



# INSPIRED BY HUNGARIAN POETRY

BRITISH POETS IN  
CONVERSATION WITH  
ATTILA JÓZSEF

2013



Balassi Institute  
Hungarian Cultural Centre  
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## FOREWORD

The Balassi Institute Hungarian Cultural Centre London launched its new project *Inspired by Hungarian poetry: British poets in conversation with Attila József* in celebration of the Hungarian Culture Day on 22 January 2013.

On 22 January 1823 Ferenc Kölcsey – one of the most important literary figures in Hungarian history – completed his manuscript of the Hungarian National Anthem. Since 1989 Hungarian culture is celebrated on this day.

To mark this special event, the Balassi Institute Hungarian Cultural Centre London invited British poets to contribute to its new project with a poem of their own written in response to the poems of the Hungarian poet Attila József (1905–1937). The original idea of the ‘British poets in conversation with Attila József’ project came from Tibor Fischer, the internationally renowned British writer of Hungarian origin.

The aim of the project is to raise awareness and appreciation of Hungarian poetry among readers

in the UK through initiating a poetic conversation between renowned British poets and selected poems of the outstanding Hungarian poet Attila József.

The Hungarian Cultural Centre asked British poets to respond to a selection of Attila József's poems in English translation, put into English beautifully by John Bátki, Edwin Morgan, George Szirtes and Peter Zollman.

The present online anthology, published on 11 April 2013 – the birthday of Attila József and the National Poetry Day in Hungary – is the product of the poetic 'conversation' between Attila József and more than a dozen of his present-day British counterparts.

A gala reading in London on 11 April 2013 celebrates the occasion of the launch of the anthology, Attila József's work and poetry.

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# INTRODUCTION



BY  
GEORGE SZIRTES



There are three world-renowned Hungarian poets: Attila József, Miklós Radnóti and János Pilinszky, but József is the best known and the most frequently translated. His birthday, 11 April, is celebrated in Hungary as National Poetry Day. His statue sits close to the Danube, hard by Parliament, looking out, as one of his most famous poems had it, over the river. It is at the end of the street named after him. One of the finest theatres in the city is also named after him. To a great degree Attila József is the face of Hungarian poetry.

He came from a very humble background, born in a poor part of Budapest in 1905 to a peasant washerwoman whose factory-worker husband left her when Attila was three. Attila and his two sisters were too much for a single washerwoman to support so they were fostered out in provinces where Attila worked as an unpaid swineherd but he hated it so much he returned to his mother.

She died in 1919 and he was then looked after by his brother-in-law who put him through



school, but he was denied a place at the university because of a revolutionary poem he had written. He had in fact published his first book of poems, *Beauty's Beggar* (*A szépség koldusa*) at seventeen. The offending poem was in his second collection, *With a Pure Heart* (*Tiszta szívvel*, 1925)

A patron helped him study in Vienna and Paris, where he developed a love for François Villon's poems and a taste for Surrealism. In Vienna he earned his money as a newspaper seller: in Paris he read Marx. On his return to Hungary he joined the Communist Party at a time when its activities were proscribed but left it in 1932, having become a Freudian too. József was in treatment for some time for schizophrenia. Some of his greatest poems come from this time.

His fame had grown but he found himself isolated. In 1937 he died under a train near Lake Balaton. His death is generally assumed to be suicide but we might never know. His stature and popularity as a writer is reflected in the publication of his *Collected Poems and Selected Writings*, the year after he died, and his subsequent collected works after the war.

The difficulty of translating József's poetry is down to his sheer vivacity. He writes with a mixture of personal lyricism and public, almost prophetic passion, about the material condition of the world, often in strongly formal verse but in a language that is very close to the colloquial. It is very hard to get the balance right. If, as English language readers, we could imagine a blend of the John Davidson who wrote 'Thirty Bob A Week', and Louis MacNeice of 'Autumn Journal', or as French readers imagine a cross between Francois Villon, Louis Aragon and Robert Desnos - or maybe Paul Elouard - we'd be getting close. These analogies are broad rather than specific: they don't constitute an analytic style guide. They might though convey something of the voice that we might strain to hear. József's greatest poems are almost impossible to translate, though there are good efforts by John Bátki, Frederick Turner and Zsuzsanna Ozsváth, and, above all, by Edwin Morgan, whose urban Glasgow voice finds some parallels in József's working class Budapest. Speaking József in Hungarian is not like speaking even a modernised form of poetic diction: it is very much like anybody's speech only charged up, gathering brilliant images, and driven through by high but precise feeling.

There are so few anglophone poets who read Hungarian that new translations, though welcome, would prove rather too ambitious a venture in the short term. But asking poets to respond to what they have of József in English translation is a way of establishing a spiritual and intellectual connection. The poets included here have, in my opinion, produced some very fine poems of their own as closer or more distant echoes of poems by József. József sends us to places within ourselves that we recognise as true even while seemingly removed by time, language and culture. József is one of the great humane poets of the last century. He is still with us. We still need him.



ATTILA JÓZSEF



IN  
ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Attila József has been translated into English by several poets in the past. The first serious attempt to put him on the map of translated poetry was made by Arthur Koestler who was a friend of Attila József's and who often played chess with him in a coffee-house when he visited Budapest. He asked Laurie Lee to translate a few poems, which he included in the second volume of his autobiography published in 1952. But it was left to another generation, of whom I count myself as one, who left Hungary after the 1956 revolution, to bring his poetry (as well as other modern Hungarian poets) to a wider English-speaking audience.

In the late 50s I recruited the Welsh poet Vernon Watkins as a translator. Watkins did not speak Hungarian, but with my rough versions and with help from his colleague Neville Masterman who knew Hungarian, he produced two translations of Attila József, one of which, an excellent version of "Welcome to Thomas Mann" was eventually printed in the *Times Literary Supplement* and also in the anthology *The Colonnade of Teeth*, edited by me and George Szirtes. I shall be using in this essay the more familiar first name Attila instead of the more formal family name József.

At the beginning of the 70s, Carcanet Press proposed to publish a collection of Attila's poems in English translated by the American-Hungarian poet, John Batki. They sent me the translations for my comments. I helped to select those which I felt best captured for an English audience the spirit of Attila and wrote an introduction to the book, which was published in 1973 under the title of *Selected Poems and Texts*. There were several reviews which reflected my own opinion that the translations were adequate but not outstanding. In 1997 the publisher Corvina in Budapest and Oberlin College Press in America brought out an extended version of Bátky's translations under the title *Winter Night*.

The best translator by far of Attila's poetry into English was a Scot, Edwin Morgan. The late „Makar” of Scotland translated from many languages but I think Attila was one of his all-time favourites as shown by his *Sixty Poems*, a collection devoted entirely to Attila. It was mainly Morgan's versions that George Szirtes and I selected for our anthology of modern Hungarian poetry *The Colonnade of Teeth*. When I pointed

out two small mistranslations in his otherwise brilliant rendering of 'Ode', Morgan corrected them without a murmur.

Of the many other translators of Attila's work I would like to mention two in particular, namely Peter Zollman in England and Thomas Kabdebo in Ireland, the latter also having written Attila's biography in English – hopefully, just the first work of its kind.

As for the United States, another translator from across the Ocean is Peter Hargitai, who arrived in America in 1956 as a boy. He produced somewhat free versions, mostly of the early poems of Attila. Two others Zsuzsa Ozsvath, herself Hungarian and the poet, Frederick Turner as co-translators produced some admirable versions in a transatlantic idiom, even though Turner is originally an Englishman.

I'd like to mention just one more name, that of Lucas Myers. Myers together with his Hungarian-born wife produced some fine versions of Attila's poems which were eventually printed in the *New Hungarian Quarterly*. It was Myers who brought



Attila's work to the attention of Ted Hughes , who wrote a short piece on Attila, but sadly, never translated him.

It was not only Ted Hughes who failed to translate Attila, but also WH Auden, who himself had been a socialist in his youth. I was a student in Oxford in the early 60s, where Auden was Professor of Poetry. I looked him up and gave him some rough translations of Attila's poems. I met him just twice, once when I gave him the poems, the second time when he gave them back. It seems Attila was not his cup of tea. What a loss for us.

