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Central European Anglophilia: Personal and Historical Recollections

BRITISH CONSERVATISM MADE UNIVERSAL:
ANGLOPHILIA FROM A CENTRAL EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

Anglophilia, just as much as Anglophobia, is an all-European phenomenon. Since Voltaire professed his admiration for the English in the heyday of the French Enlightenment or earlier, this movement has been widespread in Europe. Moreover, it is not simply a fashion among intellectuals. It very soon spread throughout society, affecting almost all parts of the social spectrum. While it is certainly possible to guess some reasons behind the phenomenon, it is very difficult to pinpoint one single cause. However, perhaps the most important aspect of British culture that fostered Anglophilia across Europe is British conservatism. Britain's uniquely insular location guaranteed that its social customs would develop in a particular way, unlike in the countries of mainland Europe. England, as it is called in the discourse of Anglophilia, therefore, always looked somewhat different, idiosyncratic and strange when viewed from the perspective of Europe, and when viewed from even further away, it looks stranger still. This strangeness comes from its apparent traditionalism: it does not follow all the recent trends of the continent. Moreover, its difference raises it in people's minds as an alternative to their own status quo. For the Anglophiles of the French Enlightenment, it represented an alternative to absolutist rule and lecherous Parisian manners. For the rest of the world, it came to mean the alternative to Napoleon's imperial dreams. For Germans it represented an alternative to an under-governed empire, Weimar, and later to the authoritarianism of Bismarck or Hitler. But what did it mean for people behind the Iron Curtain?

This chapter offers a partly subjective, partly more objective answer to this question. The present author will recollect some of his experiences of the phenomenon from own life, as a kind of ego-history, from before and after the fall of the Iron Curtain. To do so, he will adopt the first person singular narrative, in order to show how things appeared from that perspective. This will be followed by a reconstructive narrative of the intellectual history of Anglophilia in Hungary since the French revolution.

The moral of the story will be more than simply a refutation of the claim that the British and the Hungarian constitutional traditions are very similar, from the time of the Magna Charta and its parallel, the Golden Bull of Hungary.¹ While there were those who found such a parallel convincing and significant, legal historians to this day have always been keen to deny the supposition.² They are, of course, right, as far as actual historical parallels are concerned, although there are, no doubt, important similarities between the aristocratic strata of the two cultures. The present paper argues, however, that the ideal picture painted by Anglophilia conveys strong messages of both practical political orientation and political philosophy, which are worth reflecting on. Those messages, however, are not easily translated into generalised claims and well-formulated syllogisms. Rather, they are embedded into the very way of life which is the object of admiration and sometimes even of imitation by Anglophiles.

One further point is worth noting. Anglophilia has more than one dimension. One should not conflate its cultural manifestations with the political sides of it. A love of Jane Austen or the Beatles does not necessarily entail a love of Thatcher or constitutional monarchy. And yet they are not fully independent of each other. This is because culture is – in a surprising manner – upstream from politics. This means that whoever is in control of fashions and trends in culture will have a direct impact on politics and social matters. This is clearly the reason why soft power politics has become a key area of geopolitical contestation in the 21st century.

¹ GROSSCHMID 1928.

² For such thinkers see CONCHA 1880: 33–44.

Finally, Britain is arguably currently in the process of losing the special character which distinguished it from other parts of the world. At least that is the suggestion of Roger Scruton's book *England. An Elegy*.³ If this is true, it means that perhaps this is the last moment when Anglophiles still have a real culture to admire. Later on, it may survive as flight of fancy, a utopian vision of a non-existent entity, or simply a historical recollection, but not much more.

ANGLOPHILIA AS A FAMILY HERITAGE

Anglophilia is part of my family heritage. My father, who was an engineer, studied English at the grammar school he attended in Buda, under the famous linguist of English, László Országh. I knew this name from the cover of the English–Hungarian dictionary everyone used in Hungary when translating something from or into English – in those days in the 1970s and 1980s there was, of course, no such thing as an online dictionary. László Országh was also the author and co-author of a number of English textbooks used in secondary schools in Hungary. He was also a university lecturer, later professor, and head of the department of English at the University of Debrecen, in the “Calvinist Rome”. He would go on to be the first Hungarian recipient of the title of Honorary Commander of the British Empire (CBE), which he received for his promotion of the English language and culture.

Országh must have been a formidable character, as he kept returning in the recollections of my father. I learnt from him that Országh had lost his job at Eötvös Collegium, perhaps the most prestigious elite institution of higher education in Hungary, when the communists took over, and one of his earlier students, a classmate of my father, had even denounced him to the authorities. This made it obvious to me that Anglophilia apparently counted as a form of anti-communist sentiment.

³ SCRUTON 2001.

