

ABSTRACT

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POEMS AND TRANSLATIONS

Laura Annemarie Leichum,
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Directed By: Joshua Weiner
Associate Professor
Department of English
Creative Writing

This collection represents an enduring fascination with how language connects sense and perception, whether it be a response to a work of art or an attempt to describe the condition of vertigo. Through lyric and narrative under lyric pressure, these poems explore different ways of making experience manifest by invoking memory, both personal and cultural. In some poems, memory transforms experience or vice versa, whereas others attempt to reconcile experience and memory and what may have been lost and gained over time. In addition, German language and literature are a constant touchstone. The translations included in the middle section reflect an interest in literary translation as its own creative project as well as its influence.

A PRECIPICE OF INCHES: POEMS AND TRANSLATIONS

By

Laura Annemarie Leichum

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Advisory Committee:
Associate Professor Joshua Weiner, Chair
Associate Professor Elizabeth Arnold
Professor Michael Collier
Professor Stanley Plumly

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*Always in a foreign country, the poet uses
poetry as interpreter. –Edmond Jabès*

*I stepped from Plank to Plank
A slow and cautious way
The Stars about my Head I felt
About my Feet the Sea —*

*I knew not but the next
Would be my final inch —
This gave me that precarious gait
Some call Experience —*

–Emily Dickinson

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I

red-tailed hawk

Why did I think
there would be
a mark, a hole,
a sign of impact,

when the breast
is cradled in
the concrete bowl,
wings spread out,

draping the sides
of the birdbath
in still-life artifice
and as the wind tugs

on the prop wires,
the pantomime of flight
the lift and sink
is all it takes

to make me look
for the trap door
which released it
from the gray sky

until the beak
hooks the corner
of my eye again,
tears down and in.

strange bedfellow

Until you arrived
I slept alone
on any portion of
the bed I pleased,
tossing and flipping
as much as I liked,
twisting bedclothes,
untucking sheets,
arms flung out,
abandoned to sleep.
For three years
we were together
and I lay only
on my right side,
always dreaming
of the other side.
I made space,
I accommodated
to make this work.
But with you there
there was no respite.
You had trained me,
the constant whisper
in my left ear
a demanding buzz.
And if I strayed
to your side,
the forbidden side,
there was consequence—
nightmares of motion;
the stormy voyages or
endless rollercoasters
the rocking, heaving,
ceaseless swaying,
followed by insomnia.
So I tried to stay,
where sleep had come.
Waking each day
with my lashes crushed
on one puffy eyelid
and my right arm gone
jelly from the weight
of my head.

bird's nest sonnet

From bamboo ladders, thieves say "It's alright,
They won't lay their eggs in last year's nest."
But each is thirty day's work without light
And until complete there is no place to rest.

In caves, each swiftlet uses echo-location
To find its nest; delicate, nacre-like cup,
Their pearl of purpose, the cusp of creation,
Each embryo thought snug in its egg cup.

We too seek sounds that signal "home is here,"
To grasp the size and shape of what holds life.
These words we spit-glue together are eager

To build a meaning that our minds can hear.
For now, we harvest nests to consume life,
Worth their weight in gold to keep us eager.

sun in an empty room

How when we look for the source of the light
it is hidden just beyond the frame because
he sees in everything the potential to reflect,
even her—plain, virginal.

She's a dressmaker's form waiting to be draped:

they start out as Jo and become someone else
like a character actress cast in one noir film
after another; a dame, a broad stealing scenes
and no one knows her name.

Not a single cracker jack on the movie house floor

and Hopper sitting in his own dark theater
watching the light strike her face and arms,
slicing the flank, a long guillotine reaching
behind her, that window shade.

“Did he kill her? Can't tell yet.” No, don't tell me,

the discovery is almost always something
you forgot you knew, something that has
been there all along: the light of memory
stealing across the final scene.

carombole

Shrunk to pinpoints, the eye almost all iris,
a deep blue that would shut out the light,
aperture closing, slowly healing like a wound,
there is something frightening about pupils.

