

**Wagner Nándor - József Attila**

**My statue goes to my hometown**

**1st of May, 2005**

**Compiled for Chiyo san and others, who beleived in this dream...**

**„One day it will be a statue in public place!”  
Magdolna Supka 1954**

**„The triumvirat of Hungarian great poets are standing in  
the Petőfi Park, Nagyvárad.”  
László Tőkés Bishop**

Spring, summer, autumn, all are lovely;  
but winter's loveliest for one  
who hopes for hearth and home and family  
only for others, when all's done.

József Attila (1937)

**Résumé - Curriculum Vitae by himself Attila József** 1937 (Transl. by A.W. Tüting)



I was born 1905 in Budapest and my denomination is Greek Orthodox. My father - late Aron József - emigrated, when I was three years old, so the National League for the Protection of Children sent me to foster parents to Öcsöd. There I stayed till the age of seven, working, as poor village children usually had to: tending pigs. With seven years, my mother - late Borbála Pöcze - took me back to Budapest and had me enrolled in the second class of elementary school. My mother supported me and my two sisters with washing and cleaning; going to other families, she stayed away from morning to night, so without any parental supervision I used to play hookey and roamed about in the streets as an urchin. But in my third-class reading book I found interesting stories about King Attila, so I plunged myself into reading. I was not only interested

in those fairytales because my first name also was Attila, but first of all because my foster parents in Öcsöd always used to call me 'Pista' (short form Stephan). Being earwitness of their debate with the neighbours, I learned their opinion, that the name 'Attila' doesn't exist at all. I was all shocked by this, having a feeling as if my own existence would have been thrown into doubt. I believe, discovering those fairytales, decisively effected on all my further striving; maybe it just was this experience, that in the end lead me to literature, an experience, that made me a pensive, reconsidering man, one answering to the name of Pista as long as he had not proved, what he himself was thinking about, that is to say, that his name was Attila.

When I was nine years old, the world war broke out and our living was getting more and more worse. I only too well also had my part in lining up in front of the stores, where it could happen, that I had been standing in line in front of a grocery shop from nine o'clock in the evening till morning seven thirty, and then, when finally it being my turn, they - shutting the door in my face - would tell me, that lard had run out. I was helping my mother as much I could, selling water in the 'Világ' (Note: 'World') movie theater, stealing firewood and coal at Ferenczváros Station in order to get fuel for heating, making small coloured paper pinwheels and selling them to children from better-off families. At the covered market I would lug baskets and large packs etc.. In summer 1918 I was sent to Abbazia for recreation by King Charles' Vacation Operation for Children. My mother was already frail at that time, a cervical ulcer had appeared; I enrolled for it at the 'Liga' by myself and so came to Monor for a brief period of time. Back to Budapest, I was selling newspapers and dealing

with stamps, then with blue, white and postal money like a little banker. During the Romanian occupation I was working as a 'bread boy' in the 'Emke' coffee-house. Meanwhile, having finished five years of elementary school, I was going to 'Civil School' (Note: about junior high school).

Around Christmas 1919 my mother died; the Office for Orphans appointed my brother-in-law, the recently deceased Dr. Ödön Makai, to be my guardian. A whole spring and summer I hired myself out to work on the tugs 'Vihar' (Note: 'Storm'), 'Török' (Note: 'Turk') and 'Tatár' of Atlantica Ocean Shipping Corp.. At that time I passed my private examination leaving the fourth class in Civil School. After it my guardian and Dr. Sándor (Alexander) Giesswein sent me to Nyergesujfalu to be a seminary's pupil at the Salesians. I only stayed there for two weeks, as, you know, I am Greek Orthodox and not Roman Catholic. From there I was taken to Makó, into the Demke boarding school, where it didn't take long to get a free place. In summer I taught for board and lodgings in Mezöhegyes. My sixth class' qualifications in grammar (high) school were 'excellent', although I had tried several times to commit suicide due to problems of adolescence, because whether at that time nor before I never have had anybody by my side, who would have given me a piece of advice as a friend. At that time my first verses had appeared already, the magazine 'Nyugat' (Note: 'The West') had published some of my poems I wrote with seventeen. They took me for a child prodigy, but yet I was only a child orphan. After having finished the sixth year, I left high school and the boarding school, because I was feeling myself very inactive with all my loneliness: I did not learn, but just kept the lesson's material in mind, after the teacher having explained it, as one can see from my 'excellent' qualification. I went to Kiszombor, working as a field guardian, a farm hand, and hiring myself out as a private tutor. Two dear teachers of mine urging me, I after all decided to still take my school-leaving exam (high-school diploma). The sixth and seventh class' examinations then had been put together, so I took them in one go and thus ended school still one year earlier than my former classmates. I only have had a three months' period for studying, hence my seventh year's certificate entirely showing 'good', whereas the grades of the eighth class all only were 'satisfactory'. My high-school diploma then turned out better, getting 'satisfactory' only in 'hungarian language' and 'history'. At that time I was already charged with blasphemy on account of a poem I wrote. I was acquitted by the supreme court. I then worked as an agent for books here in Budapest for some time, later, during the period of inflation, as an employee at the private banking house Mauthner. When Hintz-system was established, I was employed there at the accounts department, and after a little while I was entrusted with the supervision of those securities to be handed over on the scheduled day - this incurring my senior colleagues' displeasure. My zeal was somehow diminished a bit by the fact, that, in addition to mine, my fellow employees were saddling me with extra work, being part of their own job, but apart from that not missing any opportunity to make spiteful remarks with regard to my poetry published in the magazines. Everybody of them was taking the chance as often he could to tell me: "When I was of your age, I also used to write poems". The banking house later went bankrupt.

