KMV 2024 – angol műfordítás

Ajánlott szövegek

válogatta: Bakos Petra

**A szövegek rövid terjedelme miatt kérjük a versfordítókat, hogy legalább három művet válasszanak!**

Louise Glück (1943–2023)

**The Red Poppy**

The great thing
is not having
a mind. Feelings:
oh, I have those; they
govern me. I have
a lord in heaven
called the sun, and open
for him, showing him
the fire of my own heart, fire
like his presence.
What could such glory be
if not a heart? Oh my brothers and sisters,
were you like me once, long ago,
before you were human? Did you
permit yourselves
to open once, who would never
open again? Because in truth
I am speaking now
the way you do. I speak
because I am shattered.

// From *The Wild Iris*, published by Ecco Press, 1992. //

Ada Limón (1976)

**The Raincoat**

When the doctor suggested surgery
and a brace for all my youngest years,
my parents scrambled to take me
to massage therapy, deep tissue work,
osteopathy, and soon my crooked spine
unspooled a bit, I could breathe again,
and move more in a body unclouded
by pain. My mom would tell me to sing
songs to her the whole forty-five minute
drive to Middle Two Rock Road and forty-
five minutes back from physical therapy.
She’d say, even my voice sounded unfettered
by my spine afterward. So I sang and sang,
because I thought she liked it. I never
asked her what she gave up to drive me,
or how her day was before this chore. Today,
at her age, I was driving myself home from yet
another spine appointment, singing along
to some maudlin but solid song on the radio,
and I saw a mom take her raincoat off
and give it to her young daughter when
a storm took over the afternoon. My god,
I thought, my whole life I’ve been under her
raincoat thinking it was somehow a marvel
that I never got wet.

// From The Carrying, published by Milkweed Editions, 2018. //

Tracy K. Smith (1972)

**Everybody’s Autobiography**

I find myself most alone
When I believe I am striving for glory.

These times, cool and sharp,
A monument of moon-white stone

lodges in place near my heart.
In a dream, my children

Glisten inside raindrops, or teardrops.
Like strangers, like seeds of children.

I will only be allowed to claim them
if I consent to love everyone’s children.

If I consent to love everyone’s children,
Only then will I be allowed to claim them,

My strangers, my seeds of children,
Glistening inside raindrops or teardrops

In my dream. Children
Lodged in place near my heart—

A monument of moon-white stone,
Cool and sharp.

I believe I am striving for glory
When I find myself most alone.

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Tom Sleigh (1953)

**Second Sight**

In my fantasy of fatherhood, in which I’m
your real father, not just the almost dad
arriving through random channels of divorce,
you and I don’t lie to one another—
shrugging each other off when words
get the best of us but coming
full circle with wan smiles.
When you hole up inside yourself,
headphones and computer screen
taking you away, I want to feel in ten years
that if I’m still alive you’ll still look
at me with that same wary expectancy,
your surreptitious cool-eyed appraisal
debating if my love for you is real.
Am I destined to be those shark-faced waves
that my death will one day make you enter?
You and your mother make such a self-sufficient pair—
in thrift stores looking for your prom dress,
what father could stand up to your unsparing eyes
gauging with such erotic calculation
your figure in the mirror? Back of it all, when I
indulge my second sight, all I see are dead zones:
no grandchildren, no evenings at the beach, no bonfires
in a future that allows one glass of wine
per shot of insulin. Will we both agree
that I love you, always, no matter
my love’s flawed, aging partiality?
My occupation now is to help you be alone.

// Originally in Station Zed, published by Graywolf Press, 2014. //

### Gerald Murnane

### Land Deal

### *After a full explanation of what my object was, I purchased two large tracts of land from them—about 600,000 acres, more or less—and delivered over to them blankets, knives, looking-glasses, tomahawks, beads, scissors, flour, etc., as payment for the land, and also agreed to give them a tribute, or rent, yearly.*

### *— JOHN BATMAN, 1835*

### We certainly had no cause for complaint at the time. The men from overseas politely explained all the details of the contract before we signed it. Of course there were minor matters that we should have queried. But even our most experienced negotiators were distracted by the sight of the payment offered us.

