

TOWARDS RENEWAL OF A DEMOCRATIC POETICS

Four Younger Hungarian Poets

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The personal reputation of the artist and also the degree of relevance accorded his work have varied from region to region perhaps more strikingly in this century than ever before. Thus English-language writers working on more or less the margin of society are aware of the contrasting, differentiated status of literature in other socio-economic systems, particularly the socialist states. And it is with mixed feelings that they observe how in Eastern Europe even those practising the modest art of lyric poetry may produce lines capable of cutting through the mega-voices of world-straddling technetronic systems. Artistic culture in the 'other Europe' has displayed a creativity, awareness of the historical process, and insight into the human condition at a level of achievement and acknowledged relevance rarely encountered elsewhere. It is arguably a measure of the determining power of the historical process of modernization, that the great productive potential of East Central Europe's human and material resources has so far been restricted to contributing to the world at large principally within the highly individualized areas of the arts, aesthetics, and ideas. With that reservation made clear, for such it is, it must yet be a source of satisfaction that, despite the manipulative shortcomings of the present 'age of communication,' the achievements of even the smaller countries of the region are becoming ever more widely known. Such is the case of Hungary, particularly in music, cinema, and poetry.

The time is propitious in many ways. Formerly, the 'classics' of a small nation's literary past because of their essential 'otherness' remained in important respects inaccessible to a foreign audience. To some extent this is still so. However, due to structural developmental factors the situation is somewhat different for the literature of the past half-century. Since the 1950s in particular, the fiction, drama and poetry written in Budapest and Prague, say, are not merely intelligible but in some instances may even speak more directly to readers in London, New York and Ottawa than many works written in their own language. What we are witnessing is a phenomenon of immense importance. Beside established forces in both East and West which make for homogenization, we see the rise of new technological, economic and communications techniques, whose imperatives are increased

human freedom and innovativeness, and whose impact results in the pluralization of consciousness and of needs. What makes the younger generation of Hungarian artists and writers so interesting is that, displaying relative invulnerability to the standardizing pressures within which they grew up, they not only *express* the principle of plurality of choice, but *practice* that of the pluralization of self-managing production units.

The four younger Hungarian poets presented here have been selected on the strength of their originality of sensibility, subject-matter and tone. Although they are lyric poets, one epic theme is their common concern: man in emerging late-modern socialist society. This they represent through concrete, sometimes startling images embodying sharply observed detail from everyday life, stimulating intellectual awareness and provoking moral judgement. In the background two influences conjoin. One is Hungarian culture's readiness to adapt western modernist techniques; the other is its literature's long tradition of explicit social protest. Both influences combined first in Endre Ady (d. 1919), the founder of Hungarian modernist lyric verse and a journalist in the Karl Kraus vein.¹ It was with a sense of revelation that the nation's most eminent Marxist literary critic, György Lukács, first became aware of Ady as a unique poetic voice uttering a new conception of the world (equalled only by his contemporary, Béla Bartók).² Ady's creative vision encompassed a revolutionary rejection of 'reality,' causing him to be attacked as a 'traitor' in the last years of World War One which culminated in the short-lived Hungarian republic of soviets in 1919. Thus Ady had renewed the tradition of Sándor Petőfi (d. 1849), combining lyric genius with political purpose, together with affirmation of the individual within a regenerated society.

That tradition of social concern on the part of Hungarian lyric poetry continues into the present, but with a crucial difference. The earlier poets stood closer to the reality of power. Sándor Petőfi was associated with the famous political and military figures of the 1848 War of Independence, as was Endre Ady with leading personalities in the socialist and anti-war movements. Later poets, including some middle generation figures referred to below, were close to the various left-wing parties seeking to overthrow the old order. Very different is the situation of the younger poets discussed here, who seek no such public role, espouse no political viewpoint and exist on the margins of power. Nevertheless, as we shall see, their work is of a significance far beyond their apparent station.

The discussion that follows is based upon a selection of the work of four of the most innovative poets writing in Hungary today: György Petri (b. 1943), Lajos Pintér (b. 1953), Szabolcs Várady (b. 1943), and Dezső Tandori (b. 1938). The quality and variety of contemporary Hungarian poetry are becoming known throughout the world. For English readers a watershed came in 1963, when W. H. Auden wrote of one of Ferenc Juhász's epics, "I am certain that it . . . is one of the greatest poems written in my

time."³ Since then several anthologies have appeared, the most extensive being the 300-page volume published by Columbia University Press in 1977 which includes three of our poets.⁴ What distinguishes the outlook of the younger writers is that they are the product of the post-revolutionary phase of the new Hungarian society. Their childhood saw the climacteric year 1956, and their coming of age the equally significant events of 1968. These four poets are distinctively 'urban' intellectuals, university graduates in languages or (in Petri's case) philosophy. Three make their living as editors and translators, Petri, the exception in many ways, is casually employed in sociological surveys and translations.

Inevitably one compares these poets with better-known middle-generation writers only a dozen or so years older, who propelled Hungarian poetry to great heights in the decade following 1945. Among them the best known are Ferenc Juhász and Laszló Nagy,⁵ whose work possesses an epic breadth, elemental power of language, socio-historical vision and burning individualism which won them popular acclaim. Of peasant background like many other writers of that period, their view of what constituted the building of communism was a major source of inspiration for their writing. The issues and tasks seemed clear: peace, reconstruction, social justice and democratization of culture, towards which everyone ought to work, writers included. The vision was beautiful, the course apparently simple. Some of the best poetry of that time expressed this sense of unfolding destiny with freshness, directness, sincerity. It was optimistic, it was for a time officially acceptable, it was popular—and some of it was great art.

But over the past decade or more, with public perceptions no longer focussed affirmatively upon a collective future, a more critical literary sensibility has evolved. In response, state pressure has been brought to bear against even leading writers and publications, because they represent that pluralistic consciousness which in Eastern Europe still is only perceived as posing a challenge to official hegemonies. Recent instances include the suppressing of the last book of essays by the best-known of Hungary's poets, the late Gyula Illyés (1900-1983); the limitations placed upon the leading poet and essayist Sándor Csoóri (b. 1927); and measures against the Young Writers Group, culminating in the replacing of the entire editorial board of the outstanding monthly magazine *Moving World*.⁶ There is also the growing volume of 'dissident' writing in *szamizdat* publications. However, the poetry discussed in the present survey is drawn from volumes produced by leading Hungarian publishers (incidentally, thus exemplifying the diversity of officially 'tolerated' literature).

Hungarian culture is a highly verbal one, yet a conspiracy of silence has hung over vital aspects of the nation's experience of the last several decades. Only in recent years have historiographical works, memoirs and films begun to lift a corner of the veil of collective amnesia.⁷ Culture is thus making manifest what is already implicit in economic life: that in

terms of what is of most human, as well as of most social and productive importance, the class struggle is being supplanted by the information struggle. Key areas of contemporary Hungarian experience are still disquietingly obscure, while others come into view with a sense of startling disclosure. The slow accretion of information makes it ever clearer that the collective unconscious has been reinforced by a manipulated literature. Hence the desire of writers constantly to refine literary means and ends, in order to raise consciousness on the part of the social as well as the individual self. This is why the newer poetry of the younger poets seems to express withdrawal to a prepared position from which to survey the uneasy and by no means predestined continuum between past and present.

"Why are the young so miserable?" asked a leading older poet sympathetically, suggesting as answer that it is because each generation needs its own apocalypse which the poet hands on "like a lyric relay-baton."⁸ What has emerged is a new sort of generation gap within post-revolutionary society. For many older career-intellectuals the past lives on as the heroic period of *their* youth; as one of new beginnings, physical and spiritual endurance, the defeat of fascism, the excitement of building the new post-war order, even a partial challenge to Stalinism. After such labours, it was felt, surely the road will be easier? Instead, the problems seem greater. Laying foundations upon ground cleared by war may appear to have been easier than erecting the habitation of socialism—in that Lenin and a leading Hungarian functionary concur.⁹ Many writers and intellectuals, who certainly are not to be labelled 'oppositional,' view the current stalled progress of socialism in Hungary as calling not for building up but for building out, not the increasing but the sharing of power. This is perceived as crucial not only to the individual's sense of feeling at ease and at home in his own country, but as essential to the very process of modernization. Officialdom's response to criticism, particularly by the younger generation, is that what they perceive as deficiencies are rendered all the more visible by the very successes already achieved and the expectations consequently aroused. But one's own past can never be invoked to negate another's present reality. Thus, the heroic phase of Hungarian socialism is slipping beyond the event-horizon of the younger poets.

Like not a few younger artists in other fields, the four poets discussed here write of what it is like to live in the present. And living involves being on the defensive. If the recent Hungarian past was an arduous ascent, the present is a rocky plateau across which clouds sweep. The full implications of the watershed of 1956 have yet to be assimilated in theory and practice, in private as well as in public consciousness.¹⁰ Indeed it has even been admitted at the highest level that the earlier period still exerts, if indirectly, an influence upon the cultural, intellectual and political life of Hungary.¹¹ Though the poets are far from being denied an audience, this can include the unwelcome attentions of security agencies. This is more than another

dimension of the 'difficulty' inherent in the lot of modern artists. Hence the irrelevance of the question as to whether the poets could be 'more themselves' by moving, say, to Edinburgh or Toronto. The poetic persona of each is irremediably the ensemble of his relationships with contemporary Hungarian society. It has even been argued by the poet László Nagy, who was all too familiar with the pressures of the recent past, that poets in his country have drawn strength from experiences which have enriched them in comparison with their western counterparts.¹² But this aside, the work of our four younger poets strongly suggests how artistic strategies may be stimulated by the tensions within the existing political order.

Their work makes it clear that notwithstanding their highly personal approach, the poets discussed here are preoccupied with the challenges of their social reality. In this they continue Hungarian literature's tradition of public responsibility, though at a more modest, less 'heroic' level. For theirs is essentially a democratic poetics concerned with everyday life and ordinary people. But it is also a poetics of tension, of the everyday problem of how to live responsibly in a society where decisions are made over the heads of ordinary people and even the nation. The task is to describe as honestly as possible what *is*. And for poets a precondition must be the discriminating use of language. It is well-known that since 1848 writers and intellectuals in Eastern Europe have been regarded as spokesmen for 'the people,' 'independence,' 'justice'—however elusive these proved to be in reality. And what do these terms mean *now*? They have become mere words—as Szabolcs Várady puts it, in one of his most striking poems—dragging along with them "obsolete dictionary definitions," while what really matters is the new "indirect" meaning of each.¹³

In order to be true to the canon of art, and to be publishable, the newer poetry's strategy is one of indirectness. This consists in filtering descriptive detail, commentary and reflection through the ironic perceptions of the observer. Here a foreign mentor, doubtless initially surprising to many, has been identified. Hungarian poetry had long been receptive to foreign influences: French modernists, Lorca, Dylan Thomas(!), Kafka, Whitman, Ginsberg among others. But of late critics have repeatedly cited T. S. Eliot as being a "part of literary education in Hungary." Particularly striking is the comment on György Petri's development, to the effect that Eliot had "set him free"—free, no less, from the tradition of the until recently most often-cited Hungarian poet, "the most erudite Marxist of his time," Attila József (1905-37).¹⁴ And what Eliot is valued for is his irony.¹⁵

In their handling of such themes as the dilemma of the individual in society, the sense of dislocation and the problem of knowledge, the poets employ an irony which cuts beyond mere complaining to the profounder levels of criticism, even revelation. By retrieving aspects of lived experience from beneath the onrushing hegemonies of routine and necessity, this is a poetry not of objective social formations but of personal witnessing. Yet

it owes more to ideology than might at first be thought. It was written in the context of the long-standing philosophical debate on the theory and practice of art in relation to tactics and ethics.¹⁶ More particularly, it could only have been produced within a society formally committed to creating a higher human type within a superior social model—that is, within one of the self-conscious Eastern European societies aware of the gap between promise and performance. Thus Hungary could be termed a “pre-eminently contradictory system” by a leading cultural theoretician.¹⁷ Much of the newer poetry finds its home in precisely this. In its search for the justification of everything that exists, it is a legitimization-crisis literature. But when is a crisis really a crisis?

This raises the problem of knowledge in its most relevant form. Crises occur frequently in many societies, yet do not necessarily signal irreversible decline. Hungarian spokesmen even argue that it is to the credit of their society that it is able to “reveal” conflicts in order to grapple with them. But only those crises are to be revealed which embody prescribed “fertile” contradictions capable of resolution at a higher level. For not everybody is entitled to say what is or is not a crisis. Accordingly, writers and intellectuals are regularly charged with over-stepping the bounds. Apparently it is “an everyday fact” of life that some writers conjure up “pseudo-contradictions” of an overly narrow subjective-emotional sort.¹⁸ It is not that the poetic impulse points towards existential hopelessness—for that poses no challenge and asks nothing. It is rather that the new Hungarian poetry is in the national literary tradition in expressing hope that society may change for the individual’s sake. Of the two, this is the more challenging, for whereas hopelessness is impotent, hope is not and is the more difficult to contain. Of all the arts, poetry is the most concentrated in effect and the most personal, a line can leap off the page and change the reader’s world. But poetry does not enjoy its present generous measure of state subvention in Hungary, in order for it to change the world without due notice. As a leading critic has put it, “the job of literature” is to aid in creating harmony between the individual and his community.¹⁹ Such a literature would simply deploy approved metaphors to reinforce collectivities.

The newer poetry however reinforces the individual’s personhood, strengthening his conviction that he may and must pass judgement upon the quality of life. That is why this poetry’s critical stance ought not to be construed as negativism. Ought not to be—but is. “The writing of verse,” a leading literary historian asserts, demonstrates the “vocational crisis” of intellectuals generally. He goes on to warn that poetry by its very nature operates in so “direct” a way that “the overall picture is bound to be distorted.”²⁰ Clearly, what we have described as this poetry’s indirectness can appear dismayingly direct to others. And if the writer’s role today is nevertheless grudgingly perceived as inevitably tending to extend the frontiers of critical awareness, this is not due to any new official theory favouring the

freedom of culture, but rather to *inevitable* trends towards liberalization. For the achievement of stability amid acceptable levels of material and human satisfaction depends increasingly, given the modern conditions of production, upon the fuller utilization of freer individuals. But liberalization is not the same as democratization. Thus even though it is formally admitted that writers should play a critical role,²¹ this is dependent upon their first being "moulded."²² What is deemed unacceptable is that some should form groups (a recurrent complaint) within which they presume to mis-represent and slander the present.²³ Writers who do so are dismissed in epithets ranging from "medicine men" to nihilist exponents of "marginal consciousness"²⁴ The question of what socialist Hungary needs from its writers, and what it may be prepared to put up with, is often given a public airing. A typical defining of limits has come from a leading spokesman on cultural affairs, who, conceding that "we must be very circumspect," and recognizing that there are inevitable "operational costs" to be born, goes on to suggest that "our percentage of error, in letting weeds and cultural waste accumulate, is somewhat higher than is tolerable."²⁵ These not uncharacteristic metaphors have, of course, scant aesthetic, intellectual or even political value; perhaps intentionally so, representing simply tactical positions adopted towards specific offending writers and works.

Because of the priority accorded a politically restricted socio-ideological view of reality, aesthetics continues to be the under-developed area of Hungarian artistic culture today. Literary criticism has tended to oscillate between censorship—the term is that of a leading literary historian—and indecisiveness when confronted with the work itself.²⁶ This is no coincidence, for the crisis of criticism in literature does but reflect the hesitant and confined role of criticism within Hungarian society at large. It is far removed from Karl Marx's vision of cultural activity on the part of the individual under socialism, which was specifically and continuously to be one of practical criticism.²⁷ Such an aesthetics advocating raising of activated personal consciousness, accords with the artistic strategies of the younger poets.

The Authenticity of the Personal: György Petri

Of the younger poets writing in Hungary today, György Petri²⁸ achieved recognition early as being "among the best,"²⁹ with his strikingly contemporary choice of subjects, and uniquely keen sense of irony.³⁰ His poetry consists principally of images which, for all their concreteness, relate inwards to individual and outwards to social perception. Image succeeds image, their sensuous and intellectual resonances forming a logical chain of 'meaning'—"underneath thick dust / in a hot / unfloored loft, silent / the dismantled world" (from "By an Unknown Eastern European Poet, 1955"). Petri's images have the authenticity of the 'found,' and the conviction of

what has been searched for. The language is relaxed and idiomatic, though rhyme and elements of word-play at times tighten the line and lend emphasis. The poet's characteristic irony has the honesty to turn in even against its medium—as when Petri likens his verses to chalices, each of which has a tiny flaw: “So don't pour your soul into them. / A soul leaves a sticky place on the tablecloth” (“Enclosed Along with Some Poems”).

To explore and establish the authenticity of the personal is the objective of these watchfully alert poems.³¹ This is achieved with a mordant yet playful wit which in one poem puts even imagination to the test, to see whether it can create, if not timeless concepts, then a vision of ideal personal experiencing (“Sci.-Fi. Love”). The poet's persona as expressed here explores beyond biographical limits, to experience vicariously what he has not had the opportunity to live through. Though he has not participated in the great events of his country's recent past, he shows how difficult it is to retain a footing in the back-draught from the vehicle of history as it recedes from the observer. If there is no struggle here, there is certainly a sense of aftermath. Yet participation involves commitment which can be limiting. And Petri knows that unselfaware role-playing can damage relationships at the most intimate inter-personal level.

The personal may achieve authenticity most surely as agency. Above all, it affirms the accountability of a person in his full potentiality. Petri employs satire and tenderness to show how this applies to lovers. Between two beings drawn to each other there must be no preconditions, thereby signifying a meeting of freedoms that is spontaneous, self-fulfilling—the key to the poem “Gratitude” which successfully combines politics and love (twin ingredients of some of the best Hungarian poetry). There may be no limit to the number and type of voluntary relationships. The ‘escape’ of love-making based upon freedom is paralleled by the fulfillment to be found within a narrow circle of friends. A group's inner-directedness and sense of identity may be reinforced by encircling outside pressures. And poets, for instance, who share a sense of embattled comradeship, may be forced into ever-obliquer modes of communicating—“filing away at lyric skeleton keys” (“To Sz. V.”). Beyond the personal, there lies nothing. Thus, when even friendship's at an end there will be only encroaching desert wasteland, the epoch of “cactus and sand” (“Inscription”).

Though Petri's poetry is attuned to the messages of the nervous system, it can also catch the decisive moments in his country's recent history. From these derive the constraining forces upon the present, which is a time when issues desperately await resolution. One of his best-known poems shows it as “an irresolute present—settling dust—suspended” (“Unknown Eastern European Poet”). It had commenced in shock, a sense of loss (“the colour goes out of the world”). Yet why does the protagonist remind himself “daily” that once he had believed, while declaring that he believes no longer? Presumably because once there was something worthy of belief,

and because he possessed—perhaps possesses still—the capacity to believe.

The shadow of history's 'determining' force, often invoked to render the individual irrelevant, looms behind Petri's poetry. The relationship between past and present, in the official Hungarian version, is of a guiding and a guided destiny. Such assertions of inevitability are countered by Petri's commitment to personhood. In his society one is 'bound' to submit—hence the recurrent images of binding, of obligation. The overt mechanisms of compulsion in the 1950s are suggested by "ropes drawn taut," and the context of exhaustion ("Eastern European Poet"). The rope image, as applied to the directing of human movement, recurs more explicitly in a striking shorter poem ("Marionette") where, in an extended metaphor, man is shown prevented from standing on his own two feet. For there are ties that bind him, though not in the sense of creating meaningfully human connections; they elevate, but at the expense of his losing contact with firm ground. Man goes through the motions, but the motive forces are not his own. Thus the poem shows the protagonist raised up on ropes "way beyond any binding tie," nothing but vacant air beneath his feet. And yet man does move, must do so, for that is his nature. And when he can achieve movement of his own volition, it must be in moderation lest it prove destructive. For even though man is "wingless," he risks space-walking within the field of earth's tugging gravity. Despite the inevitableness of his fall, man is always "fruitlessly leaping" after that which catches his eye. Such a leap, though directed upwards, must carry him down. Thus "Staircase" suggests a more modest mechanism for ambition, one that mediates between levels. Through "domesticating height" step by step, a safer, more modest strategy of movement may be devised. This way man may adopt strategies which are grounded in the empirical, the personally attainable, not an irresponsible leap of mind.

The Smell of Metaphor: Szabolcs Várady

Of the poets writing in Hungary today, Szabolcs Várady's accents are most idiomatic, though capable of switching abruptly from the anecdotal to the abstract discourse of authority.³² His subject is the existential complexity of everyday life whose context is familiar but whose content is disturbing. For beneath the calm surface of the ordinary the protagonist perceives bottomless depths which fill him with insecurity and doubt. At times the reader is drawn into a poem to attempt to complete the sense of broken phrases which signify the absence of wholeness, the tentative nature of experience, and life as a series of improvisations.

A recurrent theme of Várady's poems is the problematic of the laws of development. In "The Great Process" the language is abstract, the measure sombre, in keeping with the theme of the inexorable operation of a law of social evolution which seems to exist solely for itself "whether we want it or

not." "Philosophical Fragment" addresses itself, with a somewhat grim humour, to similar basic premises. Everyone knows that life's foundations change: but what do they stand on? What had legitimized the old; what will legitimize the new? When the old feet "take to their heels," something else will come along that will be called feet, though of a necessarily different "feetness." Other poems testify to what it means to feel encapsulated within another's seemingly alien interpretation of the historical-political process. Though the issue is deadly serious, the poet resorts to sardonic humour in portraying an environment dominated by a single organizing principle, "The Big Fix." The fix, tie or bond—however we translate it—is not one between equals. Here implicit inequality of status is no less absolute than the explicit difference between social classes. Their aims coincide, asserts the fixer, who imposes the hegemony of his "painful virtue" upon the (silently) protesting other who is being fixed. The fixer attempts to justify himself, declaring that History fastens bonds upon *him* (or "us"), which are in addition to those "we fasten . . . upon you." But these circumscribing terms, these circumlocutions, what do they mean in practice? Well, the poet says, they are *almost* metaphorical. And to what end? To reinforce what is conspiratorially referred to as "our common secret," the key to which is hidden from both parties.

Through questioning the rationale alleged to justify totalizing organization, Varády in his turn touches on the problem of knowledge. For self-knowledge is dependent on understanding one's relationship to that which contains and makes a person into an "insider." Yet the subject has no access to an outer reality, which alone might help him to comprehend that he is indeed 'within' another. Moreover, the 'big fix' acts from above upon an essentially passive subject. Its agency is twofold, human and yet (allegedly!) impersonal. Both are absolute powers, seeking acceptance and legitimation through consensus—which is the common secret—with the acted-upon object. Now, though what is secret ultimately cannot be understood, at least its mode of operation may become comprehensible. But even this, the poet appears to be saying, could be observed only by "an outsider, if"—and this is extremely unlikely—"there were such a one" (the title of the poem). Such an improbable being could come only from the womb of nature—in other words, from outside all man-made systems. The message is the medium of this poem, stuttering through fractured phrases of rhetoric, slogans, justifications, to form the shell of containment. It is composed of words which have become fossilized, their dictionary meanings now "obsolete." The life of insiders is thus directed not by science but a form of archaic literature.³³ It is this dysfunction which inspires Varády to observe that metaphor is usurping meaning. The insider is unaware of this, for his "sense of language" has changed. He strains to catch only the indirect meanings of words, those new interpretations which originate in the upper stratum of power. How may one recognize this transgression of sense? Not

by the faculties of our senses, for the "smell of metaphor" goes undetected by the nose, that primeval organ which has long since atrophied. In the coming new division of labour, the poet as word-smith must play sensor.

Towards a Natural Order of Integrity: Lajos Pintér

The poetry of Lajos Pintér³⁴ makes an immediate impact through its highly original surface texture. Strong, often bizarre images, are linked with staccato and at times fractured syntax interspersed with colloquialisms, slang, even snatches of semi-literate dialect. The natural order of speech. In a similarly variegated subject-matter references to Hungarian folklore, allusions to historical figures and even ironic echoes of well-known poems provide contrasting dimensions to the emphasis on the present. That Pintér lives and works in the provincial town of Kecskemét doubtless accounts for the blend of nature and folk-culture sensibility and 'urban' sophistication with which he depicts the impact of historical change in terms of the moral responsibility of the individual, the fate of ideals, and the pathos of love of country.

The common heroism necessary for asserting individual responsibility, and artistic integrity, is the theme of 'For Our Imaginings, Hearts, Fists.' Its point of departure is the rights and rites of youth; but its principal concern is to assert that truthfulness and integrity must drive the creative process. From its opening declaration "We're young," it enumerates the main modes of expression—words, music, love—and culminates in the declaration that hearts and fists are the necessary means by which what is imagined must be realized. An "old woman" has the last word; speaking in dialect with peasant-like hard-headedness, she states that one *must* ask for one's rights. Writing is also a form of asking, if pursued not by timeservers but by "'im 'oo feels 'ee must." Such commitment anticipates opposition in the present, yet looks to vindication in the future: "You think it's a curse—maybe it's a song / a bit ugly this time, oh lovely before long." (From 'Copybook of Sword-blades')

A major preoccupation of Pintér's is the contrast between the closure of expediency and the openness of integrity. Here falsehood deals in violence and death; but truthfulness is commitment to ideals which never deny man's natural right to life. A rapid-fire succession of semi-slapstick images of noisy conformity and "irregular going by regulations" contrast with the mute images of a mausoleum of revolution and a heroine of folktale lying with her seven wounds in "voice-degrading silence." The quintessential poet of revolution, Sandor Petőfi, is called upon to reveal once again his legendary rainbowed stairway of ascent—if indeed it can exist at all in the present epoch, when the different roads to socialism are being debated, and when colours which formerly were primary now "bleed away to grey."

The comparison is continued elsewhere, when György Dózsa, the 16th century archetypal revolutionary peasant leader—who was captured and roasted upon an iron throne—is contrasted with the “businessmen of revolution” who make “deals.” For the actions of those in office, elevated above the common man, belie their presumed superiority—like angels who have befouled floors which must be hosed down after them. In place of this, the poet implies, there must be a transvaluation of values. We must learn to appreciate once more everyday things which are closer to life, that supreme power vested in nature which protects the right to exist of the most humble, the proletarian weeds of the field.³⁵

Within this oscillation between past and present, ideal and compromise, love of country remains firm. It gives, or at least reinforces, a sense of identity. Here “small is beautiful” may be applied to cultural rather than physical ecology. For the qualitative is all the more crucial within a small country. This is engagingly presented in a poem where parts of Hungary are likened to the sole of a shoe and the country to a footprint. For Pinter, “my people” are scattered places and things: landscape, farms, ribbons, headscarves, shawls. The symbolism of physical necessities is of items which are small in scale, yet seem all the smaller as mere remnants, survivals. Frontiers are on the move, the country’s meadows scatter throughout the world, blood flows. What exists is what is left. Left, that is, by world powers who on two occasions in this century have presumed to define Hungary’s existence, and that certainly not in accordance with any natural order.

The Enigma of the Sequence: Dezső Tandori

On first encountering the work³⁶ of Dezső Tandori, it will doubtless strike many readers as surprising that this most idiosyncratic and often obscure poetry could come from probably the most prolific and widely published younger writer of any of the Eastern European countries today. Perhaps even more than the other poets, he is preoccupied with the problem of knowledge, particularly the crisis of the knower who is able to experience reality only as space, never as time.

Tandori’s poems are set to a great extent in the city, in the event-stream of street pseudo-life, in which individuals move with varying degrees of automatism at the secondary level of intentionality. Here there are no complexities, no compelling human associations, no circles of friends. What there is of the personal appears as but a faint essence diffused through the text. What there is of everyday life is revealed in the poet’s random retrievals from among the impressions of actuality. The poetry of Dezső Tandori has a dominant visual component that has been passed through an exclusively intellectual filter. To this extent Tandori is unique among Hungarian poets in his excluding of emotion. His poetry is concentrated within median areas

of concrete experience, without touching the poles of ethical awareness: neither that involving moral choice when confronted by the uniqueness of each event, nor that relating to some overall principle. The observer-protagonist who figures in his poems is essentially passive. The limited individuality with which he is endowed is merely a recording mechanism for registering his unease, disorientation, and automatism of response.

These are qualities, or anti-qualities, which barely achieve a measure of integration in what appears to be the poet's search for a pattern of meaning. They convey a tentative and bleak poetic vision very different from, say, the lyrical affirmation of Ferenc Juhász's "Man Imposes His Pattern Upon a Dream" (1955).³⁷ Arranging his poetic data to present a carefully contrived reductionism made up of random comments, fleeting impressions and out-right trivia, is Tandori's way of grappling with the problem of knowledge in terms of how to discern intention and direction. In apparent contradiction of an ideology which claims to foretell the course of historical evolution, Tandori counterposes what we may term 'the enigma of the sequence.' What is it that has, will and should come to pass? And for what purpose, through what logic, by what agency? That observer who appears in the poems, protagonist in spite of himself—what may he read into the course of events, what meaning find or perhaps implant there? Even mere habit may be mistaken for the exercise of choice, and selective memory impute an order among past actions in which discrimination may have played no part. What happened in the past has now at least a certain authority of finality. But by what right did it happen in the first place? Through manifesting itself as sequence. In these poems there are two types of sequence: the connecting footsteps of the ambulatory observer, and the conventions of the games he plays. Into the coordinates of space comes matter—in a human shape, if not exactly with a human face. This personage moves between established reference points, in the course of walks frequently described in these poems, usually within the fixed topography of the city; at other times he submits to directions of another sort, the conventions of card games or chess. For the rest, what ought to be regarded as *non sequiturs* really *do* follow.

The observer-protagonist seems to be exiled to the margin of things. The great forces within society do not operate upon him directly; rather, they appear to be concentrated within material phenomena. If, indeed, they *are* there—for, being invisible, their existence has to be taken on trust by one who seems predisposed to accept his dependent status. The protagonist's destiny is to be abroad in this unregarding world. Hence in these poems the recurrent theme of the journey, the seemingly excessively detailed recounting of the various stages of a day's excursion to a lake-resort, and the more frequent cross-town meanderings. They have neither beginning, middle, nor end. The human trajectory traces a flattened arc. If there is a reference point at all, it is the hastily snatched meal (more a refuelling stop) never at home but always in an impersonal "eating establishment" as Tandori insists

on calling it, where casual note is taken of the service and functional disposition of the table, glasses, bottles, where the all too rare spasm of satisfaction is registered rather than experienced.

What Tandori sets before us in painstaking detail is the corollary of the problem of knowledge: the problematic of selfhood, of how to define the knower. In these poems the observer's random references are to an equally random world. This world, it must be assumed, was created by man. But all sense of human agency, of intentionality, is absent. The poems consist entirely of foreground, and convey a mounting sense of suffocation in an endless present. Considered in more general terms, they suggest the symptoms of the schizophrenia induced by the alienated administration of society amid the modern means of production, in their absence of vital contact with time and the predominance of spatiality.³⁸

However, this is not to say that Tandori's verse is no more than the poetry of alienation. There is a playful irony suggesting the creative self-alienation of the poet from what he shows as the alienated consciousness of man enmeshed in such a world. Perhaps this points to the personal negating of impersonal negation. The dawning awareness of one's need for authenticity is the beginning of liberation. Its precondition is the will to desire, which comes from within the process of living. There may even be a measure of muted hope in the certainty of some 'beginning' yet to come, at some incommensurable "point in time."³⁹ Sometime, somehow, Tandori seems to be saying, there will come something one has been expecting—a "pure point" in time worth waiting for, when "just that right moment comes and brings something irrevocably different." "The Certain Starting-Point" concludes with an invocation of the new, but with emphasis now on human expression: "the point meanwhile being to express it," the fresh start. In life as well as art, self-managing proceeds "word by word," for words of one's own can be trusted. As with the other poets, Tandori's starting-point is the conviction that to write is to act in a profound and effective way.

NOTES

1. However, a leading academician and literary historian, writing of the nationwide Ady Centennial celebrations, declared that "distortion of the Ady image was a striking symptom in 1977" making the poet an outsider. Miklós Szabolcsi, "Literature, Criticism and Reality in the Hungary of the Seventies," *New Hungarian Quarterly*, XX:76 (1979), 126-140; see p. 138.

2. György Lukács, *Magyar irodalom, magyar kultúra* (Hungarian Literature, Hungarian Culture) (Budapest, 1970), Preface, pp. 8-9 here the philosopher relates how his reading of Ady's *Új versek* (New Poems) in 1906 caused "a shock . . . of decisive importance," "because he never . . . became reconciled to Hungarian reality and through it to reality as a whole as it then existed."

3. Ilona Duczynska and Karl Polányi, eds., *The Plough and the Pen. Writings from Hungary 1930-1956* (Peter Owen: London, and McClelland & Stewart: Toronto, 1963). With a Foreword by W. H. Auden, p. 11.

4. *Modern Hungarian Poetry*. Edited and with an Introduction by Miklós Vajda. Foreword by William Jay Smith (Columbia University Press: New York, 1977).

5. Ferenc Juhász, *The Boy Changed into a Stag. Selected Poems 1949-1967*. Translated and with an Introduction by Kenneth McRobbie, with Ilona Duczynska (Oxford University Press: Toronto, 1970). László Nagy, *Love of the Scorching Wind. Selected Poems 1953-1971*. Translated by Tony Connor and Kenneth McRobbie. Foreword by George Gömöri (Oxford University Press: London, 1973).

6. Gyula Illyés' book of essays, *Violence and the Spirit of Independence* (1979) was withdrawn following its printing. Sándor Csoóri was restricted to publishing poetry for one year, for writing an Introduction to Miklós Duray's *In A Bind* (New York, 1983) on the plight of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. Following the removal of the editor-in-chief of the outstanding monthly *Moving World* (Mozga Vilag) in late 1983, the entire editorial board resigned in sympathy.

7. The historian Gyula Juhász, in the course of an historical conference, mentioned that "this inability to 'speak out' leaves an immeasurable quantity of grenade splinters in the soul" (*Magyar Hírlap*, 26 June 1982). The Party monthly *Társadalmi Szemle* began publishing sketches of political figures of the 1950s in late 1982. A considerable number of films address the troubled period of the 1950s (though not without numerous cuts and delays in being released); a distinguished example, which won an award at the 1984 Cannes Film Festival, is Márta Mészáros' *Diary-For My Child*, about the period 1947-53, which will have a sequel.

8. István Vas, in his Introduction ("Petri György és a pesszimizmus") to a selection from the poetry of György Petri in the Anthology *Költők egymás közt* (Poets Among Themselves) (Budapest, 1969), pp. 267-269; p. 267.

9. György Aczél, *Eszménk erejével* (Budapest, 1970), translated as *Culture and Socialist Democracy* (Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1975), p. 240 "Lenin regarded the seizure of power as relatively 'easier'."

10. György Lukács, *Művészet és társadalom* (Art and Society) (Budapest, 1968), Preface, p. 10 "The history of the ideological development of the Stalin era has not yet been written. A great many are still content with a mere general denunciation of the 'cult of personality'."

11. Imre Pozsgay, "The Scope and Limits of Legislating on Culture," *New Hungarian Quarterly*, XVIII:66 (1977), 63-74. The author was the previous Minister of Culture, and wrote (p. 65) that "the aberrations" of the cultural policy of the 1950s are, if indirectly, "still present today." Miklós Szabolcsi, "Literature, Criticism and Reality," p. 134: the periods 1945-49 and the 1950s are among "the unsettled questions that preoccupy intellectual life and political thought in Hungary."

12. "Talking About Integrity. An Interview with László Nagy," *New Hungarian Quarterly*, VII:20 (1966), 139-142, p. 141. "I am free, and hard experience has made me something more than most of my western contemporaries."

13. "About Feet. Philosophical Fragment."

14. István Vas, "Petri György és a pesszimizmus," pp. 268-69; Petri contributes an untitled autobiographical note to the Anthology (p. 289) "A felszabadító példát ehhez végül is T. S. Eliot költészetében találtam meg." László Ferenczi, "Experimenting with Unemotional Poetry," *New Hungarian Quarterly*, XII:43 (1971), 160-161; p. 160.

15. Miklós Szabolcsi, "Literature, Criticism and Reality," p. 139, observes that in poetry "irony and its instruments . . . have become general."

16. György Lukács, *Utam Marxhoz. Válogatott filozófiai tanulmányok* (My Road to Marx. Selected Essays in Philosophy) (Budapest, 1971), I, 11-12 on links between

ethics and aesthetics. Also György Lukács, *Tactics and Ethics* (New Left Books: London, 1972), pp. 9-11. Agnes Heller, *A szándéktól a követ kezmenyekig* (From Intention to Consequences) (Budapest, 1970), p. 49 "The artist cannot take tactics into account in his works, for he transforms reality not for the sake of a moment, but for history."

17. Péter Rényi, "What Happened to the Revolution?" *New Hungarian Quarterly*, XI:39 (1970), 17-31, p. 28 "in this sense socialism is a preeminently contradictory system." The writer is Deputy Editor of *Nepszabadsag*, the daily paper of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.

18. György Aczél, *Culture and Socialist Democracy*, p. 59; p. 60, "the sense of crisis is not in itself 'an intellectual state of a superior kind';" what is called for is "thinking, probing, fighting and acting"; also see pp. 52, 58, 62-3, 159.

19. Miklós Ovári, "The Writer in the Community," *New Hungarian Quarterly*, XVII:63 (1976), 8-15; pp. 12, 15. The writer was Secretary of the Central Committee of the HSWP, and Head of its Department of science, education and culture.

20. Miklós Szabolcsi, "Literature, Criticism and Reality," pp. 130-1.

21. Vilmos Faragó, "A Generation of Survivors: A Conversation with Iván Boldizsár," *New Hungarian Quarterly*, XX:75 (1979); 120-133. In the course of an interview, this Editor of the *NHQ*, President of the Hungarian PEN, journalist and author, stated (p. 128): "every writer, particularly young writers . . . every intelligent person is in opposition." Also Miklós Szabolcsi, "Literature, Criticism and Reality," p. 130.

22. Péter Rényi, "What Happened to the Revolution?," p. 30; Imre Pozsgay, "The Scope and Limits of Legislating on Culture," p. 73.

23. Péter Rényi, "What Happened to the Revolution?," p. 27 "today's rising generation" feels "doomed to a drab, philistine existence." But cf. István Vas, "Petri György és a pessimizmus," p. 268 this older poet while singling out its "pessimism" judged Petri's poetry to be "powerful, honest."

24. Péter Rényi, "What Happened to the Revolution?" p. 19; Imre Pozsgay, "The Scope and Limits of Legislating on Culture," p. 74. György Aczél, "Intellectuals in Socialist Society," *New Hungarian Quarterly*, XX:75 (1979), 32-40; pp. 36-37.

25. György Aczél, *Culture and Socialist Democracy*, pp. 89-90, 25-27, 91, 176, 128.

26. Miklós Szabolcsi, "Literature, Criticism and Reality," pp. 126-28, 139-140. György Aczél, "Creative Discontents," *New Hungarian Quarterly*, XVII:63 (1976), 16-26; p. 24.

27. I have in mind the context of the passage in *The German Ideology* where Marx writes of being able "to criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind," in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1975), p. 160.

28. György Petri (b. 1943) has published two volumes of verse: *Magyarázatok M. számára* (Explanations for M.) (Budapest, 1971), 127 pp. *Körülrít zuhanás* (Circumscribed Fall) (Budapest, 1974), 71 pp. An early selection appears in the Anthology *Költők egymás közt* (Poets Among Themselves) (Budapest, 1969), pp. 265-289.

29. László Ferenczi, "A Prolific and a Taciturn Poet," *New Hungarian Quarterly*, XVI:59 (1975), 176-9.

30. László Ferenczi. "Experimenting with Unemotional Poetry," *New Hungarian Quarterly*, XII:43 (1971), 160-161, reviewing Petri's first volume: it is "an experiment in thinking without emotion, and in avoiding the traps of hope and despair." The critic modified this view in reviewing Petri's second book ("A Prolific and a Taciturn Poet") where the poet's "emotion-free thinking" (p. 179) was again noted, but also that "the demand and wish for analysis and its concomitant irony and self-irony bear witness to the presence of emotions, curbed and under control." István Vas, "Petri György és a pessimizmus," p. 268 on Petri's "having completed Eliot's high-school. No small thing in Hungary."

31. György Petri, *Költők egymás közt*, p. 289.

32. Szabolcs Várady (b. 1943) has so far published one volume *Ha már itt vagy* (If You Are Already Here) (Budapest, 1981) 59 pp. He is represented in collections of the poetry of younger poets. He is an editor at a Budapest publishing house specializing in foreign literature in translation. His translations include essays by Susan Sontag and the selected poems of Archibald MacLeish.

33. György Aczél, *Culture and Socialist Democracy*, p. 299 concerning the "forceful impact on young people" of adult's "morals, habits and needs"—"And what will this impact be unless there is harmony between our deeds and our words?"

34. Lajos Pinter (b. 1953) has published *Feheringes folyók* (White-Shirt Rivers) (Budapest, 1975), 113 pp., and *Európai diákdál, versek 1974-1979* (European Student Song) (Kecskemet, 1981), 95 pp.

35. "Now where's that Staircase, Sandor?" "Hosing down the Floor after Angels," "Every Day Something New," "Instead of a Flag."

36. Dezső Tandori (b. 1938) has published several poetry collections; of these, the following have been consulted: *Toredék Hamlethez* (Fragments for Hamlet) (Budapest, 1969); *Egy talált tárgy megtisztítása* (Cleansing of an *objet trouve*) (Budapest, 1973); *A mennyezet és a padló* (Ceiling and Floor) (Budapest, 1976), 224 pp.; *Még így sem* (Not Even So) (Budapest 1978), 325 pp. In addition to detective fiction, Tandori has published a novel "*Itt éjszaka koalák járnak*" ("Koalas Walk Here at Night") (Budapest, 1977), 201 pp. His translations include works by Hegel, Heine, Rilke, Peter Handke, Samuel Beckett, Sylvia Plath, e. e. cummings, Randall Jarrell, John Berryman, Robert Musil and Karl Kraus.

37. Ferenc Juhász, *The Boy Changed into a Stag* (1970), "Man Imposes His Pattern Upon a Dream," pp. 89-92.

38. See Joseph Gabel, *False Consciousness*. An essay on reification (Oxford, 1975), pp. 18-19, 52, 62, 80-83, 101, 105-7, 194-5.

39. The poems referred to below are "Now and in the Hour of our Death," "Lines," and "The Certain Starting-Point."

FOUR YOUNGER HUNGARIAN POETS

A Selection

Translated by Kenneth McRobbie

GYÖRGY PETRI

BY AN UNKNOWN EASTERN EUROPEAN POET, 1955

It's fading
 like the two flags
year after year on state occasions
stuck into iron sockets cemented
above doorways—fading,
colour goes out of the world.

Where are the celebrations now?

Underneath thick dust
in a hot
unfloored loft, silent
the dismantled world.

An end to parading.

Transformed into howling
whipped away by the wind.
Instead of celebratory bards
the wind says poems: from now on,

it says, eddying dust and tremulous heat
across the concreted square.

Hard to believe we'd loved women here.

Red-hot blast furnaces,
ropes drawn taut;
 over that epoch
an irresolute present of
drifting dust in suspension.

Structures left unfinished,
sham empire.

What I believed in
I no longer believe.
But once I did

—something
I tell myself each day.

And I won't forgive any of them.

Corrosive
our terrible loneliness,
rusted rails in sunlight.

STAIRCASE

Who was it invented
circumscribed falling,
 the staircase
that domesticates height,
melting into gradation
congealed verticality?

Who hit on the roundabout
way's modest strategy,
 solution for
fruitlessly leaping for
what catches his eye
—though wingless, Man?

NEWS SUMMARY

Softly accumulating like fluff
in stair corners, an epoch's filth.

GRATITUDE

The stillness on state holidays
drives you crazy, no different
from that of Catholic Sundays.
In loitering crowds, people
are even harder to take
than when harnessed to some goal.

This time I don't let
the glow fade, as I usually
ungratefully do after love freely given.
In the vacuum streets
it helps me escape, that I can remember
your face and thighs,
your warmth,
your lap's fishy smell.

You had no luck finding a bathroom,
the bed was uncomfortable
like a roof-ridge.
Your skin's novel odour blended
with the mattress' insecticidal smell.

I awoke to the booming of guns:
a round number of years ago
something happened. You slept on.

Your glasses, your patent-leather handbag
lie on the floor; your dress
hangs from the window-latch
sensibly turned inside-out.

On your black slip
a strap had slid sideways.
A soft luminescence wavered
in the hair of your neck and collarbone
while the guns boomed on,

and upon a protruding
armchair-spring
fine dust trembled.

SCI.-FI. LOVE

There are so many other things we could be doing.
For loving's ultimately a neoplatonic
thing. I'm considering what would happen
if we were to try it this way:
putting out feelers, calling on what meta-
physical and parapsychical
knowledge we have. For instance, you might agree
that you, at twelve-thirty sharp, will imagine
me to be there in Mechwart Square, and I'll
imagine you in the same place (or rather
of necessity a little further off)
though on the same park bench.
Two ideal subjects sunning themselves
in Mechwart Square! But which one?
An ideal Mechwart Square?
(My brain's a razorblade blunted by
stubbly inconsistencies).
Then there's the question of whether we're
imaginable, *you* and *I*. Or are only
two *of a kind* imaginable?
But when we're chatting or in each other's arms
you then are only
a contour of my functional
dispositioning—the frontier
you always remain behind,
though also the supposable cause of this
frontier's modifying, and the same with me
—the same too with Mechwart Square!
Language is deceptive—e.g. “We imagine
each other in Mechwart Square.” The locative
must correspond to real activity in space,
fictitious characteristics seemingly
applying only to us.
But let's try the complementary
formulation: “Mutually, each imagines
Mechwart Square around the other”
—and at once the relativity is revealed.
Q.E.D. If two ideal subjects are sunning themselves
it's in an ideal Mechwart Square
this happens—a merely formal consideration, for
one can't say whether this in any way
differs from the meeting of empirical
existences in the real Mechwart Square.

If it doesn't (I mention this only now
because it's the surprise) there must be an ideal
twelve-thirty that never changes. It's obvious,
two ideal lovers
cannot meet in real time
in an ideal public place.
Such a love is eternal (logically).

SZABOLCS VÁRADY

THE BIG FIX

In the end our aims, although your intentions
are hostile to us, do coincide. The bonds,
both ours and yours—you must believe
even considering how they differ
from that latter—painful necessity! --
we fasten (with caring, careful hands)
upon you; and that other is secured
by History which—but does it have to be spelled out?
progresses through difficult contradictions
being after all, and exactly for this reason, composed
of one and the same substance. And the difficult part
falls to us. Sacrifice—and for whom?
Our painful virtue, vision of evil!?
No, enough. Painful, yes. A let-down—just you! just now!
let us down, would you!?! Okay. Whatever's coming, let it.
You want it to. Although—how otherwise
would there be a way for you to bad-mouth us? --
so that it shouldn't be necessary to tighten the . . .
Almost only metaphorically. Whatever it was,
it was for this. Do you think it was easy?
But fight we did for it; now it's here. Whatever the cost.
The price came high—it's to be valued highly.
Put to use—soon used up.
Thus, this much. Now for the last time, my olive-branch.
And the big fix which binds us together
our common aim, has to be a common secret.

AN OUTSIDER, IF THERE WERE SUCH A ONE

An outsider, if there were such a one,
babe-in-arms with grown-up's brain
or that certain Martian let's say.
An outsider, if such there were
would hardly understand

why it's for his own sake
his own and well for the world's sake
world history's and in fact for the whole universe's sake
that it's desirable the
commendable the
and no less advisable the

An outsider, if there were such a one
if there were such wouldn't understand;
if he would understand in that way, this outsider
wouldn't be completely an outsider.

Rather, one more of an outsider would believe,
one from another solar system or straight from the womb
yet endowed nevertheless—if most rudimentarily—
with human speech
this most way-out outsider might reckon
that words cited in obsolete conventional
dictionary meanings are to be believed:

nothing more desirable than that the
nothing more commendable than that the
and almost nothing more advisable than that the

The outermost outsider of all
from the furthest outside would think something like this.

But we who in certain respects
—namely our hides are at stake—
are on the inside, straining attentively
so as to follow the highest higher-ups'
pronouncements, our sense of language so changed
that by now we grasp directly words' indirect
meanings, we who exist in the space allotted us
for want of better, and would be content meanwhile

if things take the least unfavourable turn—
certainly before long the various stages
of outsiderhood will be beyond our ken, not even
noses registering appropriate disgust
at metaphor's smell, nary a wrinkle.

ABOUT FEET. Philosophical Fragment

Everything has feet; that is, something to stand on.
But feet have no feet, standing only on themselves.
And should it happen that feet take to their heels
(that is, the feet that everything stands on vanish)
well, things'll mostly continue standing even then,
and what they stand on would before long be called feet.
Now the question is, what do the runaway feet stand on?
Presumably there's something (maybe we should call it feet)
on which those feet do stand, on which the others now don't;
doubtful, though, that it's the feetness of these feet
on which they stand now—

LAJOS PINTÉR

FOR OUR IMAGININGS, HEARTS, FISTS

We're young
—for our words, form
for our energy, movings
for our love, a contender
our way, a friend

for our music, song
for our song, we seek music
music, harmony,
for our imaginings, hearts, fists.

(An old woman:
askin's all that yer kin do
about yer rights,
it's onlee 'im 'oo feels 'e must
as writes)

EVERY DAY SOMETHING DIFFERENT

It's people like ourselves we seek, one at a time.
People like ourselves simply don't exist, I say.
Like I was preparing to issue an order: "Witches
simply don't exist." Don't, yet better if they did.
Better them than the holy ghost!
What precisely is it, this struggle? Woodpeckers:
blacksmiths of the trees. Kipi-kopi,
tili-toli. Every day's the same. Every day
the absence of the same things. Someone started
again to step from fairy tale. When the rose-spray
opened into a sword. And the two boys
got lost. It's rumoured both of them grew
wings. For come morning even their things
had flown away. Two beds, clothes, both outfits.
Someone's taken off; who's going after him?
Every day something else. As to people like ourselves
there aren't any,
I say; and no man is a
stranger.
Without believing, maybe you just keep going.
Without faith, maybe you can start afresh.

INSTEAD OF A FLAG

The one who says dear not only
to girls—
 but to woman-maned landscape,
black ribbon-wreathed houses,
homeland farms.

 The one who can say
my people, my people--
 but within his memory
worldwide-strewn the meadows, within
his memory even The Stag
burned down.

 That it not fall to pieces, not
be abased, I embrace, I bind it about,
hold fast its every side—on its frontiers
that's my blood spurting out.

 I'm getting used to it,
getting used to my being shed.
Instead of a flag
anyone anywhere can hand me on
 from one to another.

And now suddenly ecstasy gives tongue
and spontaneously starts the song.

 Four-cornered
headscarf on the roadway, four-cornered
shawl-fields.

 Yet someone does watch over me: come dawn
does carry news of me.

The one who says dear not only
to girls,
 but to woman-maned landscape,
black ribbon-wreathed houses,
amputated trees— — —

 it can be a victory, when
 the grass will grow over him.

HOSING DOWN THE FLOOR AFTER ANGELS

hosing down the floor after angels
staring at the sun along with my gang
squatting among weeds in a field
appreciating the depreciated

On my new oilcloth chessboard I'm starting to take a fancy
to openings; already it's not only tense situations I like.

If everything has a meaning—two meanings . . . I can't finish.
A great art, not to have anything happen; because a large part
of the above is now revocable. In school I was never able to
eat my elevenses as I should: the confrontation was disturbing
(my tummy's and my classmates'). There being two things at the same time.
And I don't know when I started playing truant more and more. I
don't like studying. Even opening gambits don't stay in my head.

A little while ago I was watching a stationer's storefront-lights
from the bus, and
through its dirty windows looked up at an apartment opposite.
(Whoever dies there will see this neon fountain-pen at the last.)
For a long time at home I've been preparing to put things in
order; and up to now it's not befitting
to a certain age and routine, until just the right moment comes
and brings something irrevocably different.

DEZSÓ TANDORI

THE LINES START AND STOP

Name, colon, instead of colon capital H (he)
miss-hit, and at once the whole thing's a laugh. I wanted
to say how of all the times since I was born—
I mean, I can remember one; but now at last I understand
Afterwards. But still, this is much more serious.
Its main characters are still living; newer ones too have appeared.

Now it's as if two eras would merge as one, before going their two ways.
Someone's in the marathon hospital. Someone
alone in the flat. At home at our place, in progress still
the "other persons" championship. Wednesday, the doubles match
will have its turn; they would like to charge admission,
there should be betting on them; but wait—who with whom?

As if some non-existent large letter-size red
sixty-fillér postage-stamp would suddenly flutter
for which my first ideal man-of-letters, perhaps in time off
between two cat-autopsies, exchanged a few of my more precious
items. And I might lose one or two of my buttons
if I occupied myself with the others at present.

For a Steiner-Stolz beauty-prize game
I'd have to clamber up to the hallway shelf, it's there in
a pale-blue *Chess Life*; over Christmas 1953-54
I came home from Orczy Road, I rarely went there, and
found myself there again in a quite surprising way . . . with
friendship I think back upon that company.

For the time being the game stays on the shelf. And anyway
for such a thing one always first needs an opponent!
(So that beautiful combinations may come.) Again this
winter I did not repeat that Christmas trip.
Nor many others. And either I'd become fond of Nagymezo Street
or else was bored with it again. Not to mention the comings home via
the Chain Bridge.

The streetcar stops in front of our place. Why would I take a photo of it?
Such things don't figure in my plans. Cheese, bottled fruit
I consume in the morning—consume!—I can look out anytime
from the window, can stretch out on the bed. And that
I'm not doing so . . . ?

THE CERTAIN STARTING-POINT

On H. street's, rather Embankment's and H. street's
corner, we found the sidewalk tables of a functioning
restaurant establishment
already laid, and we were conscious
within ourselves of a decision to—this is the certain
starting-point, this much. Well then—and so forth—
and I hadn't even given
due consideration to arranging such a thing, to asking
in so many words whether the guest would be
seated outside; this was
I, these were we, and—a very generous measure of beer
they served us, with two glasses. The scone was excellent.
Under the
trees towards the gasoline station cars turned in,
through the restaurant premises'
window, rather its window—through the window on
the H. street side
was to be seen the Embankment window on which—
through which appeared
the nine streetcar. It turned in at the restaurant.
I said, look behind.
Look behind, I said, the identical patterned
imitation-stone protruberances
on the restaurant structure's walls—and I don't know
what word I used
“identical pattern,” namely what they're doing
with identical
patterning, as on the balcony division of a building erected
much later that I had admired; that last word's not so great
either; what was I doing admiring?
Already the whole thing's gone from my mind.
Meanwhile, decades have passed;
I mean, the two buildings—and others. Meanwhile about
a quarter of an hour has passed; about seasons
—it was the first of September—our conversation started,
we broke off; we paid nineteen forints.
I couldn't express how pleasing, the generous measure
etcetera, even this
no one was expecting. We said, we don't like it—
you don't like it—
autumn, we said that (I said that) what I don't like
about it is
that it ends; we stated—both of us now, both
on this count—that

among seasons, upon spring there follows very soon short summer,
and then apart from the aforementioned only winter remains,
when for those things which are to come—or for those
gone by—we wait,
we said, and I don't really know this either how
it's possible—meanwhile
having left for home—to end it happily. Rather the point
meanwhile being to express it.