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## Three candles

*Featured poet*

# Charles Fishman

# Charles Fishman: Selected Poems

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*Credits:*

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"Wyoming Autumn" first appeared in New Works Review (<http://www.new-works.org/>).

"Blue Bicycles" first appeared in the chapbook *Zoom* (Singular Speech Press, 1990).

"After Darkness" first appeared in New Works Review (<http://www.new-works.org/>).

"Army Doctor – Unit 731" first appeared in Poetry Porch (<http://www.poetryporch.com>).

"The Silence" received the Ann Stanford Poetry Award from Southern California Anthology in 1996 & was published in SCA in 1997.

"Jerusalem Snow" first appeared in International Quarterly.

"Praying for My Sister" first appeared in Poetry Porch (<http://www.poetryporch.com>).

"Lament for Federico García Lorca" won the Eve of St. Agnes Poetry Award from Negative Capability in 1998 & was published by The Abiko Quarterly in 1999.

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## Bronx '47

War over: no memory of war  
no memory of little sister  
chewing brown hair  
2 years *before television*  
listening behind closed doors  
awed by extraterran contrails  
under closed lids  
(when I opened my eyes not one would  
disappear)  
Year of deep snow fantasies of my body  
vaulting over White Castle like Bellerophon  
manic and invisible lying down iced  
and naked in the fish market  
my arms buried  
up to the wrist  
in sawdust  
like Hasidic dancers up to their souls  
in trance  
Lost in the night gliding  
with pigeons white  
flight feathers fanned  
open  
the wind iridescent brotherly—  
someone's attenuated trembling wand  
extended indefinitely  
into the air  
Summer in the false country of New Jersey:  
cow-udder warm  
mornings thick  
with pollen  
lazing back into the cool water bed  
of the earth  
City nights, a density of life:  
*GAS HEATS BEST* against  
a gray sky  
under it, stoop ball against concrete  
—short pants king of Wheeler Avenue  
morning glories opening  
inside my hands  
chalking fences: *I HATE YOU! I LOVE YOU!*  
*WORLD!*

# Spectrum Elegy

*For Louis Rose*

Ribbon of violet draped on shoulders, gun  
in your lunchbox, cap set straight—you might  
have died against metal, filaments of bright steel  
arrayed at your chest like blades of shrapnel.  
You might have skidded by the hospital  
and greeted death with a bomb's quick violence.

Makeshift ghost, you ransacked country roads  
in silence intense and deep as indigo  
and shuddered the cricket pumpkin dark  
with bedsheets flashlit from beneath  
as if your demon's breath were lightning! Uncle,  
you prankster, did you know the fright you pirated  
was treasure rich and inviolate as midnight snow?

The blue of your mechanic's veins  
terrified a battery of fingermen who swore  
to get you juiced-up and egotripping and raw  
with energy until you dared swing an immigrant  
Yid fist at America. I loved you because you kicked  
fascisti horsemen in the balls and hung  
your faith out when the deathwinds blew.

No one ever grew green with desire for you:  
you refused to stay planted long enough  
and drew your wiry roots out, our soiled imaginings  
still clinging, and flew head-on into the first  
clean wind. Aerobic and stellar, you broke into  
dare-Jesus dancing that clicked like a gun's safety  
and jagged a thin lip of tin against time's grain.

I snagged a loop of my soul on your machine,  
yellow taxi trafficking in images:  
meter down but ticking-off its nickels in your gut  
where the true toll was. You rattled away on the crazed  
cobblestones of the 30's: love-runner and chief itinerant cook—  
dishing up whores, caches of cool wine, stashed bread.  
At the end of your day's run the dazed guards bellowed.

You were a genius at cards: *Play this one!* you'd say,  
or *Sit still!* A tease of love and blood, you'd poker-  
face it till the flood swept our game away: the world  
gone orange suddenly. But we knew your anger was a bluff—  
it was the game inside that fooled us, under your mask,  
where the cancer waited, then played its ace-high flush

against your round-the-corner straight.

Then the blood came and kept coming, thickly red  
and strange. They could do so little. You bled slowly  
from my head, thin ribbons of pain. I couldn't hear  
what was said when they slipped your body into the bare rip  
in the earth like a boy's ruined bicycle. The heat  
in my chest brooded like a hen tending a cracked egg.

## A Six-Pointed Star

1

Today you are real, child-to-be.  
You kick at the walls of your prison house,  
splintering the nerves at the tips  
of my fingers—

When I touch my scalp  
blood wells up  
as if a small taproot  
of terror  
has become unplugged.

2

I bend over your crib:  
you still breathe, yes! yes!  
The vaporizer whirrs  
like a spaceship,  
blows cool wet air—  
a kind of invisible ray  
potent with the numb murder  
of sleep.

Your face is beautiful in the dim light  
blowing in from the hallway:  
your mouth open so I can see your few teeth,  
small bits of your self that will last.  
You are the continuance, you make Auschwitz  
less of a mockery.

3

Your body is small but perfect,  
each pout and dip of flesh  
gleaming with soapy water.

When I scrub your limbs  
I can see there is hair on them  
already, a light down of human  
feathers.

You expose yourself so readily  
my blood gathers,  
throbbing painfully, a thumb  
struck by a hammer.

It is all I can handle to towel  
you dry.

4

Today in the park  
we walked away from your mother:  
you ran ahead into the open field,  
intent under your snow hood  
as the winter sun.

I tossed you the ball under  
hand, had to tell you to watch it  
fall toward you like a tiny comet:  
a dozen times before we could take  
our eyes off each other.

5

Already you fly too far  
from me, your life rising  
quietly from your skull  
like hair warming in sunlight.

The swing holds you up  
like a gallows, the full weight  
of your childhood suspended  
on the crosspiece . . .

I push you out again,  
watching you drift beyond my reach  
on that life raft, pulled back  
toward me by your small  
gravity.

Each time I push you out  
you return more slowly,  
with the weight of your bones  
towing against you.

6

You brush your hair  
little Jew girl—  
already the dark roots  
flame out,  
reach higher with each stroke.

How well you've learned  
what I could not teach you:  
you wear the star  
inside,  
ashamed to state too clearly  
who you are.

Daughter,



I see the knowledge of pain  
guide your soft white arm . . .  
your pointed fear  
puts out my eyes.

## European Movements

Córdoba to Hamburg Bordeaux to  
Strasbourg Marseilles to Rome Bucharest  
to Belgrade Kalisz to Lublin Vienna to  
Kishinev Cracow to Lvov Nomads,  
why so restless? Did you hear the voice  
of Midsummer lightning? All that back-  
breaking portage: Granada to Corfu Genoa  
to Salonika, tireless! Always hurrying  
from one black patch to another: Cologne  
to Bialystok Prague to Kiev Lisbon to  
Amsterdam Tallinn to Polotsk: ceaseless  
in your translations! Dear malcontents,  
unsettled on dark nights under the moon  
of horses: Soncino to Posen Chernigov  
to Frankfurt Avignon to Tarnopol Berdichev  
to Worms Exiles! Black Sea transports  
Crimea Express Zhitomir to Copenhagen  
Helsinki to Antwerp Starodub to Brest  
whirling lights clustered at Satmar in  
the galaxy of Warsaw starstreams time  
travelers on the dead continent wrapped  
in languages in the Law's endless bindings  
Why didn't you stay put in the whale's  
belly? Why didn't you pull the white sky  
of silence over your heads? Did the golden  
bells of Chelmno charm you? the meadow flowers  
of Majdanek bend their fiery cups? Did you  
rise to the black psalteries of Ravensbrück?  
Wanderers! such desire for a life of Christian  
culture! such anointings with sacred oils,  
bathings in blessed waters!

