

ANASEMIOTIC MULTILINGUAL POETRY: FACT OR FICTION?

(A Linguistic Self-Portrait with Illustrations)

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More than once I have asked myself the question: Am I bound to go schizophrenic? Can I keep the four different persons jumping under my skin in the container of one identical surface-personality? Or is there, perhaps, a distant chance for a higher and better kind of mental health latently present in my state? The answer varies according to the Moon's position in the heavens as much as it varies according to whether I am in the midst of a linguistics lecture at the University of Illinois at Chicago where I teach, sitting at home at my desk, or riding the Northwestern Railroad to Chicago from Lake Bluff, where I live. The merciless devil of poetry comes and rapes my conscious mind in the unlikeliest places and at the unlikeliest times, and to make matters worse, frequently it happens in two languages at once, or intermittantly, in one after the other. Here is a typical scene of my life: I sat at the breakfast table with my American wife and she is telling me something about school or about one of our daughters. I try very hard to listen and even manage to nod or hum "aha" in the appropriate pauses allowed by her sentence syntax, but it's no use: I drift hopelessly, and she knows it. "What did I say"—she asks, and if I am lucky I manage to recapitulate 30% of her last sentence. Then she rephrases what she said. First it used to irritate her tremendously, but now she can tell, by just looking at me, that I am having one of my "phonetic attacks", the family term we coined for the periodic symptoms of my chronic disease. It no doubt makes me difficult to live with and the rewards must seem appallingly meager if they are, to add insult to injury, in the relatively distant and useless Hungarian language.

I don't think I will ever manage to shake loose of Hungarian completely. There was a period when I tried, but now I realize that it is useless. I carry the language with me, like a turtle carries its shell, and the more I try to give it up, the more savage the "phonetic attacks" a few days later. Perhaps on the train, perhaps while I am reading an English language linguistics publication. So I decided there is no use fighting it: I just have to accept it when it comes, forgetting about who will read it, when, where, and how, if ever, the resultant poem will be published. And then a strange thing happens: having thus allowed the Hungarian poem to rape my mind and eventually surface, it begins to translate itself into English. Again, the process is largely unconscious. I have no real intention of translating myself into English, nor do I work at it very hard. I am completely honest and I do not exaggerate: It happens automatically. Soon after a given Hungarian poem is finished, I catch myself

(sometimes in the bathroom, sometimes in the shower, unfortunately also while driving, which is really dangerous!) rewriting the poem in English. Yes, I mean *re-writing*, or *re-casting*, seldom, if ever *actually translating*. Translating to me is an arduous, conscious, and deliberate philological undertaking during which inspiration may or may not join in the process. It is very hard for me to say whether my inspired translations are actually better than the workmanly, sober ones, and it certainly matters a great deal whether the translation was into English from Hungarian, or vice versa. I have done a fair number of pieces in Hungarian verse translation from Old Provençal, French, English, Vietnamese, and Thai (all published in various anthologies and journals) and do translate Hungarian classics and 20th century poets into English fairly routinely, as one of the editors of *The Poetry of Hungary: An Anthology from the 12th to the 20th Century* (forthcoming). But this is *not* what I do to my own poems. Invariably the poems "translated by myself"—and this holds true whether it is from Hungarian to English, or the other way round—turn out to be independent, new poems that had, so to speak, a parent poem, or an inspirational model. To put it in other words: a philologist trying to compare my English and Hungarian poems could no possibly fail to recognize that there exists some kind of relationship between English poem A and Hungarian poem A₁; in fact, if the two poems were written by two different individuals, he would have to draw the conclusion that somebody had been plagiarizing. There is an inter-language osmosis of ideas, imagery and general mood between these cross-language cousins that is quite unmistakable. Yet, if a careful editor in charge of keeping verse translations very close to the original were to sit in judgement over my products, he would have every right to return the material to me and insist that I indeed *translate* rather than *re-cast* or *re-write*. Yet I am fully aware of how a good, yet close and faithful verse-translation is done: I have done it many times and, according to most of my critics, quite successfully. This, however, applies chiefly to foreign material rendered in Hungarian. Quite frequently a shift in form is the result of an English self-re-encoding. Consider the following English "version" (if you can call it that) of a completely formal and traditional Hungarian sonnet. The Hungarian version:

Tanulj *hogyan* olvasni

Mert jól tudom, hogy nemsokára majd
 ez úton végig vissza kell rohannom,
 idejében, míg bírja bicska-hangom
 jelekkel ékezet fákat, talajt
 s gödrökbe rejtem szaggatott ruháim.
 Magamnak véstem mind a torz jelet:
 Hisz visszamenni oly nehéz lehet
 ferdült emlékek rámrótt éjszakáin.
 Tanulja-e, ki egyhelyhez kötött,
 a messzi földek leírásait?
 Bilincset old-e néha le a hit?

Mihaszna kérdés: fuss, megütözött,
s tanulj *hogyan* olvasni, *mit* helyett,
meglelve tennem újjelzésedet.¹

An accurate prose paraphrase of this sonnet amounts to the following in English:²

Since I know well that soon in the future
I will have to run back along this road,
I will mark the trees and the ground with signs
while there is still time, while my voice's pen-knife
/is still able to do so
and hide my torn cloths into holes (in the ground).
All these distorted signs I made for myself
since it must be hard to go back
during nights lived through as penalty of memories
/gone astray.
Should one, tied to one place, learn
about the description of distant lands?
Can faith ever remove one's shackles?
A useless question: run, you shocked one,
and learn *how* instead of *what* to read
by finding your own road-marks.

Now the English poem corresponding to this, goes like this:

For I know well enough a time will come
when we will have to crawl back along the roads
we ever hastened over, I take this knife of words
(the sharpest blade of all) and make a mark
in every tree that sheds its tears around me,
and hide my shoes and rags in holes in the mud:
and all these marks I make for just one purpose:
to find my way back through the labyrinth
of memory's inherited punishments.

Should I read books of distant lands
I cannot reach alive?
The question is useless.
Run, run, stubborn fool,
learn *how* instead of *what* to read:
the signs are elusive
and all frontier-guards are kept
strictly and unbribably
incommunicado.

The reader will, obviously, opt for the second English version, since the prose-paraphrase shows nothing of the elaborate rhyming of the Hungarian original

and additionally produces, because of its literalness, a few awkward phrases, such as *my voice's pen-knife* whereas the corresponding Hungarian *bicska-hangom* (morphologically rendered *pen-knife-voice-mine*) is a permissible rhetoric device in Hungarian. This poem, at least, has some elements of true translation in it, such as the line *learn how instead of what to read*, which happens to be literally identical to the Hungarian version. Nevertheless, you cannot call it a "translation", both on formal and on semantic grounds. To show an even more striking example of self-re-encoding, consider the following short piece. The English poem:

The Mule Within

I keep a mule within me, chained,
on a labor farm.
He thinks he's on probation,
and dreams; "If I could race ... like a horse..."
His haunting visions eat sores in his neck
like a narrow collar.
His thoughts can fly,
He trudged like a turtle.
He is a useful and reliable creature
who never did a fellow any harm.
His pay is low, but regular.
He is a language teacher.
The Mule Within has a Hungarian proto-poem behind it:

It reads in the original:

Nyelvtanár

Süketen rójaja körét a fél-szamar,
- versenyló volt az anyja: -
Valami emlék látogatja.
Beszéd- e?
Iramlás?
Földszagú határ?
Foglalkozása: nyelvtanár.

