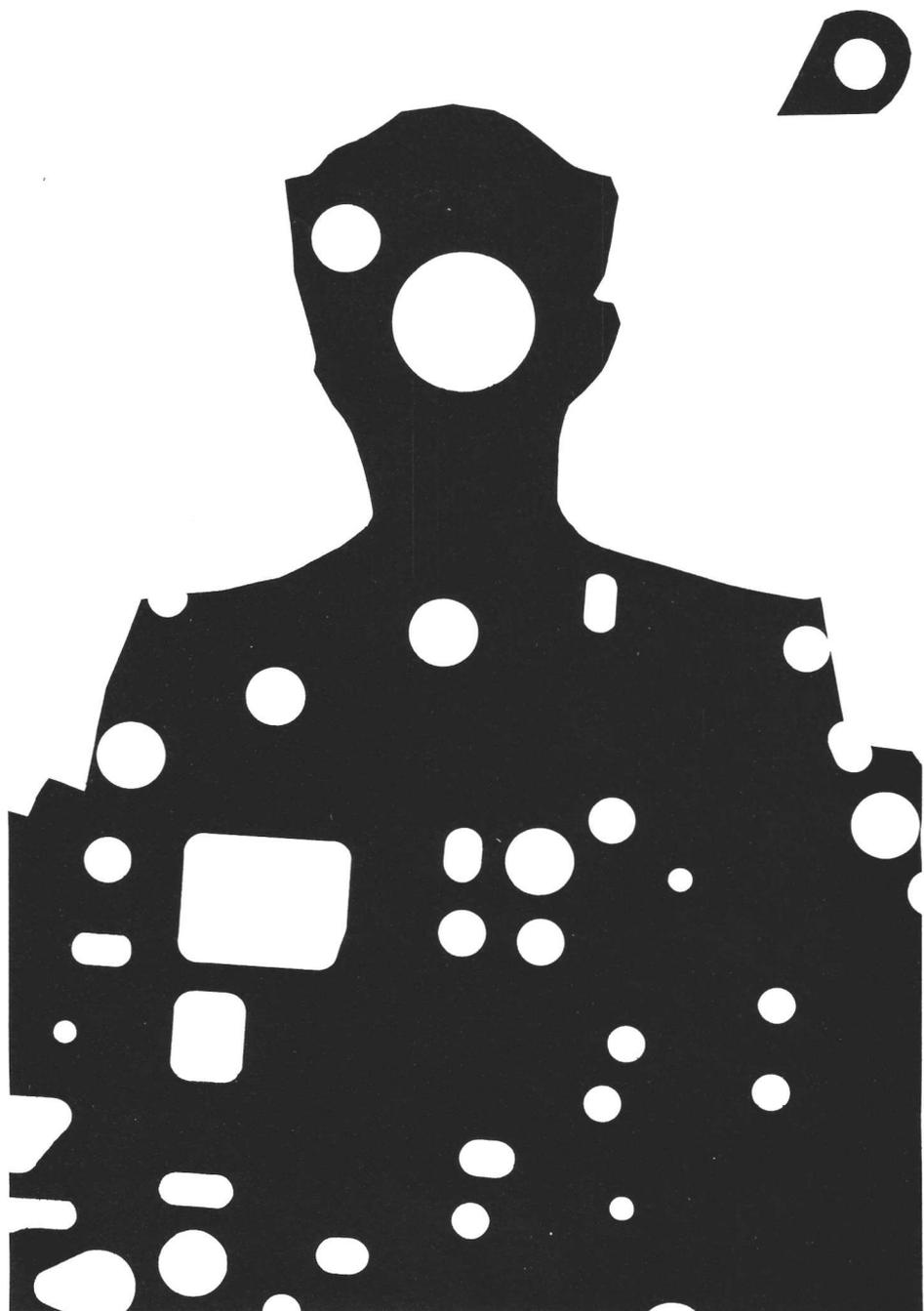




BEYOND LABELS  
ROBERT ZEND



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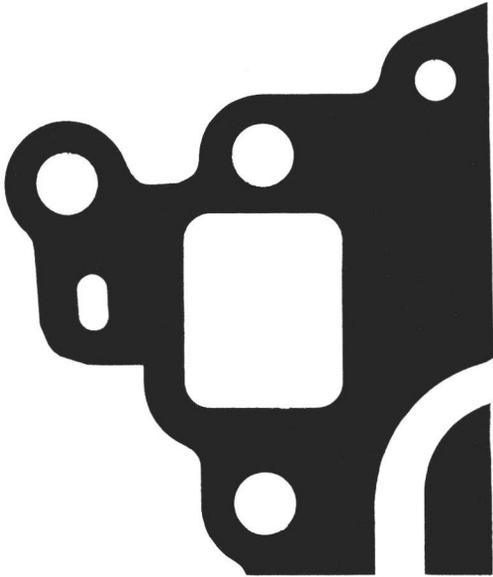
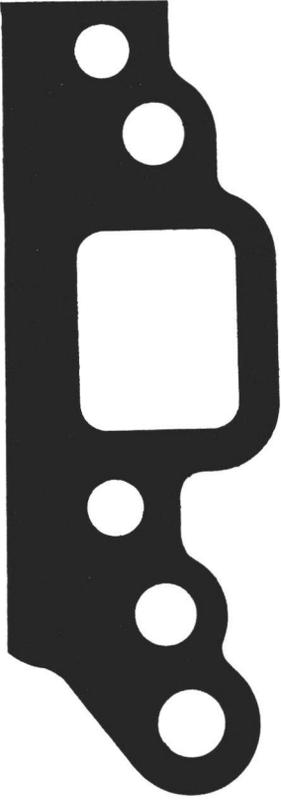
**ALSO BY ROBERT ZEND**

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*My Friend, Jerónimo*, Omnibooks  
*Arbormundi*, Blewointmentpress

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*Oāb*, Exile Editions

*To My Daughter  
Aniko*



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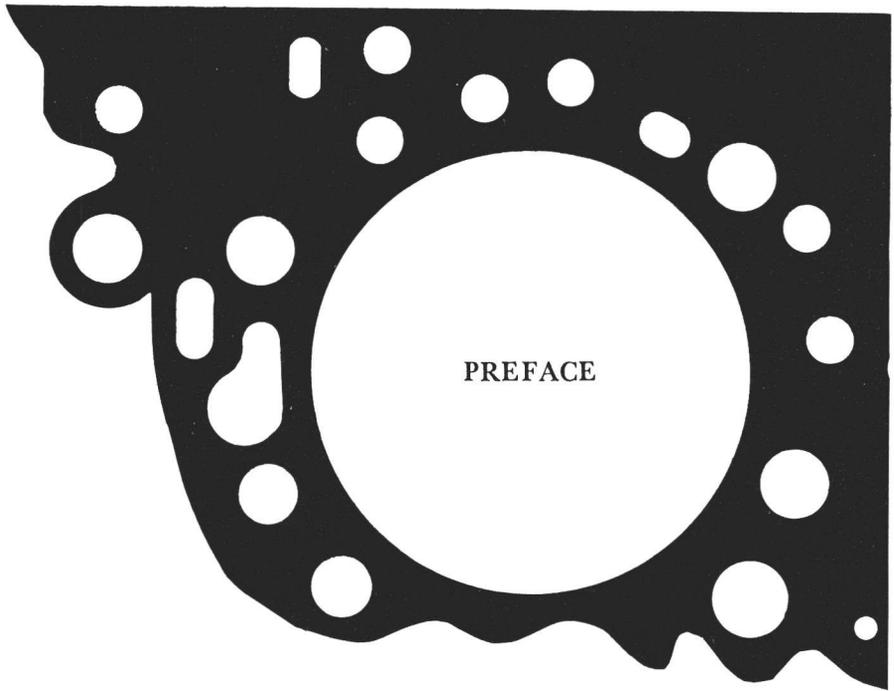
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*A Statement*  
delivered Saturday, October 3, 1981,  
at the Panel Discussion on Exile,  
a Program of the International Writers' Congress,  
"The Writer and Human Rights,"  
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## LABELS

In 1921, two babies were born in a Budapest hospital from two mothers who were in the same room of the maternity ward. One child was Catholic, the other Jewish. Since the two babies were born within the hour, the nurses became so busy that they exchanged them.

Before continuing the story of the two babies, I have to explain how in 1921, unlike a few years later, a Catholic and a Jewish mother could be placed in the same hospital room. This was possible because it happened just three years after the end of the First World War, in which the assimilated Jewry of Hungary fought without any discrimination; it also happened because, in those times, the labels under which people were categorized were so numerous that the amount of hatred fed into the population by the rulers, in order to divide and conquer, had to be distributed into so many directions that the Jews, for the time being, had to settle for a small dosage of hatred — as did the other label-owners, like the ethnic groups living in the country (Serbians, Croatians, Saxonians, Schwabs, Romanians, Valachs, Czechs, Slovaks, Ruthenians, Italians, Gypsies, etc.), or like minority religious groups (Calvinists, Lutherans, Greek Orthodox, Evangelists, etc.), who were all incited against one another. This is the main reason why the swap of the two babies in 1921 was still possible.

About one decade later, when totalitarian governments took power in several countries of Europe, they began simplifying and polarizing the labelling of people. Hatred was no longer divided democratically because, being in a hurry, the radical rulers needed one favourite scapegoat to concentrate on, in order to strengthen by fear their grip on the people, so

they selected the most suitable subjects according to their local needs (like the Communists in Spain, the Capitalists in the Soviet Union, the Jews in Germany, etc.). All labels — whether they were dignifying or humiliating — were meted out to certain groups, not because they did something good or evil, not because they deserved a reward or a punishment for something they did or failed to do, but merely for circumstances beyond their control, for given facts they couldn't help, like having been born into a rich or a poor family, into an Aryan or a Jewish family, and so on. The label-makers of Europe in those years were strongly visual men; they selected colours to go with their labels: thus, the German Nazis wore brown shirts, the Italian Fascists black shirts, the Hungarian Nazis green shirts; the colour of the Communists was red, the Jews were identified by yellow (stars on their chests or bands on their arms). Europe in the 1930s was very much like the Rubik's Cube in the 1980s (the only exception being the colour white on the cube — the symbol of purity and innocence).

When the two babies at the beginning of my story became ten years old, the swap was somehow discovered; but by then neither family was emotionally capable of correcting the error: during a decade the bonds of love had grown unbreakable. While keeping their secret, both the parents and the boys remained close friends, despite the changing times. That's how it happened that when they became young men, the Jewish boy who was labelled as a pure Aryan since birth saved the life of the born-Catholic boy whose freshly gotten label predestined him to be exterminated by the racists of his own race. This story, more forcefully than anything else, proved to me in my early youth the complete senselessness of labelling people according to nationality, place of birth, date of birth, religion, class origin, sex, age, the colour of skin, the colour of hair, the colour of eyes, the length of nose, the number of pimples, or whatever. No matter which boy would have been killed, the Aryan or the Jewish one, according to or in spite of the law of those times, it would have been the criminal murder of an innocent human being.

Among the many Hungarian writers of that age, quite a few kept their integrity. There was one, especially, who wasn't willing to accept any label, either for himself or for others. His name was Frigyes Karinthy. He didn't identify with any group; he belonged nowhere, but this non-belonging meant for him an extremely strong belonging to Man, to Mankind, to Humanity. As a humorist, he was tremendously popular, but as a philosopher he had hardly any followers then. Today, most Hungarians are enthusiastic about his profound ideas. He was (and remains) my spiritual father, the Master who first inspired me to feel, to think, to express myself, to be considerate, to have high ideals, to understand others as if they were me: in other words, to write. At least, that's what it means for me to be a writer. (Of course, it means many other things too, but this is the foundation on which all those other things are built.)



Getting rid of the labels so fashionable in Europe was not the last reason why I left my country in 1956. But the free world didn't deliver me from evil labels. In the first five years I was in limbo because I wasn't a Canadian citizen yet, but I was no longer a Hungarian either. Not a British subject yet, I called myself a British object. Being only a landed immigrant, one day I proclaimed to a new friend of mine in the CBC's shipping department: "We British people should stick together!" For a while, instead of "Good Morning," everybody in the CBC greeted me with this sentence. (Years later, one of my supervisors called me a "bloody Hungarian." Since this incident happened just two weeks after getting my Canadian citizenship, I sent him an office memo in which I requested in the future he call me a "bloody Canadian" instead.) During these years, I couldn't write for English publications because I didn't speak the language, nor could I write for publications in Hungary because, for having illegally left the country, I was considered an enemy.

The only thing I could do was to write for Hungarian ethnic papers in Toronto. But I had to choose from among them,

for each one served a special group in the Hungarian sub-society. One of them was a weekly paper published by and for old Communists who in 1919 fled the so-called White Terror in Hungary, after the defeat of the so-called Red Terror. The readership of another paper consisted mainly of latent Fascists and war criminals who escaped when the Nazis lost the Second World War against the Allies. A third one was geared to the Hungarian-speaking Jewish businessmen who left Hungary when the new Communist state began nationalizing private enterprise. Since I was simply a poet and writer who expressed his thoughts and feelings in his mother-tongue, none of these organs suited my integrity, on the one hand; on the other, they wouldn't have accepted me since I did not match any of their labels. So, for a while, I wrote articles and humoresques for a fourth newspaper, not because I shared its ideology, but because a friend of mine (Andrew Achim), who was an editor of this paper, after almost laughing himself to death upon hearing my funny stories read at my weekly house parties, simply grabbed them and published them, without even asking my permission to do so (which, I admit, quite flattered my artistic vanity). For the sake of fairness, I must note here that during the last quarter of a century all the aforementioned press organs were either dissolved or sold to new owners or they changed their views due to the "melting-pot" boiling within the Hungarian tile of the Canadian "mosaic." (Sorry for the confused image, I hope it's clear.)

Later on, I wrote, drew, designed, edited, laid out and published my own literary monthly magazine which, after about a year, collapsed, partly because it aimed at the general Hungarian-speaking public. This mandate confused my advertisers who — unable to think but in labels — kept asking me: "But tell me, is this magazine for leftists or rightists, for Catholics or Protestants, for Jews or Gendarmes, for junior or senior citizens?" My answer: "For Hungarians," left them in deep quandary. Not the first and not the last time in my life, I realized that I was a misfit. Without the Hungarian labels, I was a Hungarian misfit.