## Landscape after Battle

*For Andrzej Wajda*

To a nocturne accompaniment—  
Chopin—they perform *Liberation*.  
As they starved to Vivaldi.  
As they burned to Bach.

You ask us to remember when a corpse  
was esteemed 'incompletely processed'  
that could not, of itself, rise  
above the ashfields . . . and dance.

Andrzej, you understand the silence  
of your poets: self-hate and catechetical  
obedience; violent, unassimilable grief.

Life should taste sweet, milk warm  
from the nipple, but in your language  
it is salt and blood.

You give us a victim to remind us why we speak.

Her name is Nina and—offkey—she sings,  
and we are moved by her bare legs  
and her loose hair, and we are almost  
ready to follow . . . *Red leaves*

*build soft mounds under the emptying trees*

Poland, here is your Jew!  
She will swallow the wafer, translucent  
as pale skin, and kiss your numb body  
—unkosher meat!

And she will draw you out of your Christ-  
blazoned prison, until each bloodied finger  
wakens from its dream, until your strangled  
voice bears witness:

*One life is history enough to mourn.*

## The Death Mazurka

It was late—late in the silence—  
yet a mangled tune still rose  
as if from a needle trapped  
in a warped and spinning groove:  
an inarticulate moan  
fragmented out of sense  
but insistent it be known.

Footfalls turned me around:  
a troupe of dancers spun  
and kicked and dipped as one—  
three score minus one,  
and that *one* danced alone.  
I watched them skip and prance  
but followed only her.

And yes, the drum was swift  
and kept a lively beat,  
and violins sang sweet  
then stridently miaoued—  
a mocking sliding note.  
She alone danced on  
uncoupled, incomplete.

But the trumpets shrilled their tongues  
and the saxophones crooned deep  
and cymbals scoured the night  
to a clashing brassy gleam.  
How the women's earrings shined!  
like sparks from a whirling fire  
that never would be ash.

Then the men whisked off their hats  
and bowed to the slide trombone  
as though it sat enshrined.  
But still *she* danced alone  
at the edge of the wheeling ring:  
I could feel the horizon tilt  
when she veered close to me.

Then she turned then I then the night  
blew back forty years:  
I stood in a desolate place,  
a reservoir of death  
—I could kneel anywhere and drink!  
Yes, here was the shul in its bones  
and here *Judenrein Square*

and here a few scorched teeth  
from some martyred, unknown saint.  
The sky was a scroll of pain  
—each star a sacred name!  
I saw through time in that light.  
But I turned and blood rained down  
and I turned and dipped and drank

and could not take my fill:  
I yearned to find her there.  
And I turned toward darkness again  
where dancers in masks like skulls  
twirled in smoke and fire,  
whirled in fire and smoke.

*Now!* screamed the violins.  
And she was near as my heart  
as we clasped each other and turned.  
And *Now!* they shrieked. And *Now!*

## Broich's Boat

It was Frank Broich's boat, 32 footer,  
3 masts and inboard engines, he'd built  
with his own hands It was the boat  
and the man—he was the *image* capable, successful,  
sarcastic, brutal—a father—and you, father,  
were painfully like him, only less educated, less able  
to manipulate the world, but just as violent: quick to whip  
off your belt and threaten my life over practically  
nothing. You were broad, brawny, bone-weary and bone-  
angry from the bequeathed indecencies of your life.

It was Broich's boat that armed me for the next day  
at school, for the failure of being your son,  
for the shame-faced singularity of growing up  
Those were good hours we spent aboard  
that boat: our shared mission, to bring back  
a haul of snappers or porgies, white-bellied winter  
flounder or "doormat" fluke, to find the mother lode  
of fighting blues. Near the buoy, just off the rocks,  
on the far side of the toll bridge, the rip tide  
would listen to our wills and what we wanted—  
adventure, friendship, freedom, even love—might leap  
from the green-black swells of ocean and be hooked.

\*        \*

Father, I want to stand again at starboard as the boat  
rocks down, to feel that sluicing energy tear through me  
with each ripping nibble, the caution to wait, to pay  
out line, the bait taken and run with, the smell of sea  
brine, spider crabs, blood worms drenching—soaking—us,  
driving up into our floating bodies.

It is that connection with you I want again, that giving  
of your knowledge, your desire—I want to learn from you  
again, not a boy at a man's side, anchored by his weight,  
his steadiness, but a man in need of you, aware of you.  
Before you die, father, fish with me again, share  
your secrets: let the tide of our love turn.

## **Birthd ay Present**

Will you surprise me or will you  
give me what I want? If surprise  
seems in order, please not another  
tie, another book, another hair-shirt  
hero, another war, another liar  
for president, another lost and damaged  
God. Two hundred golden beetles  
circling my forehead round  
or twelve locusts leaning from my own  
right arm . . . can you arrange  
such gifts? Can you cause the book  
of my life to be sent, all mysteries  
cleared up? or the long shelf of my lives  
past? Can you give me the sky's tilt  
and luminosity on the night I was born?  
Will you surprise me or give me what  
I want? And if my desire matters,  
can you give me back my trust? the child's  
holy at-one-ness, unselfconscious love?  
Can you put meaning back into my heart?  
Will you place words in my father's mouth,  
bless my mother with comprehension?  
Can you present me with grandmothers?  
or permit me the world as it was  
when to live on this planet, this earth,  
was a cat's leap from a branch—grace  
and clarity? Didn't we have a contract,  
an honorable agreement? I would walk  
in the palm of your hand, a spirit  
at peace, lifted and carried, being himself  
the gift.

## New Orleans Winter

1

Mississippi,  
I bring greetings  
from the old gods:  
from the cold voodoo  
of the north,  
this torch-song

River, your old dukedom  
simmers in chemical haze

Crosses of black  
fire shimmy  
under the sign  
of the fish

Greetings to you,  
seething gumbo!

2

Rose at my ear, I fall  
through a dream of cripples,  
moral acrobats crawling  
alleys of dead slave history

Jazz-dazed, I sink to my thighs  
in hot sauce, dark cornet riffs  
pulsing brass and jasmine,  
raw oyster bars and bead-ghosts  
on maimed firework horses

City, you open my mouth  
and say *Drink! Here*  
*is my heart! Here*  
*the best vein!* and I  
put my lips to the throat  
that gleams in copper darkness,

my tongue on the salty skin,  
the sweet milky coffee  
of the breasts, the bittersweet pulp  
laid open

3

Even in this cold, you are hot  
glow, fat salamander colors:  
nipple-tassel purple, DeChirico



orange and red:

a caravan of drag queens in ball  
gowns, sequined limousines,  
white beard of the horn man,  
the sure-cure of gin

Even in this cold, you grin  
*Drink this!* you say, *Drink*  
*till you gasp awake!*

4

If the new order comes, here  
is where it will enter:  
this city of cool women and hot  
jazz, food for the fire gods:  
a jalopeña pepper  
that will unpetal  
in Jackson Square  
and swallow Baton Rouge  
with its sticky sepals:

a jambalaya garden teeming  
with booze and sex and bad  
politics

5

River,  
you breathe on my neck  
your last mouthful of catfish

## A Great Silence Has Descended

after Peter Matthiessen's **African Silences**

In Senegal, the land shimmers  
in the hot breath of the *harmattan*,  
high pale stalky grass burns  
near every village, and the earth  
is black. In Gambia, bamboo  
the brown color of burning white  
paper sprouts from a crust of stone.  
Everywhere, dead villages, waste-  
land, emptiness. Later, under  
the stars, an enormous burning tree  
of the doomed African forest.

