

Laudation

on the occasion of bestowing the
JUSTITIA REGNORUM FUNDAMENTUM AWARD

on

GÁBOR KARÁTSON,

a man of words, thoughts, visions and actions.

“The mystery of life must not be touched in unholy way by human hand.” In a nutshell this could be the summary of an active, eventful life and work of an intensely creative, restless inquiring mind – to the present generation, for the things to come. As the act on press of Ferenc Deák (the “wise man” of Hungary, statesman, minister of justice in the 19th century) would be one laconic sentence (“One should not lie”), Gábor Karátson also created in this way the optimal conservation law. And of course, like Deák, he is well aware of the fact that to enforce it in today’s world the intellectual, but especially the moral foundations are missing. As he bitterly concludes: “in accordance with the generally declared political principles, some environmental protection is needed. In theory it should be excessive; practically it is nothing.” And how did we end up here? From the writings of Gábor Karátson one can gain a clear picture about the causes of formation of the ecological crisis that threatens the very existence of mankind already; and he also shows perhaps the only viable way out, although it is difficult to walk. The Hungarian nation tried to express its appreciation for the oeuvre of the artist and philosopher with a Kossuth Prize; while as the central national institution for the protection of rights, we would like to acknowledge the services he rendered for the quality of life of future generations. The Justitia Regnorum Fundamentum Award of Gábor Karátson is actually an honour for our office, and the most relevant way of appreciation is to recall his words, and to learn from them.

“Today two processes take place simultaneously on Earth. On the one hand the unstoppable development of science and technology drifts somewhere – according to its proponents upwards; on the other hand nature itself and human spirit is in decline at the same rate.” „An eight-thousand-years long development is unveiled. One step offered itself from the other logically; spirit got subtracted from nature more and more, with only the pursuit of profit remaining.” “There is nothing to help irreverent people, because they are not interested if in thirty years life on earth may become a swamp. Nothing touches these people. As the scriptures say: Your heart is petrified.” “Some people have noticed this already in the beginning. Now we have come to the critical breaking point, when a long-long development is questioned.” “Now we could reverse the whole process. But an existential turn in world history should occur. Nothing else helps.” “The radical revolution, if there will be one, will neither stem from science, nor from our intentions for betterment (although these are also necessary), but from a founding intuition through which the spirit brings itself in a new relationship with the completeness of existing.”

“We have to return to the ancient sources of Being and Non-being; beyond the material world. Into the abyss in which each creature and thing is rooted.” “It is not in vain that these forms have become the way they are. Someone has worked on them for millions of years. Created the depths of the earth and the sky, like a living statue. And we are unwilling to understand this.” “Humans, animals, rocks, trees, rivers are peers with respect to Being and Non-being, concerning their cosmic dignity.” “A country does not belong only to the rich and powerful, not even merely to humans. It belongs to hedgehogs as well, same as to fish, rocks, worms, grasses, wells, fields, rivers.” “The country belongs to the rocks, too. To the roots. They themselves are

the country. And of course to the river as well, perhaps the most.” “Once upon a time it was believed that a river or a pile of earth is sacred in itself, as it is here, and can only be touched when absolutely necessary.”

As if God would have created separate physical objects, and we would be in a position to group and regroup them at will. To create for example tailings from meadows, fields, hillsides, mother earth. Each example shows that this is not like that. “What God has joined together, let not man separate” – said Jesus, and this saying holds true not just for marriage. Not only man and woman are joined together by God, but meadow and blades of grass, sky and birds, mountain and forest, forest and wild boars, roes, deer, soil and worm, streams and purity as well. To join these together took him a lot of time, this is called evolution. The individual components, the eye and the claws, the throat and the feet, the glacier and the desert, the sea and the forest can not be exchanged for each other.” “Ancient peoples were much more aware of this dignity – for example as maize growers have presented their rituals to honour maize gods –, than those of today, who have the bush undergo genetic manipulation.” “The child feels still that there is no such big difference between him/her and the stone or the grass, somehow these form an unknown continuum.” Today’s “official” thinking, however, strictly fragments everything. The attack on evolution has been going on since far too long by those, who did never hesitate to seek the sense of creation, not for one moment: to convert the land into shambles, into a dump.

“We do not have to change to be saved, but because it is wrong to be like this. ... Because if we want to change in order to get away with the ecological crisis, we will not get away with it. Gods will not forgive us, because we are selfish.” “If we realize that we should love the animals, the trees, the rivers and the rocks for themselves, then we will also be saved. But if the engineers keep on calculating all the time what to do for this or that, then we’re done. This is why I consider Chinese philosophy very important, as all this is sharply clear in it.” “It took many decades of work before it has become apparent at least to me, that painting, poetry and writing, moreover the translation of Chinese philosophers make up the same workspace in my case.”

