

Conversations in Bolzano by Sandor Márai.
Penguin/Viking 2004.

This book will be a delight to those who first encountered Sandor Márai in his hauntingly beautiful *Embers*, and is a piece of writing of such quality as to cement the late Hungarian author as one of the most engaging European writers of the 20th century.

Conversations in Bolzano is a very different book from the bleak and sparse *Embers*: set in the town of Bolzano it is about a series of exchanges that the infamous Giacomo Casanova has in an inn having made his escape from prison in Venice accompanied by a disreputable friar called Balbi.

Each of the chapters is charged with a tension, power and eroticism that is subtle, seductive, and totally engaging, none more so than those describing the exchange between Casanova and his maid, Teresa, and that between his erstwhile love the Duchess of Parma who, much to her amour's chagrin, turns the tables on him – and her husband – completely.

If you enjoy a subtle and intensely fulfilling read, this is a gem to be savoured. Congratulations must also go to the translator, George Szirtes, and a plea to both him and the publisher to translate and publish another one of Márai's works VERY soon.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh