

THE POET AS TRANSLATOR

Margaret Avison's "Hungarian Snap"

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SEVERAL YEARS BEFORE the publication of her first volume of poetry, *Winter Sun* (1960), Margaret Avison was walking through the then-outdoor courtyard of Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum, admiring its Chinese tomb lions. Nearby, Marshall McLuhan sat entertaining two Hungarian émigrés, Ilona Duczyńska and her husband Karl Polanyi. Spotting Avison, he motioned her to join them, saying, "Here's a poet you should use in your project."¹

As with many collaborative efforts, a fortunate accident was at the start of this one — a collection of translations of some of Hungary's greatest twentieth-century writers, including Attila József, Gyula Illyés, and Ferenc Juhász. Hungarian literature has long been neglected by English translators, for various reasons. Since the end of the Second World War, only half a dozen anthologies of its poetry or short stories have been published, and equally few novelists. Avison's translations were to be part of *The Plough and the Pen: Writings from Hungary 1930-1956*, introduced by W. H. Auden and published in 1963.² For her collection *No Time* (1989), Avison included one of these translations, revised, and she offered several of them in her *Selected Poems* (1991). Her translations are exemplary, deserving study for themselves and for the issues they raise.³

The poet as translator has a long, impressive history, especially when poets work with languages they know well. But there is a fascinating side-line to this tradition when poets translate from languages they don't understand. William Butler Yeats's lack of Greek never stopped him from translating Sophocles. Auden and Pound worked with poems in languages they couldn't read, and more recently Robert Lowell, W. S. Merwin, Elaine Feinstein, Phyllis Webb and Gwendolyn MacEwen (to list only a few) have taken the risk to enrich our sense of the possibilities of English while introducing unfamiliar writers.

Although the reasons for such translations differ among the poets themselves, certain technical concerns remain constant even when the languages vary. Lowell raised many of these in the preface to *Imitations*, his collection of translations of

Western poetry from Homer to Pasternak. "I have been restless with literal meaning," he confessed, "and labored hard to get the tone. Most often *a* tone for *the* tone is something that will always more or less escape transference to another language and cultural moment."⁴ Like many poets faced with writing in an unknown language, he had to rely on intermediaries. Of Pasternak he wrote: "I have rashly tried to improve on other translations, and have been helped by exact prose versions given me by Russian readers." This is "an old practice," as he recognized — an old practice that yields new poems twice removed from the originals.

INEVITABLY A POET BRINGS TO THE ACT of translating personal associations with a language, culture or writer. Avison recalls the Polanyis as her first experience of European intellectuals, "something I'd known from novels, and here it was in the flesh." Both had been actively involved in leftist politics in Hungary before becoming exiles. After meeting in Austria, they settled in England during the 1930s. Duczyńska taught science, and became an Associate Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society; Polanyi taught in Vienna and London, and eventually became a professor of economics at Columbia University. Fortunately the Polanyis were able to overcome Avison's fear, because of their country's policies during the Second World War, that all Hungarians were anti-Semites. Duczyńska was Jewish, Polanyi a Christian, and they represented a side of the Hungarian character new to Avison. Having admired the abortive Hungarian Revolution of 1956, and been appalled that the West had encouraged the freedom fighters and then "dumped" them, she was intrigued by the couple's commitment to politics and literature.

Along with the Polanyis, another factor that came to interest Avison — who knew some German and high-school French — was the Hungarian language itself. The effect of spoken Hungarian reminded her of Finnish, which she happily associated with girlhood school friends. (Hungarian and Finnish are both part of the Finno-Ugric language group, and distantly related.) While the pronunciation of Hungarian words tends to evenness, there is often a slight stress on the first syllable, giving the hint of an accent. Musicians have called this stress "the Hungarian snap," thinking of such composers as Bartók and Kodály. Avison immediately liked the sound of spoken Hungarian.

Duczyńska made the initial selection of poets. Her reasons for choosing them, Avison recalls, were partly political — a way of introducing her view of non-Stalinist Hungary to the West. Since the Revolution of 1848, Hungarian writers have been a major political force in national life, preserving Hungarian identity and speaking out against oppression. The Populists, who emerged in the early

1930s, were a loosely formed radical movement of peasant intelligentsia. Attempting to do for letters what Bartók had done for Hungarian music, they studied the sociology of rural life and advocated partition of the great landed estates. Some were Marxists, holding its early humanist vision; others converted to communism; and still others wanted to reform the Communist Party. Many of Hungary's leading writers between the two world wars were part of the group, or touched by it in a significant way. They were, in effect, the progenitors of the Revolution of 1956.⁵

Finally, a geographical element drew Avison to Illyés and Juhász, writers associated with the Hungarian landscape. Initially Duczyńska gave her translators little choice when assigning poems, and Avison had to compete with Kenneth McRobbie for Juhász, eventually sharing the poet. Illyés' descriptions of the Hungarian plain — a region not unlike Manitoba's prairie landscape, familiar to Avison from her youth — especially appealed to her, and she was also sympathetic to the despair he felt facing the onset of the Second World War, a despair particularly bleak after "our pacifist growing-up period, which made the Illyes intensity natural to me too. It said something."

Hungarian poetry can be read apart from the country's historical and cultural situation. However, a quest to preserve national identity is central to all of the poets Duczyńska asked Avison to translate. While communist poets such as László Benjámín, Zoltán Zelk, and Lajos Tomási were important in the national context, their poems — expressing first idealism, then disillusion with party corruption — were not especially well suited to translation. They were effective in the Polanyis' anthology mainly as examples of Hungarian writing of the period, but Avison was wise not to include her translations of Zelk and Benjámín in her own collections. On the other hand, Attila József (1905-37), Gyula Illyés (1902-83) and Ferenc Juhász (b. 1928) wrote poems that almost invite a wider audience, and translation.

HUNGARIAN IS A NOTORIOUSLY difficult language, with a unique system of grammar and few cross-over words. It has little in common with the more familiar Indo-European languages. Based, in part, on an elaborate system of suffixes, it is an agglutinative language that offers particular problems for translators of poetry: Hungarian syntax and word order differ greatly from those in English. Simply by the nature of the language, poetry in Hungarian is bound to be more compact than most poetry in English. At the same time, the Hungarian language may seem more formal because it has not undergone as rapid a shift to colloquial usage as North-American English.

Initially Avison was given the Hungarian texts, marked with the accents of the language and the metrical stresses of the verse, as well as notations of "rhyme and

assonance patterns, number of syllables and rhythmic pictures.”⁶ Literal translations accompanied each poem, with the corresponding English word under the Hungarian original, so that she could recognize each word and gauge its weight in the original poem. There were also free-flowing prose translations, although Duczyńska urged Avison not to work from them. Instead, they went over each poem together, word by word. Finally, tapes were made of the poems so that Avison could hear the sounds: “And I played the tapes and played the tapes and played the tapes, and once I got to know what the words literally meant, I tried to see if I could get an English one that was at all able to echo it.” Avison also listened to recordings of Hungarian music. She especially loved the Bartók string quartets, and recalled them as “the thing that keyed me most of all in that period.”

Each translation went through more than twenty drafts. Avison spent long hours with the Polanyis, even staying overnight at their home and working on into the next day, “battling over four or five lines, sometimes.” When asked if the process had been frustrating — especially for a writer accustomed to working by herself — she laughed, saying, “If it hadn’t been for the enormous appeal of these two people, I couldn’t have stayed the course.” This process ran over a period of four years, and was often spotty, since Duczyńska was involved with other translators as well.⁷

Translation is not simply a linguistic act, but also an interpretative one, where affinity matters. The “optic heart” in Avison’s poems, the heart that *sees*, is not far removed from the concern with consciousness and perception in Juhász’s “Farm, at Dark, on the Great Plain” (“*Tanya az Alföldön*”), which opens with a rhapsodic evocation of the natural world of a farm at night, emphasizing the universal molecular life where “breathless, matter lives.”⁸ Not until the beginning of stanza 13 does a speaker say, directly, “I lie in drenched grass,” establishing the struggle for individual consciousness on that “strange, blissful night, primal, voluptuous — / random — with nothing of passion’s single-mindedness. / Plant cannot guess — nor planet — the knowledge a human bears.” The speaker turns his attention to the farm below with a simple, intimate “I love you” — an almost shocking shift in tone. The following portrait of an aging farm couple (perhaps Juhász’s parents, who occur frequently in his work) and the hardships of their rural existence momentarily distracts the speaker, who returns to the issue of consciousness, confessing his love for the earth, and for an absent partner — “Only with you I believe, I feel at one, / nor need my heart at last go so mercilessly alone / to its corruption.” The moment of consciousness carries within it the desire to escape and merge, to return to the anonymous “glimmer” of the natural world that closes the poem. These few passages alone should suggest the richness of Avison’s translation, and the affinity she felt for Juhász.

Technical or linguistic matters, however, shape the affinity. Avison generally followed the stanzaic order of the original poems, although she did not maintain

exact meters or line breaks. In stanza five of Juhász's poem, for example, she made two sentences out of three, included a parenthetical clause and expanded the diction:

The moonlight's liquid glass
wells over the earth
and quells the very silence in its clasp
to crystal blocks,
glass turrets,
tinkling vine-stems.
Still — how this silence (silvery bushes,
half-guessed-at-stalks, dim files of foliate)
entangles and engulfs the din of empty space
and murmurous flower-scent from the garden-beds.

*A holdfény folyékony üveg
amely vastagon a világra csurog,
anyagát e csönd dermeszti meg.
Üveg-tömbök,
üveg-tornyok,
üveg-liánok csengenek.
Ez mégis a csönd. Attetsző bozótok,
sejtelem-szárú növényzetek
fonják, nővik be az úr zaját,
s a szagos virágos-kerteket.⁹*

Juhász repeats the word “glass” (*üveg*) four times, including it in a descriptive series, while Avison uses it only twice, substituting “crystal” once, and deleting it the final time. The incantory quality of the original has been changed to something more ornate, yet this ornateness is not false to the original. (As Lowell said, a translation catches *a* tone, not *the* tone.) In the second stanza of the same poem, Avison's translation reads:

Glass-petalled flowers, leaves of thin glass
are incandescent, as
our anguish.

*Üveg-virágok, üveg-lombok
izzanak,
mint a gondok.*

More literally translated, the stanza would read:

Glass-flowers, glass leaves
are incandescent,
as our troubles.

While “anguish” is too strong a translation of the Hungarian word “*gond*” (care, worry, anxiety, trouble), which Juhász uses in the plural form, the lushness of Avison's version suggests the tradition of English Romantic poetry, and this is not entirely inappropriate to Juhász. His diction and imagery, his concern with human isolation and use of the Hungarian landscape as an emblem of states of mind, resonate with familiar echoes that Avison powerfully conveys.¹⁰

When asked if she felt any kinship with Attila József's “*Ars Poetica*,” Avison admitted that she had to overcome her lack of sympathy with the poet's self-assertive stance: “One of the things I don't like about it is its superiority towards other people who are caught.” Unlike Juhász's poem, which can be enjoyed independently of his other work, and apart from its Hungarian context, ‘*Ars Poetica*’ requires some background. József, who committed suicide in 1937 at the age of thirty-two, is considered by many Hungarian critics to rank with the nation's greatest poets, Sándor Petőfi (1823-49) and Endre Ady (1877-1919). Consumed by self-analysis, he watched with increasing horror as the forces of fascism swept across his country. Yet for all his championing of the people — József is a true socialist poet — the source of his writing often seems to be a more private suffering,

and Avison was not incorrect in sensing this — it is part of the tension that makes his poetry worth careful reading.

“*Ars Poetica*” opens with a bold assertion: “I *am* a poet. What do I care / about Poesy?”¹¹ although the character of the original is missing (“*Költő vagyok — mit érdekelne / engem a költészet maga?*”).¹² By breaking the Hungarian sentence into two statements — a separate declaration followed by a question — a quality of arrogance, of swagger, enters the speaker’s voice, and this is not present in the original. The necessary shift in word order — “*költő*” (poet) opens the original, while “I *am*,” with an italicized verb for emphasis, opens the translation — solidifies this impression. The word “Poesy” bothers Avison today — “I remember hating the second line and putting the word ‘Poesy’ in, but Ilona insisted.” Translated literally, the poet’s question is “Why should I be interested in poetry itself?” “Poesy” is not the best solution to “*költészet maga*” (“poetry itself”) because it has archaic and arch connotations for a modern English-speaking audience that the word “*költészet*” lacks for Hungarian readers. Since Duczyńska not only provided the literal translations but also edited the anthology, Avison’s translations were subject to the potential pitfalls of any collaborative work. Though admirably translated, “*Ars Poetica*” is not likely to win readers to József’s work.

