INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S ISSUE

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Until recently, when one thought of women writers, only a few established names would come to mind: Virginia Woolf, Jane Austen, Emily Dickinson, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, George Eliot. As one moves into the last few decades, more names emerge, but the general tonal quality one perceives from their works has remained very nearly the same until the present generation. There has been a steady balance of solitude, one that has seemed so final and unalterable that it does not even suggest loneliness. Women, it appeared, had learned only too well to exist within restrictions that social modes had placed around them. All of the self that could not find its purpose or reflection externally in the world was deflected back onto the self.

The aesthetic consciousness of the woman artist up until the present generation, the imagination that was not allowed to match its images externally and name its structures into the world, turned inward and there marked off its own territory. It became very nearly
inaccessible to anyone not willing to grant its boundaries and the constrictions those boundaries seemed to place upon vision. I say “seemed” deliberately: the boundaries were simply horizontal. Nothing stopped the vertical perception. One has only to remember the massive plunges into psychic time in Virginia Woolf’s novels, or the manner in which Jane Austen sliced off the segment of society with which she was most familiar—a mere fragment of the whole to be sure—but then laid it open to the marrow, uncovering the disease of the whole within the part. This is the source of those labels with which critics used to ply women writers: that subtlety, that lightness, that ability to penetrate very finely into the small, everyday segments of our lives with grace and finesse, but certainly with none of the expansiveness of a Goethe, a Whitman or a Baudelaire, nor the monumental themes of the spiritual and cultural demise of entire civilizations that a Mann or a Proust would take upon themselves. However, there really can be no blame placed in this regard: one could call it chauvinism, but putting a label on something cannot explain it.

It is the quality of perception that has been at fault, the way we have been accustomed, trained, to look at ourselves and the world. As if the world and its people were “out there” and the part of us (as if it were really necessary to divide ourselves up) that belonged in or to the world were also “out there” and that only what lay “out there” were worthy of any serious thought or endeavor. In the exploration and delineation of unlimited arenas of space, geographical or internal, all qualities of strangeness and unfamiliarity can be safely explained away, can be pigeonholed and therefore owned by the mind. This is the horizontal mode of perception. It fastens on expansion. The moment one spatial arena is categorized in this manner, it is filed away and buried, and the mind grasps at yet another. Without regard to gender, the horizontal mode of perception exhausts the universe; it is a broad, but certainly not exclusive characteristic of the West.

The vertical mode, that which fastens on those very qualities of strangeness, even of nightmare and terror, with the intent to keep space open to their free existence, is just as widespread in men writers as women; it is simply more obvious in the latter, because women were never allowed social or cultural function except on a limited, horizontal plane. And when one’s horizons are sealed off, as by so many walls, it is human to turn one’s vision in directions that are still open, where one can place one’s own boundaries. This external constriction was naturally, and almost always, reflected in some manner in the writings of women. The imagination always finds its basis in reality, and reality is simply our perception of the world, which in turn has as its basis the
imagination. The two interpenetrate and interdirect. They are never separate. And it is the simple truth of this last statement which we all, and really quite without gender, seem to have been struggling toward for the last two centuries or so. And now we, women as well as men, have splayed our visionary sensors to accommodate a single mode of perception which is both vertical and horizontal.

The vision of women writers is now beginning to lie across itself, is spreading out. Their imagination is not consuming the world, nor being consumed by it, but rather a kind of immense brightening is taking place, an illumination of what has always been our universe, but which is now seen as if for the first time; a clarification, a magical naming of new relationships just perceived that has the power to restructure, even to create. I do not use the word “create” lightly. Too often it has been used to define what is actually a limited process: that of simply labeling objective and subjective relationships, as if their differentiation were built into an absolute structure which the mind only perceived, its only task to find its position in that structure—as if the “in here” and the “out there” did not have precisely the same centre, that being wherever the imagination positioned it. Women have learned, like Ilse Aichinger’s bound man, to live within forces of restriction, to become graceful within them, to make the control exercised by the ropes their own and use it powerfully as a focus which invents the coherence of the world and their relationship to it. But, as in Aichinger’s “Old Love,” the focus has changed. The emphasis is now on “voyager.” Using the discipline learned from superimposed restrictions, but not the restrictions themselves, their vision has moved out, embracing expansion, still nurturing the necessary solitude of consciousness.

Beneath all the women’s voices represented here, there is the directive: the universe is not worn out, our relationship to it not exhausted, only our old way of looking at it; we can call things only as we see them. Their words have a sense of immediacy, of directness, as if the instant the word is conceived in the imagination, it has assumed a new configuration, a new confluence of restructured relationships. The word is its own purpose. It is world bared to essential elements correlative to our own primal essences; it is space vitalized and born to the urgency of process by time, concept shaped to image, subject concurrent with object: the primacy of vision reasserted, articulating, inventing a universe that is again open to our greatest powers of perception. Only this time the feeling one gets is that the organization will be infinite, perpetual, and that all of us will at last be a part of it. “Words do not turn their heads/ they get up/ at once/ and go” (Hilde Domin). The word bears us with it into being.
A story, a story!
(Let it go. Let it come.)
I was stamped out like a Plymouth fender
into this world.
First came the crib
with its glacial bars.
Then dolls
and the devotion to their plastic mouths.
Then there was school,
the little straight rows of chairs,
blotting my name over and over,
but undersea all the time,
a stranger whose elbows wouldn’t work.
Then there was life
with its cruel houses
and people who seldom touched —
though touch is all —
but I grew,
like a pig in a trenchcoat I grew,
and then there were many strange apparitions,
the nagging rain, the sun turning into poison
and all of that, saws working through my heart,
but I grew, I grew,
and God was there like an island I had not rowed to,
still ignorant of Him, my arms and my legs worked,
and I grew, I grew,
I wore rubies and bought tomatoes
and now, in my middle age,
about nineteen in the head I’d say,
I am rowing, I am rowing
though the oarlocks stick and are rusty
and the sea blinks and rolls
like a worried eyeball,
but I am rowing, I am rowing,
though the wind pushes me back
and I know that that island will not be perfect,
it will have the flaws of life,
the absurdities of the dinner table,
but there will be a door
and I will open it
and I will get rid of the rat inside of me,
the gnawing pestilential rat.
God will take it with his two hands
and embrace it.

As the African says:
This is my tale which I have told,
if it be sweet, if it be not sweet,
take somewhere else and let some return to me.
This story ends with me still rowing.

Anne Sexton

THE CHILDREN

The children are all crying in their pens
and the surf carries their cries away.
They are old men who have seen too much,
their mouths are full of dirty clothes,
the Tongues poverty, tears like pus.
The surf pushed their cries back.
Listen.
They are bewitched.
They are writing down their life
on the wings of an elf
who then dissolves.
They are writing down their life
on a century fallen to ruin.
They are writing down their life
on the bomb of an alien God.
I am too.
We must get help.
The children are dying in their pens.
Their bodies are crumbling.
Their tongues are twisted backwards.
There is a certain ritual to it.
There is a dance they do in their pens.
Their mouths are immense.
They are swallowing monster hearts.
So is my mouth.

Listen.
We must all stop dying in the little ways,
in the craters of hate,
in the potholes of indifference—
a murder in the temple.
The place I live in
is a kind of maze
and I keep seeking
the exit or the home.
Yet if I could listen
to the bulldog courage of those children
and turn inward into the plague of my soul
with more eyes than the stars
I could melt the darkness—
as suddenly as that time
when an awful headache goes away
or someone puts out the fire—
and stop the darkness and its amputations
and find the real McCoy
in the private holiness
of my hands.

Anne Sexton
COURAGE

It is in the small things we see it.
The child’s first step,
as awesome as an earthquake.
The first time you rode a bike,
wallowing up the sidewalk.
The first spanking when your heart
went on a journey all alone.
When they called you crybaby
or poor or fatty or crazy
and made you into an alien,
you drank their acid
and concealed it.

Later,
if you faced the death of bombs and bullets
you did not do it with a banner,
you did it with only a hat to
cover your heart.
You did not fondle the weakness inside you
though it was there.
Your courage was a small coal
that you kept swallowing.
If your buddy saved you
and died himself in so doing,
then his courage was not courage,
it was love; love as simple as shaving soap.

Later,
if you have endured a great despair,
then you did it alone,
getting a transfusion from the fire,
picking the scabs off your heart,
then wringing it out like a sock.
Next, my kinsman, you powdered your sorrow,
you gave it a back rub
and then you covered it with a blanket
and after it had slept a while
it woke to the wings of the roses
and was transformed.

Later,
when you face old age and its natural conclusion
your courage will still be shown in the little ways,
each spring will be a sword you’ll sharpen,
those you love will live in a fever of love,
and you’ll bargain with the calendar
and at the last moment
when death opens the back door
you’ll put on your carpet slippers
and stride out.
OLD LOVE

ILSE AICHINGER

Two little, partially gray people worked their way tiredly up the street. In front of them the sun accented the sand, behind them the wind blew into the sailcloth. From time to time they stood still, faced one another and each observed the other cautiously and in detail. There was no familiarity in their gazes, no commitment, and they seemed indifferent to what flowed out of the park over gullies. “All that is western trash,” the man said once, but he lisped badly and it just as easily could have been called something else. The woman nodded and pulled the loosely knit shawl tighter about her neck. “Wasn’t a young man there,” she said, “who wanted to visit us? They have put him behind glass.” “And when?” “As far as I know, yesterday.” “Crystals and their formation,” replied the man concerned, “in this country one serves nothing else.” To their left a church square appeared, and he had to hold onto his hat. “And what becomes of it?” asked the woman. Her voice was soft and clear, even though her accent was slightly foreign. “When I wish to have someone over for coffee, for example, after a joust, I expect him to come.” “Naturally,” said the man. “Covered with red dust perhaps,” she continued more excited now and had to sneeze, “but I expect him to come. What do you think?” “That such expectations are natural,” he replied. Children ran past with caps of blue, red and green, carrying something slung over their shoulders on nooses, ice skates, or maybe smaller boots also, hunting weapons, two each and many carried four. “Young grown-ups,” said the man, “future whalers who won’t visit us either.” Again they stood still and examined each other briefly. “Where did you awaken?” he asked. “I was wrapped in yellowed sailcloth, lay under an icy breeze, the end, that was all.” “And I awoke with the rams at the zoo entrance.” “The old stories are of no further help to anyone. There are many who were
wrapped in nothing more than heavy packing paper." "I know," said the man, "these things I know." "When I think of my old school notebook," said the woman, "my script so fine and how they bent over me and cried 'Good, Muriel, good!' And then you fall asleep and find yourself again with people fishing at the river or in depot corridors." "So it is," he said, "whether you want to or not, there's more than enough of it." "Yes," she replied shyly. And added, fighting for breath in a gust of wind: "Besides, the whole thing has taken place in no more than half a day. Not even half a day. Too short a time to find conviction." "Conviction?" "I mean to revolt against the government and all that. Where your friend Morton now sits." "Not anymore." "Not anymore? But then it's too late!" "You wanted to see the boy," he said and without looking up he helped her over the curb. "You see him with us." "See him with us," he repeated, "and because of that we are on our way. Hat closets, cloakrooms, winter curtains and trays. Therein lies our present interest. In the appropriate reception. We want to pass over the avoidable associations, we want to come upon his whereabouts easily." "You say that lightly." "I mean," he continued patiently, "without garrulousness and vain repetitions, which previously we have been able to avoid." "Yes, do you think so?" she replied, uncertain.

They stopped in front of a window. This window did not resemble a display window, but instead looked the way shop windows usually look when they have been converted into ground-floor flats: no window bars, the single panes laboriously and badly cleaned so that one noticed traces of chamois on them. And the bright stringy curtains, whose stitch design gave a shredded effect, were not behind the panes but rather drawn together behind the somewhat too deep embrasure. Yes, it was a former display window and in turn could have been just a former window and who knows how often it had changed from one to the other without success. Still, the windowsill was lengthened artfully up to the inner recess and was covered with velvet. Yellowish leaf-plants in clay pots were placed left and right along the walls, but in the middle, illuminated by nothing but the weak morning sun, stood old furniture in miniature: a kitchen cabinet, a desk, a spinet, even washboards and tub, three ornate chairs around an oval table, an armchair, an optical illusion (as fake paintings are sometimes called) upon which the fortress of Finstermünz was depicted, and half covered by a black cloth, a Recamière and a rocking chair. One of the lower left drawers of the desk was open, a fountain pen lying across it. "Here," cried the woman, "here it is, it must have been here!" "Where we did not receive him?" "Where he did not enter." "It is in fact number seventy-eight," said the man, who surveyed the old narrow housedoor.
near the window, "seventy-four, seventy-six, seventy-eight." "Let's as­
sume he might have been riding a horse," she said, "he couldn't have
gotten through the door." "Had you started to write a letter?" he asked
cautiously and pointed to the fountain pen caught in the half-open
desk drawer. "I had always begun to write letters," she replied irri­
tated, "except on a few Wednesdays in early autumn, four or five, you
can count them on your fingers!" "And then the wash, your old weak­
ness." "That proves nothing," she retorted as tears mounted in her
eyes. The man had gone to the house gate and tried the latch, but the
gate was locked. He pressed the only half-rusted bell button in the wall,
but nothing stirred. "Everything's closed," he said, "and I am con­
vinced: we should never have begun with the ship painting, and gen­
erally speaking, with all such undertakings, pen refillings, spinet les­
sions, and so forth." "Spinet lessons," she cried stricken, "the four
schoolgirls and one of them . . ." "Then they might have had no reason,
nothing with which to reproach us," he said quickly, "and we might
be able to complain like all the others, like the rest of humanity, my
friend Morton," he again attempted to ring, "my friend Morton, for
example. . . ." "Let him go," she said, "leave your friend Morton out
of this once and for all. From now on everything without him." She
pressed her forehead against the glass. "How wasted and ruined every­
thing looks here. Not a place a person could depart from, in any case
not like this. No, not like this!" She was still near tears. "When a place
looks like this, one can't do anything but stay." She stamped her foot.
"Stay, stay! Between washboards and waterspots, too." "I believe some­
one is coming now," said the man. "And these yellow flowers . . ."
The door opened quickly and a large, fairly powerful woman looked
out. She wore a kitchen apron, a white scarf, and horn-rimmed glasses,
her short gray hair tangled about her head. "I think we know each
other," the man said decisively. "Wasn't your maiden name Strauss?
My wife on the other hand is close to the house where Eduard was
born . . . could you have learned anything concerning his fate?" "Not
a word," said the woman at the door. "To speak plainly, our concern
is not with my wife's relatives," the man said quickly when she sought
to close the door again. "Well, then?" She glanced behind her into the
hall as if someone stood there and then turned once again toward the
street. "But rather with a young man on a horse," said the man hastily,
"born in Erfurt, headstrong, uninspired, and lovable. Imagine, he once
said he would visit us and he came, too. He charged in as if between
stone statues and took an interest in everything. But when he wished
to come the second time, and that's just it—should have come," he in­
terrupted himself with a glance toward his companion, "should have
come, then he didn’t come again. We had arranged everything, we sat there and waited. I still had the possibility of devoting myself to my two major interests, but her? To be brief: do you know anything? We hear they put him behind glass, but we can’t believe it. He always had so much open air about him, sand on his heels.” “I would have associated him sooner with crises of the sea,” he added after a shorter pause, “but by no means with crises of the street. No, by no means.” “You are shameless,” the woman at the door said in her tremulous voice, while over her left shoulder emerged the head of a horse which she stroked softly. “I think you go too far.” “I hope so,” answered the man, “that seldom lay in the realm of my possibilities. Isn’t that true, Belle?” He turned again to his now silent companion. “And whoever reads the newspapers comes upon the most curious notions. For example, I can tell you quite plainly that you kept monkeys and peewits in the window. And that it was still in the recent past. Obviously, before you ever wore your apron. And your hair was prettier then, too!” “To be sure, a great many never got in,” he continued quickly, “for you already valued leafplants at that time. And the poor animals suffered from isolation, didn’t you think, Belle?” She nodded. “How are you coming along with our furniture? Have you gotten the dust out? I don’t mean the gray, which is from us, that went easily no doubt. But the red, which our young rider let fly from the washboards. And even when he didn’t come. How did you fare in this direction? Did you find a tool, and which one, or did you have to use muscle? The powers of the imagination should rise for both of them. I heard about a brush, for example, a kind of sweeping brush . . . .” “Stop!” said the woman at the door. “Merely because it interests me,” said the man. “I was always afflicted with all sorts of interests, as opposed to Belle,” he turned aside smiling, “to whom areas of interest always remained foreign. Yes, I would almost say that as soon as something became interesting, she lost sight of it, even in our happiest time. That provides one with much quiet, the opportunity, which otherwise might have eluded one, to busy oneself with household belongings. To think of the dust, I might have never thought of the dust otherwise.” “You don’t say,” retorted the woman at the door and vainly attempted to push the horse back into the hall. “Also, I might never have had the opportunity to visit my female cousins,” explained the man, “of whom only two were dim-wits!” “Voyager,” Belle said suddenly and she succeeded for the first time in looking away from the plants and furniture. The horse drew breath. “Certainly two different kinds of dim-wits,” he muttered, “astoundingly different.” “Voyager,” Belle said once again. “I warn you,” said the woman at the door as the horse pushed past her into the street. She clutched its
neck in a clumsy and somewhat rough embrace. “I would gladly tell you what you stand to lose!” “No need,” replied the man and tugged on his hat. “These matters have already been made known to us at various times in other quarters.” “Yes, they are known to us!” cried Belle. “Perhaps not well enough,” replied the woman gasping. “We should be the judges of that,” said the man, “Belle and I . . . .” “Come inside!” cried the woman and propped herself more forcefully against the horse. “We have both grown up in regions whose names promised too much.” “Tell me about it when we are inside. We can examine everything by turns!” “Impossible,” said the man. “There comes Hen­ni,” cried Belle and pulled timidly at his sleeve, “I lent my fur coat to her!” She pointed, without turning around, to the window whose pane mirrored a plump beggar girl across the street. It appeared as though she shuffled along between the spinet and kitchen wood. “The green fur, you know, the one I told you about. But she didn’t know what it was for. My good Henni, I had lost sight of her. I was also angry with her then.” The horse shook its mane and stood sud­denly in the street. “My god, how many kinds of chance there are,” said Belle happily. “And always when you least expect it.” The horse went up to her and smelled her hat. “Yes, it is still the same one,” said Belle, “believe it or not, I have changed only the scarf.” “Henni, look at this,” she called and looked over her shoulder. The beggar girl stopped short, overjoyed she put her hand above her eyes and hurried­ly attempted to cross the street. “Are we ready now?” said the man calmly. “Only a moment,” replied Belle. The beggar girl started to wave excitedly. “Hey, you two,” she called, “who would have thought it? When we still sharpened pens, Belle, my dear one!” Belle laughed. “Are you leaving the nest?” “This time voluntarily,” responded the man and helped Henni onto the sidewalk, “the spinet, pages of memo­ries, the sweet muse!” “Then you can take me along for a stretch,” said Henni, who was a little winded, “the area hereabouts is grazed out.” The horse pawed. “Up to the third corner, that will do,” she said, while he helped her and Belle to mount. He nodded and swung himself up between the two. “And what should one hold onto?” The horse fell in step. It had left the sidewalk and strove toward the center of the street. “We travelers,” murmured Belle. “You will have to take the responsibility,” called the woman in the door. She made a motion as if to enter the street, but remained standing on the threshold in her white apron. “You will see where this leads you. And your young hero, your horseman?” “The poor thing,” said Belle into the winter sun which appeared before them in the sky. The horse had attained the summit of the street, it fell into a trot.
Translators Jascha Kessler and Amin Banani

