

FIVE POEMS OF ATTILA JÓZSEF

Translated by ©László Fórizs

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IT'S NOT ME WHO SHOUTS¹

*It's not me who shouts but the earth is rumbling
Beware, beware because Satan has gone mad
Lurk in the pure bottom of the springs
Hide behind the sparkling diamonds
Mingle with the bugs under the stones
Oh, hide yourself in the freshly baked bread
Poor, poor you!
With the fresh showers soak into the the earth
Bathing your face in yourself is vain
Only in somebody else you can be washed.
Be the tiny edge on a blade of grass
And you will be greater than the universe.
Oh, machines, birds, leaves and stars!
Our barren mother is begging for a child.
My friend, my dear, beloved friend
Whether it is horrible or splendid
It's not me who shouts but the earth is rumbling.*

¹ József Attila: *Nem én kiáltok*. (Attila József: *It's not me who shouts*, December, 1936); translated by László Főríz, Nashville, 1991.

WITHOUT KNOCKING²

*If I become attached to you
you can come in my room without knocking
but please think it over
I put you to my pailliasse the rustling straw is sighing with dust.*

*I bring you fresh water in the carofe
I wipe your shoes before you leave
nobody will disturb us here
stooping you can patch our clothes in peace.*

*Silence is deep I speak to you
if you are tired I give you my sole chair
in the warm room you can take off your tie your collar
If you are hungry you will get a clean paper for plate
if I happen to have something else
but please leave me some food because I am also always hungry.*

*If I become attached to you
you can come in my room without knocking
but please think it over
it would hurt me if you didn't come for a long time.*

² József Attila: *Kopogtatás nélkül* (Attila József: *Without knocking*, April, 1926); translated by László Fórizs, Nashville, July 18, 1991 (Revised: Budapest, October 4, 1998).

DREAD³

*In swaddling-rags pursing his lips
Behind the alcove a little child lies
Now dozes then fitfully weeps
In the wretched room there is twilight.*

*Trembling shaking as on the cold
Naked stones a puddle in the fall wind
Hiding her face in her worn clothes
In the corner a girl is brooding.*

*Both live there with desire and hate
In the bleak alcove they have to share
Above the bed in a frayed frame
Rákóczi and dog with sandy fur.*

*She is seven would like to escape
For she can't even cavort inside
She must be there without a brake
Mommy left her to care for this child.*

*So deeply thinking she almost
Falls asleep. Wish she could run around!
She feels so strong that she would throw
The whole big city down to the ground.*

*Swollen eyes she's just opened them
At once follows the sharp cry of him
She looks him up and down and then
Without a word warms up the cold milk.*

*His face starts becoming blue while
The young girl gazes with stony stare
In her pale hair dead butterfly
Hanging its wing a ribbon is there.*

*At last she pushes the feeding
Bottle into the baby's screaming mouth
Who is coughing, suffocating
And like a breaking rod he shrieks out.*

*The nipple's dribbling like a faucet
When the girl suddenly takes it away
He starts jerking like a rough sea
Snatches at it and bursts into wail.*

³ József Attila: Iszonyat (Attila József: *Dread*, November, 1934); translated by László Főríz, Nashville, 1991.

*Then she thrusts it into his mouth
For the poor boy is gasping, stretching
But before the nipple calms him down
She takes it again out of his lips.*

*How can he understand such things?
He's being shivered by the wrath of
Despair. The milk's hesitating
To come back from his tiny stomach.*

*He's red as if he's been born in
That moment. Like larvae on his head
The blood-vessels' re wriggling, crawling
And the boy's big toes are being stiffened.*

*He's making terrifying roars
As catching nothingness with his gums
Such dread rose in the ancestors
At the time of begetting the gods.*

*He is shuddering with horror
Why does she take it if she gives it?
Like a murderer she's so cold;
In the yard a blind man is singing.*

*She's played for an hour with the boy
Without any word or any smile;
When a neighbor raps at the door
Although she is startled she replies*

*To calm the woman through the hole
"Oh, the poor baby must be teething."
Then she sits down in the alcove
Having ten thin fingers to play with.*

*When the tiny boy is embraced
By his mother late in the evening
– As for so many weeks – he takes
A firm hold of her and doesn't need milk.*