Owing to Országh, my father seemed to have been engaged with the Anglo-sphere. In his recollections of the Second World War he always mentioned that they listened to the BBC, because they wanted to hear the truth about the course of the war. When they left Hungary with the students of the Technical University in Budapest, they escaped to Germany, and there he managed to apply to the Americans for the refugee status. In this way he hoped to avoid being repatriated to the Soviet Union for forced labour (known in Hungary as “*málenkij robot*”).⁴ These references showed me, while still a child, that one could trust Britain (and also the US) much more than any of the other major powers in our immediate environment. This information was reinforced by what I recall from my maternal grandmother’s life. She lived with us, working as an occasional dressmaker to supplement her pension. Although as it later turned out, she and her husband, my grandfather, had supported radical revisionism and further far-right ideas in the interwar period, when she was working by the light of her desk lamp in my childhood years in the 1970s, the green eye of her short wave radio was also burning in the darkness, and I remember the announcer saying after the signal, “This is the Voice of America, from Washington”, or “Radio Free Europe”. As one of three daughters, besides the three sons of her parents, she was invited, when it was possible to do so, to visit one of her three brothers, who lived in Connecticut in the US. She brought home a lot of presents, and we kept receiving gift packages by post from my far-away American uncle.

MIDDLE CLASS ANGLOPHILIA IN CENTRAL EUROPE

My father’s and my mother’s family had different reasons to trust the English-speaking world. My father’s family originated from Switzerland, and came to Budapest from Austria at the turn of the century, as bricklayers, who ran their own building firm. They fared comparatively well, and built a three-storey

⁴ About that see PÁSZTOR – FEKETE-SZALÓKY 2020.

family residence in Rózsadomb, a posh and fashionable residential area on the Buda side. As originally German-speaking people, they were legitimists, in other words they were supporters of the Habsburg claim to the Hungarian throne. My grandfather died when my father was still a teenager and their company was confiscated from the family by the Communists. For them, as legitimists, sympathy with the British political tradition was quite natural.

My mother's family was of Hungarian origin. In the interwar period they had lived in Miskolc. My great-grandfather was the director of the bath house, and president of the local history association and an amateur photographer, as well as the president of the local volunteer firemen's association. He brought up their three daughters and three sons in the spirit of hard work, but he also wanted to provide them with a decent, cultured lifestyle. His ideal was a bourgeois lifestyle, resembling in some respects the way of life of the lower nobility. Their Lutheran ideal was hard work and gentlemanly behaviour. My grandmother would often scold by saying that a gentleman's child would not do such a thing. While her idea of an "úriember" ("noble man") was different from the ideal of the English gentleman it was still, with its social aspirations, together with the duty-bound Protestantism, not so different from the Victorian ideals of the middle classes. Notions of gentility were characteristic of the historical middle classes in both cultures, which in Hungary were often connected to covert or open anti-Semitism, in the tone of the public speech of the age. While in Hungary the aristocracy traditionally represented the Anglophile political direction, from the interwar period onwards it also became a marker of middle-class mentality and self-perception. The Hungarian middle class identity and certain gentlemanly attitudes mingled in this pattern of social behaviour. 19th-century novels in both countries provide plenty of illustrations of this combination of social status and cultural preferences. What was represented by authors from Jane Austen to George Eliot and Henry James in English literature, was also present in the novels of József Eötvös, Zsigmond Kemény, Mór Jókai and Kálmán Mikszáth. Victorian morality had an appeal among the Hungarian "gentry", a term which was used somewhat differently in the Hungarian context, denoting the nobility that had turned into a middle class, a class in the original

sense of the term, striving to preserve its social prestige and status. Although the gentry held positions in the administration of the state, they did not always fare well in their social rivalry with the traditional urban bourgeoisie or the upwardly mobile new bourgeoisie – which prepared the ground for political anti-Semitism in the country. After the communist takeover the gentry were declared public enemy number one, and the middle-class mentality was to be combatted on all fronts. English cultural sympathies and social connections were regarded as a form of betrayal of the new regime. In 1956, many young people fled to Britain to escape the suppression of the revolution.

ANGLOPHILIA OF A STUDENT OF ENGLISH IN COMMUNIST HUNGARY

I had an opportunity to get acquainted with real English people when I spent a year in Oxford in 1987–1988, as a Soros Scholar. That year, which I spent as a visiting graduate at Oriel College, one of the oldest colleges of the university, turned out to be crucial in my own character formation. The life of the researcher seems to have fitted my own natural inclinations. Yet I could not have benefited from it, if this experience had not been preceded by five years' study at the faculty of humanities back in Budapest. To become a student of English and Hungarian language and literature was only made possible by the fact that as well as enrolling me in the grammar school's English class, my parents paid for private language tuition, and I also had the chance to take part in a language course in London at the age of 17. Apparently, my parents paid special attention to improving my English language skills. As English became one of my main subjects during my undergraduate and graduate studies, they thought they had prepared me also for emigration to an English-speaking country, where they expected I could live a freer life.

