they tell me that you’re dying;  
slowly your wrinkles form your heart’s tributaries,  
and your brow proclaims Wiglaf’s long awaited wisdom.  
now—i wonder—  
what is behind those ball-bearing eyes?

You never were prone to sit in silence or shed a tear.  
You never were one for giving in,  
and now raising a foot is an effort.  
[don’t sigh too hard—they’ll hear you  
don’t smile too wide—they’ll think you fine  
don’t cry too hard—they’ll already miss you  
and, God knows, it’s not that time]  
maybe someday there will be time for you and i again—  
to “climb Washington monument” while humming Hungarian tunes—  
or walk along the river gathering “junk.”  
we’ll sing together and count the grains of Dover.  
[how placidly you stay  
yes, i know,  
you’re not asleep and i’ll not go away]

never did i think i would pray for one moment—  
a moment when you’d have strength again to speak of the homeland,  
and i, the patience to listen.