Forugh Farrokhzad

THE WIND WILL BLOW US AWAY

In my small night, ah
the wind coming to meet the leaves on the trees
in my small night, terror and ruin

Listen

Hear the darkness blowing?
I stare into that blessing like a stranger
I am addicted to despair

Listen

Do you hear darkness blowing?
Something's going by now in the night
the moon's red, fretful
and the clouds, massing like mourners
on our roof, weigh it down with fear
as though waiting for the moment of deluge

A moment
and then, nothing.

Beyond this window, that shuddering
and the earth
winding down to a stop

Beyond this window a presence
staring at us

O, green from head to toe
Leave your hands in my loving hands, searing memory
Entrust your lips to mine
cressing you like the warmth of being

the wind carrying us off with it
the wind carrying us off with it
Forugh Farrokhzad

BORN AGAIN

One dark word is all I am
uttering you again and again
until you wake where you blossom forever

In this word I breathed you, breathed
and in this word bound you
to trees, water, flame

Life may be
a street she walks down every long day, a basket in her hand
Life may be
the rope over the limb he hangs himself with
Life may be a child home from school

Life may be lighting a cigarette in the languid pause of lovemaking

Or the pedestrian's void gaze
as he tips his hat to another's
void smile, saying, Good morning

Life may be that sealed moment
when my gaze disintegrates in the lens of your eyes
and I know myself
sensing the moon in me, and joined to darkness

In a room measured by solitude
my heart
measured by love
finds ordinary excuses for its happiness
the lovely lapse of flowers vased
the sapling you set in our yard
the canaries' cantilena
their singing fills the window

Ah . . .
This has fallen to me
This has fallen to me
This to me
A sky a curtain shrouds
The descent of a broken stair
Marriage to exile and rot
My lot pacing the sad gardens of memory
Dying sorrowing, a voice saying to me:
I love
your hands

In the garden I plant my hands
I know I shall grow, I know, I know
swallows will lay their eggs
in the nest of my inkstained fingers
twin pairs of bright cherries
will be my earrings
and dahlia petals dress my fingernails

There's a certain lane where
boys with the same tousled hair, thin necks and scrawny legs
who loved me once still
recall the simple smile of a girl
swept away one night by the wind

A certain lane my heart stole
from my childhood's quarter

A body wanders time's arid trajectory
If only that body could make that barren path conceive it
A body conscious of an image
Emerging from the festal mirror

And that's how
one dies
how one lingers on

No diver will ever fetch a pearl from the well a brooklet drowns in

I
know a sad little nymph
who lives in the sea
and plays the wooden flute of her heart
tenderly, tenderly
sad little nymph
dying at night of a kiss
and by a kiss reborn each day
Forugh Farrokhzad

FRIDAY

silent Friday
deserted Friday
Friday of back streets, old miseries
Friday’s languorous, languishing thoughts
Friday’s spasms of yawns and stretching
futile Friday
sacrificed Friday

the house vacant
dismal house
house shuttered against the coming of the young
gloomed house vainly recalling the sun
house of desolations, doubting, divinings
curtains house, books house, closets and pictures house

* * *

O how my life passed, calmly proud
a strange and foreign stream
flowing through the heart of these mute, deserted Fridays
the heart of these vacant, desolating houses
O how my life passed calmly proud...
IN THE YEAR OF DROUGHT

Terror with wet eyes
Disguised as a girl
Anyone who sees her
Won't escape the kiss

Mother keeps seven sons
Off the road at night
Terror with glutton eyes
Passes and whistles smoke

Milk runs into the pail
Bread crumbles in hands
The wildest youth
Tears down the wooden gate

There on a bed of nettles
Beauty crouches on all fours
Her nostrils as red
As her eyes are deep

When they're all kissing
The bell begins to toll
Blood rushes away
Heels smashed by a shot

The wind—skew-whiff—barks
At leaf-packs to break them up
Dead bird of the heart
Cruelly cinder-scorched

Mother mourns over a pitcher
Ten plus ten, what's that come to?
The youngest son
Strung himself up on a tree
Nina Cassian

LULL

Seven days on end,
no wind on the sea—
look, from feeble dawn
to lunchtime conflagration
even my knife can’t cut
its clear green honey.
See, toward evening it loses
its young green look
and seems to fade,
dying in the greater expanse.
Until the moon shimmers
sea and horizon are one.
When it gets silky
the moon cuts it with a scythe.

LIGHT-PLAY

You trace a yellow circle
on the white page
and the sun settles on your hands,
shadow to one side.
And on the table your hands move
from sun to shadow,
now pink, now violet-blue,
from shadow to sun—
like a child’s first attempt at color,
now warm, now cold,
near, far—
like trying out for death.
Nina Cassian

QUARREL WITH CHAOS

My visitors are:
a man cut off at the waist,
a continuous lady
and their slab-like daughter,
a professor who teaches cheese,
a murderer with a cold, a swarm
of unmarried ants,
a mustached tree,
a young stork,
a child with a cardboard leg
and three ignorant of the laws of motion.

Last of all, the evening dog
appears
who barks loudly at them
and sees them off the premises.

KNOWLEDGE

I've stitched my dress with continents,
bound the equator round my waist.
I waltz to a steady rhythm, bending slightly.

I can't stop my arms
plunging into galaxies,
gloved to elbows in adhesive gold;
I carry on my arms a star's vaccine.

With such greedy sight
my eyelids flutter in the breeze
like a strange enthusiastic plant.

No one fears me
except Error,
who is everywhere.
Andrée Chedid

QUI RESTE DEBOUT?

D'abord,
Efface ton nom
Abolis ton âge
Supprime tes lieux
Déracine ce que tu sembles

Qui reste debout?

Maintenant,
Ressaisis ton nom
Revêts ton âge
Adopte ta maison
Pénètre ta marche

Et puis . . .

A n'en plus finir,
Recommence.

IMAGINE

Imagine
la mer,
Sèche comme lavande.

Imagine
des arbres,
Qui récuseraient l'oiseau.

Et derrière l'horizon,
Dans sa pâleur énorme,
Imagine
la mort,
Renonçant aux vivants.
Andrée Chedid

WHO REMAINS STANDING?

First,
erase your name,
unravel your years,
destroy your surroundings,
uproot what you seem,

and who remains standing?

Then,
rewrite your name,
restore your age,
rebuild your house,
pursue your path,

and then,

endlessly,
start over, all over again.

IMAGINE

Imagine the ocean
dry as lavender.

Imagine branches
ceasing to be perches
for the birds.

And then on the horizon
imagine death
in its pallor of pallors
letting the dead
live again.
Andrée Chedid

VISAGE INTARISSABLE

Visages d’années précises,
mais de telles énigmes!

Visages sans rumeurs
Visages à l’affût
Visages qui s’enfantent
Visages de limaille

Visages tels que vous êtes,
Et déjà n’êtes plus!

Jamais ne tarira le battement sous l’écorce
Ni ma soif de te dire

Visage le plus nu!

A QUOI JOUE-T-ON ?

Que faisons-nous d’autre
que jardiner nos ombres,
Tandis qu’au loin
crépite et s’évade l’univers ?

Que faisons-nous d’autre
que visiter le temps,
Tandis qu’au près
s’architecture notre mort ?

Que faisons-nous d’autre
que rogner l’horizon,
Tandis qu’au loin
qu’au près —

le grand heurt.
Andrée Chedid

THE NAKED FACE

Faces of the counted years,
but still of such enigmas,

faces without rumors,
faces in expectancy,
faces in constant birth,
faces of so many cells,

faces that are you as you are
and already are not.

Never shall pulses stop
beneath your surfaces,
nor shall my thirst to understand you cease,

you,
one face beneath them all,
naked.

WHAT ARE WE PLAYING AT?

What else can we do
but garden our shadows
while far away
the universe burns and vanishes?

What else can we do
but visit with time
while nearby
time times us to death?

What else can we do
but stop at the horizon
while far away
and nearby —

the real collision.
Andrée Chedid

L’ANCÊTRE ET LE FUTUR

Le grain serré des morts
a tissé notre chair
Leurs rumeurs circulent
dans les replis du sang
Nous fléchissons parfois
sous le plein des ancêtres

Mais le présent sonne haut
qui fissure les murs
qui écarte les frontières
invente la route grandie

Tout au centre de nous
la liberté rayonne
ensemence notre course
lève paroles de sel

Que la mémoire du sang
veille sans abréger le jour!
Devançons notre peau
pour d’autres seuils à franchir.

QUEL AILLEURS?

N’empruntant aucun ciel
N’usant d’aucune figure
Ne jouant d’aucun nom

L’ailleurs nous provoque!

Sous les voûtes du temps
J’en balbutie les signes.
Andrée Chedid

THE FUTURE AND THE ANCESTOR

The dead's tight grain
is woven in our flesh
Their rumors move ahead
within the channels of the blood
Sometimes we bend
beneath the fullness of ancestors

But the present
that shatters walls,
banishes boundaries
and invents the road to come
rings on.

Right in the center of our lives
liberty shines,
begets our race
and sows the salt of words.

Let the memory of blood
be vigilant but never void the day.
Let us precede ourselves
across new thresholds.

WHAT ELSEWHERE?

Borrowing no sky
Using no figure
Dallying with no name

The elsewhere still provokes us!

Under time's arches
I mumble its signs.
Hilde Domin

VIELE

Viele liegen dort
ich tauche die Hand ins Wasser
ich berühre die Stirn eines jeden
das Haar
die zärtliche Biegung am Hals
wenn ich das Haar berühre
riecht es noch
der Tote steht auf
er ist fast im Zimmer
dann berühre ich dein Haar
es ist seines
es gibt viele hundert
oder du hebst die Hand du sagst etwas
einer steht auf
der Fußboden unter mir
ändert sich
die Sonne ändert sich
wenn sie kommen
einer von ihnen
seine Form über dir liegt
ich sein Haar berühre
wenn ich dein Haar berühre
Many

Many lie there
I dip my hand in the water
I touch each forehead
the hair
the tender curve of the throat
when I touch the hair
I can still smell it
the dead one gets up
he is almost in the room
then I touch your hair
it is his
there are hundreds of them
or you raise your hand you say something
one gets up
the floor under me
changes
the sun changes
when they come
one of them
lays his shape on you
I touch his hair
when I touch yours
Hilde Domin

GEBURTSTAGE

1

Sie ist tot

heute ist ihr Geburtstag
das ist der Tag
an dem sie
in diesem Dreieck
zwischen den Beinen ihrer Mutter
herausgewürgt wurde
sie
die mich herausgewürgt hat
zwischen ihren Beinen

sie ist Asche

2

Immer denke ich
an die Geburt eines Rehs
wie es die Beine auf den Boden setzte

3

Ich habe niemand ins Licht gezwängt
nur Worte
Worte drehen nicht den Kopf
sie stehen auf
sofort
und gehn
Hilde Domin

BIRTHDAYS

1

She is dead

today is her birthday
that is the day
on which she
was disgorged
in that triangle
between her mother’s legs
she
who disgorged me
between her legs

she is ashes

2

I always think
of the birth of a deer
how it sets its legs on the ground

3

I have forced nobody into the light
only words
words do not turn their heads
they get up
at once
and go
Jénny Mastorákis

THE POET

The work of a poet
must be difficult.
Personally I don’t know.
In all my life
I’ve only written
some long, despairing letters
for parched districts.
I plugged them up in bottles
and cast them into the sewers.

PROCEDURE

I claim the uniqueness
of my existence
stumbling over noises
wounding my senses
the corners of my most beloved things.
Now I’m learning the language
of the killed.
It’s something like a difficult
technical terminology
or again like the sailors
who change the winds
with signals.
Jénny Mastorákis

THE DAY THAT HAS GONE

The day that has gone
leaves you with a telephone coin
without your knowing whom to call
and to tell him
that the sunset outside is passing out manifestos
to the weathervanes.
It leaves a small piece of paper
in your closed fist
with a blood-bruised message.
You remain with the coin in your fist
and look at it, that on one side
has the harsh profile of Justice
and Hermes' caduceus on the other,
symbols you cannot
explain
no matter how much you want to.

THE DEATH OF A WARRIOR

The death of a warrior
should be slow and studied
like the distilled
transport of an adolescent
who becomes a man when he first makes love.
On his tomb place
two large question marks
for life and for death
and a traffic sign
that forbids
the passing of parades.
Lucille Clifton

IN SALEM

to Jeanette

Weird sister
the Black witches know that
the terror is not in the moon
choreographing the dance of wereladies
and the terror is not in the broom
swinging around to the hum of cat music
nor the wild clock face grinning from the wall,
the terror is in the plain pink
at the window
and the hedges moral as fire
and the plain face of the white woman watching us
as she beats her ordinary bread.

A STORM POEM

for Adrienne

The wind is eating
the world again.
Continents spin
on its vigorous tongue
and you Adrienne
broken like a bone
should not sink
casual as dinner.
Adrienne.
I pronounce your name.
I push your person
into the throat
of this glutton.
For you
let the windmouth burn at last.
For you
let the windteeth break.
Lucille Clifton

GOD'S MOOD

these daughters are bone,
they break.
He wanted stone girls
and boys with branches for arms
that He could lift His life with
and be lifted by.
these sons are bone.

He is tired of years that keep turning into age
and flesh that keeps widening.
He is tired of waiting for His teeth to
bite Him and walk away.

He is tired of bone,
it breaks.
He is tired of eve's fancy and
adam's whining ways.

NEW BONES

we will wear
new bones again.
we will leave
these rainy days,
break out through
another mouth
into sun and honey time.
worlds buzz over us like bees,
we be splendid in new bones.
other people think they know
how long life is
how strong life is.
we know.
it is the pure shape
the stone prism
water
clarified by wood

the pure shape of meeting
the small separations and the change
the leaving behind and
the falling apart

the pure shape of pain
a child’s wonder
when he first discovers the dawn
that makes division permanent

terror is a short-lived nightmare
until it is real

and then there is an equalization

tthere are different degrees of terror
different bits of glass in the eye’s cathedral

too little to reach
and tall enough to want
that

is the paradox

the space between bars is
intentional it

holds up other columns
Roberta Morris

DIALOGUE II

In the evening prisms
of my eyes, I see my body
washed up on some shore:
White, in all that's dark,
and huge.

Tell me, does the artist see
what he paints, or paint
what he sees?

But my body is the poem:
Imperishable and clear.
Teeth and skin and bone.
A pattern bent in space.

Ah, my dear, beware:
The idea of form is not
the form.

