

EAVAN BOLAND

Six Poets

I

When I was a child two German girls came to help my mother in the house. It was just after the war. The small towns of Germany were in the grip of winter, hunger and disgrace. These girls, who were sisters, hardly more than teenagers, had left that aftermath behind and come to the shelter of a country which had been neutral. There was rationing in Ireland. But there was also butter and meat. Clothing was plentiful. It was an easier place to be.

I was too young to remember their actual arrival. They came into my consciousness with my first words, my first memories. I remember the kitchen, the damp clothes, the snap of the fire, the smell of peat. I remember one of them opening a door that led into the darkness of a back lane. I can hear their voices as they folded clothes and put away plates. I can hear my own voice as I said back the numbers they tried to teach me -- *eine zwei drei vier fünf*. Over and over again. Or the quick phrases I learned because they said the reality of their lives. *Ich bin beschäftigt*. I am busy.

Above all, I remember that when my parents left the room, and there was no need to learn or be polite, they spoke to each other in rapid, headlong sentences: shutting out with relief the Irish twilight, the small child and all the evidence of what was not home.

For many years they were a background memory. Gradually, that changed. They became at once clearer and more mysterious: intaglios, cut deeper in my consciousness than I had realised. Even their voices began to return. What was it I had heard? Gossip and anecdote? Or was I hearing distant towns, in their harsh moment of reckoning -- and wider tragedies of nationhood and inhumanity -- creeping through their words like fog under a windowsill?

The truth is I couldn't know: not then, not now. But some of the yearning and curiosity I still feel about them is in this selection. It is the outcome of years of retrospect and regret: of knowing I had not asked them the questions I later wanted to ask. When I first saw them they were teenagers, sisters. Both are now dead.

But later it seemed that the door one of them opened was legendary, not real: that it led from our ordinary, tea-time kitchen into the very heart of a broken Europe. And the conduit, the path was language. A language I could not understand but which spoke to me all the same.

It still speaks to me -- that language I cannot understand but need to hear. And that, I think, covers some of the paradox of translation. Some of the poems in this selection were being written, or had been written, at the very moment those sisters were talking. In some of these lines their loneliness, their necessary absence is explained far more clearly than they or I could then have managed.

II

There are nine poets in the book from which this selection is taken. Their dates of birth range from the mid nineteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth. All are German-speaking. Their places of origin are from as far north as Bukowina and as far south as Carinthia. Their places of exile range from Sweden to South America.

All wrote in the presence or aftermath of a war which cut deeply into their lives. Of course, they lived different lives and experienced the war variously. It also needs to be remembered that the poems here are only a fraction, albeit an important fraction, of the work written by these poets.

These are poems, then, written in the shadow of a war. But there is more to it than that. They are poems written by those whom war injures and excludes in a particular way: in other words, women. Nevertheless, the question may persist: why women, why war? If these look like restrictive categories for translation, there is a reason:

The problem about human catastrophe is that can be remembered all too well. But it is much harder to re-imagine it. What brings it from the domain of fact to the realm of feeling is often just a detail. A cup, a shoe, an open window, a village roof with missing slates. Once we see it, we recognise it. *That could have been me*, we suddenly think. *I could have been there*. That moment of private truth, simply because it cuts history down to size, has a rare value.

It seems to me there is something compelling and revealing in the way the world of the public poet encounters the hidden life of the woman in these poems. As it does so, both change. The individual experience of the first makes the collective experience of the second available in a new and poignant way. The result is a dark, moving interplay of determinism and elegy.

III

That in itself, however, requires a word of warning. These are not war poems as such. Women are not usually war poets. They are not primary agents of conflict; they do not sign or violate treaties. They are rarely at the front line.

Nevertheless, their perceptions of the aftermath of war may be especially keen. Just as the soldier at the front may write the most engaged war poems, so women -- always a less powerful unit of society -- may document the the lurch from enormous power to its loss, which Germany suffered in just a few decades, in a particularly acute way.

