A very great Hungarian writer (and surely one of the greatest prose writers of Europe) in the twentieth century is Krúdy. I translated a few of his paragraphs in Chapter 1, descriptive passages of Budapest around 1900. Very few of Krúdy's writings have been translated into foreign languages; only one of his books exists in English. He is translatable only with the greatest of difficulty—in essence, hardly translatable at all. One reason for this is the alluvial soil of his imagination and memory, whereby his writing is full of rich and unique allusions to Magyar things, places and times, evoking meanings to people at the bottom of whose minds and hearts those words already lie (for words are not symbols of *things,* they are symbols of *meanings*). Another reason is the lyrical tone of his prose, a slow cello-like music rising and falling, in accord with the rhythm of the Hungarian language that, again, is so different from other European languages. It is thus that Krúdy's long paragraphs end on a soft, falling note. His descriptions are often magical, and nearly always inimitable. I wrote once that his novels are four-

dimensional paintings whose beauty is manifested not only through shades and forms but through the fourth dimension of human reality—time itself—as the thin stream of the story at once bursts into a magnificent fountain, the water splashing and coursing in rainbow colors. He was not so much like Proust, who loved high society and yet condemned it, as like Monet, who painted beautiful gardens because he loved them. Like Proust (whom he surely never read), Krúdy was re-searching times, scenes and people lost. His earliest writings were suffused with nostalgia for an older, better Hungary. He traced the still visible path of sunken memories: the still living fragrances, colors, shapes, clouds of the past. He did not need the taste of the *madeleine;* his delicacies were always fresh and ready, stored in his mind. The way he wrote at the age of twenty-five reveals something astonishing to anyone who is interested not only in writing but in the mysterious alchemy of the human heart: he knew everything about old age during the physical splendor of his youth; he knew everything about autumn in the spring of his life. Throughout his life he was fascinated with dreams. He knew something that the psychiatrists of this century do not know, which is that in our dreams we really do not think differently, we merely remember differently. He was not only a Hungarian Proust, he was a Homer, not of certain places but of certain times, a Magyar-writing Homer of the great subterranean development near the end of the Modern Age—that of historical consciousness. Except by a few Hungarian writers, Krúdy was not deeply appreciated during his lifetime, mostly because of the fantastic volume of his output. That was an inseparable condition of his fantastic life and character. As Szerb wrote, he was running after money but wrote masterpieces instead. Like Balzac, he was always short of money; he wrote twelve, sixteen sheets every morning, with an old-fashioned steel pen, in violet ink. Unlike Balzac, he never corrected anything, not even proofs. He seldom read what he wrote. No one has, even remotely, written like Krúdy in Hungarian. He defies categorization. He was neither a "populist" nor an "urbanist" writer, the two categories that, in the twentieth century, often divide Hungarian writing into two groups, sometimes unnecessarily or lamentably so. He wrote about the lights and the shadows of certain streets in Budapest and about the dreamy mists in the copses of faraway valleys and remote counties of Hungary with the same kind of imagination and intuition, with the same kind of lyrical mastery, in the same way.