So I decided once and for all to become a writer and also to find a bourgeois

occupation being close to literature. I enrolled at the philosophical faculty of Szeged university for the subjects Hungarian, French and Philosophy. Having signed up for 52 lessons a week, I passed the colloquium in 20 lessons with 'excellent'. I had boarding for free and with the royalties for my poems I used to pay the lodgings. I was proud of, my lecturer, Prof. Lajos Dézsi, having stated, that he was considering me to be capable for doing research on my own. But I lost all my interest in it, when Prof. Antal Horger, who would have had to give me the Hungarian language test, sent for me and explained in presence of two witnesses - I still recall their names, both are teachers at junior high school now - , that as long as he was there, I'd never become a teacher at junior high school, because "a person like you" - literally he said - "writing such poems" - he was waving an issue of the 'Szeged' right under my nose, "never can be entrusted with the education of our coming generation". One often speaks of irony of fate, but here it's really the fact: this poem of mine, its title is 'With Pure Heart' (Note: 'Tiszta szívvel'), became quite famous. Seven newspaper articles have been published on it; Lajos Hatvany called it a whole postwar generation's document for ages to come; yet Ignotus "was caressing, stroking, humming and murmuring this wonderful poem in his mind", he wrote of it in "Nyugat", referring to these lines in his 'Ars poetica' as a classic example of the new poetry writing.

The following year - I was twenty years then - I went to Vienna, enrolled at the university and made a living with selling newspapers at the entrance of the restaurant 'Ratskeller' and working as a cleaner at 'Hungarian Students of Vienna' boarding house. When director Antal Lábán got to know about me, he put an end to it, gave me free boarding at the 'Collegium Hungaricum', also getting me private pupils: I gave lessons to the two sons of Zoltán Hajdu, president of the Anglo-Austrian Bank. From Vienna - out of a dreadful hovel, where I didn't even owe a sheet - I got straightly to Hatvan, being guest in Hatvany castle. There the hostess, Mrs. Albert Hirsch, provided me with money for a summer trip to Paris. There I enrolled at the Sorbonne. I passed the summer in a fishing village in southern France.

Then I returned to Hungary, studying for two semesters at Pest university. Yet I did not take the teacher exam, because, thinking of the threatening remarks of Anthony Horger, I anyway didn't believe in getting an employment as a teacher. Later, after the foundation of Foreign Trade's Institute, I got a job there to be a Hungarian-French correspondent; president Sándor Kóródi will kindly allow me to mention his name in this connection as a reference. But then, unexpectedly, I was buffeted by fate in a way, that - although really hardened by life - was knocked down. Social Security Institute (OTI) first sent me into a sanitarium, and after it with diagnosis 'Neurasthenia gravis' gave me sick leave. I retired from my office, accepting, that I would have been a burden on this young institute. Now I am editor of the critical literary journal 'Szép Szó' (Note: 'Beautiful Word'). In addition to my Hungarian mother tongue, I am writing and reading French and German, am experienced in Hungarian and French correspondence and my typewriting is perfect. I also knew shorthand and would be able to refresh this skill within a month's time. I have knowledge on printing typography, am able to formulate precisely. I think to be honest, my perceptive faculty in my opinion is good and I am fast at work.

## How we write about him

One of the greatest Hungarian poets of the 20th century, who spent his entire life in extreme poverty and suffered from depression. Although József poems were melancholic, they also expressed the author's faith in life's beauty and harmony. József committed suicide at the age of 32. He was an unyielding critic of the government in the 1930s, but his interest in Freud and independent thinking also led to his break with the Communist Party.

