



Portraits of a Marriage

By Sandor Marai

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A rediscovered masterwork from the famed Hungarian novelist Sándor Márai, *Portraits of a Marriage* is in fact a startling exploration of a triangle of entanglement.

A wealthy couple in bourgeois society, Peter and Ilonka appear to enjoy a fine union. Their home is tastefully decorated; their clothes are well tailored; they move in important circles. And yet, to hypersensitive Ilonka, her choice in décor is never good enough, and her looks are never fair enough to fully win the love of her husband, who has carried with him a secret that has long tormented him: Peter is in love with Judit, a peasant and servant in his childhood home. For Judit, however, even Peter's affection cannot transcend that which she loves most—the prospect of her own freedom and a future without the constraints of the society that has ensnared all three in a vortex of love and loss.

Set against the backdrop of Hungary between the wars, *Portraits of a Marriage* offers further “posthumous evidence of [Márai’s] neglected brilliance” (*Chicago Tribune*) and his exquisite, acutely observed evocations of sacrifice and longing.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. This autopsy of a failed marriage shows a virtuosic control of character and tone meaningfully set against the ossification of the fin de siècle Austro-Hungarian empire. It starts with Ilonka, whose middle-class husband, Peter, is in love with his mother-in-law's maid, Judit. Ilonka's bitter tale of a fight to win her husband back, only to be outdone by the other woman, gives way to the same story told by Peter, itself followed by Judit's take. What emerges is a cubist portrait of a harsh love and a dying society, elegantly paced and delightfully contradictory. Ilonka, Peter, and Judit each possess strong philosophies on life and love, and Márai successfully probes the blind spots and conflicting assumptions in their varied points of view. With each new voice, each very much its own thanks to Szirtes's faultless new translation, Márai (1900–1989) builds suspense and reveals new layers and twists to this tale. Suffused with nostalgia and regret, the book evokes and examines both the nature of longing and the decline of a great empire. (Feb.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Three interior monologues stand as a triptych in the latest novel to be translated into English by a Hungarian writer who flourished in the 1930s. With this phenomenal novel, our conviction, based on the Márai novels already translated, including *Embers* (2001) and *The Rebels* (2007), is confirmed: he ranks as one of the twentieth century's greatest novelists. The book's title is apt; the three sections focus on the conditions of one particular marriage: that between a Budapest industrial magnate and his beautiful wife in the deceptively peaceful years between the world wars, when the "world had not been boarded over yet; for a moment everything—Europe, life itself—was bathed in intense light." In seeking definitions of love, and in exercising his obviously abiding interest in the theme of loneliness in marriage, the author, in a glorious demonstration of psychological acuity, offers his powerful findings from three perspectives: from the husband and from the wife, naturally, but also from the servant girl in the man's parents' household who becomes his second wife. The idea that marriage partners keep information about themselves from each other is the outwardly simple, even ordinary, premise upon which the narrative rests; it is the author's brilliant dissection of that situation that makes this novel so exceptional. The ultimate factor in deciding if the novel works is whether the three segments mesh well enough to give the reader a smoothly integrated whole picture, and *Portraits of a Marriage* is the last word on the effectiveness of the triple-voice technique. -Brad Hooper

Review

"*Portraits of a Marriage*...is brilliant in the acuity of its observations, its unremitting intelligence...Marai gives voice to a vanished world in a chorus that is both eulogy and manifesto."
—The New York Times Book Review

"Deeply satisfying...I wonder why I had never read him before." —Michael Korda, The Daily Beast

"This autopsy of a failed marriage shows a virtuosic control of character and tone meaningfully set against the ossification of the fin de siècle Austro-Hungarian empire... What emerges is a cubist portrait of a harsh love and a dying society, elegantly paced and delightfully contradictory... With each new voice [Márai] builds suspense and reveals new layers and twists to this tale. Suffused with nostalgia and regret, the book evokes and examines both the nature of longing and the decline of a great empire."

—PW (starred review)

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Geraldine Dube:

This Portraits of a Marriage is great reserve for you because the content which can be full of information for you who all always deal with world and still have to make decision every minute. This kind of book reveal it data accurately using great plan word or we can say no rambling sentences in it. So if you are read the idea hurriedly you can have whole info in it. Doesn't mean it only will give you straight forward sentences but hard core information with splendid delivering sentences. Having Portraits of a Marriage in your hand like obtaining the world in your arm, details in it is not ridiculous 1. We can say that no reserve that offer you world with ten or fifteen minute right but this guide already do that. So , this can be good reading book. Heya Mr. and Mrs. hectic do you still doubt that?

Charity Reulet:

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Donald Bonilla:

Many people spending their time by playing outside using friends, fun activity along with family or just watching TV the whole day. You can have new activity to shell out your whole day by looking at a book. Ugh, do you think reading a book can definitely hard because you have to bring the book everywhere? It fine you can have the e-book, having everywhere you want in your Cell phone. Like Portraits of a Marriage which is finding the e-book version. So , why not try out this book? Let's see.

Harry Dwyer:

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