Then the forest opens, the bank  
of a river rises up to meet us, travellers  
in the late twentieth century of death:  
a flute, melodious and wistful, high  
and unceasing, sings out, dance  
of the forest ghosts. At Ouazamon,  
small stone hearths, gourd calabashes  
of shining bronze, long wood ladles  
and stone pestles laid out on the swept earth  
like ancient art. At the forest edge,  
birds: dark hornbills, red-eyed doves, pygmy  
kingfishers, cattle egrets like effigies  
of carved snow. Behind them, the dark smoke  
of a fire.

\*            \*

Zaire: pretty graveyard in a grove  
of tall mimosas   hibiscus in blossom:  
a dark, sinister lavender   sunlit sun-  
bird on a bare limb. Tambourine doves hurl  
their sad falling notes   then Lualaba,  
the Congo: green as a blood-green sea, green  
as the beak of a parrot god   The silver  
limbs of a dead tree across the Dungu  
are decked with a winged red inflorescence.

In the late twentieth century, the scars  
of slavery glow in every clearing, the smell  
of urine, death, anger, tyranny, and decay  
drift like a mist over the green and the arid  
lands. In the C.A.R., an emperor orders  
the murder of thirty thousand elephants  
by helicopter gunship   for the sickness

of deposed kings and their impotent admirers  
the white and the black rhino are butchered  
and de-horned the bush elephant is coaxed  
toward extinction with buzz saws and AK-47s.

In the Congo Basin, a great silence has descended,  
but a sudden burst of reedbuck out of a thicket  
in the grassy swale and the heart leaps again—  
like a male diadem butterfly with big white dots  
on black wings, it flutters back to life.

\*       \*

Ever more quietly and deeply, we move  
into the rain forest. The dust of the world  
swirls in cathedral light in the long  
sun shafts and, high overhead, a bright *mbolo*  
fruit swells with sun in a chink of blue sky.  
Here, a white pilot in a military aircraft armed  
with firebombs and rockets gunned down a troop  
of elephants. The nightjars warned, but Angola,  
with her Cuban mercenaries, financed guerrilla war  
with the sale of ivory from a hundred thousand dead.

And so we fly over the burned and ruined  
plateaus of the Congo Republic into a killing storm.

\*       \*

The once green continent of Africa struggles  
in its sleep, chained to old ways and new  
terrors, a tethered cockerel whose bill gapes  
with fear and thirst. In the soft murmuring  
of fire and smoke, in the roar of animal  
slaughter, it turns to the east, to the west,  
but strangles on its cord. The forest knows—  
the forest is—this song.

## **By the Sea**

Sea wind, you have a soft mouth  
You know blessings and the mourner's *kaddish*  
Ashes strewn on the waves seed the barrier beaches  
    coral reefs off the Grenadines  
    atolls of Micronesia

White mouth of the black sea,  
when it is time to take me do not hold back  
    your power  
but, until that moment, blow softly  
    on me and my beloveds

Sea breeze, buttery soft in the dry heat,  
    drop showers of violet sand grains  
    out of this late sunlight  
        pour down on me this softening  
fill my ears so the noise of this world fades  
close my eyes: the inner landscape  
                                    will open

Blow softer, wind from the hundred billion suns

## Field

*Indigo Batwing Vermilion Goat Balls Pineapple  
Leech Soup*

Father, you wouldn't speak so I collaborated  
with the unspoken I took you at your word  
and kept silent silence a field we walked  
together Your language was color and, for you,  
a shade—a hue—held a full note of difference

In this field, clear gradations of color: ragweed  
pokeweed chicory wild carrot nameless tufts  
and over-castings of shadow *Bronze Green,*  
*provocateur of exiles Emerald Green,*  
*that velvets the moss-lipped snow Aquamarine*  
*that deepens the sea's turquoise Cedar Green,*  
*too dark for densities of love*

In the wind's warm stillness the sun relearns  
its name gentle liftings of the scarred field  
soothe the sky's broken azure The haze  
is in the seeing but the field dances *Lemon*  
*Yellow, lightning after the Flood Benzidine*  
*Yellow, that the monks outlawed for its silences*  
*Golden Yellow, blood of Delilah's throat*

No figure but my own: why are you absent  
as well as mute? Will you address me at last  
in persimmon or lavender? Will you rub my poems  
with your thumbs, the way you gauged chartreuse?  
*Milori Blue, embezzler of horizons Marlin*  
*Blue, gill slash of the lost ocean*

In this field, darknesses grow wings: *Air-gun*  
*Silver Licorice Nighthawk Conquistador Ochre*  
*Primavera Sunset Viridian Dreamstalk*

Father, listen to your son talking in colors!

## For My Body

In the beginning, the wind lifted you,  
your veins rested just beneath the sky.  
Do you remember your blood pulsing  
fearlessly, a branching tribe of rivers?  
Is it true that your hair was curled blond  
sunlight? How many falls did you parachute  
over? Best friend and most attentive  
lover, I remember riding inside you,  
your winged leaps and drunken  
staggers, how you were stung by beauty,  
how joy welled up within you. My body,  
when your voice grew dark and smoky  
as a leaf-strewn glade and earth-dark hair  
came to cover you, your blood surged,  
you hardened like a wind-battered pine.  
Such stretchings and yieldings! sunshine  
and salt spray and the briny fire of you  
rising, carrying you with it. Body,  
it is still good to know you, to listen  
for your sighs, your cries of pain  
or triumph, for the rough growls of pleasure  
in your throat. But your beard shot  
through with gray, the first soft mottlings  
of black night. . . Old friend, if you were  
to find a soul to love your soul, eyes  
to adore your eyes, a heart as true as star-  
light, gentle as spring's first leaf-green  
rain—what then? Would you turn her away,  
would you turn from that deep delight?

## Natural Selection

*A new type of giant sponge, previously unknown to science, is growing on thousands of shattered barrels of radioactive waste dumped into the Pacific Ocean. . . .*

I wanted a new vase to frame summer's flowers  
but nothing ceramic would do, nothing merely  
smooth, mauve, streaked, hand-worked. I wanted  
something that would hold the twilight without  
spilling, would keep the branches and night-  
laced leaves and twigs from floating, deserting  
the blue nest of the moment. Moonlight held back,  
sunlight lingered in the future, and time drifted  
in a drugged haze, but nothing could be found  
to embrace me. It was the embrace I wanted:  
to be sheathed, calmed by approaching darkness,  
quieted, fixed in beauty and silence. I knew myself  
empty, but your fingers on my face began to heal  
me, your soft-lipped words so like the petals  
of flowers I could put stems to them. I wanted  
a bouquet of nouns and verbs to fill me, a garden  
of adjectives. I would cling to shattered barrels,  
sway in the current off the Farallon Islands, a new  
species: remote, unrepentant, mysterious, blossoming.

# Wyoming Autumn

## Part One

1

A black flare of cloud drags snow  
out of the west, then sun returns  
A cool breeze caresses your body  
but with no edge, no absence of mercy,  
and the day heats up, sending a hand  
of pure green fire down your back  
blue fire, too, fingers gold-tipped, cerulean

\*       \*

The creek runs narrow, translucent,  
and quiet over its bed of stones  
The big cottonwoods and box elders  
don't know the year will end: they linger  
in this season, in which almost nothing  
has died    This day is steeped in forgetting.

