

SQUEEZING KULAKS – THE HISTORY OF A STORY

Mariann DÓSA

Student, Corvinus University of Budapest
H-1093 Budapest, Fővám tér 8.; e-mail: mariann.dosa@gmail.com

Závada Pál: *Kulákprés*. [Squeezing Kulaks.] Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 2006.

The third most recent edition of Pál Závada's first work was published which contains a surprisingly large quantity of extraordinary things. It is not simply the first book of the author, but the only one of an expressly sociographic character. And what is even more interesting is the history of the three editions that have appeared so far. For it is not simply reediting and formal alterations, modernisation, but the book has undergone a real transubstantiation.

The history of the birth of *Squeezing Kulaks* is very interesting in itself. In his twenties Pál Závada, rummaging at the loft of their family home at Tótkomlós, found letters, photographs and other documents that had soon encouraged him to start writing. He did not want to write simply the history of his family, but presented the history, lifestyle and difficulties of peasant society from the end of World War II up to the changes provoked by the 1956 revolution through the community of his native village. The first edition was published in 1986, with the subtitle of "Documents and Commentaries to the History of a Peasant Farm" by the Institute for Cultural Research. What is most interesting about it is that at that stage the author did not undertake stating that he was actually processing the history of his own family, therefore he presented the events as the life of a "peasant family of Tótkomlós", of the fictitious Rolniks. He argued saying that he would lose credibility in the eyes of his readers if his direct involvement were revealed, and he also felt that it would be truly difficult to preserve objectivity if he used his own family name. The second edition of the book was published in 1991 by Kossuth Publishing House, but already as expressly the history of the Závada family. The author disclosed the formerly applied pious fraud and also gave arguments for it. In comparison the third edition by Magvető Press in 2006 has brought about far less essential changes, and here one may meet mostly formal and technical innovations.

The contents and essential message of the book are naturally identical in all the three editions. After a brief presentation of the history of the village and the family he outlines the conditions between 1945 and 1949 in the first part. He describes the articulation of the peasant society, its differences in income, the resettlements from and into the village that had a major impact at a later stage, he presents peasant work and way of life, as well as the burdens on the members of the rural community, taxes and compulsory delivery obtaining an important role at a later stage. The second part comprises the period between 1949 and 1953. The lists of kulaks were introduced by

the Party at that time, and highly violent activities were launched when the delivery was collected. The mostly unfounded accusations began, the leadership attempted to fully sweat the peasantry by invented reasons. The family was also confronted with huge demands they were ever less able to comply with, and soon they were totally unable to do so. It was from that time on that they started to receive appeals and warrants, and members of the family were condemned to actual imprisonment on three occasions. Thus the family was slowly ruined; finally they lost their livelihood and existence. What is extraordinary of this part is that it records the vivid correspondence of family members distantly located by military service as well as imprisonment. The third and final part presents the events and changes during the period between 1953 and 1956. The winds of change hit also the peasantry of Tótkomlós, but hopes were soon thwarted. Their conditions somewhat improved but that was not enough to save the peasant society from its final sinking. The book ends with a highly pessimistic message. It envisions the disappearance of the entire peasant form of existence and society out of the ruins of a peasant farm, but it should be admitted that the author was not really wrong...

The biggest differences are clearly between the first and the second editions. The author is not silent about it either, for he published the 1991 variant with a new subtitle (*A Sociography of Family and Village History – Tótkomlós 1945–1956*). Here I would not dwell upon the name of the family in focus and on the related obvious modifications deriving from the alteration of the basic situation. These changes are handled perfectly smoothly by the author himself. Obviously, however, it is also due to this modification that he had largely reworked his writing during the five years passed between the two editions. Hence the content does not change essentially (though he had rewritten and extended the text as well), but the structure and form all the more so. The triple articulation is retained, but the book is arranged under different subtitles that agree with the arrangement in the first variant only in a few cases. He puts some parts earlier and others later; and the triple articulation of the first version is changed into a two-tier one.

It is an essential change, however, that instead of describing the techniques of the operation of the authority regulated by orders the author rather focuses on the figures of his story, bringing the family much closer to the reader. Similarly major changes have affected the form of the book. Today the typed text of the 1986 edition is somewhat smiled upon. In addition photographs are very much felt to be missing in comparison to the later editions. The subsequent editions are full of photographs presenting Tótkomlós and its community as well as the family, making the book not only colorful and impressive, but bring the Závada family into the immediate proximity of the reader. The various documents and letters already had a major role in the first edition. Understandably they could be incorporated into the book as continuous parts of the main text and typed into it. This may be somewhat disturbing today, for it is difficult to separate the incorporated documents from the main narrative. Separation is not always clear even in this arrangement. In the two subsequent editions naturally the original documents are included, and often even the letters were printed in their original in the text. Hence articulation becomes mostly clear, but in some cases it is still embarrassing as the text embraces the letters and documents included,

therefore sometimes it is difficult to see which passage belongs to the specific part of content and which does not. In this respect it is the 2006 edition that is best arranged. Here the typed letters are separated from the main text by lines and headers, and the documents are also better separated from the essential text by their original, 'attached' nature. These minor changes and modernizations greatly facilitate the reader's orientation. The Appendix of the book contains (typed, in descriptive style) the various laws and decrees of the period on taxation and delivery, quoting the exact acts and articles. The Supplements contain the various appeals, the aggregated results of production, the stock of utensils, receipts, etc. The Notes contain the list of references and literature used. Interestingly this part is formally clearer than the Notes of the subsequent two editions. For here the author presents the sources in the form of an actual list, sketchily, with numbering, whereas he enumerates them almost textually, continually, articulated in paragraphs in the next to editions (and particularly in the most recent one).

The reader may find far less differences between the 1991 and the 2006 editions. The photographs and documents originally used were lost during the publishing procedure at the time of the chaos of the change of the system; therefore the author had to alter his work (despite his original ideas) for the new edition. These alterations did not at all affect the main body of the text (only the editor revised it), but clearly the lost documents had to be supplemented by others. He could acquire some photographs once again from relatives, from family albums, but he received a lot of photos also from the Digital Photo Archives of the Association for the Urban Protection of Tótkomlós. There are far fewer photos illustrating concrete actions (house searches, violent acts) than in the 1991 edition, instead the author applied the technique of 'slow approach', rather trying to describe the situations and events. Similarly to the previous edition these are supplied with commentaries in italics, placed under or juxtaposed to the photos. The Postscript presents the 'subsequent' life of the village and the family after 1956 in all the three cases, but the Závada family is accorded a far more emphatic role in the two latter editions.

All in all, the reader may be enriched not only by a still highly valuable and important sociography but also by a rather interesting momentum of literary history (or even technical history). And last but not the least it is very interesting to read Pál Závada's first, expressly sociographic work after his three literary pieces.