

Translated by Meg Taylor

Please

We were deluged
and washed with the waters of Noah's flood
we were soaked through
to the skin of our hearts

Longing for a landscape
this side of the border of tears
doesn't work
longing to hold on to spring blossom
longing to remain unscathed
doesn't work

What works is to ask
please
that at sunrise the dove
will bring the olive branch
that the fruit will be as colourful
as the blossom
that even the rose petals on the ground
can become a shining crown

And that we, out of the flood
out of the lions den and the
fiery furnace
will be released
renewing ourselves
even more wounded and even more healed.

Your mouth on mine

Your mouth on mine.
I lose all outline.
Thousands of tiny blossoms
unfurl
all over my body.

You kissed me tenderly
and went.

Dry shame like a fire
is red
on my belly and breasts.

Passing Landscape

We must be able to go away
and yet be like a tree
rooted in the earth
standing fast while the landscape passes.
We must hold our breath
until the wind dies down
and different air starts to encircle us
until the play of light and shade
of green and blue
shows the old pattern
and we are home

wherever that may be
and able to sit down and lean against it
as if it were the gravestone of
our mother.

Etiquette for Everywhere

They spit in your face
wrap a cloud around you
say its raining.

A rain wet face
is publicly acceptable
even a tear soaked one.

The abused
make light of it
so they may be forgiven.

Certainly this was known to every
Jew
in the Third Reich.

Only the hanged
hung there
bothersome to look at

and were thrashed
while dying
for their dying.

I want you

Freedom
I want you
roughed up with sandpaper
you smooth one

(the one I mean
my
our
freedom from and freedom to)

slave to fashion

You are licked
with pointed tongues
until you are all round
a sphere
on all the cloths

This freedom word
that I want to rough up
I want to stick glass splinters into you
to make you hard on the tongue
nobody is ball

You

and other
words I want to stick glass splinters in
like Confucius
the old Chinaman
commands

The square bowl he says
must
have corners
he says
or the state will collapse

Nothing else he says
is necessary
call
the round round
and the square square

Three Ways of Transcribing Poems

1

I wish to write
in clear letters
on a dry riverbed
a white ribbon of pebbles
seen from afar
or a scree slope
rubble
sliding under my lines
slipping away
so that the however
of the thorny life of my words
be the however of each letter

2

Little letters
precise ones
so that the words come quietly
so that the words sneak in
so that you have to go there
towards the words
to look for them in the white
paper
quietly
you dont notice them entering
through the pores
sweat that runs inwards

Fear
mine
ours
and the however of each letter

I want a strip of paper
 as big as me
 one metre sixty
 on it a poem
 that screams
 when someone passes by
 screams in black letters
 demands the impossible
 moral courage for example
 that bravery which no animal has
 fellow suffering for example
 solidarity rather than being herded
 foreign-words
 made at home in deed

Human
 animal with moral courage
 human
 animal that knows fellow suffering
 human foreignword-animal word-animal
 animal
 that writes poems
 poem
 that demands the impossible
 of everyone who passes by
 urgently
 peremptorily
 as if its yelling
 drink Coca-Cola

My sex is trembling

My sex is trembling
 like a little bird
 under the touch of your gaze.

Your hands a tender breeze
 on my body.
 All my guards flee.

You open the last door.
 I am so shocked
 with happiness
 that all sleep becomes thin
 like a well worn cloth.

Eskimobird

Often
 when I fall asleep
 I feel beneath me
 the swaying take-off
 of the great Eskimobird
 seeking its course

like a hesitant plane.

I lie on its back
between its wings
but you,
a multi-formed animal,
sit on the tail of the bird
and fly with me
overarching me
and my breath
cant escape you.

Words

Words are ripe pomegranates
they fall to earth
and open themselves.
The inner will be turned outwards
the fruit exposes its secret
and shows its seed.
A new secret.

Get up Abel

Get up Abel
it must be played anew

it must be played anew every day

every day the answer must stay in front of us

yes must be an option

if you dont get up Abel
how can the answer
to this singularly important question
ever be changed

we can shut all the churches
and get rid of all the law books
in all the languages of the earth
if only youd get up
and take back
that first wrong answer
to the only question
that matters

get up
so that Cain says
so that he can say
I am your keeper
brother
how can I not be your keeper

Get up every day
so that we keep it in front of us
this Yes I am here

I
your brother

So that the children of Abel
are no longer afraid
because Cain isn't Cain anymore

I write this
I a child of Abel
afraid every day
of the answer
the air in my lungs runs out
as I wait for the answer

Get up Abel
so that it can begin differently
between us all

The fires that burn
the fire that burns on the earth
shall be Abels fire

And on the tail of the rocket
shall be Abels fires

Build me a House

The wind comes.