Only 7 lines compared to the 12 lines in English, this poem bears the title *Language Teacher*, the "punch-line" of the English version. It can be paraphrased as follows:

Deaf, the half-ass walks his circle,
-his mother was a racing mare!-
Some memory keeps haunting him.
Is it speech?
Is it dashing?
The earth-smelling country?
His occupation: language teacher.

In this second instance, then, we see the Hungarian poem as a more remote ancestor of the English version than in the case of *Learn how to Read*, though once again, the author of the English version, were he a different person, could not claim absolute originality, if confronted with the Hungarian poem.

The next step in this curious relationship between my Hungarian and my English poems is the point where any textural, tangible identity ceases to be manifest. When I lived in Honolulu, Hawaii, between 1958 and 1960 as high school teacher of European languages, I very rarely wrote English poems and the ones I did write were ungrammatical monstrosities with only an occasional clever line here and there, incurred mostly by accident. Yet, years after being away from Hawaii, in 1969 and 1970 I wrote a number of poems on Hawaii and, for all practical purposes, these are original English poems without an underlying Hungarian prototype. Or are they? Here again I am lost in doubt and can explain myself only by saying that despite the ten-year distance separating my Hungarian *Hawaii Elegies* and the poems written about the islands ten years later in Chicago, the basic emotional experiences and the persona in whose consciousness these experiences were deposited have remained the same, which means that on an even higher, very abstract level, these poems, too, are, in some mysterious way, metamorphoses of one another. In point of fact, most of the emotional attitudes and viewpoints represented in *Aloha Reconsidered* (see in this selection) are recoverable from 5 sonnets and a highly formal sixth poem in *Szomj és ecet* (pp. 85-90) though not one word of direct translation exists between them.

At the beginning of this discussion I used the term *phonetic attack* in order to indicate impressionistically how the process of bilingual or intermittant composition manifests itself in my ordinary daily behavior. Now, after briefly presenting these various, graduated possibilities of the interrelationships that exist between my Hungarian and English poems, I should like to try to present a little more formalized account of the bi-lingual poetic process, addressing my remarks to literary and linguistic readers alike.⁴ I have not forgotten any of my Hungarian, but have rather grown in my use of it, and as far as English is concerned, I am gradually approaching full bilingualism except for occasional mispronunciations. The following remarks, then, are just an additional step in the general direction in which linguistics is moving today: Instead of analyzing my prose sentence constructions, I am attempting to formalize here, based on careful introspection, how the poem(s) come(s) about (1) in Hungarian, (2) in English, (1a) as a translation from English, (2a) as a translation from Hungarian, (3) or as an English poem with an immediate or distant Hungarian prototype, and lastly, (4) as an entirely independent English poem.

cognition
culture-psychology-philosophy

SEMOLOGY: The meanings of dictionary entries and abstract sentence structures.

LEXOLOGY: Dictionary entries, meaningful forms, sentences.

MORPHOLOGY: Formally patterned potentially meaningful elements: words.

PHONOLOGY: Distinctive sounds, characterized by features, syllables, nonsense words.

acoustic or articulatory phonetics

Fig. 1

The funnel on the bottom bends "inward", whereas the one on top bends "outward". What this indicates is that the number of noises we humans produce in order to encode our messages is disproportionately smaller than the number of concepts we carry in our consciousness. Phonological analyses of English vary rather widely as to school of thought, sophistication and vintage; but almost all scholars of linguistics, and especially when it comes to some written representation of the phonological material, use approximately 40 or 42 symbols, known in some traditions as "phonemes". Now 42 is—certainly a much smaller number than 10,000 or 15,000—a very conservative estimate of the number of vocabulary items used by an average native speaker of American English. Note also that vocabulary items can be highly complex and be merely the surface realizations of a great many more semantic components, most of which the speaker is aware of. Let me just show one typical example: We say rather easily UNESCO, or LM (pronounced *lem*). As phonological units they are (yunéskow) and (lém), respectively. Most people using the word UNESCO would probably realize that it stands for "United Nations Educational Social and Cultural Organization" and that *lem* stands for "Lunar Module". Now just to explain what *united* means, what *nation* means, then what *United Nations* means, takes a long time and the number of concepts touched upon is very large. If you meditate on the complexities of explaining these two common terms, you will begin to see what I mean by saying that our phonological apparatus is a great deal simpler than our conceptual universe. Nor need words be abbreviations of sophisticated instruments or institutions in order to be semantically complex: Just try really to explain the concepts *Sun*, *Moon*, and *Earth* and you will see what I mean.

The funnel on the top, then is widening out in relation to the box, as it houses the concepts (and their components) we humans carry in our heads. It is a rubber-bag-like,

flexible component, capable of growth (learning) and of shrinking (forgetting) and is populated by a large number of universal human concepts (*hot, cold, night, day, Sun, Moon, male, female, dog, horse, etc.*) along with the more technical subcomponents of such concepts, and some culture-specific ones (*hominy grits, bubble and squeak, sauerkraut, beef goulash, stars and stripes, social security, de-Stalinization, luau pig, to jerrymander, etc.*). Just as it is true that tomorrow's poetry has not yet been written, it is also true that I can inform any intelligent English speaking person of some unfamiliar fact or institution existing in some other country, as long as I imbed the new information in a matrix which is basically familiar to him, the listener. Thus I can describe the Southern dish *hominy grits* to a Hungarian who never tasted it or heard of it, and the British dish *bubble and squeak* to an American similarly unaware of its existence, and so on. The acquisition of such new information, if done systematically and repeated over the course of four years in a structured environment, is known as a college education. The college student will acquire, no doubt, some new vocabulary as he goes along (i.e., new lexemes, such as *to jerrymander, de-Stalinization, etc.*) but in many cases, especially if the person comes from an outstanding high school, the number of new vocabulary items will be negligible compared to the total amount of new information acquired during his stay in college.

