



Adventures of Sindbad

Gyula Krúdy , George Szirtes

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In these marvellously written tales, Sindbad, a voyager in the realms of memory and imagination, travels through the centuries in pursuit of an ideal of love that is directed as much at the feminine essence as at his individual lovers. Whether the women he seduces and loves are projections of his desire, or he of theirs, is a moot question. These short stories flow without a strict narrative framework Sindbad journeys between the past and the present and is merely a ghost in many of his adventures. Although Sindbad can move through time, it is time that proves his chief enemy, and youth that remains his real love. This deeply autumnal book, full of resonances and associations, is an erotic elegy to the dying Habsburg empire.

Adventures of Sindbad Details

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From Reader Review Adventures of Sindbad for online ebook

Nicholas During says

What a weird and wonderful book. I'm not sure if I really understand this book yet, which is part of the reason I like it so much. It's got a real modern feel to it, which contrasts beautifully with the atmosphere of rarified imperial intrigue and fashion. It also has some great philosophizing about the relationships between men and women and relationships. It's also a precursor to the Latin American magic realism of a later period. It moves around a lot, and the reader never really knows where she is the narrative, or even if the narrator is alive or dead. The descriptions are beautiful, with wonderful details about an era in decline. But rather than just memorializing a dying period, the experimental writing-style gives it a sense of a future world as well. And hey, problems between men and women ain't going away.

Argos says

Kim önermi?ti hat?rlam?yorum ama modern Macar edebiyat?ndan iyi bir örnek denmi?ti. 20 hikaye, bol metafor, allegori ve göndermeler içinde anla??lmas? zor yaz?lar. Belki ben anlamad?m ama kitab? yar?da b?rakmama tak?nt?m olmazsa bitirmezdim, zaten bitti?inde de akl?mda kalan tek ?ey Sinbad isimli birinin ne anlatt??? belli olmayan öyküleri.

Michael says

Maybe I was expecting something else when I heard Krudy called 'the Hungarian Proust', and that it was translated by the seemingly masterful George Szirtes, but I found this book laboured, dull, clunky and flaccid. The endless circling round 'love' as the main thrust of the book does not permit comparison with Proust, unfortunately. Whilst whimsical and occasionally quite funny, it reminded me of picaresque literature more than the modernism alluded to in the summaries. Whilst the description of Hungary at the fall of Hapsburg is often neatly atmospheric, the boring two-dimensional antics of the main character are not enough to sustain interest in the stories enough to appreciate these moments.

JacquiWine says

When I put together my list for the Classics Club back in December 2015, I included a few translations alongside various British and American novels I had been intending to read for a while. The Adventures of Sindbad was one of my random picks, a collection of interlinked stories by the Hungarian writer Gyula Krúdy (the pieces were originally published in journals/magazines from 1911 to 1917 and then collated together in this volume in 1944). Krúdy was something of a literary star in his day, producing over fifty novels and some three thousand short pieces before his death in 1933. The Adventures of Sindbad comprises a series of stories and sketches featuring the titular character, Sindbad, a sort of Hungarian Don Juan, whose reminiscences of times past are recounted in this somewhat strange and haunting book.

To read my review, please visit:

Bettie? says

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

Larry says

Groovy discovery from the bargain table at Prairie Lights. Early "magical realist" stories of a sort of immortal Hungarian Don Juan. Mesmerizing.

Stephen says

Despite its completely oversaturated melancholy (seriously, how many times can the word "melancholy" be used in 200 pages?) and its relentless attention to the stupidity and rapaciousness of a man who has loved, we are told, one hundred and seven women, Krudy's Sindbad stories proved to be surprisingly affecting. If you like the sound of dead leaves scraping along a path, a dying world populated by ghosts (the eponymous Sindbad being one of them) where lovers take strolls through graveyards, nocturnal visits, gloomy and lovelorn men waiting eternally outside of windows, then I recommend this book, if only for lines like the following:

"What did Sindbad like?
He liked snowdrifts and women's legs."

