

ÁGNES LEHÓCZKY

REMEMBERER



egg box

Rememberer

First Published, 2011, by Egg Box Publishing
www.eggboxpublishing.com

All rights reserved © Ágnes Lehóczky, 2011

The right of Ágnes Lehóczky
to be identified as the author of this work
has been asserted in accordance with Section 77
of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not,
by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, stored in a
retrieval system, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior
consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is
published and without a similar condition including this condition
being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Book design & artwork:
Nathan Hamilton
& Su Yen Pang

Printed and bound by:
Biddles, Kings Lynn
www.biddles.co.uk

ISBN: 978-0956928900



REMEMBERER
by Ágnes Lehóczky



Anyának

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

ikszedik stáció (Budapest, Universitas, 2000)

Medalion (Budapest, Universitas, 2002)

Budapest to Babel (Egg Box, 2008)

*Poetry, The Geometry of The Living Substance – Four Essays on Ágnes
Nemes Nagy* (Cambridge Scholars, 2011)



CONTENTS

PART ONE - UNDER ERASURE

PRELUDE

ON A CROWDED CATACOMB..	9
-------------------------	---

UNDER ERASURE I

THE FLIGHT FEATHERS' TALE	12
CARP FISHPOND FABLE	13

TORSO IN THE WINDOW

11 TOKENS	14
-----------	----

BROWN AND GREY - FIVE FOLIOS FROM 1979

FOLIO1	20
FOLIO2	21
FOLIO3	22
FOLIO4	23
FOLIO5	24

UNDER ERASURE II

KENTISH CANVAS 1	25
KENTISH CANVAS 2	26

THE EXISTENCE OF ZERO

27

PART TWO - INTO A BARMAN'S NOTEBOOK

1 TIDAL PREDICTIONS	33
2 GEOLOGY OF A NOTEBOOK	35
3 I'S NOTEBOOK	37
4 THE ALBUM OF EDESSA	38
5 THE ALBUM OF THE LIVING	39
6 MONDAY, MIDSUMMER	41
7 THE PARCHMENT SKIN	43
8 UNTITLED	46

CONTENTS

PART THREE - A BOOK OF BREATHINGS

BALATON 1: THE CERAMIC POT	49
BALATON 2: SPIRAL	50
BALATON 3: THE HORSE-CHESTNUT	51
BALATON 4: THE ANNIVERSARY..	52
BALATON 5: MAGNESIUM AND SULPHATE	53
BALATON 6: A CITY IN A KEYHOLE	54
BALATON 7: PHILEMON ON THE ZENITH	55
BALATON 8: EN ROUTE FOR THE AIRPORT	56
BALATON 9: IN BAUCIS' VINEYARD	58
BALATON 10: POT BY POST	59

PART FOUR - EIGHT POEMS FROM SIULA GRANDE

WHITE NIGHT 1	63
WHITE NIGHT 2	64
WHITE NIGHT 3	65
WHITE NIGHT 4	66
WHITE NIGHT 5	67
WHITE NIGHT 6	68
WHITE NIGHT 7	69
WHITE NIGHT 8	70

PART FIVE - REMEMBERER

REMEMBERER	75
------------	----

1

Under Erasure

Under Erasure II

Kentish Canvas 1

The distance between houses is less and less explicable. Cuts of Caen limestone-walls here and there. Terracotta tiles in the snow. Dependent on the angle from which the train, tangible or transparent, rolls into the metamorphic landscape, into an old town of cordial spectres, medieval chubby wax figurines. No sensation. Though their look feels real when you lean over. Their idiomatic grins, their homespun costumes smelling of straw. These houses have three jovial white caps. It is a pilgrimage for the blind. From chimney to chimney, here I am again. Travelling into landscapes of an unknown season. Look out for their freshly painted cowls. Your left sleeve weightily left in the air. Waving at roofs. Sketching drafts of squares and triangles in this fog. Their palpable contours crumble away in your gloves like chalk. They are Saxon. Your cadences freeze in the air. Muted under an opaque snowfall. Triplets of spiral cones, tinted wooden arrows, brick-stones of Benedictine abbeys, pyramidal roofs, bloodstained tiles of a cathedral transept. They were here, you insist, pointing at outlines of air, contours of nothing.