The wind that combs the flowers
and turns the blossoms into butterflies
that lets pigeons climb out of old paper
in the canyons of Manhattan
skywards right up to the tenth floor
and smashes the migrating birds
against the towers of the skyscrapers.

The wind comes,
the salty wind
that drives us across the sea
and throws us on to the beach
like jellyfish
that are going to be swept out again.
The wind comes.
Hold me tight.

Oh, my light body made of sand
formed according to the eternal image, only
out of sand.
The wind comes
and takes away a finger
the water comes
and ploughs small furrows on to me.
But the wind
lays my heart free
- the twittering red bird
behind the ribcage

and it burns the skin of my heart
with its saltpetre breath.
Oh, my body made of sand!
Hold me tight
hold my body made of sand.

Let us go inland
where the little plants anchor the earth.
I want a solid floor
green, knotted from roots
like a mat.
Saw up the tree
take stones
and build me a house.
A little house
with a white wall
for the evening sun
and a well to be a mirror
for the moon
so that it doesnt
get lost
over the sea.
A house
near an apple tree
or an olive tree
where the wind
will go by
like a hunter whose quarry
is not
us.

A Poem

A poem is a frozen moment
melted by each reader for themselves
to flow into the here and now.

Word and Thing

Word and thing
lay tightly
side by side
the same
body warmth
in thing and
word.

Breaking out from here for Paul Celan, Peter Szondi, Jean Amery who didnt want to live any more.

The rope
knotted prison style from bed sheets
bed sheets on which I cried
I wind it round myself
divers rope
around my body
I jump off
I dive
through
away from the day

I surface
on the other side of the earth

.
There I want
to breathe freer
there I want to invent an alphabet
of harder working letters

Bird Lament

A bird without feet is the lament
no branch, no hand, no nest.
A bird which flies itself sore
in the tightness
a bird which gets lost
in the wideness
a bird which drowns
in the sea.
A bird
which is a bird
which is a stone
which screams.

A mute bird
which no one hears.

Two Doors

Only two doors
are bolted.
All the others invite you in
and open with the softest
pressure of your curiosity.

Only these doors are
so hard to open
that your strength runs out.
No joiner comes and
planes them down and oils
the stubborn bolts.

The door which closed
behind you and you
outside.
The door which locked
before you and you
inside.

Conversation with my slippers

The abandoned shoes
left behind
on the edge
of a crater
of a river
of a bed
these shoes
from which the feet
went away

on an edge
barefoot
in the shoeless and clothesless land

My slippers
which look at me
they sit by my bed
and look at me
side by side
see how they look at me
these tender beasts
I kneel down
and stroke
my frightened
slippers
fur

Departure from Spain

I love this barren land
and want to take nothing.

Only the time
to be alone
with time.

And to look at a cloud
or the blanching
of the evening.

With the longing for always
and the fear
of today.

Written in the Rain

If we were bees
who can feel the sun
through the cloudy sky
who find their way
to the blossom
and never lose direction,
our fields would be forever
shining
however short our life
we would seldom cry.

Orienteering

My heart, this
sunflower
searching
for the light.
Which
of the long gone
shimmerings
will you raise your head to
in the dark days?

April

The world smells sweetly
of yesterday.
Scent is lasting.

You open the window.
All springs
come inside with this one.

Spring is more
than green leaves.
One kiss contains all kisses.

Always this shining smooth
sky above the city
to which the streets all flow.

You know
winter and pain
are nothing: they don't kill.

The air which smells sweetly today
of yesterday
is that which smelt sweetly of today.

House without Windows

Pain coffins us in
in a house without windows.
The sun which opens the flowers
shows its edges
even more clearly.
It is a die of silence
in the night.

Comfort
which finds no windows and no doors
and wants to come in
bitterly gathers kindling.
It wants to force a miracle
and sets fire to
the house of pain.

Distance

The distance
of a sick person
from one who sits by them

is no greater
than the continents
from each other.

Infinitely far.

Only this
hand in hand.