And so, the women poets in this book seem to shift the entire category of war poetry into after-war poetry. That they also seem to write here with remarkably similar tones and themes should be no surprise. As Lisel Mueller says in her superb book of translations of Marie Luise Kaschnitz: 'There was no way for these writers and those of the next generation to write except in the context of that catastrophe and the evil which led to it.'

In fact these are rarely poems of public reference. I have deliberately chosen poems that display the broadest vocabulary of loss -- a breadth that seems to me in keeping with the richness and surprise of this work. The private vulnerability -- the crashing in of a beloved world of perceptions, an almost secret world of importances -- is often

the deepest truth of historical tragedy.

I have been drawn to the detail of Nelly Sachs's amethyst, its old lights a sudden sign for new death. To the wonderful railways in Rose Ausländer's poem 'Strangers', signalling the endless stateless displacement of people shuffling those platforms without a destination. To the big grey birds in Bachmann's poem about leaving England. These fragments, rags, torn pieces of perception are sometimes healed here into wonderful poems; and sometimes not. But their power is unquestionable.

In these poems, also, are some of the most violated domestic interiors I know of in all poetry: Else-Lasker Schüler's grey flowers and her blue piano, in the shadow of the cellar door. Hilde Domin's dream-like waterlogged doors in the city of Cologne. Rose Ausländer's eerie still life of a table with wine and bread and strawberries in the shadow of the ghetto. Nelly Sachs's carpet burnt by the fiery feet of a stateless person.

The political poem is an elusive category. The absolute privacy and reticence of some of these poems may not at first seem to fit that category. Yet in many instances, these poems show how the privacies and sidelinings of a woman's life -- the silences of mothers and daughters, the individual life swept away by remote decisions, the shattered existence of families -- affect a poetic perspective in a time of catastrophic violence. It is the very powerlessness of these lost entities which becomes, with hindsight, both a retrieval system and a searing critique of power. In that sense, of course, these are defining political poems.

IV

I am profoundly interested in that bleak landscape which follows war or -- in the minds of certain writers here -- anticipates it. If I understand it rightly, that terrain is an extraordinary and reliable sign of dispossession: sometimes the only reference left of a land which once existed, full of human hope and ordinariness.

My interest is not abstract. During the Troubles in Ireland the political life of the island was endlessly on view -- violent, oppressive and often cruel. Gradually, act by murderous act, a country I had once known, once understood to have existed, disappeared. With that disappearance, a world of familiar signs -- of memories and explanations -- was displaced.

What's more, as that land disappeared there was little enough to register its previous existence. The delicacy and actuality of a place in its time can quickly be overwritten.

But the political poem in Ireland did register that disappearing country. Visibly, eloquently, that poem became a fever chart of the events around it. As it did so, something striking happened. The more it registered the political upheaval the less it became a public poem. The less it became a public poem, the more available it was to the private world which is the site of the deepest injury in a time of violence.

The truth was, that the violation of our island went so deep, was so toxic, that the private could no longer find shelter from the public. Everything was touched. Nothing was spared: A buckled shoe in a market street after a bombing. A woman looking out a window at an altered street -- they were all emblems, images, perhaps even a graffiti

of the new reality. Overnight, so it seemed, the division between the public and private imagination ceased to be meaningful. Both were interchangeable ways of grasping and rendering a new reality. The political poem became a map of dissolving boundaries.

I do not mean to compare what happened on one island to the mid-century cataclysm which these poets knew and endured. Nevertheless, I do believe my experience of the first made me more able to read these beautiful poems for what they are -- one of the most poignant acoustic systems of all: the vast public event felt as a private tremor.

RoseAusländer

RoseAusländer was born Rosalie Scherzer into a traditional Jewish family in Czernowitz in May 1901. She thus became a native of one of the most volatile boundaries of the old Austria. She was the elder of two children Her father, Sigmund Scherzer, was a Rabbinical student. She learned both Yiddish and Hebrew at home.

