

who came to Canada after 1956, had great difficulties adjusting to the commercial, profit-centered, non-supportive economic and social scene in Canada. Throughout their life they had preserved the puritan, village-oriented, non-commercial ethic of the impoverished proud peasant. In Communist Hungary, they had lived a community-centered life in a Budapest industrial district. After several misadventures, they obtained a share-tenancy in the tobacco belt. Their deeply held social views, forbidding commercial speculation and profit-centeredness, coupled with their social and psychological isolation in Canadian society, produced a sense of failure and discouragement, which persisted even fifteen years after their arrival in Canada.

We have commented on only some of the most visible issues raised in these immigrant life histories. They demonstrate the rich informational and conceptual contributions of this form of immigrant source material to an understanding of Canadian and North American immigrant experience. They suggest also that the proposed theory of research outlined by Linda Dégh presents a viable and refined avenue of exploring the interaction between immigrant and North American cultures.

*Linda Dégh, "Approaches to Folklore Research Among Immigrant Groups," *Journal of American Folklore*, 79 (1966): 551-556.

** John Kósa, *Land of Choice: The Hungarians in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957.

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En is voltam jávorfácska. . . * By Sári Megyery. Paris: Magyar Műhely, 1975. Pp. 383. \$8.00.

Ours is the golden age of memoirs, but Sári Megyery's autobiography is more than mere reminiscence of yet another immigrant. It is a thorough exploration of a tantalizingly exciting life, an authentic mirror of an equally fascinating era and a valuable document about several outstanding figures of the Hungarian literary renaissance between 1920 and 1938. The writer, like Puck, hops from lover to lover, from country to country, mesmerizing the reader who dizzily follows the meteoric career of this extraordinary woman. Ambivalence in her attitude is apparent throughout the book: she alternates between yearning nostalgia and sharp criticism of her social class. She delivers her chronicle with scathing sincerity; thus her story becomes a moving human credo as well as reliable literary source material.

Part I describes her childhood at the beginning of the century among the Hungarian gentry. It is a world in which dullness, greed, gluttony, corruption, pride and prejudice prevail. The protagonists, her relatives, are grotesque, ancient dames, gallant country squires, antediluvian phantoms who belong to a wax museum dedicated to immortalize a sunken society. With gentle irony and loving understanding, the author delivers her bold indictment and gradually removes the masks from each actor of the drama. Her grandfather, the highly respected judge, a champion of justice, turns out to be an ardent anti-Semite; his wife, the noble *grande dame*, is a stingy, petty, nagging snob. Her elegant aunts stand naked as shallow coffee-klutch damsels whose major preoccupation is to catch rich, preferably aristocratic husbands for themselves and their nieces. This is a world of Kálmán Mikszáth or Jane Austen. The young Sári, perpetually discontent in this suffocating atmosphere, is driven by an internal force to break away.

Her sympathies are generous, her descriptions throb with passion in the portrayal of her parents. The weak, unhappy, hen-pecked, sensitive father, a prominent lawyer, is caught in the web of an agonizingly bad marriage. Since he lacks ambition and refuses to climb the social ladder, his wife becomes almost paranoid. A typical product of the gentry, she is a supreme hostess, a card-playing, flirtatious society queen, a sycophant, more concerned with pretense and propriety than substance. Her obsession with rank, position and never-enough-money drives the family to despair.

The home boundaries could not hold the exquisitely beautiful, precocious Sári too long. After she enrolls in an acting studio, she is soon discovered by major producers. At the age of 19, Sacy von Blondel (her new stage name) gets a contract with the Usher firm in Berlin, acts in Teinhardt's theaters and becomes a superstar, leading lady in 49 movies.

But she remains unfulfilled in spite of her glamorous life. In quest of something more meaningful, at the zenith of her career, Miss Blondel quits acting and returns to Budapest to dedicate her life to literature. In a short time she publishes one book after another; novels, volumes of poetry, collections of essays: *Csak a fényre vigyázz* [Beware of the Light Only], *A szerelem a szerelmesé* [Love Belongs to Lovers], *Végkielégítés* [Final Settlement], *A vendég* [The Guest], to mention only a few. In addition, she contributes to a number of newspapers and magazines. Though lacking in serious depth, her pen moves with the same ease as she did before the cameras.