When I approached Canadian publishers with the idea of publishing one or two of my books, first they asked me if I

was a well-known writer or poet in Hungary (which I was not). My pen-name was extremely popular among children for whom I wrote, but I was just about to publish my first book of one hundred poems under my own name by a dissident publishing company when the Revolution broke out, and after its defeat I chose to leave my country rather than publish party-line poetry or publish dissident poetry and be jailed, or deported, or silenced afterwards. In the first years of my exile, I wrote only in my mother tongue, so translation into English was another (if not the greatest) problem.



When several years after the Revolution the Hungarian government realized their need for hard currency, it changed our labels from "Counter-Revolutionary Hooligans" to "Our Beloved Fellow-Country-Men Living Abroad," and opened before us the gates of the Iron Curtain.

During my visits as a tourist in my own country, I tried my best to explore possibilities of publishing my Hungarian works there. The editors, personally, liked my work, but they had a problem labelling me: "If you are a Hungarian poet, why do you live in Canada? If you are a Canadian poet, why do you want to publish in Hungary?" In vain did I try to explain to them that being a poet does not depend on the geographical location of the poet's body, or on the political system under which the publisher functions, but on the linguistic and literary value of the poems. (I have to clarify here that the poems I tried to publish in Hungary were not at all hostile to Hungary; they spoke about the change, the culture shock, the homesickness, about the schizoid emotions of an exile between two worlds. Actually, a writer-friend of mine in Hungary, after reading my work, told me: "You are more of a Hungarian patriot in Canada than we are here, in Hungary.")

One sympathetic publisher finally proposed a compromise to me: "Let's pretend," he said, "that you are a Canadian poet who wrote your poems in English, and we will call the poems we publish in Hungarian the Hungarian translations of your original English poems." "But I cannot lie about this,"

I said, “these are my original Hungarian poems!” “I understand,” he said, “but there is no precedent! We have never done such a thing! We can publish Hungarian poets living in Hungary either in Hungarian or in English translation. We can publish English poets either in English or in Hungarian translation. We can publish the English work of Hungarian poets living in exile, in Hungarian translation. But we have never published the original Hungarian poetry of Hungarian poets living in exile, in Hungarian, in Hungary! We just cannot start a new trend! Try again in two or three years, perhaps the political atmosphere will change by then.” This was the day when I defined for myself what a “misfit” was: “A misfit is a human being who tries to remain a human being despite the surrounding pressure called mankind.”



Although I have been talking in the first person, I know that most poets and writers who have come from behind the Iron Curtain face similar problems. If you are an Italian, a Swedish, a French, or a German author, you can publish your work both in Canada, on one hand, and in Italy, Sweden, France, or Germany (West Germany, I mean), on the other.

If you are a Hungarian, Czech, Bulgarian, Albanian, Polish, East German, etc., author behind the Iron Curtain, you cannot write what you want to write: you have to write what others want you to write.

If you are an exile, you can write what you want to write, but you cannot publish your original work back home, unless it criticizes the country of your exile which gave you shelter and accepted you. Nor can you publish your work written in your mother tongue in exile, unless you can afford to be your own publisher. Let me express here my appreciation to the Multicultural Section of the Secretary of State in Canada which has the power — unlimited politically, but limited financially — to break this rule.

“Are you as famous in Canada as Marshall McLuhan or Glenn Gould?” a publisher asked me in Budapest. His question

was similar to the one asked twenty some years earlier: "Are you well-known in Hungary?" Before you are allowed to enter and enrich the poetry and literature of your own country, of your own language, first you have to make a name for yourself in an alien country; you have to prove that you can speak and write in another language; you have to produce bestsellers for a culture other than that which nourished you from birth: this is what the cultural authorities of your native land demand from you, before even reading the first line of your poem that you wrote in your own (and their own) language. The same "cultural workers" did publish manuscripts written by workers, peasants, and cleaning-ladies who emigrated from Hungary to Canada and didn't make it: these books are called "life-stories" and serve a double purpose: They are useful anti-capitalist propaganda for the population of Hungary and they also prove that they publish books from Hungarians living abroad. Briefly, this is the choice: You must become either a celebrated writer in non-Hungarian or a failure as a non-writer, if you want to be published in Hungary.

It is possible that the greatest living poets and writers of the Iron Curtain countries, the greatest innovators of their languages, live abroad, yet their works are sentenced to oblivion, due to mindless discrimination based on arbitrary and irrelevant criteria.

Such is the unique cross that we carry, which is one not shared by any other kind of artist, only by the handler of the pen. A painter, a sculptor, an architect, a composer, a musician, a dancer, a performer living in exile is *not* banned from the public of the fatherland, perhaps because the label-makers think (and they do think quite erroneously) that their message *can* be interpreted in *many* ways. But a message, clearly expressed by the written word, seems to be too unambiguous to them. If you say something, it means exactly what you said, and therefore it is more dangerous than colours, shapes, melodies, or movements, which are but the symbols of the Word, of Logos.

The cross we carry is unique also because the written word of people living in totalitarian systems can be trans-

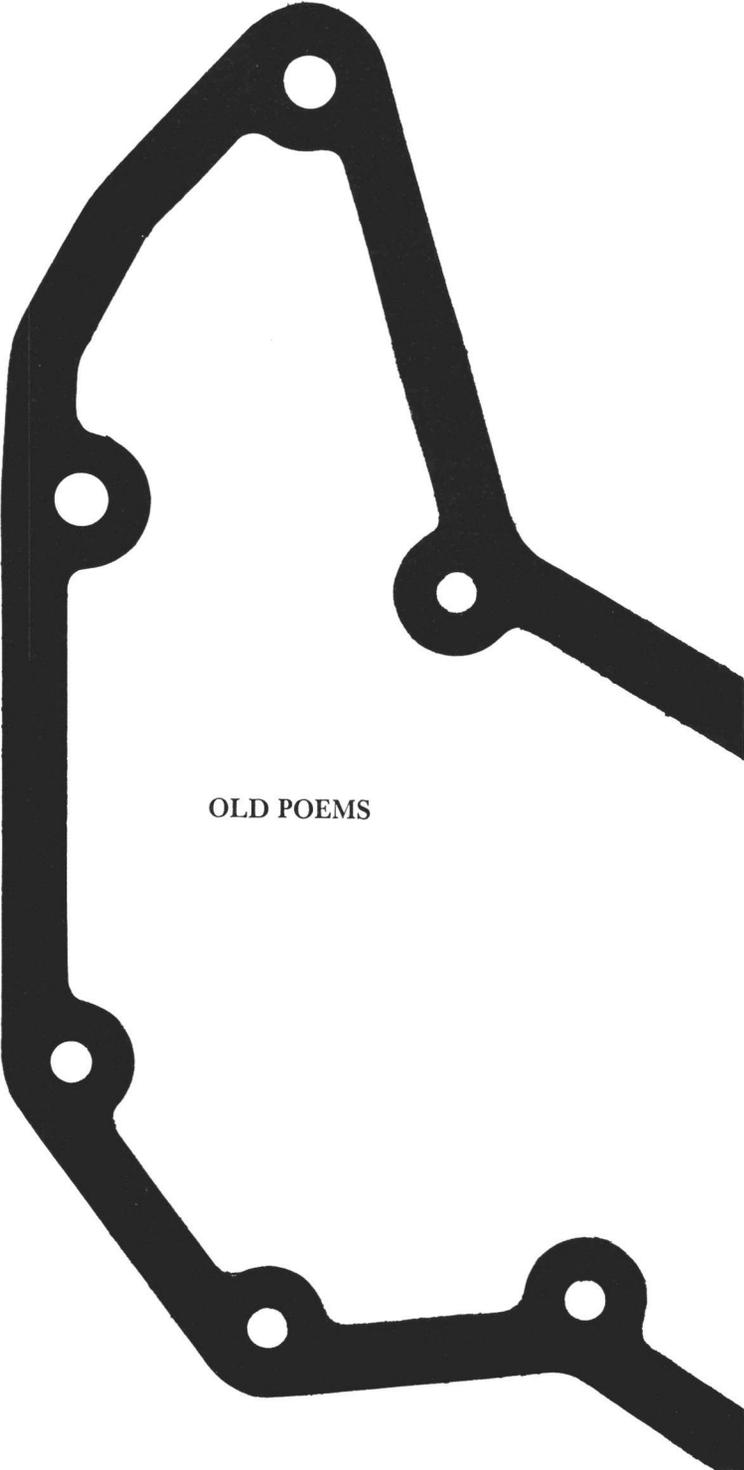
lated into any language of the free world. Democracy is not vengeful: it does not set geographical or political conditions for its publications. There exists a marked imbalance between authors who live in dictatorships being accepted in democracies, on one hand, and authors who live in exile being rejected in dictatorships, on the other.

The righting of this imbalance may be one of the tasks that the Human Rights Commission should deal with, in the future.

Let me finish my short speech with an even shorter poem of mine, which I wrote recently:

In a country  
where everyone  
is searching for  
identity,  
I am  
an alien  
for I'm already  
identical.

October 1, 1980



OLD POEMS

## SOMETHING DIFFERENT

What I want to write  
the way I want to write  
no one has ever written before.

Existence is boring:  
predicate follows subject, children intercourse,  
summer spring, eating hunger,  
day night, endlessly.  
From hydrogen to radium, carbon to man,  
slingshot to rocket, simple to complex,  
matter practises its scales incessantly  
on the space-time piano of the cosmos.

Existence is boring, but possibilities  
are thousands strong;  
Man is less than one.

What I want to write,  
recklessly, stubbornly, hopelessly,  
is what no man has ever thought of,  
what even God hasn't.  
(Once upon a time, a Countess and a Bass Fiddle  
married and had a chubby little Light Bulb)  
(Ingombung, ng-ng rrrrr, aio oia u-u-dnG . . .)  
(The baby had a wrinkled face and a long white beard  
and then began growing younger and younger)  
(The Diary of a Keyhole)  
Scream, dream, trance, tongues,  
tantrum, mantra, madness, miracles,  
help me!  
But how can you, if even you are  
built of the bricks of this world?

Something beautiful?  
Who's interested?  
Something good?  
What's good?  
Something true?  
What for?  
It has to be something new  
that won't grow old the day after tomorrow,  
so super-new  
that it won't grow old-fashioned,  
won't be repeated, won't be understood,  
ever.

Should I extricate myself from the mud of Existentialism,  
I'll just have to step into Essentialism.  
Etaoin Shrdlu!

January 20, 1969

## AMERICA

Here there are no thatched roofs  
on which stork-nets lie low:  
here only silver antennae tower —  
from the Atlantic to the Pacific  
the continent is one single village —  
here, one with a lot of money  
can buy only more money —  
But ask for a street, or happiness  
and no one knows where —

We crossed the fable-ocean to get away from the land  
where there wasn't enough room for us  
in the houses and on the streets —  
where armies every decade changed their shirt colours  
and massacred us again and again —  
where even the trees eavesdropped on us  
whispering behind our backs —  
where at nights what was left of our souls  
kept on trembling in fear —

We escaped here to realize this truth:  
Nowhere is good!  
Two superpowers fight for us, for the people of Earth  
and both are against us!  
It will make little difference  
which one ends up victorious,  
and for what reason  
there is no hope.

April 17, 1968

## LABOUR PAINS

You think I have  
to force myself  
to write a poem every day?

The fisherman doesn't  
have to invent the fish  
he takes from the lake.

I am the state,  
said Louis XIV,  
and like him  
(or unlike him)  
I say:  
I am the poem.

My book is no pool  
made by a dam,  
my book is a lake  
made by a river.

Imagine the labour-  
pains of a woman  
who gives birth to children every day . . .  
Believe me, being constantly pregnant  
with unwritten poems  
isn't love play.

January 12, 1967



## ABOUT SOULS

Souls? Why write about souls?  
A man can snuff out a soul.  
A planet can snuff out a man.  
An atom can snuff out a planet.  
An atom. A tiny errant atom.  
Souls? Why write about souls?

April 17, 1969

## SHARP

I dig  
the cactus  
for its  
humour

April 13, 1968

## MAN-MADE SATELLITE

*for Isaac Asimov*

That summer lasted a million years,  
we thought it would last forever,  
above us the Sphere  
gave off sparks and glowed all over,  
it sped around and courted the Earth  
and the Earth returned its love  
by teeming with tendrils,  
by turning its barren fields into jungles —  
giant beings rose up,  
water, land, air  
bubbled, broke, blew —  
the landscape turned into a garden,  
a paradise of golden heat —  
we came down from the trees  
and lay about in the clearings,  
our muscles unclenched,  
our eyelids fell over our eyes,  
our sense of smell diminished,  
our fur wore off our skin —  
that summer lasted a million years  
and we, living through it,  
thought it would last forever —

Then came the fall —  
forebodings appeared in the sky —  
a comet crossed over the horizon —  
glaciers began to inch along —  
the lava deep below began to murmur —  
snow-capped mountains suddenly thrust up —

tornadoes churned up the waters –  
an armada of waves sailed away –  
the bands of the aurora borealis  
lost their way and staggered across the heavens –  
a curtain of silver rain came down for a thousand years –  
dusk fell over everything –  
and we were cold.

In the swamps the immense bodies of reptiles,  
conceived during the summer, rotted away –  
thick trees with drooping leaves crashed –  
and we were cold.

The small, the fast, the long crawling creatures survived –  
the nibbling dwarf-reptiles survived –  
the hairy and furry mammals survived –  
the grasslands, the steppes, the tundra and scrublands survived –  
the predators with flexible jaws survived –  
the fleet of foot and the sharp of eye survived –  
those who crawled underground survived –  
and we were cold,

and we were soaked,  
we were naked and hairless  
with our puny arms and spindly legs,  
with our receding noses and eyes and ears,  
even our strongest ones shivered and starved –  
we longed for the old days,  
we searched in vain for the lost gold and heat,  
scheming our revenge against the fittest.  
Straddling them, we rode the wild stallions,  
the wolf gave us back our sense of smell:  
we domesticated him to sniff for us,  
we commanded the tall waving grasses to stand  
at attention and yield us bread,  
we subdued the wild bull with our yoke,  
we forced the sharp-taloned falcon to hunt for us,  
we carved the mammoth's tusk into a lance  
and thrust it through the heart of the tiger,  
we left in the beehive just enough honey  
for the bees to feed their young  
so their young could feed our young,

we impaled the lamb to trap the lion.  
We let the strong ones fight it out,  
we, the weak ones!  
We clothed ourselves with the fur of sheep,  
we, the shivering ones!  
Yes, we bound their legs into sheaves  
and manufactured spokes for our wheels,  
we, the slow ones!  
Yes, we even harnessed the winds and the waves  
to drive our mills,  
we, the lazy ones!  
Yes, we even stole the lightning from the sky  
and struck fire,  
we, the orphans of the sun!  
And we recreated the wings of the birds,  
we, the worms of the earth!  
And we hammered iron to form  
the lungs of the fish  
and buckled them onto our backs,  
we, the drowning ones!

