

## THE CULTIVATION OF PHILOSOPHY

I sowed the idea of infinity  
in the unruffled soil  
of a wooden stool  
you see how nicely it grows  
—says a philosopher rubbing his hands

And indeed it grows  
like a beanstalk  
Another three or four  
seasons of infinity  
and it will outgrow  
even his head

I also knocked together a cylinder  
—says the philosopher  
at the top of the cylinder a pendulum  
I am sure you see where this is going  
the cylinder is space  
the pendulum is time  
tick-tick-tick  
—says the philosopher and laughing loudly  
he flutters his little hands

finally I came up with the word existence  
a hard and colorless word  
you gather warm leaves with quick hands a long time  
you have to trample images  
call a sunset a phenomenon  
to discover under all of this  
the dead white  
philosopher's stone

we now expect  
the philosopher to weep over this wisdom of his

but he doesn't weep  
existence after all will not be moved  
space will not melt  
and time will not stand still in its insensate course

## A TALE

six men in black livery  
go grandly alongside  
carrying lit lanterns

again as if pondering  
—watch the flowers in the garden  
cover them properly in the winter  
I wouldn't want them to go to ruin

you are the eldest—he says—  
take the genuine pearl cuff links  
in the pouch behind the picture  
may they bring you good luck  
I was given them by my mother  
when I graduated from school  
he didn't say anything else  
but fell into a deeper sleep

so this is how our dead  
look after us  
admonishing us in dreams  
returning our lost money  
trying to finagle us jobs  
numbling lottery numbers  
or when they can't do that  
tapping fingers on the pane

and we in infinite gratitude  
invent them an immortality  
smug as a mouse's burrow

The poet imitates the voices of birds  
he cranes his long neck  
his protruding Adam's apple  
is like a clumsy finger on a wing of melody

when singing he deeply believes  
that he advances the sunrise  
the warmth of his song depends on this  
as does the purity of his high notes

the poet imitates the sleep of stones  
his head withdrawn into his shoulders  
he is like a piece of sculpture  
breathing rarely and painfully

when asleep he believes that he alone  
will penetrate the mystery of existence  
and take without the help of theologians  
eternity into his avid mouth

what would the world be  
were it not filled with  
the incessant bustling of the poet  
among the birds and stones

THREE STUDIES ON THE SUBJECT  
OF REALISM

1

Those who paint small mirrors of lakes  
clouds and swans scenes by a stream  
those who like no one else manage to convey the sweetness of sleep  
a naked arm under one's head an open leaf and the sky  
and if they ever dare to recount the sea  
easily they contain that word in rose-coasted lips

they bear us in little baskets made of osiers  
and deposit us on the breast from which we drank long ago  
let us not blame them because their world without storms  
will wither like a flower plucked at sunset  
their small round warm reality  
is like the cheek of a shepherd when he plays a flute  
they thought that we would find happiness  
in the tranquil heart of a landscape with a rainbow

2

those who paint interiors of old barber-shops  
slovenly old women donkeys and vegetables  
drunken scenes brutal mercenaries  
everything in heavy and dull brown ochre  
and a ray of light which pushes through  
between the rafters of a sooty hovel  
sinks to the table on which are scattered  
juicy yellows and foggy blues  
the ray is there so that on it can be stropped  
the severe brush of the hunched master

so they penetrate the interiors of tenement houses  
and peer into the heart as into a bag of silver  
and see only a blind man who is counting pearls  
a dishonoured girl beaten deceived people  
dark weeping below and clothes-lines in the attic

the clear water of fresh floods  
is requested by the brush

3

finally they  
the authors of canvases divided into the right side and the left side  
who know only two colors  
color yes and color no  
the inventors of simple symbols  
open palms and clenched fists  
singing and weeping  
birds and projectiles  
smiles and grinning teeth

who say

later when we get installed in the fruits of our labor  
we will use the subtle color "perhaps"  
and "on one condition" with pearly lustre  
but right now we are drilling two choruses  
and on to the empty stage  
under a blinding light  
we throw you  
with a shout: choose while there's time  
choose what you're waiting for  
choose

And to help you we imperceptibly give a nudge to the balance

## A LIFE

once again  
in dead earnest  
offer to the betrayed world  
a rose

1

He wrote his first poem on a rose  
and bathed his fake in a reary rain  
gymnasium  
Class II A

he swore on his one and only heart  
that he would always defend the beautiful  
that he would never go in fear of violence  
that never ever  
always always

under his school desk  
that boy now lies  
clasping to his breast  
a helpless confession

on the desk his name  
the formula for a cone's volume  
the declension of *puer bonus*  
and the word *Jadzia*