Attila József is one of the Hungarian poets who is closest to my heart. My generation grew up on his poems, at first enjoying those which dealt with his private life (such as "Mother") while later we came to admire his Surrealistic imagery and his merciless verbal precision. Some of his poems have a truly universal appeal, for instance such masterpieces as the 'Ode' and 'Belated Lament', both of which are included in the present publication. For me however, one of his most important poems is a political one, entitled "A Breath of Air" (Levegőt!) written in

the 1930s against the pseudo-parliamentary and deeply undemocratic regime of Admiral Horthy. There are several versions of this poem in English, for example one by the American poet Matthew Zion and myself, which can be found in the *New Writing of Eastern Europe*, Quadrangle Books, Chicago, 1968.

Back in 1956, I was a fourth-year student of Hungarian and Polish at Budapest University and instrumental in organising the students' march on October 23, which escalated into the revolution. A few days later, I was appointed by our Students Revolutionary Committee editor of the University's weekly student newspaper *Egyetemi ifjúság* (University Youth), which during the revolution we published daily. On my suggestion we adopted two lines from this rousing poem: "Come ye Freedom! You bear us an order!" as our motto above the title-heading. It pleases me greatly to know that Attila József, who meant so much to my generation, has now been an inspiration to so many British poets for this anthology.

*George Gömöri*

**Attila József in English translation:**

*Perched on Nothing's Branch*, translated by Peter Hargitai (Apalachee Press. 1987)

*Winter Night: selected poems of Attila József*, translated by John Batki (Oberlin College Press and Corvina Books Ltd., 1997)

*The Iron-Blue Vault: selected poems*, translated by Zsuzsanna Ozsvath and Frederick Turner (Bloodaxe Books, 2000)

*Attila József: Sixty Poems*, translated by Edwin Morgan (Edinburgh: Mariscat, 2001)

*A Transparent Lion: selected poems of Attila József*, translated by Michael Castro & Gabor G. Gyukics (Los Angeles, CA: Green Integer 149, 2006)

**Attila József's poems in English-language anthologies:**

*The Lost Rider*. Dávidházi, P. et al. (Budapest: Corvina Books, 1997)

*The Colonnade of Teeth: Modern Hungarian Poetry*. Gömöri, G. and Szirtes, G. (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1996)



# POEMS



BY  
ATTILA JÓZSEF

JÓZSEF ATTILA

## SZÜLETÉSNAPOMRA

*Harminckét éves lettem én –  
meglepetés e költemény  
csecse  
becse:*

*ajándék, mellyel meglepem  
e kávéházi szegleten  
magam  
magam.*

*Harminckét évem elszelelt  
s még havi kétszáz sose telt.  
Az ám,  
Hazám!*

*Lehettem volna oktató,  
nem ily töltőtoll koptató  
szegény  
legény.*

*De nem lettem, mert Szegeden  
eltanácsolt az egyetem  
fura  
ura.*

*Intelme gyorsan, nyersen ért  
a „Nincsen apám” versemért,  
a hont  
kivont*

*szablyával óvta ellenem.  
Ideidézi szellemem  
Hevét  
s nevét:*

*„Ön, amig szóból értek én,  
nem lesz tanár e féltekén” –  
gagyog  
s ragyog.*

*Ha örül Horger Antal úr,  
hogy költőnk nem nyelvtant tanul,  
sekély  
e kéj –*

*Én egész népemet fogom  
nem középiskolás fokon  
taní-  
tani!*

*1937. április 11.*



ATTILA JÓZSEF

## ON MY BIRTHDAY

To end my thirty-second year  
I wrote myself a souvenir –  
a pretty  
ditty:

a quick impromptu memoir  
saluting in this coffee-bar  
my birth  
on earth.

Thirty two years... Without a doubt  
what Hungary has doled me out  
was not  
a lot.

I could have been a teacher, but  
I wear my pencils to the butt  
for just  
a crust,

for I was sent down from Szeged  
by the provost, that egg-headed  
old so  
and so

who picked on my 'With a Pure Heart' –  
To save the nation from my art  
he barred  
the bard

and drew his sword against my kind.  
His words deserve to be enshrined  
to shame  
his name:

'Until I do give up the ghost  
don't dream of any teaching post' –  
I quote,  
Unquote.

So what matter if I am banned  
from Prof. A. Horger's graduand  
grammar  
crammer?

I'll teach my people, one and all,  
much greater things than what you call  
college  
knowledge.

*[Peter Zollman]*

JÓZSEF ATTILA

## REMÉNYTELENÜL

*Az ember végül homokos,  
szomorú, vizes síkra ér,  
szétnéz merengve és okos  
fejével biccent, nem remél.*

*Én is így próbálok csalás  
nélkül szétnézni könnyedén.  
Ezüstös fejszesuhanás  
játszik a nyárfa levelén.*

*A semmi ágán ül szívem,  
kis teste hangtalan vacog,  
köréje gyűlnek szeliden  
s nézik, nézik a csillagok.*

1933

ATTILA JÓZSEF

## WITHOUT HOPE

Man comes at last to a vast stretch  
of sandy, dull, waterlogged plain,  
looks round in wonder, the poor wretch,  
nods sagely and knows hope is vain.

I too am genuinely trying  
to look round unconcernedly.  
An axehead, a silvery sighing,  
Shudders across the poplar tree.

My heart is perched on nothing's branch,  
a small, dumb, shivering event:  
the gentle stars jostle and bunch  
and gaze on in astonishment.

*[George Szirtes]*

JÓZSEF ATTILA

## ÓDA

1

*Itt ülök csillámló sziklafalon.  
Az ifju nyár  
könnyű szellője, mint egy kedves  
vacsora melege, száll.  
Szoktatom szívemet a csendhez.  
Nem oly nehéz –  
idesereglik, ami tovatűnt,  
a fej lehajlik és lecsüng  
a kéz.*

*Nézem a hegyek sörényét –  
homlokod fényét  
villantja minden levél.  
Az úton senki, senki,  
látom, hogy meglebbenti  
szoknyád a szél.  
És a törékeny lombok alatt  
látom előrebiccentni hajad,  
megrezzenni lágy emlőidet és*

*- amint elfut a Szinva-patak -  
ím újra látom, hogy fakad  
a kerek fehér köveken,  
fogaidon a tündér nevetés.*

2

*Óh mennyire szeretlek téged,  
ki szóra bírtad egyaránt  
a szív legmélyebb üregeiben  
cseleit szövő, fondor magányt  
s a mindenséget.*

*Ki mint vízesés önnön robajától,  
elválsz tőlem és halkan futsz tova,  
míg én, életem csúcsai közt, a távol  
közelében, zengem, sikoltom,  
verődve földön és égbolton,  
hogyan szeretlek, te édes mostoha!*

3

*Szeretlek, mint anyját a gyermek,  
mint mélyüket a hallgatag vermek,  
szeretlek, mint a fényt a termek,  
mint lángot a lélek, test a nyugalmat!*

*Szeretlek, mint élni szeretnek  
halandók, amíg meg nem halnak.*

*Minden mosolyod, mozdulatod, szavad  
örzöm, mint hulló tárgyakat a föld.  
Elmémbé, mint a fémbe a savak,  
ösztoneimmel belemartalak,  
te kedves, szép alak,  
lényed ott minden lényeket kitölt.*

*A pillanatok zörögve elvonulnak,  
de te némán ülsz fülemben.  
Csillagok gyúlnak és lehullnak,  
de te megálltál szememben.  
Ízed, miként a barlangban a csend,  
számban kihűlve leng  
s a vizes poháron kezéd,  
rajta a finom érzet,  
föl-földereng.*

4

*Óh, hát miféle anyag vagyok én,  
hogy pillantásod metsz és alakít?  
Miféle lélek és miféle fény  
s ámulatra méltó tünemény,*



*hogy bejárhatom a semmiség ködén  
termékeny tested lankás tájait?  
S mint megnyílt értelembe az ige,  
alászállhatok rejtelseibe!...*

*Vérköreid, miként a rózsabokrok,  
reszketnek szüntelen.  
Viszik az örök áramot, hogy  
orcádon nyíljon ki a szerelem  
s méhednek áldott gyümölcse legyen.  
Gyomrod érzékeny talaját  
a sok gyökerecske át meg át  
hímezi, finom fonalát  
csomóba szőve, bontva bogját –  
hogy nedűid sejtje gyűjtse sok raját  
s lombos tüdőd szép cserjéi saját  
dicsőségüket susogják!*

*Az örök anyag boldogan halad  
benned a belek alagútjain  
és gazdag életet nyer a salak  
a buzgó vesék forró kútjain!*

*Hullámozó dombok emelkednek,  
csillagképek rezegnek benned,  
tavak mozdulnak, munkálnak gyáarak,*

sürög millió élő állat,  
bogár,  
hinár,  
a kegyetlenség és a jóság;  
nap süt, homályló északi fény borong -  
tartalmaidban ott bolyong  
az öntudatlan örökkévalóság.

