FOREWORD

LONG RECOGNIZED as a major poet in a country of many talented poets, Sándor Weöres was born in 1913 in Szombathely in western Hungary and was brought up in the neighboring village of Csönge. He was the son of a noble family; one of his ancestors became rich by selling supplies to the Napoleonic armies. Family tradition has it that there was a Gypsy chieftain among his ancestors, and the existence of such a figure may account for Weöres's dark, smoky eyes and for his lifelong interest in ancient Oriental culture and traditions. His father was a landowner and an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army. Weöres grew up speaking both German and Hungarian; at the age of nine or ten his German governess read Goethe, Schiller, and Heine to him. He attended the University of Pécs, first as a law student, then as a student of geography and history. He eventually took a doctorate in philosophy and aesthetics. In his doctoral dissertation, published in 1939 under the title *The Birth of the Poem*, he set forth his own principles of composition.

Weöres was something of a child prodigy, composing poetry even as an infant. "The prattle which started in the cradle," he has said, "was gradually transformed into conscious versification at the age of four or five." At the age of fifteen he wrote these lines:

> I am now at the end of my career;
> You, youngster, follow in my footsteps.

His career was then just beginning, but throughout his life the publication of each new volume has marked a new beginning, and he has never at any time lost the spirit of youth.

During the forties Weöres worked as a librarian and a museum administrator in various cities. In 1945 he retired to his native village of Csönge and became for a time a farmer. When he was nineteen, several of his poems were accepted for publication in the leading magazine *Nyugat* (West) by its editor, the well-known poet Mihály Babits. In 1935 and again in 1936 he received the Baumgarten Prize, considered at the time the highest literary award in Hungary. During World War II he was drafted into the labor force, but was never sent to the front. Since 1951 he has lived in Budapest and has devoted himself solely to his writing.

Weöres has traveled widely in Europe and has been to Egypt, Turkey, and the Soviet Union. His two visits to the Far East have had a great impact upon his work. He went to Manila in 1937 to take part in an Eucharistic Congress, and continued on to India and Vietnam. In 1948–49 he spent a year in Italy, and in 1959 visited China. As a translator of the Ukrainian poet Shevchenko, he was invited to Kiev in 1964, and as a translator of Rustaveli, he attended the celebration in honor of the Georgian poet in Tbilisi in 1966. In most of his travels since 1947 he has been accompanied by his wife, Amy Károlyi, a poet in her own right and a translator of Emily Dickinson. As guests of the Translation Center of Columbia University, Sándor Weöres and Amy Károlyi visited the United States in 1977 at the time of the publication of *Modern Hungarian Poetry*, edited by Miklós Vajda, by Columbia University Press. Together with Ferenc Juhász and István Vas, they read their poems to large audiences at the Guggenheim Museum in New York and at the Library of Congress in Washington, and they travelled to New England and to the West Coast.

Today acknowledged as one of the most important poets in the history of Hungarian literature, Sándor Weöres is unequalled in his mastery of the language. His work in a great variety of forms has brought him world renown and the admiration and friendship of poets in many countries. The wide range of his work makes it difficult to compare him with any other modern poet. For the depth of his lyricism, he calls to mind Rainer Maria Rilke or Dylan Thomas; in his philosophical and religious intensity he suggests T. S. Eliot or Paul Valéry; in his playful handling of language he evokes Christian Morgenstern.

To find a poet of similar range and virtuosity, one who can write inspired rhymes for children and who, as a visionary, can speak in near-prophetic measures of man's place in the universe one must turn to William Blake. Sándor Weöres is right in claiming that he finds the same mentality and the same sense of mission in Blake's works as in his own.

Weöres's subject is nothing less than man's place not just in the world but in the cosmos. His entire work is an effort to make a whole of the fragmentation of man's experience past and present. In examining the myths of other countries and other civilizations, he weaves his own myth around his own existence. He acknowledges a wide range of influences all the way from ancient Chinese poetry, Lao Tse, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh and the Egyptian hymns all the way to Negro mythology and the Polynesian Rabie Hainuvele cycle of myths. In an interview Weöres once said that he saw himself as a little man with a big head who happens to be passing through a room. There is nothing at all remarkable about this little man, he said: he is simply the medium through which the universe expresses itself.

