

Prof. Adam Makkai
SOME OF THE BETTER KNOWN HUNGARIAN LITERATURE IN
ENGLISH TRANSLATION

I. PROSE/DRAMA

Note: All authors below are listed in order of their year of birth.

The best known piece of all Hungarian literature is *The Tragedy of Man* by **Imre Madách (1823-1864)**. In it Adam, just exiled from Paradise, foresees all of human history in a dream. Although translated more than a dozen times ever since the 19th century, the three best English renditions are:

Iain MacLeod, Edinburgh, Canongate 1993, ISBN: 0862414180.

Thomas R. Mark, New York, Columbia U/P., 1989, ISBN: 0880331690.

George Szirtes, Budapest, Corvina, 1988, ISBN: 9631327302.

Hungary's best known 19th century novelist was **Mór Jókai (1825-1904)**, who wrote well over one hundred novels. Some of his best known works in English are:

The New Landlord, A.J. Patterson (trans), MacMillan, London, 1868.

Eyes like the Sea, R.N. Bain (trans), London, Lawrence & Bullen, 1894.

Black Diamonds, F. Gerard (trans), London, Gerrald & Sons, 1896.

A Hungarian Nabob, R.N. Bain (trans), London, Gerrald & Sons, 1898.

The Last Days of the Janissaries, R.N. Bain (trans), London, Gerrald & Sons 1897.

The Baron's Sons, P.F. Bicknell (trans), London, Macqueen, 1902.

The Poor Plutocrats, R.N. Bain (trans), London, Gerrald & Sons, 1899.

Regarded by many as Jókai's equal was **Kálmán Mikszáth (1847-1910)**, now enjoying a quiet renaissance:

A Strange Marriage, István Farkas (trans), Budapest, Corvina, 1964.

The Two Beggar Students, Mari Kattua (trans), Budapest, Corvina, 1964.

St. Peter's Umbrella, István Fekete (trans), Budapest, Corvina, 1962.

Of equal fame and importance as both novelist and poet was **Dezső Kosztolányi (1885-1936)**. He embodied a free humanist spirit thriving toward aesthetic purity. His most important novels include:

Anna Édes, George Szirtes (trans), New York, New Directions, 1993.

ISBN: 0811212556.

Darker Muses, Nero the Bloody Poet (prefatory letter by Thomas Mann, afterword

By George F. Cushing), Budapest, Corvina, 1990. ISBN: 9631328414.

Skylark, Richard Aczel (trans), introduction by Peter Esterhazy. Budapest, London, New York, CEU Press, 1996. ISBN: 1858660599.

Hungarian prose in the 20th century reached its peak in the inimitable style of **Gyula Krudy (1878-1933)**. Historian John Lukacs compared it to „the voice of a chello”. An outstanding example of his work in English is:

The Adventures of Sindbad, George Szirtes (trans), Budapest-London, CEU Press,
1998, ISBN: 9639116122.

Considered the greatest realist of the 20th century was **Zsigmond Móricz (1879-1942)**. Instead of idealizing peasant life, he showed real suffering in a Zola-like naturalist style.

Be Faithful unto Death, Stephen Vizinczey (trans), Budapest, London, New York:
CEU Press, 1995. ISBN: 1858660602.

Lajos Zilahy (1891-1974) enjoyed tremendous popularity both in Hungary and abroad. His best known works in English are:

The Deserter, George Halasz (trans), Doubleday, Doran & Co., Garden City, N.Y.

1932, BL System No.: 004021337.

The Dukays, John Pauker (trans), London, Heinemann, 1950. Nat. bib. No. GB 5000647.

The Guns Look Back, Lawrence Wolfe (trans), London-Toronto, Heinemann, 1938. Sytem No.: 004021320.

One of the undisputed masters of 20th century Hungarian prose was **Sándor Márai (1900-1989)**, often called the „Hungarian Thomas Mann.” He has had a major renaissance in the English speaking world:

Conversations in Bolzano, or Casanova in Bolzano, George Szirtes (trans), Viking, 2004, London.

