

## Poetry Series

# Paul Hartal

- poems -

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## **Paul Hartal**

A man of many Odysseys, Paul Hartal is a Canadian poet, author and artist born in Szeged, Hungary. His critically acclaimed books include Postmodern Light (poetry, 2006), Love Poems (2004), The Kidnapping of the Painter Miró (novel, 1997, 2001), The Brush and the Compass (1988), Painted Melodies (1983) and A History of Architecture (1972).

In 1975 he published in Montreal A Manifesto on Lyrical Conceptualism. Lyco Art is a new element on the periodic table of aesthetics, which intertwines the logic of passion with the passion of logic. In 1980 the Lyrical Conceptualist Society hosted the First International Poetry Exhibition in Montreal. A few years later Hartal formed the Centre for Art, Science and Technology, which Clifford Pickover describes in Mazes for the Mind as a network that "facilitates the exchange of ideas between various domains of human knowledge".

In 1978 Hartal exhibited his paintings at the Musée du Luxembourg and the Raymond Duncan Gallery in France and his canvas Flowers for Cézanne won the Prix de Paris. He also presented his oeuvre in museums and galleries in New York, Montreal, Budapest, as well as many other places. Representing Canada, his work was featured at the cultural events of the 1988 Seoul Olympics.

An explorer of global habitats and cultures, Hartal has traveled through Europe, North-America, Argentina, Australia, China, Japan and Korea. His research interests focus on the connectivity of art, mathematics and science. He has been involved in interdisciplinary symmetry studies and in 1994 NASA invited him to participate in visionary space exploration projects.

In the 1970s the poet attended Concordia University in Montreal and wrote a thesis on Aesthetics and History. He also holds degrees from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Columbia Pacific University (1986). CPU was an innovative school in San Rafael, state approved and supervised by the Department of Education in California. Hartal's dissertation, The Interface Dynamics of Art and Science was published by University Press of America under the title, The Brush and the Compass (New York, 1988). The interdisciplinary periodical Ylem published excerpts from the book. Vie des Arts and The Montreal Mirror described it as a 'thought-provoking work bridging art and science'. The volume also generated wide interest overseas.

As a student at the University of Medicine in Szeged, Hartal participated in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. A few months later he burnt all his poems and papers and escaped to freedom.

Horace long ago observed that by implication all poetry is didactic: It aims to instruct and delight. Paul Hartal approaches poetry from a different angle; embracing the credo that the heart of poetry is the poetry of the heart. A recurring theme of his recent work explores the human tragedies of wars and genocides. He is not a newcomer to the field. In March 1944 German troops occupied Hungary and the future poet at eight years of age was imprisoned in the Nazi concentration camp of Strasshof in Austria. He was liberated by the Russians a year later.

Writing about the Shoah experience is a gloomy and difficult task. Indeed, the philosopher Theodor Adorno once remarked that writing poetry after Auschwitz is not only barbaric but even impossible. Yet Hartal begs to differ. In his opinion, after Auschwitz we require even more poetry than before. Poetry precipitates catharsis. Poetry heals the soul. We need to extract light from the core of darkness, he says. We need poetry to commemorate and to remember the victims; to denounce the villains. We need poetry to solemnize magnanimous acts of sacrifice. We need the magic power of verse, extolling heroes, honoring courage and compassion.

## **A Paradox of Truth**

The truth  
Is never simple,  
Said Oscar Wilde.

But the aphorism  
Is so simple  
That it cannot be true.

Paul Hartal

## **A Prisoner of Sobibor**

On an early autumn day  
a train coming from Minsk rolled  
into the railway station of Sobibor,  
a village in the Lublin district of Poland.

The passengers of the train  
were unaware that the outskirts  
of this dusty small town  
concealed a dreadful Nazi death camp  
where gas chambers poisoned victims  
with carbon monoxide.

It was September 23, 1943,  
and a Soviet prisoner of war,  
First Lieutenant Alexander Pechersky  
was also in one of the boxcars  
of the deported Jews.

His mind in captivity  
wandered restlessly.  
He thought about his family.  
And he thought about the war  
and about Mother Russia  
and of daring plans of escape.

In the Great Patriotic War  
Sasha fought bravely  
against the German invaders  
in the Smolensk Oblast,  
defending the road to Moscow.  
as the Red Army was retreating.

A Wehrmacht unit captured him  
in the fall of 1941 in Vyazma.  
Sasha found it ironic that here  
in 1812 the Russians defeated  
a French army of Napoleon  
retreating from Moscow.

Before his arrival in Sobibor,  
Sasha had already spent long months  
in various prisoner camps.  
Then, during a strip search,  
the Nazis discovered  
that he was circumcised  
and as a Jew they deported him  
to Sobibor.

The transport that took him to the camp  
was an unusual one, because the Nazis  
selected 80 men for work,  
instead of gassing them.

Sasha was chosen along with 79 others  
to build new storage facilities in the lager.

Now, exhausted and hungry,  
he was chopping wood  
with other prisoners.  
They hoisted their heavy axes  
and then let them fall  
on the tree stumps.

SS Oberscharführer Karl Frenzel,  
a squad leader, guarded the group.  
He routinely punished prisoners  
for slowing down  
with twenty-five lashes each.

Once, when Sergeant Frenzel  
was busy in beating a prisoner,  
he noticed that Sasha  
took a moment of rest.

'Russian soldier, you don't like the way  
I punish this fool?' Frenzel asked.  
'Well, I give you exactly five minutes  
to split this stump. If you make it,  
you get a pack of cigarettes.  
But if you miss even by one second,  
you get twenty-five lashes, too.'

It looked an impossible assignment  
but Sasha was still young and strong.  
He started to assault the stump  
with all his strength,  
fuelled with the hatred of the enemy.

He finished the task in less  
than the allotted time of five minutes.

Impressed by the performance,  
Frenzel handed Sasha  
a pack of cigarettes.

Many prisoners  
valued the luxury of smoking  
even more than their scarce food rations.  
But Sasha refused to take  
the highly prized commodity.

'Thanks, but I don't smoke', he said.  
Then he lifted his axe  
and went back to work.

The SS guard was puzzled and furious.  
He turned around and left.

However, he returned soon  
with a piece of bread  
and some margarine.

It was a very alluring delicacy  
for a starving man  
and Frenzel handed the food to Sasha.

But, again,  
Sasha declined the SS man's offer.  
'Thank you', he said, "the food  
we are getting here satisfies me fully.'

This was obviously a lie  
and Oberscharführer Frenzel  
became even more furious.  
Yet at the same time  
he admired the strength,  
the pride and moral backbone  
of the prisoner.

The SS man was at a loss how to react.  
But he did not whip Sasha.  
He just turned on his heels and left.

A few weeks later a revolt broke out  
in the Sobibor death camp.  
Sasha played a central role  
in organizing the uprising.

In the afternoon of October 14, 1943,  
the prisoners killed  
most of the German SS men  
and some of the Ukrainian guards  
in the camp.

Three hundred prisoners,  
from a crowd of nearly six hundred,  
managed to break through  
the barbed wire fences and mine fields  
under a hail of fire of the guards.

This daring uprising  
was the most successful mass escape  
of prisoners from a Nazi lager  
in World War II.  
But only about 50 of the escapees  
survived the war.

Sasha was one of them.  
He found his way to the partisan forces  
fighting in the forests against the Fascists  
and later joined again the Soviet Red Army.

Seventeen years after the war,  
In 1962, Karl Frenzel was arrested  
in Germany for his participation  
in the mass extermination  
of 250,000 Jews at Sobibor.

Witnesses testified that Frenzel  
was a sadist murderer.  
He brutally had beaten to death  
scores of prisoners, whereas others  
he shot through the head.

A survivor of the death camp,  
Esther Ternner-Raab  
saw the SS sergeant grabbing a baby  
and slamming the infant's head  
against the side of a boxcar.

The Hagen Trials in Germany  
continued for four years.  
In the end,  
the court found Karl Frenzel guilty.  
It sentenced him to life imprisonment  
for war crimes  
and crimes against humanity.

Paul Hartal

## **Absolute Irony**

'The universe  
is a mysterious place',  
the poet said.

'There might exist  
other worlds wherein  
the laws of nature  
are different from ours.'

'No', the engineer said,  
'in a vacuum  
light travels at the speed  
of 300,000 km per second  
and nothing can move  
faster than that.'

'Oh, absolute claims  
are always  
absolutely wrong',  
the turtle said.

'But since this is  
an absolute claim  
it ought to be  
wrong, too',  
the engineer objected.

'Yes',  
agreed the turtle,  
'yet in being wrong  
it is also  
absolutely right.'

Paul Hartal

## **Absurd Breast Cancer Prevention**

"Surgical removal of the breasts before any sign of cancer is one way to significantly lower the risk."  
Journal of Clinical Oncology, March 15,2005

'Changing Your Lifestyle Can Change Your Genes... genes are not your destiny', Dean Ornish, M.D.,  
Newsweek, June 17,2008

She is scared to death, so what is the answer?  
Tell me doctor, please, advise her while she is healthy,  
For she is statistically at a high risk of becoming ill  
And afraid to contract the dreadful breast cancer.

Cut her healthy breasts, remove all hale tissue,  
The good surgeon tells her, with assurance insists  
That the operation solves the problem, reduces the risk  
To zero, and so cancer is no longer the issue.

But the injudicious medical counsel fails to inform her  
That as a life style scourge cancer can be prevented better,  
And anyway, removing the breasts does not really matter  
Because the disease may strike the body elsewhere.

This brutal cure is absurd, like the act of one afraid of steps,  
A person at a high risk of fractures who avoids walking  
And in a Kafkaesque way opts to amputate the limbs  
In order to prevent the breaking of the legs.

Paul Hartal

## **An Oak Wood Piano on Kristallnacht**

The SS guard hit Zindel Grynszpan on the head and he fell  
Into a ditch. Father, he heard the voice of his son, you must  
Go on. Zindel took the hand of his son and climbed out of  
The trench. With his wife, a son and daughter on his side  
They continued the march. But the SS guards did not stop  
The savage whipping of the deportees. Blood was flowing  
On all sides.

