

Collected Poems

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August 30, 2025

Chapter I

1934

I.I Consciousness (*Eszmélet*)

I

Dawn unbinds sky from earth	1
and upon its clear, soft word	2
beetles and children	3
spin forth into the daylight;	4
there is no moisture in the air,	5
the bright levity floats!	6
Overnight they alighted on the trees	7
like small butterflies, the leaves.	8

French

L'aube détache le ciel de la terre	1
et, à sa voix claire et douce,	2
scarabées et enfants virevoltent	3
en entrant sur la scène du jour;	4
l'air n'est pas humide,	5
la brillante légèreté flotte!	6
Avec la nuit, elles se posèrent sur les arbres	7
comme de petits papillons, les feuilles.	8

Original Hungarian

<i>Földtől¹ eloldja² az eget³</i>	1
<i>a hajnal⁴ s⁵ tiszta⁶, lágy⁷ szavára⁸</i>	2
<i>a bogarak,⁹ a gyerekek</i>	3
<i>kipörögnek¹⁰ a napvilágra¹¹;</i>	4
<i>a levegőben¹² semmi pára¹³,</i>	5
<i>a csilló¹⁴ könnyűség¹⁵ lebeg!¹⁶</i>	6
<i>Az éjjel¹⁷ rászálltak¹⁸ a fákra,¹⁹</i>	7
<i>mint²⁰ kis²¹ lepkék,²² a levelek.²³</i>	8

Chiastic structure:

1-4: e-e(8)/á-[r]a(9)/e-e(8)/á-[r]a(9)

5-8: á-[r]a(9)/e-e(8)/á-[r]a(9)/e-e(8)

¹ *föld* 'earth' + abl. *-től* 'without/from'

² vb. pref. *el-* 'away' + vb. *old* 'to unbind' + 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. def. *-ja*

³ *ég* 'sky' + acc. *-et* → *eget*

⁴ 'dawn'

⁵ poetic abbrv. *es* 'and' (does not count as a syllable)

⁶ adj. 'bright'

⁷ adj. 'soft'

⁸ *szó* 'voice', 'word' + 3rd pers. sg. single poss. *-a* → *szava* + subl. *-ra* 'by' → *szavára*

⁹ *bogár* 'beetle' + pl. *-(a)k* → *bogarak*

¹⁰ vb. *kipörög* 'to spin' + 3rd pers. pl. ind. pres. indef. *-nek*

¹¹ *nap* 'sun/day' + *világ* 'world' + subl. *-ra* 'onto'

¹² *levegő* 'air' + innes. *-ben* 'in'

¹³ 'moisture/mist'

¹⁴ vb. *csillog* 'to glitter' + adj.-forming *-o* → *csilló*; usually *csillogó*

¹⁵ *könnyű* 'simplicity/easiness' + noun-forming *-ség* (state of being)

¹⁶ vb. *lebeg* 'to float (in the air)', 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. indef.

¹⁷ *éj* 'night' + instr. *-vel* 'with' → *éjjel*

¹⁸ pointed action *rá-* 'on' + vb. *száll* 'to fly/land/to come down' + 3rd pers. sg. past indef. *-tak*

¹⁹ *fa* 'tree' + pl. *-k* + subl. *-ra* 'onto' → *fákra*

²⁰ 'like'

²¹ 'small'

²² *lepké* 'butterfly' + pl. *-k* → *lepkék*

²³ *level* 'leaf' + pl. *-(e)k*

II

I saw paintings daubed with blue,	1
red, yellow in my dreams	2
and felt that everything was just so —	3
not one speck of dust flying madly about.	4
Now my dream comes down as a blur into my members,	5
and the iron world is the order.	6
During the day a moon rises inwardly and,	7
when the night is out, a sun shines herewithin.	8

Cursory remark

Verses 1-4 are about the night, verses 5-7 transition to the day, and verse 8 brings us back to the night — this cyclic structure supporting the mismatched, recurring alternance of days and nights.

French

J'ai vu des tableaux barbouillés de bleu,	1
rouge et jaune dans mes rêves	2
et je sentis que tout était en ordre —	3
pas un seul grain de poussière qui vole agité.	4
Maintenant mon rêve descend, estompé, dans mes membres,	5
et le monde de fer est l'ordre.	6
Avec le jour, une lune point en moi et,	7
à la nuit tombée, un soleil brille ci-dedans.	8

Original Hungarian

<i>Kék, piros, sárga, összekent</i> ²⁴	1
<i>képeket</i> ²⁵ <i>láttam</i> ²⁶ <i>álmaimban</i> ²⁷	2
<i>és úgy éreztem,</i> ²⁸ <i>ez a rend</i> ²⁹ —	3
<i>egy szallo</i> ³⁰ <i>porszem</i> ³¹ <i>el</i> ³² <i>nem hobbant.</i> ³³	4
<i>Most homályként</i> ³⁴ <i>száll</i> ³⁵ <i>tagjaimban</i> ³⁶	5
<i>álmom s a vas</i> ³⁷ <i>világ a rend.</i>	6
<i>Nappal</i> ³⁸ <i>hold</i> ³⁹ <i>kél</i> ⁴⁰ <i>bennem</i> ⁴¹ <i>s ha</i> ⁴² <i>kinn</i> ⁴³ <i>van</i>	7
<i>az éj</i> ⁴⁴ — <i>egy nap süt</i> ⁴⁵ <i>idebent.</i> ⁴⁶	8

Chiastic structure:

1-4: e-ent(8)/ai-an(9)/a-rend(8)/i-an(9)

5-8: i-an(9)/a-rend(8)/ai-an(9)/e-ent(8)

²⁴ *össze* ‘together’ + *ken* ‘smear’ → *összekent* + 3rd pers. sg. past indef. -*t*

²⁵ *kép* ‘picture’ + pl. -(*e*)*k* + acc. -(*e*)*t*

²⁶ vb. *lát* ‘to see’ + short base -*t* + 1st pers. sg. past def. -*tam*

²⁷ *álom* ‘dream’ + 1st pers. sg. poss. -*a* + poss. pl. -*i* + 1st pers. sg. pers. -*m* + innes. -*ban* ‘in’ → *álmaimban*

²⁸ vb. *érez* ‘to feel’, 1st pers. sg. past def.

