



## Celestial Harmonies

*Péter Esterházy, Judith Sollós (Translator)*

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*Harmonia Caelestis* is the product of a decade of labour: a monumental, part-autobiographical family history. If *Helping Verbs of the Heart* was an homage to his mother, then this is a memorial to his father. It is actually two works in one. Book 1, "Numbered Sentences from the Life of the Esterházy Family", comprises 371 paragraphs, some elusively succinct, others pages long, that amount to a gloriously kaleidoscopic romp through the centuries that lie behind this European dynasty. Not that the name Esterházy is ever uttered: the main protagonist of each episode is invariably identified as "my father", whether he is an anti-Habsburg Kuruc insurrectionist or a Habsburg-loyal Labanc, a hammer of the Ottomans, a dying old man, a prisoner of war, a lord charming enough to enchant Goethe himself, or a childless man, to mention but a few of "my fathers", all evoked through the language and literature proper to each persona. This strategy of anonymity allows Esterházy to extend his typically vast net of quotations to sources that originally have no family connotations whatsoever, thereby lending broader significance to the particulars of this one family, however grand, and, vice versa, appropriating the general (European) experience to the family's specific circumstances. The baroquely exuberant proliferation of anecdotal gleanings and fragments of real and fictional history, drawing on a gamut of written genres, from maxims to parables, from confessional autobiography to the account books and chronicles, is ultimately threaded together by an unobtrusive, profoundly witty and wise philosophical vein.

Book 2, subtitled "Confessions of an Esterházy family", is ostensibly a more conventional family novel. Its very subtitle alludes to an earlier Hungarian masterpiece of the genre, *Confessions of a Bourgeois*, 1934-35 by Sándor Márai. It consists of a series of snapshots of key events in the lives of the author's great-grandfather, grandfather, father and the young Esterházy himself. These are built up, over two hundred numbered passages, into a more or less chronological portrait of a century-and-a-half of steady decline of the family's fortunes. After 1945 the Esterházys suffered an almost catastrophic repeat of the confiscations and curtailment of liberties that befell them during the short-lived Commune of 1919 one that not only stripped them of their former rank and privileges but threatened their very subsistence. Largely anecdotal and often absurd in tone, much of this is recounted with great gusto from the author's personal perspective, not least the stories of his own childhood, such as being accidentally dropped into the baptismal font; the trek to a godforsaken village in July 1950 when an official deportation order resulted in the family being dumped in one of two rooms in a peasant couple's house; schooldays and trips to matches with his football-mad father. For all the vicissitudes and uncertainties it describes, the tone of the writing throughout is one of blithely upbeat humour and harmony, without a hint of reproach, regret or complaint.

"A captivatingly rich novel in terms of both its form and its stance. Certainly it is the most striking work of the fifty-year-old author's career to date, and I would even venture to call it an epitome of the Esterházy oeuvre. Given its formal richness, however, it is in a way also a compendium of two to three centuries of Hungarian prose."

-Péter Dérczy, Élet és Irodalom

"This new novel is no less constructed of fragments than his earlier novels, and those are no less whole, but this has the widest span of any Esterházy composition to date: it is a sweeping, baroque work."

-József Tamás Reményi, Népszabadság

## Celestial Harmonies Details

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## From Reader Review Celestial Harmonies for online ebook

### Julia Boechat says

Esse livro foi o que escolhi para representar a Hungria na Volta ao Mundo em Livros.

Os Esterházys foram nobres húngaros importantes, condes, diplomatas, guerreiros, políticos. O seu palácio era conhecido como a Versalhes húngara. Eles são para os húngaros algo como os Kennedys, os Rothschilds e os Rockefellers, tudo em uma só família, segundo o próprio autor. Fora do país, são muito conhecidos como os patronos de Haydn. Durante o comunismo, perderam tudo. Péter Esterházy se voltou então à história de sua família para escrever o seu último romance, Celestial Harmonies.