The Grynszpan family were Polish Jews from Hanover.  
When the Nazis came to power they became outcasts.  
In October 1938 they were expelled from Germany  
And deported to Poland in a group of 12,000 Jews.  
They were taken by train to the frontier town Neubenschen  
And from there on foot to the German-Polish border.  
When they reached the border heavy rain started to fall.

The Nazis confiscated their money. They had no food to eat.  
Polish officers arrived and began to inspect their papers.  
They admitted the refugees with Polish passports,  
Housing them in military stables. Old, sick and children  
Were herded together in most inhuman conditions.

One of the first things that Zindel did in Poland was to send  
A postcard to his seventeen year old son Hirsch in Paris.  
When Hirsch Grynszpan read the family's tribulations  
He became furious. His heart was filled with rage and hatred  
And he decided to avenge their sufferings. On the morning  
Of November 7, Hirsch entered a gunsmith's shop on rue  
Faubourg Saint-Martin and purchased a 6.35 calibre pistol  
With a box of 25 bullets, for 235 Francs.

Then he took a ride on the Metro to the Solferino stop  
And walked to the German Embassy at 78 rue de Lille.  
Hirsch told the receptionist that he has some documents with him.  
He was received by Ernst vom Rath, the third secretary.  
When the German diplomat closed the door Hirsch pulled out  
The gun. "You are a filthy Kraut", he said, "and in the name of  
12,000 persecuted Jews here is the document". He fired five  
Bullets from point blank range at vom Rath. The diplomat died  
Two days later of his wounds.

The assassination came as a godsend thing for the Nazis.  
Hitler denounced it as part of a global Jewish conspiracy  
Against Germany. It became a pretext for the well-orchestrated  
Pogrom of Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass.  
During the night of November 9-10, 1938, in every place  
Throughout the Third Reich, Storm Troops attacked Jews  
And Jewish institutions.

Hitler's henchmen burnt down or destroyed in Germany  
Nearly two hundred synagogues. They burst into Jewish houses,  
Broke the glass of Jewish businesses and beat up Jews wherever

They found them. About ninety people were murdered  
And thousands of others were wounded in the street violence.  
The Nazis also arrested thirty thousand Jews and sent them  
To concentration camps in Buchenwald, Dachau,  
And Sachsenhausen. And on top of all this, the Reich  
Cynically imposed a billion mark penalty  
On the Jewish Community to pay for the damages.

In Berlin hundreds of truncheon swinging storm troops  
Led the mob in smashing up the glass plate windows  
Of Jewish stores. In the Jewish neighbourhoods of German  
Cities the Nazis lit bonfires. They threw on them to burn  
Torah scrolls, prayer books and whole libraries. Thousands  
Of Germans joined the Storm Troops in the atrocities.  
But many resented the pogrom. People watched in horror  
The roundup; they cried silently behind their curtains.

On a third floor balcony in Leipzig  
Storm Troops shattered a balustrade and pushed  
An upright oak wood piano over the edge. It plunged like  
A black wingless dragon and fell helplessly to the street.  
It crashed on the pavement with a shocking clamour.  
Its wooden casing had split. The strings stripped bare  
Stood in the middle of the wreckage as an orphan harp  
Screaming with a heartbreaking outcry.

Paul Hartal

## Angel in Transit

I arrived at the airport under dark  
Overcast skies. I had a night flight to catch  
From Amsterdam to Budapest.

And as I waited  
Through the small hours,  
The Schiphol Airport  
Became quite deserted.

I felt lonely and sad.  
My wife just died  
And I was depressed.

I waited for my plane  
In an almost empty waiting room  
When suddenly, to my great surprise,  
A pretty young woman seated herself  
Next to my chair.

I found this rather strange  
Because all the benches around us  
Were unoccupied and I wondered  
Why she chose to sit nearby.

She was silent but I started to talk to her.  
After a while I told her my story  
And she began to comfort me  
With warm and compassionate words.

At some point I gathered courage  
And asked her why she sat next to me.  
She looked at me with a gentle smile and said:  
'I don't know'.

Yet I felt a mysterious presence  
And in her eyes I saw glowing diamond rays  
Of solace, tenderness and love.

She stayed there for about 20 or 25 minutes.  
Then she rose, gave me a hug, kissed my face  
And walked away to board a plane.

Paul Hartal

## **Armenia, Armenia**

After the great flood Noah's ark landed  
on Mount Ararat, says the Bible.

Nowadays, the snow-capped summit  
of the mountain soars over Yerevan.  
Although the dormant volcanic cone  
of Ararat lies south of the border,  
in Turkish Anatolia,  
the view of the mountain dominates  
the skyline of the Armenian capital.

Most of the territory  
that was once part of historic Armenia  
belongs to Turkey today.  
Under the yoke of the Muslim Ottomans,  
the aspirations of the Christian Armenians  
to obtain autonomy clashed  
with the dreams of their rulers  
to establish a pan-Turkish Empire.

In the 19th century the government  
of the crumbling Ottoman Empire  
started a campaign to wipe out  
the Armenian population.  
It perpetrated a genocide,  
which reached its peak  
during the First World War.

In 1908 an extremist wing  
of the Union and Progress Party,  
the Young Turks, came to power  
in the Ottoman Empire.  
They rejected demands for ethnic autonomy  
and launched a systematic state organized attack  
on the Armenian community.

It began on April 24, 1915,  
when the Ottoman authorities arrested  
some 250 Armenian leaders in Istanbul  
and murdered them.

Then armed Turks began uprooting men,  
women and children from their homes.  
Rape and murder became a commonplace.  
Depriving them food and water, Turkish squads  
forced Armenian communities to march  
through the deserts of Syria where they died  
of dehydration, starvation and exhaustion.

Hundreds of eyewitnesses  
from all over the world recorded  
and documented state-supported massacres.

In 1915, for example, Leslie Davis,  
the American consul in Kharput, reported  
that 10,000 bodies of murdered Armenians  
had been discovered near Lake Göeljuk.

In the same year Giacomo Gorrini,  
the Italian consul in Trabzon, testified:  
"I saw thousands of innocent women  
and children placed on boats,  
which were capsized in the Black Sea".

Armenians call the mass slaughter  
of their people Metz Yeghérn, the calamity.  
Historians estimate the number of those  
who lost their lives  
in the great Armenian tragedy at 1.5 million.  
The government of Turkey, however,  
refuses to admit that a state organized genocide  
took place.

In the fall of 2001 Pope John Paul II  
paid a visit to the former Soviet Republic  
of Armenia. He laid a rose at the eternal flame  
in the memorial of Yerevan  
and prayed for the victims:

The lament that rises from this place,  
The call of the dead from the depth of Metz Yeghérn,  
The cry of innocent blood  
That pleads like the blood of Abel,  
Like Rachel weeping for her children  
Because they are no more.

Paul Hartal

## **Atheism Compliments God**

Since God does not exist,  
He could not create the world,  
Said the atheist.

Then who created it?  
The poet asked.

Well, the world just came into being  
By itself, she replied.

Well, in that case  
This is indeed a great compliment  
For God, the poet said.

She gave him a surprised look.  
And why is that? She asked.

Imagine that a book, for example,  
Could write itself without the author,  
Would not be it a fantastic miracle?

Yes, indeed, she agreed.

So, a self-creating universe,  
The poet said, would even be  
An immeasurably greater  
And miraculous accomplishment,  
The utmost manifestation  
Of the Glory of God.

Therefore, paradoxically, atheism  
Unwillingly but compliments God.

Paul Hartal

## **Batman Combats Oscar Wilde**

"Are you serious?" Frederick asked.

"Yes, Oscar Wilde, the writer", George Batman said. "We had a conversation in the park."

"Oh", said Frederick. "Is he not dead?"

"We had a conversation in the park", Batman said.

"I see", said Frederick.

"You remember that in The Picture of Dorian Gray Wilde argues that books cannot be moral or immoral, only well-written or badly written", Batman commented.

"So?"

"Well, I disagreed."

"And why is that?" Frederick inquired.

"Look. Wilde confuses content with style. A book with a moral message can either fail or excel in its stylistic presentation, and so can a book with immoral content."

"I see", said Frederick. "So what happened?"

"Nothing special", Batman said. "We continued to argue. I told Oscar that I am not impressed with some of his witty dictums."

"Oh", Frederick said. "What did Wilde say?"

"He wanted to hear examples", Batman said.

"Did you give him?"

"Yes, of course. I started with the 'The truth is rarely pure, and never simple', from The Importance of Being Earnest."

"What is wrong with that?" Frederick asked.

"I told Wilde that his purified statement is self-contradictory because it is so simple that it cannot be true".

"I see", Frederick said. "What else?"

"Well", said Batman, "I also told him that I disagreed with the aphorism that 'Women are meant to be loved, not to be understood'. This is a derogatory and false comment on the psychology of women, belittling female intelligence and dignity. Besides, not only that men also want to be loved, but love and understanding can be overlapping as well."

"What did Wilde say?"

"I don't know. He is dead".

Paul Hartal

## Big Bang with Horizon Problem

The crocodile rested idly on the Nile bank.  
The Sun rose toward the zenith in the sky,  
The hot air was trembling over unstirred grass  
And an Egyptian plover landed near the river.

"Long time no see", the crocodile said.  
"Oh, I am very busy", the wading bird answered.  
"Is that so?" the crocodile inquired.  
"Oh yes", the plover said, "I study astronomy."

"Have you ever heard of the Horizon Problem?" the plover asked.  
"No, this is the first time that I hear that the horizon has a problem".

"Well, we talk here about the horizon of the universe  
And it is a scientific mystery. Mind you, the primeval atom  
At the beginning of time exploded in the so called Big Bang  
Nearly 14 billion years ago. Now, as you might know,  
Nothing can travel faster than light. But when you look  
Across the vast space of the visible cosmos, from one edge  
To the other, you ought to consider that these two edges are  
Approximately 28 billion years apart."

