

THE FAITHFUL KNIGHT OF THE KING WITH NO KINGDOM. THE CASE OF LÁSZLÓ ALMÁSY. (THE ENGLISH PATIENT

György Csepeli^{1*}

¹ Author affiliation: Faculty of Social Sciences, ELTE, Budapest, Hungary

* Correspondent author: György Csepeli – csepeli.gyorgy@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The paper will present the sociological and psychological complexities behind the encounter of Charles, last Emperor and King of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and his young admirer, László Almásy at Easter, 1921. The King, withdrawing from power in 1918, and the young man Almásy met in the palace of the Bishop of Szombathely in 1921 in the night hours of Great Saturday. The following morning the King was to make a journey to Budapest to meet Miklós Horthy, Regent of Hungary, whom he had made Admiral three years before. Almásy was the driver of the car bringing the King to Budapest. Horthy and the King met in the Royal Castle of Buda where Charles had been coronated as King of Hungary in December 1917. The Admiral was unwilling to transfer the power and sent the King back immediately. Almásy had become the knight of the king involuntarily but, as it will be demonstrated, his role in the attempted coup d'état of the King was far from being accidental. Michael Ondaatje published a novel in 1992 entitled *The English Patient*. Based on the novel, Anthony Minghella directed a romantic war drama film of the same title in 1996. The character named as the "English Patient" was the Hungarian driver of Charles IV attempting to get his throne back in 1921. The real Almásy, however, had a much more romantic life than his fictitious counterpart.

Keywords: illusion, speech act, conflict, symbolic space, reality

At Easter, 1921 a surprise guest showed up during the Great Saturday Dinner given by the bishop of Szombathely, János Mikes. According to the vivid description of the bishop's niece, the guests "were sitting at the dinner table when the butler asked the bishop to follow him downstairs, as guests had arrived who wished to speak to him. Then Laci Almásy came to the table, and after whispering something in his ear, he asked the bishop to go downstairs. My uncle then got up and followed Laci. He saw a man sitting in an open car, disguised by the automobilist's driving helmet and dark glasses or goggles. He got a shock when this person took the goggles off. He recognized this man as his king." (Bierman, 2004, p. 25).

The king and his host did not sleep that night. The bishop alerted the prime minister, Pál Teleki, who was on the nearby estate of Antal Sigray and already arrived at the episcopal palace with Sigray at four in the morning. They were joined by Mikes' guest, József Vass, Minister of Religion and Public Education, who was performing his Easter spiritual practice in Szombathely as a priest. The king stated that he wanted to go to Budapest immediately, where he would call on Regent Horthy to hand over power to him. He just asked what those present thought he should give Horthy as a reward after the governor has handed over power to him.

Bishop Mikes provided the king with his car and his intimate secretary, László Almásy, who drove the car the next day bringing the king to Budapest to meet the Regent at the Buda Royal Castle, the last commander of the navy of the Monarchy, whom he had appointed. In the meantime, another car left Szombathely, on which Prime Minister Pál Teleki was travelling. He promised that as soon as he arrived in Budapest, he would warn Horthy of the king's expected arrival. The king was sure that his faithful admiral would hand over power, and he would remain there in the Castle, beginning his reign in the small country that remained of the part of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy known as Hungary.

However, Teleki's driver did not know Western Hungary. The driver of the car transporting Teleki got lost, which is why the Prime Minister arrived in Budapest much later than Charles. Consequently, Horthy had no idea of the uninvited guest, who, upon arrival, parked the car in front of the Prime Minister's Palace. The king changed clothes and then walked a few hundred meters from the prime minister's office to the royal palace, where Governor Horthy lived at that time. Along the way, he recalled his magnificent coronation three years before when he went down the same road, in the morning, from the palace to the coronation church, at noon from the coronation church back to the palace, but then he was sitting in a six-horse carriage with the freshly crowned queen and the cute Prince Ottó (Csepeli, 2017). The king's visit was a complete failure. Horthy did not hand over power to him. Almásy and the king returned to the episcopal palace in Szombathely empty-handed. On the way, he had had a cold in the open car, so a week passed before he finally left the country at the urging of the government. His chauffeur escorted the king to the border and they never met again.

