

REVIEWS

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To Find the Voice of Angels and the Devils Dwelling in Details¹

With writing about the intellectual history of the “Jewish question in Hungary,” János Gyurgyák certainly took on a huge task. The author’s purpose was to make us face up things and to think, and if the reader gets over the Pavlovian reflexes of different off-hand reactions he must admit that Gyurgyák’s book really makes one *think*. One measure of the success of the book is actually that there can hardly be any reader who, considering his position unquestionable, would not find at least one assertion that would “rightly” offend him.

According to the author’s expressed intention, one with which we can only agree, telling a story is not an activity for its own sake but a therapeutic communal exercise, and if it does not kill the pain immediately it can, if we are fortunate, at least have a relaxing effect. If we interpret the historian’s tasks in this sense, we can also see clearly that the author’s work is not mere reconstruction but construction, in the “noble sense” of the word. Thus it necessarily has several layers of meaning. On the one hand, the book contains a “metahistorical narration” (in the author’s interpretation this concerns

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“the rise and fall” of the ideology of assimilation), which provides the rhetorical framework for the volume; on the other hand it contains a metapolitical layer (the interpretation and assessment of the populist-urbanist schism dividing the Hungarian intelligentsia of the 20th century). Furthermore, there is a “professional-technical” level as well, the historical reconstruction of political and social ideas about the Jewry and the Jewish assimilation.

These layers are naturally built upon one another, but in a certain sense they can be separated, moreover in my opinion they should be. Gyurgyák’s position as a historian focuses on validating the distinctions, i.e. presenting often contradictory viewpoints from the tangled opinions. Hence, with reference to the above, it is advisable to distinguish the rhetoric, metapolitical and methodological layers, not speaking about the fact that it is precisely this intertwining which explains the agitations of those disapproving of the book (most often culminating in the question whether one can be *sine ira et studio* objective, knowing the tragic connotations of the history of Hungarian Jewry). I think that, although the author’s goodwill cannot be doubted in this regard, he is not entirely innocent either.

The rhetorical framework of Gyurgyák’s book is a clear lesson in *tragic narration*, provided it is approached with, let’s say, Hayden White’s metahistorical model in mind. The story he tells is centred on the “failure of the assimilation dream” and the tragic halt of a “well-beginning process”. According to the author, the “framework for a compromise” was formed between the 1840s and 1860s, even though it was not unequivocal for either “side” and therefore the entire construction was built upon mutually unrealistic expectations. (This is well-demonstrated by the unclear meaning of the word “similarity” even in the case of József Eötvös, who was rigorous with concepts.) Nevertheless, the “assimilatory vision” meant a long-lasting programme accepted by the Hungarian political elite, although the “requirements” were becoming increasingly distant from social reality.

According to Gyurgyák (who structures his social history model largely with reference to Jacob Katz) the “halt” had several structural causes. On the one hand, there is the pure fact that “assimilation *en masse* is impossible in the age of nationalism”, while, on the other, the Hungarian story unfolded in a “geo-political cul-de-sac”. In Gyurgyák’s opinion, there were only two severely distorted lines to the story in Hungarian historical consciousness: an *anti-Semitic* explanation of the world, and a narration he calls the “Neologue view of history,” marked by the “denial of the Jewish question”, the “myth of

the thousand-year peaceful coexistence”, the “over-interpretation” of the role of the Hungarian liberal tradition in Jewish emancipation, and finally the “denial of the existence of any inherent Hungarian anti-Semitism.” While the scientific value of the former was anyhow rather insignificant, the latter, a kind of “Whig interpretation of history”, essentially defined the historiographical tradition dealing with the history of Hungarian Jewry. One of Gyurgyák’s most important attempts was to discard this construction. According to him, the Neologue interpretation of history is a vision which those concerned insisted on, despite the gradual distancing of dream and reality. This “blindness” is actually one of the main sources of the tragedy: the unsuspecting calmness of the players, the heart-wrenching duality of their “private” battles and the shadows sneaking up behind them.

In the author’s cyclorama, the representatives of anti-Semitism are also touched by the wind of tragedy. The road leading to Hell is paved if not by goodwill but with the search for truth: only the anti-Semites pointed out the false nature of the assimilation project, while the liberal and moderately conservative critiques fell outside the main Hungarian political-cultural trends, especially in the inter-war period. In this sense, the eruption of anti-Semitism is not simply an “accident”, or perhaps the consequence of the underground influx of imported ideologies, as, according to Gyurgyák, the Neologue interpretation of history tried to make the issue be understood, but rather the critique of a false construction built on false premises.

That is the reason why the anti-Semitic texts embedded in the metahistorical narration of the book mostly sound tragicomic; otherwise they are mainly *nadve*, but 1944 is there in front of them when exactly these principles become the ideological framework of mass murder. At the same time, Gyurgyák retains a “historicist” perspective, asserting that nothing should be viewed exclusively from the “end point”, and he tries to mark the difference between the ethnic and racial/biological discourses, showing that not necessarily all the texts, which challenged the assimilatory social and historical interpretation, had an anti-Semitic orientation.