Mas, como ele é o Esterházy, ele não tem interesse em fazer um história linear. Ele começa o livro com as “Numbered Sentences from the Lives of the Esterházy Family”, centenas de anedotas numeradas, todas sobre o mesmo personagem, “meu pai”. Usando apenas esse nome, ele conta histórias de família, sobre os Esterházy heróicos e os traidores, sobre suas relações com príncipes e imperadores, turcos, prisioneiros de guerra, aquele que matou a mulher para herdar sua fortuna, o que teve um ataque de gases em frente a tsarina Catarina (ela teria respondido “enfim um som sincero”), o que recebeu os russos, que ele chamava de bárbaros, no seu palácio. Outros “meus pais” são tirados de romances famosos, são figuras míticas, são paródias de Nabokov, Gombrowicz, Joyce, Musil, Sófocles, Calvino e dezenas de outros. Um é um dublê de corpo da Lady Di, um é o gato de Schrödinger.

“11 – I once had a distant, fascinating and intriguing father – let’s call my father by this name around whose crib there danced the last moon rays of the old century and the first shimmering light of a new dawn – the Evening Star, the Morning Star, the Star of the Even-Morn. That’s where our name comes from.“

“15 For fifty fillérs my father would eat a fly, for one florint you could take a picture of the cadaver in his tongue, for five florints and an apple (Starking), he’d bite a mouse in two. He never worked with outsourced mice, he liked to catch his own.”

“31 My father was a great warrior, an enemy commander, who had no peer in duel or warfare. (No peer in warfare, et cetera, I know! My mother.) Prince Rákóczi had great affection for him, as once he had slaughtered forty-two of the enemy in front of his very eyes. When the Prince was told that my father was planning to betray him, he refused to believe it. But he had to, because it was my mother who had denounced him, after he’d told her about his plan. My father ended up in front of a military tribunal, and the tribunal sentenced him to death for high treason. My mother didn’t shed a tear (...).”

“132 In the Eighteenth Century my father did away with religion, in the nineteenth century he did away with god, in the twentieth century, he did away with man.“

“152 My father, the man without qualities, slept with his older sister. Fuck it / him / her.”

“210 My father: a horse has four legs, and it still trips up. In the same way, the Danube has two banks, but they shot the Jews into it just the same.“

“237 Is my father capable of creating a boulder so large that he himself could not raise it?”

“266 (They found a clearing and, gun in hand, the two parties positioned themselves about thirty paces’ distance from each other in keeping with the custom of fighting a duel that many Hungarian writers, and practically every Hungarian writer of aristocratic origin, have described in detail). I had an argument with a Stranger, father. It was nothing, really. I slapped him, and then he killed me in a duel near Kalugano. Please forgive me, my father wrote my grandfather in his last letter.”

“274 My father is just like Piero della Francesca’s father: metaphorical.”

A segunda parte se chama “Confessions of an Esterházy family”, em alusão às Confissões de um Burguês de Sándor Márai. Essa parte é mais linear, e foca em eventos importantes da vida do autor, seu pai, avô e bisavô, principalmente durante o comunismo. Essa parte pode ser descrita como o declínio de uma família – afinal, o autor disse uma vez que toda história de família depois de Thomas Mann é influenciada pelos Buddenbrook.

Esse romance foi publicado em 2001, mas não era cedo demais para dizer que é um dos maiores do século XXI.

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### **Mark Bell says**

One of the better big books that have not gotten the attention they deserve. A remarkable fictionalized chronicle of the author's aristocratic family from the Hapsburg Empire to the present day.

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### **Shelby says**

When I read a fiction book, I don't expect too much from it. A decent plot and halfway developed characters are really all I need. Hand me an 800 pages plus fiction book, an, by golly, both plot and characters have better be spectacular. Sadly, this book gave a semi-autobiographical, semi-fictional bunch of unconnected thoughts with characters that weren't developed any farther than "This was my aunt. She like coffee" or some

such factoid that had nothing to do with the story itself. Not a very winning combination. I'm sure some people would read this book and love it, for some of the writing itself is quite beautiful, and sometimes thought provoking. Sadly, I am not one of those people, and wish I had been reading something else for the past month.