In 1938 she travels to Paris to sign a contract for a book, never returns to Hungary, marries a distinguished playwright, André Lang, and

begins her academic career. After attending the Sorbonne and Cambridge, she launches her new books in French and English.

Part II may be entitled: "In the Shadow of the Gods." During her stay in Budapest, the blonde beauty is quickly embraced (both literally and figuratively) by the chief members of the *Nyugat* [West] literary circle. The ensuing chapters recount her friendship with Dezső Kosztolányi, Ernő Szép, Frigyes Karinthy, Ferenc Molnár, Lajos Zilahy, Sándor Márai, Lőrinc Szabó and scores of others. These portraits are highly sensitive and full of venerating compassion.

The true historical value of the book, however, is provided in the third part, which contains hitherto unpublished private letters written by the most prominent men-of-letter. These epistles were replies to a questionnaire prepared by the author in 1936 as a project, sponsored by a literary club. The question was: "How is a poem born? Give your solution to the mystery of creation!" All the addressees answered immediately. One cannot help being moved by some of these confessions. "A poem is a terribly monumental thing!" sighs Karinthy, the sensational humorist. He was the first to reply, followed by the above-mentioned writers and many more.

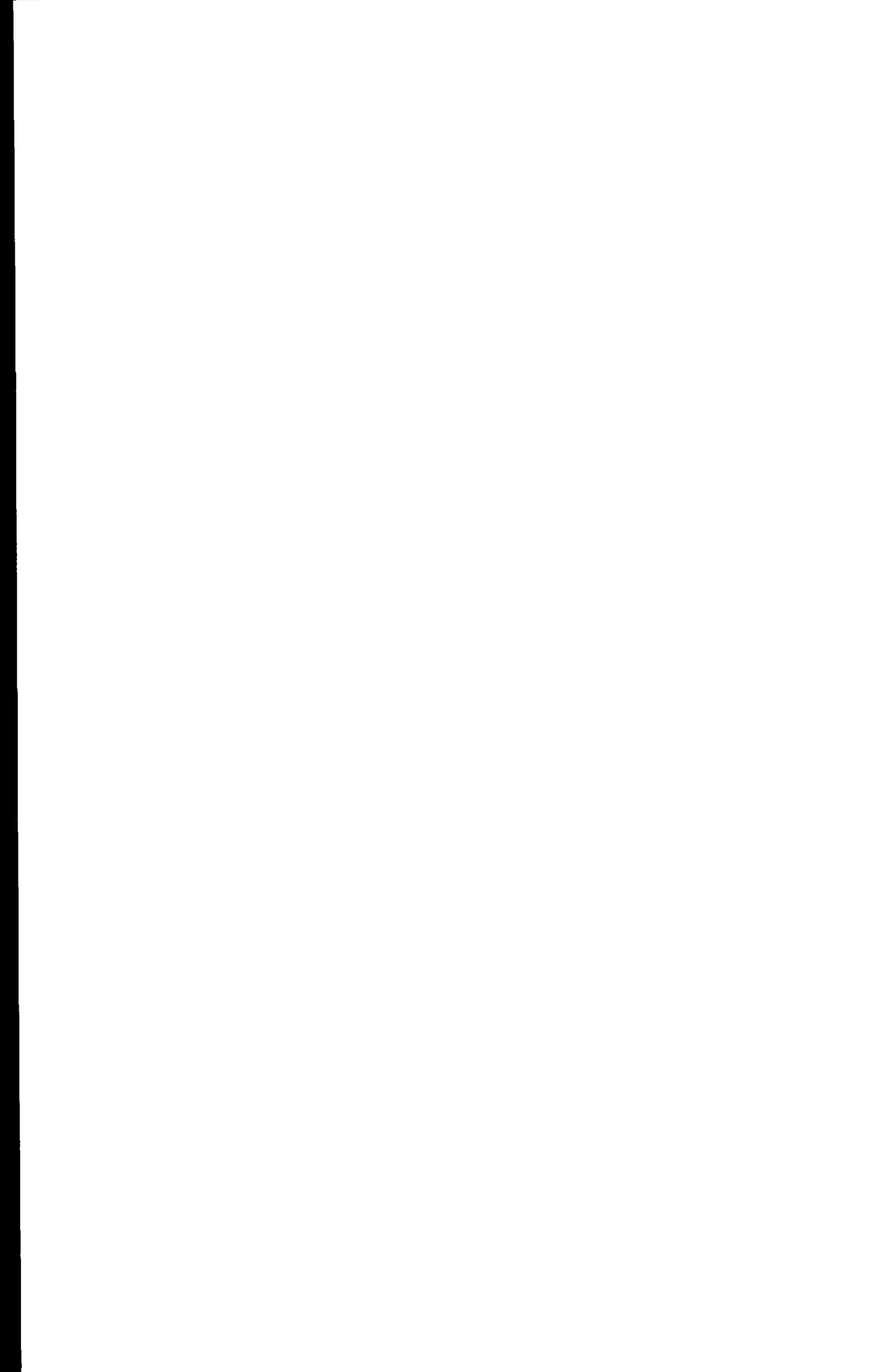
These rare, valuable literary documents were found accidentally after the war in an old chest. The entire material was donated to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The book is free of pathos, clichés and mannerism. Although some sentences are ungrammatical, the style is colorful and vivid revealing the author's enthusiasm for the Magyar tongue. In the introduction she writes: "My sole motivation for writing this memoir was my love for my native tongue! I have tried to protect it for decades with an almost schizophrenic passion from the influence of my adopted languages." After living abroad for forty years, the writer succeeded splendidly.

