Three candles
Featured poet

Charles Fishman
Charles Fishman: Selected Poems

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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 H A T E Y O U !  I L O V E Y O U !
   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
cobbles 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 
racks 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.
Birthday 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, sequinned 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 jalapeño 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 hombills, 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  A quamarine 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  Benzedine 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?
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,
early 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
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

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

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
Blue Bicycles

Under the dogwood the bicycles are blue
and still, but blurred enough
to make them seem to move
behind his pane
the child keeps watch and what he sees
is real

* * *

The wheels on the bikes are blue-barely
in focus: blue as ice on a petrel's mouth . . .

The child dreams he is gliding in a park
— his father runs behind, steadying,
steadying, and then moves off The bicycle
rises under him like a star

* * *

The wheels are coldly beautiful . . .
the child sees how right they are
for moving: he could float with them
under the milky sky, under trees blowing
like visible green wind
could fly with them
into the earth's elegant houses, into the bronze
eye of a god
could move deliberately, paddling
like a turtle with webbed feet, navigating
narrow channels, sailing down the white throat
of time
with them, he could go back—drifting—he could retreat: back to his father's arms,
the meaty hands, back to the glimpsed penis,
the black shock of hair

* * *

Hazy and blue as a dream, light fills the room
where the child waits for life to come to him:
in his mind all things arrive—a train
with its million miniature cars comes toward him
brimming with oil and grain, comes booming
and clattering, engulfed in whistles and steam
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
scalpeled 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:

ey 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 unbarring 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 ‘Infirmary’ 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 sweetmesses 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,
al 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 [esquita, 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 gâelas 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, A inadamar:
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:


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 Watermark 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).