She attended the University of Czernowitz where her interest in philosophy began. In 1920, following the death of her father, as well as the passing of Bukovina to Romanian administration, she emigrated to the United States with fellow student, IgnazAusländer. They were married in 1923. They separated in 1926.

In 1931 after her divorce was finalised she returned to her home in Czernowitz to look after her invalid mother. She worked as a teacher and pursued an active literary life. Her first book of poems, *Der Regenbogen* (The Rainbow) was published in 1939 in a small edition of 400. It was widely praised in Bukovina but, because of her Jewish identity, could have no currency in Nazi Germany.

She returned to New York in 1939. But after a few months, anxious to be reunited with her family, she went back to Czernowitz. In 1941 Czernowitz was occupied by Nazi troops, the ghetto was closed. She remained there for three years, often sheltering in cellars. While there, she met Paul Celan. Of this time she said, 'While we waited for death, there were those of us who dwelt in dreamwords -- our traumatic home amidst our homelessness. To write was to live.'

She moved back to New York in 1946 and published her poems there in both English and German. Her first post-war book was *Blinde Sommer* (Blind Summer) published in Vienna in 1965. *Ohne Visum* (Without Papers) was published in 1974. *Andere Zeichen* (Other Signs) came out in 1975.

By the mid-1960s she had decided to return to Germany. The last two decades of her life were spent in the Nelly Sachs home for the Jewish elderly in Dusseldorf. She received many prizes and honors in her later years. She died in Dusseldorf in 1988. Ausländer's poems are revelatory: lyric, questing, elegiac and direct. They chronicle an extraordinary journey through languages, homelands, memories and recoveries. At a profound level she understood that both language and identity had been uniquely tempered in her lifetime and by her experience. Her poems are the measure of that experience.

Mutterland

Mein Vaterland ist tot
sie haben es begraben
im Feuer.

Ich lebe
in meinem Mutterland-
Wort.

Motherland

My Fatherland is dead.
They buried it
in fire.

I live
in my Motherland --
the Word.

Meine Nachtigall

*Meine Mutter war einmal ein Reh.
Die goldbraunen Augen
die Anmut
blieben ihr aus der Rehzeit.*

*Hier war sie
halb Engel halb Mensch die
Mitte war Mutter.
Als ich sie fragte was sie gern geworden wäre
sagte sie: eine Nachtigall.*

*Jetzt ist sie eine Nachtigall.
Nacht um Nacht höre ich sie
im Garten meines schlaflosen Traumes.
Sie singt das Zion der Ahnen*

*sie singt das alte Österreich
sie singt die Berge und Buchenwälder
der Bukowina.
Wiegenlieder
singt mir Nacht um Nacht
meine Nachtigall
im Garten meines schlaflosen Traumes.*

My Nightingale

My mother was a doe in another time.
Her honey-brown eyes

and her loveliness
survive from that moment.

Here she was --
half an angel and half humankind --
the center was *mother* .
When I asked her once what she would have wanted to be
she made this answer to me: a nightingale.

Now she is a nightingale.
Every night, night after night, I hear her
in the garden of my sleepless dream.
She is singing the Zion of her ancestors.

She is singing the long-ago Austria.
She is singing the hills and beech-woods
of Bukowina.
My nightingale
sings lullabies to me
night after night
in the garden of my sleepless dream.

Elizabeth Langgässer

Elizabeth Langgässer was born in 1899 in market town of Alzey in south-western Germany. Her mother was Christian. She herself was raised Catholic. Her architect father, however, Eduard Langgasser, had been baptised into the Jewish faith.

Langgasser went to the Höhere Mädchenschule in Alzey. She qualified as a teacher and between 1921-- 4 taught elementary school in Griesheim and Darmstadt. By this time, she was already writing. Her first volume of poems *Der Wendekreis des Lammes* (The Turning Circle of the Lambs) was published in 1924.