\*       \*

These fields have been here since before  
the Beginning    the bent-down leaves  
of the tasseled grasses are more ancient  
than the showy Bighorns and each tree, distinct  
in the earth and eternally beautiful, is the first  
to have grown on this planet

2

I saw a large deer, a white-tail, down by the river  
—he seemed to be dreaming his way across Wyoming  
The deer dreamed and sauntered out of my view  
the way a hawk will soar and circle, flashing his rusty back  
then his white wing-feathers until he's a mile or two downwind

3

A few leaves trickle out of the cottonwoods and a fly  
buzzes into my hair    Gnats swim the air: they know this ocean  
of beauty

The hills that frame Johnson and Sheridan counties  
are wind-scoured stone, pyramidal and barren,  
though brushed at times with pear-green tones or rose,  
and the rolling pasture lands below them open  
into oases    into stands of mountain ash and aspen  
the sunlight deems holy, so that it embraces them,



stroking each sculpted leaf to gold or ochre flame

4

Today the golden leaves fall: so many break  
from their arching branches, it seems a migration  
of pale yellow birds—so many, the river is amazed  
to carry them and the current is unable to speed them all away

\* \*

The land is fenced off now, but beauty cannot be contained  
When roads lead up a mountain, they carry you into the sky

The high cheat-grass is tasseled and bleached to a soft beige,  
nearly white in the afternoon's harsh light, and the short, thick-  
bladed, grasses seem lit from beneath, or within: a toned-down  
apricot, lime, and scarlet

\* \*

I saw a brown grasshopper that flew like a large moth  
and another, smaller, being that sailed with the reddest wings

I knew to linger would be to miss the sound  
the bell of the afternoon makes in these hills,  
and so I climbed higher, until there was nowhere else

5

Today, the grass is a sea of cottonwood leaves  
The black dragon cloud that crossed the sun yesterday afternoon  
brought the cold nearer my blood felt the chill  
and, this morning, the augur of colder days—colder and darker—  
nibbled at my fingers

\* \*

Afternoon: the chill lingers, but dandelions bloom  
The river runs clear again and blue fire has been brushed back  
into the sky In the sparse shadow of the hills, black angus bulls  
moan and bellow a tortured music that seems right for the season  
In the pasture land at the foot of the hills, they mull the news  
from the stars

\* \*

As soon as the sun breaks free of the clouds, a hunter  
starts shooting—I walk away from the flat pop of the rifle shots  
and miss the ring-neck that flies up near my boots He flies swiftly  
into the field, in a jagged startled arc and I'm left with the gift  
of five feathers, black-striped on a field of tan and sienna

6

What a bleak morning! The clouds are a milky gray  
the black bulls bellow and the angular crests of the hills  
seem etched into the slate of the sky Without the blessing of sun,  
the last gold leaves wear a pallor the brush darkens  
and it is the already desiccated—reeds at the irrigation ditch,  
the tall splayed grasses—that appear vivid and beautiful

7

I thought the harsh cry was a crow's or a magpie's  
but the warning notes were a doe's She and her companion  
had seen me moving through the tangled brush . . .  
I was near the stream, dreaming away the afternoon,  
and she was on the verge of the wood She was safe  
from me, but her blood told her to run, and so she cried again,  
in that harsh and startled voice then bounded into the stump-littered  
undergrowth of the forest

\* \*

A friend spoke with the clearest words—*I tremble for it!*  
That is what we had felt all month: that this land,  
this northern blaze of Wyoming, was one of the last chapters  
in the sacred book of the earth one of the last places  
where our songs could still be heard, where they would not be written  
for show or profit but would be the true coinage of our spirits

Here we could not remain separate from the planet  
but would see that we are the earth and stars awakening,  
that we are the caretakers who have come home

## Part Two

1

I rise in darkness a light wet snow is falling  
The sky is grey-white and a slight scale of frost  
crusts the fields

The ridged bark of cottonwoods is wet and dark  
on the extended branches but dry underneath  
where the thinned canopy of leaves still protects it

The fields are deep in haze and a slantwise snow  
skims the planet

The spare lines of trees trunks fallen from the height  
of the vanished sun the million tufts of dry August  
and September flowers and the softly rippling waves

of the dying grass—all seems brushed with the dust of bones

2

No one has walked down to the water  
and, except for the chance prints of raccoon  
and deer veering off the embankment, the snow  
is untouched the crust of whiteness unbroken

This late in the afternoon, the sun burns low  
in the western sky: it shines white-gold light  
that is blinding

\*        \*

How the river rushes now, and how clear it runs!  
It does not mind the cold that gnaws at your fingers:  
it doubts the future will freeze it

Now is all rip and churn all glint and shimmer  
Nothing can stop this joy

3

This autumn's turned to winter Not a hawk flies  
through the crystallized air the waves of fall-  
burnished grass that—days ago—shined  
with rainbow light are small white peaks a deep range  
of ice-capped mountains, miniaturized

Everything keeps still but time and a white silence  
holds the West Only the rising sun of late October  
can wake this landscape out of its uneasy sleep

4

In back of the hills, rifle shots knock they knock insistently  
against the white-streaked sky and they travel with me as I walk

\*        \*

In a snowy field, dark shapes: a herd of mule deer, grazing  
There are 18 of them and each lifts a graceful neck to watch  
as I pass, a perpendicular shadow that slowly crosses their space,  
this ice-gripped Eden where they've found a few strands of exposed grass

As I near, the deer get jittery and a few start to step and prance:  
this is an old dance to them

\*        \*

And now the rifle shots knock against the sky they knock  
and knock and the report is clearly over us: death

has awakened late on this cold fall morning

And now the deer begin to leap over a fence that cuts  
the grassy field Another fence awaits them if they move too far  
but, for now, escape is all they seek—and so, with utter grace,  
they leap

5

This morning, hundreds of sheep in the field . . .  
The smallest shift in the breeze and they swirl  
in circles then, again, grow still

Last night, the gates around this pasture were locked  
but the ice has escaped the grass is soft and green  
again only the tallest peaks show white

\* \*

Somewhere out of sight, someone is herding cows  
The cows are not mooing: theirs is a heavier complaint  
That fierce sound churns like a tide under this autumn  
and it will not dissipate like a cloud What is that loud keening?  
why so nearly a moan? They are shipping cattle today  
separating calves from cows and the stubborn cows  
will not stop grieving

\* \*

Near the river, the bulls stand like carved black rocks  
their large heads in the oat-colored grass a few ram their foreheads—  
hard as black stone—while barely moving

\* \*

Late afternoon. A blaze of light streams through the clouds  
then brushes them smooth Underneath, the palest orange light:  
one lake of radiance after another The peaks of the Bighorns  
are dark but the sky above them: unspeakably beautiful

6

Last night, the fathoms-deep sheep flock crossed in darkness  
I remember how the flare from my flashlight held them,  
how they waited for me to pass

### Part Three

The sun rises again, and it is warm  
The ice-capped Bighorns are blue-white in the distance  
and the fenced-off fields are wheat-golden in the soft shine  
of the morning

The air today is so clean and sweet that breathing  
is like drinking deep from a clear stream on a mountain

The sheep have migrated again: the path I walk on  
is spattered with dark green droppings but the pasture  
that, just yesterday, they whitened with their bodies,  
is jarringly empty

\*       \*

A lone fly lands on my arm, drawn to the heat  
and the aura of a living thing drawn, too, to the stench  
and perfume of the earth I've walked on to be here  
He is all buzz and attention: an insomniac of the season  
who can't sleep for the splendor of smells that are visited on him

\*       \*

Except for the single fly a sudden echo  
from the plain-of-the-grieving-cows and one quick scatter  
of rifle shots firecrackering somewhere east,  
silence has returned

Stillness has returned: this morning, not a deer pauses  
in the shade of the trees and, in the burnished fields,  
the bulls do not bellow

\*       \*

The river runs nearly silent now, and a last patch of snow  
clings to the embankment's deepest cleft For a moment,  
there is no wind, and the slight breeze that pulses in the branches  
of the cottonwoods barely rustles the last dry leathery leaves

\*       \*

In the Bighorns, a long black silky shadow crosses—flash  
of white wing patches—then there is only sun sky the sweep  
of grassy land the black sea of white-capped mountains  
the light dying out and the cold dream of the oncoming wind