A whale washed up on shore
is always lying on his side.
His genitals extend for yards.
They'll tow him out to sea.

Does the artist see?
Or does he paint?

In the evening prisms
of my eyes, I see my body
washed up on some shore:
White, in all that's dark,
and huge.
BUENOS AIRES

In the noise of the city
all my words turn to
nerves touched by a
dentist’s drill.
A blinding sound
cuts off my ears and
sends a knife
through my tongue.

I only speak
to silence
when cars have
wheeled themselves
to death’s exhaust
and moons rise
by the forest sound
of quiet decibel.
Emily Borenstein

CHANGE
I remember things before they happen
the way a blind woman feels things
all the hidden edges and ends of things
tearing loose from their moorings
carrying me along like a haunting raga
that will never leave you
We are like trains that go dark
moving quietly away to be yarded forever
This is the point of no return
the place we have come to
We enter it the way a river enters the sea
with the voice of a great rushing
I look at you receding and receding
like lost music
You wave your hand goodbye
until I am a speck on the horizon
Tomorrow another sun will come up
out of a river of song with no banks

WHITE NIGHTMARE
I dress my typewriter in a plastic
shroud
I turn my words back into my teeth
Like dead celibates neatly pigeonholed
my work-sheets lie in their little
caskets
piled high on the shelf. Trapped
somewhere between beginnings and endings
the moon turns to ice—
The light in my room stands shivering,
naked,
bordered with red rain, lightning and
snakes
I pass through the light and leave
no trace
like a fish through water
Isabel Fraire

MEDIODIA

se desdobra uno infinitamente
   para verse
y en este desdoblarse
   pierde la imagen

el espejo de cara ante el espejo
   *   *   *

hemos roto el día en dos mitades de naranja
una para nadie y la otra para nadie
y nosotros en el centro, inmóviles,
   bañados por el sol
   *   *   *

nadie es sombra
   nadie es espejo
   el polvo de sol se dispersa ocupándolo todo
   *   *   *

en el centro del día
   me convierto en nada
a mis ojos acuden objetos
   colmados de presencia
bañados en luz
   llenos de sí mismos
   *   *   *

por encima de los árboles
   el aire—lleno de luz

en la sombra cada cosa en su lugar
brizna tras brizna de pasto
arruga tras arruga de corteza

44
Isabel Fraire

NOON

In order to see
   one is infinitely revealed
and in this revelation
   the image is lost

the mirror-face before the mirror
   *
   *
   *

we have separated day into two halves of an orange
one part for no one and the other for no one
and we are in the center, motionless,
   cleansed by the sun
   *
   *
   *

no one is shadow
   no one is mirror
   the sun's dust scatters
   attracted to everything
   *
   *
   *

in the center of day
   I am transformed into nothing
objects stir before my eyes
   filled with their own presence
purified by light
   full of themselves
   *
   *
   *

above the trees
   the air—full of light

in the shadows each thing in its place
blade after blade of grass
ridge after ridge of bark
Isabel Fraire

las palabras
son
para decirlas después

cuando algo importa
   te sucede
estás
   en el centro de
   lo que se rompe y hace

   no eres
   no piensas

las palabras
   vienen después
   al querer recuperar

   esto
   que no eres
   es

Isabel Fraire

el poema
   desaparece
queda
   el rescholdo
una nueva
   manera
   de ser
Isabel Fraire

words
    are
    for speaking later

when something important
    happens to you
you are
    in the center of
    what shatters and is remade

    you are not
    you do not think

words
    come later
        in order to recover

    this
        that you are not
        is

Isabel Fraire

the poem
    vanishes
embers
    remain
a new
    configuration
    of being
HEIRS OF HEAVEN ON EARTH

MADELINE DEFREESE

Ever since Milroy Calhoun had read Oswald Garrison Villard's *The Disappearing Daily* in Journalism School extension classes, he had answered all inquiries regarding his employment with the declaration that he earned his living by the Daily Disappearing. Friends who learned to agree that there was nothing unusual about writing obituaries to stay alive, ignored the cast of that tenuous line. They did not know that after his broken shift on the Daily *Columbian*, Milroy limped home to spend yet another three to four hours wrestling with the easy deaths that churned from his typewriter in true bread-and-butter fashion.

At home, in the chilly privacy of his white-walled, blue-velvet-draped study, specially equipped with the required machinery for inspiration, Milroy turned the unvarnished facts into wooden poems. But first it was necessary to exorcise those lying names, many of them proper, that put such comfortable distance between the reader and the requiem: “He was a past master of the Grandview Masonic Lodge . . .” “Services will be in the Rose Chapel . . .” “The ashes of Minnie A. Meske, 74, will be scattered in the Swan River Valley . . .” “He had lived in the Skipworth Veterans’ Hospital for the past eleven years . . .” “Interment will be in Pleasant View Gardens . . .”

What a predictable story, you will say. And from the worst possible angle, that of the indifferent observer. But when I tell you that I am Milroy’s bride of twenty-seven summers, that he has made love to me night after night in the high narrow bed under the bust of John Keats, with a passion as urgent in its demands as it is various in its expressions, you may be more willing to listen.

Together we reviewed the innocuous columns of type in the morning *Herald*, a kind of foreplay sanctioned by custom and relieved, now and then, by the striking ineptitude of the competition: “For 30 years
he worked as a heavy equipment operator and mechanic. In 1948 he
married Violet Blum . . .” If the operator had been turned around it
would have fit me and Milroy. The technician showed me how to regu­
late the buttons and Milroy said it wasn’t as if he couldn’t be self­
supporting.

At first it was fun teaching him new things. He learned to use the
mirror to watch me undress at night, and I tried to make it worth his
effort. I bought one of those electric timers that switch on a lamp to
keep off burglars, only we used it to change from the bright ceiling
lights to colored low-intensity lamps.

One of our favorite games was mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. It
never failed to bring Milroy around on days when fatigue was turning
him blue. Insensitive people forget that just because it’s hard to breathe,
a man doesn’t lose his healthy appetites. It was my job, as Milroy’s
wife, to keep them going. You’d be surprised how a limited vital ca­
pacity makes the things you use it for more important—like weekend
excursions when the gas is rationed.

I got so I could tell the difference between the shallow breathing
that meant his muscles weren’t performing right, and the other kind
that meant they were. Some women wouldn’t be able to respond to
someone like Milroy, but they’re the stupid ones who can’t see the possi­
bilities. I saw them from the start.

I remember when Milroy and I first met. Others found him drab
in his grey business suit, his eyes fixed on a point miles down the road.
The honest ones were afraid—as if they could never be sure where
Milroy was: his shadow or his reflection, an echo perhaps, crammed in
the tight corner by the closet as presence merely. Meanwhile, the real
Milroy drifted off somewhere beyond the smoke rings, the string that
should have held him, an imaginary line the eye paints in to keep us
tied to what we understand.

Enough for the Milroy others saw. They were fools, without imagi­
nation. I was afraid, too, but I didn’t let that interfere with taking
every chance to arrange a private meeting. I was a legend in violent
characters scrawled in corners of hospital restrooms with neat LADIES
signs on the door. I wanted to slash through those tidy indelible brands
or scrawl FORBIDDEN in sawtooth letters on that public face. It wasn’t
right for me to be restrained by manacles I had no part in forging. I
could have bitten through the steel like a teething ring before I learned
to talk.

Talking conferred on me a slight advantage. I have a truly hypnotic
voice. Even the dramatic coach acknowledges that. And Milroy could
usually be persuaded to loosen his rigorous hold if I was careful not to
let him see my fear as I crooned the standard lullabies like any hairbrained mother. It was only a way of gaining time. Or seeming to gain it. But shall we agree, it worked? Mother Earth wooing Death, the Grim Rapist. Did I get that wrong? I’m sorry but I do become distracted. More so, of late. Now I’ve given away my secret and you’re not likely to believe me again—ever. You’ll say I’ve made the whole thing up and that I can’t be trusted. It hurts me to admit it, but you’re partly right. Milroy was someone I invented to make my life less lonely. But once I had invented him, he cooperated even better than the balloons. He took any shape that pleased me, as if it was no bother to spend most of his life in an iron lung so long as we could still make love. I kept pretending that he made the plans. I’m not really a liberated woman, and Milroy gets easily upset about his manhood, so we both like the arrangement even though we never formalized it, or, for that matter, said it aloud to each other. That time we held a midnight rendezvous under Makinlay Bridge near Marco Flats, it was my proposal. He made a bed of ferns and wild roses with the thorns left on, and while I played the continent’s saddest tune on my recorder, Milroy did his best to weave the rushes into a crown to complement my hair. I wore it down, just above my knees, and the grey streaks in it caught the river lights so well it would have made you jealous as a high-school girl.

It was after that I wrote another paragraph to put in Milroy’s file, which, by the way, I keep in the tool box in the garage near the vials. Files and vials, get it? They make a pretty rhyme that’s lost on Milroy whose tastes run to blank verse and heroic couplets. Now I’m talking like a critic, and you can’t go any lower than that. Let me show you the paragraph:

Past and future collided in his brain as he turned to Astrology by Omarr just opposite the comic section. And underneath “Know Your Own Vital Signs,” conducted by the syndicate’s Dr. Hartman whose leaflets, like a card deck all aces, allowed him to pull out the relevant pamphlet at 25 cents in stamps or coin. The leaflet was meant to supplement the day’s breezy dismissal of frightening symptoms confided by readers from Wichita to New Zealand. When glancing through the evening paper to review his own productions, Milroy never failed to rise to the bait of “You and Your Gall Bladder” or “Seizures Are Frightening.”

If you were an enemy finding that, you’d never guess how close we were, would you? It sounds like a paragraph from a novel long ago when it was still possible to read and write something besides death.
Once when Milroy had to return to the hospital, very ill, he looked up at his cold TV set and saw his own reflection.

“That man has a very low Neilsen rating,” Milroy said. “And they want to embalm him.”

I almost said No, Milroy, that’s you, but I caught myself in time and said Let’s get the nurse to bring a towel and cut down the glare.

“By all means,” Milroy said slowly, “cut the damn fool down.”

I know you’d like to hear more about our love life. We had ways to keep it from going bad. Routine was what made Milroy’s job a nightmare, so I took steps to see that it didn’t sneak up on our private enterprise. The way we furnished our bedroom was part of it, but there were others. If I told you about the knife we strung from the ceiling like a pendulum, or the wall-sized poster in solid black with red letters SEIZE THE DAY you might find it strange, even bizarre. I like to say creative. Other times it might be special potions or positions. Or the lights. We even changed beds like the time by the bridge, and whenever we drove anywhere it was always on pneumatic tires.

Occasionally, it was along the highways on our rare vacations from the city—some jagged spot called the Lone Pine Motel or the E-Z-Rest Roadside Inn. Gradually I learned to distrust these encounters, for Milroy always seemed to have plans for me that I could not accede to. Like the elaborate Oriental masque he projected for a small waystation in Georgia when mercury threatened to pop its overworked vessel and there were only a few molecules of air suspended in that humid blanket.

In Herald headlines, people always die in the past tense, which is more than you can say for Milroy’s newspaper. But the Herald can be accused of dodges too, like So-and-So passed on or away, was summoned, maybe. Or taken. I like the last one best because I know what it should mean. I’ve always been taken by death. My own. Milroy’s. The shrouded figures in his late, late poems. The bold-type deaths Milroy devised to buy the bed we make love on. His editor won’t let him write the headstones, but once in a while, through fate or fatal accident, a good one hits the top of the pile:

Piper Overturf
Follows Husband
In Death by Month

When you get a headline of that quality, you don’t even need a story. I framed it in gilt and put it just beside the Keats bust, opposite the one I’m planning for myself. In the cemetery ads they call it Before Need, as if anything could be before that. I’m not ashamed to admit my needs, and Milroy has learned to listen and cooperate.
He found it hard to listen at first. People in iron lungs talk a lot. The therapist says it means they need more physical activity, but once I experimented with changing the tempo of the machine. When air goes in and out at a different speed it makes a syncopated music. Music, I've always heard, is the most direct of all the arts, so when you start to play the iron lung, bizarre things happen. People who hate the cello or the bass viol just because it's inconvenient to carry one around should quit grumbling and join that Order of Invalids I told you about. I say, let them throw away their cosmic violins and take up the kidney machine.

This woman in the hospital where Milroy used to be a patient delivered a baby she was never able to hold. Milroy was more like the baby: he couldn't deliver till I got him through the mechanical breathing with the proper stimulation and created optimum conditions. After that, he could always hold me, and I didn't worry much about him getting tired. He had a lot of lost time to make up for. We both did.

Back in convent boarding school, the best-behaved among us got to stay up late to help change candles when the old nuns died. They laid them out in the upstairs parlor: stiff serge, starched linen, parchment of cheek and breast. Three vows pinned to the bosom by a heavy crucifix. (A portent of that larger weight over Milroy's chest?) The formula of religious vows written on bond in her own hand gave the dead sister's public promises their private character.

And to think I once considered joining them! I heard about this order of handicapped nuns with a rule less spartan than the usual. They sort of pooled their physical assets to offset the disabilities: one might walk or hear, another could see, and the whole bunch had learned to suffer from the time they started to suck in air. With these modern orders for men and women, Milroy and I could still join up, but they'd never be able to accept our kind of sex.

People who knew us casually always managed to remain confused about the newspaper morgue, no matter how often I explained that it was just a safety vault for old cuts and bios, really a special collections library and not a mausoleum.

Sometimes I have daydreams about how different it could be if Milroy had a job with the Herald. He could sand the lines of his poems all day, and they wouldn't be any smoother. Still, they might be an improvement on the jerry-rigged stuff Romney Morgan furnishes: "She had retired and was reading in bed. The light was on and a heating pad was in use. She apparently went to sleep and expired . . . ." There's something much too impromptu about that, not to mention the heating
pad. With a little imagination, there could be a short and and the writer would be in control of his materials. Or that other one about LaVerne Elizabeth Bloomfield, 20, who “became a highway fatality Thursday.” It sounds like butterflies going back to worms, doesn’t it? I could make up the pages, and if I did, you’d be sure no lovely young girl of 20 would turn into a highway fatality right under your nose and across from People Attending Disposal Meeting.

In boarding school we slept in dormitories with white curtains around our sad little beds and a nun with a flashlight patrolling to see that we kept our hands crossed over our breasts like corpses when we’d said the night prayer aloud and started for the other shore. It was strict silence in the dormitory, all ablutions supervised, so you can see where I derive my passion for talking in bed.

If he worked at home I could even help Milroy. More than I do now. It’s not equal rights for one to do the nice clean part of it just with words and one to do the arranging of events. You might say it was a compromise to keep our marriage going. Milroy just couldn’t take the pressure that put his poems in second, maybe third, place, if you count me. Getting used to me and all the unexpected hurdles life provides was more than he could manage with his handicap. So I said fine, I’d help him with the schedule problems. That way he’d know what to dig up first. It’s not the same as working on a crack team where all the bigshots’ life stories are cut up and polished during every slack period until they split the light like diamonds. Milroy barely has time to drink the soup I send him out with every morning.

One time we stopped overnight in this little village in French Canada only a mile from the border, and they nearly refused to let us stay because we didn’t have our marriage license. Mostly, I carry my important papers with me, so I fumbled in my briefcase while the hotel clerk glared at Milroy’s nervous movements and refused to let us sign. I became terribly angry and wanted to take out the death certificate, only I had the presence of mind to know that wouldn’t work. My voice saved us that time all right. It was thick as honey with just enough sting left in to make him turn over the ledger. We took the most expensive room and asked for two bottles of Canadian rye. And we made them bring rock crystal goblets to drink it from.

It was after that I started to help him with his job. And for a while he welcomed it, as if we had a partnership in death. I even showed him how to get ahead by sometimes making things happen. Everybody—Shakespeare even—knows women are good at that. Once I put the leather-bound volume of Shakespeare’s plays under my hips with the play open to Lady Macbeth’s speech. There was always drama in the
bedroom. It broke the spine, of course, but Milroy was wonderful that night. I believe in education by osmosis, don’t you? Like those recordings you can put under your pillow to master a foreign language while you sleep.

My handicapped sisters would understand. One was deaf as the Board of Pardons; one couldn’t see; and one, an auto accident victim, looked as normal as you but she couldn’t smell anything, good or bad, and gourmet lobster tasted like paper plates to her; the same as fish and chips. Another one from Hawaii has her regular senses but her skin breaks out whenever a ray of sun hits it, so she never goes outdoors without an umbrella, sun or wind, and everybody waiting for lift-off. She’s a mite no bigger than a mollusk—snails, I mean, not octopuses. One doctor, he tried to make me say octopi, but I told him, with Milroy gone, you take care of the breathing and let me do the words. Seems like they want to interfere with the simple things you can do, even when it doesn’t make that much difference.

If you believe like that critic that style is the man and the man is the air he breathes, you might be tempted to think Milroy is an artificial man, but I’ve slept with him often enough to know different.