²⁹ ‘order’

³⁰ vb. *száll* ‘to fly’ + pres. part. -*ó*

³¹ ‘a speck of dust’

³² *el nem* + past. part.; the verbal prefix *el* emphasises the completion of the action

³³ vb. *hobbant* ‘to become imbalanced’, arch. + past part. -*t*

³⁴ *homály* ‘blur’ + essive formal -*ként* ‘as’

³⁵ vb. ‘to land/to come down’, 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres.

³⁶ *tag* ‘member’ + 1st pers. sg. poss. -(*j*)*a* + poss. pl. -*i* + 1st pers. sg. pers. -*m* + innes. -*ban* ‘in’ → *tagjaimban*

³⁷ ‘iron’

³⁸ *nap* ‘day’ + instr. -*val* ‘with’ → *nappal*

³⁹ ‘moon’

⁴⁰ vb. ‘to rise’, 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. def., arch. alt. *kel*

⁴¹ pron. *benne* ‘inside smth/smb’ + 1st pers. sg. pers. -*m*

⁴² ‘when’

⁴³ ‘outside’

⁴⁴ ‘night’

⁴⁵ vb. ‘to roast/shine’, 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. indef.

⁴⁶ adv. *ide* ‘here’ + *bent* ‘within’

III

I am thin, at times I only eat bread;	1
amidst those idle and blithering souls,	2
I seek in vain more certainty, like the die.	3
No chuck roast reaches my mouth	4
while I cuddle a small child to my heart —	5
however clever, the cat cannot catch at once	6
the mouse outdoors and the one indoors.	7

Cursory remark

J cannot pursue his art and, at the same time, keep a job that would put real food on his table. Cuddling a small child to his heart is his metaphor for the creation of poetry. J is the cat in verses 6-7.

French

Je suis maigre, parfois je ne mange que du pain ;	1
entouré par ces âmes oisives et bavardes,	2
je cherche en vain plus de certitude, comme le dé.	3
Aucun rôti de palette ne trouve ma bouche	4
quand j'étreins un enfant sur mon cœur —	5
aussi fûté soit-il, le chat ne peut attrapper d'un coup	6
la souris dehors et celle dedans.	7

Original Hungarian

<i>Sóvány</i> ⁴⁷ <i>vagyok, csak kenyeret</i> ⁴⁸	1
<i>eszem</i> ⁴⁹ <i>néha</i> , ⁵⁰ <i>e</i> ⁵¹ <i>léha</i> , ⁵² <i>locska</i> ⁵³	2
<i>lelkek</i> ⁵⁴ <i>közt</i> ⁵⁵ <i>ingyen</i> ⁵⁶ <i>keresek</i> ⁵⁷	3
<i>bizonyosabbat</i> , ⁵⁸ <i>mint</i> ⁵⁹ <i>a kocska</i> . ⁶⁰	4
<i>Nem dörgölődzik</i> ⁶¹ <i>sült</i> ⁶² <i>lopcska</i> ⁶³	5
<i>számhoz</i> ⁶⁴ <i>s szívemhez</i> ⁶⁵ <i>kisgyerek</i> ⁶⁶ —	6
<i>ügyeskedhet</i> , ⁶⁷ <i>nem fog</i> ⁶⁸ <i>a macska</i> ⁶⁹	7
<i>egyszerre</i> ⁷⁰ <i>kint</i> ⁷¹ <i>s bent</i> ⁷² <i>egeret</i> . ⁷³	8

Chiastic structure:

1-4: e-ret(8)/o-cska(9)/e-ek(8)/o-cska(9)

5-8: o-cska(8)/e-ek(8)/a-cska(8)/e-ret(8) — same length

⁴⁷ 'slim/thin', fig. 'poor'

⁴⁸ *kenyér* 'bread' + acc. *-(e)t* → *kenyeret*

⁴⁹ vb. *esz* 'to eat', rare without verbal pref., inf. *enni* + 1st pers. sg. ind. pres. def. *-em* → *eszem*

⁵⁰ adv. 'sometimes'

⁵¹ poetic abbrv. *eme/ez* 'this'

⁵² 'improvident/idler'

⁵³ adj. 'blethering'

⁵⁴ *lélek* 'soul' + pl. *-(e)k* → *lelkek*

⁵⁵ post. 'between/amid' from *között*: *köz* 'interval' + loc. *-ött*

⁵⁶ fig. arch. 'in vain'; usually 'free of charge'

⁵⁷ vb. *keres* 'to seek' + 1st pers. sg. ind. pres. indef.

⁵⁸ adj. *bizonyos* 'certain' + comp. *-abb* 'more' + acc. *-t*

⁵⁹ 'like'

⁶⁰ 'a die'

⁶¹ vb. 'to press against', 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. indef.

⁶² vb. *süül* 'to roast' + past part. *-t*

⁶³ 'chuck' (shoulder meat cut, probably pork)

⁶⁴ *száj* 'mouth' + 1st pers. sg. single poss. *-m* → *szám* + allat. *-hoz* 'towards' → *számhoz*

⁶⁵ *szívem* 'heart' + allat. *-hez* 'towards'

⁶⁶ *kis* 'small' + *gyerek* 'child'

⁶⁷ vb. *ügyesked* 'to be clever' + 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. potential *-het*

⁶⁸ vb. 'to hold', 3rd pers. sg. pers. indef.

⁶⁹ 'cat'

⁷⁰ adv. *egyszer* 'at once' + abl. *-re* 'onto'

⁷¹ adv. 'outside'

⁷² adv. 'inside'

⁷³ *egér* 'mouse' + acc. *-(e)t* → *egeret*

IV

Just like a pile of logs,	1
the world lies in a jumble;	2
each thing presses, weighs on,	3
holds fast to the next,	4
and so everything is determined.	5
Only what is not has a shrub,	6
only that will be that flower;	7
what is falls to pieces.	8

Cursory remark

‘To be or not to be’ is usually construed as the dichotomy between life and death. J tells us that not-to-be is potential beauty, whereas to-be is actual death.

