizenship ^{when I was} in the United States army.

Also there were political considerations behind my return. I figured that the Germans had lost the Second World War, which left only the United States and the Soviet Union in the running. I thought that it would be impossible that the Russians should get Hungary because the Soviet Union was very weak and I didn't think that the United States would give satellites to Russia for nothing. So, I returned. Rusztem Vambéry who was in the United States at the time warned ^{me} with tears in his eyes against returning. If I had known what would happen to me, knowing that I would survive everything, that I would stay alive, I would do ^{over} it all again.

Although I was not a Marxist, I had been a member of the Social-

Democratic Party since 1931, because the Social Democrats were the only group which resisted Horthy. Mine was merely a formal membership. Then when I returned I joined the Social Democratic Party again. After the war, every writer, had to join a party in order to write. Kéthly asked me to work on Népszava which was a great waste x of time. On Haladás one had more freedom: one could even attack x the Social-Democratic Party. About joining the Party, Sándor Szalai said: "If you are a Jesuit, you join the CP, if you are a barefoot~~x~~ Franciscan, you join the Social Democrats." Goda told me to join the Party which had the full cash register, hence ^{to} join the CP.

I began to feel trapped as soon as I returned. The day after my return László Orbán sent a car for me and told me that I would receive a good salary, a car and a villa from the Communist Party for my services. They wanted me, not to join the CP, but to support it from the outside. Zoltán Biró, Rakosi's nephew~~x~~, the head of the Party's education department, summoned me to him, but I ~~x~~ refused to see him for about half a year. I finally went to see him. He had an enormous library x full of foreign books, the library decorated by a picture of Stalin. He praised me and asked me why I joined the Social Democratic Party. He said they would give me the greatest possible freedom although I was not a Marxist. He asked me to work for them, to inform them about the activities and personnel of the Social Democratic Party. I refused, saying

"There's just no way for you and me to understand each other; you lived in Moscow during the War and I in New York. It makes all the difference. So why don't we just forget about it."

In spite of this he started in again so I left.

Why didn't I try to leave Hungary in 1947? I was tired, exhausted, I had been driving too hard. I returned to Budapest with the thought of having the same apartment in the same street for thirty years, of going to the Balaton for my vacations. I was tired and lazy. It was the first time in my life that I didn't do something I should have done because I was lazy. I will never be guilty of this again. I had a library again, and I didn't want to leave my mother. I was also afraid of the poverty of emigration.

Meanwhile, I was writing; I wrote a book, poetry, and I worked for Haladás and Népszava. It was difficult to write good stuff for Népszava because one was not allowed to criticize the Russian movies or attack the Russian plays.

I made one mental concession to the Communists: I thought that although their regime would be worse for me, it would at least be better for the workers in spite of the fact that I knew that it was a stupid regime, medieval, etc. . . . I had no way of knowing how the workers fared under the regime because I avoided visiting any factories, in order to prevent the Communists from accusing me of spying. For the same reason, I didn't correspond

with my American friends. Actually the regime made concessions to the workers until the end of 1949. I went to the countryside, to villages, quite often and knew that the peasants lived quite well until 1949.

I was in the country, in Doboz, when I heard that Marosán had announced the ^{merger} ~~union~~ of the Social Democratic and Communist Parties. I had the feeling then that I must leave the Party. Why didn't I? I committed only one wrong action in all my life and this was it. Everyone hoped that somehow we'll get away with it. Jusztusz said that if Social Democrats didn't agree to be merged into the Communist Party, the Communists would kill 5,000 workers, and anyway there would be a war. Actually I was a member of the CP until my arrest, although I did everything to be ousted from the Party. The Social Democrats were the only ones who had the misfortune of having to join the Communist Party, and the only way of leaving the Party, short of ouster, was to petition the Central Committee which would then naturally arrest one. When I was called before a CP revision committee consisting of Imre Máté, Oszkár Bethlen's wife, etc., I made statements which would get me dismissed from the Party but which would not be drastic enough to have me arrested. Révai voted against my ouster while Máté and some of the others were for it. They asked me about Hungarian literature and I told them that I thought Kucska couldn't write to save his life, and that he wrote junk. I also told Máté

that he couldn't write. My judgments were aesthetic, not political.

You had to know just how far to go with your criticism to prevent arrest. No, my poem ^{attacking} ~~about~~ Stalin was never published; in fact I didn't ~~even~~ even tell my wife about it. I ^{copied} ~~copied~~ it into ~~a~~ ^{the} ~~volume~~ volume of Szeged and Arad gazette, Kossuth's newspaper, in the National Museum. I did this by underlining certain letters and words.

By 1949, I knew that I would be arrested. It was a good feeling; I felt that I was getting rid of a heavy responsibility. First of all I knew that Ignótz had been arrested because he had spent a number of years in the West; I knew that none of the charges against ^{him} were true. I had been watched since 1947, because of a postcard I received which they misunderstood, ^{from} and which they thought that I wanted to leave the country. I knew what was coming, everyone knew; I told my friends that I would be arrested as an imperialist spy, and three weeks before my arrest I had a horrible dream about being arrested. But, actually, when I thought about it rationally, I didn't believe that the Communists would be so stupid ^{as} to arrest me, since they would not gain by it. When I was arrested, I felt that the situation was hopeless, that they would have to kill me, or else the whole thing was senseless.