I always read and meditated before Milroy came home at night. Having to wait till he finished with his poems gave me lots of time. So I learned to sit quietly in the corner, not rustling the newspaper, just reading the same phrase over and over until it told me what to do. “Death cut short a promising career . . . .” The critical question: what was it promising? If it was anything like my promises to Milroy, they were empty as balloons before inflation. But as each day pumped them full of living breath, they were a delight. No easy, mechanical airs from service station or hardware store. None of those boring red-apple rounds mindlessly repeated with an occasional orange sausage, but wild animal forms, grotesque in their configurations, that made your lungs burst with pain and pride.

Riding the Florida Greyhound on a winter excursion, I met this widow who had just gone back to the Virgin Islands eight months after her mother’s funeral, for the placing of the gravestone. When the preacher took the veil away she saw it was an awful mistake: her own name—MILDRED MOSBY—carved in Gothic letters three inches high. Going home, she was still upset and kept waiting for the bus driver to lose control right by one of those skull-and-crossbone markers the Safety Council puts out to interrupt our deathless days. That’s the kind of thing Milroy would like to put in the obits, only they won’t let him. I can tell you think I’m lying again, but there must be kinder words for it. Psychiatrists—people who write—they talk about fantasy and pro-
jection, about fiction and release. *Release:* now there's the key! Learning to let go. Mostly, I'm afraid to let go. Of anything. Milroy. My body. This story, even. You wouldn't believe how I sweated over the opening paragraphs to make them sound not-quite-so-mad.

The best thing about that mutilated order: you can't make a bunch of niggling rules the same for everyone. It's *from* each according to his ability, *to* each according to his need. One owns a wheelchair; one, a Seeing Eye dog; one arthritic even had a motorcycle because it was cheaper than a Ford. And if I went, I'd have Milroy because I need him every bit as much. They'd have to see the sense in that: to give him up would be like choking off the air or popping your favorite balloon with a hypodermic needle.

For a while I thought of evening the score for that poor woman on the Greyhound who was really me, by putting your name in the same Black Letter style on this page. You would read along like any fool out for a joyride, and you wouldn't guess that all the time the hit-man was crouching in the back seat waiting to blow your brains out. I know that sounds violent, but we live in a violent world and there doesn't seem to be any other way to make your voice heard, or if there is you have to wait too long for enough quiet to set it off.

In the end I didn't go—not so much because of Milroy as of the black plague that threatens institutions. As soon as one more iron lung came in, there would be somebody like that hotel clerk with his French kiss-of-death telling me I had to set the motor for 30 RPM—that's respirations, not revolutions.

If I was like you my life would be too dull for words. I would have gone into perpetual mourning for Milroy because I couldn't figure a way past the infantile paralysis. I doubt whether you can handle the replica I've moulded with my scarred hands to put on top of the coffin, but it floats the river of life, not heavy like those other, utterly dead, weights. More like balloons on their way to freedom.

His hands are moving slowly towards my throat, and there's something in his eyes different from the hundreds of speeches I've made him read before. This time I've decided not to say a word because I'm smart enough to know my voice can't bring it off. I'll just lie perfectly still. I've unplugged the iron lung, not that it makes much difference now that Milroy has decided to take everything, even me, into his own hands. He pretends it's time for me to have a longer sleep than usual and it really turns him on. He's moving slow as a snakecharmer, wary because of the poison. He doesn't know I've already cartooned his comic lines by ESP to fill those mad balloons the kids will read after Church on Sunday morning. He doesn't know how well I've learned to wait.
Ellen Warmond

OVERLEVEND

II

Voor oude en nieuwe
symbolen te laat

voor vlinders te laat
vogels te laat
bloemen
te laat

en zelfs machines
ijzeren waarheid
roest

computers
metalen hersens
roest

later dan toelaatbaar
te laat.

NOEM MAAR EEN WOORD

Soms hebben wij een hand
die een vreemde hand kan grijpen
en wat betekent dat? een houvast
een universum een tekort
een klein en hard kristal
een schitterende pijn?

wij noemen het mens of liefde
of om het even wat

noem maar een woord
het is altijd
hetzelfde
Ellen Warmond

SURVIVING

II

Too late for symbols
old and new
too late for butterflies
too late birds
flowers
too late

and even machines
iron truth
rusts

computers
metal brains
rust

later than permissible
too late.

NAME ANY WORD

Sometimes we have a hand
capable of grasping a strange hand
and what does it mean? a support
a universe a lack
a crystal small and hard
a blazing pain?

we call it man or love
or any name will do

name any word
it is ever the same
noem maar een woord
er zijn er
zoveel
noem maar een woord
het is steeds het verkeerde

noem maar een woord
of liever
laat het maar na.

Ellen Warmond

CHANGEMENT DE DECOR

Zodra de dag als een dreigbrief
in mijn kamer wordt geschoven
worden de rode zegels van de droom
door snelle messen zonlicht losgebroken

huizen slaan traag hun bittere ogen op
en sterren vallen doodsbleek uit hun banen

terwijl de zwijgende schildwachten
nachtdroom en dagdroom haastig
elkaar hun plaatsen afstaan
legt het vuurpeleton van de twaalf
nieuwe uren bedaard op mij aan.
name any word
there are so many
name any word
always the wrong one

name any word
or better yet
leave it unsaid.

Ellen Warmond

CHANGEMENT DE DECOR

As soon as the day is pushed
into my room like a threatening letter
the red seals of dreams are
broken by rapid knives of sun

houses slowly open their bitter eyes
and stars pale as death fall out of orbit

while nightdream and daydream
the silent sentinels
hastily change guard
the firing-squad of the new
twelve hours calmly take aim at me.
Elouise Loftin

UNANIMOUS DECISIONS

someplace each night i beat you
in my sleep cursing you in tongues
i cant keep sometimes striking your
face your arms your crazy heart and
wild dancing from memory throwing you
down staircases over and over with you
ending in my arms each time i wake
screaming and sweating sorry and guilty
like a criminal who didnt mean to
it would be so simple if the monster
kept you at the castle or it were true
that i could not remember nothing i have
not forgotten or anything i refuse to forget
all prize fighters are pitiful

SKULL NOTE

there must be some gigantic
camera
shooting holes through the
film
of this weird transaction
whatever it is you believe
you are in after openings
of your eyes each morning
god must be some awkward
preposition
I AM . . .

The night asks me who I am
I'm its black and anxious secret
I'm its rebellious reticence
I mask myself with silence
Wrap my heart with doubt
Solemnly gazing here
While the ages ask me
who I am.

The wind asks me who I am
I'm its perplexed spirit
Denied by Time, going nowhere
Walking endlessly
Passing without staying
And when I reach the edge
Of my suffering, once again
it's the void!

Time asks me who I am
I'm a giant once folding
Then unfolding centuries
I summon the scarred past
From the bliss of opulent hope
Then bury it back in its grave
Making a new yesterday whose tomorrow
has no sun.

The self asks me who I am
Dumbfounded, I stare into darkness
Nothing brings me peace
I ask, but the answer
Remains veiled by a mirage
I continue to approach it
But when I reach it, it dissolves,
it dissolves and dies.
Patricia Renée Ewing

I have voyaged
in my silver canoe

to the red sands
and the distant sea

Holding my eyeball
before me: a bulwark
against the tide.

I will summon all
who wish to descend
where the green night
falls
a silent bell
and an orange half-moon
dips
into a midnight sea.

Where the long sigh
of a silver bird
(hesitates):

then lays its elegant shape
upon the sand.
A CRESCENT ECLIPSES BETWEEN MY EYES

It moves far from the
edge it reflects,

The world
impressing itself upon me.

When I hold my head
in my hands it disappears.

It is called
Memory's one seam.

It is called
Where ends meet.

Scar, thread
I am held by,

When you go, you go
To the ends of the earth.
Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen

AQUELE QUE PARTIU

Aquele que partiu
Precedendo os próprios passos como um jovem morto
Deixou-nos a esperança.

Ele não ficou para connosco
Destruiu com amargas mãos seu próprio rosto
Intacta é a sua ausência
Como a estátua dum deus
Poupada pelos invasores duma cidade em ruínas
Ele não ficou para assistir
A morte da verdade e à vitória do tempo

Que ao longe
Na mais longínqua praia
Onde só haja espuma sal e vento
Ele se perca tendo-se cumprido
Segundo a lei do seu próprio pensamento

E que ninguém repita o seu nome proibido.

OS BARCOS

Dormem na praia os barcos pescadores
Imóveis mas abrindo
Os seus olhos de estátua

E a curva do seu bico
Rói a solidão.
Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen

THAT ONE WHO WENT AWAY

That one who went away
preceding his own steps like a dead boy,
left us hope.

He did not stay among us
to destroy his own face with bitter hands.
Intact is his absence
like the statue of a god
spared by the invaders of a ruined town.
He did not stay to witness
the death of truth, the victory of time.

Far away
on the farthest shore
with only salt and wind and spray,
let him be lost, fulfilled
following the law of his own thought.

And let no one speak his forbidden name.

THE BOATS

On the beach the fishing boats sleep
motionless yet opening wide
their statue-eyes

and the curve of their beaks
gnaws the solitude.
Sachiko Yoshihara

ANAEMIA

My feet on the ground

suddenly all around me spreads
a white sea of sunlight
  (cicadas shrilling in hot summer)

I see some crippled beast  (what is it?)
crawling across the white yard
dark eyes smiling
in a patch of shade

I have nothing
I have nothing but those dark eyes
I have nothing but this white sunshine

in the flooding noon
I smell white blood
  (cicadas still shrilling in hot summer).

RESURRECTION

To kill love in order not to die  that is self-defence
the pistol pointed at you is pointed at my heart
the flame of crime and the ice of punishment
make me crack open and should I break in two
there will be a hole like a lie  which will probably
silently expand  that is death
the sound of earth dripping will recede  and then
to be in a cell for a long long time
with its one window where there might perhaps be
unquiet death burning death burning life
in the rain a spider weaving a web  wet with his own sweat
reducing and annihilating the shining oblong of O.
Sachiko Yoshihara

MADNESS

Eyes shut tight
I hear my brains go splat and scatter
like dry tea-leaves.

I must kill
one lovely languid serpent after another.

A horse lies dangling upside down and a moon rising
Mary with a child in her arms weeps with red eyes —
now watch me whittle my finger away
and paint red characters.

One streak of white hair many streaks of white hair
I am not to blame it’s the dreams the paper that are to blame.

A car crashes into another car slowly undersea.
Whittling my finger sharpening it like a pencil
let me write in red O Mary what words do you want me to
write down?

Darkness comes rushing on me with waves with fever
a knife comes flying to me with a cat O burst the window!

Pitiful
O everything each and everyone so pitiful.
Diane Wakoski

STILLIFE: MICHAEL, SILVER FLUTE AND VIOLETS

for M.R.

as if I could remember you still for a moment,
always moving,
like a fountain that passes and repasses
the same water,
keeping sparkling and pursed
against the metal lips
which shoot and crackle it

And violets coming
into the room where you are standing,
 tho that gesture for you takes up many
square feet of space
held in the hand of a girl
who was herself fragrant and intense,
violet against the wet woody ground, was violet
against brown damp trunks

And you reading poems by a man
who probably broke his neck against the green scummed water
in a deep well,

Green,
I want you green,
Green wind,
Green branches. . .

* * *

There is a small nut of life in me
that is never touched
by life around me.
I am myself moved, in retrospect,
by how little I had, and how not understanding
the extreme poverty of my life
left me innocent
of the worst thing poverty does to people

* * *

bitterness.
Well, my friend,
you did not have your music lessons
when you were young.
And I had mine, though at a price.
And neither of us
is a musician today, tho we have each spent
a decade of time practicing our hands against our ears
and understand measured cadences better than most other speakers
can.
And neither of us can give up poetry or music
as emblems.
You carry your silver flute everywhere,
and a small wooden one in a case by your side.
And I my mythical piano
which makes my shoulders rounder each year.
Weight
of the past.
Who is the girl holding the bunch of violets?
For she was only an emblem
when my hands were still bloody from the keys.
Nadia Tuéni

Ce sont des vérités aux énormes couleurs
comme un paysage;
il n'y a pas d'ombre sur le soleil
rien n'est plus tendre que la mort.
A l'heure des choses de la nuit
l'œil voit plus loin
c'est ainsi que le vent ramène le matin
froid de pleine-lune.
Et pourtant il arrive que la terre soit prodigieuse!

EXIL

Et voici des pays que le vent découpe en couleurs: cette nature-vive est plus bleue qu'un soleil au zénith. J'entre dans la géographie des pierres, et d'un coup d'ongle je découvre la perfection du mal. Là où l'œil aperçoit un autre œil, dis-toi que le désert commence. La poitrine ouverte des montagnes est une cage à pluie. Soudain un sommet plus glorieux qu'un bûcher jaillit de l'océan.

Terre nouvelle et qui roule d'enfance en enfance et que nos doigts limitent d'un mouvement d'amour. Terre osseuse, amante dure, aux plages de folie, mais qu'un souffle parcourt de la tête à la vie, un souffle humide de toutes nos larmes.

Et voici des orages qui prennent forme de villes aux frontières d'oiseaux. Noire est douce musique sur nos vitres de jour. La mer est un souvenir de vieillesse. La lune n'est qu'un temps perdu. Demain mon ciel au galop piétinera vos pensées, et sur leurs débris mous comme un matin, se lèvera l'exil.

Nadia Tuéni

Je me souviens ô mon amour
de cette danseuse qui pleurait avec ses jambes
un soir où la lune était.
Certainties in huge colors
like landscapes;
sun without shadows
nothing softer than death.
At night
the eye pierces deeper
and the wind brings back the morning
shivering from full moon.
And yet the earth: a vast miracle!

And here are countries slashed in colors by the wind: this living
nature is bluer than a sun at its zenith. I enter the geography of stones,
and with a stroke I discover the perfection of evil. In that place where
one eye perceives another, tell yourself that the desert begins. The
opened chest of the mountains captures the rain. Suddenly an alp more
radiant than a pyre erupts from the sea.

New land leading from childhood to childhood, land that our
fingers limit with a movement of love. Land of bone, hard lover, with
beaches of madness, yet a breath traverses you from head to life, a
breath dripping with all our tears.

And here are towns sculpted by storms, ringed with birds. Black
plays sweet music on the windowpanes of day. The sea is a memory of
old age. The moon is only lost time. Tomorrow my sky at a gallop will
crush your thoughts, and from their ruins will ascend, soft as morning,
exile.

My love I remember
this dancer who cried with her legs
one evening under the moon.
**Nadia Tuéni**

**INVENTAIRE**

De tout ce qui est terre j'accepte le message. De ce qui est jardin j'accepte la puissance. Une odeur d'avenir s'installe et bouscule un enfant sur son trajet.

Nous ferons des soleils derrière le mur, parmi vos yeux de lunes peintes et dans vos mains qui coulent fraîches.

Si la mort parfaitement belle il y aura pour chaque vie un matin d'oiseaux tendres et cruels.

De ce qui est lumière je penserai la nuit (ne dites rien c'est chose faite). Sur vos pas un amour blanc comme une menace.

Ce soir, entre moi et le premier venu, un mot sur le ciel courbe. Car, de ce qui est un cri je ferai mon histoire.

**Nadia Tuéni**

Je pense à la terre et au blé
plus riches après la bataille,
à cette fleur de sang irremplaçable.

Homme au profil de prisonnier
contemporain de tous les temps,
muet comme un arbre d'hiver,
écoute.

Sous la tente le vent emporte les oiseaux,
l'enfant s'endort avec des rêves de mer rouge
et de la rosée au paupières.

Que faut-il de plus pour la guerre?
Un chemin, un vivant, un mort,
un fleuve dont la boue est sainte,
et l'avare chaleur de Juin.

Une horloge, un mur, un vieux sabre,
une tête oubliée en haut de l'escalier,
un blanc bédouin sur fond de sable,
et le bruit double de la peur.
**Nadia Tuéni**

**INVENTORY**

From all which is earth I accept the message. From that which is garden I accept the force. A smell of the future settles down upsetting a child on his way.

We will make suns behind the wall, within your eyes of painted moons and in your cool-running hands.

If death is perfect beauty, each life inherits a morning of birds, gentle and cruel.

From that which is day I will conceive the night (say nothing it is done). In your steps a white foreboding love.

This evening, between me and the first arrival, a word arches on the sky. Because from a cry I will build my life.

---

**Nadia Tuéni**

I think of the land and the wheat richer after the battle, of this flower of irreplaceable blood.

Man with a prisoner’s profile contemporary of all times, mute like a tree of winter, listen.

Under the tent wind carries the birds, the child sleeps dreaming of a red sea and the dew on eyelids.

What more does war need? A road, someone living, someone dead, a river of sacred mud, and the devouring heat of June.

A clock, a wall, an old sabre, a head forgotten at the top of the stairway, a bedouin white against the background of sand, and the double noise of fear.
Nadia Tuéni

Nuit ma grande pensée, que j’aime à sentir sur mes tempes
l’étreinte de ton reptile. Mes yeux s’accrochent à la tempête;
le ciel toutes voiles au vent s’ébranle, et je crains le sang
tiède que la mer sur nos côtes rejette.

La terre nécessite la présence multiple du soleil, puisque dans
mes narines une odeur de vie et de cités détruites.