László Almásy was born on August 22, 1895, not far from Szombathely, in the castle called Borostyánkő, bought by his grandfather. After the victorious powers in the First World War cut up the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the castle found itself on the territory of the newly established Republic of Austria. The winners took great care to ensure that there was no consensus between the newly formed and already established states sharing the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. According to the well-established principle of "divide et impera", the borders of the Kingdom of Hungary, established on the half of the defeated Austro-Hungarian Monarchy called Hungary, and the neighboring Republic of Austria were drawn by the victors so as to give the new Austrian state a territorial strip in western Hungary. The area was creatively called Burgenland by the Austrians, a name no one had ever known before.

Almásy attended grammar school in Kőszeg, adjacent to Borostyánkő, when the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy still existed. The Benedictine monks teaching in his school could hardly handle the unstoppable, undisciplined boy, who was already then interested only in cars and planes. However, the once bad student became a good soldier. He served as a hussar on the Russian front and as a pilot on the Italian front. His merits were recognized by the ruler with Silver and Bronze degree knights medals and the Charles troop cross.

The young soldier and the bishop, 20 years older, met still during the war. The bishop set up a hospital in his castle in Répceszentgyörgy. It was in this hospital that János Almásy, László's brother, who was seriously wounded on the front, was being cared for. The two men soon got to like each other. By the time the war ended, Almásy had become the bishop's secretary and moved into the episcopal palace.

Confused times came by. On October 31, 1918, Charles IV appointed Mihály Károlyi as his Hungarian Prime Minister. Two weeks later, at the Eckartsau castle near Vienna, the king made a statement announcing that he withdrew from state affairs and acknowledged the decision of Hungary to establish its future form of government. However, the king was well aware that political action was effected by words, and until he uttered the words "I renounce," he was bound by his ruling oath, which also had words as the means of act (Austin, 1962). When he signed a similar statement two days earlier under pressure from representatives of the Austrian government, Queen Zita, insulted, stated that "a ruler can never resign! Never!" (Speidl, 2012, p.16). The royal couple soon fled from Eckartsau to Switzerland. They could not hope to return to the Austrian throne but they did not give up the hope of returning to the Hungarian throne.

As a result of the declaration signed at Eckartsau Castle, Mihály Károlyi proclaimed the Hungarian People's Republic on November 16, 1918, of which he became the first prime minister and later president. However, the new form of state did not bring a solution to the major issue facing Hungary, which had become independent after the end of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The major issue facing Hungary resulted from the fact that no one outside the Hungarian government thought that Hungary, which had broken away from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, had the same territory as it had had when being part of the Monarchy. To emphasize the independence of the Hungarian government, Károlyi called a special truce on 13 November 1918 with the victors in Belgrade, which established demarcation lines separating the country in the south and east, leaving the Hungarian administration untouched in the occupied territories. However, the text of the truce remained a dead letter (Ormos, 2020). The advancing Romanian and Serbian armies were never in the business of respecting the demarcation lines, they moved forward smoothly in Transylvania and Vojvodina. The army of the newly created Czechoslovak state occupied northern Hungary. On March 21, 1919, Károlyi's People's Republic collapsed under the political, economic and, last but not least, social psychological burdens caused by the territorial losses.

A new, radical, socialist system came to power that could only last four months. The socialist system relentlessly confronted everyone in whom it saw an obstacle to achieving its utopian goals. Bishop Mikes was arrested and imprisoned in Budapest. From there he fled back to Szombathely. By the time his persecutors could have recaptured him, the system of red terror had failed. To retain the power of the Christian-national system, which defined itself as a counter-revolution against democratic and socialist revolutions, it also initially resorted to the means of terror (Bodo, 2019, Müller-Takács and Tulip, 2019).