French

Tout comme un tas de bûches,	1
le monde gît en vrac ;	2
chaque chose presse, pèse,	3
s’arrime à l’autre,	4
et ainsi tout est déterminé.	5
Seul ce qui n’est pas a un arbuste,	6
seul cela sera cette fleur ;	7
ce qui est tombera en pièces.	8

Original Hungarian

<i>Akár⁷⁴ egy halom⁷⁵ hasított⁷⁶ fa,⁷⁷</i>	1
<i>hever⁷⁸ egymáson⁷⁹ a világ,⁸⁰</i>	2
<i>szorítja,⁸¹ nyomja,⁸² összefogja⁸³</i>	3
<i>egyik⁸⁴ dolog⁸⁵ a másikat⁸⁶</i>	4
<i>s így⁸⁷ mindenik⁸⁸ determinált.⁸⁹</i>	5
<i>Csak⁹⁰ ami⁹¹ nincs, annak⁹² van bokra,⁹³</i>	6
<i>csak⁹⁴ ami lesz,⁹⁵ az a virág,</i>	7
<i>ami van, széthull⁹⁶ darabokra.⁹⁷</i>	8

Chiastic structure:

1-4: o-a(9)/i-á(8)/o-a(9)/i-á(8)

5-8: i-á(8)/o-a(9)/i-á(8)/o-a(9)

⁷⁴ conj. literary ‘just like’

⁷⁵ ‘pile/heap’

⁷⁶ vb. *hasít* ‘to cleave/split’ + past. part. *-ott*

⁷⁷ ‘tree’

⁷⁸ vb. ‘to lie’, 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. indef.

⁷⁹ pron. *egymás* ‘each other/one another’ + super. *-on* ‘on’

⁸⁰ ‘world’

⁸¹ vb. *szorít* ‘to press/constrict’, inf. *szorítani* + 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. def. *-ja*

⁸² vb. *nyom* ‘to weigh’ + 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. def. *-ja*

⁸³ *össze* ‘together’ + vb. *fog* ‘to hold’ + 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. def. *-ja*

⁸⁴ *egy* ‘one’ + 3rd pers. pl. mult. poss. *-ik* ‘of’

⁸⁵ ‘thing’

⁸⁶ adj. *más* ‘other’ + noun-forming *-ik* → ‘another’ + 3rd pers. sg. single poss. *-a* + acc. *-t* → *-át*

⁸⁷ ‘just so’

⁸⁸ adv. *minden* ‘everyone/everything’

⁸⁹ Latin *determinare* + vb.-forming *-ál* ‘to determine’ + past part. *-t*

⁹⁰ adv. ‘only’

⁹¹ rel. pron. ‘which/that’

⁹² art. *az* ‘that’ + attr. poss. *-nak* → *annak*

⁹³ *bokor* ‘shrub/bush’ + 3rd pers. sg. single poss. *-a*

⁹⁴ adv. ‘only’

⁹⁵ vb. ‘to become’, 3rd pers. sg. ind. fut. indef.

⁹⁶ vb. ‘to fall apart’, 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. indef.

⁹⁷ adv. *darab* ‘piece/chunk’ + pl. *-ok* + subl. *-ra* ‘into’

V

At the freight train station,	I
I lay down just so behind the tree's butt,	2
like a piece of silence;	3
a grey weed reached my mouth,	4
raw, strange-sweet.	5
Playing dead, I watched the guard, sensing what,	6
and his shadow on the quiet wagons	7
stubbornly leaping at the bright, dewy coal.	8

Cursory remark

This is likely a memory from J's childhood, when his family was so poor that he would occasionally steal lumps of coal from the wagons at the freight train station nearby his home.

French

À la gare de fret,	I
je m'étais ainsi derrière le pied de l'arbre,	2
comme un morceau de silence;	3
une herbe grise atteignit ma bouche,	4
crue, étrange-sucrée.	5
Faisant le mort, je regardais le garde, suspectant quoi,	6
et son ombre qui, sur les wagons silencieux,	7
s'entêtait à bondir sur les charbons reluisants,	8
couverts de rosée.	9

Original Hungarian

<i>A teherpályaudvaron</i> ⁹⁸	1
<i>úgy</i> ⁹⁹ <i>lapultam</i> ¹⁰⁰ <i>a fa</i> ¹⁰¹ <i>tövéhez</i> , ¹⁰²	2
<i>mint</i> ¹⁰³ <i>egy darab</i> ¹⁰⁴ <i>csönd</i> ¹⁰⁵ ; <i>szürke</i> ¹⁰⁶ <i>gyom</i> ¹⁰⁷	3
<i>ért</i> ¹⁰⁸ <i>számhoz</i> , ¹⁰⁹ <i>nyers</i> , ¹¹⁰ <i>különös-édes</i> .	4
<i>Holtan</i> ¹¹¹ <i>lestem</i> ¹¹² <i>az őrt</i> , ¹¹³ <i>mit</i> ¹¹⁴ <i>érez</i> , ¹¹⁵	5
<i>s a hallgató</i> ¹¹⁶ <i>vagónokon</i> ¹¹⁷	6
<i>árnyát</i> , ¹¹⁸ <i>mely</i> ¹¹⁹ <i>ráugrott</i> ¹²⁰ <i>a fényes</i> , ¹²¹	7
<i>harmatos</i> ¹²² <i>szénre</i> ¹²³ <i>konokon</i> . ¹²⁴	8

Chiastic structure:

1-4: a-o(8)/é-e(9)/e-o(8)/é-e(9)

5-8: é-e(9)/o-o(8)/é-e(9)/o-o(8)

⁹⁸ *teher* 'freight' + *pálya* 'track' + *udvar* 'courtyard' + super. *-on* 'on'

⁹⁹ adv. 'so (in this/that manner)'

¹⁰⁰ vb. *lapul* 'to lie low' + 1st pers. sg. past indef. *-tam*

¹⁰¹ 'tree'

¹⁰² *tő* 'base of the stem of a plant' + 3rd pers. sg. single poss. *-e* 'of' → *töve* + allat. *-hez* 'towards' →

tövéhez

¹⁰³ 'like'

¹⁰⁴ 'piece'

¹⁰⁵ 'silence', alt. *csend*

¹⁰⁶ adj. 'grey'

¹⁰⁷ 'weed'

¹⁰⁸ vb. *ért* 'to reach', arch. 'to touch', fig. 'to understand', 3rd pers. sg. past indef.