5

Mint alvadt vérdarabok,  
úgy hullnak eléd  
ezek a szavak.  
A lét dadog,  
csak a törvény a tiszta beszéd.  
De szorgos szerveim, kik újjászülnék  
napról napra, már fölkészülnek,  
hogyan elnémuljanak.

De addig mind kiált -  
Kit két ezer millió embernek  
sokaságából kiszemelnek,  
te egyetlen, te lágy  
bölcső, erős sír, eleven ágy,  
fogadj magadba!...

*(Milyen magas e hajnali ég!  
Seregek csillognak érceiben.  
Bántja szemem a nagy fényesség,  
El vagyok veszve, azt hiszem.  
Hallom, amint fölöttem csattog,  
ver a szívem.)*

6

*(Mellékdal)*

*(Visz a vonat, megyek utánad,  
talán ma még meg is talállak,  
talán kívül e lángoló arc,  
talán csendesen meg is szólalsz:*

*Csobog a langyos víz, fürödj meg!  
Ime a kendő, törülközz meg!  
Sül a hús, enyhítse étvágyad!  
Ahol én fekszem, az az ágyad.)*

1933. június

ATTILA JÓZSEF

## ODE

1

Here I sit on a shining wall.  
The light young summer wind  
rises like the warm welcome of supper.  
I accustom my heart to the silence:  
not hard.

Here  
I regain what I lost,  
I bend my head,  
my hand hangs down.

My eyes are on the mane of the mountains –  
your splendid brow,  
every leaf on fire!

On the street no one, no one;  
I see your skirt lifted by the wind.  
Your hair strays under fine leaves,  
I see your soft breasts  
trembling –  
as Szinva brook runs down –

Oh what I see:  
a magic laugh  
shining on your teeth,  
on the round white stones.

2

Oh how I love you!  
You have been able to force  
speech from the universe –  
and from solitude, weaving its fitful deceits  
in the heart's deepest place.

Now, as the booming leaves the waterfall,  
you leave, you run subdued, until  
I cry from among the peaks of life, singing  
in those distances hung between earth and heaven,  
that I love you, that it is you,  
sweet would-be mother, that I love.

3

I love you as the child loves its mother,  
as the silent cave loves its depths.  
I love you as rooms love sunlight,  
as the soul loves warmth and the body rest.

I love you as mortal men love living  
and strive in its arms till death.

I am the keeper of your words, your smiles,  
your movements – everything, as the earth keeps  
everything that falls.

My instincts, like acid on metal, have  
engraved you on my mind; my existence  
takes form at last, dear love, from your sweet  
essence.

Loudly the moments pass by:  
dumb you remain, dumb, and I  
have ears for you alone.

Glittering stars – already they are setting,  
but you are always steady in my sight.

Breath of silence in the cave: your flavour  
stings cold in the mouth; at times your hand  
with its delicate veining will bend  
mistily round the glass of water.

4

Oh but what substance am I made of,  
moulded and carved by your simplest glance?  
What mind, what light and miracle

that can make me reach the gentle  
dales of your fertile  
body, through the mist of nothingness?  
As the word is released by reason,  
I can delve into its enigmas!...

Your veins quiver like bushes,  
ceaselessly, bushes of roses.  
They move in the eternal stream,  
for love to flourish in your face  
and your belly to bear its fruit.  
The sensitive soil of your flesh  
is sown with finest roots,  
thin threads it knots, unknots, –  
for the juices of the tiny cells  
to crowd to a growing mass,  
and the leafy bush of the lungs  
to murmur up its praise!

And the deep undying matter advances  
singing in its galleries, and rich life emerges  
from tireless wells, from the very scourings  
of buried pits, of burning kidneys!

In you, the swelling hills  
rise, constellations wink,

lakes move, and workshops work:  
a million beings, quick  
insects,  
bladderwrack,  
cruelty and goodness;  
suns shine, auroras go dark –  
here, in your huge essence,  
the eternal unconscious wanders.

5

Like clotted blood, in shreds,  
these words  
are dropped in your path.  
Existence stammers:  
only law has a clear voice.  
My active senses, reborn day after day,  
are ready even now  
for silence.

But up to now everything cries aloud –  
chosen out of the two thousand millions,  
you alone, you the living bed,  
you the gentle cradle, you the fierce tomb:  
into yourself: – into yourself I  
beseech you, receive me.



(How deep the sky at daybreak!  
Armies shine in light of steel.  
The glitter hurts my sight.  
I am lost, in this air.  
Surely my heart must break,  
beating in the light.)

6

(After-song)

(The train takes me, I follow after you,  
perhaps today I'll find you again,  
perhaps my burning face will be cool,  
perhaps you'll say, in your undertone:

The water's lukewarm, go and try it!  
A towel for your body, dry it!  
The meat is baked, end your hunger!  
In my bed for ever linger.)

*[Edwin Morgan]*

JÓZSEF ATTILA

## KÉSEI SIRATÓ

*Harminchat fokos lázban égek mindig  
s te nem ápolasz, anyám.  
Mint lenge, könnyű lány, ha odaintik,  
kinyújtóztál a halál oldalán.  
Lágy őszi tájból és sok kedves nőből  
próbállak összeállítani téged;  
de nem futja, már látom, az időből,  
a tömény tűz eléget.*

*Utoljára Szabadszállásra mentem,  
a hadak vége volt  
s ez összekuszálódott Budapesten  
kenyér nélkül, üresen állt a bolt.  
A vonattetőn hasaltam keresztben,  
hoztam krumplit, a zsákban köles volt már;  
neked, én konok, csirkét is szereztem  
s te már seholse voltál.*

*Tőlem elvetted, kukacoknak adtad  
édes emléd s magad.*

*Vigasztaltad fiad és pirongattad  
s lám, csalárd, hazug volt kedves szavad.  
Levesem hűtötted, fűjtad, kavartad,  
mondtad: Egyél, nekem nőssz nagyra, szentem!  
Most zsíros nyirkot kóstol üres ajkad –  
félrevezetted engem.*

*Ettelek volna meg!... Te vacsorádat  
hoztad el – kértem én?  
Mért görbitetted mosásnak a hátad?  
Hogy egyengess egy láda fenekén?  
Lásd, örülnék, ha megvernél még egyszer!  
Boldoggá tenne most, mert visszavágnék:  
haszontalan vagy! nem-lenni igyekszel  
s mindent elrontsz, te árnyék!*

*Nagyobb szélhámos vagy, mint bármelyik nő,  
ki csal és hiteget!  
Suttyomban elhagytad szerelmeidből  
jajongva szült, eleven hitedet.  
Cigány vagy! Amit adtál hízelegve,  
mind visszaloptad az utolsó órán!  
A gyerekek kél káromkodni kedve –  
nem hallod, mama? Szólj rám!*

*Világosodik lassacskán az elmém,  
a legenda oda.  
A gyermek, aki csügg anyja szerelmén,  
észreveszi, hogy milyen ostoba.  
Kit anya szült, az mind csalódik végül,  
vagy így, vagy úgy, hogy maga próbál csalni.  
Ha küzd, hát abba, ha pedig kibékül,  
ebbe fog belehalni.*

1935 / 1936

ATTILA JÓZSEF

## BELATED LAMENT

Mother, my fever is ninety-eight point six,  
and you are not here to take care of me.  
Instead, like an easy woman, when called,  
you stretched out by death's side.  
I try to piece you together from soft  
autumn landscapes and women dear to me,  
but I can see there won't be time.  
This fire is burning me away.

It was the end of the war  
when I went to the country that last time.  
In the city, all the stores were empty –  
no food, not even bread.  
I lay flat on my belly on top of a boxcar  
to bring you flour and potatoes in a sack.  
I, your stubborn son, brought a chicken for you.  
But you weren't there.

