

Miklós Nadasdi's Sándor Petőfi Anthology 1
Ten poems of Sándor Petőfi translated from the Hungarian original into
English by Miklós Nadasdi

A plan gone up in smoke
 National song
 Prophecy
 At the end of September
 The sea is rising up
 Mottled life
 My mother's hen
 I turned into the kitchen
 I dreamed something beautiful
 The moonlight is bathing in the sea of the sky

SÁNDOR PETŐFI, one of the greatest Hungarian poets, was born on January 1, 1823, in Kiskoros. Hungary. He disappeared on the battlefield and probably died on July 31, 1849, in Segesvar, Transylvania.

Petőfi studied at eight different schools, joined for a short time a group of strolling players, and enlisted as a private soldier, but because of ill health was soon dismissed from the army.

Petőfi's first poem was published in 1842. In 1844, on the recommendation of Mihály Vörösmarty, then the leading Hungarian poet, he became an assistant editor of the literary periodical *Pesti Divatlap*. His first volume of poetry, *Versek*, appeared in the same year.

In 1847 he married Julia Szendrey, who inspired his best love poems. After 1847, together with Mór Jókai, he edited the magazine *Életképek*

Petőfi's poems glowed with political passion, and one of them, "Talpra magyar" ("Rise, Hungarian"), written on the eve of the revolution, became its anthem.

During the revolution he became the aide-de-camp of Gen. Jozef Bem, then head of the Transylvanian army. Petőfi disappeared during the Battle of Segesvár, July 31, 1849, and was assumed to have died in the fighting, though his body was never discovered.

(Extracted from an entry written by the Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica,)

MIKLÓS NÁDASDI was born on January 29, 1932, in Budapest, Hungary. He received an M.D. degree at the Semmelweis University of Budapest in 1956, the same year when, during a revolution against the Soviet regime, he escaped from Hungary to Vienna. The following year he immigrated to Canada with the sponsorship of Hans Selye, the scientist who developed the stress theory. He worked as his postgraduate student at the University of Montreal where he obtained A Ph.D. degree in experimental medicine. This followed 34 scientific publications. In 1964 he moved to Toronto and became the vice president of medical affairs of Glaxo, a large international pharmaceutical company (now GSK). He also established a medical practice as a staff member of the North York General Hospital in Toronto. He is married, has two children, four grandchildren and a great-grandchild. Presently he is retired and lives with his wife in Toronto.

A PLAN GONE UP IN SMOKE

All the way home there was one thing
I was pondering:
The first thing to tell my mother
Upon my homecoming.

What shall I say to her that is
Nice, warm and has grace?
While the arms that rocked my cradle
She lifts for embrace.

Endless row of delicious thoughts
Pile up in my head,
Time is at a standstill
While the carriage speeds ahead.

I step into the small room,
My mother flies to me...
And I cling to her lips... speechless...
Like fruits on a tree.

NATIONAL SONG

Hungarians, get on your feet!
This is the time, this is the need!
Shall we be free or remain slaves?
The answer is: No two ways!
God of Hungarians,
We swear,
We swear that none stays
Prisoner!

We have been prisoners since when
Our forefathers, who were free men,
Could not rest in slavish soil
That is surrounded by turmoil.
God of Hungarians,
We swear,
We swear that none stays
Prisoner!

A low down man who is not brave
and too coward to choose the grave
When his country needs his life
he refuses to sacrifice.
God of Hungarians,
We swear,
We swear that none stays
Prisoner!

The sword shines better than the chain,
We shall not wear chain again!
Let us pull out the ancient sword,
In the name of our dear Lord!
God of Hungarians,
We swear,
We swear that none stays
Prisoner!

Hungary will renew its name,
It will get back its well-earned fame;
Enough of centuries of blame,
We shall get rid of the false shame!
God of Hungarians,
We swear,
We swear that none stays
Prisoner!

And as time goes on and on,
Our grandchildren will come
To honor and bless all our graves
And whisper our sacred names.
God of Hungarians,
We swear,
We swear that none stays
Prisoner!