"So what?" the crocodile asked.  
The plover took a deep breath. "Well, if nothing can travel  
Faster than light and the universe is 14 billion years old,  
How can the two edges of the universe be 28 billion years apart?"

"Oh, I see", the crocodile said.  
"Maybe the Big Bang Theory is wrong".  
"Why", the bird said, "the problem involves the exchange  
Of information, energy and heat because these also  
Can only occur at the speed of light."

"I am somewhat at a loss to follow you", the crocodile said.  
"Look! Different distant regions of outer space in the cosmos  
Are very far from each other and cannot communicate.  
In spite of this, the microwave background radiation  
Filling in the universe seems inscrutably uniform.  
It measures the same temperature everywhere."

"So, to me", the crocodile said, "this just proves again  
That the Big Bang Theory is wrong".  
"Not necessarily", the plover objected.

"Consider, for example, the possibility that at its birth,  
In less than a second after the Big Bang,  
The early universe underwent an extremely rapid process  
Of exponential expansion so that all its parts originated  
In a casually connected region. Astrophysicists call this  
Exponential expansion the Theory of Cosmic Inflation".

"I am very impressed by your erudition", the crocodile said.

"Thank you", smiled the bird. "Also, Cosmic Inflation Theory  
Can explain why the universe appears to be flat, isotropic  
And homogenous, that is to say uniform in all orientation."

"Flat? How can it be flat? " the crocodile asked.  
"My understanding is", said the bird, "that when scientists  
Talk about a flat universe, they mean a doughnut shaped  
Three dimensional topological object known as torus."

"Wow", the crocodile exclaimed. "This is really amazing.  
Yet I have another hypothesis. How about the possibility  
That the speed of light has changed throughout the ages  
After this colossal firecracker event of the Big Bang happened."

"I think we should end this conversation now",  
The plover said, "because some humans are watching us  
And they look like hunters rather than biologists."  
"Do not worry", the crocodile said,  
"They have no idea that we are aliens."

Paul Hartal

## **Black Tunnel With Light**

We used to be so close  
Like one flesh and blood  
But right now  
I have to take a step back  
Outside there is still light  
Only the tunnel is black.

We still sing and dance  
And when our eyes meet we laugh  
But right now  
I have to take a step back  
I need a fresh look at life  
The things placed on the rack.

You still say, "Come home"  
Into the cinnabar cave.  
But right now  
I have to take a step back  
Put a finger on the pulse of flux  
While waves wash ashore the wrack.

Paul Hartal

## **By Act of Legislation**

Once upon a time  
In a faraway country  
The people of the Province of Falsity  
Spoke only truth  
Whereas those who lived  
In the Province of Truth  
Spoke only falsity.

In both provinces  
The people sang  
Their national anthem in chorus:  
If we are lying  
We are telling the truth  
But if we are telling the truth  
We are lying.

Little wonder  
People got confused there  
And they remained confused  
For a long time  
Until one day the Prince  
Decided to interfere.

So he ordered the Parliament  
To legislate a new law  
A new law that solved the problem  
And simply abolished the difference  
Between truth and falsity.

Paul Hartal

## **Camp Concerts**

In school I learnt  
That music beautifies life.  
It elevates and ennoble  
The soul.

But tell me  
My dear teacher:  
How could the music  
Elevate the prisoners  
Of Treblinka?

How could  
The waltz or the tango  
Beautify the tortures  
In Sobibor?

And how could  
The symphonies  
At Auschwitz ennoble  
The victims?

The Nazis organized  
The concerts  
In the death camps  
In order  
To humiliate  
The prisoners  
And to mock  
The lofty essence  
Of human life.

Orchestras  
In the lagers  
Played to degrade  
The lifeblood of dignity  
To debase the marrow  
Of the soul.

Inside  
The barbed wire fences  
Trumpets sobbed  
Flutes and violins wept  
As majestic melodies  
Soared over  
Grisly horrors.

Paul Hartal

## Cesarean Section

On a sunny day of Taurus  
they cut her abdomen.  
With stainless scalpels  
the surgeons unlatched her uterus  
and out of her slashed womb,  
touching with their sterile gloves  
the enigma of an enclosed but remote self,  
they pulled out the boy crying,  
covered with blood,  
incised forever  
with the trauma of a violent birth,  
a ferocious portal to light,  
a brutal entrance into the world  
through the skillful horror  
of a Caesarean section.

Many days passed since then  
and they have grown wild,  
like cranberries and black currants,  
sprouting from an invisible umbilical cord  
of drifting bond and unsevered lineage.  
And while the untamed river  
of memory flows,  
somehow  
he still remembers his birth  
as a holographic record,  
an engram in the brain cells,  
wrapped in the charcoal void  
of the mystery of being,  
an approaching lullaby,  
and the silence of  
an unborn Mozart sonata.

Paul Hartal

## **Change**

You said  
she soon will change  
you hoped  
in time he will alter  
yet heard lies  
and saw her falter  
and him doped

So now make a u-turn  
let the tire burn  
and the fire retire

Lessen the range  
review the facts  
limit the scope  
go on and adjust  
yardstick your acts

Modify your plan  
for she will not alter  
and he will not change  
but my friend then  
you can

Paul Hartal

## Colors of Silence

Yellow roses swing in the wind  
Lonely dogs bark but the wolves prevail  
The violin strings snap, protesting  
The aloofly silent mind of the nail.

Blue tulips pray with the bells  
On the lake white triangles sail  
The postman walks slowly, pondering  
The silent somber red box of the mail.

Evening descends on the green hills  
The trees are wincing along the grey tail  
In the dense dark rests the black forest  
The silence dreams it screams under a veil.

Paul Hartal

## Critics

At a misty lake  
Twelve critics asked  
    Old William Blake,  
        What is poetry?

As evening descended  
The poet produced a ginger  
    And pointed to the moon  
        But they saw only  
            His finger.

Then an optimistic man  
Recited Walt Whitman  
    To his sole companion  
A young stallion.

    And the keen  
    Sentient horse  
        Heard more  
            Than the prose.

Paul Hartal

## **Dark Sky**

High in the black sky  
Like a bright moving red star  
A lonely airplane ploughs the night  
A blinking rhyme of ruby light  
Crossing the dark  
Between the twinkling diamonds  
Of the constellation Ursa Major.

The yellow crescent  
Of the curious moon  
Stares down on the orphan earth  
And I wonder whether its  
Clement melodious rays  
Will console your gentle soul  
And bring solace to your solitude.

Paul Hartal

## **Descartes' Despair**

How can we affirm our own existence?  
Cogito ergo sum, Descartes said,  
I think therefore I am.

But wait!  
Who is doing the thinking?  
The body?  
Am I my body?

Well, Descartes explained, we are talking about  
Two incompatible substances:  
The unextended and indivisible mind  
In contrast with the extended and divisible matter,  
Res cogitans versus res extensa.

Yes, but am I my body?  
How is the contact created  
Between the mental  
And the physical worlds?  
Princess Elizabeth of the Palatinate asked.

Well, somewhere at the base of the brain,  
In the pineal gland, replied the philosopher.

Oh, I have a problem with that,  
The princess remarked.  
For, if the brain exists in space,  
How can the non-spatial mind dwell in it?

And Descartes threw up his hands  
In despair.

Paul Hartal

## **Early June Girls**

While walking  
Along the street  
On a sunny afternoon  
Of late spring  
The air was filled  
With the heavy smell  
Of carcinogenic gases  
Emitted by  
The rolling cars.

Oh! How I  
Loved the aroma  
Of gasoline  
In my childhood.

While walking  
On a sunny afternoon  
Of late spring  
The petrol  
In the street  
Was mixed  
With the hovering  
Exciting scent  
Of by-passing  
Early-June girls.

Paul Hartal

## **Fading Chlorophyll In Maple Leaves of Autumn**

Stands still the foliage  
In full colors of October  
Upon the slopes of Mount Royal  
And white seagulls hover  
Above the waves  
In the port.

The purple foam of urban magic  
Penetrates everything and overgrows  
This city compressed between hill and river  
While the quiet sorrow flows  
On the streets  
Of downtown.

Stands still the foliage  
In full colors of October  
Revealing my own life cycle  
My receding years, hidden order  
Fading chlorophyll  
In maple leaves  
Of autumn.

Paul Hartal

## **Fear**

Life is often dreadful  
Full of fright and panic  
A strange stride in the dark  
The world became so toxic.

I told her all this  
But she said:  
The sear of fear  
Is real  
Deep like the sea  
Look into its eyes  
And invite him  
To a cup of tea.

Yet the arrow of time  
Is laden with sickness  
Death awaits each mortal being  
Both commoner and princess.

I told her all this  
But she said:  
The sear of fear  
Is real  
Deep like the sea  
Look into its eyes  
And invite him  
To a cup of tea.

There is no scare in love  
Yet I fear your kisses  
This might be our last tango  
A sweet touch of bitterness.

I told her all this  
But she said:  
The sear of fear  
Is real  
Deep like the sea  
Look into its eyes  
And invite him  
To a cup of tea.

Paul Hartal

## Flowers of Horror

People who love flowers  
Cannot be bad  
Says the proverb.

But take the insight  
With a grain of salt  
For malignant hands  
Can turn flowers  
Into graceless means  
Of lies and deception.

During World War II  
The National Socialists  
Perfected the dark art  
Of deceit by exploiting  
The beauty of nature  
To disguise and shroud  
Their fiendish goals  
Of ruin and destruction.

The skies darkened then  
Even in the sunshine  
Violets trembled  
And forget-me-nots  
Whispered worries  
Wobbling in the wind.

Sixty km north of Prague  
A barbed wire fence  
Above the camp gate  
Of Terezin, the sign said:  
Arbeit macht frei.

Here the Nazis set up  
The model ghetto  
Theresienstadt where  
Work made the inmates  
Free and they could plant  
Colourful flowers.