There were signs of what was coming. For instance, I was constantly attacked ^k in Szabad Nép. There was an article attacking

Géza Laczkó and myself ~~xxxxxx~~ entitled ~~z~~ "The Two Daredevils." They also attacked my book of poetry. Although some of the CP leaders liked me, Márton ~~Hz~~ Horváth and some of the others didn't. Rákosi was annoyed that I didn't write any poems glorifying him. He knew that a Moscow paper had printed translations of some of my earlier poetry. The middle functionaries hated me because of my article attacking them, an article entitled "Marxism and Nailpolish." I attacked ~~Klaniczay~~, ^{for} ~~xxxx~~ the Zrínyiász, and I wrote an article about the anniversary of the 1848 Revolution called "A Hundred Year Ago," which caused quite a scandal and infuriated Andics.

∨ Actually, the AVO was quite inefficient and didn't function as precisely as most people thought. They arrested people quite haphazardly. I was arrested in the summer of 1950, together with 180 other Social Democrats all of whose names ~~xxxx~~ began with letters falling ⁱⁿ ~~at~~ the first part of the ~~xxxx~~ alphabet. That is, they made up a list of Social Democrats from a-g, and didn't arrest anyone after that, people like Palotay, etc.

This is the way I was arrested. They asked me to attend the KávoVy Vary movie festival, and when they arrested me on the border of Czechoslovakia, they claimed that I was trying to defect.

When I was in prison, I thought to myself: "finally I will have prison experiences!" Until then I had only been in a Vichy concentration camp in Morocco, and in Ellis Island. Also I was

glad to get back my purity - not to work on Népszava any longer, not to be involved with the regime any more. Finally! Finally, I thought, I am freed of the responsibility. There were many who felt that way. Now people knew that we were not allies of the regime. I walked up and down in my small cell and felt just the way Joseph felt in the well. I thought what a great writer Thomas Mann was to have realized how it feels.

I spent four months at the AVO's 60 Andrásy Avenue prison. One day I was taken to Gabor Péter's office, a big corner room. There were two big AVH agents standing behind him. He offered me a cigarette. I saw all my papers, my file, lying before him on the desk. I said: "If you have read these, you must know that I am here for nothing."

He said: "Yes, I know. But they brought you in and you are going to drop dead here."

I thanked him for his high reasoning, which was worthy of a Justinian. He said: "It was not I who brought you in but my subordinates who read too many Nick Carter books."

He showed me that there were fifty denunciations against me, one by a colleague at Szabad Nép of whom I knew that he was an informer, from György Máté who claimed that I was an imperialist agent, and from Tamás Major who wanted to take his revenge for a crushing review I ~~wrote~~ wrote of one of his starring roles. One of the agents provocateurs at Népszava had tried to pump me, had tried

to get me to say something about the Rajk trial. I refused to say anything and kept looking at the door pointedly, to make him go away. In his denunciation he claimed that I kept looking at the door while he was talking to me because I expected the AVH to come for me at any moment.

I told Péter: "Don't you know that the country and Hungarian literature need me?"

He called me an idiot, saying: "Aren't you an idiot to come back, to return home, to this shit?"

At the AVH prison they often left me alone for a week and sometimes they interrogated me for 16 hours.

The charge against me had eight points claiming that I was a secret American agent, that I was a leader of the Hungarian Trotskyites, that I was planning an armed uprising against the regime, and that I was trying to sabotage the labor competition. They asked me to sign a statement admitting all these charges, and since they threatened to beat me to ~~death~~ death, I did so; I signed. There is no point in resisting them when they want you to admit or sign something because sooner or later they will be able to torture you into it. So it is better to do what they want at the beginning. One of the more decent AVO's once asked me my opinion about Trotsky. I said that I hated him the way I hate Stalin. "You are lying again," he said. I kept denying that I was a Trotskyite until he showed me proof. Apparently,

once when I was at a party, a Stalinist ~~and~~ and a Trotskyite were arguing. As a joke, I got up and said: "Trotsky was always right." This ^{story} ~~was~~ true, they just distorted the whole thing. The same AVO agent said that I had given data to the OSS. I admitted this; I always admitted things which I could prove to be lies. For example, I admitted that in 1940, the OSS asked me to participate in the African invasion, and also that I gave military information about Hungary to the OSS. The AVO agent came back and said: "These are lies, take them back." But he insisted that one part of my ^{conf} ~~confession~~ was true; that I gave military information to the ~~XXXXX~~ Americans. I said that the Americans didn't need me to find out how many tracks there were at the Keleti railroad station, which ^{was} ~~is~~ about the only sort of information I could give them..

At the same time, the whole thing was ridiculous, laughable. They asked me: "Where are you?"

I said: "At the Gestapo of Mucsa."

In spite of the horror, they were ridiculous. One AVO man begged me to read some poems claiming they were written by a friend of his. He offered me some cigars if I consented. I agreed on the condition that I would be left alone for 48 hours. He took the poems from the safe in his office with trembling hands. I even got AVO food. I felt like laughing; here I was, an unshaved, filthy, ragged prisoner and an AVO agent was trembling with excitement, eager to hear what I thought of his poems. He wrote the

poems, of course. I told ~~them~~^{him} that the poems were bourgeois decadent lies, the work of a mentally sick, evil person full of ~~bottomless~~^{bottomless} hate against the world, and that they had nothing to do with socialist realism.

