

I speak to you, my son,
after years of silence. Verona is no more.
I crumbled its brickdust in my fingers. That is what remains
of the great love of native cities.

I hear your laughter in the garden. And the mad spring's
scent comes toward me across the wet leaves.
Toward me, who, not believing in any saving power,
outlived the others and myself as well.

Do you know how it is when one wakes
at night suddenly and asks,
listening to the pounding heart: what more do you want,
insatiable? Spring, a nightingale is singing.

Children's laughter in the garden. A first clear star
above a foam of buds on the hills
and a light song returns to my lips
and I am young again, as before, in Verona.

To reject. To reject everything. That is not it.
I will neither resurrect the past nor return.
Sleep, Romeo, Juliet, on your headrest of stone feathers.
I won't raise your bound hands from the ashes.
Let the cat visit the deserted cathedrals,
its pupil flashing on the altars. Let an owl
nest on the dead ogive.

In the white noon among the rubble, let the snake
warm itself on leaves of coltsfoot and in the silence
let him coil in lustrous circles around useless gold.
I won't return. I want to know what's left
after rejecting youth and spring,
after rejecting those red lips

from which heat seemed to flow
on sultry nights.

After songs and the scent of wine,
oaths and laments, diamond nights,
and the cry of gulls with the black sun
glaring behind them.

From life, from the apple cut by the flaming knife,
what grain will be saved?

My son, believe me, nothing remains.
Only adult toil,
the furrow of fate in the palm.
Only toil,
Nothing more.

Kraków, 1945

translated by Renata Gorczyńska
and Robert Hass

Miłosz 2

SONG ON PORCELAIN

Spattered in dirty waves
Flecking the fresh black loam
In the mounds of these new graves.
In sorrow and pain and cost,
Sir, porcelain troubles me most.

Washington, D.C., 1947

translated by Czesław Miłosz
and Robert Pinsky

Rose-colored cup and saucer,
Flowery demitasses:
You lie beside the river
Where an armored column passes.
Winds from across the meadow
Sprinkle the banks with down;
A torn apple tree's shadow
Falls on the muddy path;
The ground everywhere is strewn
With bits of brittle froth —
Of all things broken and lost
Porcelain troubles me most.

Before the first red tones
Begin to warm the sky
The earth wakes up, and moans.
It is the small sad cry
Of cups and saucers cracking,
The masters' precious dream
Of roses, of mowers raking,
And shepherds on the lawn.
The black underground stream
Swallows the frozen swan.
This morning, as I walked past,
The porcelain troubled me most.

The blackened plain spreads out
To where the horizon blurs
In a litter of handle and spout,
A lively pulp that stirs
And crunches under my feet.
Pretty, useless foam:
Your stained colors are sweet,

By southern wind. You who grant certainty
 In the hour of fear, in the week of doubt,
 It is too early, let the wine mature,
 Let the travelers sleep in Mittelbergheim.

Mittelbergheim, Alsace, 1951

translated by Czesław Miłosz
 and Richard Lourie

Wine sleeps in casks of Rhine oak.
 I am wakened by the bell of a chapel in the vineyards
 Of Mittelbergheim. I hear a small spring
 Trickling into a well in the yard, a clatter
 Of sabots in the street. Tobacco drying
 Under the eaves, and ploughs and wooden wheels
 And mountain slopes and autumn are with me.

I keep my eyes closed. Do not rush me,
 You, fire, power, might, for it is too early.
 I have lived through many years and, as in this half-dream,
 I felt I was attaining the moving frontier
 Beyond which color and sound come true
 And the things of this earth are united.
 Do not yet force me to open my lips.
 Let me trust and believe I will attain.
 Let me linger here in Mittelbergheim.

I know I should. They are with me,
 Autumn and wooden wheels and tobacco hung
 Under the eaves. Here and everywhere
 Is my homeland, wherever I turn
 And in whatever language I would hear
 The song of a child, the conversation of lovers.
 Happier than anyone, I am to receive
 A glance, a smile, a star, silk creased
 At the knee. Serene, beholding,
 I am to walk on hills in the soft glow of day
 Over waters, cities, roads, human customs.

Fire, power, might, you who hold me
 In the palm of your hand whose furrows
 Are like immense gorges combed