

Magyarázni



Helen Hajnoczky

[MUG-yar-az-knee]

[‘Make it Hungarian’]



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Helen Hajnoczky

Coach House Books, Toronto

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first edition

Published with the generous assistance of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council. Coach House Books also acknowledges the support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund and the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Book Publishing Tax Credit.

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

Hajnoczky, Helen, author

Magyarázni / Helen Hajnoczky. -- First edition.

Poems.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-1-55245-327-8 (paperback)

I. Title.

PS86I5A3857M34 2016

C8H1.6

C2015-908210-2

Magyarázni is available as an ebook: ISBN 978 1 77056 441 1 (EPUB), 978 1 77056 442-8 (PDF), 978 1 77056 457 2 (MOBI)

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*I am a word
in a foreign language*
– Margaret Atwood, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*

My hovercraft is full of eels.
– ‘Dirty Hungarian Phrasebook,’
Monty Python’s Flying Circus

Save me your space-age techno-babble, Attila the Hun.
– Zack Brannigan, *Futurama*

Diddynek

[For my father]



Pronunciation Guide

Bad, as an extended cat, as by absence, etc.
Like a tsunami, check your cheek like an etching.
The wide deck, like when you were a kid playing.
Jam in the fridge, the edge of a bridge.
You like less, on the edge of the bed.

You write a cheque, the same but without.
In a café you find euphoria.
Get on your legs, you go, etc. (Not used in English)
Similar to speaking like here, not so in English.
Basically, you say hi, but you're behind and mute.
Human thick and thin.

You could lead, or leave sow seeds.
Swim in the sea. Yes, you have faith, the key.
Kiss, you're weak, make lists, you leave.
Hey, your mind might assume a lying thing.
(Anywhere else), knit bones.

You go, the snow, forced sorcery.
(Not used in English; corresponds to the German Ö).
(Not used in English; a longer, more closed variant of Ö).
Your hands numb now from overuse.

You buy peas, apricots, you can hope.
You can wish it, say it, share it, shout it.
At least you can tell, or estimate.
Feast on something similar to stew.
(Not used in English) rude fool.

(Not used in English, corresponds to the german Ü).
(Not used in English) from every view, you could evolve.
Your room, clean, vacuumed.
you leave behind roses.
Pleasure, leisure, genre.
Deserted.



Altatódal

Doll, this altitude
holds the night close to the dull moon.
But here, gleaming like pitch,
we're home again.

In English: peace attends the breeze.
Angels watch you tumble from the trees,
swaddled in nightlight,
aching for daybreak.

In Hungarian: the peppers and carrots
and onions take up flutes and fiddles,
flailing stalks and jiving roots,
they leap into the pot.

Instead of waiting for your branch to break,
you're ebbed to sleep by a simmering cauldron,
the English of your mother's song,
Hungarian of your father's.

The nightlight dances on the wall
like a pepper set for the soup.
All to tell, not too dull.
You sleep.





Állatkert

A K-car or school bus or Suburban to tour the
living bestiary of the plains. Point and this is
the North American land-dwelling water horse,
the mountains, cold north, snow, and each hide
is a map splotched with continents, aerial views of
possible worlds where a cow is a hippo, where a
hippo is a horse, where Hungarian is Latin, where
the Suburban is broken down at the Petro-Can just
outside of town, bus broken down in the Kananaskis,
K-car stuck in the city snow. Black squirrels
scramble up birch trees, cows graze, a field
of hay bales a bowl of giant Shredded Wheat and
the time rolls by, foothills roll into Rockies, snow
settles, packs into ice on the sidewalk. You are
a quiet little creature, snow mammal,
prairie dweller, adapted from a temperate
climate, the rhythm of your hibernation,
the Latin of your silly jokes.





Belváros

You wait, this charming place,
luminous towers,
columns of bells,
chimes that scrape the evening sky.

The inner city, sunset,
sheer walls of light reverberate
with all the tones and glow
of your resentment, this place.

You have hated the
wash of lustrous peach,
you have missed the
tinted clouds, the swell of
incandescent night.

The gong of evening
shimmers, clanging chorus of
traffic signals, sprong of fluorescent
signs in the twilight.

The glint of your reflection that
rings off the ground-floor windows,
alone you wait, cozy in
the awning of dusk
lilting from the buildings.

Sharp clang of memory.
Twinkle of memory.
Chime of the city.

B



Cukorka

Your reflection
 splintered in foil
these solemn treats

 this bitter history
sugary sweet

unhooked from the tree
 you melt

a plastic angel dipped
 in flames, blurred
and bubbling

you unwrap
the old world
 you chew
 and smile

 you don't swallow
until they look away.

C



Cserkészek

Check if you're ready
Roll and tighten your neckerchief
Roll on your stockings, stand at attention

Deliver your lines with conviction
A more personable person
A more magyar Hungarian

Paint eggs, throw rosewater
Thread needles, weave leather
Serve dinner to your elders

Recite your practised lines
With your flawless intonation
With your perfect lack of understanding

How well you know your friends
Whom you cannot understand
Who cannot understand you

Savour the illicit snippets of English
Smuggled out to the parking lot
Together you roll and ignite secrets

A large, stylized, red 'Cs' (Hungarian 'Cs' sound) is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the page. The letters are thick and have a slightly irregular, hand-drawn appearance.



Duna

The river flows clear or muddy
you know the river flows cold
or warm or

The river cuts across countries
or it springs locally and
ambles through every city or

The river is shallow enough to wade or
deep enough to drown in, the bed
scattered with bombed-out bridges or

The iron was hauled back up on land
you know the river ribbons
the countryside or you know

The river slices through the city, one bank
heaved up like a tidal wave, one bank
spread out like a flood plain or

You knew the river's name
before or you
didn't know the river at all.

D



No common contemporary word

Sputtering drone, petticoats,
embroidered vests,
red leather boots.

No one cooks over an open fire,
scratches words into wood,
drinks by candlelight.

You want a sharp consonant,
an axe of a word to split myths,
to cleave false memories.

You want a word to spit
this was no world, no time
anyone lived in.

The truth was a city,
baroque façades, paved streets,
three-piece suits and hatpins.

But war is a dry husk
to jam in people's mouths,
so you'll let the letter rust and dull.

(The rhythm of that drone,
that swirl of skirts,
the burn of liquor in your throat.)

Dz



Dzsúsz

Every drop, this
vocabulary
squeezed to the rind,

these letters,
down to the pith,
this pulpy language,
sugary thick.

You thirst for something
smooth, something that flows,
a cool rinse, bright
and clear.

Watered down, no need to sip,
you can slug it back,
past your lips.

Swallow the meaning,
diluted,
it slips down easy.

Dzs



Elfelejt

Away, half, yet you still
 grasp, get out of the car,
get up, the railing. Where
 once you, but now only, you
 leave the party to go dancing,
you step out into the early
 morning air, the breeze
 whirling the skirt of your
nightgown, the dew beneath
 your, yet then around you follow,
 in circles, you are after or being
followed. No more, your hand or,
 could you make out, what
 days, no more language but
that gingerbread man so cute
 with the icing and sprinkles
 how could you not laugh.
You won't remember this but,
 long after you forgot, still the
candles huddled in the church,
 empty pews echoing your
 children's sobs.

E