He knows where the train must stop but sees  
it will keep on going: he is the only station  
on the map

\* \*

The hair on his father's chest grows  
in a perfect cross: he is so vividly poised  
on the tall rock it seems he is about to jump

The child is looking up at the sun: he sees his mother  
seated on her bicycle—he sees she has come into the glare  
of the rock, he sees she is gliding toward him,  
naked and impossible to touch

\* \*

All things arrive and depart: the bicycle  
pulls light into him—like a pyramid of quartz, he glows  
with mineral change

The world is burning  
like a photograph: it is going nowhere, but up

He begins to see  
how the night empties light into time,  
how silence opens—a blue flower—in the brain:

reason enough to make his soul climb, wheeling  
faster and faster

## After Darkness

1.  
Today, mother, you have become  
most vulnerable: shaved scrubbed  
opened to the knife and to the knowledge  
of your surgeon, you are lost  
in a drugged haze a field of opium poppies  
can not equal

While you withdraw from your damaged  
body that lies in false sunlight  
under the cutter's hand,  
I recall the thousand afternoons  
I found you washing dishes  
or folding clothes or setting our small  
kitchen table for dinner: always  
you'd be dancing from one needy thing  
to another always you'd be singing,  
at least the melody of a song

Mother, we were so young and innocent  
only the afternoon shade seemed dark  
to us

2.  
Later, I grew away from you  
and knew what it was to be lonely;  
after the dream of your body,  
where could I live so well?  
where would the sun rise and set  
in me the way it lived and died in you?

Now, the earth in me stops spinning . . .  
light bleeds from the evening sky  
I think even you will darken a little now  
that sunlight will dim in you

3.  
After you've been stitched, washed,  
and slowly wakened I will you  
to be strong to heal quickly and to be  
young but then you whisper, *Daddy*  
*needs to rest* and it's clear, mother,  
how tired you've grown



I try to remember you as you were  
nearly sixty years ago, before I was  
your son: your long brown hair brushed  
with a reddish fire slim waist  
and slender legs always one step  
from dancing The photos I have of you  
darken and grow old

4.  
When I learn that you will live  
that life flows back into each cell  
each bone and when you tell me, *My heart  
is set on dancing—*

ten thousand sunsets shift from black  
to rose Words hold me again in their sweet  
and fiery embrace

## Army Doctor – Unit 731

(from the testimony of Yuasa Ken)

His father had a practice in Shitamachi,  
the old district of Tokyo, and a hunger  
to be a doctor grew inside him. When the war  
knocked at his window, he was ready:  
you can't cure the soon-to-be-dead  
without doctors. Dispatched to Shansi

province in China, he flew like a night moth  
to the hospital, where the bitter cold  
did not daunt him: he was a warrior,  
a samurai in a fresh white coat. Still,  
he felt his bones go cold and his will waver,  
for he knew what manner of death lived there.

In the hospital, he stepped into the circle  
of his destiny, where others had gathered,  
but only to act out their supporting roles:  
he was the one who would follow orders  
or issue commands. The smiling Red Cross  
nurses had been over this ground before

but never with such a good-looking young doctor,  
and their cheerful demeanor made him think:  
What if this man tried to flee? if he died  
under the knife, without a last meal or a call  
to his family, without his Shansi gods clustered  
around him? He thought these things, but they

were not his concern. *If he did not practice  
on the living, how would he learn?* He would not  
lose heart with everyone watching and made the *log*  
lie down: he would not be embarrassed by weakness.  
The anesthetic took effect, but the appendix  
was hard to locate, and the opening of the pharynx

was a puzzle to resolve, like the opening of a gate  
in a walled garden. When this prisoner was neatly  
dissected, yet would not die, he, Yuasa Ken, watched  
the director of the hospital inject air into his heart.  
This was the first time he understood the power  
that lived in his uniform, in his surgeon's tools,

in his hands, and each incision he made after this  
seemed easier. He practiced sewing up intestines  
that had slipped from living bodies, and he watched  
as the dentist excised healthy teeth as the urologist

scalped testicles, and he took pride in these things:  
he was a loyal servant of the Japanese nation.

Gradually, he came to enjoy his accomplishments  
and, in town, would swing his shoulders: the girls loved  
his swagger, and all the local men deferred to him—  
everyone admires an officer! The city moved  
with the merest rise in his voice, with the merest dip.  
*Sake* overflowed his cup.

\*           \*

After the war, he had eleven years to think, but then  
he was released from prison, and the nurses  
who had served with him took his face in their hands:  
their words were softer and more fragrant than cherry  
blossoms torn and scattered by the wind. But an old pain  
flooded him, and he asked them to remember:

they had been with him at Shansi. Hadn't they  
held down his victims and complained, *Sleep, sleep—  
drug give!*, in that parody of Chinese? Didn't they feel  
the same shudder he felt rush through them now,  
as if death had brushed their hearts?

# The Silence

After Claude Lanzmann's **Shoah**

## Part One

In the beauty of Chelmno 2,000 were burned  
each day—2,000 Jews

On his third day unloading the dead  
he saw his wife and children and asked  
to die with them to be buried  
with them, laid out head-to-foot in ditches  
like canned herring in a dark sauce  
of blood

\* \*

Ponari, Lithuania: thick fragrant evergreen forests:  
here the Vilna Jews were murdered—here,  
*There was a time when the trees were full of screams*

\* \*

In the first grave, 24,000 bodies—they opened  
the grave with their hands The dead  
were in layers, flatter as you dug,  
flatter and less recognizable as you dug,  
more than dead yet numb as death  
as you dug

\* \*

November 1942 Treblinka: red green yellow purple  
flames One who had been an opera singer  
chanted *Eli, Eli*, facing the flames

Pyres burned 7 days, no, 8 days: a kind of miracle  
a burning forest of decayed and broken limbs

The Narew River took the bone dust  
from what was crushed when it would not burn

\* \*

In Auschwitz, the Jews made up 80% of the pre-war  
population—but 80% of what? what animal  
with back and legs, fur and femurs,  
but without a head? without a head yet galloping  
in place, its bloody mane flying away from it

in the wind

\* \*

The cemetery of Sobibor is closed  
Treblinka is closed  
but in July 1942 the convoys rolled,  
20 cars at a time, an hour or so  
to empty: the fish seller, the woodcutter,  
the blacksmith, the shoemaker Those  
in the first 20 cars already dead

Sunshine flashed diamonds, and the vodka  
was passed

*On the morning of the second day, we saw we had left  
Czechoslovakia . . .*

\* \*

The screaming burned into your mind  
the crying burned and the silence  
that rose up between the cries: it, too,  
left you sleepless

As you went on breathing, the transports  
disappeared the people disappeared  
Outside the camp, the ground undulated  
with decomposing bodies

Still the Jews waited—for deliverance or to be safely  
murdered

\* \*

Auschwitz I: bluish-purplish crystals scattered  
between bodies

Camp B1, Birkenau, the women's camp: "Suddenly,  
water came up and swept the bodies down . . ."

Each crematorium had 15 ovens a large undressing  
room 3,000 could be killed at once

\* \*

Treblinka: Jewish bricklayers, Ukrainian  
carpenters, German overseers built  
the death camp

The commandant now sells beer!