2

the caretaker ran out with the big bell  
opened his mouth  
and sounded the fire alarm  
pictures quickly turned away

the white building turned red  
then trees entered the picture  
trees that stood by the school  
into the schoolyard  
where boys were playing

armed men came running  
and a game of catch began  
those who were able  
to run into the wood  
went on playing  
cops and robbers

3

that one from II A—  
but in fact that boy  
was quite different

trading currencies  
beaten on the face  
taken for execution  
lying on concrete  
stubbornly crawling  
to the bowl filled  
with hunger for life  
stripped to the bone  
and yet still alive

when he was freed  
he wept for shame  
for the second time

4

justice should be rendered to him  
he wasn't easily reconciled to life

the rapid stream of events quickened  
he stood in a wilderness and howled

he searched the ruins for mementos  
prayed with the names of the dead

poetry is the sister of memory  
guards bodies in the wilderness

poems' murmurs are worth no more  
than the breath of others they carry

he sits by himself at a little table  
drums his fingers summons a void

5

a well-meaning fellow comes up  
sits down and says  
I can't bear to see how you suffer

and your writing is getting worse  
you're being sucked dry  
by the greedy mouths of the dead

on your one string  
you play a mosquito's complaint  
you will be cast off  
by the greedy arms of the living

I know

it's hard to be reconciled  
not everything is exactly  
the way it ought to be

but please turn around  
and step into the future  
leave memories behind  
enter the land of hope

you tried to outyell time  
addressing the dead

now try to outyell time  
addressing the unborn

no one wants you  
to betray yourself  
stick to your subject  
write on what is not

6

at night the poet reads  
economics pamphlets  
at night the poet builds  
a paradise for his dead

it is a white rectangle  
like a block of cheese  
where each has a hole  
oily quiet and warm

paradise will be finished  
when the class struggle ends  
and when from one hectare  
we will get a given amount

then a billion lightbulbs  
will light up  
and loudspeakers sing out

7

again the poet is writing  
summoning the unborn  
to the future's paradise

over a rocky precipice  
he spans a straw bridge

he runs across it  
lighthearted as hope

8

they rebuilt the poet  
his table downtown

they rebuilt the café  
a fish tank for artists

he's no longer alone  
sitting with him are  
a young musician  
a certain sculptor  
a red-maned critic  
and two girl models

how great to march with the people  
—the poet thinks—  
and shuffles his feet under the table

sometimes they discuss whether  
the dictatorship of the proletariat  
may exclude art in the true sense

then they look at each other  
with a burst of laughter  
at not having kicked the habit  
of rhetorical questions

## ORNAMENT MAKERS

Praised be the ornament makers  
the masons and the decorators  
the creators of fitting angels

also the makers of ribbons  
and on them hearty inscriptions  
(fluttered by a great river-wind)

flutists and fiddlers who ensure  
that every note played is pure  
guarding Bach's *Air on the G-string*

and poets it goes without saying  
the defenders of children playing  
giving voice to smiles hands and eyes

they're right it is not art's business  
to seek out the truth is for science  
masons guard the heart's warmth

so that there be a mosaic over the gate  
a dove a branch or a sun amid daisies  
(past the gate symbols' strings are pulled)

we already have words colors rhymes  
that laugh and cry as if alive  
the masons will preserve these words

that by this dark mills are powered  
we masons frankly can't be bothered  
we are the party of life and delight

in a street with a joyful carnival  
there's the eyesore of a prison wall  
an ugly strain on an ideal landscape

they called out the best of the masons  
and all night they painted the prisons  
pink even the backs of the men inside

## THE BOX CALLED IMAGINATION

Rap a knuckle on the wall—  
a cuckoo will jump  
from a block  
of oak

It will summon trees  
one after another  
until a forest  
stands

whistle softly—  
a river will run  
a mighty thread  
tying hill to dale

clear your throat—  
here is a city  
with one tower  
a leaning wall  
yellow houses  
like playing dice

now  
close your eyes  
snow will fall  
it will snuff out  
trees' green flames  
and the red tower

under the snow  
it is night  
with a bright clock on top  
the landscape's owl



## WRITING

when I mount a chair  
to capture the table  
and raise a finger  
to arrest the sun  
when I take the skin off my face  
and the house off my shoulders  
and clutching  
my metaphor  
a goose quill  
my teeth sunk into the air  
I try to create  
a new  
vowel—

in the table's wilderness  
lie paper flowers  
the wall's frock coat fastens  
with a button of small space  
enough enough  
the ascension  
failed

for a little while longer  
my pen trips over a page  
from an evil yellow sky  
a trickle  
of sand  
descends

