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# NEW YORK CITY AND OTHER TIMES

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## ODE TO NEW YORK

New York is tough on its newcomers  
from Lvov or Laos, or émigrés  
from Ontario or Ohio.

My own Manhattan began circa 1980  
with a ride on the D train from Brooklyn  
to Lower East Side's Broadway.

December's gusts pushed litter  
inside the day between supports  
of elevated noise over my head,

subway trains rumbled somewhat  
urgent - too fast to catch - all alien,  
iron-wrought staircases grew out  
from the narrow pavement.

Where was that famous Broadway  
I saw in a glossy magazine  
on the plane to New York?

Wind carried me on its back  
into foolish bravery - no fear,  
no disappointment - just open-eyed  
curiosity beneath the overcast sky.

The past was a whole life ago  
and here I was to build the present  
on the mirror's side of my soul without  
prophecy, regrets or premonition.

It wouldn't be a peaceful annex  
to the house of David, but a part of the city,  
strange, multifaced, unconquered.

Now, many years later I've fully tasted  
the concoction of bustling Manhattan  
with its crowd, Carnegie Hall, Central Park,  
garlands of bridges on its shoulders.

All was savory for my eyes, tongue, mind  
for an hour, for a day, for life.

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*Bench in Central Park*  
[CLICK](#) to enlarge

#### PHOTO OF CENTRAL PARK IN SNOW

The skyline of Manhattan blurs above the Park.  
Empty benches freed from the summer crowd,

lean their backs on a wooden fence.  
The prickly wind erased people from the picture,

elsewhere they bend against the gusts,  
burying chins and noses in scarves

and woolen hats, pulled down on foreheads.  
The only living trace is birds' footprints

on the foreground. The photo emanates  
the quietness that hangs on trees

sinking in snow up to their ankles, leaving  
the city's anxiety some place outside the frame.

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## VILLA IN THE HAMPTONS

Mendelssohn's violin concerto  
is caught in the long hazel hair  
of a woman at the open window.

A moonbeam stretches  
its hands to the feet  
of cypresses on the shore.

The black cape of sky  
with bright dots of stars,  
douses its hem in the ocean.

The violin's sound consumes  
the sea and cypresses and the woman -  
in one take of a breath.

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## A MAN WAITS FOR A 'D' TRAIN, WATCHING

A girl with headphones on her blonde head  
doesn't bother to pick up a dime rolling down

from her hand as she buys a ticket.  
An old bearded man plays a flute with the passion

of his memory and his eyes intensely shut,  
unaware of people, passing by his collecting tin can.

A man in construction overalls and scruffy hair  
bends on a bench sinking his head in cupped hands.

A young mother with short dyed-red hair and  
pride and worry in her eyes squeezes the hands

of her twin daughters on both sides, jumping, like  
attached to a pole ribbons, fluttering on the wind.

Everything on this hot and smutty platform

is condensed to an interval between trains...

The rest is his loneliness outside others' loneliness.

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## EURYDICE

Her breasts are like two birds breathing.  
He sneaks inside her dreams,

touches curls of hair on her neck,  
whispers Shir-Shirim into her ear.

She opens her eyes - like Orpheus  
is his voice - her brows rise in wonder,

the hand covers her surprising mouth.  
She loses herself and she follows him.

Her breasts like two birds breathing  
and she turns into his shadow.

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## ONE BIG SIGH

*I'd make myself into an orchestrator of kisses.  
Instead of millions of kisses snapped off at random,  
let them happen all at once - a powerful smack...  
- Stephen Dobyns; Forestall Park*

Imagine a diligent dreamer  
with rigorous training in fantasy  
would haunt the whole town  
(a county, even a country)  
into a deliberate audible breath.

Everyone would sigh in one common language:  
satisfying, loud, languid, ... or  
quiet, cautious - as if afraid

of blowing down a house of cards ... or  
short like a blink of eyelashes against a speck of dust.

A visionary conductor of sighs  
I would raise the energy of snow blowers  
blow-driers and whistle blowers, depending  
on how participants puckered their lips.

A heavy concordant sigh could  
happen in the morning,  
when everyone still in a house-robe  
opens the papers with one wide-flung gesture  
to free headlines into a kitchen.

In a high pitch of imagination I would make  
all lovers close their eyes,  
hold their breath for a deep kiss  
and then loudly release a velvety timbre moan.

...one, two, three - one big sigh together.

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## ELEGY TO NIGHT

After Joseph Brodsky

The night is everywhere.  
All are fallen asleep -  
a house, stairs, night table,  
the beginning of a poem  
between the flaps of a pad,  
chairs, leaning their backs  
against a dining wall.

A man stretches out on a bed  
for a night  
his soul leaves his body  
withdrawing into itself,  
as Jewish *tzadiks* taught.  
But maybe it just perches  
on a tabouret beside the bed  
and patiently awaits the morning

to return into his body.

Windows' sleepy eyes  
peek through the curtains  
a torchere flanks a fireplace  
gaping in the dark.

The house sleeps on trusting hands  
of night without prejudice  
or premonition - like drunken Lot  
not-knowing his daughters' plan.

Morning seeps through the skin of walls -  
a percolating murmur of a kitchen  
prods silence out of the house  
onto stairs and on a lawn, where  
a loyal dog of a newspaper waits  
for the sleep to dissolve into the light. Not yet.

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Note: *tzadiks* - wise, learned men (Hebrew)

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## ON THE WAY TO FAME

The drive on the noon highway  
to the right place of success  
shouldn't be a problem -  
30 miles passed, 30 - to go.

Except...  
a sudden screech of a flat tire,  
rubber smell and a skid  
off the central lane

beyond the yellow line  
separated the traffic from  
the indifference of a rough shoulder.

The second key ingredient  
of potential success - the right time  
also has leaked out of my tire.

I don't need a man -  
I handle my life pretty well -  
but who's gonna change my tire.  
O, that Triple A with its triple delay.

But nevertheless,  
the car starts limping on a donut  
slow-slowly transporting me from  
one spot of frustration to another.

What if I make a U-turn and  
drive back, peeking over the divider,  
searching for the lost time?

What if there I discover a poem?

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