

ANCESTRY, PROGENY, AND OTHER SHORT POEMS

1. ANCESTRY AND PROGENY

Locked in a safety box

These seven decades

Uncle's scribbled nightmare

To emaciated sacks

Of bones at Birkenau

Sinews barely alive

Raising questions

What of his uncles

Who stayed behind

Perhaps left at Katyn

Riddled with bullets

Or shtetl slaughtered

Their Pumpian no more now

Than etching on marble tablet

A Holocaust museum memorial

From mother's remains

A mustachioed picture

Servant of Franz Joseph?

Or lackey to Nicholas tsar

Whose common ancestor

From which family branch?

My dead did not know

But a great uncle said

Our Austrian tailor

Served royal blood

No one knew our real name

Changed in Montreal

Or by immigration?

As my youth faded

Those then living

Had not asked why

Life lived this long

Not caring much

Of missed opportunity

To find out. more

Concern whether I

shall come to see

Longed for progeny

Of serial marriages

Grow to meet my aspirations

2. COMMON ANCESTOR

Loose white robe, approaching

Berber in the desert

blue turban, teeth missing

grizzled skin, dark eternal

withered from beating sun

Shallow pool, shimmering

trapped on bedrock in the desert

alone in a sea of sand

water not there tomorrow

evanescent whimsy, parched death

His survival, my crossing

drops of life in the desert

Berber hand grabs Jewish arm

teeth rotting, holey smile

he pushes, drink to life

A shofar laced in gleaming silver
once sounded in the desert

now silent antique on the wall
memorial to expulsion

lone Jew wanders through sands of time

Reach out, recoil from the Berber
halt vengeance in the desert

He grins, no sword in hand

and smiling skips away
no slaughter of infidel today.

Precious water wets my skin
from hidden stream in the desert

Life meets in dry creek bed
Berber shares a splash and moves on
still grinning, all in play

Perhaps he knows

We have a common ancestor

3. SEARCHING FOR REST AND RECREATION

Wandering the aisles
of the Ju Guang Express
searching, a footstep at a time
for faces, breasts, crotches
women laid in rows of seats
yellow thighs assuaging lonely years

Have they changed so much since Nam?
these girls no longer doomed to whoredom
Do they sense staring lust of sixties men?
Sprawled, sleeping through the journey
they hide no desire, nor contempt
in pretentious veils of shame

Was it so then, that
sex was such a living
and women tended to it?
No pimples in pubic gardens
Now no need nor memory
to indulge in times forgotten

But the man now so much older
still wanders aisles of trains
yearning through age-glazed eyes
for that young mother unsatisfied
wanting only to ignite passion
embers teasing fifty years ago

4. MOTHER'S MESSAGE

Seasons passed as cumulus on windswept afternoons

Her image clouded by leagues and time

A long discarded placenta, mine from thine

Each journey over oceans void of knowing

Proclaimed veined hands across from mine

As did the gravel voice, she lay waiting ready

When age showed more than death, I could never see it

I still called from empty distance

Puzzled by cobwebs silken of her mind

Have you some message for me, not knowing what I meant

She paused, a wisdom in her silence

I cannot think of any, sigh spared memory

When other mother, in-law-mother, in intensive care

Wheezing, with doctors watching, her eye

Pierced heart thrice hung in blind white light

Almost at that moment, instant of amusement

Eternal knowing inchoate will of life

Came the call of mother's passing

Finite wisdom transmitted, she had one final time

Made me choose whom to pay homage

Dues to the dead or kneel to those alive

5. BLIND WRITER

Writer blinded by reality as fantasy
puts passion to pen, finding no words
How I wished, for want of will
to write the decades, old memories

Now without knowledge
or understanding to sustain
I whittle against hardwood
of life gnarled in setting sun

Lacking craft to carve drama
failing memory today
grasps vain hope to feed
ego's urge to have others
know that I live