The Rebels, George Szirtes (trans), London, Picador, 2007 ISBN: 9780330454544

Esther's Inheritance, George Szirtes (trans), New York, A. A. Knopf, ISBN: 1400045002

Embers, Carol Brown Janeway (trans), New York, A. A. Knopf, 2001 ISBN: 0375707425

A major essayist as well as a master novelist, **Antal Szerb (1901-1945)** author of a History of Hungarian Literature and a History of World Literature, died in a Nazi labor camp:

Journey by Moonlight, Len Rix (trans), London 2002, Pushkin. ISBN: 1901285375

The Pendragon Legend, Len Rix (trans), London, 2006, Pushkin. ISBN: 19018560X

The Traveler, Peter Hargitai (trans), Lincoln, NE., Author's Choice Press,

ISBN: 978-0595-78508-6, also in New York, Puski-Corvin Books, 1994,
ISBN: 0-915951-21-5.

One of the best known writers of the post-war era was a great wit full of sarcasm, **István Örkény (1912-1979)**.

Catsplay, Clara Gyorgyey (trans), New York, Samuel French, 1976.

ISBN: 0-573-60755-9.

The Flower Show/The Toth Family, Michael H. Heim and Clara Gyorgyey (trans),

New York, New Directions, 1982. ISBN: 0-8112-0836-2.

Hungary has also produced major woman novelists. One of the best known available in English translation was **Magda Szabó (1917-2007)**:

Night of the Pig-Killing, Kathleen Szasz (trans), London, Jonathan Cape, 1965
BL system no.: 00356501200000000.

The Door, Len Rix (trans), London: Harvill Secker, 2005. ISBN: 1843431939

The Gift of the Wondrous Fig Tree: a Fairy Tale, Noémi N.Najbauer (trans),
Budapest, Európa Könyvkiadó, 2008. ISBN: 9789630785327.

The first and so far only Hungarian winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 2002 for his novel „Fateless” is **Imre Kertész (1929—)**:

Fateless, Cristopher C. Wilson and Katherina M. Wilson (trans), Evanston,
Northwestern University Press, 1992. ISBN: 0810110490.

Kaddish for an Unborn Child, Tim Wilkinson (trans), Vintage, New York,
2004. ISBN: 1400078628.

Liquidation, Tim Wilkinson (trans), New York, A. A. Knopf, 2004. ISBN:
1400041538.

Detective Story, Tim Wilkinson (trans), London, Harvill Secker, 2008. ISBN:
1846551838.

The Pathseeker, Tim Wilkinson (trans), New York, Melville House, 2008,
ISBN: 978-1-933633-53-4

One of Hungary’s most prolific authors is **György Konrád (1933—)**:

The Case Worker, Richard Allen (trans), London, S.J. Hutchinson, 1975,
ISBN: 0091214408.

The City Builder, Ivan Sanders (trans), New York, London: Harcourt Brace
Jovanovich, 1977. ISBN: 0151180091.

The Loser, Ivan Sanders (trans), London, Allen Lane 1982-1983. ISBN:
0713915994.

The Melancholy of Rebirth: Essays from Post-Communist Central Europe.
Michael Henry Heim (trans), San Diego-London, Harcourt Brace J. 1995
ISBN: 0156002523.

Péter Nádas (1942—) is one of the most read Hungarian authors:

A Book of Memories, Imre Goldstein (trans), London, Jonathan Cape, 1997.
ISBN: 022403524X

The End of a Family Story, Imre Goldstein (trans), London, Jonathan Cape, 1999.

ISBN: 0224059556.

Own Death, János Salamon (trans), Göttingen: Steidl : London: Thames & Hudson. ISBN: 9783865210194

Of Hungarian postmodernist novelists living today, one of the best known is **Peter Esterhazy (1950--)**:

Helping Verbs of the Heart, Michael Henry Heim (trans), New York, Grove Weidenfekt, 1990-1991, ISBN: 0802111238.

The Book of Hrabal, Judith Sollosy (trans), London, Quartet 1993.

ISBN: 0704370646.

She Loves Me, Judith Sollosy (trans), London, Quartet, 1997. ISBN: 0704380420

Celestial Harmonies, Judith Sollosy (trans), London, Harper Perennial, 2005

ISBN: 9780007141487, 0007141483.

