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As it was destined to be / Conversation with Károly Szerencsés

“After a certain age, people begin to stick to certainties, fundamentals, frames that were created by, or rather created *for* themselves. This is the reason why I think that Károly Szerencsés is the most beautifully writing contemporary historian today. For me, it is a certainty. What else can I say about him? Perhaps that he used to be my teacher, although just for a brief period, yet I’ve learnt and continue to learn much more from him than I had ever hoped? Or that I respect very few and look up to even less people, but he is one of these few? Or, that God works in mysterious ways and everything, really everything happens as was destined to be? I don’t know. What I do know without a doubt is that we have a say in things that are beyond expression and we have the strength to rise up and speak.”

Károly Szerencsés, *historian, author, university professor; grand award winner of the Hungarian Writers Association, Pro Urbe Budapest² and Pesti Srác award³ winner*

² Pro Urbe Budapest award is given to individuals who have done fruitful, long-lasting and exceptional work in the interest of the city of Budapest.

³ Pesti Srác award (Young Man of Pest) is named after those young, mostly teenage boys who fought bravely during the revolution of 1956. The award is granted to individuals who help keep their memories alive via their active public service.

Professor, is it possible for a historian to know, to feel what those moments were in the past where things could have taken a different turn? Or can they identify events that can be referred to as points of no return?

History is a continuous process, it is not preordained, therefore it does not have a beginning, nor does it have an end. We, the laws of nature, the laws of economy, outer circumstances shape it, and I am convinced that ordinary people take part in shaping it as well. Those who demand a place for themselves and have ambitions in public life and in politics can all shape history. But it comes with great responsibility. Historians are never able to reconstruct what happened in any exact moment. It is impossible; the most they can do is reconstruct certain elements. I believe that the processes and links should be explored, and there may be some symbolic moments within these that can help us sense the direction in which the world had turned in a given situation. In the history of Hungary such moment is the coronation of St. Stephen⁴. Although it is a single moment of a process that has been going on for hundreds of centuries and is going to continue for a long time to come; likewise, the creation of the Hungarian state is ongoing. But I could mention the murder of Caesar, or the battle of Mohács.⁵ All these were parts of a continuum and through these moments we can symbolically sense the turn of events as they had taken place. The murder of István Tisza⁶ was a similar moment in the 20th century. That's when we felt, in that very moment, that the historic Hungary had collapsed, and then came Trianon,⁷ a murderous shot. Or such was the death, the suicide of Pál Teleki⁸ – even if he indeed killed himself, it was murder. We felt in that act that we had ran out of air and elbowroom, we had no longer had the opportunity to make a move. And that man chose the solution of flying a bullet in his head. The capturing and deportation of Béla Kovács⁹ is closer to our era. With that moment, it has become palpable for society that it was no use having a parliament, even majority in parliament; it was no use having the right to immunity. The strength was on the Russian side, on the side of the invaders, and eventually they would always enforce the system they've had in mind. And the last such moment that I would like to mention is the announcement Imre Pozsgay¹⁰ made on the radio in January, 1989 when he publicly declared that 1956 was not a counter-revolution.¹¹ It was such a symbolic and tangible turning point that it rocked the entire Kádár-system¹² that has been

4 St. Stephen (975-1038) was the first king of Hungary, also called the founder of state, reigned between 1000-1038.

5 A crucial battle against the Ottoman Empire lost by the Hungarian party in 1526.

6 István Tisza (1861-1918) was the former prime minister of Hungary between 1903 and 1905, then between 1913 and 1917, assassinated on 31st October, 1918.

7 Peace dictate closing World War I on 4th June, 1920 which resulted in Hungary losing two thirds of its territory and over half of its population.

8 Pál Teleki (1879-1941) was the former prime minister of Hungary who committed suicide on 3rd April, 1941 when torn between having to choose between two equally non-desirable options of forming alliance with the Axis powers or the Allies.

9 Béla Kovács (1908-1959) was the secretary general of the Smallholders Party, arrested by the Hungarian communist regime on 25th February, 1947 and deported to Siberia.

10 Imre Pozsgay (1933-2016) was a former member of the Hungarian Socialist Party, then founder of a new party, the National Democratic Alliance in May, 1991.