¹⁰⁹ *száj* 'mouth' + 1st pers. sg. single poss. *-m* → *szám* + allat. 'towards' *-hoz* → *számhoz*

¹¹⁰ adj. 'raw'

¹¹¹ *holt* 'dead' + adv.-forming *-an*

¹¹² vb. *les* 'to spy' + 1st pers. sg. past indef. *-tem*

¹¹³ *őr* 'guard' + acc. *-t*

¹¹⁴ inter. 'what'

¹¹⁵ vb. 'to feel/smell/taste', 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. indef.

¹¹⁶ vb. *hallgat* 'to remain silent/to listen' + adj.-forming *-ag*

¹¹⁷ *vagón* 'wagon' + pl. *-ok* + super. *-on* 'on'

¹¹⁸ *árny* 'shadow/ghost' + 3rd pers. sg. single poss. *-a* + acc. *-t* → *-át*

¹¹⁹ literary, 'which/that'

¹²⁰ pointed action *ra-* 'at' + vb. *ugrik* 'to leap/jump' + 3rd pers. sg. ind. past. indef. *-ott* → *ugrott*

¹²¹ *fény* 'light/glitter' + adj.-forming *-es* → 'bright'

¹²² adj. 'dewy'

¹²³ *szén* 'coal' + subl. *-re* 'onto'

¹²⁴ adj. *konok* 'stubborn' + super. *-on* 'on (that manner)'

VI

Behold the anguish inside,	1
yet the explanation lies outside.	2
Your wound is the world — on fire, burning up —	3
and you feel your soul, the fever.	4
You are captive as long as your heart rebels —	5
then you are free if it indulges	6
not building for yourself a house	7
where a landlord settles in.	8

Cursory remark

We are not captives of the world, but of our own heart, which invited the world (the landlord) in for us to contend with. The inner struggle is felt as anguish and yields a feverish soul.

French

Voici le tourment intérieur,	1
pourtant l'explication se trouve à l'extérieur.	2
Ta blessure est le monde — en feu, s'échauffant —	3
et tu sens ton âme, la fièvre.	4
Tu es captif tant que ton cœur se révolte —	5
ainsi tu es libre s'il se complâit	6
à ne plus bâtir pour toi une maison	7
où un propriétaire vient demeurer.	8

Original Hungarian

<i>Im</i> ¹²⁵ <i>itt a szenvedés</i> ¹²⁶ <i>belül</i> , ¹²⁷	1
<i>ám</i> ¹²⁸ <i>ott kívül</i> ¹²⁹ <i>a magyarázat</i> . ¹³⁰	2
<i>Sebed</i> ¹³¹ <i>a világ — ég</i> , ¹³² <i>bevül</i> ¹³³	3
<i>s te</i> ¹³⁴ <i>lelkedet</i> ¹³⁵ <i>érezed</i> , ¹³⁶ <i>a lázat</i> . ¹³⁷	4
<i>Rab</i> ¹³⁸ <i>vagy, amíg</i> ¹³⁹ <i>a szíved</i> ¹⁴⁰ <i>lázad</i> ¹⁴¹ —	5
<i>úgy</i> ¹⁴² <i>szabadulsz</i> , ¹⁴³ <i>ha</i> ¹⁴⁴ <i>kényedül</i> ¹⁴⁵	6
<i>nem raksz</i> ¹⁴⁶ <i>magadnak</i> ¹⁴⁷ <i>olyan</i> ¹⁴⁸ <i>házat</i> , ¹⁴⁹	7
<i>melybe</i> ¹⁵⁰ <i>háziúr</i> ¹⁵¹ <i>települ</i> . ¹⁵²	8

Chiastic structure:

1-4: e-ül(8)/á-at(9)/e-ül(8)/á-at(9)

5-8: á-ad(9)/e-ül(8)/á-at(9)/e-ül(8)

¹²⁵ literary, abbrev. *íme* ‘here is/ behold’

¹²⁶ vb. *szenved* ‘to suffer’ + noun-forming *-és*

¹²⁷ ‘inside’

¹²⁸ poetic, interj. contrad. ‘but’

¹²⁹ adv. ‘outdoor/outside’

¹³⁰ vb. *magyaráz* ‘to explain’ + noun-forming *-at*

¹³¹ *seb* ‘wound’ + 2nd pers. sg. single poss. *-ed*

¹³² vb. ‘to be on fire’, 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. indef.

¹³³ vb. ‘to grow hot’, 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. indef.

¹³⁴ inform. sg. ‘you’

¹³⁵ *lélek* ‘soul’ + 2nd pers. sg. single poss. *-ed* → *lelked* + acc. *-(e)t*

¹³⁶ vb. *érez* ‘to feel’, 2nd pers. sg. ind. pres. def.

¹³⁷ *láz* ‘fever’ + acc. *-(a)t*

¹³⁸ ‘captive’

¹³⁹ adv. ‘as long as’; ‘until’ if followed by negated verb

¹⁴⁰ *szíved* ‘heart’ + 2nd pers. sg. single poss. *-ed*

¹⁴¹ vb. *to rebel*, 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. indef.

¹⁴² *úgy ... ha ...* ‘then ... if ...’

¹⁴³ *szabad* ‘free’ + vb.-forming *-ul* + 2nd pers. sg. ind. pres. indef. *-sz*

¹⁴⁴ ‘if’

¹⁴⁵ literary, vb. ‘to indulge’, 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. indef.

¹⁴⁶ vb. *rak* ‘to set up/to build’, 2nd pers. sg. ind. pres. indef. *-sz*

¹⁴⁷ *maga* ‘oneself’ + 2nd pers. sg. single poss. *-d* + dat. *-nak*

¹⁴⁸ pron. ‘such/that kind of thing’

¹⁴⁹ *ház* ‘house’ + acc. *-(a)t*

¹⁵⁰ literary, arch. *mely* ‘which’ + illative *-be* ‘into (the inside of)’

¹⁵¹ *ház* ‘house’ + adj.-forming ‘of the’ *-i* + *úr* ‘master’

¹⁵² vb. ‘to settle (somewhere)’, 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. indef.