A leading member of the new generation of Hungarian novelists is

László Krasznahorkai (1954 —)

The Melancholy of Resistance, George Szirtes (trans), London, Quartet Books, 1998. ISBN: 0704380090.

War and War, George Szirtes (trans), New York, New Directions, 2006. ISBN: 0811216098 or 9780811216098.

II. POETRY

Note: authors are listed in the order of their year of birth.

In Hungary poetry has always been considered the main stay of Hungarian identity, national consciousness, indeed of history and survival itself. For a comprehensive essay see „A Nation and its Poetry” by László Cs. Szabó (pp. 1051-1122) in A. Makkai 2000 (Ed). Unless listed as a separate volume, references are to this work above.

The first known Hungarian literary text is a „Funeral Oration” rendered English by Alan Jenkins, (p.30 in Makkai 2000). The first poem „The Lament of Mary” dates from 1300 A.D. Several versions in Makkai 2000, including a Middle English one by Thomas N. Hall, (p.37). The first significant poet **Janus Pannonius (1434-1472)** wrote in Latin (pp. 46-50). The first poet writing in Hungarian was on a par with France’s Ronsard and DuBellay, **Bálint Balassi (1554-1594)**, (pp. 78-107). Translators include Keith Bosley and Peter Sherwood, Yakov Hornstein, Joseph Leftwich and W.D. Snodgrass. **Count Miklós Zrínyi (1620-1664)** is remembered for his epic poem „The Zrinyiad”, describing the Turkish wars. Marie B. Jaffee translated the first female poet, **Kata Szidónia Petrőczy (1662-1708)**.

The poets of the Hungarian Enlightenment are preceded by anonymous freedom-fighter and patriotic poets. The three major masters of the

Enlightenment were **Mihály Csokonai-Vitéz (1773-1805)**, **Dániel Berzsenyi (1776-1836)** and **Ferenc Kölcsey (1790-1838)**; the latter is the author of Hungary's National Anthem. There are many excellent translations in this section by Watson Kirkconnell.

Hungary's 19th century saw the Romantic Era ushered in by **Mihály Vörösmarty (1800-1955)**, **János Arany (1817-1882)**, and **Sándor Petőfi (1823-1849)**. Arany's translations of Shakespeare and Aristophanes into Hungarian are peerless even today. These three constitute the great „Hungarian Triumvirate” as constant national classics.

The first truly „modern” poet was **Endre Ady (1877-1919)** whose unique diction

presents almost insurmountable difficulties in translation. **Mihály Babits (1883-1941)** was the epitome of the poet-scholar, his translation of Dante's „Divine Comedy” remains unsurpassed. As the Editor of *Nyugat (The West)* he ushered in the modern age. Next to **Gyula Juhász (1883-1937)** here we find **Dezső Kosztolányi (1885-1936)** already listed among the novelists.

The list of classical poets born in the 20th century starts with **Lőrinc Szabó (1900-1957)** and **Gyula Illyés (1902-1983)** (pp. 714-781). With the tragically short life of **Attila József (1905-1937)**, who committed suicide at age thirty two, we reach an international figure who was inducted into the Western canon by Prof. Harold Bloom of Yale:

Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon*, New York, 1994 Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,
Relevant page: 527.

Attila József's inclusion was based on:

Perched on Nothing's Branch, Peter Hargitai (trans), Apalachee Press 1987, ISBN: 1-0-094082100 (1st edition), 5th ed.: White Pine Press, ISBN: 1-893996-06-X.

Selected Poems, Peter Hargitai (trans), iUniverse, 2005, ISBN: 9780595356140.

Selected Poems and Texts, John Batki and James Atlas (trans. and Eds), Introduction by George Gömöri, Cheadle Hulme, Carnconet Press, 1973. (Without ISBN No.)

Gyula Illyés (1902-1983) was the great synthesizer of the Socialist-Populist movement and of a heavily French-influenced Western orientation. He and Attila József were close friends. Illyés' poem „One Sentence on Tyranny” (pp. 765-778) rendered twice by Vernon Watkins and George Szirtes both played a major role in the 1956 anti-Soviet uprising. Bruce Berlind devoted a separate book to his poems on old age:

Charon's Ferry: Fifty Poems, Bruce Berlind (trans), Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2000, ISBN: 0-8101-1898-3, 0-8101-1799-1.