### The strangers no doubt supposed that their goods were quite unfamiliar to us. They watched tolerantly while we dipped our hands into the bags of flour, draped ourselves in blankets, and tested the blades of knives against the nearest branches. And when they left we were still toying with our new possessions. But what we marvelled at most was not their novelty. We had recognised an almost miraculous correspondence between the strangers’ steel and glass and wool and flour and those metals and mirrors and cloths and foodstuffs that we so often postulated, speculated about, or dreamed of.

### Is it surprising that a people who could use against stubborn wood and pliant grass and bloody flesh nothing more serviceable than stone—is it surprising that such a people should have become so familiar with the idea of metal? Each one of us, in his dreams, had felled tall trees with blades that lodged deep in the pale pulp beneath the bark. Any of us could have enacted the sweeping of honed metal through a stand of seeded grass or described the precise parting of fat or muscle beneath a tapered knife. We knew the strength and sheen of steel and the trueness of its edge from having so often called it into possible existence.

### It was the same with glass and wool and flour. How could we not have inferred the perfection of mirrors—we who peered so often into rippled puddles after wavering images of ourselves? There was no quality of wool that we had not conjectured as we huddled under stiff pelts of possum on rainy winter evenings. And every day the laborious pounding of the women at their dusty mills recalled for us the richness of the wheaten flour that we had never tasted.

### But we had always clearly distinguished between the possible and the actual. Almost anything was possible. Any god might reside behind the thundercloud or the waterfall, any faery race inhabit the land below the ocean’s edge; any new day might bring us such a miracle as an axe of steel or a blanket of wool. The almost boundless scope of the possible was limited only by the occurrence of the actual. And it went without saying that what existed in the one sense could never exist in the other. Almost anything was possible except, of course, the actual.

### It might be asked whether our individual or collective histories furnished any example of a possibility becoming actual. Had no man ever dreamed of possessing a certain weapon or woman and, a day or a year later, laid hold of his desire? This can be simply answered by the assurance that no one among us was ever heard to claim that anything in his possession resembled, even remotely, some possible thing he had once hoped to possess.

### That same evening, with the blankets warm against our backs and the blades still gleaming beside us, we were forced to confront an unpalatable proposition. The goods that had appeared among us so suddenly belonged only in a possible world. We were therefore dreaming. The dream may have been the most vivid and enduring that any of us had known. But however long it lasted it was still a dream.

### We admired the subtlety of the dream. The dreamer (or dreamers—we had already admitted the likelihood of our collective responsibility) had invented a race of men among whom possible objects passed as actual. And these men had been moved to offer us the ownership of their prizes in return for something that was itself not real.

### We found further evidence to support this account of things. The pallor of the men we had met that day, the lack of purpose in much of their behaviour, the vagueness of their explanations—these may well have been the flaws of men dreamed of in haste. And, perhaps paradoxically, the nearly perfect properties of the stuffs offered to us seemed the work of a dreamer, someone who lavished on the central items of his dream all those desirable qualities that are never found in actual objects.

### It was this point that led us to alter part of our explanation for the events of that day. We were still agreed that what had happened was part of some dream. And yet it was characteristic of most dreams that the substance of them seemed, at the time, actual to the dreamer. How, if we were dreaming of the strangers and their goods, were we able to argue against our taking them for actual men and objects?

### We decided that none of us was the dreamer. Who, then, was? One of our gods, perhaps? But no god could have had such an acquaintance with the actual that he succeeded in creating an illusion of it that had almost deceived us.

### There was only one reasonable explanation. The pale strangers, the men we had first seen that day, were dreaming of us and our confusion. Or, rather, the true strangers were dreaming of a meeting between ourselves and their dreamed-of selves.