Eyesight is one of the means by which your body
maintains its balance; you need to perceive
your body's position in the proper context.
The other means are: the inner-ear, the lower
part of the brain in the back of your skull.
If one or more of these becomes damaged
you may have trouble relating to gravity.

Walking down the stairway, looking up
at the sky, bending down to grab a sock,
reaching up to hold a subway strap,
may trigger ricochet between the inner walls,
ringing reverberations in the vestibules,
a world of sensations at odds with the laws.

Light as a feather, stiff as a board
Light as a feather, stiff as a board

Floating into the room,
light-headed and nauseous,
I sit on the examination table
wearing black rubber goggles
that shut out the light
and allow tiny cameras
to focus tight on each eye.
When I lie on my left side
the pupils begin to vibrate
between what they perceive
as the edges of up and down.
On the tv screen the pupil plays
a fast game with no pockets
just bank shot after bank shot
in the grainy black and gray
of a security monitor
in a backroom.

living lights

Troncones, Mexico

For M.

We drag our hands through wet sand,
exciting the edges of single cell algae,
each finger leaving a sparkling trail
of earth-bound constellations;

a bioluminescence rarely seen on land
—fireflies, foxfire, fireworms—
and utterly extinct in cities where
the sulfurous glow of streetlights
and the harsh throb of neon
dictate what we are able to see,
the blue-green spark of single cells
now invisible as they touch.

With the starlight dimmed,
how easily we forget the night sky
used to be a familiar field of lanterns
guiding all travelers. On this beach
the darkness falls in deep sea fathoms;
the stars are as numerous as the stars
and the waves are washing them ashore
for us to touch over and over.

something borrowed

Prague

Another woman kneels
on the cobblestones
her forehead touching
the arc of the bridge
her hands are open
figure of a cup
a silent request
eyes down, head down
her bare neck
begging those who
flow over and past

In the class
I am rushing to join
we will repeat
this shape, balasana.
separated by more
than just language,
by faces that were
taught to close
or open with fear,
we align our bodies

Our breath pools
together as we kneel
and bow our torsos
until foreheads touch,
arms stretch out,
hands point in prayer,
we use what we have
to shape belonging

My body still
as a corpse now
near the Vltava river
I slip under,
a smooth dark stone
dropped in shallow
purling water
come to rest
against the others

No matter how
the body moves
it forms a question,
the beginning of something
at the end of something
a swan's neck curved
towards the water
am I praying
am I begging
am I thanking

Somewhere
in the back of my throat
it unfurls
a vision of a green city
the bridge I recognize
as the angles and arches
in a tinted etching
I did not buy

wanderlust

A few weeks ago, the surprise of an unsolicited photo,
the handwriting on the envelope unmistakable, although
it is unlikely we would know each other's faces on the street.
Was there something familiar in the cheekbones, the nose,
the mouth, the jaw line, the ears, anything at all?
Your hair doesn't seem to be the right color
and your face is thinner and leathery and tan.
Wearing sunglasses and a gold chain of all things
(you never wore any jewelry) and dressed all in white,
light cotton shirt and crisp tailored pants, you're in the islands
somewhere, where I'm sure I've never been.
The picture was taken by a stranger or someone,
one you may or may not have told about us.
I would say you look older, but really you look foreign,
like those German tourists we used to see
sunburnt and ridiculous on Italian beaches.
And do you still remember taking those photos
on a mountain path in the Alps,
the sun cutting across my squinting eyes
I tried to keep open for each quick flick of the lens?
You were never in any of them, our family always at three quarters.
Le nom de père, le non de père, that well-worn trail;
so everyday I have to put on my shoes and walk away,
and sometimes I'm tired, but I have no choice,
you know how it is, it runs in the blood.

