

The Poet or the Duke?

*To His Imperial Highness,
Eduard Habsburg-Lothringen,
Archduke of Austria
(b. 1967 –)*

by [Jeffrey Burghauer](#) (February 2025)



Queen Zita of Hungary and Crown Prince Otto of Hungary,
Coronation Day, 1916 (Gyula Eder, 1929)

A lively desire of knowing and of recording our ancestors

so generally prevails, that it must depend on the influence of some common principle in the minds of men. We seem to have lived in the persons of our forefathers. It is the labor and reward of vanity to extend the term of this ideal longevity. Our imagination is always active to enlarge the narrow circle in which Nature has confined us. Fifty or a hundred years may be allotted to an individual, but we step forward beyond death with such hopes as religion and philosophy will suggest, and we fill up the silent vacancy that precedes our birth by associating ourselves to the authors of our existence. Our calmer judgment will rather tend to moderate than to suppress the pride of an ancient and worthy race. The satirist may laugh; the philosopher may preach. But Reason herself will respect the prejudices and habits which have been consecrated by the experience of mankind. –Edward Gibbon

Poetry is news that stays news. –Ezra Pound

Your Highness, human life cannot but prove
A man may qualify as something of
 An existential fluke.
I wonder. Who do you imagine more
Ridiculous in twenty twenty-four:
 The Poet or the Duke?

When either rages, threatening to part
The Seas with his pronouncements, none lose heart,
 For it's a barren threat;
We're feudal creatures. Modern *laissez-faire*
Makes everybody thrilled to be the heir
 To nothing but a debt.

I've read of you: "Reactionary"; "White
Supremacist"; "Exploiter"; "Parasite";
 "Religious zealot"; "His

Most recent book is full of rancid lies"—
The Everyman at least can recognize,
 Though, what a Monarch *is*.

Possession of the adamantine cleat
Of Pedigree (today, an obsolete
 Prestige) or pointless skills
Is not so horrible, as long as you
Remain that queer anachronism who
 At least can pay his bills.

It's only natural that men like us,
Whose social function is superfluous,
 Should mutually pledge
Perpetual support. And that is why
(With brimming soul & empty wallet) I
 Solicit patronage.

I'll be your Poet, taking your prestige
(Which no one really cares about, my liege),
 And, managing to feed
It through the craft whose bleak demands I curse,
Convert your reputation into verse
 Which none shall ever read.

Your Highness, ever since your fathers cut
That part of the Carpathians from what
 Was Ottoman terrain,
My family wore its loyalty to yours
Through something like a century of wars
 As lions wear a mane.

Although possession of the city passed
From hand to hand with each concussive blast,
 With each dactylic flame
Engaging an already-trampled field,
My grateful family cannot but wield

Their city's German name.

Though many favors cannot be repaid,
Some can. Forget the bullshit masquerade.

Forget the winsome trash
That ancient Pedigree or fecund Muse
Sincerely promise to produce. The news
Remaining news is cash.

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