The new information (such as the ability to recount the history of the United States with major dates and corresponding events) is a matter of the person's having acquired new interconnections (perhaps in bundles or in elaborate networks) of cognitive-semological material, all of which may express itself in the vocabulary he brought with himself from Boston Latin and High, Bronx Science, Exeter, or Groton. Similarly, entirely new poems may be read and appreciated without the reader's having to look up a single new word in the dictionary. This aspect of "new information" being encoded in "familiar containers" is a particularly satisfying experience for foreign-born when re-discovering, say Shakespeare in the original. Being brought up in Hungary where there exists a two-hundred year old Shakespeare cult, I knew dozens of lines from Hamlet in Hungarian before I ever saw or read the play in English. I was always afraid that the English version would be too hard to understand. After years in the United States, and already a practicing high school teacher with an American B. A. diploma, I saw my first English Hamlet performance in Honolulu, Hawaii, staged by the University of Hawaii Players. It was a splendid performance, but the most memorable fact about it, to me, was the fact that lines such as *not a mouse stirring: and I am the Ghost of thy father*—along with the rest of the play—sounded completely comprehensible, yet electrifyingly new. By the time I heard the line *something is rotten in the State of Denmark* which has become a political proverb in Hungarian (*valami bűzlik Dániában*) having acquired the idiomatic meaning "the rulers are up to no good again", I was beyond myself with delight. Hamlet had, all of a sudden, acquired a new meaning for me: the old meaning of the play which I had studied and practically known by heart in Hungarian was now added to the strikingly different emotional overtones it evoked from me, listening to it

twelve thousand miles away in 80° Fahrenheit, the day after Christmas, and in English. Apparently what happened was that I had acquired a sufficient amount of English sentence syntax (Division No. 2, Figure 1) to understand easily the performance of *Hamlet* in English, which was aided by my former familiarity with the play, in my memory (top funnel, Figure 1). It was experiences similar to my re-discovery of the original English *Hamlet* that convinced me before I ever had any formal training in linguistics that institutions, ideas, concepts, even actual poems, plays and novels must have some sort of an abstract existence independent of the actual language in which they happen to be realized at a given time. To go back to the *Hamlet* example for a moment: It was no use telling myself that the English version was the "real" one: for all its beauty and for all the joy of being able to understand it almost as the English spoken around me, it seemed more distant than the Hungarian version I knew so well. But this was in 1960. Today, twenty-eight years later, *Hamlet* for me is a bilingual reality and I am equally comfortable both with the original and with the classical Hungarian translation by János Arany, Hungary's greatest literary genius of the 19th century. My job as teacher of German, Russian, French, Latin, and Russian at Iolani School in Honolulu, using the medium of English, while I spoke Hungarian to my relatives, read and corresponded in it regularly, with the students speaking pidgin English among themselves to say nothing of Japanese, Chinese, Tagalog and Hawaiian which they spoke to their parents and grandparents, made me a natural candidate for graduate training in linguistics, and so it happened that after having acquired a B.A. from Harvard and having taught two years in Honolulu, I now found myself at Yale University as a graduate student taking courses in structural linguistics from the late Bernard Bloch. The structuralist training in linguistics concentrates heavily on form and shies away from analyzing the semantic side of language. In so doing, it gives one a very thorough workout in rigor and implants a powerful dosage of self-criticism and doubt concerning everything that is not visibly manifest in a language but is merely guessed at, whether by positing systems behind visible facts or by psychological hindsight. Inevitably, therefore, a four-year period of severe repression of the poetic instinct in my life followed which was not to be lifted until I received my doctorate in the fall of 1965. I nevertheless managed to write a Ph.D. dissertation on a hitherto esoteric topic: English idioms.⁵

Today the field of linguistics is torn between competing schools of thought. The structuralist-behaviorist school, which was dominant between 1930 and 1960 is still with us, though it has been pushed somewhat into the background. Currently dominant is the transformational-generative school of linguistics started by Noam Chomsky at MIT in 1956; but it has begun to show signs of disintegration, as it is torn between those who tie meaning to the sentence (the so-called "interpretivists") and those who start the generative process of speech in the realm of meaning (the so-called "generativists"). There is, at any rate, a clear tendency to move away from observable data and delve into previously unexplored areas of meaning. This turning away from data has caused much trouble for transformationalists, so that, recently, there is a trend to return to field-work. The school of tagmemics, inaugurated by Kenneth L.

Pike has brought some truly impressive results in the area of describing previously unwritten languages; furthermore, Pike's theory of language has ample room for pieces of literature which are considered behavioral manifestations of a highly organized and special kind. Transformational grammar is so deeply involved with quasi-algebraic rules of "wellformedness" versus "illformedness", that it can-in clear conscience-be accused of being downright anti-literary. The school of thought in whose spirit my self-portrait is being drawn is that of the so-called "stratificational-cognitive" model, invented by Sydney M. Lamb at Berkeley, California, later transported to Yale, now cultivated at Rice University in Houston, Texas. During the writing of my doctoral thesis I came into contact with Lamb and his philosophy and found that this model, if properly expanded and modified, has, as far as I can see, the best chance to give a formal account of how discourse of all types is produced and understood. What follows below, then, is a stratificationally oriented account of the poetic process, but as such it is strictly my own and nobody else is to be held responsible for it. I will now redraw Figure 1 so as to accommodate two languages,-in my case Hungarian and English.

The diagram is a great deal easier to read than it looks at first glance. To start from top to bottom, we have, in the same person's mind, GENERAL COGNITION. This means that independently of what language one speaks, one knows one's name, whether one is hungry or not, cold or warm, whether one is a Christian or an atheist, and so forth. People also realize whether they are in English, or in Hungarian speaking company, hence they will use their LANGUAGE ADJUSTOR. The social situation may be entirely identical-take that of making the acquaintance of a new person. If the person is an American, I will say *how do you do?* and if he is Hungarian, I will state my name, saying *Makkai Ádám vagyok* ("Adam Makkai am I"). In French, on the other hand, I would say *enchanté*. In my daily life it happens all the time that I meet new people in mixed American-Hungarian company. Invariably I will instantaneously switch from Hungarian to English, and vice versa, depending on whether I recognized the language the other person spoke. This kind of situation, with the bilingual person doing most of the talking, is indicated by the arrows going down, that is, from cognition towards the required phonology.

However, something different happens if I have to interpret a Hungarian request in English (or conversely), to say nothing of the difficulty that it entails to render a Hungarian joke in English. This, of course, happens very frequently in immigrant circles. Let us imagine the following situation: A Hungarian immigrant who speaks broken English, tells his American host about his grandiose business plans. The host manages to understand him despite his broken English, but fails to realize that the person actually understands less than what he seems to be able to say. It is common knowledge among multilinguals that it is easier to talk in a foreign language than to understand unexpected speech thrown at you. When you talk: you are in control, you choose your own words you know best; but when you're spoken to, you cannot signal to the speaker what vocabulary items, idioms, or phrases are strange to you. You work by assembling the meaning from the

