

INTRODUCTION

Reading a poem by Attila Balázs is like diving head first into turbulent water. There's no chance for second guessing, the decisive moment has arrived, action is inescapable. There's no time for excuses, denials, regrets, or hesitations. As the poem is unfolding before you, everything is calibrated to enhance the immediacy of its situation. Take, for example, these lines from his poem "Jazz in Vancouver":

she is singing inwardly
as if she were weeping

she weeps inwardly
as if she were singing

my body stiffens into a statue
on the padded seat
my blood pulsates beneath her
black skin

Here, Balázs reveals a profound feeling of identification with the singer that is utterly inextricable from the music triggering the experience. The poem, therefore, develops out of the tangible singer's performance into the intense epiphany.

The title of the volume begins at the neck and seems to be an allusion to one of François Villon's grimmest prison poems, "*Ballade des pendus*" ("Ballad of the Hanged"), which, incidentally, Villon composed while awaiting execution. Unlike Villon's other gallows humor, that particular Villon poem is sobering because, as the poet contemplates his imminent death, he begs for human understanding, compassion, dignity, and forgiveness. Villon pleads for himself and for all of us: "*De notre mal personne ne s'en rie*"; ("Let no one laugh at our suffering.") Villon was the quintessential outsider, wandering vagabond, thief, what Whitman surely would have called "one of the roughs." Villon's language, for instance, is a departure from elevated, poetic diction. On the one hand, it crystal-

VILLON NYAKKENDŐJE

megkeményedik ajkad
mikor
Villon vagy József Attilát
szavalsz

szemed a távolba mered
mintha haragudnál
vagy
megfeledkeznél rólam

féltékenység moco-rog
a rothadó fészekben
mely visszavárja
az elhajászott madarakat

a sötétre váltó égen
mint kivetítőn
Villon megigazítja a kötelet
sebhelyes nyakán –

VILLON'S NECKTIE

your lips stiffen
when
you recite
Villon or Attila József

your eyes stare into the distance
as if you were angry
or
you've forgotten me

jealousy stirs
in the rotting nest
which waits for the birds to return
that have been driven away

in the darkening sky
as if on a projector
Villon adjusts the rope
on his scarred neck

KIRAKÓS JÁTÉK

ülj le ide az ágyra
nézlek csendben
felfedezlek újra
maradj mellettem

ne siess, ülj le
a fecskék már telelőn
nem pihennek felhők sem
a dombtetőn

maradj mellettem
míg remegő kezekkel
összerakom magam

kirakós játék ez kísértetekkel
magamtól sem félek
szétszórt kártyák a napok
arcod térképén keresgélek
fogd a kezem míg meghalok!

PUZZLE

sit down here on the bed
I gaze at you in silence
I discover you anew
stay next to me

don't rush off, sit down
the swallows are wintering already
not even the clouds rest
on the top of the hill

stay next to me
until I collect myself
with trembling hands

this is a puzzle with ghosts
I'm not afraid of myself
the days are scattered cards
I search for you on the map of your face
hold my hand until I die!