

SAFE PLACE IN *THE* FUTURE (?) DYSTOPIA NOW UTOPIA NEVER

POEMS

WISLAWA SZYMBORSKA

DENISE LEVERTOV

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MUSEUM OF
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INTO THE ARK

An endless rain is just beginning.
Into the ark, for where else can you go,
you poems for a single voice,
private exultations,
unnecessary talents,
surplus curiosity,
short-range sorrows and fears,
eagerness to see things from all six sides.

Rivers are swelling and bursting their banks.
Into the ark, all you chiaroscuros and half-tones,
you details, ornaments, and whims,
silly exceptions,
forgotten signs,
countless shades of the color gray,
play for play's sake,
and tears of mirth.

As far as the eye can see, there's water and hazy horizon.
Into the ark, plans for the distant future,
joy in difference,
admiration for the better man,
choice not narrowed down to one of two,
outworn scruples,
time to think it over,
and belief that all this
will come in handy someday.



For the sake of the children
that we still are,
fairy tales have happy endings.
That's the only finale that will do here, too.
The rain will stop,
the waves will subside,
the clouds will part
in the cleared up sky,
and they'll be once more
what clouds ought to be:
lofty and rather lighthearted
in their likeness to things
drying in the sun—
isles of bliss,
lambs,
cauliflowers,
diapers.



WISLAWA SZYMBORSKA
Polish Poet

LIFE AT WAR

The disasters numb within us
caught in the chest, rolling
in the brain like pebbles. The feeling
resembles lumps of raw dough

weighing down a child's stomach on baking day.
Or Rilke said it, 'My heart. . .
Could I say of it, it overflows
with bitterness . . . but no, as though

its contents were simply balled into
formless lumps, thus
do I carry it about.'
The same war

continues.

We have breathed the grits of it in, all our lives,
our lungs are pocked with it,
the mucous membrane of our dreams
coated with it, the imagination
filmed over with the gray filth of it:

the knowledge that humankind,

delicate Man, whose flesh
responds to a caress, whose eyes
are flowers that perceive the stars,

whose music excels the music of birds,
whose laughter matches the laughter of dogs,
whose understanding manifests designs
fairer than the spider's most intricate web,



DENISE LEVERTOV
American Poet



still turns without surprise, with mere regret
to the scheduled breaking open of breasts whose milk
runs out over the entrails of still-alive babies,
transformation of witnessing eyes to pulp-fragments,
implosion of skinned penises into carcass-gulleys.

We are the humans, men who can make;
whose language imagines mercy,
lovingkindness we have believed one another
mirrored forms of a God we felt as good—

who do these acts, who convince ourselves
it is necessary; these acts are done
to our own flesh; burned human flesh
is smelling in Vietnam as I write.

Yes, this is the knowledge that jostles for space
in our bodies along with all we
go on knowing of joy, love;

our nerve filaments twitch with its presence
day and night,
nothing we say has not the husky phlegm of it in the saying,
nothing we do has the quickness, the sureness,
the deep intelligence living at peace would have.

TIGGLEDY TIP

We called it the tiggledy tip
three toddlers who giggled at that sound
and gazed in awe at the sight
of the huge mound that loomed over the
small valley.

It was always there, a constant feature
in the landscape of our
childhood disregarded
except for the silly name
that made us smile.
But in another valley
other children
were swallowed in a swoop
of coal-dust, water;
black and tarry.



Not much older than us
a whole school of children
blinked away by the slide
of a tiggledy tip.
Black & white the news reports,
fear and horror through the valleys,
packing cases as we moved
away from the tiggledy tip.
The other valley now
has graves,
mothers who never saw
their children grow and bring forth infants,
a generation lost forever
to a tiggledy tip.



MICHELLE BRETON
Canadian Poet

DISASTER

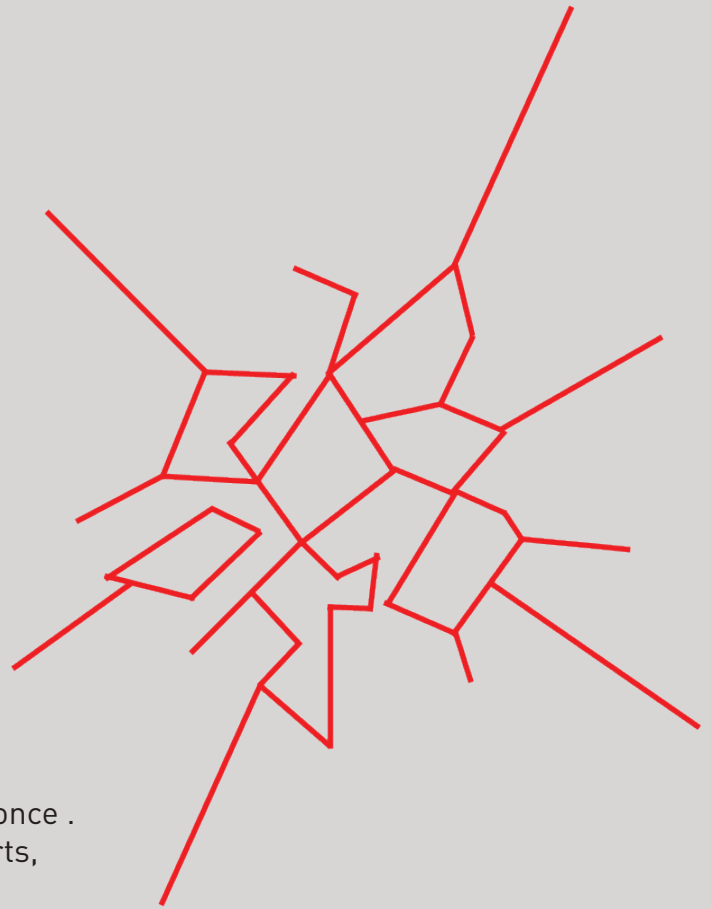
We heard disaster creeping
When the newborn baby cried.
And the way your generation fled
From pain and genocide.
We heard it in the weeping
Of women with sons and lovers lost.
We heard it in the way they said,
“In life and war there comes a cost”