## NOTHING SPECIAL

nothing special  
boards paint  
nails paste  
paper string

mr artist  
builds a world  
not from atoms  
but from remnants

forest of arden  
from umbrella  
ionian sea  
from parkers quink

just as long as  
his look is wise  
just as long as  
his hand is sure—

and presto the—world—

hooks of flowers  
on needles of grass  
clouds of wire  
drawn out by wind

## BLACK ROSE

it emerges  
black  
from eyes blinded  
by lime  
it touches the air  
and strands  
diamond  
black rose  
amid planetary chaos  
blowing  
the imagination's little pipe  
lead out  
colors  
from a black  
rose  
like a memory  
from a burned city  
violet—for poison and cathedral  
red—for a streak and an emperor  
blue—for a clock  
yellow—for a bone and an ocean  
green—for a girl turned into a tree  
white—for white  
O black rose  
in a black rose  
what do you hide  
amid the dead flies of electrons

## APOLLO AND MARSYAS

The real duel of Apollo  
with Marsyas  
(absolute ear  
versus immense range)  
takes place in the evening  
when as we already know  
the judges  
have awarded victory to the god  
bound tight to a tree  
meticulously stripped of his skin  
Marsyas  
howls  
before the howl reaches his tall ears  
he reposes in the shadow of that howl  
shaken by a shudder of disgust  
Apollo is cleaning his instrument  
only seemingly  
is the voice of Marsyas  
monotonous  
and composed of a single vowel  
A  
in reality  
Marsyas relates  
the inexhaustible wealth  
of his body  
bald mountains of liver  
white ravines of ailment  
rustling forests of lung  
sweet hillocks of muscle  
joints bile blood and shudders

## FRAGMENT

the wintry wind of bone  
over the salt of memory  
shaken by a shudder of disgust  
Apollo is cleaning his instrument  
now to the chorus  
is joined the backbone of Marsyas  
in principle the same A  
only deeper with the addition of rust  
this is already beyond the endurance  
of the god with nerves of artificial fibre  
along a gravel path  
hedged with box  
the victor departs  
wondering  
whether out of Marsyas' howling  
there will not some day arise  
a new kind  
of art—let us say—concrete  
suddenly  
at his feet  
falls a petrified nightingale  
he looks back  
and sees  
that the hair of the tree to which Marsyas was fastened  
is white  
completely

Hear us O Silver-bowed archer through the clutter of leaves and arrows  
through the stubborn silence of battle and the mighty call of the dead  
again autumn O Silver-bowed archer trees and people depart  
we sleep in sultry tents under a sky crumpled by curses  
we dip our faces in dust and wash our bodies in sweat  
from the breast opened by a sword not blood not blood escapes  
animals die the eyes of mules are sinking  
the sails of our ships are rotting and no storm near the bay  
we shall not return to our wives bitter girls of foreign countries  
will not leave us much time to weep in their arms  
not for the stone wreath of Troy do we implore You O Master  
not for a plume of fame white women and gold  
but restore if you can to blemished faces goodness  
and put simplicity into our hands just as you once put iron  
send down white clouds Apollo white clouds white clouds

## ATTEMPT AT A DESCRIPTION

First I will describe myself  
starting from my head  
or better from my foot  
or from my hand  
from the little finger of my left hand

my little finger  
is warm  
curved slightly inward  
ending in a nail  
it is made of three segments  
grows straight from my palm  
if it were on its own  
it would make a sizeable worm

it is a peculiar finger  
a left hand's little finger unique in the whole world  
given to me directly

other little fingers of a left hand  
are a cold abstraction  
with mine  
we have a common date of birth  
date of death  
a common loneliness

only blood  
busy with scansion of dark tautologies  
binds together distant shores  
with a thread of mutual agreement

