

character of its own: the reconstructed historical ensemble of the Buda Castle Hill, the preserved townscape of Szentendre, the Castle once erected by Prince Eugene of Savoy at Ráckeve restored with a view to its new functions, the recreational facilities at Visegrád by Imre Makovecz, the planning of Kecskemét and the new establishments there. The principles underlying this scale of values can be pointed out on the basis of the lectures: the lessons of the universal history and theory of architecture (a lecture by József Kerényi), the traditions handed down by the monuments of the Hungarian history of architecture (Jenő Rados, Miklós Horler), the model of folk architecture (Tamás Hofer, János Bitó).

For two reasons Ráckeve has proved to be an appropriate scene for translating all this into architectural design. On the one hand, there is a small town environment similar to Szentendre's in more than one aspects, where it is easy to find some outdated architectural-urbanistic phenomena ready for alteration. (Let us quote Horler: "There is an alarming example for this [outdated attitude—G. H.], the planning program of Ráckeve, a plan approved of and valid at present, which is completely strange to the traditional settlement structure and building pattern of the village..." etc. p. 38). On the other hand, the stage proper for the seminar was the magnificent Savoie Castle built by Hildebrandt, restored not long ago, and turned into a resthouse for architects. During their work the designers had tried to establish a development pattern corresponding to the potentialities of the neighbourhood (agricultural model) and suitable for new functions (recreation, ecology) starting from the values of the past (identity).

In the volume published about the workshop seminar the objectives and the program are outlined, the lectures delivered are published (also in the original foreign language), finally the accomplished plans are also presented on the nearly 200 pages. A merit of the book is that the editors have not left out of consideration the non-Hungarian readers either. Although most of the Hungarian texts have an English equivalent, texts in German and French can also be found in the volume. The high quality graphic representations have to be specially mentioned: through this it is not only the mental climate of the course that comes to life on the pages, but the world the participants moved about and created during their stay there gets visually represented as well.

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Csoóri Sándor

**Wings of Knives and Nails**

Translated by I. L. Halasz de Beky

Toronto, Vox Humana, 1981. 37 pp.

Kálnoky László

**Flash of Lightning**

Translated by I. L. Halasz de Beky

Toronto, Vox Humana, 1984. 27 pp.

I work as I live: without hope. When I sit down to write  
I never know where I'll end up. And it is only this  
risky and uncertain adventure itself which is capable  
of resolving my hopelessness.

This statement (from *A Half-confessed Life*) is not only representative as an expression of Sándor Csoóri's attitude to his activity as a writer, but is, more significantly, suggestive as to the nature of his popularity. Aphorisms—like anecdotes and essays, which form the larger part of Csoóri's popular *œuvre*—

enjoy a tone of irresistible definitiveness, without being subject to the rigours of detail or systematic thought. To say that Csoóri's writing is, in this sense, predominantly anecdotal is to do no more than recognize his proper place in a national literature in which the anecdote—from Miklós Bethlen to Péter Esterházy—has always played a leading generic role. What is more important to bear in mind in presenting a writer like Csoóri to an Anglophone readership is the degree to which anecdote is also decisive in the formation of his popularity and reputation. It is after all Csoóri the figure, rather than a body of specific texts, that has become a topical and popular, if controversial 'institution' of contemporary Hungarian cultural life. His sociographical essays, poems, prefaces and film-scripts are, where available, widely read, but, characteristically of the protagonist of anecdote, his popularity extends much further than, and is indeed to some degree detached from his writings themselves. His untiring sincerity regarding questions of the national past and present—as an *attitude*—is probably better known, and more unequivocally respected than any single poem or essay. Consequently, it is often the fact of his outspokenness, rather than what is actually spoken, that claims attention and applause.

Again, it is not unusual for a Hungarian writer to become a national 'phenomenon', to represent something intangibly larger than the sum of his own works, but that obscure space between text and significance clearly presents serious problems for translation.

One response is to insist upon the autonomy of the work of art, to privilege the text with an aesthetic integrity immune to history. Here, literature is raised to a giddy realm of universality—and thus translatability—above the real communities and conditions which constitute its practical life, an ideological leap similar to that from writer to phenomenal figure. Alternatively one can attempt to 'translate' or represent these conditions themselves, insisting that they are inseparable from the meaning of the literary work. Here, the space between text and significance is interrogated and interpreted within a causal narrative of cultural history.

I. L. Halasz de Beky seems to have opted for the first of these possibilities. Apart from a brief biographical paragraph on the inside cover of each volume, no other information is offered, and the poems are left to 'speak for themselves'.

Considering, however, that Csoóri's poetry is hardly the most challenging aspect of his work, it is far from sure in his case that the poems have much to 'say' to a western readership when taken out of context. Born of a familiar opposition between an ominous urban industrialism and an organic community of vitality and intimate sensibility ever receding into the irrecoverable past, ("only the countries of yesterday smell sweet." *Linger in Time Too*), his poetry is symptomatic of the country and city dilemma which has remained a crucial theme in Hungarian culture. It is not surprising then that the poems included in Halasz de Beky's collection are informed by a nineteenth century romanticism, updated with the psychological directness of modernism:

It is good, though, that I stayed below,  
on the same level as you, lilacs, grasses,  
the wind comes here amongst you,  
comes the rain.

Maybe I would have become a machine a long time ago,  
if I had striven further upward,  
carnival's feigned smile under the clouds,  
grave melancholy in bird.

.....  
Good horses, good fighters, good deaths,  
my ancestors bleeding to death again and again,  
here, earth-close  
even the memory is more immense...

