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Összes versei I-II by Lajos Kassák
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Books Abroad, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Winter, 1971), pp. 169-170
Published by: Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40125206
Accessed: 22/06/2014 15:19

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thumb"; as for Einstein, he is riding a huge iron egg with a radiant smile on his face. Juhász' world sometimes strikes us with its similarity to that of Hieronymus Bosch; but even a rhymed inventory of Bosch's visions can be dull and repetitive. The anthropomorphic monsters and diabolic creatures endlessly evoked by Juhász cannot fill us with apprehension and terror any more—the worst of Juhász often reads like a caricature of the best that this poet once produced.

George Gömöri
Cambridge University

György Gömöri. *Átváltozások*. London. Szepsi Csombor Kör. 1969. 101 pages.

Exile is fashionable in our century, because it is easy for sensitive people to reach their limits of acceptable endurance. The boiling points, the degrees of actual fever, of course, vary from individual to individual, but certain governments use objective measurements to name, to treat, and to quarantine the sick. Sensitive people from such countries tend to experience their exile in political terms exclusively: they narrow down its validity. Others, as a rule from less authoritarian countries, do the opposite: they forget about political terms altogether and live like happy or blasé or bitter Ulysses, forgetful of their barren Ithacas which long have ceased to suggest to them the memory of home.

Gömöri, a Hungarian poet living in England, has now published his third book of poems, and even the title "Transformations" suggests that the personal restlessness and homelessness expressed in his two previous books now are experienced by him as symptoms of an exile which lies in the nature of things and cannot really be called exile at all. Its proper name is human life on earth. In his previous books, political grievances and personal experiences of the world at large were expressed side by side, they did not quite mix. Now he has succeeded in turning himself into a single stream of sentiment that reacts to political, social, and natural phenomena alike. But this naturalization of political and social ills has not made him dispassionate according to the recipe of Eastern mysticism. The title "Transformations" does not quite suggest what the book itself does. In spite of all the relativism, of the weariness and frustration pouring in on him from every quarter, he still feels that "this is the time of waiting" and that this waiting is equivocal: its possible termination may just as well be doomsday as the day of some kind of salvation. The transformations may be wayward and they may seem to be interminable, but he has not succumbed to them inwardly. The answer to the question of what gives him power not to accept what he is bound to tolerate may be found in his "Oldfashioned Ode to Freedom": "Only by our trust in you do we bear/ in a human way our inhuman loneliness."

András Sándor
Howard University

Lajos Kassák. *Összes versei I-II.* Budapest. Magvető. 1970.

There is always a temptation to say that modern Hungarian poetry began with Kassák, in spite of the fact that the generation that preceded him, the writers who gathered around the review *Nyugat*, produced at least three poets (Ady, Babits, Kosztolányi) whose work contains finer verse than anything in the whole output of Kassák. It is true that the younger poet found his original voice relatively early, in the 1920s, while to Babits and Kosztolányi (we shall return to Ady), the complete realization of their poetics came only toward the end of their lives, in the thirties. And it is also true that both retained conspicuous elements of their early fin-de-siècle attitude until the very end of their careers. But the reasons for Kassák's exceptionally great historical significance go deeper.

Ady did create a new poetics by way of reacting against the sterility of late nineteenth-century Hungarian verse, but his solution was too original: he opened a new gate and then closed it. Other poets could not profit from a style so idiosyncratic. A more general and radical change had to come. The idea of a new "impure" language was realized in Kassák's untitled poems written in the 1920s. These poems—together with the autobiographical poem *A ló meghal a madarak kirepülnek* (1922), one of the few really major achievements of twentieth-century Hungarian poetry—represent the most original work contained in the two vast volumes of the poet's "Collected Poems." What went before: the rapid change from fin-de-siècle tones to expressionism was essentially a preparation for this culminating phase. In the twenties Kassák really "discovered" a new idiom in the sense in which Pound would use that word, and the discovery was entirely due to Kassák's talent, for all the other poets of the Hungarian avant-garde were of no importance.

