

would mean well over 5 million (generally hardcover) copies of collected poems in the United States!

Unfortunately, Hungarian is a Finno-Ugric language of "luxury"—belonging to a family of languages far removed from the Indo-European tongues of its neighbors—an insurmountable barrier in communication with the outside world. The occasional translations of Hungarian poems are generally well-meaning but pedestrian, if not misleading, attempts at conveying the beauty of the original. Thus, for example, the latest verse of Ferenc Juhász, at 47 the greatest Hungarian poet and certainly one of the greatest in the world, is bound to remain a lost treasure for English-speaking readers. Yet poetry belongs to the essence of Hungarian literary life and traditionally offers the greatest scope for exciting and creative experimentation. Nostalgia for Europe and the world, coupled with the awareness of the linguistic barrier, thus provides the unique background to the Hungarian literary scene.

PAUL LENDVAI

India

The Indian writer has never had it so good. For the first time in the history of India many writers and poets are able to live by writing. Literacy has risen dramatically: When India became independent, in 1947, only 13 out of 100 could sign their names; today almost half the populace can read and write. In a population of 600 million this means more than 250 million potential readers.

State patronage has also played a significant role in bettering the lot of writers. The Sahitya Akademi ("Academy of Letters"), set up in 1954, has been commissioning translations of foreign works, both classic and modern, into Indian languages and from one Indian language to another; awarding prizes of 5,000 rupees (\$670) every year for outstanding works of fiction and poetry in each of the country's 15 officially recognized languages; and arranging literary conferences. Each of India's 22 states has a similar academy extending patronage to men of letters in its region, and every large city has a Tagore Theatre, where works of playwrights can be performed. The National Book Trust and state-sponsored language trusts arrange publication of works that commercial publishers are reluctant to handle. All-India Radio, which claims to

reach 70 percent of the population, has well-known writers, poets, and playwrights on its payroll. A good radio play has a fair chance of being translated into all Indian languages and earning as many royalty checks. Successful writers acceptable to the Establishment are nominated to the upper house of the Parliament (Rajya Sabha) and to state legislatures, and are named in the annual honors list. By now the number of poets, playwrights, and novelists who have earned state patronage in some form or other runs into the thousands. Of these, the elite are a dozen winners of the Bharatiya Jnanpith Award of 100,000 rupees (\$13,335), set up by an industrial house.

ALTHOUGH THERE ARE NO reliable figures on publishing and bookselling in India, according to UNESCO only seven countries publish more titles than India does. More than 11,000 firms are listed in the *Directory of Indian Publishers*; among them they publish upward of 14,000 titles every year. English, though frowned upon by the patriotic and read by no more than 2.5 percent of the population, is still well ahead of all the Indian languages: 40 percent of all books published in India are in English; English newspapers and journals command larger circulations and pay more for articles than do journals in vernacular languages.

The national language, Hindi—spoken by over 140 million people—comes a poor second. But Hindi is fast catching up and has already surpassed English in the realm of fiction and poetry. Whereas the most celebrated Indo-Anglian novelist, R. K. Narayan, rarely sells more than 10,000 copies of a new novel, the works of the most widely read Hindi writer, Gulshan Nanda, go into many editions of 50,000 each. His *Jheel Key Us Par* ("On the Other Side of the Lake") has broken all Indian records, having sold more than 1.5 million copies in three years. Nanda, like many other Hindi writers, is also much in demand by the film industry. When their novels are bought, these writers are also commissioned to write the film scripts and the dialogue, and they earn enormous fees. Hitherto only one novel in English, R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*, has been filmed.

Poets writing in Indian languages do even better. Most of them begin their careers by appearing at poetry symposia (*Kavi Sammelans*), which draw enormous crowds. Thereafter their poems appear in journals and newspapers (most

papers devote a column or two to poetry every day), and, finally, they bring out anthologies of their works.

If poets manage to gain entry to the film business, their future is assured. They compose lyrics to suit the scenes, and some of the top Urdu poets—the language in which most film songs are written—command fees between 30,000 and 100,000 rupees (\$4,000 to \$13,335) for composing half a dozen lyrics. All transactions in the film industry are in cash and are rarely reported to income-tax authorities.

The Indians' reading tastes are very different from those of Europeans or Americans. Religion, science, philosophy, economics, and politics are more avidly read than fiction or poetry. Translations of the *Gita* and the *Upanishads* are steady sellers. Books on Hinduism, notably the works of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, ex-President of the republic, and the *pensées* of Krishnamurti, are found on the shelves of every public library. Of contemporaries, the most highly rated is Nirad C. Chaudhuri (*Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, *The Continent of Circe*). Some of the esteem he enjoys is due to his harsh criticism of Indian character. For the same reason, V. S. Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness* continues to be a steady seller.

Books published in the United States or in England command more respect and circulation than those published in India. Even established Indian writers like R. K. Narayan, Dom Moraes, R. Praver Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, and M. D. Malgonkar are not so widely read as British or American writers like Lawrence Durrell, J. D. Salinger, Norman Mailer, Mary McCarthy, Saul Bellow, Kingsley Amis, and Iris Murdoch. In 1974 Prime Minister Indira Gandhi read 19 books, all of which were in English. Of these only two were by Indian authors and only one was published in India.

