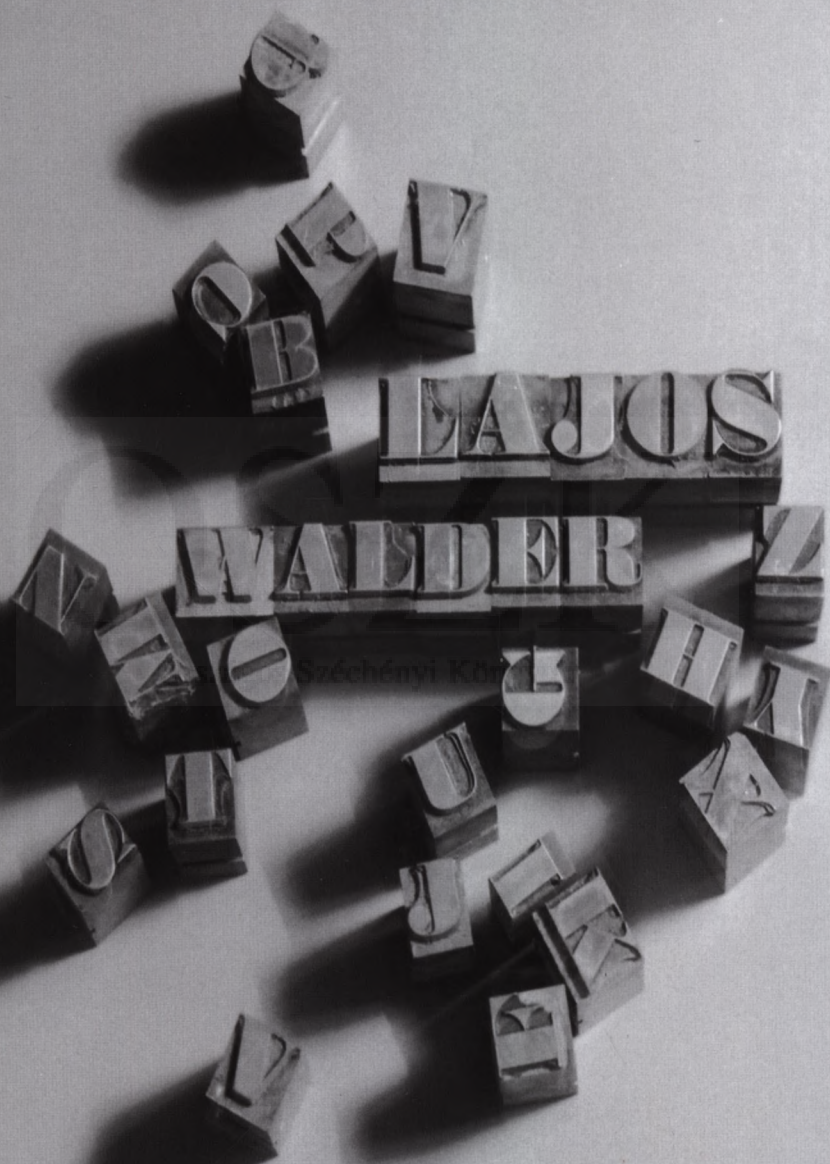


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OSZK

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

WE, THE TWENTY-FIVE LETTERS
OF THE ALPHABET



English Translations from the Selected Poems of the late Lajos Walder

WE, THE TWENTY-FIVE LETTERS
OF THE ALPHABET

LAJOS WALDER



Dr Lajos Walder, Budapest, c.1943.

LAJOS WALDER

WE, THE TWENTY-FIVE
LETTERS
OF THE ALPHABET

*Translated from the Hungarian
with an
Introduction and Notes by Agnes Walder*



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My collaboration with my late uncle, Imre Walder, lasted over two decades. It was a deeply loving and precious relationship in which his help to me was immeasurable. My Uncle's faultless memory of personal matters and the breadth of his historical and literary knowledge of their times, made it possible for me not to err with nuance. It also enabled me to write both detailed and accurate information in the notes to the poems. I miss him, particularly now that the English publications have eventuated.

My love and thanks to:

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LOVE HAS PRESERVED
YOUR MEMORY

OSZK

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

INTRODUCTION

AGNES WALDER

I

IN 1987 MY FAMILY in Sydney received a letter and a tape-recorded cassette from one of my aunts in Budapest. The letter stated that there had been a one hour program on Radio Budapest about my father and his poetry. She knew that we would want to hear it, so she taped it. The program was put to air by Mr Géza Hegedüs who was, by then, the famous old man of Hungarian literature. He was a writer/historian who also taught drama at university and was one of the foremost literary critics of his times. Mr Hegedüs had also been a friend of my father in their youth. The radio program was entitled, 'Remembering the memorable Lajos Vándor'.

My father's real name was Lajos Walder. 'Vándor', meaning 'Wanderer', was his chosen literary pseudonym. 'But who remembers him today?', lamented Mr Hegedüs:

Our broadest literary history doesn't mention his name, and even in the *Lexicon of Literature* there are only a few lines which inform us that Lajos (Walder) Vándor (1913-1945) was a poet; that fascism took him away; and that since then all trace of him had disappeared. Yet it is not so much that all trace of him has been lost, but rather that the trace of his exciting poetry has been lost, with its strongly individual voice which, in a moment of history, became popular and highly esteemed from our podiums.

Mr Hegedüs went on to claim that my father was an extraordinarily gifted poet, whose work was so unique that it hardly had any relatives:

What a sensation it was for us to hear that particular voice, which in his poems awakened gaiety in us while reminding us of our deepest anxieties . . . [His] outstandingly recitable and highly effective free verse was well known during the 1930s because the most popular presenters of the time were keen to recite it.

I feel it is my job, . . . to let the reading public know that there was a poet called Lajos Vándor, who lived for just under 32 years, who was the most credible voice to express the times between the two world wars. Without the totally individualistic voice of this artist, the overall picture of that time is not complete.

Mr Hegedüs first met my father in 1932. Hegedüs was then one of five twenty year-old young men (most of whom later became famous writers in Hungary) who started a literary periodical called *Anonymous*. He fondly remembered the occasion of their meeting and reported it thus:

One afternoon the door of the editorial office was opened by a round-faced young man who was, by the standards of those times, dressed in a bodge fashion. His manner was provocatively arrogant. He wasn't tall, but he was all muscle and under his slicked black hair his face was smiling. I remember well, he said the following, word for word:

My name is Lajos Vándor. I am a poet, a law student and a trainee worker at the knitting mills. To the proletarians I am a rotten bourgeois; to the bourgeoisie I am a stinking proletarian; to the petit-bourgeoisie I am an evil anarchist and to the anarchists I am a cowardly petit-bourgeois. And everybody is right, whatever they say about me. But I wrote a few masterpieces – these, the poets and les belles ames would call prose, and the prose writers and modern aesthetes would call poems. Take them and eat them, read them, and publish them; but first give me a cigarette because I left my cash register at home and I don't have four cents in my pocket to buy a single fag.

As I was reading his poems I was gripped with the feeling that I had rarely sensed such a completely accurate expression of our times. This was fright, anxiety and profound indignation mixed with bizarre humour.

The poet was then just nineteen years old, and one of the poems he handed to the other young men was 'We the Twenty-five Letters of the Alphabet . . .'. Mr Hegedüs's assessment of his work in 1987 included the following remarks:

His uniquely voiced poetry was written with enormous compositional care. He carefully planned what appeared to be careless and polished it until it was exactly as careless as he intended it to be.

He lived not quite 32 years. He had two volumes of poetry published. Their content is 50 poems. But there is not a single inferior one among them. Once, with his usual self-sarcasm, he said to me: 'I only write my selected works.'

In an era of entirely pessimistic hopelessness, Vándor heralded gentle humanity and tried to find some measure of comfort in the joy of knowing how to laugh. It is with this laughter, this manly humour, that he rose above his own despair. Lajos Vándor lived with this moral superiority for nearly 32 years, when, with the

knowledge of life regained, he died immediately. It is as if he had written the theme in one of his sadly amusing poems.

II

My father's first volume of poetry, *Heads or Tails*, was published by *Anonymous* in Budapest in 1933, when he was twenty years old. Five years later, in 1938, his second volume of poetry, *Group Portrait*, was published by Cserépfalvi of Budapest. These are the books which contain the 50 poems mentioned in the radio program. There were to be no further publications in my father's life-time: after 1938 the works of Jewish artists could not be published in Hungary.

III

My father, Lajos Walder, was born in June 1913, in Budapest. Both of his parents were Jewish. He was the first child of his mother and the fourth child of his father, who had been widowed earlier and left with three small children. These three children, my father's two sisters and older brother, were raised as Catholics, in accordance with the wishes of their mother, who was a Catholic. My father's younger brother Imre was born two and a half years after my father.

My grandfather, who served in the Austro-Hungarian army in an administrative capacity throughout World War I, was forcibly retired from the army without a pension during an upsurge of anti-semitism in 1919. He died early, when my father was only 11 years old. This left the family very poor. My grandmother, in spite of enormous hardships, was very determined to raise all the children together. For many years they led a hand-to-mouth existence. But they were a close-knit family, of mixed religions, where everyone fasted on the Jewish Day of Atonement and also celebrated Christmas.

By the time my father obtained his baccalaureate, the 'Numerus Clausus', which severely restricted the entry of Jewish students into university, was already in effect in Hungary. Since he had completed his examinations with straight distinctions, he was one of the handful of Jewish students able to enter university. From there he graduated as a Doctor of Law in 1937. In the meantime, he wrote poetry, published and edited the highly respected literary monthly entitled *Cross-section* which appeared on the news-stands for the then record time of two years. He worked as a factory hand in order to earn a living, and also worked as a children's program presenter on the radio, where he wrote the fairytales presented in these programs. In addition, always in the hope of trying to make a living out of writing, he wrote numerous short-stories, many of which appeared in other magazines and journals. But he saw himself, first and foremost, as a poet.

IV

My father married my mother, Eva Lustig in 1939. In the same year, the Jewish Laws came into effect in Hungary. Jewish professionals were barred from practising their professions. My father, who had completed his Articles of Law less than a year earlier, was only able to get a job as a labourer in a stocking factory. It was then that he had a calling card made with the following wording:

Dr Lajos Vándor
factory-hand and lyrical poet

In 1940, my parents' first child, my brother Peter, was born. In the same year 'Forced Labour' came into effect. In World War II, Hungary was an ally of Germany. But forced labour was a uniquely Hungarian phenomenon. Not considered good enough to serve in the Hungarian army, Jewish males between the ages of 18 and 60, were to serve in forced labour battalions. Avoidance was punishable by death. In 1942, following the great Russian breakthrough near the River Don, a large proportion of the forced labour battalions were sent to the front with the Hungarian army. The unarmed Jewish battalions were sent ahead of the army to clear minefields and were annihilated almost to a man. My maternal uncle was killed in this way on the Russian front.

Until the early part of 1942, my father and his younger brother Imre Walder served in the same forced labour battalion. In May of that year, the battalion had too many men. Because my father was already a family man, he was one of the few who were transferred to another battalion in the vicinity of Budápest. So at the time of the 'six months long Ukrainian Front', this was considered very good news – a reprieve. My Uncle Imre, who survived the war, was eventually captured by the advancing Russian troops. He returned from Russian captivity at the end of 1945.

My father's new battalion in Budapest was not fully utilised and he was able to live at home during much of that time. By that stage, holding down even a factory job between call-ups was out of the question. It was during that period that he must have written his three plays entitled: *Vase of Pompeii*, *Tyrtaeus* and *Below Freezing*. And so, today, there is the thought that, in those already terrible and anxiety-filled times, he lived at least partly, in the self-made hope of seeing them performed one day.

V

The Germans invaded Hungary on 19 March 1944. Ghettoisation and systematic deportation of the Jewish population (starting with the provinces) began immediately. In early November 1944, when the Russians had already reached the outskirts of Budapest, all locally stationed forced labour units were herded towards Austria on numerous death marches. My father reached Mauthausen. From there, in the final few weeks of the war, he was marched to the Death Camp of Gunskirchen.

Gunskirchen was liberated on 7 May by the Americans. My father, along with some of the other survivors, (including Mr Hegedüs), walked through the open gates and accepted a tin of meat from an American soldier. By then, they had had nearly nothing to eat for weeks. Almost immediately after he ate, my father developed terrible stomach cramps. A few hours later, he died on the straw laid down in a makeshift hospital.

VI

When my father died, his mother, my own pregnant mother, my brother Peter, then aged 5, and my 18 months-old self, were still in the Budapest ghetto. His second daughter, my sister Nina, was born just one month later, when the house-to-house liberation of the Budapest ghetto had already been accomplished. Mercifully, at that time, the family had not yet received news of his death.

VII

In the difficult postwar years in Budapest, my mother tried repeatedly to have my father's work published again, or at least to have his plays performed. Most of these efforts were heartbreaking and all were unsuccessful because in Hungary, from the early 1950s, no literature was considered relevant unless it had communist themes. My father's work, with its profoundly humanistic themes and strong focus on the individual, did not meet those requirements. Even less so, since he had an equal contempt for fascism and communism (as is manifested in his poem entitled 'Last Human Being').

VIII

After the war, my mother Eva married Alexander Endrey, who was the most wonderful second father to Peter, Nina and myself. My younger sister Linda was born to this marriage.

During the 1956 uprising, one very cold and frightening November night, the six of us, in just the clothes we were wearing, and one haversack for the greatest essentials between us, walked across 'no man's land' into Austria. Some months later we were able to emigrate to Sydney, Australia. My uncle, Imre Walder, also decided to settle in Sydney with his family.

In 1961, my grandmother Ida Walder was able to follow us. When she left Hungary it was still in the communist era and the allocation of things she could bring with her was severely restricted and closely scrutinized. However, no one suspected that the bundles of age-old, yellowed and torn manuscripts she packed in her trunk were anything other than the sentimental memorabilia of an old lady. And so my father's unpublished manuscripts reached Sydney.

In the many years that followed, the unspoken responsibility of one day achieving publication of his work in Hungary, was left to us his children. Mr Hegedüs's 1987 radio program, put to air just as the 40 year old censorship was collapsing

in Hungary, provided us with an opportunity. With his help we commenced negotiations with a publisher in Budapest to have my father's work republished.

Two years later, in 1989, a volume of my father's selected poems entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You* ('Egy Költő Élt Itt Közöttetek') was published in Budapest by Maecenas Publishers. This volume contains 105 poems in all – the 50 poems which were published in my father's lifetime, and an additional 55 poems which had never before been published. One year later, in 1990, Maecenas published two of my father's plays, the *Vase of Pompeii* and *Tyrtaeus*. I have since then translated both of these plays into English.

Between the commencement of negotiations in 1987 and the publication of the poems, there were countless phone calls and correspondence with the publisher. The formidable effort of realising these publications from the other side of the world was possible because my brother and two sisters helped me to achieve it.

In 1989 I was in Budapest when *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You* was launched. Together with my uncle, the late Imre Walder, I appeared on Hungarian television, for a discussion of my father's works. In that interview, I said that 'the editing of my father's work was excruciatingly painful, but that the overriding courage to do it came from the thought that one must not allow evil to triumph over his work'.

In fact, the editing and organising of his unpublished manuscripts which began before 1980 was so painful that I often had to stop for weeks on end to endure it. This is reflected in my own poem, entitled 'In the Fullness of Time', which concludes this volume.

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

VIII

Some Thoughts Concerning my Father's Work and its Translation into English

Mr Hegedüs was not the only Hungarian critic to claim that my father's poetry differs from traditional Hungarian poetry. Recently, I re-read some 1938 critiques of his work when *Group Portrait* was published.

Mr Gábor Thurzó, a later well-known novelist and dramaturge wrote:

Lajos Vándor has neither ancestor nor partner in Hungarian literature. He is a poet, without a doubt a lyricist through and through, yet one whose every line and every poetic breath is pure heresy, pure rebellion against the accustomed forms of poetry.

The truth of this assessment provides personal cause for rejoicing because it contains the essence of my own opportunity to successfully translate *most* of his works into English. Hungarian is a very different language from English – it is far more 'long-winded' than English. And yet today, in 2004, I marvel at the economy of his expressions written six or seven decades ago in Hungarian, and often have a tough time keeping up with it in English.

At the age of nineteen, in the concluding line of his poem entitled 'I am a Wanderer', he described his identity as 'the lone wanderer of the eternal other' and stayed true to this claim – even in his plays, which were the last of his writings. In an era of sanctimonious determinism, his poems abound with paradoxes which highlight ever present otherness – other points of view.

Always an iconoclast, he wanted to break down fallacies – to bring about an awareness of the need to examine the 'old', to show up its errors or downright lies, and not to continue with the resulting misery just because it had been good enough for the last few hundred years. After every disappointment he is always examining, and then communicating the jolting findings, in a desperate hope to enlighten. In an era which actively suppressed and discouraged individuality, he affirmed that the only 'way out' was via the evolution of the individual.

He was an early feminist. A topic to which he often returned was men's inadequate understanding and treatment of women. Generally speaking, he regarded them as emotionally in advance of men. Quite early, he considered androgyny to be a natural and indispensable part of his own manhood. (His poem entitled 'Arm-in-arm' was written in his early twenties).

He was contemptuous of the many who still wrote 'pretty' poetry (as expressed in 'Obligatory Spring Poem') and his break with the most esteemed poetic traditions was deliberate. He wanted to use everyday language in poetry. Yet, behind his 'ordinary speaking voice', there is always a potent philosophical content within his poetry.

His desire to travel was never realised (excepting a short trip to Vienna and my parents' honeymoon in Yugoslavia – a wedding gift from my mother's uncle) because of chronically poor financial circumstances. But he was an unstoppable reader, not only of literature, but of a wide variety of other topics. Consequently, he had an educated curiosity about every corner of the world (including Australia).

My translations of his work are not yet finished. I started them with the nagging fear that after their successful reception in 1989 and 1990 in Budapest, knowledge of his work in Hungary would again be restricted to literary scholars and academics. But there was another, even more compelling priority: that his grandchildren, who were born in Australia and do not speak Hungarian, and his great-grandchildren and their descendants, should be able to read his work.

AGNES WALDER, May 2004

OSZK

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

VÁNDOR VAGYOK

— modern szerzetes

ki kétsoros zakóban vándorol.
Mindent csak egyformán szeretek;
a réteken házakról álmodom
s a városban örökzöld fenyőkről.
Évezredek vándora vagyok,
Rómában germán voltam
és német Flandriában.
Hordtam tógát és térdszalagrendet,
s ahol voltam,
mindig idegen voltam, —
és otthon is, — mindig csak idegen.
Vándor vagyok, — léha modern költő,
ódát két pengőért is írok,
s irodalmi füleket ne sértsen,
ez egyszerű halk ajánlatom:
négyoldalas novellát tízpengőért, —
sajátkezüleg házhoz szállítok.

Vándor vagyok, — modern szerzetes
ki kétsoros zakóban vándorol.
Kufár voltam Jézus-templomában
s könyvkiadó az Akadémián, —
mindig más és mindig idegen voltam,
mindig más, mint saját magam:
Rómában germán,
német Flandriában,
papíron írás,
írásban betű,
a réteken házakat tetőztem,
az aszfaltra szórtam a magot, —
és magamnak is idegen vagyok:
mert német harcos voltam Flandriában
s a háboruban fegyverszünet, —
mindig egészen más voltam magamnál,
zakóban vándorló szerzetes.

I AM A WANDERER

– a modern monk
who wanders in a double-breasted suit.
All things I like just equally;
in the fields I dream about houses
and in the city about evergreen pines.
I am a wanderer of millennia,
in Rome a Goth
a German in Flanders,
I wore a toga and the Order of the Garter
and wherever I was
I was always a stranger –
and at home too – always just a stranger.
I am a wanderer – a frivolous modern poet,
an ode I write for as little as two forints,
and let this quiet, simple offer of mine
not offend literary ears:
for ten forints, a four page short-story
I will personally home deliver.

