

Review

Author(s): Mihály Szegedy-Maszák

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validity because of their motives. One of these is the theme of *Izapeső*, the portrayal of the suicide of a young farmgirl. What gave this particular story special meaning to its author in a country infamous for the number of its suicides? Quite simply, the fact that from an ethical point of view no one is accountable for the death of the farmgirl, although the intimate witnesses of and participants in her life and death lose no time in laying the blame at the door of the eternal Other. The young girl's father and his wife blame the "village" and her wayward boyfriend; the "village" blames her father's obstinacy, his stubborn resistance to the "winds of change"; and from their mutual backbiting it seems that they are all "innocent sinners," that is, sinners only in a Christian context, by sharing in Original Sin, the sin of being part of the reality that is history, which visits unbearable burdens on those who cannot stand up to them—like the heroine of the book.

The factual material or "truth value" of Csoóri's poetically terse book—i. e., the conflict between the farmer who holds on to his land to the last and large-scale agricultural production, which relies on those who are more willing to adjust to new conditions—long ago ceased to be a characteristic social conflict in Hungary. However, *Izapeső* portrays the kind of eternal human attitudes and dispositions that were already reflected in *Antigone*. In Csoóri's sociography—although the village has branded him the major but not the sole guilty party—the father of the dead girl is, in the final analysis, the only character with true substance, the only one who, precisely due to his stubbornness, rises to tragic heights. He lives, and makes his family live, according to the Law, the only possible and valuable Law in his eyes, which finally drives his daughter, living by the dictates of a different law found through love, to her death.

In the sixties many Hungarian sociographies, novels and films dealt with similar conflicts arising from the often aggressive collectivization of agriculture. Most of these, however, have lost their relevance, because they were dominated by the portrayal of a specific, time-related reality. Sándor Csoóri's *Izapeső* has kept its validity because of its wider relevance—its faithful portrayal of conflicts as old as mankind.

Csaba Könczöl
Budapest

Vándorének: Nyugat-európai és tengerentúli magyar költők. Béládi Miklós, ed. Budapest. Szépirodalmi. 1981. 402 pages.

"Wanderer's Song" is an anthology of Hungarian verse written by poets living in the West. The reader's first feeling must be one of gratitude to the publisher and to the critic who made the selection. Very few important poets are missing; and the blame cannot be laid upon the editor, for their exclusion is due in most cases to their reluctance to see their work in such an anthology. Sándor Márai (b. 1900) is probably the only writer whose absence is a serious loss for the public. Some of his works could be conceded to be masterpieces, but most of them were written long ago and in prose; so his activity could be regarded as of an earlier period than the one represented by most authors in this book.

On second thought, however, I might qualify my enthusiasm. There is not a shadow of a doubt about the importance of a publication that makes an integral part of Hungarian literature accessible for readers living in Hungary. But the

question can be asked as to what extent this poetry is an original contribution to the 800-year-old tradition of that literature. In other words, how many of the texts included may turn out to be of lasting value? It is not easy to give a satisfactory answer to that question. Great talents are few, and the reader will not find in this book artists comparable in stature to Czesław Miłosz or to such a major Hungarian poet as the late János Pilinszky (see *WLT* 51:4, pp. 575–76).

It goes without saying that *Vándorének* has a striking thematic originality: many poems reflect an acute sense of homelessness and cultural estrangement. The verse of György Gömöri (b. 1934), for instance, expresses both the inexorable process of the emigrant's alienation from his native country and the hopelessness of finding his identity in his adopted country. In some cases, however, thematic originality is not combined with artistic talent. While reading the poems of the thirty-eight authors represented in this collection, one cannot help concluding that Hungarians living abroad sometimes use verse as a vehicle of their nostalgia for a country left behind. The result of such turning loose of emotion may be not only honesty in a moral sense but also dilettantism in an artistic sense. Still, it would be unjust to devote too much attention to poets who probably disclaim any pretensions to original genius. The aim of the anthology is to give a general survey of the Hungarian verse being written in the Western world, and it must be taken for granted that such surveys are always uneven in esthetic terms.

If I try to justify my critical remarks with stylistic criteria, I must refer to the literary movements of neo-populism and postmodernism. The evocation of the atmosphere of village life and the elegiac lament on the decline of rural communities is largely derivative if compared with the work of the populists who worked in Hungary between the two world wars. By contrast, the Hungarian postmodernists who live in Paris, London or the United States have a serious claim to consideration, for they often anticipated the experiments made by a new generation of writers who started their activity in Hungary in the late 1960s or the early 70s. The dramatic monologues of Győző Határ (b. 1914) undoubtedly mark the highest level in the book. No other Hungarian writer living abroad can match his enormous sense of humor and anagrammatic talent. As for the younger generation, that of József Bakucz (b. 1929), Alpár Bujdosó (b. 1934), Pál Nagy (b. 1934) and Tibor Papp (b. 1936), their proneness to experiment with textual discontinuity has exerted some influence on contemporary writing in Hungary. They came to the rescue of younger poets and novelists at a time when the latter were hampered by their scanty knowledge of recent trends in Western literatures.

Poetic language must always be re-created. Sometimes inspiration may come from poets publishing in the same language but living abroad. *Vándorének* deserves special attention, because it can be of great help to the cause of Hungarian verse writing.

Mihály Szegedy-Maszák
University of Budapest