The poet is one who in the words of Weöres must "retain the childhood, embryonic or perhaps even pre-conception quintessence of our being." The poet gives expression to the archetypal patterns of man's collective unconscious (and in this Weöres comes close to a Jungian view of the human psyche), unimpeded and open to change and experiment. "I think," he has said, "one should explore everything. Including those things which will never be accepted, not even in the distant future. We can never know, at the start of an experiment, where it will lead. Perhaps it will be an abortive, still-born enterprise, perhaps it will be a necessary and useful experiment—only we cannot know that, not even after we have completed it. It may take decades or centuries to prove whether it was a useful experiment or a useless one. It may never be proved at all... The possibility that this poem or that one led nowhere does not worry me in the least. I never think about it."

Such an openness and willingness to experiment lends a constant freshness to everything that Weöres touches. He seems never to lose a childlike sense of wonder. He invents incessantly—new characters, new rhythms, even in some cases new languages. No modern poet, not even W. H. Auden, has written in such a variety of forms and shown himself master of them all. He ranges from simple nursery rhymes to sophisticated epigrams. He has a strong visual imagination and has produced witty line drawings and imaginative concrete poems. He can be incisive and profoundly moving; he can also be obscene, vulgar, and at times very funny. He has written long philosophical and satirical poems as well as explicitly erotic ones.

Critics have sometimes complained that Weöres is too esoteric and detached, but although he was never a political poet, his poems have sometimes dealt directly with the political and social scene. In 1953 he wrote a poem "Le Journal" which speaks of the fifties exactly as they were in Hungary and yet reads as if transformed by myth. However abstract Weöres becomes, he is always sensuous in his language. His great poems resemble the works of Mozart: they have a surface sweetness and delicacy that covers over a deep underlying tragedy.

"In such a poet," Edwin Morgan, the British translator of Weöres, has written, "it is natural that there should go with all this a deep sense of the interconnections of human and non-human life. These connections, felt more strongly by Weöres than the everyday props and ligatures of social institutions and habits, have sometimes given him a reputation for withdrawnness or pessimism that this work as a whole does not in fact show. Yet although he is obviously not writing for a mass audience, his poetry is so sinewy with energy, so ready to break out into wonder or playfulness that its 'black' qualities must be placed in that broader context of abounding creative pleasure. Even the bitter 'Internus', with its unrelieved catalogue of human failings, its Baudelairean nest of disgusts, has its positives; they emerge in the cleansing, purging power of an artist's 'No!,' something utterly distinct from the cynically negative positions the consciously reflective social mind might throw up:

The panic world is baffled at my gate:
'Madman! Egotist! Traitor!' its words beat.
But wait: I have a bakehouse in my head,
you'll feed someday on this still uncooled bread.

At the end of 'Internus' the poet imagines his death as a return to the great plenum from which everything is continuously poured."

It is a paradox that the baker in this case is at the same time a conscious artist and a kind of mage. In a recent poem Weöres sees genius as a candle lit in a distant window at night, hardly bright enough to illuminate the interior of the room but a guiding signal to the wanderer:

Its flicker marks
the direction of my village
like a huge bonfire
across the night.

Weöres believes that the poet's mission is to speak for the whole man; he is one "who, if born with the gift of poetry, will use this gift well." Using his gift means for Weöres writing poetry that will move his readers so that they cannot remain indifferent, even if they do not understand it fully. This sense of Blakean mission he expressed as a very young man in his doctoral dissertation *The Birth of the Poem* and later defined explicitly in the introduction to *Springs of Fire* (1964): "My goal is not to provoke enthusiasm or irritation, nor to wish to be simply unusual. I want something different; I want to send out a ray of light that will shake the entire being, instinct, feelings, comprehension, imagination and spirit. The reader reads the poem but the poem also reads the reader. I want to radiate through the reader and shake him so that he will give up his closed, final, existential singular 'I' for the benefit of the open, social, cosmic, and endless plural 'I's."

The metaphor of flame occurs often in the recent poems of Weöres, as in "Song: Boundless Space":

When I was no one yet,
light, clear light,
in the winding brooks
I often slept.

As I almost became someone
a great force rolled me,
stone, rough stone,
ice-veined, down the slope.

And, finally, I have brightened
to live, flame, naked flame,
in rounded, boundless space,
showing our real country.

