

COLLECTED POEMS

Otto Laske

1967-1992

Copyright © Otto Laske 2010

All rights reserved.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgment is made to the following periodicals in which a few of these poems previously appeared:

1. Blue Light, The Answer, Fir Tree, Atelier 3.2, 1992.
2. Northern German Garden, Salamander 6.1, 1991.
3. Afternoon, Black Angel, Condition Humaine (formerly Seafaring), Loss (formerly Smile), and Nightfall, Allos, Lingua Press, 1980 (Kenneth Gaburo, editor)

In 1979, composer Keith Paulson-Thorp, in his *Five Laske Songs*, used the following poems: Afternoon, Black Angel, Loss. (The poems "Embrace" and "Season" are now lost.)

About This Volume

The poems collected in this volume were written over a period of twenty years beginning in 1967. They follow a period of 12 years in which I wrote poetry exclusively in German, now collected in *Schlesische Sprachschmiede* (2010).

The poems show the influence of Gottfried Benn, Paul Celan, and Robert Creeley. They owe much to the tutoring of Harold Bond (1940-2000) with whom I worked during the years of 1979 to 1982 and again 1989 to 1992. Gitta Steiner was the first American poet who took an interest in my English poetry.

The poems are presented in four groups, named after the original smaller collections they were initially part of. Each group captures my poetic development at a particular time:

- Prose Poems, 1988 -1992
- Karman Poems, 1992
- Untold Harmonies, 1979 - 1991
- Tremblings, 1967 - 1979

An unpublished set of translations exists, both from German to English and English to German, entitled *The Distant Land* (Das Ferne Land).

TO THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Dearest English, I entrust to you
my life where German
falls and fails, its yes-buts
so dense, so tiring; where French,
too clear, models me wrongly,
sauf que je pourrais espérer
une patrie.

Otto Laske

For Gitta Steiner

CONTENTS

PROSE POEMS [1988-1992]

- 3 A Hero's Welcome
- 4 A Rider from Afar
- 6 An Eye will Appear
- 8 Child of Vapor
- 10 Convulsions
- 11 Ferocity
- 12 Green Hotel
- 13 Guitar
- 14 I Must Write
- 15 Journey into Night
- 16 Neighborhood
- 17 New Syntax
- 18 Of a Child in Coming
- 20 Songs to Come
- 22 Turns of Mind

KARMAN POEMS [1992]

- 27 Blue Light
- 28 Border Crossing
- 29 First Supper
- 30 Icons
- 31 Into the Unknown
- 32 Little Russia
- 34 Rear-view Mirror
- 35 Sabbath
- 36 Spring
- 37 The Answer

38 Wildflowers

UNTOLD HARMONIES [1979-1991]

- 41 A Long Way to Come
- 43 Becoming What I see
- 44 Boston Common
- 45 Dread
- 46 Ein Wiedersehen
- 48 Evening in Linz
- 49 Far Gone
- 50 Fear of the Unknown
- 51 Fir Tree
- 52 Foreboding
- 53 Greendale Avenue
- 55 He
- 56 Highway Exit
- 57 July Garden
- 58 Kaiser Franz Joseph Strasse
- 60 Last Hour
- 61 Mother Earth
- 62 Mother Tongue
- 63 New York City
- 64 Northern German Garden
- 66 Not My Country
- 67 Oaks in Fall
- 68 Photograph From the Fifties
- 69 Ramada Inn
- 70 Return to Silesia
- 72 Rose of Budapest
- 73 Silesia of My Mind
- 75 The Desirability of Stone
- 76 The Pendant
- 77 Treelink

- 78 Twin Sister
- 79 Window
- 81 You Were the Rower

TREMBLINGS [1967-1979]

- 84 Afternoon
- 85 Angels
- 86 Berlin Intellectual
- 87 Black Angel
- 88 Change of Season
- 89 Companion
- 90 Condition Humaine
- 91 Dancer
- 92 Dog Tears
- 93 Down and Out
- 94 Estrangement
- 95 Farewell to Los Angeles
- 99 Hauptstimme
- 100 How to Last
- 101 Landscape
- 102 Last Visit
- 103 Loss
- 104 Night Fall
- 105 Promising Season
- 106 Spring
- 107 Suicide Warning
- 109 Sycamore
- 110 Today
- 111 Tree of Winter
- 112 Union
- 113 Upon Visiting the Granary

Prose Poems

A HERO'S WELCOME

As my wheel is etching the seething hearse
across the olive grove, I overturn the turbid road,
feeling a hell of prayer in my bones.

Skin has returned to fear the king. Loss has spoken.
Therapy hopes my shadow towards the letter, and
its test is stating chance.

I agitate the trees where the dark of water
to my land has persevered. Where the base
is dropping its garden, wood will rise,

and metal law will swerve to make
the difference that can form.
My fight is not done.

I will not drop mass, nor put out night.
Like a good mason who supplies the length
for another house, I am singing in the dark,

counting beyond gloom. The rack of distance
around the green is supplying my bed.
I don't fear marriages of light.

A RIDER FROM AFAR

Jazz of fear crashes into empty drumming.
I hit oak and cannot figure out six miles
of women riding against the willow seas.
The clarinet of man stirs another heat.

Before the day grew, I was serving the moves
of shale, and a king was studying
the currents of ice, overturning all my turns.
Now, ferocity is walking in my direction.

Force has delivered the spring through music.
A young girl upon the top of language
is riding in, clinging to a mane.
Vapor of milk has stopped her age.

She talks horse and flies her banner
towards the king who calls her to a halt.
But she is above the gloom, embellishing
the herb of therapy with sighs of hay.

The weed of her hair demands another
visit to Rome where she will sleep
with Augustus, speaking to Vergil before
the face of god turns to Jerusalem.

The king will not mate. He is caught
in northern seas following the lines
of my palm and has waxed his ears
not to hear desire.

But from afar a rider who cannot be stopped
works harder to get at the girl
than I can do, arriving at night fall
with the promise of his loins.

AN EYE WILL APPEAR

The promise of evening floats, and I am evening.
I am melting to the point of oil, bearing a husband's name.
Faith is moving my dragon while I twist armies of mind.

Your strength has taught me to park my urges.
In a drooping herb where the center is supporting
warped metabolisms, you left a hope of child.

Unless you are woman and have voice when I cup
your breasts with hands, we shall remain the bottom
of rock. Will our embraces burn?

Roofs have thrown weird tiles against my front,
and birds have looked at our togethernesses.
Our skin from this story is among their foods:

They are rehearsing the note that is pushing
the music of surface out of our ears
to feed them in their sleep.

Relentless force under their current is gaping
our true mouths, and in the manner of light
our crash ends as it began: womanly.

Before we know it, our bodies are playing
a hundred rhymes, a folksong along which
another mouth is resting its sorrow.