Undoubtedly the most translated Hungarian poet is **Miklós Radnóti (1909-1944)**, who, although converted to Catholicism, was killed by the Nazis in the village of Abda. He described his own execution in a 7-liner called „Post Card.” (four versions on pp. 880-881.) Emery George of the University of Michigan translated and edited the complete poetry of Miklós Radnóti:

The Complete Poetic Works of Miklós Radnóti, Emery George (trans. and Ed.), Ardis Publisher, Woodstock, N.Y., 1980. ISBN: 9780882335155, 0882335154.

At the University of Cambridge, UK, George Gömöri in co-operation with the British poet Clive Wilmer, translated and edited:

Forced March. Selected Poems of Miklós Radnóti, George Gömöri and Clive Wilmer (trans. and Eds.), Manchester, Carcanet Press, 1979. ISBN: 85635-275-6.

The Life and Poetry of Miklós Radnóti, George Gömöri and Clive Wilmer (Eds.)

(essays by different authors): East European Monographs, Boulder, Co., 1999, Distrib. By Columbia U. Press, ISBN: 0-8803-426-6.

The longest lived and most controversial Hungarian poet of all times was **György Faludy (1910-2006)**. He gained his fame and notoriety by recasting François Villon in Hungarian. Generations knew it by heart. (See Makkai 2003: 15-45). He was masterfully translated by Peter Zollman.

The most remarkable, indeed unique verbal magician of the Hungarian language, a prolific translator and writer of mythological plays was **Sándor Weöres (1913-1989)** Pp. 915-944). His better known translators include Edwin Morgan, Bruce Berlind, Peter Zollman, W. Arthur Boggs, and Donald E. Morse. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize for literature. The next truly major poet was **János Pilinszky (1921-1981)**, who has been translated into English by Ted Hughes, Peter Jay, and Peter Zollman.

Ágnes Nemes Nagy (1922-1991) was undoubtedly the topmost woman poet of Hungary enjoying European stature (974-1006). She first appeared in English translated by Bruce Berlind. She combines the rational and the supernatural in both free verse and the strictest of meters.

Selected Poems (by Ágnes Nemes Nagy), translated with an introduction and translators's preface by Bruce Berlind, Preface by Ágnes Nemes Nagy. Iowa City,

Iowa, International Writing Program directed by Paul Engel. University of Iowa,

1980, (no ISBN or LC No. available).

The second longest lived Hungarian poet was **Győző ('Victor') Határ 1914-2006**. He wrote plays, essays and novels beside exquisite poetry. From the time

of the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 he lived in Wimbledon (London) in the U.K. He has been masterfully translated by George Szirtes and Peter Zollman.

Nemes Nagy's and Határ's intellectualism was counterbalanced in the passionate folk-poetry inspired work of **László Nagy (1925-1978)**:

Love of the Scorching Wind. Selected Poems (of László Nagy), George Gömöri, Tony Connor, and Gyula Kodolányi (trans), Oxford-New York-Toronto, Oxford

University Press, 1974. ISBN: 0-19-211823-4.

Nagy's wife, **Margit Szécsi (1928-1990)**, grew from Socialist rebel to a worthy partner of her husband (1020-1026). She was translated by Kenneth McRobbie. The Transylvanian poet **Géza Páskándi (1933-1995)** was translated by J.G. Nichols and Neville Masterman (1031-1036).

Ferenc Juhász (1928—) continues to thrive. His grand symphonic poem „The Boy Changed into a Stag Clamours at the Gate of Secrets” (1038-1048)

was translated by David Wevill, who properly identified the author's inspiration as Béla Bartók's „Cantata profana.”

The most significant senior poet alive today is **Sándor Kányádi (1929—)**, who hails from Transylvania (pp. 289-311 in Makkai 2003). He has been translated by Peter Zollman.