In one of his most striking long poems, "The Lost Parasol", two lovers lie down in the grass on the edge of a wild gorge, and when they arise, the girl leaves behind her red parasol. The poem describes in magnificent detail the slow disintegration of the forgotten parasol, with its flashing red silk and bone handle, in the driving wind and rain. As nature changes, the lovers also change, and the parasol is slowly transformed; invaded by vines, by worms and lizards, it settles in the brambles and goes slowly to pieces until only a tuft of red silk floats off into space. The lovers are lost in nature like the parasol, which, literally with its bone handle and its red silk, physically symbolizes their love. The merging of the parasol with space calls to mind a delicate Chinese print, and ndeed this poem unfolds in its wealth of detail like a misty Chinese scroll. The object of civilization is destroyed by nature, which continues to reproduce itself: the two lovers become one only in the song of the poet, which is eternal. Nowhere has Weöres more beautifully expressed his vision of the artist's triumph than in the concluding stanza:

The red silk parasol was my song,
    sung for my only one;
this true love is the clearest spring,
    I have smoothed its mirror with my breath,
I have seen the two of us, the secret is known:
    we shall moulder into one after death.
Now I expend my life exultantly
like the oriole in the tree:
till it falls down on the old forest floor,
singing with such full throat its heart must burst and soar.

William Jay Smith

INTRODUCTION

The seventy poems included in this volume are a modest introduction to a prolific life's work further screened by an accidental factor, that of translatability. It is not the poet's first appearance in English: in 1970 twenty-four Weöres poems were published in Edwin Morgan's translation in a volume of poems by Weöres and Ferenc Juhász, in the Penguin Modern European Poets series. However, this book was not given the reception it deserved; besides, it has long since been out of print. Weöres's writings have appeared in several other European languages as well. His name is familiar to those with a special interest in verse, but his presence is nevertheless marginal and in no way proportionate to his achievement.

In Hungarian, the Weöres œuvre includes three weighty volumes (over one thousand eight hundred pages) of poetry, and another three (almost two thousand five hundred pages) of poetry translations. His verse plays and plays for children make up another volume (of nearly five hundred pages). Furthermore, the unusual two-volume (almost one thousand pages long) anthology of forgotten or previously undiscovered gems of Hungarian poetry entitled *Három veréb hat szemmel* (Three Sparrows with Six Eyes), compiled, annotated and introduced by Weöres, is also regarded as part of his work. His own articles, prose works, interviews, comments on his experiments, as well as letters documenting the birth of some of his work, have been published here and there but not systematically. His œuvre is the subject of several books* and countless in-depth studies, and after long years of official neglect, it seems that he has taken his rightful place in Hungarian literature at last, though there is no consensus amongst his critics. His popularity with readers is unparalleled, though this is true only of certain parts of his work. The poet himself is still with us; he will be seventy-five in 1988, and though less frequently than before, he is still publishing.

For those familiar with it, this extensive œuvre constitutes an organic whole. Some basic qualities which go hand in hand with Weöres's poetic talent—his attraction to myth, transcendental and mystical interests, empathy, feeling for reality coupled with a pronounced inclination for abstraction, love of play and humour, the daring and persistence of his experimenting, a striving for the reconciliation of opposites, a serenity which raises him above the everyday world and, last but not least, an impressive linguistic and formal inventiveness—are the pillars on which the thematic arches of his work rest. Weöres's poetry is seemingly full of contradiction—it reveals its inner harmony and unity only gradually. The variety of themes, subjects, voices, the multiplicity of form and prosody, the virtuosity of language apparent even in this small selection are so impressively rich and unusual that the non-Hungarian reader surely needs some background information.

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* Of these, I have used Zoltán Kenyeres's *Tündérsíp* (Budapest, 1983) in writing this introduction; I wish to express my thanks here.

Weöres was born a year before the outbreak of the Great War on his father's 150 acres, that had been a 1,500-acre estate in his grandfather's time. It was here, in the countryside, that he learned the folk-songs, sayings, tales and games that were still prevalent at the time among the peasants. He became acquainted with poetry thanks to his mother and German governess. There was a local Theosophical Society, founded, like many others, during a visit by Annie Besant to Budapest in 1905, which in the poet's small village in time metamorphosed into an Anthroposophical Society, and his mother took the small boy with her to its meetings. Even decades later, the mysterious undercurrents, the surrealistic march of bizarre disembodied beings, coupled with the other magically handled effects, helped to expand the field of vision of his poetry beyond the describable.