The blood of risk laughs without our knowing;
minute by minute our lips are computing loss.
When your brow has grieved, an eye will appear,

will stop the kiss, and gather our age's bricks
to new houses where night's gear shifts into the waters
of forgiveness, to support the acupuncture of our hearts.

CHILD OF VAPOR

When fear has orbited night, no one
can love. The lip of church wants faith
to race against any death.

I force the oak of therapy even though
woman is trying to farm below my science.
All the fears are moving. I am swelling.

I had doubted the hull of surface
on a woman spread over moving couches,
her head ecstatic. Rhythm from the heart

of air amazes her voice, freeing the child
of court inside her embrace. The urge springs
to the hell beyond the bed, waiting for words of vapor.

I is changing. Out of song's distance I
am hearing earth's orbit sob. Have I played?
Is the child pointing to a simpler age?

They counted my fish by the trouble
of merit. What can spring filter in a night?
Ground is set to nought, and the whales return.

In the week that moved death, they smashed
my sound and urged another century to form,
closing the green frail sea behind my heart.

They asked me to appear, and I have grieved
for their sake, singing in a child's voice.

CONVULSIONS

Where clay meets the sound of iron,
you park harm over the death
of oak and drop all music.

The sun presses the afternoon further.
You are gasping, looking for escape;
you can't believe in anyone's
noisy heart bearing uncaring truth.

The hope of language is waiting
in a wood behind your tongue.
You close the path of sound, computing
its strength. Are you fighting gestures?

A riotous storm is turning
beach to rock, and you are
setting up trouble in fungi.
The order of day likes your drag.

You raced against the weeds, looking for
evenings where the center of gloom
plays, turning the death of strength
into foam for the Venus of Hiroshima.

It's a phantom show, a side book
for evenings lost in wireless thought
when bitter moons pay lip service to love.

FEROCITY

Until the fire of ferocity
across iron was blasting air
under your hell, had you believed
the base of child?

The seven suns: fires of wind
within the middle along your extent,
chasing you from four directions.

While your moment beyond language
had counted, a ready example
appeared, and the stress source
wouldn't move.

A lip typed fear.

A light inside the mind of paper
attacked the gesture from the east.
Sound was roaring.

Before your front was smashed
by the war of man,
a new face had formed,
and a fungus was singing end.

GREEN HOTEL

Since his past has increased, rhythm
of women practices on his hull.
He turns to the watcher of morning
below the career of atmosphere
from their science.

His land below the sky of wood
believes. While every island
fills luck, a horse is appearing.
Wind is building poetry, amplifying
breath behind the saw.

The hundred women: willows.
Horse: a vapor. Before this keyword
will help the likely century to come,
his image will crash in a fist,
moving the sob underground.

Glass has softened his life;
the mason of luck is curling
gloom. He found: certain engines
do sing, time soaring behind their roar.

A chestnut of dirt is becoming
his mistress in another green hotel.
Spirits of marriage want to bend him
over the shoulder of fear.

What theories do apply?

GUITAR

The noise of women is reporting sky.
While they are touching, their hands point to ice.

I am appearing as the waves hasten forward,
extending my running law further to the sea.

On drizzled rocks female feet are standing
against my loins, as my temperature drops hope.

Force has started, and I flee to a sun road.
The fist of radiation continues another second,

but my guitar is staying, edging to the east.
My lips compute seas toward a failed queen.

No love has sung, and our troubles do not age.
I still hope for nights under eucalyptus trees.

I MUST WRITE

I report to the ghost of paper
as a place of sight. A thought,
piercing windows of envy,
hoodwinks my pen. Doubt celebrates.

When the shadows of day depart
through the door of script, I increase.
Waves are crashing, trees moving,
minds soaring. Cannot my paper burn?

Some mandolinist is playing me like a saw.
I can taste the murder on those soul foods
of night. Darkness twists my mind
without a noise, with a force not my own.

Should the morning return, I could not stay.
I would be fighting self. Fear of
fungus throughout my gorgeous mind
would make me lust for air,

and I would rise, to burn my paper
in a higher, silent house, far
above the musty places that I know.

JOURNEY INTO NIGHT

Light performs acupuncture
on the afternoon.

Faith is moving my dragons,
twisting armies of mind.

You have the strength to show me
how to park my urges. In late
afternoon light, I watch your face's

metabolisms sink into ellipses;
your brow grieves, your lips compute
a loss, resting me along your mouth.

What birds will sing the music of skin
when the gaping between us ceases
and the blood of risk laughs no more?

The umbrella of evening floats into the room.
Afternoon withdraws its loans: light
in bankruptcy. The door walks toward us

with a smile on its surface, its hinges
helpless arms, its handle winking arrival.
Rehearsing for morning, it cannot close

what we began. Throughout the house,
evening shifts into the gear of forgiveness,
leaving us as we ascend stairs toward night.

NEIGHBORHOOD

My life: the distance of language.
While the lamps of age slept,
Have I landed on an acorn's roof?

Until the cities of morning are
grieving, lost age wouldn't cause
the west to surface anywhere near.

Ginger-root is doing its gloom.
Apprehension is falling,-- we don't fear
idiots during their hollow sleep.

Despite absence from home,
the noises of earth talk
of us after our death.

The third eye on another head is linking
a dirge to the phantom spirit
above the music of voyage.

My gearshift: a living rhythm. I meet
my morning and arm my urge with offspring.
My hope: the neighborhood of language.

NEW SYNTAX

My rhythm: living water.

Where its trouble at play approaches
a ferocity eye, I view rivers.

My voice reads a flower, a desk burns, and my story
makes a turn toward the color of liquid hell.

While the fungus of morning blooms in day's bell tower,
easy summer rises out of language.

At noon, a god chooses a new syntax.

The fire of my hand celebrates itself in a fist of joy.

Iron history does not relent on my nights.

Evening comes, speaking memories aloud.

From their syllables, a deep red seeps into rivers,
turning them hostile toward my return.

OF A CHILD IN COMING

Because the noise of thought
has fertilized too much weed,
I am getting that common sound
of stress. Have I softened?

Distance with art has touched
its reason behind the ghost of woman.
Her cry changes the wind; she is
following another clarinet mother.

My mind's turns have driven
the ecstasy of rhythm
to new hospitals and, although
I don't remember a Chicago fire

to her figure, girl woman appears.
She is a sea, a fire of luck
above the dream of radiation,
where morning can rest its mind.

The eye of summer heat moves
her image across the back
below an easy month. Her laugh
turns my name like a leaf,

and another eager hand
is applying sound to paper.
Gloom applies itself, and plans
of ferocity support the child.

Will the word burn enough
to make the child appear?

SONGS TO COME

Fire: my kind. -- Since a woman's
life has visited my hope,
her story about the law of ice has
increased me to the dialect
of wind, and I am burning.

