by the philosopher David Carrier; we need more of this disciplined reflection on and within our profession. The practical examples cited by the conservators lend credence to Watson's, Carrier's and Martin's remarks. Unfortunately, I did not learn of the event until after its closure: I would have made every effort to have viewed what I suspect was a marvellous exhibit.

Richard Teleky, Hungarian Rhapsodies: Essays on Ethnicity, Identity, and Culture

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Teleky, Richard. *Hungarian Rhapsodies: Essays on Ethnicity, Identity, and Culture.* Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997. 238 pp., illus., cloth $49.95, ISBN 0-7748-0623-0.

Over the past fifteen years, students of material culture have shown an increasing interest in the function and use of objects. The resulting research has provided a more thorough understanding of how and why people consume and value the things around them.[1] In this context Richard Teleky's *Hungarian Rhapsodies: Essays on Ethnicity, Identity, and Culture* makes a notable, albeit indirect, contribution to the field that should be of interest from a variety of perspectives. The book is a powerful account of Teleky's personal exploration of ethnicity in an effort to reconcile his contemporary identity with an ancestral one. The book touches on several disciplines: Hungarian and central European studies, ethnography, as well as comparative literature, popular culture, and film studies. *Hungarian Rhapsodies* consists of twelve essays, varied in style from the scholarly to the very personal. Though interdisciplinary, the book is unified by the author's determined search for answers to two important questions: how is identity shaped, and what part does ethnicity play?

Teleky writes with clarity spiced with witty irony and humor. The author is the administrator of the creative writing program at York University. He is the editor of *The Oxford Book of French-Canadian Short Stories* and the author of *Goodnight, Sweetheart and Other Stories.* A third-generation Hungarian American, Teleky learned Hungarian as an adult. Unfolding step by step the search for the meaning of ethnic identity, the author guides the reader into a better understanding of what constitutes one's own identity.

The way the book is designed and arranged deserves high praise. Essay by essay, the author builds a structure that helps the reader to understand so called "Hungarianness" and Teleky's own complex relationship with his ethnic Hungarian background. From his struggle with the Hungarian language, through an examination of Andre Kerdesz's photographs, a visit to a Hungarian church in Cleveland, an analysis of the stereotypical treatment of Hungarians in fiction and film, to a final account of the author's trip to Hungary, Teleky unveils for the reader the whole process of his personal exploration of ethnicity.

The first essay of the book describes his efforts in learning the Hungarian language. Teleky starts with the language as the key to the culture. Unrelated to the Teutonic, Latin and Slav languages, Hungarian has remained totally intact. Everything about the language is different, not only the words themselves, but the way they are formed, the syntax and grammar. The inspiration behind the author's decision to learn Hungarian is "a box of Hungarian letters" written by Teleky's great-grandfather to his daughters, who emigrated to America in 1909. Official translation is not enough for the curious writer. He is searching for untold memories and the truth hidden within the words of the letters.

But it is not his curiosity alone that makes the author struggle with the Hungarian language. Learning Hungarian is for the author a significant part of going back to the past to reclaim identity. Being a writer, he knows very well the power of language to shape one's thinking. By learning the language of his origin, Teleky wants to reclaim a lost sense of the landscape and the life of the place his grandmother left ninety years earlier. The author admits that, although nostalgic for people and places left behind, his grandmother never returned to see her parents and her native village. Nine years after her death, Teleky wonders why he had never insisted that his grandmother visit Hungary again and why he had not gone with her. Learning Hungarian is for the author a

significant step in the process of going back to the past to reclaim his identity.

After language come photographs — pictures of a vanished world. Teleky analyzes several photographic images of Hungary made in the first quarter of this century by Andrè Kertèsz. This photographer had preserved the underside of belle-époque Hungary in some of the finest photographs of the twentieth century. In his effort to preserve a dying way of life, Kertèsz relied on the technological power of the camera. Avoiding the wealthy, Kertèsz concentrated on the less privileged, creating a revealing chronicle of his time: photographs of a young man dozing in a Budapest coffee shop, a blind violinist fiddling in the middle of an unpaved street, a man sweeping, the city of Buda at night. As images of ordinary people and ordinary situations, the photographs exude the warmth and intimacy of the moment. Drawn also to the countryside, Kertèsz preserved in his photographs a dying way of life, the life, in fact, that Teleky wanted to see: the world of his grandmother's memories.

A visit to the archives of St Elizabeth Catholic Church opens the next essay and the next step in Teleky's search for the lost past. At the end of the First World War it was claimed that after Budapest, Cleveland, Ohio, had the largest Hungarian population of any city in the world. A once-thriving centre of Cleveland's Hungarian community, St Elizabeth parish has declined from over 4 000 members in the 1920s to the current number of about 800 people. Teleky's grandparents worshiped in this church, his mother was confirmed there. The place has its own nostalgic attraction: "I needed to see the church again. I felt mainly the sad passing of generations. And I wanted to talk with grandparents long dead" (p. 33). The church has shared the fate of many other ethnic parishes. Faced with the assimilation of younger generations, and no longer a neighbourhood church, the parish relies on worshipers from throughout the city. Since the parish doesn't have the money required to organize the church archives, the task is accomplished only thanks to volunteers' strong desire to preserve yellowing documents from the past: letters, documents, photographs, baptism certificates, and books.

The three succeeding essays address the author's search for the reasons behind the loss or rejection of ethnic identity. The author examines the place of Hungarians in North American fiction and movies. Teleky explores the notion of "Hungarianness" and what constitutes the stereotype of Hungarians in fiction and cinema. Teleky's analysis is inevitably limited to a small number of books and motion pictures. Nevertheless, he is able to reveal the emotional price of total assimilation and the psychological wounds left by the loss of ethnic identity.