\*       \*

Yes, it is true there were mountains  
of corpses, a new and forbidding range  
more romantic and mysterious than the Carpathians

And then it was winter at Auschwitz: the luminous  
whiteness of snow    snow licking the barbed wire  
snow in the frozen mouths of the murdered

\*       \*

The Nazis invented little, knew Luther's pronouncements  
on the Jews of Europe, were intimates of the Church  
Fathers, drew from this patriarchy the necessary  
inspiration

\*       \*

Chelmno: the Jews arrived half-frozen, caked  
with filth, mesmerized by despair, orphaned  
from the world but wedded to their fate: packed in  
like firewood and ready to burn

In Kulmhof, green vans stood ready, their double-  
leafed rear doors already opening

O who were the drivers who rushed  
back and forth from the gates  
of the ruined castle, delivering their  
genome booty? Who were these fatal  
angels who emptied the riches  
of the Lodz Ghetto into the earth  
of Rzuszow forest? *You couldn't hear  
a child squawk as the trucks flew by*

\*       \*

In Grabow, the Jews have been gone  
for 60 years: it was they who did the carvings  
on these lovely houses

The synagogue is now a furniture warehouse:  
today's sale, coffee tables cleverly disguised  
as gravestones

The young tried to run but the Germans caught  
them like hares the streets steamed  
with their blood

The rest understood: locked in the Polish church,  
an elder collected their gold another  
muttered a prayer

They were tanners tailors sellers of eggs  
When the trucks were ready, babies were tossed in  
by their legs

## Part Two

Polish men loved their "little Jewesses"  
but for the SS even the prettiest were taboo,  
though they could be toyed with—exquisite pain  
or malevolence so complete neither the brain  
nor the body could register it, but the spirit  
would feel shamed

At Chelmno, the Jews were chained when the doors  
were unbarred and the day broke on them—but only the workers  
The rest, mainly women and children, were changed  
immediately into lifeless things, then vaporized into smoke

\* \*

At first light, huge green vans—unlocked but armored—  
rolled right up to the church: Jews had been stored here,  
held in the church and starved

You silent and forgetful ones, you gave only sidelong  
glances, your eyes drawn by the moans

\* \*

It is Mary's birthday in Chelmno and there are no Jews  
no Jews save Mary and her child Even now,  
the scene is pastoral: a horse cart the gray-green  
of lichen-spattered trees cross on the church spire  
50 vans to empty the church, each of them green, spacious,  
punctual 50 armored vans to relieve it of its burden . . .  
and the Jews, too, are punctual though they bear the weight  
of their God How many have been remade  
into cleverly crafted pots or wardrobes with false bottoms,  
or louvered doors that open onto nothing The white church  
with its spire its gold its genocidal mysteries—how calmly  
it floats on the sea of remembrance, as if the dead the Jewish dead  
might return to it

Green vans ran slowly over the dirt road so the Jews—80  
in each van—would have ample time to die  
Those not yet dead were thrown into the ovens alive—  
'They could feel the fire burn them'

Such silence in the woods the deep still darkening Polish forest

\* \*

In Lodz Ghetto, Jews took a step and fell: to be dead  
was normal to survive was to desire and hunger  
ate desire A survivor was a loaf of still-warm bread,  
the only thing left in the world to be eaten

\* \*

Treblinka: newly arrived Jews were taught a work song  
to die to and 12-15 thousand were murdered daily  
Ice-rimmed cars shunted into the village station  
barbed wire glittered on windows Ukrainians  
and Latvians on the roofs of buildings clustered  
on the ramps, 25 from the Blue Squad, 10 Ukrainians,  
5 Germans The Red Squad carried the clothes  
of the victims . . . a packed train was a puzzle  
that took 3 hours to solve

\* \*

The *Funnel*: 13 feet wide maintained in terrible perfection  
by the Camouflage Squad that wove pine branches  
into the barbed wire At the top of a rise, the gas chamber  
slumbered like a temple sunk beneath the soil

For Christmas the mercury dropped to 15° and colder

\* \*

Prisoners forced to impersonate barbers cut hair  
in the gas chambers the women completely naked,  
naked with their children

To calm the women—to help them feel a future  
was coming—the hair was clipped, not shaved:  
two minutes a cut *no time to waste*: the Germans  
needed hair for mattresses and U-boat sailors' socks

Sixteen barbers snipping in unison And if friends  
from home came in—what then?



*Stay a moment longer: one last caress of the steel*

\* \*

In the *Funnel*, panic overcame the women  
who lost control of their bodies Screamed at  
by the guards, half blinded by pain and terror—  
'a whiplash of beatings'—they forgot who they were  
All they could see was bare flesh, slashes of blood,  
dribbles of shit and urine, and the flash of green life  
in the twisted wire life already dead

No mercy soothed this passage or stemmed the surge  
of death, the churn and whipped-up slush the raging  
squalor of it Jewish women these *Jewish* women

but the sick and old were siphoned off and the children  
—they, too, were turned from the tidal crush and shifted  
to the 'Infirmery' with its white cloth flag & bright red cross  
where they could be cured of Jewishness  
and burned like rubbish

### Part Three

Vrba at Auschwitz:

"We had to get out those bodies *running*"  
yet panic had to be avoided  
so that blood on the ramp wouldn't delay  
so that gas could seep unimpeded  
so that murder could proceed as ordered

At Birkenau, in '44, even Zyklon-B understood  
the nuances of Hungarian  
and kept up a dissolute muttering  
until the dead were positioned securely  
until corpses were properly elevated  
until the bones could no longer talk

The crematoria looked like immigration centers  
but were really full-service shopping plazas  
featuring the world's best bakeries

LICE CAN KILL! promised the Disinfection Squad,  
WASH YOURSELF! The mouth of the gas chamber  
had the mass of cathedral doors

CLEAN IS GOOD! promised the gas chamber:  
*Breathe deeply and be still . . .*

\* \*

The guards were poets: saw the dead  
'packed together like basalt,' like 'blocks  
of stone,' saw how they 'tumbled out'

Lights switched off in the chamber  
The gas climbed the walls in darkness  
Like blocks—like blocks of stone—they fell  
like rocks falling from a racing truck  
but a great void where the crystals had been tossed  
as if the *burning bush* had spoken there:  
the weakest of them crushed, smeared with excrement  
and blood their stronger sisters and brothers  
twisted and still above them

The dark gas of European history had done its work

\* \*

Their murderers had believed in the valuelessness  
of life and had lived as inhabitants of a planet  
whose four unnamed winds were negation basking  
in the typhus sun empathic with the community  
of corpses

How they swam and splashed in the Lake of Ashes!

\* \*

In the dark of the darkest night, the Jews waited  
—on a remote uncharted star—  
in the tomb of history they waited They waited  
for the stone to be rolled back They waited  
for black night to be divided to be torn  
from the dead sky They waited for light  
to shoot through their hearts needles of infinite  
desire

They waited and in the night's terrible darkness  
a woman's voice cried out:

she thought herself the last witness of darkness  
the last Jew in the universe with eyes

and she cried out in the plain speech of their memories,  
which sealed the borders of their lives  
It was the silence that called to them it was the voice  
of the pain that called to them

This was their native tongue

#### Part Four

My people, you are gone forever:  
your faces smudged faded blurred  
submerged in deepening drifts of winter,  
your stunned silences, tendrils of fear and longing  
that embraced all you loved your tears and denials  
and the brimming coldness that parched  
the fiery stalks of your being

Such painful sweetnesses enter us  
at thought of you: your hair that lives still  
in the secret dreams of Europe your songs  
that have not learned to dull their yearning  
the rich fragrances of your books and scrolls  
your butcher shops and bakeries that were small  
entire worlds the tang and textures of Ladino Hebrew  
Yiddish and all the ripped tongues of your dispersion,  
all the haunted and unrecoverable names of your murdered  
villages the garments you wore on Sabbath evenings  
and the chanted prayers you carried with you always,  
folded like wings until the sun rose or set and they lifted free . . .

Ghost siblings, your vanished lives grow more silent  
though we have become the paleontologists of words:  
your absence is itself a rushing music that rises now and swells  
a shadowing forest of branches that flourishes and flames  
and each unsounded note unfurls like a burning leaf  
so that speech and poetry will not name you so that we mourn  
as we sing.