Could she not return? The house
of news over trouble is orbiting;
pieces of her mind are hitting
my history until the boiling amber
runs, and its truth is swerving.

Ghosts of blood laugh and,
in stages, while noise is
compressed to stress,
war plays every brick
hand, and some arrive dead.

How can the whole of life
throughout the base of fire
bend? How does harm work?

When science forsakes a man's
life, what can woman overturn?
What door of trouble
will she fail to close?

A cry marches on, heating up
the rhythm of my land.

Has anyone tried song?

TURNS OF MIND

My light: the fervor of language
While the lamps of sense slept,
I landed on an acorn's roof.

As long as the cities were grieving,
a lost age would not cause the east
to surface anywhere near.

I was leaving on the curled highway
of stress, where evenings burn oil.

Ginger root was doing her gloom.

Despite absence from home,
the noises of earth reached me,
but I could not hold the note.

Space about another blue hotel
did not permit sleep to prod
its major voice to alarm.

My gearshift: living. I met my morning,
arming my urge with offspring.

In a phantom church, despair appeared
in a hundred places. I turned west,
facing broken centuries of glass.

To follow the laws of day, I opened a flower
and looked into its crystal of calm.

Karman Poems

BLUE LIGHT

It came, with a timing
as unexpected
as a flock of birds.

I welcome the blue light
blinking at me in the small hour.

Certainty is overwhelming me,
but I don't know why.

Here, in the dark, I find myself
looking for old treasures under the lamp

while the window turns into
windmills searching the sky.

The wind suddenly rips open the door
into a far-flung meadow under a howling blue.

There is only the alluring gesture
of night standing naked over the horizon.

I cover my face with my hands
and abandon myself to the unknown.

BORDER CROSSING

Perhaps I won a battle
in your eyes, when water rose
and held itself, still rising,
tight in expanding skin,
and then burst forth and overflowed,
to stream and stream,

as if a tiny ocular nerve
had given up control
over my vast dominion,
letting the dams break
to show me land beyond
the human plain.

I see uncharted valleys,
crevices of failing,
the stony bark of pride on trees
of waxing hope, and where
the sun is sinking, rays cutting
splinters from glass of ancient fear.

Here, at the frontier of my territory,
I stand now, ignorant of how
to breathe, what to ingest,
certain I overstepped a line
into some vast unknown in which my foot,
an infant, stumbles as I pass.

FIRST SUPPER

Held up by a candle dissolving the harried darkness
of mind, I move a hand out to yours, as if to protect
the evening's startled innocence.

A flicker of light moves along your face to an infant across,
holding its head up into a seething astonishment
over its own breathing.

We become part of a prayer rising from table cloth,
hundreds of years old.

The city rises from its steeples to consecrate
the fragile bond at the dawn of our small beliefs, and we surge

into a world beyond, where no traffic ever stops at red lights,
but only for a star crossing over, to help us follow through.

ICONS

Standing in the doorway, a little stooped like a question mark,
you welcome me with the baby in your arms, smiling.

I carry a question around with me, to protect us
from vile images, of mothers separated from their infants,

from their men, to be shot, to be buried in mass graves,
under the precision of machine gun fire in Litzmannstadt,
a few years before you were born.

I am casting a shadow over you, wearing my long,
black coat with its collar up, hiding a blood-red scarf,
as if asking for sacrifices to save the Reich.

I have no words for the nightmares your smile
shields me from, leaving the answer open like a door
to be re-entered on future evenings.

I cannot weep with you since you wouldn't believe I witness
ghetto scenes in your house; perhaps you would call me
a killer, a helper of the Gestapo like Ruzkowski.

I am a child who survived the perpetrators.
In place of answers I hold fragile icons against storms
of the past in my hands, praying they will speak for me.

INTO THE UNKNOWN

Your hair is under my lips. It flows to your shoulders
as I kiss them, sensing their fragrance rise to mind
where I balance desires. There is a whole universe
to explore, and I do, not as an exercise in anatomy,

but a journey in pursuit of fathoming roundness --
distant mountain landscapes in evening light
I wander into without a map, in search
of the holy grail of this twosome adventure.

Along the way hills, partly shaded by your hair,
reminders of how you gradually climbed
into the world, small and helpless, finally
standing up to voice your own strong opinions.

Knees are a point of rest in this wilderness,
a place of roundness supporting the artifice,
so that it can embrace, and confirm I never
went too far; I did not lose you in the wandering.

Wind takes us, breath melts us down, until our shoulders
meet like a plane touching earth, until the whole
bent-over universe comes together, turning
around an axis visible only to the closed eye.

LITTLE RUSSIA

Your image glides into the tangerine azaleas,
bursting forth from a patch of Chagall blue.

The skies are green, with a sediment of lilac.
Trees in the foreground wear the crown

of your black hair, shrinking under its weight,
the way I feel when your hair falls

over me at night when your earrings
touch my skin like dangling daggers.

How good it would be to know where
those sinuous streets go, where you might

wander in this Belorussian landscape, dis-
appearing in one of the decrepit wooden houses

to hide from me, or perhaps to surprise me,
emerging after a sudden argument.

I hope your love for risks will not let you step
farther aside, where a dragon peacefully waits

for you, curled up in misty grays shaded with red,
its tongue waiting for a wholesome breakfast.

I would hate to give you up for anything in this little Russia,
given my own precarious hold on a tree barely old
enough to support me, out of reach of the azaleas.

Should you want to emigrate from the scene, let me know.
I am ready to dance out of it with you.

REAR-VIEW MIRROR

At this moment, when you
drive your car with your eyes
covered by the dark curls of hair
thrown backward at times,

the mirror sends out electricity,
the evening is embracing
me, and the street lights
are singing some high-feast song.

I don't quite follow, while
the baby in the basket beside
you is sleeping, curling its fingers
around columns of air.

Perhaps its dreams meet mine, perhaps
I should let you drive me
forever, reading the mirrored
landscape from your face alone,
wondering where we will end up.

SABBATH

April sun stands in the window
over the baby's chair,
with the hanging puppets swirling
in front of it
like a kaleidoscope.

Friday morning.

I promise you I do not notice the milk
spilled onto the floor, or the distant rumble
of the washing machine. Not even you.

I simply proceed as on other days,
feeling myself rooted in your loins,
a part of your universe
like a book on dance or a spoon.

I can feel your breathing
making waves in my mind.

During the afternoon, the world
comes to a standstill in the baby's sing-song.

The candles in the Mexican clay tree
at dusk tremble ever so slightly,
shaking the wine's spicy fruit into the air.

The puppets are steady now, resting up for the holiday.
It is time to prepare for a new life.

SPRING

Waves of crocuses leap up the hill
and hold it prisoner for over a week.
I follow them to the top, to hear
the land sigh for you who are
as new to me as the forsythia.

