

Two Poems · *Ioanna-Veronika Warwick*

EXILE

for Robert Pinsky

The blinds are turned,
curtains drawn;
a globe of milky glass
contains the light.
A small label inside:
“Made in Poland.”

So you reach me even here,
my old homeland.
How you stammer in a foreign language,
wring your many hands.
I have only a few
Polish things in the house:
carved wooden plates,
a piece of amber
with something hard to see
trapped in it:
a moth, perhaps
a leaf. Not like
some of my countrymen,
who blanket the walls
with folkloric tapestries,
film posters (they haven't
seen the films),
the national emblem over the piano.

A clever man once said
that for Jews other Jews
are either not Jewish enough
or else absurdly too Jewish.
But it's not a question of Jewishness:
it's a question of exile.

The more we remember
the more we forget.
The tallest mountains melt away.
The sea puts on the mask
of that other sea,
at least in its greener moments.

That's why the need for shrines,
for reciting memories
or a heritage of words
like the rosary or the Shema;
for picture books—we can read
less and less—
for translating trees into candelabras,
birds into bells,
bread into flesh,
clouds into ships and photographs.

That's why we eat strange foods,
pickled flowers and tongues,
keep our hearts in lacquered boxes,
and string fallen stars
into a necklace of complaints.
We weep not enough,
or absurdly too much.
Our burial instructions are ignored;
we bury ourselves,
facing the morning
in which we came.