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### **Bettie? says**

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

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### **Alana says**

Hungarians are sexy motherfuckers. I have never read more heartbreak and hilarity in a single work.

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### **Vit Babenco says**

“Fear and communists, everything here begins with them, and will end with them too, it seems.”

*Celestial Harmonies* is a book of the earthly disharmonies and it consists of two parts:

The first half of a novel is a huge list of the probable author’s fathers that could exist since the medieval epoch... It is an exhaustive inventory of all possible father’s vices and sins and wrongdoings...

And Péter Esterházy, like the patent Oedipus, pitilessly kills all his hypothetical fathers all down the ages. The second half is the family history proper...

“People quickly grow tired of the good, look for something better, find something worse, then insist on it ever after for fear of something still worse to come.” This is the rule formulated by the author’s grandfather and the family abides by this rule...

*Celestial Harmonies* is an honest and merciless, full of dark sarcasm memorial to the odious era.

In the twentieth century, two planetary cataclysms happened: communism and fascism.

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### **Zorro says**

Εκπληκτικ? βιβλ?ο. Μπορε? ε?κολα να συνεπ?ρει.

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### **Joey says**

Someone has daddy issues

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### **Οδυσσ?ας Μουζ?λης says**

Θε?κ? βιβλ?ο!

## **Joselito Honestly and Brilliantly says**

When my brother's knee was injured while into competitive sports (naks!) he was operated on at the St. Luke's Medical Center in Quezon City. On the day of his discharge from the hospital he requested me to pick him up as he couldn't then drive by himself.

I was able to immediately free myself from my other commitments that day so I drove to the hospital about an hour early. Not wanting to wait too long, I decided to drop by the Booksale store nearby. As I entered the store the first book I saw was this. Hardbound, pages as smooth as a baby's skin, with a borrower's card from the Floral Park Public Library, but without any indication at all that somebody has borrowed, used or read it before.

At that time, I was grappling with Donald Barthelme's *The Dead Father*. It would turn out later that the very last footnote in this book by Peter Esterhazy is his (Esterhazy's) special thanks to the estate of Donald Barthelme for giving him permission to quote extensively from *The Dead Father* and his expression of admiration for Barthelme's writing.

After reading *The Dead Father* I didn't get to immediately read this book, though. I think I was sort of intimidated by its length and thickness, 846 pages in fine, small print. Somebody smacks you in the head with this and you may get a brain concussion. I thought it would be a tiring read. It was not.

What is this book all about? Hungary has a thousand-year history and among the greatest and most powerful aristocrats in this country's past were those of the Esterhazy family, counting among them several princes, military commanders, diplomats, bishops, counts and patrons of the arts. By the mid-20th century, however, the power, prestige and wealth of this family were gone. There was a brief communist takeover in 1919, then the second world war and the eventual Soviet rule. The Esterhazys became enemies of the people and succumbed to dispossession, resettlement and impoverishment.

The author's father was born into great wealth and privilege in 1919. But by the time the author himself was born in 1950 the family was already forced to share a house with another family and the author's father was earning very little doing one menial work after another. One of his four children even died while still a baby for lack of good nutrition and proper medical care.

A harrowing riches-to-rags theme, supposedly. But it was no tear-jerker. This is a novel of great MELANCHOLIC GAIETY.

Divided into two parts, Book 1 has 371 paragraphs of different lengths (from the very, very short to the very, very long). These paragraphs are all about fathers (or almost all, if I missed some which have nothing to do with fathers): the author's father, his father's father, all the other Esterhazy fathers past and present, some non-Esterhazy fathers (paragraph 139 is even about fathers in Philippines--so Pinoy fathers!). And these are fathers of all kinds: good fathers, bad fathers, heroic fathers, fathers who abuse their children, intelligent fathers, stupid fathers, weird fathers, Barthelme's *Dead Father*, etc.).

Book 2 is also numbered (from 1 to 201) but each of the numbers often have two or more paragraphs constituting a mini story. Here we find the story of the downfall of the Esterhazy family who had lost

everything (their vast tracks of land, their servants, their palaces and money) except their values, dignity, love of life and--in the case of the author at least--their sense of humor.

Why "Celestial Harmonies"? Let me hazard a guess. The term "celestial harmonies" was used tongue-in-cheek around at least 3 times in the book (as far as I remember). But the real reason could be this: there is a collage of many different "fathers" here, and a ton of literary allusions, heavy borrowings of phrases and indirect quotes from works of authors like Barthelme, Samuel Beckett, Saul Bellow, Yasunari Kawabata, John Updike, Nabokov, James Joyce, Frank McCourt (!), Henry Miller, Kenzaburo Oe, George Orwell, Franz Kafka, etc. Great works and voices towering above us all. Celestial. Esterhazy found harmonies in all of them. So, Celestial Harmonies.

But that's just my opinion.

I have several favorite "paragraphs" (Esterhazy, I dunno, call them "sentences") here. But let me quote here paragraph 189 from Book 1. Notice the biblical allusion (Moses' land flowing with milk and honey). Notice the sad theme of a father quarelling with the mother. Then notice the humor:

"My father was about to strike my mother, something that--need we add--was nothing out of the ordinary, but then he just shook her head instead (presumably like Christ the shoemaker), and stormed out to the kitchen. He paced up and down, huffing and puffing, abusing my mother under his breath, who (my mother) had just made a general comment regarding the sadness she felt with respect to her life. (Not a reproach or accusation, just the realization of complete failure, which is a reproach and accusation.) My father ripped open the refrigerator door: three milks, one in a bottle, two in plastic bags. He slammed the bottle to the floor, the milk squirting all over the place. In the meantime he was already tearing at the plastic bag with his teeth, forcing the milk out, which squirted in his face, fuck! He fucked it down and trampled it underfoot along with the third bag. The kitchen was awash in the squeaking milk. He took the honey from the cupboard, one tube and one bottle. The bottle--as a matter of custom, we might say--bang!, to the floor, and meanwhile he was forcing the liquid gold from the tube. Drip and stick everywhere. It'd have been good, had my mother sneaked quietly, cautiously out to the kitchen, and watched him rage for a while, whirling round, shirrtail hanging out of his pants, everything about him tentative, his gestures, his grimaces, his sentiments, and then she, too, could have joined him, trampling into the new, sweet terrain that was the kitchen, into the guck, and she could have embraced him, whispering, you, you...you land of milk and honey! Instead, my father stormed into the living room, pulled my mother off the sofa--she was huddled there, torn between tears and dry eyes--and as he shoved her toward the kitchen, he shouted, You are going off to the land flowing with milk and honey, but I will not go up in the midst of thee, for thou art a stiff-necked people, lest I consume thee in the way!"

Peter Esterhazy wrote this book in his native language and it was translated to English by Judith Sollosy who wrote a short introduction to it in April 2003 for its publication in the United States ending with this statement:

"I can't help thinking that when the Good Lord created the world in six days and took off for the Bahamas on the seventh, he made a bad mistake. And he knows it. And once in a while, in His infinite boredom, He looks down on us, feels sorry for our plight, and He sends us a Shakespeare, or a Mozart--or a book like 'Celestial Harmonies'."

And to think I bought this treasure at the Booksale for only Php145.00!

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## Tarah Luke says

#1001books #696left

This had so much more potential, but ended up being incredibly confusing. The problem here is not the length, but the lack of general knowledge about Hungarian history and the style the book is written in. I am not a fan of pomo, random, stream of conscious form of writing, which is what this was. I found the second book much more readable (and intelligible) than the first, but my mind is more attuned to facts and concrete details than poetry and random jumps. The writing is good, and it makes me want to learn more about Hungarian history and the Esterhazy family.