It was during my university years that English culture became crucial for me. Although I could not excel with my English among the children of diplomat parents, a new world opened up to me, one which I enjoyed a great deal, and

which allowed me to see beyond the world of communist rule in my home country. There was a kind of a poetry workshop at the English Department of Eötvös University, as many of my teachers there were poets themselves. They introduced to me the world of Shakespeare (at one point in my life I translated all his sonnets into Hungarian), the British Romantics (I wrote a play about Byron, Shelley and Keats in Italy). I picked up British conservatism at Oxford, when I started to study the thought of Edmund Burke, as part of my education in the history of English language political thought. I met with representatives of the 1956 generation of refugees, including the historian László Péter, at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, as well as Mátyás Sárközi at the BBC's Hungarian department, and Lóránt Czigány. I also found student life at Oriel quite impressive, including the rather delicately arranged self-governing body of the Middle Common Room. These were real lessons in politics for me, complemented both with my regular visits to the debates of the lower house of the British Parliament and giving interviews at the BBC. Whenever I went up to London, I visited the small charity bookshop behind St Paul's, from where you could take three books free of charge on each visit, if you showed your Hungarian passport. Another person I had the chance to meet at All Souls was Isaiah Berlin, who became a kind of a role model for me. My year at Oxford, followed somewhat later by half a year at Cambridge, as a visiting doctoral student with a joint fellowship to King's and Trinity, probably the two richest colleges of the university, committed me to English culture. These were the years of Margaret Thatcher, and we were very close to the year when the Iron Curtain fell, when Hungary along with the other countries of the Eastern bloc were liberated from Communist rule. A Soros Scholarship, as it turned out, was meant to prepare the new political elite for their future jobs. Some of the recipients of this grant became active politicians later, including the future Prime Minister of the country, Viktor Orbán, who was a classmate of my wife at the Law School in Budapest, which was still an ideological hotbed of the oppressive system in those years. Although I myself did not become a politician, I became engaged with the political thought of Britain. Having been brought up in a middle-class family in Communist Hungary made me

a lifelong opponent of Communism – both of my parents participated in the 1956 revolution, so anti-Communism was part of my family heritage. However, my own personal experiences of the English way of life during my university studies made me an advocate of British freedom – as well as the British form of moderate conservatism.

ANGLOPHILIA AS A SOURCE OF HISTORICAL LEGITIMACY AFTER THE REGIME CHANGE IN HUNGARY

To show how close I came to the workshops of the politics of the new era, I have to mention that two of my closest professors at university became leading politicians in the first, right-wing Christian Democratic government of free Hungary. One of them can be regarded as a crucial player in the Atlantic orientation of the Antall Government. Gyula Kodolányi taught me at the Department of Comparative Literature. He was himself a poet, and spoke English very well. I still remember a course he held in which we translated classical poems into Hungarian from a number of languages. His father-in-law was Gyula Illyés, one of the greatest names of 20th-century Hungarian poetry, and his uncle was János Kodolányi, another leading light in Hungarian literature, who participated in the opposition movement. I later heard an accusation that he reported to the communist secret service, although I have never seen any evidence to back it up. It was from him that I learnt that I can publish wherever I want, as long as I write what I really want to write. It was also he who wrote the letter of recommendation for my Soros Scholarship. As he had spent years in the US and had established the teaching of American Studies at Eötvös University, he became a state secretary and chief advisor on foreign affairs to József Antall, the first freely elected prime minister of Hungary after the regime change.

Kodolányi's self-perception of his own role, as foreign policy adviser to the PM, was that it paralleled the role of the editors of the *Magyar Szemle* (Hungarian Review) in the interwar period. The homepage of the journal describes this parallel thus:

In November 1992 a group of intellectuals launched the monthly *Magyar Szemle* (Hungarian Review), a non-partisan survey of politics, the economy, society, the arts and intellectual life. In choosing their title they paid homage to an earlier review under the same title which was forced to terminate publication in March 1944 when Nazi troops invaded Hungary. Under its great editors, historian Gyula Szekfű and literary historian Sándor Eckhardt, the earlier *Magyar Szemle* was the most distinguished forum of the best minds of Hungary, of the famous and the young, right and left, government experts and opposition critics, between the two wars.⁵

This reminder of the mission of the journal explicitly refers to “the active encouragement of the then Prime Minister, József Antall” of the relaunch of the journal, and mentions its Anglo orientation, claiming to “devote special attention to fostering the idea of European and transatlantic integration in Hungary”. Its editor-in-chief was Gyula Kodolányi from 1992–2017, and the present author was a member of its editorial board as well as director of the journal.

