

The Gift of Memory

There comes a time in your life
when you no longer need sight, hearing or touch
to write a poem. The once-remarked
flutter of a sparrow at high noon skipping
from branch to branch in an apple tree suffices.
The child you were back then
will tell you without a moment's hesitation
that the whole world
– like a little piece of coloured glass –
can expand into a rose window at the moment
you lift it on your palm into the sun.

A Short Treatise on Seeds

*For the world to become a basilica
one winged seed, flying where the wind blows it, suffices.*
– Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Fortress*

How many flowers have I planted in my life, how many
trees,
how many dogs and birds have I fed?
Will any of these bear witness to my
service? Is our concealed love of these creatures
merely the measure of our care for them?
To consider attentively this world's beauty and wretched-
ness –
does that mean to revivify that which is born, grows and
vanishes?
If the seed only knew that from it would come the bread
that fuels the thew of builders of sacred structures
it would be the proudest being on earth.
But it – being the tiniest – so remains
even then, when God has taken up residence in the temple,
the power of which began with that small seed.
And so the seed never dies, however many times
it's died, before glancing at the immensity of Heaven?
To be a seed, that is, to be the most perfect particle
of creation! Dreaming thus, can I feel myself
immortal?

Teacup

Not large, white, slightly crimped,
of thin Meissener porcelain,
with a colourful pattern of pansies and ragged
triangular leaves – like ivy or grape leaves.
It belonged to my maternal grandmother.
How many times have I sat by
the table unfolded full, during family
teas – with grandparents and Mum and Dad
and a clutch of distant relatives?
One of them must have sent me this sign today
from the great beyond, for, sipping coffee, suddenly
I felt my heart leap towards them, absent now
for many decades. Surely all of them
once held this decorative handle in their fingers.
Can it be that they transmitted their mysterious message
through it,

that they're waiting There for me? That death,
to which I must submit at last after all,
will reunite me with them once again
at the eternal banquet, with the common bonds
of blood though now transfigured into light?

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Translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



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Foreign language translations

Germany, France, Israel, Japan, the Netherlands, Serbia, Sweden,
Romania, the UK – in anthologies.

Selected poetry collections

Nieprzerwany dialog. Wiersze z lat 1968–2019, 2019

Z Księgi Przejścia, 2017

Złoty dzięcioł, 2015

Wtedy-dzisiaj, 2010

W podróży, 2007

Lato 1999, 2000

Opowieści przestrzeni, 1999

Requiem z ptakami, 1996

Kamień przydrożny, 1993

Nagła wieczność, 1984

To pierwsze, 1979

Do krwi, 1977

Imię ludzkie, 1974

Adriana Szymanska also writes short stories, novels and essays.

Selected awards

Orpheus Literary Prize (2016, 2018, 2022) – nomination

Catholic Publishers' Association Award FENIKS (2021) – distinction

Sęp-Szarzyński Poetry Award (1994)