VII

I looked up from beneath the evening	1
to the cogwheels of the heavens —	2
from the glittering threads of chance	3
the loom of the past wove the law;	4
and I looked up again onto the sky	5
from beneath the steam of my dreams,	6
and I saw the fabric of the law	7
always tearing up somewhere.	8

Cursory remark

Whereas verses 1-2 echo the ancient mechanical understanding of the firmament as concentric spheres, and verses 2-4 hearken back at the mythological Fates (*Parcæ*), verses 5-8 evoke the image of an aerostat, whose aeronaut is J, where J's dreams are the steam that tries to lift him up, and the law is the envelope, whose tears are J's constant misfortune. (The metaphor is a little off, as balloons use hot air, not steam.)

French

Par dessous le soir,	1
j'ai levé les yeux aux rouages des cieux —	2
des fils scintillants de la chance	3
le métier du passé avait tissé la loi;	4
par dessous la vapeur de mes rêves,	5
j'ai regardé à nouveau dans les cieux	6
et j'ai vu le tissu de la loi	7
toujours se déchirer quelque part.	8

Original Hungarian

<i>Én fölnéztem</i> ¹⁵³ <i>az est</i> ¹⁵⁴ <i>alól</i> ¹⁵⁵	1
<i>az eget</i> ¹⁵⁶ <i>fogaskerekére</i> ¹⁵⁷ —	2
<i>csilló</i> ¹⁵⁸ <i>véletlen</i> ¹⁵⁹ <i>szálaiból</i> ¹⁶⁰	3
<i>törvényt</i> ¹⁶¹ <i>szőtt</i> ¹⁶² <i>a mult</i> ¹⁶³ <i>szövőszéke</i> ¹⁶⁴	4
<i>és megint</i> ¹⁶⁵ <i>fölnéztem az égre</i> ¹⁶⁶	5
<i>álmaim</i> ¹⁶⁷ <i>gőzeit</i> ¹⁶⁸ <i>alól</i>	6
<i>s láttam</i> ¹⁶⁹ <i>a törvény szövédéke</i> ¹⁷⁰	7
<i>mindig</i> ¹⁷¹ <i>fölfeslik</i> ¹⁷² <i>valahol</i> ¹⁷³	8

Chiastic structure:

1-4: a-ól(8)/é-e(9)/a[i]-ól(9)/é-e(9)

5-8: é-e(9)/[i]a-ól(8)/é-e(9)/a-ol(8)

¹⁵³ vb. pref. *föl-* 'upwards' + vb. *néz* 'to look' + 1st pers. sg. past. def. *-tem*

¹⁵⁴ arch. '(in the) evening'

¹⁵⁵ *al* 'lower part' + abl. *-l* 'from'

¹⁵⁶ *ég* 'sky' + acc. *-(e)t*

¹⁵⁷ *fogas* 'tooth' + *kerék* 'wheel': 'cogwheel' + 3rd pers. sg. single poss. *-e* + subl. *-re* 'towards'

¹⁵⁸ vb. *csillog* 'to glitter' + adj.-forming *-o* → *csilló*; usually *csillogó*

¹⁵⁹ 'chance'

¹⁶⁰ *szál* 'thread' + 3rd pers. sg. poss. *-a* + poss. pl. *-i* + elative *-ból* 'from/out of'

¹⁶¹ *törvény* 'law/principle' + acc. *-t*

¹⁶² vb. *sző* 'to weave', past part.

¹⁶³ *mult*? rare, past part. 'past', inf. *múlik*

¹⁶⁴ *szövő* 'weaver' + *szék* 'chair': 'loom' + 3rd pers. sg. single poss. *-e*

¹⁶⁵ *meg* 'again' (short action) + adv.-forming *-int*

¹⁶⁶ *ég* 'sky' + subl. sg. *-re* 'onto'

¹⁶⁷ *álom* 'dream' + 1st pers. sg. poss. *-a* + poss. pl. *-i* + 1st pers. sg. pers. *-m*

¹⁶⁸ *gőz* 'steam, vapour' + 3rd pers. sg. poss. *-e* + pl. poss. *-i*

¹⁶⁹ vb. *lát* 'to see' + short base *-t*, 1st pers. sg. past def. *-tam*

¹⁷⁰ *szövédéke* 'fabric/cloth/web' + 3rd pers. sg. single poss. *-e*

¹⁷¹ *mind* 'always' (repetition) + term. 'until' *-ig*

¹⁷² vb. pref. *föl-* 'upwards' + arch., poetic, vb. *feslik* 'to come unstitched', 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. indef.

¹⁷³ 'somewhere'

VIII

The silence listened intently — One struck.	1
You could visit your childhood;	2
between the damp cement walls	3
you could imagine a bit of freedom —	4
I thought. And as soon as I stood up,	5
the stars, the Great Bear	6
indeed were glittering above,	7
like the grilles up in the silent cell.	8

Cursory remark

This is likely a memory of J's imprisonment in 1931.

French

Le silence écoutait attentivement — Une heure sonna.	1
Tu pourrais visiter ton enfance;	2
entre les murs de ciment humide	3
tu pourrais imaginer un peu de liberté —	4
me dis-je. Et dès que je fus sur pied,	5
les étoiles, la Grande Ourse	6
scintillaient en effet au-dessus,	7
comme les grilles en haut dans ma cellule.	8

Original Hungarian

<i>Fülelt</i> ¹⁷⁴ <i>a csend</i> ¹⁷⁵ — <i>egy</i> ¹⁷⁶ <i>ütött</i> ¹⁷⁷	1
<i>Fölkereshetnéd</i> ¹⁷⁸ <i>ifjúságod</i> , ¹⁷⁹	2
<i>nyirkos</i> ¹⁸⁰ <i>cementfalak</i> ¹⁸¹ <i>között</i> ¹⁸²	3
<i>képzelhetsz</i> ¹⁸³ <i>egy kis szabadságot</i> ¹⁸⁴ —	4
<i>gondoltam</i> . ¹⁸⁵ <i>S hát</i> ¹⁸⁶ <i>amint</i> ¹⁸⁷ <i>fölállok</i> ¹⁸⁸	5
<i>a csillagok</i> , ¹⁸⁹ <i>a Göncölök</i> ¹⁹⁰	6
<i>úgy fénylenek</i> ¹⁹¹ <i>fönt</i> , ¹⁹² <i>mint a rácsok</i> ¹⁹³	7
<i>a hallgatag</i> ¹⁹⁴ <i>cella</i> ¹⁹⁵ <i>fölött</i> . ¹⁹⁶	8

Chiastic structure:

1-4: ü-ö[tt](8)/á-o(9)/ö-ö[tt](8)/á-o(9)

5-8: á-o[k](9)/ö-ö(8)/á-o[k](9)/ö-ö[tt](8)

¹⁷⁴ *fül* 'ear' + vb.-forming *-el*: 'to listen (intently)' + 3rd pers. ind. past indef. *-t*

¹⁷⁵ 'silence'. alt. *csönd*

¹⁷⁶ *egy* + acc. *-t*

¹⁷⁷ vb. *üt* 'to strike' + 3rd pers. sg. ind. past indef. *-(ö)tt*

¹⁷⁸ *föl-* 'upwards' + *keres* 'to seek': 'to visit' + pot. 'may/might' *-het* + 2nd pers. sg. ind. pres. cond. *-ned*, alt. *felkeres*

¹⁷⁹ adj. *ifjú* 'young' + noun-forming *-ság* (state of being): 'youth' + 2nd pers. informal sg. poss. single poss. *-od*: 'your childhood' (informal)

¹⁸⁰ adj. 'humid/damp'

¹⁸¹ *cement* 'cement' + *fal* 'wall' + pl. *-ak*

¹⁸² post. 'between/amid', *köz* 'interval' + loc. *-ött*

¹⁸³ *kép* 'image' + vb.-forming *-(z)el*: 'to imagine' + pot. *-het* + 2nd pers. sg. ind. pres. *-sz*

¹⁸⁴ *szabad* 'free' + *-ság* (state of being): 'freedom' + acc. *-(a)t*

¹⁸⁵ vb. *gondol* 'to think/plan/guess/worry' + 1st pers. sg. ind. past *-tam*

¹⁸⁶ 'back body', 'well...', 'then/and/but' (questioning back), 'surely'

¹⁸⁷ *az* + *mint* 'like': 'as soon as', literary 'as'

¹⁸⁸ *föl-* 'upwards' + vb. *láll* 'to stand' + 1st pers. sg. ind. pres. indef. *-ok*, alt. *felállok*

¹⁸⁹ *csillag* 'star' + pl. *-ak*

¹⁹⁰ *Göncöl* + pl. *-ök*: 'the Great Bear' (constellation)

¹⁹¹ *fény* 'light' + freq. vb.-forming *-lik*: 'to glitter' + 3rd pers. pl. ind. pres. indef. *-ek*

¹⁹² adv. 'above/up/awake/upstairs', alt. *fent*

¹⁹³ *rács* 'grid/grille' + pl. *-ok*

¹⁹⁴ vb. *hallgat* 'to remain silent/to listen' + adj.-forming *-ag*

¹⁹⁵ 'cell'

¹⁹⁶ *föl-* 'up/upwards' + loc. *-ött*: 'above', alt. *elett*

IX

I heard iron weeping,	1
I heard rain laughing.	2
I saw that the past was cracked	3
and that only memories may be forgotten,	4
and how I cannot but love,	5
bending under my burdens —	6
why should I also forge a weapon	7
out of you, golden self-awareness!	8

Cursory remark

Verses 1-2 refer to the sounds of iron being forged and quenched in water. The blacksmith is fixing a crack, which reminds J of a painful past event, possibly a break-up. Verses 3-6 form a chiasm: verse 5 echoes verse 4: to avoid his love fading away, he will keep loving; verse 6 answers verse 3: instead of hammering the crack to make it disappear, J bends under it. Then there is no need to forge a sword blade to become strong. J's self-consciousness is golden, like the glow that illuminates all the interior of the kiln.

French

J'ai entendu le fer sangloter,	1
j'ai entendu la pluie rire.	2
Je vis que le passé était craquelé	3
et que seuls les souvenirs peuvent s'oublier,	4
et comment je ne peux qu'aimer,	5
pliant sous mes fardeaux —	6
pourquoi devrais-je aussi forger une arme	7
de toi, for intérieur doré!	8

Original Hungarian

<i>Hallottam</i> ¹⁹⁷ <i>sírni</i> ¹⁹⁸ <i>a vasat</i> , ¹⁹⁹	1
<i>hallottam az esőt</i> ²⁰⁰ <i>nevetni</i> . ²⁰¹	2
<i>Láttam</i> , ²⁰² <i>hogy</i> ²⁰³ <i>a mult</i> ²⁰⁴ <i>meghasadt</i> ²⁰⁵	3
<i>s csak</i> ²⁰⁶ <i>képzetet</i> ²⁰⁷ <i>lehet</i> ²⁰⁸ <i>feledni</i> ; ²⁰⁹	4
<i>s hogy</i> ²¹⁰ <i>nem tudok</i> ²¹¹ <i>mást</i> , ²¹² <i>mint</i> ²¹³ <i>szeretni</i> , ²¹⁴	5
<i>görnyedve</i> ²¹⁵ <i>terheim</i> ²¹⁶ <i>alatt</i> ²¹⁷ —	6
<i>minek</i> ²¹⁸ <i>is</i> ²¹⁹ <i>kell</i> ²²⁰ <i>fegyvert</i> ²²¹ <i>veretni</i> ²²²	7
<i>belőled</i> , ²²³ <i>arany</i> ²²⁴ <i>öntudat!</i> ²²⁵	8

Chiastic structure:

1-4: a-a[t](8)/e[t]-[n]i(9)/a-a[dt](8)/e[d]-[n]i(9)

