

“Weather-Proofing” *Shenandoah*. Fall, 1974: 18-19.

WEATHER-PROOFING

Poems

by

Sandra Schor

Acknowledgments

Some of the poems in this manuscript have previously appeared in *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The Centennial Review*, *Colorado Quarterly*, *Confrontation*, *Florida Quarterly*, *The Journal of Popular Film*, *The Little Magazine*, *Montana Gothic*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Shenandoah*, *Southern Poetry Review*.

Table of Contents

I Weather-Proofing

A Priest's Mind	1
Weather-Proofing	2
Riding the Earth	3
Small Consolation	4
To the Poet as a Young Traveler	6
The Fact of the Darkness	7
Outside, Where Films End	9
On Revisiting Tintern Abbey	10
The Coming of the Ice: A Sestina	11
House at the Beach	13
Postcard from a Daughter in Crete	15
Spinoza and Dostoevsky Tell Me About My Cousins	16
Looking for Monday	17
On the Absence of Moths Underseas	18

II The Practical Life

The Practical Life	19
Taking the News	21
In the Best of Health	22
In the Center of the Soup	23
Masks	24
They Who Never Tire	25
Decorum	26
After Babi Yar	27
Death of the Short-Term Memory	29

Open-Ended	30
Joys and Desires	31
Snow on the Louvre	32
Night Ferry to Helsinki	33
The Unicorn and the Sea	35
III Hovering	
Hovering	36
Gestorben in Zurich	37
In the Church of the Frari	39
Death of an Audio Engineer	40
For Georgio Morandi	42
Piano Recital from Second Row Center	43
In the Shade of Asclepius	44
The Accident of Recovery	45
On a Dish from the Ch'ing Dynasty	46
Swallows on the Moon	47
At Point Hope on the Chukchi Sea	49
IV Translations from Chinese	
To the Tune "Spring at Wu Ling"	50
To the Tune "A Slow Sound"	51
Shutting the Door of a Tiny Study	52
Eulogies Written to My Husband	53
Poem Dedicated to My Editor, Miss Yen Bing	55

I Weather-Proofing

A Priest's Mind

Rembrandt never left home
and Borges had
not even a wife
until he was sixty-seven,
his library being his first marriage,
the one for love

A priest's mind becomes his church,
parables in stained glass,
eyes and stories,
light

When I think of what
I have not written,
not written
traveling, gathering, searching,
not written under impressive showers of sense
neither words nor paint nor musical notation not written
the poem
on the clean white page,
let someone say to me
--Will you say it? Will you?—
Stay home, out of light bulbs,
power cut, no gas in the car, no radio, stay home,
read nothing, listen to no one,
invent the country of the mind,
the great silent continent of mind and then
--Who will say it?--keep it away
from friends with two weeks vacation coming up,
draw an elephant for Central Africa
as the old cartographers did,
let the poem undo itself, imagine the senses
of a lifetime, a fish, a bear, imagine the senses
getting out of my way, the zoo,
the constellations, the timetables, imagine

Weather-Proofing

We would come into squalls when
we least expected them.
The rain entered our
eyes and
altered our hearing
because we went everywhere
hatless
and kept our eyeglasses
pressed in our pockets. Sometimes snow sat
on our eyelids
and seeing
was not worth the effort of
lifting. Do you recall that April,
the day our feet ached so,
the day, with our heads bent to our books,
our necks grew so cold and wet
in our own family room
that we climbed into our bed
and lay there until September
when CBS brought news of
hurricane Irene up from Savannah
She was pounding on our window
and on our roof. Soon
the children came to the door
of our bedroom to say
they had submitted themselves to weather-proofing
at Ronald's drive-in cleaner
and by morning
would be through Irene's eye,
and dry.
What could we do
from under our covers
without benefit of weather-proofing
but throw them the usual cautions
to read their maps
and keep the Olds manual
in the glove compartment
in case they needed parts?
They hollered in to us
where Ronald's was
but by then the pounding
was everywhere
and the wind
was already under the covers
and seizing us.

Riding the Earth

I walk. You arrive by car
draped in towels
and fitted between folding chairs
to spread next to the sea.
Impatient with all that fuss
I arrow past you for a long cool plunge
then work my way back up, empty-armed,
innocent as an empress
and tenting blankets with you in the wind
grinding our camp into shadows.
We take down our books
as families straggle back to their cars.
Out to sea the empire is reddening,
a Saturday market where prices fall
as the hour for happiness grows late.
Flushed and immodest in our beach-side bed,
we startle the open air,
that sweet coming round of flesh and sea and pleasure
is our globe of marriage
is our summer of prattling as we bring the vegetables
 in from the garden
as a dog howls in the finery of our backyard smoke
is time flooding under us
as we and the sea make our way together
on the earth's back
each of us holding fast to the webbed lounges
you have borne like ships to the edge of the sea
and one of us wet, a concession to life and the erogenous
 dark that is rising,
and one dry, a premonition of autumn and a need to
slide down in the warmth that is in us
to the sure fever of our faith
before winter.

Small Consolation

A train stands in the station,
 steam clouding the glass overhead,
 St. Lazare in a dream. I speak French
 or Russian.

I tell them,
 in the hiss of engines,
 how I love them. I say,
 --Make no mistake. I speak
 one language
 or the other.

They nod, my two American sons,
 leaning out the compartment windows,
 averting their eyes.

On their heads, overseas caps,
 each with a silver falcon,
 and glittering at their shoulders
 the braid of foreign wars.
 One is eighteen, one fourteen;
 their jackets and caps fit perfectly.

--Be strong, I say. Think of freedom
 and from time to time
 I will send you woolen socks. Think, my sons,
 that we are Russians (why does it console me
 to insist we are one
 or the other?)

Engines simmer. Compartments flash. I kiss
 each one on the lips,
 Dmitri first,
 then the younger.

--Mother, leave us now. Keep in mind
 how you have taught us
 to stay alert
 and to believe.

--But at the front, I say, look always
 for signs of the familiar: directions
 in our own language, poplar trees, a farmhouse
 once passed in the family car. Remember
 who you are.

--The front of what? the younger asks.
 (I cannot drum up his name.)

--Wear shoes in battle. No soldier
 fights in sneakers. Be on the lookout
 for packages. Befriend the cook. I shall
 send socks also for the cook.

The engine shakes. Steam
crashes between us.
I feel the arms of the younger
sliding from me.
As the train rushes down the platform,
a woman
hurls herself to the tracks.
I understand nothing,
not the shouts
nor the screams.
Soon I force myself to leave,
imagining the night's obituaries
in a language
I cannot read.

To the Poet as a Young Traveler
(For E. H. S.)

When you come home
you will declare yourself,
unpack who you are and,
behind the curtain,
submit to their hands
feeling up and down your body
for diamonds and dope.
Everyone your age
goes through it.
Two years you lived the life of others
noting that lovers in the museums
had turned to stone.
Why were the gardens only decorative,
you asked. At home
we eat what we grow.

Later, memories of primroses
will make your mouth water
and on the birthdays of certain foreign men
you will detect a fragrance
as soon as you open your eyes.
Rosy teas and a southern latitude
change the bloodtide: I like to think, my child,
you are too young for that
but a repertory of smiles
plays at your lips.

You say you have nothing to declare,
a watch, a few Shetland sweaters
worn at the elbow, a folding umbrella
for me. I can
hardly take my eyes off you,
you glisten so with battle,
sunned in the plazas of buried cities,
charmed by the words of street poets
whose images caress you where
your flesh becomes eyes.
This is your moment of declaration.
They wave you free: everything you have acquired
is art. I take you home,
the coins for your customs
still pressed in my hand.

The Fact of the Darkness

The fact of the darkness may account for it,
the fact of my shape filling the darkness
with the seat to the left of me empty
may account for it, for my quiet tragedy
in the widowing darkness
on the aisle
with the seat to the left of me empty.
You know how we end up
holding hands, or touching knees
at the occasion
of the good parts.
Tonight everything is framed
as an occasion
here in the no-smoking darkness
where I wait with the outrage
of a bereaved,
invisible as a tree
dying in the forest,
my feet tapping in the litter of earth,
the popcorn of the man behind even now
(now as the air conditioning cools me)
spilling itself on my leg.
The eyes of couples move everywhere
past me like dogs
on their way to the screen
trained in the matinees of their youth
to find their rewards.
No one is aware of my credits.
My laughter, my sighs, the formality of my eyes
shining in the darkness
speak to no one of my taste,
how it runs to art, to spies
and sentimentality. Tonight
the lovers will take over the world
and I will have to put up with it
as they ask once again for those few
final words, *Darling, at the end,*
what was it she said?
In the darkness there is no one to tell me.
Outside, the clamminess stays in my sandals,

the lights of the shopping center fall
through the haze of the heat wave,
I run to my car, to my bed
and ask you in the wedding darkness
how it will end.

Outside, Where Films End

Outside, where films end
battles of afternoon
are long since stilled
the last ground of day
surrendered to
this cramped hour of privacy
between the rages of work
and the blankness of dinner.
I am still on the other side
still slipping my eye
where no person here may look
between the great lips of the star.

Where were we to meet? How long
must I stand in this blur
and wait?
To walk for miles is what I want,
your shower of this day's happenings
real as a two-day rain upon me
your excellent dinner
reviving the ghostly laws
of the body, forcing
my lips to part.
And haven't we agreed on it, I, setting out alone
grabbing at time, suspending at a moment's notice
life for art, and you, only imagining
what it has been like inside?
Frame by frame
the land of princes vanishes;
only the toads remain.
As I step outside, in the place
where films finally end,
your human shape
rises from the dead to receive me,
like arms.

On Revisiting Tintern Abbey

Once along the sylvan Wye
picnicking on plums and mango
you pressed the peeled Y
of a living branch
into the shade of the abbey
that fell on our neatly planted stones.

Now this remembered earth
shows us her burial breasts
and we stand among the why of absent trees
in the lengthening presence of our bones.

The Coming of the Ice: A Sestina

Love, the last mushroom on September's hill, dies
 before the worst of winter strikes, shrinks
 that mild brown head and bends its neck
 in self-protection as the cold glares
 down, white as midnight, opulent as ice,
 turning its bland heat within to poison.

You, love, are lethal now, tough and poisoned
 privately among soft memories. Sex dies
 last, patience first, a thin ice
 sheets the bed. Everyone knows that shrinks
 and mystics eat mushrooms: a jackal glares
 in the eye, a viper coils at the neck.

I cannot blame you, love. Nec-
 rology is not good reading. Poisoned
 by night gardens, blinded by glares
 of zoo animals who never die,
 you are preoccupied, your cells heavy, you shrink
 from touch--is it you?--expecting the clutch of ice.

But all is not up with us. Ice
 has the property of melting, flows through the neck
 of the beaker as water. And what shrinks
 fits once more as the effects of the poison
 show--frailty becoming sinew. As a cell dies
 another multiplies. Between them there is only the glare.

Think of it, living so seductive and death glar-
 ing over every shoulder. Children have the eyes
 of potatoes, sprouting tiny vines, their flesh cut into dice
 for replanting after they witness this neck
 and neck race with death. Relieved, they recover their poise and
 stretch their arms to the sky. *Our* distance shrinks

as a world threatened by war shrinks.

We huddle under the mushroom before the glare
of the glacier's eye fixes us, before the poisoned
waters freeze our history; our status in the pre-ice
age alters rapidly. No longer stiff-necked,
love, we rush home. Fear, cool as the hyena at the zoo, dies.

Under the glacier's glare we shout, stick our necks
out. The oozing mushroom shrinks above the massed ice.
Whoever dies first eludes its poison.

House at the Beach

We trafficked in third class beach houses those years
finding every June a fresh vein
to let the sea in.

Addicts, we fled the city,
left it on a train somewhere
like a gift from a distant uncle,
and took to sealing the beach house for
year round occupancy
making the joints water-tight,
calling the roofer to find the leak
that had changed the climate of our bedroom.
New storm glass replaced the picture window
though soon the sand and sun forced us
to pull the wide shade down against the glare.
In October as we watched the philosophic sea
under its moon, the deck floor rotted through
plunging us to strip of beach below.

After that we could not free ourselves of
small quantities of sand. Everything
was gritty, my eyes under their lids,
your dreams of women in
spherical easy chairs. The gulls
seemed free of this.

We called to them but they
flew past us, flew to wider sands.
Erosion left us stranded
on a single jeweled dune. Some nights
the fish beat against the door
and often in the anointed morning
one with a bleary eye lay blue and
gasping on the last cross splints of the deck.

The electrician, in boots, came when we called
to put the yellow light in.

We thought it up, and by noon
the man quit telling us to leave
and just followed directions.

Midnight comes. The house is
black as a freezer
with only the yellow warning light going

on and off with the sea. Unable to sleep
we guess the height of waves
that thunder
and bang
at our front door,
creeping in our damp bedclothes
to check the light.
Soon we get out the umbrellas and raincoats
as the intermittent flash becomes a beam.
When the trembling ocean floods over us
the light will be all we can see.

Postcard from a Daughter in Crete

Frescoed profile
 falls from the day's mail.
 I know that frizzy hair and overbite,
 that profiled eye
 longer than an eye need be, sign
 of an all-seeing cult.
 As if awakened, I suddenly see
 as mine
 that head on someone else's wall.

Your note calls her
 the ideal Minoan beauty
 elegant and womanly
 who, you say, looks very much like me.
 I smile for the bind
 you find yourself in--caught by
 flaws of hair and teeth
 that govern family lives,
 that do us dirt
 as poor plaster muddies paint.
 There is in each of us a dentist
 who straightens every tooth.

In a mother's walls
 a daughter's devils live.
 Portrait of
 Mother as Minoan Queen
 now arrives home
 as, in the face of it,
 daughters devouring the homeliness of mothers
 mask a flash of recognition
 in the flesh of love.

Spinoza and Dostoevsky Tell Me About My Cousins

1941

Photos clipped carefully as fingernails
 from the *Sunday News*
 are art for my aunt's walls
 scorched fireman and rescued child
 fisherwoman cast against sunset
 grinning paraplegic clutching flag in teeth.
 My cousins have the worst and best at home, they
 look elsewhere for subtleties

My uncle

makes a modest living
 loading fruit in early Brooklyn markets.
 Afternoons he lifts his fiddle
 and sings with his children
 while the rest of our family
 moves from Williamsburg
 and whispers away fortunes in the war
 Push open the windows of Williamsburg
 Let me hear their voices
 as brothers stand with a sister and sing
 in androgynous Andrews Sisters style. Williamsburg
 was ever modest. *I'll be with you*
 in apple blossom time.
 “Moderation,” Spinoza said, “is also a kind of ambition,
 humility being unnatural to man
 whose essence is desire.”

1945

The cousins sing at every coming home party
Welcome home Julie
Welcome home Bennie
 The boys marry
 and die young of heart attacks, each one buried
 in his wedding suit
 Let me hear the widows of Williamsburg
 as they awaken the sleepers and the dead.
 Dostoevsky said, “If there is no God
 then all is possible.” Do you remember how
 Grushenka sent her desperate message to Dmitri?
 --Tell him I loved him for an hour.

Looking for Monday

Where are the old scrimmages of winter Sundays?
Dodging the laundried dish towel, you found
after-dinner war beside the Steuben ads.
Sometimes we grabbed each other and strolled the Metropolitan
taking from the walls
a Sunday light for artless days.
What else was Sunday for? I read once
that Sunday was for suicide, especially in winter.
Work's brooding surf, they said,
slows its pounding. Roads freeze faster on a Sunday
and the work comes to a slippery end. But
death was far away. Hard winter flashed by
the apartment windows. Here lamps had to go on early
and the only hazard in a cigarette was
dozing off with one. In the living rooms,
deepened with people, men joked, sweated women peeled apples.
Together we waited for Monday.

Sundays still come. Between the snow-injured day and you
a sheet of Therma-Pane stretches like a band-aid.
Children have become their own hostile homework, all spread out,
shushed in undecipherable numbers: nothing flickers but the game.
I ought to tell you, motionless in the imperfect Sunday light,
how all my thoughts of Monday
run savagely out of bounds.

On the Absence of Moths Underseas

Who'll play the grand piano
 standing in its room of sea
 on the ocean floor
 black as a concert:
 you and I
 in armchairs
 beneath the
 surface tension.

Again the lamps are lit
 again I hear you play your tunes
 a moth arriving upstairs
 beating time against my lamp
 and I with it
 phrasing your nuances
 praising your graceful nuances:
 without lyrics of his own
 the moth remembers
 lines from neon signs he fluttered near
 on the boulevards.
 HENRY'S MEAT. I hum.
 I da dee dum.
 The moth and I extend our wings
 to dance.

In the dark waves
 each night after our lamp goes out
 the dark waves rise from the ocean floor
 the books fall from our hands
 the moths vanish and
 we touch:
 your theme repeats forever underseas.

We try to leave our armchairs.
 Voices of friends call on us to leave:
 place your feet firmly on the ocean floor
 press down
 you must help each other
 but there is no way
 no way to crash the surface of our sleep
 no lamp to take us where the music has to end.
 Here we hold the music in our arms
 though I note the absence of moths.

II The Practical Life

The Practical Life
(for Marie Ponsot)

They seize my boat
appearing out of the dark on all sides,
their flapping scarves nothing
next to the crack of swords mastering air

and what are swords
next to their eyes
caressing my neck
intimate as knives?

Hands locked to oars
I sit at their feet
there is no place to go
but I am using all my strength.
They begin their political ballads

and now what are their eyes
next to those lyrics
flying out of their mouths
like nocturnal birds
ever more deceitful and languorous
songs I sang as a child
suddenly licentious, wheeling over my body

Sea obscures the night
police launches, neighbors in small fishing boats—
between here and home
how many
have been thrown into the sea?

The parodies grow louder
doer of vicious deeds I become
formed by the hammer of the sea,
my name, episodes from my childhood
in the innocent city of long ago,
now crossing the ocean. I long for the city
that closeted my injuries; the pirates
rule over me

Here the noise of the ocean
obscures the ocean
waves foam and swell
my name booms on the lips of pirates, terrorists
who have sailed secretly to the center of the ocean
to overtake me.
Have they come
demanding the gold of my childhood
for the never ending stanzas
of their songs?
Or do they mistake me
for a fugitive seeking asylum
believing me one of the drowned
who take their asylum at sea

Taking The News

If they could film my atrocity,
find something to do
with their hands, a motive
for standing dry-eyed before me
here in the hospital corridor
with floodlights and microphones
high on a boom—I
would be called on to star.
But the long eye of sorrow
is blind and its voice,
dark as intravenous, throbs
in my memory to keep me alive: old friends
who have come to see “how
she is taking the news.”
I hold up my hands to my face,
“No pictures,” I yell,
the attendant is wheeling me fast,
“No comment, stand back, let me
pass.” Silent ones lose against fear.

We have come to a room in the night.
Real flowers are spread at the window
like lapis. The eyes of my family are
wet and their hands
turn each other to ashes and
my voice, rising from the dark
hushed theater of my veins,
demands that they feed and applaud and see.

In the Best of Health

Cockscomb stand
in the cut glass vase,
raising their heads like
so many roosters. I am in the
best of health. In London
larkspur came with breakfast
after we ran along the Thames, violets
in limoges in Paris. In the Bronx,
flowers filled the four walls of my hospital room
though the night nurse
arranged them in the hall,
suspicious of their toxins.
Here I go from room to room
cultivating rows of flowers
in the Persian rug.
Blossoms like these opening against glass
are an album of
everything in my life: a splash of blood
going down with the first meal
after the battle dies away.
More than food, the wounded crave sleep.
We sleep,
deeply, like infantrymen,
the cockscomb humming over our heads.
Dreams of battle snap in the air. It is Tuesday.
No, Wednesday. I am helpless to count
the days of the week on the
fingers of my hand. The surgeon knows
when it is morning, and the gardener
digs on the first Saturday in May.
As the cockscomb stand in the
cut glass tomb, there is nothing
we need to say. Not a thing you and I
must say.

In the Center of the Soup

The strange power of fever
drives the sickroom (our bed, our lamp speeding us)
into a new land,
you and your smile arriving first
as though you are wrapped around a kiosk in our room
forever advertising aspirin or
offering a glass of apple juice with foreign labels.
This heat drives hard, making us both
uncertain of the weather. Chills
bring on the promises of science.
I might be
in the twenty-first century,
unrecognizable, my love,
a lady waiting for someone's sperm to thaw
as she sits alone having a capsule for dinner,
with her glasses on,
quaking cold; better to be
in bed with a hot flu
and you
at the far end stroking my foot,
all postponement, the kettle whispering under its breath
and I
not quite following the conversation.
Eyes glaze, drinks spill on the linens,
the universe boils faster and faster, arriving on schedule
in my afflicted horoscope--illness before the twenty-first
is no surprise.
My forehead sweats. I ask our whereabouts.
Is this the inn? I fear the cook we came to try
has left. You say, from far away,
"Try the broth." I say,
"Where are you? Why has the light gone out
of the center of the soup? Are the trees bare?
Does the maid have a sweater on?"
But you are calling
from beyond the darkened broth,
"You'll be all right," you say. "Let's leave this country
in a few more days. No one here cares about
the weather."

Masks

Carvers, add fire through
the peep-hole of an eye,
bring a queen out of the small dark space
between me and my painted-on
intelligence. Give me speech, make servant
or buffoon of me.

Or cut elsewhere
for eyes--that is the central task
with masks: placing the eyes. No headdress here, hair
frames eyes as blackshine furs a bear
at night. Art abstracts, tyrant or
bear, lioness or
wife. A face becomes concave, tusks and combs
add elegance of line, gaps
make zags of ivory teeth,
and painted beans for eyes obstruct
the search for *who I am*,
eyes, nose, mouth packed into a
chin of papier maché,
teacher, hostess, friend--all of Cassiopeia
fitted into a spoon.

Defaced, I feel the mask
shift for tragedy,
though behind, I tell you, eyes and mouth hold
fast. Part the hair to find the eyes
and there I am, peering high in the foliage
notwithstanding demons in the nose
and ghouls flying in the wig.

They Who Never Tire

I have seen my burial beneath
debris of wakeful nights: in the place
where squalor fouls age, I who crave health
lie down. The strong mature anywhere, are sure-footed
on land, swim like whales
in the sea, they who never tire
sleep with the sun on their shoulders.

Fatigued and unforgiving, arms
endure the quilt, the blade-tight back
tensed and holding itself, neck-upended
as on the point of a triangle.

Precisely as the spirit sinks to wakefulness, fatigued eyes
stare down the sleepless stars.
Cupped palm seeks water in a waterless dream
the bed stony, bed littered with debris
debris as on a city street, blown, comfortless.