No such problems occurred with her translations of Gyula Illyés’ “Ode to Bartók” (“*Bartók*”), “The Plough Moves” (“*Megy az eke*”), and “Of Tyranny, in One Breath” (“*Egy mondat a zsarnokságról*”), and her inclusion of the ode in several collections attests to her estimation of its power. Speaking of Illyés, she said: “There is nothing that gets in the way, there’s no ego that gets in the poem, there’s just utterance.” This “utterance,” she called it, “was always a combination of reasonable statement and enormous power of feeling.” Avison, who is not thought of as a political poet, was in fact drawn to Illyés’ politics. In a note added to the ode for her own collections, she explained the unusual circumstances of its publication, which are worth relating here not only for what they suggest about the poem, but also because they may have contributed to Avison’s sympathetic reading of it. Written in the autumn of 1955, when the Rákosi regime was urging Hungarian writers to follow the dictates of socialist realism, the ode paid tribute to Bartók on the tenth anniversary of his death. The composer’s music, then banned in Hungary, was a rallying point for anyone unsympathetic to Rákosi. Published in a popular weekly Budapest entertainment magazine, *Színház és Mozi* (Stage and Cinema), with a print-run of over 60,000, the poem had a powerful effect, and several days after its appearance police removed all remaining copies from the newsstands.

The ode is a stirring call to freedom, first linking it with artistic creation, principally Bartók’s use of folk material in his music (“O speak for us, / stern artist, true musician”).¹³ Only from the discord of his creations can true harmony emerge. Illyés contends that Bartók’s music has the power to solace a suffering people because it embodies their song, their dream; it is crucial to the survival of the nation.

This was a dangerous poem to have written at that time, and Avison admired Illyés for taking the risk.

Again she followed the poet's stanzaic pattern, although the shorter concluding stanzas of the original have been linked together, for a soaring effect. Regarding her version, Avison wrote that "an attempt has been made to echo the sound and syllabics of Illyés' poem in the English translating."¹⁴ This was no easy task, as the opening stanza indicates:

"Jangling discords?" Yes! If you call it this, that has
 such potency for us.
 Yes, the splintering and smashing
 glass strewn upon earth — the lash's
 crack, the curses, the saw-teeth's screeching
 scrape and shriek — let the violins learn this dementia,
 and the singers' voices, let them learn from these;
 let there be no peace,
 no stained glass, perfumed ease
 under the gilt and the velvet and the gargoyles
 of the concert hall, no sanctuary from turmoil
 while our hearts are gutted with grief and know no peace.

"*Hangzavart?*" — *Azt! Ha nekik az,*
ami nekünk vigasz!
Azt! Földre hullt
pohár fölcattanó
szitok-szavát, fűrészfoga közél szorult
reszelő sikongató
játát tunulja hegedű
s éneklő gége — ne legyen béke, ne legyen derű
a bearanyozott, a fennen
finom, elzárt zeneteremben,
*míg nincs a jaj-sötét szivekben!*¹⁵

Clearly the original is a much more compact poem. Avison's pyrotechnic sounds, however, have caught the Hungarian, even suggesting its brilliance. Phrases like "the saw-teeth's screeching / scrap and shriek" and "gutted with grief" recall Hopkins, and remind us that a good English translation will contain echoes of the tradition of English poetry as it introduces another tradition. Yet Avison's use of alliteration and assonance (especially on the letters s, c, and g), like Illyés', evokes Bartók's musical line, and is true to the tone of the original.

Regarding her revisions to the ode, made before including it in *No Time* (1989), Avison said: "Some of them were for ear. If you remember the 'glass flashing' — my ear was offended and I was sure in the original it couldn't have been quite so blatant. And sometimes because I thought the logic was easier to follow with a little more care, just so that it would be a little more syntactically correct. The Hungarian seemed to be constructed in logical as well as musical terms, and I thought we sacrificed something there as I went over it. I think Ilona would not have minded." This is not the place to enumerate all of her revisions, but several

examples are worth noting. In line 4, for example, “glass flashing from earth” was aptly changed to “glass strewn upon earth.” In stanza four, line six, the “T” in “That,” which begins the line, has been capitalized to establish the following ten lines as part of a continuous—though twisting—phrase, also giving it prominence over the use of the lowered-case “that” in the opening of the next several lines. More important than these small changes is the fact that Avison made any revisions at all to work published years before — they suggest the care that she has taken with her writing.