You took yourself and your sweet breasts  
from me and gave them to maggots.

The words you used to scold, to comfort  
were nothing but cheating, lying words.  
You cooled my bowl of soup, you stirred it,  
'Eat, my baby, grow tall for me.'  
Now your empty mouth bites into damp and  
grease  
– oh you deceived me.

I should have devoured you! You gave your own  
dinner, but did I ask for it? And why did you  
break your back doing all that laundry?  
So that the coffin might straighten it out?  
I would be glad to have you beat me once more.  
I'd be happy, because I could hit you back.  
You are worthless! You just want to be dead!  
You spoil everything! You are a ghost!

You are a greater cheat than any woman  
that ever deceived me. You wailed,  
you gave birth out of love,  
– and then you stole away.  
O you gipsy, you wheedled, you gave  
only to steal it back in the last hour.  
Your child wants to swear and curse –  
mother, can't you hear? Stop me!

Slowly the mind calms down,  
the myths run out.  
The child who clings to his mother's love  
sees how foolish he has been.  
Every mother's son is let down in the end,  
either deceived, or else trying to cheat.  
You can try to fight, and you will be killed.  
Or else make your peace – and die.

*[John Bátki]*

JÓZSEF ATTILA

## A DUNÁNÁL

### 1

*A rakodópart alsó kövén ültem,  
néztem, hogy úszik el a dinnyehéj.  
Alig hallottam, sorsomba merülten,  
hogy fecseg a felszín, hallgat a mély.  
Mintha szivemből folyt volna tova,  
zavaros, bölcs és nagy volt a Duna.*

*Mint az izmok, ha dolgozik az ember,  
reszel, kalapál, vályogot vet, ás,  
úgy pattant, feszült, úgy ernyedett el  
minden hullám, minden mozdulás.  
S mint édesanyám, ringatott, mesélt  
s mosta a város minden szennyesét.*

*És elkezdett az eső cseperészni,  
de mintha mindegy volna, el is állt.  
És mégis, mint aki barlangból nézi  
a hosszú esőt – néztem a határt:*



*egykedvű, örök eső módra hullt,  
szüntelenül, mi tarka volt, a mult.*

*A Duna csak folyt. És mint a termékeny,  
másra gondoló anyának ölén  
a kisgyermek, úgy játszadoztak szépen  
és nevetgéltek a habok felém.  
Az idő árján úgy remegtek ők,  
mint sírköves, dülöngő temetők.*

## 2

*Én úgy vagyok, hogy már százezer éve  
nézem, amit meglátok hirtelen.  
Egy pillanat s kész az idő egésze,  
mit százezer ős szemlélget velem.*

*Látom, mit ők nem láttak, mert kapáltak,  
öltek, öleltek, tették, ami kell,  
s ők látják azt, az anyagba leszálltak,  
mit én nem látok, ha vallani kell.*

*Tudunk egymásról, mint öröm és bánat.  
Enyém a mult és övék a jelen.  
Verset írunk – ők fogják ceruzámat  
s én érzem őket és emlékezem.*

*Anyám kún volt, az apám félig székel,*  
*félig román, vagy tán egészen az.*  
*Anyám szájából édes volt az étel,*  
*apám szájából szép volt az igaz.*  
*Mikor mozdulok, ők ölelik egymást.*  
*Elszomorodom néha emiatt –*  
*ez az elmúlás. Ebből vagyok. „Meglásd,*  
*ha majd nem leszünk!...” – megszólítanak.*

*Megszólítanak, mert ők én vagyok már;*  
*gyenge létemre így vagyok erős,*  
*ki emlékszem, hogy több vagyok a soknál,*  
*mert az összejtig vagyok minden ős –*  
*az Ős vagyok, mely sokasodni foszlik:*  
*apám- s anyámmá válok boldogan,*  
*s apám, anyám maga is ketté oszlik*  
*s én lelkes eggyé így szaporodom!*

*A világ vagyok – minden, ami volt, van:*  
*a sok nemzedék, mely egymásra tör.*  
*A honfoglalók győznek velem holtan*  
*s a meghódoltak kínja meggyötör.*

*Árpád és Zalán, Werbőczy és Dózsa –  
török, tatár, tót, román kavargó  
e szívben, mely e multnak már adósa  
szelíd jövővel – mai magyarok!*

*... Én dolgozni akarok. Elegendő  
harc, hogy a multat be kell vallani.  
A Dunának, mely mult, jelen, jövőendő,  
egymást ölelik lágy hullámai.  
A harcot, amelyet őseink vívtak,  
békévé oldja az emlékezés  
s rendezni végre közös dolgainkat,  
ez a mi munkánk; és nem is kevés.*

*1936. június*

ATTILA JÓZSEF

## BY THE DANUBE

### 1

I sat there on the quayside by the landing,  
a melon rind was drifting on the flow.  
I delved into my fate, just understanding:  
the surface chatters, while it's calm below.  
As if my heart had been its very source,  
troubled, wise was the Danube, mighty force.

Like muscles when you work and lift the axe,  
or harvest, hammer, excavate a grave,  
so did the water tighten, surge, relax  
with every current, every breezy wave.  
Like Mother, dandled, told a tale, caressed,  
laundered the dirt of all of Budapest.

A drizzle started, moistening the morning  
but didn't care much, so it stopped again.  
And yet, like someone who under an awning  
watches the rain- I gazed into the plain:

As twilight, that may infinitely last,  
so grey was all that used to shine, the past.

The Danube flowed. And like a tiny child  
plays on his fertile, dreamy mother's knee,  
so cradled and embraced and gently smiled  
each playful wave, waving hullo to me.  
They shuddered on the flood of past events  
like tombstones, tumbling graveyard monuments.

## 2

For hundred thousand years I have been gazing  
and suddenly I see what's there to see.  
A flash, and time is fully-grown, embracing  
what generations scan and show to me.

I see what they've not seen, for they defended,  
embraced, dug, murdered, their living to ply,  
and they see now, in cold matter descended,  
what I can't see when I'm to testify.

We all relate, like blessèd to the damn'd,  
Mine is the past and theirs is the today  
We write poems - my pencil in their hand,  
I sense them and remember what to say.

Mother was Kún, Father was Székely, partly,  
 and half, or maybe, pure Romanian.  
 From Mother's lips the food was sweet and hearty,  
 from Father's lips the truth was radiant.  
 They embrace again when I am stirring.  
 This fills my heart with deep melancholy -  
 we are all mortal. It's me, re-occurring.  
 „Just wait, we'll soon be gone!...” They talk to me.

They call, I know we are now one: this one-ness  
 has made me strong, for I remember well  
 that I am every parent in the boundless  
 succession to the primal lonely cell.  
 I am the First, who splits, proliferating  
 till I become my father and mother,  
 then father splits and mother, procreating  
 the multiplying me and none other!

I am the world - the ancient, endless story:  
 clan fighting clan for creed or crazy greed.  
 I march among the conquerors in glory,  
 I suffer with the conquered in defeat.  
 Árpád and Zalán, Werbőczy and Dózsa -  
 Slavs, Mongols, Turks and other variants

in me, we shall redeem the long foreclosure  
with gentle future - new Hungarians!

...I want to work. It's hard for human nature  
to make a true confession of the past.  
The Danube, which is past, present and future  
entwines its waves in tender friendly clasps.  
Out of the blood our fathers shed in battles  
flows peace, through our remembrance  
and regard,  
creating order in our common matters,  
this is our task, we know it will be hard.

*[Peter Zollman]*

JÓZSEF ATTILA

## KARÓVAL JÖTTÉL...

*Karóval jöttél, nem virággal,  
feleseltél a másvilággal,  
aranyat ígértél nagy zsákkal  
anyádnak és most itt csücsülsz,*

*mint fák tövéén a bolondgomba  
(így van rád, akinek van, gondja),  
be vagy zárva a Hét Toronyba  
és már sohasem menekülsz.*

*Téjfoggal kőbe mért haraptál?  
Mért siettél, ha elmaradtál?  
Miért nem éjszaka álmodtál?  
Végre mi kellett volna, mondd?*

*Magadat mindig kitakartad,  
sebedet mindig elvakartad,  
híres vagy, hogyha ezt akartad.  
S hány hét a világ, te bolond?*



*Szeretnél? Magához ki fűzött?  
Bujdokoltál? Vajjon ki űzött?  
Győzd, ami volt, ha ugyan győződ,  
se késed nincs, se kenyered.*

*Be vagy a Hét Toronyba zárva,  
örülj, ha jut tüzelőfára,  
örülj, itt van egy puha párna,  
hajtsd le szépen a fejedet.*

*1937. október*

ATTILA JÓZSEF

## YOU CAME WITH A STICK...

You came with a stick, not a flower,  
defied that otherworldly power,  
pledged your mother a princely dower,  
sacks of gold, – and you squat at home

as in the trees the toadstools wizen  
(so, in your need, your friends will listen),  
the Seven Towers are your prison,  
in freedom you shall never roam.

