

GYULA JENEI

# Scissors

*Translated from Hungarian by Diana Senechal*

my grandmother will have other scissors too: smaller, larger, sharper—but most of all i will love the pair that has, below the rings, on the wide-opening, ornate handle-necks, the likenesses of a man and woman embossed. they have been looking at each other for a hundred years. the man from the left, the woman from the right. you can no longer pinpoint their features; the portraits are tiny anyhow, but my grandmother claims that they are franz joseph and sisi. of course she will say queen elisabeth, and from behind her one-templed spectacles her aged eye contemplates the heads with their worn lines, which i wear down even more, whenever i polish them with sandpaper. later i do not remember whether my grandmother, as a young woman, still in the time of the monarchy, was given the scissors or bought them, but as a child i listen to the heaps of tales she happily tells. she tells of her husband, a smith-mechanic, and of my father's sister, jolanka, who died of dysentery at age twelve. my father was only six then, he survived. and my grandmother tells of the coronation too—when they still live in pest—of charles and zita. she speaks reverently of the king's wig, i cut something with the scissors, and franz joseph's and elisabeth's portraits come close with each clip, but they never touch. only the rings make a metal clap, and the blades scrape, and then the past dissolves in the future, and then they bury my grandmother, and i forget her stories, all i remember about them is their having been, and only the scissors have remained, and the sewing box with the thimble, then the thimble gets lost too. the scissors i have sharpened though, and now i have them on my desk as i write this, and i look at the king and queen, whose unhappiness has long dissolved in their shared lore, the books, films, the portrait-bearing schönbrunn souvenirs. i click the scissors as a child, then as an adult, if i need to cut

something or open an envelope, and i love them, but i take no interest in the royal figures, having no interest in the question of power or of birthplace either. this cannot be quite correct. i should disambiguate this *havingnointerest*, and explain why not. i should gradate the assertions and misgivings: polish them, sand them. in any case, all embellishment wears away, and only the man remains, and the woman: faces on a pair of scissors, unhappy peacetime.