Buds of starvation  
Blossoms of death.

Do not worry  
The daffodils said.  
This is a friendly place  
The hyacinths sighed.  
Do not revolt  
The roses rustled.

Yet the daisies shuddered  
And forget-me-nots

Whispered worries  
Wobbling in the wind.

On the roads of Galicia  
Between Lublin and Lvov  
In east Poland behind  
The barbed wire fences  
Of Belzec geranium pots  
Lined the path  
To the gas chambers.

Buds of starvation  
Blossoms of death.

The skies darkened then  
Even in the sunshine  
Violets trembled  
And forget-me-nots  
Whispered worries  
Wobbling in the wind.

Paul Hartal

**For Eleanor H. Porter (1868-1920)**

The world  
Is a more beautiful place  
Because of Pollyanna.

The world, however,  
Is not a beautiful place  
For Pollyanna.

Paul Hartal

## **For Miklós Radnóti**

Your verse is so magical,  
Written so well,  
I still adore its music  
And drink from its well.  
After the war your town  
Gave my grammar school  
The honour of your name,  
Yet history is cruel  
It ignored your fame.  
Your woman waited years  
For your return in vain  
And you dreamt she stood  
At the russet hedge again.  
And like in the old days,  
You wished to marvel  
On her leg above the ankle  
At the delicate blue vein.  
My teacher told me  
That buried underground  
Your notebook of poems  
In a mass grave was found.  
The fascists who shot you  
At war's end in the head  
Did not know that you were  
The greatest living poet  
In your beloved land.  
Had they known it  
Oh, they would have been glad  
To hang you instead.

Paul Hartal

## **For Paul Celan**

The stars of eternity stare into the darkness  
Breathing nothingness that grows around  
Orphaned black holes of silent despair in space  
Your percolated wounds never could heal  
By the doleful symphonies of a tormented élan.

You never recovered from the mass murders  
To which you bear witness with anguished cenotaphs  
Oh your yellow haired mother could not come home  
She could not come home; her heart was torn by lead.

Blazing stars of frozen eternity shine at the moon frost  
Slowly the late autumn opens an envelope of pain  
It engulfs your lost world with charred pilgrims  
Floating along latitudes of convulsive memories.

Your yellow haired mother could not come home  
Her heart was torn by lead; she could not come home  
Hot stars of cold eternity gleam in the lonely darkness  
And black holes dance in the crumbling empty space  
You yearn for faith, searching for a beam of hope.

Paul Hartal

## **Four Seasons**

Maple leaves of yesterday  
Rainbow leaves of morrow  
Autumn strolls on its way  
Time it fails to borrow.

Ice crystals of yesterday  
Snow flowers of morrow  
Winter roves on a dray  
Time it fails to borrow.

Oak leaves of yesterday  
Verdant leaves of morrow  
April flows into May  
Time it fails to borrow.

Blue blossoms of yesterday  
Forget-me-not of morrow  
Summer rides a railway  
Love overcomes sorrow.

Paul Hartal

## Friendship

I dream of a friendship  
Stronger than steel  
I wish to have a friend  
To share secrets and meal.

A friend is loyal  
Brave and earnest  
Caring and loving  
Devout and honest.

I wish to have a friend  
Steady like a dam  
Who laughs at my jokes  
And accepts me as I am.

I dream of a friendship  
What more can I tell  
A friend who is forgiving  
And plays soccer well.

Paul Hartal

## From Plane to Sphere

They all tried.  
They tried to free Euclid of every flaw.  
At Bach's time Girolamo Saccheri did  
And Adrien-Marie Legendre later.

Unconsoled,  
Pitying himself and all mankind,  
Farkas Bolyai came back  
With broken mast and torn sail.

He came back from the voyage  
To the reefs of the infernal Dead Sea.

He traversed the bottomless night,  
Devoting his life to the search for truth,  
Trying to prove Euclid's fifth postulate  
And reach the parallels.

At the beginning he warned his son  
But later he encouraged, even urged him  
To come forth with the novel idea  
Of non-Euclidean geometry,  
For violets react to light in early spring.

And János indeed  
Brought forward new theorems.  
In eighteen twenty three,  
When he was only twenty-one years old,  
He solved the timeworn problem.

He created a new universe  
By removing points, lines and parallels  
From the surface of the plane  
And placing them  
In the realm of the sphere.

Paul Hartal

## **From the Secret Life of Tuesday**

Originally,  
Tuesday wanted to be  
Next to Thursday  
But nobody really cared.

In any case,  
It stayed stuck wedged  
For a long time between  
Monday and Wednesday.

Once, on a sunny day,  
Tuesday took a break  
And went to the beach  
To have some fun.

Friday  
Substituted for it willingly  
Because Friday  
Liked Tuesday very much.

This happened  
More than three years ago  
And  
Nobody noticed.

Paul Hartal

## **God's Silence**

On a January day  
It occurred to me  
It is neither  
A coincidence,  
Nor an act of negligence  
That God promotes  
The inference,  
Explaining why His words  
Are not curt or terse:  
Rather in silence  
He will immerse;  
And perhaps  
He speaks the language  
Of silence  
Out of self-defense.

Paul Hartal

## Grandma

Above the bed  
Old photos stared down  
Solemnly from the wall.  
Behind the glass frame  
Grandpa wore  
His grey uniform  
Of the Great War;  
Grandma her sombre dress.

She died before I was born  
And grandpa shortly after.  
The only grandparent  
That I knew was  
My mother's step mother.

For some reason  
She did not get along well  
With my parents  
But I basked  
In the warmth of her  
Pampering indulgence.

In the manner  
Of old peasant women  
She dressed in long black  
Garments that covered  
Her delicate frame,  
Hanging down  
From her fragile shoulders  
Like late autumn leaves.

I think I was about  
Three years old  
When I became very sick  
With dysentery.

Grandma took me  
To her house to recover.  
I lost my appetite  
And her remedies  
Included a daily dose  
Of red wine  
Which she served me  
In a small crystal glass.

Holding my hand in hers  
Sometimes she took me  
For a walk in the streets.  
As we passed  
The men removed  
Their hats  
To greet her.

In the summer of 1944  
The gendarmes came  
And pushed her onto  
A crammed cattle car  
For a horrible journey  
Across Nazi occupied Europe  
From Hungary to Poland.

At the end of the voyage  
Grandma was murdered  
In the gas chambers  
Of Auschwitz.

Her body was burned  
In the fires of ovens  
Her ashes soared  
With the flames  
Of the chimneys,  
Carried by the winds  
To the skies,  
Rising higher and higher  
To the planets  
And the stars.

Paul Hartal

## **Happiness is a Shark**

Happiness is a shark,  
Swimming in the deep  
Dimension of the dark  
Drifting duffel of sleep.

Decay of despair;  
Hardness of hope.

Happiness is a crow,  
Hiding in the thicket,  
Or flying in a row  
At a drizzly sunset.

Drought of despair;  
Hunger of hope.

Happiness is a rose,  
On the tree of duty,  
A smiling verse in prose  
Of halcyon beauty.

Dust of despair  
Honey of hope.

Paul Hartal

## Heavenly Satire

It is hard to resist  
The thought,  
Though not with alacrity  
It is wrought,  
That the Almighty  
Laughs a lot  
At the tender spot  
Of the human commonwealth:  
Our frailty and stupidity  
Seem to enhance His health  
And sustain Him  
Forever.

Sure,  
He can endow us  
With beauty, brains and wealth,  
However, often what we get  
Is just a fist.  
Yet He does not appear to be  
Neither a rightist  
Nor a leftist,  
But rather  
A parodist,  
Enveloped in dense haze  
Or, perhaps,  
In transparent mist.

In any case,  
As a satirist  
Enjoying the twist,  
God is so great  
That He can afford  
Even not to exist.

Paul Hartal

## **Her Kiss**

He steers hurriedly the hardened handlebar  
The light dims out in a cozy red chamber  
A door of dreams opens with a moan ajar  
A want of breeze lays layer upon layer.

Her dress is colorful but simple and modest  
Her jasper hair falls on her white shoulders  
He enters her cave beneath the jade forest  
An old book on the shelf silently moulders.

Her skin is velvety silk, delicate and smooth  
Her eyes brightly glisten, the pearls of Atlantis  
One cannot find such jewels in any booth,  
Her breasts pomegranates, sweeter than raisins.

Forgive me, he says, for not kissing your mouth  
And she smiles and agrees yet somewhat amiss  
Then he moves to the door turning to the south  
But before he leaves she kisses him on the lips.

Paul Hartal

## Homage to Matsuo Basho

Descendant of a samurai family  
Page and friend of the son  
Of the Lord of Iga Province  
Great haiku poet  
Creator of word pictures  
In seventeen syllables  
Matsuo Basho  
I salute you.

Lover of plum blossom fragrance  
Of thin layers of mist  
The rising sun  
On the mountain path  
And the pristine elegance  
Of the rice planting song  
Matsuo Basho  
Are you still on the road  
From the monastery  
On Mount Koya  
To Kyoto?

When I read your lines  
I hear the sound  
Of Japanese temple bells  
And see the white and pink blossoms  
Of cherry trees blow upon  
Omi Lake in spring.

Paul Hartal

## **Honor and Betrayal (Jiangsu 1937-1945)**

The bamboo leaves swished in the wind  
As Lieutenant Ryouta Takahashi said goodbye  
To his wife and son.

He made his way to the port  
With measured steps,  
His mind thick with heavy thoughts.

On route  
To reinforce the Japanese garrison in Shanghai  
The convoy set sail  
From the Sasebo Naval Arsenal  
In Nagasaki Prefecture.

It was part of the 3rd expeditionary fleet  
Of the Imperial Japanese Navy  
Consisting of a dozen cruisers and gunboats.

Their mission was to patrol the coasts  
And river ways of China and to give support  
to the landing operations of Japanese troops.

The boats ploughed through choppy waters  
In the South China Sea for two days  
And three nights.