You could not have come at a better time,
now that I believe. This is my hand,
ready to touch, escaping a night
deep with stained promises.

As I breathe, a cloud swims
into the horizon, greeting me
with the fervor of its windblown
commonwealth.

I return from the hill,
ready for summer now.

THE ANSWER

Walking my fingers through your hair, I cannot forget how,
instants before, you left your loneliness on my shoulders and,

with an undulation, closed your eyes -- the one I was kissing,
and the other, that had already fallen asleep --

to enter the dark wishes of an underground cave. There I found
you sitting, your arms crossed, and asked you for the way.

You only looked at me astonished as a child, taking me
by the hand, as if to say, what a silly question, here,

in this darkness that is brighter than day, once you let yourself in
and forget all and everything about the days when we don't know,

those without evening. Really, I promise you, I could never
take the hollow cry out of your mouth, but have filled it

with my tongue until there was no space that could not sing.

It is true, I am still waiting for the night to end with the sound

of a celesta in my ear, where the question of whether I love you
answers itself so effortlessly I cannot remember having asked.

Already I rise with a sudden drift of air, holding you up
into the light that breaks through cloudy dawn.

I greet day like a traveler who found a home, on this morning
so full as the night was dense, where nothing is in its old place.

WILDFLOWERS

A bagpipe carries on I do not know from where.
Wind-driven melodies sail the pond.
On this November morning, I quiver
like the water's cunning blue.

A few steps farther I emerge from the shore,
still warm with you, your baby's
cries caressing my ear, its head safe
under the curls of your dark hair.

I took the wildflowers I brought you in June
from a place nearby, just before driving
my car to your run-down street, only
to find the front door burglarized.

Running through the door, splinter-laced
with memories, I fear for you again, leaping
stairs, while the bagpipe meanders
through the black crevices of your voice.

Before me is the patch of wildflowers:
some survived.
My hands stretch out, greeting the fever
of our embrace in the tiny buds
my fingers cannot calm.

Untold Harmonies

A LONG WAY TO COME

We made the last train over the Odra river
before Russians and Poles moved in,
leaving behind the reddish door
with my father's golden name shield,
on a Silesian January morning
nineteen forty-five.

When we arrived, the Bremen Roland
still stood tall, facing the cathedral
to defend liberties lost to an older Reich.

Moors surrounded us,
holding me entranced at night,
when the moon hung in the birches
near Osterholz, where the sky
is an unending meadow on the North Sea.

Years later, down south, Plato descended
over tea in Palmengarten
to undo the Frankfurt School
in a single afternoon, quoting Sophistès.

I took a boat from the Northern Pier,
Bremerhaven, to see the Statue of Liberty,
where Mother debarked forty years ago,
shedding Northern German soil from her feet.

The Liberty Trail was short, leading
to the vineyards of St. Catharines, Ontario,
and on to the perturbed French of Montréal.

The European shoreline beckoned.
Luxe, calme, et volupté had vanished,
but I found houses with tulips
on the balcony and potatoes in the yard,
on old Roman waterways near the Oude Rhijn.

What a distance from Utrecht to the steel mills
on the Mohongahela, where Andrew Mellon's children
daily receive computers in the mail, and on
to Route 128 where they were made.

As on the day we left, the blue, turned-over sled
of my childhood is still lying on its side,
even though in a recent spring, over a veranda
of climbing roses, I found a New England home.

BECOMING WHAT I SEE

This evening, I am holy.
An aura rises flame-like
from my head into the air.

The surfaces in the room
give way; a dark-wooded clock
stops as I watch its hands.

I have limbs of a Buddha kneeling,
inhaling immensity,
exhaling centuries to come.

My mind glides on water, over a lake
wider than the eye can see,
aiming at the setting sun.

Breathtaking quiet --
I enter what I see.
No thought of drowning.

Cries of a flying duck stagger me.
On the shore, gesturing birches,
faint bird voices.

Night arrives as a swan.

BOSTON COMMON

Charles Street is in uproar
this Saturday afternoon.
It's May, and your dark green door
is closed.

My way back to the Common is endless
despite the advertisements
from tubular planes
and the lilies for sale on the sidewalk.

I've almost reached the Common
when a vociferous voice rises
in the air, shouting my name.

You are calling me!

I seem to appear in the sky above,
flower bulbs are bursting;
sun showers my skin with rays.

DREAD

I hear a dark whisper
from a far location,

something close to roaming
over windblown poppy fields --

a scent of summerly Flanders
just before an explosion in World War One.

It bursts forth as a murderous
shouting from the dead,

enough to make you want to take cover,
followed by a dust storm.

Years afterwards, plants still
struggle to keep their roots alive,
to bloom again.

EIN WIEDERSEHEN

For my Father

Prince of my foolish waiting,
stranger, long in coming,
but fullest of arrival as none other
in the killing steppe of my heart.

How could I not foresee you would cross
the Russia of the boy's childhood
fevers and receive him heavenly
on your last day!

I could still hear the horses
neighing in the breaking ice of Danziger Bucht,
the frozen limbs of children
shatter in the trek near Gdynia;

could see the Minsk prison cell worthy
of an iconic Christ, and sense the rattling cold
of Smolensk meadows on your now quiet hands,
never withdrawn, never to be held again.

When in my tiny shoes I lost
your trace and could not understand
where fathers go in wars they hate,
in killings they condemn, what held me then?

Was I resting in your uniform
of dusty olive green when bombs fell,
or toiling in your hair to make you
invisible to their lightning flash?

I only know your bloated body
returned too late, on feet
that could not walk more than the distances
I covered in my early shoes.

From your absence, I built futures
larger than my days, from hope
you might return, a shining past,
while the dead hours ransacked

my childish wait. Even now,
with your life asleep, you stun me
as only a king would who holds me
in his arms for a tad of my breath,

to be with me as I cover
your ashen hands with mine.

EVENING IN LINZ

Graceful chandeliers,
curved mirrors, painted
furniture at Wolfinger's;
eight o'clock. Pentecost.

Across my window, the green onion
sits on the ocher shaft
of the tower at Hauptplatz,
with a penetrating golden tip.

Slow at first, the movement consoles me
for long absences with fingers bent into myself,
as if Maria from the nearby Schlosskirche
had taken pity on me.

Tu Austria nube.
As the light fades, a narrow black flag
bulges against the sky in a gesture
of horror, soothed only by the sobbing pink

of my window sill geraniums.
The tower beats nine.
Over distant hills, beyond the Danube,
an unknown hand rises,

stretching a silky moon
over the gently won landscape
of my hips, to resurrect me
as a woman in my sleep.

FAR GONE

Beloved she-foe, I step
into your house,
that of the lioness

to understand your paths,
your secret compulsions,
your underbelly.

I hear the cry
of the zebra
you have devoured.

I comb the wool
of the lamb
you haven eaten.