II

SELECTED POEMS FROM *KATZE UND DERWISCH* BY GISELA KRAFT
TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

nile promenade

cairo

I AM TRYING TO GO TO THE MUSEUM FENCE
I gravel clumps sand dust wire coil
parlez vous
horn I AM grease puddle plank rock chunk
cardboard mound beam TRY roar ING bell bag
de bris dirt ex haust TO gate fumes
crowd peel pulp donkey a-a crack mud pipe
TRYING grumble garbage tin lid TRYING TO stick
chaff wall residue TO trill whistle TO hundred
and three degrees pavement pieces bones rubbish desert
THE MUSE seeds stalk liquid manure spoke barrel hole UM
plastic mud de-tour head start dog lies
gutter snippets crap quicklime rubble nail
hall of the mummy lint string basket slip per TO
dump note mountain cord bottle tin can filth bucket
GO TO *ramses three* GO TO *amon amenophis* hundred
and three degrees manhole rail ditch GO TO heat
smoke tar coating circle traffic swamp laugh canister
tub streetlight hollow sea rags access road pole handle
sack sheep feed fuck you ma'am glass rust shard cluster
TO TRY brick SE-TO-TRY rubber husk earth
corner point post scrap ofFENSIVE stink board gap
splinter
MU-TO-GO end UM-I shreds paper oil spot sun
nefertari nefertiti AM rotten nile deny deny deny nile
nile nile
nihil nisi horus horachti going home

anatolian mother

*dedicated to the Turkish women
of the first generation*

cybele
whose breast
drapes across Europe
mother goddess
mother of humanity
my mother
or only a
centuries old
illusion

cybele
whose knees
I cling to
in the middle of rush hour traffic

cybele
twelve-breasted
mother to thousands

Your likeness
in the museum of ephesus
is misleading

Diana your pseudonym
though you were never
that thin

your nipples
as perfectly patterned
as an onion
counterfeit for sure

there's a better reproduction in Ankara
a mountain in the form of woman
her arms draped over panthers and lions
this is the best description
"of a mountain"

avalanches
collapse on land
for example
europe

but what are ice floes in the ocean
carelessly drifting into each other
against your enduring
primitive time

ma
the phrygians called you
ma
mama

that was my first word
and it didn't lie

but you
are still going strong
in wedding
in kreuzberg
in anatolia

cybele
whose thousand and first
cheek twitches when hit
by a husband who doesn't matter

you became estranged
had an affair with the west
gave birth
and quickly forgot about us

what should we do
nervous insects
under the hem of your skirt
we are
also yours

here is your realm
it is enormous
it will embrace
all the children
the wanted
and those only
allah wanted

between birth and birth
you knit husks
for all beings

while riding the subway
or sitting in a chair
as the men
play cards

cybele why
do we seek her
ma of the phrygians
what do you make of our moods

cybele
those who seek you
follow the mountains
because a mountain
is the best police sketch
“of the mountain”

once
from the window of my hotel
in the courtyard
in a street in karaman
I saw you in the flesh

while the earth
south of the equator
cinches itself together
your waistline expands and expands
towards the depths of the stone-paved
cosmos

your white headscarf
the tip
of the triangle

children burst forth from you
china asia millions
crawl from underneath the hem of your skirt

cybele
what are you
doing here
have you lost the means
to celebrate yourself
why do you crouch in the wasteland
in silence

you let the husband yammer
and remain silent
and remain
in berlin

yunus in berlin

*Yunus Emre,
Turkish Folkpoet
13th Century*

today you see him
at the landwehrkanal
he counts the cigarette butts
as he throws them into the water

today you see him
at the train station
he counts the wheels on the cars
the doors that open outwards
suitcases hanging from fists

today you see him
in a corner bar drinking raki
he counts his children
on his fingers
the dead and the living
his loved ones
from here
and back then

today you see him
at a government agency
he counts his years
backwards until birth

today you see him
on the assembly line
counting holes
on a steel plate
in the third goes a peg
always the same peg
always the third hole
boats with masts but no sails
they drift on

today you see him
counting faces
in the middle of karl marx street
his own face is not among them

today you see him
yunus
he counts the waves
the mountains the valleys
the foam crests and the furrows
a cold wind lashes
the landwehrkanal

today you see him
standing still today
just this once

museum island

the peace doves settle down
on the iron shoulders
of the memorialized hero

a man with the gold helmet
mends the ripped green
silk of the spree

a blue construction crane
embroiders steel cable stitches
in a wave pattern

where cathedrals admire themselves
in an apricot-colored mirror
a councilor
with a rosy chin
dreams the black thumb of hammurabi

the wife of the net-maker from cölln
asks Gilgamesh
for an amulet

the lion of sam'al
has a line of red ants
crawling through its fur

two old fisherman
grown taciturn
marx and engels
watch the gutted
centuries

the anonymous snitch letters from mesopotamia, the two-river-land,
disintegrate into white gravel

means to an end

saw hammer drill
needle and tongs
are there any tools
that weren't from the beginning
misused for torture and killing?