### At once, several puzzles seemed resolved. The strangers had not observed us as men observe one another. There were moments when they might have been looking through our hazy outlines towards sights they recognised more easily. They spoke to us with oddly raised voices and claimed our attention with exaggerated gestures as though we were separated from them by a considerable distance, or as though they feared we might fade altogether from their sight before we had served the purpose for which they had allowed us into their dream.

### When had this dream begun? Only, we hoped, on that same day when we first met the strangers. But we could not deny that our entire lives and the sum of our history might have been dreamed by these people of whom we knew almost nothing. This did not dismay us utterly. As characters in a dream, we might have been much less at liberty than we had always supposed. But the authors of the dream encompassing us had apparently granted us at least the freedom to recognise, after all these years, the simple truth behind what we had taken for a complex world.

### Why had things happened thus? We could only assume that these other men dreamed for the same purpose that we (dreamers within a dream) often gave ourselves up to dreaming. They wanted for a time to mistake the possible for the actual. At that moment, as we deliberated under familiar stars (already subtly different now that we knew their true origin), the dreaming men were in an actual land far away, arranging our very deliberations so that their dreamed-of selves could enjoy for a little while the illusion that they had acquired something actual.

### And what was this unreal object of their dreams? The document we had signed explained everything. If we had not been distracted by their glass and steel that afternoon we would have recognised even then the absurdity of the day’s events. The strangers wanted to possess the land.

### Of course it was the wildest folly to suppose that the land, which was by definition indivisible, could be measured or parcelled out by a mere agreement among men. In any case, we had been fairly sure that the foreigners failed to see our land. From their awkwardness and unease as they stood on the soil, we judged that they did not recognise the support it provided or the respect it demanded. When they moved even a short distance across it, stepping aside from places that invited passage and treading on places that were plainly not to be intruded on, we knew that they would lose themselves before they found the real land.

### Still, they had seen a land of some sort. That land was, in their own words, a place for farms and even, perhaps, a village. It would have been more in keeping with the scope of the dream surrounding them had they talked of founding an unheard-of city where they stood. But all their schemes were alike from our point of view. Villages or cities were all in the realm of possibility and could never have a real existence. The land would remain the land, designed for us yet, at the same time, providing the scenery for the dreams of a people who would never see either our land or any land they dreamed of.

### What could we do, knowing what we then knew? We seemed as helpless as those characters we remembered from private dreams who tried to run with legs strangely nerveless. Yet if we had no choice but to complete the events of the dream, we could still admire the marvellous inventiveness of it. And we could wonder endlessly what sort of people they were in their far country, dreaming of a possible land they could never inhabit, dreaming further of a people such as ourselves with our one weakness, and then dreaming of acquiring from us the land which could never exist.

### We decided, of course, to abide by the transaction that had been so neatly contrived. And although we knew we could never truly awake from a dream that did not belong to us, still we trusted that one day we might seem, to ourselves at least, to awake.

### Some of us, remembering how after dreams of loss they had awakened with real tears in their eyes, hoped that we would somehow awake to be convinced of the genuineness of the steel in our hands and the wool round our shoulders. Others insisted that for as long as we handled such things we could be no more than characters in the vast dream that had settled over us—the dream that would never end until a race of men in a land unknown to us learned how much of their history was a dream that must one day end.

Gerald Murnane

### Last Letter to a Niece

### My Dearest Niece,

### With this letter, our long-standing correspondence comes to an end. The reasons for this will become clear while you read the following pages. Yes, this letter must be my last, and yet I begin it with the same message that I sent in all my earlier letters. I remind you yet again, dear niece, that you are not obliged to reply to me; and I add yet again that I almost prefer not to hear from you, since this allows me to imagine many possible replies.

### This letter has been the hardest to compose. In all my earlier letters I wrote the truth, but in these pages I have to write what might be called a higher truth. First, however, I must set the scene for you, as usual.

### The time is evening, and the sky is almost dark. The day was fine and calm, and the stars will all be visible shortly, but the ocean is strangely loud. The weather must be bad far away in the west, because a heavy swell is running and I can hear, every half-minute, the loud crack as some huge wave breaks against the cliffs. After each crack, I imagine I feel under my feet the same tremor that I would feel if I were standing on one of the cliffs; but of course the cliffs are nearly a kilometre away, and the old farmhouse stands rock-solid as always.

