



Shelter under the Sun

Poetry of Three Hungarian Women

Borbála Kulin

Zita Izsó

Krisztina Rita Molnár

Translated by Gabor G Gyukics

The poets wish to acknowledge these publications:

Borbála

Kulin: <https://www.unlikelystories.org/content/failure>

Zita Izsó: <https://www.unlikelystories.org/content/a-long-time-no-see-relative-and-as-the-offspring-of-the-cichlids>

Krisztina

Molnár: <https://www.unlikelystories.org/content/stare-the-cloud>

The press expresses its appreciation to the Petofi Literary Fund for a grant in support of the translation of the poems by Gabor G Gyukics.



Cover art by Sára Pozsgai

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021948763

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Published by Singing Bone Press

Singingbonepress.com

ISBN: 978-0-933439-31-3

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Preface

In the first half of the last century, there were serious debates in Hungarian literature about whether a woman could write professionally and, if so, what and how. Can anything a woman writes be worthy of attention or is what she has to say relevant on only certain well-defined topics?

The echoes of those debates haunt the poets in this volume, too. It would be difficult to ignore the fact that these poems were written by women, even though it is equally difficult to capture what their specifications are. The way they see the world, their visions and methods are different. Still they are united by a common point of view. From this perspective the world is alien, often hostile, incomprehensible, and operates according to rules that are not their own, and “I,” the speaker, pays the price. Still it doesn’t seem to be changeable within the framework of our long-standing social parlor game. The game itself is the problem, so the poems of this book constantly bump into the walls of the game, questioning it and revealing its absurdity—the absurdity that remains hidden from the players, forever.

Borbála Kulin's poetry is the closest to what—at least in Central European literature—has traditionally been expected of women poets in subject matter and approach. Her poems deal with love, home, the experience of the female body, individuality, and uniqueness. She tries to describe and make sense of a

world that constantly confines and hurts even those who make every effort to adapt to it. But the image breaks into fractal-like, self-repeating pixels and the concepts of woman, mother, family, home, country, and body lose their meanings. The impossibility of being at home goes beyond the actual geographic and social reasons, but the speaker of the poems can still find her voice in the tiny, preserved pieces of this fragmented worldview.

In **Zita Izsó's** poems it is as if the speech situations of her poems illustrate the famous words of the internationally renowned psychologist András Feldmár on trauma: "Trauma in reality is not what happened to you, but the fact that it's impossible to talk about it to anyone. The experience is frozen." Izsó's poetry—using images of ice, melting, and freezing—renders this experience with incredible power. The self in the poems speaks for all the silenced, swept-under-the-carpet, "collateral" victims, and does so without dissolving their exclusion. The horror and inhumanity of what has happened to the victims strike our hearts because they use a language which they are excluded from. This language is so solid and safe because it makes certain things unspeakable and certain experiences taboos. When we see them, we look away and pretend nothing has happened. Izsó makes these experiences speak so we know we are dealing with people who blame themselves for what they went through. Domestic violence, terminal illness, traumas of war, the exclusion and vulnerability of homeless refugees are all addressed in these poems. In addition, poems treat the traditional, traumatic experiences of

womanhood—infertility, giving birth to a disabled child, harassment, rape. Behind her images an alien meaning emerges, the language that talks about a world in which words could never be born. These are heavy, powerful poems of indispensable confrontation. They show that in the reality of experience there is no private and foreign, that the boundaries of the common and the personal are within us, and that they are mere illusions. This universal level of experience and empathy, which can be called Christlike, without exaggeration, makes her poems an authentic, unflinching voice of morality without becoming dogmatic, moralizing, or offering false comfort or absolution.

The speaker's language in **Krisztina Rita Molnár's** poetry circulates like an elusive, untraceable patch of light among the objects and occurrences of the world, society, and history: always flying to a new place, hiding its source and body from us. She doesn't call anything her own. She has no home, though she is able to reach and observe every place. She is playing, pointing out surprising moments to wonder at, but before being fully absorbed in it, she moves on. Yet her attention is like a child's, exquisite and straightforward. The poems point things out, raising them into conscious as their most important task. As the poem *Oil Lamp* conceives it (paraphrasing the biblical parable of the wise and foolish virgins with multiple irony), the goal is to maintain the boundary. But this is only an indication, a signal to the ever-moving line between conscious and unconscious. There is no need to do anything else. These poems

suggest that this boundary, the moment of this glance and attention, are what we really are. So any kind of perpetuance and solidification would imprison the playful, ever-wandering, always-in-motion light of consciousness. That is why Krisztina Rita Molnár's poetry keeps the reader in perpetual motion. If we would feel that we understand, she immediately marks it, makes the situation uncertain by the conscious, reflective use of form, rhythm, and rhyme. The poem's speaker gives us an ironic wry look and disappears. In the Persian rug in her poem "A Million Stitches" readers can see both sides of it. We won't step on it with the certainty that it's ours, as it's "rightfully ours", and we are at home with it.

Orsolya Rákai, literary scholar and
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BORBÁLA KULIN
WHERE WE DIDN'T EVEN START