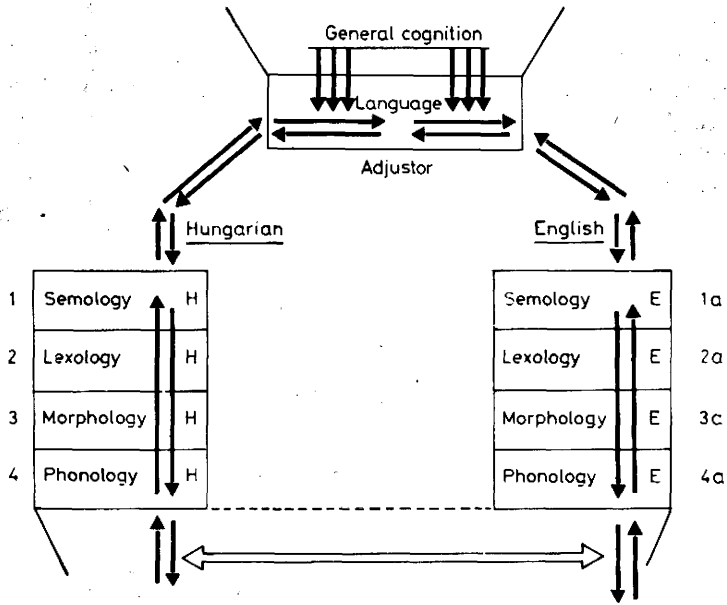


Fig. 2

context, and perhaps you succeed, or you act (in politeness) as if you understood them; eventually you can remember the phrase and find out what you missed. So the host, in all friendliness, intones to his Hungarian guest: *don't count your chickens before they're hatched*: gives a chuckle and terminates the conversation. (This kind of situation has happened more than once to me personally.) The immigrant turns to the Americans and inquires what the phrase meant. The interpreter (I, in this instance), faces the problem of having to translate the sense of the utterance, not just the words. The sentence (taken literally), in Hungarian *don't count your chickens before they're hatched*, sounds like an instruction to a farmer from a book. To convey the meaning "refrain from celebrating success prematurely" I have to say something like "don't drink a toast to the bear's hide in advance" (that is, before you've brought him in after hunting). The Hungarian phrase goes *ne igyál előre a medve bőrre*. In French we find *ne vendez pas la peau de l'ours avant de l'avoir tué* "Don't sell the bear's hide before killing him". But how do I arrive at the appropriate Hungarian translation? To contrast this situation with the more common type of translating one does in bilingual existence, let us compare this example with an ordinary question such as *where is the glass?* (We imagine that the glass talked about is one commonly known to everybody present.) I, the interpreter, hear the English phonological string *where is the glass?* with the typical American question intonation of the voice falling at the end, or in a statement. The phonemes of English involved, (wer+iz+glæs), are analyzed into the five morphemes *where is the* and *glass* and by the time my brain

has a chance to grasp the syntactic structure of *interrogative, BE, third person singular present, definite article, noun, inanimate, count*, the sememic stratum has signalled the meanings of the participant lexemes, whereupon my cognition takes over and (without saying a word just yet) I may see "in my mind's eye" the glass in question on the kitchen table where my friend has left it. I now have several choices open to me. I can just go and get the glass. I can answer (in any of the languages I know and which are appropriate at the moment) and say where the glass is, or I can translate the question. Let us imagine that the appropriate thing to do in this situation is to translate the question. I know that I must ask a question in Hungarian. I also know that the lexeme to be used in Hungarian must refer culturally to the same object (glass = pohár); I also know that the glass has been seen before by everyone present and that it is one (definite piece) that we are talking about and not just any glass, or a glass in general. This semantic situation predetermines my Hungarian sentence-structure, as it will decidedly disallow me to make a declarative sentence. Thus I choose the appropriate lexemes, construct them in ordinary interrogative form, imbed this syntactic structure in the relevant Hungarian morphemes, and then proceed to pronounce the question in Hungarian: *Hol van a pohár?* (This process can be traced on Figure 2 quite easily: I have travelled from right to left as the black arrow indicates, starting with English phonology up through the LANGUAGE ADJUSTOR aided by general cognition, down from Hungarian semology to Hungarian phonology.) If I had originated the question myself, I would not have started with English phonology: The question would have started in my general cognition, then, through the language adjustor it would have gone straight into the Hungarian semology and from there downwards.

Now, in order to begin to get closer to our topic at hand, namely bilingual poetics, let us first see how the translation of formal poetry can be illustrated. I will, instead of giving a very complicated example, stick to a simple Hungarian nursery rhyme and its English verse translation.⁶

The Hungarian nursery rhyme (actually a didacticism used to teach three-year olds how to draw) goes like this:

Pont, pont, vesszőcske,
Készen van a fejecske.
Kurta nyaka, nagy a hasa,
Készen van a Török Pasa.

It consist of two sentences: (1) period, period, comma, diminutive suffix, ready adverbial suffix, is, the, head, diminutive suffix, and (2) short, neck, possessive suffix, large, the, belly, possessive suffix, ready, adverbial suffix, is, the, Turkish, Pasha. After rearranging the morphemes, we arrive at the following English prose translation:

Period, period, little comma,
 The little head is ready.
 His neck is short, his belly is big,
 The Turkish Pasha is ready.

This is a completely accurate "literal translation" of the original, yet the English speaking reader is at a loss as to what to make of this text. At this point it becomes necessary to explain that this is a rhyming didacticism spoken in 28 syllables, to the accompaniment of drawing motion with a pencil on paper, or a stick of chalk on the blackboard. We have now, let us imagine, succeeded in decoding the meaning of this text in Hungarian; we know what it means and understand what it is used for in the culture. But what about rendering it in English? This problem was a very real one to me personally, as my daughter, Sylvia, requested of us when she was two and a half years old that we show her the Pasha in "Mommy language", that is, English. First of all we decided that the Turkish Pasha had to go (a cognitive-cultural decision) as it plays no role in the cultural universe of an American youngster. Contrariwise, in Hungary, which was under Turkish occupation for 150 years, the Turks have become, by dint of time, laughable-amiable symbols of a once very real and ferocious political oppression. First we thought of using a savage Indian instead, but later decided that the connotations associated with Indians in the USA are quite different than are Hungarian attitudes toward the Turks. Eventually, after several versions, we came up with the following solution:

Dot, dot, tiny thread,
 Ready is the tiny head.
 Short his neck and huge his tummy,
 Ready is the big, fat dummy.

Needless to say, this is no great poetry, but then neither was the original. However, the translation works; it allows you to draw a "big fat dummy" completed in 28 syllables both in English and in Hungarian:

1 Pont, pont, vesszőcske,
 2 Készen van a fejecske.
 3 Kurta nyaka, nagy a hasa,
 4 Készen van a Török Pasa.

1 Dot, dot, tiny thread,
 2 Ready is the tiny head.
 3 Short his neck and huge his tummy,
 4 Ready is the big, fat dummy.

(The first line in both languages draw the two eyes and the nose; the second line draws the circumference of the head; line three draws the neck and the circumference of the belly, and the last line the two stick arms and the two stick legs.)