11 Before Hungary's transition to democracy in 1991, during the communist era it was forbidden to talk about the events of 1956 as a revolution.

12 The Kádár-system existed between 1956 and 1988 and it is named after the communist prime minister János Kádár.

ruling for thirty-three years. So, we have such moments, but even these are merely parts of larger processes. They are important, they can be researched, but from a historian's point of view it is essential to explore and explain the interrelations and connections. And such tools can help these processes get closer to those individuals who do not want to read monographs upon monographs, but who just want to be able to connect single events to those major changes that have truly resulted in the world turning.

To make them understandable?

Yes, to make them understandable, symbolic, and clear. It is important because otherwise history might seem to be something that is of itself and for itself. These pieces of information must find their way into public life, and they need to reach the decision-makers. Because voters, who decide with their single vote, are also decision-makers and so is the prime minister who makes decisions on critical matters. It is a good thing if more and more people become familiar with and start thinking about these processes, how they happened, what events preceded them and what their consequences were. The consequences, by the way, can even turn out to be interesting.

So, if such is the case, a historian has grave responsibility to convey the correct interpretation.

Sure, the responsibility is enormous, of course only in case the things a historian says reach people or the decision-makers. That is, if the historic point of view and the ability to deliberate is embedded in public life. However, deliberation or weighing the options rationally, is only possible if we are familiar with certain facts. That's the only way to vote with a clear conscience. This is the alpha and the omega of democracy. How do I choose, do I know certain facts and programs? Do I know people who propagate them? Or do I cast my vote according to a completely different set of values? This is the most crucial question of democracy for the future. Whether the media and other things end up pushing the ability to deliberate and the thirst for knowledge under itself. Do we need all these things at all, or do we decide based on other regards? For instance, based on emotions that may include hatred, love, or based on outer appearance, or perhaps according to mere economic, very narrow economic views? Or do we completely ignore our perspectives, our future, our children's and grandchildren's future?

This is complete self-surrender.

Yes, the question is what direction the evolution of democracy will take. Today's mass democracy fundamentally rests on two things. One of them is the education of the population, which means that in the interest of the nation the maximum amount of the most precise information needs to reach the people. And they need to weigh their options; it is necessary to be able to make a sober, informed decision. On the other hand, obscurantism can be the other influencing factor. That is, according to some schemes, which we can call propaganda in simple terms, or manipulation with a more negative expression... well, if people decide based on this. If the latter one prevails, then today's mass democracy does not have a future.

So, two more factors come in here, right? The role of education, and that of the fourth branch of government, the media.

Absolutely. This is history as well, because from Kossuth¹³ to István Bethlen¹⁴ this has been the base pillar of demanding democracy. Democracy, the right to decide, the right to vote in order to decide our future can only be given to those who have a desire to understand the circumstances. So, they have to be given the opportunity to be well informed, so they don't decide based merely on propaganda and manipulation. This was the idea of the 19th and 20th centuries that was later overwritten by the general crowd, but unfortunately, it did not go hand in hand with high-quality mass education, although that's how it should have happened. This is the key question from every point of view, economically, socially, and politically, as well. I don't have illusions that quality education can be complete, that it can affect the entire society, but the wider the scope of education, the more likely it is that we can avoid pitfalls.

I would like to revisit the question of the right to vote, which is not simply a legal, but also a moral question. There are parts of the world even today where the right to free election is not self-evident, whereas at other places where it is, many people don't exercise it. And at this point, the work of Polybius comes to mind (Theory about the change of state forms and mixed government) in which he wrote „new generations grow up and the task of guarding democracy is passed down to the children of the children of the founders, who due to having grown used to it, appreciate equal rights and freedom less and less.” He wrote this nearly 2,000 years ago. Have we learnt from our mistakes? Or is human nature completely hopeless in this regard and we continue making the same mistakes over and over again?