I am a wanderer – a modern monk
who wanders in a double-breasted suit.
I was a trader in the temple of Jesus
and a publisher in Academia –
I was always the other and always a stranger
always other than my own self:
in Rome a Goth
a German in Flanders
on paper the writing,
in writing the letter,
in the fields I roofed houses,
onto the asphalt I sowed the seeds
and even to myself I am a stranger:
because I was a German fighter in Flanders
and armistice in war –
I was always wholly other than myself
the monk who wanders in a double breasted suit.

In Rome I recited Greek poems,
kissed the hands of hetaerae –
I was always the other and always a stranger;
a petit-bourgeois in the nightclub
and in the soup-kitchen a dandy.
I am a wanderer – a modern monk
who wanders in a double-breasted suit
who would have liked to walk naked,
and knots his tie with care.
I was always the other and always a stranger
always other than my own self:
in Rome a Goth, a German in Flanders
on paper the writing, in writing the letter –
in the fields I roofed houses,
onto the asphalt I sowed the seeds
and even to myself I am a stranger.

I am a wanderer – a modern monk
the lone wanderer of the eternal other.

MI, AZ ÁBÉCÉ HUSZONÖT BETŰJE . . .

Mi, abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
az ábécé huszonöt betűje, —
szomorúan vonjuk le a következtetéseket arról,
ami Európában történik
és hajlandók vagyunk kimondani, ha kell
az általános betűsztrájkot,
még a kínai ábécé negyvenezer betűjére is, —
ha az európai államok
nem változtatják meg
a követségeiknek adott titkos külpolitikai prospektusait.
Mi, akik egyformán szolgáljuk az Angol világbirodalmat
és a Magyar Királyságot,
a harmadik Francia Köztársaságot és az Orosz Szovjetet,
vádoljuk a világ lelkismeretének sajtófőnökét azzal,
hogy egymásután
a legsúlyosabb sajtóhibákat követi el.
Mi, akik germán vagy latin alakban,
Nyugat minden hadüzenetében és békekötésében jelen voltunk,
vádoljuk a történelemírókat,
akik meghamisítva az emberiség történelmét, —
véres nemzeti történelmet akarnak írni.
Mi, akik voltunk Courths-Mahler regény és Zarathustra,
Shakespeare vígjáték és Racine tragédia,
tiltakozunk az új hadüzenetek ellen,
amelyeknek a tervezete már minden állam
hadügyminisztériumában fellelhető.
Mi, az ábécé huszonöt betűje,
akik az ólombányászok és betűöntők jóvoltából
a svéd óvodásgyerekek énekkönyveiben vagyunk
és az olasz anatómia könyvekben,
akik a Bibliában vagyunk
és a hadirokkantak igazolványaiban, —
tiltakozunk minden siffrirozott távirat
és minden politikai becsstelenség ellen,
amelyről mi tudunk, de mások nem tudnak,
mert:
nem akarunk a veszteséglistákon újra mint nevek szerepelni,
amelyet az özvegyek és az árvák
könnyes szemekkel olvasnak el.
Mi, az ábécé huszonöt betűje,
az A-tól az Ó-n keresztül a Z-ig
követeljük a világbékét és követeljük a jogegyenlőséget,
és hajlandók vagyunk lemondva autonómiánkról,
csupán nyole betűvé összezsugorodni, —
hogy a pornográf és detektívregények helyett,
beleégessük az emberek szemébe ezt a szót, hogy:
Szeretet.

‘WE, THE TWENTY-FIVE LETTERS
OF THE ALPHABET . . . ’

We, abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz,
the twenty-five letters of the alphabet
sadly draw our conclusions
about the current turn of events in Europe
and are willing, if need be,
to proclaim a general letter strike
even onto the forty thousand letters
of the Chinese alphabet –
if the European nations
do not alter
the top secret foreign policy directives
handed to their ambassadors.
We, who equally serve the British Empire
and the Hungarian Monarchy,
the Third French Republic and the Russian Soviet,
accuse the chief editor of the world’s conscience
of successively committing
the gravest printing errors.
We, who in Germanic or Latin shape, were present
in every declaration of war and every peace treaty of the West
accuse the historiographers
who, by falsifying the history of humanity,
want to write bloody national chronicles.
We, who have been a Courths-Mahler romance
and the Zarathustra,
a Shakespeare comedy and a tragedy by Racine,
protest against the new declarations of war
whose plans can already be detected
in every nation’s war ministry.
We, the twenty-five letters of the alphabet
who, thanks to the good work
of the lead miners and the type casters,
are in the music books
of the Swedish kindergarten children
and in Italian anatomy books,
who are in the Bible

and in the identity-papers of the war amputees,
protest against every enciphered telegram
and every political swindle,
which we know about but which others are not aware of,
because:

we do not want to appear again
as names on the casualty lists
that the widows and the orphans
will read through tear-filled eyes.
We, the twenty-five letters of the alphabet,
from 'A' through 'O' to 'Z'
demand world peace and demand equality before the law
and having relinquished our autonomy,
are willing to shrink to a mere four letters
so that, in place of the pornograph and detective novels,
we may burn into human eyes, one word:
'Love'.

OSZK

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

REVERENCE

I mourn every woman
who lives and is not mine

because for me they are dead.

I tie a long black veil
onto my desires
and immediately notify
my sense organs
about the calamity.

As a punishment:

I will not dream about them anymore
and since I caught them in the act
with someone else

I immediately commence
divorce proceedings
against – my imagination.

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

PHILOSOPHICALLY PROFOUND POEM

'Give me a firm spot in space'
and I will build the first
five hundred room aircastle with hot and cold running water,
where for a daily two hundred dollars,
even the poorest person gets
a cosy, soft, warm and
friendly handshake.
Because it's not the Pan-European ideals I want to realise,
my obsession is –
that if it be utopia, at least it should be edible.
Yes – because, more important than any bridge-problem is,
that there are people on earth
whose reasons for not eating meat every day
is not on account of a medical diet,
but because,
regrettably, the butcher and small goods industries
are only geared for short term loans
and so they don't even give twenty grams of bacon rind for the saying:
. . . may God repay you . . .

Unfortunately, in the great depression the God-Shares
have fallen to rock bottom
and people
sell to one another the very air for cash,
not to mention –
that, for cash, they are also willing to withhold it from one another.
So this is where the preachings
and the Culberston-style contract bridge played among friends
has brought them.
The whole world, like a crazed and naked whore
turns itself into small change,
so that, having subsequently
drugged its self-awareness
with fashionable fads and poisons –

would not hear
the dull monotonous heartbeats
of the wretched troops of the hungry –
which with rhythmic protractions burn
into their parched brains

the new murders'
and the new wars'
triumphant, all-consuming hatred.

OSZK

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

INTERVU.

Egészen szabad vers.

Tulajdonképen ugysem fogja elhinni senki sem:
délután, amikor Vándor Lajos hazament
azzal fogadta az édesanyja
negyvenhét éves
és fájnak a lábai
hogy az ebédlőben
valaki vár rá

A fentnevezett szónálkül letetette a kabátját
négyévvvel ezelőtt
vették a Rákoczi-uton,
a kereskedő először 156
pengőt kért,
de aztán odaadta 100-ért
és bement a fürdőszobába.

Kezetmosott a fürdőkád fölött
a háziur tavasszal hozatta
ujjonnan, mert már
tizenkilenc év óta laknak
a házban és rendes lakók
megtörülközött és benyitott az ebédlőbe.

-Jó napot kívánok,- mondta udvarias hangon,
-Vándor Lajos vagyok,

egy pillanatnyi szünet következett
Il pleut, il pleut bergere
énekelte öccse
az előszobában
aztán az ismeretlen megszólalt:

-Örvendek - mondta röviden - ISTEN.

Vándor Lajos tudta, hogy mi a háború,
az apja négy évig volt a fronton
az egyik nagybátyját pedig
akit egy román előrs elcsipett
tizennyolc darabba vágták
de az is lehet hogy
tizenkilencbe
és különben is, volt már néhány élménye,
nem vesztette el hát,
az önralmát.

Egy pillanatig először mégis tétovázott,
összegörnyedt és mélyen meghajolt,-
de aztán fölébredt benne a riporter
gyereklapokba irt meséket
és heti folyóiratokba
szines riportokat csinált

INTERVIEW

Entirely free verse.

Strictly speaking nobody is going to believe this

in the afternoon, when Lajos Walder arrived home
he was informed by his mother

forty-seven years old
and her legs aching,

that someone was waiting for him
in the dining room.

The aforementioned, without a word, took off his coat

they had bought it

four years ago

in Rákoczi street,

the shopkeeper

first said 156 pengo^o

but afterwards

let them have it for a hundred,

and went into the bathroom.

He washed his hands over the bath

the landlord

had a new one installed

in the spring

because they had lived

in the house

for the past nineteen years

and were decent tenants,

dried his hands and entered the dining room.

'Good afternoon', he said in a polite voice

'I am Lajos Walder'

a momentary silence followed

'Il pleut il pleut bergère'
sang his brother
in the hallway,

then the stranger spoke:

'DELIGHTED' – HE said briefly – 'GOD'

Lajos Walder knew what war meant,
his father had been at the front
for four years

as for one of his uncles,
he was caught by
a Rumanian advance guard,
and cut into eighteen pieces
or perhaps it was
nineteen

in other ways too, he had a few experiences
so he did not lose
his composure.

For a moment, he still hesitated
then the reporter woke in him,

he wrote fairytales
for children's magazines
and contributed colourful reports
to weekly periodicals,

he reached into his drawer, took out some paper
and rummaged for a pencil.

'YOU WANT AN INTERVIEW' said a smiling GOD,
'AS A RULE HUMANS ASK BORING QUESTIONS. I HOPE
YOU WILL NOT BEGIN A SINGLE ONE WITH 'WHY'
AND ANYWAY THERE ARE A FEW
QUESTIONS TO WHICH FOR HIGHER REASONS
I WILL NOT BE ABLE TO ANSWER.'

'Sir' said Walder quietly
'I am no longer an inexperienced reporter
that I would harass you with such questions as
 why are we alive?
 what is the goal?
 from where?
 to where?

 etcetera . . .

 because such things for the most part
 are of no real interest to the reader
 and even if they were,
 bearing in mind censorship –
 the editor would cross them out anyway

besides I have far more
interesting questions,
for instance:

to what do we owe this honour?'

'A FEW SECONDS AGO', HE said, 'I HAD SOME MATTER
TO ATTEND TO AND I INADVERTENTLY LET GO OF
THE CAVEMAN'S HAND; AND SINCE THE POOR
CREATURE WAS HELPLESS BY HIMSELF, I WAS
CONCERNED THAT HE MAY HAVE PERISHED.'

'I do not understand . . . that a few seconds . . . ago
. . . humanity's existence . . . amounts only to that much . . .
But, the age of the Earth is accurately estimated
at two billion years
even according to the sages and the Hindu philosophers
it is that, roughly speaking.'

'THIS IS ONLY A RELATIVE VIEWPOINT', replied GOD,
'EARTH – COMPARED TO THE LIFE OF MAN,
IS INDEED TWO BILLION YEARS OLD.'

'I understand . . . I fully understand' . . . said Walder,
' . . . and how do you like him, Sir, the human
and what he created?'

'PLEASE DO NOT WRITE THIS
BUT CONFIDENTIALLY I CAN TELL YOU
THAT IT IS AFTER ALL PECULIAR WHAT THE
NEWSPAPERS SCRIBBLE ABOUT THE HUMAN
MIND'S CREATIVE POWER SINCE MAN HAS
INVENTED NOTHING – HE MERELY DISCOVERED
WHAT HAS ETERNALLY EXISTED. NEW THINGS –
HE HAS NEVER CREATED, ALWAYS JUST A PIANIST
OF PHRASES HE COPIES THE NOTES FROM MY
INFINITE SCALES AND THAT'S HOW HE PLAYS.'

'Sir', stuttered Walder with a heavy heart,
'what you are saying is tantamount to
blasphemy-against-humanity
according to this everything is in vain
and even Newton solved only one line
of the Giant Crossword Puzzle.'

'YOU SPOKE CORRECTLY', came the gentle reply
'ALL THE TRIUMPH OF THE HUMAN MIND
CONSTITUTES BUT A FEW LINES
OF ETERNITY'S INFINITE MONOLOGUE.'

'Sir', said Lajos Walder, hopeful,

'the first mariner has long ago
circumnavigated the Cape of Good Hope
and proudly reflected on
how powerful man is,

could you not leave me with a heavenly sign
so that people would believe when I tell them:
you were here and commented thus!

But by then there was no one else in the room
and for dinner
he ate
scrambled eggs

Lajos Walder
the chief editor of humanity.

GOD on the other hand
hurried directly
to a Conference on Star Issues
to listen to the complaint of Uranus
whose territorial integrity was being threatened:

- by a stray comet.

OSZK
Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

A FEJ.

A Főnöke dühöngött és behivta
és ráförmedt, hogy mit jelentsen ez:

két i betűre nem tett tegnap pontot
és különben is —
nagyon hanyagul könyvel.

Ő könnyes szemmel állt meg az ajtóban,
és keresztülvillant agyán,
hogy most kirugják
— holnap megint munkanélkül állok, —
gondolta, mit szól ehhez,
majd szegény anyám.

A Főnök urnak azt szerette volna,
válaszolni, hogy
kettő helyett dolgozom
szakadatlan,
de csak dadogott s nem jött
hang a torkán,
és zavarában teljesen elvesztette,
mint mondani szokás — a fejét.

Természetes, hogy mindenütt keresték,
seprővel nyultak
még a szekrény alá is,
de a feje, melyről határozottan állította
hogy reggel magával hozta az irodába:
soha többé nem került elő.

Később bejelentette a rendőrségen
és meghirdette minden napilapban,
hogy itt és itt
ebben az időben:

56-os fejét elvesztette.

A többiek megdöbbenve olvasták a hirt
és megcsóválták a nyakukat,
hogy nemrégén még élt köztük
egy ember,

aki ósdi, divatjamult szokásként
fejét hordott:

a kalapja alatt.

THE HEAD

His boss, in a fit of rage
called him in and abused him –
what was the meaning of this:

Yesterday, twice he had left off
the dot from the letter 'i'
and anyway –
his book-keeping was very careless.

He stood in the doorway
with tears in his eyes
and it flashed through his mind
that now, they'll throw him out
 'tomorrow I'll be unemployed again'
 he thought,
 'what will my poor mother say'.

To the Boss, he would have liked
to reply:

 'I work unceasingly
 in place of two',
but he just stuttered,
no voice escaped his throat
and in his confusion,
as the saying goes,

he completely lost – his head.

Naturally, they looked for it everywhere,
poked with the broom
even under the cupboard,
but his head, which he firmly stated
he had brought with him
to the office that morning,

was never found again.

Later, he reported it to the police
and advertised it in every daily
that in such and such a place
at such and such a time

he lost his head – size 56.

The others were astounded to read the news
and shook their necks,
that not so long ago,
there still lived amongst them
a person,

who in accordance
with the ancient, out-moded custom
wore a head

under his hat.

MR SOMOGYI, OR THE
EVERYDAY ODE

'Mr. Somogyi', I said to him
as we turned into the boulevard
 the wind howled in our faces –
 shivering, I buttoned up my coat
 and the electric clock showed
 half past one in the morning
'Mr. Somogyi – twice already you had
gallstones, and once for three weeks
you were held in jail under investigation,
tell me, what is the meaning of our lives?'

'I know that now you think me crazy', I continued
as he looked at my face in amazement –
 he had such colourless eyes
 that when he applied for
 his passport, the police-clerk
 in his embarrassment didn't know
 what colour to write in

'because this I should really be asking God
since only He can answer it

but God is so far away Mr. Somogyi,
and I don't have any gate money;
I am hoping to borrow twenty cents from you –
and whosoever helps us out of our immediate money crises

– always amounts, a little, to God –

that is why I turn to You – Mr. Somogyi
with my question, aside from my petition.'
Somogyi was mutely silent,
 because it is possible to be talkatively silent;

the neon sign
on the facade of the house
at Octagon Square was also silent
and still it brazenly roared
towards us:

Moulin Rouge, Moulin Rouge
and he was embarrassed because he couldn't answer.

'Can that be possible, Mr. Somogyi,

that we only live for life's pleasures?
But surely, life's pleasures spring from life –
without life, there wouldn't be any aim,
without life, we wouldn't have – our lives?

'You see that broad coming towards us?'
asked Somogyi with a sly glance,
'she's a good lay and I'll pay for you
as well, because you're a decent young man
and I like being with you, only don't always
ask me such idiocies like – the tax form'
and he looked at me reprehensively.

'You are right,' I answered with a sinking heart
'Mr. Somogyi, you are absolutely right,
after all, what is the meaning of meaning?'

If we do it cleverly enough
the satisfaction of our senses
can provide us
with sufficient local desensitisation

it doesn't matter therefore,
whether they call it lust, belief,
wine or opium –

all we need to watch out for
is that, in the balancing of our existence

the scale shouldn't tilt in our minds' favour
because 'blessed are the poor in spirit'
Mr. Somogyi, who do not question, who only eat
and who, for those very reasons,
even from the point of view of governability,
are above reproach
and 'theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven'

with free first class tickets
all the way,
to the gates of Saint Peter'.

OSZK
Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

CSOPORTKÉP MAGAMRÓL.

Már régen nem csinállok
dinasztikus kérdést magamból
és egyáltalán nem is szaporodom :

se Első, se Második,
se Tizenhatodik,

csak egyszerűen —
Lajos vagyok.

Tulajdonképen már csak ex-Lajos,

takaréktűzhelybe srófolt lobogó láng,
fél-lelkű hős,
nyugdíjas forradalmár.

Néha azért még találkozunk,
az elemista Lajos, meg a többi,
— az álmodó, a cinikus, a gimnazista,
a jó fiu és akit mások megszólíznak. —

Őszintén elbeszélgetünk egymással,
arról — mit jóvátenni nem lehet:

hogyan is volt csak?
s mi lehetett volna,
legalább az egyik Lajosból
közülünk.

S a családi tanácskozás végén
előbukkan a fotográfus bácsi,
s a sok Lajos
komoly arccal körém gyűl:

középen én ülök,
s a lábam előtt, amint illik
az ovodista fekszik.

Aztán elmennek.

S ki egyedül maradt, már
se Első, se Tizenhatodik

csak egy személyazonossági igazolvány

valakiről,
— aki nem azonos.

GROUP PORTRAIT
OF MYSELF

For a long time now
I haven't made a dynastic issue out of myself
and not by any means am I multiplying:

Neither First, nor Second,
nor Sixteenth,

I am simply
just Louis.

Strictly speaking just ex-Louis,

economy stove wrung blazing flame
half-hearted hero,
retired revolutionary.

Once in a while though, we still meet
the elementary school Louis and the others
the dreamer, the cynic and the secondary-schooler,
the good boy, and the one others disapprove of.

We talk to each other honestly
about what cannot be redeemed:

Just how was it?
And what could have become
of at least one of the Louis
amongst us.

And at the end of the family counsel
uncle photographer pops up,
and the many Louis
gather around me with serious faces:

I sit in the middle,
and at my feet, as is proper
lies the kindergartner.

Then they go away.

And the one who remains
is neither the First nor the Sixteenth

just the identity papers

of someone,
who is not identical.

