

Baron Bálint Balassi de Kékkő et Gyarmat – the greatest Hungarian poet of the Age of Late-Renaissance

Bálint Balassi (20 October 1554 – 30 May 1594) was the greatest Hungarian lyrical poet of the age of late-Renaissance. He wrote mainly in Hungarian but was also fluent in other European languages including Latin, Italian, German, Polish, Turkish, Slovakian, Croatian and Romanian. For centuries on, he has been considered the true founder of modern Hungarian lyric and erotic poetry. He was born at Zólyom in the Kingdom of Hungary (now Zvolen, Slovakia) and educated by the Calvinist minister Péter Bornemissza, as well as his mother Anna Sulyok, a talented Protestant lady. His very first work, *The Little Herbal Garden for the Sick Souls*, a translation of Michael Bock's *Wurlzgerlein für die krancken Seelen*, was published in Cracow in 1572 and can still be seen at the Great Library of Sárospatak Calvinist College. It was originally aimed at comforting his father János Balassi who was living in exile at a castle near Krosno, Poland. On his rehabilitation, Bálint accompanied him to court and was present at the coronation dinner in Pressburg (now Bratislava), the royal capital of Hungary in 1572. He then joined the army and fought the Turks at the fortress of Eger in north-eastern Hungary. There he fell in love with Anna Losonczi, daughter of the captain of Temesvár and, evidently, from his verses, his love did not remain unrequited although she preferred to give her hand to Kristóf Ungnád after her first husband's death. Eventually, Balassi began to realize how much he loved her only after he had lost her. He pursued her with expensive gifts and marvellous poems but she stayed true to her marriage vows while he could only preserve her memory in his verses. In 1574 he was sent to the military camp of captain Gáspár Bekes to fight against the Transylvanian prince Stephen Báthory but his troops were encountered and scattered on the way there while he himself got wounded and taken prisoner. His captivity lasted two years, during which he accompanied Báthory who was crowned king of Poland. He returned to Hungary soon after his father's death. On Christmas Day 1584, at the castle of Sárospatak, he married his cousin Krisztina Dobó, daughter of the valiant commander of Eger István Dobó, which became the cause of his many subsequent troubles and misfortunes. His wife's greedy relatives nearly ruined him by lawsuits and when in 1586 he turned to Catholicism to escape their persecutions they tried to slander him and his son with embracing Islam. The desertion of his wife and the legal disputes were followed by years of uncertainty although in 1589 he was invited to Poland to serve in the impending war against Turkey. As it had not occurred, he, in disappointment, returned to Hungary in 1591 after staying for a while at the Jesuit College of Braunsberg. In the following fifteen-year war he joined the army again and later bravely died at the siege of Esztergom in 1594 being severely wounded in the leg by a cannonball. He was buried at Hybe (now Slovakia). Balassi's poems are traditionally divided into hymns, martial songs, love poems and adaptations from Latin and German. They are all most authentic, exceedingly objective and so excellent stylistically making it even difficult to imagine him as a contemporary of Sebestyén Tinódi Lantos and Péter Ilosvay. Yet, his erotic verses are considered to be his best literary achievements. They circulated in manuscripts for generations but had never been printed until 1874 when Farkas Deák discovered a good copy of them at the Radványi Library. For beauty, feeling and expressing passion, there had been nothing like them till the age of such great poets as Mihály Csokonai Vitéz and Sándor Petőfi. Balassi was also the inventor of a new stanza that carries his name and consists of nine lines as a b c c b d d b or three rhyming pairs alternating with the rhyming third, sixth and ninth lines.



Borivóknak való

In laudem verni temporis¹

1

Áldott szép Pünkösdnek gyönyörű ideje,
Mindent egészséggel látogató ege,
Hosszú úton járókat könnyebbítő szele!

2

Te nyitod rózsákat meg illatozásra,
Néma fülemile torkát kiáltásra,
Fákat is te öltöztetsz sokszínű ruhákba.

3

Néked virágoznak bokrok, szép violák,
Folyó vizek, kutak csak néked tisztulnak,
A jó hamar lovak is csak benned vigadnak.

4

Mert fáradtság után fűre ment tagokat
Szép harmatos fűvel hizlalod azokat,
Új erővel építvén üzéshez inakat.

5

Sőt még az végbéli jó vitéz katonák,
A szép szagú mezőt kik széjjel bejárják,
Most azok is vigadnak, s az időt mulatják.

6

Ki szép fűvön lévén bánik jó lovával,
Ki vígan lakozik vitéz barátjával,
Ki pedig véres fegyvert tisztított csiszárral.

7

Újul még az föld is mindenütt tetőled,
Tisztul homályából az ég is tevéled,
Minden teremtett állat megindul tebenned.

8

Ily jó időt érvén Isten kegyelméből,
Dicsérjük szent nevét fejenként jó szívből,
Igyunk, lakjunk egymással vígan, szeretetből!
Bálint Balassi

Chanson pour les buveurs de vin

In laudem verni temporis²

1

La sainte Pentecôte est la saison bénie,
Climat salubre et ciel serein et temps exquis
Et vent si doux pour ceux qui vont à l'aventure!

2

Déjà le rossignol à chanter se dispose,
Pour embaumer la vie tu fais fleurir les roses
Et des vertes forêts chatoyer la parure.

3

¹ A tavasz dicsérete (lat.).

² Un éloge pour le printemps (lat.)

