FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Humor

Voyage to Kazohinia
Sándor Szathmári
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New Europe Books
978-0-9825781-2-4
(July 3, 2012)

"I have been watching your country … and have to admit that in many respects you are perfect … What a person of culture cannot endure is that you live without heart, without the salt and sense of life." So complains Gulliver, oft-shipwrecked hero of *Voyage to Kazohinia* in a new translation by New Europe Books. Having borrowed his hero from Jonathan Swift, Sándor Szathmári presents us with a contemporary set of travels through a society so "perfect" it is almost inhuman.

At first, this new land of Kazohinia is agreeable to Gulliver: he is surrounded by the peaceable, attractive Hins, who prove willing to absorb him into their technologically sophisticated society. Yet after only months, Gulliver despairs: the culture is so alien that he is perceived as insane. What he mistook for perfection is empty of what defines him. The Hins lack understanding of love, hate, monogamy, music, and art. They have no money or government, no sense of parenthood or family. Not only do they lack these things—they dismiss them as unwelcome and destructive concepts.

Indeed, Gulliver's doctor tells him that to seek "nonexistent" things like beauty, entertainment, and literature is to "attribute value to the unnecessary" and that "nothing but damage can come from cultivating non-existing things, because we ourselves live in the existing world." Of love, his teacher says "the fact that we loved somebody implied that we had to behave more harmfully to all those we did not love, so love itself was kazi—entailing conflict, contrast, hunger, and decay." (*Kazo* is a Hin word that refers to that which is unproductive and irrational.)

The late Sándor Szathmári was a significant figure in Hungarian literature and was also known for his participation in the Esperanto movement. Of his writings, Szathmári is best known for *Voyage to Kazohinia*, which has appeared in several printings under varying names

and was also one of the few novels ever published in Esperanto. Whether the author espouses the depthless perfection of Kazohinia, or cautions against the pursuit of such utopian constructs (and their technology), has been debated by not a few scholars. Indeed, Szathmári seems to laugh at both Gulliver's Great Britain and the world of Kazohinia. Each have their ridiculous aspects. But whatever his ultimate goal, Szathmári succeeds in forcing readers to confront the ways citizens of societies accept as truth those precepts that define and enable the society's existence, even at the expense of the individual.

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