On the Poem’s Other Side
by Rokhl Korn
trans. Irena Klepfisz (c) 1995

On the poem’s other side there’s a secret:
An orchard and a house, its roof of thatch —
Three pines stand there in silence
Three sentinels posted on an eternal watch.

On the poem’s other side there’s a bird
With yellow-brown feathers, a bright red breast.
Every winter it flies to this orchard
And sits like a bud on the barren nest.

On the poem’s other side there’s a road
Sliced narrow, thin, so razorsharp fine
And there someone wanders barefoot and mute
A ghost lost along the passage of time.

On the poem’s other side wonderous things can occur
Even now in this hour clouded and gray,
As it presses against the pane of the glass
The feverish longing of a wounded day.

On the poem’s other side my mother stands rapt
In the doorway a moment in the fading light
And calls me home, like long ago, long ago:
Enough play now, don’t you see? It’s night.

The People’s Poetry Gathering is pleased to offer a forum for poets to pay tribute to other poets and to their poetic inspirations.

Irena Klepfisz pays tribute to Yiddish women poets from the early twentieth century.

Eugene Redmond, Robert Pinsky and others pay tribute to Henry Dumas (1934-1968), the blues activist poet who was slain by a transit policeman in a New York City subway.

Robert Bly and Martín Espada pay tribute to Pablo Neruda, celebrating the Chilean poet-activists’s work which has profoundly influenced 20th century poetry in all languages. Neruda (1904–1973) was the winner of the 1971 Nobel Prize for Literature.

Galway Kinnell pays tribute to Federico García Lorca, reading his “Llanto por Ignacio Sanché Mijias.” Spain’s greatest modern poet was murdered by the Fascist partisans. His Poet in New York sequence makes him one of the great observers of our city.

Charlie Morrow and friends host a banquet and performances in honor of poet, performer and translator Armand Schwerner who died February 4, 1999 (Sunday, April II, reservations required, $18).

Victor Hernández Cruz pays tribute to William Carlos Williams (1883–1963), the great modernist poet.
Play Ebony Play Ivory
by Henry Dumas

play ebony play ivory
play chords that speak primeval
play ebony play ivory
play notes that speak my people…

play ebony play ivory
play til air explodes
play til it subsides
play ebony play ivory.

for the songless, the dead
who rot the earth
all these dead,
whose muted sour tongues speak broken chords,
all these aging people poison the heart of earth.

they cannot sing
they cannot play
they cannot breathe the early rhythm
they never heard the pulse of womb

so up! you bursting lungs
you spirits of morning breath
up! and make fingers
and play long and play soft
play ebony play ivory.

play my people
all my people who breathe the breath of earth
all my people who are keys and chords...

now touch
and hear and see
let your lungs scream
til they explode
til blood subsides
and flesh vibrates…
make chords that speak
play long play soft
play ebony play ivory
play ebony
play ivory

**New York**
(Oficina y denuncia)

Debajo de las multiplicaciones
hay una gota de sangre de pato.
Debajo de las divisiones
hay una gota de sangre de marinero.
Debajo de las sumas, un río de sangre tierna;
un río que viene cantando
por los dormitorios de los arrabales,
y es plata, cemento o brisa
en el alba mentida de New York.
Existen las montañas, lo sé.
Y los anteojos para la sabiduría,
lo sé. Pero yo no he venido a ver el cielo.
He venido para ver la turbia sangre,
la sangre que lleva las máquinas a las cataratas
y el espíritu a la lengua de la cobra.
Todos los días se matan en New York
cuatro millones de patos,
cinco millones de cerdos,
dos mil palomas para el gusto de los agonizantes,
un millón de vacas,
un millón de corderos
y dos millones de gallos,
que dejan los cielos hechos añicos.
Más vale sollozar afilando la navaja
o asesinar a los perros en las alucinantes cacerías,
que resistir en la madrugada
los interminables trenes de leche
los interminables trenes de sangre
y los trenes de rosas maniatadas
por los comerciantes de perfumes.
Los patos y las palomas,
y los cerdos y los corderos
ponen sus gotas de sangre
de abajo de las multiplicaciones,
Under the multiplications
is a drop of duck’s blood;
under the long divisions
is a drop of sailor’s blood,
under all the adding up, a river of tender blood.
A river which flows singing
past bedrooms in the boroughs,
a river which is money, cement, or wind
in the false dawn of New York.
The mountains exist. I know it.
And wisdom’s eyeglasses.
I know it. But I didn’t come to look at the sky.
I came to see the murky blood,
blood that carries the machinery over the waterfalls
and the soul to the fang of the cobra.
Each day in New York they slaughter
four million ducks,
five million hogs,
two million pigeons for the dying to relish,
one million cows,
one million lambs,
and two million roosters which shatter the sky.

It is better to sob while sharpening the knife
or while murdering dogs in hallucinated hunts,
the endless trains bringing milk,
the endless trains bringing blood,
and the trains full of roses manacled
by the perfume-dealers.
The ducks and pigeons
and hogs and lambs
lay their blood-drops
under the multiplications,
and the terrified bellowings of cows milked empty
fills with sorrow the valley
where the Hudson becomes drunk with oil.

I denounce all those
who never think of the other half,
the irredeemable half,
who raise their mountains of concrete
where the hearts of little
forgotten animals beat
and where all of us will fall
in the final fiesta of jackhammers.
I spit in your faces.
That other half hears me,
eating, pissing, flying in their purity,
like the supers’ children
who take their flimsy palettes
to the holes in spaces where
insects’ antennas are rusting.
This is not hell, this is the street.
That is not death. That is the fruit stand.

There are broken rivers and distances just out of reach
in the cat’s paw smashed by a car,
and I hear the song of the worm
in the hearts of many young girls.
Rust, fermentation, earth tremors.
You yourself are earth drifting among numbers in the office
What am I going to do, put the landscapes in their right places?
Put in good order the loves that soon turn into photographs,
that soon become pieces of wood and mouthfuls of blood?
No, no: I denounce,
I denounce the conspiracy of these deserted offices
which erase the plans of the forest,
and I offer myself as food for the cows milked empty
when their bellowings fill the valley