

1990

# Exile

Ioanna-Veronika Warwick

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## Two Poems · *Ioanna-Veronika Warwick*

### EXILE

*for Robert Pinsky*

The blinds are turned,  
curtains drawn;  
a globe of milky glass  
contains the light.  
A small label inside:  
“Made in Poland.”

So you reach me even here,  
my old homeland.  
How you stammer in a foreign language,  
wring your many hands.  
I have only a few  
Polish things in the house:  
carved wooden plates,  
a piece of amber  
with something hard to see  
trapped in it:  
a moth, perhaps  
a leaf. Not like  
some of my countrymen,  
who blanket the walls  
with folkloric tapestries,  
film posters (they haven't  
seen the films),  
the national emblem over the piano.

A clever man once said  
that for Jews other Jews  
are either not Jewish enough  
or else absurdly too Jewish.  
But it's not a question of Jewishness:  
it's a question of exile.

The more we remember  
the more we forget.  
The tallest mountains melt away.  
The sea puts on the mask  
of that other sea,  
at least in its greener moments.

That's why the need for shrines,  
for reciting memories  
or a heritage of words  
like the rosary or the Shema;  
for picture books—we can read  
less and less—  
for translating trees into candelabras,  
birds into bells,  
bread into flesh,  
clouds into ships and photographs.

That's why we eat strange foods,  
pickled flowers and tongues,  
keep our hearts in lacquered boxes,  
and string fallen stars  
into a necklace of complaints.  
We weep not enough,  
or absurdly too much.  
Our burial instructions are ignored;  
we bury ourselves,  
facing the morning  
in which we came.