In Griesheim she met Hermann Heller, also of Jewish origin, by whom she had a daughter Cordelia in 1929. That year she moved to Berlin with her mother and grandmother. There, she was drawn to the writers around the magazine *Kolonne* . She came to know such poets as Günter Eich, Peter Huchel. She was deeply influenced by the nature poet Wilhelm Lehmann.

In 1933 she published *Proserpina* (Proserpine). In the same year, she met and married Willhelm Hoffmann, who was non-Jewish. Their marriage was unsanctioned, since in 1935 the anti-Jewish Nuremberg, prohibited any inter-racial marriage. In the same year, she was prohibited from writing by the Nazi Reich Literature Chamber. This amounted to a professional disqualification, cutting her off from income as well as publication.

In 1941, her daughter Cordelia was required to wear the yellow star. Langgässer made frantic efforts to save her daughter, even managing to get her a Spanish passport. Despite this, in 1944 Cordelia was deported to Auschwitz. A year later, Elizabeth

Langgässer was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

Elizabeth Langgässer wrote both poetry and prose. After the war she published *Der Torso* (The Torso) 1947 and *Das Labyrinth* (The Labyrinth) in 1949. Her novel *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* (The Indelible Seal) was widely read after the war. Her books of poetry are as follows: *Der Wendekreis des Lammes* (The Turning Circle of the Lambs) came out in 1924. *Die Tierkreisgedichte* (The Animal Circle Poems) in 1935. *Der Laubmann und die Rose* (The Leaf Man and the Rose) came out in 1947. *Metamorphosen* (Metamorphosis) was published after her death in 1959. Her poetry, in particular, is almost impossible to find in English. One novel, *The Quest*, was published in the United States in 1953. Her work -- philosophic, Christian, formal, mythological -- fell out of fashion in the post-war era.

Her themes were those of the Christian nature poem -- a lyric of grace and renewal. That theme is especially tested here in 'Frühling 1946', written on the release of her daughter Cordelia from Auschwitz. Langgässer's poem opens an extraordinary window into the undocumented, harrowing reunions after the war, when survivors from the camps rejoined their loved ones. Langgässer died in Karlsruhe in 1950 of complications brought about by multiple sclerosis.

Frühling 1946

Holde Anemone,
Bist du wieder da
Und erscheinst mit heller Krone
Mir Gerschundenem zum Lohne
Wie Nausikaa?

Windbewegtes Bücken,
Woge, Schaum und Licht!
Ach, welch sphärisches Entzücken
Nahm dem staubebeugten Rücken
Endlich sein Gewicht?

Aus dem Reich der Kröte
Steige ich empor,
Unterm Lid noch Plutons Röte
Und Des Totenführers Flöte
Graßlich noch im Ohr.

Sah in Gorgos Auge
Eisenharten Glanz,
Ausgesprühte Lügenlauge
Hört' ich flüstern, daß sie tauge
Mich zu töten ganz.

Anemone! Küssen
Laß mich dein Gesicht:
Ungenspiegelt von den Flüssen
Styx und Lethe, ohne Wissen

Un das Nein und Nicht.

Ohne zu verführen
Lebst und bist du da,
Still mein Herz zu rühren,
Ohne es zu schüren --
Kind Nausikaa!.

Spring 1946

So you return
my sweet Anemone --
all brilliant stamen, calyx, crown --
making it worth the devastation,
like Nausicaa?

Wind-blown and bowing --
wave and spray and light --
what whirling joy at last
has lifted up this weight
from shoulders bent with dust?

Now I arise
out of the toad's domain --
Pluto's reddish glare still under my eyelids
and the hideous pipe of the guide to the dead
still in my ears.

I have seen the iron gleam
in the gorgon's eye.
I have heard the hiss, the whisper,
the rumour that she would kill me:
It was a lie.