The tragicomic vein is supported by stylistic elements and adjectives which seem to reflect on Gyurgyák’s attempt to force some kind of “hermeneutic empathy” on himself (and also on the reader) when he is quoting otherwise disturbing arguments, trying to read them as reflections of a valid “social experience” (as long as their authors had “a kind of substantive premonition”, moreover “anticipation” of the troubles to come). This intention is

marked by the author's use of rather polite phrases when he introduces the anti-Semitic authors, such as "may not reflect on reality in all aspects" or "with even the best intentions".

According to Gyurgyák, the cul-de-sac of assimilation was an important catalyst of the distortion of Hungarian political culture as far as it contributed to the institutionalisation of the vision of "two opposing Hungaries" and the self-reproduction of two "camps", turned into themselves and defending their visceral aggression with a self-justifying rhetoric. All these lead us to the author's "political" standpoint. The above may already demonstrate, although his value judgements are disputable and should be disputed, that a thorough misinterpretation is necessary to attribute to the book an anti-Semitic tendency in the author's political subconscious. Gyurgyák does not regard the intellectual *Kulturkampf*, which, in his reading, was also the result of the "Jewish question", as a natural condition, neither does he conclude with a programme of political action. He does not intend to shepherd the Hungarian intelligentsia to ideological trenches, rather out of them.

It must be emphasised that this does *not* mean that we have to agree with his metapolitical vision *in the least*. It is a very severe "political" statement that the distortion of Hungarian political culture is primarily (or at least to a large degree) the consequence of the "Jewish question". His ideological stipulations are connected with this preconception, such as the claim that "political controversies had not deepened into an abyss up to the beginning of the century" (or that the "ideological aggression" of the civic radicals, whom Gyurgyák described as the representative movement of the "Jewish escaping margins", was playing a pivotal role in the formation of the abyss).

The criticism of civic radicalism and primarily the reinterpretation of Oszkár Jászi is one of the pillars of this metapolitical construction. Rather obviously, Jászi is the central figure of Gyurgyák's narrative, a kind of political and intellectual "significant Other", perhaps for personal-biographical reasons, invested with the complex spiritual mechanisms of identification and refusal. It is perhaps justified to read certain ideas in Jászi's portrait as some kind of confession and (also) psychological self-reflection on the part of Gyurgyák (primarily the repeated emphasis on the irreconcilability of the *homo politicus* and intellectual existence, and the opposition of the "man of party politics" with that of intellect). It is important to note that Gyurgyák, in the eighties, ardently acclaimed the intellectual legacy of Jászi and the *Huszadik Század* (*Twentieth Century*), and began his career as a historian by re-

searching the civic radical tradition, while, at the turn of the decade, he participated in the “radical reformist” cultural project of the journal *Századvég* (*Turn of the Century*), from which the Alliance of Young Democrats (FIDESZ) was later to emerge. It is all the more intriguing to find that his final “political” judgement concerning Jászi is sharply negative and perhaps represents the most questionable part of the volume stylistically, too – although the respect due to the “noble enemy” shows through the entire argument.

In Gyurgyák’s interpretation, the final assessment of Jászi’s activity can be characterised only by the notion of “failure”. In his opinion, this was the result of the lack of widespread popularity of Jászi and his circle, who, despite their intentions, remained within the boundaries of the Jewish bourgeois-intellectual elite, which was advanced in assimilation but not entirely accepted by the Hungarian majority society. It was also connected to the fact that they simultaneously tried to promote both bourgeois values and socialist criticism, manifesting a tragic contradiction. Furthermore, they represented a secular, moreover often atheist tendency, which was alien for the majority society. Last but not least, Gyurgyák thinks that the civic radicals’ failure was most importantly due to “neglecting the Jewish question.” In this sense a tragic mistake was committed by Jászi (and his intellectual medium) – their impatience coming from “nadve intellectual illusions” alienated the larger part of Hungarian political society and thus their political project had a “devastating effect,” moreover, the “liberal socialism” expressing Jászi’s life programme eventually fell into total “disuse”.

According to the author, approaching the matter through the optic of the “Jewish question”, Jászi and his circle bear an indirect responsibility for the fact that the “New Hungary” promoted by them was identified as a “Jewish Hungary” by the majority of the Hungarian political nation. The fact that such an abyss came about is treated as an axiom in the book and is often referred to. In Gyurgyák’s opinion, the right-wing Catholic Béla Bangha, for example, “further deepened the abyss between left-wing and liberal *Jewish Hungary* and right-wing *Christian Hungary*” and although he also thinks that the populist-urbanist dichotomy was not exclusively about the Jewish question, he asserts that it was due to the latter that the “two sides” could not discuss other matters calmly.

