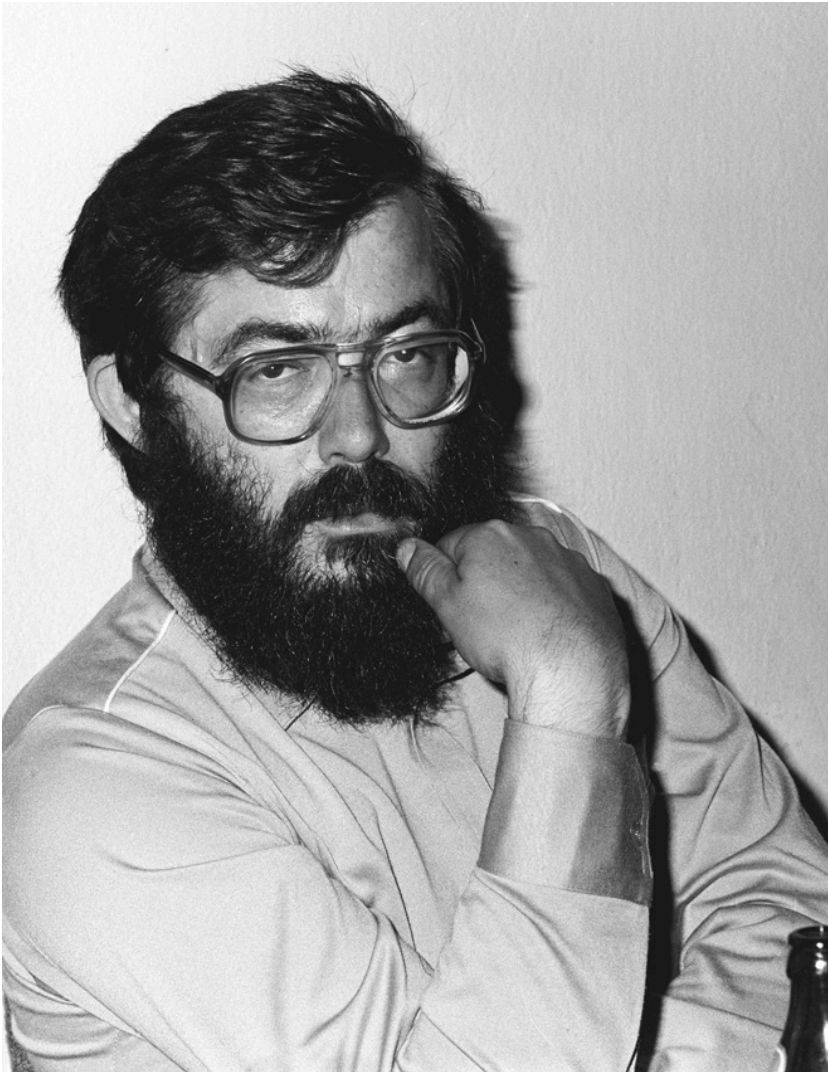


# Blurb and Author Photo

ISTVÁN BAKA (1948-1995), one of the most significant Hungarian lyric poets at the end of the twentieth century was born in Szekszárd, Transdanubia, and died in Szeged, at the southern edge of the Hungarian plain. Apart from his expertise in Hungarian and Russian, which manifested itself in his manifold translations – that included the mock translating of himself as ‘Pehotnij’, an imaginary Russian poet – Baka possessed an innate sense of stylistic perfection which made him as a poet and as an editor both angelic and devilishly difficult. Once in the early eighties, he signed himself as *Stephanus Szegediensis poeta laureatus Hungariae* and then spent the rest of his life to prove that the ironic epithet was essentially true.



Was it? His children, his devoted wife, his friends, the better half of the Hungarian literary establishment were convinced of it – he had been honoured with prizes, bursaries, memorial volumes – but would

he appeal to a wider international public? This slim volume is a test, a test of fire and water. For Baka, refusing to comply with *fin-de-siecle* fashions, wrote in classic forms, and his main translator, Peter Zollman, recreated his rhymes and metrical schemes in tight English verse – conserving even the original melody.

Baka thought that in a disinte-grating world the tigher the formal discipline the more chance the poem has to survive. The world for this shy, egocentric, but not egoistical poet was godless and chaotic: in the allegedly monumental disorder his poems were sequels of order.

In his last years, István Baka was not only fighting his demons that filled his mind with thoughts of *vanitatum vanitas*, but he also physically and mentally struggled with cancer – which, at the end, killed him. Yet he survived in his eight slim books of poetry, and in the memory of those who knew and loved him.

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