Even with his occasionally misogynistic views, it's hard to fault a character--or that character's inventor--entirely when he's capable of a view that encompasses both of those things.

Leissa Shahrak says

Something tells me that I would have enjoyed this book more if I could have read it in Hungarian, but, unfortunately, my Hungarian is only tourist-talk.

Eric Franklin says

Ahhh, the cynicism of a man who has lived and loved for centuries, but still can't escape the gravitational pull of his numerous loves. The struggle for love and acceptance is apparently something that never goes away, even after death.

Here is a brilliant evocation by Sindbad near the end of the book to give you the flavor:

'Lord,' thought Sindbad, 'give me untroubled dreams and a quiet night. Stop my ears against words poured into it by women. Help me forget the scent of their hair, the strange lightning of their eyes, the taste of their hands and the moist kisses of their mouths. Lord, you who are wise, advice me when they are lying, which is always. Remind me that the truth is something they never tell. That they never do love. Lord, up there, far beyond the tower, think occasionally of me, a poor, foolish man, an admirer of women, who believes in their smiles, their kisses, their tickling and their blessed lies. Lord, let me be a flower in that garden where lonely women retreat in the knowledge that no one's by. Let me be a lantern in the house of love where women mutter and babble and sigh the same old words. Let me be the handkerchief into which they weep their false tears. Lord, let me be a gatepost ladies pass light-heartedly while clinging to the arms of their suitors. Lord protect me, never let me fall into the hands of women.'

The language in this translation is spectacular. Told as a couple of dozen small scenes with nearly as many women, the pacing and viewpoint shifts did throw me off initially. The jump-cuts between the stories were just really jarring out of the gate. As I kept reading, however, I began to really appreciate the subtlety of the overlapping stories and interludes, and began to wallow in the flowery narrative.

Laura says

I enjoyed the reading but I think something was still missing to catch my attention. Maybe it was the right book at the wrong time.....

The detailed description of the environment and of the characters make the book an interesting reading though. You should try to see if this is the right time for you to read this book.

Vishnu says

It pains me almost physically to see how obscure is the name of Krudy in the English-speaking world. If each cliché has a point of origin, then "poetry in prose" must have arisen out of description of this collection of short stories or any others which have flown from the pen of Gyula Krudy.

Krudy's Sindbad is a lovable, irascible, womanising character out of an epic who is at times alive and at others dead; at times human and at other a comb, a sprig of mistletoe and often a ghost ruminating on the life gone by. Over the course of each story, we learn of his many dalliances each of which have their own unique flavour; their own scent which you can smell as clearly as that of soil that gets wet in the rain; as that of spring that rolls after a harsh winter; as that of every memory you've ever harboured to recall and cherish under the sun.

This is a compelling work, one that makes you weak with nostalgia for your own lost days of youth, of love that bore no fruit. It's a work that you can try to take quotes out of but find yourself reusing nearly all the words and sentences in it. This is a work which you come across but rarely and that one liaison with it is enough to begin your own affair with it for a lifetime. This is intoxication by way of words which are but disguised poems written in prose. This is what every person's summer of love and magic aspires to be.

Jeffrey Keeten says

””There is only one God’, proclaimed Sindbad with conviction. ‘He who lives in our hearts and is born out of our love. It is the God who protects us, who allows us to meet in secret, so that no one should know of our love; who tells me what you think; who takes care that our eyes should seek only each other’s, who joins our hands, and brings our hearts together like two tempest-tossed birds that have found each other....’

‘You believe in love?’ asked Mitra, gazing at him with big round eyes.

‘I believe in nothing but love.’

The Széchenyi Chain Bridge that connects Buda with Pest.

Sindbad is a rake, an unrepentant philanderer, a seducer, a heartbreaker, and the Don Juan of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

He is also dead.