Que tout donc recommence depuis la première mouette jusqu’au
message déposé par hasard dans une bouche. L’ombre est absurde
tant qu’il n’y a pas d’histoire sans image, d’image sans souvenir,
et de souvenir sans lumière.

Quoique nous fassions, le mot toinbe comme une sentence crachée,
comme un venin et pourtant si docile.

Il fut un pays de couleur ancienne, plus ancienne qu’un amour
de jeunesse.

Ce pays franchit ma porte le soir lorsque le coeur est un feu
qui se couche éteint par l’eau bénite.

Moi, à la recherche de mon corps.

Nadia Tuéni

Mais toi noire de plaisir,
luisante au corps de temple de minuit,
un vent lourd te détrône
quand tu ouvres les yeux sur un royaume.
Nous allions tristes de parole;
chaque geste est coupable de briser une enfance;
l’autre paysage est amour.
Nous allions,
tu m’as donné le temps de me faire un visage
comme le pain chaud du prisonnier;
et c’est de toi que je parle,
de toi qui es le feu et l’eau,
merveilleusement reine telle une vie.
Nadia Tuéni

Night my great thought, how I love to feel your reptile embrace on my temples. My eyes cling to the storm; wind drives sails of sky, and I fear the warm blood thrown back on our shores by the sea.

The land requires the multiple presence of sun, while in my nostrils lingers an odor of life and destroyed cities.

Let everything begin again from the first gull to the message left by chance in one mouth. The shadow is absurd since there is no history without image, no image without memory, and no memory without light.

Whatever we do, the word falls like a sputtered judgment, like venom and yet so gentle.

There was a country of ancient color, more ancient than a youthful love.

This country oversteps my threshold the evening when my heart is a fire which lies down extinguished by holy water.

I, in search of my body.

Nadia Tuéni

But you black from pleasure, shining with the body of the temple of midnight, a heavy wind dethrones you when your eyes open on a kingdom. We were going sad through words; each gesture is guilty of smashing a childhood; the other landscape is love. We were going, you have given me time to make a face like the prisoner's warm bread; and it is of you that I speak, you who are fire and water, like life, a marvelous queen.
Judith Minty

WOMEN POETS

I

It is rumored that we speak now
with a single voice, we
women poets, that we have lost
the ring of individuality,
that the protest
has molded us into one
hard, metallic soprano
whose ear is pressed
to her own lips.

If this is true, then
do all our tits turn hard
on the same day of the month
and does all our bleeding
flow into one Amazon River?
And this bulky child
that we carry in our bellies,
when we birth him, will he then
be only one homogeneous poem?

If we would believe
the critics, if we have destroyed
our separate selves in the struggle
and now wear identical cloaks,
then we must find salvation, sisters,
before we join hands
form a circle, and in the soil
between our toes, cultivate
the petals of one perfect penis.

II

And if those snorting stallions
and bearded goats of poets
neigh and whinny at our songs, let them
roar their fragile words. We will twist our lips into a Giaconda smile and nod as fear sparks behind their wild eyes.

We know how they court the Muse, promise her laurel and honey as we sit quiet with hands folded delicately on our aprons and watch her throw crumbs. We see how their hooves trample the clearing near her altar.

She is a seductress, that woman, bent and wrinkled, yet still she draws their seminal fluid. But it is to us she comes at night, laughing and weeping, to us that she finally speaks. She is our mother, our grandmother. She is one of us.

III

Rumors grow often in gardens. They blister among the flowers. If we are careless and turn our faces to the mirror, the rose may be drained of its color. We must bend our backs and weed out those black roots row on row.

For our voice is not single. It is full of descants and grace notes. Our melody rises from the earth's ovens. It flies like a brown wren through trees and leaps with waves along the shoreline. It is all colors that hiss and crackle in hearth fires.

We are not one, but everywoman. Kora or Kali, devouring or benevolent, Circe or the Virgin,
we know our power. And our poems, finally,  
they breathe without us. Hear them now  
as they ring like a thousand bells  
from the fingers of our children.

Judith Minty
CONJOINED

The onion in my cupboard, a monster, actually  
two joined under one transparent skin:  
each half-round, then flat and deformed  
where it pressed and grew against the other.

An accident, like the two-headed calf rooted  
in one body, fighting to suck at its mother's teats;  
or like those other freaks, Chang and Eng, twins  
joined at the chest by skin and muscle, doomed  
to live, even love, together for sixty years.

Do you feel the skin that binds us  
together as we move, heavy in this house?  
To sever the muscle could free one,  
but might kill the other. Ah, but men  
don't slice onions in the kitchen, seldom see  
what is invisible. We cannot escape each other.
Carol Muske

RICE

Their calendars are based on rice.
During drought, the days repeat—
the hours huddle like crows,
wait in lines
for dusk to grow light again.
The people walk in their sleep
to the New Year, an identical dawn
when fish move in threes. A sign of rain.

The children draw in dust
and tell riddles:
“What day comes twice?”
“Day without rice.”

The monsoon is near.
When the rains come,
knives hang in trees.
They glitter.
A sail passes on the river.

When it pours, the rice is cut free.
It swims east to the river.

What is eaten by fish endures,
turns to weed and sleeps.

What escapes flies in threes
to another weather.

What is washed up becomes a ghost
haunts the paddies at dawn
wearing the masks of the starving.
Suzanne Paradis

NATURE MORTE

Les grives abattues
les joncs coupés les roses
aux ronces emmêlées
les chênes châtiés
dans la plaie des racines
la croix noire du temps
sur l'absence des ruines
dans l'ordre le soleil
les giroflées et l'ombre

Les poulies du silence
ouvrent des puits polis
par des vieilles eaux brunes
j'explore le visage
qui livre à mon amour
sa mauvaise sculpture
la forme inachevée
d'un rêve qui portait
la beauté déchirée,
d'un songe découpé
comme un gâteau de noces
la clarté insipide
de corps voisins, inertes
J'épuise entre mes dents
le poème de haine
impossible à écrire
qui se tait et qui geint
comme une chanson blanche.
Suzanne Paradis

STILL LIFE

The thrushes felled
the rushes cut the roses
entangled with brambles
the oaks punished
in the wound of the roots
the black cross of time
on the absence of the ruins
in this order: sun
gillyflowers and shadow

The pulleys of silence
open up wells polished
by old brown waters
I explore the face
which reveals to my love
its evil sculpture
the unfinished form
of a phantasy which bears
the lacerated beauty
of a dream sliced
like a wedding cake
the insipid clarity
of adjacent bodies, inert
I consume between my teeth
the poem of hatred
impossible to write
which is hushed and which moans
like a white song.
Denise Levertov

FOR THE BLIND

Listen: the wind in new leaves
whispers, smoother than fingertips,
than floss smoothing through fingertips . . .

When the sighted
talk about white they may mean
silence of sullen cold, that winter
— no matter how warm your rooms —
waits with at the door.
(Though there’s another whiteness,
more like the weightlessness of a flake of snow,
of a petal, a pine needle . . .)

When they say black they may mean the persistence
of cold wind hopelessly, angrily
tearing and tearing through leafless boughs.
(Though there’s another blackness,
round and full as the notes of cello and drum . . .)

But this:
this lively, delicate shiver
that whispers itself
caressingly over our flesh
when leaves are small and moist
and winds are gentle,
is green. Light green. Not weightless,
light.
Denise Levertov

FACE

When love, exaltation, the holy awe
of Poetry entering your doors and lifting you
on one finger as if if you were a feather
fallen from its wings, seize you, then your face
is luminous. I saw the angel
of Jacob once, alabaster, stone and not stone,
icandescent.

That look, the same,
illuminates you, then.

But when
hatred and a desire of vengeance
make you sullen, your eyes grow smaller,
your mouth turns sour, a heaviness
pulls the flesh of your poet’s face
down, makes it a mask
of denial. I remember:
from the same block of stone Jacob was carved,
but he was thick, opaque. The sculptor showed
Jacob still unwounded, locked into combat, unblesst,
the day
not yet dawning.
A long line had formed at the store called “Universam.” The people were standing one behind another, observing a definite space in between. Everyone freely participated in this standing.

I stopped and began to ponder if I were to push the person in front of me, that one would fall on the next one, the next one on the next one and the whole line, in a minute, would fall down on their faces with a noise as if someone were running his finger over a comb.

Then I thought: Why push the people down and be elevated above those lying down? Why should one be above people when there is the possibility of living on the same level?

I crossed the road and took my place at the end of the line.

In front of me there was a back in a short fur coat and a muskrat hat. A striking phenomenon: during the day one cannot find a muskrat hat even with a flashlight, and yet the whole of Moscow wears muskrat hats.

Personally I wear a rabbit collar and a ratiné cloth coat made in 1958. Ratiné—a solid fabric; one can wear it his whole life. During the time I wore it, it became old fashioned and again regained fashion.

“And what are they selling?”

I turned. In front of me there was a girl in a muskrat hat with earflaps.

“Indeed,”—I thought, “why did I get into the line?”

“Allow me,” I said politely, “we will find out.”

I knocked, as though on a door, on a back standing before me.

The muskrat back turned and displayed his dark profile with a prominent nose. The profile of this muzhik resembled an unaesthetic crow.
“Please tell me, what are they selling?”
“Japanese umbrellas.”
“Japanese umbrellas”—I transmitted to the girl.
“I can hear,” the girl replied rudely.
Obviously she can hear. She is not deaf. But she could have pretended, she could have said “Thank you kindly.” Then I could have asked:
“It’s OK isn’t it?”
“What do you mean it’s OK?”
“The Japanese umbrellas. They are very handy. One can fold them and hide them in a handbag.”
Inasmuch as I don’t carry a handbag I would have asked the girl:
“Can one put them into a pocket?”
This could have become a beginning of our conversation, which could have lasted a year, or three, or a whole lifetime. But the girl did not want to talk to me even three minutes, because I did not wear a fur coat, but a coat made of ratine fabric, with narrow lapels.
Clothes are the external appearance by which people are judged. My external appearance depends, unfortunately, not on me, but on circumstances and it is completely contrary to my inner “I.”
These two “I’s,” being constantly antagonistic to each other, render one ineffective. They deprive me of my individuality.
They say that the millionaires in the West dress very poorly. Rockefeller, for instance could put on my ratine coat and go on with his business and no one would be amazed.
When a man can allow himself what he likes, he can feel comfortable walking in an old coat.
But I am not so rich that I could ignore money. I am not so wise as to cease searching for the sense of life. I am not so old that I would be pleased with life as it is. And I am not so young that I would be happy without a reason for being subordinate to biological optimism.
I am in the middle of my life, at that very tragic age when the passions have not yet run their course, but the weariness already has settled in my heart. My “I’s” rip each other to pieces and I trust neither myself nor the others, and therefore most of all I love to stand in long lines, to be behind the backs, to be like everybody else.
Just as now, I am standing at the end of a long hopeful line. I am peaceful and feel I am right. Is it possible for so many people to be mistaken at the same time? They could not waste their time and patience for a false goal.
A Japanese woman in European dress walked by our line. She had a Moscow-made umbrella over her head. The umbrella was solid black with an impressive wooden handle and a plastic knob.

I stepped aside and found myself in the Japanese woman’s way.

“Hi,” I greeted her warmly. “Nice day.”

I secretly calculated that the Japanese woman would bow in a low, respectful manner, in such a low bow that I would be able to see her well-shaped back. A real Japanese woman is educated in spirit to worship a man, no matter who he is, since this is the only correct education. Man by no means needs someone else’s individuality. He always searches in a woman for reinforcement of his own individuality.

“And why don’t you have a Japanese umbrella?” I asked.

“Our umbrellas were not designed for your climatic conditions,” answered the Japanese woman, continuing on her way, with short steps as if she were wearing a kimono and not trousers.

I stepped back into the line and my heart was pierced by a microbe of the feeling of orphanhood. I began to doubt: do I need a Japanese umbrella which does not fit our climatic conditions? Am I right in succumbing to the instinct of fashion? Maybe there is some sense in overcoming this instinct and leaving the line?

The saleslady broke into my thoughts.

“Do you like blue or red?” she asked.

“What?” I came to my senses.

The saleslady pushed a blue umbrella and a box toward me.

“And what is this?”

“Additional goods,” said the saleslady, “Italian platform shoes.”

“But I don’t need them.”

“To make it complete; the Japanese umbrella goes with them as a set.”

“But what do I need those platform shoes for? I am a man.”

“You can make a present to your wife.”

“I don’t have a wife.”

“That’s not a loss,” the saleslady said. “You can always find a woman to fit these shoes.”

Actually I needed neither the umbrella, nor the shoes, but it would be an affront to walk out empty-handed.
"I will take only the umbrella"—I declared.
The line sighed deafly behind me and squeezed me out with a pressing move.
I walked to the side, opened my umbrella and suddenly I felt that I was being lifted. I pushed my feet to the ground but my shoes apparently were too light and I became airborne.
The sensation of the flight was quite familiar and even pleasant. I had experienced the same sensation in my childhood dreams.
The blue cupola of the umbrella was constantly braced on the air cushion. I was flying, supported by air and not afraid of falling.
In the beginning I was flying quite low, about two meters above the ground, and I was calculating that someone in the line would grab my legs and end my flight. But nobody grabbed me—possibly being afraid that I would tear them loose from the ground and carry them on my feet to the sky.
"To stand in line was a common fate," crossed my mind, "but to fly is my fate alone."
I recalled that when I had great doubts, I did not forsake the line. And when I became airborne, nobody even lifted his head.
And why? Because everybody needs an umbrella. And nobody needs me. And indeed: one cannot place me in a handbag, nor exchange me for something useful. There is neither beauty nor usefulness in me. Only inconveniences. One has to feed me. One has to talk to me. One has to understand me.
The umbrella meanwhile was gaining altitude. I became afraid that I would be carried into the airplane flight pattern and I would be killed by a plane. A propeller might hit me.
Flying by a nine-story building, I grabbed a T.V. antenna with my free hand and floundering, I landed on the roof. I pressed a little protrusion on the umbrella handle. The umbrella collapsed and lost its blue cupola.
I hung it on the antenna and sat on the roof with my feet dangling.
Unobstructed, I could see the city from above.
I suddenly saw that the line had turned into a different one. At first I could not comprehend what was happening, but upon looking more attentively I understood that the people and the goods had exchanged places. The goods extended themselves into a long line and began to select people. And the people, sitting in cardboard boxes, similar to the ones in which T.V. sets are packed, their heads protruding, were breathing fresh air.
"I would like to have an elegant man with glasses," a Canadian
fur coat said.

“One minute . . . ” the saleslady walked among the boxes and brought with her a man with glasses and a drooping moustache.

The fur coat handed the saleslady the money and left with the man.

“We would like to have that fat uncle,” requested some American blue jeans.

“I will not go,” the fat uncle, in baggy satin trousers, replied from the box. “I wear a ‘56’ and they are ‘44’.”

“You are right,” the saleslady agreed, “he is too big for you.”

“But we stood in line.” The blue jeans were perturbed. “What is this, we stood in line for nothing.”

Next to the blue jeans a nylon wig was lingering. And behind him, changing from foot to foot were Austrian winter platform shoes:

“Take me!” a cute blonde whispered to the Austrian shoes.

“Take me!” interjected a brunette with a small moustache, who was jumping in her box.

“And who will select me?” I wondered looking at the goods.

“Am I needed by something?”

I looked in both directions. The roof was messy: there were some bricks, broken glass, and assorted building junk. It seemed that the construction workers, having placed the last brick, forgot to or didn’t want to clean up their own mess.

I took a large brick, put it under my shirt in order to become heavier. Then I took my umbrella from the T.V. antenna and opened it above me.

The umbrella flowingly whisked me from the roof and carried me in a sloping descent to the store.

I found an empty and spacious box and sat down in it. On the box there was a picture of a blue glass and the words: “This side up. Fragile.”
Carole Gregory Clemens

Sometimes my father
puts his face on the moon
and comes into my room,
he is never there
when I awake.

MY FATHER HAS A SISTER

I love,
she raises blades of sun
from corn,
fruit trees from rain
and laughter
from us children.

MY NAME IS RADIO GREEN

they call me “Radio”
cause I talk so much,
I'm seven
and I know what they do
with the ice pick.
In 1952
they handled our color
like a ice pick,
stuck our Black skin
the sun set in.
Raquel Jodorowsky

TODAVÍA SOLOS BAJO LOS SATELITES

De una manera tranquila como los envenenados al agonizar quiero agradecerte Mundo por tu antigua bondad porque en tu misteriosa presentación nos diste a probar el pan de los ángeles y mi familia subsistió en el desierto con un pedazo de Dios en el estómago.

Quiero agradecerte Mundo porque desde entonces nos soportas y nos permites abrazar el espacio y llegar a las puertas del nacimiento del sol.

En el imperio pobre de los elementos rotas las márgenes y despreciadas las orillas nos dejas innundar el Más Allá.

Pero hemos llenado de pulgas a la Luna horadado sus ojos, hemos raspado con cucharas su vejez. hemos creado un cielo intermitente un universo metálico para sueños sintéticos.