And yet it only works

Amongst the walking.

The Tree Blooms Nevertheless

The tree blooms nevertheless
Even on the way to execution
trees have always bloomed

The wind drives
cherry blossom and
butterflies
even into the bed
of the condemned

They keep going
the blossom holders
in bright rows
without turning their heads

Some say a word to you
or you think they speak
in passing
because it is so still

Whoever meets it

Whoever meets it
will be lifted up
as if by a huge crane
and set down
where nothing holds true
where no road
leads from yesterday to tomorrow.
Buttons, jewellery and colour
will be swept
with a broom
from his clothes.
Then he will be stripped
and put on show.
Hostile hands
feel his hips.
Hes pressure cooked
in tears
in the slow kitchens of time
until the flesh
on his bones becomes tender.
He gets pressed through the finest
sieves of pain
and strained through
pitiless cloths
which let nothing through
and on which the last grain of
self respect
is left behind.
He gets chosen
and punished
and is made to eat the dust

off the soles of the disappointed
on all the country lanes of betrayal
and as its harvest time
his blood
shall fertilise the large vines
and protect them from the frost.

But sometimes
if he is lucky
(though through no understandable
merit
just as he was not put outside
for any known fault
but simply because he was on hand)
he will be reprieved
by the unknown
all powerful judge
as long as there is time.
Then he gets rediscovered
like a new continent
or a crucifix
after an air-raid
in a rubble filled shelter.
Its as though the points are set
his nowhere
is coupled
to the old landscape
like a carriage shunted
on to a train
from a dead end.
Under the rainbowed gate
on a certain day of the calendar
that is thick with future
a tender yesterday
recognises him and opens its arms
to receive him.

No cat with nine lives
no lizard and no starfish
whose lost limb grows back
no severed worm
is as tough as the man
who has been placed
in the sun
of love and hope.
His fear fades
like the marks of the branding iron
or the scars of the wounds
from his body.
His defoliated
tree of joy
grows new shoots
and even the bark of trust
slowly grows back.
He gets used to the altered
ploughed image
in the mirror
he oils his skin
and covers the impudent
skeleton man
with a new layer of fat

until he no longer
smells strange
to everyone.
And quite unremarked
maybe on a holiday
or on a birthday
he no longer sits
only on the edge
of the offered chair
as if on the run
or as if it has
wormeaten legs
but he sits
with his kin at the table
and is at home
and almost
safe
and delights in
the gifts
and loves what is borrowed
more than what is owned
and every day
is for him
surprisingly present
so luminously light
and clearly bordered
like the span
between the outspread
pinions
of a gliding bird.

The fearful time lag
of the test
sinks in.
The turnpikes
on all frontiers
are moved back
into brightness.
But the substance
of the self
is as altered
as the metal that comes out of the furnace.
Or its as if
from the tenth or twentieth floor
- the difference is marginal
for a *salto mortale*
without a safety net
hes fallen on his feet
in the middle of Times Square
and has escaped
the muzzles of the oncoming cars
by the skin of his teeth
just before the lights turn red.
And so a certain
birdlike lightness
has stayed with him.
*

But you
who meet him
on every street

you who break
bread with him
bend down and stroke
the delicate moss on the ground
without ruffling it
stroke the little animal
without making it flinch.
Lay your hand protectively
on the head of a child,
let it be kissed
by the tender mouth
of the beloved,
or hold it
as under a tap
under the flowing gold
of the afternoon sun
so that it becomes transparent
and completely useless
at lending a hand
in the building
of barbed wire hells
whether public
or intimate
and so that it never
calls out me too
when panic is handing out
its fearful weapons
and never
gets to hold
the great iron rod
that cuts through
the Other
as through foam.
And that it never
comes home to you
in the evening
like a retriever
with a pheasant
or a little hare
the booty of its instinct
laying for you
the skin of a you
on your table.

So that
when on the last day
it lies before you
on the bedspread
like a pale flower
faded
but not quite as light
and not quite as pure
but like a human hand
which gets stained
and washed
and stained again
you thank it
and say
farewell my hand.

You were a loving
link
between me and the world.

Five Songs of Emigration

Here

Unwanted children
my words
freeze.

Come
I want to place
you
on my warm
fingertips
butterflies in the winter.

The sun
pale as a moon
shines here as well
in this land
where we savour our difference
to the end.