To confirm its Anglo-Saxon orientation, the founders of *Magyar Szemle* launched *Hungarian Review*, an English language twin of *Magyar Szemle*. The first issue out of this journal appeared in 2010, when the Fidesz party won a memorable two-thirds victory in the national elections. This English language journal was inspired by the *Hungarian Quarterly*, the English language periodical of the interwar period, which was established in 1934 by István Bethlen, who had earlier been PM of Hungary for ten years, between 1921–1931, with the explicit purpose “to introduce Hungary and Hungarian topics of interest to an Anglo-Saxon⁶ readership. Moreover, it would be an important tool to win over leading personalities in the English-speaking world.”⁷ Its editor was a talented man of letters and organiser, József Balogh (Blum), who also edited the *Magyar*

⁵ GRÓH 2018.

⁶ “Anglo-Saxon” in the vocabulary of the period meant “English-speaking”. Footnote by FRANK 2003: 70.

⁷ Memorandum, 3 July 1934. Manuscript Collection of the National Széchenyi Library, József Balogh Papers: Litterae Originales (Litt. Orig.) Fond I/1525. Quoted by FRANK 2003: 70.

Szemle and the *Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie*.⁸ One historian described Balogh thus: “Balogh, who combined the intellectual heritage of nineteenth-century liberalism with the actively anti-revolutionary attitude of the Horthy régime, had developed from a guardian of traditional values into an anti-German and anti-Nazi politician.”⁹ Bethlen himself had the most pronounced Anglophile orientation among the leading Hungarian statesmen of the interwar period.¹⁰ That this Anglophilia had a definite political meaning is underlined by Thomas Sakmyster, who argues that he “carefully nurtured this image of a responsible and moderate statesman by frequently affirming his respect and admiration for England”.¹¹ Tibor Frank quotes Bethlen writing in a letter to Archduke József Ferenc that “the Society of the Hungarian Quarterly aims not only at presenting Hungary in England, but – for the moment and in a modest way – it serves the purposes of Anglophile propaganda also in Hungary”.¹² This author also refers to Bethlen as an Anglophile: “Like so many of his contemporaries of similar social and political background in Hungary, [he] was an Anglophile.” Even the Regent (kormányzó) Miklós Horthy himself also had an Anglo orientation. Frank stresses that his whole reign would have been impossible without American backing: “If we accept Wittke’s view that ‘Czechoslovakia was «made in America»’ we could also go on and maintain that Admiral Horthy’s Kingdom of Hungary was conceived and kept alive to just about its demise with American help.”¹³ This might be a somewhat exaggerated claim, yet the fact is that Horthy maintained exceptionally friendly relationships with the representatives of that overseas power, and he enjoyed comparatively supportive coverage in the American press, where he was portrayed as the alternative to a Habsburg restoration in Hungary. Frank also demonstrates that Horthy had strong ties to Britain as well: “Admiral Miklós Horthy was tied with strong links to both the British and

⁸ FRANK 1993: 5–13; DEMETER 1999: 287–305.

⁹ FRANK 1999: 300.

¹⁰ ROMSICS 1995.

¹¹ SAKMYSTER 1978: 3–16.

¹² FRANK 2003: 78. Frank quotes from a letter by József Balogh to Count Kálmán Almásy, 12 September 1938. OSzK: Litt. Orig., Fond 1/45/262.

¹³ FRANK 1999.

the American elite.”¹⁴ According to Frank, Horthy may have actually hoped for a British victory, and counted on its political support, because he feared the Soviet Union very much.¹⁵ This hope was, of course, as it transpired, a mistaken one, but it tells us a lot about the best case scenario envisaged by Horthy and his regime, as well as the ultimate motivations of Hungarian Anglophiles. Some historians take Bethlen’s Anglo- and Francophile orientation as a lesson learnt from the history of Transylvania, from where his family originated, and where he had his first political experiences. Bethlen can also be regarded as a typical example of interwar Anglophilia, with its somewhat utopian zeal to convince the English public and the British political elite of the truth and justice of the Hungarian cause. Yet members of this Anglophile elite also had a powerful foreign policy point: when they preserved Britain as their political standard, they were rightly motivated by an opposition to the Nazi and Communist totalitarian threat. This interwar Anglophilia led to some genuine, albeit unsuccessful, political efforts during the war, to establish contact with the British Government and elite circles in Britain and manoeuvre the country’s fate through those connections towards a more promising future. All these efforts were basically rendered vain by the German occupation of the country in 1944.

