

THE TREES

The trees that I see from my window
appear not to have changed.
But they have. One of the tallest
is broken, and now we don't remember
what a great wall of green it made.
Others have a disease.
The earth does not breathe enough.
The hedges hardly have time
to put out their new leaves
before August clogs them with dust
and October with smoke.
The garden's history and the city's
are not of interest. We have no time
to sketch the leaves or the insects
or to sit in the white light
hour after hour, working.
The trees don't seem to have changed,
they look true to their kind.
And yet they have been carried
far away. Not even a cry,
not even a sigh is heard.
This is no cause for despair,
my daughter, but for understanding
while together we look at the trees
and you learn who your father is.

translated by
Michael Hamburger

IN MEMORIAM I

Once you asked me what was on my mind
and I did not reply.
But it's become very difficult
to talk of last things, my mother.

In the last hours
you stared wide-eyed.
You were terrified that you would not
be able to talk any more
not even inside yourself
about the one thing.
Now the noise is so violent
so furious the shaking-up of all reality
that even down there in the end
the tremor must reach you
felt as it was in the cellars once, in the war.
I shall not have time enough to reckon up, even now
it's too late for that.
And this is the very thing
I did not know before.
Now you know it too
we know it
while about to be reborn.

translated by
Michael Hamburger

IN MEMORIAM III

The little girl crushed the mantis with a rock.
It jerked its head at each blow.
From its abdomen an omelet of seed
a stain of eaten meals.

The mandibles bit.
The knives of the claws slashed
air. One half
of an insect fulfilled itself.

translated by
Michael Hamburger