Sous les buissons la violette s'alanguit,
L'eau neuve rend plus purs les ruisseaux et les puits,
Tu donnes belle humeur aux destriers rapides.

4

De leur longue fatigue ils vont se reposer
Et se repaître d'herbe tendre et de rosée
Qui font la foulée souple et le sabot solide.

5

Et vous aussi, soldats valeureux des confins,
Vous parcourez les prés nouveaux dont le parfum
Par ce temps clair vous réjouit et vous enchante.

6

L'un mène sur le pré son cheval et le panse,
Deux compagnons assis dans l'herbe font bombance,
D'un autre, l'armurier polit l'épée sanglante.

7

Infiniment la terre aussi se renouvelle,
De ses noires nuées tu as lavé le ciel,
Les bêtes en tous lieux retrouvent leur vigueur.

8

Béni soit Dieu qui nous donna des temps si doux,
Chantons joyeusement sa grâce, égayons-nous,
Tous ensemble, louons le saint nom du Seigneur!

Ladislav Gara

For wine drinkers

In laudem verni temporis³

1

Blessed sweet Pentecost's weather brightly glowing,
Beautiful sky on all healthiness bestowing,
Wind that brings relief onto tired wayfarers blowing!

2

It is thou who givest perfume to the roses,
The once mute nightingale now its song composes,
And trees, too, thou dressest in many-coloured clothes.

3

It's through thee that hedges bloom, violets appear;
Flowing waters and wells through thee turn crystal clear,
And our speedy stallions, too, prance along with good cheer.

4

For after their long run, the tender grass bedews
Their exhausted bodies, while their vigour renews,
Infusing new energy in their nerves and sinews.

5

And even the good, brave frontier soldiers alight
And through the scented fields roam about with delight,
Now they, too, are overjoyed that the weather's so bright.

6

³ A praise to springtime (lat.).

In the soft grass leaving their horses to run free,
With their brothers-in-arms they go off on a spree
While with their blood-stained weapons their pages are busy.

7

The whole earth is renewed, thanks to thee everywhere.
Thanks to thee, the blue sky breaks through the misty air,
And every living creature emerges from its lair.

8

Enjoying, as we do, this weather through God's grace,
From our hearts let us all His holy name praise,
Let us drink, and to true friendship our glasses raise!

Rene Bonnarjea

Do winopijców

In laudem verni temporis⁴

1

Maju zielony, dni błogosławione,
Serce nam koi niebo rozmajone,
I wietrzyk chłodzi wędrowce strudzone!

2

Ty budzisz wonie różanego krzewu,
Nieme słowiki sposobisz do śpiewu,
Ty się zielenić rozkazujesz drzewu.

3

W tobie ziół wszelkich i gajów kwitnienie,
Przeźroczyścieją zdroje i strumienie,
Koni wesołych słysząc dziarskie rzenie.

4

Minęły zimy srogie niewygody,
Szczypią rumaki ruń, kobierzec młody,
Zdolne z ochotą nową pójść w zawody.

5

Ci nawet, co straż kresową trzymają,
Gdy się po kwietnym błoniu przechadzają,
Do woli wczasu błogo zażywają.

6

Ten konia swego świeżym źdźbłem częstuje,
Ów z przyjaciół wesoło ucztuje,
Tamtemu chłopiec broń czyści, rychtuje.

7

Maj z chmur niebiosa oczyszcza, maj sprawia,
Że ziemia wszystka wszędy się odnawia,
Stworzenie wszelkie żywo się zabawia.

8

Wczas i dostatki z łaski Pana mając,
A imię jego szczerze wychwalając,

⁴ Chwała wiosnie (lat.).

Ucztujmy, bracie, wino popijając!
Witold Dąbrowski

Für Weintrinker

In laudem verni temporis⁵

1

Herrliche und segenreiche Pfingstzeiten,
wenn die Himmel sich gesund und strahlend breiten,
wenn die Winde leicht den frohen Wanderer begleiten!

2

Rosen öffnest du in diesen hellen Tagen,
machst die Kehlen stummer Nachtigallen schlagen,
machst, daß Baum und Busch die allerschönsten Kleider
tragen.

3

Wenn Jasmin und Flieder ihre Blüten zeigen,
wenn die Quellen reiner aus den Bergen steigen,
bäumen sich die raschen Pferde auf im Frühlingsreigen.

4

Aus dem Winterschlaf erlöst du ihre Glieder,
saftig grüne Gräser gibst du ihnen wieder,
in den Adern jagst du neue Säfte auf und nieder.

5

Und sogar die sonst so braven Grenzsoldaten,
weit und breit bekannt für ihre kühnen Taten,
sich in Wiesenduft und Sonnenschein jetzt wohligh baden.

6

Einer will im tiefen Gras den Rappen pflegen,
einer läßt zum Freudenmahl, den Frühlingssegen,
einer bringt zum Waffenschmied den blutverbrannten
Degen.

7

Überall will sich durch dich die Welt erneuern,
auch das Himmelslicht erwacht zu neuen Feuern,
alle Wesen regen sich, um deine Macht zu feiern.

8

Eine solche Zeit in Gottes Huld zu leben
und dem Herrn von Herzen alle Ehr zu geben -
Freunde, laßt uns liebesfroh den Krug zum Mahl erheben!

Heinz Kahlau

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⁵ Lob des Frühlings (lat.).