What came after this period? First, a slack-

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ening of tension. This is not to say that there are no fine poems in the volumes published between the two wars. There are poems ("Mária aki mindenütt jelen van," "Érthetetlen kép," "Azok az esték") of a delicacy which the poet in his best period could not reach. But Kassák, who wished to be a European and not a mere Hungarian poet in the thirties and forties could not resist the temptation to write too much.

The years that brought Kassák closer to his Hungarian contemporaries were followed by a decade of dead silence. The verse that came out in the last decade of his life is uneven, but it shows that Kassák had the capacity for development. For the second time he went beyond values that exist only for a smaller community, people using the language cultivated by the poet, and now in an entirely different way—by expressing a tragic sense of life ("Pillantás a mélybe," "A tenger étvágya," "November kánkán," "Marc Chagall").

Kassák's poetry contains the artistically most valuable product of a man who in his many-sided activity set himself the task of raising Hungarian culture to the European level. Owing to his highly original creative gift this self-made man of working-class origin could succeed much more in realizing the ideals of that nineteenth-century aristocrat whom Kossuth called "the greatest of Hungarians": István Széchenyi, than many talented poets who had the best education imaginable and read in four or five languages. Instead of producing individual variants of earlier West European literary trends, in his finest verse he shows a parallel development with the best French, Anglo-American, German, or Russian poets of his time.

Mihály Szegedy-Maszák
Budapest

Noted

László Passuth. *Rézkor.* Budapest. Szépirodalmi. 1969. 648 pages.

Passuth is a writer well known in Hungary for his historical novels. His latest volume, too, is historical, and it is called (in the subtitle) a novel, but in fact it is the second part of his autobiography, covering the decade from 1923 to 1933. The title "Copper Age" clearly suggests that Passuth cannot even associate this period with bronze, let alone iron, silver, or gold, and yet it is better than the rock bottom, stone. In his presentation the age appears less than mediocre, more than weak, and, like copper, it tries to shine as gold.

Passuth was a bank official during this time, under the patronage of an uncle in good position, but his intermittent description of the narrow environment of banking life serves as something more than the recounting of personal working conditions. It broadens into the background of this decade which began with postwar inflation and ended with the last throes of the depression of 1929, embracing a period of cautious and sham prosperity based on capital flowing in from abroad, loans—often with extraordinarily high interest rates.

Passuth himself, even if from the basis of a critical and disenchanted opposition, spent his short holidays abroad in Western Europe. It is characteristic that the best thing he can wish for a lost acquaintance is that she may be living in Paris. *A. Sándor*

Related Title

Gunnar Gunnarson. *Georg Lukács.* Stockholm. Cavefors. 1969. 365 pages + 12 plates.

In their search for social relevance, some radical Scandinavian critics have turned to the ready-made formulas of Marxism, and the various heresies of Adorno, Bloch, Goldmann, Horkheimer, and so on, are being discussed just now with a seriousness reminiscent of the thirties. Gunnarson's essay is a contribution to this discussion, an attempt to make Lukács' thought somewhat more accessible to the Swedish reader—an enormous and finally impossible task, as Gunnarson himself admits.

The author's interest in Lukács and his work spans four decades, and has resulted in a carefully objective and intricately detailed study. In an attempt to get beyond polemics and clichés (the sentimental notion, for example, that Lukács' life is an intellectual tragedy) Gunnarson has done a great deal of research on historical and intellectual background; this material, interspersed with an analysis of Lukács' important theoretical, critical, and polemical work, gives a rather complete picture of Lukács' intellectual development. If there is any comparable work in English, French, or German, it is unknown to me.

The uniformly hagiographic tone of the book, however, calls forth some reservations from at least one hopelessly skeptical reader. Perhaps this is a symptom of alienation; certainly it is an indication of differing ethical and critical standards.

Lukács' faith in the central importance of economics and class to historical understanding is accompanied by the dogmatist's occupational disease, an exaggerated trust in abstractions and improvised action. Gunnarson quotes Thomas Mann's impression of Lukács' "eerie abstractness" as if it were high praise. This is only one example of a certain

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