Human nature does not change. Circumstances change, the circumstances that influence people. Obviously, the worldview of a person in the era of antiquity was completely different; for them slavery, the privileges associated with being a citizen, or the exclusion of women from practicing politics were self-evident – this is a completely different attitude. But I don't think that human nature, in and of itself, changes. Emotions that our best authors write about from antiquity to today, such as self-sacrifice, vileness, jealousy, love, sensitivity towards public life, sneakiness, fear, terror – these emotions are likely to have existed from the first minute people have lived in societies; and they exist to this day. I don't think, however, that we continue making the same mistakes because it is precisely history that helps us recognize these mistakes. It is history and arts that facilitate the recognition of these mistakes. Today's circumstances, science, arts, or information are entirely different from that of the ancient times. These circumstances make it possible for people to avoid making the same mistakes. Surely, it is a very difficult task. That is why the responsibility of science, the arts and the media is enormous. Regrettably however, the experiences regarding the latter one are less than positive. Today the media has the greatest influence, much larger than the arts, or even science, therefore the media should convey

13 Lajos Kossuth (1802-1894) was the Governor-President of the Kingdom of Hungary during the revolution of 1848-1849, he is regarded as one of the greatest statesman in the history of the nation.

14 Bethlen István (1874-1946) was the former prime minister of Hungary after World War I between 1921 and 1931, he played a key role in the economic consolidation of the war-torn country.

the findings. Sadly, though, that is not what we see. Instead, the exact opposite is happening, the media uses the arts and science to its own advantage. Awful! This aspiration exists. With that said, getting back to the original question, I don't think that history repeats itself.

That's good news.

I know there are many people who think that history repeats itself, but they may feel that way due to the means being used, which indeed re-occur. The instruments of politics are tried and used repeatedly, these include the effort to create constant chaos, spreading a sense of uncertainty, questioning all the values – these aren't new things. These means are hundreds of years old and we have to move beyond them. It's our responsibility. And if we are unable to do that, we will fail. Some kind of new standard will emerge, because this type of democracy that builds on freedom is going to become non-viable. It will turn into a system that is built upon chaos where the opposing parties hold a constant grudge against one another and that takes away their strength and the opportunity to develop. All in all, I still think that we have a chance, we have to trust people and we have to expose everybody who uses the same tools that were used by the most repulsive ideologies of the 20th century – whether we mean the communists or the national socialists. Although these instruments are still here today, I trust that we won't buy them anymore. They will have an impact; there will always be a crowd that will respond to them, there will always be people with radical views who can be abetted. But I still believe that the media, science and the arts will have another impact, keeping these radicals in line. In Hungary, the people and the will of the people have always been able to keep these radicals in order. Those who overrode the calm constructive will of the people have always come from abroad with big money and guns. That's how it happened in 1918, in 1944 and in 1956. So now, after 1990 we have a grand opportunity to control the open intervention that is coming from the outside. We can't avoid it, there will always be blackmail and threats, there will always be economic and other interests. In case of a country so small this cannot be avoided, but this time we are at least able to control it, so they can't just force their will upon us however they'd wish. This is how we stand today, on April 20, 2017, which of course can change even in a week, but for the moment that's the situation and we would need to be able to live with it. We should appreciate the situation and not allow ourselves to be taken over by all kinds of long expired, enticing clichés.

Regarding means, lately many people pay a lot of attention to Alinsky (Saul Alinsky, American radical leftist, author, writer of ('Rules for Radicals' – editor), but you have written that it would be more useful and understandable to recall the instruments used by Rákosi¹⁵ and his people.

Well yes, these instruments wave back at us. There were similar means in the 20th, or even the 19th century which is somewhat disheartening...

15 Mátyás Rákosi (1892-1971) was the leader of Hungary's Communist Party and the de facto ruler of the communist Hungary between 1945 and 1956. His name has become one with the the dishonest and brutal acts committed in the era.

Not just somewhat disheartening. We are “celebrating” the 70th anniversary of the blueslip election this year. Does this disgraceful historical event have a specific impact on the mentality of the present? I am referring to the inclination to vote or the type of human being communism produced.