### As a child and a young man, I was known as the reader of the family. While my brothers and sisters were playing cards or listening to the gramophone, I would be sitting in a corner with a book open in front of me. I was always lost in a book, so my mother used to say. She, the wife of a dairy farmer and the mother of seven children, had little opportunity to read, but that simple remark of hers stays in my thoughts as I write this last letter. What did my mother understand of body, mind, soul, that caused her to report of her eldest son, while his body and face and eyes were clearly in her sight, that he was somehow within the confines of the smallish object held in his hands and, moreover, unsure of his whereabouts?

### Something else my mother said of me: I was a bookish person. After you have read this letter, niece, you may choose to understand my mother’s remark in other than its obvious sense. My mother would have meant that I read a great many books, but she was, in fact, wrong. If my hard-worked mother had cared to look closely, she might sometimes have seen that the book I held up to the kerosene lamp at the kitchen table on some evening in winter was the same that I had shielded with my hand from the sunlight on the back veranda on some Sunday morning of the previous summer.

### When I write “book,” I mean, as you surely know, the sort of book that has characters, a setting, and a story. I have seldom troubled myself over any other sort of book.

### In many a letter during past years, I named for you one or another book that had affected me. As well, I mentioned certain passages in each book and told you that I often took pains to recall my first reading of each passage. I wonder how much you divined of what I am now about to tell you in full. The truth is, dear niece, that I have been, from an early age, powerfully drawn towards certain female characters in books. I am almost reluctant, even in such a letter as this, to write in everyday language about my feelings towards these personages, but you might begin to understand my situation if you think of me as having fallen, and ever since remained, in love with the personages.

### Picture me on the day when I first learned what it was that would inspire and sustain me from then onwards. I am hardly more than a child. I am sitting on the lowest of the tier of sandstone blocks that support the rainwater tank on the shady, southern side of the house. This is my favourite place for reading by day in mild weather. The bulk of the tank-stand protects me from the sea wind, and if I lean sideways I sometimes feel against my face a trailing leaf or petal from the nasturtiums that grow out of the cracks between the topmost stones and down over the cream-coloured surface behind me. I am reading a book by an Englishman who died nearly fifty years before my birth. The book was presented to me as suitable for older children, but I was to learn much later that the author intended the book for adults. The action of the book was purported to have taken place nearly a thousand years before the author’s birth. Among the major characters of the book was a young woman who later became the wife of the chief character and, later again, was rejected by him. At one or another moment while I was reading from the later pages of the book a report of the circumstances of this female character, I had to stop reading. Rather than cause embarrassment to either of us, I will describe my situation at that moment by calling on one of those stock expressions that can yield surprising meaning if one ponders them word by word. I tell you, dear niece, that my feelings got the better of me for a few moments.

### Do not suppose that a few moments of intense feeling of themselves revealed much to me. But after I had reflected for long on the events just described, I began to foresee the peculiar course that my life would take in the future: I would seek in books what most others sought among living persons.

### I reflected as follows. My reading about the personage in the book had caused me to feel more intensely than I had previously felt for any living person … At this point, dear niece, you may be preparing to revise your previous good opinion of me. Please, at least, read on … If I had been utterly candid with you from the beginning of our correspondence, you might have broken with me long ago. To whom, then, could I have written my many hundreds of pages? To whom could I have addressed this most decisive of letters? My being able to write even these few pages today is justification a hundredfold for whatever reticence and evasion I may have practised before now.

### You read and interpreted rightly just now. I declare to you freely that I felt as a child and have felt ever since more concern for certain characters in books than for my own sisters and brothers, more than for my own mother and father even, and certainly more than for any of the few friends I have had. And in answer to your urgent question: you, dear niece, stand somewhat apart from the persons just mentioned. You are, it is true, a blood relation, but our having never met and our agreement that we should never meet allows me often to suppose that we are connected through literature only and not through your father’s being my younger brother. Then again, that you are a blood relation of mine should lessen the strangeness of my revelations. You must have been from an early age not unfamiliar with aloofness and solitariness among the branches of our family. I am by no means your only unmarried uncle or aunt.