By now, all the ancient animals are out of date  
and there are no more modern ones still to be tamed,  
so we created a new animal, one that never lived.  
Look over here, God! — This man-made creature  
will soar higher than the golden eagle,  
will scrutinize the stars better than our squinting eyes,  
will eavesdrop on the other hemisphere of our globe  
and keep us informed better than our ears,  
will spy on the approach of your clouds and rains and winds  
and report their movements to our minds better than our senses,  
will time the supernovae better than our brains,  
will stop the arrows of our foes better than our skin!  
This new animal will be more a horse than a horse,  
more a dog than a dog,  
more a falcon than a falcon,  
more a mammoth than a mammoth!  
It will be better than the senses  
that you created and we used!

It will be more an animal  
than any you created and we tamed!

There it soars and returns  
into the very corners of your immense domain,  
this man-made satellite  
created on the Eighth Day of Creation, by the sickly ape.  
It rises,  
revolves and rotates,  
sees all things,  
has no hair, yet it's not cold,  
has no muscle, yet moves ahead,  
it takes our eyes, ears, hands, feet, brains  
along with it into interstellar space  
and expands  
and multiplies  
and for a thousand generations, we shall bless its seeds:  
It will carry within it from this planet  
our small, miserable, naked, helpless bodies  
when winter returns  
to kill even the hardest of small survivors;  
it will carry off our mortal bodies to a new land  
so we can talk with the inhabitants of other solar systems,  
so we can populate the still-uninhabited galaxies  
with our everlasting human race . . .

. . . so we might regain once again that ancient garden  
and that ancient summer might last forever.

November 2, 1963

## ELEVEN YEARS IN ELEVEN LINES

“I must have dialed the wrong number,”  
she said, apologizing,  
but he surprised her by replying: “How do you know?”  
and carried the conversation for a while,

he took a fancy to her voice,  
made a date,  
met her once,  
then once more,

and, after a few months, he married her  
only to realize after a few years,  
how right she was in the beginning.

May 7, 1969

## FIRST PERSON

When I talk about myself,  
I talk about you, too.

August 9, 1972

## TWO TIMES TOO

A man can be too young to die.  
A man can be too young to be born.

No man can be too old to die.  
No man can be too old to be born.

April 4, 1969

## THE DIFFERENCE

The pseudo-poet uses the medium  
of poetry to speak;  
the true poet is used as a medium  
through whom poetry speaks.

March 3, 1982

## DEPARTURE BY ARRIVAL

I met her once.  
Soon after she left the city  
and I was sad.

I missed the dazzling fireworks,  
the baroque arabesques,  
the sparkling soap-bubbles,  
the purple shadow across an El Greco-like painting,  
the brilliant patterns of a peacock-tail,  
the fragrance of lilacs,  
    all which seemed to hide behind  
    the secretive curtain of her velvet smile . . .

Some months later she came back to the city for a day  
and when she left again, I knew  
that her smile wasn't a curtain,  
but a mural.

January 13, 1967

### THIS HAIKU

This haiku is a  
rainbow arching in the sky,  
starting at my heart.

April 3, 1969

### THE MAGELLAN PARADOX

The dot approaches  
by going away:  
space is curved.

April 3, 1969

### SUNSET

The glory-gold  
is turned blood-red  
in the atmosphere of Man's Earth.

April 3, 1969

## PERHAPS

Perhaps somewhere we all are one,  
you and I  
and the cats  
and the storm and yellow  
and the pinetrees and God  
only none of us remembers.

The alarm-clock is ringing  
somewhere far away  
while whoever was and will be I  
dreams us legion.

But recently — have you noticed ? —  
it all began dissolving.

October 12, 1967

## DEAD END

No salvation in heaven.  
No happiness on earth.  
No heaven after death.  
No rebirth after earth.

The question is: Why not?  
The answer is: Why yes?

May 16, 1969

## A GERMAN LADY PREPARES FOR BED

She hangs up her dress neatly so it won't wrinkle through the night,  
removes her hair-pins one by one so they won't prick her scalp,  
slips into her summer-cool, winter-warm silk pyjamas,  
puts on her glasses so she could see better her fuzzy dreams

February 14, 1968

## A LOVE LETTER

Someone seeks being.

We say, No.

Someone struggles to become. We say, No.

Someone daydreams in our eyes. Someone drums with our fingers. Someone itches our mouths. Someone throbs in our groins. We say, No.

Someone knocks on our doors, raps on our windows, hammers on our walls.

Inside the warm nest of our inertia and habits and comfort and superstitions, we do not budge. We, the murderers.

Someone out there is freezing on the snow-fields of white non-existence.

February 7, 1963

QUADRANGLE

*for Lilian Schulze*

A beautiful young couple  
stood us up last night  
they were invited for dinner  
but forgot to come

This morning the man  
sent a box of chocolates  
to my wife as a sign  
of his apology

When the first chocolates  
melted in my mouth  
I was no longer  
so mad at the woman

October 15, 1967

## THE GOLDEN RULES

*for George Jonas*

As my age grows, so does my scope.  
When I am old — I truly hope —  
infinite wisdom shall fill my  
mind. (Here I need a rhyme . . . but right now  
I'm too busy to look for one.)

Part of this wisdom, I dare say,  
already fills my mind today.  
I know it's not yet infinite,  
but I share with you some of it:

Keep your arms down  
while washing your hands  
(unless you also wish  
to rinse your arm-pits).

In this world, chairs mostly stand on four legs.  
Ideally these should be of equal length.  
(The same is true of mammals too.)

A radio must have a strong voice.  
This principle is not valid for a wife.  
(The former can be turned off.)

It's good to be born in a rich country,  
or to be born rich, in a poor country,  
yet it's best not to be born at all,  
(alas, this happens hardly at all).

In fat countries, it's healthy to be skinny;  
in skinny countries, it's healthy to be fat.

If you smoke a lot,  
you may die of a heart attack.  
If you stop smoking,  
you may die of a car accident.  
If you smoke or stop smoking,  
you may die.  
One thing is sure: you better drive a car,  
if you don't want to be run over by a car.

You can arrive late to the movie, if it's continuous,  
but if you do so, you must avoid the last show.

Killing is forbidden. That's a basic rule.  
Sometimes you must. If there is a war. And there often is.  
If you do kill (or don't), you can be sent to prison.  
Your principle about killing should be: Avoid prison.

Another important golden rule is:  
every day make sure the pictures on the walls are straight.

If you are painting a fresco on a church-ceiling  
and want to go for lunch,  
don't forget to climb down the ladder first.

It's desirable to have plenty of  
that shining silver or filthy green stuff.

Don't talk too loud while drinking water.

If you don't walk all over others,  
others will walk all over you;  
either experience may be enjoyable,  
depending on your religion.

If you have a heart condition,  
don't travel in countries where there's a revolution,  
because a bullet in your heart  
may worsen your heart condition.

A bouquet of red roses you give a woman  
has a symbolic meaning.  
It means that she wants you to make love to her.

If you hate people, study dolphins  
for dolphins are known to like people  
(it would be worthwhile to understand why).  
Perhaps this is all that's behind the rumour  
that dolphins are highly intelligent.

Cursed is he who understands  
that blessed are the poor in heart.

You may drive fast,  
but never faster  
than the car ahead of you.

When the sun is shining,  
use suntan lotion,  
but be sure to remove your shirt first;  
narrow the lens-opening of your camera  
in case it is not sunbathing you want.

Soup goes faster with a spoon.

Until they arrange charter flights to the moon,  
practising high-jumping mustn't be neglected.

If you want to be a modern poet  
in Europe, write free verse;  
in America, write rhyming verse.  
Be aware of your whereabouts

before starting to write.  
In Europe or in America,  
it's better not to write at all.

Right now, no more golden rules come to mind.  
In Israel, you likely type from right to left —  
I have to investigate that one.  
(China, anyone?)

As my age grows, so does my scope.  
In my old age, I truly hope:  
infinite wisdom fills my mind  
about the purpose of mankind. (Rhyme! — Hurray!)

April 27, 1968

## THE LINE RUNS ON

*for Saul Steinberg*

the line runs on the line runs on the line runs on the line runs  
on now it's the top of a table upon which a plate a cup a salt-  
shaker and a peppershaker are resting the line runs on now it's  
the ground out of which a house grows out the line runs on  
now it's the smooth surface of a lake with a tree below and  
above the line runs on now a bookshelf the line runs on now  
a graph the line runs on now a thread holding a button to a  
thimble finger the line runs on now the tracks under a train  
runs on now it's a sheet of paper which a pencil skates across  
the line runs on now it's a wire connecting two houses shirts  
and socks and underpants hang to dry on the cloth line runs  
on between two steps to become first a ceiling then a floor and  
the line runs on to scribble the signature of the artist Steinberg

April 3, 1969

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my friends  
for making me what they are.

I am grateful to my enemies  
for making me what they are not.

I find in every person  
a friend and an enemy.

March 3, 1982

## JINN

Did you ever realize  
that within  
every little book of matches  
twenty forest fires lurk?

January 11, 1967

## DIALOGUE FOR ONE VOICE

Please, let me sit down, I tell myself.  
Now that I am finally alone,  
I'd like a quiet, cozy conversation with myself.

Why are other people so important?  
Why can't I sleep? Why am I so nervous?  
Can I explain why? No, I can't.

When I think it over,  
I come to the conclusion  
that people come in two kinds:  
some are like this, others like that,  
and both kinds will once die. So what's the problem?

But while they are alive?  
If they do talk, *it* doesn't matter.  
If they don't talk, *they* do not matter.

What's important then? Things? Thoughts?  
Neither. I'll be dead, too.  
But while I'm still living?  
If I do think, *it* doesn't matter.  
If I don't think, *I* don't matter. Well?

Posterity? Not really. In twenty-five years' time,  
the future generation will be, like us,  
the present one.  
What difference does it all make?

My only happiness comes from writing

about my unhappiness. Isn't that something?  
It is, but does it make life worthwhile?

I just keep going because I keep thinking  
(perhaps foolishly) that it's better to feel bad  
than to feel nothing at all  
when I am nothing at all.  
What's left?

When I fell asleep this afternoon, I came apart,  
and from below I watched  
all the fireworks going off inside my head.  
It was a delightful experience. That's one.

Being with my young child is magnificent.  
That's two.

Basking in the sun is marvellous. That's three.

Too bad I have to do other things  
for days, for weeks, for years on end.

April 27, 1968

## FROM AN UNWRITTEN DIARY

At noon today I walked along "our" street —  
I was there on business —  
The church steps were still grey —  
The policewoman waved the same way as then —  
The same people were passing under the scaffold —  
The mannikin in the window still wore her plastic smile —  
But this time you weren't walking beside me —  
Nor was I holding your hand —  
Nor did your gaze meet mine —  
A sadness came over me —  
I turned my head and asked your absence:  
Do you remember, my sweet little . . . ?  
No reply —  
There was only the sound of a waterfall far away —  
Or a melancholy bell tolling —  
Slowly, inaudibly —

December 20, 1963

## UNIVERSAL GRIEF

*for Filippo Spartano*

Studying the literature of past centuries  
(each of which sheltered a cluster of poets  
and writers and philosophers of many nations,  
their number totalling almost a thousand)  
I felt like crying, I was so sorry for them,  
for no matter how many they were, and no matter  
how the poor souls tried to think and feel and describe  
and express themselves through the centuries,  
they still couldn't add, not even one iota,  
to what I have thought and felt and described  
and expressed through my short years. . . .

April 17, 1969

## ATTITUDE

Life's easier for the dreamer,  
if he has a sense of humour.

January 4, 1962

## THE PRECEPT

I am boiling with being,  
it never dies down,  
like the penny in the magic purse,  
I spend it and it's always there.

The million-faced, boiling, great orb in heaven  
hurdles its parcels onto the earth,  
the earth unties them and distributes their contents,  
these are the precepts I receive incessantly:

“Hold yourself together as long as possible!  
Mend the holes of your body  
so that the gift I once gave you won't evaporate,  
or be blown away by the winds!

“Keep warm and cover, hatch and multiply  
the carriers of your own face!  
Should everyone perish, be enough, you alone,  
to populate the fields and the woods and the mountains!”

Being is boiling, boiling in me,  
it bangs on my walls and my gates within.  
I understand your precepts, sun-goddess-mother:  
I won't waste the treasure you bequeathed to me.

January 27, 1964

## WHAT IT IS TO LOVE

When we are in love,  
we love to make love  
because many love-makings  
extinguish our love,  
freeing our captured hearts  
for new loves to come.

Loving someone  
is a preparation  
for loving the next one.

August 25 1967

## A THREE-WORD DEFINITION OF LOVE

Indescribably  
sweet  
suffering.

April 3, 1969

## NOTHING

I want to write about Nothing.  
This is not the same as saying:  
There is nothing I want to write about.

I want to write about Nothing  
because I've always written about something  
and now I need a change.

So far everyone has been writing about something,  
and all the time I've been just imitating them.  
Now I will write about Nothing.

Everywhere there is something.  
Only Nothing is nowhere.  
I want to grasp that Nothing.

Nothing doesn't exist, except in my mind,  
but since there is something in my mind all the time,  
and Nothing itself isn't, it's only a word.

Nothing is interesting, isn't it?  
I wrote a lot about it already, didn't I?  
A lot more can be said about Nothing.

Where is Nothing then? Nothing is where  
something isn't, but where something isn't,  
something else is, so Nothing can't be there.

That elephant, for instance, which doesn't stand  
where I am lying, on the sofa,  
is Nothing like an elephant, but something else like me.

Julius Caesar is also Nothing today:  
he isn't sitting where you are sitting while  
reading this poem, but you are something.

These are all Nothings, and beside them  
there are many other Nothings. Whatever could have been  
but has not become is Nothing.

Yet something appeared in its place.

Things that have ceased to be aren't Nothings either.  
People usually mistake them for Nothing.  
Whatever was exists now somehow.

My grandfather, for instance, did not become Nothing.  
He exists in memory, in yellowed photographs,  
his atoms are hurled by the whirlpools of Space.

The same is true for whatever will be.  
By merely being,  
you are building the twenty-first century.

When I utter the word: Nothing, I mean something by it;  
when you hear my word:

Nothing, it makes you think of something:  
we have "Nothing" in common now,  
so we have something in common.

I may write down the word: Nothing, but that too is something:  
blue lines on white paper reflected in your eyes,  
interpreted as something by the grey cells of your brain.