**Be free to eat, drink, make love and sleep!  
Weigh yourself with the universe!  
I shan't hiss my inward curse to creep  
and serve the base bone-crushing powers.**  
(from 'Ars Poetica', 1937, trans. by Michael Beevor)

Attila József was born in Budapest in one of the working-class districts of the city. His father, an itinerant Romanian worker, left the family when József was three, originally planning to move to the United States, but ending finally in Romania. As a heritage his father left him the name of the world-conquering King of the Huns, Attila. József and his sisters were supported by their mother, a washerwoman. In 1910-12 József spent two depressing years with his foster parents in Öcsöd, and at the age of nine he attempted suicide. His mother died in 1919 of terminal cancer and overwork. József's brother-in-law was appointed his legal guardian.

Between the years 1920 and 1923 József studied at a secondary school in Makó, without graduating. As a poet József made his debut with *A SZÉPSÉG KOLDUSA* (1922), he was then 17-years old and still attending the school. Foreword for the collection was written by the famous poet Gyula Juhász (1883-1937). József studied privately for a year, and entered the University of Szeged in 1924 to study Hungarian and French literature. With the help of a mesenat, Lajos Hatvany, he acquired a good education in Hungary, Austria (1925) and France (1926-27), where he studied France and discovered the work of François Villon, the famous poet and thief from the 15th-century.

In 1925 József published his second collection of poems, *NEM ÉN KIÁLTOK*. He was expelled from the university because of a revolutionary poem, 'Tiszta szível' (With a Pure Heart) - the poem was attacked by the influential professor Antal Horger, who ended József's hopes to become a teacher. József wrote: "I have no father,

no mother, no God, no country, no cradle, no shroud, no kisses, no love. For three days I have not eaten, neither much nor little. My twenty years are a power, my twenty years are for sale. If nobody wants them, the devil will buy them. I will break in with a pure heart: if need be, I will kill someone. I shall be seized and hanged and buried in hallowed ground, and grass that brings death will grow over my wondrously fair heart" With his manuscripts he traveled to Vienna, where he made a living by selling newspapers and cleaning dormitories, and then to Paris, where he studied at Sorbonne. During this period he read Karl Marx, whose call for revolution appealed to him.

József's works were praised by such internationally known Hungarian researches and critics as Béla Balázs and [Görgy Lukács](#). In 1927 several French magazines published József's poems. His affair with a middle-class girl ended in his nervous breakdown. In 1927-28 he studied at the University of Budapest, but he never finished university. After his attack on the poet, novelist, and critic Mihály Babits in a review, the Baumgarten Foundation withdrew its support to him, which was no wonder because Babits was its curator. His third collection of poems, NINCSEN APÁM SE ANYÁM, appeared in 1929, and showed the influence of French surrealism and Endre Ady, Gyula Juhász, and Lajos Kassák. Next year he joined the illegal Hungarian Communist Party. DÖNTSD A TOKÉT (1931) was confiscated by the public prosecutor and in 1931 József's essay 'Irodalom és szocializmus' led to indictment. In 1932 appeared József's KÜLVÁROSI ÉJ, his mature collection of poems. His most famous love poem, 'Oda', from 1933 took the reader for a journey around and inside the body of the beloved woman. József's last two books were MEDVETÁNC, which appeared in 1934, and NAGYON FÁJ (1936). With these books gained a wide critical attention. Politically he has started to advocated humane socialism, and alliance with all democratic forces. His political essays were later included in vol. 3. of his collected works (1958).

József had entered psychoanalysis in 1931. It inspired him to search synthesis between Sigmund Freud's theories and Marxism, but otherwise the psychoanalytic treatment did him no good. "See, here inside is the suffering, / out there, sure enough, is the explanation," he wrote later in 1934, taking distance to his own mental problems. Some of the leaders of the Communist party started to view József with suspicion when József advocated an united front with the social democrats - this was not accepted by Moscow-controlled comrades. In 1933 he was expelled from the party by Stalinists, who accused him of fascist views. On the same year Judit Szántó became his life companion. When the Soviet Writers Congress was arranged in Moscow, József was not invited, which embittered him much. In

1935 he was again hospitalized for severe depression. During his decline he wrote: "My eyes are jumping from my head. If I go crazy, please don't hurt me. Just hold me down with your strong hands." Probably encouraged by his psychiatrist Edit Gyömrői, József wrote the confessional, defamatory text SZABAD-ÖTLETEK JEGYZÉKE KÉT ÜLÉSBEN. It was partly based on his psychoanalytic treatment and not published in Hungary until 1990s.

**The can tap all my telephone calls  
(when, why, to whom.)  
They have a file on my dreams and plans  
and on those who read them.  
And who knows when they'll find  
sufficient reason to dig up their files  
that violate my rights.**

(from 'A Breath of Air!', 1936, trans. by John Bátki)

In 1936 he was given a job as editor of the independent left-wing review *Szép szó*. On January 1937 József met the author Thomas Mann, but he was not allowed to read publicly his poem 'Thomas Mann üdvözlése,' in which he wrote: "You know this well: the poet never lies. / The real is not enough; through its disguise / Tell us the truth which fills the mind with light / Because, without each other, all is night." In the summer he was again in a hospital. However, he produced during this period some of his best poems. József committed suicide in Balatonszárszó on December 3, 1937 by throwing himself under a freight train. A lunatic from the village, a sales representative, and a conductor witnessed the accident.