CLASSICAL HUNGARIAN ANGLOPHILIA

I belong to a generation which had compulsory Russian lessons at school, as part of our ideological indoctrination. Learning English represented an alternative. Comparing the people studying or teaching at the English and the Russian Department of Budapest University, one could tell the difference, even if the then head of the English Department was an expert on Socialist Realist literature in England. Through the study of English the gates of Europe opened up for you: I was taken twice for study trips to Worcester College, England, the partner of Budapest University.

¹⁴ FRANK 2018: 176.

¹⁵ FRANK 2018: 11.

Yet it was my PhD which determined my scholarly path. After returning to Budapest from my year in Oxford, I started my doctoral studies at Budapest University with a scholarship from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, affiliated to Budapest University's Department of Moral and Social Philosophy (the concept of the PhD program was not yet known in Hungary). My supervisor was Mária Ludassy, a member of the "Lukács Kindergarten", but also an ardent and pedantic historian of philosophy, who published a collection by what she called the British Moralists. A crucial contact for me was István Hont, at King's, a major force of the second generation of the Cambridge historians of political thought. Although Hont and myself had very different perspectives on politics, we were able to work together very well. He initiated me into research on the history of early modern political thought, with special focus on Britain and its wider European and American context. This helped me to put my earlier research on Burke into context, and helped me to write my doctoral dissertation on the concept of moderation in the Scottish Enlightenment.¹⁶ In this vein I also edited a small volume of Hayek's essays on the Scottish Enlightenment, with explanatory remarks by John Gray.¹⁷ This latter project made me realise the proximity between the Austrian philosophical tradition and British conservatism.¹⁸ In Nyíri's account of Austrian philosophy, Count István Széchenyi and his father, Ferenc Széchenyi both played major roles, as key figures on the Hungarian side of this tradition. While Nyíri was clearly influenced by the author of the *Austrian Mind*, he established, together with Barry Smith and Rudolf Haller, a new philosophical paradigm, a special dialect of Continental Conservatism, which is not too different from the British prototype.¹⁹

Nyíri argues that István Széchenyi should better be understood as working within this Austrian tradition of moderate conservatism. I think that Nyíri

¹⁶ I published in Hungarian a selection of sources on this topic and an edited version of my thesis as HÖRCHER 1996. For a later overview of my findings, see my paper HÖRCHER 2016b: 5–23.

¹⁷ HÖRCHER 2002.

¹⁸ The work of Kristóf Nyíri has also proved very instructive for my understanding of the conservative relevance of Austrian philosophy. My own take on this relationship is exemplified by my early piece HÖRCHER 1995: 27–34.

¹⁹ JOHNSTON 1972.

makes an important point and it is indeed possible to interpret Széchenyi's life and work in this way. His interest in promoting a more lively public life, setting a personal example by his investments in the domestic economy and his support for Hungarian culture, advocating the liberation of the regulatory environment in economy and trade, while establishing and operating cultural institutions as a way to raise up his political community indeed resembles the ideas of some of the best minds of Austrian philosophy, including Friedrich Hayek. Yet I think that Count Széchenyi's Anglophilia was most importantly a family heritage.²⁰ It was his father, Ferenc Széchenyi, a member of the reform generation, who first supported the reforms of Joseph II and it was he who made a study trip to Britain, about which he published a detailed travelogue, partly written by himself and partly by his secretary, János Dániel Ribini.²¹ His impressions of Britain, where he also met some of the best minds of the Scottish Enlightenment, including Adam Smith, the philosopher and early economist, as well as William Robertson, the famous historian, had a lasting effect on his own thought. Surprisingly, despite being a Catholic, he visited the grave of David Hume, who was generally believed to be an atheist.²² Yet it was British industry, commerce and agriculture that made the most lasting impression on him, this may explain the similarity of his ideas to those of Edmund Burke, and why he prepared two plans for a new constitution, which reflected many of the ideas that he had learnt from the British constitution.²³

²⁰ This is something that also appears in Nyíri's account of Széchenyi's achievements. Also on early modern Hungarian Anglophilia, including that of the two Széchenyis, see FEST 1917.

²¹ See CSÁKY 1981. My own take on the relationship between father and son is summarised in HÖRCHER 2016a: 22–45.

²² There is a Latin language version of the travelogue, entitled *Descriptio itineraria seu peregrinationis C. Francisci Széchenyi, per Germaniam, Belgium, Galliam, Angliam et Scotiam, Anno 1787*. (Referred to by FEST 1917: 455.) Its location is unknown however. A German language summary is available under the title: *Reise Journal vom 23. Mai 1787 bis d. 16. Juli desselben Jahres, enthaltend die Reise von Wien über Prag, Dresden, Leipzig, Dessau, Berlin, Braunschweig, Hamburg, Hannover, Kassel, Wetzlar, Coblenz, Köln, Aachen, Spa*.