throw away the tools
even the nails on your fingers
can scratch
and about the tongue
the Chinese have a saying,
it can pulverize a person

is there not some means that peace
can call its own

erect a house
made of blossom petals
and bird down
capacious as a dream
and no one will live in it

all we have is what
keeps its form
to hold something together
you must use force
even for peace

**absence
or a record of the
creation of a fabulous animal**

on the first day you were beautiful and good
on the second you grew a horn
on the third a lead-gray wing budded
from your shoulder
on the fourth a claw sprouted from your shoe
on the fifth you flew
right into my armpit
built a nest and then lost interest
on the sixth you were a host of leeches
having their way with my veins
on the seventh I heard you
trotting above me with hollow hoof beats
on the eighth you went to moses to ask for advice
winged horned buraq the prophet's steed
returned as a lamb on the ninth
to graze on my belly fur
on the tenth you died for issac
the angel decided in favor of animal testing
on the eleventh I had forgotten the color of your eyes
on the twelfth day you were poor and naked
on the thirteenth you were laying on the bottom of the sea
a millions of eons old whispering mussel
on the fourteenth they called you into the field
duldul, ali's tireless gray mule
on the fifteenth you stood still
welded on the lip of a kettle
the sweat of the holy brew had oxidized
your copper neck
on the sixteenth you were the primordial ox
zarathustra sang of your suffering
on the seventeenth day when I came home
you were once again the one human being

III

claude glass

Maybe it's her brown glass that I am looking into
getting a reflection of a landscape that's just
over my shoulder and a long time away from here

something like Dorothy and her brother
rediscovering their own country when they took
those long walks through the Lake District

they later recollected in letters, poems and journals.
The views have all the subtle shades and focus
of a compulsive thoughtful backward glance,

the tones and perspective create islands of memory,
with some features on the edges blurred, curving away
into the oblivion of what lies beyond the ink-washed edge.

Trying to take in your whole landscape is not possible:
the purple-blue of the alps, the path of the Main river,
on the way to the *Ruhrgebiet* where you were born

which is why I have to use this ersatz fish-eye lens,
so-close-yet-so-far intimacy of peering through
the peephole of an apartment door; a face blooms,

your face framed by the hood of your winter coat
as the sifting, shifting wind-blown snowflakes fall
and accumulate, light and sticky like powdered sugar.

You are holding the kitchen utensils we borrowed
in your gloved hands, circling the column of snow
as you scrape and smooth every detail of a strange,

amber-colored goddess of plenty, Mrs Butterworth,
unmistakable in her shape, the sweep of her hair
the drape of her apron and dress and her folded hands

like an Italian Madonna and you tell me she is your first
American memory. You never talked about leaving
Germany after the war or how it was that you survived,

you never spoke in German to me at all about anything
so the winter courtyard is the island we're shipwrecked on
the lost country of you that I hold in my hand at a perfect
distance to capture the past that is always present.

three performances by the lorelei

I—as *Völva* from the *Poetic Edda*

The subject is knowledge,
a voluntary hanging by the neck,
an attempt to graft yourself
to the *Ur*-branches of the world tree.

Would you like to know more?

In a tree the wisdom is layered,
the pith creates palimpsest,
each ring adding to the ream,
whereas we tend to equate
knowledge with loss,
you have to give something up
to gain something

I have gained five pounds of knowledge
these past few months but we don't
measure these things in girth,
rather I have lost my figure
but gained weighty thoughts
and kept that lean and hungry look
in my eyes

Would you like to know more?

Odin plucked an eye from its
socket in exchange for knowledge
but how our bodies will betray us.
He will die despite this bargain
and even though he is the All-Father.
The crone seeress alone
knows how the end will come.