Sári Megyery emerges as a warm, generous, courageous person, a forerunner of Women's Liberation, who maintained her humanism and integrity in all circumstances. In her merciless reviewing of the failures of her kinfolks, and the exploration of the predicament of a woman in that doomed society, she has produced a powerful record of a long-gone world, a notable contribution to Hungarian literary history and a fascinating, highly readable book.

* The title, "I Too Had Been a Tiny Maple Tree. . ." comes from Kosztolányi who playfully called the writer a "tiny maple tree."

Clara Györgyey



Review of Reviews

Egyházi társadalom a középkori Magyarországon [Ecclesiastical Society in Medieval Hungary]. By Elemér Mályusz. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1971. 398 pp.

This study . . . is the result of ten years of a research conducted between 1934 and 1944, and put in its final form only twenty-seven years later. There is no indication that more recent material has been added to the original research . . . [T]he aim of the book is to demonstrate that the structural division of the clergy in medieval Hungary, its life, activities, the rivalries among its various strata, as well as the deep gap which existed between the upper, middle and the lower clergy, reflected the structure and nature of the contemporary feudal society of Hungary. The prominent role, significance and merit of this ecclesiastical community was that it provided, almost exclusively, the framework for the development of an intellectual segment which, at least until the advent of the renaissance period, was missing in the secular community of the feudal society.

The book discusses in great detail, on the basis of original documents, papal tax-records and testaments of individual clergymen, the sharp contrast in the social and economic status between the upper and middle clergy (bishops and canons) and the lower clergy (parish priests). Although the bishops frequently held important state positions, their education corresponding to the highest contemporary standards, and were granted large feudal estates, the so-called "private church" (the parish priests) served the spiritual needs of the village community. The village priest was almost illiterate, his knowledge of Latin extended only to the indispensable parts of the liturgy, and his economic basis was usually a small piece of land donated by the local gentry-landowner. . . .

Thematically the strongest, most coherent part of the book deals with the monastic clergy. In Hungary, like elsewhere, the monastic orders during the feudal era were the centers and carriers of cultural, intellectual and literary activities. Among them the Benedictine order had a significant role in the collection and preservation of manuscripts. One of their oldest monasteries, Pannonhalma, possessed already in the