**Classic Poetry Series**

# Anna Swirszczynska

## - poems -

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## Anna Swirszczynska (1909 - 1984)

Anna Swirszczynska (also known as Anna Swir) was a Polish poet whose works deal with themes, including her experiences during World War II, motherhood, the female body, and sensuality.

Swirszczynska was born in Warsaw and grew up in poverty as the daughter of an artist. She began publishing her poems in the 1930s. During the Nazi occupation of Poland she joined the Polish resistance movement in World War II and was a military nurse during the Warsaw Uprising. She wrote for underground publications and once waited 60 minutes to be executed. Czeslaw Milosz writes of knowing her during this time and has translated a volume of her work. Her experiences during the war strongly influenced her poetry. In 1974 she published Building the Barricade, a volume which describes the suffering she witnessed and experienced during that time. She also writes frankly about the female body in various stages of life.

**He Was Lucky**

The old man
leaves his house, carries books.
A German soldier snatches his books
flings them in the mud.

The old man picks them up,
the soldier hits him in the face.
The old man falls,
the soldier kicks him and walks away.

The old man
lies in mud and blood.
Under him he feels
the books.

Anna Swirszczynska

**She Does Not Remember**

She was an evil stepmother.
In her old age she is slowly dying
in an empty hovel.

She shudders
like a clutch of burnt paper.
She does not remember that she was evil.
But she knows
that she feels cold.

Translated from the Polish by Czeslaw Milosz and Leonard Nathan

Anonymous Submission

Anna Swirszczynska

**The Ghetto: A Mother**

Cuddling in the arms her half-asphyxiated baby, howling,
she ran up the staircase of the apartment building that was set ablaze.
From the first floor to the second.
From the second to the third.
From the third to the fourth.

Until she had jumped onto the roof.
There, having choked with air, clinging to the chimney,
she looked down from where she could hear
the crackle of flames which were reaching higher and higher.

And then she became motionless and silent.
She kept silent to the end, till the moment
at which she suddenly clenched her eyelids,
stepped to the roof edge and, throwing forward her arms,
she dropped her baby down.

Two seconds earlier than she herself leapt down.

Anna Swirszczynska

**The Greatest Love**

She is sixty.  She lives
the greatest love of her life.

She walks arm-in-arm with her dear one,
her hair streams in the wind.
Her dear one says:
"You have hair like pearls."

Her children say:
"Old fool."

Translated from the Polish by Czeslaw Milosz and Leonard Nathan

Anonymous Submission

Anna Swirszczynska

**The Same Inside**

Walking to your place for a love fest
I saw at a street corner
an old beggar women.
I took her hand,
kissed her delicate cheek,
we talked, she was
the same inside as I am,
from the same kind,
I sensed this instantly
as a dog knows by scent
another dog.
I gave her money,
I could not part from her.
After all, one needs
someone who is close.
And then I no longer knew
why I was walking to your place.

Anna Swirszczynska

**The Sea And The Man**

You will not tame this sea
either by humility or rapture.
But you can laugh
in its face.

Laughter
was invented by those
who live briefly
as a burst of laughter.

The eternal sea
will never learn to laugh.

Translated from the Polish by Czeslaw Milosz and Leonard Nathan

Anonymous Submission

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**The Second Madrigal**

A night of love
exquisite as a
concert from old Venice
played on exquisite instruments.
Healthy as a
buttock of a little angel.
Wise as an
anthill.
Garish as air
blown into a trumpet.
Abundant as the reign
of a royal Negro couple
seated on two thrones
cast in gold.

A night of love with you,
a big baroque battle
and two victories.

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