

## Survivor

Róźewicz 1

I'm twenty-four  
Led to slaughter  
I survived.

These words are empty and equivalent:  
man and animal  
love and hate  
foe and friend  
dark and light.

Man is killed just like an animal  
I've seen:  
truckloads of chopped-up people  
who will never be saved.

Concepts are only words:  
virtue and vice  
truth and lie  
beauty and ugliness  
courage and cowardice.

Virtue and vice weigh the same  
I've seen:  
a man who was both  
vicious and virtuous.

I'm searching for a teacher and a master  
let him give me back my sight hearing and speech  
let him name objects and concepts again  
let him separate the light from the dark.

I'm twenty-four  
Led to slaughter  
I survived.

## Pigtail

Róźewicz 2

When all the women  
from the transport had their heads shaved  
four workers  
with brooms made from linden twigs  
swept and gathered up the hair

Behind the clean glass  
lies the stiff hair of those gassed  
in the gas chambers  
there are pins and bone combs  
in this hair

No light shines through it  
no breeze parts it  
no hand touches it  
nor rain nor lips

In giant chests  
clusters the dried-out hair  
of those gassed  
and an ashen pigtail  
with a little ribbon  
pulled on at school by  
naughty boys

The Auschwitz Museum, 1948

## In the Middle of Life

Różewicz 3

After the end of the world  
after my death  
I found myself in the middle of life  
creating myself  
building a life  
people animals landscapes

this is a table I kept saying  
this is a table  
on the table are bread knife  
the knife is used for cutting bread  
people feed on bread

man should be loved  
I learned by night by day  
what should one love  
I answered man

this is a window I kept saying  
this is a window  
beyond the window is a garden  
in the garden I see an apple tree  
the apple tree blossoms  
the blossoms fall off  
fruit forms  
ripens

my father picks an apple  
the man picking the apple  
is my father

I was sitting on the front steps of the house  
that old woman  
pulling a goat on a rope  
is more needed  
is worth more

than the seven wonders of the world  
anyone who thinks or feels  
she isn't needed  
is guilty of genocide

this is a man  
this is a tree this is bread

people eat to live  
I kept repeating to myself  
human life is important  
human life has great importance  
the value of life  
exceeds the value of every object  
man has made  
man is a great treasure  
I kept repeating stubbornly

this is water I kept saying  
stroking the waves with my hand  
talking to the river  
water I said  
kind water  
it is I

the man talked to the water  
talked to the moon  
to the flowers to the rain  
he talked to the earth  
to the birds  
to the sky

the sky was silent  
the earth was silent  
if he heard a voice  
flowing  
from the earth the water the sky  
it was the voice of another man