History is a process that is difficult to follow. Some people squeeze the events and driving forces into certain schemes, thereby simplifying them. According to one such group with a very twisted mind (and communists are definitely not the only ones) everything that falls outside of their own worldview, their own political conviction ought to be annihilated. Or in case of “democracy”, all opposing opinions must be kept in minority, so they’re repressed, silenced. Based on this, according to the present canon, anyone who doesn’t think exactly like them can only be harmful, dictatorial, corrupt, reactionary, fascist, nationalist, and an anti-Semite. Regrettably, some people buy into this, and the most disappointing is when our youth is carried away into this dizziness. We are talking about a very dangerous force. The reason why the blueslip operation is very important for us is that it’s a perfect symbol that illustrates the means this twisted minded bunch is willing to use in order to seize and expropriate power. The will of the people is of no importance to them, whatsoever. People must want what *they* prescribe for *them* to want. If people resist, they get labeled fascists. A radically elitist liberal can do this as much as a similarly radical communist fighting in the class struggle. But if this defiant, stubborn Hungarian population refuses to vote for them, then violence, lies, outside support and interference or fraud are all justifiable. We are better off accepting that some people have already gone through this and they won’t ever get rid of the experience, we won’t be able to change their minds. But if new generations keep falling into the same trap repeatedly, that suggests that something has been deliberately set up here...

Based on what we see they seem to fall into it...

I hope not! Those who fall into it constitute only a small minority of the youth. 12,000 people carried out the blueslip fraud. They cast over 200,000 votes. Sure, the Ministry of the Interior (under communist leadership), the State Protection Authority and the court system were all part of the fraud. Including them as well, we’re talking about 1.5 million people involved. But most of the youth did not want this. Young people are good because they think; they tend to think. If information and sincere ideas reach them, if thoughts about faith, Hungarianness and culture find their way towards them, they can be shaped. They can be moved towards the right direction. That’s why the media has become such a decisive factor, it is the transmitter of all kinds of information, whether it is political, cultural, or so-called civil-society related. And there are the written and unwritten regulations of the media that sometimes seem to limit the freedom of thought and expression. The violence of “politically correct” is very close to the power of stigmatization, which is one of the most important weapons of the aforementioned group and they use it to eliminate their professional or political opponents. These days, the media nearly overcomes the role of education. But perhaps eventually, it won’t be able to do so. It is the duty of the teachers to avoid that, their responsibility has never been as crucial as it is today. As a matter of fact, we have positive rebellious traditions and they are not ugly traditions. We, Hungarians, have this within ourselves; it’s in our genes. The problem is when these

genes are mobilized to serve a dishonest, false purpose – these rebellious traditions that are 300-500 years old. If people of ill will manage to use our rebellious traditions to mislead our youth in order to accomplish their false goals, then we have a serious problem. But we have another kind of tradition within us: our soberness, this people is a sober people. It has happened very rarely that people gave in to rebellion, and if there is no determinant outer pressure, I believe that they are able to find the right track on the long term as well.

What is right regarding methods? As we can see, mediocrity, the lack of ideas, the violent bluster are indiscriminate. What can be done against ignoble attacks?

I say that a calm, persevering, firm, but non-defensive stance is the correct attitude towards what is happening now. But again, calmness can be seen as indifference and that is a major problem. That is one of their goals, anyway, to aggravate people with constant turmoil. And while somebody reacts with thoughts of battery, others may become indifferent and think “I don’t care about any of this, I just want to be left alone!” Both are incorrect, but violence should not prompt defensiveness; this is also a historical experience. The lesson learned in 1918 and after 1945 was the same, that constant mass fight – as it is called in history – results in unrest and uncertainty. Today, the Hungarian people have very clearly declared who they want to see govern and who they want to see in majority of the parliament. Given these facts, we cannot go into a defensive state. We should not desert. We have been through this many times, but in the past there has always been an unusually strong outside impact, an outside force.

Isn't it present now? Or is the current one different?

It isn’t that strong now. There are economic, financial, and other types of pressure, but we have no reason to desert or go into a defensive stance now. On the other hand, we have no reason to enter an irrational confrontation either. That is why it is important that those who take charge in politics do so even among such circumstances and not say that they’ve had enough. Confrontation needs to be taken on, not pointlessly and not if failure is certain, but it should be taken on. And we, who decided to elect them three years ago, mustn’t just indifferently look on at how those in the frontline are being labeled, abused, and threatened, even crucified at times. Now, *that* we shouldn’t do! In the given moment, we have to stand by them – those who don’t desert – and we have to stand by them peacefully, firmly and with dignity. If they took on the fight, it’s a reasonable expectation that they continue fighting, even in the current unpleasant situation. They shouldn’t provide areas of vulnerability carelessly; they shouldn’t allow for opportunities to be created for blackmail, they shouldn’t risk losing our trust. I hope that’s how it is today. Obviously, it is necessary to act together, as it always has been during the course of history. I see hope for success and I don’t think the foundation of the alliance had been rocked or wavered.