Y al final de la vuelta estamos solos todavía solos bajo los satélites.

Hermano Mundo quizás como nosotros has muerto muchas veces y dentro de la Sociedad del Gran Orden que te rige los Angeles Mayores te olvidaron (tan bien como a nosotros) y no te es dado conocer hacia dónde se dirige tu girar.

Ya ves que tú tampoco has encontrado reposo ni los hombres, mordiéndose en el fondo de tu nada comprendiendo que la paz, sólo existe en las mesas.
Raquel Jodorowsky

STILL ALONE UNDER THE SATELLITES

As if dying from poison peacefully
I thank you, World, for your ancient goodness
for in your mysterious offering
you gave us the bread of angels to taste
and in the desert my family survived
with a bit of God in their stomachs.

Thank you, World,
for you have sustained us
and let us embrace space
to reach the gates of the sun’s source.
In the impoverished realm of the elements
boundaries broken and limits disdained
you let us flood into the Beyond.
But we fill the moon with fleas,
gouge out its eyes, shovel up its antiquity
and create an intermittent sky,
a metallic universe for synthetic dreams.
At the end of the cycle we are alone
still alone under the satellites.

Brother World
like us, perhaps, you have died many times
and in the Great Order which rules you
the Archangels forget you (just like us)
and you cannot know
the direction of your turns.

You see you have not found rest
nor the men who decay deep in your nothingness
realizing that peace only exists in the plateau.
Mundo.—La pena o la vergüenza de Dios
una lágrima que rueda por su rostro
hacia el vacío.
Una gota de sudor que se evapora
en la piel del Infinito.
Dentro de ti, Mundo
petrificados como ojos de pescado
no venimos ni vamos
Estamos solamente
sosteniendo la enfermedad del Universo.
Pobrecitos nosotros
encerrados de por vida en la prisión del espíritu
en la pieza negra que son los años.
¿Dónde escapar, si siempre toparemos tus paredes de aire?
Nos haces creer que somos libres
dentro de tu anillo, Mundo
casado con el misterio.
Serpiente que se muerde la cola
En tu vientre nos llevas como gatos rabiosos
Madre Ira
Y nos sacamos los ojos los unos a los otros
porque sí, porque está oscuro.
Oh, Gran Cuidador. Oh, Comedor de hombres
Ya no seremos ricos ni tampoco pobres.
Nada de ti nos llevaremos
cuando nos transformes en sueño
y hayas triturado nuestras risas
en tu cámara secreta de torturas subterráneas.
Ya sabemos para qué nos engordas, cómenos al fin
pero no olvides Carnivoro Saltimbanqui de los cielos
que nuestro amor puede hacerte mucho mal
nuestro amor de exploradores
que un día descubre cómo abrirte un poro
que nos haga saltar al Universo
aunque sólo sea para ver
tu pequeñez
girando en el espacio.
World.—The punishment or shame of God,
a tear rolling down his face
into the void.
A drop of sweat which evaporates
on the skin of Infinity.
Within you, World,
like petrified fish eyes
we neither come nor go.
We only endure
the sickness of the Universe.
We miserable beings
locked up for life in the prison of the soul
the dark cell of years.
Where can we escape when we always collide with your walls of air?
You make us believe we are free
within your ring, World
wed to mystery.
Snake gnawing your tail
in your belly you bear us like rabid cats.
Mother Wrath.
And we scratch out each other’s eyes
because it is so dark.
Oh, Great Protector. Oh, Ravenous Cannibal.
Soon we will be neither rich nor poor.
We will keep nothing of you
when you transform us in the dream
and pulverize our laughter
in your secret chamber of subterranean tortures.
Now we know why you fatten us, therefore eat us
but do not forget, Carnivorous Saltimbanco of the skies,
our love can do you great harm
our love of explorers
which one day discovers how to open your pore
and makes us leap into the cosmos
even if only to see
your smallness
revolving in space.
He aquí nuestro planeta
recibiendo la basura
del universo.
Porque somos la defecación de algún Dios.
Por eso tenemos la vaga reminiscencia
de una grandeza.

Dios
a quien hemos transformado en una palabra
explotada en grandes empresas de comercio.
Una palabra que nos hace miedo
como si fuera un esqueleto oculto
en el aparador.

Dios, Dios
A quien hemos hecho representar
por negros cuervos
o por rojos gavilanes de rapiña
sacados a pasear en sillar de oro
amarradas a las espaldas de fieles impotentes.
Como si un ropaje pudiera ser el símbolo
del amor!

Mientras Jesucristo vistió como un obrero
cualquiera de su época
es decir
como un poeta pobre del siglo XX.
Here our planet receives
the refuse
of the universe.
We, the excrement of some God,
still have the faint reminiscence
of grandeur.

God
by us changed into a word
exploited by big business.
A word which frightens us
like a skeleton hidden
in the closet.
God, God
whom we depict
with black ravens
or crimson hawks
paraded on litters of gold
bound to the backs of impotent believers.
As if apparel could be
the symbol of love!
Whereas Christ appeared as a kind
of worker in his time
or as a poor poet
of the Twentieth Century.
Lucia Getsi

MOTHER

death was born with her

illumined her presence
like sunspots
filtered through shade trees

with each tilt of earth
spilled night
over all her bright princes

she hardly knew
when the sun went down

so quiet
her dreams chasing light
smearing the horizon red

LULLABY

a long sleep
to dream
I am dreaming

one rises
to hear clocks ticking

the other chants
clusters of words
spun in long images
of waking
Lucia Getsi

OLDFATHER'S VISION

Birth of a night so old
I cannot remember it

cannot remember it

distant aeons of light
ages of progressing darkness

pouring a milk sheen of dawn
over the earth

I drink the dawn
offering words in sacrifice

regurgitate the mother's milk of hours
to anoint them

On an altar of dawn
I cut away the symbols

watch alphabet clutter the earth

try to take root in the elements
wait for sunrise
hide

Stones sea earth
remain

WORD

My face lies open in your breath
To cup the rain of your voice.
Broken eyes are honed
To the shape of your mouth
As water through my fingers
I drip onto your tongue.
Maria Eulália de Macedo

AS AMANTES ABANDONADAS

O poeta e as palavras
Amaram-se de noite.
Amor raivoso e frio como um lírio pelas madrugadas.
Violou-as uma a uma,
Conheceu-lhes o corpo e os segredos,
Seus perfis de vento e espuma.
Ganhou-as; e foi ele que se perdeu.
Depois passou por elas na rua
E nem as conheceu.

O DIA DA MINHA MORTE

Era domingo civil e mortuário
Com roupa nova
E falas de lodo
No encontro ocasional e vário.
Eu que levava na mão
Água de pura alegria
Morri nessa hora.
Morri sem alarde e sem desgosto
(Já à morte estava afeita)
Morri em dia de agosto.
Aqui está a notícia
Pra quando a história for feita.
Maria Eulália de Macedo

THE ABANDONED MISTRESSES

The poet and the words .
made love the whole night long.
Angry love cold as lilies at dawn.
He violated them one by one,
learned their bodies and secrets,
their profiles of wind and foam.
He won them; and he was lost.
And when their paths next crossed,
he passed them by unknowing.

THE DAY OF MY DEATH

It was a soundless deathlike Sunday
with new clothes
and trivial conversation among those
who happened to meet.
Bearing in my hand
water of pure joy
I died in that hour.
I died without distaste or display
(I was already accustomed to death).
I died on an August day.
Here is the news item intended
for when the story is ended.
WE CAN'T GET ON

we can't get on in bed,
he said; the blank struggle
over the pillows: please

understand, o touch me.
the sheets are betrayal,
slaking you and me

if only—but the touch
makes us strangers, more.
she flees to the edge

of the bed, pursued.
night is a battlefield
for bodies;

daybreak the knife
that separates as, waking,
they glance off one another, wary.
Doris Mozer

INITIATIONS

I

Journeying to your world
the language changed
in mid sea.

There drums part smoke
to pulsing lights
while priests
with sharp guitars
intone magic
for brethren ears alone.

There bare savannahs
direct tourists
to windy rocks
with tenant hermits
chanting
sacerdotage
to the heathen sun.

II

a toad squats
within me
filling
the wound
with excremental horrors
born of love.
Inger Christensen

JEG

"A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one."

Fjerindhyllet forening
Du og en solsorts vinge
Det syngende aftentraes smykke
Mandens skjul i fuglen
Fuglens klarsyn i ham
Naturflugt Bevidsthed
Jeg
jeg er den der betragter

Saligheds mørkning
Mandog solsort besejret
Hvilende drift i dem begge
Drikker med samme hjerte
Synger med samme naeb
Forskansningens naerbillede
Jeg
jeg er den der er udenfor

Uvirkelig smerte
Solsortens leg og din stemme
Forbindelsens ekko og aften
Lytter til mandens fløjten
Opfatter fuglens sprog
Kaldende Er jeg en kvinde
Jeg
jeg er den der er åben
I

"A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one."

Feather-swathed fusion
You and a blackbird’s wing
Jewel of the singing evening tree
The man hidden in the bird
Vision of the bird in him
Nature-flight Awareness
I
I am the one who is watching

Darkening bliss
Man and blackbird vanquished
Dormant instinct in both
Drink with the same heart
Sing with the same beak
Fortification’s close-up
I
I am the one who is outside

Unreal pain
The blackbird’s play and your voice
Connection’s echo and evening
Listen to the man’s whistling
Fathom the speech of the bird
Calling Am I a woman
I
I am the one who is open
Inger Christensen

Som skiftergråt hav svaever
min vinterflade hjerne
i rummet

et flygtende fyrtårn svinger
mine faldøjne
rundt

det vi kaldte land
er de nærmest stjerner

GYR

Dagen som rifles
af vinden en morgen
uglernes fjer
på en lysere måde
sindet som skifter
formindskes
noget forsvandt
Inger Christensen

Like a slate-gray sea my winterflat brain drifts in space

a fugitive lighthouse sweeps my down-beamed eyes in a wide arc

what we called land is the nearest stars.

DAWN

The day which is rifled by the wind one morning, the owls’ feathers in a lighter way, the mind which is shifting— are diminished, something disappeared.
IN THE PLANETARIUM

Man-made stars
speed across
a man-made space

and I lean back into the chair
as my mother must have
leaned back under the space
of my father’s body.
A small light, a comet
approaches the sun.
My father’s seed
approaches
my mother’s. A soft laugh,
and I begin

to inhabit a space that grows
to hold me, cells divide,
moons break away
from planets, atoms spin
solar systems around me.
The comet’s tail
is blown away from the sun.
My tail shrinks
in my mother’s sea.
I grow fingers, toes. The arm
of the galaxy will hold me

when I leave one space
for another
space.
DEAFMUTES

There were two deafmutes in the village, and both of them were shoemakers. Or was it that there were two shoemakers in the village, and both of them were deafmutes? To mend shoes must be a wordless art. And when you talk of fixing heel or sole, you must use gestures.

TO THE MAN WHO WATCHES SPIDERS

They say we devour our men after mating. But you who have watched us for hours and days, defend us.
Some say

that women who die in childbirth
become spiders that hang in the heavens,
funerary escorts of a dying sun,
while they wait for the day
when they can devour all

of mankind. Tell them,
tell them that we, like women,
know perfection, that we lose it,
quickly, that we hide the loss
in a growing, terrifying art.

Disguise is shyness. Ageing
we sit and spin, uncertain
that someone could love us,
seeing us.
Julieta Dobles Yzaguirre

CANTO EN VANO PARA UNA RESURRECCION

Alguien se nos está muriendo siempre,
con esa muerte lenta de los pulsos vacíos,
mientras tú y yo besamos,
reímos de las cosas y del viento,
comemos,
nos amamos,
y sabemos
que toda nuestra luz nos pertenece,
sin ser nuestra siquiera.

Alguien se muere siempre,
 hasta cuando
un péndulo dibuja
cuartos de hora hacia la vida,
o cuando fingen niños en la plaza
su muerte de juguete.

Alguien se está muriendo sin remedio,
con los pies hacia el mar,
que no detiene nunca
su rítmico latido azul salado.

Cada instante termina para alguien
toda la eternidad,
mientras cantan los coros en la iglesia,
y cada niño nace,
y el pan crece en las rojas
mandíbulas del fuego.

Alguien se muere
con cada movimiento
de tu mano y mi mano,
y nosotros seguimos,
sin saberlo,
ingendramos más hijos,
sin saberlo,
y pensamos vivir eternamente,
¡sin saberlo!
Julieta Dobles Yzaguirre

SONG IN VAIN FOR A RESURRECTION

Someone is dying
continuously,
with that slow death of empty pulses,
while you and I kiss,
laugh at life and the wind,
we eat,
make love,
and know
that all our light belongs to us,
without even being ours.

Someone is always dying,
while
the pendulum sketches
quarter-hours toward life,
while children stage death games
in the playground.

Someone is dying
inevitably,
with feet toward the sea,
which never hesitates
in its briny-blue, rhythmic beat.

Every moment ends someone’s
eternity,
while choirs chant in the churches,
while every child is born,
and bread rises in the red
jaws of fire.

Someone dies
with every pass
of your hand and mine,
and we continue,
without knowing,
and breed more children,
without knowing,
and we pretend to live forever,
without knowing.
Maxine Kumin

THE DEATHS OF THE UNCLEs

I am going backward in a home movie.
The reel stutters and balks before it takes hold
but surely these are my uncles spiking the lemonade
and fanning their girls on my grandmother's verandah.
My uncles, innocent of their deaths, swatting
the shuttlecock's white tit in the Sunday twilight.
Some are wearing gray suede spats, the buttons
Glint like money. Two are in checkered knickers,
the bachelor uncle in his World War One puttees
is making a mule jump for the cavalry, he is crying
Tuck, damn you, Rastus, you son of a sea cook!
How full of family feeling they are, their seven
Bald heads coming back as shiny as an infection,
coming back to testify like Charlie Chaplin,
falling down a lot like Laurel and Hardy.
Stanley a skeleton rattling his closet knob
long before he toppled three flights with Parkinson's.
Everyone knew Miss Pris whom he kept in rooms
over the movie theater, rooms full of rose water
while his wife lay alone at home like a tarnished spoon.
Mitchell the specialist, big bellied, heavy of nose,
broad as a rowboat, sniffed out the spices.
Shrank to a toothpick after his heart attack,
fasted on cottage cheese, threw out his black cigars
and taken at naptime died in his dressing gown
Tidy in paisley wool, old pauper thumb in his mouth.
Jasper the freckled, the Pepsodent smiler,
cuckold and debtor, ten years a deacon
stalled his Pierce Arrow smack on a railroad track
while the twins in their pram cried for a new father.
The twins in their pram as speechless as puppies.
O run the film forward past Lawrence the baby,
the masterpiece, handsomest, favorite issue.
Cover the screen while the hats at his funeral
bob past like sailboats, like black iron cooking pots.
Larry the Lightheart dead of a bullet
and pass over Horace, who never embezzled,
moderate Horace with sand in his eyelids
so we can have Roger again, the mule trainer
crying son of a sea cook! into his dotage,
wearin the Stars and Stripes next to his hearing aid,
shining his Mason’s ring, fingeri9ng his shriner’s pin,
Roger the celibate, warrior, joiner
but it was Dan Dan Dan the apple of my girlhood
with his backyard telescope swallowing the stars
with the reedy keening of his B flat licorice stick,
Dan who took me teadancing at the Adelphia Club,
Dan who took me boating on the Schuylkill scum,
Dan who sent the roses, the old singing telegrams
and cracked apart at Normandy leaving behind
a slow-motion clip of him leading the Conga line,
his white bucks in the closet and a sweet worm in my heart.
Veronica Porumbacu

FROM WHAT ONCE WAS

From what once was, from the crazy nights
with horses’ clatter through the dust of the Milky Way,
with the rope-walker’s step on the line
    between night and day,
with the cry of the moonbeam cutting like
diamond the window pane,
with the storm in a single maple leaf,
and the northern lights in a single flower of ice—
is left only a thin haze,
dream within dream, or maybe
for my blood with which I wrote
transparent runes on the sky,
only insomnia with which I ask
tribute from memory.

FAROTHER AWAY

What would they say to me when,
asleep
I add myself
to the anonymous crowd,
my bones,
farther away from me than
the cold rocks of the moon . . .
Veronica Porumbacu

THE PUPIL

Answer me, friends:
what good would it be
 to wish for an ephemeral house
 to adorn?
 Like gracing
 a train compartment,
or wheels
gnashing into nowhere.
 Ahead,
a row of blind semaphors,
 fires
 long since extinguished:
 space without time,
 a neutral time,
 perhaps a well
 into which I am falling
 and I shout, and I shout, and I shout.
 Above,
 the eye of the day, still white,
 no bigger than a moon,
 than a gold coin,
 than the pupil:
 ... minuscule snake eye.