In a peculiar way this conception is manifested in the period following 1989. This *duality* makes up the “vicious circle” stifling Hungarian political culture – one side “defends the indefensible” while the other “hinders the re-

generation of Hungarian national consciousness by recalling the Holocaust from time to time". And although he does not take it to the end, he obviously sees some *continuity* between the self-defensive mechanism of the Neologue view of history (which allegedly condemns as anti-Semitic anybody who makes any distinction or just mentions the Jews as a group) and the post-1989 political culture of the liberals. Gyurgyák tries to contribute to resolving the antagonism by symbolically taking on the role of mediator. In my opinion, this attempt is rooted in the confusion of the metapolitical and the historical viewpoints, and thus the author arrives at a highly *ambivalent position*: asserting that the party political conflicts of the 1990s can be traced back to the history of Jewish assimilation. This signals the danger that the sketchy outline of ideas in the epilogue inflates the scientific nature of the book retrospectively, and the essentialist concept of the "Jewish position" leads to the lumping together of radically different biographies and life situations running into one another in the end with a clear political purpose.

This essentialism of the epilogue does not come up to the distinctive level otherwise characterising the text as a whole, and at some points a uniform treatment of the entirely non-uniform Jewry can be seen, which charge, ironically, Gyurgyák himself lays against Jászai. The author is talking about grievances between the "Jewish and Christian society" and about two "entirely opposing" viewpoints of history, which according to him proceed from the radical divergence of the experiences of the non-Jewish majority of Hungarian society and those of Jews, while at the same time he is slipping into some kind of "collective metaphysics", assuming that all members of a certain ethnic community share "one destiny" (as if the Hungarian "Christian", i.e. non-Jewish, society had merely had a fun time during the war and the rule of the Arrow Cross regime, with only the cataclysmic entry of "the Russians" putting a stop to the general public complacency). A significant example of this can be seen in his remark about the significance of the 1989 changes, noting that "today there is no longer any need to use 'urbanist' instead of 'Jewish' and 'populist' instead of 'Christian' or 'non-Jewish'" – as if these terms were quite clearly interchangeable.

In many ways this metapolitical framework coincides with the "post-nationalist" construction of history formulated by the end of the 1990s, but it would be a mistake to identify the two entirely. The post-nationalist set of ideas postulates that the degeneration of the Hungarian national consciousness was the main legacy of the "actually existing socialism", and the task of the

elite is to recreate and fortify the notion of identity. In its present form the post-nationalist patriotism is the projection of the football fan's emotional culture onto history – a good patriot has always been behind the “Hungarian team”. The basis of all this is provided by a non-problematic conception of the past, the intermixing of “image-building” with the historical narration and the conflation of potentially opposing segments of tradition.

A post-nationalist public figure is at the same time an ethnicist and a protagonist of the myth of the “hospitable nation”, a proud bastion of Europeanness and Western civilization against the south-eastern neighbours, but also a representative of “Hungarian characteristics” and exoticism as opposed to “Western uniformity”. Paganism and Christianity, the Kuruc romantics and the nostalgic cult of the Monarchy appear at the same time in its iconography. These are not identity alternatives co-existing in the national tradition and in tragic conflict at their time, neither do they represent historical problems to be studied, but they are components of an ahistorical *success story*, which fit into the framework of the thousand-year continuity of statehood, and can even be included as an image in ministerial speeches. These features are united by a “Hungarian national characterology,” interpreted on the level of popular wisdom. It is not surprising that this “grand narrative” of national identity building shows many similarities with the quasi-empire building “Millennial” nationalism of the previous turn of the century. Neither is it surprising that it picked the most outstanding political personality, István Tisza, from the slate of historical consciousness as its hero.

This *ahistorical national unity* is threatened by the *non-Hungarian outside world*. The aggression always comes from outside (the Mongols, the Turks, the Trianon Treaty, the Russians), perhaps via the domestic servants of external powers. If historical conflicts always came about primarily between Hungarians and non-Hungarians, this accentuates the narrative of differences from the “internal aliens” and over-stretches the question of “who is Hungarian?”. All this can, of course, be reconciled with the “colour-blind” inclusion of noted personalities and developments in the international stage in the national canon, such as Ede (Edward) Teller, János (John) Neumann, Ferenc (François) Fejtő, the “Hungarian atomic bomb”, “Hungarian Hollywood”, Hungarian Nobel prize winners, just to mention a few well-known examples.

