

Eva Livia Corredor. *East-West Odyssey*. Self Published, 2008. Pp. 275, illus.; Zsuzsanna Láposy Diosy. *Life behind the Iron Curtain*. Self Published, 2006. No page no., illus.; Kati Marton. *Enemies of the People. My Family's Journey to North America*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009. pp. 272, illus.

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Three books, three totally different life stories, yet each a memoir of the Second World War and its aftermath. In *East West Odyssey* the author's focus is on her career in the United States and fitting into American society years after her flight from Hungary. *Enemies of the People* tells a gripping story of how even privileged persons with good connections were hounded by the Communist government, while *Life Behind the Iron Curtain* chronicles what happened to ordinary people in post-war Hungary. Kati Marton's is the most professional and the best written. This is no surprise given her journalistic background, her access to primary sources beyond her own memory, and her impressive publisher support. While an academic with scholarly publications to her credit, Corredor's work suffers from not having had a strict editor. Unfortunately, the English version of Láposy's work is almost unreadable because the translator was not at home in English and no competent editor reviewed the manuscript. What is a gripping story with flashes of vivid description is thus seriously marred.

All three are memoirs but they are not equal. Marton is the child narrator whose comments are placed into context by the journalist. The tale, too, is not her own so much as that of her parents so that there is already a distancing. Sometimes told from the child's perspective, sometimes from the adult journalist's, the combination is well handled: we learn of the factual events of 1950's Hungary when no one was safe and the black car could come to anyone. For the full picture, Marton draws on her father's memoir of his imprisonment, her mother's unpublished memoir, the files of the Hungarian State Security Office (ÁVO) available to all after the fall of Communism, reportage in various newspapers about her parents, as well as access to State Department documents. With all of this material at hand, she wonders why her parents chose to live so dangerously: "having barely survived the Nazis, my parents should have kept their heads down. Yet, when the Communists took over Hungary, my parents brazenly and openly aligned themselves with the new Enemy: the Americans. How could they have taken such risks" (15)? As correspondents for the Associated Press and the United Press they had access to both the British and the US Embassy; their command of English and refined social skills made them popular. Yet it was only in 1955 that the Communists moved against them: her father was arrested on February 25; her mother on June 20th. The narrative of both arrests, of the interrogations, the ploy of placing spies as cell mates with her father, all of the tricks of the secret service come from the documents Marton was able to consult at the Hungarian Secret Police Archives. This makes the narrative both gripping and detailed.

Iлона Marton was released on April 3, 1956, Endre on August 15. They were able to resume their lives, their jobs still available to them, though both had to report regularly to the secret police. A quote from the AVO files serves to illustrate the arbitrary nature of life under Communism and confirm that there was no evidence of illegal activity by Endre Marton (or by extension, his wife): "the reports contain no data ... which would be considered illegal. ... There is

no factual evidence to confirm the charge of spying, but in my opinion, it is probable that the [Martons] conducted such activity” (141). Of course, factual reporting was suspect in itself within that paranoid world.

The Martons left legally for the Vienna on January 17, 1957 with the help of the US Legation, but they had been able to cover the events of the Revolution of 1956. “The memories of the Hungarian Revolution are tied up with the reuniting of our family,” Kati Marton writes, but she does not spare the politicians who left Hungary in the lurch at that crucial time. Their friend and champion, Ambassador Ravndal had been transferred so that “the stunning challenge to the Soviet Empire that began in the streets of Budapest ... would happen without the presence of a senior American diplomat. John Foster Dulles, the Cold Warrior who had trumpeted rolling back the Iron Curtain, chose not to send an envoy to replace Ravndal until the explosion of freedom he had encouraged was extinguished in blood” (186). The final chapters of the work briefly recount the family’s eventual settling in Bethesda, but note that the Hungarian government continued its attempts to recruit them—again learned from the Archives. Only in 1967 did the surveillance of the family cease. In the “Epilogue” Marton identifies a key element in her parents’ lives: while they shared little with her, this reticence enabled them to survive, and by not dwelling on the past, its “wounds and regrets” they passed on a much healthier world view than would otherwise have been possible.