Are you referring to the alliance between those who elect and those elected?

Yes, I am. However, there is one more danger that has always been present, and it is a very big danger – the occurrence of dissent within. Even among those who take on the difficulties and advantages of power, dissension may occur in the critical moment. The

advantages mean a much greater danger. This shouldn't be allowed to happen. Regrettably, there are such things as dissension and breaking up in a nation.

The basic principle would have to be a national minimum, which we haven't had for a while.

Yes, we are able to disintegrate into fundamental pieces.

Was there a moment when we had it?

The national minimum?

Yes. Was there such a thing after the transition to democracy? Let's not go back further than that...

The problem is that we don't know what we mean by the national minimum.

The question of Hungarians outside of our borders, for example. This could be a national minimum. Sure, others may see it differently; it's very likely that we are all determined by where we are coming from.

Yes, well, it is indeed the minimum that the nation ought to feel that it forms one community, even if state boundaries dissect it. Togetherness is important; to feel that whatever may come at us we are ready to throw in our lot in the interest of the nation. Whether it is with fellow Hungarians outside of our borders, or in demand of sovereignty or even in the interest of upholding our national culture, in defense of the Hungarian language, or going even further – in defense of the existence of the Hungarian nation. I must admit that there is an influential section of society in Hungary today for whom the existence of the Hungarian nation, Hungarian culture, Hungarian language is no longer important, for whom the loss of these would not be traumatic.

That's what I was referring to when I mentioned the importance of where we're coming from.

There is such a group, but I find it to be a dwarf-like minority. Although without a doubt, their effects are strong. But we've seen this before. Hungarian culture is strong enough; we are talking about a culture that is over 1,000 years old. It has the ability to survive, it has never been broken. Think about it, Hungarian has only been the official language of the historic Hungary since 1844. Before that, it was exclusively the peasantry, the commoners who sustained this culture and the language, the dances, the songs, the legends. Despite all those violent outside impacts, like germanization, the Turkish, settling in new groups - despite all this, they were not able to break us; I think this is the greatest success story in the history of Europe. This completely kinless language and people managed to remain in existence among the German, Slavic, and other hostile circumstances, in insanely wild waters, like the muslim conquest. No one will ever take our culture down. So, the great new idea is to take the people down, those who carry the culture within themselves. It has two basic tools: one of them is the demographic problem, meaning the faith in the future needs to be taken away. Because only those are willing to have children, two, three, five who have trust in the future. So, faith needs to be taken away,

the belief that this country, this nation is viable, that it has a perspective, a future, God forbid, it even has mission. This faith has begun to shake. Needless to say, the socialist, communist 40 years have contributed to this; it will be difficult to get over it. That's why we see a frighteningly decreasing tendency in the number of Hungarians, not only in the Hungary after Trianon, but in the Carpathian basin as well. Although, it is still the greatest population in the Carpathian basin, the numbers are decreasing at an alarming rate, and if we study the current trends we can conclude that this may lead to severe problems. The idea of replacement migration has been made up in order to speed up the process. Not just in Hungary, but in all of Europe, since this is a German and French problem as well. A problem that envisions a solution that includes swapping the lifestyle, the livelihood, the past and the future.

The fertility rate in Germany is about 1.4 these days.

I can imagine. The answer to this would be flooding Europe with new masses of tens and hundreds of millions.

Is this the only reason? The demographic point of view?

No, not demography, the faith in our future. It shook when the Christian faith has dwindled away.

The violent collision between Western Europe that has lost its own identity on one side, and the muslim culture on the other, I don't know... isn't this a potential bursting charge? I wonder, does the European leadership comprehend this? Is what's happening deliberate or by chance?

Most likely, they think that huge populations, like the German and the French will be able to integrate the incoming millions of migrants. Possibly, that's what it seems like from their office-palaces.

Empiricism has contradicted it.