## Jerusalem Snow

*Everywhere in Jerusalem, you notice  
the heavy weight of the past on the present.*

—Amos Elon

1

Snow drinks the Cardo, whitens  
the brown and chalk, beige and sand-  
colored stones of the Holy City, stills  
the passionate flurry: brings the pilgrim  
to silence.

2

Snow of Jerusalem, souls of the returning  
dead, you endless company of martyrs—  
we who are alive now wake to you!  
In this snow that visits and departs,  
the centuries blow back . . .

*Jews of Argentina and Yemen, of Uzbekistan  
and America, the snow dreams you back  
to one people: Morocco, India, Syria,  
Salonika, you are here now. Ethiopia,  
Russia, Afghanistan, Bulgaria, you are here  
now. You swirl with these white flakes,  
you shatter the green branches of the spirit.  
Germany, Poland, Latvia, Estonia, you are  
here now. Italy, Hungary, Romania, Lithuania,  
you are here now.*

3

The trees of Jerusalem bend, then break  
under the surf of snow: funeral pyres of pines  
and eucalyptus, lemon trees weighted down  
with white fruit, olives and almonds that give flavor  
to life—all are wreathed in whiteness.

4

In the Jewish Quarter, snowballs take flight  
from roofs of reclaimed yeshivas, snowmen  
go up, colorful and transient in kipahs  
of blue frost.

5

Snow on the Dome of the Rock, on El Aqsa,  
on the Holy Sepulchre, on the ruined mikvahs  
of the Second Temple, on the single living arch

of the Hurva Synagogue, on the high mantel of HaKotel.

A siege of nature seizes the spirit of the people.

6

Yerushalayim, you bring the outdriven  
inward—and in such a guise of beauty!

Conquered a thousand times, by Hadrians  
of oblivion, you still the onrush:  
so much of what is essential in you  
lies strewn in rubble.

## Praying for My Sister

*This earth is but one country and mankind its citizens.*

—Bahá'u'lláh

1

I went to Acco and prayed for my sister.  
It was a bleak day in January, the northernmost coast  
of the kingdom. The bus ride from Jerusalem took hours.  
What is a day to the heart that seeks absolution?  
I had taken this duty on myself. I would stand in the Báb's garden  
where Haganah soldiers had been murdered by the British;  
I would speak for her words of hope and comfort.

This was the realm of passionate martyrdom,  
and I would read from Bahá'í scripture, *The Fire Tablet*  
and *The Seven Valleys*. It was late afternoon and the sky  
was rapidly darkening—soon there would be rain.  
No one stood with me in this haunted place, but I reached out  
to my sister through these words; I reached out to her God  
for her, as the cool drops fell . . . and I felt the spirit of my sister  
touch my lips, the breath of an old Spirit graze my cheek.

2

In Haifa, too, I prayed for her: at the great temple,  
under the gold-leafed dome. Deep in the sacred gardens,  
the sea stirred the ramparts; light blossomed  
on the ripening fruit. *Here was the shrine.*  
I took my shoes off and entered. The quiet approached me.

I prayed for my sister here. I asked for Bahá'u'lláh's blessing  
to descend on her like cool rain, to sweeten her days  
with the scent of lush blossoms. In this small chapel,  
I could not tell if the Earth had, at last, become one country,  
but I knew that my sister should be minister of a world at peace.

3

I prayed for my sister in Acco and Haifa, and I prayed  
for her again at the Wall, for this was the place  
where the power of life fully spoke to me, where history  
and heaven seemed entwined. I prayed for her  
in the Judean hills, where the zealots had known God  
through the strength of community and isolation;  
at Stella Carmel, where Christian missionaries offered Christ  
to my wandering heart (and where I said grace for them  
in my heart's best Hebrew). I spoke to my sister words barely spoken,  
until what I murmured to myself felt like the sweetest blessing.

# Lament for Federico García Lorca

*I want to sleep the sleep of apples  
and learn a lament that will cleanse me of earth. . . .*

—Gacela de la Muerte Oscura

## I. Madrid, May 1998

1

In an alcove of the Real Jardín Botánico, the cool rain  
comes down, drenching, restoring the earth Lorca,  
I address this to you, in this centenary of your birth,  
while your beloved nation prepares to remember  
her murdered poet, her celebrant and guide,  
whose untamed words refused the bridle whose words  
were green as sunflower leaves in August

For you, Federico, this late elegy that wakes  
in the mother country where you lived What is history,  
which forgets more than it remembers? Lorca,  
where is your grave and which patch of earth covers you?  
which ocean of salt-roses harbors your lost poems?

2

The beautiful luminous old and broken streets of Madrid  
curve out in spokes from the wheels of the great plazas  
In the shade of an almond tree, dear poet, I wait for you,  
but you do not appear I wait for you at el Palacio Real,  
whose rooms have the grandeur of cathedrals in the halls  
of the Prado where Zurburán and Velásquez still speak  
to the listening eye in Plaza de la Cibeles where the goddess  
is charioted by lions

No, you are not there nor at the shrine to Spain's unknown  
warriors Your voice—torn from your throat by *Falange* bullets—  
is not heard in the shadow of monuments though I hear it still  
speaking of spirit and courage

## II. Córdoba: an Empty Temple

We needed a Jason or a murdered poet to navigate  
the inwound byways of Córdoba to dodge the semi-blockaded  
hotels and mute desk-clerks distracted by backed-up traffic  
We needed bilingual sonar to steer by and a seer on each corner  
a guide with night vision in our obscured daylight and radar  
for tombs And so we entered the labyrinth of history  
whose doorways are expulsion and sorrow

This is how we arrived at the *Mesquita*, that triumph of faith  
and ornateness of vanities indulged sacerdotal deceits  
teleological vagaries Lorca, you did not appear amid the tiers  
and painted arches, nor were you drifting on a raft  
on the rushing waters of the Guadalquivir, that murky river  
whose green-tipped current swept the past before it  
as it flashed near the Roman bridge

Dear poet, did you accompany us then as we retraced our steps  
and wandered into the city's steamy encampment along its flower-  
festooned streets? Did you grow silent and contemplative  
en *La Calle des Judios* where Sephardic melodies  
remembered to elevate themselves to the level of our hearts?

Federico, did you stray with us along the gold-brown alleyways  
where each stone is a memorial tablet, a library of dialects and souls?  
Did you dream with us in the florid Alcázar and mourn with us  
in the empty Jerusalem of the one surviving synagogue?  
Was that you leaning against the shadow that was the missing ark,  
in whose absence only regret and the quietest of angers live?