**"Kedvesem erősderekú, karcsú asszony,  
ültem már repülőgépen, magasból ő is kicsinek látszik,  
de pilótalétemre is megbecsülném.  
Maga mossa a ruhát, a hab álmodozva reszket karjain,  
letérdel, mintha imádkonza, fölsikálja a padlót és  
nagyot kagac,  
ha elvégezte,  
kacagása mint az alma, melybe héjastul beléharap,  
olyankor az is hangosan nevet (...)"**

(from 'Hajnalban kel föl, mint a pékek')

The central themes in József's poems are poverty, loneliness, suffering, but on the other hand also love and hope for the more human world. In a love poem to himself, entitled 'Attila József,' he wrote: "I really love you, / believe me. Its something I inherited / from my mother." Evident in his works is the influence of both Marx and [Sigmund Freud](#). József's works are exact in language and evocative in imagery. After WW II József was presented with his



proletarian themes as a model for young poets, and his influence is still far-reaching.

**For further information:** [József Attila](#); [József Attila's Selected Poems](#) in English; [József Attila homepage](#) –

**For further reading:** *József Attila* by A. Németh (1944); *The Invisible Writing* by A. Koestler (1954); *Költőnk és kora. József Attila költészete és esztétikája* by Ervin Gyertán (1963); *Fiatal életek indulója. József Attila pályakezdése* by Miklós Szabolcsi (1963); *József Attila* by László Balogh (1970); *József Attila* by M. Vágó (1975); *József Attila-kommentárok* by Gábor Török (1976); *Érik a fény* by Miklós Szabolcsi (1977); *Columbia Dictionary of Modern European Literature*, ed. by Jean-Albert Bédé (1980); *A History of Hungarian Literature* by István Nemeskürty et al. (1983); *The Oxford History of Hungarian Literature* by Lóránt Czigány (1984)

**Selected works:**

SZÉPSÉG KOLDUSA, 1922

NEM ÉN KIÁLTOK, 1925

NINCSEN APÁM, SE ANYÁM, 1929

DÖNTSD A TŐKÉT, NE SIRÁNKOZZ, 1931

KÜLVÁROSI ÉJ, 1932

MEDVETÁNC, 1934

NAGYON FÁJ, 1936

ÖSSZES VERSEI ÉS VÁLOGATOTT IRÁSAI, 1938

ÖSSZES VERSEI ÉS MŰFODÍTÁSAI, 1940

ÖSSZES MŰVEI, 1958

ÖSSZES MŰVEI, 1967

József Attila: Selected Poems and Texts, 1973 (introduction by G. Gömöri)

Perched on Nothing's Branch, 1987

Winter Night, 1997

# Poems

*Translated by Zsuzsanna Ozsváth and Frederick Turner*

## *No Shriek of Mine*

Nem én kiáltok

No shriek of mine, it is the earth that thunders.  
Beware, beware, Satan has gone insane;  
cling to the clean dim floors of the translucent springs,  
melt yourself to the plate glass,  
hide behind the diamond's glittering,  
beneath the stones, the beetle's twittering,  
O sink yourself within the smell of fresh-baked bread,  
poor wretched one, poor wretch.  
Ooze with the fresh showers into the rills of earth--  
in vain you bathe your own face in your self,  
it can be cleansed only in that of others.  
Be the tiny blade upon the grass:  
greater than the spindle of the whole world's mass.  
O you machines, birds, tree-branches, constellations!  
Our barren mother cries out for a child.  
My friend, you dear, you most beloved friend,  
whether it comes in horror or in grandeur,  
it is no shriek of mine, but the earth's thunder.

(1924)

## *What Will Become of Him...*

### **Mondd, mit érlel**

What will become of him, whoever  
has got no handle to his hoe,  
upon whose whiskers crumbs don't quiver,  
who dawdles, gloomy, thrawn, and slow;  
who would from half a furlong's hoeing  
keep one potato out of three,  
whose hair falls out in patches, growing  
bald unnoticed--who'd care to see?

What will become of him, whoever  
has but five acres under crops,  
whose draggled hen clucks at the stover,  
whose thoughts nest in a mudhole's slops;  
when no yoke clinks, no oxen bellow;  
when mother serves the family soup  
and steam from a liquid weak and yellow  
drifts from the bottom of the scoop?

What will become of him, whoever  
must live alone and work alone;  
whose stew has neither salt nor savour,  
the grocer gives no tick nor loan;  
who has one broken chair for kindling,  
cat sitting on the cracked stove's shelf;  
who sets his keychain swinging, jingling,  
who stares, stares; lies down by himself?

