



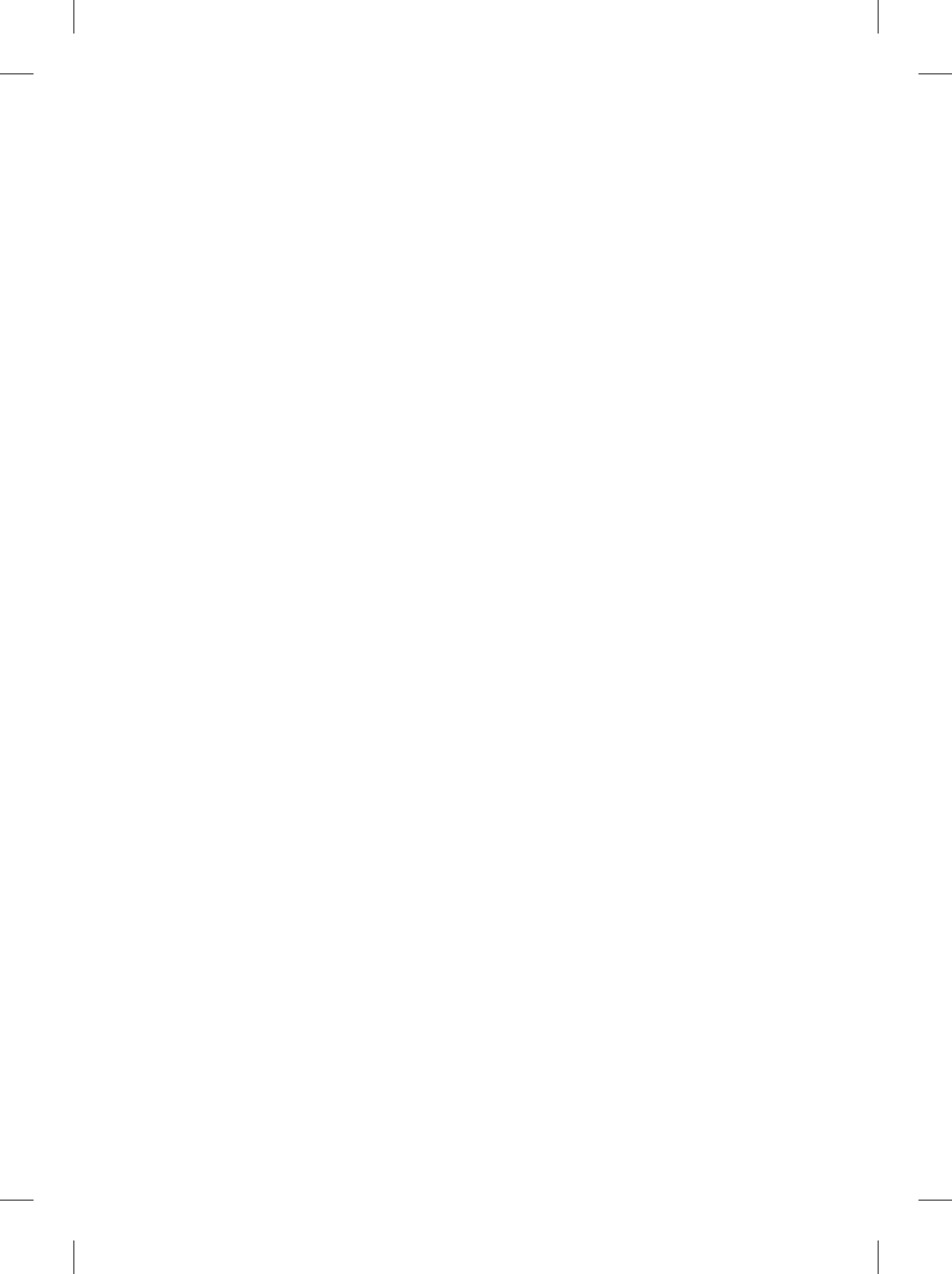
THE CONTEMPORARY  
ART OF THE NOVELLA



**THE CONTEMPORARY ART OF THE NOVELLA**



# **THE PATHSEEKER**



# THE PATHSEEKER

IMRE  
KERTÉSZ

TRANSLATED, WITH AN AFTERWORD, BY TIM WILKINSON



MELVILLEHOUSE  
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

COPYRIGHT © IMRE KERTÉSZ 2008

TRANSLATION © TIM WILKINSON 2008

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED UNDER THE TITLE *A NYOMKERESŐ*.