The stables of your love
full of animals
open up to me.

When you prepare an onslaught
with the front paw of a lover

I am already far gone,
braving my burning hope --
resolved never to leave you.

FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

He would shine through the tree
of winter, where the snow had built
castles for dreams to live by.

Overcome by fright but unwilling
to confess, he would leave his mark there,
letting us figure out what it meant.

We would watch him stealing himself
away when noticing us,
deciding he could not stay.

He waxed and waned like images
in black ice that shift
with the temperature.

We spoke of him haltingly,
with a furtive glance, huddled together.

On the coldest night
he hung a light into the tree.

That was the night my friends found me
there, with eyes that could not close.

FIR TREE

When all human veils have fallen from the branches of the large,
sun-stunned fir tree, you will fathom spring in its naked form,
free of memories, and light will traverse you.

Pity those for whom even star light galaxies are not transparent
enough, whose suburb window begonias signify little more
than another silent spring.

Where the forsythia answer to the dark fir green, wind is opening
its wings, sun performs marriage ceremonies
for offspring; even blue jays find less jaded tones.

Burn your anger in the kiln of memory; start over! The fir tree
has been growing in you for years and, still magic, begs to differ
from the human sense of time, promising new life.

FOREBODING

Pear, your moon hovers
over the darkened sill of my hunger,
in my mind's autumnal home.

The stem erratically in the air--
on which pitch of earth
will you firmly land, fruit
of yellow mantle?

When in my palate's dome you are bell,
what alarm will you sound in me?

GREENDALE AVENUE

Had I known your black leotard would divide my life in two,
adding me to the history of Greendale Avenue, I might not

have been intrigued. But not knowing the story, I only saw
the blondish tuft of hair standing out that April day, many

years after it all began with philosophy courses at Smith College
that seemed bloodless, leading to a flight into marriage and

to dancing out of it, into a repeat performance of twelve years.
By then, the need to find your inescapable color was already killing

the dance, was throwing your hands into a bucket of clay, to wring
out of it the translucent pearl of self, and burn it in the kiln

of rapturous devotion. That bundle of hair grew out to harrying
length, part of a beast looking for prey that now haunts me

in my dogwood-sheltered cave adorned by lilies of the valley.
They make it easy to forget how the absence of supporting hands,

when you first stood up, the non-approving glance at your dancing,
and the long years of underground skirmishes with monsters

of the house later made the kitchen seem so empty, despite
the children, and the bedroom so oppressive.

Envisioning the black leotard today, I sense it always warned me
that fire was in the offing, that the blondish streak was a flame about

to engulf me one day. And when I now pass by the house on Greendale Avenue,
where on early mornings the blue jays once ruptured my sleep,

I see hands waving from the white dogwood tree; a black flag flutters
over the graying slate roof on top of the veranda where

the first roses appear. I hear sobbing, with echoes coming from
the lilac bush, and over the chimney a red, blondish flame rises,

to warn me: "The stones of this empty house have absorbed
your days and hours, have married your laughter to unearthly cries

no dance can dance." And I return to your April day appearance,
to the "I will be right with you" of your voice, and let myself
be nurtured by its dark tone of which our history is made.

HE

As if he knew the ascent
that turns an ant into an ox
he persevered on his path.

Nobody noticed him and even he,
fervent with that ascent, felt
more like ant than ox
in many hours of his life.

With lights to simulate the presence
of a god, he went to find
the animal's extent, man's scope.

When in his winter, infuriate
spring still moved him.

He kept seeking the flame,
high over the animal's remains.

HIGHWAY EXIT

We used to take exit 17, coming home from a day
on the beach, or with tinsel still in the trunk,
only to find junk mail, and sometimes
a tree branch that broke, heavy with snow.

Now the path is the same, but when turning off
the highway, taking a left onto Greendale,
something invisible inside me is upset,
and only with effort keeps the wheel straight.

The house under pines overlooking Chatham Bay
comes back, barely visible through the tears,
emerging from the windshield now and then;
two white deck chairs still look to the sea.

No more ocean sunsets or nightly lighthouse walks.
The neighbors will not miss me: they thought
I was an outsider anyway. The small gate to the beach
will stay permanently closed.

When I now take exit 17, my in-laws' ashes
cry out for their daughter's smile, the one
with which my married life started.

Any exit will do now,
if only I did not pass it yet.

JULY GARDEN

Here, where oak mates with rhododendron, we joined
our lives, in a garden full of laughter, going back
and forth between our glances and the roses beyond.

As then, the sun designs Belgian lace on the lawn,
marrying light to shade. Wind-blown memories
link us to trees tall as our hopes.

The balloons are gone. Blue vats that once held wine bottles
are filled with rain water graced by a sheen of pollen.
A single red geranium radiates from the backyard window.

The guests who celebrated us have turned into
robins spreading their song in a sly breeze
that vacillates between holding on and letting go.

A bond that only elves could have woven at the border
of night and day is shattered now. Can I say "it was"
when the roses turn the other way as I look at them?

This morning, men came to cut down oak branches
overhanging the roof. Their shade has moved inside.
Not even the house believes the marriage ever happened.

KAISER FRANZ JOSEPH STRASSE

April in Vienna,
return of "Du glückliches..."
-- if only it were!

Going down Kaiser Franz
Joseph Strasse, some
golden angel's wing

whisks by, flying free
over wide skirts
and ample hats, high boots.

Farther away, a horse-drawn
carriage rumbles
over cobblestones,

down a street the midday
sun is lavished on,
nineteen hundred and four.

Almost time to say:
"It's twelve noon;
lunch will be served

in the veranda adjacent
to the plant house,
leading to the lawn
with the first daffodils."

A breeze abducts the image,
turns it into a postcard sent
by royal order
to where I now stand --

part of a different world,
the dynasty gone,
nineteen hundred ninety-four.

LAST HOUR

Can you imagine
me in my last hour,
when the rampage
of life leaves you
alone, on the highest
mountain I ever
climbed where
resounding wind now
blows from paradise?

MOTHER EARTH

The jungle in me is renewing itself ever so often.
At times it feels like a Peruvian rain forest,
and then again like a Indian tapestry,
a geometrically designed story of lost generations.

Who am I to claim membership in this terrain, this
geography through which I barely find my way?
All I remember are faces once foaming like lava
before turning to ashes.

They are part of my history: this flight
of orchid birds to the south, migrations
of elders to their death, the silent reaching-out
of newborns into another region of the skull.

Speech from my lips is a small breeze
in a hurricane of voices, heard only when an ancient
one, who was here long before me, silences the storm
and takes my breathing back into hers.

MOTHER TONGUE

Slip into your native language
like a fish into the wave.

Leap from the rocky height
of departure, always mastered.

Light shines from under the frantic stone
of domestic syllables

as they burst the palate in dark arrival.