But they think that they will be able to integrate. This is wrong, I agree that it's wrong, but it's most tragic for nations that have smaller populations, like Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks and so on. The Germans are in the hundreds of millions, and we are twelve million. The emphasis is on the proportions. I don't think that even the Germans will be able to integrate this mass. We have 1,000 years of experience in how to defend ourselves, how to keep and protect those things we have just spoken about minutes ago. The Germans, the French... they have no idea about this, about what is happening to them. We know, hence our resistance. That's why the Polish understands us. Because they have fought the Germans, the Russians for 1,000 years for the exact same reason. And they are still here and we are still here. So, our immune system is more developed in this regard, although our proportion in numbers is lower. And if what the scientists are talking about is really going to happen and the population of Africa is going to double in the next fifty years, and Africa is already incapable of supporting its current population, then what is going to happen? It is not going to be one or two million, but hundreds of millions who will arrive. Against those kinds of numbers, a country of ten or twelve million will be completely helpless

and it won't be able to pass its culture down. The greatest tragedy for me is that the entire Hungarian culture from János Arany, through Endre Ady all the way to Attila József¹⁶ will just sink below like Atlantis. Everybody and everything will go down. The Germans and the French may not be worried that their culture is going to disappear thinking that the arriving masses will take it over. But all you have to do is look at certain districts of some of the larger cities in Western Europe. It may still be French, German, English, but it is no longer European. Our relation to this paradox is what is going to determine the fate of future generations. I may say that it is a question of existence or peril for us.

I would like to get back to symbols for a second. For me, it was a very defining moment when in 2015 the masses started off from the Eastern Railway station, do you remember? Of course, they had a wholehearted entourage as well, and they walked on the highway for a while, hindering traffic and disregarding all kinds of European laws. And when sunset had come, they stopped and started to pray. Long lines of cars were halted, but they just kept praying and giving thanks to Allah. In this moment, thousands of gut-gripping questions emerged inside me, and I haven't received answers to these questions since then.

Well, this is a migration. It's worth studying how the barbaric migration built upon the Roman Empire. I can ponder this and I'm willing to do so, but I am certain that it will be fatal to Hungary. And it hurts me. It is unacceptable for me. I can't identify with those who think that it is a natural process, those who think that our culture is no loss. Or do they think that it can be put into a museum, or that Hungarian literature can be preserved using some kind of a voice-recording tool? Sure, that may be able to give a flash. Egyptians, Greeks? But where will the people have gone? I can't accept this on any level. I think as long as it is possible we have to guard and preserve our own identity by any means.

It is true. Identity, culture, we have spoken a lot about them, polite literature is an organic part of our culture as well. Why did you decide to marry polite literature with history, what was the intention?

The tools that can be used to write history are finite. Exactly what we have discussed, its goal is not simply to investigate, *l'art pour l'art*, what happened on a particular day in 1426 and describe it as precisely as possible. The goal is to give handlebars to the present generations. It is my experience that the community of historians has been quite inbred these days. I would call it academicism if we were to compare it to fine arts. This also means that the best thoughts don't even reach others in the same field, let alone the public sphere, the wider segments of society or the decision-makers. The situation in science is grave. That's why I thought that I should call for help by using other instruments, and I have found them in polite literature, in personal conveyance, personal identity, and in the profession of faith. If the readers feel that a flash and bone human being is talking to them, not some sort of irrevocable code or scientific word – the content reaches them more easily. This is how I try to get closer to the readers. And I was able to do this while preserving my sovereignty. It is very important that a man, although not entirely, still stays true to

16 Three emblematic poets of Hungarian literature.

himself. This was due to my wife alone who was also a historian – I know that now, in fact, I knew it then. She had the most exceptional teacher personality. So, I have my wife to thank for this. For a while, the two of us were strong enough to reach people on our own way, to teach, to write. This was a special kind of fortune.