You chanced your milk teeth. A rock to bite?  
You hurried, but couldn't make it quite?  
You had your dreams, but never at night?  
How did you hope to end the play?

You've laid yourself always proudly bare,  
You've scratched your wounds always, everywhere,  
you are now famous, but do you care?  
How nigh, you fool, is Judgement day?

You loved? Who held you close to her breast?  
You had to hide? Who threatened your nest?  
Will you survive by doing your best?  
You have no knife, you have no bread.

The Seven Towers are holding you tight,  
be glad, you have some fuel to light,  
be glad, a pillow awaits you tonight,  
rest now softly your weary head.

*[Peter Zollman]*



# POEMS



INSPIRED BY  
ATTILA JÓZSEF'S  
POETRY



DEREK ADAMS

## HOPELESS

*(After Attila József)*

My wren heart flicks its tail  
on an almost impossible uppermost branch.  
Far above, beyond the sky, Hubble  
records the movement of stars.

Light signals across time;  
its hopeless messages blink  
and blink and disappear  
like the flame of a guttering match.

Bird's eye to the sky, I too seek signals.  
Below foliage obscures my vision,  
a sharp thunk-thunk reaches my ears,  
sends shivers up through the tree.

POLLY CLARK

## GRADUATION PHOTO, 1964

You've got to hand it to her, she's determined.

Day after day in the photo on my desk  
my mother smiles like the world's first teenager,  
her plump hands crossed across her tummy.

Night after night after night  
I unfold letters, and this girl  
tumbles out.

She doesn't know the 60s have arrived.  
She doesn't know they're happening to her.  
She doesn't know she'll be shaking them  
out of her children forever.

Mother, the first in the family to go to university,  
the first woman with easy access  
contraception,  
why did you lie there as if the future was far away,  
smiling, smokey-eyed, like a girl in a photo



from the birth of the 60s –

to which a man  
with his fashionable sideburns and long cigarette  
applies a match, just to see what will happen,  
because he can, because he's curious,  
because destruction, not progress, is in his heart.

ANTONY DUNN

## HEART

*after Attila József's 'Without Hope' (1933)*

If we agree the heart's a bird  
and perched on nothing but its height  
we must not think it too absurd  
that it sees further than we might –

how to the plain's horizons come  
machineries to wreck and scar  
and strike the poplars down and dumb  
and flare and flash out every star

and us – and that it might betide  
the going-down of everything.  
The shuddered bird will open wide  
and sing and sing and sing and sing.

JACQUELINE GABBITAS

GRASS LOOKS ON  
WITH DISINTEREST AT  
THE MOTHERS AND  
THE SONS WHO FOLLOW

*after Attila József's Belated Lament*

Under the weight of small belongings, man that is  
woman slugs on,  
leaving a trail of actions and *Sehnsucht*, and other  
human things.

In number, she is many, and has borne the same  
cold we bear; cold  
that snaps the filament of hair on skins, the fibre  
in leaves and blades;

she has been mantled in the warmth that we too  
welcome; the sun  
that brings on the thaw, and rises our sap in green  
explosions.

I've watched her diaspora and her encampment;  
the complex acts  
of procreation; the birth of small man that is girl  
or boy; the loss of one,

the rise of the other. I've watched the fires burning  
them away,  
as, eventually, they will burn us all. I've watched  
the boy grow tall.

He will survive, and wear the Earth like an  
overcoat he once owned,  
and will think himself let down because the skies  
are not clear,

the seas plentiful, volcanos still, the myths not  
true.

He will lament this, knowing that even he too lets  
us all down.

*\* Sehnsucht is a German noun that is difficult to translate adequately and describes a deep emotional state. It is usually translated as 'longing', 'yearning', or a type of 'intensely missing'.*

GEORGE GÖMÖRI

## THE LAST APPLE

Flora sent Attila some apples to Szárszó  
he ate one of them  
this was not an apple of love  
but one of farewell  
for he wrote to her soon after  
“please don’t come next Sunday”  
he ambled out to the railway station  
waited for the goods train to start  
and then

*English version by the author and Mari Gömöri*

WAYNE HOLLOWAY-SMITH

## VALENTINE'S DAY, 1919

*'my heart is perched on nothing's branch'*

– Attila József, *'Without Hope'*

(translated by George Szirtes)

Undone at an early age, and poor, he hugged the  
tree.

Or rather, he threw his arms right out and  
pushed his heart  
toward its bark-bound and awkward body.

The villagers who saw, or heard from those who  
saw,

declaimed at once 'an unnatural love';  
others, an unhealthy  
'hibition, – at best, a folly. Clerics clucked,

mustachioed men and small girls laughed, though  
chief of despondences was the tree itself.

The singular way  
it was unwavered by his swelling and wholly clean  
intention.

But who in his correctly-twigged mind could  
fault,

he thought, the actions which brought  
close the counter-  
point to one's own leaf-canopied heart? He knew  
that,

for the time being, his only torts would be  
the tree he felt spring up through his  
spent heart,  
and the flick-book of unvarnished rage that would  
dance

him to the edge of his otherwise brinked body,  
such was

the unformulaic rejection to which he'd  
been victim.

Rejection, an inverted affection. Affection,

his brand new old enemy. He could not help but  
picture a heart,

external but recognisably his own,  
contracted

in the empty branches of that tree. Its fault: it  
looked seven types of alive.

ÁGNES LEHÓCZKY

## EN ROUTE FOR THE AIRPORT THROUGH THE NINTH DISTRICT

For a long while I've been planning to tell you about an early morning taxi-ride on this wide avenue leading straight to the airport. I mean as direct as it can be since one can hardly avoid bumping into familiar bric-a-brac left in corners and arches. I've made this trip several times before through the city still dormant. In the winter, for example. This time, it is a journey out of summer's very last second, a summer almost always over. I want to tell you about this last minute of summer rising above terracotta rooftops, always and already fallow, stretching its limbs out of lichthofs and chimneys. Chimneys and lichthofs and courtyards. Casting premature shadows on yellow firewalls. This last minute of the sunrise is dyed into an unseen flesh-coloured pink, as thin as a thought, as round. These taxi-rides are always backward, to the places of arrivals. To airports. Or seaports. Copenhagen. Budapest. Run-down



North-Sea holiday towns rimmed with rattling amusement parks and empty merry-go-rounds. These sea-side towns are edges of the universe. Like the rim of a pitch black lake. Has a city ever really drowned? A city which was made of stairways? I was thinking of places. How some carry such heavy contents. Then I was thinking of the ones over there. How vacuums need to replenish. Some places are merely hollows. Craters. Yet not matter-of-fact craters. They are lighter and they float. And the goal is to fill their emptiness with long-known substance. With tons of heavy iron. Until they drown. To replace their lightness with gravity. To make them memory. I think. It is like finding birds' nests in your hair, finding the roots, the bulbs. The taxi passes by the hospital at 6 am; your light is on. Light yellow light. Neon. There is a hospital at each corner. There is a you in every hospital. Waiting for an illuminated messenger, a stranger. The only way to tell the weight of a place is to climb spiral stairways upwards, to lead your eyes onto a helical path over the panorama of cupolas and domes, hillsides, towers, white washed light-houses, basilicas. I love such words. Their gravitation. Their contents falling off balconies, from cups accidentally tilted. We spent

hours on the top of the fifth floor staring down at the street a few hundred meters below us. We wondered at the pillars' stamina scaffolding the fin-de-siècle apartment block. We are fine, you nodded, pointing at the abyss of the street. Let's fill it up, let's replenish it with a whirlwind, let's hire an orchestra. This is what it means. To have heard of a round-mouthed snail. To know of a herd of goats drowned in the bottom of a pitch back lake leaving only their nails behind. It's crazy. Look at the hospital, it is over there. Between that lamppost and the Tropic of Cancer. The primary school, a little to the left, between the sun and the waxing crescent moon, drawn, yet with invisible contours. The concrete pigeon statue you used to climb is there, between that bin and the Arctic. Where the market used to be is now a tooth-gap on the map. Right in the middle of this market, you are sitting and thinking of a lake. You the compass. Hold on. The tram here is not a spectral tram, the tram is tram 24, let's confirm it, still functioning, with flesh and blood passengers en route for work. In thoughts I touch their sleeves. The sleeves of the park's shadows. I want to name them one by one, apparitions of empty playgrounds. There is an abbey in the middle of

this playground. It bursts out of nowhere, like a bud, right in the middle of the sandpit, a horse-chestnut. A basilica. We walk up to the zenith photographing the dome's inner construction. Then the outer construction. Photographing the architecture of air. A rooftop experience. It is just another terracotta rooftop experience.