Modern science imagines Space as a bottomless lake of Nothing  
in which worlds like fish swim, but no thing can swim in Nothing:  
Modern science is rubbish.

There's something in Space, not Nothing.  
Sometimes the jammed energies of this something  
explode into new universes.

Summing it all up, I would define Nothing  
as the only thing that never did, never does  
and never will exist.

Naturally, you think I said nothing in this poem.  
But I said something. Not everything.  
Nothing is everything. Everything is just something.

April 10, 1968

SONNET LXIX

O  
o  
o  
o

O  
o  
o  
o

O  
o  
o  
o

Oh  
Oh

April 27, 1968

## PRELUDE AND FUGUE

*for Janine*

### **Prelude:**

If I don't set pen to paper now, the pain remains within me:  
by letting the blue flow onto the paper,  
hopefully I won't be blue.

### **Fugue:**

I wrote a poem to A(mbrosios),  
I read it to B(elinda),  
then gave it to A(mbrosios)  
who showed it to C(ameleon)  
who mentioned it to D(olores).

I didn't really like what I had written about A(mbrosios),  
but B(elinda) wept when I read it aloud,  
that's why I gave it to A(mbrosios) because B(elinda) wept.  
C(ameleon) liked the content but didn't like the form  
and told this to D(olores) who didn't read my poem at all.

D(olores) told A(mbrosios)  
that she, D(ol.) and her husband, C(am.)  
didn't like what I had written about him;  
A(mbrosios) told B(elinda) that he, A(mbr.) agreed  
with C(amel.) and D(olor.), and after he said this,  
even B(elind.) agreed with A(mbros.).

Belinda told me that A(m.) B(e.) C(a.) D(o.)  
disliked what I wrote about A(mb.)  
but expected me to be surprised,  
me who showed my poem to A(mbros.) and C(amel.)

only because B(elind.) had weeped,  
and despite that I, myself, disliked it.

Now everyone agrees with me,  
but I don't agree with anyone  
because they don't know that I dislike what I wrote,  
so they just think that they disagree with me.

I didn't agree with B(elinda)  
when she wept  
because I didn't like what I wrote —  
I don't even now agree with B(elinda)  
when her tears froze into criticism,  
neither one seems right —  
B(elinda) wept for only one reason:  
she believed that ACD (Ambro-Came-Dolo) will also weep,  
but when ACD didn't like what I had written,  
B. too decided to dislike what I had written.

I can't agree with D(olores),  
she never read what I had written.

I don't agree with A(mbrosios)  
because he didn't tell me what bothered him about the form;  
he couldn't talk due to the tears  
caused by the content of my poem about him.

With C(ameleon) I fully agree:  
we both dislike what I had written.

According to B(elinda)  
CD (ameleon-olores) were surprised  
that I had such deep feelings,  
as the content had proved,  
but A(mbrosios), who is a poet, cannot see past the form.

I agree with A(mbrosios), (I said to B(elinda)),  
but I have an excellent excuse:  
A(mbrosios) used to use that form  
and writing about A(mbrosios), after reading his book,

I just couldn't shake it off, although it was alien to me,  
and this was my main reason to dislike what I had written  
until you B(elinda), I said to B(elinda),  
started to weep.

B(elinda) replied  
that CD (amel-olor) thought so far  
that I was a heartless and cold man  
which (according to B(elinda)) was true,  
but from the content they were able to see now  
that I was a warm-hearted man  
which (according to B(elinda)) was true.

You're contradicting yourself,  
(I told B(elinda)),  
Not at all (replied B(elinda)):  
You're always warm with others,  
only with me were you cold and heartless  
while I was your mistress and when you broke up with me . . .  
(said B(elinda) with a bitter smile).

My former mistress B(elinda) is now with E(benezer)  
who is friends with A(mbrosios) and C(ameleon),  
and D(olores) is C(ameleon)'s wife.  
Why do ABCDE feel  
that I am cold and heartless?  
D feels this because her husband C feels this.  
C feels this because his friend E feels this.  
E feels this because his mistress (my ex-mistress) B feels this.  
A feels this because his friend E feels this.  
I don't feel this because I don't feel this.

If I were cold and heartless,  
I wouldn't have written poems for twenty years,  
out of my supersensitive heart,  
but even if I wrote them,  
I shouldn't have showed them to my former mistress  
who has split into five persons now;  
I should have shown them only to F(rançoise)  
who married me because she felt

that I was a man with heart,  
although she didn't know too much about poetry.

**Coda:**

ABCDE, please, try to learn about art:  
The hide and the heart are not the same part.

April 27, 1968



## GOD DEAD?

God has not died,  
only his name  
which was confused  
with the sun  
and thunder  
and destiny  
and victory  
and genesis  
and love  
and law  
and wisdom  
and fatherhood  
begins to fall apart  
into electricity  
and strategy  
and astronomy  
and historical materialism  
and extrasensory perception  
and psychoanalysis  
and the theory of probability –  
only his name  
disintegrates.

God has not died  
because he never lived.

January 13, 1967

## ENIGMA

Humans on planet earth,  
we have translated everything  
into the language of our senses.

But we  
remained  
untranslated.

Minerals  
trees  
water  
stars  
germs  
beams of light  
stare at us incredulously.

We puzzle them.

January 10, 1967

## MINDSCAPE

Thunder before lightning —  
Falls the wind —  
Blows the rain —  
My brain-storm rages  
across the livid landscape —  
Sunshine on starlight —  
The Fifth Season —

May 7, 1969

## WHAT THE POET IS

The poet is a wos  
(a sow backward)  
feeding on trash,  
emptying food

January 9, 1967

## PSALM

*for Northrop Frye*

1. God, for ages I did not know you – I never believed the pious gossip about you – I never listened to the childish fairy tales – and I was right, for now I know you.

2. You are the rosy smile of my child – and that which preceded it – and that which remains after it has disappeared.

3. You are the feverish fusing of bodies – the desire before and the satisfaction after – you are what changed into lust into love into pain – and you still remain what you always have been.

4. You are the hatred in my heart – against those who cut through my circles – and that which was before this hatred – and that which remains untouched by its flames.

5. You are this pair of scissors on my desk – and the cigarette I am smoking – and the paper and the pen and even this poem – you allowed all of these to spring forth from you – and yet you are not diminished.

6. You are the totality of galaxies that keeps a zillion solar systems hurtling within them – you are the prime nebula, their source – you are void itself which condensed into that prime nebula – and you, the idea of that void – you are the specks of dust drifting into my nostrils – you, the world without me and the worlds within me – but you are also beyond.

7. You are space and time – this cosmos is perhaps the vaguest of your thoughts – but while you metamorphose into something else – space and time remain – and you are both what they were and what they become – and also something more.

8. You are entropy which goes from hot to cold – from movement to stillness – from smoothness to roughness – from brightness to darkness – and while advancing, you are adventurous – leaving nothing to chance in your numberless changes – you are youthfulness which is aging – but as you are born and living and dying – you remain ever-young, ever-old – for all the ages are like changing cells – in your ageless body which remains unchanged.

9. You are the number One – which becomes two and three and ten – and a hundred and a million and all the fractions and all the waves – you are also the One made up of millions – the nothing as well as infinity – the mother as well as the children of One – you are the twig and the branch and the bough – the leaf and the bud and the flower – the seed and the trunk – and you are the tree.

10. Now I know you, God: – you are possibility itself – the main theme followed by endless variations – sighing lovers, thunderstorms, wandering clouds, expanding universes, whining puppies, flickering moonlight, giggling babies, exploding volcanoes, grains of sand, alternating sunspots – you are the possibility with a thousand faces – all that exists are your grimaces – but your face is one.

11. Oh, how many words I have spoken and written so far – throughout the minute eternity which I call my life – how many loves I have stormed through – how many nights I have spent with heated discussions – how many thoughts have dashed through my brain – how much laughter I provoked and how many games I invented – how many letters I wrote to how many friends – how many blades of grass I trampled upon – how many paintings and stars I saw with my eyes – how many voices and melodies I heard with my ears!

12. Has everything fallen into the stream of the past? – will even the future fall into it? – will everything fall through the sieve of time and be swept away tracelessly by the storm of your change? – will even I fall through the sieve of time and not be saved even as a memory or a fossil?

13. Answer me, God, will even I – who was and is a god unto himself – a predetermined unfolding of endless possibilities through chains of coincidences – my poems like grimaces – my words and sentences like twigs and branches – my deeds like so many changes in colour – will even I be swept away by the wind of your law – and freeze into nothingness, nowhere, neverness?

14. I am hearing the swell of a great organ – your voice rising out of the ground – resounding from the far corners of the world:

15. “Divine mote of dust, do not fear! – Spark on a sea of fire, do not worry! – You will forget everything and wake in me! – I will remember everything and you shall be me – I who was – I who am – I who will be – from time immemorial – through the eternity-long instances – until the end of time – everywhere, every beginning and every amen!”

January 18, 1964

## UNTITLED

One day  
you will realize that tomorrow  
will be like today and today is  
like yesterday.

Tomorrow  
a beautiful blonde will await you.  
The Nobel Prize will be yours.  
A space ship will make you  
the first man on Mars.  
You yawn.

The heart pains.  
With studying, loving, travelling,  
games, inventions, poems  
you try to chase the pain away.  
Yet, the pain remains.

You've experienced everything:  
feverish discussions all night long with friends,  
the delight of storming strange bodies in bed,  
the flood of fatherly love,  
the joy of reunions,  
oh, yes —  
fame, success, money . . .  
yes, yes,  
and . . . ?

What would make you happy?  
Death? No. Nothing after . . .  
Life after death? No. A life is just a life . . .  
Reincarnation? Maybe,  
but on one condition:  
That I may forget everything. . . .

April 18, 1969

## A MEMORY

Once, at fifteen,  
I made my poor,  
    old dad so mad at me

that he chased me  
around the table  
    till I caught him, finally.

April 17, 1967

## THE COUNSEL

The wise monk said: "Call God,  
if the maze of life makes you dizzy!"  
I tried to follow his advice,  
but the line was always busy.

January 2, 1962

## PEOPLE

People have one thing in common:  
They are all different.

December 5, 1973

## TO A WORKAHOLIC

Don't always hurry! Slow down.  
You can't run away, anyway,  
from the present moment.

March 3, 1982

## UTOPIA

There are two kinds of freedom:  
not to serve others,  
and not to be served by others.

February 5, 1964

## LOST

Somewhere a god is bending over a planet  
and tears are running down his cheeks —  
how many good-evil,  
beautiful-ugly, funny-serious,  
tall-short, fat-skinny, blonde-brunette,  
male-female, old-young  
of his progeny, all of them born from his breath,  
were burnt and trampled upon and smashed  
by his naughty, immature, careless, heedless,  
dark arch-enemy, ever-present Satan —  
each one of them a portion of his eternal life,  
which, behold, is now as full of holes  
as a piece of Emmentaler . . .  
to find all the pieces? Space has no floor —  
To plaster them together? Foreign matter can't cement them —  
To recreate them? No supergod could do it —  
therefore,  
he tries to remember them all  
while tears are running down his cheeks. . . .

January 20, 1969

## MENE, TEKEL

Floods,  
earthquakes,  
volcanic eruptions,  
hurricanes,  
forest fires,  
epidemics,  
pollutions,  
wars,  
murders,  
suicides

are like the handwriting on the wall  
which we cannot read:

We are parasites on the body of planet earth,  
these are the ways it scratches and twitches.  
We are not welcome here.

January 14, 1967

## THE TWILIGHT PEOPLE

They never do what they say,  
never say what they mean,  
never mean what they show,  
never show what they are.

Behind their bright faces there's a blight.  
Their anger sneaks through in whispers.  
When they want to kill you,  
    they light your cigarette for you.  
Without the warmth of their mothers' wombs around them,  
    without the firmness of their fathers' hands holding theirs,  
    they will warmly and firmly protect you.

The twilight people will hurt you  
    when they have to be grateful to you.  
Unpredictably they will help you  
    and bitterly regret it while doing it.  
They will think you rude, should you not feign amazement  
    at the treasures of their castles in the sky.  
They will trample all over you, should you let them —  
    and if you don't let them,  
    they will trample all over you, behind your back.

Yes, they have been hurt by life —  
yes, they suffer —  
and life is not long enough  
    to repay the pain —  
and mankind is not generous enough  
    to comfort them as often as they need it —  
and the Earth is not powerful enough

to avenge the crime that conceived them –  
and fate has not enough mercy to snuff out  
their unloved, unneeded souls –

Do you want to know what the twilight people are?  
They are the word “suicide” on the lips of our race.

Try not to hate them.  
It's true it would have been better all around,  
especially for them,  
if they hadn't been born.  
But since they are here,  
just feel remorse for them in your heart  
and ignore them  
(but not too noticeably).

March 18, 1969

## AN EPISTLE TO LEOPARDI

*for Professor M.W. Ukas*

I am reading your poems, Giacomo:  
you pondered the problem of death,  
so I am pondering it too.  
The problem of death.  
Nothing comes to mind.

“Oh, death! Dark tunnel . . . steep abyss . . .  
annihilation. . . .” I say to myself,  
for I’d like to tremble  
and break out in goose-pimples  
and hear my teeth clatter,  
or at least have shivers go up and down my spine,  
but I feel nothing.

“Oh, death! Eternal peace . . . tranquillity . . .  
pleasant rest after the turmoil  
of a laborious life . . .  
how glad I would be. . . .”  
I try to rejoice, so I imagine  
how much longer death’s holiday would be  
than the coming long weekend,  
but I can’t rejoice over it.

“Death must be either a horror  
or a harmony for the poet!”  
(I reproach myself as if I were my own stern father),  
I still don’t feel remorse  
(as if I were my own naughty child).  
Perhaps I’m not a poet? . . . I don’t care.  
Who knows what a poet is, anyway?

Death.  
I wouldn't exist.  
I wouldn't be unhappy,  
if I wasn't.  
So what's there to worry about if there's nothing there?

Death.  
I'd go on existing.  
I'd wake up and see life's all a dream.  
All right then.  
If there's an afterlife, there's no death.  
So what's there to think about if there's no such thing?

Summing up: I don't know what death is all about.  
If there is death, it's nothing,  
so it's meaningless.  
If there is no death, it's meaningless,  
so it's nothing.  
Both ways it's nothing.  
What annoys me, though, is that I don't know  
which one of the two possibilities is true;  
in other words, that I don't understand death.  
But this happens to be another problem:  
there are a lot of things I don't understand,  
they all annoy me —  
so what's so special about this one?