Anemone, my daughter,
let me kiss your face: it is
unmirrored by the waters
of Lethe or of Styx.
And innocent of *no* or *not* .

And see, you are alive
and here -- there's no deception --
and quiet in the way you touch my heart
yet do not rake its fires --
my child, my Nausicaa!

Else Lasker-Schüler

Else Lasker-Schüler was born, the youngest of six children, on 11 February 1869. 'I was born in Thebes,' she once wrote, referring to her love for fantastical identity, 'although I first saw the light in Elberfeld in the Rhineland.' Her family were Jewish, but at this date largely assimilated. She was close to her mother. Her father, however, was a banker who had scant tolerance for daughters. 'He did not appreciate girls very much,' she wrote, 'and whenever I went out with him I had to be dressed in brazenly boyish clothes.' This early culture of play and impersonation remained with her into adult life.

In 1894 she married Berthold Lasker, a physician. Five years later she had a son, Paul. In 1902 she published her first volume of poems, *Styx. Gedichte* (Styx. Poems) swiftly followed in 1904 by *Der Siebente Tag* (The Seventh Day).

In 1899 she divorced. She was remarried in 1904 to George Levin, one of the leaders of the Expressionist movement in Berlin. This marriage also failed. By now she was openly unconventional. In the early part of the century she was a central part of the Berlin cafés which she described as 'our nocturnal home... our oasis, our gypsy caravan'. In 1913 she published a play *Die Wupper* (The Wupper) and an acclaimed volume of poems *Hebraische Balladen* (Hebrew Ballads) in 1913, followed by *My Wonders* in 1914. In 1917 her *Collected Poems* were published.

She travelled widely in the 1920s, despite financial hardship. Her closest friends were Gottfried Benn and the painter Franz Marc. By these friendships, she allied herself with the freedom and experiment of Weimar Germany. Her own poetry was beginning to be rewarded at the start of the 1930s -- she won the prestigious Kleist prize -- but the Nazi movement was beginning to encroach on and censor Expressionism. In 1933 a scuffle with Nazi brownshirts, in which she was beaten with an iron rod, made her flee to Zurich. The devastating event of these years was the death of her son Paul from tuberculosis in 1927. She never ceased to grieve his loss.

Lasker-Schüler's late years were displaced and lonely. She lived for the last six or so years in Jerusalem, in what was then Palestine. The outbreak of war prevented her return to Zurich. The displacement, the loneliness and an increasing imaginative acceptance of her fate is stated in her superb, visionary last book *Mein Blaues Klavier* (My Blue Piano). It combines the play and experiment of her Expressionist roots with a profound, elegiac lyricism. She died in January 1945 of a heart attack and was buried on the Mount of Olives.

Yehudi Amichai, who used to see her when he was a boy, has written: 'She is known around the world as one of the great poets of this century.' And in 1953, at a poetry reading devoted to her work, Gottfried Benn called her 'the greatest lyric poet Germany ever had' (*Dies war die größte Lyrikerin, die Deutschland je hatte*).

Mein blaues Klavier

Ich habe zu Hause ein blaues Klavier
Und kenne doch keine Note.

Es steht im Dunkel der Kellertür,

Seitdem die Welt verrohte.

Es spielten Sternenhände vier
-Die Mondfrau sang im Boote-
Nun tanzen die Ratten im Geklirr.

Zerbrochen ist die Klaviatur...
Ich beweine die blaue Tote.

Ach liebe Engel öffnet mir
-Ich aß vom bitteren Brote-
Mir lebend schon die Himmelstür-
Auch wider dem Verbote.

My Blue Piano

At home I have a blue piano.
But I can't play a note.

It's been in the shadow of the cellar door
Ever since the world went rotten.

Four starry hands play harmonies.
The Woman in the Moon sang in her boat.
Now only rats dance to the clanks.

The keyboard is in bits.
I weep for what is blue. Is dead.