The Existence of Zero

1

The long drive on the canvas rolls smoothly. No-one on the road. You prefer to wake at dawn. The rich morning silences, the animated fabric of net-working birds and bugs. The intrusive start of the engine, the way the noise forces them to clear the air, and clears the road in front of you too. These early summer mornings. The counting of milestones. Repetition of road-signs, lamposts, electric poles, arriving, it seems, from an infinite landscape. Vapour trails criss-crossing your windscreen. Another sunrise resting on your bonnet. This is how you prefer it to be. The morning.

2

Before you travelled you lost heart. You stared at the photo on the passport for days. A document renewed but never used. Before you travel, you iterate, you must look through bookshelves to find the map, the tourist guide, the route ahead peeping in-between dusty cracks, you search for the traveller, the foreign soul, the spectre. In a library of books written in abstractions, so you sweep manuscripts off surfaces and display what's palpable instead. A floating shell. A leaf without contour: what pulls it together is inner nervation. A sandalwood pilgrim-figurine reaching into your own dimensions. An empty copper birdcage.

3

Your veiled voice in the receiver. Words woven arduously from rough fibre, coarse filaments. You tell me that the drive turned out to be dramatic. You hit the large body of an eagle bird. And then sobbed all the way home. The driving rules dictate and one mustn't stop. One must not stop, but prolong the serpentine reeling under tyres. You tell me this after the journey into an outdated present from which you are simply and suddenly gone. The trip that has not even started is already over. Are you back in the city of flint? You ask. Your smile blows a reminiscing puff of air into my ear.

2



Into a Barman's Notebook

3 I's Notebook

There are a lot of cities I would like not to remember. To talk of them as if they weren't. As if those cities had not existed before. There has to be a hole in the membrane of memory this way. Through which these places can escape into the atmosphere and spill. And refill themselves as memories of no-one and find their home in nowhere. As long as the atmosphere does not eject them. It depends on how many names I could fail to give them. The sunset is not a word, either. Only an incision. Into rocks of greaseproof paper. The sunset is a crater on a photograph. Once upon a time. I didn't want to remember. A city with a river. This city has not got a name, and the river too, is anonymous. He or she dwelt. A town-dweller, non-significant, that could be I. It is called skinning a white wall. And painting over it again. Depriving space of space. In the end space swells up and all the edges grow together. And there isn't a millimetre of white left on the page to fill with inky hieroglyphs. The strata of all definitions stamped on greaseproof paper. If only I forgot names. I would be back in the same cul-de-sac. What's the point of knowing? What it was I met. I could dwell in here. It would be practical. Names overlap. The topography of memories. Reliefs of the mind, the mini-planet. Each a different colour. The earth's unpeelable skin. They may extend over hundreds of thousands of square kilometres of its surface. And in the end no-one knows. Who I talked about. I could dig down and find the core of it. I could memorise what is not. What not to remember. The sunset is not sunrise. The concave not the convex.

3

A Book of Breathings

Hajnának és Szabolcsnak

Balaton 2: Spiral

We spent the very last hour of the day under an unreal starry sky. A dizzy experience. A kind of dying: of fright. Upwards. Imagine vertigo, in reverse. But was it us or the planets who felt lightheaded that night? You say, we too are made of the same solar material. Of the same chewy red clay. The spiral in our lives, you say, is so obvious that one must be blind not to see it meandering whirling the deposits of years, silts of belated afterthoughts. Look at the web of helices braiding the young and the old. Did you know? That even stars and snails have something in common? It is in this land's curling characteristics, domes of basilicas, flights of stairs, layers of geology, chalk, bath stone, basalt, slate, lava, tufa, dolomite, calcium, magnesium carbonate, loess, silt, wind-blown, the abbey in front of us with two spinning spires, your whirling visits to the Copenhagen port, the Copenhagen you, the 'you' you could have been, the you 'you' passed by twenty five years after you passed by the Copenhagen port twenty-five years ago, this zig-zagging to and fro and up and down. Did you know that in this lake Central-Europe drowned? Imagine Central-Europe as a water corpse. And, in search of the minute worn-crested Miocene shell, the tiny crescent nail of a goat, *Congeria unguilacprae*, we dive down to the bottom of its basin with the children, for the tiny skeleton of the shouting girl, the water corpse of her shepherd and the bones of the shepherd's thousand golden haired goats, lost in the bottom of some kind of a hollow and concave vessel. They say they had turned into loess, basalt, magnesium carbonate, lava, tufa in the end. Then they turned into an abbey. Then into a manuscript, old and long-forgotten. Then into a bishop. We are made of remnants of each other. If you pass by this lake at night-time, you'll see an empty eye, as gigantic as the universe. This eye is a city made of endless stairways, a city which had long been drowned. Around it flickering houses and clapping sailing boats encompass its bright black pupil. Their chime is metallic as the boats in a bay of the North Sea. If quieter. Look, this snail, the one with the round mouth, is crawling onto this page, leaving a vapour trail across the paper.

Balaton 9: In Baucis' Vineyard

And then grandmother, who was once made of the same chewy red clay as the planets, grabs me by the hand and we step into the maze of her vineyard. The hillside we stand on is warm and sunlit. She says she daily watches over the city peeping through between these vine-branches. As if she were a light shaft. I follow her eyes and notice this city's numb face in the distance. Slowly closing her eyes. She leads me to a bunch of grapes, each covered with a red net-bag. The grapes look ruby, ripe, heavy. Grapes of the universe, I think. She explains that these net-bags are against wasps while disentangling the fruit from the net's rough fabrics with her hands, bony, brown. I am not allowed to pick it randomly, only one cluster at a time. Systematically and with self-discipline. I guess I understand why. What would the grape clusters look gap-toothed? With absences and chasms? She points at the old house. She tells me she left it a long time ago. She can't live inside that monster any longer. She gave birth to this monster by building the walls sixty years ago carrying timbers and bricks up to the zenith of the hill. Up and down the hillside like Sisyphus rolling the same rock. And now, only a bleak labyrinth watches blindly over the city with eyes, look, shut with mosquito nets. A draughty yawn. A gap-toothed grin. Here is the shopping you've asked for, I said. The bag of cinnamon. The vanilla-sugar. The ground black pepper. The baking soda. No, it wasn't a chore. My bag was ever so light.

4

Eight Poems from Siula Grande

White night 4

This train trip on this early January morning is like the alpinist's who undertook the first ascent of the west face of the Peruvian Andes and slipped and got suspended on a rope above a gaping crack of a bottomless glacier. My train too seems to levitate for a flash reeling by that monstrous tower block, a giant mountain chain, remembered from dark concrete panes of past train trips, faces of forests learnt by heart, names of towns reiterated even in sleep. And just when the train passes by it falls, as if, hanging above this nothing on a rope, someone, you, for example, had cut the rough fibre with an invisible pocket knife, with a single-syllable hiss. Why, I wonder, these flimsy faces etched into trams' glass? Do masks leave an impression of friction ridges too? They do. The Capuchin monks do. And I breathe air sporadically in and out and imagine, I am a winter coat, an alpinist's heavy gear I all at once stripped off – discarding old skin, remains of cords, an ice axe, a red suitcase, a worn out cocoon and a light waterproof tent under echoes of seracs and archways I would never want to return to. A horizontal fall. Be Munchausen, you boom, and eat snow, ride cannonballs and pull yourself out of this hole by your own hair. By the roots. By the bulbs.

White night 8

A sharp change in altitude. Your eardrums throb so the airhostess offers you sweets to suck and eat and encourages you to chew and swallow. Carriage by carriage, the train zooms by a monstrous tower-block remembered from the deposit of several thick overnight snowfalls. A giant mountain range formed by metamorphic rocks, reigning over the January horizon. Its concrete storeys randomly collaged. Strata of snow. Are there such things? Snowbound streets and courtyards rising like dough with the hour. Or like an air balloon, bursting into your room through the window, a gigantic puffed face. The left sleeve of your winter coat lifts itself. Your face melts into the gloss of the hoar frosty glass. You breathe in and out. All at once it blurs. Because of that sharp puff on the glass. You blow all the leaves off the magnolia tree. They scatter like black and brown Indian Runner Ducks in the snow. You reiterate the names of towns from the very last carriage of the train. For another fading face, another forest to be erased with transparent ink from the landscape and then forgotten. The last thing you would want is to freeze thirty thousand feet above sea level. Above cloud-level. You drop your woolly hat into the abyss of the courtyard. Then your compass. Then your torch. For how much longer will you sleep-hike? Pass me that old tube of oil pastel, tempera, chalk, a handful of snow, a pot of transparent ink. You adjust to the direction of the train inching away from Siula Grande. Look, there, the end of the rope, cut with a hiss. Is that a kite or you flapping on the other end of it, your flimsy figure fluttering in white frost? Throwing your papery body upwards, you parachute, like the sleeve of a winter coat. This one will be a controlled descent with semi-rigid wings, you think. Is there a difference between narcolepsy and insomnia in the end? Between cloud-level and sea-level? The North Wind creeps in and out through your nostrils. A gentle tap on your shoulder. An azure-eyed, slender inspector murmurs into your ears as the train, window by window, reels in to your final destination. Is this the place you were looking for? he asks. You pull your red suitcase after your shadow rolling it through a puddle of last year's sleet. Fiddling with a cocoon in your pocket, with the dry skin of a

