

Franz Liszt Spends a Night above the Fishmarket

[*Liszt Ferenc éjszakája a Hal téri házban*](#)

The candle-flame, a feminine blush, blows out
between the closing thighs of night. It's dark.
A discarded hassock soils the room like ink.
That glimmering is God's ceremonial buckler,
the Milky Way. It is now I should hear the Music
of the Spheres, but like root-crop left too long in tilth,
autumnal-sodden, the heavenly host themselves
have mouldered away.

It is quiet. All Hungary is sleeping.
The horizon pouts her lips for a kiss,
makes smacking noises in her sleep and drools:
Be thankful you are one of us, dear boy.
I am thankful. But I hope you will not notice
how the gold-braid of my rhapsodies has faded
on your moth-eaten old ceremonial suit,
my poor country. I have scored you into
the Grand Hotel d'Europe and failed to note
your place has been prepared at the kitchen table.
It's all one now. Sleep on, and may your dreams
return the wide sky's kiss. I won't disturb you.
The piano is a sealed coffin; the tedious
flirtation of the candle is snuffed out.
I gaze dumbly at the Milky Way's corrosions,
and down on the square where trader's stalls grow brilliant
with constellations of scales and stink of fish,
a topsy-turvy world where heraldic angels
serve as ingredients for starch or for poteen,
and the red-white-green insignia we sport
on our breast pockets for bull at target practice.

Translated by George Szirtes

From ***[Selected Poems](#)*** by István Baka

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