At the AVO I signed everything they wanted ~~me~~ to sign, and I confessed to all sorts of things. I made sure that the details were ~~contradictory~~, so that there would be a scandal if it ever came to an open trial.

This is how I claimed to have met my ~~contacts~~ in the United States secret service. I told them that I met them at a drugstore on Broadway and 72nd Street in New York, ~~in~~ⁱⁿ December, 1941. I said that my contacts were Edgar Allan Poe and Walt ~~R~~^R Whitman, ~~and~~ a jovial white-bearded major. I said that their superior was Donovan's deputy, a man called Z.E. Bubbel at 42 Niniveh Street, Babylon, ~~in~~ Long Island. This man had two protuberances on his forehead, he was an orthodox Jew, and smelled of brimstone. Finally they gave my confession to the public prosecutor but I was never brought to trial, probably because the charge and the confession were found to be too ridiculous.

There were four identical cases against Social Democrats, the other three were against György Egri, Garam ~~V~~^Völgyi, and György Gábor. All four of us were sent to Recsk.

Before this, however, in September, 1950, they came and told me that I would be executed the next morning. The one feeling one

has at a moment like this is to leave something for posterity - to let people on the outside know what has happened. I knew I wouldn't be able to say or shout anything before I was executed, because Rajk had screamed his innocence while he was being taken to his execution, and after that the faces of the condemned were covered while they were being taken to the gallows. I managed to save a piece of toilet paper, I chipped a splinter of wood off my cot and pricked my finger. Why did I prick my finger? Because the blood in one's finger can be regulated-when one pushes, it ^u spurts out. On the toilet paper I ~~wrote~~ wrote with the splinter: "Orwell was right." I hid the piece of paper between the bricks in the wall. It was all a farce, of course, because they didn't execute me at the end. Years later, after I had been freed, I visited this spot where I had been in prison. By the then the 60 Andrassy Avenue headquarters of the AVO had been converted to the ~~kuk~~ Lukacs patisserie. Down in the basement there were cosy little booths following the shape of the former cells. It was an eerie feeling.

After I had been ~~ix~~ imprisoned there was a Party membership meeting at Nepszava at which they tried to get my present wife - we were not married yet - to state that I was an imperialist agent. She said she refused to do so without seeing a formal indictment against me, ^{and} until a legal trial found me guilty. She was accused of doubting the integrity of the AVO, the Party, the

state, etc. They told her that arrest by the AVO was sufficient proof of my guilt. She was fired - she had been a foreign editor of Népszava - but she was not ousted from the Party, because Népszava had a decent Party organization where everyone hated the Communists.

Recsk

I was at Recsk from October, 1950, until September, 1953, when the forced labor camps were discontinued. There were a few things I found out pretty soon. First that it was imperative not to let ourselves go mentally, spiritually. I worked during the day, and in the evening, half dead with fatigue, I held lectures. My mattress in the barracks was the busiest place; I was surrounded always by visitors, people coming to talk about Persian literature and what have you. Those who didn't want to live, who didn't want to see their family, their wives, were dead in a week. The physicians said that one could only live eight months without sufficient vitamins and proteins. I lived this way for three years. They wanted to starve and work us to death. The greatest hardship, the biggest suffering was not to get packages, not to be allowed to write or to receive letters; we were the living dead. I tried to get committed to the jail because here I could write poetry in my head during the day, though I would only receive food once a day. I succeeded. I became ^a"permanent" prisoner, that is I was jailed for five months because I did not

fulfill my work norm ^{and} because I abused the Soviet Union; for instance, once when the wood we were carrying was very heavy, I said to somebody: "Just think you're carrying Stalin," and ~~for~~ ^{for} holding evening lectures which were called incitement of the camp. The prison building was long and narrow with cells on both sides. Each cell had a three-liter tin ~~x~~ ^{and} can, ~~with~~ ^a wooden cot which was very low, and had no place for one's head. The cells were unheated and the windows were white-washed so we couldn't look outside. The cell was two and a half steps long. During the day we could only sit or stand.

At night I slept naked; I put my pants underneath me, my shirt on top and I tied my coat around me with with sleeves over my head. I rolled up into a cocoon and that ~~was~~ way the heat I generated kept me warm.

We only received food once a day - in the evening, consisting of soup, a vegetable and a piece of bread. The size of the bread depended on the good will of the guards; usually it was 540 calories or if the guard was good-natured, it might be 800. ~~Therefore,~~ ^{Consequently:} ~~this~~ this meant death from starvation.

Doctor Ács, the camp physician, and a fellow prisoner, called me in on the tenth day and told me that he had medicine ~~x~~ enough only for 10 percent of the sick. He didn't know whether he should save every tenth, or give a small quantity to each prisoner. Ács became the most hated man in the camp; he decided to save the

elite and let the others die. He saved a Catholic priest, me, etc.

I was liked in the camp; I gave people solace. They believed me when I said that the Americans would come - people needed hope. I made the Soviet Army look ~~am~~ ridiculous. They respected the fact that I refused to be humble towards the guards, the authorities. I realized that was the only way I could stay myself. I told one of the guards: "You can beat me to death, but you can't force me to talk to you."

Everyone realized how important these spiritual, psychological matters were. At ~~Reack~~ the intellectuals, ~~and~~ the Horthyite officers and the aristocracy were the best at keeping their pride and dignity.

Because they liked me, my fellow prisoners gave up part of their bacon rations every ^Iday while I was in solitary confinement, and so it was that I found 15 dekagrams of bacon under the vegetables every night. Every day 15 people gave up one dekagram of ~~ham~~ bacon for me. The cook knew that I was in cell 12 and saw to it that I got this extra ration. That's how I ~~stayed~~ stayed alive.

Time is a relative concept. When I was in ~~a mine~~ ^{the rock quarry} with a stupid partner, then the daily 14 hours seemed like 140 hours, and when I was with someone interesting it appeared to be four hours. There was a certain precision about this - it was amazing. The first day in solitary I started to organize my memories, to figure out

and list what I did, why I did it, etc. I tried to discover the motives for my past actions, and determine how far I had remained true to my childhood dreams. Was it all accident or did I get there through my own will? Were my ideas my own or were they borrowed? I tried to clarify my life to myself.

One day I did nothing but conjure up the memory of my dead friends, Kosztolányi, Béla & Zsolt, ^{Rusztém} ~~Kosztolányi~~ Vámbéry, etc.

Then I played a history game. I tried to think of ^{people} ~~whom~~ I knew in ~~my~~ history and literature such as Hadrian, Sigismund ~~Malatesta~~, Chichikov and so on.

I wrote poetry with great intensity, with such intensity that in the morning I didn't feel hunger, and in the evening I felt as if the day were just beginning; it was a tremendously happy feeling, that here one could write poetry. I wrote my Kuruc poetry here - I ~~remembered~~ ^{remembered} all the dates and names mentioned in the poem. I have a fantastic memory. I wrote about 40 or 50 lines per day. I wanted to write the story of my life, the story of my ~~mental~~ mental and spiritual development, in poetry.

^{By} ~~the~~ ^{the} evening I had usually forgotten what I wrote during the day but the next morning I knew it all again. When I had written about 8,000 lines, I recited it all in order to remember it. I was afraid of one thing only; I was afraid that I would freeze or starve to death and then my poetry would stay within me, without anyone having heard it. I wrote a whole volume of

poems at Recsk.

When I got out of solitary confinement, about 100 inmates learned various parts of my poems, so that I am not a master of my own poetry; my poems are being published all over the world, in Vienna, Canada, etc.

When someone got out of ~~Recsk~~ Recsk, he would go to my wife and my mother and recite those parts of my poems which he had memorized. Sometimes he would only know the first part and say: "I don't know the end of this poem, Gyurka Egri knows and he is still at Recsk."

The sergeant used to look the prisoners over and gave them decent food for a week or two if it looked as though they were starved to death. The sergeant was a sadist and looked at the permanent prisoners, that is those in solitary, as if they were ~~f~~ dogs or cattle. It wasn't kindness which made him give them food when they were starving, it was an ancient instinct which made him throw a piece of food to the prisoner as if he were a dog.

In the evening^g they would come with bloodhounds, but when they realized that the ~~the~~ bloodhounds had come over to our side, had made friends with us, they shot them.

One night, after I had ~~me~~ gone to bed, I heard from my cell that an AVO was inciting, provoking the dogs to attack us. He entered my cell, the dog looked at me and I looked at him and then I said: "I suppose I am supposed to be terrified now." Staying calm was

always very effective. The dog wouldn't attack me, and when they ~~my~~ saw that the dogs came over to our side, they shot them. The AVO's shot the dogs with five or six shots in the stomach, and let them run.

The guards knew that I was a poet. A guard came in one day and said: "You are Károly Kisfaludy. Please write me a poem for my girl ~~fr~~ friend's memory album."

I told him that it would take a few days. He told me to do it in his room, but I was afraid that I would get pneumonia because in my cell the temperature was minus ⁵1 - it was in the winter - and in his it was plus 25. So he brought me paper and asked me not to tell the other guard that I was doing this. In about four days he came and actually knocked on the door of my cell. I gave him the poem and he was very happy. Meanwhile, I had written some of my poems on the paper and hidden them in the sand on the ~~ground~~^{floor} of my cell. The sand was useful in other ways too, because in the winter I filled my boots with it and it kept my feet warm. In the evening, there was a knocking again and he said "Mr. Writer, I brought you your honorari^{um}."

My honorarium consisted of 25 liters of soup with frozen fat on top, and 30 kilos of rice and meat. I ate two kilos and put as much as I could into my pockets and boots, after having emptied my boots of sand. Then he came and took the pails away. The rice kept me warm at night and when I wanted to eat it, I warmed it in

my hands to take the chill off. I spent five months in the Recsk prison; afterwards I joined the rest of the prisoners in the barracks.

I could talk volumes about the psychoses of the AVO's. ~~ONE~~ Once the sergeant told me to clean the toilets; I was glad to do this because I had not seen water for months. In the summer I kept clean by rubbing the dirt off and in the winter I didn't bother to do this because the dirt kept me warm. Also it was the first time I had ~~the~~^{an} occasion to see the countryside. I lost the scrubbing brush in the toilet; it fell down the ~~stair~~ drain. As a result the sergeant wrote a report about me, stating that I was sabotaging the hygienic conditions in the camp, and spreading the plague. I saw that he was laughing while writing this. So, I thought I would try out something. I can cry whenever I want to, and so I burst into tears. His reaction was fantastic: he actually had an erection. Ever since then he liked me.