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## Jonfaith says

An astonishing torque of history, memory and language.

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## K.D. Absolutely says

*Celestial Harmonies: (1990) All the world's a stage art and pageantry in the Renaissance and baroque.*

Especially in its first part, reading *Celestial Harmonies* is like reading snippets from the life of demi-gods up there in Mount Olympus. The first person fragmented narrative goes anywhere you don't know what the narrator will tell you next. It could be the chandelier, the contents of the treasure drawer, how much does the king-father loves his mother or his mistress, how the king father searches for his God, how does the father compare to God, etc. There are some bright and shining, amusing and amazing portions but there are also those that a mortal reader like me does not know anything about and just made me feel clueless or even bored. Wiki helped once in a while but there are just some parts that only maybe Hungarian readers know or can appreciate.

The book is thick, 880 pages and heavy, first class glossy paper with hardbound cover. Reading it for straight two whole days last weekend should have been an agony for my rheumatic hands but I persisted. Reason? I could not help but read because the life of this former Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the **Esterhazys** was just amazingly interesting. It is like being there and watching how a royal, popular and respected European family fell down from their Mt. Olympus with even a member dying along the way because they were so poor. However, this book is not a tearjerker. The narration is strange. I think **Peter Esterhazy** (born 1950), a scion of the family who is now a mathematician, novelist and a freelance writer, did not write this novel to solicit sympathy. For me, this book just wants to show us how anybody who are rich and famous now could one day, find themselves as poor as rats in the gutters. But Esterhazy, did not, at least in this book, compare his *father* with the biblical character Job, although his *father* has deep faith in God and that this faith permeates as the underlying theme of this book. Esterhazy also did not put blame on anybody or anything in particular that led to his family's downfall. He just tells the story just how it happened but he did not write it like a history book but metaphorically in a magical realism kind of way.

If a book has a gender, this is definitely a very manly book. It centers on fathers. Esterhazy used the word

*father* not only in reference to God (the father) and his biological king-father but also his grandfather, or the father's grandfather, uncles, older brothers, or any father for that matter. Particularly in the first part of the book, readers must decipher whose the father being referred to in some of the portions. It did not put me off, because of Esterhazy's brilliant play of words; you just interpret his words for yourself. Suit it in any way you want, the outcome is still fascinating if not outright amazing especially when in the end the fragmented narrations fall into their right pieces of the Esterhazy's long and arduous history as a family.

The second part provides a more focused approach as it details the occupation of Hungary by communist, followed by World War II and the eventual takeover of the Soviet Union. So, when you finally close the book, the anchored and definitive second half seems to be enhanced by the fragments of the first part. It like when you clean your leather shoes. If you just brush it without applying shoe polish, it feels like that when you are reading the second part. But as afterthought, if you apply some shoe polish, the shoes shine brighter. But Esterhazy's style makes it unbelievably interesting because of the sequence: the shine comes first before the shoes. For me, this speaks well of how bright a novelist Esterhazy is.

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### **Keso Shengelia says**

This book is the most rewarding experience and i highly recommend it.

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### **Jeruen says**

An edited version of this article was first published as Book Review: *Celestial Harmonies* by Péter Esterházy on [Blogcritics.org](http://Blogcritics.org).

A noble family, and hundreds of years of history. This novel packs more historical events than any other book I have seen, all written from the point of view of the lastest descendant of the Esterházy family. However, finishing this book left me dissatisfied, and wished I didn't pick up this book in the first place. Let me tell you why.

But first, a little attempt at a synopsis.

The House of Esterházy is one of the most prominent aristocratic families in Hungary and in Europe. Several generations exist, and the collective histories of these people are told through the eyes of the author, who himself is a descendant of the Esterházy family. Hence, it has the potential to be a historical novel. We see princes, diplomats, aristocrats, and many other political figures come and go. Several hundred years of Hungarian history are covered in this book.