I have to write an essay tonight.  
Tomorrow I have to write some letters.  
The day after I have to take the kid  
to the planetarium.  
On Sunday I have to take some pictures.  
Next week I have to translate some poems.  
Sometime in the future I would like to build  
a table with an interchangeable top  
so that by pushing various buttons,  
it could become a chess-board, a scrabble-board,  
a tic-tac-toe board, a backgammon-board,  
or any other board demanded by the game. . . .

I'll always occupy  
my days and weeks and years somehow,  
because if I don't do something,  
I am bored,  
therefore I'll always perform fascinating  
activities to stave off boredom:  
I'll issue blue lines on white paper —  
I'll discuss interesting things with boring people,  
or boring things with interesting people —  
I'll doodle — play the piano — fake love to women  
go to concerts or galleries — or just drive around . . .  
Existence alone is not enough.

Yes, Giacomo, my dear dead friend,  
Italian count, poet, philosopher and misfit,  
whom I know so well, though you don't know me at all,  
you see,  
your problem was not death, but existence,  
sheer Existence  
against which we have but one weapon: Life.

Death is no problem. Everything dies.  
Even the Moon will die, although you spoke of it  
as being eternal. By now we know  
that even the Sun is mortal as are all the giant  
celestial bodies. The Universe itself  
was born, lives, will die. But the larger things are,  
the longer they last. At least this is the way  
it seems to us.

Compared with the miniscule Quark, this short-lived  
subatomic particle recently discovered,  
even we are immortal.

And the Quark is wrong when it thinks (if it thinks) us eternal —  
as we are wrong when we think the Universe eternal —  
as you were wrong when you thought the Moon eternal:  
Nothing is eternal.

Units or individuals are but occasional  
comings-together of matter. They unite. They disperse.  
Then they take on a new shape for a while. And so on.

Everything's like this. We are too. Against this, rebellion is ridiculous. These are the rules of the game. We are just not exceptions, that's all.

I must end this letter, my friend,  
my much older friend (considering how old matter is:  
almost two hundred years ago somewhere something composed  
itself  
to become you, and later on me, here and now),  
my much younger friend too (since mankind when you lived  
was two centuries younger), our real age  
— usually counted in years — doesn't really matter,  
a year here, a year there, when we're talking about Eons . . .  
I must end this letter to you, my friend,  
in order to finish my essay about you.

We'll meet again soon,  
I hope,  
If I've the time, I may even write you again  
(although I hate writing to friends  
who never answer,  
and you are one of those,  
although — and I say this to excuse you —  
sometimes even when you were alive and ill,  
it was hard for you to write,  
and since you died  
it became even harder.  
However,  
even if I won't have time to write,  
we still might meet:  
if there's an afterlife — there;  
if there isn't — there too,  
in which case it may well be that we've already met,  
and that one of your former atoms now resides somewhere  
in one of my ear-lobes, fulfilling an important role.  
(Forgive me this assumption,  
I don't intend to degrade you:  
it may even be the other way around  
so that one of the molecules in my brain

was part of the white of your big toenail . . . .  
I hope there's no misunderstanding.)

All in all I — unlike you —  
am comforted by the thought  
that what we call by two names  
“exciting activities” and “boredom of life”  
are phases of one illness  
and death is the cure for both.

Isn't it true, my Giacomo?  
Since June the 15th of 1837  
you haven't been suffering, have you?  
You haven't been excited;  
you haven't been bored. . .  
and still, you see, there's no trouble,  
everything's going smoothly, everything's in running order,  
life is no more a problem,  
nor is death. . . .

This incidental notion, in itself, proves  
that death can't be at all the greatest problem,  
for in death death is no problem,  
for death solves the problem of death, thus proving  
that life is in error  
when it believes death to be the greatest problem,  
thus life is the problem, for life is in error . . .  
but then, this problem of life too  
is solved by death.

Until then  
we just have to pull through somehow.

January 23, 1969

**TIME**

*for Frank Juranka*

Imagine an hourglass  
the top of which is filled with sand,  
but no matter how high you look up,  
you cannot see its top.

The grains of sand drop incessantly  
into the lower glass,  
but no matter how deep you look down,  
you cannot see its bottom.

Imagine how long  
through an hourglass like this  
sand has been falling  
and will go on to fall.

You say that such an hourglass is  
so absurd that it cannot be,  
I say that the two grains of sand,  
which fall through now, are you and me.

January 10, 1967

AT THE FOOT OF THE SPHINX

*for Daniel Kolos*

He (who in no language talks –  
whose words are pyramids, labyrinths,  
spiralling orbits of suns  
and parabolas of comets)

has begun to utter a sentence  
(silent to us, parasites  
swarming on the surface of a tiny particle  
whirling in the cosmos:

a piece of clay lying flat  
on the palm of his hand)  
which we in vain have tried to decipher  
for twenty-five thousand years

while generations are dying and being born  
in a breath-pause between two of his words.

July 7, 1975

## PROPHECY

The static that you hear  
when reading my poems today  
will sound like sweet music  
in the ears of your sons.

January 15, 1967

## THE NEXT DAY

He dreamed of everything,  
and when he woke,  
he remembered nothing,  
  
yet, he carried the dreams within him.

December 2, 1967

## SIGNAL

I am where there are no things, where dream merges with reality. Here the opposites don't fight it out, for good and evil go hand-in-hand.

I am where the navel of the world is, where foetus and cord and mother are one. Here is where the eyebrows of frowning gods meet. Here is where the cold thing-in-itself has its being.

Here life and death are the same: two poles of one magnet. Here my words make no sense: they sound so strange that they ring familiar.

Here there is silence, listen to it. Someone is speaking or singing or rumbling. Don't ask whose voice. It may be mine.

November 24, 1964

## I REMEMBER IT

I was Nothing, primeval Nothing, in which nothing stirred, I remember it —

I was the Voice that said, “Let there be,” and I was the Chaos that echoed that voice, I remember it —

I was the pullulating Plant Kingdom, stretching out of the depths to the light, I remember it —

I was the swarming Animal Kingdom, moving in the sea, on the land, in the sky, I remember it —

I was the last slave of Pharaoh and I was Attila sweeping across the steppes of Asia, I remember it —

I was the sailor who shouted “Land!” when Columbus arrived at the shore of America, and I was the first Indian murdered by Cortez, I remember it —

I was Space and Time, Matter and Spirit, Mineral and Organism, Nature and History, Artist and Scientist, Rich and Poor in all times, I remember it —

Last night I ate a good dinner. What was it?

I can't remember it —

May 8, 1969

## CENTURY

*for Oscar Bookbinder*

This age is a block of granite. The multihued bubbles all sailed away. No rhymes resound anymore.

Structures of severe steel tear into the sky. Their thousands of window-eyes are all blind.

An invisible robot-god locked the flame-shaped souls into cube-shaped boxes.

Cogwheels squeak. Someone mislaid the grease. The flowers are reluctant to bloom. The ebbing seas are choking on their own poisoned crests.

The dreams are harvested. The sheaves are stored away in regular coffins under six feet of earth where they can safely rot.

Triumphant Man, ascending the first step leading to Heaven, scratches his furry chest for fleas and beams around proudly with his smile of the ape.

November 17, 1963

## SKY BLUE

The day will dawn when  
someone will seize my poems  
and unravel the lovely blue lines of ink  
knotted in my letters  
and take the thin thread  
and bury one end  
deep inside the earth  
and bind the other end around his waist  
for his leap out into space.

March 27, 1964

## ZOOM-OUT

Our universe is a leaf  
on the tree of existence,  
and then there is the forest. . . .

August 20, 1960

## SPACE SHIP

*for Jon Lomborg*

Where oh where will our little space ships take us  
Let me tell you  
For you don't know it today  
Nor anyone else on Earth  
But me —  
There will come a time when everyone will know  
Either from me  
Or from someone else  
But today such knowledge is befogged  
And this fog is far from lifting —  
You believe  
Reader  
Friend  
Worker in Moscow  
President of the United States  
Indian peasant  
Viennese journalist  
You all believe that space ships  
Will take us for fast rides around the Earth  
And later on to the Moon  
Which like a faithful puppy turning its face toward us  
Runs on its leash around us in circles —  
You believe that mankind as a child  
Will grow up as time goes by  
And we will get acquainted with the other tenants  
Of this solar apartment building  
And visit our neighbours Mrs. Venus and Mr. Mars  
And when later on in the years of adolescence  
We will cut the apron strings of our dear mother Earth

We will even meet in person that mysterious old man  
Who lives alone in a room at the top Mr. Pluto  
Of whom now through our child eyes wild in wonder  
We see nothing yet but light reflecting from his pince-nez —  
You believe, don't you? that the space ship  
will be our private tutor  
Who will teach us all the secrets of the immense  
Multifaceted universe while we grow up  
And walk with us holding our hands  
To other houses of this galactic city  
From the outskirts where we now live  
What's more he will even take us on excursions  
To other galactic cities  
Where everything is different  
Where the horizon is different  
Where the fall of the stone is different  
Where different elements form differently  
Where different rhythms pulsate differently  
And where we would grow a sense unthinkable today  
Not a sixth one but a sixtieth one  
Or a six hundredth one  
In order to comprehend the laws  
Passed by the mayors of these distant galactic cities —  
And when upon returning from our grand cosmic tour  
— This is how you imagine it mortals of today, don't you? —  
We'll be overjoyed to slip our foot back again  
Into our soft terrestrial slippers  
And feel the May-breeze-carressings of our mother Earth  
Listen to her thunder-scoldings  
Eat her summer-cooked and soil-served suppers  
Hear her rustling-forest lullabies  
Be rocked by her ocean waves  
And fall asleep as she draws tight the curtains of her night —  
It won't happen that way, children  
Space ships will take us somewhere else  
Not from one point in space to another  
Not from one point in time to another —  
First we will fly with such speed  
that we won't fall back unless we want to

Then with such speed that every space traveller  
will live a few weeks longer  
Then with such speed that he who returns  
will find his son older than himself  
Then with such speed that while having lunch on the space ship  
generations will die and be born on this planet  
And a new Tower of Babel  
not of languages but of ages  
will rise on Earth  
The inhabitants of different centuries will mingle  
Thousand-year-old teenagers  
will court their great-great-granddaughters  
Everyone's name will be followed by two numbers  
his age in years and his year of birth  
And this Tower of Babel shall rise above the clouds  
its floors will reach unto other systems of stars  
And the universe will be populated by people of two ages  
in the millennia to come  
And finally we will fly with such speed  
that we will reach the speed of light itself  
Space will fall rushing down – space will fall away –  
with the speed of light – and time itself will have a stop  
We will stop in time – time will stop in us – do you hear me,  
brothers? – here's where the space ship will take us  
No one understands this yet – no pen has ever written it down –  
this is the first one I now hold in my hand –  
Circulation respiration thought will stop in time – and yet we  
will live on moving with the speed of light – locked forever  
in the moment of the eternal present  
In our trains we travelled in space while time shot past us  
In our space ships we'll travel in time while space will shoot  
past us  
And the end of the line will fuse with its beginning – the circle  
will draw to a close – and finally we shall arrive or return to  
Him – about whose Beginning our first legends stammered  
We shall be eternal – all-knowing – almighty – the only law  
existing – the only measurement of all things  
Gods will sit in the space ships which once were constructed –  
by the measly tiny worm – crawling on this rock

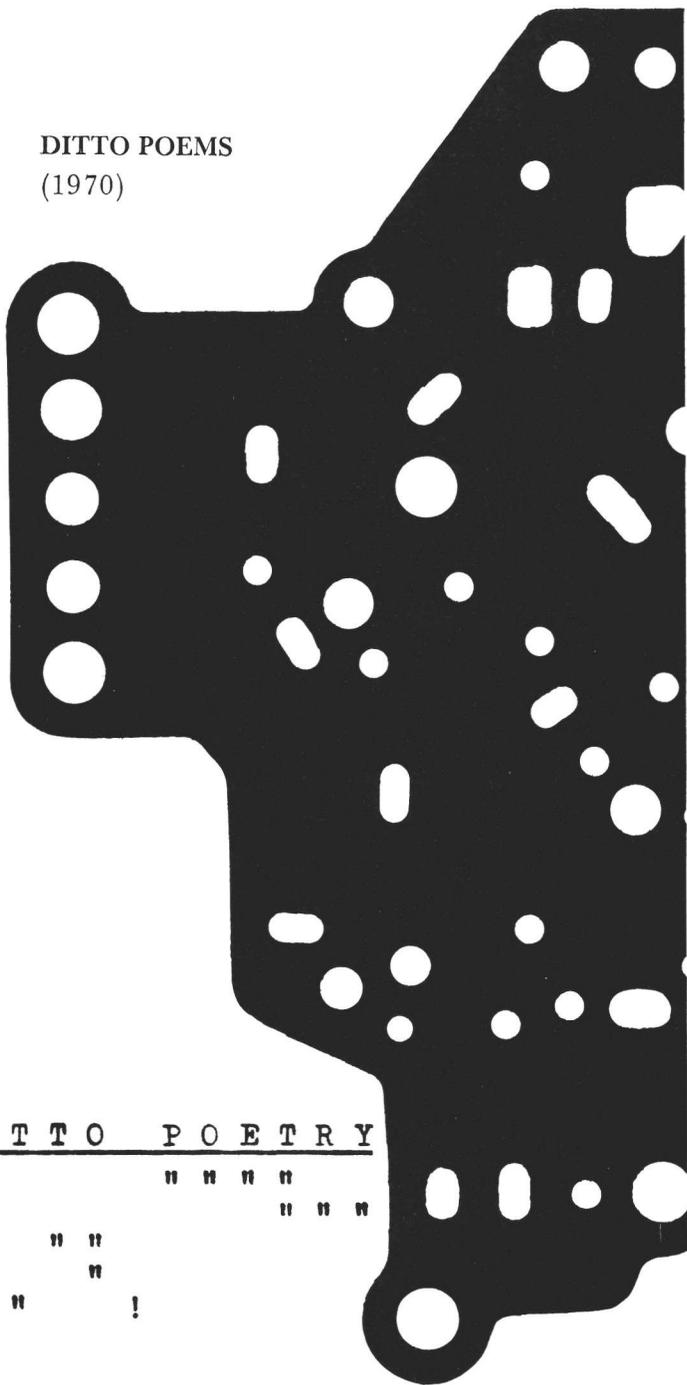
The space ship he thought out will fly faster than his thoughts  
Until we reach the outermost membrane of this cosmic cell  
To transmit the impulse — our own flight — the message which  
was ourselves  
In the nervous system of that immense organism — every cell  
of which seemed to us infinite  
Oh yes, our history was but the idea — the movement — the  
impulse — the reaction — the reflex  
For an immense heart out there somewhere — beyond every-  
thing else — to make one beat  
For an immense brain out there somewhere — beyond every-  
thing else — to think one thought  
For an immense hand out there somewhere — beyond every-  
thing else — to grab a pen to write  
For an immense body to turn over in its sleep — or perhaps  
to twitch as it makes love  
Do you understand me, brothers? — every moment of our lives  
stands — with the speed of light motionlessly in time —  
containing God the everlasting  
Infinite gods station within us — and in every single second  
universes die and are born  
A multitude of universes stand within us — with the speed of  
light of divine eternity  
The air we can see through as if it didn't exist — the clear water  
that reflects all its pebbles —  
The stones and trees and animals and even machines — hide a  
myriad of infinite universes in each of their corpuscles —  
Oh we don't have to go anywhere, brothers — and we don't  
have to board ships or trains — or blast off in space ships  
light-speeding away  
It is enough to sit and just stare into ourselves — or it's enough  
to fall asleep — or it's enough to make love  
Oh it's enough just to be  
A complexity of gods is our every split-second — and we are  
the vibration deep inside the vague thought of a god  
He has thought us — and he has thought the planet — and he  
has thought the space ship — the way a supergod has  
thought him —  
This is the station where the space ship takes us — even if we  
do not get on it at all