5-8: e[t]-[n]i(9)/a-a[tt](8)/e[t]-[n]i(9)/u-a[t](8)

¹⁹⁷ vb. *hall* ‘to hear’ + 1st pers. sg. ind. past def. -*ottam*

¹⁹⁸ vb. *sír* ‘to cry/weep’ + inf. -*ni*

¹⁹⁹ *vas* ‘iron’ + acc. -(a)*t*

²⁰⁰ vb. *es*, inf. *esik* + pres. part. -*ő* + acc. -*t*

²⁰¹ vb. *nevet* ‘to laugh’, inf. *nevetni*

²⁰² vb. *lát* ‘to see’ + short base -*t*, 1st pers. sg. past def. -*tam*

²⁰³ adv. ‘how’

²⁰⁴ **mult**? rare, past part. ‘past’, inf. *múlik*

²⁰⁵ perfective *meg-* + vb. *hasad* ‘to crack/split apart’ + past part. -*t*

²⁰⁶ adv. ‘only’

²⁰⁷ *képzet* ‘idea/image/notion’ + acc. -*t*

²⁰⁸ pot. vb. *van/lesz*: ‘may be/may become’, 3rd pers. sg. ind.

²⁰⁹ lit. vb. *feled* ‘to forget’, alt. *felejt*

²¹⁰ adv. ‘how’

²¹¹ vb. *tud* ‘to know’/aux. ‘can + inf.’ + 1st pers. sg. ind. pres. indef. -*ok*

²¹² adj. *más* ‘other/different’ + acc. -*t*

²¹³ comp. different degrees ‘than’

²¹⁴ inf. vb. *szeret* ‘to love’

²¹⁵ vb. *görnyed* ‘to bend (under a burden)’ + adv.-forming -*ve*

²¹⁶ *teher* ‘freight/burden’ + 1st pers. sg. poss. mult. poss. -*eim* → *terheim*

²¹⁷ post. *al-* ‘lower part’ + loc. -(a)*tt*

²¹⁸ *mi* + dat. -*nek*: ‘for what’

²¹⁹ doublet of *és* ‘and’, adv. ‘also’

²²⁰ aux. vb. ‘must/need to/have to + inf.’

²²¹ *fegyver* ‘weapon’ + acc. -*t*

²²² inf. vb. ‘to hammer’, alt. *veretés*

²²³ pron. *belőle* ‘out of him/her/it’ + 2nd pers. sg. -*d*

²²⁴ ‘gold/golden’

²²⁵ ‘self-awareness’

X

He is a grown man he who has	1
neither mother nor father in his heart,	2
he who knows that he receives life	3
as an extra to death, and that he returns it	4
any time, like a found object	5
— therefore he treasures it,	6
he who is neither a god nor a priest,	7
neither to himself nor to others.	8

Cursory remark

An integral man (the Hungarian language is actually gender neutral) knows that his parents cannot protect him anymore from the truth of mortality. This truth is not treasured by gods, as they are immortal, nor Christian priests, who preach eternal life.

French

Il est un homme accompli celui qui n'a	1
ni mère ni père en son cœur,	2
celui qui sait qu'il reçoit la vie	3
tel un supplément à la mort, et qu'il la rendra	4
à tout moment, comme un objet trouvé	5
— par conséquent il la garde précieusement,	6
celui qui n'est ni un dieu ni un prêtre,	7
ni pour lui-même, ni pour autrui.	8

Original Hungarian

<i>Az meglett²²⁶ ember²²⁷, akinek²²⁸</i>	1
<i>szívében²²⁹ nincs se anyja,²³⁰ apja,²³¹</i>	2
<i>ki²³² tudja,²³³ hogy²³⁴ az életet²³⁵</i>	3
<i>halálra²³⁶ ráadásul²³⁷ kapja²³⁸</i>	4
<i>s mint²³⁹ talált²⁴⁰ tárgyat²⁴¹ visszaadja²⁴²</i>	5
<i>bármikor²⁴³ — ezért²⁴⁴ őrizi²⁴⁵ meg,²⁴⁶</i>	6
<i>ki²⁴⁷ nem istene²⁴⁸ és nem papja²⁴⁹</i>	7
<i>se²⁵⁰ magának,²⁵¹ sem senkinek.²⁵²</i>	8

Chiastic structure:

1-4: [k]i-[n]e[k](8)/a[p]-[j]a(9)/e-e(8)/a[p]-[j]a(9)

5-8: a[d]-[j]a(9)/i-e(8)/a[p]-[j]a(9)/[k]i-[n]e[k](8)

²²⁶ obs. ‘adult’

²²⁷ ‘person’

²²⁸ pron. *aki* ‘who’ + attr. poss. *-nek*

²²⁹ *szív* ‘heart’ + poss. ‘his’ *-e* + innes. ‘in’ *-ben*

²³⁰ *anya* ‘mother’ + 3rd pers. sg. single poss. *-(j)a*

²³¹ *apa* ‘father’ + 3rd pers. sg. single poss. *-(j)a*

²³² pron. rel. arch. ‘he who’, alt. *aki*

²³³ vb. *tud* ‘to know’ + 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. def. *-ja*

²³⁴ conj. ‘so that’

²³⁵ *élet* ‘life’ + acc. *-(e)t*

²³⁶ vb. *hal* ‘to die’ + arch. noun-forming *-ál* → ‘death’ + subl. ‘on/for’ *-ra* → ‘to death’

²³⁷ *ráadás* ‘addition/extra’ + essive ‘as/with the intention of’ *-ul*

²³⁸ vb. *kap* ‘to receive’ + 3rd pers. sg. ind. pers. def. *-ja*

²³⁹ ‘like’

²⁴⁰ vb. *talált* ‘to find’ + past part.

²⁴¹ *tárgy* ‘object/thing/subject’ + acc. *-(a)t*

²⁴² vb. *visszaad* ‘to give back’ + 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. def. *-ja*

²⁴³ *bár* ‘any’ + adv. *mikor* ‘when’ → ‘any time’

²⁴⁴ conj. ‘therefore’

²⁴⁵ vb. *őriz* ‘to guard’ + 3rd pers. sg. ind. pres. def. *-i*

²⁴⁶ arch. emph.