ANESTHESIA

And suddenly
 the silhouettes hush
 irremediably
 like the drowned in winter
 under the river's ice,
 like saints, vertical, enigmatic,
 behind glass.
Hanne F. Juritz

NICHT SO WICHTIG

ich halte mich öfters bei toten auf.
bei sabine häufiger als bei ulrike.
ich geruch liegt mir mehr.
sie könnte durchaus noch leben.
bei dem duft.

jetzt wär ich ihr bestimmt eine grosse hilfe.
jetzt, wo ich weiss, dass sie niemals gestunken hat.
überhaupt könnte ich der einzig richtige partner
für sie gewesen sein.
wahrscheinlich wär sie dann noch am leben.

wahrscheinlich wären beide noch am leben.
sie und ulrike.
aber ulrike ist nicht so wichtig.

PHOTOMATON

vor dem spiegel hab ich mir
eine brauchbare totenmaske ausgedacht
und eingeübt.
natürlich ohne lippenbemalung.
blässe wirkt oft wunder.
erst am offenen grab wird eindruck gemacht.

sand in den ohren.
gänsehaut zwischen den zehen
und sausen im haar.
die krämpfe lassen nach.
honorierung folgt nie auf dem fusse.

wenigstens sind passbilder dann nicht mehr angebracht.
Hanne F. Juritz

NOT SO IMPORTANT

frequently I live with dead people
with Sabine more than Ulrike.
she smells better.
she could still be very much alive.
from her scent.

now I'd really be a big help to her.
now that I know she's never stunk.
I could have been the only right partner
for her after all.
maybe then she would still be alive.

maybe they would both be alive.
she and Ulrike.
but Ulrike isn't so important.

PHOTOMAT

in front of the mirror I have
thought out and practiced
a serviceable deathmask.
naturally without lipstick.
pallor often works wonders.

at the open grave the impression is first made.
sand in the ears.
goose pimples between the toes
and windblown hair.
the spasms go away.
payment is never quick.

at least passport pictures would be out of place.
Jayne Cortez

SO LONG

My man loved me so much
he wanted to kill me
cause he loved me so good
he wanted to die
cause he loved me without sorrow
so sad without tears
he loved me to kill to die to cry
so much he wanted to scream
cause i loved him too much i
drank his tears
loved him too much
i ate his strength
loved him too much i stole his joy
i loved him to drink to eat to steal
cause we loved so much
so good to love to love
so long to love
so long

I AM NEW YORK CITY

i am new york city
here is my brain of hot sauce
my tobacco teeth my
    mattress of bedbug tongue
legs apart    hand on chin
    war on the roof    insults
pointed fingers    pushcarts
    my contraceptives all

look at my pelvis blushing

i am new york city of blood
police and fried pies
    i rub my docks red with grenadine
and jelly madness in a flow of tokay
my huge skull of pigeons
my seance of peeping toms
my plaited ovaries excuse me
this is my grime my thigh of
steelspoons and toothpicks
    i imitate no one

i am new york city
of the brown spit and soft tomatoes
    give me my confetti of flesh
my marquee of false nipples
    my sideshow of open beaks
in my nose of soot
    in my ox bled eyes
in my ear of saturday night specials

i eat ha ha    hee hee and ho ho

i am new york city
never-change-never-sleep-never-melt
    my shoes are incognito
cadavers grow from my goatee
    look i sparkle with shit with wishbones
my nickname is glue-me

Take my face of stink bombs
my star spangle banner of hot dogs
take my beer-can junta
my reptilian ass of footprints
and approach me through life
approach me through death
approach me through my widows peak
through my split ends my asthmatic laugh
approach me through my wash rag
half ankle    half elbow
massage me with your camphor tears
salute the patina and concrete
of my rat tail wig
face up    face down
piss into the bite of our handshake
i am new york city
   my skillet-head friend
my fat-bellied comrade
citizens
   break wind with me

Jayne Cortez

IFE NIGHT

Big beautiful bronze man
your love is as close
as the life-death shrill
from old folks in paradise
young as beginning rains in Guinea-Bissau
and strong like a million quivering
frog-throats wailing through
the night wells of Ife

How deep this time of us
dancing beneath Mozambique
against moon confessing flames
bouncing baby heart-beat
ocean tears of mud
to a strange snake of a new mask
arking the brain neck
of our song
Irene Friedman

BEYOND

go chasing cats
when silence
becomes too
self-evident
you’ll find green
sleep on the street
you’ve known all winter
and hear
the ice break
with retrospective
sadness you’ll feel
the alleys swell
with forgotten garbage
and hear
the rattle of breaths beyond
the shutters
where you can return
oh much later
to the muffled
smells

NEW MORNING POEM

sunrays
penetrate the shower curtain
dissolve into
your hands
  clean strength
  upon my breasts
washing
  our body
  clean
as a handshake
sculptured against
the curtain
  like a fist
The first days of July fell on Santiago del Estero with cold winds and the hissing threat of an even harder winter than usual. A relentless gray film blew on the wind and with each gust the dried trees bent to the breaking point. Only the giant cactuses kept their thorny profiles erect in the blow; but in the end they too went down, showing even that courage to be hollow within. Everything had turned whitish, like a dirty snowscape, snowless but blustery. The pitch and thorn trees creaked, and the cold licked at the bleached bones of dead animals.

Inside the shack, which was fenced in by a cactus hedge, the wind whipped as freely as it did in the open. The carved door, the family’s pride, was next to no use, and the tin and burlap walls and thatched roof offered little protection. Huddled together around a dwindling fire, Orosmán, Belisaria, their eight children, and the grandmother sought warmth — human warmth more than that of the nearly dead coals. In its fruit crate, the fourteen-month-old baby cried. Belisaria asked herself what they would do with the baby that was on its way.

As if to answer her, from the depth of their silence came the voice of the oldest boy, Orestes. “We can’t keep going like this, father. Let’s move on to Tucumán.”

“To Tucumán, to Tucumán,” said the younger ones.
“Tucumán, they say the city has lights. And that the houses are tall and strong. The wind can’t go through them.”

“Don Zoilo says we’ll find work there. That they need hands for the sugarcane. And he says there’s a lot of money too.”

“Father, don Zoilo went to the sugar harvest last year. He says he’s too old to go again, he says he’s selling his wagon.”
“Orestes says we can trade him our goats and two sheep for it. We won’t need them in the city.”

“But how can we travel with your mother this way?” Orosmán said.

“All the same, I’m going,” Belisaria said.

“Your grandmother’s too old.”

“I want to go where it’s warm too. I want my last days to be good.”

That night they all slept better. Hope covered them like a blanket.

The next morning seethed with activity. First there was the discussion with don Zoilo, who, in addition to the goats and sheep, wanted the door thrown into the bargain. That was impossible. To part with it would mean betraying family traditions. The door had five devils carved on it and above them a kind of angel. The angel, as it turned out, was more diabolical than the other figures. That was the fault of Orosmán’s grandfather, who had carved the door out there in the missions without really knowing how to work the wood. Still, the priests had said it was very pretty, that they would use it in the chapel; but instead of feeling pride the grandfather that same night made off into the wilds with his horse and on its back his door. The door was his and his family’s, not God’s. It stayed in the family, and now Orosmán was not going to be the one who swapped it for a roofless, worn-out wagon made of heavy logs—even if it was one of the better wagons around for going off to the sugar harvest in.

At last the deal was closed. The animals alone were traded for the wagon. The three horses pranced briskly in place under the weight of their harnesses, which had lain unused in a corner of the shack for five years. Long strips of leather hung from the harness straps to keep off the flies that tickled the horses’ flanks. They felt spirited again after their long inactivity.

Orosmán and his children loaded the sacks of corn and whatever else of value they found in the shack. Little by little the whole shack took its place in the wagon. The burlap wall coverings were used for wrapping, the roof thatch for filling spaces and for bedding. In the end, only two posts remained; they stood like a cross over the tomb of the shack the family was leaving forever.

Don Zoilo, squatting on his haunches and drinking maté, said to them, “Take my advice, go to the city. You’ll find good work there; they pay better wages. Don’t take any work in the fields. Go straight to the city.”

They were his farewell words. Orosmán, mounted on the middle horse, cracked his whip and they were on their way.
A cold night caught them and forced them to halt. They cooked their meal on a fire thinned by the wind, then slept buried in the wagon amid their goods and the straw. The next morning brought a bit of sun, like a promise, and saw them to the highway that led to the city. The dry, thorny scrub was behind them, but their new surroundings, with fewer and fewer trees, refused to change. And the sky, as the afternoon gradually drained away, took on ugly grayish tones, until finally the countryside and the sky were blurred in the mist of the horizon. Once more night came down on them, on their hunger and their cold.

When they started out again they saw that the fields on either hand were turning green, cultivated. The city was near. All at once, a great blast startled them. Another followed, and then another.

“They’re cannons,” said Orestes in a low voice. “I’ve been told cannons sound like that. Everything shakes.”

“Nonsense, my son. They must be the noises of the big city.” And Orosmán urged the horses on.

They entered the city along an avenue lined with houses and gardens, and an enormous number of people were hurrying along, all in the same direction. The wagon followed them, turning around a square and making its way down a narrow street; suddenly it discovered a troop of soldiers lying in wait around a corner. At a word of command, the soldiers set out marching.

The wagon continued along past tall buildings decked out with blue and white flags. The number of people doubled and multiplied, all of them shouting and singing. Automobiles and horse-drawn carriages pushed the wagon toward the central plaza; Orosmán and his family, utterly bewildered, let themselves be borne along. Army tanks coming toward them made their eyes widen with fright. Still worse was that policeman shouting at them, “Keep moving, keep moving! You can’t stop there!”

The drums went wild and the stream dragged them along. A sergeant on horseback cut through to them to call out, “Get away, can’t you see you’re not allowed here?”

The horses no longer responded to the reins; the younger children, hidden in the straw, were in tears. Now the wagon passed long banners with the hard word S-E-S-Q-U-I-C-E-N-T-E-N-N-N-A-L. None of them could make it out. Belisaria also gave in to tears. This was Hell itself and she implored the Virgin to deliver them from the spot.

At long last they found a street that carried them away from the plaza, though they still had to open a way among the crowds. They
passed in front of a whitewashed house which seemed to be at the heart of the tumult; it had windows with green grillwork on either side of the door.

"Look, look! A door almost as pretty as ours," shouted one of the children. But nothing any longer attracted their attention, not even the explosion of lights that went off outlining the cathedral against the night like an admonition. The sky reverberated with evil fireballs, red and green, and with the glow their faces seemed those of forsaken souls.

And like a forsaken soul the wagon let itself be dragged along by the whirlwind of shouts and colors, by the tide of the city. The cannons thundered again, the din was deafening, and the moment the horses found themselves on a street free of ringing people they broke into a mad gallop. Orosmán was able to rein them in only when they reached open country, where all that remained of the city was a red stain in the sky.

They went more slowly now, but they did not stop. They barely stopped at all, in fact, until they reached the two crossed poles that watched over the place where their shack had been. There the cold awaited them, lying in ambush, and the need for a fire was urgent after their forced march of a day, a night, and part of another night. To frighten off evil spirits a fire was needed too, but they were barely able to get a handful of twigs lit. One of the children wailed, "Let's burn the door."

"No, not the door," Belisaria said. "It's all we have, it keeps us company. If we burn it, some curse might fall on us."

The silence was long and painful.

"A worse curse would be if grandmother died of the cold," Orosmán said.

They said goodbye to the door with ceremony. The flames grew rapidly and the faces of the devils began to twist and mock them—all of them and the angel. But they were kept warm the whole night, and when don Zoilo came along in the morning the embers were still red. He was surprised to see them there—Orosmán, his woman, mother, and children—as if in prayer at the foot of the crossed poles, which were the only reminder left them of their shack.

"What? You're back?" don Zoilo said from his horse. "You'll have to start all over again."

"Yes, all over again," said Orosmán. "And now we don't even have our door to protect us. But we preferred coming back, even if we die of the cold." And staring at his hands, he added, "Because when we got there, Tucumán was at war."
Henriqueta Lisboa

ELEGIA MENOR

Como reconhecer a morte?
Acaso seu aspecto é côr de cinza?
Tem cartão de visita, nome próprio?
Esperará por nós no vestíbulo?

Quando na vizinhança esteve
nem mesmo a cortina esvoaçou
à sua chegada. Foi tudo
exato e sóbrio. Que cisão perfeita
entre quem se viu escolhido
e quem ficou ainda à espera
até que porventura ela volte:

—la passando, lembrei-me de ti.

As folhas do calendário são leves.
Desprende-as o vento, surge uma data.
Será hoje, amanhã, depois?
É como se calasse um violino
sem mais, antes do acorde final.
Um estalo de cordas. Uma veia
que se recusa a seu ofício—tão simples.
Um olvidar as rotineiras cousas.
E um pender de cabeça mais confiante.

Depois, apenas esse dúvida
odor de flores entre moscas.

CANÇÃO

Noite amarga
sem estrela.

Sem estrela
mas com lágrimas.
MINOR ELEGY

How to recognize death?
Does she perhaps look gray?
Has she a calling card, a proper name?
Will she wait for us in the vestibule?

When she was nearby
not even the curtain fluttered
at her coming. Everything was
exact and sober. What a perfect schism
between the one who saw himself chosen
and the one who was left waiting
until she happens back:

“I was passing and thought of you.”

The calendar leaves are light.
Wind lifts them, a date looms.
Will it be today, tomorrow, later?
It is as if a violin stopped
short, before the final chord.
A jangle of strings. A vein
that refuses to do business—so simple.
A forgetting of routine things.
A more trustful droop of the head.

After, only that dubious odor
of flowers surrounded by flies.

SONG

Bitter night
without a star.

Without a star.
With tears.
Zéphy Dhoráakis

THE DESPAIRING SUMMER CAME

The despairing summer came
the summer I hate has come—it turned the light upside down
    and disemboweled it
that bird with the human voice also came
to tell me that the telephone wires will never come again
and the cigarette of hastening heavens on his lips
he told me he will never come again
because he has a well like that of a young girl
she dresses his wounds and straightens out his kisses on his mouth
and with cold water and a swallow knits
the golden cord of her laughter
“... but you, button up this wind in your hair
sleep much better in trees
sleep more deeply in your dreams . . .”
It’s better for me to wait in the dark
I grow cold with love and tremble
I fall at the knees of dream, I repose within myself
I want no other truth anymore
I spread the grass of his caresses within me
I spread the savage face of pain within me
But you, why are you guarding half your soul?
Your hands opened up cliffs between us
the nets of happiness broke in our faces
and the stones of an evening came
and the night and the rain came like crates
Afterwards the umbrella broke, a black thunderstorm fell upon me
and thus did the rafters of the sky close me in
and all the centers of amusement are closed on the eighth night . . .
Toward where is this body stumbling
this black wing of music and a sunken caress?
Zéphy Dhorákis

THE WORLD OF MY SILENCE . . .

The world of my silence is not always absolute
I pretend not to see the thousand and more wrinkles of the year
the smeared lips
eyes that have stopped looking for a long time now
words that led to pine groves and forests
and at another time to black rivers again
I pretend as though I do not miss the hands plaited round the moon
and the seashells alive at the edge of waves
But the seadepths have swallowed the azure ring

A day ago we had a storm
The harbors bound behind the ships
and we playing cards in the dirty parlor
Sea and harbor had died
around us the houses were going away like funeral processions
They must be traveling somewhere else, I said, but not we
“How cold your hair is—behind your lips your laughter is a
blurred glass”
someone from the hold was singing an air
persistently “but you and I are now finally a pair
and with two propellers we shall wander the world through
I have already forgotten everything else—limbs that clamped
themselves on limbs
and the small-bodied woman behind the conflagration”

“. . . bathe in the lukewarm moon—it will do you good”
“but I’ve been walking for hours now in shallow waters . . .
how can I drown in this mood?”

Now I wander like one dead in the dazzle of beautiful things
INVENTIONS

I dream
of cherry blossoms,
the whistle in the song
of sailors, the
squirrels that see snow
coming. By day
I give support to the spines
they bear; by night
they throw me from a dreadful
height. As the feet
of my dreams
come and go, I find
another place
to live. Like strange
wardrobes,
like dead fish floating
they rise in my consciousness.
I wake up encumbered
with allegories.

DECLENSION

Having dared
so much forest
and green,
I rest beneath a parasol
of uncertainties.
I am the compromise,
a bridge
in the vacancy of time,
the black anchor
of the sun.
Birds pass
in the wind of
the forest.
Sleep
does not come easily
to the hand,
and yet,
I am
afraid
wherever the leverage disappears.

Rosalind MacPhee

EXERTION

Drifting
on the sea
of a bad translation,
I discover the silk
of midnight. I,
like a boatman, asleep
in the minutes
of fish, take my bearings
by the stars, along
their fine threads.
The waves
are a silence
which does not end:
words quietly traverse
beneath the surface.
There is a lifting of spray
as I capture the night
in the five
knuckles
of my sorcery. I attain the satisfaction
of dreams.
The dark opening
an orange
door:
the moon
captured in the exfoliation
of its night-
gown.
Tess Gallagher

SONG FOR THE NEXT RIVER

Someone is always telling you
you're too sure or not sure
enough. What can it mean?
I don't live anywhere.

Once I put my foot down.
I said it would be
that way. No one believed it.
They saw me looking away, how my hands
have bought everything
and found the next river
out of there.