However, there is one complication. In an attempt to be artistic and metaphorical, the narrator (presumably the author) portrays all of these as activities done by his Father (with a capital F). Yes, all the previous men belonging to the Esterházy family are portrayed as his collective Father. This makes it sort of cute, in an artistic sense, but as a narrative, this was an utter failure, I believe.

For one, it makes it really hard to form a mental representation of the sequence of events. I tried so hard to see how events related to each other, figuring out which one happened first, followed by which one, and so

forth. But since every episode is about a Father that may not be exactly the same in real life, then it reaches a point when the reader just gives up all attempts in trying to read this book in a coherent fashion. One suspends all expectations of cohesion.

So, once the reader suspends an expectation of cohesion, what happens? The novel suddenly becomes boring. Yes, it is just pages and pages of vignettes, that is just tied together by a loose theme, that is, these are all vignettes about episodes from various members of the Esterházy family. It seems like this is just 840-something pages of text, all written in a stream of consciousness.

The thing is, I have nothing against stream of consciousness. In fact, I liked James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Similar to *Ulysses*, this book also has plenty of material. Both books are tough books to read. Contrary to *Ulysses* however, this book covers material from several hundred years, while all the events that *Ulysses* covered happened in one day.

Hence, this results in a bipolar book. One the one hand, it uses artistic devices indicating that this is a literary work of art, but on the other hand, there are just plenty of events covered that it makes it very hard for the reader not to treat it as a historical novel. This divide is particularly evident in the division the author imposed on the text: Book 1 is more a collection of numbered sentences describing events several hundred years ago; while Book 2 covers more the Soviet period as seen by the House of Esterházy.

So overall, I came out of this book disappointed, and with a headache, wishing that I never picked this book up in the first place. The literary devices were overused, and the form of narration was incompatible with the material. Instead of appearing as a spectacular piece of literature, it feels more like a transcript of a monologue by a senile individual, someone suffering from Alzheimer's disease, recalling events in his past, in random order. He recalls and retells whatever event he remembers, in no particular order, in no particular causal relation, with no attention whatsoever to whether his stories were coherent or not.

I give this 2 out of 5 stars.

See my other book reviews here.

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## Becky says

My word, that was a chore. 841 pages of literary fanciness, jumpy storytelling, and unsympathetic family issues. I have no idea why this book was written the way it was. I'm not a fan of innovative methods and zany structures. I like a good story I can get my teeth into, and that never happens throughout the length of this book. The first section consists of numbered paragraphs, mostly short but sometimes 3-4 pages in length, all about "my father." But "My Father" may be an Esterhazy of any generation from the dark ages to the modern day, he's probably being messed around by some wanton woman, and he may or may not be a nobleman, depending on the era. Just occasionally I hit a hypnotic kind of rhythm with this section, but generally it was arduous and unforgiving. I almost gave up multiple times.

The second half follows a more linear story, focussing in on the more modern day history of the family, their fall from grace as communism takes over, and their potential hand in its downfall. Thankfully this half is a lot more accessible, but the Esterhazy's are never particularly likeable. I'm not sure how much of the story is true and how much is literary invention, I know very little about the nobility of Hungary but man...surely there is an amazing story to be told about a family with such endurance. But this book felt like the band, The

Dirty Projectors. If you consider yourself a fan of a certain kind of music, you're supposed to love them. But really, the music is disjointed, spiky, cold and while technically proficient, could really do with just finding a good tune. I feel exactly the same way about this book as I do about them. Eburgh.