Eva Corredor’s work reflects a blend of the insecurity and self-centeredness which Marton seems to have escaped. Born into relative privilege in Budaörs as the daughter of a physician, she is shocked on entering the local school that other children might be jealous of her: the daughter of the mayor takes a dislike to her and calls her “a dirty Schwabian,” yet Eva’s explanation also smacks of intolerance: “Her parents belonged to a different ethnic group and may have envied my father’s financial success and popularity in the community” (30). What was the different ethnic group? If the child was not of German background, was she ethnic Hungarian? What does that make Eva, who indulges in fantasies of being descended from the Huns? Such innuendo in references to ethnic groups who seem to have it in for her, but who are never identified either on a case-by-case basis or collectively, surfaces again and again in the narrative. The reflection highlights what I consider to be one of the more disturbing aspects of the book: seeing jealousy behind any setbacks the author encounters: “Similar incidents occurred throughout my life. Some people, especially in the US, seem to have a chemical reaction against tall blondes who are not dumb” (31).

The flight of Eva and her family to Austria and eventually Germany is sketched briefly but with the same lack of insight into the situation. Finding themselves in a refugee camp and then moved West in cattle wagons, she complains of the discomfort. I, too, remember these stations in our flight, but the German effort to move refugees away from the front was more heroic than harrowing. Yes, we were in cattle cars, but these were not sealed and they did stop to allow for the normal activities of life. And, as she herself admits, the family benefitted from her father being a doctor, which enabled him to get a job in a refugee hospital and eventually move into private practice in Germany. Her siblings had successful careers in their chosen fields because eventually life in Germany was normalized and the young, in particular, were able to blend into the mainstream. So I am puzzled by her remark “it continued to disturb me that my father ... should have decided to settle [in Germany] instead of attempting to return back [sic] to

Hungary” (47). Does she not realize that returning to Hungary before 1989 was tantamount to returning to a prison state? That her family’s middle class status, not to mention flight, would have labeled them as enemies of the state, especially before the relative thaw of the 1980’s? That the freedom and opportunities of West Germany offered a better life than the socialist constraints of Hungary?

Eva’s years of exile in Germany seemed happy and fulfilled enough, but when she was 20 Eva decided to study in Paris. It was at the Sorbonne that she met her husband, a “Latin lover” from an unnamed country. Eventually, he took the family to New York. Her husband’s infidelity led to divorce and the need to make a life for her daughter, and in this, Eva does seem heroic. What is disturbing is that she more often than not idolizes those who are prominent or famous. A series of name-droppings does not do well for her image as a resourceful person. As noted earlier, vague but prejudiced references to “other national and ethnic groups” is a disturbing feature. On the other hand, she makes amazingly naive statements, for example, that medical doctors or Israelis have higher morals than others.

Undoubtedly, Eva’s career in America was a success: she taught at various good schools and capped her career with a stint at the United States Naval Academy. Which makes me wonder why there are so many negative messages in the work. There is hardly a positive statement about herself without someone being put down. Her anti-capitalist attitude is countered by an aversion to socialism and the appropriation of wealth and benefits, which she sees as rightfully hers. Unlike Marton, who is almost a detached observer, or Láposy, who records events with the immediacy of the diary format, Corredor seems to select events and persons which show her brilliant and wealthy connections; in spite of her protestations to the contrary, she seems to drift into her career more by accident than design. Corredor’s memoir is an interesting account of her life, but it sheds little information on the post-World War II lives of Hungarians. This probably was not her intention, so it is only in the context of this comparative review that the question comes up. The account is an interesting tale of the struggle of a smart and talented woman to be recognized in the world of American academia when women were still pioneers. It is a shame that the lack of introspection fails to shed light on the reasons for her choices: why she wanted to study in Paris, why she remained in New York after her divorce, or for any of the other choices she made.

The question motivating Corredor’s memoir is, “But then, indeed, where am I from!?! And why do people always treat me as an ‘other’?” (3). All refugees or exiles face this dilemma, but Eva is remote from her Hungarian roots and never seems to have embraced her American identity. Maybe that is why she fails to find her place.

Zsuzsanna Láposy’s *Life behind the Iron Curtain* covers a larger canvas than the others and is the most immediate. Written for her children, the Hungarian version might well have served its purpose. Translated by her daughter-in-law, Christina Diósy, the manuscript was sent to friends in England, Mollie Green and Raymond Taylor. The two seem to have arranged for its printing by Trafford Publications in Toronto. Obviously, these friends were impressed by the tale as the introduction gushes: “The memories are fantastic ... I would like to meet the authoress [sic] one day” (n.p.). But Green and Taylor have no point of reference to Hungarian history, as is shown by this statement from the introduction: “‘Life Behind the Iron Curtain’ [sic] shows the [sic] 20th century Hungarian history through the family of the authoress [sic]. During the whole

20th century there was no democracy in the country, except for the 1990's. Rather, we can see the results of WWI, the kingship dictatorship, Nazism, WWII and communism [sic]." Glosses in the text come from Wikipedia and much inaccuracy and muddling of historical facts remains.