When, sometime in the future, a historian will analyse the roots of this *fin-de-siècle* post-nationalist view of history, emerging in the 1990s, it will be obviously a basic task to consider the legacy of the circle around the noted

journal *Századvég*, also hallmarked by János Gyurgyák. In my opinion, this journal also stood for a kind of post-nationalist proposition, in so far as its programme wanted to go beyond the division being reproduced by the discourses on Hungarian identity, if not in the same sense as it all came about in the second half of the 1990s – because *then and there* very few of the young people in the system-changing new elite thought that that aesthetics of the new Hungarian patriotism would be later shaped by the regressive (self)imitation of the rock opera *Stephen the King*. When this narration acquired institutional opportunities, especially after 1998, the fact that the emphasis changed from transcending to identity-building contributed to all this, since Gyurgyák's former colleagues increasingly began to work with what was available in terms of personnel and historical resources, and the inevitable result was that the post-nationalist image of history increasingly became mixed with neo-nationalism.

Gyurgyák believes that the constant appearance of the “Jewish question” hinders the implementation of the identity-building project in as much as the Hungarian identity discourse is constantly confused with the manifestation of anti-Semitism. To resolve this, he considers it necessary to draw a distinction between anti-Semitism and Hungarian ethnicism, which he thinks would essentially promote the cause of Hungarian identity-building. Unlike the neo-nationalist narrative, he does not believe that the Jews “mix” these two registers together primarily to protect “their positions in power”. He thinks it has more to do with exaggerated reactions of fear rooted in particular traumas. The politics of *The Jewish Question in Hungary* in its own way intends to contribute to resolving the tension, and with that to assist in the implementation of an “ideal” – national self-confidence boosting – post-nationalist project.

Gyurgyák's metapolitical narrative is a problematic attempt at mediation, but we cannot let the book be read *backwards* due to that. In judging his work it is at least as important how the concrete textual reconstructions make up the above analysed rhetorical and metapolitical concept. The historical programme of the volume is to explore how the different groupings of Hungarian political culture battled with the “Jewish question” from the formation of the “unstipulated” and “confusing” assimilation construction up to 1945. In my opinion, the main criteria of an ambitious work of the history of political ideas are the following: a) clearness and reflection of the conceptual framework; b) the problem-sensitive exploration of the relationship be-

tween the political and social contexts, and the examined texts; c) drafting the relevant comparative framework (the comparison of specific idiosyncratic phraseologies of a given culture with regional and wider ideological traditions and speech situations); d) identification of the general intellectual sources of certain ideas; e) a heuristically productive grasp of the supra-personal discursive units (traditions, political languages, idioms, etc.); f) sensitivity to genre-specific features and assessment of the relative importance and representative nature of emphasised ideas; g) adequate demonstration of the relationship of several authors to each other; h) reflection on the theme's professional literature, reflection on the historiographical environment. I believe it would be advisable to analyse the book in the light of these points in any further professional discussion.

As far as we are looking at the problem of the *conceptual framework* it can be seen that the author uses exactly the two key notions of the book rather naively. Gyurgyák is making an attempt to dissolve the notional ambivalence of the "Jewish question" rooted in an ideological overburden in such a way that he aims at returning to the "original meaning" of words. However, the question arises whether, in the case of expressions used in the political conflict, there is a pre-ideological meaning, which is not bound at all to political value judgements.

His use of "assimilation", another keyword, is also rather problematic. Gyurgyák adopts the definition of István Szabó, a historian active in the mid-20th century, primarily focusing on the history of the peasantry while being inspired by the *Völksgeschichte* tradition. According to Szabó, a process of assimilation is successful when "the assimilated have assumed the consciousness of the new 'folk-allegiance' without any reservations". Surprisingly, Gyurgyák does not really touch upon the problem that such a definition is not an irrevocable tautology but definitely an ideological construction, as is well shown by the appearance of the characteristic notion of *népiség* (folk-allegiance, ethnicity). This definition should have been related to the historiographical framework of its own time (for example, involving comparison with the notion of *Völkstum*), and then there would have been more space left to grasp the inevitable ambiguity and situationality of collective identities (just think of the complexity of such cases as the Szeklers' Hungarian "consciousness of folk-allegiance").

One of the most serious general problems of the book arises from the viewpoint of drafting the system of relations between *text and context*. When

introducing the “assimilatory construction” of the 19th century, the general ideological medium of Hungarian “nation building” is actually lost, namely that the offer of assimilation was made to all the non-Hungarian population of Hungary, and the Jewish assimilation was part and parcel of a complex issue involving many different nationalities and ethnicities. At the same time, Gyurgyák is not completely lacking valid insights concerning the broader context: for instance, it is a rather important and well-documented realisation that the anti-Semites had also essentially supported assimilation up to the 1910s. The more general frameworks of the transition from the assimilatory concept of nationhood to the ethno-nationalist identity-discourse are well demonstrated by such concrete analyses as the case of Alajos Kovács, an anti-Semitic journalist, who viewed Jews as the vanguard of Hungarianization until 1918, but regarded them as an alien body having intruded into the nation after 1918.