TIM LIARDET

## THE GUAM FEVER

*after Attila József's 'Belated Lament'*

The nurse checks me every hour.

Father, my temperature goes up.

Though twenty years dead  
you seem to hover over me, nose to nose:

You never told me the war was over—  
and now I'm stuck on this island  
in the rags of my body.

You hover, you hover, but I'm so bony-faced  
and in this cap so lizard-like  
I can only talk, at speed, in lizard-talk...

"Yo...Yo...Yoooosh..."

I'm the sugar-ghost, the glucose-ghost, wading  
from the swamps at the jungle's edge...

That arm, only half formed. The lack of thumbs.  
That rifle, half melted away. That torso

unforming in the vapours of delirium,  
dissolving from the knees down, the knees up...

The war is over, you say, the war is over,  
the war was over long ago;  
you place your large palm on my brow.

About to break my sword,  
about to break my vow and break my word  
I have shed the debris of my army boots

and slipped back  
into my boiling,  
no, my icy feet.

JOHN McAULIFFE

## EXIT

*'a small, dumb, shivering event' – Attila József*

Much-delayed by faulty trams and a misread sign,  
we're halted,  
outside the museum, by a smashed tv on the  
footpath,  
fallen from who knows what heights, its screen  
a glittering edge on red wire and green and silver  
circuits,  
its crocked, fallen, akimbo openness a guess  
at how that morning it entertained the gathered  
family  
for an hour, in Dutch, while – on our way -  
we walked bitter squares,  
buying bread and milk and photographing iced-  
up fountains,  
you out of focus in your scarf, looking away at the  
elaborate  
railed windows, the art nouveau roofs and  
doorways.  
The casing we slowly left behind, with backward  
glance

and upward look at its unlikely origin. No need  
to go around stating the obvious, about  
endurance, or time:  
something landed, out of nowhere, out of the  
ordinary,  
through the same shaking light in which, later,  
at the *Sortie*  
diving for cover and catching up, everyone  
and their mother waits for us, subtitles  
disappearing into speech, proffering umbrellas.

JOHN MOLE

## BEQUESTS

From this life's end  
before we leave  
to our mothers we send  
ambiguous love,

to our fathers forgiveness  
with a full heart  
for the world's distress,  
its folly and hurt,

to what lies ahead,  
the pillow that waits  
on an earthy bed,  
a blessing of sorts,

to what stays behind  
a residual peace  
in which all may find  
oblivion or grace.

*Written after reading Attila József's 'Belated  
Lament' and 'By the Danube'*



CLARE POLLARD

**FUTURE WITHOUT HOPE  
(THAT I HOPE WILL NOT  
HAPPEN)**

*After Attila József*

Man ends at last in a town  
swilling, swirling, sunken,  
checks his insurance, poor sap,  
nods (of course), all hope gone.

I too am genuinely trying  
to see a movie-set, the unreal,  
as the sea's silvery body  
flops up on shore like a seal.

My heart is a paper boat,  
a gesture: trembling, tenuous.  
The rich live behind moats.  
Their astonishment is boundless.

CLARE POLLARD

## BEADS

*After Attila József*

Beads are fat around your neck,  
toad-mouths croaking in the lake.  
Droppings glisten,  
droppings glisten on its bank.

Round the rose of moon the melt,  
round your hips a shining belt.  
Knotted rope is  
knotted rope is round my throat.

Skirt is drifting round your thighs,  
in the bell the bell's tongue sways.  
Liquid mirror  
holds two pale and splaying trees.

Skirt is drifting round your thighs,  
in the bell the bell's tongue cries.  
Liquid mirror  
thick with mute and stinking leaves.

SAM RIVIERE

**(PREFACE)**

(this train ride makes me feel high up  
though actually it's at sea-level and  
there's no cold water but my coffee  
is hotter than the sun (I consistently feel  
I'm travelling around something not  
towards or beyond it (until some day  
a week or two from now when you come  
out of the shower wrapped in steam  
and two towels (one white one blue)  
and I can't imagine where it is you  
could be from (I found it comforting  
once imagining the earth from high up  
but don't dream of hotels made of windows  
anymore though my vertigo's worsened  
(in the cafe on the 52nd floor I thought  
I couldn't take my hands off the table top  
(from up here everything looks blue  
(it's inevitable we meet in the retelling  
or in other universities (that white scoop in  
the sky was ice-cream the daymoon))))))))))

CAROL RUMENS

# LAUNDRY BLUE

(after Attila József)

The creaky, loaded basket at her hip,  
Mum took the wash up to the drying-attic  
and I, a poet even then, stayed back  
to stamp around, and make my feelings known.

My howls meant, 'Don't leave me on my own.  
Don't hug those babies when you should be  
hugging  
me!' Mum didn't take the slightest notice.  
She went on lifting, stooping, reaching, pegging  
sheet after glistening sheet, slip upon slip,  
darned socks, gradated nurseries of the headless,  
and dancing shirts. That's how poor women love -  
with pegged lips and an ounce of indigo.

The wet shades still flit and flap above.  
I try to rub my tears off, to compose  
my roaring face, and...  
But Mum can't hold me now. Her grey hair blows  
across a sky of rain she's mixed with blue.

CAROL RUMENS

## EASTER SNOW

*"There was a man of double deed  
Sowed his garden full of seed..."*

Anon.

*"And so I've found my native country..."*

Attila József

There was a man of double deed  
Sowed his garden full of snow,  
Lit a stove he could not feed,  
Sired a child he could not grow,  
Who fashioned birds from wooden blocks,  
And when their wings fused night to dark,  
And when their songs escaped the locks,  
Broke some sticks and made an ark.  
But who could sail so deep a ship,  
Or marry beast to bolting beast,  
Dance as he would his flimsy whip  
Over the backs of the deceased?

Poets must tell the truth, you said:  
The poor must, too, although they lie.  
Helpless beside your iron bed,

Under the tunnel of the sky,  
We ask you softly what you need -  
Blue roller-skates? A football team?  
But you are far and far indeed.  
And all the stumbling magi bring  
Is the dreaming of a dream,  
Candle-light too black to bear,  
And lonely courtyards echoing  
The snowy wing-beats of your heart  
Towards the deficit of air -  
Predicted in your natal chart.

FIONA SAMPSON

## BY THE DANUBE

River gods are dark-  
fleshed, dressed  
in the suck and shadow  
of deep water.  
They are gods of sediment,  
of a grief that hangs and clots  
in clear currents.  
Under trees the river  
runs on expressionless  
as if turning its back,  
perhaps not in refusal  
but with compassion:  
it is smooth as the back  
of a catfish  
truffling the river bed.

Near Vrsac the Danube  
narrows over a weir  
that combs the river,  
splitting it  
then plaiting it,

organizing and abandoning the wide water  
in a sandy plain.

Look in vain for a river god  
among the concrete jetties  
on which a man in a cap  
sits fishing, and lovers  
stroll arm in arm  
before a fish supper  
on the terrace  
of the café nearby.

Dailiness and drama, the river  
spilling past jetties.  
Dailiness and drama, time spilling  
over concrete,  
the sandy path through  
nettles, the maize beyond.

*This is Illyria, lady*  
and here are the brown eyes  
and smooth brown skin  
of a river god  
who wears the person of my lover  
as, rapt  
and a little cold, we swim down  
among the weeds  
and ghosts.