Now even when he was alive he was very possessive of the women he had seduced. As a ghost he is even more so. They are supposed to be faithful and pine for him all the rest of the days of their lives. *”He could never forgive women. He thought he perceived miraculous qualities in them, a combination of the fidelity of the saints with the virtues of the martyrs. And how he would rage when one of them took up with another man though it was he who had done the leaving.”*

This book was published in 1911 and became a huge bestseller. The Hungarian population could not get enough of the adventures of this Lothario. His stories and his novels were serialized in magazines before being collected into books. The Austro-Hungarian culture was passionate about love and morbidly romantic about suicide. In 1889 the crown prince of Austria, Rudolph, committed suicide with his girlfriend. Suicide was an epidemic among young males, but a problem with young females as well who saw death as something to rush towards than something to be avoided. After World War One the Austro-Hungarian empire was dismantled by the victorious Allies. They lost over a ? of their population and ? of their territory. Even now looking at the suicide rates of the countries that made up the old Empire they are still too high. Slovenia is 8th, Hungary is 9th and Austria is 29th in the world.

Dismemberment of a country.

When I was in Budapest I asked the tour guide about the high suicide rates. She said and I’m paraphrasing “we (Hungarians) were on the wrong side of every conflict, then came the Germans and then the Russians. God turned his face away from us. We lost all sense of ourselves. We are lost.”

Sindbad loves women, but he loves their clothes even more.

”He moaned with the sheer joy of living, his heart in his mouth, every time spring and summer came round he could watch them parading their new clothes. The white blouses of women about town, the traveller’s green skirt and the secretary’s cheap shoes; the hairdresser’s black apron, the feathers in the hat of the

forty-year-old grand dame, the nurse's white uniform, the black scarf of the impoverished aristocrat from Buda, the actress's loose pantaloons, the hand clad in mother-of-pearl gloves holding opera-glasses in the private box, the leg braced on the high step of the carriage in the process of alighting, the cooing and cackling of Jewish women and the white necks prayerfully bent in Buda churches; these had occupied Sindbad's imagination throughout his life...women without their clothes were all the same, they never interested him."

Fedak Sari, a famous Hungarian actress, a pageantry of clothes.

I can still remember driving down Clement Street in San Francisco and seeing this woman dressed all in black with a big hat and a long veil. She had high heels and stockings. She had blond wavy hair that spilled all the way down her back providing the only relief in color to her ensemble. She was pushing this old Victorian style baby carriage with the big buggy wheels up this steep hill. I can only think she was coming from or going to a funeral. She absolutely took my breath away. I think most men have a Rolodex of images of, in my case women, who usually unintentionally created a lasting mental image for us. I just pulled up another one of a calf wrapped twice with a long telephone cord as the woman walked back and forth across the room curling her hair around her fingers as she conversed on the phone. I could do this all day. I'm blessed/cursed with an excellent memory.

Sindbad wraps himself up in these images, being dead can sometimes be lonely, and such memories provided warmth for his ghostly bones. He visits his old flames and the woman named Monkey who was his longest lasting conquest and also his most loyal lover thinks of him differently now.

"'You know, Sindbad,' she said after a short silence, sometimes I love you so much, I feel less like your lover--your discarded, abandoned and forgotten lover--than like your mother. I know you so well. It is as if I had given birth to you.'"

Is she thinking of Sindbad?

Sindbad comes back as a sprig of mistletoe on the belt of a Nun...not the best choice. He soon was pining for the hair comb of a harlot. He does find an opening inhabiting a crypt in a church.

"Fate willed that he should travel as a ghost until the great day of salvation chose to arrive. For some months he took shelter in an empty crypt under the threshold of a highland church whose occupant had wandered off somewhere. All day he watched legs stepping over the stones and learned to recognize people by them. Already there were a few well-known old acquaintances whose tap-tap he could tell from some way off, and he kissed the heels of beautiful women as they passed over him, sighing so violently that the flat stone above the crypt seemed to move."

This is an ode to "velvet lips", stockings, and lovelorn looks of lust. Budapest in this time period had more women than men and passions ran high. Assignations, passionate embraces, illicit meetings, clandestine lunches, and slavish devotion were pursued by not only single people, but just as assiduously by married people. With so much of the population "on the market" it lead to a cornucopia of ecstasy, misery, rapture, and melancholy. Gyula Krudy's character encouraged his readership to pursue love at the cost of everything else. Budapest embraced the concept with open arms. A strange book, but one that conjured up my past when I pursued and sometimes was pursued.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Roger Critchlow says

Life where the possibility of love means everything, a possibility to be sought in every moment with who ever is available, because to be everlastingly in love is as good as it gets, and it never lasts, so do it as often as you can.