Faust gave up his soul because
he could no longer carry his lack,
no longer drag it across the yard
like a mongrel dog on a chain,
He hated having to say how
he didn't know everything,
but how our hearts will betray us,
when all he knows can not
grant him the life of his love.

Can a loss be used to fill a gap—
only if they are related to each other
*To fill a gap, insert the thing that caused it—
Block it up with other—
and 'twill yawn the more.*

Would you like to know more?

We keep bartering away parts
in order to know the whole,
to know the seed, our beginning;
believing it will reveal the end.

II—as Faust's Margarete

In the Grimm forest
the trees are full of women.
They take refuge in the loden green
shadows to hide from their own blood.
When there is trouble at home it's best
to take your chances in the dark woods.

*Meine Ruh ist hin,
Mein Herz ist schwer;
Ich finde sie nimmer
und nimmermehr.*

I, too, took a prickly pinecone seed
and planted it deep in the ground.
I didn't have to wait long at all
for it to grow a hundred feet tall.
I clambered up and sat in its crown.
Even though I wear a coat of a thousand furs,
my toes curled around the rough branches,
I am not a treed animal to be hunted by
an errant prince. This is voluntary exile.

Some say I carry my own trousseau,
one dress as beautiful as the sun,
one dress as beautiful as the moon,
one dress as beautiful as the stars,
three impossible garments tucked in a walnut,
but that is not my world in a nutshell.

Licking the sticky sap, the mead of inspiration,
will sustain me and I have been sitting here
for decades now, keeping my distance,
perched high above the fray.
Time enough for war to end,
Time enough for ways to change,
Time enough for me to realize my folly,
but I'm still perched.

Is this tree an ersatz father,
growing me like a fruit
like Yggdrasil grew the world
until someone arrives to pluck,
to hang themselves from the branch
until the desired object drops to the ground?
I decline to drop into a waiting lap,
a waiting hand, a waiting mouth.
To father will never mean the same
as to mother and to daughter will never
mean anything generative I suppose.

*Bin weder Fräulein, weder schön,
Kann ungeleitet nach Hause gehn.*

III—as Kleist's Penthesilea

The battlefield is dust and heat and nowhere to hide.
She tosses the spear from hand to hand.
A man's weapon.
She considers it as she considers Achilles.
The heft and swift strength of him.
She plays with it as if it were a harmless toy.
(She prefers the arrow, shot straight from the breast.
Now that is a thing to be taken seriously.)
She throws the spear straight up into the air,
the sharp point of its purpose pointing downwards.
Thunk.
It pierces the ground not far from the edge of her body.
With each toss, she grows more and more amorous.
The point passes within centimeters of her face
—a piece of her hair flutters, her cotton shift stirs—
and then it lands between her bare feet.
Thunk.
Over and over again, she walks a few paces and turns,
as if she is dancing a dangerous *pas de deux*,

and thrusts the spear into the air.
The battlefield is dust and heat and nowhere to hide.
She tries to plant a forest for her meditation
on her doomed love for Achilles,
to protect her from desire,
to root her feet firmly in the earth.

OLATHE MEANS BEAUTIFUL

1. industrial airport

Through the windows of the Metro right before
the swift, ear-popping descent into the tunnel
the pink sunset is lighting up the jet trails
and I wonder what kind of planes had passed
overhead and if they broke the sound barrier.
I don't have the practiced eye to identify
although someone tried to teach me years ago.

Every morning during the summer months
we would wake to the squawk and static
of my grandfather's weather radio as if
he had to be prepared to take to the air
at any moment, a habit from the days
when he had his own plane or long before
that when he flew for the Army and trained
pilots and went by the nickname Goldie.

Sunday afternoons we ran wild across
a field of dry stubble near the runways
as the dog chased scents, nose to the ground.
Poppa trailing behind all of us with his camera,
usually the Canon, maybe the old Rolleiflex:
it produced funny square photographs and
the view finder turned everything upside down.