He was brought up a Lutheran, and his interest in the transcendental and metaphysical, and his attraction to mythology became apparent early. A history and anthology of Classical Antiquity in his parents' library started him on his way, and soon he also read Far Eastern philosophy, myths, and later, the medieval and modern Christian mystics. He was a poor student. At times he had a private tutor, at others he was sent from school to school in western Hungary. Yet even as a schoolboy he had impressive classical learning, and his perceptive teachers eased his way towards modern literature. Since the age of four or five he had been regularly writing verse, and this aptitude was coupled with an instinctive sense of form and inventiveness. Like a sponge, he soaked up the sound of folk-songs, and he also experimented, on the basis of his classical and modern reading, with variations on the poetic attitude, on the handling of his tools, imagery, condensation, linguistic and rhythmical shaping. Thus, poetically Weöres was mature at a truly Mozartian age; he wrote poems worthy of a poet, some of which are included in his collected works. His first appearance at the age of fifteen in a national daily caused quite a sensation. He first corresponded, then came into personal contact, with the major poets of the day, and soon his work was published in *Nyugat*, the country's leading literary journal. One of the poems ("The Old Ones") he had published at the age of fifteen caught the eye of Zoltán Kodály, who set it to music; it became one of his most popular works for mixed choir.

But such early success so easily come by did not have an adverse influence on Weöres, who continued steadily on the road dictated by his talent. "The Old Ones" and "The Lunatic Cyclist", also included in this selection, are a good foretaste of the later works. In these he does not describe an experience or an episode. Leaving himself out of the poem, he describes his subject from a distance, focusing on the general or abstract—yet in a very concrete manner and sharply, as it were, placing it and, in the case of "The Lunatic Cyclist", the 'meaning' or 'message' of the grotesque is never spelt out, but is created by the reader. The sure handling of form and language is also impressive.

In 1933 Weöres started his studies at the University of Pécs in southern Hungary. Though there is no room here for a detailed study of the poet's development, mention must nevertheless be made of three great men who had a decisive influence on him. Karl Kerényi taught classical studies at the University of Pécs from 1934 on. Under the threat of Nazi propaganda, which even exploited Germanic mythology, the subsequently world-famous classical scholar, interpreter of myth and historian of religion emphasized the Mediterranean heritage, that spirit of the South which could serve as the basis of a modern Hungarian national consciousness as opposed to the false romanticism of the Asiatic steppes. Later, in Budapest, he edited a series under the title of *Sziget* (Island), which also had a strong influence on writers. In this he propagated the somewhat irrational and idealistic philosophical island idea, and tried to confront the barbarism of Fascism with an idealized Greek culture.

The philosopher and novelist Béla Hamvas, who also belonged to the *Sziget* circle and with whom Weöres became personally acquainted only in 1944, was the second strong influence on his thinking. Starting out from modern traditionalist philosophy, Hamvas began tracing the vanished world of the Golden Age, and collected and made use of those ancient texts which could serve as proof of the unity of existence or perfect harmony that was still present in ancient cultures. In this review of *Medúza* (1944), Weöres's fourth volume of poems, Hamvas encouraged Weöres to write Orphic poetry (this was a reference to Mallarmé) and to turn away from a poetry of outerness which had gained supremacy since the "Homeric straying from the true path," from superficiality, a fascination with the surface and from sensual enchantment. "In contrast, Orphic poetry is the true poetry which tames tigers and which makes fish raise their heads out of water." This encouragement was so much in line with Weöres's own inclinations and the direction of his experiments at the time that, after reading the review, he wrote to a friend: "Today's poetry by necessity can be no other but Orphic; in other words, it encounters reality not on the surface, not as phenomena, but only in the upper spheres; it must penetrate the substance of things, must experience things from the inside, must speak not *about* a thing, but must speak the *thing* itself. Or, rather, it shouldn't speak but sing, because man speaks *about* something and sings something."

The third person with a definitive influence on Weöres was the art historian and philosopher of art Lajos Fülep, teacher first at the University of Pécs, then for a short time at the Eötvös Kollégium in Budapest, where the intellectual élite was trained. Though in no way a radical, he was nevertheless neglected for most of his life. At the time Weöres met him, officially he taught history of art at the University while he was Calvinist minister of a nearby village. Weöres learned from him what it means to be a Hungarian in the European sense; he learned a modern, humanist ideal of culture and an approach to art based on philosophy. Even when he was an acknowledged poet, in fact until Fülep's death in 1970, Weöres always showed him his new poems first. Fülep was one of the most important intellectual touchstones and sources of inspiration to several generations of writers and artists, thanks not so much to his relatively small œuvre but to his charisma as a teacher. His influence can be compared only to that of the essayist and novelist László Németh and the Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács.