Sweet angels I have eaten
Such bitter bread. Push open
The door of heaven. For me, for now --

Although I am still alive --
Although it is not allowed.

Abends

Auf einmal mußte ich singen --
Und ich wußte nicht warum?
-- Doch abends weinte ich bitterlich.

Es steig aus allen Dingen
Ein Schmerz, und der ging um
-- Und legte sich auf mich.

In the Evening

I had to do it -- suddenly, I had to sing.
I had no idea why --
But when the evening came I wept. I wept bitterly.

Pain was everywhere. Sprang out of everything --
Spread everywhere. Into everything --
And then lay on top of me.

Hilde Domin

Hilde Domin was born as Hildegard Löwenstein, daughter of a Jewish lawyer, in Cologne in 1909. Her home was not orthodox and she herself has stated that she considered herself, at least to begin with, as an assimilated German Jew. She began her studies in Cologne, then moved on to the Universities of Heidelberg and Berlin where she studied philosophy and political science. She worked on her dissertation with Karl Mannheim and Karl Jaspers.

In 1932, as anti-semitism was becoming institutionalised in Germany, she decided to leave her own country and seek shelter in Italy. Initially, she went to Florence. Her parents remained in Cologne for another year. In 1933 they followed their daughter into flight from the Nazi régime; in their case they selected England as a sanctuary.

She finished her dissertation on a precursor of Machiavelli at the University of Florence, earning a *Dott. Scienze Politiche*. She then married Erwin Palm in Italy and lived with him in Rome, teaching languages there, until 1939. At one point they barely escaped capture in a Fascist round-up of Jews in Rome.

They left for England in 1939 to join her parents. She taught there for a year but could not settle: Despite the fact that she had not been a direct victim of the Nazis, Hilde Domin's fear that Hitler would conquer all of Europe was acute. She left England with her husband in 1940 and settled in Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic for more than a decade, where both herself and her husband were teachers.

In 1950 and 1951 both her parents died. Hilde Domin has spoken of the death of her mother as a defining event: 'It is a fact that "my second life" the life of the poet Domin, started after her death,' she has said, 'which was one of the events which shook my life at the time.' Three years later she returned to Heidelberg with Erwin Palm. From then on, with the exception of a year in Spain, she made her life in Heidelberg in Germany. In 1959 she published her first volume of poetry *Nur eine Rose als Stütze* (Only One Rose as Support). In 1964 she published an acclaimed volume of poetry *Hier* (Here). She published *Aus und über Deutschland* (Of and from Germany) in 1982. Also *Ich will Dich* (I want You) in 1995.

She has received many honours. In 1983 she received the *Nelly-Sachs-Preis der Stadt Dortmund*. Today she lives in Heidelberg.

Köln

Die versunkene Stadt

für mich
allein
versunken.

Ich schwimme
in diesen Straßen.
Andere gehn.

Die alten Häuser
haben neue große Türen
aus Glas.

Die Toten und ich
wir schwimmen
durch die neuen Türen
unserer alten Häuser.

Cologne

The sunken city,
sunken
for me
alone.

I swim
in these streets.
Others walk.

The old houses
have grand, new doors,
all of glass.

We swim,
the dead and I,
through the new doors
of our old houses.

Marie Luise Kaschnitz

Marie Luise Kaschnitz was born in January 1901 as Marie Luise von Holzinger-Berstettin in south west Germany at the northern edge of the Black Forest. Her first home was on the estate of her aristocratic family in Karlsruhe. Her father was an officer in the Imperial army. Shortly after her birth, they moved to Potsdam.

Just a year before the First World War the family moved again to Berlin, where she went to school. Following the separation of her parents, after the war -- and seeking independence from her family -- she became a bookseller in Weimar in 1917.

In 1924 she worked as a secretary in the Archaeological Institute in Rome. Here she

met her future husband, the Austrian archaeologist Guido Baron von Kaschnitz Kaschnitz-Weinberg. They married in 1925. It was a marriage that was exceptionally close, if nomadic, until his death in 1958.