Stop crying for me.
If I never take another step
this ground is beaten.

CROSSING

for Michael

I have looked at you
as one receives a letter mysteriously
over oceans, hands out of nowhere. And you
have looked back until the last possible moment
at the tulips brushing my throat, the wedding party
a nest of smiles behind us. Like applause
in a field, the summer lawn tilts away
and I have settled again on your arm,
a bird remembered for the sky it returns.

So much of what we come to
happens out of branches repeated
as the same water, reflections not broken
by the small blaze near a door, nor emptied
as faces taken first for their danger. And you,
who have believed me, what I seem,
give all there is of pardon. Each resemblance,
each moon so like a moon, opens
on a river you cross always alone.
Yet we gather like a forest, the joys
that fall to us even in mockery, the usual world
of homes and lights, its true disguises.

Tess Gallagher

SKIN GRAFT

With your one good hand
you find the word “feathers.”
You’re looking for a witness.
The lost hand stares like a turtle
baked alive in its plaster shell.
How you care for it, like a child,
held just below the breasts, or
cradled now in the lap of your gown.

On the white table an orange
would take you by the teeth.
I peel it, as though to be so able
were a way of listening to the wife
between us. Haven’t we seen her children
ablaze like a fence built again
and again around the house
of your rescue? Ashes
have warned: the hand is a torch, the mind
as easily cut off
as an ear.

Even a mouth
will heal; repeat the doors
you could not please, the matches
they took from you. Repeat
the tongues nesting in the heat. Say
escape is no scar, no matter
how the skin crawls back.
Ankie Peypers

SPRINGTOUWVERSJE

Nog zingt het kringlied door de lucht
een twee drie gevangen
een twee drie gevangen
aan een dorre boom van as
moeten zij nu hangen.

Ik sta aan de muur
want ik moet zoeken.
Uit oude boeken
springt de apokalypse mij op de rug.
Zo zal het zijn:
kinderkringen
die mij omringen
en ik kleuren van zomer en pijn
zal hun oordeel zijn.
God, het is laat.
Zet mij aan de muur.
Ik wil zoeken.

DE ANDERE

In mij is een jongere vrouw dan ik
met lichtere ogen en smaller handen.
Zij staat op kleine gespitste voeten
door mijn ogen naar buiten te zien
en kijkt naar de dagen, naar licht en naar kleuren,
ziet alles verwonderd, ziet alles heel schoon.
Beiden verlangen we, dat zij kon spreken
dat ze kon bewegen en leven en breken
de donkere, die om haar woont.
Ankie Peypers

JUMPROPE RHYME

Still the round rings through the air
one two three you’re trapped
one two three you’re trapped
in a barren tree of ashes
they must now hang there.

I stand against the wall
for I’m the one to go seek.
The apocalypse jumps on my back
from ancient books.
This is how it will be:
circles of children
encircling me
whose judgment will lie
in colors of summer and pain.
God, it is late.
Put me against the wall.
I want to go seek.

THE OTHER

A woman lives in me younger than I
with lighter eyes and slighter hands.
She stands on small and narrow feet
looking out through my eyes and
watches the days, the light and the hues,
sees all with surprise, sees splendor out there.
We both wish she could speak
she could move and could be and could break
the dark one who, enclosing her, lives.
Susan Musgrave

NIGHT WIND

Somewhere out there we are animals,
in the cold wind always blowing from death—
breathing its storm under my dry skin—
beating bone-music into the tight black drum of my fear.

Wind cast us in all directions—
my face collapsed in your eyes—
pieces of your heart came away in my hands.
I felt some strange cold distance of touch in your body I've entered a hundred times.

Wind gives no reason for taking only tears at the blind window as I lie silent against you.

Against you.
Our bodies know what the silence is.

The sound has no ending like a dream you never return to. I still remember that emptiness—the first whisper of darkness and the dead wind rising all night.
Evá Mylonás

HOLIDAYS

During the holidays
I received seven invitations to commit suicide
with the knives of strangers at my back
I drink fruit juice to my health
My luminous landscapes
my disobedient slaves
and the graves of my friends
are all so far behind me
The colors of lovers
the glimmering of hair
and the afternoon
are all so dark
During the holidays
they gave me a bright green dress
a live dress made of golden beetles
I wore my chlorophyll dress
Long rows of rotted leaves
beads
half-truths
are all so far behind me
that no connection no past exists
no remembrance exists
nor the sentiments of skeletons
I have no continuity
coherence
conventions.
Ida Vitale

RESPUESTA DEL DERVICHE

Quizás
la sabiduría consista
en alejarse si algo vibra
a nuestro movimiento
(porque la horrible araña
cae sobre la víctima)
para ver
   refleja como una estrella
la realidad distante.

De ese modo
  la situación
florece a nuestros ojos
   —o pierde
uno a uno
  sus pétalos—
como una especie vista
por primera vez.
Y juzgaremos triste,
  vano zurcido
que nada repara,
el dibujo trivial de nuestro gesto,
improbable amuleto
contra
la emigración de las certezas.
Ida Vitale

ANSWER OF THE DERVISH

Perhaps
wisdom consists
of retreating
when something vibrates with our rhythm
(for the horrid spider
falls upon its victim)
to perceive
    the distant reality
reflected like a star.

Thus
    the situation
blossoms before our eyes
    —or loses
one by one
    its petals—
as a strange species
seen for the first time.
Under our sad verdict,
    futile darnings
which repair nothing,
the insignificant sketch of our gesture,
a dubious amulet
against
the migration of certainties.
Lindiwe Mabuza

THIS DAY IS COSMIC

This day was eyes
searching
reading
eye reaching eyesembrace.
This day was ears
alip
all flesh poised
dancing rhythms
manured
this day
in welled galaxies—
labyrinthine dimensions of us in us
steam
fusions furious fins
and wings
and leaves
of blood-screaming Flames

That we held
could not hold alone
not alone
ignited hearts
globe afloat Zimbabwe mist—
minds, bodies, nails
all matter matters now
thence
with each ball-mouthed dolphin
leap
into my Congos hive
where water fire
clasp.
It is bottom deep . . .
It is side deep . . .
Where oven-sharp steel
still
spices with cosmic sparks
glowing
flowing
squirting
genes of volitions phoenix

*Lindiwe Mabuza*

**AGAPE: TOMORROW**

when they seal love
with smiling clusters of diamond
they never tell about the dark depths looming behind

when they say love
is like a red red rose
they never tell about the green thorns guarding the petals

nor can they who remember
fully relish the honeycomb
when the thumb swells blue from all the stings

but in the free and obedient hive of our growing love
worker bees honour
the rose
erect . . . the brilliance
of the future
partaking of today's dark thorns.
Colette Inez

MOUTHS GROW WELL

No merchant of cure
to prolong the light.
Out, old bulb
that lit each grain.

Yet mouths grow well
shaping O's.

They show me go on
in the nothing I suspect.

End means one
sun is ours,
end means I
as pronouns change.

The sun is sick,
it will die of itself
in the hospital sky.

I. It. What?
In the stammering earth
the answers have
no questioners.
Colette Inez

GRIP SONG

Grip, an anagram of prig.
Catholic twirp, I was
I suppose in the grip of the nuns,
prigs, all.

Target, arrow.
Where is the blue-eyed archer,
languorous hair
his hand like a breeze
pulls back?

My heart is a kite seeking its height
beyond the pine frame.

The archer pulls back.

His distance
draws my center in,
eye of the rose,
a chit of the sun
burning my veins

far from the fog
of nunnery beds
where I gripped the rose,
blood on my palms
like a sexless Christ
driven to death in a frame.
Chana Bloch

RIDES OF PASSAGE

Our father of mud
we built a house of you
made you a roof
In that dark square
we were safe

Our father of straw
we could see you burn
till the sky came through
till the cold
pushed through the broken spaces
Our father of ash

Our father
we carve your name
in the forest of stones
where you are
Our father of stone
wait for us
Gabriela Melinescu

SONG

Alone the man, alas, reflecting
tells his beloved: we are not one
though we turn the lamp off and bodies
fuse like the halves of a stone.

Alone the woman, alas, in confusion
tells her beloved: we are not not one
though we turn off the lamps and bodies
fuse like the halves of a stone.

They, knowing the flaw
and the harsh rule, grow sad,
of the two, only one shall win
and the other shall die solemn like the bull
brought into the fight.

MELANCHOLY SONG FOR SELMA LAGERLÖF

I don’t know anything yet,
you wild birds, white lattice!
As if from a sick bed
I look Northward,
come white bears, icebergs and howls,
out of which has flown the greeting.
I seize you white lattice,
and cry: I don’t know anything yet!
Suddenly, drenched, comes a child
with gray eyes, he knows
the flags of all countries,
knows the smoking chimney and the dynamite and the cry,
the time of one day and the time of the hopeless,
the shame of ill luck,
and just and honest
suddenly knows everything.
Maria Alberta Meneres

RELEVOS

Uma pálpebra é um meio
de ver o mundo. Não o olho
que esse escolhe o verde o mato
a água e deixa o contorno

Uma pálpebra comanda:
estada de carne de luz
por dentro guarda um relevo
feito de escama e azul

Proibe o sol o silêncio
Desliza em roda de neve
E quando o fugido salta
muros velhos e se mete

nos intervalos dos medos,
uma pálpebra é um meio
de ver o mundo vazio.
De coisas vazias cheio.

PRETEXTO

Porque não cai a noite, de uma vez?
—Custa viver assim aos encontrões!
Já sei de cor os passos que me cercam,
o silêncio que pede pelas ruas,
e o desenho de todos os portões.

Porque não cai a noite, de uma vez?
—Irritam-me estas horas penduradas
como frutos maduros que não tombam.

(E dentro em mim, ninguém vem desfazer
o novelo das tardes enroladas.)
SCULPTURED RELIEFS

An eyelid is a means
of seeing the world. Not the eye
for that chooses the green the forest
the water and leaves the outline

An eyelid is a commander;
sword of flesh of flame
it guards a relief inside
made up of blue and scales

It forbids the sun the silence
It slides on a snowy wheel
And when the fugitive vaults
over ancient walls and steals

into interstices of terrors,
an eyelid is a means
of seeing the empty world.
Full of empty things.

PRETEXT

Why does night not fall, once and for all?
—It hurts to live so with jostling.
I know by heart the footsteps around me,
the silence begging through the streets,
and the design of all the gateways.

Why does night not fall, once and for all?
—How irritating are these suspended hours
like ripened fruits that do not fall.

(And within me, no one comes to unwind
the twilights coiled into a ball.)
Laura Jensen

STEREOPTICAN

A.

A girl at prayer
and a kiss behind a fan
while a father looks in
at the door.

Fountains
and the buildings
of government;
market and kerchiefs
and a shuttered horse,
a horse
that has taken the veil.

In a tinted room
a tinted plant;
wake up
its deserted stairs
become so honored
by absence.

B.

The girl has drowned
in kisses
answered by a shotgun
and a running lover
broken through the glass

The horse stands
into its sure reward
and the tinted room
remains
half-focused forever,
half-gone
where a house would go
from such a promise;
fragile and when
a handprint
on the tinted sofa
breaks it,
it is dust
that is gone.

Laura Jensen

MIGRATION

Gusts of birds are rolling
through low clouds
snatching themselves from boughs
with a final guttural prayer.

They will be scattered without mercy
but scattered together
like their single feathers caught
in the bed of your grandmother.

She believed, to the ears
around the fireside, the first fire
of the winter, birds
go to the moon and nest there,
sleep in its dark side, sleep
in the dark, in peace, as children
do (when they are good) in peace
while grandmothers rock a while longer.

She dreams for them dreams, and dreams
for herself of the moving, bending
road of sweet clean wings. The feathers
of her childhood shift beneath her;

She and a drifting wing, the whirlwind
of winter, sway like a glider into eternity.
Rumiko Kora

CONTEMPLATION

I hear a hundred voices mutter and complain behind my back

I hear a thousand voices mutter and complain away ahead of me

I don't know how to still the thousand voices any more than the hundred voices —
I dissipate the voices in my own way

I select products painted with plastic that is their sweat and sell them these under an agreement with the military (their motors function without thinking)

Without me people might get along better but my own way works as well as theirs without me people might get along better but after all here am I

and so what matters is what I think — without me nothing would get done in the end without me there would be no progress and no happiness.
Rumiko Kora

AWAKE

After things have been crowding against one another and passing across me
the trees silently turn the backs of their leaves and take the world away from me.

Out of this void I extend a hand and touch the cheek of wood’s hot grain
a naked arm and beneath the earth circling round and round
the dark rocks.

(I escaped from futility
I followed the curves of the leaves of darkness towards the boundary beyond
because you were there
because you were not there.)

In the furnace fired by matter of various kinds
the eyes under their closed lids
seek speeds faster than the speed of dust falling at dawn.

Translucent morning light
has opened my eyelids from within and a crisis has just awakened.
My hand mixes the unknown breath of things with the unseen mornings of the earth.
Vesna Parun

A REST AT THE CROSSROAD

I ask life to lower a heavy dark curtain to the ground when the days and years of bitter light are over; the leaden rain to extinguish the sky and allow the old earth to cool off under our feet, and the young vegetation to cover it.

But the hands of time are transparent and airy as spiderweb, and when darkness is unlocked a thousand glow-worms light in the grass. They light up the forest, and pain is again sharply brilliant and festive. From its reflection the night trembles like a timid fire.

And the wind grows and ignites unknown deep sparks. Bouncing on all sides, they glitter and entangle themselves in the black cypresses, in the stormy arrows of the horizons past and present, until the unknown eyes of tomorrow.

Life is a small tent in the middle of a black forest, the fires of fate blaze around it intense sadness renews itself. The night is clear and transparent and visible in the unfathomable distance, in every stalk of death and in every flower of sorrow, in the wide land of loneliness, the infinite land of love.
Vesna Parun

MOTHER OF MAN

It would have been better if you had given birth to a black winter, o mother, than to me.

Better to a bear in a den, to a snake on a layer.
And better if you had kissed a stone instead of my face,
better if the udder of a beast had fed me than a woman.

And if you had given birth to a bird, o mother, it would have become a mother.
It would have been happy, it would have warmed another bird with its wing.
If you had born a tree, it would have come to life in the spring,
a linden-tree would have blossomed, and the reed become green from your song.

A lamb would have rested at your feet if you were a mother to a lamb.
If you were to coo and to cry, a loving little calf would have understood you.

This way you stand alone and alone share your silence with graves;
it is bitter to be a man as long as the knife and men are brothers.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

CAROL ADLER has had her poetry published in many literary journals.

ILSE AICHINGER is the author of one novel, numerous short stories, radio plays, and dialogues. In 1952 she won the Austrian State Prize for Literature.

NAZIK AL-MALA'IKA was born in 1923 in Baghdad. In addition to her poetry, she is also noted as a literary critic and essayist dealing with modern social and political problems.

ANGELA BALL graduated from Ohio University and is now working on her M.F.A. in creative writing at the University of Iowa Writers Workshop.

AMIN BANANI is Professor of Persian and History at the University of California, Los Angeles, and is collaborating with Jascha Kessler on a volume of selected poems by Forugh Farrokzad.

B.M. BENNANI is the editor of a new journal of poetry, translations and letters called *Paintbrush*.

CHANA BLOCH is the winner of the 1974 “Discovery Contest of the Poetry Center at the 92nd Street YM-YWHA in New York.” She is now teaching at Mills College.

EMILY BORENSTEIN received an M.A. in English from N.Y.U. Her poems have appeared in *Epos, Poetry Venture* and others.

LISA BRADFORD has published translations of several Argentinian poets.

NINA CASSIAN was born in Romania in 1924. She has published over fifteen volumes of poetry as well as many translations, especially from the German.

ANDREE CHEDID was born in Cairo in 1921. She now lives in Paris where she has written ten books of poems, seven novels, and three plays since 1950.


NADIA CHRISTENSEN recently completed a translation of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish women poets for a Penguin Books anthology.

CAROLE G. CLEMENS teaches at New York University. She was born in Youngstown, Ohio.
LUCILLE CLIFTON was born in Depew, New York in 1936. Her first book of poetry is titled *Good Times*.


CHRISTINE COTTON has published translations from French and Spanish. She recently completed an English translation of Dominque de Roux's novel, *Yellow House*.

MADELINE DeFREES is a Professor of English in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Montana.

ZEPHY DHORAKIS was born in Athens in 1939. She has published ten books of poetry.

HILDE DOMIN has published poetry, fiction, and essays. Her poetry has been translated into English, Italian, Romanian, Spanish and Hungarian.

MARGUERITE DORIAN is a native of Bucharest, Romania where she has published a volume of poetry. Her novel, *A Ride on the Milky Way*, is in English translation.

VYTAS DUKAS is Professor of Russian and chairman of the Russian and East European Studies Department at San Diego State.

PATRICIA RENEE EWING is a young Canadian poet from Montreal whose work has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies.

FORUGH FARROKHZAD was born in 1934 in Tehran, Persia. She has published four volumes of verse. In addition, she co-directed her own film script, *The House in Black*, in 1964.

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