With his third volume, which appeared in 1938, Weöres had already taken an entirely independent direction, that of existence-expression instead of self-expression, the experimental road of the constant inherent in changing *phenomena*, that is not experience. He was searching for the unity between man and nature, the cosmos, in fact, the ennobling assurance of finality, gradually exiling the concrete self in all its forms from his poems. In his experiments he made use of every means at his disposal, from symbolism all the way to surrealism.

The result of Béla Hamvas's encouragement first took shape in a prose volume of brief pieces of wisdom, published in 1945. With its mixture of Oriental philosophy, pantheism, neo-Platonism, Christian mysticism and modern existentialism, it declared war on both individualism and all intentions directed at improving society. "Do not tolerate in yourself even the germ of any kind of intention to better society. For every generalized community is a fog; and he who runs about in the fog will sooner or later step on something living," says one of his teachings. The artist's escape from individualism does not point towards the world but towards uncommitted meditation which will lead to "love without feeling." "There is no good or bad in totality, there is no merit or mistake, no reward or punishment." "The home of science and art is not existence, the *esse*, but the possible, the *posse*, and if it is manifest in existence, it will make existence all the richer." Thus though the human condition, or life, may be hopeless, it can still be ennobled through art and creation. "There is something that is unchanging. The essence of everything is this unchanging thing. If I am freed of all incidentality, nothing of me will remain except the unchanging," says the "Summation" towards the end of the book.

This book appeared during the first awakening of a country in ruins, humiliated by the war, at the birth of the hope of a new age, and though in part it carried the trauma of war, with doctrines expressing in detail a social hopelessness and despair of a future, it met with general disapproval. In addition, Weöres's original poetic attitude was totally unlike what had been expected of a Hungarian poet throughout the centuries. Since the sixteenth century, history has shaped the fate of this nation, severed from Western Europe and not coming up to its own expectations, so that for want of the necessary institutions, a free press and so on, the cause of national independence, and social progress, or both, became the responsilibity of writers and poets. The great, eternal, universal subjects of poetry appeared, even in the works of the greatest, such as Petőfi and Ady, peculiarly entwined with the cause of the homeland and of progress. The poets centred around *Nyugat*, the generation before Weöres—specifically Mihály Babits, Dezső Kosztolányi and Milán Füst, who supported the young Weöres and whom he regarded as his masters until their death—were the first who dared to be poets, and could be great as such, without undertaking this role, though they never turned their back on the cause, and in their own way, outside of poetry, as men and writers, were part of it. Weöres turned away from it completely and explicitly. He was constitutionally unfit for the role.

Forging together his natural skills and the influences that acted on him, Weöres continued experimenting. Between 1945 and 1948, when he was silenced, four more volumes of his poetry were published. He had entered a critical stage of experimentation. In the early fifties, the time of Stalinism, when he wrote for his desk drawer and only his translations could be published, he was already a great poet at the height of his powers who had solved the problems of attitude and expression. In his experiments he made use of surrealism and dada, automatic writing, logical permutation, interprojection or superimposition, or else the floating of motifs living their own lives within the poem, daring games with rhythm, and an interaction of motifs and construction reminiscent of musical composition. In this volume, for example, his early poem "Homeward Bound" is an attempt at creating a fugue, while his "Symphonies" are large-scale 'musical' compositions with several movements, long songs at any rate in which the pronouncedly rhythmic, sometimes mysterious, almost melodious text—in Hungarian, at least—creates a definite musical, extra-verbal impression. Some of the choruses of "The Assumption", for example, are baroque and almost polyphonic in character; at other times the text is reminiscent of a chorale, a hymn, an anthem, or folk-song. But above all, after banishing the poetry of experience, the poetic Ego and the individual, and even going beyond modern objective verse, Weöres solved one of the most difficult problems of modern poetry, that of the expression of emotion. For this he needed the impersonal ancient, collective voice of myths, to create the impression that it was not the poet but, as it were, the consciousness of the world itself that was registering what is happening.