²³ "Ferenc Széchenyi reacted in a characteristically Burkean way to the phenomenon of the revolution, half a year before the publication of the Reflections." KONTLER 1990: 79. László Kontler's source is MARCZALI 1907: 83.

Széchenyi played a major role in the heated constitutional debates in the period following the death of Joseph II in 1790, and proposed major changes to the constitutional arrangements, along the lines of what he conceived of as the British constitution.²⁴ Later, when the Habsburgs retaliated against what they regarded as a Hungarian coup, the elder Széchenyi withdrew into civilian life, and became one of the most important founts of a Catholic spiritual and religious regeneration, inspired by Romantic medievalism.

The most important effect of his Anglophilia, however, was the lasting impact of his educational ideals on his son, Count István Széchenyi, probably the single most important protagonist in Hungarian Anglophilia. While most of the historical literature emphasised the conflict between father and son, Ambrus Miskolczy focused instead on the continuity between the two.²⁵ Fest had earlier pointed out that for the elder Széchenyi “the country’s political circumstances, constitution” was the most important, even if there are few references to it in the travelogue, chiefly to evade the censors.

Although his son, Count István Széchenyi, was for a long time less interested in politics, it was with an unprecedented gesture that he stepped onto the stage of Hungarian politics: in 1825 he proposed to establish the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and offered a year’s income from his estates to finance the project. With that noble act he embarked on an exceptional career as the great reformer of his country, most importantly as an innovative founder of social and economic institutions for the public benefit. He travelled to Britain five times, first going shortly after the end of the Napoleonic war, in 1815. From his extant diaries an English translation has been published of his account of travels in the British Isles in 1832 and 1834.²⁶ As early as 1815 he had become fascinated by the constitutional traditions of the country: “There are only three things in England that in my opinion one has to learn, and all the others are nothing: the constitution, the machines, and horse breeding.”²⁷

²⁴ On this see CONCHA 1885.

²⁵ See most recently MISKOLCZY 2019.

²⁶ VÁCI 2021.

²⁷ On 13 December 1815. VISZOTA 1925: 167.

Like most other Hungarian travellers to Britain of his day, István Széchenyi was an admirer of the constitutional tradition of Britain. However, the absolutist nature of Habsburg rule under Francis I prevented him from becoming involved in constitutional planning. The great idea which made Széchenyi so influential as the initiator of the reform era in 19th-century Hungary was that the country's economy and social structures required smoothly executed but profound changes. Unlike his father, who spent some time in state service, as part of the Habsburg administration, István Széchenyi drew upon his own personal reserves as one of the country's pre-eminent landowners, as well as making use of his talents as one of the most enlightened and broad-minded members of the country's aristocratic elite. He realised that the global success of England was due to its innovations in economy, including an agricultural sector relying on cutting-edge technology, increasingly vigorous industrial production, vibrant trading activity, along with its dynamic social life, whose leading figures were engaged both in cultural sponsorship and philanthropic activity. He also realised that as the son of the founder of a national museum and a national library, he was expected to set a good example for his fellow citizens to follow. The success of his public donation for the establishment of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences led him to initiate further public ventures. He saw that the thriving civil life of Britain depended on the dynamic nature of social relations. In this vein he established the National Casino, a place of gathering for a new social, business and cultural elite, the members of which were all interested in invigorating both horizontal and vertical social ties. He was aware of the responsibility and the interest of the landowning class in starting industrial production. He found Austrian partners to start a ship building industrial enterprise. However, he also recognised that the legislative environment was not conducive to these initiatives – he therefore published an influential socio-political pamphlet, the book entitled *Credit*. In it he argued that both his own class, the aristocracy, and the lesser nobility must make sacrifices to invigorate the blood circulation of the country. The most important aspect of this was the need to give up the privileged institution of entail, and to take on the burden of public taxation. Széchenyi also had a keen interest in transport and communication and he realised that

the English success depended on trade routes as well as innovations in the field of transport. Széchenyi himself became involved in the development of rail and ship transport using steam engine technology. In a land-locked country like Hungary waterborne cargo transport had to rely on the River Danube and Lake Balaton. Széchenyi was the primary motor behind the building of the first stone-bridge over the Danube, connecting Pest with Buda, and through it, the two halves of the country, a move which also had a symbolic meaning. The major cinematic epic about his life was entitled *Hidember* (The Bridgeman), directed by Géza Bereményi in 2002. The reason Széchenyi has always captured the public imagination is partly due to his own cultural activity and his support of writers and actors. Having published a discussion paper on a theatre that would put on drama in the national language, he played an integral role in championing the cause of the national theatre and making it a success. By 1837 the first National Theatre was ready to open its gates in Pest.