For example, there is the poor Hungarian woman, unable to speak English, in the book *Doctor's Son* by John O'Hara: a mother whose grieving after her child's death had moved her for a moment beyond ethnic labels. There is the immigrant boy, desperate to fit in, from J. Marlyn's *Under the Ribs of Death*, for whom speaking a foreign language is a shameful thing. Or Edwin, a character from H. Calisher's *The New Yorkers*, who carries a burden of fragmented personality, becoming almost apologetic for everything he isn't — comfortable and assimilated. We have also George, from Margaret Atwood's *Wilderness Tips*, faceless, unreal, adding only a frisson of sinister foreignness. And, of course, there is *The English Patient* — Almasy — from the acclaimed novel by Michael Ondaatje — a Hungarian count, sophisticated and continental, whose ethnicity is without meaning. "Almasy is the typical Hungarian of North American fiction — absent even when present. His ethnicity interests no one, neither his creator nor himself" (p. 62).

In his attempt to explore factors that influence ethnic identity, Richard Teleky analyzes the notion of self-hate "that occurs when individuals in a minority group accept the values of the dominant culture — and its view of them — as they try to assimilate, separating themselves from all that is 'other' in their background, often without even being aware of what they are doing or the price of the rejection" (p. 65). The author also examines the movie *The Music Box*, based on Joe Eszterhas' screenplay, and directed by Costa-Gavras. The film is loosely based on the true story of Ukrainian-born John Demianiuk, who was tried as Ivan the Terrible of Treblinka. In the movie, the main character — the Hungarian Laszlo — is accused of lying on his application for American citizenship to conceal war crimes committed in Hungary. Teleky accuses Eszterhas, who said about *The Music Box*: "I think that some Hungarians will take umbrage at the film," of reinforcing ethnic self-hate by piling stereotype on stereotype, and by reducing the reality to black and white. All postwar Hungarians in the movie seem to be anti-Semites and Nazi sympathizers. No one shows humane values. Indeed, Hungary makes one of the movie's main characters, Laszlo's daughter, literally sick.

The atmosphere of the book changes with the essay dedicated to Hungarian stereotypes and kitsch as a popular culture phenomenon. The author's short dictionary of stereotypes and kitsch includes, among others: vampires, csardas, gypsy music and continental lovers — consumed by madness or melancholy. According to the author, since Hungary is Western enough to be familiar, but Eastern enough to be exotic, it makes a desirable setting for popular culture products. Teleky traces the origin of Hungarian stereotypes and, in the process, gives quite a humorous and entertaining lecture on the general history and nature of kitsch and stereotype.

In search of the nature of ethnic identity Teleky takes the reader to a Hungarian bookstore, describing the importance that foreign-language stores have in creating the link with the country and culture of origin. The author also analyzes the dilemmas faced by central European Literature studies as well as the whole process of translation, a process that is as much linguistic as interpretative. Teleky also notices the unique challenge posed by poetry as well as the importance of poets as translators in the process of conveying the emotional richness of the originals.

The chronicle of Teleky's trip to Hungary closes his search for the meaning of ethnicity. The day-by-day account, diary style of the essay adds to the story the sense of authenticity and freshness. The journey inevitably had to confront the pastoral world from grandma's memories and Kertèsz's photographs with the real country and people living in the year 1993. The dilemmas and anxieties of the nation going through transition from communism to capitalism, people's fears of being drawn into the conflict in former Yugoslavia, and finally Teleky's meeting with relatives living in his grandmother's village, finally complement the picture of past and present Hungary. His desire to re-create the past is complete.

In the final essay of the book, the author's thoughts and considerations are pulled together under the title, "The Third Generation and the 'Problem' of Ethnicity." Richard Teleky shares with the reader his own long-sought-after way of understanding ethnic identity. For him it means greater appreciation for the arbitrariness of life and a better awareness of the fragility of humanity. By paraphrasing Flaubert's saying, that "God is in the details," the author names ethnic identity as emotions and images hidden in details: the beauty of St Roch chapel in Budapest, an anonymous painting seen long ago, the taste of grandmother's apple strudel, a favourite poem that loses too much in translation, a piece of music. Endless details are kept alive by imagination and memory.

The author's premise is that objects, images, music and food not only reflect and manifest one's ethnicity, but they themselves convey the idea of ethnic identity. Therefore, things themselves play a significant role in influencing and shaping people's ethnicity. For the author, accepting and understanding one's ethnicity make it possible to be more fully human. Thus, Teleky links "Hungarianness" with universal humanity: he comes, as he says, to "... appreciate the way people have struggled to find a good life for themselves while also ... [acquiring] a new vocabulary — a new language, and new points of reference — for their struggle" (p. 175).

The rich historical, political and social background offered by *Hungarian Rhapsodies* contributes to its value. The reader is given an opportunity to learn and to understand better the role of historical context in forming different aspects of Hungarian and, indeed, all ethnic identity. Being interdisciplinary, the book enriches and broadens perspectives on several academic studies. For someone researching links between culture, images and objects, the book will make valuable reading. Each essay contains enough insights to provide a starting point for various lines of enquiry. In the face of the growing sophistication of object studies, *Hungarian Rhapsodies* sheds light on several aspects of material history and its relationship to ethnicity. Since visual images play so important a role in Teleky's work, a larger number of illustrations and photographs would have greatly enhanced the book. Still, Richard Teleky's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* is an important work and is definitely worth the reader's time.

NOTES

1. For a recent discussion of this trend, see Gerald Pocius, "Material Culture Research: Authentic Things, Authentic Values," *Material History Review* 45 (Spring 1997), 5–15.