What will become of him, whoever  
works to support his family;  
the cabbage-heart they quarrel over,  
the film the big girl gets to see;

always the laundry--dirt's slow strangling--  
the wife's mouth tastes of vegetables,  
and when the light's off, silent wrangling,  
gropings, eavesdroppings, darkness, rules?

What will become of him, whoever  
idles outside the factory,  
a woman meanwhile hauls the lever,  
a pale-skulled child sets the fusee;  
when through the gates he gazes vainly,  
vainly humps bags and market-creels--  
he dozes, they rouse him inhumanely,  
and always catch him when he steals?

What will become of him, whoever  
weighs out potatoes, salt, and bread,  
wraps them in newsprint's inky flavour,  
and doesn't brush the scales he's read;  
and in the gloom he dusts, complaining,  
the rent is high, the tax is keen,  
the price--but what's the use explaining  
the extra charge for kerosene?

And what will come of him, whoever  
knows he's a poet, sings his fears,  
whose wife mops up the floor forever,  
who chases copy-work for years;  
whose name's a brand-name, if he has one,  
just like a soap or cooking-fat,  
whose life is given, if he has one,  
all to the proletariat?

(1932)

## *Without Hope*

### Reménytelenül

Slowly, musingly

I am as one who comes to rest  
by that sad, sandy, sodden shore  
and looks around, and undistressed  
nods his wise head, and hopes no more.

Just so I try to turn my gaze  
with no deceptions, carelessly.  
A silver axe-swish lightly plays  
on the white leaf of the poplar tree.

Upon a branch of nothingness  
my heart sits trembling voicelessly,  
and watching, watching, numberless,  
the mild stars gather round to see.

In heaven's ironblue vault . . .

In heaven's ironblue vault revolves  
a cool and lacquered dynamo.  
The word sparks in my teeth, resolves  
--oh, noiseless constellations!--so--

In me the past falls like a stone  
through space as voiceless as the air.  
Time, silent, blue, drifts off alone.  
The swordblade glitters; and my hair--

My moustache, a fat chrysalis,  
tastes on my mouth of transience.

My heart aches, words cool out to this.  
To whom, though, might their sound make sense?

(1933)

## *ODE*

Óda

1

I am alone on these glittering crags.  
A sinuous breeze  
floats delicious, the infant summer's  
supertime simmer and ease.  
I school my heart into this silence.  
Not so arduous--  
All that is vanished is aswarm in me,  
my head is bowed, and my hand is  
vacuous.

I see the mane of the mountain--  
each little leafvein  
leaps with the light of your brow.

The path is quite deserted,  
I see how your skirt is floated  
in the wind's sough.  
Under the tender, the tenuous bough  
I see you shake out your hair, how it clings,  
your soft, trembling breasts; behold  
--just as the Szinva-stream glides beneath--  
the round white pebbles of your teeth,  
and how the welling laughter springs  
tumbling over them like fairy gold.

## 2

Oh how much I love you, who've given  
speech to both the universes:  
the heart's caves, its trickweaving deepenings,  
sly involute lonelinesses--  
and starry heaven.  
As water glides from its own thunderous fall  
you fly from me and we are cleft and parted,  
whilst I, among the mountains of my life, still call,  
still kneel, and sing, and raise the echo with my cry,  
slamming against the earth and sky,  
that I love you, step-nurse, mother-hearted!

## 3

I love you as a child his mother's breast,  
as the dumb caves their own bottomlessness,  
as halls the light that shows them best,  
as the soul loves flame, as the body rest!  
I love you as we who marked for death  
love the moments of their living breath.

Every smile, every word, every move you make,  
as falling bodies to my earth, I press;  
as into metal acids eat and ache,  
I etch you in my brains with instinct's stress,  
beautiful shapeliness,  
your substance fills the essence they partake.

The moments march by, clattering and relentless,  
but in my ears your silence lies.  
Even the stars blaze up, fall, evanesce,  
but you're a stillness in my eyes.

The taste of you, hushed like a cavern-pool,  
floats in my mouth, as cool;  
your hand, upon a water-glass,  
veined with its glowing lace,  
dawns beautiful.

#### 4

Ah, what strange stuff is this of which I'm made,  
that but your glance can sculpt me into shape?--  
what kind of soul, what kind of light or shade,  
what prodigy that I, who have long strayed  
in my dim fog of nothingness unmade,  
explore your fertile body's curving scape?

--And as the logos flowers in my brain,  
immerse myself in its occult terrain! . . .

Your capillaries, like a bloodred rose,  
ceaselessly stir and dance.

There that eternal current seethes and flows  
and flowers as love upon your countenance,  
to bless with fruit your womb's dark excellence.