Importantly, Széchenyi was aware that the preservation of social peace was a key to Hungary becoming a prosperous country. No doubt, he must have heard of the class compromises which had facilitated the success of the British, while social unrest hindered economic development in revolutionary and post-revolutionary France. In this as in much else, including the future of the political elites' relationship to the monarch, he proposed to take the British way, a sort of moderate social progressivism combined with a cautious political and institutional conservatism, based on trust and mutual social credit. Unfortunately, he was only able to hold the reins of political leadership in his hands for a short while. The younger generation was fired up by the parliamentary speeches and political journalism of the talented orator and political innovator, Lajos Kossuth. The radicalisation of the Hungarian elite and the short-sighted policies of the Habsburgs led to a war of independence and to the Declaration of Independence.²⁸

²⁸ For a reconstruction of the great moment of Lajos Kossuth's career and his breakthrough in persuading the Habsburgs to accept what came to be called the April Laws, in March 1848, when he still defended a lawful revolution, see DEÁK 2001 as well as HÖRCHER 2019: 91–120.

Vienna's retaliation against the rebellious Hungarians was swift and brutal. It was only after long years of absolutist rule and a process of negotiations between the Vienna court and the country that the conservative cause finally gained the upper hand, resulting in the Settlement of 1867, between Franz Joseph, in his capacity as the king of Hungary, on the one side, and Ferenc Deák, the sage of the country. Deák was a skilful lawyer and a tactical negotiator, and due to the rise of Prussia, Vienna realised it was incumbent on it to pacify the Hungarians. As a result, the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy was born. Some of the later historical evaluations of this period, including that by István Bibó, claim that this was a mistaken compromise by the Hungarians, which gave up the country's independence and autonomy, eventually leading to defeat in the First World War and the dissolution of the Kingdom of Hungary, as a result of the fatal Treaty of Trianon in 1920.²⁹ Other works, including the detailed studies by László Péter, convincingly argue that it was in fact a rather clever move on the part of both elites, leading to a half century of peace during which Hungary flourished economically and culturally, like never before or since.³⁰ This issue became and has remained a never-ending historiographic debate ever since.

ANGLOPHILIA IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD AND BEYOND

Anglophilia once again became crucial in the interwar period, when Hungary was dominated by the political regime controlled by the Admiral-Regent, Miklós Horthy. As mentioned earlier, Horthy himself was open to developing the Anglo-American connection. However, the Treaty of Trianon and the failure to come to terms with it in the collective memory of the nation were to historically determine the immediate future of the country. Revisionism became the single biggest issue of Hungarian politics, which led inevitably to an official alliance with the Germans, because the Hungarian elite could only

²⁹ BIBÓ 2015: 199–232.

³⁰ PÉTER 2012: 213–280.

hope for the return of the lost territories from them. Yet after 1933 this was to be a fatal direction, resulting in the Holocaust, and Anglophiles in Hungary served to draw attention to this fact in a country which had a significant Jewish population. It was in this context that Prime Minister Bethlen's Anglophilia is to be interpreted. The circle of the *Magyar Szemle* (Hungarian Review) gave voice to this alternative political direction and packaged it into a new cultural orientation. Its chief ideologue, Gyula Szekfű was one of the most prestigious historians of the age.³¹ He chose to take a path that was deliberately different from the mainstream nationalist tone of Hungarian history-writing: he wanted to show the advantages of the Habsburg influence in the country's troubled past. His grand narrative was a critical take on the achievements of the post 1848 generations of the Hungarian political and cultural elite. The narrative had a pronounced anti-Semitic overtone, even if he made every effort to criticise recent Hungarian politics, as exemplified by his term "Neo-Baroque society". By this term he meant to ridicule an ahistorical, nostalgic return to a past which never existed, in the political symbolism of the age.³²

Szekfű did, however, make a valid point: he made Széchenyi the hero of his grand narrative, presenting him as the major political force pushing the country towards "Westernisation", as opposed to the agenda of national independence, propagated by Kossuth and his followers. While in the mainstream of Hungarian history-writing Kossuth was considered to have taken the right direction, Szekfű and his undeclared but quite influential post-1945 followers, including László Péter in London, and Domokos Kosáry in Hungary, presented Széchenyi as having made the better historical choice by stressing social, economic and cultural progress (*haladás*) instead of simply the independence of the land (*haza*). Professors Péter and Kosáry had problems with the mainstream nationalist agenda for different reasons. Professor Péter was a participant in the 1956 revolution, after which he was forced to leave the country. At the School of Slavonic and East European Studies he tried to reconstruct the grand narrative of Hungarian history, from St. Stephen's coronation, through the

³¹ DÉNES 2015.

³² SZEKFŰ 1920. A later edition was published in 1934, following up events to his own days.