## STUDY OF THE OBJECT

1  
The most beautiful is the object  
which does not exist

it does not serve to carry water  
or to preserve the ashes of a hero

it was not cradled by Antigone  
nor was a rat drowned in it

it has no hole  
and is entirely open

seen  
from every side  
which means  
hardly anticipated

the hairs  
of all its lines  
join  
in one stream of light

neither  
blindness  
nor  
death  
can take away the object  
which does not exist

2  
mark the place  
where stood the object  
which does not exist

with a black square  
it will be  
a simple dirge  
for the beautiful absence

manly regret  
imprisoned  
in a quadrangle

3

now  
all space  
swells like an ocean

a hurricane bears  
on the black sail

the wing of a blizzard circles  
over the black square

and the island sinks  
beneath the salty increase

4

now you have  
empty space  
more beautiful than the object  
more beautiful than the place it leaves

it is the pre-world  
a white paradise  
of all possibilities  
you may enter there  
cry out  
vertical-horizontal

perpendicular lightning  
strikes the naked horizon

we can stop at that  
anyway you have already created a world

5

obey the counsels  
of the inner eye

do not yield  
to murmurs mutterings snackings

it is the uncreated world  
crowding before the gates of your canvas

angels are offering  
the rosy wadding of clouds

trees are inserting everywhere  
slovenly green hair

kings are praising purple  
and commanding their trumpeters  
to gild

even the whale asks for a portrait  
obey the counsels of the inner eye  
admit no one

6

extract  
from the shadow of the object

## PEBBLE

The pebble  
is a perfect creature

equal to itself  
mindful of its limits

filled exactly  
with a pebbly meaning

with a scent which does not remind one of anything  
does not frighten anything away does not arouse desire

its ardor and coldness  
are just and full of dignity

I feel a heavy remorse  
when I hold it in my hand  
and its noble body  
is permeated by false warmth

—Pebbles cannot be tamed  
to the end they will look at us  
with a calm and very clear eye

which does not exist  
from polar space  
from the stern reveries of the inner eye  
a chair

beautiful and useless  
like a cathedral in the wilderness

place on the chair  
a crumpled tablecloth  
add to the idea of order  
the idea of adventure

let it be a confession of faith  
before the vertical struggling with the horizontal

let it be  
quieter than angels  
prouder than kings  
more substantial than a whale  
let it have the face of the last things

we ask reveal o chair  
the depths of the inner eye  
the iris of necessity  
the pupil of death

## TAMARISK

I was talking of battles  
dungeons and ships  
heroes being slain  
and heroes slaying  
and I forgot about that one

I was talking of the sea tempest  
the crumbling of walls  
wheat burning  
and hills overthrown  
and I forgot about the tamarisk

when he lies down  
pierced by a javelin  
and the lips of his wound  
slowly close  
he sees  
neither sea  
nor city  
nor friend  
he sees  
just before his face  
the tamarisk

he ascends  
the highest  
dry twig of the tamarisk  
and by-passing  
leaves brown and green  
he attempts  
to soar into the sky  
without wings  
without blood  
without thought  
without

## REVELATION

Two perhaps three  
times  
I was sure  
I would touch the essence  
and would know

the web of my formula  
made of allusions as in the Phaedo  
had also the rigor  
of Heisenberg's equation

I was sitting immobile  
with watery eyes  
I felt my backbone  
fill with quiet certitude

earth stood still  
heaven stood still  
my immobility  
was nearly perfect

the postman rang  
I had to pour out the dirty water  
prepare tea

Shiva lifted his finger  
the furniture of heaven and earth  
started to spin again

I returned to my room  
where is that perfect peace  
the idea of a glass  
was being spilled all over the table

## INNER VOICE

I sat down immobile  
with watery eyes  
filled with emptiness  
i.e. with desire

If it happens to me once more  
I shall be moved neither by the postman's bell  
nor by the shouting of angels

I shall sit  
immobile  
my eyes fixed  
upon the heart of things  
a dead star  
a black drop of infinity

My inner voice  
has nothing to advise  
has nothing to warn against

does not say either yes  
or no

is barely audible  
and almost inarticulate

even if you bend way down  
you hear only syllables  
stripped of all meaning

I try not to drown him out  
I deal with him civilly

I pretend to treat him as an equal  
and that what he says is of great consequence

sometimes I even  
try to engage him in conversation  
—you know yesterday I refused  
I've never done such a thing  
I wouldn't now either

—glu—glu

—so you think  
I did right

—ga—go—gi

I am glad we agree  
—ma—a—