A myriad rootlets broider round  
and round your stomach's tender ground,  
whose subtle threadings, woven and unwound,  
unknit the very knot whereby they're bound,  
that thus thy lymphic cellbrood might abound,  
and the great, leaved boughs of thy lungs resound  
their whispered glory round!

The eterna materia goes marching on  
happily through your gut's dark cavern-cells,



and to the dead waste rich life is given  
within the ardent kidneys' boiling wells!

Billowing, your hills arise, arise,  
constellations tremble in your skies,  
lakes, factories work on by day and night,  
a million creatures bustle with delight,  
millipede,  
seaweed,  
a heartless mercy, gentle cruelty,  
your hot sun shines, your darkling north light broods,  
in you there stir the unscanned moods  
of a blind incalculable eternity.

## 5

So falls in clotted spatters  
at your feet this blood,  
this parched utterance.  
Being stutters;  
law is the only spotless eloquence.  
My toiling organs, wherein I am renewed  
over and over daily, are subdued  
to their final silence.

But yet each part cries out--  
O you who from the billioned multitude,  
O you unique, you chosen, wooed  
and singled out, you cradle, bed,  
and grave, soft quickener of the dead,  
receive me into you.

(How high is this dawn-shadowy sky!  
Armies are glittering in its ore.

Radiance anguishing to the eye.  
Now I am lost, I can no more.  
Up in the world I hear it batter,  
my heart's old roar.)

## 6

(Envoi)

(Now the train's going down the track,  
maybe today it'll carry me back,  
maybe my hot face will cool down today,  
maybe you'll talk to me, maybe you'll say:

Warm water's running, there's a bath by and by!  
Here is a towel, now get yourself dry!  
The meat's on the oven, and you will be fed!  
There where I lie, there is your bed.)

(1933)

## *Mama*

**Mama**

On Mama now my thoughts have dawdled  
all of a week. Clothes-basket cradled  
creaked on her hip; she'd climb the stairway  
up to the drying-attic's airway.

Then, for I was an honest fellow,  
how I would shriek and stamp and bellow!  
That swollen laundry needs no mother.  
Take me, and leave it to another.

But still she drudged so quietly,  
nor scolded me nor looked upon me,  
and the hung clothes would glow and billow  
high up above, with swoop and wallow.

It's too late now to still my bother;  
what a giant was my mother--  
over the sky her grey hair flutters,  
her bluing tints the heaven's waters.

(1934)

### *My Eyes Jump In and Out...*

Ki-be ugrál

My eyes jump in and out, I'm mad again.  
When I'm like this, don't hurt me. Hold me tight.  
When all I am goes crosseyed in my brain,  
  
don't show your fist to me: my broken sight  
would never recognize it anyway.  
Don't jerk me, sweet, off the void edge of the night.  
  
Think: I have nothing left to give away,  
no one to have and hold. What I called "me"  
is nothing too. I gnaw its crumbs today,  
  
and when this poem is done it will not be. . .  
As space is by a searchlight, I am pierced through  
by naked sight: what sin is this they see  
  
who answer not, no matter what I do,  
they who by law should love, be claimed by me.  
Do not believe this sin you can't construe,

till my grave-mould acquits and sets me free.

(1936)

## *The Scream*

### Kiáltozás

Love me wildly, to distraction,  
scare away my huge affliction,  
in the cage of an abstraction,

    I, an ape, jump up and down,  
bare my teeth in malediction,  
for I have no faith or fiction,  
    in the terror of His frown.

Mortal, do you hear my singing,  
or mere nature's echoes ringing?  
Hug me, don't just stare unseeing  
    as the sharpened knife comes down--  
there's no guardian that's undying  
who will hear my song and sighing:  
    in the terror of His frown.

As a raft upon a river,  
Slovak raftman, whosoever,  
so the human race forever  
    dumb with pain, goes drifting down--  
but I scream in vain endeavour:  
love me: I'll be good, I shiver  
    in the terror of His frown.

(1936)

## *Tumble out of the Flood*

Bukj föl az árból

Terrify me, my hidden God,  
I need your wrath, your scourge, your thunder;  
quick, come tumble out of the flood,  
lest nothingness sweep us asunder.

I am the one the horse knocks down,  
up to my eyes in dirt, a cipher,  
and yet I play with knives of pain  
too monstrous for man's heart to suffer.

How easily I flame! the sun  
is not more prone to burn--be frightening,  
scream at me: leave the fire alone!  
Rap my hands with your bolt of lightning.

Hammer it into me with rage  
or grace: it's innocence that's evil!  
that innocence could be my cage  
burns at me fiercer than a devil.

A fragment from a wreck I lie,  
tossed by a cruel tempest frothing;  
alone; I dare, and I defy:  
all merely signifying nothing.

I'd choke my very breath, to die,  
your rod and staff thus disobeying,  
and look you boldly in the eye,  
you empty, human-faced unbeing!