Her only child, Iris Costanza, was born in 1928. From then on, she and her husband travelled extensively. They visited North Africa and southern Europe. They lived in many places, although Frankfurt and Rome constituted their two real homes. From 1926 to 1932 as well as from 1953 to 1956 they lived in Rome; from 1932 to 1937 in Königsberg. From 1937 to 1941 they were in Marburg. Finally from 1941 to 1953 they were in Frankfurt.

In the 1940s the family were trapped in the fire-bombings of Frankfurt. The images and impressions from those years of war became a strong presence in Kaschnitz's work. One of her darkest poems, 'Hiroshima', which is included here, is an exploration of the brutality and anonymity of bombing.

Her first book, a novel, *Liebe beginnt*, was published in 1933. In 1947, just after the war, she published *Gedichte und Totentanz* and *Gedichte zur Zeit*. *Neue Gedichte* was published in 1957. *Dein Schweigen -- Meine-Stimme* (Your Silence -- My Voice) was published in 1962 after the death of her husband (an event which devastated her and for a while caused her seclusion even from writing.) *Ein Wort Weiter* (One Word Further) was published in 1965 and *Kein Zauberspruch* (No Magic Flormula), her last book, was published posthumously in 1974.

In 1955 she received the Georg Buchner Prize. She died in Rome in 1974 and is buried at her family's estate in Germany.

Hiroshima

Der den Tod auf Hiroshima warf
ging ins Kloster, läutet dort die Glocken.
Der den Tod auf Hiroshima warf
Sprang vom Stuhl in die Schlinge, erwürgte sich.
Der den Tod auf Hiroshima warf
Fiel in Wahnsinn, wehrt Gespenster ab
Hunderttausend, die ihn angehen nächtlich
Auferstandene aus Staub für ihn.

Nichts von alledem ist wahr.
Erst vor kurzem sah ich ihn
Im Garten seines Hauses vor der Stadt.
Die Hecken waren noch jung und die Rosenbüsche
zierlich.
Das wächst nicht so schnell, daß sich einer verbergen könnte
Im Wald des Vergessens. Gut zu sehen war
Das nackte Vorstadthaus, die junge Frau
Die neben ihm stand im Blumenkleid
Das kleine Mädchen an ihrer Hand
Der Knabe der auf seinem Rücken saß
Und über seinem Kopf die Peitsche schwang.

Sehr gut erkennbar war er selbst
Vierbeinig auf dem Grasplatz, das Gesicht
Verzerrt von Lachen, weil der Photograph
hinter der Hecke stand, das Auge der Welt.

Hiroshima

The man who dropped death on Hiroshima
Rings bells in the cloister, has taken vows.
The man who dropped death on Hiroshima
Put his head in a noose and hanged himself.
The man who dropped death on Hiroshima
Is out of his mind, is battling with risen souls
Made of atomic dust who are out to attack him.
Every night. Hundreds and thousands of them.

None of it's true.

In fact, I saw him the other day
In his front garden, there in the suburb --
With immature hedges and dainty roses.
You need time to make a Forest of Forgetting
Where someone can hide. Plainly on view
Was the naked, suburban house and the young wife
Standing beside him in her floral dress
And the little girl attached to her hand
And the boy hoisted up on his back
And cracking a whip over his head.
And he was easy to pick out
On all fours there on the lawn, his face
Contorted with laughter, because the photographer stood
Behind the hedge, the seeing eye of the world.

Ingeborg Bachmann

Ingeborg Bachmann was born in Klagenfurt in Austria in 1926. She was twelve years of age when Hitler's troops marched into the main square in 1938. She marked the event as the end of her childhood. Later, she studied at the Universities of Graz and Innsbruck, did her graduate work on Martin Heidegger and received a doctorate of philosophy in 1950.