I heard disaster creeping
When the news was airing more than once .
When sirens topped the Billboard charts,
And people lied for fun.
In the stress of growing poverty,
Smoke stacks that kill our air,
To the cries of people dying
From diseases and despair.

He heard disaster creeping
When he loaded his gun for war.
In the silence of a desert,
Where his heart was growing sore
We're worried about our welfare,
About our oil and our cars.
The directions to and from Iraq,
The new shuttle track to Mars.

We're so busy with the far and few
That we forgot about our nation.
Now in the midst of the commotion,
You can hear the implication.
Can you hear it gently seeping,

Through the sleeping and the weeping,
Can't you hear disaster creeping?



LAUREN ELIZABETH MCLEOD
American Poet

THE FLOODING THAT WRITES ITSELF

I could not teach
what they refused
to hear.

It is so dark
and damp
and cold.

I wanted to teach
how mountains explode
like people—
that abuse takes
many forms.

How long will this air last?

I can barely see the light
from my mobile phone—
did someone hear
my words text-ed out
about the growing dimness here?

*“Ma’am, we are still under
the school. Please help us,
Ma’am. This is Edilio
Coquilla. Please Ma’am.”*

The children have not even
began first grade.



EILEEN TABIOS
Filipino-American Poet

I hear their fingers scratching
sounds like restless “insects
or running water”—will
the rescuers be fooled?
Are there rescuers
above this collapsed earth?

I could not teach
the deaf to listen.
No, not lessons about
the environment—how trees
protect land from sliding
down into faraway seas.

I could not teach the guardians
who loved to call themselves
“guardians” of the future:
children now inhaling mud
to become mud.

I could not teach
politicians to cease corruption—
to grow environments where
mountains can exist
despite the hunger of
human denizens.



I could not teach how
Hunger becomes a disease
when we feed ourselves
with our children.

This lesson is not about mountains
losing their trees
so people can eat.
The lesson is about a poet
writing a poem
on a desk carved
from an “endangered species”
smuggled out into a land
replete with snow
through bribes
to a mayor, a general,
a dock inspector
a paper-pushing “facilitator”
and his administrative assistant.

And how I shall be thirsty
for the rest of my life
no matter how much water
I drink and drink
trying to release the taste
of mud spewed out
in Guinsaugon, Leyte, Philippines
on February 17, 2006.

DISCUSSION POINTS/ACTIVITIES

1. List down the images in the five poems.
 - a. Are there similar images in the five poems? What are these images?
 - b. What are the kinds of figurative language used in the five poems? For what purpose? Are they effective? Why?
 - c. What is the effect of using figurative language on the readers? Why?
2. Compare and contrast the images in these five poems with the images in the exhibition.
 - a. Which of the images in the five poems would lend themselves to
 - photography -sculpture -other media -installation
 - film -sound art -painting

Why? Make a study of how these images in the poems would be translated in other forms.
 - b. Can you group the images in the poems into the three themes of the exhibition? Which poem would fall under which theme? Why?
 - c. Which of the artworks and the poems would fall under more than one theme? Which themes would these be? Why?
 - d. Both the poems and the artworks make reference to actual event. Find out which events these refer to. Consider the differences in the way the events are depicted in poetry and in visual art in comparison to how these are depicted in news reports. Discuss the implication of these differences and/or similarities in representation
3. Read the poems silently. Allow for time for the poems to sink in. After, have the poems read out loud. You may also have the poems read with images projected on a screen or on a wall.
 - a. have a discussion on how the different ways of reading the poems affect the message as well as the responses to the poem. Share experiences with poetry.
 - b. In the poem Into the Ark, which items are paired and why? Why are these the items that are brought into the ark?
 - c. What is the war that the poem Life At War talks about? In the poem, the link among the emotions, the physical body and the mind is described. There is also a disconnect that it shows. Have a sharing on whether or not there are any reactions in the body when hearing of war or disasters, what these are and why as well as how long these reactions last.
 - d. What is the tiggledy tip referred to in the poem? Discuss the idea of silly names such as tiggledy tip to refer to otherwise dangerous areas/things, and the act of naming in poetry (and other forms of creative writing).
 - e. In Disaster , the POV shifts from first person to third to second person. What do you think is the reason for the shift, its effect on the reader?
 - f. In The Flooding That Writes Itself , is it the teaching or the learning that failed or both? Why? In the 13th stanza, the lesson is identified. What is the lesson?