NEW YORK CITY

The roof erupts in black pipes
crying out toward the skyscrapers
beyond, where its cry
is taken up and blown
into a polluted sky.

The bricks close to my window sigh,
holding shadows like sun dials
on their old nails.
On the lit walls beyond loom
black ghost dwellings.

Jan van Eyck needed cities
as backdrops for Virgin and Child,
and green hills hugging both,
leading peopled bridges
and boats to their gates.

Beyond this window,
stone is protestant,
forbidden to bear ornaments
from whose lips a breathless wish
for tenderness might rise.

Roof towers take the pipes' song,
and orchestrate a symphony
of betrayal. In the City a God,
a child awakes, and sees a home
rising from the ruins of my hopes.

NORTH GERMAN GARDEN

I journey to the roots, the entangled
maze of child-fears, undeclared hopes.

There flows the river where alders first
spoke of love lost, the path on which

full moon told the horror of betrayal
that was, perhaps, a simple change

in blood chemistry. I enter
the garden in which birches led

to rhubarb and strawberries, walking
towards the hedge, where evenings

I harvested the asparagus crop.
All the dahlias are gone that used

to gleam pearl-like in the morning sun,
enticing enough to make you want

to contemplate them all day; gone is
the old barn where one could sob tears

without being heard. Only the huge
oak, planted before Napoleon's troops

burned down the farmhouse on their march
to Russia, still stands, singing

as formerly its rough modulated melody
of peat, crossed horse heads, and redemption.

NOT MY COUNTRY

You were not always
so close to leaving,
so artfully far away.

I can feel the loosening
of hinges in my chest,
some sob stirring.

I follow your thoughts
like a detective
sensing a crime.

The map you are bent over
is not of my country;
it's not even my continent.

You will say as much
once you feel it, I know
you will be frank.

I cannot hold on to the day
you want for yourself;
only to my own breath,

the tremor of the hand
closing the gate
as the car with you goes by.

OAKS IN FALL

Like a death endlessly foreseen but slow in coming,
departure settles over the oaks in front of the house,
hesitating to drop its full weight
for fear of bringing all the leaves down.

I see the reds and browns through my window with a new eye,
its lens narrower. The shutter often comes down
at unexpected moments, and the flash doesn't work
with the sureness of bygone days.

I have reentered a world of lonely riders,
at the end of a road I thought was our road,
in a house I thought was ours. The oaks out
in front are not sure this fall they belong there.

I cannot blame them; I myself am displaced from my roots.
I ought to make a house for myself in their trunk,
and rent the house to a luckier man, who is
still certain the oaks have a life beyond this fall.

PHOTOGRAPH FROM THE FIFTIES

They stand in their garden
on a summer night, arm in arm
under the old pear tree.

Her face is all smiles as she stands
close to him, just freed from
Russian prison camp.

How well the American suit
out of the CARE package fits him
although he never set foot on Wall Street!

Forgotten the loss of battalions,
overthrown trucks, tanks,
ice breaking under horse hoofs on the Baltic.

For me, it is the time of first love --
Camel-smoke, coca cola, music box.

Rosemarie.

The pear tree is the portal
through which I step into my life.

RAMADA INN

I glide to a new seminar
on life with an unendorsed
registration.

In the lobby, ladies
show off their used charms;
their husbands sell them.

At the reception,
the hardware is down,
its software simmering helplessly.

Programs of day and night
are here interspersed, in a batch
reaching past midnight.

At the bar, Bloody Marys
are killed in droves,
by troops unable to defend themselves.

The seminar closes
with a remark about the frailty
of civilizations.

RETURN TO SILESIA

Under the bitter sky of self
I breathe the silence of the hyacinth,
stillness between calls of a mocking bird
resting from its cantilena now.

Where grows the root of fear,
the shrub of exile in my garden
-- hedged to keep the neighbors out?

I stand to pause.

The music of a Sunday morning in April
pours forth, and I go down Sinapius Strasse
where I was born, finding only burned beams
and a dead geranium in a hollow of the land.

Once, my sister and I planted carrots
and bush beans for Mother's table here,
and heard the joyous shriek
of comrades playing in the street.

Hitler's war ended that.

For years, I saw only empty windows
and broken chimneys, a ransacked apartment,
in my memory.

But today, a mocking bird who never fled
a war has opened up another time zone
where all childhoods meet.

As I look up, the bird is gone.
But the old house stands there,
its windows glassed again.

Even curtains are swaying in the wind.

ROSE OF BUDAPEST

They put you in front of the bathroom
mirror into artificial light,
unaware of your own.

Out on the windowsill now, your scent
strains to reach the cobble-stoned street.

You cannot hear the trees breathing
heavily in front of the Hilton.

The Parliament building behind you
is almost invisible in the smog;
in Mathias Church next door
no prayers rise for you.

Trees are your closest allies.

Your short life is long
compared with theirs --
standing in your Hungarian red
with leaves already dead.

SILESIA OF MY MIND

For Susan Erony

I come from a land of blue hills,
of song and tale, where Himmler
built concentration camps.

In Oleśnica, on a Sunday in 1940,
Mother answered my question
by saying "these are Poles from Łódz
and beyond, guest workers of the Reich."

They lived in a cloud of chloride,
their barbed-wired grounds pestilent,
in the faded light of the Holy
Roman Empire of German Nation.

We left town on the last train
crossing the Odra River,
a week after a Ukrainian regiment
liberated Oświęcim.

They received us well
in the Bremen moors,
where the dead horse head
still guards their barns.

The salvaged family silver
shone empty in the Bismarck candle,
more decorative than useful
around so little food on the plate.

Grown up, I learned Polish
in search of my Father's forgotten past,
reading Mickiewicz and Turan,
Chopin at my fingertips.

For reasons Silesian
I am open
to different musics.

THE DESIRABILITY OF STONE

Are stones, steadfast and ancient,
ever asking how to live?

We are not rounded off by catastrophes,
with runes marking our stand as they are.

We are not edged into the world
but dreamers -- never staying long
enough to see centuries form.

Stones do.

They were here when we were
not even fish.

Stones have faces grown inward,
their dreams turned to weight,
their tears to mass,
their self-pity wiped off by storms.

They know what we barely imagine,
never turning -- immovably moving.

All we do is throw them,
but only the small ones,
and then not very far.

THE PENDANT

Held in a copper frame
it is suspended on a chain
around your neck, touching
it ever so slightly.

A woman in chaste garb
with a crescent moon above her head
is sitting on your chest,
on a stool resting on your bone.

You may not think the woman
is cut into the glass, but she is.
She was there before you started
to become yourself.

A million years ago, when
mountains formed over the fiery lava
of Earth, a god took Artemis' shape
and embossed it in lava that turned into glass.

The woman you are searching was
always in you; as the mountains
are in you, and the lava is in you.

How could you know who framed her
and put her on your chest?