In 1952 she read her poetry at a meeting of Gruppe 47, the newly formed and influential group of post-war German writers. The following year she published her first book of poems, *Die Gestundete Zeit* (Borrowed Time) and received the Gruppe 47 prize. She continued to publish to acclaim and wide international interest. In 1956 she published her second volume of poems *Anrufung des Großen Bären* (Invocation of the Great Bear). In 1959 she also gave a noted series of lectures on poetics and philosophy at the University of Frankfurt.

By the end of the 1950s, however, she had turned away, and with finality, from

poetry. Although she published a handful more poems her output -- never very large in any case -- was thereafter almost exclusively in prose. Although her fiction, especially the later novel *Malina*, came to be critically esteemed, her abandonment of poetry troubled and confused her readers. All questions were left unanswered when she died in September 1973 in a tragic and mysterious fire in her apartment in Rome.

Despite the disruption of her early career, Ingeborg Bachmann must be counted as one of the most memorable voices to emerge in post-war writing. A voice which was not silenced by the shock and bleakness of war's aftermath, but instead recorded it unswervingly. A compelling, off-kilter laureate of a broken Europe.

Her achievement is the outcome of a unique intersection of land and language. Born in Carinthia, a southernmost province of Austria, bordered by the provinces of the Tirol on the north-west and east, Salzburg and Styria on the north, Slovenia on the south-east, and Italy on the southwest, her early poems show her to be a connoisseur of borders and border-languages.

In her celebrated lectures on poetics, given in Frankfurt in 1959, she stated: 'We, who are preoccupied with language, have learned what speechlessness and muteness are -- our, if you will, purest conditions! -- and have returned from that no-man's land with language which we will perpetuate as long as life is our own continuation.' This struggle with meaning, this sense of its absolute peril and disruption following the war, was shared with older contemporaries like Paul Celan. But Bachmann was also of the new Germany -- engaged with a different landscape of displacement. Charles Simic wrote: 'Whoever in the future wishes to experience that all-pervading sense of exile our age has felt, should read Bachmann.' Her poems are among the most compelling documents of what happened -- and how it was felt and imagined -- after the war.

Abschied von England

Ich habe deinen Boden kaum betreten,
schweigsames Land, kaum einen Stein berührt,
ich war von deinem Himmel so hoch gehoben,
so in Wolken, Dunst und in noch Ferneres gestellt,
daß ich dich schon verließ,
als ich vor Anker ging.

Du hast meine Augen geschlossen
mit Meerhauch und Eichenblatt,
von meinen Tränen begossen,
hieltst du die Gräser satt;
aus meinen Träumen gelöst,
wagten sich Sonnen heran,
doch alles war wieder fort,
wenn dein Tag begann.
Alles blieb ungesagt.

Durch die Straßen flatterten die großen grauen Vögel
und wiesen mich aus.

War ich je hier?

Ich wollte nicht gesehen werden.

Meine Augen sind offen.
Meerhauch und Eichenblatt?
Unter den Schlangen des Meers
seh ich, an deiner Statt,
das Land meiner Seele erliegen.

Ich habe seinen Boden nie betreten.

Departure from England

Silent land --
I have hardly stepped on your soil.
I have hardly troubled a stone of it.
I was raised so high by your skies and so held
inside your clouds, your hazy mists, your further distances
that I had already left you
before I dropped anchor.

You have shut my eyes
with your sea breezes, your oak leaf.
You let the grasses feed
on the tears I wept.
Released from my dreams, suns
dared to make their way across country.
But everything disappeared
as soon as your day started.
And everything stayed unsaid.

Huge grey birds fluttered down the streets.
They wanted to drive me out.
But was I ever here?

I didn't want to be seen.

My eyes are wide open.
Sea breezes? Oak leaf?
Under the sinuous waves
instead of you I see
the country of my soul give up the ghost.

I have never stepped on its soil.