In the prison I was often tied up, beaten, made to sit on a hot stove.

My ears got extremely sensitive in prison - even when I was asleep I could hear ~~the sound~~ the cook was bringing the coffee over the bridge ~~outside~~ outside. This sensitivity was a general thing.

Some of the prisoners at Recsk were } György Fazekas, a veterinarian
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^{of}
~~the~~ Paks, who stayed at Recsk for three and a half years because he had been taken from somebody else, the Ajtay brothers who were sent there for participating in the Mindszenty demonstration in Hatvan even though they could prove that they were in Budapest when it took place. A sixteen year old student who had voted against a DISZ candidate, the husband of a woman who was involved in the Rajk trial, an old labor movement leader who had led strikes against the Horthy regime, etc. At first those who were sent to Recsk in '46, didn't talk to those who came in '47, considering them traitors. Later on there was a general reconciliation, when we found out that we all wanted the same thing.

The regime wanted us to work ourselves to death. We never received paper, newspapers, letters or packages. The trustees (Kápos) were usually common prisoners who were there for political (?) crimes, such as AVO's who stole more than others, etc. The prisoners who were guilty of the most contemptible behavior were either the Communist Lumpenproletariat, or the Communist intelligentsia. Many of the decent Communists broke with Communism, others became Kápos in order to save themselves by persecuting the ^{other} prisoner. This was a Communist society in miniature. ~~XXXXXXXX~~

The work consisted of road-building, forest clearing and the crushing of rocks. In the summer we worked about 14 to 16 hours a day.

The prisoners were housed in eight barracks of 100-160 people

each. Each person had about 56 centimeters for himself; therefore, if one left to go to the ~~xi~~ toilet at night it was impossible to get back to one's place. At first the barracks had no toilets, and one had to go to the guard and kneel down to be allowed to go to the toilet outside. He always made us wait for five or eight others before he allowed us to go. Sometimes one had to go in a hurry because the food was bad for the stomach and made one sick, and then one asked others to go along so that the guard would allow the group to go right away. ^P I discovered very soon that one had to sabotage their work plans if one didn't want to starve to death. It was impossible to stay alive on what they gave us if we worked as hard as they wanted us to. They said they would free us sooner if we worked harder^r and 100 or 200 idiots drove themselves and others hard; some of them died of hunger. Some worked hard because they were told that they could write to their mothers if they did so. But they never received any letters from the outside, no matter how hard they worked, and I am certain that their letters were not forwarded.

There were always plenty of false rumors: the AVO informers would spread rumors that the British had ~~xxxx~~ landed in Europe. Such rumors would make people work harder. I got my news from Szabad Nép which was fished out by one of the prisoners, a half-legged soldier, who was on duty at the sewer. The prisoners didn't have any toilet paper, only the AVO's. What he did was fish out

the faeces coming from the AVO toilet - it was easy to tell which came from them because theirs were big sausages whereas our food was so poor that our faeces were always liquid - and removed the Szabad Nép sticking to it, washing and drying it. Then he brought it to me; I was the only one allowed to read Szabad Nép because any good news would make people work too hard, would make them work themselves to death. For instance, when ~~Churchill~~ Churchill became prime minister in 1952, I didn't tell the rest of the prisoners. After I finished with the paper, the soldier who had fished it out used it to make cigarettes. I tried to explain that working too hard was nothing but suicide. Recsk was a mirror image^e of the society outside. The AVO's used to sing: "Every man is happy and free."

In the barracks we used to hold lectures in the evening. One evening we had a poetry reading with poems by Attila József, Ady and Baudelaire. This was banned as reactionary. We held one and a half to two-hour lectures; Jóska Varga and ~~Joseph~~^J, Nyeste about astro-physics and *Garamvölgyi* about Danish and Swedish history. I told stories about the United States or Africa, or else I talked about Persian literature. We always had a lecture on Sundays, and towards the end we held them every night. If there were informers ~~are~~ around then we played bridge with cards which we made of wrapping paper with blood.

A ~~lecture~~ lecture on Tolstoy was among the most successful things

we did. Engineers, etc., came to me and said: "George, it's terrible. I'm going to die here without having read "War and Peace"". So I narrated "War and Peace" and later on ~~kk~~ The Red and the Black in three afternoons. The former Lord-lieutenant of Veszprém county narrated Shakespeare's Henry V in dialogue form. I counted about 40 people who stayed awake which was very good, all things considered. Half of the listeners were workers and peasants, and if the lecture standards were too high for them, I would tell them the plots of movies and dime novels.

During the first two years, when people were greatly undernourished, there was very little talk of love or sex. Only the political officer of the camp had sexual relations with one of the prisoners. Eventuall^y~~kk~~ this officer was arrested.