TREELINK

Evening light is weighing down
on the playground oaks and maples
early this wintry day.

Here, in the snow-soft meadow,
I have stood before, happier,
not noticing the weight
in the trees, when the sun sank
to close the afternoon.

The trees have aged.

I suddenly know
they were always aching
under the heavy light.

Afternoon hides below the grass,
a raven descends, and the wind
takes years off the branches,
shifting them to my shoulders.

I return weighed down,
more certain,
more luminous.

TWIN SISTER

For Helga Laske

Tempestuous seconds of your younger smile,
anticipating mother's toothless one --
intimations of our ceasing, Sister.

On your face, an unearthly lightness
that I, your brother, can never bestow on you.

Where is it that we are entwined
in the convoluted heart, we,
who fled Silesia on the last train?

We, without descendants other than Silesian
Baroque churches, Northern German clouds,
inklings of a Chopin mazurka floating
through the fruit trees beyond the Blue Room,
and a few illegible American notes on a German will.

WINDOW

A cathedral we cannot complete,
our bond remains open
to a grace not of our doing.

We begin with the rose window
over doors on mighty hinges,
ending in the sacristy of losses.

Moving toward the altar
forgetfulness already overcomes us;
the colored windows

of desire lead us astray
in the ship. We hear voices,
but not the one and only.

We end with a kneefall
under storm bells, when
the gates are closed

to keep out rising water.
Bent toward the buttresses,
we hope for their strength,

trying words, cries, lieder,
and return alone to the ground
of our undoing.

O do not stop building
the cathedral; do not let
the towers stand lower

than the highest desire
in the burning rose window
of longing.

YOU WERE THE ROWER

Ann Sexton in memoriam

You walked the earth
on wooden legs,
awfully rowing, pretty
and alone.

Making God up
when you needed Him,
you hoped He would sing for you
like a bird in the tree Apollo's.

Your world turned on its axis many times --
into an asylum of green madness.

At last, your trembling stood
in hand-held mirrors,
transfixed into a column of salt.

You could not weep.

God came and went,
and when you wanted Him to stay,
He left for good.

He went mad over you.

Tremblings

AFTERNOON

Swaying, drooping --
red and marigold,
a whole jardin des plantes
full of remembrances.

I, the aristocrat
walking down Main Street,
enobled by your glances
of one or two weeks ago.

Whole else would care to pause
before this leaf
turning summer to fall?

Stooping down in this wind's
blow, what hope of return
can I entertain?

In the sunset of your smile,
finger to finger with you,
I ask for eternity.

ANGELS

At the border of my night and day,
you are the angel that tests the milk
and divides the guilt.

You have set the sieve in the past,
and in the future your song will find
the remnants of my crop, restoring them
to the barn of hope.

Humans want to know; but their grasp
is not beyond mice. Love alone
lets them grow into shapes
possessed by angels.

BERLIN INTELLECTUAL

As long as your cigarette lasts,
Marx will have been right
about this society.

Not even the tobacco leaves
turning blue in your face
can be trusted.

In fact, there is nothing but smoke
in the world.

The media have confiscated
language while your sentences
stood on guard against another Weimar.

In this once divided city
the divisions have crept inside,
making a mockery of *Das Kapital*.

No more Berliner Kindheit.

BLACK ANGEL

O this interminable night that comes,
its tides a threat, its waves
so full of boundless breath,
how, in this slow emergence of dark
sound can I stay silent?

Is there no cry of blue,
no shining red
for me?

When in its terrible arrival
it will come, and stay, and roam --
o linger on, my angel dear,
my black angel whose wings
rise a storm in me.

CHANGE OF SEASON

How alive are we
in this tree of yearning
when the leaves fall
and winter comes?

Do we break through the bark
to reach out to clouds?

Do we suck in November air
with lust?

Mourners of spring,
lecherous after summer,
we are held by fear,
never open to the invisible light
in our roots.

COMPANION

Single, in flight,
with no purpose other
than touching, I breathe,

when you, like a sister,
searching for other climates,
arrive.

Under us, the lagoon
comes to life with the gleaming
lights of reefs.

As dusk spreads,
we drink desire
from the light breeze,
moving toward revelation.

But we never arrive.

CONDITION HUMAINE

We compute the wave, truncate
the crest, and round off
life's foam to a dire nil.

In the quicksand of failure
our visions sob, wishes clamor,
hopes vacillate.

Of the sea we know not,
leaving its surface flat
for the easy commerce
of our hearts.

No wonder that,
when we wish to sail,
the winds fall dead
with a white and silent cry.

DANCER

In memoriam Philippa Cullen

Yours was not the pirouette
and the plié,
nor the pas de deux;
you never faked perfect timing.

You rose and sank
with your breath,
alive on surfaces
made for sudden turns.

Tree, storm, cloud, and sea
came to life in your katak,
until your breath failed,
your body broke.

To honor you,
meter has to go.

DOG TEARS

My words have died
in this disease of folly
humans call "life",
where music goes divided
in broken harmonies.

Simple is never simple enough
for tears, and silence,
silence is all I tolerate.

Who knows what spirit
works that whining dog?

Is there a logic
to his suffocation?

Can he be reanimated?

O creature, let us save
your senseless smile!

One living heart
for every dying word.

DOWN AND OUT

When my world comes to grief
I stand upright and look,
empty of speech.

I wander far over the sights
and drink the sounds.

When my world comes to grief,
I detour all traffic to lanes
outside of my body.

I flash a yellow light.

To grief I come in my own world
whose many streets I will never know.

To grief I come in my own heart,
whose banquets and funerals
I cannot anticipate.

If you see me laugh, it is
that my heart and my world
are playthings of thoughts
beyond anybody's grasping.

ESTRANGEMENT

Did you achieve it
in your dark ways,
the hurting that through lack
of touching comes?

How warm is snow
that in December falls
compared to love
that breathes not!

Is it easier to live dying
than to live?

FAREWELL TO LOS ANGELES

And slender spring
and tender May
are here, have come
overnight.

How do you know,
my love?

But surely, she said,
they must. As for
winter, we've had it
too long.

I
O the smog.

Lifting it out of itself
will take forever...

As we land, the wheels again rotate,
after their hanging sleep.

Dreaming in the smog,
trying to lift it,
is our undertaking.

Expecting you is not
like anything I know.
I do not grasp you,
and how the clouds pass by,
or the sun sets in mist
under your eyelids.

There is wind, when you come,
wind from the sea
that drives me down

the coast in a dark sail.

Expecting you is knowing
no tides and nothing,
or little, of clouds,
with a compass needle slowly
pointing south.

*It was nice t' see
ye, she said. Our*

*time is up; do
seek yourself
another love.*

*I prefer to be single, she said;
it's hard.*

*T' was really nice
to see you.*

Our gestures, our bodily house
fail in parting.