This is where it takes us — into a chamber of mirrors — where  
orders of magnitude are raised to higher powers and lowered  
to roots of powers  
This realization is the station to which — we are taken by the  
thought — that staggers behind light  
And this new station is more marvellous — than the craters of  
the Moon — or the whirling gases of the Sun  
More marvellous than the twin stars which consume each  
other — or the quasars which pull the universe apart  
For it means that we have not lived in vain — for it means that  
we have not died in vain  
For it means that we exist even if we aren't born  
For it means that even if everything has no meaning for us —  
we are the meaning for everything

June 3, 1964

DITTO POEMS

(1970)



D I T T O P O E T R Y

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## INTRODUCING DITTOS

One day, a few weeks ago, the telephone rang. It was Robert Zend: "John, tomorrow I want to show you a new kind of poetry I have invented. . . ."

If anyone but Robert had said this, I would have doubted his sanity. After all, poetry has been around for some five thousand years. There have been few genuine innovations, at least since the Dadaists of the twenties.

But because I know Robert to be one of the most imaginative writers in the country, I could hardly wait for tomorrow, the day of the great unveiling.

He came next day with his Ditto Poems. He showed me perhaps three dozen, all produced within the past week. Some were too obvious to be successful, some were too complex. But most of them were ingenious, and the idea was delightful. The first one I read — or scanned — was this:

### S A I N T ?

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"I am sorry," I said. "You did not invent Ditto Poetry. At best, you reinvented Dittos."

"What do you mean?"

Then I showed him a book by Emmett Williams. This American poet, who calls himself a "concrete poet," wrote an entire book, a love story really, using as his vocabulary only words made from the ten letters in the word "sweetheart."

Robert looked downcast, so I decided to cheer him up: "Why don't you write a large group of Ditto Poems on a single theme? How about basing them on the names of Canadian entertainment personalities and institutions. If the poems are good, they might interest the editor of *Performing Arts*."

He immediately brightened up. The idea appealed to him, perhaps because he too is employed in the entertainment business. He has been with the CBC in Toronto ever since he arrived from Hungary, in 1956. He is now a producer for the "Ideas Network."

These Ditto Poems are the result. Some are by Robert, some by me, the rest a collaboration. For every Ditto here, a dozen ended up in the wastepaper basket.

Ditto Poems cannot be read like ordinary poems. Because of the letters placed at random, they have to be scanned, like radar or TV tubes. The reader's eye has to follow the letters patiently, from left to right, line by line, top to bottom, with conscious concentration. To understand the poems, the reader must link the letters into words (every new word starts with a capital letter) and the words into phrases. Ditto Poetry is a reversed sort of poetry: the poet has the fun and the reader does the work.

These poems don't claim to express our value judgements about persons or things; our possibilities were strongly limited by the given letters or number of letters contained in their titles. We find them funny, even if they don't always flatter or fit.

The telephone rang as I was finishing this note on the début in print of Robert Zend's Ditto Poetry. It was Robert Zend: "John, tomorrow I want to show you a new kind of poetry I have invented: 'Knock Poetry.' "

I can hardly wait until tomorrow. . . .

April 1, 1970

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HOWARD BATEMAN

B a t m a n

THOM BENSON

T e n s  
e.

PIERRE BERTON

P e r t  
P e e r

B R O A D C A S T I N G ( I )

o a C s t  
o a C s t

B R O A D C A S T I N G ( II )

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B a d s  
A d C s t  
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o C s t

B R O A D W A Y

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CANADA COUNCIL

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MILTON CARMAN

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EUGENE HALLMAN

E l a n



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MARCEL MARCEAU

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WILLIAM NEEDLES

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H e S p e a  
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S H A W

H a !

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S P R I N G T H A W

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S T R A T F O R D ( II )

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JANET SOMMERVILLE

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THE TAMARACK REVIEW

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The Ultimate Ditto Poem:

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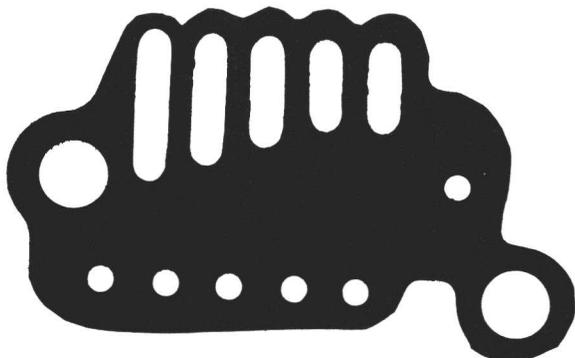
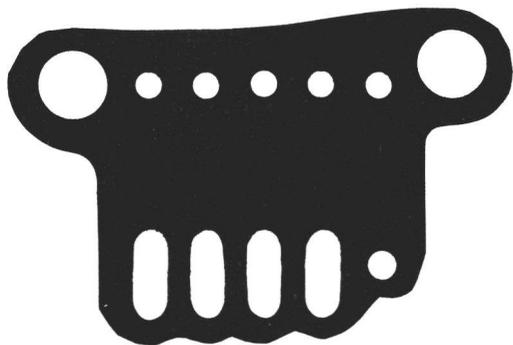
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B.

April 27, 1970

DROP POEMS

(1982)



R P P O E

D O

T R Y

I invented Drop Poetry in 1982, as an off-shoot (improvement?) of Ditto Poetry. Its rules are tougher than those of its predecessor, both for the poet and the reader. Since the letters of the poem “drop” from the title, the poet can use each letter of the title only once, and only in the original order. The reader, on the other hand, has to read each poem twice: first the title (in two lines), then the poem (second line only). Thus, the possibilities are even more limited, and the discrepancy between the “title” and the “poem” is greater than in the Ditto poems. Here are some of my early experiments:

Y A S S E R    A R A

F A T

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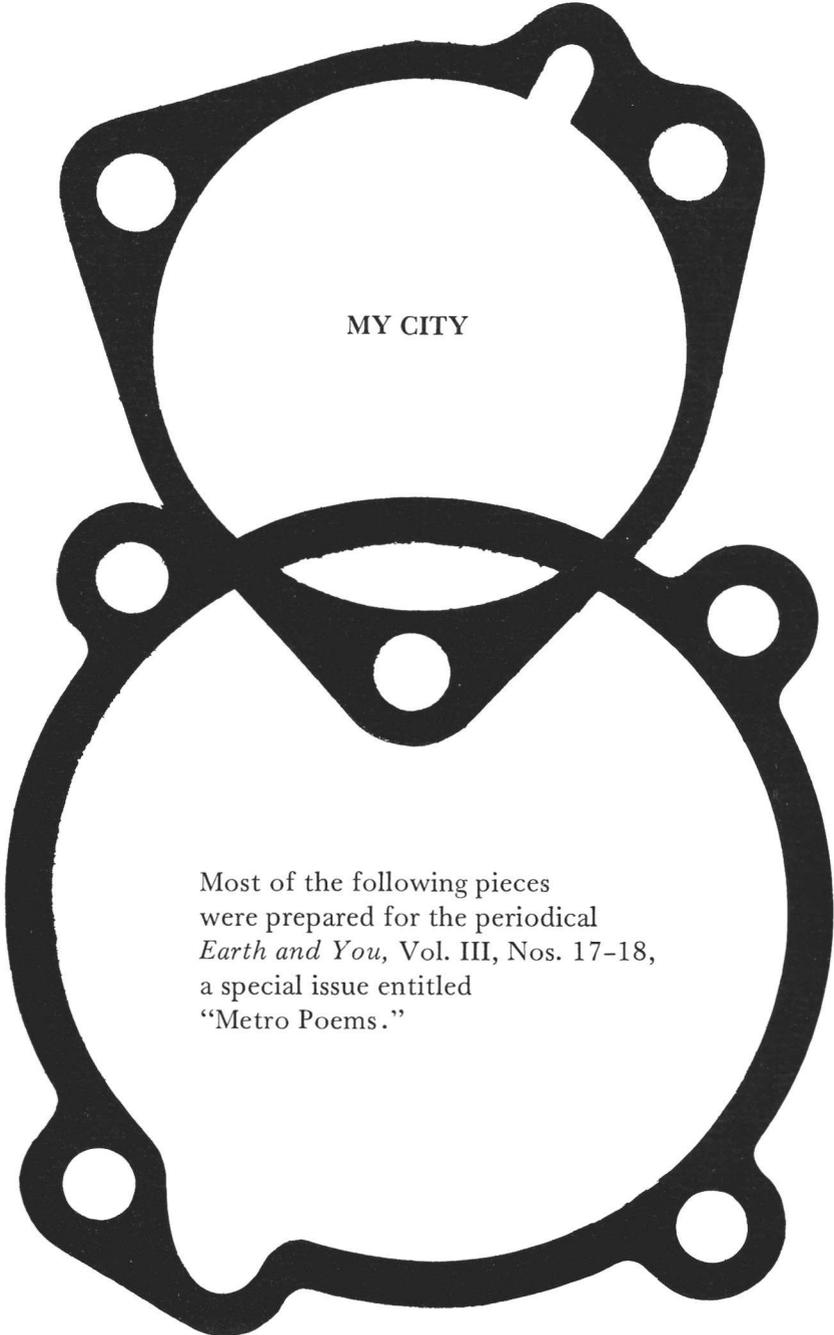
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P I E R E L I O T T R U E A U

R E D



MY CITY

Most of the following pieces  
were prepared for the periodical  
*Earth and You*, Vol. III, Nos. 17-18,  
a special issue entitled  
"Metro Poems."



TITLE PAGE DESIGNS  
 (An exercise in complication)

Poems about Toronto  
 Edited by John Robert Colombo

poems about t r n t  
 edited by john robert c o o m b o

POEMS ABOUT OUR METRO TORONTO  
 EDITED BY JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO

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## IN THIS CITY

In this city  
I just can't drop in  
without phoning to Your Privacy beforehand  
so I won't

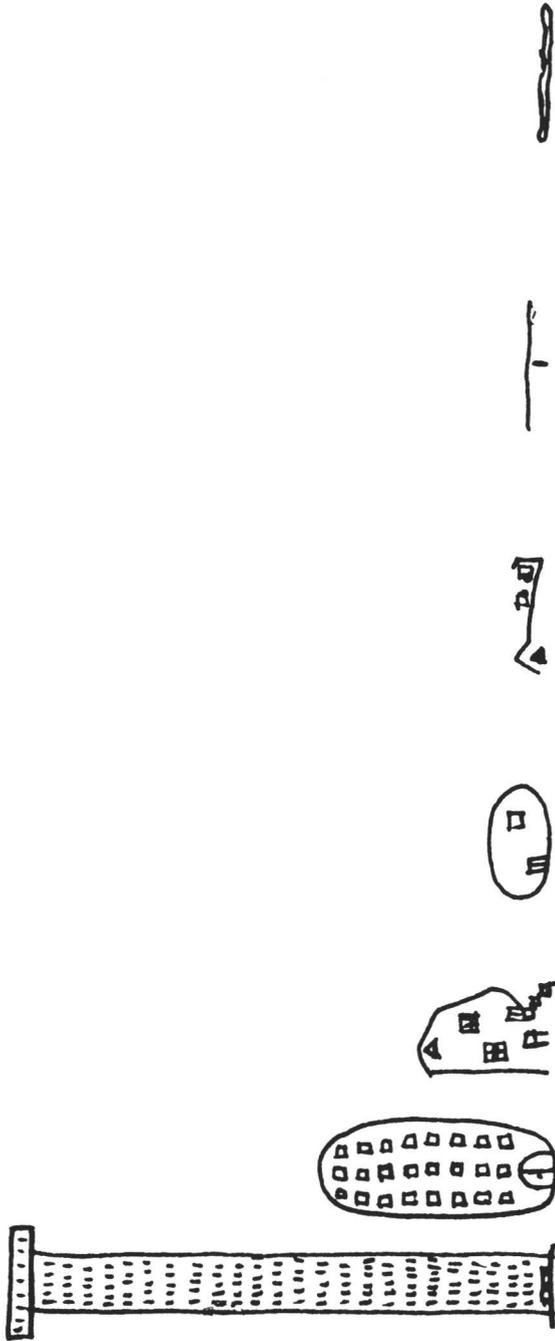
In this city  
I just can't call you on the phone  
without disturbing Your Privacy while talking  
so I won't

In this city  
I just can't kiss you  
without getting you involved and hurting you afterwards  
so I won't

Toronto is a city of wonderful non-happenings

May 10, 1970

A DOODLE OF TORONTO



## RETURN TICKETS

(An exercise in simplification)

1.