All in all, however, the concrete analyses unfortunately do not receive a wider context, i.e. the author does not fit his results into the framework of the change in Hungarian nationalism. He exclusively highlights the change in the perception of Jews, whereas the entire Hungarian national identity discourse went through a radical change from the turn of the century to the 1930s. Gyurgyák does not give explanations on many occasions, merely records characteristics (for example the contrasting position of the Eastern and Western Jews) and this may lead to misunderstandings, moreover to missing what is significant – as if the structure of Hungarian national ideology changed “just because” of the Jews and the “Jewish question.” There are, however, examples when a certain feature is excellently connected to a wider context. For example, the author convincingly proves that the phantasm of *en masse* Jewish immigration at the end of the 19th century, which captivated not only the anti-Semites but the whole of Hungarian public opinion, was a misinterpretation of the apparent urbanization of Jews, who had already lived in Hungary for one or two generations.

The relationship between text and context is also questionable in parts of the book criticising the civic radicals. As if in Gyurgyák’s interpretation the tragic fault of Jászai and his followers was at the beginning of the causality line and as if the traditional Hungarian political structure had perceived this as the only challenge. At the same time, when analysing the political culture of the 1910s, it should have been necessary to state that at this point the Austro-Hungarian political context was defined by dissatisfaction with the

existing circumstances and an understanding concerning the impossibility of maintaining the *status quo*. Thus the Hungarian historical elite was not only threatened by the civic radicals but, just to give an illustration, also by Francis Ferdinand's neo-conservatism, which was pondering on the most convenient way of breaking through the "1867 construction", and which might have precipitated something in the nature of a showdown had the *Kronprinz* not been assassinated in 1914.

The best analyses in the book can be found where the author makes historical distinctions in view of certain discursive positions which the institutionalised public phraseology completely mixed together. Thus, for example, when analysing Jászi's texts from the 1920s, he excellently identifies the psychological and political context of the emigrant politician's anti-Semitic-like statements. In the same way, he gives a fine description of the self-contradictory standpoint of the liberal-leftist intelligentsia with Jewish origins between the two world wars (they set assimilation to an imaginary "New Hungary" as their aim, while they were unable to distinguish among intellectual groupings which differently related to the system, and they only wanted to hear the ethnicist overtones in the populist rhetoric). There are, however, unfortunately numerous examples when Gyurgyák over-enforced his perspective, passing judgements completely torn from the context: thus the Social Democrats' relative silence about the "Jewish question" becomes equal with the fact that they "artificially closed themselves off" from the outside world – as in Gyurgyák's view the problem of Hungarian modernity necessarily and exclusively stood or fell on the "Jewish question."

The aspect of *comparability* is present also in a highly contradictory way in the book. The author tries to outline a Central European interpretative framework. However, Gyurgyák's model is built on a structural *in-betweenness*: on the one hand, this means the empirical fact of the presence of two types (Western and Eastern) of Jewry, on the other, it is the specifically mixed pattern of socio-political integration. (Neither the individualist integration models based on the Western European Enlightenment, nor the East-European Jewish "nation-building" is manifested with an exclusive validity, but the two overlap, and this is also well-represented in the Neologue-orthodox schism).

The fact that Hungary cannot be understood with the help of an exclusively domestic reference system is valid for any intellectual historian. As far

as Gyurgyák connects the formation of Hungarian radical anti-Semitism to the specific experiences of Hungarian society, it would at least briefly have been worth considering the anti-Semitic arguments of some thinkers who are not tied to Hungarian society and its intellectual traditions, such as Cioran or Céline. An interesting question is how can socio-historical contexts radically different from that of the Hungarian in Gyurgyák's scheme produce ideas rather similar to the Hungarian arguments? It also would have been interesting to demonstrate, at least on the level of references, how German anti-Semitism fits into Gyurgyák's framework. A central question of the current German research – which in many ways resembles that of Gyurgyák's – concerns the continuity of Wilhelmine anti-Semitism and Nazi ideology, for example, but parallels would be enlightening in the wider sense, too. Nineteenth-century anti-Semitic parties flourish and decay approximately at the same time in both Hungary and Germany, radicalisation during World War I is basic both here and there, etc. In my opinion, all this should raise the essential question as to whether and in what ways Hungarian anti-Semitic constructions are adaptations, to what degree they reflect general European (or Central European) ideological conflicts and to what degree they react to the Hungarian medium in a specific way.

Glancing to the East, there is also a basic dilemma concerning how it is possible that, despite the different socio-historical roots, in the Romanian context of the 1930s, for example, political discourse (although not political history) produced frameworks similar to those in Hungary, although we cannot really talk about a 19th century “assimilation dream” there, which was gradually “collapsing”. Similarly, the lack of a comparative framework also distorts such interpretations as when the author, writing about Jászi and his followers, describes the politicising of sociology as virtually a Hungarian phenomenon (it would have been worth him looking at works by *Stefan Collini* about the political involvement of the British turn-of-the-century generation of sociologists, in many respects regarded as an example by Jászi and his circle).

With respect to the exploration of *intellectual sources*, a rather problematic feature of the book is that it presents the different ideological traditions (especially anti-Semitism) as immanent self-developing processes (since it is possible to call someone “the pioneer of the racialist idea” only with such logic). Even with such definitely imported notions as, for example, “blood consciousness”, Gyurgyák does not show from where it got into the Hungarian

discourse. He only mentions the sources briefly when he encounters “internal references” to them.

In the case of *discursive units* (“political languages”, etc.) we must naturally count on the fact that the unexplored Hungarian national discourse and intellectual history of the concept of nation would put anybody on the spot who wanted to examine the debates about assimilation or the questions connected to anti-Semitism with exclusive reference to the Hungarian local context. Gyurgyák’s structural solution, describing the “metapolitical” groupings as traditions running in parallel, further fragments this picture. Thus the different discourses (agrarian, liberal conservative, civic radical, Social Democratic, social Darwinist and Turanist-racial) continuing a dialogue with each other in the 1910s become distant from one another also in a “physical” sense. Since he does not show the debating parties within the framework of common presumptions and conventions underlying the discussions, but as elements of standpoints spanning several generations, an important opportunity is lost for devising a veritable intellectual history of the various lines of thought as dynamic units constantly being reshaped through interaction. This also inadvertently hides the *shared reception* of Western ideological paradigms, which often overlapped with current political conflicts and provided the basic categories of professional and public discourse about assimilation, ethnicity, race and nation (for example in the case of social Darwinism).

On Gyurgyák’s intellectual landscape there are no “political languages” but standpoints, and that from time to time makes it rather difficult for him to map a given context. To give a marginal though characteristic example, he misreads, in a peculiar way, Kossuth’s argument about assimilation (“While they cannot eat the same salt or bread and cannot drink the same wine, cannot sit at the same table [...] the Jews will not be sociabiliter emancipated.”). Those who studied the intellectual history of the period would recognise the argument (i.e. it is about the problem of *sociability*), which movements of national awakening inherited from the Enlightenment and which also served as a basic element to the Hungarianising discourse of the Reform Age. In the same way, it is problematic to interpret the relationship between anti-Semitism and anti-liberalism on a segmental basis, disregarding the fact that connecting the two was increasingly a part of a unified political language, which was acquired by speakers without any special individual reflection. Formulations, such as “the Kovács-like approach to society” are typical examples of the unclear relationship of individual discourses and collective idioms. Since

Gyurgyák does not classify the discursive traditions but describes them as a series of separate standpoints, his analyses are often organised by rather questionable models. A most characteristic example of the above is the study of the racist ideology whereby he essentially took over the “hagiographic” logic of Zoltán Bosnyák, who traced the intellectual history of the “Jewish question” from an extreme right-wing perspective. In this “teleological” framework there are doctrines of very different structure and standard, like those of the populist bohemian Miklós Szemere, the eugenics scholar Zoltán Méhely, the conservative literary historian Gyula Farkas and the Arrow Cross-affiliated journalist Mihály Kolosváry-Borcsa.

Problems of methodology are also clear in the descriptions of the populist-urbanist conflict. Gyurgyák speaks about “wrongly chosen adjectives” on the one hand and, on the other, the “Jewish question”, a framework that made the compromise impossible, while he completely neglects the aspect that it was rather a “language struggle” (and those “adjectives” belonged to rather specific discourses). This *intellectual atomisation* sometimes makes understanding absolutely impossible: for example, in a footnote he characterises as simply nonsense the attempt of the populist writer Péter Veres to distinguish conceptually the ‘people’ from the ‘nation’, because his attention is directed only at the duality of the racial and the assimilatory conceptions, while here we can see a characteristic example of what determined populist rhetoric in the 1930s: i.e., following “Bartók’s logic”, they opposed their populism to the “official” discourse of Hungarianness (attacking “middle-class nationalism”, which had “nothing to do” with the peasantry’s, in many ways inter-ethnic, but still “authentically Hungarian”, “popular” culture).

Thus Gyurgyák often tries to make one single distinction, namely to separate the racial discourse from the “historical” construction of identity which relegated the “ethnic” elements to the background. As such, his analyses are marked by an honest and reliable treatment of material, but it is another matter that, in my opinion, this distinction would only have an illuminative force if the interpretation referred to broader contexts as well. It would also have been important to think over the fact that, except for the exclusively import discourses, Hungarian ethno-nationalism could not have been simply biologically based, since actually the Hungarian nation was held to be of a “mixed race”, a melting-pot for people of very different origins during its history. Thus the question is not only whether a discourse left any loopholes for assimilation or whether it clearly thought in racist categories, but also

what *asymmetric counter-concepts* organised these, in Gyurgyák's terminology, "ethnic" discourses, and how certain minorities were defined within the framework of the Hungarian nation while others were "defined to be outside".