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V Á N D O R L A J O S



C S O P O R T K É P

FILOZÓFIAI MÉLYSÉGŰ KÖLTEMÉNY

„Adjatok egy szilárd pontot a világyűrben“
és én felépítem az első,
hideg-melegvízzel ellátott ötszáz szobás légvárat,
amelyben napi huszdollárért,
a legszegényebb ember is kap
egy kényelmes, puha és meleg
barátságos kézszorítást.
Mert én nem akarom megvalósítani a Pán-Európai eszméket,
hanem az a rögeszmém, —
hogy ha már utópia, akkor legalább ehető legyen.
Igen, — mert, minden bridge-problémánál fontosabb az,
hogy emberek vannak a földön,
akik nem azért nem esznek mindennap húst,
mert az orvos diétát rendelt nekik,
hanem azért, —
mert sajnós a Mészáros és Hentesiparban
rövidlejárátú kölcsönökre vannak berendezkedve
és így két deka szalonnabőrt sem adnak arra a mondásra:
... hogy az Isten fizesse meg ...

Sajnos, a világválságban az Isten-Részvények
mélypontra zuhantak,
és az emberek,
kézspénzért adják már el egymásnak még a levegőt is,
arról nem is beszélve, —
hogy kézspénzért hajlandók egymástól elvonnai azt.
Ide jutatták tehát a prédikációk
és a családi alapon játszott
culbertson-féle kontrakt bridge.
Az egész világ, mint egy megőrült meztelen ringyó
aprópénzre vátja föl magát,
hogy aztán divatos hóbortokkal és mérgekkel
elkábítva az öntudatát, —
ne hallja
az éhezők szörnyű, nyomorult csapatainak
egyhanguan koppanó szívdobbanását,
amely ütemesen elnyújtva égeti
tikkadt velőjükbe:

az új gyilkosságok
és az új háborúk
diadalmas, mindent elborító nagy gyűlöletét!

MOOKY

If you really want to know, we found him:
my sister brought him home one autumn evening.

He came into the room
with the look of one
who doffs his hat for no one –
and if he were able,
would doubtless have hung his two thumbs
into the slits of his waistcoat.

'Hello boy' he said with his eyes
when he caught sight of me
'I am an American citizen,
a free nation's – free citizen –

I hope you understand'
he added with a grin
'what the difference is between us,'
and gave a supercilious bark.

Later he also made it known to me
that he did not rate preconceptions highly
and when I asked him
his opinion about house training

he energetically declared
that such was the privilege
of pedigree little dogs

whereas he was strictly a democrat.

We never inquired about his heredity.
An acquaintance of ours musingly remarked
in connection with him –

how inscrutable
must be
the ways of Dog Providence –

and that a genealogist who undertook
to shed light upon his ancestry,

in place of a family tree,
would find a cross-word puzzle –
wherein horizontally and vertically
all the dog breeds of the world
would appear.

He was not at all choosy,
from garlic to grapes
he ate everything,
and if I smoked better quality cigarettes

after lunch he would surely have lit one.

The newspaper and the radio were of no interest to him,
he was a confirmed pacifist;
and as a babe of the post war generation,

he held that even the cat – was just a dog.

Then one day, when he realised
that he had to stand on two legs for a mouthful,

in the dead of winter, just as he came, he quietly vanished;

I put on black clothes in his honour,
and as a mark of mourning

(it was his favourite food)
ate 10 decagrams of kolbász for dinner.

And now, like a new age Virgil, I write the new type of epos:

I sing of dog and bone and versify about a stray little mongrel,
who wanted and managed to be free – in a slave age.

OSZK

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

SHORT LYRICAL ORATION

I am the last ambassador
and the last depot
of ideology-free
European literature.

My castles in the air
are no longer airtight
and starlets
blur before me
the real stars.

In vain I toll
my feelings' manufactured
deathbell –

that Europe is a sinking ship
and I do not want to drown
in salt water –
the sons of Gandhi in India
are steaming the salt
to national colours
and before long
the sea will be saltless.

I am therefore not angry
with anyone
because if I were angry
it wouldn't matter,

since today everybody
is their own publicity chief,
printing error
and female cousin,

love itself falls under luxury tax,
and among the many places of worship
little by little
they lose God.

OSZK

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Budapest, in the late 1970s.

BUDAPEST

The foreign language travel brochures describe her
as 'The Queen of the Danube' –
that, perhaps, is a little too excessive

rather, she resembles
the proprietress
of an amorous institute.

At first she started out as two women: Pest and Buda,
but when it occurred to her
that she would then always need two new hats
and two new pairs of stockings

her business sense prevailed
and she became one woman.

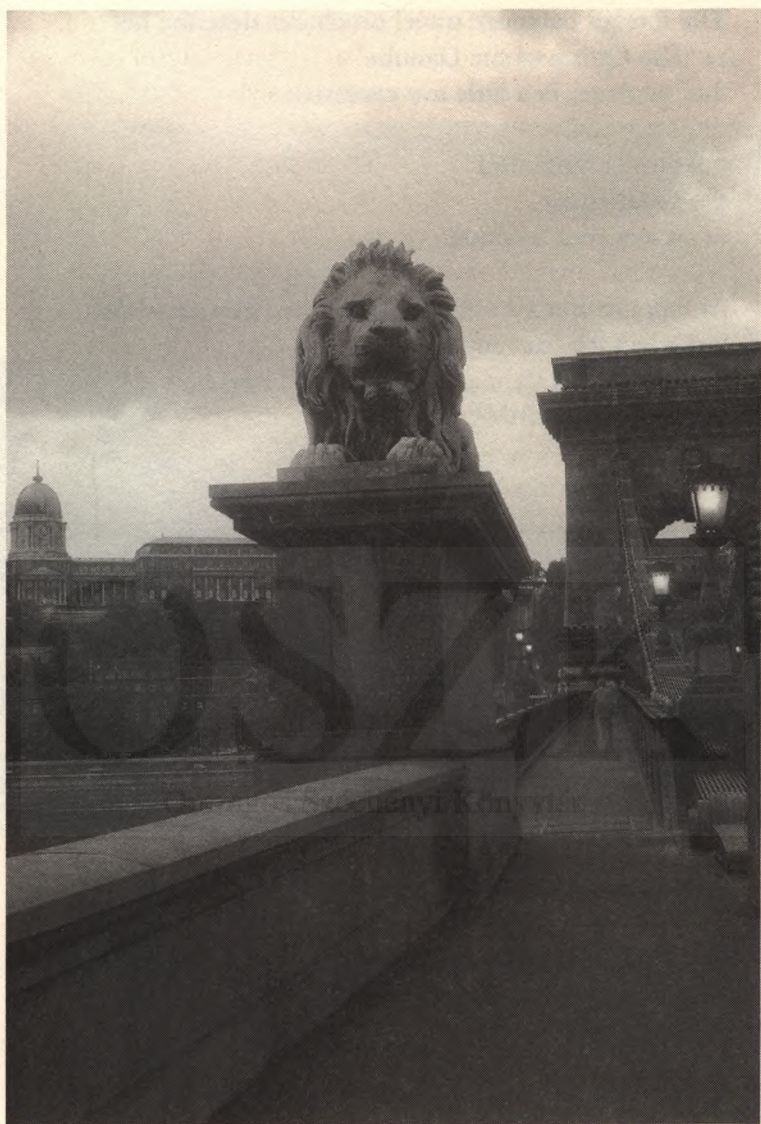
Her marital status is shrouded in uncomfortable mystery
because in spite of the fact that she is a maiden,
thus far, she has already given birth
to fourteen healthy suburbs,

and what, from the point of view of tourism,
is most embarrassing –

each one of them bears the name of a different father.

Her well-wishers say of her that she is a widow
who supports herself and her children
by renting out rooms

poor widow: she has about 1,000,000 lodgers
and, aside from official superintendence,
she is also involved –
in other business dealings.



Budapest, in the late 1970s.



If the truth be known: she is a barmaid
who appeals to foreigners in the artificial light of night
but whoever has seen her towards dawn
in her asphalt-coloured bed-jacket
will never again feel any inclination towards her.

By the way, she is not ashamed to work and
if, around the end of the month, she is occasionally squeezed
she stands out above the Danube and with a voice
hoarse from smoking and being up all night:

'come in beautiful boy' she calls
to the Great Plain.

OSZK

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ANIMAL TALE

'Sir' – said the veal goulash
in a pained voice,
and started to weep.

'Appealing
to your most sacred family sentiments
I implore you – please
listen to my sad story.

My father was the village bull --

you can imagine
how much my poor mother
cried on account of it
and their married life
was not at all exemplary.

In vain
did my father try to explain
that he did this for a living

my mother did not believe him --

and we all knew
what it meant,
when he said,

"owing to business reasons,
I have to go".

It almost broke my mother's heart!
You, sir, doubtless have heard
one or two things
about the maternal heart --

My mother's heart

is currently liverwurst
in a first-rate butcher shop
on the boulevard.

My little sister
was sacrificed to capitalism.
Our farmer syphoned away
her mother's milk,
and without it
she couldn't overcome tuberculosis . . . she died.

My nephew is Transylvanian goulash
in a Globus conserve
and my grandfather,
the Govt. pensioned village bull,
is currently salted meat
in a Norwegian cool room.

Oh sir, forgive me
for disclosing to you
my sad family connections.

Please offer
your condolences

and say an expiatory prayer for us,

whenever you read
in the obituary

that a kilo of veal chops -

costs one fifty?

INFORMATION

It was dark and I was at
the outskirts of town
when the Angel approached me.

Murillo's angels were
not like this one –
nor is the guardian angel
who, in the oleograph,
watches over
the little orphan girl
as she traverses the plank
across a fast-flowing stream.

'I am the Angel of Death', said this
stout, well-bred man of average height;
and, producing his personal credentials
inclusive of photograph,
he obligingly identified himself.
It really was him.

'Behold – the end', I mumbled sadly
and I thought of my mother.

They say that
for the dying,
in his last moments,
the greatest events
of his life
crowd into recall –
I thought of my mother,
and of Petöfi who died
in battle,
and of Heine
who died in a mattress-grave

because, as I looked around me,
I saw that I was standing in front
of a Drycleaning Establishment.
'Mr. Angel', I said in an acrid voice

'for me, this is excessive poetic symbolism
at the moment of death,
for soon I will arrive in hell
where, in the fires of purgatory
I will be cleansed like a used
deerskin glove.'

'Oh', said the embarrassed Angel of Death,
and pushed his slightly greasy hat
high onto the crown of his bald head.

'On this occasion
I have no wish to talk to you
about your personal affairs.
On the contrary,
I want, so to speak,
to ask you for a favour:

I am in need of a little information.'

'Information? From me? Regarding what?'
I asked surprised, 'and . . .'
But the Angel of Death would not
let me finish the sentence.

'I want to get to know a thing or two about humanity',

said he in a confidential tone.

'Naturally, we do not expect your services
free of charge . . .
back scratches back', he added with a cunning look
and fell expectantly silent.

'I don't fully understand', I replied honestly
and saw that the Angel of Death
considered me decidedly stupid.

Nevertheless, he made an effort to be polite
and started to explain.

'Please bear in mind', he said
'that we are in constant business contact
with humanity.

In peace time this means steady, quiet business,
just enough for a bourgeois existence
because, pray, we are a big family
up there.

But now, they say
there will be war.

I must admit, we have made a few
excellent transactions with Xerxes,
during the Crusades, with Napoleon
and then in the World War.

But in the last few years
there have been so many suicides, Sir,
that slowly
we too are beginning to be convinced

that life doesn't have much purpose!

So I'm sure you can understand
that it makes no sense
for us to tire ourselves
with the creation of a new war,
if people are already
killing themselves in large numbers
or are dying of TB, etcetera.
I think our policy is straightforward:
we will only make the deal
if we can secure

first class references
about humanity.'

'Sir', I answered furiously
unable to hide my indignation
'you came to the right person!
A shoddier, more dull-witted gang
you would not find, even among the jackals.
Every effort is futile:
They have never been good
and they are not improving.'

The Angel of Death looked at me in surprise;
at first he thought
that I craftily wanted to divert
his attention from business.
But then, when he saw
that my outburst was honest
he didn't even answer.
My disclosure visibly depressed him,
then after a brief reflection
he took his collapsible wings
out of his inside pocket,
lit a cigar and flew away.

And ever since then, when I read in the papers that
'the Great Powers are approaching each other with understanding',
that 'the new session of the League of Nations
strengthens the European peace', or that
'Germany sits down to negotiate
with France'

a cold shiver runs down my spine
and the thought flashes through my mind
that in some out-of-the-way corner,

like a nervous stockbroker
with a sure tip in his hand,
crouches the Angel of Death
excitedly waiting
for humanity to improve just that little bit,
and for relationships to improve

because then –
he will instantly strike that business deal

which means
new War and old Death.

OSZK

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

ARM-IN-ARM

Nowadays
I walk arm-in-arm
with myself.

People
look curiously
at this mysterious couple

and do not know

whether
the woman is kept
or
the man is a gigolo?

I exchange glances
with those women
who have

masculine eyes

my partner
looks at those men

who can gaze femininely.

And this is how we stroll
among the bankrupt shops
and the purchasing opportunities
of the boulevard –

and what we dream about
is

that once,
every human

was two humans:

a woman
and a man.

OSZK

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

LEGEND IN PROSE

Six days ago
God put in an order

for the earth and the sky.

The universe, rushing feverishly
finished the urgent work,
and by Saturday morning delivered it.

God
put the whole thing on his table
and from the shining, coloured wrapping paper
unwrapped – the reality.
As for the wrapping paper – he promptly threw it away.

A few seconds later
an angel arrived, out of breath.

‘My Lord, you lost something’ he said
and produced the coloured wrapping paper.

The Lord looked at him, surprised.

‘Come now,’ He said
and with His invisible finger
pointed to Earth,

‘surely this is the reality, this is the essence –
what you hold in your hand is – nothing –
merely sparkle, colourful decoration, appearance!’

The angel despaired quietly.
Then the rebellious words
broke through his silence.

‘Could it be possible that the sparkle is – nothing –
and that the grey reality is the essence?’

But then life is not worthwhile!

God gave this some thought.

'Alright,' He said gently

'for you, let reality be: the nothing
and let the sparkle be: the essence.'

The angel was about to leave.

'What is it they call you, son?' asked the Lord.

Bowing gratefully

the angel introduced himself:

'I am the poet' he said. Then he left.

The Lord gazed after him thoughtfully

'Poor thing,' He thought - 'assuredly, he will starve to death.'

This thought troubled Him
so He summoned all the stars,
and prevailed upon them
to watch over - the poets.

The stars heeded the Lord's command

and it is since that time
that there is such an extraordinarily good relationship
between - the stars and the poets.

That is to say, when the poets
look up at the stars -

they instantly forget about being hungry.

A POET LIVES HERE AMONGST YOU . . .

'A poet lives here amongst you . . .' I keep telling myself,
each time I climb the stairs to the second floor,

but the underjanitor doesn't even look at me,
and the rude little maid
throws the garbage directly on to my head
from the third floor,
the janitor, on the other hand, pretends
that he hasn't noticed I'm going his way
and accidentally in a loud voice explains
to our neighbour

that I already owe him 5 late-entry fees.

I am decidedly ashamed of myself –
two of my books have already been published,
very good reviews were written about me,
I appear on radio as well –
but it seems that poetry
is still not a respectable enough occupation
in this neighbourhood.

Of course the underjanitor always
greeted the window cleaner in advance,
not to mention the corner grocer
who likewise lives in our building
(owing to which fact, sooner or later, our building
will be proclaimed a historic monument)

'A poet dwells here amongst you . . .' I mumble on
despairingly,

so as to gain some prestige
at least in front of myself –
unfortunately it doesn't work:

"Egy költő él itt közöttetek....."

"Egy költő él itt közöttetek...mondom magamban,
valahányszor megyek föl a második emeletre,

de a vici rám se néz,
a kis szentelen cselédlány
egyenesen a fejemre szórja a szemetet
a harmadik emeletről,
a házmester pedig úgy tesz,
mintha nem venné észre, hogy arra megyek
és véletlenül hangosan magyarázza
- a szomszédunknak,

hogy már 5 kapupéppzel adósa vagyok.

Határozottan szégyenlem magam,
hiszen már két könyvem jelent meg,
nagyon szép kritikát irtak rólam,
a rádióban is szoktam szerepelni,
de ugylátszik, hogy a költészet
- még mindig nem elég rendes foglalkozás
ezen a környéken.

Persze az ablakpucolónak,
a vici mindig előre köszön,

a sarki fűszeresről nem is beszélve,
aki ugyancsak a mi házunkban lakik,
/ amely tény miatt házunkat
előbb-utóbb műemléknek fogják nyilvánítani/

" Egy költő lakik itt közöttetek..." mormolom,
hát kétségbeesetten,

hogy legalább önmagam előtt
legyen valami tekintélyem,
sajnos ^{de nem} megy:

házunk a Józsefvárosban van,

ahol az emberek vers helyett
takarékbetétet olvasnak
és már vasárnap sem hordják

- a nagyképűséget.-

our building is in Josephtown,

where, instead of poems
people read their savings books
and nowadays, not even on Sunday

will they put on airs.



Pre-war view across the Danube to Pest, in which the Joseph District is located.

TRAVELLING

My body is only 3rd class
and in it incognito travels – the soul.

Who knows? Perhaps in another world it is king
or a secret envoy
whom God is sending on a particular mission:

from my birth – to my death.

My body rushes on invisible tracks
scenery glides before my eyes
new faces appear,
old ones vanish in my memory

and gradually the travelling begins
to tire me.

Occasionally I alight
I look at my mother or at a girl –

and then on a shaky wooden bench
with a single flower – the sum total of my luggage –
the soul travels on with me.

My body is only 3rd class,
in it incognito travels the soul –

and I know that one day
out of my grasp will
hesitantly spin
my serialised travelogue:

life.

STUDY-TOUR

Each day a person meets
with something new
which he thinks

no one has ever
lived through before him

and then a novel
gets in his hands
or someone complains,

and in an instant
it dawns on him

that what was new to him
is identical for everyone.

At such times –

he feels as if he were
on a study-tour
in which every person
partakes once,

and wherever they go
the Great Tour Guide explains,

sometimes pointing to the right,
sometimes to the left

this – is love
that – is relinquishment
and that over there –

is whooping cough.

Emlékszó.

Darwin Károly Robert,
a faék ökölvívó küzdelmeinek ringbiroja,
/: lakik, Down. Központi-temető:/
született, az Isten kegyelméből
és saját anyjától, Shrewsbury-ben,
mint ez az emlézők körében,
általánosan szokás.
Már fiatal korában nagy szeretettel
fordult a természettudományok felé,
mert ő is észrevette azt,
amit mások igyekeztek letagadni.
Tanulmányai befejezése után,
sokat bolyongott a primitív népek között,
de később úgy találta,
hogy Londonban,
~~száraz~~ az uridivat ellenére is,
kitűnően szemlélni lehet:
a létért való küzdelem,-
és éppen ezért letelapodott
Angliában.
Afrikai emlékek kísértették,
amikor a szabad, bátor és hatalmas
gorillák rokonsínak merte nevezni,
az angolai aszénbányák
tűdőbeles párisít,-
ugyhogy ezt a tévedést,
melyet az egész Állatvilágban,
még a birkák és az igavono barnok közt is
erős felzudulást követett,
még lehet bosszajtani neki.
Élete végén,
amikor már közeledni érezte
utolsó óráját,
minden szabad angol adófizető polgár jogán
meghalt,
amely rendkívüli tényével,
az egész művelt világon,
még tanainál is nagyobb feltűnést keltve,-
annak rendje és módja szerint,
beskatulyáztatott a halhatatlanok közé.

MEMORIAL SPEECH

Charles Robert Darwin,
the ringside referee of the fist fight of the races
lives in the parish cemetery of Downe –
was born in Shrewsbury
by the grace of God and from his own mother,
as is generally the custom
among mammals.
Already in his youth
he turned with great love
to the natural sciences,
because he too had noticed
what others tried to deny.
At the conclusion of his studies,
he wandered extensively among primitive peoples,
but later discovered
that, gentlemen's fashions notwithstanding,
the struggle for survival
was eminently observable
in London –
and precisely for this reason, settled down
in England.