Your joint television series was a big success. (It's not too late – Margit Földesi, Tibor Gyurkovics, Károly Szerencsés – editor)

Yes, we also tried to do television together for a while. She believed in it more, she thought that she could get closer to the truth and get it across to others using this method. Many remember her, although she did not appear in what we would call *mainstream* television programs. She talked to pretty much everyone, she asked about everything even if it was uncomfortable or awkward. I, on the other hand, have turned toward a more personal and literary approach, but we have never left history behind. All of her questions and all of my writings were about history. I don't know how the profession welcomed this, but it was certainly affirmed by the viewers and the readers. I have never become a best-selling author, but it was confirmed that it was a path worth walking. Tibor Gyurkovics was the first person who explicitly supported me. He said this was good. And people need reassurance from someone who says, "this is good, it's worth doing it!" when they start walking on a path not walked before, otherwise defeatism may take the better of them. So, he had a decisive role, he was an excellent man for that matter, it was he who inspired me to go on and I don't think it had been a dead end. In fact, it's less and less of a dead end because these days it is extremely difficult to get through to people. It can be done either just on the surface, or by truly, deeply touching them, and I have rather been trying the latter.

The problem with merely scratching the surface is that though it is easy to take in, truth gets lost; and when trying to touch people deep within, gaining their acceptance might be difficult...

Yes, I agree with Ady when he said that those who needed to be reached would be reached, and there's no point in trying to reach those who don't need to be reached.

It is important to note that you have a monumental volume of writing. So far 25 books, 50 studies and nearly 50 articles have seen the light of day. In 2011 'Vein' was born, and in 2013 'The Book of My Wife.' Since then four years have passed and a tragedy has happened in February 2016. Shall we talk about it?

You need to know that our relationship with my wife lasted for 35 years.

She was 21 and you were 23 when the two of you got married.

Well, yes, when we got married, but we have met at the university. The basis of such a relationship, such a union is really those three things which are worded quite well – faith, hope and love. Out of these, love starts things off. And ours was real love and it has remained so. Hope came into the picture when I got diagnosed with an incurable illness at the age of 34, which is quite an uncomfortable thing. At that time, we had two small children and hope always stayed with us that the illness could be treated and kept under control. And the fact that I am talking to you today means that we succeeded. Nearly 23

years have passed since and I'm still here after a series of transplantations. However, it was completely unexpected when my wife got sick with cancer. Even then, we started off with faith, hope and love. This has lasted for a very long time, nearly eight years, but then hope slowly started to evaporate and cancer has defeated her in the end. In 2015, both of us being very sick, we wrote a book, 'A Nation Between Doubts'; perhaps the choice of the title suggests something. At the time, we had our doubts as well. As we ran out of hope, tragedy stepped in. My Wife's Book... perhaps at that time I already felt that I had to write it, until... But I didn't write it the way it should have been written. I think most writers feel this way. So, I have to write the third part, which will be about the final stage, and the last sentence will be "the world is different now for she is no longer here." But I don't want to write more books of this kind. Actually, it is a very interesting story because in the last 26-27 months I was reborn. I had a transplant in 2014 and since then I've been feeling well, considering the circumstances. I write, I teach and I try to process all that has happened. Although I am alone, I am not lonely. I try not to fail, which is a great danger when someone is completely without support. It is complicated. I don't have those abilities within me alone that existed in our union. I would like to create a worthy memory for my wife in this book so I can hand it over to eternity with positive emotions. To accomplish this her media appearances would have to be archived so they wouldn't get lost, or somebody wouldn't delete them when we have few devices left to carry them, and so on. These are parts of the universal Hungarian culture exactly like the words of our greatest poets or any of our cultural memories. So, my goal now is to elaborate on the last tragic and traumatic moment. I'd like to do it bluntly. Not on the level of polite literature, nor on a scientific level, but somewhere in between the two.

Is it going to have a similar structure than the previous two?

No, it is only going to be about her and our last 27 months. I don't want to add anything else; I don't think it would fit into it well.

It will be a worthy closure of the trilogy.

Well, it is a genre that one can never be satisfied with. I would need someone to say "okay, it's good now, don't bother with it any longer! It is good now!" Gitta was this person for me. You know, we receive life, maybe not as a gift, but we certainly do not ask for it and we don't have a say in how long it lasts, either. But *how* we live it depends on us only. Life is a miracle. I am not afraid of big words, even if they've been discredited a thousand times. Meeting is a miracle, two people, two souls holding onto each other throughout a lifetime. The third book will be about love and death only. My wife died and I am here. It all happened as it was destined to be.