Poem of Emigration

The objects see me come
barefoot
I give them their freedom again
my bed that wanted to be my bed
my table
the walls that had promised to wait for me
like the walls of childhood.
My gentle objects
you wanted to collect me.

Objects
you watch me go.

I Escape to the Smallest Thing

I escape to the smallest thing
the eternity of the moss
moist
finger-sized
from childhood
till now.

I Gulliver
lay my face in this moss
I stand up
Gulliver
whose stride
goes beyond the frontier of this land.

No Time for Adventure

When your suburbs are the ends of the world

you know the smell
you place the letters next to each other
they open
and you go in
not
into breadth
into a different narrowness.

Out of your door
and then where to?
Dont you make yourself at home
like everyone else
lonely
like everyone else
in the jaws of the tiger?

No, there is no time
for adventure.

Silence and Exile

Unlosable exile
you carry it with you
you slip into it
folded labyrinth
desert
pocket sized.

On the Other Side of the Moon

On the other side of the moon
your real days
go
shrouded in golden clothes
they live
as you would
in the light
banished from here
chased away
they wander there
you know they are yours.

But you welcome
morning after morning
their deputies:
stranger
than any strange land.
You know
yours
are wandering in the light
day after day
they go alongside you
only on the other side of the moon.

This Is Not It

This is not it
that we are turned
from evening to morning
to evening
on a sphere which we now know
is blue
which we see turning itself

this is not it

we are hanging head first into emptiness
we are used to it

this is not it the conveyor belt which we are glued to
from our manufacture in the womb
from our packaging in
boxes of all sizes and kinds
together with others
and at last in the smallest
darkest
alone
in the smallest single cell
as tight as the womb as windowless

we are used to it

Didnt someone say
these people and those people
are used to being tortured

This is not it
we signed for all that a long time ago
every night it gets signed
for the children of every night
the deal is made on the bed sheets
sheets for birthing
shrouds for the dead

You get turned on a blue sphere
head first from light into darkness
without noticing
like the conveyor belt
from loneliness to loneliness
your handful of ashes

this is not it
although this is it
you forget it in nice weather
the smallest conveyor belt is it
this is not visible
this isnt signed
this happens daily

On the great crater
from which we all have to descend
only you are lower down
I am still higher up on the rim

said an overseer in the concentration camp
to those people still alive
people who shovelled their own pit
before their execution
said he the executioner
You are nearer the rim

No one knows how near we are to the rim
that it turns
it turns itself
he was above and shoved them down
with this consolation

Autumn Eyes

Press yourself close
to the ground.

The earth
still smells of summer
and your body
still smells of love.

But the grass
is already yellowed above you.
The wind is cold
and full of thistledown.

And the dream which waylays you
shadow-footed
your dream
has autumn eyes.

Return

My feet were wondering
that next to them feet walked
which didnt wonder.

I who walk barefoot
and leave no track
I always look at peoples shoes.

But the paths celebrated
meeting again
with my shy feet.

In February
by my childhood home there bloomed
an almond tree.

I had dreamt
it would bloom.

Unicorn

Joy
the most modest of animals
this gentle unicorn

so quiet
no one hears it
when it comes, when it goes
my tame animal
joy

when it is thirsty
it licks the tears
of my dreams.

Travelling Light

Dont get used to it.
You mustnt get used to it.
A rose is a rose.
But a home
is not a home.

Say no to the lapdog objects
which wag their tails at you
from shop windows.
Theyre wrong. You
dont smell of permanence.

One spoon is better than two.
Hang it round your neck
you may have one
because its too difficult to scoop up
hot things with your hand.

Sugar would run through your fingers
like solace
like a wish
on the day
it comes true.

You may have one spoon
one rose
perhaps one heart
and, perhaps,
one grave.

Dangerous Spoon

You eat remembrance
with the spoon of forgetting.

It is a wicked spoon with which you eat
a spoon which consumes the food and the eater

until a bowl of shadows
is all that is left to you

in your shadow hand.

The Golden Rope

Nothing is as fleeting
as an encounter.

We play like children
we invite and reject
as if we had forever.
We joke with farewells
we collect tears like marbles
and check whether knives cut.
Too soon your name
is called.
Too soon playtime
is over.

Scared
we hold on tightly
to the golden rope
and resist the departure.
But it breaks.
We drift outwards:
away from the same town
away from the same world
under the same
all intermingling
earth.