

sustenance of their spirits. There is a future for Fáy's poetry. The promise of this can be seen in his "Mese a tavaszról" (A Tale About the Spring), whose optimistic mood surprises the reader who has become accustomed to his beautiful, but self-tormenting poems. The sarcastic and self-critical "Halotti maszk" (Deathmask) foreshadows works of a new thematic and stylistic approach. Most of his poems in the volume have a uniformly high quality but the "Keresztút" rises above them all. In it the poet seems to have successfully met the challenge presented by the theme.

László Buday, who so ably illustrated *Kövület*, writes in *Krónika*: "A deep-seated sorrow chokes us. . . . In vain we search for words to express it. How comforting it is to see those words coming from Fáy through the beautiful epoch of the Keresztút. Your past is revived, and now you can progress and continue to believe in the wonders of Fáy's poetry."<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps here we find the key to the continuing existence of Hungarians scattered in the world — a Future growing out of the sterile soil of the Past.

Maxim Tabory

#### NOTES

1. Ferenc Fáy's words, quoted from a taped discussion with the author in 1978.
2. *Ibid.*
3. The quotation is from a poem by this reviewer.
4. *Szabadság* [Liberty] (Cleveland) 88, no. 40 (October 6, 1978): 12.
5. *Krónika* [Chronicle] (Toronto) 5, no. 3 (March 1979): 8.
6. *Ibid.*, 4, no. 1 (January 1978): 13.

*44 Hungarian Short Stories*. Budapest: Corvina, 1979. 733 pp.

This volume has been published in the series of translations of representative works, European Series, sponsored by UNESCO.

The *44 Hungarian Short Stories*, the most ambitious of its kind ever to appear in the English language, follows in the footsteps of the earlier *22 Hungarian Short Stories*, published jointly by Corvina and Oxford University Press, back in 1967.

It is quite understandable in one sense that the editors deemed it necessary to double the selection of the earlier collection. In its excellence the short story in Hungary is only second in poetry. Although

essentially the product of the last decades of the nineteenth century, the variety of themes and techniques demonstrated in nearly a hundred years is indeed impressive. Moreover, the question of the choice of a country's authors represented in an anthology is a difficult and a sensitive one. Few if any editors have ever managed to please everyone. This is not the place to discuss the mechanism of a selection, and, in any event, the reviewer has it easy for his is the last word. Besides, "de gustibus non est disputandum." What ought to be attempted here is then assessment rather than overt criticism in the light of the manifold problems confronting the production of such an anthology.

Initially, an argument may put put forth that quantity may overwhelm quality. Few readers if any will have the patience to read all the selections. Yet, it may be claimed that this is surely not compulsory. The abundance of material might make one lose the way, the perspective, and consequently trap one in an avalanche of theme, character, and imagination.

Secondly, a more important argument for a clarification of the aim of such an anthology might be sought. It would be easy to argue for a more modest collection of stories were Hungary not a *terra incognita* for the majority of the prospective readers. What might the average reader expect to find in a collection of stories from a country with traditions vastly different from his own? Will he more likely search information about life and society or appreciate artistic execution, the writer's competence in telling a story? Will he expect to identify or will he be more adventurous in seeking the exotic? C. P. Snow, the eminent English writer, states in the Preface that "the anthology will teach us something, and something very important, about a remarkable country, and a remarkable literature." The stories, comments Snow further, "spread over a whole range of history and social change, and they represent a good deal of the Hungarian experience. The best of them represent, as one would expect, much more than that, since good art, though it is embedded in its own time and place, speaks to us in a common human voice."

In comparing the earlier twenty-two stories to the present forty-four, one thing immediately stands out: eleven selections are common to both volumes. Since most publications, particularly those of marginal interest to the large public, soon go out of print, the present collection provides a service by making these stories once again available. Yet, one suspects that the choice may have been made on the basis of material already conveniently translated. This new volume, on the other hand, provided an excellent opportunity to publish material as yet unavailable to the English-speaking public.