PUBLISHED BY PERMISSION OF ROWOHLT VERLAG GMBH,  
REINBEK BI HAMBURG.

DESIGN: BLAIR AND HAYES, BASED ON A SERIES DESIGN BY DAVID  
KONOPKA

MELVILLE HOUSE PUBLISHING  
145 PLYMOUTH STREET  
BROOKLYN, NY 11201

[WWW.MHPBOOKS.COM](http://WWW.MHPBOOKS.COM)

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA  
KERTÉSZ, IMRE, 1929-  
[NYOMKERESO. ENGLISH]  
THE PATHSEEKER / IMRE KERTESZ ; TRANSLATED BY TIM  
WILKINSON.

P. CM.

ISBN 978-1-933633-53-4

I. WILKINSON, TIM. II. TITLE.

PH3281.K3815N913 2008

894'.511334--DC22

2008007028







THE PATHSEEKER



## VISITING

The host—a man with a complicated family name, Hermann by Christian name—was chattering ingenuously; it seems he really did still take his guest to be only a simple colleague, and the latter, puffing on his pipe (a tiresome implement but, it had to be admitted, one that on occasion was quite indispensable) quietly studied his face. He did not see it as anything special: it was the face of a middle-aged man that radiated an untroubled self-confidence, oval in shape, ordinary nose and mouth, brown hair, blue eyes. As yet it was impossible to tell for sure if behind the show of chattering was concealed the usual trickery or merely infantile naïveté; he inclined toward the latter assumption, though in point of fact—he reflected—the difference between the two was negligible. He cast another

glance at him: did he really seriously believe he had finally managed to cut the strings? Well, it made no difference; he would soon have to learn that the strings never could be cut and that, like all witnesses, sooner or later he, too, would have to confess.

He donated another minute to him, a single minute of unclouded freedom from care. He paid attention to his chatter; he was chattering about his occupation, or, to be more precise, the difficulties of his occupation, with the confidence, if maybe not of an accomplice, then of a colleague, pretending to be immensely concerned on their account—that is to say, pretending to have not a care in the world. Crafty, the guest granted, very crafty; it was not going to be easy to break him, that was for sure. He swept his eyes over the scene: the moment seemed opportune, with the two of them sitting in spruce-green leather armchairs in one corner of the room, behind a coffee table, while in another corner the wives were trying out shoes on each other's feet, totally absorbed in this female whimsy. Yes, it was time to set to work.

He took the pipe from his mouth and cut him short with calm, premeditated hostility. He then informed him in a single terse sentence who he was and the object of his mission and the investigation that he was to pursue. Hermann turned slightly pale. He soon pulled himself together, though, as was only to be expected: to some extent the unexpected announcement had caught him off-guard, for up till now all the signs suggested that the guest—the colleague—had come to the small town merely on account of the specialist confer-

ence that had just ended, as a result of which, offhand, he could not think what to say at this late hour . . .

“And after so many years,” the guest interjected.

“Just so! I can’t deny that either,” Hermann responded. “But one thing intrigues me before we go any further: Am I under any obligation at all to answer your questions?”

“No,” came the quick answer. “Your own laws are the only ones applicable to you. You should definitely be cognizant of that, and it’s inexcusable of me not to have said so at the start.”

Hermann thanked him, he had merely been curious, and now, he declared with a smile, he was ready to give evidence, voluntarily and freely, as his guest could see. True, the guest agreed, though maybe with less appreciation than Hermann, for all his magnanimity, had no doubt been expecting. The guest was evidently of the opinion—surprising self-assurance—that Hermann would give evidence in any event. But that was precisely what was baffling. He asked nothing, just carried on calmly sitting there, sucking his pipe, looking almost bored.