PROPHECY

"You told me, mother, that our dreams
 Are drawn by a sacred hand at night,
 The dream is a window to the future
 Where the eyes of our soul get a sight.

Mother, I was dreaming something,
 Would you explain to me what it meant?
 I had wings and I was flying
 All over, without an end."

'My dear son, sunshine of my soul,
 Happier I could not have been,
 God almighty will give you long life,
 This is the joyful secret of your dream!' --

And the child grew, his young age
 Kept a flame lit in his chest,
 While the song, a soothing relief,
 Gave his heaving heart a rest.

The youngster grabbed a lute
 And put his sentiments in a song
 And on its wings, his glowing feelings,
 Like birds, were flying all around.

The magic song flew to the sky,
 Brought the star of fame down
 And from its beams, around his head,
 It weaved a shining crown.

But the fruit of the song is poison
 And each flower the poet takes away
 From his heart into his lute
 Cuts his life one precious day.

His feelings caught fire that turned into hell
 And he became the prey of flames,
 Hanging to a branch of the tree of life
 On earth that's how he remains.

He lies on his death-bed,
 Child of much torment
 And hears the faltering voice
 Of his heart-broken parent:

'Death, don't take him from my arms;
 Don't let my dear boy die,
 Heaven promised him a long life...

Or our dreams only lie?...'

"My dear mother, dreams are not lying,
Although a winding-sheet is my cover,
The glorious name of your poet son
Will survive forever and ever!"

AT THE END OF SEPTEMBER

In the valley the flowers are still blooming,
The poplars are still green by the windows,
But do you see Winter is already looming?
There is snow on the peak where the wind blows.
My young heart is freshly filled with Summer blossom,
While Spring is also in full bloom in there,
But my dark hair is greying into Autumn
And begins to show the hoarfrost of Winter.
The flowers wither, time runs so fast...
Come my beloved wife, sit on my side,
Come and put your head on my chest,
As you will on my mound in the graveyard.
If I die too soon one day, oh, tell me,
Will you cry and spread a shroud on me in tears?
Will a new lover make you forget me,
And convince you to abandon my name with ease?

When you throw away the veil of the widow,
Place it on my wooden cross as a dark banner,
I'll emerge from the sepulchral world below,
Take it down with me and keep it forever,
To dry up the tears I shed from my sobs
For you who so easily forgot,
And to bandage my wounded heart that still throbs
And loves you even there, no matter what!

THE SEA IS RISING UP

The sea is rising up,
The sea of people:
The waves high as a tower
Threaten the earth with power
Of its upheaval.

Do you see this dance?
Do you hear this tune?
This is how people revel

While they rise and rebel,
You will learn it soon.

The sea shakes and roars,
The ships are tossed around,
Masts broke and fell,
Sinking down to hell,
All the sails torn down.

Torrent, unleash your rage,
Release all your fume,
Show your vast deluge,
How fierce it is and huge,
Hurl to the sky your spume;

Use it as a lesson
To the basic rules:
Though on top is the boatman,
and down below the water,
Still, the water rules!

MOTTLED LIFE

I served Mr. Mars at one time
And Miss Thalia another time.
At one of them I got fired,
Of the other I got tired.

I walked on foot, like a pooch,
Or fared, like nobles, on a coach.
I cleaned others' riding boot
And they did mine just as good.

I was thirsty, hungry often,
Waited for dry bread to soften,
Other times I had a feast,
Like a king, to say the least.

I slept on the rough, dry ground,
Where no comfort could be found,
And rested in fancy bed
With soft pillow under my head.

I bowed humbly to the aid
Of the county magistrate,
And dignitaries tipped their hat
To me, anywhere we met.

For chambermaids it meant the end
 To walk with me hand in hand,
 Then fine ladies fell into trance
 Just thinking that they caught my glance.

I had all the finest clothes,
 Some patched up to cover holes,
 First a green patch, then blue, yellow,
 That's my mottled life, dear fellow!

MY MOTHER'S HEN

Hey, what the heck, mother hen,
 You live in our room, since when?
 You have it good from the Lord,
 I must say that you are spoiled!