I hated this city because it was flat, lifeless and prosaic  
Its downtown: cubism made of steel  
Its midtown: a sleeping village  
Its circle of suburbs: a symbol of mediocrity  
Its night-life: a howling orgy of colours  
Its youth: an insecure, dirty lot  
Its citizens: money-makers, car-drivers, TV-watchers  
Its culture: a yawn

I couldn't compare it with European cities like  
London – this buzzing bastion  
Paris – this dazzling *déjà vu*  
Budapest – this lusty dream  
Rome – this majestic monument  
Florence – this jewel of the South, and  
Venice – this eternal opera-stage

Or with North American cities like  
New York – this navel of the Earth  
Chicago – this nest of excitement  
Detroit – this pulsating industrial heart  
Miami – this altar for the sun  
Los Angeles – this giant of the West, and  
San Francisco – this pearl of the Pacific's shore

But when I returned from jungle London  
hostile Paris  
grey Budapest

cold Vienna  
dusty Rome  
crammed Florence, and  
phony Venice

Or  
dirty New York  
smoggy Los Angeles  
*nouveau riche* Miami  
unsafe Chicago  
monotonous Detroit  
violent San Francisco

Then I loved Toronto because it was huge, clean and functional  
its downtown: progressive as North America  
its midtown: romantic as Europe  
its circle of suburbs: pretty and peaceful  
its night life: a colourful kaleidoscope  
its youth: human and sincere  
its citizens: honest and friendly  
its culture: a bursting promise

It isn't a city to see and then die  
It is a city to live in and make a living in it —  
What more can you want in this age?

2.

I hated Toronto  
because Toronto was here —  
I loved other cities  
because other cities were there —

I went to the other cities  
where I hated the other cities  
because in the other cities  
the other cities were here —

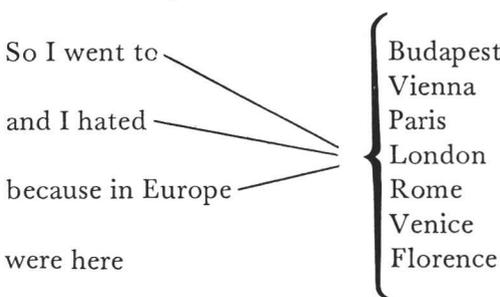
But in the other cities  
I loved Toronto  
because in the other cities  
Toronto was there —

So I came back to Toronto  
and ever since I came back  
I have loved Toronto  
because I remember  
that in the other cities  
I remembered it

3.  
I hated Toronto  
because Toronto was here

I loved Europe  
because Europe was there

So I went to  
and I hated  
because in Europe  
were here



Budapest  
Vienna  
Paris  
London  
Rome  
Venice  
Florence

But I loved Toronto  
because in Europe  
Toronto was there

So I came back to Toronto  
and ever since I came back  
I am there here in Toronto

4.

I hated —> Toronto  
because —>  
was here

I loved —> Europe  
because —>  
was there

So I went to —> Europe  
and I hated —>  
because in Europe —>  
was here

But I loved —> Toronto  
because in Europe —>  
was there

So I came back to —> Toronto  
and ever since I came back to —>  
I love —>  
because I remember that —>  
is there —

5.

I like There, I said here, so I went there,  
but there the There became here, and Here there.  
Since I liked There, I came back here from There  
so that from Here I could like There again.

July 15, 1972

## A CITY OF TWO KINDS

There are two kinds of cities:

where you can live  
but you can't make a living;

where you can make a living  
but you can't live;

Toronto is *almost* both of them.

July 16, 1972



## IN TRANSIT

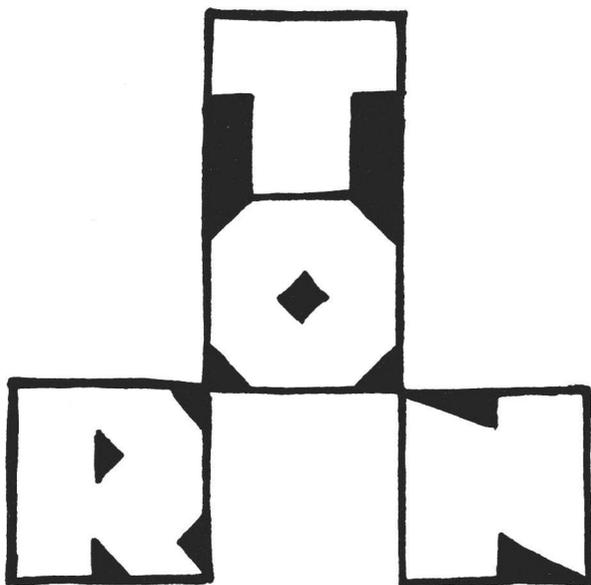
Budapest is my homeland  
Toronto is my home

In Toronto I am nostalgic for Budapest  
In Budapest I am nostalgic for Toronto

Everywhere else I am nostalgic for my nostalgia

October 30, 1970

TORN IN TORONTO



June 14, 1972

# CONCRETE BUDAPEST

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March 17, 1971

CONCRETE TORONTO

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T O R O N T O

October 3, 1970

## FUSED PERSONALITY

The deepest regions of my soul don't seem to accept that I split my life and my self into two, in 1956.

In my dream, my mother talks to me in a Canadian-accented English, she is thirty-two years old, I am forty-five. She asks me to show her the city where I live now (or I ask her to take me around my birthplace), so we go for a long stroll.

In the middle of the city, instead of Yonge Street, the river Danube (Duna) flows majestically, separating the capital into two distinct parts, the hilly Budanto on the West, and the flat Toropest on the East. She shows me Rózsadomb (Rosehill), I show her Rosedale in exchange. We like very much our (each other's) city. The two sides are connected by nine gorgeous bridges called (going from South to North) the Front-bridge, the King-bridge, the Queen-bridge, the College-Carlton-bridge, the Bloor-bridge, the St. Clair-bridge and the Eglinton-bridge; the Margit-sziget (Center-island) is connected with both banks by the Lawrence-bridge on its South-end, and the Wilson-bridge on its North-end. My mother is especially proud of the recently built Highway 401 which wasn't there yet when I left. She loves the view from the top of Gellert-mountain from where she can clearly see Lake Ontario, the O'Keefe Center and the New City Hall. I prefer the view from the top of the CN Tower: the old Parliament, built in Gothic style, and the baroque Basilica (great Cathedral) are an unforgettable sight.

We go home where my father watches TV, in 1938. The Prime Minister of Hungary, János Trudeau, talks about repatriating the Constitution from Russia. I say farewell to my parents because I have to go homes to my two wives, Ibolya (Violet) in Sándor-utca, and Janine, on Austin-Terrace. I play with my two baby daughters, Aniko in 1956 and Natalie in

1972. We are (one big) two small happy families who don't know about each other, except me.

After dinners, as usual, I go to my favourite coffee-house, the meeting-place of poets, writers, artists and musicians. On the Gallery, around a huge round table sit Karinthy, Atwood, Kosztolányi, Callaghan, Weöres, Purdy, Bartók, Gould, Kodály, Schafer, Szász, Kurelek, Kerényi, Frye and many others. The conversation is profound and witty, I am glad to belong to this tightly knit élite-group of creative people. We read (sing, show) our latest works to one another.

Then I leave them to find a quiet table where, sipping my espresso coffee and chain-smoking my cigarettes, I write a poem for the excellent literary magazine called *Search for Identity*. I write down the title in Hungarian, but I realize that my English readership won't understand it, so I cross it out and write it down again in English, but now I think about my oldest childhood friends who won't be able to read it. My right hand holding the pen freezes in mid-air while I ponder the problem, but the pain in my right shoulder wakes me up. I look around in the dawning bedroom and try to sneak back into my soft and warm dream, but it has already faded away, now hard and cold objects surround me.

October 20, 1981

BUDAPESTORONTO

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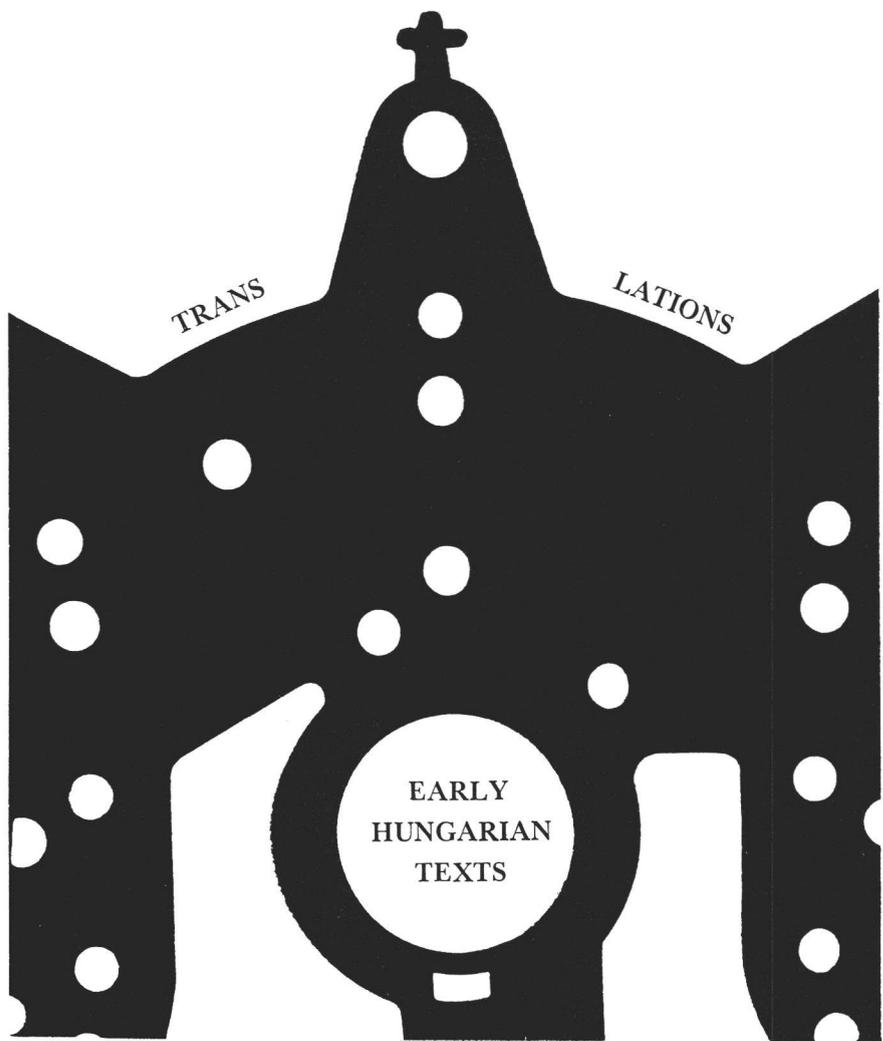
B U D A T O R O P E S T N T O T B U D A O R O N P E S T T O T O B U D A R O N T P E S T O T O R B U D A  
O N T O P E S T T O R O B U D A N T O T P E S T O R O N B U D A T O T O P E S T R O N T B U D A O T O R  
P E S T O N T O B U D A

November 4, 1981

BACK COVER DESIGNS

TRO METRO ME  
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R S O S  
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R M R M  
O O  
P O  
O EMS POEMS PO  
METRO METRO





TRANS

LATIONS

EARLY  
HUNGARIAN  
TEXTS

## FUNERAL SERMON

You see with your own eyes, my brethren, what we are. Lo, but dust and ashes is what we are. In how much grace has the Lord created our ancestor Adam in the beginning, and gave him paradise to be his home. And He told him to feed on all the fruits of paradise. He forbade him only the fruit of one tree. But He told him why he should not eat of it: "Verily, on the day that you eat of that fruit, you shall die the death of deaths." He heard of his death from God the Creator, yet he forgot it. He fell for the devil's lure and ate of that forbidden fruit, and he ate death in that fruit. And so bitter was the juice of that fruit that it tore at his throat. Not for himself alone, but for his whole race, he ate death. God was angry and cast him into this toiling world, and he became the prey of death and hell, and so did all his descendents. Who are they? We are them. As you see with your own eyes, lo and behold, no man can ever avoid this grave. Lo and behold, we all keep going toward it. Let us beseech God's mercy for this soul, that He shall spare him and forgive him all his sins. And let us beseech the holy lady Mary and the blessed Archangel Michael and all the angels to pray for him. And let us beseech the lord Saint Peter, who has been given the power to absolve and to punish, that he shall absolve him of all his sins. And let us beseech all the saints so that they should support him in the presence of God so that, because of their prayers, God shall forgive him his sins! And He shall liberate him from the pursuit of the devil and the torment of hell, and lead him back to the peace of paradise, and grant him the way to heaven, and his share of all good things. And cry out three times to our Lord: *Kyrie Eleison!*

My beloved brethren! Let us pray for the soul of this man,

whom the Lord has rescued this day from the dungeon of this illusory world, whose body alone we bury this day, so that the Lord, in his grace, may lay him unto the bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so that when the day of judgement arrives, He may awaken him to place him on His right side, among His saints and chosen ones. So be it also with you all. Cry out three times: *Kyrie Eleison!*

Traditional Hungarian Prayer,  
Late Twelfth Century.

## HYMN ON DEATH

Once there was a wise man who wanted to keep his thoughts on death. So this wise man composed these verses, which run:

I go on to death, for death is certain, yet nothing is as uncertain as the hour of death. Although it is uncertain, still I go on to death.

I go on to death, I who am yet a living being, I will be as those who have gone on before. Even if I do not go now, still I go on to death.

I go on to death, following others. And there will be even more to follow me, for I am neither the first nor the last. Therefore I go on to death.

I go on to death. I am a king, but what does rank matter, what does boasting matter, for the king over man is death. Therefore I go on to death.

I go on to death. I am a pope, but death does not let me be a pope for very long, it shuts up my mouth.

I go on to death. I am full of wise sayings, and I can silence others with my speech, but death silences me. Therefore I go on to death.

I go on to death. I am rich, but gold or great herds of cattle are of no help to me at all.

I go on to death. I am poor, and I will take nothing with me, I will curse this world, I will go out of it naked, and I go on to death.

I go on to death. I am a judge who so far has reprimanded many, but I tremble at the judgement of death, and I go on to death.

I go on to death. I was born of noble stock, but blood cannot delay my time, therefore I go on to death.

I go on to death, but I know not where I will go, nor do I know when I will go, but no matter where I turn, still I go on to death.

I go on to death, seeing that death rules over everybody, and its grip is very tight.

I go on to death. Therefore, I beg of you, merciful Christ, forgive me, pardoning all my sins, for which I deserve to die.

I go on to death, asking that everyone pray for me and seek for me forgiveness on behalf of my Lord Christ. Thus I go on to a good death.

I go on to the first death, so that my Lord Christ will save me from the second death. Thus I go on to a good death.

I go on to death, and hope for everlasting life, from which I will scorn this passing life. Thus I go on to a good death.

Traditional Hungarian Prayer,  
Mid-Sixteenth Century.

## ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND MAN

*Tamás Félegyházi*

What is the chief wisdom of man?

The knowledge of God and of himself.

How many ways are there to know God?

Two ways: one is worldly, the other spiritual.

What is the worldly knowledge of God?