Nonetheless, let us take a close look at the volume on its own merits. Of the republished stories three are truly first-class, an opinion borne out by the critical comments in each volume. *Omelette a Woburn* (1935) by Dezső Kosztolányi, is about a student travelling from Paris to Budapest. Getting off in Zurich, he walks into a chic restaurant with only a few francs in his pocket. He worries all through his sumptuous meal whether he will have enough money to pay in the end. This is a well-written, uncomplicated story about hidden social tensions. In *The Birthday of Emil Dukich* (1958), a story by Ferenc Karinthy, an elderly professor's young assistant gets drunk, makes a pass at the professor's two daughters, and, finally, his wife. Failing with all three of them, his luck turns and the janitor's wife falls his way. The slightly malicious, witty story about sophisticated Budapest society that the author knows all too well, has a very mid-European flavour to it. The third selection is by Tibor Déry, one of Hungary's major prose writers. Déry is among the few who managed to achieve some reputation in the West. His story, *Ambition and Hilarity* (1946), is about innocent war orphans who murder thoughtlessly for sweets. Another choice from Déry might have been his famous story, *Love*, which is about the imprisonment and release of an innocently convicted political prisoner in the fifties. Definitely more compelling than Boris Palotai's *Promise Darling* (1972), dealing with the same theme.

The re-publication of the other stories raises some questions. Andor Endre Gelléri, a victim of the Holocaust, was one of the most gifted prewar writers of the short story. His writing dealt mainly with the poor, people on the fringes — those with shattered hopes, hoping against hope. Gelléri's *House on an Empty Lot* (1931–1934) is an important and moving story about homelessness. Since this writer is known for his "fairy realism," a fusion of dream and reality, perhaps it may have been wise to choose a more uplifting story which better represents this strong element in his work. Magda Szabó has long been a bestseller, with publications in many languages. Szabó's preoccupation with epic themes is indicative of her strength in the novel and drama, and hence, such themes are too constrained within the boundaries of a short story such as *At Cockrow* (1967), presented here. It is a pity that she is not represented in this volume by *The Guest*, a story with less evidence of epic dimensions about the hazards of an emigré's visit home. *Fear* (1948) is hardly one of the best stories by the excellent writer, Endre Illés, and could have been omitted easily. The same can be said of stories by two classic authors, Gyula Krúdy and Dezső Szomory, *The Last Cigar and the Grey Arab* (1928) and *The Divine Garden* (1909), respectively. These stories as well as the world they reveal appear marginal.

Géza Csáth and Károly Pap represent special cases. Hitherto not widely known, their importance seems to increase with time. A psychiatrist and a music critic of note, Csáth, in his writing, was interested in pathology, particularly in extreme situations. Recent years have witnessed a revival of interest in this pioneering and experimental writer both in Hungary and abroad. The theme of *Music Makers* (1913), the destruction of high hopes in a backward society is typical for East-Central Europe. While an excellent story, *Music Makers* is among Csáth's more traditional works. It is rather his more modern, analytical stories, such as *Matricide* that give Csáth an international status. Károly Pap occupied a unique position in Hungarian literature: he incorporated such themes as the world of the Old Testament and Jewish legends. One of the stories dealing with such themes, it might be argued, might have been more typical and might have added more variety than *Organ* (1927), included here.

Anthologies are not perfect. The editors of the *44 Hungarian Short Stories* were ambitious in attempting to cover all aspects of a country's social and political history. The effort seems to have been not to exclude any author of literary eminence. Yet, too often the selection process yielded to other criteria than literary ones. To paraphrase C. P. Snow, whose comment is that some of the stories "leave out too little," the editors should have extended this thought to leave out more authors. The overall effect is that along with the numerous marvellous and adequate stories there are clearly weak ones, and a certain repetition of theme and approaches is clearly evident.

In Sándor Hunyadi's *Adventure in Uniform* (1930) the protagonist wears a private's uniform in order to get a date with a pretty housemaid. When he sheds his uniform which hides a gentleman, the girl regretfully but proudly leaves him. In *Ignác Vonó* (1963) by Endre Fejes, an ex-soldier marries a middle-class woman and pretends to be an aristocrat. In *Anna Szegi's Kiss* (1939) Pál Szabó employs again the familiar theme of class-distinction. This story ends tragically: both hero and heroine drown themselves because they are not allowed to marry.