Run around or take a rest,
 You even fly on the chest.
 When you feel like, you just cackle
 'Cause you're sure you win the battle.

You know you are welcome indoor,
 You're fed like a dove, even more,
 You sure get the best of grains,
 You live like a queen who reigns.

I hope you appreciate,
 Dear mother hen, your good fate
 And you always do your best
 To give my mother lots of eggs.--

Listen, our good dog, Morsel,
 Be sure that you hear me well,
 You are our old domestic,
 You served us with every old trick,

So keep behaving as it's due,
 Chicken meat is not for you.
 Mother hen is your good friend,
 Keep it this way 'till the end.

I TURNED INTO THE KITCHEN

I turned into the kitchen with my pipe,
 Because I wanted to put it on light...
 That is, I would have liked to do it,
 If my pipe would not have been lit!

But my pipe was nicely burning,
 That's not why I planned to turn in,
 I went 'cause something I noticed
 By no means I wanted to miss!

What I saw was a pretty girl
 Bustling about in a flickering skirt,
 She made fire in the oven,
 Her eyes had more fire in them!

We looked into each other' eyes,
 Until I became mesmerized,
 All the fire in my pipe has died
 And started a flame in my heart.

I DREAMED SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

I dreamed something beautiful,
 I dreamed and woke up suddenly.
 Why did you wake me up so soon?
 Why did you have to bother me?
 Happiness in my life is not real,
 At least in my dream it does appear.
 Why did you have to disturb?
 Oh my dear God, oh my dear God,
 Why am I not allowed
 To dream of pleasure in this world?

You told me that you don't love me
 But I could not believe it.
 Don't tell me again, don't tell me.
 Without saying I know you mean it.
 And when I am aware that my face
 In your heart has no more place:
 Stay or leave? You want me close,
 Perhaps only to please your eyes
 Watching how I agonize
 From the torment that you cause.

Oh, girl, you are so cruel,
 Just let me get away.
 We have to part forever

And go on our own way.
I would fly from you like dust
When there is wind, fly it must
To places man can never see
But I cannot move this boulder,
My sadness, that is on my shoulder
And weighs on me so heavily.

Poor me, I say goodbye to you,
Awful words I have to say.
Why don't they die on my lips
As they come out, right away?
I cannot just yet say goodbye,
Let me hold your hand for a while,
Your hand that destroyed my happiness
And tore my future apart,
Forever breaking my heart,
To cover it with tears and kisses.

My tears or my kisses, which is
Burning your hand more intensely?
Both tears and kisses can become hot
And burn your hand immensely,
Because they both came to life
Together with my fervent love
In my burning heart, to ascend
From this glowing, hot volcano,
Like pious pilgrims who well know
That they will die on your hand.

There is only one thing I ask,
Don't fear, it is not that you love me,
Only a little solace that
You will keep me in your memory.
How long will I stay in there?
How long will you remember?
If only until you can find
Someone whose heart throbs for you
And loves you as much as I do,
Then I'll stay forever in your mind!

But I do not wish that you
Should not find somebody true
Like me. If I would have that wish,
I would not really love you.
I want you to live happily,
Pick some leaves from any tree,
Pick those with a fresh fragrance,

Weave together young green leaves,
Then, when old, toss out the dry wreath
That once was my remembrance.

THE MOONLIGHT IS BATHING IN THE SEA OF THE SKY

The moonlight is bathing in the sea of the sky
The brigand is musing in the forest, with a sigh,
The night spread thick dew all over the grass,
But there are more tears in the bandit's eyes.

Leaning on the shaft of his axe he'd ponder:
"Why did I do all those mean things, I wonder.
My dear mother, you always wanted me good,
Why did I not listen to you when I could?"

I became a vagabond and left my home
I have joined robbers with whom I roam.
I am still among them, I am still the same,
A menace to travelers, to my utter shame.

I would go home gladly and leave them behind
But it is too late, there is no home to find.
My dear mother has died and the house collapsed;
The gallows are standing -- I am the next!"

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