The process of translation in this instance moved from Hungarian to English (or from left to right on Figure 2) producing a four-line stanza of 28 syllables in two sentences such that they describe the outlines of an abstract, simplistic human figure. Clearly we have "cheated" during the process of the translation: *tiny comma* became *tiny thread*, *belly* became *tummy*, and the "Pasha" has been done away with altogether in favor of *dummy*, which rhymes so reassuringly with *tummy*. As a matter of fact we probably thought of substituting *dummy* for *Pasha* because the word *tummy*, a good synonym for *belly*, presented itself. This, then, would be a clear instance of the phonology interacting with, or influencing the syntax and the semantics. But this is nothing strange. I have spoken with numerous painters and sculptors and they have always insisted that "the picture paints itself" or "the statue shapes itself" as much as he, the artist, was deliberately able to do. We humans are remarkably adaptable in our ways: we have an original idea about something and set out to accomplish it, but when the matter in which we must realize the original idea shows recalcitrance, we are capable of picking up new, additional ideas offered by nature of the resisting matter itself and thus arrive at other solutions which we perhaps did not even think of originally. In this simple instance I clearly remember that *dummy* was suggested by the word *tummy*. Yet the sentences had to make sense; that is, *tummy* and *dummy* not only had to be at the ends of lines where they had a chance to rhyme, they also had to be in the right position syntactically, in addition to being allowed by our semantic self-editing as words that made sense here. (To test the difficulty of even so simple a translation, substitute the words *honey* and *money* for *tummy* and *dummy*; then choose yet another pair, say, *bladder* and *ladder*, and so on. You will find that there is a scale of tolerable versus intolerable nonsense variations.)

It is, of course, much easier to settle for anything plausible if there is no original poem to translate. Consider that you have undertaken the challenge to fill out the following matrix:

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          be
    Larrabee
      ight
        ants
        ants
        ight
  
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I have tried this nonsense-structure on a class of undergraduate freshmen in a course called "Introduction to Poetry" at Chicago Circle several times, and here are some of the versions they came up with:

To be, to be, or not to be
 Cried Master David Larrabee
 With anguish-filled delight:
 He lost his handsome under-pants,
 His ass is bitten by the ants—
 Tremendous is his plight.

(18-year old male student)

“But Gaston dear, how can you be
 So clumsy?”—Cried Miss Larrabee,
 “You make a sorry sight:
 Some day (you hope) you’ll learn to dance
 But all you do is rip your pants
 Over your bulgy side.”

(17-year old female student)

How can the small industrial bee
 Pollute Lieutenant Larrabee
 Who, like a soaring kite,
 On Earth, below here, took no stance.
 But orbits us? Alas, no chance,
 The bee must self-ignite.

(19-year old female student)

The particular restriction in this assignment was that the name *Larrabee*—in whatever sense—had to be kept intact and could not be substituted for by a shorter form ending in the syllable *-be*. Some thirty-two students participated in the experiment and all the thirty-two versions were grammatical, and made some sort of sense. Some of them were actually quite funny. What we have here is a familiar type of stanza built on four iambic tetrameters with an iambic trimeter in the middle (line 3) and one at the end (line 6) with the rhyming scheme AAbCCb; anapaests, trochees and occasional dactylic feet being permissible substitutions for the straight iambic beat. I came to the conclusion that this fairly rigid, formal grid must have functioned as a soliciting matrix that mobilized the forces of the unconscious in the freshman class: One person came up with somebody’s derriere getting bitten by the ants; another visualized a lady danceteacher bawling out a pupil called Gaston for his clumsiness when he rips his pants by being too fat; the third one makes a take-off on the known line by Sir Isaac Watts (“How does the busy little bee / Improve each shining day...?”) then goes into ecology-talk, space-imagery and ends the stanza on the self-destruct note of the television series “Mission Impossible”. Quite a spectrum of ideas, you must admit, imbedded in the identical metric and rhyming scheme, and I have presented only 3 of the 32 versions that were produced as one home-work assignment.

Now the genuine poetic process is neither like translation, nor like filling out a matrix invented by somebody else; yet, as long as the poet uses a traditional form, it incorporates elements of both. The translation-like aspect of writing one's own poetry is the traditional dilemma of how to say in words what may have been originally a nonverbal experience; it is traditionally known as the dilemma of self-expression. The familiar exclamations of people "if I only had a way with words as Oliver does!" or "if I could only put right what I feel inside so strongly!" are, and I don't think I am stretching the point unreasonably, translation-problems in this specific sense. The grid-filling activity manifests itself most definitely during the composition of a sophisticated structure like a sonnet, or a poem in the Alcaic, or Sapphic meters. Demanding as meter and rhyme are on the poet, they also work as crutches and can become extremely dangerous forces blocking the genuine unfoldment of the poet's inner growing-process. Most of what we think of as "bad poetry" is reasonably well rhymed material done with a definite amount of versifying skill. The completely spontaneous outcry of a 5-year old child quite unaware of what he does in pain or anger, if overheard and later written down, can amount to much "better poetry" than the learned efforts of a middle-aged poetaster diligently grinding away at his metrics and rhymes. So the more demanding the poet on himself, the more he will experiment with free verse, by which I do not mean to say that people who never mastered formal metrics in the first place always succeed in writing good free verse. Think of Picasso: His impossible figures float in the freedom of figures that escaped the regular mold and are hence twice as lively as the ones that never even entered a formal mold, or are still caught up in it. There is a great difference in the quality of the free verse of a master who could write a formal sonnet if he wanted to, and the poet who never learned how to write a sonnet.

So where do the poets writing free verse get their fix, their first firm hold on the poem? There is no metrical and rhyming scheme to conjure up images in the unconscious, and they are not trying to convey somebody else's ideas in another medium or language. This is a hard question to answer and it probably differs from one poet to the next. I think I have an answer for me. It may not work for you or the next person who writes poems—but then the unavailability of general rules for poets seems par for the course. Poems get started with me as germinal forces approaching the level of consciousness through "phonetic attacks". The center of the attack, like the eye of a hurricane, is a phrase which is usually no longer than three or four words. But it can also be a single word, or a word-blend not used by anybody else except myself, as I make it up on the spur of the moment. Sometimes the exterior stimulus is an ugly or an unexpectedly beautiful sight; sometimes an aggressive television advertisement I am trying to fight off; a quaint phrase accidentally produced by a youngster; an extraordinarily difficult rhyme combination which reaches my consciousness as I sit on the train and stare at the wintry landscape: The possibilities are almost endless. It is this central phrase, the "eye of the hurricane" which acts as the father principle and impregnates the rest of my mind. The central phrase has a meaning (semology), some sort of syntax (lexology); this is precipitated in words

(morphology) and it has a definite sound pattern (phonology). With all the four strata being represented in the germinal phrase of the "phonetic attack", the rest of the way for the poem also moves in all four stratal systems, and mostly at once, as if simultaneously. To me the meaning of a line of verse is no more important than the sound of it; yet the sound is as expendable and changeable as the sense dictates under the pressure of a given line. When eventually the poem is ready, I usually put it aside for a week or two and then re-write it with a cool and sober head. This process, as outlined above, is typically true for my poems written in Hungarian, and has begun the ones that do not seem to have a philologically retrievable ancestor among my Hungarian poems.