GEORGE SZIRTES

## IN THE BANLIEUE

*After Attila József's 'A város peremén'*

We live on the edge of town  
in a banlieue of the time,  
in a square of the imagination  
haunted by crime,  
and when we are dead and buried  
we're buried in quicklime.

We're scum in the eyes of the world,  
drunks, addicts, whores, and pimps,  
but for any dozen of us that sways  
another dozen limps.  
We're not the housing the state invests in  
but the dumps on which it skimps.

Once inner city slums were home  
and that was far from great,  
but it was clear we wouldn't last  
on prime-site real estate.  
They threw us into this shanty town.  
Sir, they could hardly wait.

Don't come to us after dark, sir.  
Madam, avoid the street,  
there are some of us lurking here  
you wouldn't want to meet,  
and certain words in our loud mouths  
I don't care to repeat.

My baby brother has big wide eyes  
and he's a real sweet kid,  
but you wouldn't want to cross him now  
knowing what he once did,  
you don't want to open those big wide eyes  
to see under the lid.

The lamppost, the broken window,  
the body that you pass,  
they're what you get from hanging around  
in showers of broken glass,  
nor is the park all green and bright,  
nor is it all grass.

The ceiling may have fallen in,  
the roof be gaping wide,  
our doors may well be boarded up

but we are still inside.  
We burn old furniture for heat,  
we burn our hearts for pride.

And there are those in government  
who need someone to blame.  
You raise the baton and you charge  
you load your gun, take aim:  
but sinner and sinned-against turn out  
sometimes to be the same.

We're not much like you, I admit,  
we're foreigners at heart:  
we're not to be invited home,  
we must be kept apart.  
We're a disgrace, we stink and gob,  
we bellow, piss, and fart.

I'm not of your tribe, that is true,  
the bad guy never is:  
every state must name and shame  
its own worst enemies.  
Whoever makes speeches in the house,  
will know that I am his.

I am a guest of your good grace,  
I owe the state its due,  
I freely admit that I'm a wreck  
and all you say is true,  
but night is no darker over me  
than it is over you.

I know these streets the way I know  
the back of my grubby hand.  
I see the ambitions of the great  
and know the future's planned.  
I know what I stand to gain by it  
and how much I can stand.

See, I'm in the roll of it now,  
I started pretty raw,  
but, sir, the verse I offer you  
is minted without flaw,  
nor do these perfect fingernails  
resemble a bloody claw.

Myself, I'm not a slummer,  
I'm not your caricature.  
I'm not the sickness on the ward

for which you find a cure.  
Am I the face in my own mirror?  
Frankly I'm not sure.

The man who writes these lines for me  
thinks he's some kind of scribe.  
I wouldn't trust him. Nor is he  
a member of my tribe,  
but I've no cash and can't afford  
a better class of bribe.

He too is scared as shit, poor sod.  
I'm not sure he can hear  
as clearly as I'd like him to.  
I blame this filthy beer  
that makes my hand shake as I wish  
both him and you good cheer.

TOM WARNER

## DANUBE

Mother, I'm a bridge across the river, my hands  
and skinny wrists grown out of rolled up sleeves.

Father, my feet punch through the concrete plinth  
and find the depth of gritty water underneath,

and all I leave to mark the spot is a metal jacket,  
bunched up here, they'll say, exactly how he left it.







NOTES



ON  
CONTRIBUTORS

## DEREK ADAMS



Derek Adams is a professional photographer and one of the organisers of the Essex Poetry Festival. His poems have appeared in magazines in the UK & abroad, including *Magma*, *Railto*, *Smiths Knoll*. He was the winner of BBC Wildlife Poet of the Year 2006 and Poetry Monthly Booklet award 2004. He has published three collections of poetry: *Unconcerned but not indifferent – the life of Man Ray* (Ninth Arrondissement Press 2006), *Everyday Objects, Chance Remarks* (Littoral Press 2005) & *Postcards to Olympus* (Poetry Monthly 2004). His interests in poetry and photography have combined in a series of photographic portraits of poets, accompanied by their poems about capturing images. A travelling exhibition of the project has been seen at the Poetry Café, London, The Ledbury Poetry Festival, Chelmsford Library and Fondation A.N.P.Q. France. He is currently taking an MA in Creative and Life Writing at Goldsmiths University.  
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## POLLY CLARK



Polly Clark was born in Toronto in 1968 and brought up in Lancashire, Cumbria and the Borders of Scotland. She has worked variously as a zookeeper, a teacher of English in Hungary and in publishing at Oxford University press. In 1997 she won an Eric Gregory Award for her poetry. Her first collection, *Kiss* (Bloodaxe Books 2000), was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation. Her second, *Take Me With You* (Bloodaxe Books, 2005), a Poetry Book Society Choice, was shortlisted for the TS Eliot Prize. *Farewell My Lovely* (Bloodaxe Books, 2009) is her third collection. She has also published short stories. Polly Clark now lives on the West Coast of Scotland and is a Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Edinburgh University.

Polly Clark also devised and still leads the Fielding Programme for new writers at Cove Park, which comprises a range of retreats and mentored residencies. She is a judge for the Eric Gregory Awards.

## ANTONY DUNN



Antony Dunn has published three collections of poems, *Pilots and Navigators* (Oxford University Press 1998), *Flying Fish* (Carcenet OxfordPoets 2002) and *Bugs* (Carcenet OxfordPoets 2009). He has worked on a number of translation projects with poets from Hungary, The Netherlands, China and Israel. He is Artistic Director of the Bridlington Poetry Festival. Website: [www.antonydunn.org](http://www.antonydunn.org)

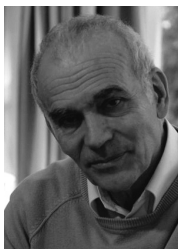
## JACQUELINE GABBITAS



Jacqueline Gabbitas was born in Nottinghamshire and completed her BA(Hons) in English and Film and MA in Writing at Sheffield Hallam University. Her poetry and short stories have been published in magazines and anthologies including: *Poetry Review*, *Oxford Magazine*, *Magma*, *Staple*, *New Fairy Tales*, *Entering the Tapestry* (Enitharmon Press, 2003) *Images of Women* (Arrowhead Press, 2006), and *Well Versed* (Hearing Eye, 2008) among others.

She was the Marketing Manager for Enitharmon Press (2007-2011) and a lecturer at the University of East London (2006-2012). In February 2012 she was awarded an Arts Council Grant to complete her first full collection, a book-length poem *Grass*. Her new chapbook, *Earthworks* was published by Stonewood Press in September 2012.

## GEORGE GÖMÖRI



George Gömöri, born in Budapest in 1934, is a poet and translator. Gömöri has lived in England since 1956, when he had to leave Hungary after the revolution. He co-translates Hungarian poetry into English with Cambridge poet Clive Wilmer. Their collaborations have included an edition of his own collection of poems *Polishing October* as well as works by Miklós Radnóti, György Petri and János Pilinszky. He is Emeritus Fellow of Darwin College, Cambridge. His literary prizes include the Salvatore Quasimodo Prize, the Ada Negri Prize and the Pro Cultura Hungarica. He is a member of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (Cracow) and the recipient of several Hungarian medals.

## WAYNE HOLLOWAY-SMITH



Wayne Holloway-Smith was born in Wiltshire. His debut pocketbook, *Beloved, in case you've been wondering*, was published by Donut Press in 2011. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *City State: New London Poetry*, *Magma*, *Erotic Review*, *The Wolf*, *New Writing*, *Stop Sharpening Your Knives 5*, *Lung Jazz: Young British Poets for Oxfam*. In 2009 he was short listed for a Society of Authors Eric Gregory Award. He lives in London and is currently working towards a PhD in English at Brunel University.

## ÁGNES LEHÓCZKY

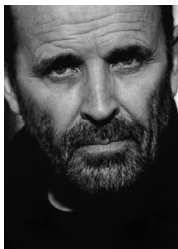


Ágnes Lehoczky is a Hungarian-born poet and translator. She completed her Masters in English and Hungarian Literature at Pázmány Péter University of Hungary in 2001 and an MA with distinction in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia in 2006. She holds a PhD in Critical and Creative Writing, also from the UEA. She has two short

poetry collections in Hungarian, *Station X* (2000) and *Medallion* (2002), published by Universitas, Hungary. Her first full collection, *Budapest to Babel*, was published by Egg Box in 2008. She was the winner of the Daniil Pashkoff Prize 2010 in poetry and the inaugural winner of the Jane Martin Prize for Poetry at Girton College, Cambridge, in 2011.