The poet-speaker of Illyés’ “The Plough Moves” equates a plough slowly digging a furrow with a hand writing a book. As the details of this metaphor are developed and sustained over five stanzas, farmer and poet merge into parts of the same “immutable creative force”:¹⁶ “Your story, Hungary, is being written / here in these furrows.” With the “vast plain his book,” farmer and poet share a similar fate — they make gestures to the future, to “all that still lies ahead.” This is Populist poetry with a vengeance, and yet its simplicity is moving. (Duczyńska and Polanyi clearly took the title of their anthology from Illyés’ poem.) Written in the rhythm of popular folksongs — a rhythm also associated with the poet Petófi — “The Plough Moves” must have been difficult to translate:

The plough moves and the moving furrow slowly
builds up the row
like a hand writing in an open book
for all to know;
its paper the vast plain, a feathery ocean
the heavens span
from brim to brim; the writing hand one aging
hired man.

*Megy az eke, szaporodik
a barázda
mintha egy nagy könyv írónék
olvasásra.
Papirosa a határ, a
tengerszéles,
a tolla meg az a zegény
öregbéres.*¹⁷

Whereas her translation of the ode is suitably cacophonous, Avison here used a less ornate language, as the poem demands. She maintained its rhyme scheme: row/know (*barázda/olvasásra*), span/man (*tengerszéles/öregbéres*), and came close to some exact correspondences (*barázda* = furrow; *olvasásra* = to be read; *tengerszéles* = sea wide; *öregbéres* = aged farmhand). In Hungarian poetry assonance is a common form of rhyme, and such partial rhymes are valued for their originality. Avison’s pure rhymes (row/know), here based on one-syllable words, do not suggest the original’s more complex pattern. She was, however, writing an English poem, not a Hungarian one, and her poem needed to work in the conventions of its own language.

For “Of Tyranny, in one Breath,” which did not appear in *The Plough and the Pen* but instead in *The Dumbfounding*, Avison used a similarly direct poetic line and diction. An indictment of political oppression (specifically the Rákosi dictatorship), the poem is made up of one sentence that runs for forty-six short stanzas, varying from two to four lines in length — an almost breathless technical feat.

Beginning with bren guns and questioning police, it becomes an exhaustive catalogue of all forms of tyranny, from the overt actions of a totalitarian state to the ways in which tyranny can overwhelm a society, informing daily life until “*you/are the prison bars you’re staring through.*”¹⁸ An example of what Avison regarded as Illyés’ “combination of reasonable statement and enormous power of feeling,” the poem is held together by repetitions — “where tyranny settles in . . .”, “for tyranny is . . .” “it is . . .” — until “tyranny” becomes a looming, inescapable “it.” As in the Bartók ode, the tone of urgency here has a hallucinatory quality; it comes from the tension between Illyés’ statements and the depth of his attachment to freedom — a tension that Avison found sympathetic, and successfully conveyed.

WHILE SOME POETS DECIDE to translate poetry during difficult creative periods (as Lowell admitted in *Imitations*), other find that translating can accompany a rich time of personal work. Avison made her translations during the heady years of her debut as a poet. The acclaim for *Winter Sun* gave her both an audience and a social role that was a creative stimulus — “recognition, like it or lump it, helps.” This new status, together with the collaborative nature of the translation project, and the friendships it brought, may have affected the preparation of her next collection, *The Dumbfounding* (1963). As Avison recalled, “It was just a nice synchronizing of things.”

The shift in tone between her first and second collections, which many critics have discussed (in some cases linking it to her religious conversion), may have also been related to her translations; as Ernest Redekop wrote: “Sometimes, indeed, it is tempting to think that she may have been influenced by some of the images and concepts that she had translated.”¹⁹ Yet such speculations are difficult to prove, and to look for comparable “images and concepts” is to ignore the collaborative process that shaped Avison’s translations. Equally conjectural, my own suspicion is that Avison’s meetings with Duczyńska may have had a subtle effect on the questions she asked herself in revising her own poems — in fact, on the entire process of revision. The intensity that characterized their sessions together, and the emphasis on clarity, precision, accuracy, and feeling, could not have been lost on someone as thoughtful as Avison. When asked if, after her experience with Hungarian poetry, she ever wanted to translate other poems, she replied, with a wry smile: “I don’t like writing. I never tackle a piece of writing if I’m not asked to, persuasively enough — that’s the trouble.” That no one asked her is our loss, for her Hungarian translations — and especially of Júhasz’s “The Farm, at Dark, on the Great Plain” and Illyés’ “Ode to Bartók” — belong with the finest translations made by contemporary poets.