Golden Bull and the Tripartitum of Werbőczy, through the famous Pragmatica Sanctio and the April Laws, up to Trianon and the end of the unwritten constitution with the introduction of Act I on the President of the Republic, in 1946. He did this as a criticism not only of the mainstream nationalist narrative (eloquently defended by György Szabad), but also as a criticism of the official history-writing of Communist Hungary. Domokos Kosáry, on the other hand, made use of the political thaw after the deep freeze of the Stalinist period in the country, when the ideology mongers of the Hungarian Communist Party proposed to turn away from the nationalist discourse in any way possible. From a post-1990 perspective, the efforts of László Péter and Domokos Kosáry point more or less in the same direction, while the artificial opposition created and sustained so long between nationalists and Westernisers has turned out to be a futile and in fact misguided opposition.

CONCLUSION, OR CAN ANGLOPHILIA SURVIVE THE DECLINE OF OLD ENGLAND

For a long time, Anglophilia was viewed in Central Europe as a form of illusionary historical construction, which had nothing to offer but a false consciousness. Both historians and political scientists alike were anxious to reveal the inadequacies of these sorts of reconstructions, pointing out that personal connections could very rarely substantiate real historical influences, and that apparently similar events, documents or institutions were in fact quite different, when interpreted correctly, without the wishful thinking of the interpreter, and without giving in to anachronism. Anglophilia could never be a real alternative in this part of the world, as Central Europe was geopolitically too far away from Britain to benefit from a direct historical, political or cultural influence.

This paper has showed that there is another way to make sense of Anglophilia in Central Europe. Instead of interpreting it as a well-defined regime or an explicit cultural standard, it can be regarded as a particular political philosophy that is embodied in certain ways of life and styles of behaviour. This embodied

philosophy is deduced from centuries of British political culture, but it is not confined to that specific cultural environment. It is an abstraction from the achievements of that political culture, a form of condensed experience, translated into an idealised way of life, with certain manners and manières, and a particular posture, that of the gentleman. These principles, embedded into practical virtues, were firmly rooted in the Western Graeco-Roman and Judeo-Christian tradition, but were first condensed and crystallised in the British context. In Central Europe they served specific political and cultural aims. In the modern era it encouraged developments in business, economy, social life and cultural affinities. It increasingly emphasised the importance of the institutional guarantees of a rule of law system. Most importantly, it encouraged opposition against both the left-wing and the right-wing variants of 20th-century totalitarianism, namely Communism, Fascism and Nazism. It is not by chance that both regimes not only regarded Anglophilia with suspicion, but outright persecuted its proponents as followers of a political orientation and political attitude that they considered to be explicitly hostile to them. It is not difficult to imagine that Anglophilia might have benevolent effects in the post-1990 context as well, by way of providing a framework that can serve as a benchmark for the political system of a particular Central European political community and its elite, regardless of the British political scene at the time.

Beyond this normative point, conservative political philosophy can learn a great deal from Anglophilia. Let us recall three points already touched upon in the introduction.

1. Principles versus a certain way of life. While philosophy usually finds expression in well-defined concepts, principles and theses, and political philosophy should be no exception, conservatism is based on the assumption that politics does not allow well-defined concepts, principles and theses. Instead, it relies on practical wisdom, a certain manner of managing political affairs and on what can be termed the confines of a way of life. It means that the most precious treasure of Old England is not a particular regime of institutional arrangement, but the preservation of a way of life, which embodies the most important traditional values and virtues.

2. If the above claim is valid, Anglophilia is first of all a cultural phenomenon, the admiration of a certain manner of life, and not primarily the defence of a certain constitutional framework or jurisprudential paradigm. If we accept that Anglophilia is first of all a cultural matter, this does not preclude political consequences. Anglophilia helps us to accept the fact that culture is upstream from politics, which means that cultural matters determine what is possible in politics in one's own country. When attention is paid to soft power, it is due to the fact that through it, external powers can influence the way of thought of your own particular community. Moreover, as John Lukacs kept emphasising, your mental landscape will determine your actual political *pouvoir*.
3. This brings us to the most pertinent question: if points 1 and 2 are true, the question is how can conservatism and its external manifestation, Anglophilia survive the decline of Old England? Roger Scruton was rather pessimistic about the prospects of English culture in his book entitled *England. An Elegy* (2001). As he saw it, the most characteristic ways of English life were indeed declining, which meant that the country's future was hopeless. In another book he reflected upon the *Uses of Pessimism*. However, in books like *News from Somewhere. On Settling* (2004) he once again proved to be dedicated to defending the traditional manners of handling human and natural affairs. If culture determines politics, and culture is what we – who are not professional politicians – do most of the time when we are together, then it is up to us to decide whether the traditional ways will find defenders or not.

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