Through the laws of nature and the creation of the world, the intelligence implanted in the brain of man proves that God is true and wise and most worthy of our respect.

What is the spiritual knowledge of God?

True intelligence from the Logos and the enlightenment of the Holy Ghost concerning God and His Will are made manifest in Christ, and thus believers can gain eternal life, for as God says: Whosoever praises me should praise himself because he both knows and understands me.

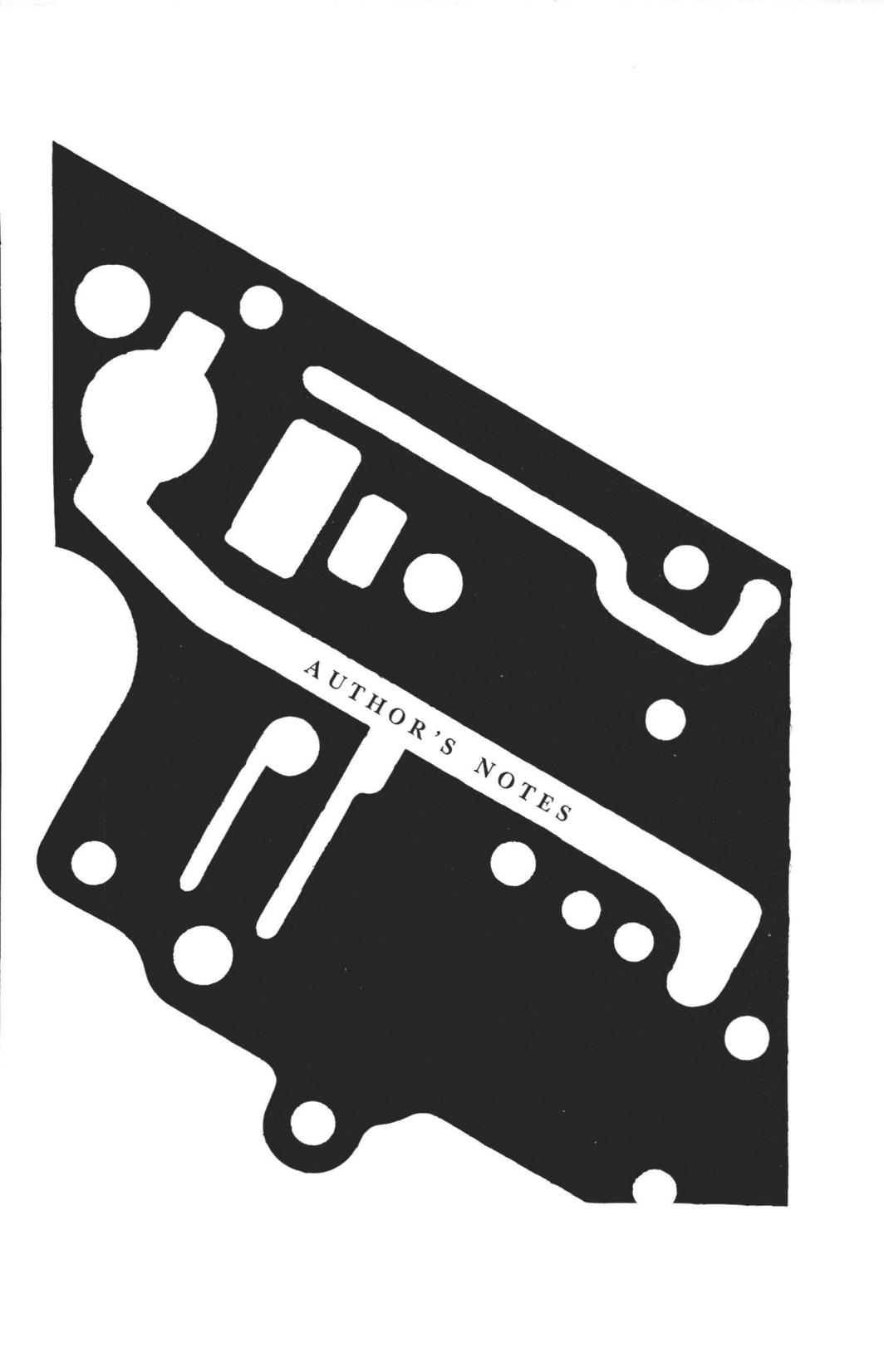
Of what does the knowledge of man consist?

An understanding of the four stages of man: First, the rational nature, in which man was created in the image of God for holiness and truth. Second, the fall, that ruin in which man was deprived of all spiritual gifts and became the son of anger. Third, the new order, in which through Christ the believers shall be transformed, and from the Logos and the strength of the Holy Ghost shall be born anew into eternal life. Fourth, the possession of future perfection following the resurrection of the body.

How does one learn about God and man?

From the Sacred Scriptures.

Catechism of Tamás Félegyházi, 1583.



AUTHOR'S NOTES

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

- \* I am obliged for a lifetime to John Robert Colombo who was not only the first Canadian poet to take interest in my poems written in Hungarian, but who – with my help – also translated a great number of them into English. The result of our one-year-long, close co-operation in 1969 was my book of poems, *From Zero to One* (Sono Nis, 1973), and also “Old Poems,” the first part of this book.
- \* The pieces published in this volume have been picked at random from different periods and moods of my life, from 1962 to 1982. Besides writing in Hungarian, which I have been doing all my life, I have since 1964 been writing poetry and prose increasingly in English.
- \* Contrary to usual practice, I dated my poems because I believe that the birthday of a poem is the important thing, not its publication date. Without dating them, my readers might think that these are my recent works.
- \* Some poems in this book were inspired by the pictures of Toronto artist Julius Marosan: “Man-Made Satellite,” “Dragon-Fly,” “Century” (oil paintings in 1963); “A Three-word Definition of Love,” “This Haiku,” “The Magellan Paradox” and “Sunset” (ink-drawings in 1969). These are actually “translations” of his paintings into words.
- \* The following poems: “What a Poet Is,” “Enigma,” “Time,” “Two Times Too,” “Labour Pains,” “Departure by Arrival,” “God Dead?,” “Mene, Tekel” and “Prophecy” are excerpts from “Seven Days of Symphonies” (written in English in 1967), a series of poems to be published in another volume.
- \* Etaoin Shrdlu. “To see if his machine is in working order, a typesetter may run his finger down the two lefthand columns of the keyboard. This produces two cabbalistic words,

Etaoin Shrdlu (the first 12 letters in order of frequency), that are sometimes seen in badly proofed newspapers.” (Martin Gardner)

- \* Mene, Tekel. The writing on the wall, meaning: “Thou art weighed on the balances and art found wanting.” (Daniel VI: 27)
- \* Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837) is one of the greatest Italian poets; also one of the most pessimistic poets of world literature.
- \* Jim Anderson, Lewis Auerbach, Janet Sommerville, Lester Sugarman were my colleagues, radio producers in CBC-FM’s “Ideas Network” in 1970; Davidson, Hallman, Ouimet were presidents of the CBC around the same time.
- \* Tom Patterson is the undeservedly forgotten and neglected originator-founder of the Stratford Festival.
- \* Translations of early Hungarian texts. After finishing *From Zero To One*, Colombo and I started working on a Hungarian anthology to be assembled in chronological order, but we didn’t get very far. The reason why we translated these three religious pieces was not that we were religious, but that Hungarian literature was religious at its Medieval beginnings.
- \* I am grateful to Angela Day for her invaluable help in the final proofreading and editing of this manuscript.
- \* The automatic-transmission valve-body separator-gaskets, which I used as a device to create the dividers between the consecutive parts of this book, are courtesy of Gabriel Nagy of Low Cost Automatic Transmissions Ltd., Toronto.

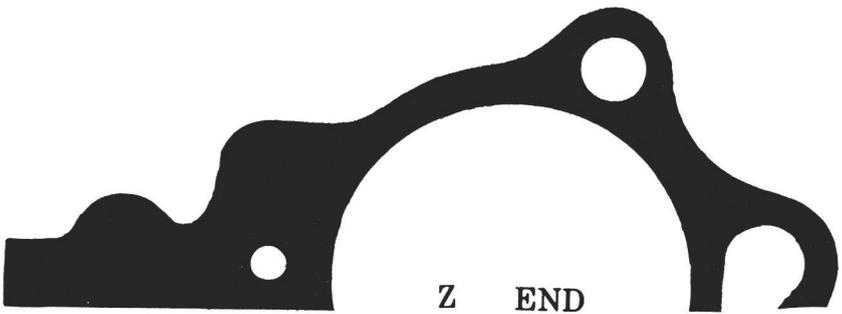
Robert Zend, who was born in Budapest, has lived in Toronto since 1956. He received his B.A. from the Péter Pázmány Science University in Budapest in 1953, his M.A. from the University of Toronto in 1969. In 1958 he joined the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation where he has worked as a shipper, film librarian, film editor and radio producer. He has researched, written, directed and produced over one hundred radio programs with Northrop Frye, Glenn Gould, A.Y. Jackson, Norman McLaren, Marshall McLuhan, Harold Town, Isaac Asimov, Robert Easton (the Mr. Higgins of Hollywood), Richard P. Feynman (Nobel Prize-winner physicist), Immanuel Velikovsky, Marcel Marceau, Andrei Voznesensky, Jorge Luis Borges, Princess Martha de Ruspoli, the Dalai Lama, etc. His series "The Lost Continent of Atlantis" was broadcast not only in Canada, but also in the United States, Great Britain and Australia. As a visual artist, he won Fourth Prize in the International Photo Contest, 1968, Budapest, and has had works exhibited at the International Craft Show at the Ontario Science Center. In 1969 he received a grant from the Canadian Film Development Corporation to produce a film, and a scholarship from the Italian Government to study in Italy for his PhD. He writes in both Hungarian and English. His literary work has appeared in the following Hungarian-language publications: *Hungarian Life*, *Toronto Mirror*, *Menora*, *Literary Gazette* (Paris), *Hungarian Poets Abroad; An Anthology* (Vienna). He has published in the following English-language publications: *The Tamarack Review*, *Canadian Literature*, *Performing Arts*, *Chess Canada*, *Earth and You*, *The Sunday Star*, *Canadian Fiction Magazine* and *The Malahat Review*. The excellent literary quarterly *Exile* has published excerpts from his longer visual works: *Oab*, *A Bouquet to Bip*, *A Bunch of Proses*, *Limbo Like Me*, and *Type Scapes: A Mystery Story*. The following anthologies feature his work: *Made in Canada*, *Volvox*, *Sounds of Time*, *The Speaking Earth*, *To Say the Least*, *The Poets of Canada*, *In Praise of Hands*, *Colombo's*

*Canadian Quotations*, *The Maple Laugh Forever* (Canada); *A Critical Ninth Assembly*, *Stellar 6: Science Fiction Stories*, *Peter's Quotations* (U.S.); *Blue Umbrellas* (Australia). He has published the following books: *From Zero to One* (Sono Nis Press), *My Friend Jeronimo* (Omnibooks), *Arbormundi* (blewointmentpress); in preparation are: *Oab*, *Nicolette* and *A Bunch of Proses* (Exile Editions). He edited *Ariel and Caliban* by Peter Singer (Aya Press). He has given poetry readings at The Eglinton Gallery, The Royal Ontario Museum, Harbourfront, the China Court Café, the University of Toronto, The Writer and the Human Rights Congress. He was invited as a resident-poet to The Sixth and Seventh Great Canadian Poetry Festival (Collingwood) in 1981 and 1982.



John Robert Colombo, the co-translator, has been called both “a one-man museum” and “the master gatherer” for his encyclopedic knowledge of things Canadian and his many compilations of Canadiana. But he is equally active on the international scene, having translated or edited translations of more than a dozen books. These include five volumes of poetry and prose from the Bulgarian, with Nikola Roussanoff, by Dora Gabe, Andrei Germanov, Lyubomir Levchev, and others; Ewa Lipska's *Such Times*, from the Polish, with Waclaw Iwaniuk; Marin Sorescu's *Symmetries*, from the Romanian, with Petronela Negoşanu; Robert Zend's *From Zero to One*, from the Hungarian, with Robert Zend; Ludwig Zeller's *When the Animal Rises from the Deep the Head Explodes*, from the Spanish, with Susana Wald. In addition, he acted as editor of Waclaw Iwaniuk's *Dark Times*, Pavel Javor's *Far from You*, and George Faludy's *East and West*. In 1982, his *Selected Poems* and *Selected Translations* appeared simultaneously.

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## ROBERT ZEND . . .

**Rafael Alberti:** Very sincere and moving poems. **Isaac Asimov:** I love your poems, especially those which you dedicate to me. **bill bissett:** y'r a marvlus word tamr miracul, wundrer uv. **Jorge Luis Borges:** Knowing your poems I understand why you like mine. **John Robert Colombo:** Robert Zend is a one-man literary renaissance. **Lawrence Day:** Zend doesn't write poetry; he breaths it. **Robert Fulford:** He is a poet of power and originality, a brilliant fantasist whose ideas are oddly compelling, a writer of fairytales for adults. **Tom Gallant:** I can't understand why his poems are not translated into twenty-seven languages of the world! **Glenn Gould:** Robert Zend is unquestionably Canada's most musical poet. **Robert Graves:** You are my friend because you are a Hungarian and a poet. **Richard Kostelanetz:** I am floored . . . **Arlene Lampert :** Zend is so funny that we must take him seriously. **Jon Lomberg:** Zend is a citizen of the Universe. **Marcel Marceau:** Zend is a great poet. He is my chosen brother. **Norman McLaren:** Robert Zend is a sorcerer *par excellence*. **bp Nichol:** The answer to every reader's quest — the Living Zend. **Joyce Carol Oates:** What a mind! **P.K. Page:** Wow! **William Ronald:** Zend is a split-personality and I love him both. **Princess Martha de Ruspoli:** We are on the same wavelength: we must have been together in Atlantis. **Aiko Suzuki:** Zend's poetry is whimsical, rare and much needed on this continent. His double-edged humour, like a splash of cold water in the face, wakes you up and it has a wonderful aftertaste. **Margaret Trudeau:** I had a very pleasant afternoon while reading your poems. **Immanuel Velikovsky:** Robert Zend's feet are planted in the ground, his heart is forgiving, his head is in the clouds. **Andrei Voznesensky:** Between your poems and mine there is no iron curtain. **Phyllis Webb:** Ego and energy, driving force and central insight into our culture . . . among many exciting discoveries, Robert Zend was the big one for me . . . **Adele Wiseman:** Canada and poetry have cause to be thankful. Zend IS. Zend is HERE.