

could also have expanded and balanced his chronology and his list of notable events, institutions, publications and personalities; and the result would have been an even more useful work on Hungarians in America.

Széplaki's work is thus not without flaws. Even so, however, it is a useful pioneering work, and a good beginning in the right direction. We would still urge the author that—before preparing the second edition of his work—he should consult with several specialists in the area (e.g. Rev. Edmund Vasváry and others), even though we know that such efforts are not always successful. We are certain that by doing so, his work will improve considerably, and it will become an even more useful handbook in the rising field of Hungarian-American studies.

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Attila József, Selected Poems and Texts. Ed. by George Gömöri and James Atlas. Carcanet Press, Cheadle. 1973.

Proletarian by origin, representative of a special brand of Marxism and Freudism, Attila József (1905-37) is one of Hungary's outstanding poets. The present collection of his poetry is thus far the most extensive available in English. The translator's John Bátki's brief note is followed by George Gömöri's expert introduction, discussing the poet's "psychoanalytic Marxism," "humanistic socialism," and suicide. The extensive supplementary material includes the often cited Curriculum Vitae (1937), a list of the main events of the poet's life, three letters written by him, a note on an early attempt at suicide, and an English language bibliography.

The fifty poems selected are fairly representative of Attila József's poetry. They include the celebrated socialist pieces (*A Breath of Air*, *Night in the Slum*), samples of the Freudian poetry (*Belated Lament*, *It hurts a lot*) and his most famous love poem, the *Ode*. The editors may well be right in giving less share to the great political poems of socialist persuasion than to personal lyrics (*Coral Beads*, *Summer Afternoon*, *Without Hope*). Their translation would, the editors contend, involve enormous thematic and technical difficulties and no poet in the English language is up to the task at present.

When compared with the 1966 selection of twenty poems, this

volume more closely resembles poetry. There are fewer awkward expressions and concern for fidelity is less to the detriment of poetic effect. All in all, the English version only seldom matches the brilliance of the original. This may disappoint but need hardly surprise bilingual readers who are well aware of the tremendous difficulties in translating a major poet from one language and culture so vastly different into another. Yet, it has been done with better results into other languages. For example, the French adaptations by such eminent poets as Guillevic, Tzara and Rousselot, seem to lose less in translation.

Imagery comes through well in Bátki's version. Such lines as "A small breeze shakes silver laughter" or "silvery axe strokes play on poplar leaves" are not without some inspiration. Attempts at preserving rhyme and rhythm proved generally rewarding. Short of rhyme and rhythm, though, the English version can do little more than to convey the content. Moreover, rhyming is frequently employed arbitrarily and with irregularity resulting in unevenness, as in the well-known "With a pure Heart." More attention ought to have been given to final lines: when clumsy, they can ruin the musical organization of the entire stanza.

Some translations lose in intensity what they gain in faithfulness to the original (Belated Lament, It hurts a lot). This may be due to the wrong choice or arrangement of words, or, at times, to the differences in the verb systems; unlike the Hungarian "ülni, állni, ölni, halni" the English infinitives do not rhyme: "to sit, to stand, to kill, to die". As a combined effect of these and other causes, both the lightness or the graveness of a poem may suffer. Pasternak says in *Doctor Zhivago* that art is the commonplace touched by the hand of genius. A poet of the commonplace in many instances, Attila József never becomes pedestrian and would hardly approve of the expressions "nationwide rain," "not even a piece of bread," "time pretends to be nothing," "I kept thinking," "I have been working all day." They just sound too plain in English.

A work of literature loses much of its appeal when deprived of local colour. The omission of geographic names was wise as they would mean little to a foreign reader. But the line "Kis lábaskában hazahozta kegyelmeséktől vacsoráját" loses its flair when translated as "She brought home in a tiny skillet the food they gave her where she worked." Another expression "puli pillanat" with its alliteration is a lovely image in the original. Its transfer into "puli moment" makes no sense in English.

It is not very likely, that even in the best translation, Attila József could occupy the place in the English world that he rightly deserves. Foreign poets, in any case, seldom if ever have the same impact on the English culture that they have on the Hungarian. Shortcomings notwithstanding, Bátky's and the editors' joint effort should be congratulated as an important step in bridging gaps separating cultures.

It should be added that this book has been accepted into the Unesco collection of Representative works, European series.

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Review of Reviews

A History of Hungary. Ervin Pamlenyi, editor. Translated by Laszlo Boros *et al.*, (Compiled under the auspices of the History Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.) London: Collet's, 1975. Pp. 676.

This is not the first history of Hungary in English but the earlier works are mostly dated and out of print, and even if they are available . . . they are too brief to be of real value to anyone but the casual reader. The present volume is of undoubted interest even to the specialist, enriched as it is with ninety-two plates, sixteen maps, brief biographies of outstanding Hungarians, a detailed chronology, and a good bibliography of works in Western languages. The text itself is a much improved, albeit abbreviated, version of the now standard two volume *Magyarország története* (History of Hungary), published in Budapest in 1964 . . .

With about two thousand years of tortured history to account for, and with a prospective readership that conceivably knows nothing of Hungary, the authors occasionally overwhelm us with data and names, while, as befits Marxist historians, they do not shun broad generalizations and hard conclusions. Their style is perfectly adequate, as is the English translation, accomplished by a team of Hungarian experts and a second team of Hungarian-speaking native Anglo-Saxons. The reader would look in vain for the dramatic historical accounts or colorful human portraits so dear to the preceding generations of Hungarian historians. What we get instead is a conscientious briefing in political and economic history, with occasional and often excellent excursions . . . into social and cultural history . . .

. . . It is with the events of the early 1940s that truth and what the authors tell us begin to part ways; by the time we reach the late 1940s, the parting is almost complete. It is comforting to have Lacko, author of the last chapter, denounce "the enormous political and economic errors" made between 1948 and 1956; but it is heartbreaking to have this fine historian accuse the leaders of the Smallholders' party of conspiring against the nation that gave them the absolute majority of