

FOR MY CHILD

Was it from some hunger
or from greater love –
but your mother is a witness to this:
I wanted to swallow you, my child,
when I felt your tiny body losing its heat
in my fingers
as though I were pressing
a warm glass of tea,
feeling its passage to cold.

You're no stranger, no guest,
for on this earth one does not
 give birth to aliens.
You reproduce yourself like a ring
and the rings fit into chains.

My child,
what else may I call you but: love.
Even without the word that is who you are,
you – seed of my every dream,
hidden third one,
who came from the world's corner
with the wonder of an unseen storm,
you who brought, rushed two together
to create you and rejoice: –

Why have you darkened creation
with the shutting of your tiny eyes
and left me begging outside
in the snow swept world
to which you have returned?

No cradle gave you pleasure
whose rocking
conceals in itself the pulse of the stars.
Let the sun crumble like glass
since you never beheld its light.
That drop of poison extinguished your faith –
you thought
it was warm sweet milk.

I wanted to swallow you, my child,
to feel the taste
of my anticipated future.
Perhaps in my blood
you will blossom as before.

But I am not worthy to be your grave.
So I bequeath you
to the summoning snow,
the snow – my first respite,
and you will sink
like a splinter of dusk
into its quiet depths
and bear greetings from me
to the frozen grasslands ahead –

Vilna Ghetto
January 18, 1943