The distinction between racial and ethnic discourses is, of course, really important in certain cases. Thus, for example, is Gyurgyák's line of thought when analysing László Németh, pointing out that the essayist's notion of a "community of fate" does not fit a biological but rather a "character discourse" and Németh's thesis was not anti-Semitic as such, but touched on the self-image of the "escaping margins" of the Jewish community. Of course, the next question would be what wider intellectual and rhetorical frameworks determined this argument (e.g. the line of thought in Németh's infamous essay, *In Minority*) and why it is that it received the strongest criticism not from the "Jewish side" but from Gyula Szekfű and his conservative-liberal circle, where, because of this work, Németh was considered as a traitor to the Christian humanist-antifascist intellectual "front."

The problem of *genre characteristics* is related here in a number of ways, i.e. a pamphlet, speech, a diary or memoir do not work on the same register and it is hardly possible to sort statements made in these genres according to the author's "position in the Jewish question". Gyurgyák's methodological starting point has in itself a homogenizing effect: in his reading, people tend to have *an opinion* about the Jewish question, which they express on given occasions and it is the historian's task to *reconstruct* those opinions. Needless to say, this concept does not leave much space for the fact that the situation where speech is pronounced determines the rhetorical framework (since the same *topoi* might work completely differently in different genres) and thus both the author and the reader are in the dark when they try to solve the correlations between an individual opinion and the commonplaces of the period.

The question of the *connection* of authors to *one another* is at the meeting point of the problems of "contextuality" and of the "supra-personal units". Gyurgyák's choice of concentrating on primarily the *diachronic* aspect and thus the self-development of standpoints becomes extremely problematic here. The few synchronical interaction models (according to which Jászi and his followers' vision of "New Hungary" evoked a right-wing reaction) seem so one-sided perhaps because of this. Thus his comparisons remain on the level of bickering when we learn that the Arrow Cross ideologists Ödön Málnási and Miklós Matolcsy thought something "similarly to Jászi" or that

the Arrow Cross regarded certain issues “similarly” to the “other side” (i.e. the left), etc. The increment of working out the synchronical model would have been to underline the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the systems of correlations: unfortunately the “myth of two sides” is quite distorting and makes it almost impossible to place, for instance, the populists’ contradictory position on the intellectual map.

Needless to say, at some points, the advantages of the ideographic method followed by Gyurgyák certainly unfold, especially when he has to distinguish among different points of view within a given tradition. Thus, for example, an important line of thought in the volume is the distinction between Jászi and the civic radical mainstream concerning their views on the question of large capital and the latifundia (as much as Jászi equally attacked the capitalists and the landowners as enemies of democratic modernisation, while a part of the civic radicals regarded large capital as a potential means of bourgeois development overcoming feudal remnants). With this analysis Gyurgyák, of course, undermines the old-new radical right-wing vision of history, which claimed that there was a unified project, according to which the critique of feudalism by the civic radicals, propelled by “racial solidarity”, consciously supported the high bourgeoisie of Jewish origin.

Concerning the last question of the *references to professional literature*, the intentional sparseness of the book is almost to the detriment of scholarship. It’s as if the author had wanted to suggest that everyone writing about the topic, except for concrete philological work, had been making an apologia for some side of the eternal *Kulturkampf*, and therefore the researcher who attempts to explore the topic objectively must take only the strictly empirical works seriously, disregarding historical interpretations. From the “Jewish side” some products of historiography with a “Zionist leaning” are the only exceptions, which Gyurgyák somehow considers as attempting to go beyond the anti-Semite vs. Neologue antagonism.

Thus the author is trapped. He advances through his material, as the champion of truth, does not glance to the right or left but often misses the innocent intellectual tourist signs and has to build an interpretative framework out of nothing. He projects just two alternatives (the eternal Neologue and the eternal anti-Semite position) on the historiographical tradition and essentially disregards the fact the Hungarian historiography has also been formed alongside other axes (e.g. a methodological one: positivism versus *Geistesgeschichte* versus Marxism, etc.), and even within a given ideological conven-

tion several sub-traditions were born (e.g. Marxist historiography created a national-communist synthesis and some kind of internationalist or anti-nationalist canon, which, in turn, could be Stalinist or even “quasi-bourgeois”).

The nearly complete neglect of international professional literature providing wider connections (with reference to European anti-Semitism only the classic works by Poliakov, Arendt and Katz are mentioned in the otherwise thoughtful bibliography) results in the already mentioned naivety of the comparative framework. All this of course implicitly supports Gyurgyák’s meta-narrative (*as far as* there was an indigenous Hungarian anti-Semitism, *so far* assimilation was obviously not successful) but in a scientific sense this does not necessarily shed glory on the author. Should it turn out that anti-Semitism existed everywhere, rather independently from the degree of assimilation and the surrounding social expectation, and the basic question is rather to what degree a given political culture got under the influence of an anti-Semitic world view, the model would lose some part of its explanatory force but certain texts would become more interpretable from the horizon of a “cultural code” (to use Shulamith Volkov’s concept).