Hay bales huddled in groups of twos and threes,
sometimes a snug half dozen, they had baked
in the heat and gave off a warm, sweet smell.
We cling and scramble, scratching our arms
and legs as we throw our bodies again
and again until we finally reach the top,
then coax the dog, who takes a running start,

jumps, and just makes it as we pull her up
by her collar, her tongue lolling as she poses.
Facing the bright sky alive with the thrum
and shriek of flight, we point to the horizon,
the planes on approach, and acting as interpreter
he reads the Morse code of their metal forms—
wing, engine, fuselage: Cessna, B-52, F-16.

2. solitaire

dusting, one of my sometime chores
running the dust cloth across
the hanging picture frames
the glass over each face
smeared with a cross
a cloudy ampersand
even my baby self marked
layers of prayers and names
you can only see up close
the living and the dead
blessed by the daily rounds
made early in the morning
my grandmother's lips moving
as she carried the holy water
from room to room
the last blessings were wholesale
a pile of small group photographs
proofs from her wedding day
kept in a silver-papered box
from the constant dab and rub
they had become warped
indented in the middle
with the same fissures
as on the cards she used for solitaire
well-worn and curved from
being cupped in the hand
shuffled until soft like fabric
she would lay them out on the white
and yellow checked oilcloth
cards drawn and carefully placed
as she planned a reunion
each one back in order by suit

3. bildungsroman

The umbrella's metal rib
had lost its plastic cap,
the fabric rucked up,
the end bent and sharp
snagged the impossible
space between my eye
and lid and everything
froze except the rain.
I stood unblinking
in your driveway,
should I run inside
and ask for help,
but as I turned my head
toward the house
I could feel it slide free.
Standing still, so still
I looked all around
to see if anything
had changed.

traveling through inner space

Now don't be surprised
if there is an overall feeling of
it's all horizon, where did vertical go,
the whole landscape a precipice of inches,
exciting and edgy, a most unusual state to be in.
With every nerve and tendon tensed
you will arrive among the otoconia
having passed through the canal,
its unexpected twists and floating debris,
tiny motes of calcium carbonate suspended in viscous.
Some of the rocks have landed,
even caused damage, craters perhaps,
no one brings back any clear photographs,
only blurry, reminiscent
of early moon landings or sonograms.
And don't be fooled, this place is huge—
be prepared for agoraphobia
up until the very moment of departure.
This is foreign territory, after all,
the usual laws do not apply;
so reach beyond the borders,
find the traveler you need to be
when faced with an unexpected sensation—
oh, Lucy in the sky with Van Gogh,
the people, they will frown over you a lot.
They tend to think that you may be off or on,
something is wrong you may think,
the ground reaches up, you try to resist,
“My, the gravity is strange in these parts,
pulls heavily to the left.”
But don't be alarmed, you won't actually fall,
won't disgrace yourself in front of the natives.
And every day is like a tourist-trap carnival,
by the end you will be screaming
“Stop the ride, I want to get off!”
But the fun never stops for anything,
you are always next in line
for the tilt-a-whirl, lucky you,
inside a personal particle accelerator,
rings of light smeared around your head.
Food is indifferent at best,
at worst will not stay with you long
and it would be wise to
procure ginger root and Dramamine

to counteract or calm,
down goes the stomach when
another wave of nausea hits the beaches—
even on land you are at sea.
Your days and nights will be filled
with explorations of positions and movements,
plumbing the depths of perception,
the dark dot of the pupil jumping so wildly
you can hardly bring words together
to speak what you are hearing
is the bees at hive in your head
white noise thick as honey,
and you can only wish for home.

between emily and joseph

After Joseph Cornell's Toward the Blue Peninsula

I, too, usually choose to begin with the creation of a universe.

Your loves sailed away; I made you a lonely sailor's box of wood and sea.

We are always in the blue—sink, swim, breathe, drown—death is an illusion.

"it is the product of the single heart lying in its narrow bed"

You teach me that there is such a thing as abandoning oneself to denial.

Our songs enclosed in small chambers are wide open and distant with desire.

I rejoice that recognition can be stretched across time and space.

Like a small child, I am jealous and possessive of everything that might pass between us.

"don't you know that 'No' is the wildest word we consign to language?"