From 1950, until March, 1952, the food ~~was~~^{became} increasingly bad. People didn't start to die of famine until December, 1951, however. It was ~~an~~ a hard winter. We decided that if it looked as though we would all starve to death, we would have to revolt so that we could kill a few AVO's before we died. This was at the end of 1951. But we were too weak to do it. Some people used to dream about food, dream about elaborate meals with many courses, but I found that it was much better to try not to think of food. Many people died of starvation: they would start out on their way back from work, apparant^ely full of vigor, and then they would fall in the snow and die. I think I would have died of starvation,

too. What saved me was that during work, a rock accidentally hit me and I had a concussion of the brain. This enabled me to lie in bed for a few days, and the doctor did everything to save me. In the hospital I received good food. We used to look at each other furtively, trying to guess how long the other would live. And then, suddenly, on the 26th of March, 1952, our food rations were doubled. I don't know why; this can't be explained by outside political events. It only proves the irrationality of the regime. I am convinced that some Russian orders were mistranslated and that's why our rations were increased. ~~PP~~ Everything in Recsk, and everything in Hungary, was ~~an~~ patterned on the Soviet Union. There was an old Communist called Mogyoró at Recsk, an old 1919 Communist, who had been in a Soviet prison. He said that the prison kitchen was just like the one he saw in Russia; it had three columns with a porch, a store-room on the right, and a lean-to in the ~~end~~ back. He said that everything was just like in a Siberian prison camp.

My ideas, my political views, didn't change in prison; at the beginning, I couldn't talk freely about my own principles because my friends would have called me a reactionary. At the beginning the regime had a large number of sympathizers, towards the end, it had very few.

Recsk - so many kinds of people - material for a multitude of short stories. The odors: not getting water for five weeks - not

even enough to drink; fortunately, we could drink rain, and wash with wet leaves. The only liquid we received sometimes was the three ~~and~~ decaliters of coffee in the morning.

★ Compared to the filthy, unwashed prisoners the guards smelled like Chanel Number 5; We could always smell the guards coming in the forest. The smells... The guards used to fry bacon over their camp-fires, arranging it so that the wind would waft the scent of frying bacon towards us. They thought that this would make us mad, but actually it was a wonderfully pleasant smell.

When we were working we had to stand all day, even to eat. We sometimes managed to kneel down during work (tróglizás) when we were behind a mound of stones, so the guards couldn't see us. One day I was working on the hillside with a fellow-prisoner; we were kneeling, a fantastic experience, a wonderful feeling of relief --- suddenly we saw a guard coming up to a stone where a salamander was sunning himself. We were frightened that the guard would kick us down the hillside if he saw us. It would have meant our death. The guard was fascinated by the salamander and didn't notice us; he watched the salamander and then laughingly cut off one of his little hands. My friend was raging and wanted to do something about it. I tried to calm him down and said: "You don't want to die a martyr's death for a salamander." The guard did notice us finally but we got away with it that time. Later, after I had left Recsk, I told Illyés about this henchman. # Illyés was over-

whelmed, exclaiming: "Peasant! Idiocy! Categorical imperative!"

After Recsk.

I left Recsk in September, 1953, when the forced labor camps were dissolved. My problem was to get a job - I was not willing to do anything but translate. Nobody dared to give me work, and nobody dared to deny it to me. By April all my books were ^{to be} found in the libraries again; it was Losoncý who had them put on the index. I had no desire whatever to go the Writers' Association. After I left prison, I petitioned the literary fund to be allowed to go to Héviz to recuperate. There was a big fight at the Writers' Association about this. Bölöni and Palotay were in favor, while Földeák called me a rotten anti-Communist and opposed it. Kuczka was against it too. Finally my petition was granted by a majority vote. I couldn't get a translating job because I was not a member of the Writers' Association's translation department, having been expelled in 1950.

Illyès and Endre Gáspár tried to get me in again. Gáspár was a Communist but on his death-bed he cursed Communism; he received a ~~state~~ ceremonial Communist funeral. Then, when ^{Méray} ~~Méray~~ went on vacation for ten days, they hired me as a translator.

Many of the Communist writers tried to apologize to me after I returned from Recsk. I was at the Writers' Association's Visegrád summer resort in the spring of 1956, when one day Zelk, Kópes, ^{and} Benjamin arrived and embraced me. The next day, early in

the morning, while I was still ^{in bed} ~~in bed~~, Benjámín knocked ^{on} ~~at~~ my door, entered and apologized to me, asking: "Can there be forgiveness for me?"

I said: "Exactly as much forgiveness as János Arany would have received from the Hungarian people if he had greeted and ~~walked~~ welcomed General Haynau to Hungary in 1949; ~~it~~ and remember, he wrote Toldi!"

Benjámín cried.

After my return from Reck, György Máté ~~it~~ said I would be rehabilitated, and suggested that I ^{request readmission} ~~ask to be readmitted~~ into the Communist Party. I refused, telling him that first of all I didn't agree with the principles and ^a aims of the Communist Party, being a neo-Platonist and a not a materialist. Secondly, I said that Marxist economic ~~criticism~~ criticism was very valuable in the 19th century, but today it is out of date, etc. ... I also added that in my ~~it~~ opinion the Communist leaders were following a mistaken policy. Besides, I said: "You denounced me."

He answered: "In those days this was our duty."

I said: "But you didn't think I was a foreign agent, did you?"

He merely said: "~~Yes~~ Well, anyway, I'm glad that you are alright."

He also offered me a sum of 300,000 forints as a rehabilitation fee. But I had already rejected the AVO's rehabilitation fee. The others, the other writers, all accepted it. Why did I do this? Because I am living for my biography. Those three lines in the

Encyclopedia Britannica - if you ~~at~~ don't think this too impertinent - mean everything to me.

The writers.