African memories threw him into temptation,
when he dared to call the consumptive pariahs
of the English coal mines
relatives of the free, brave and giant gorillas –
so that this error,
which caused a potent uproar
in the whole of the Animal World,
even among the sheep and yoke-pulling cattle,
may be forgiven to him.

At the end of his life,
as he felt his last hour approaching,
in accordance with the right of every free, tax-paying English citizen,
he died –

and with this extraordinary act of his
having created an even greater furore
in the whole of the cultured world
than did his theories –

as is right and proper,
he arrived amongst the immortals.

OSZK

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

OBLIGATORY SPRING POEM

Ars poetica for the weather and water level reporting poets

Spring

yesterday obtained
the majority of the shares in Time
and I
as my feelings'
domestic servant:

had already today
spring-cleaned
in my soul.

I started
the cost price clearance
of my remaining thoughts
from winter

and promptly noted down
a few original thoughts
to Summer.

By the way, I hope
that this autumn too,
the trees will shed

'the yellowed leaves'

and that around December
will fall
the title of my winter poem:

'The first snowflake'

HOROSCOPE

I stick a black flag on my forehead,
and with self-esteem lowered to half mast,
I decree the official mourning:

because in our town today
nineteen people were born.

Statistics lie before me

and just like the star-gazers
searched for destiny
among the heavenly signs,
when a royal child
was born

I pore over them
trying to find the answer to:

what will be their fate.

Two will die young, of lung disease,
1 will die a hero, 0.059, however, will be a movie star,
3 taxpaying citizens, 1 notorious criminal,
2 unemployed, and again 1 – a street walker.
4 of the women among them
will, on average, have two children (on average because three
will not have any children, while the fourth will bring eight
into the world). 1 will commit suicide, 2 have venereal disease
and 1 will become the victim of a fatal traffic accident.

This will be the fate of eighteen,
whilst the nineteenth
can only be expressed
in the ten thousandths:

that one will become the President of a Republic,
a banker, the world champion of the 100 metre track-run,

or remain a virgin into extreme old age.

I know – now I should be lying
like a fortune-teller on a home visit, who,
in spite of ominous signs,
prophesies a phenomenal path for the newly born.

I rather not say anything

instead, all day long, I write telegrams of condolence
and whistle Chopin's funeral march.

And when the day arrives:

that they commit suicide
or get run over by a tram,

I take out the completed death notice
from the appropriate card index,
address it

and dispatch it to the relatives.

Then they will assuredly cry
because it will occur to them
that one day they too
will have to die -

I, on the other hand,
will go dry-eyed to the window
and watch,

how indifferently is washing his hands
in the autumn rain,

an unknown, enormous Pilate.

PARLIAMENTARIANISM

Yesterday was the first time I met you:

today, there is already a government crisis
in my heart,
and you are

the prime minister designate.

The right
is receiving the news with reservation

because my wallet is on that side

but you lean on the left

because you know
that I wear my heart there.

Your program:

exactly the same
as that of your predecessor

you too promise
what neither she has kept;

but if your budget of expenditure
also resembles hers

I will be compelled to declare

a state of bankruptcy.

‘IN THE LAST FEW DAYS . . .’

In the last few days
I’ve been so engrossed in myself
that the girl I am going with
is desperately jealous of me

and because of me.

Just yesterday when, for example,
I was rushing on the street somewhere
so as not to be late

I looked at my watch,

and unexpectedly asked myself:
who is this strange young man,
who holds my briefcase
in his hand,
and rushes in my trench coat
and in my skin
towards his momentary goal.

Unfortunately there was not one acquaintance
coming towards me
that I could have asked

so I stopped and sat down on a bench
because all of a sudden,
this had become the most important thing for me.

Good Lord – I thought, frightened –
I run around here on earth,
I went to school,
I have a degree,
and now I’m learning to play the piano

why this great fervour
to get to know different things
and other people?

Then, as to a puzzle-solver
who surmounts the last obstacle,
it flashed before me:

that every effort we make
to get to know others
is only for the purpose
of finally getting a little closer

to ourselves.

OSZK

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

FAMILY EVENT

Our potted-palm
sprouted a new branch
by morning.

The cyclamens
inquisitively surrounded

the newly born.
'We had a hard night'
said the corn-leaf,

'you can say that again,
I cannot tell you how many times I thought
that it would all turn out badly'
added officiously –
an asparagus.

But as things stand
we thank you for your kind inquiry,
mother and child
are doing fine.

How tiny
and already how green,

of course, you can tell just by looking at him
what a distinguished family
he comes from.

Because if I may say:

on his mother's side
he can trace his family tree
all the way back to the Sahara

you know
that is where those
mighty palm trees are found

among whom,
translated to human terms,
even the puniest is,

at the very least ,
an Under-Secretary of State.

Mr Neighbour,
haven't you heard yet?
Our palm gave birth to a little boy
during the night!

And I don't even know why,
but I am so nervous . . .

tell me, what do you think?

Shouldn't we tell the janitor,
not to let the tenants do
any carpet-beating at all today

they are just capable
of waking up

the little one.

WORLD HISTORY

I was a dictator in my infancy,
(if I cried,
no one could sleep
because of me)

later on
I did give some of the chocolate
to my little brother

which is definitely a sign of constitution.

In school
we fought every day.
(Republic. Divine human rights.)

and when my voice
started to change:

anarchy raged in me.

Since then I lived through
several revolutions:

my own illusions beheaded me –

and now
here I stand
without a form of government:

just as
did once –

the prehistoric
man.

'I WAS ABOUT 15 YEARS OLD ...'

I was about 15 years old,
when I caught the illness
every healthy young man gets:

I wanted to redeem
suffering humanity.

Only God truly knows,
how high my fever rose

when I saw a sick person
or an old beggar.

Then Hitler came and the years passed –
the fever turned into constant temperature
– but I am still among the living!

And when as a convalescent
I walk on the street

my young dreams still
wave to me from afar
the trees and the flowers
greet me with a secret sign

And wherever I go
the old gas-lamps look gratefully
up to the sky
and give thanks
that after so many brown shirts –

a human being has finally
walked by.

ART GALLERY

My soul is a public art gallery,
but in it
there is a private room
where
aside from me

for strangers
entry – is strictly forbidden.

In the other halls
anyone can hang their picture,

I cannot verify
whether it is a forgery
or the original –

but in here

there is silence and rapture
and a few etchings

of my dead father
my mother
and you

just – *as I see each of you:*

after my own heart – free-hand.

LOST GENERATION

Of late I've often wondered:
why am I a lost generation?

Probably, because
while in the pre-war years
a young man's sole ambition was
to secure a job with a government pension

among my most daring dreams is –
a fatal traffic accident.

Then I too, would finally make a career –
and my mother would also have some benefit out of me,
the car is a dangerous machine,
she would definitely receive
compensation
and I am absolutely certain
that I would also figure in the politicians' pronouncements
'We have finally succeeded in solving
the problem of youth unemployment'

I'm afraid though,
that not even this dream of mine can be fulfilled,
because there are still
too many young men –
and too few cars.

I have not yet decided, but it is possible that tomorrow
I'll put a classified ad
in one of the bigger morning papers:

LOST: THE MEANING OF MY LIFE!
between 1913 and 1937.

I appeal to the honest finder
to keep the whole affair a secret,
because someone could well report him to the police
for hiding a spy in his apartment:

who, when one day, finds himself before God,
will reveal everything about what he saw and experienced
down there on Earth.

OSZK

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

BÉKE.

Tra-raa, Tra-raa, Tra-raa
szóltak a trombiták,
a rádiók és megafonok üvöltöttek,
a falragaszok hirdették :

az emberek nem mondták többé
egymásnak Good Morning, Bon jour,
Heil Hitler, Evviva Musselini,
és nem emelték fel
üdvözlésre a karjukat,
hanem lecsüggedt fejjel
mormolták az ufajta köszöntést, —

ÁLTALÁNOS MOZGÓSÍTÁS!

És a pásztorok eljöttek a hegyekről
és bevonultak,
a halászok a folyamok partjairól
és bevonultak,
a vadászok az erdők mélyéről
és bevonultak,
nyomukban az erdőn és mezőn
felszabadult zsolozsma szállt:

BÉKE, BÉKE, BÉKE — énekelték a madarak,
ujjongtak a vadak és a halak —
végre béke költözött közénk!

Az emberek nem bántanak többé minket,
mert az emberek mostantól kezdve

egymásra vadásznak!

PEACE

Tra-aaa, Tra-aaa, Tra-aaa
sounded the trumpets,
the radios and the loudspeakers bellowed
and the billposters proclaimed:
 people no longer said to each other
 Good Morning, Bonjour,
 Heil Hitler, Evviva Mussolini
 and they no longer raised
 their arms in greeting;
 instead, with bowed heads
 they mumbled the new kind of salute –

GENERAL MOBILISATION!

And the shepherds came from the mountains
 and they were drafted,
the fishermen came from the banks of rivers
 and they were drafted,
the hunters came from the depths of forests
 and they were drafted.
In their wake, on mountain and on meadow
soared a liberated chant:

PEACE, PEACE, PEACE – sang the birds,
game and fish rejoiced –
at last, peace has moved in amongst us!

People will not hurt us any more
because from now on people

will hunt each other.

LAST HUMAN BEING

To the Editor

Sir, I'm writing to you
I, the last human being on earth
because aside from me, there is no one
only generals and managing directors.
Everyone here is either a socialist
or belongs to the Hitler party and wears a brown shirt
though there are one or two
other interesting types:
the unemployed and the real estate magnate.

The saddest thing is
that there isn't a woman next to me.
There are of course females on the street corners
who sell for cash
the possibilities of five minute carnals,
but a woman who is capable of being virtuous
for a long time now,
is only to be found in the museum.

Although there are many around me,
not one of them can understand my words
and if I say that I am hungry -
munching, they laugh into my face.

Yet I live,
and in the street fusillade
I bandage everyone's wounds
as well as my own,
which I receive equally from all directions.

And I contemplate,
I, the last human being
and I weep for the Greek sages
that they were sages and not animals
because everything – everything here has been in vain,
the result would never have been different.

I contemplate,
I, the last human being
who will die tomorrow,
who, even when he ate salted fish with onions,
nurtured beautiful dreams.

Sir, please forgive me
for delivering my own eulogy
but the priests do it for money
and I never had any money.

Sir, I will die tomorrow
and with me, culture will die.
And the day after tomorrow
there will not be a human being on earth
only a nazi and a communist.

EXPEDITION

I am not interested in Mount Everest
the secrets of the South Pole
or the Gobi Desert
for me, the only and truly
unknown territory

is: You.

Rouge, on the faces of other women
silk dresses on their bodies
manicure on their hands
are like the promotion campaign
of the Bureau of Foreign Travel
with which they aim to entice the tourist.

But You, are missing from
Frommer's What-To-See
intended for strangers

because You have not yet been mapped.

The Wall of China surrounds You
emanating from your being
and while
suitable expedition equipment
for reaching the others is:
a car, a gold chain
or twenty bucks
no road nor path leads to You
and only
the magic carpet of the spirit helps.

You are sitting beside me
yet still extraordinarily far,
and my hand, which is so famous
from success in other expeditions
that it could well be a member
of the British Royal Geographic Society

now hesitates next to your body
like the polar explorer
enchanted for the first time
by the – *over the unknown terrain*
coolly radiating –

Northern light.

OSZK

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

THE LITANY OF VAINLINESS

In vain do you give them
the legion of honour, the iron cross
or commemorative badges of war –
instead of their legs
you can only give them wooden legs
and instead of their eyes
only glass eyes.

In vain do you give them
graves of honour in the cemetery
and in vain, you give war pensions
to their widows –
you cannot give back their lives
and if they were alive, they would refuse
your farthings.

In vain you sent them
into the firing-line:
before the assault,
the shopkeeper was thinking
how much today's takings
must have been back home,
and the peasant
that around this time, the harvesters
are returning from the wheat-fields –
and now I roar at you
the accusation:
it was not soldiers you sent
to the front,
but humans beings.

In vain you killed them
and in vain will you kill us
who write poems
against war
and it is precisely this which is maddening,
that all of us are afraid
and dreading it,
yet every word and
every struggle is in vain:
one of these days
we will still be mobilised.

OSZK

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

TYPEWRITER

the poet who now speaks
is 1913 type, portable,
still in quite good shape

and soundlessly
pours out the lines
for adult and children's magazines,

as we can see, he is a relatively
new model,
the capital letters however,
can no longer be made to work

contrary to his convictions,
without full stop or exclamation mark,
he is compelled
to write only small-letter things

in red,
if a red ribbon is inserted
if it is black, he writes in black,

but sometimes
in the middle of the night
without paper or ribbon

he taps upon
invisible ghostly lines

at such times the neighbours
object furiously
to the nocturnal disturbance of peace

but a girl, who
is in love with him
says of him,

that he is writing poems

OSZK
Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

MUNKANÉLKÜLI VERSE.

Választottbíráim — az óra, amely a falon lóg,
a gobelin-kép és a hamutartó,
összegyültek, hogy ítéljenek az ügyem felett.

— Esküdtt uraim — mondtam és mélyen meghajoltam
a könyvespolc felé, ahol esküdteim :

Renan, Mereskovszkij és Mikszáth művei
ültek vászonkötésben, —

azzal vádolnak, hogy bár nagykoru vagyok
még sohasem kerestem meg
— a kenyérrevalót!

Fájdalom a vád, amelyet ellenem felhoztak
sajnos igaz, sőt még azt is, be kell vallanom,
hogy kifejezetten könnyelmű életet élek :

a pulzusom percenként hatvanhatot üt,
és így ha ebből hatot levonnék,
zsebórámon még másodperc mutatóra
sem lenne szükségem

de én — még ezzel sem fárasztom magam.

— És csalódni méltóztatnak — folytattam felhevülve
ha azt hiszik, hogy órám van talán.
Óh, már régen zálogba tettem, de különben is
nyugodtan megmondhatom, hogy engem még
az aranyórák sem érdekelnék,
— hiszen közismert, hogy a napot lopom.

Választott bíráim összenéztek és az esküdtek is
tanácstalanok voltak — vászonkötésben,

és akkor a falióra megszólalt :

tik-tak,
ki vagy te tulajdonképen,
tik-tak,
vádolt, vádló vagy
a vád.

POEM OF THE UNEMPLOYED

My chosen judges – the clock that hangs on the wall,
the framed Gobelin and the ashtray,
assembled to judge my case.

‘Gentlemen of the jury’ said I, and bowed low
towards the bookshelf where my jurors:

Renan’s, Mereskovszkij’s and Mikszáth’s works
sat in hardbacks.

I am accused,
though being of age
of never yet having earned my keep!

Regrettably, the charge brought against me
is true, what’s more, I also have to confess
that I lead a distinctly wasteful lifestyle:

my pulse beats sixty-six times per minute
so if I were to deduct six from this
I would not even need a second hand
on my pocket watch

but I do not bother myself even with that.

‘And you vouchsafe to be disappointed’ I continued heatedly
‘if you think I have a watch.

Oh, I pawned it long ago, and anyway
I can honestly say that not even
gold watches interest me
since it is common knowledge
that I squander the day.’

My chosen judges looked at each other
and the jurors were also perplexed – in hardbacks,

and then the clock on the wall began to speak :

tic-toc,
who are you actually,
tic-toc,
accused, accuser
or the accusation.

OSZK

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

THE LAST SPECTATOR

On earth everyone was already a movie star.

In the Great Dictionary of the Academy,
in place of the word 'Heaven', 'Hollywood' appeared.
Nightly, throughout the whole world,
artificial smoke-clouds concealed the starry sky
and instead of a movie screen
the program was projected onto the milky white clouds.

The male children were christened Valentino
or Clark Gable
Greta Garbo's statue stood on the main square of every city
and in the telephone books
for every Smith there were 10,000 Barrymores.

And mothers-to-be, under the threat of monetary fine
were compelled by the authorities
in the last months of their blessed state,
to more and more diligently frequent
the movies of Robert Taylor and Ginger Rogers

so that their about-to-be-born children, would also
be that beautiful.

In the schools they no longer taught
the Cosine theory
instead, as a compulsory exercise, everywhere on earth
every day, for two hours, high school students worked in laboratories
on the manufacture of heatable and scented film.

And people from every part of the globe
poured into the British Museum
in the film section of which

a couple in love, petrified while kissing
could be viewed

and on the accompanying plaque only this much was stated:

THIS IS HOW THE MOVIES ENDED - AROUND 1940!

At the movies the audience had become completely unnecessary.
People willingly bought tickets
to every movie

just so they wouldn't have to see it,
because everyone knew the films' contents ahead of time,
since the committee only allowed
those films past censorship,

which, for every cubic metre of talking
coloured and plastic film contained:

more than 0.567 cubic decimetres of being in love
11.28 cubic centimetres of Berlin blue
and 129.43 cubic millimetres of the hair-raising -

and anyway,
(as in the past with rayon or linen),
every better retailer kept a stock of film stories,
from the Grand Guignol to the Burlesque,
and although women had these turned into dresses

an experienced film director or a seamstress who comes in
made quite a tolerable movie out of them
for home use, provided that they bought with it another

10 decagrams of Gags.

The last spectator, whom the leading motion picture studios
contracted for an exorbitant sum
for the purpose of viewing their films

was a photocell
which expressed its approval with light signals,
under the influence of artistic achievements

emitted ultra violet rays
from itself

and if the movie was not liked

automatically disconnected itself –

and so, let us confess, was far more perfect
than a spectator in 1938,
who could never give expression
to his dislike by leaving the movie theatre
half way through the projection
because the rows of chairs were narrow
and the overharassed people, instead of feet
already only wore corns in their shoes
and after all, just because he was bored
with the thing,
he couldn't disturb his fellow humans'
happy and satisfied dreams

when all through the night they couldn't sleep anyway
because of their worries.

THE DREAM

From their daily bread,
 he broke off half
 and then decided,
 that for the purposes of propaganda
he would hire their dreams as well.

And the next day when the workers
went to the factory,
this is what they read on the notice boards:

Do not wallow
in your fantasy-rich dreams!
Dream about the main and by-products
of the Oxygen Works Ltd.
Dream about oxygen, hydrogen,
nitrogen and carbon monoxide.
Dream about the products of our subsidiary
– mustard gas and chlorine gas –
dream about oxidation,
but categorically dream only in connection
with The Oxygen Works!

And the workers, who lived off air,
now not only gave their nights and days to the factory,
but spent their dreams with it as well.

Not much later the foremen
ran to the Chief Executive
in desperation.

‘Our Leader! A young worker is dreaming about Ozone
and could not care less
about the Oxygen Works.’

‘Bring him to me immediately.’
They ran for him, and brought
the worker at once.

'Is it true what they are saying about you?'

'Yes. I dream whatever I please.

After all,

my dream – is my dream,'
he emphasized it in the same way as
Monroe once said that
America belongs to the Americans.

'And anyway,' he added

'it is not included in the collective contract
that everyone must dream
in accordance with factory regulations.'

'I kick you out,' roared the Chief. 'I kick out
the collective contract and I'll kick
myself out if it serves the interests of the company.
Do you understand?'

The worker was intelligent and in front of the factory
he touched himself gingerly where they had kicked him out,
then he went into town.

A few weeks later, alarming news came
from the direction of the town.

Like they said: the worker established
The Society of Dreamers Independent of Factory Regulations,
he created their rallying tune and
is organizing resistance outside the trade union.

The foremen rushed to the Chief again:

'Our Leader! Someone is smuggling
revolutionary powder to the workers.
It is being made by the worker who was kicked out
and by a young chemist.

Whoever takes this powder,
not only doesn't dream anymore
but ceases to think as well.

'What . . .' exclaimed the Chief Executive in amazement.
'If that is how it is', he added with tears in his eyes,
'then go for him
and bring him here – in my place,
and I'll resign,
because he is your true man.
Hosanna to him'.

Thus spoke the Chief Executive of the Oxygen Works Ltd.
And on hearing such magnanimous generosity
even the workers with the most revolutionary disposition
were touched and long waved
their kerchiefs after the former Chief Executive's
disappearing Rolls Royce.

This story is about a worker who rebelled
so that he could become Chief Executive.
Let the so-called self-awareness of the working masses mourn him.
But his relatives are not nearly so sad.
If someone should inquire about the moral of this story with you,
modify Napoleon's words¹ a little – like this:

Every proletaire carries in his purse the dream,
the dream
that one day he also will become a capitalist.

1. Napoleon said: *'Tout soldat français porte dans sa giberne le bâton de maréchal de France.'*
'Every French soldier carries a French marshal's baton in his knapsack.'

'AT 7.20 PM THE ORIENT EXPRESS
ROLLED IN, . . .'

At 7.20 pm the Orient Express rolled in, counting from the left, on the second set of tracks.

Its snorting locomotive bore itself into the vapoury lights under the glass roof, and the stoker, worn out by his hard work, wiped the perspiration off his brow and uttered a sigh of relief.

His shift was over and he looked happily towards the waiting room where his kerchiefed wife and their two children were waiting for him.

The row of carriages gave a last sensuous quiver in memory of the exhilarating weightlessness of speed, and the impatient passengers nervously tossed their bags through the windows of the sleeping compartments.

Porters rushed, baggage cars clanked, and kisses and shouts of joy trumpeted life's far-ringing sounds into the heart of the night.

Life and today surged and bubbled out of nine carriages; but at the end of the train, in a sealed wagon, lay yesterday's son: a dead man.

They brought him back from Paris, where he had suffered a heart-attack, and in spite of the fact that he had dictated the pace on nine stock exchanges, he now lay rigidly in his metal coffin which was equipped with a glass lid.

Through the thick glass, his fixed eyes stared at the Moon's optically distorted face, and this is how he talked to himself in the coffin:

I came home because the hands of the clock stopped on the dial of my life, and Time, the watchmaker of infinite time, said 'enough - no further!' I acquiesce, let it be as my doctor told me one year ago, when he said that with my present lifestyle I would not survive past a year. Let medicine have its

due, because by now I want to give everyone their due; but regretfully I could not heed the warning because in Minneapolis the price of grain fell 2 points, in London a new Steel Trust was formed, and in Berlin I had to buy graphite.

Life carried me in her lap, and I sucked exciting torments from her breast; and now, here I am, staring rigidly at what our eternal travelling companion, the Moon, is doing.

Thus he mumbled to himself on the train that had carried him from Paris to Bucharest with living, loving, suffering, swaying people, who never considered that at the back of every train crouches: helplessness.

At 7.30 pm the train-driver gave his report to the station-master, who, having received the delivery-slip for one, that is to say, one dead man, returned to his office.

Utolsó ember.
~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~

Szerkesztő ur,
én írok mostan Önnek,
a földön a legutolsó ember,
mert rajtam kívül nincsen senki sem:
csak tábornok és vezérigazgató.
Itt mindenki vagy szociálista,
vagy hitler-párti és barna inget hord,-
van ugyan még
egy-két érdekes típus:
a munkanélküli s a háztulajdonos.

A legsomorubb, hogy nincs nő mellettem,
vannak ugyan az utcá-sarkokon nőstények,
kik pénzsért árulják,
az ötperces kéjek lehetőségeit,
de asszony, aki tiszta tudna lenni,
már régen csak a múzeumban van.

Vannak ugyan sokan körülöttem,
de szavamat meg egyik sem érti,-
s ha azt mondom, hogy éhes vagyok:
csámcsogva röhögnek a szemem közé.

Én mégis élek
s az utcai lövöldözésben,
pártravalo tekintet nélkül,
bekötözöm mindenki sebét
és bekötözöm a magam sebeit is,
melyeket egyformán kapok mindenfelől.

És elmerengek,
én az utolsó ember,
~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~
és sásatom a görög bölceket,
hogy bölcsek voltak és nem állatok:
mert hiába volt itt, minden, minden.-
az eredmény ugysem lett volna más.

Elmerengek,
én az utolsó ember,
aki holnap már meg fog halni,
aki ha orosz halat evett hagymával,-
még akkor is a szépről álmódott.

Szerkesztő ur, kérem ne haragudjon,
hogy megtartottam a magam gyászbeszédét,
de a papok ezt pénzsért csinálják
és nekem ~~XXXXXXXXX~~ volt sohasem. pénzem.

Szerkesztő ur, én holnap meghalok
és velem együtt meghal a kultúra.
És holnapután már nem lesz ember a földön,
csak hitler-párti és kommunista.

Vándor Lajos.

THE HUMAN

I am a human,
or if you prefer

the deficit
showing on the closing statement
of the universe.

I have twelve pairs of ribs.
This is of no great concern to me,
but half of the thirteenth
is missing –
and that does get me thinking.

Well what is a human?

My siblings: the proletaires,
and my half siblings: the capitalists,

a crowded bed-sitter
of suffering,
which they have forgotten
to wallpaper to perfection –

And ever since,
as flawed merchandise,
from the harmony of nature
he was rejected:

on the first of every month
he gives notice to the landlord

and on every fifteenth
he stays on.¹

1. The tenancy laws of the time in Budapest stated that a tenant who gave notice to the landlord on the first of the month, could change his mind until the 15th of that month.

Életrajz.

Amikor apám,
előzetes beleegyezésünk nélkül,
váratlanul meghalt, minket május elsején
lakbér nélkül hagyva hátra, -
azt hittem, hogy a Legnagyobb a háziur.
De amikor, az adóvégrehajto
beteg anyám alól elvitte az ágyat,
rájöttem arra,
hogy az állam örködik a polgárai felett.
Ettől kezdve,
nem hordtam többé féloldalt csapva a kalapom,
mert gyötrően foglalkoztatott az a gondolat,
hogy mi jut akkor a másik féloldalra?
Minden reggel besoztam a könnyeimet
és felszárítottam a harmatos réteket,
míg egyszer egy szép napon,
az egyik kötél-táncos barátom
elvesztve lelkiegyensúlyát,
vérmérgezésben meghalt.

Másnap azt olvastam
egy napilapban,
hogy a világgazdaság vége ~~széleskörű gazdasági~~
megtalálta elvesztett egyensúlyát
és én megsirattam a barátomat,
hogy nem tudott még egy napot várni.
Szememet a végtelenbe sülyesztettem,
mire kezelőorvosom
gyomorsúlyedést állapított meg.
Ekkor én,
kifordítottam vadénatuj egyéniségeimet
és a kabátgombokat a bőrömrre varratva, -
elhatároztam,
hogy felhagyok minden logikus agyműködéssel.

Igy is történt. És ~~ezzel hamar egyetemi tanár lettem.~~

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

When my father
without our prior consent
died unexpectedly, leaving us behind
on the first of May without rent
I believed that the Mightiest was the landlord.
But when the tax-collector
took away the bed
from under my sick mother
I realised
that the State watches over its citizens.
From then on
I did not wear my hat whacked on to one side
because the thought kept tormenting me –
what would then be left for the other side?
Every morning I salted my tears,
and dried up the dewy meadows,
till once on a fine day,
one of my tightrope-walking friends
having lost his emotional equilibrium,
died of blood poisoning.
The next day I read
in a daily
that the global economy
finally found its lost equilibrium,
and I mourned for my friend
that he could not wait one more day.
I sank my eyes into infinity
whereupon my doctor
diagnosed a pit in my stomach.
It was then that
I had my brand new identity turned inside-out,
and getting my coat button sewn onto my skin
I decided
to give up all logical mental activity.

That is just what happened. And soon after,
I became a university professor.

BUDAPESTI HADOSZTÁLY.

Mindössze emberek akartunk lenni,
és kötelező olvasmány leszünk, —

és VIII.-ban történelemórán,
a tanár úr — majd úgy magyaráz rólunk —
ahogy egy másik történelemtanár,
a középiskolai tanterv
alapján,
egyszer nekünk beszélt

a gorlicei áttörésről.

„Gránátok hulltak, roham-rohamra
jött ellenük, egyik a másik után,
s a zászlóaljából, mely ezer főből állt,
— életben még 20 sem maradt talán,
mégsem hátrált meg — fiuk,

a Budapesti hadosztály.“

— Most béke van, — mondod kicsit ijedten,
és a moziban megvigasztalódsz,

de hidd el, hogy ez az arcvonal
már láthatatlan összetartozik.
Hiába hord egyik szemet a hátán,
a másik luxus autóban hiába ül,
gyárban, műhelyben és az irodában
hiába van ludtálcák és savak,

a végzet: emberből — hőssé farag!

Most Pistának hívják, esetleg Pálnak,
saját neved van, gondod s életed,
de lassankint már „fogalom“ leszel, —

sorsod: közös sir,
rangod: hősi halott,
és Pista helyett egyszer majd

a Budapesti hadosztálynak — neveznek.

THE BUDAPEST DIVISION

All told we just wanted to be people,
but we shall become compulsory reading –

and in Year 12 during history class
the teacher will explain about us –
just as

 on the basis
 of the high school syllabus
another history teacher talked to us once

about the breakthrough at Gorlic:

‘Grenades were falling,
charge upon charge, one following the other
and from a battalion of a thousand men
perhaps not even 20 stayed alive,
still no retreating, boys,

for the Budapest Division?’

It’s peacetime now – you say, a trifle alarmed
and at the movies you console yourself,

but believe that this front-line
is already invisibly connected.

In vain does the one carry coal on his back,
the other sits in a luxury car in vain,
in a factory, workshop or in the office
in vain do you have flat feet or an acid stomach

destiny – will carve you: from human into hero!

Now they call you Steve, possibly Sam
you have your own name, your worries and your life,
but by degrees you’ll become a ‘concept’

your fate: mass grave
your rank: heroic dead
and instead of Steve, one day
they'll call you

the Budapest Division.

All told we just wanted to be people,
you a writer, he a shop-assistant

and now, with a pen or a paper bag in our hands
not one amongst us understands

why will we become
history?
and why will the teacher explain
in Year 12 during history class
that we were born to be heroes

- with minor bodily flaws -

you and I.

MOMENTS

My finger

as if it were the big hand of the clock
I lay upon your breast
and in the silence of the night
I listen
to how mysteriously is ticking
the wonder-wrought timepiece of our love –
your heart.

Oh – because the moments are passing –

and with every drop of blood
that courses through your heart,
people fall to the ground,

and while we, with our kisses
greet life in advance,

upon another's pulse
politely knocks

death.

Kiegészés a lehetetlennel.

Levelimet másolat nélkül írom mától kezdve,
és nem vezetek többé kettős könyvelést
jó és rosszcsелеkedeteimről,

s ha sorsom úgy kívánja 140.000 szivdobbanást
28.000 mélylélegzettel együtt,
amit az élettől kaptam ~~itt~~ eddig kölcsön naponta,
a halálra engedményezem.

Ó mert nagyon is régi adósa,
vagyok én itt a földön mindenkinek,
és jellemző arra, hogy milyen körülmények között
jöttem a világra:

már gyermekkoromba kaptam egy ügyvédi felszólítást,
amelynek tartalma a

TIZPARANC SOLAT volt

és a hittantanító bácsi nyomtatékosan figyelmeztetett,
hogy feltétlenül tegyek eleget,
a szerződésnek amelyre születésemkor léptem
az Égek Úrával,
mert különben a pokolra jutok.

Azóta már váltót is aláírtam,

magamra vállaltam a Polgári, Kereskedelmi,
Magán, Bünyvédi és Közjog szabályait
és minden időben igyekeztem eleget tenni
a Nemzetközi jogban vállalt kötelezettségeimnek
- sőt ezenfelül újabb és újabb megállapodásokat
is kötöttem,

különböző belügyminiszterileg jóváhagyott
egyesületekkel.

Életemben így lassankint egyre több lett:

az engedély, parancs, törvény és szabály,
nem cigarettáztam a villamoson , pedig szerettem volna,
sohasem horgásztam tilalmi időben,

és bár tántorogtam a terhek sulya alatt,
mindig úgy tettem, ahogy előírták,
mert tudtam, hogy mi a becsület

- és az emberi kötelesség.

Szabad és meztelen embernek születtem

COMING TO TERMS WITH THE IMPOSSIBLE

From this day onwards
I will not make copies of my letters,
nor will I maintain a double entry
of my good and bad deeds

and if my fate so requires it, the 140 000 heartbeats
together with 28 000 deep breaths,
which I received from life on a daily loan thus far,
I will assign to death.

Oh, because I am such a long-standing debtor
of everyone here on earth,
as illustrated by the circumstances under which
I came into this world:

already in my childhood I received a legal writ,
the content of which was the

TEN COMMANDMENTS

and the old Scripture teacher emphatically warned me
that I must absolutely honour the contract
I entered into upon my birth
with the Lord of Heaven,
otherwise I will go to hell.

Since then, I've even signed promissory notes,

shouldered the rules of Civil, Commercial,
Domestic, Criminal and Constitutional Law
and tried, at all times, to fulfil
my obligations under International Law -
furthermore, I entered into newer and newer agreements

with various (Minister of the Interior approved) organisations.

So, little by little, my life became filled with more and more

permission, command, law and rule.

I didn't smoke on the tram, although I would have liked to
and I never fished in forbidden season

and though I staggered under the weight of the burdens,
I always abided by regulations
because I knew what were

decency and responsibility.

I was born naked and free
and I let them put me into clothes
and in accordance with social custom
I did not remove my little coat in company
even when I felt too hot,

because I tried to tie myself to the community
with more and more strings.

And behold, now they still want to bankrupt me
because according to the demands of racial purity
I can't officially prove

that I am actually descended from Adam.

My God, don't be surprised then
that I cracked under the weight of the burdens,

since they seized my belief in civilisation
and perhaps by tomorrow they will auction it -

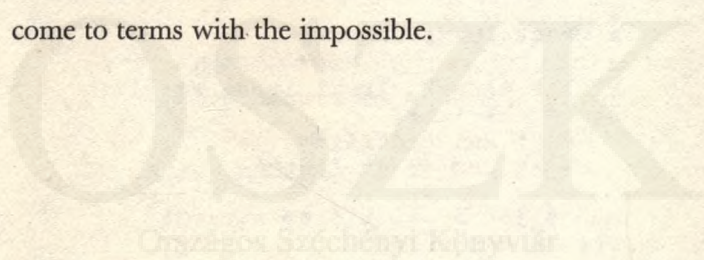
and after all this, all I ask of You
is to allow me to reach a forced settlement
for the only remaining things of importance,
to me in life:

the clouds, the flowers, my mother
and the one who loves me,
for that short duration, while life still lasts.

Lord! I've tried to live honourably
and now, given these few percent

I – most respectfully –

come to terms with the impossible.



Önkéntes száműzetés.

Se moziba, se színházba
nem járok,
és nem vagyok előfizetője:
a Rádiónak.

Nem olvasom a vezércikkeket
és a municiógyárak közgyűléseire
visszaküldöm,
a meghívókat.

A munkanélküliségélyemből,
nem adok a koldusoknak,
és már
nem izgatnak:

a mások luxus-szeretői.

Hitler és a Távirati Iroda hírei
nem érdekelnek,
mert ami érdekelne
- az nem érdekelhet

hát éljen a becsületes emberek
utolsó menedéke:

az önkéntes száműzetés.

SELF-IMPOSED EXILE

I don't go to the movies or to the theatre
and I am not a subscriber to Radio.

I do not read the editorials,
and to the ammunition manufacturers'
public meetings
I return the invitations.

I don't give to the beggars
from my unemployment benefit
and I am no longer bothered by:

the luxuriously-kept mistresses of others.

Hitler and the latest from the Telegraphic News Service
do not interest me,
 what would interest me
 – cannot interest me

so, long live the decent persons'
last refuge:

 the self-imposed exile.

Zene prózára.
2

Azol hátra a testek
és én már lejátszottam rajta:
az életem legrebb melodicit.

A jókora futamok
már elcsúsztak,
de amikor harulról elmegyek
gyakran eszreveszem,
- hogy
szerelemiink refraine-jét
tudom.

Oh jól tudom:

vau márult is zene
rikolto önfeledt hangvavat
örvint felém
sok idegen among,

de mindennek idegen
kontrapont helyett
jobbán megejt,-

- a te odaadásod - üteme.

Az ifjúságom hangversenye
már elmúlt!

s az nagyzenekarra int
vihariból
~~szó~~ kvartett lett:

fiám, leányom, te és az anyám;
és most a XI.:-ik szimfonia helyett
(amelybe leköltöttem
a többi nőket)

Ort a dallamot vezényelem

ahogy a cipőd lassú mozgásával
ringatód az újrülötledet.

MUSIC FOR PROSE

Your body is an Aeolian harp
and I have played upon it:

the most beautiful melodies of my life.

The feverish passages
have subsided
but when I leave home
I frequently notice
that

I'm humming
the refrain of our love.

Oh I know so well:

there is music elsewhere,
screeching, unbridled cacophony
emitted towards me
by many strange women,

but more than
by every strange counterpoint,
I am enchanted

by the rhythm of your giving.

The concert of my youth
is over!

And of my desires
composed for a full orchestra
came a quartet:

my son, my daughter, you and my mother;

and now instead of the XIth symphony
(in which I set to score
the other women)

I conduct that melody

in the manner which,
with the slow movement of your hips,
you cradle your newly born.

OSZK

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME

a poem by

AGNES WALDER

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME

Experiences of a second generation survivor

I

The first of these tales
was recalled
by an old anguish
riding on a dark-aqua sea
at sunset,
when such unbearable beauty
evokes the deepest pain.

II

MANY HARDSHIPS AGO,
in the early days
of self-knowledge,
I was on a heartbreaking stretch of
my journey.

Fog-bound in the night,
with the help of a small inner light
I wrote some prose and poetry
fervently noting that
such an activity
could redeem life.

With the same scanty
papers of identity,
I craved empathy
from the literary.

By and by,
through clubs and their contrivances
I met some mediocre talent,
plus the usual hangers-on
who wave the banners of disdain
and collect the petty cash.

Through workshops too,
I met with world-wise apathy,
large brains awaiting further occupancy
and a range of psychological disorders,
whose owners either looked to ease the pain
or reaffirm its legitimacy
through intellectual activity.

Yet for a time
I couldn't bear
another disenchantment.
So I stayed
and inhaled each stranger's pain
with compulsive solidarity.

Meanwhile,

the writers I waited for
never came.

Then one final day,
the bandits
who led these bestseller-hopefuls
robbed me of choice,
insisting

that submissive compromise
was the latest commandment
of writing.

And now
that old anguish
rode the ocean
revelling in this resurgence
and claiming
one encore after another –
calling me
an illegitimate,

an unknown,
a late starter,
uninvited
to a single literary salon.

I shouted back
that this era doesn't appear to have any,
and anyway,
such an assemblage could keep their vanity!

He swished out his tongue
and reminded me
that I had never had the company of
fledgling poets –
that early chance
to exercise brain and talent –
since my emigrant youth was spent
languageless
in the damned garden
of prolonged innocence.

III

For a while
I sat there in the twilight,
enduring the salt stinging the soul
once more

and then
I told that wretched old anguish to go
and take his faded anecdotes
back to the nether oceans
of the subconscious.

'Leave me be
with your regurgitations
of secondary tales.
You don't know all of it –

I have wrested evil's last victories
from his insatiable jaws.

MINE is the real story
and when darkness has fallen
I will tell it.

IV

AFTER THAT CATAclysmic
self-expulsion from the garden,
I covered my nakedness in front of man
and tried hard to hide from God.

Long after,
I wandered panic-stricken in the desert
and in my frantic search for manna
I was tempted to fabricate strange gods,

but this mirage was short-lived
because I longed for sanctity
and life beyond survival.

In the middle stages
the Muse tortured me.
The charge was
'Unexorcised Creativity'

Whenever she paused
with her varied tools of torment,
she would taunt me
with honeyed words
claiming that
I the Jewess,
was of noble birth
and had a legacy
of untold riches.

I held off confessing
as long as I was able
knowing that upon testimony
unendurable horrors awaited me.

According to my fears,
at the end of protracted trials
on the clear evidence
of furtive writings
conveying
unsuppressable needs

I was catapulted back to
the Holocaust
which terminated
in my infancy
with
the death of my father,
the Poet.

V

On the man-forsaken prairies
of individual truth
I arrived at the house of mourning.

Behind me
the years of search
rushed into the vanishing point
like the irrelevant lengths
of conquered train tracks
And from the portal up ahead
my own place in history
beckoned me
to rend my soul
in agony.

In these circumstances,
with Eternal Grief bending my head
I, daughter,
 now older than the father,
 claimed my genetic inheritance –

 the title of Poet.

VI

More than seven years
I sat shiva
over his major talent
as I restored
the literature he created
in his immutable youth.

 And there
in the unique personae of his poems
in the polished perceptions of his plays
I saw in sharp focus
the 'Group Portrait' of his soul.

This was my inimitable legacy.
Its every line confirmed
the oneness
of artistry with humanity,

and my every reading of it
distressed me!

*The worst afflictions
were caused
by the wanting hopes
of his unfinished manuscripts
which perpetuated
into dusty accusations.*

The experience necessitated
that I engineer pauses

Haemorrhaging from guilt
in these flights from pain,
I was forced to acknowledge
that the purveyor of my stops
was
but a trifling causation of evil.

VII

For my aforementioned
awful suffering on territory
which should have been
given to Joy,

once more

I curse

the accursed

to unending torments
by the ordeals
they perpetrated,

while terror devours them
in the monstrous hells
of each victim's fright.

VIII

Between his memory and me
flowed the high tide of love.

It was a family affair,

the covenant of two artists
as the younger
instructed the older.

I cherished discovering
that behind his creations,
I was long awaited
in the private workshop
of his early individuation
where
the frictional force of total integrity
constantly sharpened
the talent he treasured.

IX

I will never know the way he walked
or how he inclined his head

but holy is the knowledge
that his writings salvaged
my true identity

and holy was the quest
to carve his forgotten memory
into literary history.

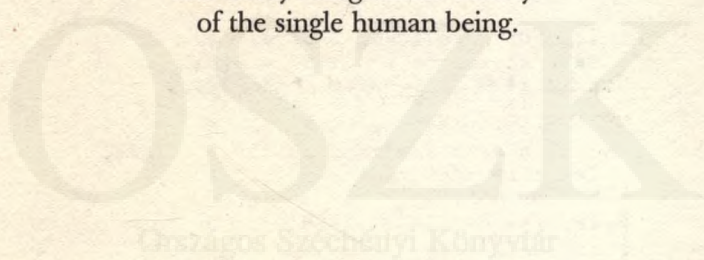
ENVOI:

Riding on the memory of his former power,
Old Anguish had miscalculated.

Stuck in a certain time zone
he could not know
that the dwelling place of my being
is at long last completed

and without such knowledge
how could he comprehend
that
like my father before me,
I subscribe solely

to the costly
and always illegitimate society
of the single human being.



Az utolsó napokban,
ennyit foglalkozom magammal,
hogy a lány akivel járok már
halálisan féltékeny rám:

én miattam.

Tegnap is amikor például
az utcán rohantam valahova,
hogy el ne késsek,

az órára néztem,

és váratlanul megkérdeztem magamtól
hogy ki ez az idegen fiatalember,
aki az én aktatáskámat tartja
a kezében,
és az én átmeneti kabátomban
és az én bőrömben rohan,
pillanatnyi célja felé.

Sajnos nem jött senki ismerős
velem szemben,
hogy ~~mi~~ megérdeklődhettem volna
náluk

így hát megálltam, leültem egy padra
mert egyszerre, ^{háman}
ez lett a legfontosabb ~~előttem~~.

-Uristen-~~o~~ ndoltam ijjedten é
összevissza szelédgálok itt a földön,
iskolába jártam,
diplomám van,
és most szorgozni tanulok

miért hát ez a nagy máhóság,
megismerni más dolgokat
és idegen embereket?

Aztán mint egy rejtvényfejtő előtt,
aki, aki leküzdte az utolsó akadályt
felvillant előttem:

hogy minden erőfeszítés, amelyel
másokat akarunk megismerni,
csak arra való,
hogy végre már egy kicsit közelebb
juthassunk:

sajátmagunkhoz.

NOTES TO THE POEMS
OF
LAJOS WALDER

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

I AM A WANDERER

'Vándor Vagyok' ('I am a Wanderer') appeared as the introductory poem of Walder's first volume of poetry. In this poem, the 19 year old poet creates his poetic identity and establishes the reason for his choice of the pseudonym, 'Vándor', which means 'Wanderer'.

It is the wish of the poet's children (who live in Sydney, Australia) that the English translations of his works appear under his family name, Walder, so that the connection with his children and grandchildren remains clear.

Mr G Hegedüs, the Hungarian writer and historian, in his introduction to the poet's posthumously published plays, makes a mention of the 'strongly Latin oriented tertiary education' of their times. Yet the poet is 'a wanderer of millennia' and the image of the 'German in Flanders' is, in all likelihood, taken from events of World War I.

Walder's profound despair at the human condition surfaces in his choice of being an 'undesirable other'. The latter also acts as a provocation upon the hypocritical values of his times, in which people were encouraged to imagine themselves 'irreproachably good' if they were Christian (preferably Roman Catholic), right-wing and irredentist: 'God, country, family' went the slogan. Hence the grotesque unlikelihood of a *petit-bourgeois* – the upright citizen – appearing in a nightclub (an event which would have been out of reach for the poet in those financially troubled times).

In the early 1930s in Hungary, the notion of '... a publisher in Academia' was totally outrageous, and bordering on the sacrilegious.

Instead of the original word for the monetary unit of his times ('pengő'), 'forint' (still in use in Hungary today), has been substituted. 'pengő' was the currency used between the two World Wars. During this period of increasingly vehement irredentism, 'pengő' was chosen for its Hungarian roots. It originated from the onomatopoeic 'peng', which describes the jingling sound coins make. 'Forint' (from the Italian 'florin') serves better in the English translation.

This poem was first published in book form in his first volume of poetry, *Heads or Tails*, published by Anonymous, Budapest, in 1933. It appeared in the posthumous volume of the poet's selected poems entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You* published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

'WE, THE TWENTY-FIVE LETTERS OF THE ALPHABET ...'

'We, The Twenty-five Letters of the Alphabet ...'

The letter 'W' does not appear in the Hungarian alphabet. Its use is restricted to those names and words which are adopted from the German.

'... Courths-Mahler ...'

The current equivalent of these romances is 'Mills and Boon'.

'and the Zarathustra'

Refers to Friedrich Nietzsche's 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra'. It was a very influential text in the early 1930s, before the Nazis contorted it beyond recognition for their own purposes.

'are willing to shrink to a mere four letters

.....

..... one word:

'Love!'

In Hungarian, love is 'a mere eight letters', 'szeretet'.

The poet wrote 'Mi, Az Abécé Huszonöt Betűje . . .' ('We, The Twenty-five Letters of the Alphabet . . .') at the age of nineteen. It first appeared a year later, in his first volume of poetry, *Heads or Tails*, published by Anonymous, Budapest, in 1933.

It appeared more recently in the posthumous volume entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, Published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

REVERENCE

'Kegelet' ('Reverence') was written by the poet when he was in his early 20s. The poem was planned for publication in the volume entitled *Group Portrait* but was omitted due to a printing error.

It first appeared in the posthumous volume of Walder's selected poems entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

PHILOSOPHICALLY PROFOUND POEM

The poet was 18-19 years old when he wrote 'Filozófiai Mélységű Költemény' ('Philosophically Profound Poem'). It was published in his first book, entitled *Heads or Tails*, by Anonymous, Budapest, in 1933, when he was twenty years old.

'Give me a firm spot in space'

In the first line of the poem, he quotes Archimedes, with poetic licence. *Archimedes said (about the lever):*

'Give me a firm spot on which to stand and I will move the earth'.

' . . . with hot and cold running water . . . '

In the early 1930s, 90 per cent of the apartment houses in Budapest, had cold water. Only the very affluent had hot and cold running water in their homes.

' . . . for a daily two hundred dollars'

In the original poem, the sum is a daily twenty dollars. However, in the translation, it has been changed to its current equivalent, easily \$200.

'Because it is not the Pan-European ideals I want to realise,
my obsession is -'

The 'Pan-European ideals' were the 1930's version of hopes for a united Europe. In these two lines there is also an untranslatable play on words: in Hungarian the word for ideal is 'esztme' while obsession is called 'rögeszme'. Hence in close proximity to 'esztme' ('ideal'), the compound word denotes a very different meaning.

'that there are people on earth
whose reasons for not eating meat every day'

In the early 1930s, beggars lined the streets in Budapest, and many people literally went hungry. Feeding a family was an all-consuming occupation. A *petit-bourgeoise* family (such as the family of the poet), could afford to eat meat at best, twice a week. Yet, according to the beliefs of the time, meat was considered the most important and most energising of foods.

' . . . may God repay you . . . '

This line represents the middle phrase in how a beggar would thank someone for giving alms. Such thanks-givings of beggars were heard so often during the day on the streets of Budapest, that the poet deliberately leaves out the beginning and end of the sentence, because everyone was so familiar with the variations of it.

'So this is where the preachings
and the Culbertson-style contract bridge played among friends
has brought them.'

In predominantly Catholic Hungary, the priests preached eternal life. The latter also aimed at keeping the frustrations of the population in check.

In the early 1930s, after Culbertson's invention of the points system, the playing of bridge spread to the petit-bourgeoisie. Thus, for the average person of the most modest means, being able to play bridge was often perceived as an elevation in social status. It brought an aura of 'sophistication' – in these financially humiliating times, the feeling of 'being a cut above the rest'. But bridge is also a competitive game and even when 'played among friends' (literally, in Hungarian, on a 'family basis'), can unmask seething aggression in the guise of benignity.

The poem's second appearance was in the posthumous volume of selected poems entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

INTERVIEW

A mention of the poet's mother's age reveals the date of this poem. He was 21 years old when he wrote it, in 1934.

The subtitle 'Entirely Free Verse' ('Egészen Szabad Vers') can also mean 'Entirely Free Poem'.

'the shopkeeper
first said 156 pengő'

'Pengo' was the Hungarian monetary currency between the two World Wars. For a more thorough explanation of 'pengo' see the footnotes of 'I am a Wanderer'. In contrast to the latter's translation, the word 'pengo' has not been changed to 'forint' in this more prosaic poem.

'as for one of his uncles,
he was caught by
a Rumanian advance guard,
and cut into eighteen pieces
or perhaps it was
nineteen'

Historically, there has been long standing animosity between the Hungarians and the Rumanians. In World War I, Rumania was neutral at first. But in 1916, it joined the Allies in their fight against the Central Powers and shortly thereafter attacked the Hungarian army. It was during this time that the poet's uncle, a soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army, was murdered.

'bearing in mind censorship'

Communist views were banned and all published material had to be compliant with Catholic doctrine.

'blasphemy-against-humanity'

The Hungarian expression for the English meaning of 'blasphemy' requires the compound word 'Istenkáromlás' (Isten meaning God, káromlás meaning swearing or blasphemy – the latter on its own is not necessarily against God). 'Emberkáromlás' (blasphemy-against-humanity) is the poet's own highly original nonce on the above. The hyphens in the English translation are the best one can do to indicate this compact expression.

'Interju' ('Interview') was not published in the poet's lifetime. It was first published in the posthumous volume of his selected poems entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989. In late September 1989, when the posthumous appeared in Budapest, 'Interview' was chosen as the 'Poem of the Month' for October on Budapest Television's poetry program. Well known actors were keen to recite it, probably because it suited the post-communist mood of the times.

THE HEAD

This poem was written during a period of chronic unemployment. The latter would have accentuated the unbridgeable gap between boss and employee. In the original poem, at the beginning of line 15, the poet called the 'Boss', 'Mr Boss'. This small subtlety cannot be rendered in English, but in the original, whilst acting as a sarcasm, it is also descriptive of an era in which titles underscored hierarchy.

'A Fej' ('The Head') was first published in Walder's second volume of poetry entitled *Group Portrait*, by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938. It appeared later in the posthumous volume entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

MR SOMOGYI, OR THE EVERYDAY ODE

' . . . and once for three weeks
you were held in jail under investigation,'

In the 1930s Hungary had a semi-fascist government and people could be held under investigation at the discretion of the police.

' . . . I don't have any gate money;
I am hoping to borrow twenty cents from you -'

The gates of apartment houses were locked at 10 p.m. After that time the janitor expected a small fee for opening the gate. Though the customary amount was only 20 or 30 cents, the poet often didn't have it. In the subsequent translation of *A poet lives here amongst you*, 'the gate money' is translated as a 'late-entry' fee.

'....."blessed are the poor in spirit"
.....
.....
.....
.....
and "theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven".'

In the 1930s most people in predominantly Catholic Hungary believed (literally) in this prayer. The same went for 'the gates of St Peter'.

'Somogyi Úr, Avagy Egy Hétköznapi Óda' ('Mr Somogyi, or the Everyday Ode') was first published in Walder's second volume of poetry, entitled *Group Portrait*, by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938. Its second appearance was in the posthumous volume of his selected poems entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

GROUP PORTRAIT OF MYSELF

The Poet's given name Lajos, means Louis in French. Consequently, he shares his name with a long line of French kings who, in Hungarian, are referred to as: 14th Lajos', 15th Lajos etc.

'economy stove wrung blazing flame'

is the closest expression available in English to the original meaning: 'takaréktűzhelybe srofolt' (literally in English, 'screwed'). In addition, 'srofolt' is generally understood as 'screwed with a screwdriver or some such tool'. Hence, its implication in the poem is that it's forced. The poet is the blazing flame forced out of the economy stove. Finally, 'srofolt' is a most appropriate analogy to the action of turning the knob on the gas stove (especially on the kind of gas stoves which were in existence more than fifty years ago). The 'economy stove' is symbolic of the ongoing need to economise. The emphasis was forever on making sure that a light, or the gas, did not stay on one moment longer than was absolutely necessary.

'the elementary school Louis.....
.....secondary-schooler.'

An 'elementary school Louis' in Hungarian is the one who attends elementary school and is embodied in just one word 'elemista'. In the same way, the one who attends high school is called 'gimnázista'. Unfortunately in English, which needs more than a single word to express these, the opening and closing half rhymes of these two lines are lost. In the original poem, the easy rhyming of 'elemista' and 'gimnázista' further conceal the 'throw-away' subtlety that, as a 'gimnázista' ('secondary-schooler'), he is no longer a novice.

'Csoportkép Magamról' ('Group Portrait of Myself'), was the introductory poem of his second volume of poetry entitled *Group Portrait*, published by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938. Its second publication was in the posthumous volume entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

MOOKY

In the original poem, the words 'hello boy' appear in English (the poet had only the most rudimentary knowledge of that language).

'... as a babe of the post war generation:
he held that even the cat – was just a dog'

These lines refer to the gross naivety of his post World War I generation, reared on obedience to sanctimonious irredentism and extreme right wing values. The pun works better in Hungarian; the cat (member of the feline family) is far more sinister than man's friend, the dog. In addition, the word 'macska' (the fully grown cat), implies more aggressive qualities than the English 'cat'.

'Kolbász' is the name of a well known, spicy Hungarian sausage. The unit of 10 grams (the decagram), is a far more common measuring unit than the gram, in Hungary, and more generally, in that part of Europe.

'Muki' (for the correct pronunciation spelled as 'Mooky' in English), was first published in book form in his second volume of poetry, entitled *Group Portrait*, by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938. The poem's second publication was in the posthumous volume of Walder's selected poems entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

SHORT LYRICAL ORATION

'the sons of Gandhi in India
are steaming the salt
to national colours'

In the early Hindu/Muslim conflicts of India he saw a mirror to the rise of ugly nationalism, in Hungary, where racial purity was the all pervasive new slogan.

'since today everybody
is their own publicity chief,
printing error
and female cousin.'

refers to the general scramble to justify personal background and to try to prove how 'faultlessly' connected people were. The discovery of some ancient Hungarian lineage, for instance through a remote cousin, was an everyday event. Ordinary people suddenly 'learned' that there were prefixes to their family names – these, of course were an instant link to aristocracy.

'Rövid Lírai Szónoklat' ('Short Lyrical Oration') was first published in the poet's second volume of poetry *Group Portrait*, by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938. Its second publication was in the posthumous volume entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

BUDAPEST

'Budapest', was first published in his second volume of poetry entitled *Group Portrait*, by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938.

'At first she started out as two women: Pest and Buda,'

The two separate towns on opposite banks of the Danube became Budapest in 1873. 'Budapest' also included 'Óbuda' or 'Ancient Buda'. The poet mentions 'Pest' first, because it became the Capital of Hungary in 1848.

'but when it occurred to her
that she would then always need two new hats
and two new pairs of stockings'

Hats, and silk stockings in particular, were the more expensive 'luxury necessities' of women's apparel.

'Her marital status is shrouded in uncomfortable mystery
because in spite of the fact that she is a maiden,
thus far, she has already given birth
to fourteen healthy suburbs,'

In those days, the sanctity of marriage was paramount: Having a child born out of wedlock was considered the greatest disgrace. A woman who gave birth to an illegitimate child was ostracized forever.

'Her well-wishers say of her that she is a widow
who supports herself and her children
by renting out rooms'

In order to make ends meet, in the bankrupt years of the 1930s, such a practice was common in Budapest. The poet's own widowed mother rented out two rooms of their four-room apartment.

'"come in beautiful boy" she calls
to the Great Plain.'

The 'Great Plain' or more literally the Great 'Lowland' (flatland), is immediately east of the capital. Now (in 2004), Budapest has twenty-two suburbs. Doubtless, considerably more of the 'Great Plain' has been appropriated into the capital since this poem was written, circa 1936-37.

The poem's second appearance was in the posthumous volume of Walder's selected poems entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

ANIMAL TALE

'the Govt. pensioned village bull,'

In Hungary, between the two World Wars, a government pension still signified unshakeable security. Consequently, the use of the abbreviation 'Govt. pension' was understood by everyone. For further explanation of 'jobs with a Government pension', see the footnotes to Walder's poem 'Lost Generation'.

'Állatmese' ('Animal Tale') first appeared in the poet's second volume of poetry, *Group Portrait*, published by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938. The second publication was in the posthumous volume of his selected poems, entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

INFORMATION

'Murillo's angels . . .'

The 17th century Spanish painter depicted the more gentle scenes of Christianity, in which the holy family was surrounded by glorious little cherub angels.

'nor is the guardian angel
who, in the oleograph,'

An oleograph was the 1930s version of a cheap print made from an oil painting. Such paintings were always of religious content or of scenes of innocence. They bestowed instant moral virtuosity upon their owners. Consequently, most homes had more than one such print hanging on their walls.

'and of Petőfi who died
in battle,'

Sándor Petőfi was an immortal Hungarian poet who died in battle in 1849, while still only in his twenties. The pun in thinking of Petőfi 'at the moment of death', is that at the time of writing 'Information', this poet was also only in his twenties.

'and of Heine
who died in a mattress-grave'

The German/Jewish poet Heine, spent the last years of his life, paralysed in bed. It was Heine himself, who coined the expression that he was living in a 'mattress-grave'.

'and then in the World War'

The war here is World War I.

'Információ' ('Information'), was first published in Walder's second volume of poetry, entitled *Group Portrait of Myself*, by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938. Its second publication was in the posthumous volume of selected poems, entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

ARM-IN-ARM

'among the bankrupt shops'

This is an image of the general poverty and financial disasters of the 1930s, still haunted by the stock market crash of 1929.

The 'boulevard' Walder refers to is one of the main arteries of Pest – a great 'ring road' that begins and ends at the Danube.

'Karonfogva' ('Arm-in-arm') was first published in Walder's second volume of poetry, entitled *Group Portrait*, by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938. It appeared again in the posthumous volume of Lajos Walder's selected poems, entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

LEGEND IN PROSE

'Legenda Prózában' ('Legend in Prose') was first published in the poet's second volume of poetry, entitled *Group Portrait*, by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938. It also appeared in the posthumous volume of his selected poems, *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

'A POET LIVES HERE AMONGST YOU . . .'

'Egy költő él itt közöttetek . . .' ('A poet lives here amongst you . . .'), was not published during the poet's lifetime. It was his children's wish that the posthumous volume of his selected poems (which was published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989), take its title, altered to the past tense, from this poem.

‘Josephtown’ (‘Józsefváros’), where the poet lived with his widowed mother, two older sisters, and younger brother, was a poor, low-middle class neighbourhood. They lived on the second floor of an apartment building. In those days all apartment buildings had a janitor as well as an underjanitor. The latter assisted in janitorial duties. After 10 pm the gates of all apartment buildings were locked. Those who got home after that time had to ring the bell to be let in by the janitor. Though the customary late-entry fee was small, the equivalent of 20 or 30 cents today, the poet often didn’t have it.

‘two of my books have already been published;’

The two books were his two volumes of poetry ‘Fej vagy Irás’ (*Heads or Tails*), published by Anonymous, Budapest, in 1933, and ‘Csoportkép’ (*Group Portrait*), published by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938. Since after 1938, the works of Jewish artists could no longer be published, there were to be no further publications in his lifetime.

‘I appear on radio as well –’

For approximately two years he worked as a Children’s Program presenter on Budapest radio. It was his task to write the fairytales presented in those programs. Several of these fairytales, many of which also appeared in various magazines in the 1930s, were found amongst his manuscripts. To date only one of them, ‘Miért szomorú a virágváza?’ (‘Why is the vase sad?’) has been translated into English. This beautiful fairytale may have been a precursor to his play *Vase of Pompeii*.

The poem was first published in the posthumous volume of his selected poems, entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

TRAVELLING

It may be of interest in the context of this poem that in one of his notebooks the following entry was found:

‘but what am I to do,
I am not willing to turn myself inside out,
and will journey on with the soul
even if
around me everyone has already buttoned their conscience
up to the chin.’

‘... a shaky wooden bench’

was the furnishing of a third class carriage on a train. The poet was familiar with the latter, because he could not afford to travel in any other class.

‘Utazás’ (‘Travelling’), was first published in the poet’s second volume entitled *Group Portrait*, by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938. Its second appearance was in the posthumous volume entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

STUDY-TOUR

Was first published in Walder’s second volume of poetry entitled *Group Portrait*, by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938 and appeared again more recently in the posthumous volume entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

MEMORIAL SPEECH

‘Emlékbeszéd’ (‘Memorial Speech’) was never published in the poet’s lifetime.

‘lives in the parish cemetery of Downe –’

Charles R. Darwin was born in Shrewsbury, England, on 12 February 1809. He died on 19 April 1882, in Downe, England. Upon his death his family arranged for him to be buried in St. Mary’s

churchyard in Downe. Afterwards, at the request of William Spottiswoode (the President of the Royal Society), the Dean of Westminster agreed for Darwin to be buried in Westminster Abbey. The poet, in Budapest, Hungary in the 1930s, was unaware of this fact.

‘.....the consumptive pariahs
of the English coal mines’

Without the availability of antibiotics, one of the most terrifying illnesses was tuberculosis, also known as consumption. Other lung diseases were also rampant, particularly in the awful conditions of the English coalmines.

In contrast, England’s parliamentary democracy was far in advance of the right wing dictatorship which existed in Hungary in the 1930s. Consequently, English citizens were freer and were assured of certain rights. This is depicted in the line: ‘in accordance with the right of every free, tax-paying English citizen’.

‘having created an even greater furore
in the whole of the cultured world,
than did his theories –’

These lines were written in the 1930s, when the vast majority of ordinary people in (predominantly Catholic) Hungary, still believed in the notion of the six-day creation.

‘as is right and proper,
he arrived amongst the immortals.’

In the original of this poem, Darwin arrives among the immortals receptacled in a light box or as if he himself were the vehicle of the box. He ‘draws-in’ among the immortals (The word ‘skatulya’ is most often associated with a matchbox). The expression ‘beskatulyázott’ (which is slang in Hungarian) is particularly charming here. It depicts the ease and rightfulness of his arrival amongst the immortals.

This poem was first published in the posthumous volume, *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

OBLIGATORY SPRING POEM

As the subtitle *‘Ars poetica for the Weather and Water level reporting poets’* suggests, the poet was contemptuous of ‘pretty’ poetry. (The latter was still very much in vogue at the time.) Ars is a latin word whose primary meaning is skill, or art. The Hungarian expression for such ‘skilled’ versifiers is: ‘verse carvers’: the quotation marks around ‘the yellowed leaves’ and ‘The first snowflake’ mock the predictability of their poems.

‘and I,
as my feelings’
domestic servant:’

In an era which was without any general awareness of psychology, Walder read Freud and Adler extensively and admired them. This was a period in which even people of the most modest means had domestic servants.

‘Kötelező Tavaszi Vers’ (‘Obligatory Spring Poem’) was first published in the poet’s second volume of poetry, entitled *Group Portrait*, by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938. It appeared again in the posthumous volume entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

HOROSCOPE

‘Horoszkóp’ (‘Horoscope’), was first published in Walder’s second volume of poetry entitled *Group Portrait*, published by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938.

'... with self-esteem lowered to half mast,'

Given the realities that will follow, he can hardly be overly proud of being human.

'Two will die young, of lung disease,'

In those pre-antibiotic days, tuberculosis was a frequent and most often fatal disease. It was eternally feared, as was venereal disease, the most common form of which was syphilis.

'... 0.059, however, will be a movie star,'

In an era of widespread unemployment, multitudes fantasized about being discovered and turned into a Greta Garbo or a Rudolf Valentino. Young women were slaves to copying the eyebrows, the clothes and hairstyles of American movie stars.

'I know – now I should be lying

like a fortune-teller on a home visit, ...'

Fortune-tellers would make home visits for a fee and tell the fortunes of, for instance, a group of girlfriends. One favourite way of telling a fortune was to have the *demi-tasse* turned upside down following the client's drinking of Turkish coffee. The person's fortune would then be told from the pattern of coffee residue in the cup.

'instead, all day long, I write telegrams of condolence
and whistle Chopin's funeral march'

Black-edged condolence telegrams were a customary way of notifying distant relatives or friends. They could be purchased at the post office. Chopin's funeral march was the most frequently played music on occasions of public mourning.

'how indifferently is washing his hands
in the autumn rain,

an unknown, enormous Pilate.'

Pontius Pilate was said to have washed his hands to symbolise his evasion of responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus.

The poem's second appearance was in the posthumous volume entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

PARLIAMENTARIANISM

'Parlamentárizmus' ('Parliamentarianism') was written to Eva, his future wife.

'but if your budget of expenditure
also resembles hers –'

A joking comment about a serious issue – whether a young woman, in an era when it was incumbent upon a man to pay for everything on a date, understood that the chosen entertainment could not be costly, because he had, at best, little money.

The poem first appeared in Walder's second volume of poetry entitled *Group Portrait*, published by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938. Its second publication was in the posthumous volume entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

'IN THE LAST FEW DAYS ...'

This untitled poem was not published in the poet's lifetime. It must have been written some time between 1937, when he obtained his degree, and 1939, when he married my mother, Eva, who was the girl he was '... going out with'.

'Az utolsó napokban . . .' ('In the last few days . . .'), was first published in the posthumous volume of his selected poems, entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

FAMILY EVENT

'Családi Esemény' ('Family Event'), evokes the life and the language of the 'community' of an apartment building in Budapest, where such an event cannot be kept from the other tenants.

'Our potted-palm'

Literally, in the original poem, 'our palm'. In Hungary, in those days, it would have been a matter-of-course that the poet meant a potted palm: full size palm trees could not have existed at all in Central-European countries, because there were no sufficiently sophisticated hot houses. The poet's mother was very fond of pot plants.

'How tiny
and already how green,

of course, you can tell just by looking at him
what a distinguished family
he comes from.'

The importance of 'pedigree' could not be understated in those days when every ordinary person claimed some descendancy from aristocracy. And certainly, every minister in the cabinet, or an 'Under-Secretary of State', would have been an aristocrat. There was an under-secretary of state in every ministry. It meant being third in charge.

' . . . carpet-beating . . . '

The parquetry flooring of the apartments was often covered by Persian carpets of various size. The dusting of carpets by way of beating them would usually occur in the inner courtyard of the building.

'you know
that is where those
mighty palm trees are found'

Unfortunately the wonderfully accurate nuance of the 'you know', which the poet employs in the original, cannot be rendered in the English translation. The Hungarian form of the French *vous* has two distinct manifestations. The first is when an adult addresses another adult; the second, even more respectful, is when a child addresses an adult, or when an adult addresses a very old person. In this stanza it is an adult addressing a peer adult in an exceedingly respectful manner. He does this because, excited by the birth of the 'little one', he feels both generous and the need to win the other over to what he is saying.

The poem was first published in the poet's second volume of poetry, entitled *Group Portrait*, by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938. Its second publication was in the posthumous volume, entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

WORLD HISTORY

'Világtörténelem' ('World History') was first published in the poet's second volume of poetry, entitled *Group Portrait*, by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, by 1938.

'Since then I lived through
several revolutions:

my own illusions beheaded me -'

This image is drawn from the French revolution, which continued to have a particularly large impact in that part of the world, and was taught in every high school history curriculum.

The poem also appeared in the posthumous volume of Walder's selected poems entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

I WAS ABOUT 15 YEARS OLD . . . ?

According to the poet's brother, Imre, this untitled poem was probably written towards the end of 1938.

'Then Hitler came and the years passed -
the fever turned into constant temperature'

By 1935, Jews in Germany were robbed of their rights as citizens. In 1936, Hitler occupied the Rhineland and the Axis was formed. In 1938, he seized Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia and was planning to invade Poland while being on the offensive against Britain. Meanwhile in Hungary, pro-Nazi and pro-German sentiments were galloping and Jewish prohibitions were constantly on the increase. Having 'constant temperature' and being permanently in a state of convalescence is analogous to a person seriously ill with tuberculosis.

'And whenever I go
the old gas-lamps . . . '

The main boulevards of Budapest still had many gas-lamps in operation.

'and give thanks
that after so many brown shirts -'

In the original poem, the line reads ' . . . after so many coloured shirts'. The German Nazis wore brown shirts, the Italian Fascists wore black shirts and the Hungarian Nazis wore green shirts.

'Körülbelül 15 éves voltam . . . ' ('I was about 15 years old . . . ') was first published in the posthumous volume, entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

ART GALLERY

'Képtár' ('Art Gallery'), was first published in his second volume of poetry entitled *Group Portrait*, by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, 1938.

'there is silence and rapture
and a few etchings

of my dead father
my mother
and you'

The 'you' in the poem is Eva, his future wife.

The poem also appeared in the posthumous volume of his selected poems, entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

LOST GENERATION

'Elveszett Generáció' ('Lost Generation') was first published in the poet's second volume, entitled 'Group Portrait', Cserépfalvi, Budapest, 1938.

The phrase 'Lost Generation' was coined after World War I - to quote Gertrude Stein: 'Ah, of you young people who served in the war, you are a lost generation'. The poet, born in 1913, was only 5 years old when World War I ended. Yet, his own generation also inherited the label 'Lost Generation'. The latter must have found its new justification in an era of massive unemployment.

'LOST: THE MEANING OF MY LIFE!
between 1913 and 1937'

In 1937, the poet was 24 years old and graduating from Law studies. At the time, unemployment in Hungary continued to be so rampant that university-trained engineers were happy to get jobs as tram conductors, and beggars lined the streets.

'... in the pre-war years'

In the original poem, in Hungarian, the expression is 'within the peace years'. This well known, nostalgic, stock phrase refers to the years before World War I. From 1849 to 1914, there were no wars in Hungary.

'to secure a job with a government pension'

with virtually no social security in the pre-World War I years, to obtain a mundane office job with a government pension was considered a very successful career. This applied not only to Hungary, but also to other parts of Europe. Max Brod, in his biography of Franz Kafka, wrote about the importance of a clerical job with a government pension in Czechoslovakia.

'and my mother would also have some benefit out of me'

He loved his widowed mother very much. He also felt a profound responsibility to try and ease her financial struggles.

'because there are still
too many young men -
and too few cars.'

In Hungary, in the 1930s, only millionaires had cars. For the average person, the possibility of purchasing a car was more remote than buying an aeroplane would be today.

'because someone could well report him to the police'

At the time, Hungary had a semi-fascist government, and an individual could be arrested and held in jail indefinitely at the discretion of the police.

The poem also appeared in the posthumous volume, entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

PEACE

'Béke' ('Peace'), first appeared in Walder's second volume of poetry, entitled *Group Portrait*, published by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938. In the same year this volume was widely reviewed. As part of the review in *World Literature Review*, Budapest, April 1938, the following was written about the poet: 'Now and then he brandishes the rod of instructive fairytales, so that from the mirror held up in front of us, we may recognise ourselves more easily.' This comment was followed by the poem called 'Peace'.

The poem's second publication was in the posthumous volume, entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

LAST HUMAN BEING

'Utolsó Ember' ('Last Human Being') was found among the poet's unpublished manuscripts. The poem was not dated. It was probably written in 1935 or 1936. At the time, Hungary had an extreme right-wing government. Consequently, such a poem could not have been published.

'munching, they laugh into my face.'

Literally in Hungarian: 'csámcsogva' - this one word expresses eating in a noisy, ugly way.

Although communism was forbidden in Hungary during the 1930s, in a short story, he wrote about 'the paid communist agitators' on the streets of Budapest – he was obviously as well aware of the corruptions of the covert left as he was of those of the existing fascist regime.

'and in the street fusillade'

is figurative at that time.

'... salted fish with onions'

refers to a herring-like small fish, literally called 'Russian fish' in Hungarian. It was the cheapest fare.

'Last Human Being' was first published in the posthumous publication of Walder's selected poems, entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

EXPEDITION

'Expedició' ('Expedition') was written to my mother, Eva, during their courting. They were married in 1939. The poem first appeared in his second volume of poetry entitled *Group Portrait*, published by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938.

In those days 'Foreign Travel' was rare – the privilege of the wealthy. Due to its rarity, it had a mysterious, exotic appeal. In fact, the poet would very much like to have travelled, had he been able to afford it. Always a voracious reader, he read widely on all subjects, including expeditions to remote places.

'But You, are missing from
Frommer's What-To-See
intended for strangers'

I substituted the currently easy to recognise travel book 'Frommer' for its original version in the poem, where it was called 'Baedekker', the only book on travel available in Hungary at the time.

'suitable expedition equipment
for reaching the others is:
a car, a gold chain
or twenty bucks'

A man had to be very rich to be able to give a car to a woman. The gift of a gold chain was a generous present in comfortable middle class circles, and the 'twenty bucks' refers to the price of a prostitute.

The glowing, natural 'Northern light' seen at night in the sky of the Northern Hemisphere, is also known as *Aurora Borealis*.

The poem appeared again in the posthumous volume of his selected poems entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

THE LITANY OF VAINLINESS

'A Hiáavalóság Litániája' ('The Litany of Vainliness'), was not published in the poet's lifetime. His brother Imre, remembers that it was written in 1937 (when the poet was 24 years old). As with his other anti-war poems, it reflects his ongoing anxiety that war was a certainty.

'the legion of honour, the iron cross'

In the original poem these two titles appear in lower case, doubtless deliberately, since they are normally written with capital letters in Hungarian.

'or commemorative badges of war'

These were given to soldiers by way of lower decorations. But badges of war (often issued by ammunition factories), were also popularly worn on the lapels of civilians in this era of extreme nationalism.

'instead of their legs
you can only give them wooden legs
and instead of their eyes
only glass eyes.'

These were post World War I realities. There was no shortage of such war-wounded men on the streets of Budapest between the two World Wars.

'and it is precisely this which is maddening,
that all of us are afraid
and dreading it,'

These lines portray the sentiments of young men (irrespective of religion), in Budapest in those years, about the coming inevitability of being called up. In spite of galloping anti-semitism, in 1937, the poet could not yet foresee that by 1939, there would be Jewish laws rendering the fate of Jewish young men infinitely worse than being called up into the army.

The poem was first published in the posthumous volume entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, by Maecenas, Budapest, 1989.

TYPEWRITER

'Irógép' ('Typewriter') was first published in the poet's second volume of poems, entitled *Group Portrait*, by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, 1938.

The poet, who likens himself to a typewriter, is prolific and capable of all manner of writing. But 'soundlessly' pouring out:

'.....the lines
for adult and children's magazines'

is clearly not his choice of writing. However, he needs to try and earn money, while completing his university degree. He is also hopeful that getting paid for his stories will 'legitimise' his desire to choose writing as a profession.

'as we can see, he is a relatively
new model,'

At the time of writing this poem, he was about 24 years old.

'in red
if a red ribbon is inserted
if it is black, he writes in black'

Here he refers to the inherent political bias of magazines. The red ribbon represents the far less frequent communist angle, while the black ribbon refers to the all-pervasive fascist view. Although communism was severely banned in Hungary at the time, communist literature nevertheless seeped through via Hungarian translations from Czechoslovakia, which had a left-of-centre Government, and many Hungarian speakers from pre-World War I times.

'but a girl, who
is in love with him'

The girl is his future wife, Eva.

The poem appeared again in the posthumous volume entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

POEM OF THE UNEMPLOYED

'Munkanélküli Verse' ('Poem of the Unemployed') first appeared in the poet's second volume of poetry entitled *Group Portrait*, published by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938.

One year earlier he graduated from Law, at the University of Budapest. The footnotes to his poem 'Coming to terms with the impossible' describe the Jewish laws which then prevented him from practising law.

'the framed Gobelin . . .'

is a typical home-embroidered Gobelin tapestry.

'Gentlemen of the Jury" said I, and bowed low'

It was a custom for the defendant to rise, bow to the Court, identify himself and state his case. This procedure was required irrespective of whether or not he had a defense lawyer.

'Renan's, Mereskovskij's and Mikszáth's works
sat in hardbacks.'

Renan was a French historian and religious scholar. Mereskovskij was a White Russian writer and Mikszáth was a modern early 20th century Hungarian novelist. The three were not representative of the poet's taste in literature. They belonged to the family's books in general and sat on a bookshelf in a room he shared with his younger brother Imre.

'I am accused
though being of age
of never yet having earned my keep!'

This was possibly a response to earlier sarcastic asides of some distant relatives, who did not think that writing was a serious occupation, coupled with his own concerns about wanting to earn a living.

'I can honestly say that not even
gold watches interest me,
since it is common knowledge
that I squander the day'

In his undergraduate years, Walder tried to make a living out of writing. To this end (as is the subject of his poem 'Typewriter'), he wrote short stories and fairytales for magazines. But this did not enable him to earn enough money for 'his keep', nor was writing considered 'real work'. The literal translation of 'that I squander the day' would be 'that I steal the day'. The latter is a commonplace expression in Hungarian. It has profoundly pejorative connotations. Someone who 'steals the day' is a person who doesn't work – hence he is 'a-good-for-nothing'.

The poem appeared in the posthumous volume of Walder's selected poems entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Macaenas, Budapest, in 1989.

THE LAST SPECTATOR

'Az utolsó néző', ('The Last Spectator'), was never published in the poet's lifetime. After 1938, the works of Jewish artists were not published.

'In the Great Dictionary of the *Academy*,

The Academy was the body which had the final say on the correct usage of the language.

'for every Smith there were 10,000 Barrymores'

For the present generation, perhaps the least known among the film stars mentioned is John Barrymore.

'And mothers-to-be.....
.....
be that beautiful.'

Refers to the superstitious belief that if a mother-to-be looks at beautiful people, her baby will also be beautiful. In the late 1930s and early 1940s the majority of the population in Hungary, to a greater or lesser extent, still believed in this superstition.

'.....high school students worked in laboratories
on the manufacture of heatable and scented film.'

The thought that movies, having progressed to talkies, should further progress to giving physical satisfaction and sensory pleasures (such as touch and smell) was already prevalent in the 1930s. More importantly however, the movie houses were not adequately heated in winter.

'which for every cubic metre of talking -
coloured and plastic film contained.'

The word plastic here has the same connotation as it has for us today: i.e. fake, artificial and prefabricated. But, in 1940 this word, (even in the technical sense), was only rarely used - so that the pun here is both sharp and original. As units of 10, both 'decimetre' and 'decagram' were and are commonly used measurements in Hungary.

'made quite a tolerable movie out of them
for home use.....'

Clothing or other items, which were sewn for 'home use', were not good enough to be seen in public. In addition, in this era of pre mass-produced clothes, the work of 'a seamstress who came in', was not the equivalent to that of a tailor in a salon.

The poem was first published in the posthumous volume of his selected poems, *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

THE DREAM

'Az Álom' ('The Dream'), was not published in the poet's lifetime. It is not known when it was written.

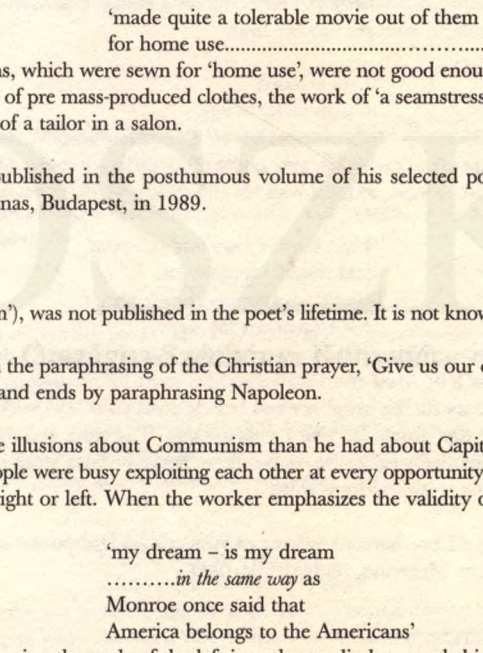
The poem begins with the paraphrasing of the Christian prayer, 'Give us our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses . . .' and ends by paraphrasing Napoleon.

The poet had no more illusions about Communism than he had about Capitalism. He was broken-hearted by the way people were busy exploiting each other at every opportunity irrespective of whether they belonged to the right or left. When the worker emphasizes the validity of

'my dream - is my dream
.....in the same way as
Monroe once said that
America belongs to the Americans'

he had already begun using the tools of the left in order to climb towards his dream of becoming a capitalist.

Known as 'The Monroe Doctrine' (2 December 1823), President Monroe's *Statement of Principle*, which became a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy, begins as follows 'The American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonisation by any European powers . . .'.



'And anyway', he added
'it is not included in the collective contract'

The latter expression was ahead of its times in Hungary of the mid 1930s, where only about 1/4 of factory workers belonged to a union, and socialist ideas such as a 'collective contract' were rare.

'... the so-called self-awareness of the working masses'

Generally speaking the poet despaired of people's lack of self-awareness and their inability to think for themselves. The latter is a constant theme in his work. He did not believe that the situation could somehow be better in the case of the underprivileged and uneducated. He was an avid reader on all subjects and the idea for this line may have come from one of Lenin's claims, 'that the revolutionary organisations will be able to guarantee the working masses in the Soviet system a greater degree of independent activity and self-awareness'.

'modify Napoleon's words a little – like this:'

People modify and paraphrase quotations to suit their own ends. To do so, via this quote from Napoleon is particularly apt, since Napoleon made use of such clever flattery to motivate his troops so as to fulfil his own ambitions.

'The Dream' was first published in the posthumous volume entitled, *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

'AT 7.20 PM THE ORIENT EXPRESS ROLLED IN ...'

This prose poem was never published in the poet's lifetime. It was found among his unpublished manuscripts without a date, and without a title.

In the 1930s, one of the routes of the 'Orient Express' (the fastest train of that era) was from Paris, France to Bucharest, Rumania. The poet had never been to Bucharest. He lived in Budapest, Hungary (which was the train's penultimate stop). Yet he deliberately placed this prose poem about a dead man at Bucharest Central Station, the final stop – the 'end of the line'.

'Its snorting locomotive bore itself into the vapoury lights under the glass roof ...'

In those days of steam-driven locomotives, steamy or 'vapoury' air rose up to the glass roofs of the busy central stations of a large city. Such steam-filled central train stations, equipped with glass roofs, were similar in construction in every capital city of Europe. Their appearance was immortalized by Claude Monet's painting entitled: *La Gare Saint-Lazare, Paris*, 1877.

'... and the stoker, worn out by his hard work, wiped the perspiration off his brow ...'

The working and living conditions of a stoker, who fed the coal into the furnace of steam locomotives, would have been the same, whether he lived in Hungary or in Rumania.

'... who never considered that at the back of every train crouches: helplessness.'

This image may have come from those who hitched a ride from one station to another, hanging on to the carriage spacers at the rear of the last carriage. (Such people could never have afforded a train fare, least of all on the 'Orient Express').

'Hét óra huszkor robgott be az Orient express, ...' (At 7.20 pm the Orient Express rolled in ...') was first published in the posthumous volume of Walder's selected poems entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

THE HUMAN

'Ember' ('The Human'), was first published in the poet's second volume of poetry, entitled *Group Portrait*, by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938. It appeared again in the posthumous volume of his selected poems, entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

'Életrajz' ('Autobiography'), parodies Surrealist poetry, which in the poet's opinion offered no great challenges of style. On a philosophical level, he was disapproving of the Surrealist movement's alignment with Marxist orthodoxy. He did not believe that literature should be associated with any political party. Nor could he agree with Surrealism's 'break with failed reason'. The movement's argument for the latter were the horrors perpetrated in World War I. Surrealism claims to create images and forms not primarily by reason but by impulse, random association or accident. But this poet could never abandon reason.

As a result of its political stance, from 1925 onwards, Surrealism linked economic revolution with liberation of the mind. This occurred in the mid '1920s in Paris, where the movement's adherents were relatively safe from both the extreme left and right. But Hungarian realities in the mid 1930s were very different. At that time, Hungary was still reeling from a particularly devastating economic aftermath of the Stock Market crash of 1929. The country had a repressive right-wing government – it was essentially a police state. Communism was banned and secret adherents were severely prosecuted. The poor, of whom there were multitudes (in the middle class as well), were treated harshly, without empathy. The underlying 'licence' to treat them this way, was that they were seen as a Communist threat.

The poet was 11 years old when his father (aged 52), died of a heart attack.

The first of May was chosen as the day for Socialist demonstrations, at the Congress of the World's Socialist Parties in Paris in 1890.

'But when the tax-collector'

The literal translation of tax-collector would be 'distraitor' for non-payment of taxes. If people were unable to pay their taxes, the distraitor or sheriff of the court, had the authority to confiscate items of furniture and such from their home. These items were subsequently sold at auction and the money went to the Taxation Department.

'I did not wear my hat whacked on to one side
because the thought kept tormenting me –
what would then be left for the other side?'

The poet's destitute family was helped neither by the left nor by the right. There were long years of constant worry about how to make ends meet. A sign of cocking, or 'whacking on', one's hat to one side was also a sign of being carefree or gay.

'Every morning I salted my tears,
and dried up the dewy meadows,'

Salt was used as a preservative. Not only does he preserve his tears, he even dries up the dew on the meadows, because any sign of tenderness is useless in such a heartless world.

It is because of the latter that one of his 'tightrope-walking friends' loses his emotional-equilibrium. He dies of blood poisoning due to the dirt of external circumstances. In those pre-antibiotics days, fatal septicemia was not uncommon.

'I *sank* my eyes into infinity
whereupon my doctor
diagnosed a pit in my stomach'

The literal translation of 'gyomorsülyedés' 'a pit in my stomach' is 'sunken-stomach'. It was one of those questionable ailments, typical of the times, when doctors readily gave psychosomatic 'validation' to a patient who was depressed or overwhelmed by life's worries. It was yet another instance of not being heard.

In that poverty-ridden era, many people could not afford to buy a new overcoat. So the custom of having overcoats turned inside out by a tailor was commonplace. It was far less expensive than purchasing a brand new coat. Having his brand new identity turned inside-out, and getting his coat button sewn onto his skin, refers to the Surrealist's alignment with Marxist orthodoxy and their sundry, somewhat forced efforts, to balance politics with poetry.

Undated, 'Autobiography' was probably written while the poet was still a student in the Faculty of Law at the University of Budapest. There, he had been disappointed by some of his professors, a number of whom he felt were, at best, mediocre. That is why when, as advocated by Surrealism, he gives up all logical mental activity, he becomes a university professor.

'Autobiography' was not published in the poet's lifetime. It was first published in the posthumous volume of his selected poems entitled *A Poet lived Here Amongst You*, by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

THE BUDAPEST DIVISION

Throughout the 1930s the poet perpetually feared a coming war. Many of his numerous anti-war poems (including 'The Budapest Division') were published.

His own father was a petty officer in the Austro-Hungarian army during World War I, when conscription became strictly obligatory for all. It was generally considered that Jews 'now had the opportunity to prove their patriotism'. Thus the poet had no way of knowing that in the coming World War II, Jews would be relegated to become the slave labour of the army in 'forced labour' units.

In Hungary the decade of the 30s was marked by ever increasing irredentist and patriotic verbiage. The general public was fed and believed in phrases such as:

'It is sweet and glorious to die for the homeland.'

So the teacher's patriotically inspired explanation of the 'breakthrough at Gorlic', which occurred in Gorlic, Poland, during World War I, includes the poet's deliberate exaggeration of the number of men that make up a battalion. In reality it was, and is, never more than 500.

Instead of the original 'Year VIII' history class (17 to 18 year olds) the Australian equivalent Year 12, has been substituted.

In accordance with the European style High School 'Baccalaureate', history was a compulsory subject.

'Budapesti Hadosztály' ('The Budapest Division') was first published in his second volume of poetry, entitled *Group Portrait*, by Cserépfalvi, Budapest, in 1938. It appeared again in the posthumous volume entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

MOMENTS

My father wrote 'Percek' ('Moments'), to my mother, Eva, after they were married (in June, 1939). It was one of the poems which was found among his unpublished manuscripts.

'Moments' was first published in the posthumous volume of his selected poems, entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, published by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

COMING TO TERMS WITH THE IMPOSSIBLE

Walder's brother, Imre, recalled that this undated poem was written around the time when the poet started working as a labourer in a stocking factory, at the beginning of 1939. A year and a half earlier, at the age of 24, he graduated from Law. Subsequently, he was able to complete his Articles in the following manner: One of his cousins, who had converted to Catholicism, was married to a Catholic doctor. This doctor, in turn, had a cousin who was a lawyer in the town of Esztergomb (40 km North of Budapest). Both men were fond of the Walder family. (In addition, the lawyer's own wife was half Jewish – a common enough phenomenon in Hungary, where intermarriage occurred often). This lawyer offered to employ him in his law firm in Esztergomb for the requisite period of six months. Since such an opportunity was well nigh impossible to obtain for a Jewish graduate of Law in Budapest, he accepted the offer and regularly travelled to Esztergomb where he completed his Articles.

However, 1938 saw a near 100 per cent loss of jobs for all Jewish persons, irrespective of their occupations. And by 1939, Jews were prohibited from practising in any of the professions. Hence his only avenue for earning a wage was to do menial work. In 1939, he commenced work as a labourer in the women's stocking factory.

'I will not make copies of my letters,'

refers to a carbon copy made on the typewriter. Walder had a very old, second hand typewriter which was all he could afford. Nevertheless, always progressive and modern for his times, he insisted on typing nearly all of his work – a fact which allowed good readability of his unpublished manuscripts, over half a century later.

'.....the 140 000 heartbeats
together with 28 000 deep breaths'

Approximates the number of heartbeats and breaths of an adult per day.

'.....I am such a long-standing debtor'

The paradox is that he was 25 years old, or rather 25 years young. So he could hardly be 'such a long-standing debtor'. On the other hand, as a Jew he belonged to an ancient race.

'... old Scripture teacher ...'

The word 'old' was added in the translation to get closer to a nuance of the original. The Hungarian word which follows 'Scripture teacher' is 'bácsi'. This word means both uncle and an older male person: 'bácsi' for a young child, denotes a wise and 'old' adult.

'shouldered the rules of Civil, Commercial,
Domestic, Criminal and Constitutional Law
and tried, at all times, to fulfil
my obligations under International Law -'

The above were also curriculum subjects the poet studied – just one or two years earlier – for his Law degree.

'with various (Minister of the Interior approved) organisations.'

Since Jews were not allowed to join non-Jewish clubs or societies, the above 'organisations' refer to Jewish youth clubs. The only exception to this was the 'János Vajda Társaság' – a Literary Club, which Jewish artists could also join, and which the poet frequented.

'I didn't smoke on the tram, although I would have liked to
and I never fished in forbidden season'

While he did smoke, it is unlikely that he ever fished at all. However, he was familiar with the 'forbidden season' for fishing on Lake Balaton. The line serves as a reiteration of the extent to which

he would not commit even such commonplace, innocuous transgressions. He believed in observing rules and regulations, because he felt that doing so helped to maintain civilisation.

'and behold, now they still want to bankrupt me'

Due to the overlong reverberations of the stock market crash of 1929 – which caused a grave economic depression in the Hungary in the 1930s – bankruptcy meant catastrophe and utter personal disgrace. The theme of bankruptcy is recurrent in his work, because he considered that the liquidations, forced sales and auctions were more than human dignity could or should have to bear.

'for that short duration while life still lasts'

In early 1939 – months away from the beginning of World War II – Walder could not have had any knowledge of the awful truth of that line.

The flippant sarcasm which points at the general brevity of life – in the late 1930s the average life expectancy was 50-60 years – cloaks the poet's profound terror at the ever worsening restrictions for Jewish people. The distress that the latter caused within him, together with his long-standing fear of war, reverberate in the lines of the second stanza.

'Kiegyezés a Lehetetlennel' ('Coming to terms with the impossible'), was first published in the posthumous volume entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

SELF-IMPOSED EXILE

This undated poem was probably written a few months before the outbreak of World War II.

'I don't go to the movies or to the theatre'

Ever since his early teenage years Walder loved the theatre. So, to find that even the theatre had betrayed him must have been awful.

'and I am not a subscriber to Radio'

In those days, in Hungary, people had to pay a monthly subscription fee to be able to listen to the radio.

'and to the ammunition manufacturers'

public meetings

I return the invitations.'

Ammunition manufacturers were highly respected 'upright patriots' who conned the general public via such forums. Aided by German propaganda and promises, Hitler promised to return land (lost in the Treaty of Trianon in 1918) to Hungary – their public meetings were little short of rallies for war. These meetings also whipped up anti-semitism and claims of 'racial purity' in a country which had long been the home of numerous minorities (many of whom were 'imported' to Hungary, during the Habsburg reign). Yet the invitations to these meetings were sent indiscriminately; they aimed to reach every home irrespective of whether it was Jewish or not. As mentioned in the notes to his poem 'The Litany of Vainliness', 'commemorative badges of war' were also issued by ammunition factories, to be proudly worn on the lapels of civilians in this era of extreme nationalism.

'I don't give to the beggars

from my unemployment benefit'

These lines are a particularly heartbreaking manifestation of the poet's despair. Throughout the poverty-ridden 1930s, when beggars lined the streets of Budapest – he felt for everyone of them, and (though poor himself) could not go past a beggar without giving something.

The so called 'unemployment benefit' was literally a pittance – the equivalent of the price of a bowl of soup in a very cheap place. From 1939-40, however, the long-standing unemployment problem

disappeared, because of the escalating production of war machinery and the removal of Jewish males from the workforce. Neither did Jewish breadwinners (whose opportunity to earn a living for their family was taken away by their mandatory conscription into 'forced labour') receive even a bowl-of-soup's worth of government aid after the introduction of the Jewish Laws in 1939.

'and I am no longer bothered by:

the luxuriously-kept mistresses of others'

In the sharpest contrast, many of the men among the very rich (including those respected ammunition manufacturers) had high profile mistresses. The accompanying gossip was a 'fascinating' distraction, and a source of day-dreams for the general public in Hungary. Hitler and Mussolini, of course, also kept pampered mistresses.

'.....the Telegraphic News Service'

The fastest news transmission at the time was by telegram.

'Önkéntes Száműzetés' ('Self-imposed Exile') was first published in the posthumous volume of Walder's selected poems entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

MUSIC FOR PROSE

My father was never to see his third child, Nina, who was born in the liberated Ghetto of Budapest, in June 1945.

His eldest child is his son, Peter, born in April 1940.

'Zene Prozára' ('Music for Prose') was written to my mother, Eva, sometime in September 1943, when I, their second child, Agnes (Gigi), was born. He was 30 years old at the time.

Although his general practice was to use a typewriter, 'Music for Prose' was found handwritten on a single sheet of paper, a copy of which is included in this volume.

In line 12, 'there is music elsewhere', the poet deliberately cheapens the word 'elsewhere': 'másutt' by spelling it: 'másüit'. The word thus becomes improper language – coarse dialect. This important subtlety cannot be rendered in English.

The 'XIth symphony', a reversal of the roman numerals designating Beethoven's IXth symphony, denotes an excess of 'symphonies': other women.

'Music for Prose' was never published in the poet's lifetime. It was first published in the posthumous volume of his selected poems, entitled *A Poet Lived Here Amongst You*, by Maecenas, Budapest, in 1989.

NOTES TO 'IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME' BY AGNES WALDER,
THE POET'S DAUGHTER AND HIS TRANSLATOR

'to rend my soul
in agony.'

This refers to the Jewish custom of making a tear in the clothing of the closest relatives of the departed.

'I, daughter,
now older than the father,'

My father died a few weeks short of his thirty-second birthday.

I started writing poetry continuously only in my late 30s. This period coincided with my sorting of my father's unpublished manuscripts. From quite early childhood I knew many of the poems in his two published volumes of poetry. But it was only in 1961 when my grandmother followed us to Australia, that she was able to bring to us his unpublished manuscripts.

But '... furtive writings
conveying
unsuppressable needs'

occurred ever since I was able to write English well enough.

'More than seven years
I sat shiva
over his major talent
as I restored
the literature he created'

Sitting 'shiva' (literally the number 7 in Hebrew) is also a Jewish custom in time of mourning. During the first seven days after the funeral, the closest family members spend the days sitting on backless chairs.

The period of 'More than seven years' refers to the time it took me (with numerous pauses, '... flights from pain'), to organise my father's unpublished manuscripts before the Hungarian publication of his posthumous volume of selected poems in 1989, and the publication of two of his plays in 1990. When I started working on his manuscripts, there was not the remotest possibility of their publication in Hungary. It was the sudden collapse of the 40 year-old Communist censorship, in 1987, which made publication possible.

'I saw in sharp focus
the 'Group Portrait' of his soul.'

Group Portrait was the title of my father's second volume of poetry, published in 1938. My lines salute his introductory poem in that volume, entitled 'Group Portrait of Myself'.

'and holy was the quest
to carve his forgotten memory
into literary history.'

This refers to the posthumous publications in Hungary. The English translations of my father's work commenced only after 1991.



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