An even more serious flaw is that the English version is almost unreadable: hardly a paragraph is free of grammatical, syntax and spelling errors to such a degree the meaning is often lost. Given that Green and Taylor do show a reasonable command of English, the carelessness in the translation is surprising. To cite just a few instances: "Mother was right with hope," meaning she was pregnant; "fabricated us a bird dolls house for us, which were we both could climb into," "bodies were constantly drifted," "converted from his evangelistic faith" meaning Calvinism, "Inner Ministry" and the enigmatic "Thomas was hungry as well, so began to home that it had been only a light sickness." Instances of carelessness abound: erratic capitalization, what seem to be captions for photos included in the text without the pictures, etc.

Organized by years beginning in 1923, the narrative is a sometimes detailed, sometimes summary account of events in Láposy's life – and by extension the life of a middle class Hungarian family – to 1957. The year-by-year format adds structure and intimacy; it also leads to repetition, particularly in the pre-war sections when life ran in a predictable rhythm. The first part ends with her marriage to Alfred Kosch and the German occupation of Hungary. The real changes come, of course with the war. The account of the bombings and siege of Budapest in 1944-45 are vividly portrayed. It is this work that gives the most vivid account not only of the sufferings of the Hungarians during the war, German occupation and the siege of Budapest, but also of the Soviet occupation. Alfred escapes the Siberian gulag only to be arrested by the Hungarian Communist government. Zsuzsanna thinks it might be because he is of German background, his family originally coming from Szászrégen in Transylvania and thus belonging to the Saxon minority of Hungary. However, the charge is mistreatment of the men under him in a labor brigade. In pre-trial detention from August 1945 to December 1946, he is released after his trial when the "victims" either disappear or refuse to testify against him. Thus, one must presume these were trumped-up charges. The whole episode poignantly illustrates the system under which the Allied Control Commission and the Yalta conference allowed the Soviet Union to terrorize its area of occupation. As the Communist grip tightens, other wrenching changes follow: the nationalization of private industry which limited employment possibilities, the expulsion of her brother from the University as a "class alien," etc. Her husband has to take a job in the provinces, and on July 13th, 1951 she and her entire family are ordered into internal exile. (See also Fenyves in this issue on "kitelepítés" – internal exile). This section of the work is probably most interesting for the details of the life into which much of Hungary's middle and upper classes were forced: relocation to remote villages to be housed at the expense of the local farmers, generally the wealthier "kuláks". The deportees were freed on Sept. 1, 1953, although not allowed to return to Budapest or major cities.

Personal strength and resilience characterize the author. While there is a certain naiveté in the work (she seems unaware of the political motivations of Alfred's imprisonment or their own exile) she faces these challenges with a positive attitude. Most surprising, perhaps, is her account of the events of 1956: she sees the momentous Revolution in the light of her own health problems, seemingly annoyed that hospitals were full of wounded and the streetcars did not run. While her brother Géza did leave for West Germany and pursued his goal of veterinary medicine,

she is more relieved that the younger brother stays.

The motivation of each woman in writing these memoirs is different, but each of them addresses the question of human dignity in a world where this seems to have lost its value. Personal integrity and resilience emerge as the saving graces of the post-war trauma. As women, they seem to have been more attuned to tragedies on a personal level and the challenges families faced. Marton's depiction of her mother's efforts to keep the family together after the arrest of her husband and Láposy's concern for the three generations of her family speak for the many women of the latter part of the 20th century who had to assume leadership roles they never envisioned. Corredor had this role thrust upon her, if not by political repression but by the disruption of her life and its resultant rootlessness. As I was writing these sentences, I was reminded of a symposium at the Library of Congress on human dignity. The speakers extolled the strides Western Civilization has taken in extending personal, individual and human rights to more and more groups over the centuries. What they failed to note, however, was that both the Nazis and the Communists denied all of these rights to their subjects. These stories serve as a reminder that survivors are needed to preserve our liberties and to warn of ways in which these can be infringed. Personal integrity and resilience emerge as the saving graces of post war trauma.