Her collection of essays on the poetry of Ágnes Nemes Nagy, *Poetry, the Geometry of Living Substance*, was published in 2011 by Cambridge Scholars and a libretto of hers was commissioned by Writers' Centre Norwich for The Voice Project at Norwich Cathedral as part of the Norfolk and Norwich Festival 2011. She currently teaches creative writing at the University of Sheffield.

## TIM LIARDET



Tim Liardet has produced seven collections of poetry. His third collection *Competing with the Piano Tuner* was a Poetry Book Society Special Commendation and short-listed for the Whitbread Poetry Prize and his fourth – *To the God of Rain* – a Poetry Book Society Recommendation for Spring 2003. *The Blood Choir*, his fifth collection, won an Arts Council England Writer's Award as a collection-in-progress, was a Poetry

Book Society Recommendation for Summer 2006 and shortlisted for the TS Eliot Prize for best collection of that year. His pamphlet – *Priest Skear* – appeared last year and was the Poetry Book Society Pamphlet Choice for Winter 2010. *The Storm House*, his seventh collection, was published by Carcanet in June 2011. *Madame Sasoo Goes Bathing*, a pamphlet, in 2012; his next full collection from Carcanet – *Portrait in the Gaudi Mirror* – is due in September 2014; his *New and Selected Poems*, from the same publisher, in September 2015. He is Professor of Poetry at Bath Spa University.

## JOHN McAULIFFE



John McAuliffe is an Irish poet. His third book *Of All Places* was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation in Autumn 2011. He teaches poetry at the Centre for New Writing at the University of Manchester where he also co-edits the Manchester Review.



## JOHN MOLE



In addition to writing poetry for both children and adults, John Mole (b. 1941) is an accomplished jazz clarinettist, and has been known to combine poetry and jazz with other poet-musicians such as Roy Fisher and John Lucas. He has won several prizes for his poetry, including an Eric Gregory award, the Cholmondeley Award and the Signal Award, has been Writer in Residence at Magdalene College, Cambridge, and is currently the Poetry Society's Poet in Residence to the City of London. He trained as a teacher and has worked in both America and Britain, and still often returns to schools to lead poetry workshops and readings. John Mole's many poems for children include "Variations on an old Rhyme" and "The Balancing Man", both of which discuss political issues in a manner relevant to young people. He wrote the libretto to the opera *Alban*, a community opera composed by Tom Wiggall and performed in May 2009 in St Albans Cathedral. A reading of his poetry for the Poetry Archive appeared on CD.

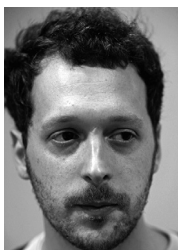
## CLARE POLLARD



Clare Pollard was born in Bolton in 1978 and currently lives in London. Her first collection of poetry, *The Heavy-Petting Zoo* (Bloodaxe, 1998) was written whilst she was still at school, and received an Eric Gregory Award. It was followed by *Bedtime* (Bloodaxe, 2002) and *Look, Clare! Look!* (Bloodaxe, 2005). A CD of Clare reading her work is available from The Poetry Archive. Her fourth collection *Changeling*, was published in June 2011, and is a Poetry Book Society Recommendation. In 2003 she won a Society of Authors travel award and an Arts Council writer's award. *The Independent* named her one of their Top Writers Under 30.

She has toured widely with the British Council, including a residency in Beijing, and she has been involved in numerous translation projects, including the Converging Lines project in Hungary in 2004 and most recently co-translating Poems by Caasha Lul Mohamud Yusuf (Poetry Translation Centre 2012). Clare's latest translation – *Ovid's Heroines* – will be published by Bloodaxe in 2013.

## SAM RIVIERE



Sam Riviere began to write poetry while at the Norwich School of Art and Design, and completed a Masters at Royal Holloway. His poems have appeared in various publications and competitions since 2005. He co-edits the anthology series *Stop Sharpening Your Knives*, and is currently working towards a PhD at the University of East Anglia. He was a recipient of a 2009 Eric Gregory Award.

## CAROL RUMENS



Carol Rumens has published a number of collections of poetry, including, most recently, *Blind Spots* (Seren, 2008) and *De Chirico's Threads* (Seren, 2010). Her awards include the Alice Hunt Bartlett Prize (with Thomas McCarthy), the Prudence Farmer Prize, and a Cholmondeley Award. *Holding Pattern* (Blackstaff, 1998), was short-listed for the Belfast City Arts Award. She has published translations, short stories, a novel

(*Plato Park*, Chatto, 1988) and a trio of poetry lectures, *Self into Song* (Bloodaxe Books/Newcastle University, 2007). She writes a regular poetry blog for *Guardian Books Online*, “Poem of the Week,” and teaches creative writing at Bangor and Hull Universities. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

## FIONA SAMPSON



She has published fifteen books – including poetry, philosophy of language and studies of writing process – of which the most recent are: *Rough Music* (Carcenet 2010), *Common Prayer* (Carcenet 2007, shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize, poem shortlisted for a Forward Prize) and *Writing: Self and Reflexivity* (with Celia Hunt; Macmillan, 2005). She has been widely translated, with eight books in translation. She has received the Newdigate Prize, writers’ awards from the Arts Councils of England and Wales and the Society of Authors and, in the United States, the Literary Review’s Charles Angoff Award. ‘Trumpeldor Beach’ was shortlisted for the 2006 Forward Prize for best single poem. She was educated at the Universities of Oxford and Nijmegen and has a PhD in the philosophy of language. She was Arts and Humanities Research Council Research Fellow

at Oxford Brookes University from 2002-2005. Fiona Sampson is internationally recognised for her pioneering residencies in health care and contributes to *The Guardian*, *The Irish Times* and other publications. Her translations include Jaan Kaplinski, an anthology of younger Central European poets, and *Orient Express*, of which she was founding editor. She was the editor of *Poetry Review* from 2005 to 2012. She gave the 2010 Newcastle Poetry Lectures under the title 'Music Lessons'. In 2009, she received a Cholmondeley Award and became a Fellow of the Royal Society for Literature.

## GEORGE SZIRTES



George Szirtes is a Hungarian born British poet, writing in English, as well as a translator from the Hungarian language into English. Szirtes has lived in the United Kingdom for most of his life.

Born in Budapest on 29 November 1948, Szirtes came to England as a refugee in 1956 aged 8. He was brought up in London and studied Fine Art in London and Leeds. His poems began appearing in national magazines in 1973 and his first book, *The Slant Door*, was published in 1979. It won the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize the following year. He has won a variety of prizes for his work, most

recently the 2004 T. S. Eliot Prize, for his collection *Reel* and the Bess Hokin Prize for poems in *Poetry* magazine, 2008. His translations from Hungarian poetry, fiction and drama have also won numerous awards. His latest book *Bad Machine* is a Poetry Society Choice.

George Szirtes lives in Wymondham, Norfolk, and teaches at the University of East Anglia. He is married to the artist Clarissa Upchurch, with whom he ran The Starwheel Press and who has been responsible for most of his book jacket images. Her interest in the city of Budapest has led to over twenty years of exploration of the city, its streets, buildings and courtyards in paintings and drawings.

## TOM WARNER



Tom Warner was born in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, but now lives in Norwich. He won an Eric Gregory Award in 2001, a Faber New Poets Award in 2010, the ink-sweat-and-tears Norfolk Prize in 2009 and 2010, the Escalator Prize in 2011 and the Plough Prize in 2011.

A pamphlet of Tom's poetry was published by Faber & Faber in 2010.



INSPIRED BY HUNGARIAN POETRY:  
BRITISH POETS IN CONVERSATION  
WITH ATTILA JÓZSEF

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Attila József's poems 'Reménytelenül', 'Óda', 'Kései sirató', 'A Dunánál', 'Karóval jöttél' and their English translations 'Without hope', 'Ode', 'Belated lament', 'By the Danube', 'You came with a stick...' (pp. 16-47) have been used here as they appeared in the anthology *The Lost Rider – A bilingual anthology* published by Corvina Books Ltd. Budapest in 1997.