The English poems with an immediate or less immediate, but nevertheless documentable Hungarian ancestor, come to me in staggered sequences of secondary and tertiary phonetic attacks which, when the going is smooth, can suddenly turn primary and direct. These are the junctures in the course of a perfectly honest job of translation when I suddenly take off and forget about the original poem: I now have a better idea for the English version so I might as well rewrite it completely. This way of translating, if applied to the writings of others, is traditionally known as "transformationism" in poetry translations, and has been practiced by extremely reputable poets both in England and in the States; Robert Lowell's "transformationist" translations of German poetry are particularly well known. But I do not commit philological imprecisions with regard to anybody else's oeuvre: I am disposing, as it were, of my own property.

* * *

But how many POTENTIAL poems is one poem, really?

Putting it another way: Is any given poem ever "ready"? Here we could enter into an interminable discussion of the meaning of the word "ready". Is it a spacial concept? Does it depend on the limits of human memory? Every one knows that the Homeric epics were recited verbally for centuries before they were written down. Undoubtedly, some "editing", conscious or unconscious, must have taken place as the various scribes put their respective versions together. But "ready" can mean aesthetic considerations. Poet A, B, and C are having a friendly contest of writing a sonnet each, using the identical rhymes given them by a fourth poet D, who gives them the actual rhymes of one of his sonnets along with the title, but not the text itself. This is a common game played among Hungarian poets; Attila József and Gyula Illyés have played it; so have lesser known poets as well. The result, invariably, is totally different poems, yet poems that are somehow tied to one another through the sonnet form and the identical rhymes. In my teens, back in Hungary, I was introduced to this fascinating game by a class-mate, Tibor Wlassics who, also living in the United States, became one of the world's leading authorities on Dante. Wlassics is currently teaching at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. He undertook

a new translation of the *Divina Comoedia in terza rima*, and while so doing he gives all of the extant English translations both from Britain and the United States. I hope to be able to devote a future article for HUNGARIAN STUDIES on the quality and awesome dimensions of Wlassics's work. Suffice it to say that I became aware of the POSSIBILITY of anasemiosis at the age of 17, but we had no terminus technicus for what we were doing. It was just fun. Almost 34 years later I now belatedly realize that what the French call "anasémie", is a live and active force not only in formally rhyming poetry, but in every-day speech as well.

That "active voice" sentences more or less mean the same as "passive voice" sentences is very well known both to linguists and literary scholars. In fact it is all too frequently presumed that the meanings between active and passive are "identical". This view, however, is an exaggeration and an oversimplification. Consider the following English sentences: *Brutus killed Caesar*, versus *Caesar was killed by Brutus*. If someone had witnessed the assassination on the Ides of March in 44 B.C., so strikingly rendered live in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, such a witness would NOT be guilty of perjury if he or she made the statement in front of a tribunal in the active, or in the passive voice. The DENOTATIVE LEGAL MEANING would remain the same; Brutus would be the "doer" or the "aggressor", (grammatically the SUBJECT in the active voice sentence) and Caesar the OBJECT grammatically, cognitively the "goal", the "target", or the "affected". (The term "undergoer" and "experiencer" have also been used in recent linguistic literature on the subject.)

The "doer" and the "done-to" are elegantly differentiated in Latin, where the NOMINATIVE case signals the grammatical SUBJECT in sentences and the ACCUSATIVE CASE fulfills the primary function of indicating the GRAMMATICAL OBJECT, or DIRECT OBJECT. Thus *Brutus occidit Caesarem* and *Caesarem occidit Brutus* mean "the same" since the suffixes -em, -um, -us and O for "accusative" and "normative", respectively, retain the cognitive functions of "agent" and "goal" despite the "freedom of the word order".

Although Hungarian is not related to Latin (it is a Finno-Ugric language related to Finnish, Estonian, Vogul, Zyrian and Ostyak), it, too, has an object marker, the morpheme (t), which enables speakers of Hungarian to shift the position of the object around without losing the cognitive object. The price one has to pay for such "freedom of the word order" is the voluntary or involuntary gathering of cognitive synsemantica or "connotative, stylistic meaning" as the text or speech act proceeds.

One of the major weaknesses of Transformational-Generative Grammar in the 'sixties and the 'seventies was this inability to see that each "transformation" always brought in extra meaning. The "preservation of meaning" despite various transformations almost became a doctrinal matter for Chomsky's less sophisticated followers. I would like to show on a simple stress-movement "transformation" using the identical words in the identical order, how stress can change the meaning of a simple declarative sentence. Consider:

I am walking HOME now.
 I am walking home nÓw.
 I am walking home now.
 I ám walking home now.
 Í am walking home now.

Native speakers of English generally agree that (1) is the "unmarked" or "neutral" version of the 5 sentences; in (1) the speaker wishes to communicate no special meaning, he has "no axe to grind", as it were. The word HOME is in capital letters in order to show that the stress here is normal. In (2), with the stress a NOW, the speaker indicates that it is exactly NOW and at no other time that (s)he is leaving on foot homewards. In (3) the manner of locomotion is highlighted; the speaker doesn't take a cab or the bus, WALKING is stressed as against other possibilities. In (4) stressing the AM, the speaker indicates that the statement had been made earlier but some one doubted it; it is thus a reiteration or an insistence. In (5), with the I receiving the emphasis, it is indicated that some one else may have wanted to leave, but the speaker insists that nobody else is to leave. In other words here we have a simple case of STRESS directly interfering with the meaning. That all 5 sentences deal with a human, his/her locomotion toward a specified place at a given time is not being disputed; after all, the words (i.e., the LEXEMES) have not been changed.

English is notorious for its levels of diction. Consider:

The old teacher walked around the building, versus
 The ancient educator circumambulated the edifice.

Most English speakers would avoid (2) in all normal situations, although the words may be recognized. The argument is frequently heard that (1) is a part of spoken English, with (2) belonging in written, or learned discourse. Hungarian, despite its "outsider status" in the Indo-European world, has kept a large Latin vocabulary. It is thus possible to say *Ez egy implauzibilis szituáció*, versus *Ez egy hihetetlen helyzet*. Both mean 'this is an implausible/incredible situation' but the Latinate version indicates the speech of an older person who had an old-fashioned education.

This is, I think, the minimal linguistic "Hinterland" anyone wishing to deal with anasemiotic poetry must kindly tolerate. In sum: I am of the conviction that minimal differences in expression always correlate with minimal differences in content, no matter how subtle or difficult to verbalize. To test this hypothesis further, I resorted to the "sonnet game" played with Tibor Wlassics when we were 18, with the exception that I gave myself the task of rewriting the sonnets always with the identical rhymes. I also thought that in order to be entirely objective about the matter, I ought to try my hand in a language I know well enough to write a sonnet in, but a language one degree removed from my native Hungarian and my quasi-native English. I opted for German. (The resultant sonnets were shown to a native speaker colleague in the German Department who kindly suggested exchanging 2 words in version 1, changed

a couple of word orders in 2 and 3, and then asked: "How long have you lived in Germany?" When I said "never, except for 2 short one-week visits" I got a very sceptical look. But let me present the texts without further ado commenting on the English paraphrases and the Hungarian poems that they resulted in.