Decorum

The great names of the children go
undiscovered. The roof lies
quiet under the rain. Even the cricket
confers no magnitude upon the grass,
the blades equal and unoccupied.
Of course, I speak only for myself
when I say
the silence of father and mother
are with me still
and as an old woman
I will need the final comfort
not of talkative children in the garden
but of a blunt and speechless daylight
and the silent protocol of the precipice.

After Babi Yar

Bring down the dead, the martyrs say,
 spread supper on the underground tables.
 I who march the long march
 can not serve.
 Survivors no longer survive
 to make heroes of victims.
 The community of martyrs
 waits for me in earth
 root to branch
 north to south
 foot to mouth.
 The family has been boned.

The massacres, oh the massacres
 I witnessed,
 held to my duty through
 Babi Yar and My Lai
 as I saw others holding to theirs
 for me. Earth ached in its roots
 and I threw off my sandals
 to ease the pain. I tried escaping
 my complicity, the getaway car was ready.
 As I pressed the accelerator,
 others climbed into the rear.
 They held a gun to my head
 though we were all looking
 for the way out. "Each man for himself," they said.
 We went back to our tasks.

I say
 there has never been anything like it.
 This age is wild. The dying
 process their own deaths;
 surgeons flee the operating rooms; scientists' machines
 burn in the sun
 like tanks in the Sinai.
 Our mothers and fathers have crated their beds
 and set off. Unpraised,
 the victims walk the earth
 jam into airports
 mount the observatories of the west.

The sky can not cover them. They put out the stars
and capsize at sea.

The graves are sealed,
the earth bulges
underneath, and the victims cry out to each other
that they can walk no further
that they, too, are deserving.

Death of the Short-Term Memory
(For R. I. S.)

Everywhere she stops on her delicate way from room to room,
“Whose flat is this? What is it
I have come to find?”

The corners of my house are hers for
safekeeping. Combs and eyeglasses
hide like candles. In a pants pocket
she fumbles with her bankbook, numbers--
like sons--disappointing, unclear.
She has given up the lipstick and scarves.
Pills are the colors of birds; skillfully
she throws her head back and swallows.

When I come in from outside, she is always stopped,
en route, missing in the long indecisive moment
the press of days. Waking in the
shallow hours of early morning
she renounces the river and
implores the sea.
“Are we going toward spring or winter?” she asks,
rising from her comforter,
“are we going toward winter or spring?”

Open-Ended

The open-ended sky discusses nothing today.
The lid is shut on all of that. The end of the embryo,

the last edge of age lie within
bored stiff in a shirt and tie.

The face of death discusses everything,
loosens logic, lets fly a thousand transitions

between nature and nausea.

And so negative to that idea: leave the lid, cover the box,

no last looks for me. I want the dirt pouring out of the sky
and just a name showing and some numbers

for eye and smile.

The rocks go on later, in ones,

the way babies arrive.

Can you imagine that eye and smile? Oh God,

table the whole broken sky on that lid
before I run on:

I'll be back to pick up the pieces
of all the old arguments.

Joys and Desires

We must go back
but we have forgotten where—
unopened maps hide the oceans
destinations like mountain ranges
fall into a fold.

We dined on trout under skies
absentminded with light
and tricking our memory,
restaurants, foreign motorways suddenly
dark.

But the imprint of planning
has outlived the exuberant days
that swarmed in our flesh like multitudes.

Shall we plan again? Oh, the science of it
those pre-departure twilights
the blood beating in our sprawled legs
at the ends of days--a winter's correspondence
come to naught, quarrels with strangers in mufflers
who arrive at our desk
never to leave.

When we come back we shall know
what to say of fortune
we shall stay while we are needed. By then
light will have vanished from our coastline
as journeys not yet taken
flash in the memory like coins
held over the palm of a hand.

Snow on the Louvre

I must confide in you on the fate of poets.
Once we were all Parisians.
Smells on the aprons of bakers
and cooks lighting their fires,
the grave intimacies of lovers
in the *Place Saint Sulpice*—
gone off as in a wind.
The streets and boulevards are courtyards: nothing
intersects. The light of Delacroix
has gone out of the church, the sun
leaded into an island
in the rose window.
Paris has been invaded
yet I go about my business,
the news hushed before the world.
At the market I barter my secrets,
each day's bargain
heavier than the one before.
Do you ask how a city's enemy
eludes the eye of its citizens
while the words of its poets
cut into their lips?
When death stops like a ghost at my door
I hide her in the entryway
between the angels who live
and the angels who die.
Then through the Parisian night
I write of snow rising on the Louvre
and my secret going on forever.

Night Ferry to Helsinki

In the land of the midnight sun
time swallows the sea. Without the fall of darkness
how do the fish learn the hour?

When my father died, my mother
screamed at me into the phone, "I didn't know
it was so late."

Gulls, black against the long sunsets,
their wing morphology powerless to keep
their astonishing curfew,
fly low like flags of embattled ships
and drop into the Baltic
glistening with exhaustion.

My skin sweat-shimmering,
the walls of my heart gone black,
I moved down the hospital corridor
past monsters in white uniforms,
half-life, half-death; they have ceased
to threaten me.

This ferry is full of drunkards.
My cosmic patriotism
becomes disoriented by their staggering, nor
is there any comfort in the way
the sky governs. I rebuke
the sun like a citizen writing her congressman:
"Your legislation has betrayed me." He can
no longer count on my vote.

"You leave me in daylight, my darling.
When midnight comes, who will be here
to answer my questions? Three times
I prayed for a child full of your facts

and kindnesses. Which one will drive through
the night to take care of me?"

But perfect interactions
tilt space
and night cannot be accommodated. Out on the Baltic
I have seen the clarity of midnight
pull the sunrise
out of the heart of the sunset.