KHUSHWANT SINGH

Italy

Every week the Italian magazine *Panorama* publishes a list of best-sellers, based on reports from a dozen bookshops scattered along the peninsula. Thanks to insistent new marketing methods, many Italians buy their books in railroad stations, at street stalls, or from door-to-door salesmen; so *Panorama's* classification may not be 100 percent re-

liable. Still, it is indicative. In past weeks, there has been the predictable mixture: some standard "consumer" novels (by Alberto Bevilacqua and Nantas Salvaggio), popularizing biography (Roberto Gervaso's *Casanova*) and history (Indro Montanelli's *Giolitti's Italy*), and a few translations (Cornelius Ryan and Pablo Neruda—strange bedfellows).

But since last summer, one presence has been constant on this and similar lists: Elsa Morante's novel *La Storia* ("History"). At latest report, it had sold more than 600,000 copies, and it is on its way to becoming the most-sold Italian book of this century. At first glance, *La Storia* seems an odd candidate for bestsellerdom. It is long (over 700 pages of fine print) and not always easy, but the author's clear intention was to write for the reader-in-the-street. For this reason, she and her publisher, Einaudi, decided to skip a hardcover edition and bring the work out directly in paperback at the accessible price of 2,000 lire (about three dollars, the cost of a first-run movie ticket). Morante's protagonist, the schoolteacher Ida, is seen in the context of contemporary history. A victim of events, she survives the German occupation, a rape, the deportation of the Jews. She is a refugee. One of her sons is first a partisan, then a black-marketeer. History, hers, is not a pageant, but a villain.

It would be wrong to mistake the book—as some critics have—as a return to the post-war *neorealismo*, to the climate of early De Sica and the novels of Giuseppe Berto. Morante has written an epic, crammed with characters, all sharply defined (including two dogs and a splendid cat) and all more important, finally, than the events that shift and shatter them.

Italians may or may not like books (recent statistics say there are 10 million habitual readers), but they dearly love a quarrel, a *polemica*, and nothing is more likely to spark one than sudden success. *La Storia*'s first reviews were ecstatic (critic-novelist Natalia Ginzburg spoke of Dostoevsky); so there was soon a backlash. Some intellectuals decried the whole idea of best-sellers; others accused Morante of sentimentalism. The book does have pages that bring tears, but the author's sentimentality is like Dickens's—a warmth toward life. English-language readers will be able to judge for themselves in a year or so, when the translation (by your reporter) is published by Knopf in the United States and by Collins in Britain.

Another recent literary polemic was also connected with the question of *neorealismo*. And this time the connection seems real. The debate concerns a group of works collectively categorized as "*letteratura selvaggia*" (wild, or outlaw, literature). One of the most-discussed publications in this vein is Dacia Maraini's *Storia di una ladra*, a first-person narration by a woman thief, transcribed over a period of many weeks by Maraini. Another first-person volume is the collection of stories by Vincenzo Guerrazzi, *Le ferie d'un operaio* ("A Worker's Holidays"). For some critics, these (and a few other) books herald a wave of proletarian writing, a new turning. For others, the books are old hat.

But the fad is real. Poet-critic Alfredo Giuliani has already begun a course in "wild literature" at the University of Bologna (Italy's farthest-out seat of higher learning). At a factory in Porto Marghera, a worker—Ferruccio Brugnaro—mimeographs his poems and distributes them at the plant. His poems have been praised by Andrea Zanzotto, a leading Italian poet. And *L'Espresso*, an important Roman weekly, recently dedicated several pages to the whole trend.

Though these literary battles kick up dust, the publishing scene is far from thrilling. As in other Western countries, there is a tendency toward concentration and internationalization. One important old firm, Vallecchi in Florence, was bought several years ago by the vast Montedison conglomerate, which recently, abruptly, closed it down. Giovanni Agnelli, with friends, relatives, and his Fiat power, owns a controlling interest in several publishing houses, including Bompiani (publisher of Moravia) and the elite Adelphi (whose exemplary critical edition of Nietzsche has been bought by a German firm). An Agnelli-controlled company recently acquired a controlling interest in Bantam Books in the United States. And Montedison has a big piece of the Rizzoli operation, which publishes not only books but also periodicals (the Italian *Playboy* for one) and *Il Corriere della sera*, Italy's outstanding daily paper.

Rizzoli is losing money on its periodicals, and so are other firms, notably the vast Mondadori combine. But some of the smaller houses retain their independence and their solvency. Perhaps Einaudi shouldn't be called small (with a turnover of 12 billion lire annually), but it is still run on a personal basis by Giulio Einaudi himself, the friend and publisher

of Pavese, Calvino, Morante, and other figures of the post-war generation.

Other even smaller firms are successful, both financially and esthetically. Outstanding is the house of Laterza (in the unlikely city of Bari), founded under the guidance of Benedetto Croce. It has a flourishing series of intellectual paperbacks, rivaling the admirable, scholarly paperbacks of Rizzoli.

Younger readers seem to prefer non-fiction to fiction, and a number of small new firms are bringing out books and pamphlets discussing Italy's present problems. Several publications try to thread a path through the labyrinth of current Italian politics; others discuss the searing questions of abortion, women's lib, penal reform.

In 1972, the last year for which dependable figures exist, Italian publishers brought out 15,749 titles (including many textbooks). There is no reason to believe 1974 produced fewer titles. So the country's 10 million readers have plenty of food for their habit.

WILLIAM WEAVER

Japan

To get an inside view of the state of publishing and reading tastes in modern-day Japan, I talked with an officer of one of the nation's foremost book-



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