Dwight says

My review

Translator George Szirtes provides a helpful introduction to this compilation of stories, informing the reader that “In Hungary, the terms ‘Krúdyesque’ and ‘the world of Krúdy’ have a currency which extends beyond books and conjures an experience comprised of the nostalgic, the fantastic and the ironic.” Szirtes’ description provides a framework to understand the tales but Krúdy’s stories have to be read to appreciate the mystical world he creates. Although ‘mistical’ might be a better term since so much occurs in a misty netherworld, including a healthy amount of dreams and ghosts.

First, the name: we find out in the first story that Sindbad “selected his name from his favourite book of stories, The Thousand and One Nights, for in those days, it was still fairly common for knight errants, poets, actors and passionate scholars to choose names from themselves.” The name proves appropriate—rarely satisfied with his lot, Sindbad wanders often and far. Sindbad, though, is an adventurer of a different sort, his attempted conquests of a carnal nature instead of financial gain. While the original Sindbad never let shipwrecks set him back, so the more recent version won’t let death keep him from his goal—to live on in the memory and dreams of the women he seduces.

Relations between men and women follow a script: men are supposed to try to take a woman’s virtue, using every means at their disposal. The women are supposed to know the men lie and hold out...well, at least hold out longer than they do. In “The Secret Room”, as in other stories, falling in love is the same as imprisonment, longings are ruined by their realization, and familiarity breeds boredom. As explicitly stated in another tale, “what would be the point of dreaming if dreams came true?”

In “Escape from Women”, Sindbad’s appraisal of women proves to be harsh but generous while laying out a game scripted in advance:

‘The strange thing,’ he thought to himself, ‘is that women tend to behave better than one has a right to expect. Poor things, giving their all, their kisses, their dreams and sighs, smuggling my name into their evening prayers—I’d be surprised if the angels didn’t wonder at times what my name was doing among the usual company of aged fathers, mothers and tiny children... They were very good indeed, poor creatures. From now on Sindbad will teach the young to cherish women, as they do flowers, as indeed they do so many odd, weak, cheated, robbed, often tortured beings...Is it not touching that for all the times they have been disappointed, the hours they have wept and mourned, nothing continues to engage them so intensely as the serious

subject of love. Love is everything to them: the air they breathe, the water they thirst for, the miracle they marvel at. They talk of love as though it were something that had independent existence, something so solid it might be grasped. Though it is true that the subject of fashion runs a close second to love in their thoughts.

‘God bless you then, dear good women—virgins, countesses, women of affairs, half-crazed Jewesses—all who listened with trembling lips, skeptical smiles and with desire and astonishment in your hearts when Sindbad favoured you with softly spoken, delicately enunciated lies that filled your heads and souls, that heightened your colour and your mood, and gave you something to think about...For his part, Sindbad would go on to leap from the windows of cursed castles and cry his eyes out for some other woman. At other times, in a complete daze, wholly indiscriminating, he would reach out to pluck one of you, almost anyone—a tea-rose or a roadside thistle—and would have forgotten your name by morning. Forgotten names and voices, voices into which whole lives were poured, your endless self-sacrifice, the dangers into which your passions led you, and the peculiar, precious vows which Sindbad managed to extract from you with the skill of a practised father-confessor—all forgotten. You were all happy to forswear yourselves in the hour of love...Really it hardly mattered that not one of you ever kept her vow.
(Ellipses in original)

[Skip to the end of the story] As the years went by there were messages from far away. Women wanted him to come back: they were bored, they felt nostalgic; they wanted to laugh, cry, cackle, fret and be happy. But Sindbad did not go back because he kept account of the lovers that had succeeded him in their affections. The subsequent pain and bitter disappointment prevented him ever forgiving their unfaithfulness. He was a rogue: in the Middle Ages he would have gone the rounds of the prisons where he would have been shorn, first of his nose, then of his ears. Furthermore, he always believed he was speaking the truth and one can ask no clearer proof of a man’s wickedness. He could never forgive women. He thought he perceived miraculous qualities in them, a combination of the fidelity of the saints with the virtues of the martyrs. And how he would rage when one of them took up with another man though it was he who had done the leaving.