BRIEFE AN ARIADNE

- (1) Ich muß schon weg. Warum?
 Ich muß schon weg. Warum? Wohin?
 Damit ich mein Schicksal vollende?
 Der Teufel, froh, klatscht in die Hände.
 Gott quält uns nicht. Wir quälen Ihn.
 Im Wüstensand, was würd' ich gießen
 durch Knoch' und Blut wenn ich dort säß?
 Ein unvolkommenes Gefäß
 ist jeder Mensch—die Wörter fließen...
 Wasser und Sand mit Blut gemischt
 zeichnen ein ewiges Gesicht—
 die Flügel tragen rechts und links—
 war ich die Flasche? Du, der Wein?
 Lache und wasche, mach' mich rein,
 sprich, sprich, wie damals sprach die Sphinx.
- (2) Gott quält uns nicht...
 Gott quält uns nicht. Wir quälen Ihn.
 (Kein Gott belächelt seine Hände...)
 Ich muß schon weg. Warum? Wohin?
 Damit ich mein Schicksal vollende?
 Ein unvolkommenes Gefäß
 ist jeder Traum; die Märchen fließen
 durch Haut und Fleisch. Doch wenn ich säß?
 im Wüstensand, was würd' ich gießen?
 Bin ich die Flasche? Dum, der Wein?
 Die Luft die Du brennst backt mich rein—
 Du schlägst die Flügel rechts und links—
 Wasser und Sand mit Blut gemischt
 zeichnen dein ewiges Gesicht,
 Du siechsts, wie damals sah die Sphinx.
- (3) Tod wählt uns nicht...
 Tod wählt uns nicht. Wir wählten Ihn;
 mein Leben nähert sich dem Ende.
 Der Herrgott weint und ringt die Hände;
 wir müssen weg: Warum? Wohin?
 Am Himmelsrand, was würd' ich gießen
 durch Glas und Topf, wenn ich dort säß?
 Ein unvolkommenes Gefäß
 ist unser Gott: die Seelen fließen—
 Blut wird gemischt mit Sand und Wasser:
 Steinflügel tragen der Verfasser.

Die Welt kehrt rechts, die Welt kehrt links;
 die Flasche brennt; erkühlt den Wein;
 wir strömen 'raus und wieder 'rein,
 und atmen durch die Haut der Sphinx.

I ought to give English prose paraphrases at this point, deliberately avoiding the rhyming sonnet form, in order to show how the meanings of the three versions differ:

- (1) I have to be leaving already. Why? And where to?
 So that I may fulfill my fate/calling?
 The Devil, glad, claps/(laughs into his hands).
 God doesn't torture us, we torture Him.
 If I sat in the sand(s) of the desert
 what would I be pouring through bones and blood?
 Every human being is an imperfect vessel,
 the words are flowing...
 Water and sand, mixed with blood,
 draw an eternal face—
 the wings carry to the right and to the left—
 was I the bottle and you, the wine?
 Laugh, and wash me clean,
 speak, speak as the Sphinx spoke once upon a time.
- (2) God does not torture us., We torture Him.
 (No God chuckles into his /own/ hands...)
 I must be leaving. But why? And where to?
 So that I may fulfill my fate/calling?
 Every dream is an imperfect vessel:
 the fairy-tales keep flowing
 through skin and flesh. Yet if I sat
 in the sand(s) of the desert, what would I be pouring?
 Am I the bottle? (And) you, the wine?
 The air you are burning bakes me clean—
 you strike to the right and to the left with your wings
 water and sand mixed with blood
 draw your eternal face:
 and you (can) see, as the Sphinx saw once upon a time.
- (3) Death doesn't choose us. We choose (him/it) Death.
 My life is drawing near the end.
 The Almighty is crying and rings His hands;
 we must be leaving: (but) why? And where to?
 At the edge of the Heavens, what would I be pouring
 through glass(es) and pot(s), if I sat there?
 Our God is an imperfect vessel
 the souls are flowing—
 Blood is (has been) mixed with sand and water,
 stone wings propel the Creator.

The bottle burns and cools the wine:
 we're streaming out, then, soon back in
 while breathing through the Sphynx's skin.

The reader will have noticed that some new rhymes did creep into sonnet 3 despite the rigorous adherence to nothing but the rhymes of sonnet 1 in sonnet 2. The new words are *ende* and *Hände*, replacing *vollende*; in the third quatrain *Wasser* and *Verfasser* replace the earlier *gemischt* and *Gesicht*, as the text—and I find that this is always true—exerts a certain will of its own which the poet has to follow. But perhaps a word or two about the status of these poems would be in order here.

They belong to a series of poems which are intended to show that every poem one writes is, in fact, potentially many more. The reason for intending to demonstrate is that the well known Greek hero, Theseus, in a novel I am currently working on, meets Ariadne again in the 20th century. After various episodes back on the island of Crete in Knossos, where the original Labyrinth was, they leap ahead into the 23rd century, then back into the present again, and farther back again into the remote past of 4,000 B.C. Theseus always gets lost in Labyrinths of one sort or another and Ariadne, his eternal extricator, eventually rebels and “cuts her string”, hence the title of the book *ARIADNE CUTS HER STRING*, in Hungarian *Ariadne elmetszi fonalát*, in German, *Ariadne schneidet ihre Schnur ab*. It is now the job of an abandoned Theseus to extricate himself from the various mazes he has got himself entangled in. In the process he writes a series of letters to Ariadne, his beloved “guru”, who has left him to his own devices. This, then, is the external context, or the bare skeleton plot of the book in which these poems, anasemiotically varied, as if they were transformations on a theme in music, add up to Theseus' letters to Ariadne.

After some hesitation, I tried to express the same three sonnets in Hungarian. I found it quite impossible to keep to the same rhymes throughout all three of the sonnets. Incidentally, it CAN be done, but the result sounds dreary to Hungarians. I will present the three Hungarian sonnets below and give accurate English prose paraphrases. The reader will see at once that the poems “are related”, and that yet they have an independent life of their own, as if someone had plagiarized on someone else's poetry. “Plagiarism”, of course, doesn't quite fit the situation in this instance since I simply kept on writing new sonnets inspired by the first. Once again, all I can think of it is music, especially variations on certain themes in the Mozartian sense, as in his “Twelve variations an Ah, vous dirais-je Maman”. Here are the three Hungarian sonnets:

LEVELEK ARIADNÉHOZ

(1) Indulni kell...

Indulni kell. De miért és hova?
 Sorsát tölti be az, aki lelép?
 Az ördög recseg, mint törött cserép-
 Isten kínjának hogy lennék oka?
 Ha ott ülnék, burnuszos beduin,
 a sivatagban véren s csonton át
 locsolnám a lélek-szimfóniát
 a szertefolyó lelkek betűin?