The Unicorn and the Sea

Walled beyond walls
the sea rises in its great room
I do not live in the sea's house
and there is nothing to reach me
of all that wet-roomed sea, nothing.
Behind my high wall I heed
only my own dry heart, though
the ocean gallop away like a horse.

Walled beyond walls
the sea rears up in its prison
I am not confined with the sea
not bound by its mysterious race
against cliff and tree. I heed
only the desire to work, the desire
to weave a unicorn of sand and sea
fenced in by desire
but cocking its horn for the sea, listening
for sea-change, now far from the sea, now
ready to gallop over the walls to run with the sea
when it calls.

III Hovering

Hovering

1. Dover to Calais

The flight of the hovercraft
 is frequently canceled,
 technical difficulties, wind.
 An inflated use of language to us—Americans
 who expected anyway not to *fly* to France
 so much as brood our way over,
 hovering having suspension in it,
 irresolution, a holding action above
 the surface to adjust to the particulars
 of the crossing. One must allow
 for the arrogance of Parisians,
 who popularized Marx without reading him.
 The English recognize there is a conceptual error
 in getting there. Hovering
 thrives between two points. One never
 arrives.

2. *The Prodigal Son*

Tonight, can you imagine,
 Baryshnikov is kept to his knees.
 Just last week the audience gasped
 as his Harlequin hovered in air. Our
 wrist watches stopped. He hung
 before our eyes.
 Tonight, in intermission, we stormed the ticket windows
 demanding our money back.

Hovering to France
 is like that.
 You stop the ballet
 if you bring it to its knees.

Gestorben In Zurich

To be on Zurichberg
 (the price of gold climbing faster
 than the #5 tram)
 to be on Zurichberg
 where they buried Joyce
 between the Dolder and the zoo
 in earshot of a dozen tourist languages and
 the lions' roar,
 to be at Joyce's grave
 returns me to the epiphytes at Kew
 their adventitious roots locking
 every orchid flower to rock,
 each a tiny temple, durable
 as Canterbury
 and baffling everyone
 by seeming very much at home.

To be on Zurichberg
 banked by crimson flowers
 tree-shuttered from the wind;
 cemeteries muffle signs of home
 and here, good sculptures
 like radio towers
 stand free among the graves.
 In a corner
 the witty somewhat melancholy Heald statue sits
 Joyce himself aloof in business suit and eyeglasses,
 the blank black bronze disguising eyes' intelligence
 and he dangling a book from his wrist
 over loosely crossed knees.
 Someone had moments earlier
 lain crimson petals on the vacant page
 as though Joyce had still the habit of astonishing life
 into words
 their adventitious roots, like his own,
 finding any stony hold.

And for just a moment
 we might think Dublin in the air,
 green coasts
 and "mr. Dooley" moving on his lips.
 But not if all we have
 is this small nearsighted statue
 stalled on its itinerary
 seated under a tree
 with its back to the path.

Dislocations. How does the voyage of Odysseus
lead to land-locked Zurich, the Zumsteg family
offering credit among the golden soup bowls
of the Kronenhalle?

Or it might be Homer here
his long narrative thread chancing
on a faraway pin
stuck high in the seriousness of earth.
A grave must tell its tale
these adventitious data of death and birth
carved by any local stone cutter
in the language he knows best
--gestorben in Zurich—
and baffling visitors by seeming rooted and at home.

In the Church of the Frari

Outdoors Venice flares. Indoors
 They've got it all wrong, put out
 the sun and let the night in
 from the deep apse working forward
 toward the canal the long naves
 in gloom, absent the deep blue
 holy blue light of Chartres
 absent the high parables
 in the whispering glass. In place of angels
 we bump each other, hold-outs
 in this blind cave of
 Santa Maria Gloriosa.

Suddenly a flash carves John the Baptist
 out of a black wall. The glow
 hisses, draws us,
 suffers our intelligence to wake.
 Soon 100 *lira* coins clink round the church.
 Cones of light touch the face of
 Bellini's Virgin, then
 Titian's Assumption.

Cheaply how cheaply the void fills with masters.
 What is the worth of 100 *lira*?
 --an overdue book at the library. In the failure to pay
 is the failure to see, is the memory
 vacant as the death mask of a doge.
 When time runs out
 lights drift off,
 fragments of beauty
 explode one last time against dark walls, against
 the absence.
 Donatello gave painted wooden eyes to John, eyes
 that remain in the mind
 after sight is gone
 when the heart asks to receive nothing
 and to have nothing taken away
 but to be at one with the recollections
 of an illumined dark.

Death Of An Audio Engineer

Time crosses the gauge of their lives,
a needle
dropping suddenly
to zero.

Once teen-aged boys
on the hilled grass,
young athletes out of shape to lift the coffin
of one who dealt in air,
who plucked famous voices
out of crystal
and symphonies
from the steaming radiators
of bedrooms. The sons trembled as the silence
fell into the grave,
the wife wrapping a leftover sound
with her arms.

How the mourners had smiled
who thought they heard the faint beep-beep
rise in the faultless chapel.
Entering the dawn of death
before the resonant night of the airwaves ended,
he took charge of his own arrangements,
befriended the undertaker,
cut lilac for him and articles
from the *New England Journal of Electronics*
about monitoring the moment of death,
citing four hundred cases in the
Boston City Hospitals.
“You need the habit of data,” he said,
“like the rest of us.”

In ten years sons marry—
two teach, the third
plays cello—
none wanting any part of
selector inputs and audio levels. They haul
the stuffed carton of ham radio gear
to the local high school. For a decade
no one on earth
has heard their father’s voice. One brother says
the unheard voice reaches him
where all voices speak,

whispering encouragement for
 marriage and the coming of
 deadlines.
 Buddies in the great capitals of the world
 fall quiet
 like the shut waters of a fountain.