The voice has no place to go;
the hands are nowhere;
our lips can't open.

To take off is easy,
compared with departure.

II

Accept the parting,
the parting.

It is not forever,
but for now, it is all we have.

Parting is like a perfect blossom
that opens one day only
and sinks back into the night.

You call it pain.
Virgil called it journey.

Release of words
in silent innuendos.

As the sea at night,
when lights fade,
comes to life with sudden force,

so words descend
and spread to all parts of the body.

There, in a calm tide,
as birds in flight
evening out the edges of the hurt
and slowly dissolving,
they breathe.

Strung together by tears,
or why would they be so translucent,
after a deep fall?

III

After the pain has stung,

there is sound sleep,
and a dizziness
from which you emerge.

Shapes need their time
to rearrange.
It is strange to walk
and see.

The trees still stand up
high, and air their benign
greeting.

O let me rest
in your silence, let me
rest.

Let me sleep in your arms,
your arms.

It cannot be that you are not.

I have not been so without myself
as now, never so
without my self.

Let me rest in your
silence, your arms
of silence.

Let me rest.

AND THE CITY GOES TO SLEEP
UNDER A BRAZEN SUN.

HAUPTSTIMME

A home for those homeless.

"I" is no group event.

To be sure, it is ME frightens.

Better in. (I mean, to be in is
more gratifying than out,
and more of a home.)

POETRY

is a program for minds to undertake,
plunge into it without getting lost,
within each other's sight.

It's a machine for sharing,
worked by mind's agility,
an angel looking forward
and back, never arrested.

At the border of how far it can
go nevertheless seeking us,
and a home not for itself.

POETRY, ever benign,
Hauptstimme,
from behind the mask greeting.

HOW TO LAST

Why can we not
in this storm
of life endure
as leaves do,

never the same
nor leaves always --
let the wind pass
and the year,
unclinging --

a tree of song,
never holding on to more
than is present?

We, who have taken root
in clouds, fashioned
storms in the heart
and sing badly
or not at all!

LANDSCAPE

In winter
the black trees
shiver in snow folds,

their branches gleam
sharp as glass.

Light cuts through them
as if ice
were its home.

I hear sounds
of wood
breaking.

LAST VISIT

For Margaret Laske

I made them die,
the chrysanthemums
in your room.

They feared me
like the plague approaching,
forbidden to flee.

The cruelty in my words,
my breath, my glances
poisoned them.

In all autumns hence
their sad fragrance
will haunt me like an ailment
I could not overcome.

LOSS

There comes
the messenger.

His news
is death.

We lived
and never
knew
each other's
heart.

Now,
in memory,
rises your
transfiguration.

NIGHT FALL

Dusk rakes its fingers
over the sullen sky,
promising darkness'
all-engulfing waves.

Over the dunes, the call
of a stricken bird.

In the day's vanishing
grasp a tremor of
forgetting.

No release.

Back and forth the
waves toss their
endless floods.

PROMISING SEASON

I desire a liquid
named honey of the moon.

In spring evenings it creeps
over the horizon,
and I look for it in the daffodils.

In May, the moon
is a full bucket;
it runs over
and I am bee.

I gather it into
subterranean chambers,
where the queen
helps me preserve it.

Her lovers die at my request.

I crave a liquid
called honey of the queen.

SPRING

For Susannah Ganus

Your winter, Susannah, was harsh --
so much snow covering the plain,
and no bird sang.

I couldn't find my way
to your house at night.

Where in the dark did you go
when ice formed?
Did the winds speak to you?
Did you find company?

You are still numb and unfeeling
of your own blood,
but your embrace will be firm again
and sure to hold,

your tongue burning to sing
when summer comes.

SUICIDE WARNING

For Lil Fox

You used to kill yourself slowly --
three packs a day --
and now, why so suddenly?

Did you feel you had to be
an achiever, taking death
all at once, or that it would
shorten the way?

Is it the long distance
that tricked you into hurrying?

What can one ask you for
in this life after death
but to be less relentless
in your pursuits, and to consider
the beauty of decay arranged
in little steps.

There is so much you miss
along the way
going at high speed.

You might want to slow down,
avoiding the fine, and looking
at sunsets once a day, making a chain
of them through memory,
to be worn when your lover comes.

Or else, notice the speed
at which plants die on the window sill.

They take their time.

Each day is just a little amethyst,
and more than that nobody can appreciate.

One night, when all is done,
you will understand
why it needed so much time.

SYCAMORE

You fell on this perfect September day
in front of my window.

How can I mourn you, now
that your green dress is spread
over the earth?

I hear Pierre Ronsard lament your death
four centuries ago when trees were still
the enemy of man.

We tamers have lost
all good reasons to take you down.

Remind us, Pierre,
that what hurt you then
should mortify us now.

TODAY

I have a day,
a whole day.
What a long time!

It will come;
it will go.
Only a day,
a single day.

If I could play
as God did,
careless and carefree,
for seven days.

If I could see
the completion he saw,
only once.

I have but a day,
a single day.

Too little to live for,
too much not to live.

TREE OF WINTER

He would shine through the tree
of winter where the snow
had built dream castles.

Overcome by need he would
leave a mark there,
letting us figure out what it meant.

We spoke of him haltingly,
with a furtive glance,
huddled together.

Again and again
we would watch him
stealing himself away
when noticing us,
deciding he could not stay.

He waxed and waned like images
under ice that shift
with the temperature.

On the coldest night,
he hung a blazing light into the tree.

That was the night when my friends later
found me there, with the light shining
into my eyes that could no longer close.

UNION

For Gitta Steiner

Until in your flesh
and part of the untiring
mouth piece of nature,

I shall not rest and get drunk
with your fairy eyes
covering sunsets.

Around your towers I shall stay,
with my breath exhausting your floods --
flood that rises towards cries to come,
that in your cavity engulfs rosy
shafts growing into darkness.

When, as in nature's plan, I end
where you begin, and my shape
is written into your embrace,
give mercy!

Even when pleasure fails let
longing be forgiven, so that unfolds
our common heart's shelter.

UPON VISITING THE GRANARY

To Ann Poggard, died October 24, 1683,
in Boston, Massachusetts

When you died in your nineteenth year,
dark men took you to the Granary
in slow procession, recommending you
to a heaven now difficult to believe in.

Filling their minds with mournful melody,
they could not fathom that you had long known love,
and had, by going away, chosen to rest from it
under October leaves.

They couldn't know that they brought you
eternal hope to be obedient only to yourself,
obedience that was not simply
an achievement for a loved man.

Would they have stood by you
had you raised your small voice
to tell the truth? Would they have defended
you in your nakedness?

I hear you singing that day
in your own tongue,
with words that rise
like beacons on the hill.

Here I stand as snow flakes melt
on your name, trying to grasp
your melody.

:

