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ZOLTÁN KALLÓS, BALLAD COLLECTOR

ZOLTÁN KALLÓS: *Balladák Könyve* ("The book of ballads") Kriterion, Bucharest, 1970. 677 pp; Helikon, Budapest, 1973, 877 pp.

Many a year has passed since the Hungarian reading public took to a book as it did to Kallós's collection of ballads. The Bucharest edition was really meant for the Hungarian minority in Rumania, but a few copies reached Hungary. It was reissued, Helikon of Budapest co-operated with Kriterion of Bucharest, records were added, and the almost 25,000 copies for the Hungarian market were sold out in days, including those in the more expensive binding. They talk about this book wherever they want to prove that interest in folk traditions has flared up once again.

This interest is addressed both to the ballad, and there can be few nobler things that folk poetry has produced, and folk song as well, which has long taken its proper place in the thinking on art of our age. In Hungary this interest has soaked deep, touching the roots of the way this society thinks of itself, but it is specially due to the Hungarian folk traditions of Transylvania and Moldavia. These stand for all that is most magnificent in ballads and folk song, folk music and the dance as well, the whole length and breadth of that part of the world where Hungarian is spoken. Transylvania's closed, tradition bound world from the start offered collectors the most mature textual variants, it was there really that the Hungarian ballad was discovered, and it was amongst the Székely of Transylvania that Bartók and Kodály collected most pentatonic tunes, most of the real gems of the old Hungarian melodic style. When Moldavia next door was discovered for Hungarian folk music, tunes to which some old Hungarian ballads were sung turned up as well, and pieces were there, heard again, still very much alive and kicking, which were on record amongst the Székely as examples of

a dying tradition. Even before Kallós, one thought of the Hungarian Székely of Transylvania and the Hungarian Csángó of Moldavia as the treasure trove of Hungarian folklore.

Kallós far surpassed all that even those familiar with both territories could possibly hope for. It was expected that he would collect what had long been collected and that using modern methods, that is a tape-recorder, he would be able to record a big part of a wealth that had been. Instead he surprised in ways that no one thought possible after a hundred years of Hungarian folkballad collecting, and Bartók and Kodály's work on folk music had started as well when this century was still young.

It became clear to start with that the Székely were not the only ones who preserved the ancient Transylvanian traditions, and it could well be that their forms are not the most archaic. The musical idiom of Central Transylvania, the *Mezőség*, that is the "heath", is at least as archaic and rich, and in many of its features, the way they sing, instrumental dance music, and the coming into being of certain more recent types of song, it is altogether unique. The valley of the Gyimes is the other territory he discovered. This is a pass through the Eastern Carpathians that leads towards Moldavia, and there, scattered in the valleys of small brooks, and high in the mountains, people lived whose traditions of folk music and folk song were not only richer than most, they had preserved ancient ways, special aspects of the tonal system, of using the voice and instruments, which created a feverish enthusiasm amongst the lay public, allowing ethnomusicologists a glimpse into the pre-history of Hungarian music. Moldavia stands for similar, partially different ancient

ways. There was a frontier between the Hungarians living there and the rest of the Hungarians for most of history, going back many centuries, and changes in Hungarian conventions and culture only reached them with delays and in a watered down state. The daily life of people there is still pretty medieval. These are all strongly flowing sources of folk poetry and folk music. There is nothing like it in any of the lands where Hungarian is spoken, nor is there anything comparable anywhere in Eastern Europe.

This is particularly true of ballads. There is no other place in Eastern Europe, or the United States, the two areas which proved richest for collectors, that offered as many and with such mature features. Kallós here publishes two hundred and seventeen ballads, forty-two folk-songs related to them and eight told in prose; attaching the music of a hundred and sixty-two. Let me say that the number of the latter expresses what it

proved possible to publish, not all those collected, Kallós always recorded sung versions, except for those told as tales, and one or two where the subject could not remember the tune. There aren't two hundred and seventeen types of course. Kallós is aware of the importance of variants, when the type is rare, or very beautiful, he publishes a number of them, fifteen of the "Three Orphans", to give an example, from many different parts of Rumania where Hungarians live, mostly areas or villages which were virgin territory for folk-song collecting until he got there. He knows what those five versions he publishes of "The Heartless Mother" mean to ethnomusicology, neither Bartók, nor Kodály, had found it while collecting amongst the Székely, and its early splendid text remained recorded without a melody for a long time until Péter Pál Domokos, the first ethnographer to work amongst the Hungarians of Moldavia, published it with

Parlando ♩ = 100

„Ho - vá méssz te, há - rom ár - va,
Ho - vá méssz te, há - rom ár - va?”
„Hosz - szú út - ra, szó - gá - lat - ra,
Hosz - szú út - ra, szó - gá - lat - ra.”

Parlando ♩ = 82

El - in - du - la, el es

Ef - jú le - ány ke - gyes,

Jobb kar - já - ra ve - vé

Ki - csi ke - gyes fi - át,

The Heartless Mother, p. 483

Parlando ♩ = 116

„El - me - gyek, el - me - gyek

Bé Tö - rök - or - szág - ba,

Leg - küs - seb lá - nyom - nak

Lá - to - ga - tá - sá - ra.

The Mother of the Rich Woman, p. 533

a tune in 1941. Kallós now added five new variants. But the three variants of "The two captives", and the two recordings of "The mother of the rich woman" are as important. The first was last found in 1916, the other in 1910 by Antal Molnár and Zoltán Kodály respectively.

Kallós also found things no one else had before him. He added about a dozen new types to the register of Hungarian ballads. Perhaps the most important of his discoveries is "The soldier girl," in three variants. This provided the missing Hungarian link in a chain that stretched all the way from France, through Portugal, Spain and Italy, to the Balkans and on to the Czechs, Slovaks and Poles. Oddly enough this wide-spread folk-theme was first "recorded", that is adapted, by an anonymous Hungarian poet in 1570.

Nor is the importance of those new types any less which branch off from known types or act as bridges between them. Discoveries of this sort are evidence that, in its present state, tradition only preserved the outstanding peaks. The wealth-that-was still exemplified the metamorphoses from one type to another, lifting the veil from the way the folk-imagination works when creating art. Equally important was discovering the complete Moldavian text of "The unmarried mother who killed her children" which had only been known in fragments, a complete text that included details which clearly proved the connection between the Hungarian ballad, and a western European one known in French, English and Danish version (Child 20).

The present reviewer collects ballads and is an ethnomusicologist as well, and it has proved difficult to decide which field most benefited by Kallós's discoveries. The musical material published in this book alone contains so much archaic that is new to scholars, especially much of what is presented on the attached record, that would be enough if it were the summing-up of the work of ten men. Let me allude only to

something on one of the attached records, a ballad from Gyimes recited on three notes of the pentatonic system, *do, so and la*, embroidering it all in a special timbre suggesting the early middle ages, or something earlier still, to the listener.

One ought to be aware that the volume was not selected from the whole of the material Kallós collected. Much has appeared earlier, hidden somewhere in a scholarly journal. In many cases he made it available to friends and fellow ethnologists, in this way his collection was dispersed through numerous channels, in the publications of ethnologists in Rumania and Hungary. Kallós did not include any of these, only stuff that was completely new and unpublished, that had not been handed to anybody else. There was more than enough for a volume full of surprises, even within these limitations. To think only of the dances and other folk-tunes he has collected! One would need astronomical figures to describe all he has done.

How is it that someone could achieve so much by his forties, a relatively early age for a scholar? In the first place by sacrificing his life to the traditions of his native land, first those of his home area, extending its limits as he grew older. Kallós is a native of the *Mezőség* (Heath) district of Transylvania; nothing seemed more natural than that, studying with the aim of teaching singing, he should collect folk-songs in an ever widening circle. This remained at the centre of his interest, what he felt to be his calling, ever since. When he was appointed to teach in the one and only Hungarian school in Moldavia he visited every small Hungarian village there and became personally acquainted with just about every one who knew folk-songs, and there are a great many of those in that part of the world. When an end was put to his teaching, he managed to get an office job in the timber industry in the Gyimes Valley. Kallós however cannot live apart from a community, life around him passionately interests him

wherever he is, particularly its manifestations in art. At that time he discovered the traditions of the Gyimes valley and made them accessible to all who treasure folk art. Finally, without a job, and not tied to any particular region, the art of all places where Hungarians lived in Transylvania or Moldavia became the field where he collected. He made it his special business to cover even the most scattered diaspora, and record their folk-songs and folk-music. He covered the whole of historic Transylvania and Moldavia, but he did not step out of their bounds, into those parts of the Great Plain which lie within the frontiers of Rumania. That is a different world and he did not really feel at home in that.