NOTES

- ¹ Avison's comments were made during a taped interview on 3 July 1991. We had had several previous discussions about her translations while I edited her *Selected Poems* (Toronto: Oxford, 1991), and Avison knew of my studies of the Hungarian language. All further comments by Avison are from this interview.
- ² Along with Avison, Duczyńska was able to gather around her a number of Canadian poets who contributed translations, including Earle Birney (2), John Robert Colombo (1), Louis Dudek (2), Eustace Ross (1, with Avison), A. J. M. Smith (3), and Raymond Souster (2), as well as Kenneth McRobbie, a co-editor of *Mosaic* and a professor of history at the University of Manitoba, whose wife was Hungarian. However, Avison's eight translations included the longest poems (apart from McRobbie's translation of Juhász's "The Boy Changed into a Stag cries out at the Gate of Secrets") and totalled eighteen pages, making them the most significant contribution to the anthology and the most sustained effort at translation.
- ³ In his article "The Only Political Duty: Margaret Avison's Translations of Hungarian Poems," *Literary Half-Yearly*, 13.2 (July 1972): 157-70, Ernest Redekop wrote: "Without knowledge of Hungarian or even of the literal translations, it is difficult to sort out Avison's particular contributions to the original [*sic*] poems. Nevertheless, certain familiar images do appear, and some of the diction is recognizably hers." Redekop's main interest is in noting similar concepts ("the nature of the individual human being") and images ("the Milky way") in Avison's translations and in her own poetry. His title is a phrase from the Foreword to *The Plough and the Pen*, where Auden suggested that a writer's "only political duty" is to translate the fiction and poetry of other countries.
- ⁴ Robert Lowell, *Imitations* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1958): xi-xiii. All further quotations from Lowell come from this edition.
- ⁵ Hungary is still a culture of the word, not the image. As recently as June, 1990, when the distinguished émigré poet George Faludy returned to Budapest, his publisher brought out a new collection of his sonnets with a first printing of 80,000 copies. In Canada, where the print-run of books by established poets is rarely more than 1,000, this figure seems astronomical.
- ⁶ Ilona Duczyńska and Karl Polanyi (eds.), *The Plough and the Pen: Writings from Hungary 1930-1956* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1963): 15. In their preface to the anthology the Polanyis describe the bilingual "work sheets" they gave their translators.
- ⁷ Adding further strain, during this time Karl Polanyi, who had originally been teaching at Columbia and flying back-and-forth between New York to Toronto, was slowly dying of cancer.
- ⁸ Ilona Duczyńska and Karl Polanyi (eds.): 199-203.
- ⁹ Ferenc Juhász, *A Mindenség Szerelme: A Szarvassá változott fiú* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1971): 575-79.
- ¹⁰ Avison's translation of "Farm, at Dark, on the Great Plain" was included in *Ferenc Juhász/The Boy Changed into a Stag/Selected Poems 1949-1967*, translated by Kenneth McRobbie and Ilona Duczyńska (Toronto: Oxford, 1970).
- ¹¹ Ilona Duczyńska and Karl Polanyi (eds.): 169-70.
- ¹² Attila József, *Összes Versei 2./1928-1937* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1984): 343-46.

- ¹³ Margaret Avison, *No Time* (Hantsport, N.S.: Lancelot, 1989) : 107-11.
¹⁴ *No Time*, 107.
¹⁵ Gyula Illyés, *Összegyűjtött versei/Második kötet* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1977) : pp. 240-43.
¹⁶ Duczyńska and Polanyi (eds.), 173-74.
¹⁷ Illyés, *Összegyűjtött versei/Első kötet* 556-57.
¹⁸ Margaret Avison, *The Dumbfounding* (New York: Norton, 1966) : 67-72.
¹⁹ Redekop, 159.

TO MY DAUGHTER

Gregory Nyte

Who at sixteen months
speaks with the phonetic purity
of the Impressionists
the rounded corners
the trenchant edges
so exact, like "ba" is bath
and "co" is cold

And it must be very cold too
for while I bundle her
in boots and hats and scarves
she persuades me noddingly
with knowing eyes "Co co co"

And yet despite the snow outside
and the draft below the doors
and from the chimney
from her sleeves her hands always emerge
springing forth as little fists
which into pretty flowers sadly grow