When they undressed you I bet they never imagined what they would find.

Although you tried to feed the fever and tame the cough with bottles of glycerin syrup.

Because you were impenetrable, my dear girl, it had to happen this way.

A body lean and hungry, the wolf having devoured everything from inside.

"When you had gone the love came. I supposed it would."

We shore each tiny piece of ourselves up against the dark corners of need.

Give me something that I don't have to share with anyone else.

You remind me of a dovecote; we only need a small space to feel free.

How were you able to remain so self-contained when everyone else was saved?

"A mutual plum is not a plum."

The root of love is nostalgia, a deep remembrance of those things past.

My sweet-tooth aches, nurse it with brandy-soaked currents, raisins, apricots,

prunes, pears, and dates, a dense black cake on a white plate.

biomorphic

If it's a condition
then mine is chronic

I can't stop looking
for the rat carcass

every day walking
this part of T Street,

marking the passage
of time, chronography,

a biography of time
told through one

biodegrading body,
pest and plague carrier

(did my sandaled
foot come too close?)

at first plump and fresh,
a biohazard site where

the eyes always go first
those small plum pieces,

ants and flies biologize
before they mythologize,

(which is the body you
scavenge every day?)

when the tail disappears
then ribs become visible

the pelt now wisps
of gray dandelion seeds

I'm unable to escape
time's matter

and I have to touch
the pulse of memory

the same way I touch
(even though I know

it's still there) the chain
around my neck

until I'm no longer
around to fill that space.

turntable blues

They say Van Gogh
had a ringing in his ear
that made him cut it off.
Which seems reasonable

to me, since a noise
like that, a mono-drone,
makes you long for stereo
and a few finite tunes.

The ear doesn't really
ring, no ding—pause—
dong, a misnomer,
like calling it benign

when it's a medieval
static with unchanging
pitch and volume,
a record needle

stuck at the bull's
eye of the concentric
grooves; a tortuous tease
making you believe

that you can pluck it
off and set it down
right there at the outer-
most ring and start up

Glenn Miller's trombone,
his big band sound
bringing the whole
world back into swing.

late harvest

This is the winter of my content:
I feel it in my bones
Even deeper than the cold.
The shiver, the quake,
The beautiful ache
Filling the roots of my toes,
Pressing against my fingertips;
I am ripe with the warmth
Soaked up all these past months.

Whoever says this season is death
Has never seen the hoarfrost bloom.
The sun bright and weak,
The air sharp, quick,
Crystallizing our voices;
Each word hanging there
From an unlikely branch.
Fruit for the taking.

Notes

Gisela Kraft (1936–) was born and raised in Berlin. She studied acting and Eurythmy and worked for several different theaters. Then in 1972 she began studying Islamic culture and religion, earning her doctorate in 1978. She was a researcher at the Institut für Islamwissenschaft der Freien Universität Berlin until 1983. Kraft focused on Turkish culture and began translating Turkish literature into German. Meanwhile she had become a dedicated Socialist and was involved in the peace movement through the group Künstler für den Frieden [Artists for Peace]. In 1984 she made the decision to move to East Berlin. Kraft is the author of several novels and books of poetry and has translated fifteen works of poetry and prose. Since 1997 she has lived in Weimar. In 2006, she received the Weimar Prize for her translation work. *Katze und Derwisch [Cat and Dervish]* (1985) includes selections from four books as well as some previously unpublished poems. Often combining references to ancient Turkish or Islamic culture, her own travels in the Middle East, and the urban setting of Berlin, Kraft's poetry explores the relationship between east and west, between place and self. Her engagement with these cultures and themes also demonstrates a feminist perspective. Especially in her earlier work she often describes the fraught relationship between Germany and its Turkish *Gastarbeiter* [guest workers], two such poems are translated here: "anatolian mother" and "yunus in berlin." In a later book *An den zeitlösen geliebten [To the eternal beloved]*, Kraft focuses on the Sufi way of seeking unity with God, the Eternal Beloved. The poem "absence or a record of the creation of a fabulous animal" is just one example of her meditation on this type of spiritual journey.