

[1] Tahwidah

Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008)

If you'll not be a rain, my love,
then be a tree
drenched in fertility... be a tree
and if you'll not be a tree, my love,
be a rock
drenched in humidity... be a rock
and if you'll not be a rock, my love,
be a moon
in the sleep of lovers... be a moon
(This is what a woman told—her son at his funeral)

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Posh

Wayne Koestenbaum (b. 1958)

[8] I. Ballad of the Layette

Sing a song of Baby's illiteracy.
Words hit consciousness
and vanquish formulae.
*

Sing a song of Baby's European layette.
Nanny collapsed,
awed, in a heap on the floor.
*

Sing a song of deadbeat dads,
impoverished barnyard creatures,
logic only I can follow.
*

Sing a song of Baby's future—
talent scouts and holding pens,
Rachmaninoff and road rage.
*

Baby lacks the proper
aural sifting mechanism.
His mind lays out for me alone its platter of goodies.

[9] II. Blue Sea Songs

I can't find the Ned Rorem
sea songs in the card catalogue,

and the librarian won't let me enter the stacks.
Those three songs have a blue tinge.

Unfortunately, they don't exist—
I dreamt them.

He wrote hundreds of real songs.
Why can't I content myself with those?

A highfalutin violinist loved them, too,
and forgave me for freezing her out.

[10] III. Posh

My father said a Latin mass, using his "posh" accent.
Then, at a hotel window, looking down

to Madison Avenue, he wept:
I was stuck with complete sentences.

After my father's window weeping spell
his face was young again, like Walter

Benjamin's. Walking the rose garden's
thorned periphery, he didn't smile.

Slowed down, thick with thought,
he wore green clip-ons, green jacket.

Much about him was green.
Occasionally a cheerful man pierced my abstraction.

There's no point in re-recording the tenor
repertoire: in 1942 it expired.

*Wayne Koestenbaum: Ballad of the Layette, Blue Sea Songs, Posh.
These poems originally appeared in the collection Best-Selling
Jewish Porn Films (Turtle Point Press, 2006). Reproduced by
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For Victims

David Shapiro (b. 1947)

[12] Song of the Victims

They have used the bodies of children
As improvised bridges
Which they later cross.
First the sun and the moon,
Then the earth comes in.
But they have lost
The atmosphere, which belongs to them

Light passersby

My grandfather emerges
in a synagogue
with familiar accents
unlike his noble voice
a pudgy little man
sweet tenor coloratura flautando
He marches down the aisle
in a blue white crown
Women take notice
and they are charmed
and he is beloved
like etymology
Is my mother in attendance
or is she dead?
What are questions now?
Are the dead permitted to
sing? Is he serious?
Are the dead permitted
to return and sing?

*David Shapiro: For Victims and The Dead will not Praise You.
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