Gábor Karátson dips his complex insights that go far beyond the verbal, but can be narrated besides his paintings in words too, from treasuries created before the decline of human spirit, where ancient knowledge still exists – from the culture of old ages, distant lands and secluded domestic corners. This is how it has become one of the determining experiences of his life – in addition to the revolution of 1956 and the Danube – the meeting with the Csango people of Gyimes, Transylvania, with their music, dances, and the Carpathian valleys they tend. „I love the pine trees, the rocks, the whole grassy mountains.” After the revolution of ’56 was trampled, following the imprisonment he was sentenced to, he was certain that „from now on one can only lie in Hungarian, and I absolutely did not feel like to do so. This might also play a role, after being released, in reviving my interest in painting and in Leonardo’s „silent language” ... which had a deeper meaning associated also with my subsequent ecological inquiry: painting is also capable of expressing thoughts long ago expelled from the official technical world language, so in a sense it can be considered to be the other half of poetry.” With my Bible aquarelles I did not want to illustrate the scriptures, but I wished to ask questions from the holy texts.” “The dreaming questioning allows images latent in the text, healing us to step forward, and I have but one wish: to have the chance to ask my questions over and over again.”

In the virtual world of purple Milka cows Gábor Karátson recommends art as a way out: “If I were the minister, I would ordain children in school to paint only grass for half a year with watercolour. If all the kids would be painting grass for half a year, the whole of Hungary would change! Because deep knowledge is conveyed by the way these blades of grass stand.” “It was not in vain that the Japanese have invented Ikebana. It transmits a knowledge that can not really be verbalized.” “I’ll bet that there is no political school, whose teachers would bring the young people out here and make them looking at the stream for two weeks. The key would be to get

that sensory experience and then their minds would be changed. The civilization rides for its fall, because it does not take this into account. One always wants to come up with a perfect, complete material world instead of this incredibly rich searching.”

Lao Tzu tells in one of his poems that politics should first learn from the mountain creek. The stream’s roaring is a language that has a profound knowledge that can not be phrased. Therefore one should leave alone what we call nature. Namely we are able to understand only parts of nature, be it either philosophically, or technically or via fine arts.” “In Chinese culture, in Chinese art we can find a powerful closeness to nature.” “Among the high cultures it is perhaps the Chinese that was the nearest to a so-called ecological thinking. Of course the Navajo, the Cheyenne or the Hopi have also been close to nature (living in it), but ... no matter how painful it is, we could no longer live in tribes. Yet the fact that China, the culture of a great empire preserved such a lot of things from this original, primary human thinking, can still teach much.”

Already in the Transylvanian village of Gyimesközéplok „well, the wooden electric pylon is replaced by one made of concrete. Rationally one can admit to the advantages of a concrete pylon, it will not putrefy. Yet I see as deterioration spreads around it. Having another few thousand such replacements carried out, this land will be just like the Grand Boulevard of Budapest. We are always improving one detail; in this case prevent the electric pylon from rotting. Wise idea. But nature does not think that way, just lets the wooden pylon putrefy. It falls and rots, everything is full of life. The isolating perfectionism kills the point itself. And what remain are the rattling parts. Well, this is the sermon of the mountain creek, God’s word. It says that everything that happens has a profound meaning and truth.”

Apollinaire’s three „plastic virtues” – purity, unity and truth – are typical of the entire life of Gábor Karátson. The imagery, composition and purity of spirit; the search for truth that was sentenced to prison, and roamed in mind over seven seas; and the intuitive combination of the early Christian, ancient Chinese or even Hopi spiritual treasures found there, furthermore the original synthesis of all this results in achieving this particular oeuvre, based on a multiculturalism meant in the most beautiful way. An integral part of this career is not the least taking sometimes prophetic public responsibility. The strong resolution of a gentle man based on ancient Chinese samples. “A poem in the Tao Te Ching is written about this. *There is nothing in the world more soft and weak than water, / and yet for attacking things that are firm and strong there is nothing / that can take precedence of it.*”

“I’m not a real activist or environmentalist, I just can not stand certain things. For years I lived a life on the Danube, being a fanatic rower. And then they began to build this damned Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros power plant system, and I felt like a creature driven into a corner. Where should I go now? Emigrate? Well, what is left for me of Hungary anyway?” “Suddenly, there was the Danube movement. More than twenty years passed since, and it just does not want to come to an end. The threat does not want to come to an end.” “The association ‘Protect the Future’ was actually founded as a consequence of the fright caused by the cyanide spill on river Tisza ... and then came the plan of cutting the trees on Roosevelt Square ... Everything will be displaced, excavated, as if they had gone mad! For someone to feel relatively at home somewhere, these trees are needed. To have the same trees standing on the same place, and not other trees three years from now.” Gábor Karátson teaches not only through paintings, words, but also with his everyday life, with an oar or a beer in his hand. And if river Tisza or Danube is hurt, he stands in front of a microphone and inspires masses of people. We salute the wise and cheerful man of words, thoughts, visions and actions, and thank him what he has done for us, for our children and grandchildren.

Budapest, 4 July 2014