²⁴⁷ ‘he who’

²⁴⁸ *isten* ‘god’ + 3rd pers. sg. sing. poss. *-e*

²⁴⁹ *pap* ‘priest’ + 3rd pers. sg. sing. poss. *-(j)a*

²⁵⁰ alt. *sem, sem ..., sem ...* ‘neither ... nor ...’

²⁵¹ pron. refl. 3rd pers. ‘himself’

²⁵² pron. *senki* ‘no one/nobody’

XI

I saw happiness; it was soft, bright	1
and one and half a quintal.	2
On the coarse grass of the farmyard	3
its curly smile swayed.	4
It plopped into the squishy, tepid puddle,	5
squinted, further grunted once at me —	6
To this day I see how hesitantly	7
the sunlight toyed with its bristles.	8

Cursory remark

While this seems a rather descriptive poem, the first and last two verses are subjective. Also the last verse echoes the first, in the fashion of a chiasm: verse 1 is about seeing happiness, and the last features light and playfulness: the Hungarian uses *fény* for 'light', but it could figuratively also mean 'joy', hence my translation: the sunlight toyed'.

French

J'ai vu le bonheur; il était doux, brillant	1
et un quintal et demi.	2
Sur la mauvaise herbe de la cour de ferme	3
son sourire courbé se balançait.	4
Il se laissa tomber dans la marre tiède et spongieuse,	5
plissa ses yeux, puis me grogna une fois —	6
Jusqu'à ce jour, je vois avec quelle hésitation	7
la lumière du jour jouait avec ses poils.	8

Original Hungarian

<i>Láttam</i> ²⁵³ <i>a boldogságot</i> ²⁵⁴ <i>én,</i> ²⁵⁵	1
<i>lány</i> ²⁵⁶ <i>volt,</i> ²⁵⁷ <i>szőke</i> ²⁵⁸ <i>és másfél</i> ²⁵⁹ <i>mázsa.</i> ²⁶⁰	2
<i>Az udvar</i> ²⁶¹ <i>szigorú</i> ²⁶² <i>gyöpén</i> ²⁶³	3
<i>imbolygott</i> ²⁶⁴ <i>göndör</i> ²⁶⁵ <i>mosolygása.</i> ²⁶⁶	4
<i>Ledől</i> ²⁶⁷ <i>a puha,</i> ²⁶⁸ <i>langy</i> ²⁶⁹ <i>tócsába,</i> ²⁷⁰	5
<i>hunyorogott,</i> ²⁷¹ <i>röffen</i> ²⁷² <i>még</i> ²⁷³ <i>felém</i> ²⁷⁴ —	6
<i>ma</i> ²⁷⁵ <i>is</i> ²⁷⁶ <i>látom,</i> ²⁷⁷ <i>mily</i> ²⁷⁸ <i>tétovázva</i> ²⁷⁹	7
<i>babrált</i> ²⁸⁰ <i>pihét</i> ²⁸¹ <i>közt</i> ²⁸² <i>a fény.</i> ²⁸³	8

Chiastic structure:

1-4: o-é(8)/á-a(9)/ö-é(8)/á-a(9)

5-8: á-a(9)/e-é(8)/á-a(9)/a-é(8)

²⁵³ vb. *lát* 'to see' + short base *-t*, 1st pers. sg. past def. *-tam*

²⁵⁴ adj. *boldog* 'happy' + noun-forming *-ság* (state of being) + acc. *-(o)t*

²⁵⁵ pron. 'I'

²⁵⁶ adj. 'soft'

²⁵⁷ vb. *van* 'to be' + 3rd pers. sg. ind. past indef.

²⁵⁸ adj. *sző* 'blonde' + dim. *-ke*

²⁵⁹ *más* 'other/different' + *fél* 'half' → 'one and a half'

²⁶⁰ 'quintal'

²⁶¹ 'yard'

²⁶² adj. 'severe/strict'

²⁶³ *gyep* 'lawn/grass' + super. *-én*

²⁶⁴ vb. *imbolyog* 'to sway' + 3rd pers. sg. single poss. *-e*

²⁶⁵ adj. 'curly'

²⁶⁶ *mosolygása* 'smile' + 3rd pers. sg. single poss. *-e*

²⁶⁷ vb. *ledől* 'to fall down' + 3rd pers. sg. ind. past indef. *-t*

²⁶⁸ 'soft/squishy'

²⁶⁹ arch. poetic *langyos* 'tepid'

²⁷⁰ *tócsa* 'puddle' + illative *-ba* 'into'

²⁷¹ vb. *hunyorog* 'to squint' + 3rd pers. sg. ind. past. indef. *-rgott*

²⁷² *röffen* 'to grunt once (of a pig)'

²⁷³ adv. 'still/moreover'

²⁷⁴ post. *felé* 'to/towards' + 1st pers. sg. poss *-m* → pron. 'towards me'

²⁷⁵ adv. 'today'

²⁷⁶ doublet of *és* 'and', adv. 'also'

²⁷⁷ vb. *lát* 'to see' + 1st pers. sg. ind. pres. def.

²⁷⁸ poetic 'how ...(!)'

²⁷⁹ vb. *tétova* 'to hesitate' (inf. *tétovázik*) → adv. part. 'doing smth hesitantly'

²⁸⁰ vb. *babrált* 'to fiddle'

²⁸¹ *pihe* 'down, fluff' + adj.-forming *-i*

²⁸² post. 'between/amid' from *között*: *köz* 'interval' + loc. *-ött*

²⁸³ 'light/glitter', fig. 'happiness/joy'

XII

I live by a railroad. On it, many a train	I
comes and goes, and I watch from afar	2
how the bright windows fly by	3
in the flickering fluff-darkness.	4

Original Hungarian

<i>Vasútnál lakom. Erre sok</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>vonat jön-megy és el-elnezem,</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>hogy' szállnak fényes ablakok</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>a lengedező szössz-sötétben.</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Így iramlanak örök éjben</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>kivilágított nappalok</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>s én állok minden fülke-fényben,</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>én könyöklök és hallgatok.</i>	<i>8</i>