The Communist writers were able to believe in Communism because they set themselves off from reality. They didn't travel on the streetcars, they didn't meet the man on the street; Marton Horvath, the editor of Szabad Nep, was once surprised at the price of ham. These people simply didn't understand how the ordinary man lived in Hungary. X

The Communist writers could be sub-divided into a number of categories: 1) Some who were the paid agents of the NKVD, like Hay. Hay's motives for serving the NKVD were noble. He is an intelligent but cowardly man - he is going to break in prison - but a bad writer. 2) Those Moscovites who were unable to escape the Communists but hated them; like Andor Gabor. 3) Those who wanted only money, like György Bölöni.

Some of them forced themselves to believe everything, down to the smallest detail, or else they believed that it would be good in 2050. But they didn't really believe. * Zelk, who was a card-sharp, said: "They are making a great poet out of me, but they don't pay." He left Communism when he was made to write bad poetry which was read by no one.

(4 The most beautiful bunch was the group of charlatans eternally true to Communism, with whom the Writers' Association was

filled in 1949 ~~and~~ and 1950. People like Ligeti, Murányi-Kovács, Gareblyés, and Tibor Barabás. 5) Decent idiots from below or old Communists like Déry. Déry was the only Communist writer who was not unprincipled, ~~and~~ dishonest or irresponsible.* Well, Benjámín was decent, too, but he is stupid. Keszthelyi is honorable too, but he is ~~insane~~ insane.

The Communist writers found it psychologically difficult to write. At the height of the Rákosi terror, they were unable to write more than 15 to 20 lines of a novel a day. When Imre Nagy came in, they found that they were able to write more freely, the pages flowed more easily. It was easier to work ~~than~~ then. Thus, the writers ~~revolted~~ revolted against Rákosi for professional reasons. Suddenly they found that they could write and people began to read them. This gave them a good feeling. Also, if their nose was good, they realized that there would be significant changes after Stalin.

By the time the Writers' Association ^{election} meeting came around ^d in September, 1956, everyone was participating in the fight against Stalinism for various reasons; some wanted freedom, some wanted to save their own skins.

Bringing in Imre Nagy in 1953, was a fatal step. The day after Imre Nagy's speech, the stupid but honest Party secretaries wailed and cried, saying: "I believed that heavy industry and the rest of it was important. I believed. How can I go to the

* (link, tisztességtelen vagy könnyed)

next meeting and face the men, and tell the same men whom I forced to believe it too, that I was lying."

And afterwards, the attempt of Rákosi to bring back the old regime was impossible. It couldn't be done. X

In October, 1953, my wife met a notorious Communist female named Alföldi, who worked in the X documentary film factory, the sort of person who went around quoting Marxist phrases. Until then she had cut my wife dead, but when they met now, ~~she~~ Alföldi embraced my wife telling her how happy she was about the fact that I had been freed and told her that her brother, ~~her~~ Alföldi's brother, had been with me at Recsk. That was the fortunate thing, that the Communists hurt everyone, even their own people. And after the big change, X after the turning point, the old regime could never be restored again.

After I was freed I was staying at the Writers' Association's summer resort; Losonczy's wife, who is Haraszi's daughter, and Aczél were also staying there. R Loconczy's wife was talking about her father, about the horrors of his arrest; he was a chief "Bolshi," arrested at the time of the Rajk trial. Aczél was very contrite, and made his mea culpa, saying: "You know I was Haraszi's secretary at the time of his arrest, and the day after his arrest I gave a cocktail party at which we danced and drank and praised the AVH for being vigilant enough to find out about Haraszi's treason." Aczél is a likeable swindler.

After I returned from Recsk, I met one of the people who had denounced me to the AVH. I pushed him and he fell, but he didn't protest or say anything. It was only on September 17th, at the Writers' Association meeting that I realized that I had pushed the wrong man. The man I had pushed was not my denouncer but a staff-member of Szabad Nép who tolerated it, because he felt that he deserved it. This shows the sort of mental state the Communists were in at the time. At this period the Communists tried to atone for their sins. On October 29th, when the Revolutionary issue of Irodalmi Ujság was being prepared, I went to the Writers' Association with a poem. Pálóczi, who was editing the issue, said: "It's a wonderful poem but I'm not going to print it because you don't need it. Zelk needs it more." The place was full of Communists.

The Communists tried to court the non-Communist writers. In 1955, Rákosi called in László Németh and said to him: "I don't know why you are against us, why you don't write for us; after all you are doing quite well; last year you earned 120,000 forints."

Németh said he hadn't earned anything of the kind and went home. At home his wife admitted that he really had earned 120,000 forints which she put in the bank without telling him.

In the past I was never on good terms with Illyés, partly because of the conflict between the periodicals Válasz and Szép Szó; I liked Attila József and the "urban" group of writers and he was

a populist.

In 1948, we ~~h~~ were both members of a delegation visiting the Debrecen wagon factory. Illyés' books had been distributed to the workers, and the workers, ^{with} supposed to give reports. At the meeting the workers read their reports, which had been written by the Communist Party secretary. They said all sorts of things ~~and suggested~~ ^{and suggested} that Illyés should enter the Party. Illyés and I were both enraged at such barbarity. At the end of the meeting when the International was sung I usually moved my mouth to pretend that I was singing. ^(This time I was so angry that I pressed my lips together.) After the meeting, Illyés invited me into his car; this was the first time we were really confronted with each other. We talked until 5:00 a.m. He felt that Hungary was in extreme peril, and said that nothing mattered any more. He said he envied me, said that I was crazy, a personification of ϵ vitality combined with good humor. (*enargia's jökedv.*)

The Petöfi Circle? I had no illusions about the Petöfi Circle. It was like trying to make butter out of shit. I don't think any kind of Communism is good, and I never had any illusions about Imre Nagy either.