Hermann broke the silence a minute later. What, in point of fact, he inquired, would be of interest to his guest? Would he like, perhaps, he pumped further, seeing that the guest was putting off giving an answer, as if he were still weighing something up, to quiz him, Hermann, about some personal questions? Or maybe, he continued with a ready, conciliatory little smile in anticipation of understanding, to ascertain what he, Hermann, knew, and how much?

“Well, certainly,” he responded. “Of course, I’d be glad to listen, insofar as you are indeed in the mood to talk about it.”

“Why not?” Hermann shrugged. After all, he had nothing to hide. Though it therefore followed, he added, that he did not have much to say either. There was no denying that he had heard about the case. He also knew that it had happened around there. It was painful, still painful, even to talk about it. He personally had not been able to devote much attention to it at the time. He did not wish to burden his guest with explanations, but at any rate he had good reason, at the time, for instance, to say no more; he had still been more or less a child, which was no excuse, of course, merely a circumstance, but it might go some way to explaining it. Even so, naturally, one thing and another had come to his attention. He heard that something had happened, despite the numerous impediments—indeed, it might be true to say that precisely through their conspicuous presence—it had been impossible for a person not to become aware of certain things, albeit involuntarily. Anyone who said any different was lying. However, the details and the scale, which is to say the case itself, had actually only started to assume their true shape later on.

At this point, Hermann relapsed into silence for a minute; perhaps to give himself a fixed point to rest on at last, he interlaced his constantly mobile hands, which had been providing a running commentary to accompany everything he said, around a knee that he



had pulled up as he sat there, and a quiet popping of his knuckles was clearly audible before he commenced speaking again.

He could have done what others had done and just ignored the matter. Who could reproach him for that? But, he carried on, something had given him no respite; something had driven him, troubled him—curiosity, but no, that wasn't the right word for it, yet this wasn't the place for being modest, so was it all right for him to speak instead about duty, the agonizing duty of knowledge? He had set about feverish research: he had sought facts, indisputable facts above all, in order to see his way clearly in the matter. He had collected files, acquired evidence, accumulated an entire archive—there were things to show to the guest. All that was missing now was to work up this heap of objective evidence; it was just . . . Hermann sighed deeply, leaned back in his seat without letting go of his knee, and closed his eyes for a minute as if they were being bothered by the strong lamplight. "It's just that even with the hypothesizing," he continued, "we are going a long way, rather too far in fact. One had certain thoughts: one can't help it. And although those thoughts don't stem from yourself. . . it's just . . . how to put it? You understand? In other words . . . there's something intimidating about this. Something stirs inside . . . some inner protest . . . a feeling that I find hard to put a name to offhand . . . I'm afraid I am not making myself clear enough . . ."

He fell silent again, casting an unsure glance at the guest, and although the latter was careful that no com-

ment of his should exercise any influence, Hermann seemed to have read encouragement from his expression, because he continued:

“Perhaps it’s the fact,” he said, “that it’s possible. Yes, the fact that we surmise the impossible, and all of a sudden we gain proof that . . . that it’s possible. I think,” working himself into a fever, “that I’ve managed to capture that certain feeling.” He leaned forward, very close to the guest, his eyes burning with a strange light, his voice switching to a whisper. “The possibility, you catch my drift? Nothing else, the mere possibility. And that what happens just once, to just one person, has now transcended the frontiers of the possible, is now a law of reality . . .” He broke off, staring ahead, almost crushed, before again lifting his still slightly troubled eyes to the guest. “I don’t know if you understand what I’m getting at . . .”

“Of course I understand,” the guest nodded. “Thought-provoking and, moreover, probably true, because on what else would our constant anguish feed if we did not all feel we had a small part in universal evil?”

“Yes, yes! I see you understand me completely!” Hermann exclaimed, stretching out his hands in sudden delight toward the guest, then, perhaps failing to find the actual target of this exuberant motion, withdrew them: “I’m glad we met, glad you’re here! Indeed, you ought to have come sooner, I’d say!”

“That was impossible,” the guest apologized.

“There was a lot we needed to talk about, a lot! There was a time when I was very much expecting . . . expecting your arrival virtually any day!”