Upon casting anchor in the Yangtze delta,  
Lieutenant Ryouta Takahashi reported himself  
To the staff of his commanding officer,  
Major Daiki Chinen.

Judging by his name,  
Takahashi-san told himself,  
The major ought to be from Okinawa.

The lieutenant spent  
A few relatively calm weeks  
In Jiangsu Province.  
But then, on August 13, 1937,  
The Battle of Shanghai began.

The exchange of fire  
Escalated into a full-scale war  
Between Japan and China.

Imperial Japanese Army units,  
Supported by aircrafts and tanks,  
Crossed over the Bazi Bridge in Shanghai.

Hirohito's Third Fleet  
Stationed in the Yangtze  
And the Huangpu River joined the battle.

They bombarded the Chinese positions  
In Shanghai.

It became one of the fiercest battles  
Of the war. After three months of fighting,  
In the end of October, the Chinese forces  
Led by the Nationalist General Chiang Kai-shek  
Started to retreat from Shanghai to Nanjing  
Engaging the Japanese in combat  
Along the road.

Advancing with his platoon,  
Takahashi was shocked to see  
Piles of corpses of Chinese men, women,  
And children lying on the roadsides.

Once, in a stockade yard,  
He saw Japanese soldiers  
Dashing forward and shouting 'charge'  
In bayonet practice on Chinese civilians.

At another time he saw a sergeant  
Amusing himself in tossing grenades  
At captured prisoners.

Grinning widely, the sergeant removed  
The safety pin of the hand grenade,  
Holding in place the lever in a death grip  
And then threw the bomb  
At the frightened and helpless victims.

It took seven seconds for a grenade  
To explode, leaving in its wake  
Bleeding men with shredded bodies  
And limbless torsos.

And Takahashi also witnessed  
Other atrocities. He saw  
Imperial Army soldiers  
Raping and killing women,  
Murdering men and children  
And then looting their houses.

In the autumn of 1937,  
In the days before Nanjing's fall,  
The invading Japanese troops massacred  
About 150,000 Chinese prisoners  
Along the Yangtze River.

The commanding officer of the region  
Was initially General Iwane Matsui  
But he became ill and

Prince Yasuhiko Asaka,  
Uncle of Emperor Hirohito replaced him.  
The Prince issued a secret order  
To kill all captives.

Despite being surrounded  
By the horrors of war,  
On a rare occasion,  
Takahashi-san managed to sit down  
With Captain Naoki Hakudo for drinking  
A few cups of saké.

They both liked it herb-flavored.  
From small choko cups  
They gulped with joy the aromatic rice brew  
And their spirit rose fast to an elevated level.

And so, it did not take long  
Before the beverage  
Loosened their tongues.

"You know, Captain", said Takahashi-san,  
"The height of the sky rivals the depth  
Of our everlasting shame."

"And why is that? " asked Hakudo-san.

"As you know our history and culture  
Are rich, but we are indebted forever  
To China for her gifts to us;  
For her contributions to our identity,  
For shaping our way of life,  
Our customs and outlook on the world.  
Mind you, culturally, Japan absorbed  
The Confucian virtues of loyalty,  
Trust, righteousness, politeness  
And wisdom. And now look  
What happens here.  
How can we do this to China? "

Hakudo-san gave an inquisitive look  
To his comrade.

"Well, lieutenant", he said,  
"Remember that your duty is to be loyal  
To your country. And never forget  
That your honor is to die for the Emperor.  
Nothing less and nothing more."

The Sino-Japanese War went on  
And expanded into World War II.

Eight years after the Battle of Shanghai,  
On August 6, 1945,  
The American "Enola Gay" B-29 bomber  
Dropped an uranium atomic bomb  
On Hiroshima.

Three days later another B-29,  
The "Bockscar", raided Nagasaki  
And destroyed it with a plutonium bomb.

Soon after the nuclear attacks  
Emperor Hirohito  
Reluctantly announced the capitulation  
Of the Empire of the Rising Sun.

On September 2, 1945,  
A formal surrender ceremony  
Was held in Tokyo Bay  
Aboard the battleship USS Missouri.

The Second World War was over.

Takahashi-san survived the war.  
However, it took many months  
Until he was able to return  
To his homeland and to reunite  
With his family.

He could hardly recognize his son.  
He also found that his wife  
Was very different.

Takahashi-san settled down  
To civilian life  
As a mechanical engineer.

A few weeks after his return  
He was sipping green tea  
In the rock garden.

It was a peaceful morning  
And a glorious sun was rising  
Over the snow-capped summit  
Of Mount Fuji.

For a while  
He looked at the magnificent scene  
And then turning to his wife, he said:  
"You know, Shiori,  
My comrades and I always believed  
In the unimpeachable supremacy  
Of the Emperor.

We served him with honor.  
And we remained loyal  
To our country till the bitter end.

Yet we betrayed humanity.”

Paul Hartal

## How the Revolution Started

The bearded amoeba  
Quietly smoked his pipe.  
The servant came in  
And said:  
The crocodile is ready  
But the president cannot make today  
The apple pie.

The bearded amoeba  
Quietly smoked his pipe.  
Yes, the dentist is in Venice  
To make the root canal,  
The servant said.  
The crocodile was looking  
At the sky.

Then suddenly  
An angry cat  
Began to puff and pant.

An orchestra was playing  
In a distant café.

The bearded amoeba  
Quietly smoked his pipe.  
It is time to start the revolution  
Mao said,  
Rising from a chair.

A portrait of Lenin  
Began to shine  
On the wall.

Paul Hartal

## **I Dream the Dreams of Shepherds**

I dream the dreams of shepherds  
Their yearnings are mine  
I long the longings of peasants  
Wandering south of the Rhine.

Walking amid scented almonds  
Across groves and vineyards  
I remember unknown places  
Far off the crowded boulevards.

I travel with sailors and strangers  
Gazing at clusters of stars  
Under the silhouette of Etna  
Sirocco strikes sails on spars.

The mind includes the excluded  
The view contains the viewer  
I am the fisherman's boat  
An ivory cloud, blue flower.

Paul Hartal

## **I Remember Nothing**

I remember nothing  
I remember no thin  
I remember no thi  
I remember no th  
I remember not  
I remember no  
I remember n  
I remember

Paul Hartal

## **I'm Your Planet**

Bright  
Beautiful star  
Now  
I am your planet  
Dust and fire  
An oozing comet  
Revolving  
Around you  
In close and distant  
Orbits.

Paul Hartal

## **Immortality**

When I die  
Bury me under the Tree of Love.

So my heart never stops to beat.

I will live in every cell of your flesh,  
I will live in every chamber of your soul.

Words of solace scatter in the wind,  
The sound of violin does not dissolve the night.

Yet time does come to a stand in eternity:  
Longer than poetry and art  
In remembrance I will live,  
And through true love survive  
Even the death of memory.

Paul Hartal

## **In the Park**

On his stepping out  
Of the door  
The glasses clinked.

In the park  
There was  
Leaden silence

But he whooped  
Cheerfully  
Amidst the trees.

A squirrel  
Stared at him  
In wonder.

Paul Hartal

## **Khmer Rouge Atrocities**

Goddess Ganga's Mother of Water,  
the great Mekong River  
flows through the Kingdom of Cambodia.

The former Kampuchea borders Thailand, Laos and Vietnam.  
It was once a powerful Buddhist Khmer empire  
that between the 11th and 14th century ruled  
most of the Indochinese Peninsula.

On its red background, between two horizontal blue stripes,  
the Khmer national flag displays a stylized image of Angkor,  
the magnificent ancient temple complex,  
a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The temple ruins are located amid forests and farms  
at Tonle Sap, the Great Lake.  
The people of Cambodia take stately pride in Angkor,  
as a lofty symbol of Khmer nationhood and identity,

In the 20th century Cambodia underwent turbulent changes  
and during the Vietnam War the Americans bombed  
and invaded the country.

In the 1970s the Maoist Pol Pot of the Khmer Rouge  
attempted to turn Cambodia into a classless peasant society  
by forcing the urban population to move from the cities  
to agricultural communities.

Similarly to Mao, Pot Pol saw farmers as the base of  
the working class proletariat.

The dictator persecuted teachers, lawyers, doctors  
and everyone else with a university education.  
Also, the anti-colonialist ideology of the Communist regime  
led to the arrest and torture of those who visited another country,  
or spoke foreign languages.

The Khmer Rouge had classified these people as class enemies.  
Pot Pol abolished money, closed banks,  
schools and hospitals and ordered to burn the books.  
After all Mao, too, believed that the more books you read,  
the more stupid you become.

The Khmer Rouge also tried to extirpate western medicine  
and substitute it for traditional peasant medicine.

The Communist revolution in Cambodia  
led not only to terrible bloodshed and suffering,  
but also involved some very bizarre specificities.

Wearing eyeglasses, for example, became a dangerous thing,  
because the Khmer Rouge believed

that only class-enemy intellectuals wore spectacles.

Another capital transgression was  
the absence of calluses on someone's hands.

Again, as the Khmer Rouge saw it,  
only class enemies had velvety finger skins.  
Unlike clerks in an office, peasants had rough skin  
on their hands because they toiled hard  
on the fields from sunrise to sunset.

Tuol Sleng, the Hill of Poisonous Trees,  
was a high school in Phnom Penh,  
which the Khmer Rouge turned into a prison of horrors.  
Here thousands of men and women lost their lives  
in cruel interrogations and brutal torture.

Between 1975 and 1979 the Pot Pol leadership  
in Tuol Sleng, Choeung Ek and other killing fields  
committed dreadful atrocities.

It is estimated that at least one million people,  
perhaps even two million, died in Cambodia  
in this period, due to executions, torture, starvation  
and forced labour induced exhaustion.

The population of the country at that time stood at about 7 million.

The genocide perpetrated by the Communist Pot Pol regime  
also targeted Christians and Buddhists, as well as ethnic minorities,  
mostly of Vietnamese, Thai and Chinese origin.

Paul Hartal

## **Like Old Wine**

Love has an end,  
You once told me.  
But my love is endless,  
Regardless of the years  
Which fly by and progress.

It did come in  
At the window,  
But does not go out  
At the door to vaporize  
In a masterless drought.

Like an old wine,  
My love matures,  
With time it ripens,  
Buoyantly evolves,  
Grows in resilience.

Paul Hartal

## **Lilac Blouse**

It snows  
As the afternoon braids  
Lavender threads of turquoise longing  
Into a soulful sanctuary  
Of remembrance.

It rained  
When the first time  
I unbuttoned your wool coat  
And under a lilac blouse  
I touched your silky breast  
Wondering about its sight  
And the taste of your  
Hardened nipple.

Sunny memory  
Still holds your hand  
Rejoicing in your kisses and embrace  
But my heart mourns  
Our unborn children  
Born out of unconsummated nights.

In the cold space  
I follow now the winding path  
Of your warm smile  
The silent echo of your graceful glance  
And caress the ethereal void  
Through which once  
You had passed.

Paul Hartal

## **Listen Darling**

Darkened by whirling giant black holes  
The night winks with thousand shiny eyes:

Listen Darling  
To my song  
Love me fast  
And love me long.

The Milky Way plays the flute of summer  
A celestial melody carries the wind:

Listen Darling  
To my song  
Love me fast  
And love me long.

Amour's flames are yellow dandelions  
Orange blossoms, violets, red thistles:

Listen Darling  
To my song  
Love me fast  
And love me long.

The heart is a hurricane of passion  
But one who truly loves forgives all sins:

Listen Darling  
To my song  
Love me fast  
And love me long.

Paul Hartal

## Lost Love's Distance

The astrophysicist aimed the telescope at Antares.  
Oh, this red giant of the Milky Way Galaxy is so beautiful, he said.  
Almost as bright as the stars Aldebaran and Regulus.  
Have a look, he told his assistant.

Almost as bright as the star Aldebaran and Regulus,  
Repeated the assistant.  
Yes, the professor said, it shines like a brilliant diamond  
in the night sky, surrounded by colorful cosmic clouds  
And winding dust lanes.

Then five years elapsed and one moonless night  
The astrophysicist again aimed his telescope at Antares.  
But he could not concentrate as his thoughts  
Constantly returned to his lost love.

One chilly day he met her at a cozy restaurant.  
They sat and ate and sipped their coffee and talked.

You were once so close to me, he said to her.  
Yet now you are drifting more and more away.  
I feel as if you were farther away than Antares.  
You know how far it is?

Yes, I know, she said. You were a good teacher.  
Antares is about 250 light-years distant from the Earth.  
That's pretty far away since light travels very fast,  
At a velocity of 300,000 kilometers each second.  
In other words the distance between us  
Is 250 times 10 trillion kilometers, and still growing.

Then the waiter came and brought them the bill.

Paul Hartal

## Love Knows Not 'Why? '

You can touch a stone, a tree or a flower  
But not the human heart, he thought  
Isolated from the conversation,  
Which went on faintly luminous  
Non-stellar formations, elliptical shells,  
Amorphous cosmic clouds, lunar crevasses  
And the conquest of space by man.

But his mind was wandering far away  
Contemplating there is no 'why?' in love  
("Quod quaeris,  
'Quare?' non habet ullus amor.")  
Pondering things that happened last night,  
How happy they were, delighted and ecstatic  
Sweet trembles fading on the winding path.

Yet the magic now is over  
Just a blurred memory remains  
Less than a forget-me-not,  
A windflower or a daisy  
Just the infinite longing on the riverside  
And in the house.

Only overwhelming sorrow and pain remain  
Immersed in the wind-borne sound of a bell  
From a distant church of town  
And beyond flesh and blood  
The everlasting love in transitory words  
Bursting through the passion  
Of a smashed glass of red wine in the hand.

And those sad falling leaves on the street,  
Oh my Lord, please, grant tranquility  
To our restless aching souls  
My Lord, why are not there cheerful loves?

His heart is pulsating  
Like solar eruptions and Cepheids  
His feelings are like the retrograde motion  
Of Oberon  
Oscillations of the expanding universe  
Shadows in Mare Imbrium  
And vanishing slowly in Cassiopeia.

Paul Hartal

## **Love Never Dies**

When its time comes  
Love retreats  
To concealed corners  
Of the heart.

It hides between  
Down-reaching shadows  
Of exiled weeping willows  
Coated in the clement crust  
Of repressed memories.

But love never dies.

I loved once a woman  
Who said one day  
That she ceased to love me.

But love never lies.

Years later we met  
Accidentally somewhere  
And we both cried.  
Our tears flowed  
Like a river of nectar and pain  
Into the Infinite Ocean  
Of Eternal Sorrows.

Paul Hartal

## Meaning and Eternity

Don't tell me  
This life is without focus and logic  
Don't tell me  
This life is elsewhere  
Immersed in uncertainty of destination  
Rocking back and forth on cosmic trails.  
Don't tell me  
That love is not eternal  
And the end of life is death.

How can I agree with you?  
The substance of the psyche is unknown.  
Brain, cognition and matter  
Remain a more profound conundrum  
Than the riddle of the sphinx.  
And is not the conjecture  
That there exist forms  
Of indubitable knowledge  
Just a logical error, a misconception?  
Is it not that somewhere reality  
Becomes merely an illusion  
And illusion  
Becomes reality?  
Is not the object always subject?

Yesterday the featherlike thin cirrus clouds  
With their delicate silky appearance  
And fibrous texture were still spread  
Irregularly in the sky  
Harbingering lovely weather.  
But today biotic, ragged nimbostrata  
Prevail the firmament  
From where rainfall escorts us  
On our dilatory way.

Paul Hartal

## Medals

An enormous explosion threw the boy out of his bed. He woke up on the carpeted floor, wiping out with his left hand the crumbs of an interrupted dream. The room shook up as another bomb detonated nearby with ear-piercing noise. Shimmering red patches of light flared up in the dark ink of the night.

Mother rushed into the room panic-stricken taking him down in a hurry to the bomb shelter. This was merely a basement shared with other people during the bomb raids.

When the sirens sounded the all clear sign it was already morning. In the apartment the latched doors had burst off their hinges. The window glasses shattered into a variety of splinters and the striped curtain in the living room became a colony of ribbons.

Looking out of the windowless room he saw long tongues of flames shooting up from an incendiary bomb that fell on the pavement. And then starting with a strange swishing sound, like the tearing of a delicate lustrous fibre, the walls of a house across the street folded up in a loud rumbling thunder.

Mother later told him that the collapsing building buried several people, including children. A boy of his age was among them. She looked at him with a curious expression which he never saw before and it made him feel very uncomfortable.

"Oh", sighed mother, "war is so terrible, so cruel and futile. It is made by dour and stupid men in uniforms, decorated with many medals, who really never grew up."

"But father also had many medals", the boy said. Mother looked at him gently for a while. "Yes, indeed, he had", she said.

There was great sadness in her eyes.

Paul Hartal

## Medical Statistics

A wild snowstorm was raging in the city.  
It was dark and the streets were deserted.  
A savage wind hooted and shook the trees.  
It blew the snow into her eyes.

Bundled up in winter clothes  
Penny sped up the pace of her steps,  
Hurrying to reach the safety of home.  
The long ribbon of her red scarf  
Flew and flopped in the roaring gale.

The roads were slippery and treacherous.  
At a wrong step she stumbled and fell.  
She landed with her outstretched hands  
On the concrete sidewalk,  
Hitting hard the icy surface.

In the hospital an orthopedic surgeon  
Examined the x-rays. He diagnosed  
A distal radius and ulna fracture  
In the left forearm.

Penny broke her wrist. The doctor pulled  
And tugged her bones to improve  
The anatomical alignment of the broken ends  
Trying to restore them to their natural position.

Then he immobilized the hand  
With a plaster cast. It took about six weeks  
For the broken bones to heal.

However, the orthopedist did not do  
An outstanding job.  
The fractured bone pieces had knitted  
Rather poorly. The wrist looked  
Deformed and lost part of its flexibility  
Of movement.

The surgeon suggested  
Reconstructive wrist operation.

"And what is the statistical risk  
Of this operation?" Penny asked.

"Oh, it is very small", the doctor said.  
"The success rate of this sort of  
Corrective Osteotomy surgery  
For post-traumatic wrist deformity  
Is around 97 percent.  
So, there is only a 3 percent chance  
Of serious complications,  
Such as median nerve paralysis."

"But can you guarantee, doctor,  
That I will not be included  
In that small 3 percent group? "

"No, I cannot guarantee that", the doctor said.

Paul Hartal

## Meeting in Belsen

For Anne Frank (1929-1945) .

One day in the autumn of 1944,  
Along with your sister Margot,  
You were deported from Auschwitz  
to Bergen-Belsen.

When you arrived in the camp  
the barracks were full,  
so for several weeks  
you lived in a crowded tent.

Unlike in Auschwitz,  
there were no gas chambers in Belsen,  
just shouting SS guards with dogs,  
watch towers and barbed wire fence,  
starvation and disease,  
living skeletons of prisoners  
tottering around like ghosts.

Typhus raged everywhere  
And each hour brought new miseries.  
You stared at the clouds in the sky  
with your big eyes that grew bigger  
in the camp on your sunken face.

Your head was shaven now  
and you dressed in coarse rags.  
But in your tiny fragile figure  
the pure fire of your lofty soul  
kept burning.

Then winter came with ice and snow,  
frosty winds swept through the camp.  
The barracks were unheated in Belsen.  
The cold followed you everywhere  
And the hunger pangs became unbearable.

You wished at least you could write  
but it was hard to get paper or pencil.

Nevertheless, February arrived  
with thrilling news.  
Amid tears and smiles you found out  
with boundless excitement  
that an old school friend from Amsterdam  
was also in Bergen-Belsen,  
in another section of the camp.

Although you could have been shot for it,  
you decided to take the risk and meet  
with your friend.

So one shivery winter night  
you walked on the frozen ground  
of the barren heath of the camp  
towards the barbed wire fence.

Scared and trembling in the dark,  
She waited on the other side.  
It was dangerous to make any sound.  
However, suddenly and against all odds  
she heard your voice whispering her name.

You could not embrace each other  
because of the barbed wire barrier.  
But you could talk and cry together  
And the tears were flowing like rivers.

She brought you a crust of bread  
and threw it over the barbed wire fence.  
But a woman took it from you  
And you fumed in dismayed frustration.

Yet two nights later  
you met again your friend at the fence.  
She tossed another package of food  
And this time you caught it.

Hundreds of miles away in Poland  
your mother was alone in Auschwitz.  
She missed her family and refused to eat.  
While freedom drew closer inch by inch  
and the Russians approached the camp  
she died of starvation  
on January 6, 1945.

Meanwhile in Bergen-Belsen  
Margot became gravely ill.  
She contracted typhus  
and one day as she lost consciousness  
she fell from her bunk and died.

At the same time you lay sick, too,  
in your barrack bunk,  
unaware of your sister's death  
or the fate of your parents.

The sun rose and set on the horizon  
and the Allies advanced in every front.

On January 27, 1945,  
Three weeks after your mother died,  
the 322nd Rifle Division of the Red Army

liberated your father in Auschwitz.

In March, American and British forces  
crossed the Rhine River in Germany  
and a month later, on April 15, 1945,  
the British 11th Armoured Division  
overran Bergen-Belsen  
and liberated the concentration camp.

But they came too late for you  
Because your heart stopped beating by then.

I don't know if irony  
Can offer any pale solace  
Yet compassionate arms  
Held you when you  
Became highly delirious.

Carrying the promise of spring  
A bright breeze blew through the lager.  
It was March 1945 now  
and slipping slowly into a deep coma  
you died peacefully  
in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

You were fifteen years old.

However, only the flesh dies.  
The soul survives.  
Your memory lives forever.

Anne, you always believed  
in the goodness of man.  
Your constructive sensibility  
transcends time and suffering.

Your towering courage soars  
above war and destruction.  
It rises in gleaming nobility  
as a symbol of the human spirit  
triumphing against evil.

Your immortal Diary inspires  
millions of people around the globe.  
Its poignant words glow and shine  
illuminating the darkness of the night  
with radiant splendour of light.

Anne, when I was born  
You were already six years old.

In the summer of 1944,

while you and your family  
were hiding in Amsterdam,  
My mother, sister and I were deported  
From Hungary to Strasshof,  
a slave labour camp near Vienna.

My father was sent to Auschwitz.

Then on April 9, 1945,  
A fortnight before my ninth birthday,  
the Red Army  
Liberated us in Strasshof.

Now the winter of life  
Turns my thinning hair grey  
And with the rolling of seasons  
I became much older than you.

I age.  
You don't.

(Montreal, 2009)

Paul Hartal

## **Moment in Frame**

At exactly  
Eight twenty nine  
Of the brittle morning  
A black car passed  
In the melting street.

A faded lonely leaf  
From last September  
Somersaulted  
By the rollicking wind  
Over the pallid snow  
Of early April.

An orange sun  
Was shining  
And a grey-winged  
Redbreast robin  
Began to chant  
Her Psalms.

Paul Hartal

## Money and Love

She was reading a book on a bench.  
He recognized her. Years ago  
He had a crush on her in high school.

So what is now your luminous goal in life? "  
She asked.

"Money and fame", he said.

"Your answer is more disappointing  
Than surprising", she said.

"Why? You don't want money and fame? "

"No, I don't want money and fame."

"You're a hypocrite."

"This sneer was predictable, but I really  
Don't want money and fame."

"Why? You don't need money to buy  
Food, clothes and other necessities? "

"Of course I need. However, I am talking  
About priorities. I don't live to make  
Money; I make money to live", she said.

"I see. But how can you be happy  
If you are not rich? " he asked.

"I don't believe that happiness really  
Can emanate from wealth.  
My neighbor won millions in the casinos  
Of Las Vegas but he is still depressed.  
And a lot of unhappy rich and famous  
People walk the streets out there."

"So what is it that you really desire in life? "

"Peace, well-being and contentment."

"That's all? "

She gave him a gentle and exploring look.

"No", she said. "That's not all.  
I desire to have an inner fortune that  
Eclipses all the external thrills of the world.  
I want to love and to be loved."

Paul Hartal

## **My Life**

My life is a Corinthian acanthus leaf  
On an intricately carved classic column  
Enchanted pellucid palace  
Silent opaque sandglass  
On an amethyst shelf  
Byzantine transition  
From circle to sphere.

My works are gothic objects  
Frail violins  
Of crystal madrigals  
Bizarre rococo laces  
In a darkly rich coloured interior  
And sometimes as I stare at them  
They are strange and unknown to me  
Like my own hand and fingers  
At three o'clock A.M.

Paul Hartal

## **No Secret: The Rwandan Genocide**

A remote source of the Nile,  
the Kagera River originates in Burundi.  
On its way to Lake Victoria it flows  
into a steep gorge along the natural border  
between Rwanda and Tanzania.  
Before entering the ravine,  
the river cascades in a small waterfall  
that swells in the rainy season.

As the Kagera sweeps down from  
the highlands it carries within its currents  
vast clusters of uprooted trees embedded  
in gigantic dollops of elephant grass.  
In the spring and summer of 1994  
it was still much the same.  
However, this time also thousands  
of human corpses floated on the river.

Rwanda and Burundi  
are two tiny African countries,  
each with a territory somewhat smaller  
than Belgium. Most of the population  
belong to Hutu tribes,  
who are traditionally crop growers.

But beginning in the 1300s  
warrior herdsmen  
from the highlands of Ethiopia  
migrated to the region.  
They originally spoke Somali or Oromo,  
but in adopting the local Bantu language  
and settling among the Hutus,  
they became known as Tutsis.

The German colonists favoured  
the Ethiopian look of the Tutsi minority.  
They employed them as overseers  
in the administration of Ruanda-Urundi,  
as the colony was called then.

Then during the First World War Belgium  
took over governing the territory  
but continued to support the Tutsis  
as the ruling class.

In 1919 Brussels received a mandate  
from the League of Nations to administer  
the colony. The Belgian colonists divided  
Tutsis and Hutus on the basis  
of cattle ownership, church documents,  
physical measurements  
and physiognomic appearance.

Basically, they had designated  
the wealthy and tall as Tutsis,  
and classified those poorer  
and shorter as Hutus.  
The Tutsis got used fast  
to their privileged status  
as Rwandan aristocrats.  
They worshipped their king  
as a god-like ruler and treated  
the Hutus with disdain as peasants.

But the aristocratic Tutsi monarchy  
came to an end in 1959  
when Belgium allowed holding  
universal elections.  
King Kigeli V of Ruanda-Urundi  
was forced to go to exile  
and the majority Hutus  
assumed control of the government.

These were turbulent times  
that deteriorated into wide spread  
communal violence.  
In 1962 two independent countries  
emerged from the former colony,  
Rwanda and Burundi.  
But the transition from colony  
to independence was not  
a peaceful one.

At the time that Rwanda  
became independent,  
Hutus comprised more than 80 percent  
of the country's seven million people.  
Nevertheless, the Tutsi minority  
was reluctant to give up  
its privileged ruling status.

Consequently, Hutus and Tutsis  
were at each other's throat  
in the power struggle  
for governing the country.  
In Rwanda hundreds of Tutsis  
were killed while thousands of others  
fled to neighbouring Burundi and Uganda.

In the aftermath of the atrocities,  
President Grégoire Kayibanda  
made the Hutus the governing majority  
of the nation. Yet the leaders  
of the new regime did not choose

a policy of national reconciliation.  
Instead, they opted for oppression  
and discrimination.

They blamed the problems of Rwanda  
on the Tutsis. In the 1970s  
the Hutu-led military  
continued to murder Tutsis in Rwanda.  
They excluded the Tutsis  
from the governmental administration,  
the armed forces, even from schools  
and universities.

Yet meanwhile Tutsis had their share  
in violent ethnic cleansing as well.  
In 1972, in response to a Hutu rebellion,  
the Tutsi controlled army  
in the Republic of Burundi  
killed over 100,000 Hutus.

Similarly to Rwanda, over 80 percent  
of the population in Burundi  
consists of Hutu tribes.

Harking back on the shame and humiliation  
of the past, the Hutu leadership in Rwanda  
intensified their hateful propaganda,  
inflaming bitterness and hostility  
against the tall, aristocratic Tutsi.

They claimed that the Tutsis  
intended to restore a feudal system  
to enslave the Hutu population.  
They recruited writers and teachers  
to travel the country to raise Hutu pride  
and to create a pan-Hutu consciousness.  
They sowed the seeds of spite,  
unfurled the propaganda of hate  
and prepared the hurricane of genocide.

However, in the neighbouring countries  
the Tutsi refugee Diaspora organized  
militia forces to overthrow  
the Hutu regime in Rwanda.  
In 1990 civil war broke out  
as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)  
of the Tutsi minority  
invaded the country from Uganda.

Then on April 6, 1994, an airplane  
carrying the Hutu presidents  
of two African nations,

Juvénal Habyarimana of Rwanda and  
Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi,  
had been shot down.

The fanatic Akazu organization  
of the Hutu Power ideologists  
immediately blamed the Tutsis  
for the shooting down of the plane.

They spread hate and hysteria.  
By radio and word of mouth  
they told Hutu civilians that it was  
their patriotic duty  
to "fill the half-empty graves"  
with the bodies of Tutsis.  
They called for the slaughter  
of all Tutsis, as well as of Hutus  
who sympathized with the Tutsi.

They even incited Hutu wives  
and husbands to murder  
their own spouses.

Although throughout the centuries  
both Hutus and Tutsis  
unleashed violent actions  
and slaughtered each other,  
the tragic events of 1994 culminated  
in one of the most horrible atrocities  
of history.