General Comments about the regime.

Everyday life under the Communist regime was impossible; the Communists ~~inspired~~ ^{inspired} unfulfilled and unfulfillable desires and demands. There was the sexual ~~problem~~ problem. By 1949, overwork and strain had tired people out so that they were ^{unable} to read and unable

to have a normal sex life, etc. There was a feeling that the country was being sterilized. And then came the wildest Revolution: people found a way of having a sex life while doing Party work, under the pretext of carrying out Party duties. The Party was sexually immoral and moralistic at the same time.

I know a case of a woman who had an affair with a friend of mine, a Communist Party member who was later imprisoned. Because of this affair the woman lost her job and her husband was forced to divorce her against his will. He only met his wife again after ~~Rakosi~~ Rakosi's fall, when they were remarried. The Party was responsible for many similar tragedies.

The ~~xxx~~ regime was just as absurd in the economic field. The following story is a case in point. Gyümert, the fruit export agency, made contracts with the peasants, agreeing to buy ~~up~~ up all their perfect Jonathan apples for four forints per kilo. The contracts were forced on the peasants. While the peasants had to sell their best apples for four forints to the export agency, they could sell their left-over bad apples for eleven forints on the free market. The result was that the ^{next} year ~~the~~ the peasants used no insecticides, so that all of their crop was worm-eaten. This enabled them to sell all of their fruit on the free market for a higher price.

There were two ~~x~~ kinds of factories, those where the workers could steal and those where they could not. If they were unable

to steal anything then they ~~produced~~ produced rejects, or threw away tools in order, at least, to destroy. I had a friend who had a job ~~as a truck guard~~ ^{as a truck guard} from which he was fired because he refused to steal. At Kőzert the employees sold short weight and stole the rest. When the members of the employees' families came in, they bought half a kilo's worth of goods and received ten kilos. The Kőzert shops always had more in their inventories than they should have according to the sales records, and thus when the examiner came, they dumped the excess down the sink. They were unable to steal butter, to give short weight, because it was already wrapped in standard packages. As a ~~xxx~~ result, the Kőzert manager didn't order butter for his shop and hence there was always a butter shortage. ~~ix~~

In the factories, norm-cheating was ubiquitous and could not be prevented.

The regime produced many things at a great loss. For instance, a television set cost 30,000 forints to produce and was sold for 5,000. The same is true of washing machines. There is another example of this sort of thing. In the summer of 1956, Géza Hegedűs became the head of the Magvető publishing house. He agreed to publish a book of my poems, which was to sell for 18 forints and was to be printed in 3,000 copies. 3,000 copies was the maximum allowed for anti-regime writers. I was to receive ^{5.30} 31 forints ~~20~~ per line

which came to about 53,000 forints for the ~~10~~ 10,000 lines in the book. The total receipts from the book would be 54,000 forints. Hegedüs ~~it~~ said: "Of course, we lose on it."

The book cost 250,000 forints ~~and~~ and Rákosi was extremely angry. If the book had been printed in 10,000 copies, they would have lost 700,000 ~~for~~ forints on it. Paper was extremely expensive in Hungary. A Shakespeare edition which appeared in 30,000 copies and was a tremendous success, resulted in a loss of five millions ~~for~~ ^{to} the regime. When it came to their own people, the Communist writers, they were ~~not~~ rewarded by several printings and editions of their work^s regardless of whether they were sold or ~~not~~ not. They were not sold! Béla Illes is a case in point. His books were printed ^{and reprinted,} and sent to a warehouse for storage, because nobody bought them. It would have been much more sensible to pay these writers without printing such excessive copies of their works.

The regime was not interested in economical production. Rákosi knew that ~~his~~ his measures would not make Hungary into an economic paradise; he knew that Dunapentele would be a ~~big~~ failure. He merely followed Moscow's orders, and did so in order to stay in power. Following Moscow's orders was far more important than having a sensible and productive economy.

Interviewer's Comments on Respondent.

Such a delightful man: vital, talented, creative, full of

~~xxx~~ sparking^I and spontaneous humor. He is perhaps somewhat unstable, but why should a talented poet be stable? A charming, irreverent, childish, malicious character. The poetry he wrote in prison is probably more eloquent a testimony ~~■~~ to the invincibility of the human spirit and ~~genius~~ genius than any interview can be. Faludy is no hero - his editorship of the London Irodalmi Ujság proves this - and yet those who were with him at Recsk testify to his courage and dignity under great stress. He is imaginative and therefore I wouldn't necessarily believe everything he says about his prison experiences. Did he really leave a note proclaiming that "Orwell was right"? Very few people in Hungary had read Orwell by 1950, and those who had been in the AVH prison at Andrásy Avenue 60, say that it was impossible to hide a note from the daily searchers. But, if the story is not ~~x~~ true in fact, it is true to the spirit of the situation; ~~it~~ it demonstrates how a creative man reacts to such a situation.