The perpetrators of the terrorist acts of the proletarian revolution and the Christian-national counter-revolution both escaped from the psychological conflicts caused by the sins, murders, torture, and robberies they committed with metaphysical justification. The excuse for the red terror was "the liberation of mankind," and, as Marx taught, "breaking the blind power of economic forces and" the creation of "power under human dignity". The perpetrators of the murders committed during the white terror were released in the name of "the Hungarian race and national idea".

The turbulent times were still going on when parliamentary elections were held in 1920 in the areas of the country dominated by the counter-revolutionary government. The new parliament annulled the proclamation of the People's Republic and restored the kingdom. However, the decision to restore the kingdom said nothing about the king. Miklós Horthy became the regent of the kingdom. The government signed the peace treaty in the same year, according to which the new Hungarian state, carved out of the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, received new borders. The area of Hungary, determined by the new borders, was reduced to one-third of its previous area. A significant number of Hungarian minorities remained in the newly formed Czechoslovakia and the already existing but enlarged Romania. Austria was not left out of the ranks of the beneficiaries either.

The king, who had fled to Switzerland, may have believed that the space had been opened to him by the restoration of the kingdom and that he could continue his reign, faithful to the oath of his rule on December 30, 1916, which he was forced to interrupt in November 1918. The coronation show was alive in his memory, but he did not realize that the Kingdom of Hungary, of which he became king, was a fiction from the point of view of international law, as it had existed only within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The rules constituted by the rituals of the coronation in 1916 were no longer in force.

The attraction of the royal role constructed by the coronation show, however, was strong enough for the king to attempt to realize fiction despite the changed circumstances (Ormos, 1990). In the spirit of the realization of fiction, the drama took place in 1920 between Charles IV and Miklós Horthy, in the first act of which Almásy played an episodic role in. The second act took place in October of the same year. On October 20, the king returned to Hungary with the queen, this time by plane. The plane landed on a meadow near Szombathely. The royal couple went to Sopron the next day, and from there they went to Budapest by train with a small army. The Sopron-Budapest journey, which lasted for a few hours under normal conditions, was protracted due to greetings, parades and masses, leaving time for the regent to stop the train on which the king and queen were travelling by military force. The failure was final this time. The National Assembly declared deprivation of the throne and the royal couple was forced into exile on the island of Madeira. There the king died of Spanish catarrh the following year. Horthy sent a huge mourning wreath for the mourning Mass, which was held in memory of the deceased king in the church in Buda Castle, where Charles was crowned in late 1916.

László Almásy, later continually enjoying Bishop Mikes' support, lived an independent, adventurous and exciting life, the main scene of which was Africa. Few people knew the desert as well as he did. Not surprisingly, when in September 1940 fighting began on the African front of World War II between the Italians and then the Germans, who were in a hurry to help them, and the British, both sides demanded Almásy's knowledge. Fighting on the African front ended in May 1943. In a novel form, this period of Almásy's life was processed in Ondaatje's novel, and the great film made from it is *The English Patient*. On the African front the British won, the German-Italian forces were defeated. Almásy returned home to Hungary.

Witnessing his years in Budapest, Ralph Brewster, a young man of Italian citizenship and of British and American descent stuck in Hungary, who, fleeing from Mussolini and immersing himself in the world of the gays of Budapest, was waiting for the end of the war. Brewster knew well, what Almásy's biographers shamefully kept secret, that the daring researcher's love interest was limited to young boys. Perhaps, deceiving himself as well, in his letters to Bishop János Mikes he speaks of his constantly failed marriage plans (Nemes, 2018. 214.)

Brewster wrote an incomparably interesting book about his years in Hungary, one of the chapters of which is about Almásy. In this chapter, he tells Brewster about his encounter with Almásy's love, Hans Eintholt, which took place in the summer of 1936 on the country road from Salzburg. Almásy was on his way from Salzburg to his birthplace, Borostyánkő, when he saw a handsome hitchhiking boy on the side of the country road. In the car, they mingled in a conversation about how the two of them felt in Salzburg. The boy said he had been lying on the river bank the day before, looking at the blue sky where a glider was circling. He really wanted to be the pilot of the glider. And it was then revealed that the pilot of the glider was the one who picked up the hitchhiker in his car (Brewster, 2018).