"The Assumption"—the "Seventh Symphony"—is outstanding not only in Weöres's work but in all of modern poetry. After the grave, seemingly detached images of mourning, relying on opposites, he presents the eternal, mystical themes of womanly existence, life, death, time, suffering, sacrifice, and love, in a manner which makes the poem emotional and rational, modern and ancient, deliberate and spontaneous, narrative and dramatic, gentle and cruel, grave and joyous, even exultant, all at the same time: philosophically abstract and sharply concrete in its imagery, but above all, spellbindingly evocative and suggestive. Going through a mysterious metamorphosis, the body turns into the source of life, and the assumption of the Virgin becomes the triumph of poetry which alone is capable of conquering death and calling forth the cosmic serenity and harmony indispensable for living. The brilliantly rendered, banal yet philosophical micro- and macro-story of "The Lost Parasol" radiates the same serenity as, following its slow decline and disintegration, this man-made utensil gradually returns to impassive nature.

The reader will notice that the present selection does not include poems from the seventies. At the time Weöres wrote an extensive and—by its very nature—untranslatable book, the complete works of an invented early nineteenth-century Hungarian poetess, Erzsébet Lónyay, whom he called Psyche: her verse, translations, personal notes and letters, complemented with a biographical study by one of her 'contemporaries' as well as the real text of a modern (real) critic, accompanied by a postscript relating the circumstances of the 'discovery' of this œuvre. Psyche, the adopted daughter of a count, was educated in a convent, but on her mother's side was a Gypsy, and therefore lived a life of extremes, full of adventure and amours, which in the language and poetic voice of the late rococo and early biedermeier she described with great honesty. She met Goethe, Hölderlin, Beethoven and the great Hungarian men of letters, and writes about her secret love affair with a (real) Hungarian poet of the age, just as she writes about every aspect of her feminine soul and the trivial events of her daily existence. Her life was cut short by a carriage accident; it is possible that her (justifiably) jealous husband, a Silesian landowner, Count Maximilian Zeidlitz, had her put out of the way. The work is a *tour de force* on several counts. As pastiche, a brilliant linguistic game, it is so perfect that not even a stringent analysis could detect that the poems were not in fact written in the early nineteenth century. But the feat is multiple: thus Psyche sends her poems to the great critic of the age (who actually lived), who in his answer makes up a poem in the style of a contemporary (actual) poet. Weöres does not parody this poet, rather he writes lines as the great critic, who lived a hundred and fifty years ago and had nothing of the poet in him, would have written them. On another level, *Psyche* goes beyond the display of Weöres's empathy and love of games and turns into a feat of psychological transvestism as well. We experience the life, loves, maturation into a woman and later mother, the happiness and sufferings of a real woman. Going even further, as Zoltán Kenyeres writes in his above-mentioned book, *Psyche* "is the virtual creation of a life-style and a new possibility for life. The dream of a late rococo, early biedermeier literature in an independent and free Hungary, where poets are not burdened by the need to express the crucial problems of society and the nation but are free to devote themselves to the common manifestations of love, joy, and sorrow: this is the dream of a Hungarian literature, European in character, one that could afford the luxury of being Hungarian in language only and not necessarily in subject."

One of the secrets of Weöres's great popularity lies in the effect of the ribald poems and brilliant stylistic devices of *Psyche*, the other in the folk-song-like and humorous children's poems, sayings and short songs written with wonderful simplicity and magical poetic power. These fruits of experimentation with rhythm which Kodály encouraged, are known by hundreds of thousands, most of whom hear them first in kindergarten where they give them the first joyous taste of true poetry. These two aspects of Weöres are *ipso facto* untranslatable, and must remain Hungarian secrets.

The reader can judge better than I, what translation, which by its very nature flies in the face of providence, is capable of in the case of a poet who steers his poems from the ancient myths through the Far Eastern, classical and modern mystical philosophies all the way to the world of contemporary European man in the magnetic field of universal human culture, and does all this in Hungarian. I may have selected the poems for this anthology and have even participated in their translation, but like Weöres am Hungarian

myself and know the poems in my native language. One thing is incontestable: there are first-class translations in this volume, which nevertheless means only that they provide an approach to, an approximation and glimpse of the original. I hardly know of any other poet in whose work form, rhythm, rhyme, linguistic invention and verse melody, all language-specific yet magical means which go beyond language and understanding and which touch the reader not in the sphere of the rational but at more ancient, more profound and sensitive spots, matter so much. All these are carriers of intangible content-defying meaning. On the other hand, there are also few poets in this century with so much imagination and power to make things manifest, who are able to see man and cosmos, life and death, microcosm and macrocosm, the material and the spiritual as an integral whole, making this magnificent vision shine forth with the serene harmony of real poetry, this greatest of human accomplishments.

MIKLÓS VAJDA