

Book Reviews

Kard és Kasza [Sword and Sickle]. By Albert Wass. A Literary Guild Publication, 1976. Pp. 860.

Albert Wass left Hungary after the Second World War. Although he is far removed from his native Transylvania, under the blue Florida skies he continues to write about that land as if he had left it only yesterday.

Wass is not one of those trend-following writers who exploit sex in order to appease certain elements of the reading public. He never transgresses the bounds of good taste; yet he is popular among Hungarians and non-Hungarians alike in many parts of the world.

His major works are: *A tizenhárom almafa* [Thirteen Apple Trees], *Adjátok vissza hegyeimet* [Give Me Back My Mountains], *Valalki tévedett* [Someone Has Made a Mistake], *Magukrahagyottak* [The Forsaken]. These are not only entertaining novels; judging by the reviews in the non-Hungarian press, they have achieved world-wide recognition. Wass's books have been translated into German, English, Dutch and Spanish; they have brought the attention of many nations to the peculiarities of the traditions, history and spirit of the Hungarian people.

There are readers who, at first, note only his unique style, his rich vocabulary, and interesting sentence construction. But sooner or later everyone realizes that Wass has an important message. In one of his novels a mortally wounded man asks a girl to teach him to pray. The girl bends down her head and prays: "Our father who art in heaven. . ." "Our father. . ." repeats the man submissively. Then he bursts out "why in heaven? why not here on earth? He is needed here, not in heaven. . ."

Another of his novels, *Elvásik a veres csillag* [The Red Star Wanes], reveals Wass's peculiar characteristic, the ability to introduce warm and clean humour into a tragic story. This is not an attempt on his part to make his novels more colourful. It is a product of his inner joyfulness which is present even in his descriptions of the misfortunes of Hungarian Transylvanians during and after the Second World War. This

talent enables Wass to depict the sufferings of his people in a manner palatable even to non-Hungarians.

Wass's new book, *Sword and Sickle*, is an historical novel. Part I is a chronicle, not only of a family, but also of the Hungarian nation through nine hundred years. The author's breadth of knowledge is revealed by his description of a people's evolution, spirit and traditions. The second part is a description of the modern age, the era of the Second World War. It is not a dull report on the politics and diplomacy of the day, but a lively, touching story of a people, the Hungarians of Transylvania. It carries the reader with the story and makes him share the joys, grief and cares of the novel's heroes. The author's message is clear. It is wrong to place the burden of guilt for the Hungarians' misfortunes on scapegoats such as the "aristocracy" or the "clergy". Hungarians were collectively responsible for the tragedy that overtook them, and they all must individually bear the burden of that responsibility.

The sword and the sickle are symbols. The former is indispensable in the conquest of the homeland and its defence against external foes. But one can retain the homeland only with the sickle, the plow: through the cultivation of the soil, through backbreaking and honest toil.

Wass has received many literary honours, but he has not stopped writing. He has now presented us with a unique book which combines joy and sadness, encouragement and warning. This is a work of eternal validity, for today's man, who has conquered space but keeps stumbling on earth, needs moral guidance. After reading this book the despondent will raise his head, the sad will smile, and those who had lost hope will discover light in the seemingly dark future. What more can a writer offer to his readers?

Holland

Erzsébet Kisjókai

Quest for a New Central Europe: A Symposium. Edited by Julius Varsányi. Adelaide – Sydney: Australian Carpathian Federation, 1976. 295 pp. ISBN 0 9597246 0 3.

In his introduction to the work, Dr. Varsányi describes its purpose in the following terms:

This is not an attempt to pass moral judgements on a particular political reality, but rather, a scrutiny of its underlying facts and superimposed features, in an attempt to determine the degree of validity of this reality, and the viability of an alternative form of regional arrangement.