Among the best known modern poets we find **Otto Orbán (1936-1990?)** who had an innovating effect on Hungarian poetry:

The Journey of Barbarus, Bruce Berlind (trans), Passaggiata Press, 1997, ISBN: 1-57889-054-3.

Dezső Tandori (1938—) became famous for his love of birds:

Birds and Other Relations, Bruce Berlind (trans), Princeton University Press, 1986, ISBN: 0-691-06685-X.

Imre Oravecz (1943—) lived in the USA for a while. He writes a great deal about his birth place, Szajla, and the nearby communist concentration camp of Recksk and other modernist themes:

When you became she, Bruce Berlind (trans), Xenos Books, 1994. ISBN: 1-879378-10-8.

SOME MORE IMPORTANT ANTHOLOGIES

I. In Quest of the 'Miracle Stag': An Anthology of Hungarian Poetry in English Translation from the 13th Century to the Present, Vol. I. Adam Makkai (Ed.) 2nd Edition by Tertina, Budapest 2000. ISBN (Tertina), Budapest, 963 86024 2 2, Atlantis-Centaur, Chicago 0-9642094-9-7, Library of Congress: 00-132827.

The volume is currently available from TINTA KIADÓ, Budapest

info@tintakiado.hu, kissgabo@tintakiado.hu, or viola@tintakiado.hu

Price: HUF 10,000. (The exchange rate varies, is HUF 230 to \$1 USD.)

II. *In Quest of the 'Miracle Stag': An Anthology of Hungarian Poetry in English Translation from the Start of the 20th Century to the Present*,

Vol II (continuation of the previous volume), Adam Makkai (Ed.)

Budapest, 2003. The International Association of Hungarian Language and Culture. ISBN: 963 210 814 0 and Atlantis-Centaur, Chicago. ISBN: 1-930902-00-X. Available from the Association of Hungarian Language and Culture, Budapest, Rákóczi Blvd.38, I/2. Tel: (36-1) 413-0114, Fax: (36-1)

344-4366, Home page: www.mnyknt.hu

Price: HUF 10,000.

III. *The Colonnade of Teeth. Modern Hungarian Poetry*, George Szirtes, George Gömöri (Eds.) Foreword by Edwin Morgan. Newcastle, Bloodaxe, 1966. ISBN: 1-855224-331-7. (35 poets by 27 translators).

IV. *Silenced Voices. Hungarian Plays from Transylvania*. Selected and Translated by Csilla Bertha and Donald E. Morse. Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2008. ISBN 978-1-904505-34-1

“Introduction: Falling Through the Cracks” (by the translators and editors)

András Sütő (1927 – 2003), *Advent in the Hargita Mountains (Advent a Hargitán)*, 21-98.

Csaba Lászlóffy (1939 --), *The Heretic (Az eretnek)*, 99 – 157.

Géza Páskándi (1933 – 1995), *The Avenger, the Gatekeeper, or It Is Requested that You Wipe Your Feet (A bosszúálló, a Kapus, Avagy: Kérjük a Lábat Letörölni)*, 159 – 197.

János Székely (1929 – 92), *Caligula's Governor (Kaligula helytartója)*, 199 – 260.

Géza Szöcs (1953 --), *A Christmas Play or Uncle Louise and the Little Ones (Karácsonyi játék, avagy Laiosz Báci és a kisdedek)*, 261 – 282.

V. *Homeland in the Heights. An Anthology of Post-World War II Hungarian Poetry*.

Csilla Bertha, (Ed.) Budapest, Eötvös József Kiadó, 2000. ISBN: 963 9024 88 0.

Poems by **Gyula Illyés** (1902-1983), **Sándor Weöres** (1913-1989), **János Pilinszky** (1921-1981), **Ágnes Nemes Nagy** (1922-1991), **Margit Szécsi** (1928-1990), **Ferenc Juhász** (1928--), **Sándor Kányádi** (1929--), **Sándor Csoóri** (1930--), **Gizella Hervay** (1934-1982), **Sándor Gál** (1937--), **Domokos**

Szilágyi (1938-1976), József Utassy (1941--), Árpád Farkas (1944--), Gáspár Nagy (1949-2008), Géza Szócs (1953--).