(1937)

# *Eagle*

Sas

Eagle, gigantic, diving  
heaven's echoey precipices!  
What winged thing's this, arriving  
from voids and nothingnesses!

His starry beak of azure  
devours the vaulted cosm,  
his talons of erasure  
rip at its flesh-warm bosom.

The world's eyeball, transparent,  
weeps at the the bloody capture,  
the downy feathers errant.  
This is the red dawn's rapture.

There is no height above it,  
essence is torn and savaged;  
there is no depth beneath it,  
being itself is ravished.

One wing is my own aura,  
the other wing is Flóra:  
newborn, beyond all seeming,  
each thus in each redeeming.

(1937)

# Consciousness

## *Eszmélet*

1.

The dawn dissevers earth and skies  
and at its pure and lovely bidding  
the children and the dragonflies  
twirl out into the sunworld's budding;  
no vapor dims the air's receding,  
a twinkling lightness buoys the eyes!  
Last night into their trees were gliding  
the leaves, like tiny butterflies.

2.

Blue, yellow, red, they flocked my dream,  
smudged images the mind had taken,  
I felt the cosmic order gleam--  
and not a speck of dust was shaken.  
My dream's a floating shade; I waken;  
order is but an iron regime.  
By day, the moon's my body's beacon,  
by night, an inner sun will burn.

3.

I'm gaunt, sometimes bread's all I touch,  
I seek amid this trivial chatter  
unrecompensed, and yearn to clutch,  
what has more truth than dice, more matter.

No roast rib warms my mouth and platter,  
no child my heart, forgoing such--  
the cat can't both, how deft a ratter,  
inside and outside make her catch.

4.

Just like split firewood stacked together,  
the universe embraces all,  
so that each object holds the other  
confined by pressures mutual,  
all things ordained, reciprocal.  
Only unbeing can branch and feather,  
only becoming blooms at all;  
what is must break, or fade, or wither.

5.

Down by the branched marshaling-yard  
I lurked behind a root, fear-stricken,  
of silence was the living shard,  
I tasted grey and wierd-sweet lichen.  
I saw a shadow leap and thicken:  
it was the shadow of the guard--  
did he suspect?--watched his shade quicken  
upon the heaped coal dew-bestarred.

6.

Inside there is a world of pain,  
outside is only explanation.  
The world's your scab, the outer stain,  
your soul's the fever-inflammation.



Jailed by your heart's own insurrection,  
you're only free when you refrain,  
nor build so fine a habitation,  
the landlord takes it back again.

7.

I stared from underneath the evening  
into the cogwheel of the sky--  
the loom of all the past was weaving  
law from those glimmery threads, and I  
looked up again into the sky  
from underneath the steams of dreaming  
and saw that always, by and by,  
the weft of law is torn, unseaming.

8.

Silence gave ear: the clock struck one.  
Maybe you could go back to boydom;  
walled in with concrete dank and wan,  
maybe imagine hints of freedom.  
And now I stand, and through the sky-dome  
the stars, the Dippers, shine and burn  
like bars, the sign of jail and thraldom,  
above a silent cell of stone.

9.

I've heard the crying of the steel,  
I've heard the laugh of rain, its pattern;  
I've seen the past burst through its seal:  
only illusions are forgotten,

for naught but love was I begotten,  
bent, though, beneath my burdens' wheel--  
why must we forge such weapons, flatten  
the gold awareness of the real?

10.

He only is a man, who knows  
there is no mother and no father,  
that death is only what he owes  
and life's a bonus altogether,  
returns his find to its bequeather,  
holding it only till he goes;  
nor to himself, nor to another,  
takes on a god's or pastor's pose.

11.

I've seen what they call happiness:  
soft, blonde, it weighed two hundred kilos;  
it waddled smiling on the grass,  
its tail a curl between two pillows.  
Its lukewarm puddle glowed with yellows,  
it blinked and grunted at me--yes,  
I still remember where it wallows,  
touched by the dawns of blissfulness.

12.

I live beside the tracks, where I  
can see the trains pass through the station.  
I see the brilliant windows fly  
in floating dark and dim privation.

Through the eternal night's negation  
just so the lit-up days rush by;  
in all the cars' illumination,  
silent, resting my elbow, I.  
(1934)

## That Which Your Heart Disguises

**Amit szívedbe rejtész**

*For the eightieth birthday of Freud*

That which your heart disguises  
open your eyes and see;  
that which your eye surmises  
let your heart wait to be.

Desire--and all concede it--  
kills all who are not dead.  
But happiness, you need it  
as you need daily bread.

Children, all of the living  
yearn for our mother's arms;  
lovemaking, or death-giving,  
to wed's to take up arms.

Be like the Man of Eighty,  
hunted by men with guns,  
who bleeds, but in his beauty  
still sires a million sons.