The day for listening
 is majestically on schedule,
 but inconvenient: the brothers talk it over.
 What is one more day
 after ten years? Overnight
 a tender sprouting of memories
 shows where each has kept his father,
 the way country people find a sheep's grave
 under the greenest grass.

When they gather
 someone opens a bottle of Scotch.
 The voice begins quietly,
 gradually filling the hotel room,
 releasing the old excitement,
 the triumph of fine gear. It greets each one by name,
 knowing its welcome; but breaks each from the other
 as a sudden rain
 scatters companions
 on the street.

No cover exists
 but the voice.

It says little. Now that they are earning a living,
 (the cellist has only yesterday
 found a chair
 in a Canadian symphony)
 it is time
 to commence the life-long habit of
 charity, and, thanking them for their patience,
 instructing them to destroy the tape
 but never the equipment,
 the voice departs
 effacing itself as abruptly in the airwaves
 as an urn of ashes
 overturned in the wind.

For Georgio Morandi
 --Retrospective at the Guggenheim
 Museum, New York, 1982.

*Have you heard
 the still lifes of Morandi?* Listen—
 it is the best of times,
 and the universe of things
 whispers mutinously in cupboards,
 funnel and teapot fast
 in solidarity. These are the things he lifts
 into light. They refuse to be coned
 or cubed, yet the canvas
 must take them on. When the first gun sounds,
 they stand mute, unready
 for war, the last dark
 line of defense. Deaf to the commands
 of the general who plots with objective eye,
 conscientious cup, flask, and pitcher receive
 their arsenal of light, construct
 their own peace.

Shelf over my desk: blue mug brown
 lamp long-handled metal
 stapler--I have known the etiquette in you,
 your promiscuous dust and light, have dreamed you
 out of shape and re-dreamed you
 endlessly as I placate sleep.

*Have you seen
 the still lifes of Morandi?* Canvas upon canvas
 flashes signs of pouring, painting, spooning. The light
 ripples with what we have. We live--even live still--
 light years from its source. All over the world
 cups and saucers give back light like comets.

Piano Recital from Second Row Center
(for Maurizio Pollini)

He shocks me. I stare
as one stares at a blind man
stepping to the center of
a dangerous intersection.
The music deepens, his eyes
rise behind half-sealed lids. Unseen,
I see everything, follow
the craft of neck, the sweat,
lips tightening as uncontrollable gasps
escape his mouth. This close
I am touched by desire,
that one tiny figure of the Appassionata
might take account of me,
so loyally I sit, so fanatic I am
beneath those hands and sightless eyes. The trance
widens, the howl of music
shivers past, spreading equally
to the last woman in the highest ring: she wears
a green dress and
I have spotted her across the sky of faces.
No need for the suspicions of
our eyes. All the sonatas we love
are heaped in those blind man's fingers
and though he could reach out and touch me--not her,
not the woman in green
in the blessed distance
of the highest ring—
it is our common duty
to remain in our seats
and hold the limits of the fallen afternoon
aloft in the disorder of praise.

In the Shade of Asclepius

Asclepius is not my god
though healing is godlike
and the one who suffers
holds the name of a god on
dry lips.

Rest and endurance
are ambiguous in this hot clime
where hours are slow as breaths
in a sleep of months. The cure
goes on
doctors tell their fees
apply the fragrant herbs
and lure the sacred serpents near.

I see, carried out the gates,
a woman on the verge
of child-birth. Incubation
is the secret--no one dies
inside. As bears disdain winter
we sleep the fevers through,
physicians interpreting our talk
of intervention.

When I recover
I write my progress on a stone
deploy my dream
and recommend my doctor
and my god.

The Accident of Recovery

Under Plato's olive tree
chickens sleep in the ruins of the academy.
Had we been luckier
had the priests of Delphi loved us all
had the cold rain pushed wildflowers
through the cracks in Apollo's stage
had grape or laurel routed Epidaurus of its snakes
and the hill of marble seats not thrown
our praises back to us as dread
(acid all the while eating away
the white stone) we might
have started up the engines
in the burying dark
groped in that prodigious tomb
for one golden mask cleansed of earth
mouth telling the royal records
as an inland anchovy tells where seas had been.

On a Dish from the Ch'ing Dynasty
--Asia Society, New York

Your handwork, Sir, throws a coin of darkness
out of the bone-clear morning.
Bats, peaches--two warring states
fill the artist's head and
battle to be at peace. The poet
also writes of opposites,
exile and the worn terraces of home,
distant friends and a common moonlight. Sir,
I read your porcelain poem
and hear the gibbons of Tu Fu
screaming on the Yangtse.
My eye for a thousand years
would stay on peaches
ripe with memories of home,
but already the furred wingtips
dry the riverbed of my blood.
Many a Ch'ing painter had
twin callings,
inking the whitest paper
with the blackest poem.
I will search for your scroll, Sir,
from exhibit to exhibit. A poet tells
what the eye never meets.

Swallows On The Moon

--"The facts about bird migrations
were never wholly unknown."

The Bestiary, T.H. White.

Defoe's teacher wrote that
swallows traveled to the moon
rising in mass conglobulations
from the beams of neighbors' barns
as comradely as moon men
do now. Limited in
his own migrations
he must have envied their
assemblages on roofs, their
glossy mid-day lift-off,
and thought where he would go
had he the friends,
the forked tail and
the temporary habits.
The night before,
seeking in moonlight to
outwit his pupil,
he'd written a dissent to nature
as the white summit of the moon
called him to its porcelain seas.
Oh, had he the small furry feel
of winter coming on
and wings to beat,
as all night
those immaculate beaches beckoned.
Dutifully, the academy
had given years of
civility and sense to Daniel
who wrecked his teacher's dream.
The pupil let it be known
that swallows had to follow insects South
for food
and passionately took his pen
for details of another landing,
one that he could see,
Crusoe on his isle,
a castaway as homeward bound
as swallows on the moon.
For Daniel never saw them land,
nor heard the twittering grottoes on the moon,

nor sensed the swallows up there
standing side by side
along the crater's edge
as evenly as waves.