Let us therefore close the file on Sindbad’s not altogether pointless and occasionally amusing existence.

(Also included at the review is a link to my comments on the 1971 movie)

Ad Blankestijn says

Evocative stories full of romantic nostalgia about a Hungarian Casanova called (why not?) "Sindbad," who like that other, more famous count from Transsylvania, is "undead," a lovesick suicide who keeps coming back to revisit past loves, although there is nothing horrible about him. Also the women he has loved still need him to gratify their fantasies. But it is love with the grave hanging over it, passion that is unavoidable but futile, and the memories are sweet but also painful. These stories are like *La Valse* by Ravel, a dirge for a lost world, for the year Krúdy finished writing about Sindbad, the empire Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed. Read more about Hungarian novels on my blog *Splendid Labyrinths*

Blogbaas Van 'tVliegend Eiland says

9/10

???? ?????? says

There is a pale crust of tender nostalgic longing on the surface of this book. You could taste the bitter lament of lost places, scents, voices, images. The fragmented line of the narrative feels like a dream, a misty tender dream reminding you of a strange place looks like home, even though you never saw it before.

Wonderful

If you read "the man without qualities", then you are familiar with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but through the eyes of an Austrian writer. This is a good book to see the other side, with its magical underground atmosphere.

Patrick says

In these stories, the rake Sindbad, emblem of the dying romantic Austro-Hungarian Empire, revisits old lovers, sometimes alive, sometimes as a ghost. Nothing much happens beyond the evocation of a dreamlike atmosphere. Krudy/Sindbad is not much concerned with love itself, but rather the heights and depths which passion - sensual, erotic, emotional - drives the imagination, and the cruelty and fickleness of appetites and egos.

Jonathan says

Calvino + Barth somehow sown together and thrown backward in time to the first decade of the 20thc, deposited in Hungary and given a melancholic obsession with women.

The lack of a fifth star may be due more to my mood than any failure of the text.

Daniel Polansky says

To judge by my recent acquisitions, 'surreal works of fiction by 20th century central European authors' is starting to eclipse 'elevated genre fiction' as my reading brand of choice. Much of this is the influence of (here we are again) the New York Review of Books Classic's Editions (did I get the nomenclature right without checking? I've heard people just say NYRB Classics, which is objectively an aesthetic misstep, what with the the awkward 4/5 abbreviation), part of it is because a little bit of my heart remains, forever, in a curl

of land running from the Curonian Spit down to Kotor. Forgive the exaggerated prose, this was not my first beer. Where were we? Yes, *The Adventures of Sindbad*. A curious, winding, lovely little book, consisting of the ruminations of the ghost of Sindbad (no relation) a cad and great lover in, roughly speaking, *Duel Monarchy Hungary*. Ruminations aren't exactly accurate, as his character is a ghost that pays pilgrimage to the sites and participants involved in his great acts of seduction, love making, and folly. A note of eerie nostalgia lies over the whole thing, as does a benign contempt for the lies and passions of men and woman. But at heart it is keenly life-affirming novel, despite the spectral protagonist, and Krudy displays a lovely style, sideways and funny, faintly but pleasingly erotic. Apparently it is widely considered a classic in its native Hungary, and good on the Hungarians. It fits in well with what I remember of them, a funny, caustic people, a peculiar little island of pony-riding steppes folk stuck slap-dash in the great surrounding circle of Slavs and Teutons. Oh, to see Budapest again, to lay beside the Seva in the green grass, to stare up at St. Stephens, to eat something liberally spiced. Did I mention I'm writing this in a bar? Yes? Very well, then.