All in all, Gyurgyák’s undeniably grandiose undertaking of *Ideengeschichte* raises three basic questions for me. Firstly: can the “history of the Jewish question” be separated from and worked on without the *history* of the Hungarian *national discourse*? Secondly: can an intellectual history, *attempting exclusively to record the standpoints*, be meaningfully written (i.e. is it not necessary to establish wider discursive units)? Thirdly: is it possible to write the history of Hungarian anti-Semitism and the “Jewish question” *exclusively* with respect to the *internal development* of Hungarian society and culture?

Of course, final answers do not exist for these dilemmas and each scholar must relate to them according to his taste and intellectual value judgments. The writer of the present lines would give a negative answer to the above questions in his scientific conscience, but at this point the problem of discutability arises, posing the question of the standpoint of the speaker himself. At the same time, I have tried to show that affirmative answers in certain cases are clearly to the detriment of understanding the source material.

I personally think, keeping in mind that here individual choices and convictions are as strong as concrete analyses, that the principal issue is the internal cohesion and integration of Hungarian society, which for nearly two hundred years has attempted to achieve modernity while being hamshackled in its own “contradictions”. What Gyurgyák calls “the Jewish question” is only

a part of this riddle. Thus, the problem of Hungarian anti-Semitism is connected to the issues of assimilation *as much as* to the history of Hungarian conservatism, liberalism and socialism full of downfalls, decimations and resumptions. In my opinion, in order to examine this problem, an approach involving, however mild, the wording of a *separate* Hungarian and a *separate* Jewish “community of fate” is unlikely to be effective, given its gross essentialist implications. For me it would be much more promising if the author approached collective identity formation through the analysis of the multiplicity of “constitutive experiences,” being sensitive to the perspective of phenomenology and focusing more on narrative identities and alternative “canons” of representation (let us say, somehow like, in the genre of cinematography, Gábor Bódy’s *Private History* or Péter Forgács’s series *Private Hungary* have been doing it).

In my opinion, that is why the mediatory attempt of Gyurgyák has a heteromorphic nature. It is obvious that anyone who undertakes a mediating role between two parties, held to be in antagonistic contradiction, tries to place himself symbolically *between the two standpoints* (let us now disregard the fact that this kind of strategy might also serve to place the writer *in the focus of attention*). The “battle on two fronts” and “empathy with both sides” present the essence of the would-be mediating rhetoric: neither party is right, but I, the mediator, take over the legitimate viewpoints from both and create a united vision by overcoming the two half-truths.

Sometimes such a strategy creates only a *quasi-symmetry*, i.e. tends to exclusively support dominance or to promote radical steps while attributing aggression to the party who is in reality on the defensive. Gyurgyák’s book also shows well that, in the 1940s, anti-Semitic rhetoric aiming most severely at the deprivation of civil rights instrumentalized the demand for such a symmetry, and, alleging the final threat to the Hungarian nation and the unprecedented advance of the Jews, demanded radical steps to “re-establish the balance.”

If now we disregard such spiteful demands for symmetry, the basic issue has a completely different character in those cases when there is a real mediatory attempt and not a mere effort of self-legitimation (and we have no reason to doubt János Gyurgyák’s sincerity in this sense). The success of mediation depends on whether the counter-position is based on *real social experience* and whether the different parties (in reality there are always more than two) recognise themselves in that counter-position and whether they

can recognise the *sub specie aeternitatis* half-truth in their standpoint with the mediator's help.

For me this is the principal problem of the *Jewish Question in Hungary* and the real lesson of the dispute surrounding the volume. According to the book's metapolitical and rhetoric framework, the two opposing parties seen by Gyurgyák, between whom he attempts mediation and tries to create empathy for each other, are the "honest Hungarian ethnicists" (in the "heights" of Sándor Csoóri's *Noonday Moon*) and those who identify consciously with the "collective fate" of Jewishness. The critics' dissatisfaction derives exactly from that: they do not recognise themselves in the counter-position. They feel that, despite his best intentions, Gyurgyák wants to force them into a standpoint they cannot identify with. It is already a consequence of the Hungarian intelligentsia's overpoliticisation that, for many readers, the side-slip of the metapolitical concept retrospectively destroys the credibility of the concrete efforts of the intellectual historian.

It would be reassuring if we were able to discuss those issues (the social history of Jewish assimilation in Hungary; the history of ideas of Hungarian anti-Semitism; the relationship between the Hungarian intelligentsia and politics between 1945 and 1989, and after 1989), which Gyurgyák tries to intermingle in his book. A successful cultural and political attempt at mediation in relation to these issues would be more than welcome, but I would like to think that the breaking points would be at *different* places in all three questions. However, I think that we can only agree with the author's viewpoint that "questions" don't have to be *finally answered*, since what is more important is to "call conflicts by their names", to speak about the different communal traumas and to practice personal and collective empathy.