That old thorn, broken piercing

your sole, is long since drawn.  
Now from your heart's releasing  
death, too, falls and is gone.

That which your eye surmises  
seize with your hand and will;  
that which your heart disguises  
is yours to kiss or kill.

*(1936)*

[...]

## And So I've Found My Native Country...

**Íme, hát megleltem hazámat**

And so I've found my native country,  
that soil the gravedigger will frame,  
where they who write the words above me  
do not for once misspell my name.

This black collection-box receives me  
(for no one needs me any more),  
this Iron Six that was worth twenty,  
this coin left over from the war.

None needs that iron ring inscripted  
with sweet words, that the world is new:  
rights, land.--Our laws are the leftovers;  
now pretty gold rings all pursue.

For many years I had been lonely.  
Then many people visited.  
I'd have been happy if they'd stayed.

You are alone, was what they said.

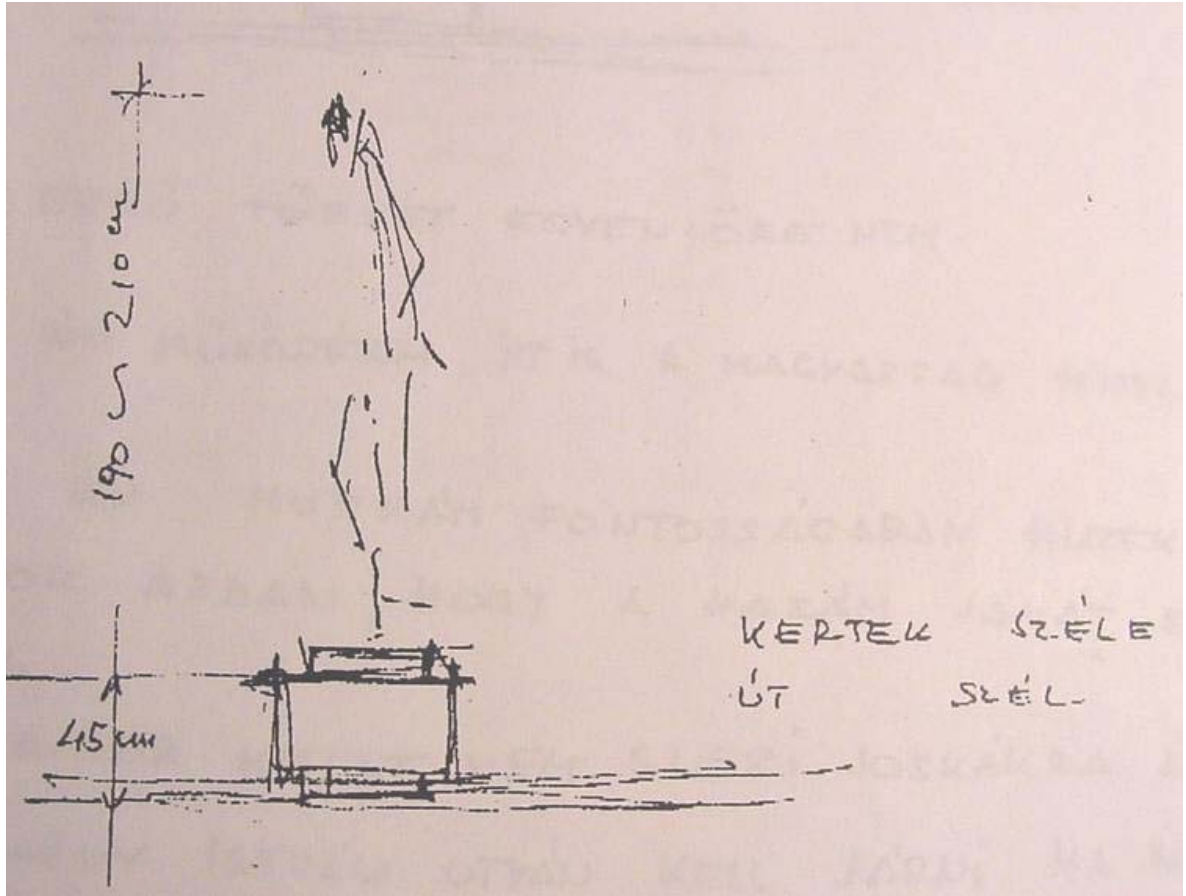
And so I lived, useless and empty,  
and now I see it all quite plain.  
They let me play the fool until  
by now even my death's in vain.

All through my life I've tried to weather  
the whirlwind that would always blow.  
I was more sinned against than sinning,  
and it's a laugh that it was so.

Spring, summer, autumn, all are lovely;  
but winter's loveliest for one  
who hopes for hearth and home and family  
only for others, when all's done.

*(1937)*





Instructions from Nándor, how to place the statue.



Waiting for 50 years to be cast in bronze.



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