Víz és homok, vérrel sorssá keverve
 rajzolja ki a titokzatos arcot:
 jobb szárny bal szárnyal vív Chiméra-harcot:
 Zúdulj le rám, mosdass, magadból ömlő!
 Te voltál hát a bor, s én csak a tömlő?
 S beszélt a Szfinx. De kőből volt a nyelve.

(2) Dehogysis kínoz minket...

Dehogysis kínoz minket Ó, az Isten,
 mi szomorítjuk Őt. Ördög röhécsel
 minden bokornál; buktató, sötét csel
 a "sors" csupán – szó, jelentése sincsen.
 Lukás tömlő az álom, átszivárog
 csonton és bőrön, mint a rossz esőlé;
 de így válik nagy mozgató erővé:
 átfolynak rajta titkos másvilágok.
 Tömlő volnék, s Te benne ritka bor?
 De ha így van, miért vagy kőszobor,
 mely vak szárnyával jobbra-balra ver?
 Vér és homok kősziklává-meredt
 arculata néz kis embereket
 s ki értem jönne, nincs Angyal-haver.

(3) Dehogysis választ minket...

Dehogysis választ minket a halálunk,
 gyakorlatilag mi választjuk Őt.
 Szánjuk magunk, sok kis kéz-tördelőt,
 s minden népmesét vakon bezabálunk.
 Csakhogy: indulni kell. A másvilágra?
 Hogy szűrhetném le csontpoháron át
 a fejbeverő pokol-látomást:
 Repedt fazék vagy, Isten! Száz imára,
 ezerre sem felelsz. Szent kőszobor
 maradsz a legtöbb filozófiában;
 csapkodó szárnyad zúz, porba sodor
 multat s jövőndőt; jobb s bal összeolvad;
 Bika-Kos-Hal-Vtöntve jössz Te, hol vad
 szfinx-sor gunnyaszt, jobb mítoszok híjjában.

The main title is the same as in the German originals; the subtitles are always the first line. Here are the English paraphrases:

- (1) It's time to leave. But why and where to?
 He who escapes (beates it), does he fulfill his calling?
 The Devil rattles like a broken clay-pot-
 (and, besides) how could I be the cause of God's misery/suffering?
 If I were to sit, (like a) Beduin in a bournous in
 the desert, would I be pouring (watering with) the soul-symphony
 (by way of) with the letters of souls flowing apart?
 Water and sand, mixed with blood into Fate
 draws the mysterious face:
 the left and the right wing fight a Chimera's fight with one another,
 Cascade down upon me, rinse me, Thou who art pouring out of thyself!
 Were you, then, the wine and I only the flask?
 And (so) the Sphinx spoke, but her/hers/its tongue was made out of stone.
- (2) What an ideal By no means does He, God, torture us
 it is we who make Him sad. Devils chuckle
 by every bush; "fate" is but a dirty trick, a ruse
 that trips you (one) up; a (mere) word; it has no meaning either.
 Dreams are leaky water-bags, the seep through
 bones and skin like bad (dirty) rain water,
 but this is how they become great and moving forces:
 secret (spiritual) "Other Worlds" pour through them.
 Could (would) I be the flask, and you a rare wine in it?
 But if this could be so, why are you a stone statue
 that strikes out left and right with its blind wings?
 A sand -and- blood-face frozen into a solid rock
 is looking at small human beings
 and I've got no pal among the Angels who might come to fetch me (to take me home).
- (3) What an idea! By no means does our Death choose us
 in a practical sense we choose it (Death).
 We feel sorry for ourselves, while wringing our hands
 and blindly we swallow every folk-tale.
 (But) It's just that we have to be leaving... To Other World?
 How could I distill (syphon off) through a boneglass
 the infernal vision bombarding my head
 that Thou, God art a leaky pot! You fail to
 answer a hundred prayers, you ignore a thousand just as lightly,
 a holy stone statue Thou remainest in most
 philosophies; thy spastic wing smashes and sweeps into the dust
 both the past and the future; left and right melt
 into one; Thou comest as Taurus-Aries-Pisce-pouring
 Aquarian waters, while untamable rows of Sphinxes
 squat (poised to attack) lacking better myths.

I will, eventually, try to write these up in English. I am reasonably certain that the Hungarian versions (in sonnet form) are by far the most involved ones. This is

understandable; despite having lived 31–32 years in the United States, I have maintained active contact with Hungarian literature and published two volumes of Hungarian poetry, *Szomj és ecet* (1966) and $K^2 = 13$ (1971). (The first book's title says Thirst and Vinegar in English.)

This linguistic self-portrait must end in open-ended questions. Am I developing two personalities, one thinking in Hungarian and the other one in English? Is there additional stratification to be found inside the no doubt extremely complex cognitive system of one's mind such that bilingual poets will automatically process the identical experience toward both the system of language A and that of language B depending on the intensity and frequency of the phonetic attacks reaching their consciousness at the time of the peak of the experience? I hope that some day I will be closer to the outlines of an answer. In the meantime there is nothing wrong with my believing that my whole life is one long poem written by me, for me, through me, but also hopelessly out of my own control. So everything I can do, in whatever language, whatever length, form, style, and quality, is merely yet another minor subvariety of the same basic poem. Will it ever show up as a novel? Perhaps it will.

Notes

1. In *Szomj és ecet (Thirst and Vinegar)* 1966. Los Angeles, p. 56.
2. It would be pointless here to attempt an accurate sonnet-translation of the poem precisely because I intend to show that its English ghost-twin has resisted (at least for me) becoming an English sonnet. Needless to say, anybody skilled in English sonnets can translate it as such.
3. In *Szomj és ecet*, p. 76.
4. The outline which follows is deliberately kept as simple as possible either on bilingualism or the poetic process, but as a condensed presentation of what I think I do. In classical "structural linguistics" the analyst usually got himself a "native informant" whose utterances he then proceeded to classify on an analytical-taxonomical basis. More recently, it has become permissible, even fashionable, to serve as one's own informant, and especially so if the linguist (of whatever school of thought) was working on his own mother-tongue. After thirty-one years in the United States I view a natural language as a quadripartite structure (representable as a brick-shaped box with four stories in it) with a funnel on the top, and a funnel on the bottom.
5. Appeared as *Idiom Structure in English*, by Mouton & Co., The Hague, 1972, *Janua Linguarum*, Series maior 48, 372 pp.
6. A more formal account of this translation was given at the Pacific Conference on Contrastive Linguistics and Language Universals in Honolulu, Hawaii in January 1971; the paper appeared under the title "The Transformation of a Turkish Pasha into a Big Fat Dummy" In *Working Papers in Linguistics: The PCCLLU Papers*, Department of Linguistics, University of Hawaii, August 1971, pp. 267–273. It is now also anthologized in *Readings in Stratificational Linguistics* (pp. 305–315) University of Alabama Press, 1972, Adam Makkai and David G. Lockwood (Eds.).