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### **Masanobu says**

This review needs some context. Péter Esterházy was born in 1950 in Budapest to one of the most notable noble families of former Austro-Hungarian monarchy. This novel is divided in two parts: the first one is a collection of sentences about Esterházy men since the formal foundation of the family around the end of the 16th century, while the second part has a structure more similar to that of a novel and tells the story of Péter himself, his father and his grandfather. I chose this book because I love reading about large families, but I was somewhat disappointed with *Celestial Harmonies*. If you are like me and don't know a thing about Hungarian history, Wikipedia'll come in handy. It has also an article about the Esterházy family that'll prove useful to have a clear family tree. This didn't make it an easy read. The writing didn't help either. While the style is flowing, precise, intelligent and a little demanding of the reader, it is too experimental for my taste. Sorry, but I can't bear reading page after page of descriptions of family heirlooms. I thought it would pay back somehow, but it didn't. The author talks about some of them all around the book, but that infamous list doesn't enhance the reader's experience in any way. This book was way too long, so long that I was weary before I had finished it.

However, I liked some things about the book. I liked the rythm created by the repetition of 'my father' or 'my dear father' in the first part and reading about how the most recent Hungarian history affected the Esterházys, especially about Hungary supporting nazis and then the Soviet republic. I would recommend to anyone who wants to read this book to think of it as a colossal monument to the Esterházy family, instead of a novel. I don't mean this is necessarily a bad book, I would say it is beautiful as a sculpture is. I guess this wasn't the right book for me, since this isn't what I expect of novels.

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### **Connor says**

The first section was too repetitive for me. I enjoyed the second section much more. The writing throughout the book is erudite, aristocratic, but my favorite lines were about the decay of that sense of grandeur. One section in particular stuck out to me, where the narrator of the second section is looking at all these old objects his grandma has, and is trying to imagine a world so focused on aesthetics that it could create them.

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### **Elizabeth Moffat says**

I have to admit, I struggled with this book and did not finish it. I gave it two stars for the writing style but realised that it wasn't for me. It felt rather disjointed in a way I did not like.

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### **Víctor Sampayo says**

Ni siquiera logro pensar en una posible clasificación para este libro monumental. ¿Autobiografía? ¿Novela? ¿Libro familiar? Podría ser todo eso pero también todo lo contrario, porque si algo resulta notable en la prosa

de Esterházy es la capacidad de convertirlo todo el literatura mediante los senderos torcidos no sólo del lenguaje, sino de las referencias históricas, familiares, bíblicas, míticas, e incluso psicológicas. Así, en la primera parte (el libro, con sus más de 800 páginas, consta de dos), el «padre» es una suerte de protagonista de todas las historias del mundo, al grado de que puede surgir la sospecha de que la intención del escritor es hacer de la figura paterna un arquetipo primordial, un Adam Cadmon articulado por todas las acciones del ser humano, desde las más bajas, hasta las más sublimes, pasando por las tiernas, las violentas, las grotescas, las *naïf*, las graciosas y las indignantes.

En la segunda parte, el libro se acerca más a lo biográfico —si bien nunca podremos saber con certeza qué tan cerca llega realmente—, lo cual, en una familia como la Esterházy en Hungría, equivale a lo histórico. Es decir, el paso de un mundo aristocrático y decimonónico hacia su propia decadencia, las dos guerras mundiales y sus efectos en la familia, y las persecuciones comunistas, que tendrían su punto más álgido en un turbio episodio con el padre de protagonista precisamente, lo cual podría resumirse como el paso de la opulencia feudal a la miseria más abyecta, el paso de las actividades intelectuales y oligárquicas a labores que sólo podían hacer los peones menos espabilados. Pero en cualquier caso, un proceso narrado con las mismas armas que ya se vislumbraban desde la primera página del libro: la ironía, el humor cáustico, los extraños e hipnóticos caminos que un lenguaje lleno de malabares y guiños poéticos son capaces de abrir, y que, gracias a las musas, no se empantanen en la autocompasión o en jeremiadas y azotes en la espalda por el mundo perdido. Y al final, lo que queda claro es que esa evocación se asemeja más a un canto homérico que a una reivindicación o a un estéril intento de lavar un nombre de todos conocido en Hungría. Un intento, vamos, de convertir la historia de toda una estirpe en un mundo mítico en el que pueden caber sí, todas las tragedias y nefastos destinos, pero también todas las alegrías.

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