Hungarian literature abounds in tales of poverty. This is most evident in stories about peasant life. *Brutes* (1932) by Zsigmond Móricz, Hungary's outstanding writer of prose, has been regarded as a masterpiece ever since it was written. The story relates how two shepherds brutally murder a third and his son and how their crime is uncovered; a shocking tale of backwardness and brutality, told in a terse, dramatic manner. *Brutes* may lose some of its effectiveness when removed from its native context. The unfortunate but inevitable loss is in the flavour of folk

speech. Contemporary English doesn't appear to have the means to convey this important element in the peasant stories. The most gifted chronicler of peasant life since Mórícz is Ferenc Sánta. In his stories the tragedy of poverty is always redeemed with an element of the idyll; there is "a ray of sunshine in the realm of darkness." The story *Nazis* (1960), while an important period-piece, does not quite do justice to Sánta's special, huge talent.

To conclude a random sample of stories that raise doubts: György Moldova is perhaps Hungary's most popular and outspoken writer. The story printed here about soccer teams, *Legend of an Outside Right* (1962), is disappointingly long and tedious. The international success of the plays *Catsplay* and *Tot Family* made István Örkény the best-known Hungarian writer abroad ever since Ferenc Molnár. In his native Hungary Örkény's grotesque "one-minute stories" are often ranked above his plays. When well-chosen, their effect will be inescapable even in translation. When no sufficient discrimination is exercised in the selection, however, the English-speaking reader might find them overtly cynical and alien to his sense of humour.

C. P. Snow mentions in the Preface that some of the stories are too long and leisurely by English standards. While this is unfortunately true, length seems less of a factor in a truly good story. The mother in *Smouldering Crisis* (1909), gentle psychological story by Margit Kaffka, had lost both her husband and lover and now lives in withdrawal, only for her son. Her seeming resignation hides a latent anxiety, a mysterious force that inspires the unrequited passion of the narrator, her son's young friend.

One of the collection's best pieces, *The Student and the Woman* (1959) by László Kamondy, also relates an infatuation of a young student for a beautiful mature married woman. While rowing people around on Lake Balaton, the student becomes fascinated with a woman sunbathing on the shore. She tries to fight him off, alternately amused and angered. He is only asking for a kiss; at the end he is given more than he is asking for. Written with a disarming simplicity, the story is on the top of Snow's list. The seldom outstanding István Csurka nevertheless can be counted upon to turn out genuine stories. He is particularly adept at portraying the outclass — people on the fringes. *Kerbside* (1975) is about two elderly streetsweepers. One of them, the woman, is trying to persuade the other, an alcoholic man, that they could make a go of it together.

Among the many somber stories, humour, fun, is a rare guest. With its wry, bizarre humour, Gábor Goda's *Peaceful Sunday* (1960) is such an

exception. The story takes a satiric view of careerism under socialism. The protagonist has two ambitions in life: to be promoted and to get married. He is concerned that promotion should take precedence over marriage as the girl in question is the manager's daughter and "under socialism things like this are tricky." The story takes a tragic turn: discussing his promotion with his boss while swimming long distance in Lake Balaton, the hero suffers heart failure and drowns.

In conclusion it might be said that from a strictly literary point of view a few of the stories are no better than mediocre without a real story base. Several others repeat problems stated in other stories, while the other half are distinguished works. From another point of view, the anthology provides a useful service as a source of information, as an encyclopedia of Hungarian life. When considering the amount of work and care that went into its production and the consistently high quality of its translation, the *44 Hungarian Short Stories* is a worthy addition to the little that had been available in the field. This reviewer cannot help feeling though that more discrimination and a slightly less conservative approach might have produced a smaller but a higher quality volume.

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*A Felvidék az ezeréves magyar államtestben: Magyarok Csehszlovákiában* [Upper Hungary in the Thousand-Year-Old Hungarian Body Politic: Hungarians in Czechoslovakia]. By László Sirchich. Cleveland, Ohio, 1979. Published by and available from the author: 2092 West 95th Street, Cleveland, OH 44102. 48 pp. \$3.50, paper.

This booklet unites three valuable short studies. The first of these highlights little-known episodes of Hungarian resistance in 1919 to the annexation of Upper Hungary by Czechoslovakia. The episodes include the protest of the citizens of Pozsony/Pressburg (later Bratislava), and their petition for a plebiscite; the defense and eventual counteroffensive by Hungarian military units against the Czechoslovak Legion; and the June, 1920 declaration of Hungarian deputies in the Prague Parliament, branding the annexation of Hungarian-inhabited territories a violation of the principle of self-determination. A brief survey of subsequent efforts to ease the burdens and solve the problems of the Hungarian minority completes the study, bringing it up to the unrealized hopes of the Prague Spring in 1968.