At Point Hope On The Chukchi Sea

--Senator Buckley admired the clear
roles of men and women there. "Better
than receiving welfare," he stated.

Eskimo girls
play hopscotch
on the ice,
the lines and squares
etched near
the edge of it
in sight of men
harpooning creatures
never hunted by
a woman.

Deep in the ice
the men lock the whale
hooked and butchered into
steaks, skin, blubber
enough to feed
a village for a year.
The women clean the blades
and far into the night,
over the fires they tend,
bend the iron rods.

Atop the ice
a sentry of birds in fur
takes the morning off
and happy men go down in sleds,
they trade oil and furs,
and toast a distant fair
in wirephotos.

But at the edge
the ice has voices.
The shoreline shifts
and campsites of women
keep on working,
for a footing if nothing else,
toes curled from infancies of hopscotch
against premonitions
of a slide.

IV Translations from Chinese

To the Tune "Spring at Wu Ling"

by Li Ch'ing Chao
Translation by Robert Chiang and
Sandra Schor

The breeze calms. Sweet blossoms fall to dust.
The sun fades and I'm
too tired to comb my hair.
Though my things are everywhere
you, and life, are gone.
I long to speak but words
become tears. The spring,
I hear, is fresh at Two Lakes.
How I yearn to be out
in a small boat
though I fear the boats there
will not bear my grief.

To the Tune of "A Slow Sound"

by Li Ch'ing Chao
Translation by Robert Chiang and
Sandra Schor

Search. Search. Hunt. Hunt.
Cold. Cold. Lone. Lone.
Loss. Loss. Sad. Sad.
Pain. Pain.

Warm winds leave and
return cold. I cannot bear the change.
I take three bowls and
two cups more of watered wine
to fight the strengthening wind. A wild goose
passes. The wound in my heart aches
for our old friendship. Yellow flowers
cover the earth. I have been weary
and there is no one else to notice them.
At the side of a small window, I wait alone,
impatient for the day to blacken.
Into the wu t'ung tree a fine rain falls,
drop by drop, in the dusk. I am here
with one word. What shall I do
with my word: Sorrow?

Shutting the Door of a Tiny Study, I ask my Husband, who Works
 Outside it, to Do a Panel in Grass writing. Magic Enters his
 Word. It is Wild, Changed. I am Overjoyed.

by Shen Yee-ping.

Translation by Rosabel Lu and Sandra Schor

As pirates from South River
 overran the great Northeast
 and as people flowed from the raging land,
 precisely then I dared to name my house
 “Contented Hut.” And why must they despise
 contentment snatched from the flames of war?
 Oh, the heart’s contentment
 is never illicit. Both earth and sky
 perceive no shame in contentment.
 Must I walk in a mansion
 down long corridors of rooms? My spare,
 ordered house is snug as a simple boat.
 In it, reading a small scroll
 uplifts me. Nor do I read for reputation—
 fame holds hands with slander. I overlook
 fleet horses, tall silken carriages—
 glory comes on foot. A spoon of rice,
 something to drink: there’s no shame
 in frugality. Sometimes, as a poet
 I become arrogant, bemoaning how bitterly
 I work to make a poem
 that will rival the great Tu Fu.
 Frenzied, I extend a panel. I demand
 you write upon it! Soon your brush begins—
 a snake, a dragon. I am happy. Deep is my sigh
Yi yu shee! I attain unspeakable joy
 as you throw your brush
 and transform a single word
 into a rainbow. One final sweep
 and a living whale opens
 the white sparkle of sea.

Eulogies Written to My Husband

by Shen Yee-ping
 Translation by Rosabel Lu and
 Sandra Schor

I

Thirty-three years
 Inseparable
 Our shadows a single shape
 Sharing bitter and sweet
 So distressed for our nation we stole
 not a day for ourselves.

Seventy days
 Sinking
 You finally abandoned me
 A swan broken from the flock
 I weep as at the final watch
 the loneliness before dawn.

II

I believe your wisdom
 And deep humanity
 Will live in history.

I am the only one who knows
 Your modesty
 And secret courage.

III

I look up—
 The sky is free of shame
 And down—
 The world is free of shame.
 You have fallen like a pile of
 Bright stones.
 I recall the smile
 Of your final hour.
 The body I know you by
 Is gone. The spirit,
 Bright and safe,
 Is at rest.

In public you were brave,
 Righteous before all. Privately you were
 Filled with passion. I bare my heart
 And weep. I have such pain:

Your best abilities
Have not been unfurled.
Why do you forsake me?
My body
drifts in the world, alone.

Poem Dedicated to My Editor, Miss Yen Bing

by Shen Yee-ping

Translation by Rosabel Lu and Sandra Schor

Long ago, in the house of Shieh,
 a graceful, gifted girl gave honor
 to the paper that held her words.
 Scholars of the Sung Dynasty
 then distorted history
 by forgetting such women. In the Central Plain
 women had to be
 frogs, hid in the dark waters
 of wells. Sadly, I fear the good works
 of Chao times are in ashes. I grieve
 when our leaders say they love the multitude
 and omit women. Skies fall;
 horizons fade. Do we two
 cherish a private feeling? Yen Bing, you pity me
 and I pity you. Ancient chronicles record
 Lan Tai, whose emperor gave his fairest,
 brightest concubine to a desert king: then talent
 bloomed in the desert!
 and Mu Lan who, brotherless, warred as a man
 and spared her ailing father.
 Han women lived on in sunlight. Womanhood
 has never slipped beneath
 the shadows of men.
 The brightness of history
 suns our nation. We shall have spring
 and liberty shall flower
 the full length of River South.