



HJALMAR HAGELSTAM, "FIANCE" (1932)

TENUOUS PHOENIX

Suddenly your voice begins to break windows
 Inside me: I am an old house you take advantage of.
 Your face swings in long slow arcs into my sides.
 I begin to cry: this old grey frame, this porch,
 The garden, the fence. . . How I love this earth!
 I think: it is unbearable that you misunderstand me,
 Even as my hate melts into water.
 But then, in your procession, you do not notice me.
 I sit in an ancient rocker, smoking, content,
 With my books and a distinguished correspondence.
 Through a jagged hole I see you are inside now,
 Balanced under a chandelier, waiting, yet your face
 Points toward a distant light, and you have forgotten me,
 Or I am a means to an end. Your words are allegorical,
 Terrifying. I pull you to me, and you are relieved:
 For moments, I give you makeshift shelter.
 Now I am but a single piece, and you strip me to the muscle
 In anticipation.
 I tell you that I love you, but too late. Your teeth
 Are rocks; your face burns like an old chair, ragged, smelly.
 Your eyes motion that I am not to touch you.
 You accelerate like sun through the windows of a museum.
 My body bends, almost breaking, loud with denial, rigid
 With assent: all that you say I admit to, yet even now
 I defend myself, unrelenting, dependent, frightened by two fears:
 Of the crushing, fragile liberation, hovering, pending;
 Of the wavering, looming, futile questions
 You will soon begin to ask.

JAMES CUMMINS

PLACE

On the last day of the world
 I would want to plant a tree

what for
 not for the fruit

the tree that bears the fruit
 is not the one that was planted

I want the tree that stands
 in the earth for the first time

with the sun already
 going down

and the water
 coming to touch its roots

in the earth full of the dead
 and clouds passing

once
 over its leaves

W. S. MERWIN

POETRY

A DREAM

My mother's garden is bare.
 The garden of her secret indulgences
 where my child fingers
 nibbled exotic sentience,
 plump, beaded skins
 of sweet wild strawberries,
 satiny, sharp-scented chives.
 A thin strip of a garden
 yielding her private fancies,
 sunk against the heat-cracked west wall;
 she cooled its middle years
 under swooping, canopied wisteria.

I dream it bare dry dirt, turned, crumbled;
 I want to plant something.
 Among shadows one shape rises, nudges, impels my hands,
 my fingers burrow,
 a supplicant to deep earth;
 I draw up four tall red tulips
 shaping a heart of soil.

I plant the fallow space
 around my heart with tulips,
 emptying my darkness
 into efflorescent squares.
 Red, then purple sentinels in
 close-cupped, unbending embrace
 reveal my earth-held shapes
 of molasses brown, newly moistened.

KATRIN BRIDGET SNOW

TO MY GRANDDAUGHTER EMMA JANE

a newsletter on the day of your birth

On June 20, 1987, the day of your birth,
 another nuclear test bomb was detonated in Nevada;
 and in Oregon, your ancestral home,
 the robins sang in symphony
 to announce the beginning of summer.

On the day of your birth,
 thousands of Korean students, long out of patience
 with seemingly endless repression
 rioted again in Seoul;
 and the waves washed treasures
 onto a sunbathed Northwest beach
 while seagulls cried overhead.

On the day of your birth,
 the dedicated father of the first American volunteer
 killed by U.S. sponsored Contras in Nicaragua
 underwent open heart surgery
 while your Uncle Dan, Aunt Wanda and Cousin Danice
 were out in field service
 proclaiming the inception of God's Kingdom
 and urging their neighbors to abandon
 false teachings and bad habits.

On the day of your birth Congressmen argued
 over a trillion dollar national budget
 while Portland's homeless rummaged through garbage
 and slept fitfully in doorways;
 worldwide protest against Apartheid escalated,
 and Oregon state employees marched
 for justice and equity.

On the day of your birth conflict threatened
 in the long disputed Persian Gulf,
 where the President of your country
 would risk World War III in the name of protecting
 "vital national interests";
 your Aunt Cecily joyfully went shopping
 for baby clothes,
 and your Grandmother Mary Jane,
 amid numerous distractions,
 attempted to write a poor poem.

One thing I promise you, Emma Jane,
 our special new person just embarked
 upon the ever changing sea of life,
 we will find the means to bequeath to you
 a better world than the sad and violent one
 which we inherited.

MARY JANE BREWSTER