Capuchin monk, with twenty-four talismans of friendship. These paper-thin sentences always give you hope. The parched body of a moth you picked up the other day from the floor mistaking it for a brooch, is in your thoughts. A handful of soft soil leaking from your palms. A line of white geese in the snow, a necklace crafted from white-gold resting against skin. A line of black crows pecking the frosty earth. One effaces the other. Illuminates and then eliminates.

5

Rememberer

Rememberer

(*Nagyszüleimnek*)

They warned you about the edges of the season, of the next on its way. About rims of the months, the years, fictitious, nearly impalpable. They muttered words about margins. About the stimulus it takes to cross them, the spur of inching from one season into the next without any drastic alterations, grotesque metamorphoses. The tattered body of the old summer boat reeled smoothly through the water a few metres above an underground city shaped geometrically like the river, curling like your own meanderings across another city built overground on hot tarmac. You scanned passing landscapes through the discoloured windows of the boat, pages of what's outside, folios of the hour, coated and folded like an architectural ghost, a geometrical memoir of tarred rooflines, manuscripts scraped off and used again, marks of removed stairways, dust-lines of former wholeness. Shadows of floorboards pared pale yellow as hot sand. Static and moving your face conversed with the filthy glass as the hydrofoil trickled the water down out of the season like a hollow shell, a curled up carapace of an insect, a metal cocoon with two rudimentary wings, two antennae on each side, stroking the surface of its own liquefied context. Its diluted circumstance. Shedding quiet conversations about the sudden ending of summers. You then learnt their conversations by heart, unfinished sentences about approaching hot Septembers, floating down the millennium old sky, the river, the city, the body. Under railway bridges and over deck bridges passing by abandoned boatyards cramped with dysfunctional kayaks, superfluous mops and buckets, paddles with chipped blades, peeling gloss. One envies the mouldy patience of these shed-objects, the apathy of summer and winter bric-a-brac. Their idle being there. But then one envies the river diver too. His sporadic rota of diving underworld, down into another labyrinthine city. The cryptic wealth and the riches he finds underwater. Digging through the impenetrable, the strata of dusked river beds. Lost key rings, forint coins tangled with river weeds and moss, wire hair combs, rust-eaten compasses, sunken yachts, empty telephone boxes reeking of once raucous messages imparted in immaterial moments, their inaudible hieroglyphs, the objects' *danse macabre*, their uncorrodable presence. And then the

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Denise Riley, George Szirtes, Nathan Hamilton, Adam Piette and Jeremy Noel-Tod. Without their assistance this book would not be this one.

An enormous thank you to the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Authors' Foundation, administered by the Society of Authors, The Voice Project, The Jane Martin Prize, The Hungarian Cultural Centre, London, and the Hungarian Faludi Academy for their support during work on this collection.

Further thanks (in no particular order) to the following people for their encouragement and tireless support: Tessa Sowerby, Hajnalka Lehóczky, Szabolcs Szigeti, Sokratis Kioussis, Isabel A. Hill, Veronika Schandl, Sian Croose, Madeline Callaghan, Emilie Vince, Maria Kardel, Noémi Kovács, Andrew Spragg, Vahni Capildeo, Emma Bell, Kate Kilalea, Anna Selby, Alice Wright, Peter Holm-Jensen, Melody Wright, Lynda Thompson, Hayley Buckland, Louise Johnson, Grainne McGeough, Liz Adams, Amaan Hyder, Geraldine Monk, Alan Halsey, Gábor Nagy, Gyöngyi Végh, Jane Hodson, Angela Wright, Sam Ladkin, Richard De Ritter, Gary J. Hughes, Anna Bíró-Kocsis, Gabriella Bazsó, Alice Kate Mullen, Steven Fowler, Janet Macpherson, Deb Muldowney, Kim Knight, Julia Webb, Jonathan Baker, Henriette Louwerse, Stefan Tobler, Ethel Maqeda, Jo Budd, Marketa Mikulova, Éva Szentes, Emil Hargittay, Angie Pegg, Claire-Jane Carter and Jenny Hodgson.