A love of one's native land works wonders in ethnographic collecting and has done great things for Hungarian culture. Those who really loved their own neck of the woods always produced something of immense value for the whole when they delved to greater depths than elsewhere. Kallós surpasses us all. Not only because the

country he covers is bigger, the whole Principality of Transylvania that once was, and even more, or because it is incomparably richer in archaic material than any other, but because Kallós is driven by an inner need to do what others do out of mere enthusiasm. Preserving the traditions of the people gives meaning to his life. This explains why he carries on though he puts his basic interests at risk, again and again, with renewed strength. He did it when he only enriched the publications of others, he did it when his name was beginning to be bruited about, but far from ensuring him a living it cost him money; and he did it, with great satisfaction, when he received sufficient recognition to publish books under his own name—another volume contains all the songs one Moldavian woman knew—and twenty years of systematic and devoted research were beginning to make him some royalties as well. And he will surely do it again, for nothing can keep this man, obsessed with folk song, from his calling: the search for the culture his people has produced.

LAJOS VARGYAS

A PROLIFIC AND A TACITURN POET

MIHÁLY LADÁNYI: *Se csillaga, se holdja* [Neither Star Nor Moon], Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1974, 466 pp; GYÖRGY PETRI: *Körüllírt zuhanás* [Circumscribed Fall], Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1974, 71 pp.

Mihály Ladányi, the "song-beaten offspring of cotters", began publishing verse in university periodicals as a student two decades ago; his first published volume in 1959 bore the modest but carefully chosen title *Az út kezdete* (The Beginning of the Road). How very deliberate it was now

becomes clear after publication of this tenth volume of verse.

When Ladányi began his career, Hungarian lyric poetry was ceremonial and serious, perhaps too much so. Even though different trends vied with each other, just as they do today, almost every trend and

virtually every poet agreed on one basic issue: they wanted to create *poetry*, in other words, a separate realm, with its own special and unmistakable orthography and hydrography, atmosphere and values. Individual poems served as the building blocks in the realization of this ideal poetry and were subordinate to the whole of the volume, or to poetry as such, just as chapters of a novel are to the complete work.

From *Az út kezdete* on, Ladányi has not written poetry, he has improvised poems. As far as function is concerned, his poems are in a co-ordinate relation with one another, similar to diary entries, a fact which naturally does not preclude some poems being more successful, others less so. Ladányi speaks untiringly and unceasingly of eternal *hic et nunc*'s, of the constantly changing "here and now". "Every day I prepare for my fate," the poet wrote in "Luna", a poem from *Dobszóló* (Drum Solo, 1967), and his verse records daily resumptions, hopes and despairs, joys and failures, perceptions and observations. Notwithstanding that it sounds bad in aesthetics and criticism, I would call Ladányi's poems human documents, adding that they are the notes of a moralist.

Above all Ladányi's poems document change in life style: the amazement, vacillation, search for a foothold and acclimatization of a young man who came to the capital city from the village. It is no accident that he compares the city to a huge woman and depicts it altogether with a feminine nature. And it is no accident either that glimpses of Budapest restaurants and espresso-bars flash throughout his work. That is not to say Ladányi is a poet of the city; he is not. Since the early 1960s he has frequently returned to live in the country. His experiences in the capital city, however, are one of the sources for his poetry. "My poems are still reveries of the ditch bank, I write them during my roamings, in taverns, country stations, old press-houses," he notes on the fly-leaf of *Kitépett tollú szél* (Plucked Wind), 1974. Many poems express concern

for the revolution, demanding it, calling out to it or mourning for it, and he always identifies himself with those for whom this idealistic, and sometimes perhaps naively, envisaged revolution unfurled its colours. The setting and local colour of places where he writes and wanders come to life in his verse as a background for the people he meets. Ladányi's poetry is anthropocentric and individual-centred, flashes of profiles, of workers, peasants and professionals, the educated and uneducated, poets, readers and boorish critics, friends and adversaries, old and young, and of women, scores of them. Portraits of lovers, the heroines of completed and hopeless love stories. In Hungary Ladányi's generation was the first to encounter—already as adults—the sexual revolution. In twenty years of poetry, a sequence of conquests are related which puts Casanova to shame in a stubborn, unyielding search for ideal love that puts the Romantics to shame. Before the sexual revolution love, for the most part, was a sexual or sex-related moral problem. Now, with the gradual disappearance of sex taboos, heretofore unnoticed or hidden social, moral and psychological problems of love have come to light. Ladányi's poems offer important glosses on the possibilities and need for love in the third quarter of the twentieth century.

In practice a Ladányi poem becomes the maid servant of the examination of behavioural forms. The background is the memory of the Second World War and the threat of a Third World War, the recollection of the years of the personality cult, the problems of the construction of socialism and the achievements and failures of technological development. However, the examination is almost never abstract, impersonal or timeless, but is always linked with a date, concrete persons and concrete problems.

Ladányi is one of the most popular Hungarian poets today. His latest volume, *Se csil-*

* See poems from this volume in Edwin Morgan's translation, on pp. 69–73 of this issue.—The Editor.