.....  
(*Earth-Close*)

Halasz de Beky's translations have not assisted in at least presenting Csoóri's poems as accomplished realizations of their own genre. In aspiring to literal accuracy—and this with uneven success—the translations miss, or at least sacrifice subtleties of rhythm and tone. At times the poems read like somewhat clumsy prose:

The southern wind brushed me and made fingertips bud too in  
death's stack-yard, but undefeated I saw only a hen remained  
alive...

(*The First Moment of Resurrection*)

What is intense and compressed in Csoóri slackens into loose and pedestrian constructions:

even the air too and on the day after the space-carnival the orphan  
words...

Problems with the use of the article, and the word 'too' in these last quotations plague the translations as a whole. 'Too', used almost without exception to translate the polysemic Hungarian 'is', appears uncomfortably in nearly every poem in the volume; as in the title *Linger in Time Too*, or the line "the enemy stays far away today too" (*Message*), or the almost illiterate lines, "your name: the name of horror on bright day too, / your name: bright name on a lampless day too." (*The Fire's Resident Student*).

The effect of all this is not only to produce awkward syntax and spurious English, but also to confirm the impression that these poems were translated within a restricted and for this reason repetitive vocabulary. In addition to this it is unfortunate that the volume is further marred by printing errors. In one poem (*Your Time*) the repetition of a line is made to look intentional by a variation in spacing, while in the Hungarian the line appears once and once only.

To do the translator justice, not all of the weaknesses of the collection are due to his own linguistic shortcomings. As Csoóri does not engage his readers and translators with the emotional challenge of a Pilinszky or the formal dexterity of a Weöres, his poems might have been far more usefully presented in a critical and contextualizing edition as symptomatic representations of a complex and powerful attitude to culture and society still prominent in Hungary today.

As a craftsman László Kálnoky (born in 1912) has somewhat more to offer. Himself an experienced translator he possesses a keen sense of the possibilities of form and poetic device. An ironic approach to such themes as age and personal failure is coupled with a formal precision capable of exploiting the ironic and pathetic potentialities of rhythm and rhyme.

T. S. Eliot's telling comment that "the so-called *vers libre* which is good is anything but free" is pertinently true of much of Kálnoky's work. This is made quite clear by the shortcomings of his translator's 'liberties'. Again, the translations sacrifice vitality for a diluted, if literal, prosaicness. But as Kálnoky's poems are not merely blandly referential statements, precision in translation necessarily involves some kind of representation of the formal tensions they create. Halasz de Beky, however, does not pick up on the very significant uses of internal rhyme, assonance and falling rhythms which pervade the originals, and where Kálnoky employs a closed system of metre and rhyme the translator not only ignores the system, but also its *purpose* in mediating and qualifying what is said.

In *Memory of My Career* (*Pályám emlékezete*), for example, Kálnoky's wistful recognition that he is not the autonomous author of his own past and development is objectified by the use of rhyme, which at once orders his mediations from without and produces a sense of self-parody. Halasz de Beky's translation entirely ignores the formal scheme of its original, and although the power of the statement is not altogether lost, the worked composure and equivocality of the poet's contemplation disappears from the poem.

Again the translations are troubled by a deep uncertainty over the use of the article in English. One of many instances will suffice here:

With calcium narrows the vein, the heart, the brain  
but the self-knowledge keeps expanding,...

(*On my Birthday*)

It is far from clear why Halasz de Beky has chosen to omit the poem's fourth and final stanza from his translation. This is how his version continues:

while among the dead stiffened  
crabs and snails the sea-flood,  
retreating before winter, leaves me alone.

The aging faces's [*sic*] rag curtain  
conceals the young.  
If there is no reason, why should the soul fight,  
if there is only shadow-peopled shore,  
silt that nourishes no plants?  
Time-snatches scattered about by the wind,  
and the timeless cauldron boils,  
where the fresh marrow and blood keep cooking,  
while you will be castrated by genderless angels  
with stern silver faces.

and this, for the translator is the end of the poem. Here, for the record, is a prose version of the missing final stanza:

Shall I do as the would-be suicide, as the cowardly  
conjurer who has never hurt a fly, and, while dissolving  
tablets in the glass, knows that all the same he will not drink?

It is surely this stanza which interprets the rest of the poem, giving it a locatable subject and constituting its ironic conclusion. Has Halasz de Beky been working from an unknown earlier draft, or has he simply forgotten to turn the page in the *Collected Poems*?

It is, I think, unnecessary to offer further examples. Troubled by a quite fundamental clumsiness of style ("What you have done, / Nobody can ever do it") Halasz de Beky's Kálnoky is no less disappointing than his Csoóri. Whatever one's opinion of the status of these two poets, this fact is inevitably regrettable. After all, to any Anglophone interest in contemporary Hungarian culture Csoóri the phenomenon demands and deserves representation and explanation, while Kálnoky the fastidious craftsman merits sensitive and qualified translation.

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### **Bibliographia ethnographica Carpatobalcanica 1-3**

In 1959 Czechoslovakian and Polish ethnographers proposed the foundation of an international commission for the study of Carpathian and Balkanic ethnography. Since then, the following countries have participated in the meetings and research projects: Bulgaria, Hungary, Rumania, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia (and naturally the two proposing countries themselves). The Secretary General of the commission is Professor Václav Frolec (Brno). After several years of preparation the first issues of their international bibliographies appeared. In each of them participants from the member states send bibliographical items according to a special topic, and the (Czechoslovakian) editors arrange them into a book.

The commission (in Czech *Mezinárodní komise pro studium lidové kultury v Karpatech a na Balkáně*, its more used abbreviation is MKKKB) trusted Václav Frolec and Jaromír Kubiček with editing the bibliographies.