### If you are still inclined to judge me harshly, dear niece, remember that I have done little harm to any living person during my bachelor’s life. I was never a brute or unfaithful to any wife; I was never a tyrant to any child. Above all, consider my claim that I never chose to live as I have lived. My own conscience has reassured me often that I have dreamed and read only in an effort to draw nearer to the people who are my true kindred; the place that is my true home. My acts and omissions have had their origins in my nature and not in my will.

### And now you wonder about my religious faith. I was not deceiving you whenever I mentioned in earlier letters my weekly churchgoing, but I have to confess to you that I long ago ceased to believe in the doctrines of our religion. I have read as much as I could bring myself to read of the book from which our religion has been derived. I was able to feel for no character in that book the half of what I have felt for many a character in books scarcely mentioning God.

### Do not be dismayed, niece. I have sat in church every Sunday while our correspondence has gone forward, although stolidly rather than devoutly, and more as some English labourer of the previous century sat in his village church in one or another of my most admired books. I use my time in church for my own purposes but I cause no scandal. From under my eyebrows, I look at certain young women. My only purpose is to take home to my stone farmhouse and my bleak paddocks a small store of remembered sights.

### You must remind yourself, niece, that I see very few young women. I spend a few hours each week in the town of Y—, where numerous young women are to be seen in shops and offices and on the footpaths. But I have observed during my lifetime a great change in the demeanour of young women. The weatherboard church in this isolated district is perhaps the last place where I could hope to see young women dressed modestly and with eyes downcast.

### But I have not explained myself. I am interested in the appearance and deportment of young women in this, the everyday visible world, for the good reason that the female personages in books, like all other such personages together with the places they inhabit, are quite invisible.

### You can hardly believe me. In your mind at this very moment are characters, costumes, interiors of houses, landscapes and skies, all of them faithful images of their counterparts in descriptive passages in books you have read and remembered. Allow me to set you right, dear niece, and to make a true reader of you.

### I have had no education to speak of, but a man may learn surprising things if he spends all his life in the same house and most of that life alone. With no chatter or argument in his ears, he will hear the persuasive rhythms of sentences from the books that he keeps beside his bed. With his eyes undistracted by novelty, he will see what those sentences truly denote. For long after I had first fallen in love as a result of my reading, I still supposed that the objects of my love were visible to me. Did I not see in my mind, while I read, image after image? Could I not call to mind, long after I had closed this or that book, the face, the clothing, the gestures of the personage I loved—and of others also? Whenever I think of how readily I deceived myself in this simplest of matters, I wonder in how many other matters no less simple are persons deceived who will not inspect the contents of their own minds nor look for the source of what appears there. And I beg you, dear niece, not to be prevented by the welter of sights and sounds in the great city where you live; not to be deceived by the glibness of the educated; but to accept as truths only the findings of your own introspection.

### But I am preaching at you, when my own example should serve. You will believe me, niece, when I tell you that I learned, in time, that all the contents of all the books that I had read or would read were invisible. Whatever personages I had loved, or would love in the future, were forever hidden from me. Certainly, I saw as I read. But what I saw came only from my poor stock of remembered sights. And what I saw was only a scrap of what I believed I saw. An example will serve.

### Last night, I was reading yet again from a book the author of which was born before the midpoint of the previous century but lived until the year before my own birth. I had read only a few words referring to the chief female personage of the book before the appearance in my mind of the first of the images that another sort of reader would have supposed to have originated by some means in the text of the book. Being by now well skilled in such tasks, I needed only a moment of mental exertion before I recognised the source of the image just mentioned. Note first that the image was of a detail only. The text referred to a young woman. Would you not expect that any image then arising in my mind would be an image of a young woman? But I assure you that I saw only an image of a corner of a somewhat pale forehead with a strand of dark hair trailing across it. And I assure you further that this detail had its source not in any sentence of the text but in the memory of the reader of the text, myself. Some weeks before, while I sat in my usual seat in a rear corner of the church, I observed from under my eyebrows a certain young woman as she returned to her seat from the communion rail. I observed many details of her appearance, and all were of equal interest to me. Neither in the church nor at any time afterwards did I think of any of those details as being connected with any personage in any book that I had read. And yet, dear niece, the image of a strand of dark hair and a corner of a forehead are all that I can see, for the time being, of a personage who has been dear to me for longer than I have been writing my letters to you.

### Much might be learned from all this, dear niece. I myself have certainly learned much from many similar discoveries. Item: if, for the sake of convenience, we call the subject matter of books a world, then that world is wholly invisible to the residents of the world where I write these words and where you read them. For I have studied the images not only of personages but of those details we suppose to be the settings of books and suppose further to have arisen from words in the text. The same book whose chief female character is visible to me presently as only a strand of hair trailing across a forehead, that same book contains hundreds of sentences describing a variety of landscapes in the south of England. I have observed myself to read all of those so-called descriptive sentences while seeing in my mind only one or another of precisely four details from the scattered coloured illustrations in a magazine that had belonged to my dead sister and still lay about this house. All of the illustrations were of landscapes in the midlands of England.

### But you have read enough of arguments and demonstrations, and I have almost lost my thread. Trust me to know that the personages I have been devoted to since boyhood have been invisible to me, as have their homes, their native districts, and even the skies above those districts. At once, several questions occur to you. You assume, correctly, that I have never felt drawn towards any young woman in this, the visible world, and you want me to explain this seeming failure in me.

### I have often myself considered this question, niece, and I have come to understand that I might have brought myself to approach one or another young woman from this district, or even from the town of Y— if even one of the following two conditions could have been fulfilled: before I had first seen the young woman, I would have had to read about her, if not in a book then in passages of the sort of writing such as appears in the sort of books that I read; alternatively, before I had first seen the young woman I would have had to know that the young woman had read about me as described earlier in this sentence.

### You may consider these conditions overly stringent, niece, and the chance of their being fulfilled absurdly remote. Do not suspect for a moment that I devised these conditions from a wish to remain solitary. Think of me, rather, as a man who can love only the subjects of sentences in texts purporting to be other than factual.

### There has been only one occasion when I felt myself drawn to treat with a young woman of this, the visible world without any bookish preliminaries. When I was still quite young, and still not reconciled altogether to my fate, I thought I might strengthen my resolve by learning about other solitaries: monkish eremites, exiles, dwellers in remote places. I happened to find in a pile of old magazines that someone had lent to one of my sisters an illustrated article about the island of Tristan da Cunha in the South Atlantic. I learned from the article that the island is the loneliest inhabited place on earth, lying far from shipping routes. The cliffs around the island allow no ship to berth. Any visiting ship must anchor at sea while the men of Tristan row out to her. These things alone were enough to excite my interest. You know the situation of this farm: a strip of land at the very southern edge of the continent, with its boundary on one side the high cliffs where I often walk alone. You should know also that the nearest bay to this farm is named after a ship that was wrecked there during the previous century. But my interest in the lonely island increased after I had learned from the magazine article about a disaster that had happened some forty years before my birth. A boat carrying all the able-bodied men of the island was lost at sea, and Tristan became a settlement of mostly women and children. For many years afterwards, so I read, the young women prayed every night for a shipwreck to bring marriageable men.

### There came into my mind an image of a certain young woman of Tristan da Cunha, and whenever I looked up from my paddocks to the cliffs I thought of her as standing on the highest cliff of her island and staring out to sea. I was impelled to visit the library in the town of Y— and to consult a detailed atlas. I learned, with much excitement, that the island of Tristan da Cunha and the district where this farm is situated lie almost on the same latitude. I learned further that no land—not even the speck of an island—lies between Tristan and this coast. Now, dear niece, you must know as I know that the prevailing winds and currents in this hemisphere are from west to east, and so you can anticipate the conjectures that I made after I had studied the atlas. If the young woman on the cliff tops of the island of Tristan had written a message and had enclosed the message in a bottle and had thrown the bottle into the Atlantic Ocean from a cliff on the western side of her island, then her message might well have been carried at last to the coast of this district.

### You may be inclined to smile as you read this, niece, but after I had first conjectured thus, I began the habit of walking once each week along the few beaches near this farm. While I walked, I composed in my mind various versions of the message from the young woman of Tristan. I found no bottle, which should hardly surprise you, but I was often consoled to think that a message such as I had imagined might lie during all my lifetime in some pool or crevice beneath the cliffs of my native district.

### You have another matter to raise. You want to argue that each of the personages I have devoted myself to had her origins somewhere in the mind of the author of the writing that first brought her to my notice. You suggest that I might have studied the life and the pronouncements of the author in order to discover the reality, as you might call it, beneath my illusions, as you might call them. Better still, I might read a suitable work by a living author and then submit to him or her a list of questions to be answered in writing and at length.

### In fact, dear niece, I tried long ago but soon abandoned the line of investigation noted above. Most of the authors concerned wrote their books during the previous century and died before my birth. (You must have observed that I learned my own style of writing from those worthies.) I read just enough about the lives of the authors of my admired books to learn that they were vain and arrogant persons and much given to pettiness. But what of the present century? A great change has occurred in books during this century. The writers of those books have tried to describe what they had better have left unreported. The writers of the present century have lost respect for the invisible. I have never troubled myself to learn about the writers themselves. (I exclude from these remarks a certain writer from a small island-republic in the North Atlantic. I learned of the existence of his books by a remarkable chance and read several in translation, but I could not bring myself afterwards to compose any message for him in his cliff-bound homeland.)

### I have come to hope, dear niece, that the act of writing may be a sort of miracle as a result of which invisible entities are made aware of each other through the medium of the visible. But how can I believe that the awareness is mutual? Although I have sometimes felt one or another of my beloved personages as a presence nearby, I have had no grounds for supposing that she might even have imagined my possible existence.

### On a day long ago, when I was somewhat cast down from thinking of these matters, I wrote my first letter to you, dear niece. I sought a way out of my isolation by means of the following, admittedly simplistic, proposition: if the act of writing can bring into being personages previously unimagined by either writer or reader, then I might dare to hope for some wholly unexpected outcome from my own writing, although it could never be part of any book.

### How many years have passed since then you and I alone know, and this, as I have told you, is my last letter. However little I may know of it, I remain hopeful that something will come of this writing.

### \* \* \*

### Something will come of this writing. I was born in Transylvania in the seventeenth century of the modern era. I became in my youth a follower of Prince Ferenc Rákóczi. When the Prince went into exile after the War of Independence, I was one of the band of followers who went with him. In the second decade of the eighteenth century, we arrived at the port of Gallipoli as invited guests of the Sultan of Turkey. Shortly afterwards, I wrote the first of my letters to my aunt, the Countess P—, in Constantinople. We followers of Prince Rákóczi had hoped that our exile might not be for long, but almost all of us remained for the rest of our lives in Turkey, and even those few who left Turkey were never allowed to return to their native land, my native land. For forty-one years, until almost the last year of my life, I wrote regularly to my aunt. I wrote to her almost a full account of my life. One of the few matters that I chose not to write openly about was my solitary state. Only a few of the exiles were women, and all of these were married. Most of us men remained solitary throughout our lives.

### \* \* \*

### Dear Reader

### The following is adapted from one of the seven pages about the life and the writing of Kelemen Mikes in the *Oxford History of Hungarian Literature*, 1984.

### The *Letters from Turkey* were regarded by critics for a long time only as a source for the history of the exiles. Much futile research was done in an attempt to find traces of the mysterious Countess P— who proved never to have existed. Mikes never sent his letters to any ‘aunt’ but copied them into a letter-book, which was found after his death.