*The bottle makes him cry and he asks
Only for the strong warmth of the lap;
As he closes his eyes at last
He's still trembling like a stooped old man.*

*Coming home she is deadly tired
She doesn't know what's come over her son.
"Mom, I gave him the milk in time!"
And the girl endlessly chatters on.*

*“Let me cook in the kitchen, please.”
She’s very bright energetic...
But her mother had better sleep
She’s so exhausted and desolate.*

*This night the stars are not burning
While crying the seasons and the skies
The mother’s weeping in her sleep
When she starts up thinking her son cries.*

*The boy’s benumbed with silent grief
As his mother rises from her bed
He seems to her to smile and dream
So she’s soothed and goes to sleep again.*

*Next morning the mother makes some
Food and early hurries off to work
When her daughter also wakes up
She starts dressing and endlessly vows.*

*But she is so lonesome inside
Desire pushes her outside to play
Suddenly comes the boy’s hungry cry
And all over again starts the pain.*

NOTHING⁴

Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing.

Let it be so that it not be.

Let it be so that it not be.

Let's say Edith.

Invisible, yellow baby chickens are scratching about for the stars.

Perhaps it's dawning, perhaps Budapest is burning,

perhaps the paint is melting on the face of a sweaty giant girl.

There are cars clattering, there are shutters rolling,

there are oceans rumbling, there are people flooding.

I can't stand that rough house there on the corner;

it's like the tinea on the face of a tiny baby.

It must be either an unknown morning

or a railway station I have arrived at.

I have no baggage.

I forgot something. Perhaps if I could find it out.

One – nothing.

Two – nothing.

Three – nothing.

It is so unusual as this railway station

that there is nothing, nothing at all.

⁴ József Attila: Semmi (Attila József: Nothing, December, 1936); translated by László Fórizs, Nashville, December 27, 1991.

*IT HURTS SO MUCH*⁵

*Death prowls behind
Outside inside you escape like
into the hole a small frightened mouse*

*to the woman
until you can so that you be
protected by their arms, laps and knees.*

*Not only their
soft warm laps lure and your desire
you are thrust there by necessity.*

*Whoever can
find a woman will embrace till
all become white the seductive lips.*

*The treasure's double
so is the trouble one has to love.
Who loves but cannot find a partner*

*he's so homeless
as helpless an animal is
in the forest while doing its needs.*

*No other place
can hide your face even if you aim –
Oh, brave you!– a knife at your mother.*

*She understood –
no one else could – what these words mean
and yet she has just thrown me away.*

*My head's splitting
among the living no place for me
I cannot endure the troubles and pain.*

*Like a baby
who gets crazy and shakes his rattle
but no one comes in. – It is in vain.*

*Should I love her
Could I hate her? It doesn't matter.
I'm not ashamed that I found it out.*

⁵ József Attila: Nagyon fáj (Attila József: It hurts so much, October–November, 1936.); translated by László Fórizs, Nashville, Christmas, 1991.

*Because who is
scared by his dreams dazed by the sun
will be driven out in any case.*

*My culture's falling
like the clothing from the lovers
in the happy hour of making love.*

*But where is she
to come and see death tosses me
Why should I suffer dolor alone?*

*They both suffer
through the labor the pain's twofold
and humility can assuage it;*

*but to my songs
money belongs so my sorrow
can only bring disgrace on me.*

*So every whelp!
I beg your help there on the street
let your eyes burst where this woman goes.*

*Oh, innocents!
In labor camps wail under boots
and say to her that it hurts so much.*

*You faithful dogs!
In the thick fogs get under wheels
and bark to her that it hurts so much.*

*Women with babies!
Have miscarriages and go there
to sob to her that it hurts so much.*

*Safe and sound people
whoever meet her fail and shatter
and mumble to her that it hurts so much.*

*Young men who can
tear each other for a woman
do not conceal that it hurts so much.*

*Horses and bulls!
Quietly pulls who is gelded
But shriek out to her it hurts so much.*

*And you dumb fish!
Do accomplish the angler's task
and gape from the hook it hurts so much.*

*All the living
with everything home farm country
let it burn down what the fire can touch.*

*From the cinder
let's come to her while she's dozing off
and yap together it hurts so much.*

*So she can hear
while living here what she denied
at her pleases is her own worth.*

*She has deprived
the outside inside escaping life
of the last chance for a rebirth.*