A passionate love developed between the two of them, as evidenced by the letters kept in the Borostyánkő Castle (Bierman, 2004.132). When Almásy left Libya in 1942, Eintholt remained there and lost his life in the battle of El-Alameini. At the end of 1944, Almásy behaved boldly in Budapest during the Arrow Cross terror. In two demonstrable cases he hid Jews, saving them from certain destruction. After the war, he was arrested on suspicion of war crimes, and only with the intervention of Mátyás Rákosi did he escape certain death. The accusation was based on one of Almásy's books. At the time the book was published, in 1943, it seemed a good idea for the publisher to publish the book entitled "At Rommel's Army in Libya". However, this title fell back in a deadly manner in 1945.

The escape of the accused can be explained by the "small world" phenomenon known from network theory (Travers and Milgram, 1969). Almásy knew the world-famous Eastern researcher, Gyula Germanus, who was willing to testify alongside the accused, stating that there was nothing in the accused book to prove the author's alleged war crimes. Otherwise, the prosecutor and the judge had not even read the book. Mátyás Rákosi had been Gyula Germanus' favorite student in 1911 and 1912 at the Oriental Academy. Germanus spoke to Rákosi, who called the judge on the phone and that was enough for the acquittal.

However, the persecution did not end. The NKVD also noticed Almásy, who eventually escaped to Cairo with the help of the British secret service. There, King Faruk appointed him director of the Desert Research Institute, but he could not take office because he died in March 1951.

The drama in which Almásy played an episodic role had two actors. It took place between Charles IV and Miklós Horthy. In the symbolic space, there was no conflict between the two protagonists. The fact of the coronation was not denied by Horthy either. However, the consensual symbolic space obscured the real conflict that stemmed from fundamental political changes that had taken place in the period since the coronation. From among the independent small states established on the site of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Hungary was the only one on which the Monarchy cast a long shadow. The Kingdom of Hungary, established by the Treaty of Trianon, was born in a semantic confusion, to which the elite of the counter-revolutionary system that came to power reacted in two different ways. For those who vividly remembered the coronation show, there was no doubt that Charles IV was the legitimate king of the Kingdom of Hungary. In a legitimate reading, the Kingdom of Hungary, left alone by the king who withdrew from state affairs in October 1918, was the same as the Kingdom of Hungary, which signed the Treaty of Trianon. The name was really the same, but the state was different. However, the difference was obscured by the names that were identical. It was a peculiarity that during Charles IV's second attempt to return, the troops fighting alongside the

king in the battle of Budaörs fought with students addressed on behalf of the "Hungarian royal government".

The opponents of the legitimists were the free king electors, who, however, could not agree on who could be the king. For 400 years, Hungary, as part of the Habsburg Empire, had had no chance to have the king of its own choice. The wars of independence against the Habsburgs one after the other ended with the defeat of the Hungarians. If the free royalists had found a candidate, it could have been an easy task for that person, reviving anti-Habsburg memories. But there was no such candidate.

The laughing third was Miklós Horthy, who was elected regent by the National Assembly on 1 March 1920, with the blessing given by the entente. Legitimists believed that Horthy, as a former commander of Charles IV's former fleet, will not stand in the way of his ruler if he wants to occupy the throne. Horthy also qualified for free king electors as a temporary solution. The temporary period lasted 24 years. Horthy was forced to resign on October 16, 1944. His successor, as the "Leader of the Nation," headed the Kingdom of Hungary for a few months, which was abolished on 1 February 1946 by the National Assembly democratically elected on 5 November 1945.

Living in the fictional kingdom of Charles IV and then his heir Otto I's, legitimists remained spiritually independent in the kingdom without a king and in the far-right and far-left dictatorships that followed. The leader of the legitimists, Antal Sigray, was deported to Mauthausen in 1944 by the Germans. Freed from there, he did not return to Hungary. Those who stayed at home and escaped the German occupation, as Charles IV's biographer, the sharply anti-German Iván Lajos, were taken to the Gulag, from where there was no escape.

Spiritual independence was not needed in the new Hungary.

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