### III. Seville: Flamenco Dancer

The two male singers clapped and shattered  
their vocal cords: they knew a life depends upon dying  
that a song can not be saved unless the singer  
buries it deep in his body then draws it forth from his mouth  
We could see how they had stayed death's hand with their lamenting  
we could feel the music pulse in them we could see how they stamped  
and savored every note we could hear how the words to the song  
welled up in them how each fractured note rose from the soles  
of their feet how they split each phrase into dark syllables and blood  
We could see the torn words lift from them like bits of still-burning ash  
We thought they might die of their song but then they grew quiet  
and only the sob of guitars remained

O Sevilla, I loved you then in that blazing decrescendo  
I loved you then in the singers' sudden dying I loved you  
in that waterfall of darkly broken notes I loved you in your theatre  
of black and crumpled silk I loved you in the dancer who came swiftly forward  
as if he'd been pierced by your strings as if he'd been torn from the throats  
of your dead singers as if your poets had dressed him in their darkest  
and silkiest words Ai, the *guitarristas* now trembled they woke  
from their sleep and their fingers repaired the strings that wished only  
to remain broken and they drummed the silver frets they caressed  
the Spanish cedar and the *cantores* stepped forward to sing



Yes, the singers leaned forward but the tune was black moonlight  
and blood for the dancer had found its ruined notes abandoned  
and he slashed at the throat of the song He glared like a god or an angel  
under a gypsy moon He splashed in the waves of the song  
and the spume of his darkness was fire that lit the night with your words  
Yes, Lorca, I think he was dancing your words I think his swift darkness  
was like your spirit when it danced—*por España*—on the sea of the living  
How dark how *black* were his eyes! How tall and lean he was!  
We thought the night had returned as a man that *flamenco* was fleshly  
and human Ai, the guitarristas broke every string! Ai, the cantores  
ripped the tongues from their mouths! and he, like a wave of black fire,  
kept on dancing

#### IV. Granada

1

You wouldn't leave Spain, your mother country  
Spain, with all her deceits and vanities Spain,  
most devout and most cruel You would not go  
into exile would not escape to France or America  
Another continent, even a Spanish one, was a planet  
where your songs could not live

You would not uproot yourself from *España*  
for in this soil you had grown strong It was here  
that your words first came to you like white doves  
returning to their roost it was here that the deep music  
of violence and love poured into you its bitter-sweetness  
Yes, Federico, Spain poured herself into you flamenco  
poured into you gypsy blood flowed into you and death  
kissed your throat

Federico, you would not evict yourself from *España*  
though all the violins of Granada  
ceased their crying

2

Lorca, I couldn't locate you on Sacromonte Hill but your spirit  
lived there: in Gypsy songs spilling from the doorways  
in bright clay pots filled with red and purple geraniums in *gacelas*  
tendrilling over stuccoed walls washed white in the light  
of the early Spanish sun

On this road up the mountain that wound along the edge  
that looked down into a calm green valley and across at the walls  
of the Alhambra, so quickly lost from view, spears of giant aloe  
and yucca reached skyward and yellow and red cactus blossoms  
burst open in the growing warmth

I could not find you amid this extravagance of flowers and song,  
but I knew your words lived in every meter of simple and lofty beauty  
that your ghost leaned near to the sheer rim and peered over  
that your vision climbed Sacromonte ahead of me and led me on

3

We know it all now, how Spain murdered you: you were killed  
at *Fuente Grande*, called by the Arabs who built it, *Ainadamar*:  
the Fount of Tears Until that moment, Federico, you were chained  
to a fate that loved you, but then you were handcuffed to death.

Now bubbles rise from the bottom of your fountain . . . they vanish  
Nearby, *en el barranco*—on that sweep of barren land that scars  
the earth of Viznar—thousands were shot and buried but you were executed  
at the fountain of life and tears Near the bend in the road, Federico,  
the dead light poured down on you through half-broken pines  
On a moonless August morning, the soil of Spain  
became forever stained with your loyal blood

Now a black wrought-iron gate guards your tomb: a large black gate  
with your name emblazoned on it a black gate whose lock and center post  
throw the shadow of a cross all the way to the Palace Dear Poet,  
who has left these fresh flowers on your white granite tomb  
and who, in the shade of olive trees and poplars, listens  
to the ghost music of your living words?

4

No, Lorca, I could not find you in the centenary of your birth,  
but silently I salute you, the murdered master of song: for your work  
that is as solid and richly detailed as a cathedral for your delicate  
and nuanced sensibility for your lines like flowing waves sculpted  
from the true stone of the essential for your honoring of the noble dead  
for the power of your vision and memory for your *witnessing*  
and for the inexhaustible pulse of your yearning

## Notes:

*Army Doctor—Unit 731: Log* was military jargon for the victims of Unit 731 medical atrocities. At the time this poem was written, Yuasa Ken worked in a clinic and lived near Ogikubo in Tokyo.

*A Great Silence Has Descended*: C.A.R. is the Central African Republic.

*Lament for Federico García Lorca*: Lorca was born on June 5, 1898 in Fuente Vaqueros, Granada, and executed by anti-Republican nationalists (the Falangist Black Guard) at Fuente Grande, on August 19, 1936. When he was last seen alive, he was handcuffed to Dioscoro Galindo Gonzales, a local history teacher.

*Wyoming Autumn* is dedicated to Sharon Dynak and Sigrid Nunez (Part One) and to David Romtvedt and Margo Brown (Parts Two & Three).



## About the Author:

Charles Fishman's books include **The Firewalkers** (Avisson Press, 1996), **Blood to Remember: American Poets on the Holocaust** (Texas Tech University Press, 1991), **The Death Mazurka** (Texas Tech, 1989), which was nominated for the 1990 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry and listed by ALA/*Choice* as one of the outstanding books of the year, **Catlives** (1991), and seven chapbooks. His next book, **The Country of Memory**, will be published by Rattapallax Press, Spring 2002. Several electronic books are available at <http://www.write-on-line.co.uk/Frames/works.htm>.

An accomplished editor and poetry judge, Fishman created the Visiting Writers Program at SUNY Farmingdale in 1979 and served as director of this program until his retirement in 1997. He co-founded the Long Island Poetry Collective (1973) and was a founding editor of *Xanadu* magazine and *Pleasure Dome Press* (1975). He served as final judge for the 1998 Capricorn Poetry Award, the *Elias Lieberman Student Poetry Award* of the Poetry Society of America (1983) and the *Anna Davidson Rosenberg Award* of the Judah L. Magnes Museum (1998); he was a founder and coordinator of the *Paumanok Poetry Award* competition (1990-97). He was Series Editor for the *Water Mark Poets of North America Book Award* (1980-83); Associate Editor for *The Drunken Boat*, a Web-based review of poetry; Poetry Editor of *Gaia*, *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Genocide Studies*; and Contributing Editor for *Esprit*, *Wordsmith*, and other magazines. Since 1995, he has served as a poetry consultant to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC.

His poems, essays, reviews, fiction, and translations have appeared in more than 300 print and electronic magazines including and his work appears in such major anthologies as **Bittersweet Legacy: Creative Responses to the Holocaust** (University Presses of America, 2001), **And What Rough Beast: Poems at the End of the Century** (Ashland Poetry Press, 1999), **Beyond Lament: Poets of the World Bearing Witness to the Holocaust** (Northwestern University Press, 1998), **Fathers** (St. Martin's Press, 1997), and **Carrying the Darkness: The Poetry of the Vietnam War** (Avon, 1985). The first full-length critical study of his work appears in **Contemporary Jewish-American Dramatists and Poets** (Greenwood, 1999).

His awards include the *Eve of St. Agnes Poetry Award* from *Negative Capability* (1999), the *Ann Stanford Poetry Prize* of the *Southern California Anthology* (1996), and the *Gertrude B. Claytor Memorial Award* of the Poetry Society of America (1987). He has been a finalist or prizewinner in numerous other competitions, including the *Pablo Neruda Poetry Award* (Nimrod, 1998), the *Alice Fay Di Castagnola Award* (PSA, 1994), and the *New Letters Award for Poetry* (1993). He has received NEH fellowships in poetry from Yale University (1982), the University of California at San Diego (1978), and Boston University (1974) and completed a Doctor of Arts (D.A.) in contemporary American poetry and poetry writing at SUNY Albany in 1982. In 1995, he received a fellowship in poetry from the New York Foundation for the Arts.

He has given more than 250 readings throughout the United States and in Israel and has conducted numerous poetry workshops. He has had poetry residencies at Mishkenot Sha'ananim (Jerusalem, 1992), Ucross (Clearmont, WY, 1993 & 1997), the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts (Sweetbriar, VA, 1997), and the Millay Colony for the Arts (Austerlitz, NY, 1999), and was a featured poet at the Asheville Poetry Festival (1994).