

MODERN HUNGARIAN POETRY

András Petőcz

in a row of sunlight

translation by
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CORVINA

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"there, even the smells were different"

(isaac bashevis singer)

new york, madison avenue

(new york, madison avenue)

if you were to say new york, i'd say
madison ave, it's nighttime, i'm heading
downtown towards 31st, i'm looking for
a sandwich, or something, and have no idea
how i could possibly find a way home,
from the garbage bags i'm stumbling around
between right now, i'm with some arab character
named mahmoud, my name's mahmoud,
he says, mahmoud shuqair, he says,
i'm a palestinian from jerusalem
he says and smiles, the rain pelts down
around us, i'm tired, we duck into some fast
food joint, he just smiles, i really like
this arab guy, i think to myself, i'd never
want to hurt him, and then igal sarna shows
up, i haven't seen him in years, i'm igal
sarna, he'd said once, years ago, i'm igal
sarna, he says, from tel aviv, and now he hugs
this palestinian, to my surprise, i just
stare at this foreign scene, too
struck by it, you know him, i ask him, you
guys know eachother, i ask, kind of
surprised, there in the streets
of new york, in the night, then
suddenly alone i stay, on the corner of
31st and madison, i don't care so
the rain just floods down my face –

new york, without baránszky

(new york, baránszky nélkül)

so, new york without baránszky is still new york i guess,
you can't go thinking that now the streets are going
to go crooked, i'm sure, for example, that there's
still a 31st street, exactly where it was even before we
came to this thing i feel i must speak of, though i can't, re-
ally, times square is just the same as it was, madison remains
unaltered, hell, i think that run
down, old black guy's still standing out on the corner
of broadway squeezing out those horrible, fake jagger notes
ever since, no, nothing's changed, we can just
suppose that some things don't change at all, it's just
that, right now, we're just getting over a funeral and
the weather's just fine, but, honestly, that
coffin was far too small, somehow your coffin
looked a little too short, i can't think you'd fit,
could you?, wasn't it a little stuffy in there?,
as i wonder to myself, wave shortly, and the
weather was beautiful, so, if you go to new york,
just don't go complaining to the natives –

that night

(akkor éjjel)

i'm bob, he says, call me bob, *his hand*,
now he's signaling to the yellowcab with his hand, nah,
i had no choice, there, *there*, that night
on 70th in central park, i had no
choice, if i didn't want to stay,
alone, forever, *the new york night, man*,
in the new york night, hey, i think, at
least that's a cab, sure, bob, okay, all clear now,
he doesn't blink an eye, *natch*,
he takes it all natural-like, that i sit down next
to him, in that cab, as if i'd even known
him for ten minutes, he explains his poems to me,
and the importance of poetry, all i
know is that i can't stay alone
here, in the new york night, there's
no way i'm gonna stay alone, we're off, now,
'cross harlem, off in front of bars with blacks
leaning, they're just leaning all heavy on the wall
outside, we're just off in our cab, dark doorway
thresholds, rotted out cars staring in at me, bob's all
spirited and happy in his explanation for some poem,
for his poems, and the poetry scene, and how
i just have to translate all his stuff to hungarian, he wants
to be published first in hungarian, because it's *ancient*,
an ancient, mystical language, all swept up in the
mist, and then in some ancient mystic language he
begins to scat sing, all swept up in the mist, he begins
to sing, and sing there, on that sleepy-soft cabseat
sweeping swiftly, special-like, there, in the new york air –

iowa city

(iowa city)

i'm going down some unknown street to its end, in
search of some unknown house, it's nighttime, next
to me strides some unknown *young woman in a purple*
wig, we converse in english, it's nighttime, a
hot end-of-august night, and i don't think that this
stroll is ever going to end, and i don't think i want to
put any end to this night, in the end of summer,
nothing happens, it's just unbelievable that
i'm here in this faroff land, this faroff
wilderness, unbelievable that everything
is nonetheless so familiar, and everything
is the way it is, the unknown road, that it's
familiar to me, the unknown city, too, and the night –

in the first few days

(az első napokban)

in the first few days, then in the first few weeks,
i was scared to death people would realize
i can't really speak english, and then
what would people say, i thought, then,
on the third day of my stay, my new
bathroom and kitchenmates arrive, igal sarna
from tel aviv, thin, in some blue suit
sitting there, in the lobby, then already
the social center of the place, he's talking
and talking, we found out we'd share the bathroom
and kitchen, i think because of my terrible english
i'd be pulling teeth to cultivate social relations
with him and the others, and still things
just rolled right along, this thanks to igal,
even I myself could be found in the crowd
within seconds, we spent every moment together
and he spent every moment talking, always
explaining something, his english isn't
perfect either, and i'm surprised, i had guessed
everyone in israel speaks this stuff perfectly,
whatever, then he starts telling stories,
how his parents escaped poland to tel aviv
during the war, and he shows us pictures, he
speaks mainly about his father, who just died not
long ago, and there we are: iowa, in the communal
kitchen of two small college dormrooms, and we some
how talked *everything* over, *travelers*
lost over oceans and mountains, hungry
for sharing a conversation, restless –

steve the hungarian

(steve, a magyar)

steve is our boss, steve ungar is his name,
so he's sort of hungarian, in as much
as he's austrian, and from *this* point of view,
or rather from *that* point of view, his name
means hungary, in german, so his family came out of
vienna, to great amerika, they even called his granddad *pishta*,
or at least sometimes, when he was in
a good mood, and so this steve very proudly fills me
in, in english, of course, because
he doesn't speak a word of hungarian,
but that's to be expected, just now and
then he comes up with *me called stevie*, or some
thing, and smiles at this proudly, like an idiot, so,
that's our boss, the boss of this great group
of scholarship winners, he's the head teacher,
whose great task in life is to figure out all
sorts of interesting programs to entertain us with,
and we're really happy about the fact that steve,
the great american, viennese, hungarian,
can figure out all sorts of programs just
for us, because that's really great, honestly,
i mean, we never would have expected,
they shouldn't have, wow,
this is great, i say to igal,
to ayeta, and kang, and to bernardo, too,
yup, we're lucky, bernardo nods,
meanwhile he obviously has no idea
why he should be happy, he just under
stands that for some reason i'm
not really all that happy, either –

at first, there were only two

(először, csak ketten jöttek)

at first, there were only two of them,
two of those typical american beauties, girls
coming from good families, who are proud of
that, that they are american and puritan, just
everything you could ask for, stiff as boards,
cold, as icicles, as you used to say, and you just
can't wipe the smirks off their faces, as *if saying*
hi to you in the street meant, they are really very
frank, direct people, so, yeah, at first only two of them
came, just parked their asses on the floor, tried to pretend
that they were really laid back, and i just look at my room
mate from tel aviv, what does he think of their
being direct, igal, you know, my roommate, from
tel aviv, so, igal does his damndest to keep his
mouth shut, then he whispers over to me, hey watch out,
or they'll call you in on sexual harassment, so the girls
shoot glances over at us now, so by this time, i'm figuring
out that nothing much is really going to come of this party,
then later came a third, brought a bottle of californian wine
in a brown-paper bag, sorry, but californian wines just make
my stomach wretch, it's not me, it's just that my stomach
jumps up, then a fourth one comes, she's the kind,
polite one, she even offers that, hey, at halloween
there will be fireworks in front of the college,
and we chat about all sorts of things,
then a fifth one came, with her a sixth, then more and more,
and soon there were ten, and they smiled and all, and
they just kept showing up, until there were about
twenty of them, and my stomach is starting to lurch
from the california wine, and a shudder runs through me,

i hated the whole thing, and my stomach jumps up,
and i scream, and gasping for breath i awake, with sweat
rolling down, far off, in america –

in a row of sunlight*

(a napsütötte sávban)

jennifer has blue hair, streaked
here and there with orange, wonder
ful girl, everybody really likes her
(she's already together with fabian),
me, too, i like her, fabian is argentine,
not really too much to remark on him other
wise, a family father, a poet, editor,
it's just that, for the moment,
he's with jennifer, it's pretty
weird to see them together,
not that there's anything wrong
with jennifer and her blue hair, just
that she's sort of pugnacious, pontificates
incessantly, and poor fabian just
seems so insignificant, whatever, i can't
quite figure out which one of them
i find stranger, and then there's
bernardo now together with joe, joe's
a great guy, a poet, i think, and writes
short stories, looks tough as nails,
and bernardo is from brazil, writes
novels, i hear that he's just the best,
the intelligent one, the sensitive,
so bernardo and joe fit nicely together,
just as jennifer and fabian, and
they look even happier, not that there's

* it is probably worth mentioning that the "sunlit path" is a recurring theme in Hungarian literature, particularly in the form of a poem by György Petri on a quest for redemption or salvation. (the translator)

anything wrong with jennifer's hair, i really
don't think the hair is that important
just here, and this russian poet
anastasia is in love with bernardo,
we told bernard, and he just
laughed a little, laughed when we told him
she had an erotic dream about him, so, every
one's doing okay, just i'm the one lying
here alone, under the beechtrees in iowa, between
the shadows of branches, just now, in
a row of sunlight –

her name was rachel

(ráchelnek hívták)

she wore a yamaca on her head
her name was rachel, and
was part of some religious,
christian society,
eighteen years old, still
a virgin, she introduced herself
that way to everybody, it took
the place of a handshake, the fact
that she's a virgin,
and that the guy with whom
she would be together for the
first time is also to be a virgin, they
would enter this way into matrimony, and
after the ceremony everyone
will be happy and they should take
part in eachother's development for
men are animals, in general, and
only want to rape women, she
stated this quite crisply and nonchalantly,
after some small talk, and igal
asks her exactly how her name
and her yamaca, and her religious
circle all fit into the same puzzle, and
what she's looking for hanging out with
all these older men, so, yeah,
we had a nice little chat, drank darn near
half a bottle of wine between the three of
us, then about one a.m. she didn't really want
to leave, and she says she wonders if mahmoud,
the palestinian writer, is already asleep, and

she actually wanted to knock on his door,
and start some conversation, to which igal quickly
reacted that if she continues this sort of behavior
we're going to have to file charges of sexual
abuse, and she was sort of stunned, and
that's how finally, towards one-thirty,
she got the hell out of our hallway –

what olga is known for

(olga arról nevezetes)

olga is known for not being able to
speak english, just russian
and always smiles surreptitiously, and
otherwise is rather refined, and reserved
and all, and looks at men with great under-
standing, as if she knows well why we
look at her with great understanding, so,
olga doesn't speak english at all, can only communicate
with anastasia, who, on the other hand, speaks english in
such a manner that you would think that many times
in her childhood in new york, in central park she
was almost raped, and otherwise is exactly like
a little pig, puffy and sweet, endlessly
dreams of bernardo, she has wild, erotic dreams
about bernardo, and one time she dreamed about
taking bernardo's prick into her mouth, and then she
told everyone about her dream, everyone, that is, except
bernardo, of course, and so we told everything, that is,
to bernardo, and he just laughed about the whole thing,
he's actually not interested in women
at all, poor anastasia has no idea, what disillusionment
it would be if she knew, and olga doesn't
even know, of course, just because she doesn't
even speak english, because we've tried already
many times to tell her, i will never forget igal's
gesticulations with which he attempted to explain this
to her, that bernardo and joe and so on, she
just looks at him, not taking in a thing, shakes
her head, and when she finally understands,
she still just looks at him, and doesn't want

to believe him, doesn't want to think that all of
anastasia's dreams are in vain, all that beauty
and all that good that she dreams of, *all those happy
fancies for nothing, for nothing,
for nothing, for nothing –*

four quarters

(négy darab negyeddolláros)

i got four quarters on
me, looking now into
the pool hall, there's
hai, the kid from vietnam,
i am about to play with
him, true enough, it will be
a challenge, he thinks he's pretty
smart and very polite, but actually
suave and crafty, sneaky, just
smiles all the time, *keep smiling*,
say the americans, not that he's
american, no, not at all, but he sure
learned to smile, because he was seven,
when they kicked the life out of the american
troops in vietnam, so
that's my worthy opponent,
and he thinks he's just great,
and he hates losing;
he incorporates all the gags in
the interest of the win, continues
formal jungle combat, he'll shoot
from behind, if needed;
i'm right there in vietnam, i
think, just more calm, and just
softer so i lose everytime;
then it turns out that the warrior's
little sister goes to school in new
york, one of his old girlfriends from
back home works in l.a., thin and
just gorgeous, honest vietnamese

beauty, she even visited the
sad warrior once, and
that night you couldn't sleep
from the sound, a royal
ruckus all night, from
the room next door, they were
disgustingly happy for eachother,
me, i'm not happy for them, never
mind, i'm selfish, i have no sense
of friendship, the next morning
he comes out with "you
were very noisy", and there must
have been some "young lady" at my
place last night, he tells everyone,
all the while his girl, true
asian beauty, is walking long
thighs around, he buys her extra
food of all sorts, and everyone's
making fun of me, they leave him
alone, what's more is he starts off
telling us about hanoi and saigon, and
even says something about budapest, how
we, too and *they, too*, and at this point
i have no idea how to react, i think,
tonight, *i have to beat this guy* at pool,
and i do beat hai, at pool, that night –

somewhere faroff in korea

(*valahol messze koreában*)

ayeta is ugandan, slightly plump,
with large breasts, she doesn't really
speak english that well, despite the fact that it's her mother
tongue, and then when she speaks it's as if she were from
obuda, if you get what i'm talking about, i know it
well, i grew up there, as in *obuda*, so that's why i say
that she seems very *obudan*, as if i were to say to you
that we're both from montana, so you can see all over
ayeta's face that she doesn't really know how to handle
the fact that here we are in america, she just tells these
jokes as if she's from the *suburbs*
of budapest, like when one time she told me that
her stomach hurt, and that i must have put something in it,
that is, into her stomach, and it hurt so much,
what am i supposed to say, there i am *struck dumb*,
she just looks at me, as if i'd really put something
into her stomach, then afterwards, completely
without any reason that i can see, she smiles at me
really sharply, a great, long, row of healthy,
white teeth, and that's when i'm
suddenly sure that the whole thing
was just a joke, and that i shouldn't
worry about what she might be trying
to report me for, something i didn't do
or something i simply had no idea
you could be reported for;
ayeta's girlfriend is
kang, the korean, who, i suppose, is
an even harder nut to crack,
if i may say, she thinks it's over

whelming abruptness if you even look at
her and start talking, and might you be
so bold as to be friendly with her,
you will scare the hell out of her,
she'll call in sick for days, meanwhile,
she's meditating all night, in the lotus position,
strongly believing in the omnipotent changing
power of her household buddha, this all takes
away from the fact that she is really very
kind and humble, like a delicate,
pallid little flower,
she delicately and pallidly writes her novel, about
some woman who turns into a yellow flower
beside her husband, and there,
the yellow flower wilts and
dies on some tiny, little terrace,
somewhere faroff in korea –

karen

(karen)

karen,
says karen,
that her name is karen, that
that's what she is called, and me,
right away i think of anna karenina,
not that she's russian, she's chinese,
a great, big, chinese-canadian wo
man, who's proud of being chinese, all the
while having been born in canada, now
proud of studying in america, that
she's able to, and that sums up chinese women,
those that are canadian, too, are called karen,
and just like that, they study in america, in iowa,
just like that, they're content, they rent
a little apartment, and there, even in their little,
rented apartment, they can feel good, they
sit down in iowa coffeeshops, have them
selves some chinese tea, eat chinese food,
and then run around town in chinese clothes,
and they're real happy that they can get every,
single kind of chinese knick-knack and
brick-a-brack anywhere in america, and they're proud of
having every kind of chinese souvenir known to man,
from san francisco, new york, chicago,
because on every little, plastic, three-cent, empire state
building there it is, written in flea-sized writing,
made in china,
and that is how national identity grows and blossoms in karen,
because everything she touches is chinese, and if she touches
herself, she's chinese, too, and she enjoys this, very much,
she takes great pleasure –

mary said

(*mary mondta, hogy*)

mary said, and peter, too, that
rowena is from the philippine
islands, philipino, and writes poems,
really adorable, and puts her poems up
on the net, so the whole world knows
it's her and then the whole world will know
its her on the net, and then they're going
to read her poems, and then they're going
to feel them, and feel how great
and powerful they are, and they will
have that feeling deep inside, and
that's going to be great for every
body, really, and for her, too, and
she's really so admirable, and so sweet
and smiles so much sometimes her teeth
hurt, and so then she doesn't smile, but
really, she does all the time, because she
knows that smiling is good, and that if
you smile, then the whole world
smiles with you, and *you with it*, and
really everybody knows that's sort of
cool, so just smile at her, and then she'll
smile back, and you just can't go wrong, and
you know, mary also said that rowena and lem
met here in iowa, and that they got a scholar
ship, one is mexican-indian and the other comes
from far away, from the philipino islands, and
it's amazing that they just happen to meet
here, and really, they could just make it all
come true, and that is just fabulous, and

we should really respect that, and that
phillipinos are very proud of their country,
and really it's so special that she could
upload rowena's poems, you know upload
them from a *file*, and then the poor people who
stayed home can still read them, and then they
can at least see what rowena writes *here*,
in faroff iowa, and how tough it must be for her,
to be so far away, and that she has to eat *ham*
burgers, poor girl, in this distant america –

i can already say

(azt már elmondhatom)

i can already say that i've seen
the mississippi, hell, i even swam in it,
i've gone across it, taken a boat, watched
the shores, and could not get the thought
of huck out of my head, you know, from
tom sawyer, and that slave,
jimmy, i kept looking for them on
the shore, but i couldn't find them anywhere,
life goes on, i go and sunbathe, i lay out on
the sandy shores of the mississippi, enjoy the
strong sun beating down, bern
ardo and igal are sunbathing too, kang han and
ayeta, too, as it happens, ayeta didn't sunbathe
with us for too long, she was the first to escape
into the shade, black, african skin can't stand too
much sun, she says, this is too much for her, and i
am amazed, i ask her, if it's perhaps even colder
in uganda than it is here, asked this with light,
innocent irony, she very seriously responded,
well, the fact is that there's so much rain over there
that it never gets above thirty celsius, and that in her opinion,
the burning sun is unbearable and unhealthy,
she simply doesn't understand why we sunbathe
for so long in our white skin, probably
even dangerous, and that is what ayeta
said on the mississippi shore, there,
where little huck once ran down,
to swim –

beatrice

(beatrice)

that german chick is beatrice,
bald, twenty-one years old, six foot one,
with a tough, manly face, sometimes she wears
a purple wig, but only on her way to a party,
and there she loves dancing with girls, and right away,
after the first party, she goes and makes really good
friends with meg, meg is really pretty, twenty-
something, one of the organizers, one of the *staff*
people, so meanwhile, she writes poems, in
poetry class she reads them aloud, she has a
beautiful, oval face, kind of a wide butt, but life goes on,
meg is really the only one here who's a real bombshell,
even igal tells me how he dreams of *meg*, of *meg buzzi*,
and now i have to explain to him, as i have to
explain to you, what one might associate with her name
in hungarian (it means to fuck), i explain the meaning, how
people make these mistakes, when you learn languages
and you introduce yourself, essentially, as *fukmi*,
or some such thing, we always have to laugh, and he
considers my explanation to be very valuable
information, then, with eyes shining, he explains
how if he ever *meg...buzzi*, what it would be like
with meg, *megbuzzi*-ing her, meanwhile,
beatrice becomes more and more popular
among the girls, meg hangs out with her,
they look sort of funny together, when beatrice
puts on her purple wig and her long, white
summer gown, between that and the wig,
she could easily pass for a transvestite, one dressed
as a woman, and the rest of us are just dumbstruck

by the whole thing, how meg and beatrice dance
with eachother, they're just beautiful to
gether, a hell of a pair, and there's really not much for us
to do here, i explain to igal, and we're left dumbstruck
for another two months, as beatrice goes and gets every girl
wrapped up around her finger, in the meantime, she puts
together a future for herself here in america, she's the only
one here who has a chance to stay in iowa, the rest of
us, hearts heavy, bid farewell –

in the voluntary crematory

(*önkéntes krematóriumban*)

i'm on the eight floor
of the mayflower dormitory, opening my door
when who should come up behind me
but agneskia, the polish woman, she's not even polish,
she's french, lives with her husband in
paris, heck, she even lived in tel aviv for
a couple of years, born in new york, no less,
her parents were polish, polish immigrants,
and that's where she first saw the sun, spent
her childhood in new york, there, on the new
york pavement, lived, played baseball, bask
etball, and damn, does she speak american
english, like one of those homeless people
in new york, on the other hand, she speaks french
really well, rolls her r's all guttural-like, like
a real parisian woman, and speaks hebrew
to some extent, polish, though, is her
mother tongue, so she can get around
in conversation with just about the whole
world, still, she hates the whole world
around her, she's always in a bad mood,
her head hurts, her room is a crematorium,
at least, according to igal, who's always
sitting at her place and who – it turns out – is half polish,
though he was born in tel aviv, so they get along well,
just that igal can't stand agnieska's smoking habit,
i can't either, no, not a chance for us,
the constant clouds are unbareable,
asphyxia sets in at the thres
hold, and she just sits and smokes,

and writes poems, and is reading the
divine comedy, in italian, because,
you know, she speaks italian, too, mmmh,
not really, it's just that right now she's
reading dante, speaks rather poorly,
i suppose, damn it, she can't know every
thing, i suppose we can forgive her
on this one, anyway, i keep my
fingers crossed for her, wish her
all the success in the world, in
her self-inflicted crematorium,
hope she's successful in translating dante to english,
that's her plan, she's dredging the depths of dante, rum
maging through his bag of tricks, because that's
the way we are, that makes us feel good, we
take up the responsibilities of our great crematorium,
in *god knows* in which bag of tricks, for
god knows what kind of redemption –

in a strained falsetto

(magas, éneklő hangon)

in a strained falsetto,
some swiss, and very hairy,
young guy is talking to us
now about computer text,
he's not even that young
anymore, say, forty-five, hairy
hands, hairy neck, a thick
mustache on his face, but
then on his chin, thick
shaved stubble, tough,
muscular, bespectacled,
grizzly wrinkles cover his face,
what's more is his name is emil,
so, a tough stump stands before us,
it's just that from his voice you'd
think he's farinelli, and in that
high pitch he gives a presentation on
computers, and tells us how
the future will bring the birth
of the hypertext, and much better
things to read will be available, and
there won't be any books, just computers
all around us, every single piece
of text will end up on a computer,
and then we can *download* different
texts and literature, of course,
that is we *download* them from the inter
net, and when we *downloaded*
them, then, yeah, we'll
feel good about it,

and we'll read them, and these computertexts will be hypertexts, you know, because you can have all different versions of each text all at once, and then everyone can read the version, and just that version, which you feel like reading, and so literature will be very democratic and people can express themselves with texts, with novels, and stories, and tales, and poems, but, then of course we won't call them these names, soon even literal categories will disappear and everything, and it will really be very interesting, if people will really live and write and read this way, emil is really excited about his new age, because it really will be even more interesting and exciting than right here and now, but, on the other hand, right here and now is pretty interesting and exciting already –

my dear friend germán

(*barátom, german*)

you're a little crazy,
my dear friend, germán, i tell
the chilean poet, he excitedly
runs up and down the hallway, give me air!
give me air! he gasps takes the windows out
of the frames, and he'll do anything just
to breathe, and he breathes, completely normally,
i can't see just then why he needs to breathe
more normally, but regardless, he panics in
assuageably, his hands shake, he's sweat
ing, his face is ashen, just as if
he's having a heart attack
and lighting up a cigarette at the same time,
now he's drinking a little vodka, this
goes with the fashion here in america,
really, they love the russians here,
that's all they're interested in,
it seems, so germán drinks his vodka, the chil
ean poet, he wants to calm down, i don't know what
made him fly off the handle, he feels alone, true, it
doesn't put him in any sort of a swinging mood
to be here in america, in far off america, he feels
homesick, he whispers something to me,
something like him having enough of puritan morality,
he's had enough of everything and he's alone,
something like women don't pay attention to him
and that there is not one woman who would really value him,
the young chilean poet, that everyone's just perfect
ly alone and to themselves, and that's it, he hates that

everyone is so tough, and you know, he's got every right to just burst one day, to finally react, he's got every right to just lose it for a minute –

the turkish woman

(a török nő)

the turkish woman is erendiz, fifty
years old, writes prose, fat, she's got
a great, big ass, sticks her nose into
everything, she's a nice lady, though, she
just doesn't like me too much, she's afraid that
i'm mad at her, you know, because she's turkish and
the turks occupied Hungary for 150 years, but hey,
it wasn't even an invasion, inasmuch as there
were many hungarians who liked the turks, whatever,
doesn't matter, the fact is, that here in iowa, there
's this turkish woman who does her damndest to get on
my nerves, because she thinks that i don't like her, she
even went and told me, straight out, that i must not like
her, because hungarians don't like turks, she's sure of it,
and hungarians destroy all the relics of the turks in hungary,
they didn't take care of the mosques, says erendiz, me, i
have no idea what to make of all this, and so at this
elegant social dinner, i get a slightly better idea of what's
going on, for—in erendiz's very presence—once she had
brought to light her usual diatribe on how no one
loves the turks, no, not even the hungarians, well,
to make a long story short, in response,
i tell her that the grave of the last turkish
pasha is still there in buda castle, and really,
what a nice gesture i think this is on our
part, there's the grave, and when i walk my
dog, i always go in that direction, i always walk
my dog around there, to which bernardo the kid
from brazil, his mouth still stuffed, comes out with
his conclusion that the dog must piss on the grave

of the last turkish pasha everytime, and laughs,
to which everyone grins rather slyly into their
plates, and well that's all erendiz needs right now,
she stands up, walks out nervously,
i really don't think i've done too much to ameliorate
turkish-hungarian relations, but i'm really not at all that
upset with the turks, hell, hungarians love some of their
former rulers, we celebrate the anniversary of the loss
to the turks at the battle of mohács, and no one
does that except the hungarians –

the dream come true

(a megvalósult álom)

we finally get on the bus
and start off on our way to the
john deere factories, we can finally,
thank god, see the agricultural machines
at the famous john deere tractor plant,
we can finally see what makes all this living
worthwhile, huge, disgusting combines, goliath
harvesters, just beyond the beds of the
table-lathes, happy, little migrant workers
bustle about, we get john
deere baseball caps, john
deere bags, and safety glasses,
but of course, damn, do we feel good
about the whole thing, we get to sit
down in every single kind of enormous
machine, and get pictures taken
of ourselves, and everyone
smiles at this, sincerely happy,
it's so great here,
feels so good to see
one of the great, towering
citadels of iowa's industrial factories, creating
the machines that powered a nation, here the fully-
contented american can live out his life, spirit
ually balanced and appropriately endowed with trade
union rights, as for igal and me, they sit us into a sm
all john deere dune buggy and it fires right up, and,
giggling, we run circles around the concrete courtyard
of the john deere works, everyone smiles, everyone's

content, the others wave, and looky here, we've
been here, too, and this is what the dream come true
looks like, this is happiness in the flesh –

the foreign man

(*az idegen férfi*)

u pe myint, the foreign man,
the enigmatic eunuch, heading
just now in my direction down
the hallway, his face is of rubber,
instead of eyes, glass beads stare back
at me, his movements are mechanical,
his smile is also mechanical and
unforgiving, i feel a strange pang
as he looks in my direction,
and that's why i just smile back
mechanically if i run into him,
and that's what i do now, we nerv
ously and mechanically greet each
other, i feel black magic and
distance, i don't know
if he's chinese, or indian,
because he came from
somewhere around there, he's
a citizen of myanmar,
that's burma to some of us
ignorants, and so,
he's a writer, i don't know
where burma is exactly, natch,
he's also a doctor and
herbologist, gets along well with
hai, the prose writer, he's fat
and soft, and this softness is also alien
ating and alarming, too, because
he's not at all weak, he's not
a softy, visibly slow and in

decisive, he moves about aimlessly,
but somehow, just now, as a cat,
readying for the hunt, like a cat, behind
that coziness, that congeniality,
that softness, lies some terrible
and inexplicable power –

distant, foreign bodies

(*távoli, idegen lények*)

i'm going to calona,
to that little american city where
the amish live, i go back to the
eighteenth century now, see people
decked out in eighteenth century
clothing, in horsewagons and
two-wheeled carts, in small carriages
they make their way around the city
from farm to farm, don't use elect
ricity, don't watch tv, don't wash
with a washing machine, or sit in cars,
don't love anything that has anything to do
with the twentieth century, they follow
the way of life of their respected ancestors,
they don't run with the times, they don't want to keep
in step with the new age, they're sick of everything
that's new, they don't surf the net, don't talk
on the phone, don't receive telegrams, they don't
take pictures, guess they don't want to see
evidence of their children growing, adolescents,
fiancés, men of households, their dying selves,
they don't want anything that's new, that's not original,
they have no relationship with the outside world, but they
have kids, they raise them that way, i saw some, too,
as if i were looking at tom sawyer, they were in just that same
clothing, they sat on a small carriage, their father
seated elegantly up on the dickey, the reins in hand,
and so directing a sad horse, and we just flew
by in a VW minibus, they didn't look at us, just
stared stoically ahead, at the road kicking dirt up

on them, they had a ten-year-old who didn't want to notice us, either, they didn't want to take into account that there was a world living around them, aside from theirs, on all sides, we passed them as UFOs might pass, i really did feel that they were the real ones, and we were the distant, foreign bodies –

in the early light

(*reggeli napsütésben*)

it's dawn, in my insomnia, i
don't know what to do next, igal
is rummaging in the kitchen, he wants
me to wake up, but i don't feel much
like having a conversation with him at
six in the morning, it bugs me, all that rumbling,
and it feels good to hear it, and suddenly i'm
asleep again, in a dream, i'm walking around
tel aviv, on the beach, i feel the soft, warmth
suck on my bare feet as i walk, it
feels nice, *mazl tov*, i hear, and there's
igal, a bottle of wine in his hand, you don't
drink, i tell him, but today's a holiday, he
says, your holiday, he says because you
get a lot of luck, he says it like that,
a lot of luck, he never says things like that,
i'd never really seen him so worked up, either,
emotional, i'm stunned, he just splashes his bottle
around, and waves at me with a large,
black hat, and for some reason, i
start laughing, and i'm still laughing
when, with eyes wide open, i
gaze about the room,
in a very early light –

morning, waking

(reggel, ébredéskor)

i go out to the kitchen, it's morning, igal
must be off already to the java house, he's
drinking coffee by now, with a croissant, as
always, while i'm wavering in the common
kitchen, unable to find anything to do,
it'd be nice if he were here, he'd explain something,
the way he always does, or he'd say we should go
to the pool, something like that, actually,
it'd be nice if he were here, even if he drives
me nuts, with that incessant busy bee manner
he's so in love with, whatever, he can't stop for
even a second, and still, he can work,
and he talks, and explains, one thing after another,
his mouth doesn't give up, he says everyone's like that
in israel, running around, a mile a minute, and they
don't even go to saunas, because the whole country's
a sauna, and he was amazed, he said,
the first time i took him to the sauna in iowa, he
didn't even want to go in, just told me how
interesting he thought it was, and how
it must be crawling with gays, and then he
went in just the same, but it just made me
more nervous, after three minutes he wanted
to leave, said he can't sit still for five minutes,
and really, that's him, so he must be there by now in the
java house, he's drinking his coffee, he cracked off
at dawn, and here i am in bright morning, powerless, moping,
like some *quadruplegic*, and i think of my grandmother end
lessly, who died in *tab*, in *somogy*, back home,
my dad was three years old when his

mom died, name was *roza czigler*, that is
my grandmother's was *roza czigler*, and when
i said this name, *czigler*, to igal, out of nowhere,
it seems, he laughed out loud, and in
some indescribably familiar
gesture said: *shalom* –

san francisco, a beautiful dream

(*san francisco, gyönyörű álom*)

anastasia, a russian writer, is very proud
of the fact that her grandfather was a *kgb*
general in stalin's time, her father then
obtained the rank of colonel in the same, peachy
establishment, so following foot
steps having no doubt gotten a hand
up, so, the two of them, in commendable fashion,
served, did their part for the soviet-russian nation,
and thus, anastasia's able to take pride in the whole
family, and the family finds the chance to be proud
of her, they afford her every opportunity, in their power,
to make them proud, it's important, no doubt, she be
at the forefront of literature, no doubt they can help,
she had a great upbringing, was already
being taught english at age seven, which
just goes to show how her *kgb* father and grand
father saw so well and wisely into the future, it's
fantastic that anastasia could receive such an up
bringing, and thus, she has come to iowa, she's writing
her new novel, or rather her first novel, if we're
splitting hairs, still she's a mere
23, her book of poems has already
surfaced in russia, so successful
that they sent it here to iowa right away,
of course her *kgb* grandfather has nothing to do with this,
important we understand this, she works a little every day
on her novel, so it will be ready by the time she gets home,
fabulous, she doesn't do anything else, faithfully
sends off letters to friends left back home, hits
email every day, helps olga to communicate with the others,

because olga, the novel-writer, doesn't speak english, but she wrote a chekhov takeoff called tanja-tanja and then became world-famous, or would have, just that she has communication problems, no problem, uses anastasia, who speaks english like a real new yorker and still ain't interested in anything but her novel, she's a nice girl, too, believes ardently in soul-transference, and such incantations, terrified by crime, and most certainly by america, some even fear her, like vasilij, the moldavian-romanian, who believes anastasia to be a *kgber* herself, writing reports on him regularly, but anastasia *really* only cares about her novel, she works on it for two months, then off to san francisco with olga, and that's where the real trouble starts, true love wells up in the form of a russian-sanfranciscan boy, and love blinds her, poor thing, she's lost all sight suddenly of novel and friends, san francisco and love are all that exist now, the whole thing takes a week, she'll come back to iowa, sort out her scholarship so she can stay another week in san francisco, extend her visa, then change her ticket, and everything will work out just fine, just fine, if it hadn't have been for that one *sign from above*, the one no one expected, one of her oldest friends dies suddenly in a car accident near moscow, now she simply must go to the funeral, it can not be any other way, and so, that's the end of love, the novel remains, moscow, too, and san francisco continues to be a beautiful dream –

eleven o'clock in the morning

(reggel, tizenegy óra)

it's ten o'clock in the
morning, time to come
back to my senses, bub
bling over, i burst from
bed, pull on sneakers, light,
casual shorts,
the so-called camping pants,
jump inside, ah, that subtle,
washing, arousing morning
feeling, the way I thrust myself
with relaxed intention into
pants, then, as if on cue,
jane enters, little jane, igal's
translator, darling, timid
girl, twenty-five, speaks hebrew,
arab, russian, and english, of course,
all superbly, i can't really even
say which is her mother tongue, she's
in search of igal, in the other room,
she takes the time, though, to thoroughly
look me over in my state, does
that thing, as if she wants something,
but i know better, it's the usual trap,
they express sociability and try
to make you feel comfortable this
way here, she doesn't want anything
from me, frankly, such things are no
longer in vogue, i don't even
understand, see, how people
here manage to reproduce,

maybe it's true that immigration is
the only reason there are so
many people, i ponder this a moment,
shrug, and head off jogging –

relaxed and enigmatically

(lazán és titokzatosan)

i'm in chicago with a hungarian
-chicagan, poet, we step into some
strange bar, i'm with some girl
from san francisco, too, anya,
and she just keeps asking questions,
as if she's head over heels for me, i
feel thin and eligible, i am apparent
ly attractive, i smile, relaxed,
and enigmatically, learn how to smile,
relaxed, and enigmatically, that's
the most important thing, most of all
write that way, too, as if
you were smiling enigmatically, in-
differently, we head into a chicagan
hole in the wall, meantime, i'm just
waves of enigma, as if, with my be
havior, i could be throwing one of thousands
of meanings, your way, enigmatically,
with obvious intentions, i look at anya
now and again, then ignore her completely,
to her, i'm the mysterious foreigner, just
stepped off the choochoo from the moon
or the sun, here i really am the myster
ious foreigner, from a distant world, who
is very relaxed, and enigmatically sits down
in some strange hole in the wall, relaxed
now, we enigmatically order some drinks,
and soon it's just the two of us, but then,

it's just me, i am alone, and
then it's as if *it's just*
the table left alone there –

gospel music

(gospel music)

i'm in chicago, some friends are hauling
me off just now to mass, gospel music, they
say, it'll be interesting, they say, the
black society here has their ser
vice, i'm a little flustered, pure black
people around me, i wouldn't want to end
up in the wrong place, i'm just hoping
the kkk doesn't stroll in,
poshly, politely, we sit, jockey for
position, just as we do at home, i see
well-dressed blacks placing mics' at the pulpit,
smiling all the while, i patiently await
the beginning of the ceremony, everyone is
happy and excited, beautifully dressed people
close in on all sides, and then a light
suit, and there a young man with a white tie,
a rich baritone begins to blare,
the gathering silently attentive, then
one by one they begin to answer him, at first
meekly, now growing strong and confident,
i hear more and more voices, and in the end,
everyone stands in place, singing, i
stand, too, the voices sweep shapelessly but
borderlessly, now they begin to sway in deli
rium, behind me, a thin, black woman
in an unreally short skirt, throws
her body this way and that, sings,
deliriously, ecstatically, a fat
woman beside me swings great arms, now lightly,
great hips rock and then rub against my thigh, the

sound swells and fills the great hall,
jeeezuhs, jeeezuhs, i hear
more and more, the mood circles about
me, and this is how i imagine the tribes
of africa, their dances, i wait for
tight blouse behind me to turn into a fever
ish girl who is experiencing out-of-body,
her body pounds, the whites of her eyes flash up
out from under half-closed eyelids, jeezuhs, jeezuhs,
i hear jeeeezuhs again and again, still ringing
in my ears as the cool, late october wind
calmly wipes my flushed face
outside the church –

chicago at night

(chicago, éjjel)

don't ever forget that night
in chicago, on the bank of lake
michigan, next to chicago avenue,
the pearson street sidewalk,
i stopped and saw an aberration of a
man, someone, no comparison to be made
here at all, a torn face, his nose wasn't really
there anymore, just when the ambulance got
there, a cop was directing us away for every
one's own good, it was a black guy, dying there,
the doctor bent over him to hear, *fuck you*,
he spit on the ground, *fuck your god*,
in a sputter, his head fell back for the
last time, clutching still a daily dose in his hand,
knowing somehow how somewhere,
at some *point*, he may
still need it that much –

straight on, to a black tree

(egészen a fekete fáig)

i pull on my hat, my base
ball cap, i don't even know
how to play baseball, but i
do love my hat, i start to run,
down in front of the dorms, and
along the iowa river, *this side*,
then across the bridge, and then
i jog right through strangers
coming on along the path, and they all
say hi, and then i do, too,
evening is drawing on, no it's night
now, nightjogging, we say hi to each
other, nothing better to do, and we
do enjoy sweating, this is my nightly
jog, this is me running in the night,
this is my habitual night run,
let us run, one and all, every day,
gimme my daily run, give me this
day, this daily run, today, i say,
today, i am taken in by the park at
night, go straight on to the trunk
of that tree, i say, give myself
that much, one more time, building
muscle for tomorrow, yeah, strength,
confidence, endure, because, that much
must be done, running in the park at night,
running straight to the trunk, that root, that tree,
to the end, to that towering, once ominously
unobtainable, black tree –

playing on survival

(túlélésre játszom)

i

don't eat meat, no dairy
products, either, can't have the temple
corrupted by animal products,
i eat fruit, lots, vegetables,
whole-wheat, but
even bread must be eaten
with self-control,
not that,
not that i've forgotten,
bread could cause breakouts,
on my skin, i don't want to
break out of my skin,
i don't want to beat myself, i don't
want to win the fight against myself,
my worst enemy is not
me, myself, my worst enemy,
i just tell myself, and
don't eat meat, because
this causes a visible allergic
reaction, no good to
to not eat anything, 'cause, then,
then i'll just disappear, no doubt
that then there are no break outs,
here, now, far off in america still,
still i'll survive somehow,
i know somehow sometime i just
got to get home –

colorful flags of frisco

(színes zászlók san francisco felett)

gorgeous, colorful flags wave
all over the place over san
francisco, alright, not
true, not over it, but
on its houses, waving,
not everywhere, but here
in town, just now in the center,
just where the beatniks once
lived, ginsburg's crowd, the
fact is, that rainbow-colored
flags wave and wag,
as if in some
pomp-in-spring fair,
they sing free gay love,
on west bank here, a love
able elder gentleman, clark blaise,
that is, shows me around the
colorful world of s.f., smiling,
friendly, and all, clark takes me
around, chuckling in his expression
of what fabulous guys these
guys are, everything's possible,
we're free, he says, nothing
prohibited, nothing frowned
upon, he explains, i think, how
incredible, this thing, this west
coast, here, still i think believable too,
it's me, here, in this puritan,
strict, and still so amazingly free,
america –

san francisco night

(éjszaka, san francisco)

it's nighttime, standing on the corner of market
and powell, san francisco, this homeless, black
guy comes over and – doesn't beg – just starts talking,
not scary, i just can't understand a word, i'm alone
in the most beautiful city on the west
coast, i chat with this guy for a while none
theless, a friend in the night, then alone, i
walk back towards my temporary home in
sf, everything seems so safe and isn't, it's
idyllic, on the surface, sf, i stroll through the
light sanfranciscan night air, i see palm
trees and tropical plants, it's 2 am, now
getting home, sheldon street, for five nights
i live in this apt, for five nights i am alone in this
little apartment, now from the living
room, i see the pacific ocean, so pacific,
i step out onto the terrace to have the west
coast at my feet, san francisco just under them,
and i must be happy, i should be, i really am happy,
just about happy –

closing party

(záróbuli)

on the eve of igal's departure, we held an end-of-the-year party in the hallway, between the elevator and the japanese woman's room, beer, wine, music, everyone made it to the party, we even danced, even ayeta danced, we asked her for some tribal dances from uganda, she turned to us, mysterious little smile, in a gesture only slightly lacking in grace, she bangs out some sacred body beats that we would have to consider international, didn't entirely come together, so, she's dancing with peter, in any event, who's ugandan, too, 'cept he broke on through to the iowan scene a few decades earlier and now he teaches, college professor, loved by all, talks non-stop, mostly about how everybody thinks he's a genius, yeah, books published in every language, his last article was put out in japanese, in the very best of japanese daily magazines, no less, until it was picked up by the senegalese, who published it and loved it so, that australia begged him for it, everywhere, everybody's screaming for it, and him, he just remains himself, obstinate, unchangeable, eyes fixed forward, believes but in the all-powerful god, who just happens to be elvis presley, the expression of his love is evident right down to the elvis presley socks, yeah, peter's that guy that everyone loves, and the best part is that now, here in the party if you look real careful, you can catch elvis, flashing out, stern, beautiful face, just now situated between the shoe and pant-cuff of one college professor, a fantastic feeling, calming, seeing us all dance here, at the farewell party, even elvis makes his appearance, we all smile happily to one another, and kang, of course, is

smiling, too, well, he always smiles, yes, that smile just kind
of stuck on him in seoul, he smiles it now, and makes gestures,
like he's showing us a new car on a game show, hell, if he
didn't gesture, he wouldn't have anything to do with his hands,
and he's always this way, now, wait,
careful, you can't always make such gestures,
people are sensitive around here, they're sensitive, being all
thrown together, writers from timbuktu and florida, and they're
scared, yeah, they're scared of what people might say, what they
might be saying about them, they are closed and apprehensive,
but right now there's a party goin on, a farewell party for igal,
everything is free and open, almost everyone is here,
olga locked herself up in her room with gila,
her close russian-american confidant,
they're smoking grass, and olga is making herself cry, inducing tears
as she does when she parties, we're not crying, we're not making
anybody cry, we're feeling good, in the hallway, between
the elevator and the japanese woman's room –

if asked

(*ha megkérdezik*)

if they ever ask me
what it is that i did in america,
i won't tell them what i did,
because
it would be rather strange
to respond that i didn't do anything,
i slept in america,
slept on the eighth floor of a dormitory,
in a room,
with air-conditioning,
which always worked just fine,
didn't get sick,
didn't crack or stress out,
yes,
everything was fine,
i was left to sleep, i had money,
didn't have to worry about falling into poverty,
like at home, then, on fridays,
the *van* arrived, that's when
we got to go to the *eagle*, just as if
i were going to the *spar* back home,
where i bought myself brown rice,
some frozen fish, apples, tomatoes,
then a *gallon*, that is four liters,
of orange juice,
then i ate brown rice for a week
and drank juice, and slept,
went out jogging from time to time,
with others whom i didn't
know and who just kept saying *hi*

when they passed, and sometimes
they would even say *hey*,
and so we jogged, jovially,
passing by one another in
the park, and grinned, because, you know,
we are normal, all of us, just so happens
that we're here right now in america, we
want to be healthy, damned healthy,
we *keep fit*, scoff rice and fish, and
try and make sure that
everything's alright –

what i don't know

(*azt nem tudom*)

i don't know exactly
how much
i've been changed by all that
happened in america,
i wake differently,
i see everything a
round me as something else,
i'm
harder and more decisive, some
times i pretend i'm still in america,
that i'm on my way to the java
house, to sink some ginseng tea, i pretend
i'd have a bite, some kind
of pastry, not too much,
lots of carbohydrates there,
i wanted to lose weight,
i was afraid of getting sick,
i was a
fraid that then i'd never get home, that
this would cause problems, i didn't want
to cause problems,
then i pretend
i'm on my way to mickey's, and i'd
eat more chicken breast sandwiches,
i'd eat french fries
and put ketchup on
everything, i'd drink orange juice
on the side and that was per
fect, i loved that orange juice, thick,
with juicy bits of orange, i will never

forget it, you could bite into that stuff,
i'd crunch on little orange bits,
and i
enjoyed that orange taste, a bit
sweet, once again,
just once i'd like
to taste that juice, in iowa,
at mickey's,
i'd order one more chicken sandwich,
i'd eat it slow with fries and ketchup,
lots of ketchup, if i could –

sitting in the coffeeshop of our dreams

(beülünk álmaink kávéházába)

igal wrote and said he really misses iowa, because there, in iowa, he was happy, at any point, he could go and sit in the java house to have a cup of coffee, and there, while he was mixing his coffee, he could imagine himself running into an american girl who would not consider it sexual harassment if he were to so much as look at her and make her feel with his eyes that he might want something, the kind of thing that the average, puritan, american girl's mind is incapable of correctly construing, but igal is, i'm afraid, obviously mistaken, for we know, as he must, that there's still no way he can find such a girl, because they're just *not like that*, girls aren't really *like that at all* nowadays, igal probably knows that, he even tells me how women in tel aviv, how they're still *like that*, how you can still look at them, they even like it when people look, with all the sorts of things that igal says, i can't tell you what he's referring to, what he's thinking when he says he's dying to get back to iowa, when meanwhile it's so possible to ravidly stare down the farmer's daughter in tel aviv without getting lynched, hey, i didn't think of that, now that's a good question, nice, next time i email him, i'm gonna ask him why he doesn't stay home on his ass, why he's always going on about iowa and his java house, aha!, so, yeah, i've got him now, i've cornered the bastard, he's been crawling after women for fifty years now, yeah, says, he's got every right, i don't believe him, won't ride that line for a minute, who does he think i am?, yeah,

girls are different in tel aviv, my eye, they're just like that, just like everywhere else in the world, slap in some silicone breasts, wear so much plastic on their fingertips and dye in their hair that you'd be a fool to try and caress them, they don't even want you to, 'cause, then, *hell*, of course there's got to be something demeaning or cruel in that, too, if somebody, if, if somebody wantsa do something, then's he's gotta be asking for *that*, right?, to *do* that, no, don't *do*, we've gotta prohibit that somehow, and they do, because they have just that kind of law, and it's *harassment*, and that's enough to take 'em to court, those awful men, there's private property, then if someone steps over *the line*, then it's as if it's over *the threshold*, it's like their *house*, it's their home, then it's just self-defense if she shoots you down, and they will, it's simpler that way, stamp them out, under foot, those who want *in*, because that shows that all those who want *in* are dogs, animals, all of them, and that's all they want, all the time, because *that's the way they are*, and we can't have them being *that way*, because if we do, then they aren't the other, or this way, or, *they're* doing it the right way, but they don't want it *anyway*, no way, or may be they do, but not like this or that, it's hard to understand all this, i don't, but whatever, if i did understand it, as some do, it wouldn't be any easier than it isn't for them to, i'm just a penpal, writing to igal, we write emails, and get along alright, and this way, in our way, we imagine the world for eachother, how one day, far off, in iowa, we will

sit down to have coffee in the coffee shop of our dreams,
and there, *there something will happen*, something which
we can't even handle dreaming about, thinking about it,
we don't even know, if we really want it to happen –

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