The Rwandan radio exhorted people  
to fight for Rwanda and to kill  
the Tutsis like 'cockroaches'  
and sweep them from the country.  
The radio inflamed the Hutus  
to massacre the Tutsis,  
urging them to use  
every kind of weapons;  
if not guns and grenades,  
then arrows, spears,  
machetes, knives and clubs.

And so they did.  
Frenzied Hutu squads killed  
Tutsi men, women, children  
and babies by the thousands  
in the streets, in churches,  
schools and in their houses.  
In the countryside the murderers  
covered the dead with banana leaves  
in order to screen them  
from aerial photography.

In about 100 days,  
between April 6 and mid-July in 1994,  
approximately one million people  
were killed. The victims also included  
Hutus who refused to participate  
in the massacres or were  
on friendly relations with Tutsis.

The cold blooded murderers  
who perpetrated these heinous crimes  
were fuelled by fanatic dedication  
to a pan-nationalist identity politics.

The killers were often not strangers  
but familiar faces to the victims,  
neighbours and workmates,  
even relatives or former friends.

The December 1993 issue  
of the Hutu Kangura magazine shows  
a picture of the Rwandan President  
Grégoire Kayibanda next to a machete.  
Adjacent to the picture appear the words:  
"Tutsi: Race of God", and then  
the magazine poses the question:  
"Which weapons are we going to use  
to beat the cockroaches for good? "

The genocide  
that followed was no secret!  
It occurred uninterrupted  
by United Nations forces  
that were in place  
monitoring a ceasefire.

And journalists and TV cameras  
from all over the world reported  
the massacres.  
Viewers in cities and villages  
on different continents  
sat in front of their television screens,  
sipping coffee or eating popcorn,  
and watched in shock  
the horrible mass murders.

The genocide ended in July 1994  
when the Tutsi rebels of the RPF  
defeated the Hutu military forces  
of Rwanda. Fearing retributions,  
two million Hutus fled  
to neighbouring Burundi, Tanzania,

Uganda and Zaire. Many of them participated in the massacres.

Conditions in the refugee camps were dreadful and thousands died in epidemics of cholera and dysentery.

The international community could have intervened in order to stop the Rwandan genocide, but governments lacked the political will to do that. And, indeed, the United Nations Security Council accepted responsibility for failing to prevent the massacres.

The unchecked brutality of the perpetrators of this genocide "made a mockery, once again, of the pledge 'never again'", said the Canadian Foreign Minister, Lloyd Axworthy. He was referring to the promise made after the Holocaust.

Paul Hartal

## **Now?**

Now  
Now  
Now  
Now  
Now  
Now  
Now  
Now  
Which  
One  
Is  
Really  
Now?

Paul Hartal

## **Nurse in Evergreen of Absence**

My nurse, my blessed nurse  
In evergreen of absence  
You breast-fed me, nurtured me  
But now my confidence is shaken  
My tranquillity vanished, taken.

I extend my arms toward you  
Please, lift me up, hold me tight  
Yet you just stand in the square  
As I cry and weep to no avail  
No matter how much I kick the air  
I beg: Lift me up, hold me right  
All in vain, a rope of sand  
You are firm, ignore my plight.

I cry and scream and kick in rage  
Still undeterred you stand your place  
But now why rivers of tears pour down  
From your eyes over your face?

Then in faltering steps slowly  
You walk toward the gate, it's open  
There you stop, framed and frozen.  
Only the flowers on your dress elate  
Dance and stream in the balmy breeze  
As poplars whisper secrets to armadas  
Of loudly singing southern cicadas.

You stare at me for a long time from the gate  
Before turning on your heels to a formless form  
Disappearing fast in the shadows of the alley  
Like a butterfly, swept away by a nightly storm.

I never saw you again.

O my nurse, my sweet nurse  
In evergreen of absence.

Paul Hartal

## Obelisks

Let me remember old trails  
Let me weep over lost loves  
They are all the same love  
But different

Let me remember old trails  
Cherry trees along muddy roads  
And ancient obelisks  
They are now so different  
But still the same

Let me remember missteps  
Let me regret wrong paths  
They are all the same path  
But different

The seasons always alter  
Or they hardly ever change  
Only the hours pass  
Time stands still  
And your love is mine

Let me remember old lanes  
Let me weep over old loves  
They are all different  
But still the same

Let me remember good times  
Life in its fleeting flight  
Days of yore that vanished  
They are still the same  
But different

The seasons always alter  
Or they hardly ever change  
Only the hours pass  
Time stand still  
And my love is yours

Let me take new roads  
Let me praise new loves  
They are all the same love  
But different

Paul Hartal

## **On the Killing Fields**

I did not learn from books  
About the horrors of war  
I was soaked in them  
On the killing fields  
Amid exploding shells  
Frightened and savage.

I did not watch movies  
To see dead bodies  
Lying on green meadows  
I saw them with my own eyes  
The raging fires  
The engulfing flames  
In the blazing tanks.

The sun was shining  
It was a balmy  
And beautiful day  
As the summer wind carried  
The nauseating smell  
Of the burning flesh  
Across gentle hills.

Paul Hartal

## **Once Upon an August Dreamy**

Once upon an August dreamy  
I saw a flat plane very sphery  
I could not imagine the simple  
Deck ducks danced in a drizzle.

I dreamed of the impossible  
The perceptible invisible  
Paris moved to Guatemala  
Goethe wrote the Kalevala.

Once upon a winter bleary  
I saw the world seamy, creamy  
The yellow a purple colour  
The mirror in misdemeanour.

I dreamed of the impossible  
The pope became infallible  
Vendors sold plenty of things  
Rag rings and American kings.

Paul Hartal

## **Only One Love**

There is only one love  
In the whole world  
But the heart  
Has many chambers

Paul Hartal

## **Organic Poem**

Let's grow  
organic poems,  
verse vitamins  
for the soul.

Let's spray  
the streets with  
luminous songs.

Let's sow  
the squares with  
ethereal grace  
and charm.

And then  
let's lift the city  
above the clouds.

Let the air  
be pure  
and the sky  
blue again.

Let the city fly  
on magic wings  
of words in peace  
and prosperity.

Paul Hartal

## Painting For Hitler

Anyone who paints the meadow blue  
And the sky green with yellow clouds  
Should be sterilized or executed,  
Adolf Hitler said.

For many years I waited with a response to that.  
Finally on a spring morning I took a canvas and  
With slow and measured brushstrokes I painted  
The sky green with yellow clouds  
And the meadow blue.

I did this not only as a symbolical act  
Of defiance but also in reply to the present day  
Followers of the Nazi dictator who continue  
To admire and worship him.

Prior to his rise to power Adolf painted  
Nostalgic landscapes. He also designed  
The Nazi flag in which he reversed  
The ancient Hindu and Buddhist icon  
Of the swastika from a symbol of peace  
To a symbol of violence and hatred.

As the supreme military commander  
Of the Reich he liked to impress his minions  
By quoting from memory encyclopaedic data  
Such as the exact tonnage of each warship of  
Every nation. However, General Franz Halder  
Described Hitler as a grotesque neurotic  
Who gave irrational orders. The fuehrer wanted  
To outperform Napoleon and in the process  
Fifty million people died in Europe.  
Six million of them were Jews.

This monstrous criminal of history also posed  
As art theorist although he failed to grasp  
The principle of artistic freedom. He forbade  
Aesthetic experimentation and raged at signs  
Of the flight of imagination. He feared the idea  
Of liberating perception from the tight hold of  
Appearances because we can see what we cannot  
See only through the unique eye of the free artist.

Anyone who paints the meadow blue  
And the sky green with yellow clouds  
Should be sterilized, or executed,  
Hitler said on October 15, 1933 in Munich  
In a cornerstone laying speech  
For the House of German Art.

The dictator confiscated the right to see  
The world in a different way than he saw it.

An ignoramus, Hitler was evidently unaware  
Of the stunning colour phenomena of nature.  
He did not know or ignored that often times  
Before violent thunderstorms strike  
The sky does display hues of green  
In the visible electromagnetic spectrum  
With a wavelength of about 510 nanometres.

Also depending on the position of the sun  
And weather conditions in an electric sky  
The clouds can appear yellow  
With a visible electromagnetic wavelength  
Of about 570 nanometres on the spectrum.

Those who look for them can find  
Every tint and shade in the firmament.  
When rainbows appear in the sky they play  
Magnificent symphonies of all the hues  
And colours ranging from red through violet.

And the earth itself abounds  
In an infinite scale and wealth of colours.  
Amid distant memories of sweet fragrances  
I remember red summer fields of poppy seeds  
Blooming cobalt chicories and indigo oat grasses  
As the sun was traversing high in the sky  
A loyal companion to my walk through  
Lavender irises and purple periwinkles  
In wild-flower strewn blue meadows.

Paul Hartal

## Palindromic Flight

747  
oh  
bilateral symmetry  
elegant fuselage  
lo  
the wings  
and  
the tail  
in a palindromic flight  
poetry  
crosses  
the sky  
behold  
behold  
the sky  
crosses  
poetry  
in a palindromic flight  
the tail  
and  
the wings  
lo  
elegant fuselage  
bilateral symmetry  
oh

747

Paul Hartal

## **Past and Present**

Bygone days silently curl  
Fold in airy yesteryears  
They retreat to hide  
Behind the elliptic orbits  
Of the revolving planets

The days become nights  
And they change  
Like caterpillars  
Or like gelatinous eggs  
Of some toads  
That detect vibrations

And then they quietly sail  
With the solar wind  
To distant places in space  
To remote galaxies  
Filled with shimmering stars.

But in the uncurved spheres  
Of the pulsating heart  
Amid the fugitive joys  
And haunting sorrows of life  
The magic lanterns  
Of bygone days glow  
Under the rainbow clocks  
Of ageless hours

And while history  
Restlessly meanders  
On the foamy stream  
Of its inflammable river  
Flows the Eternal Now  
Of untamed remembrance

Paul Hartal

## **Pesticide Fields**

For Rachel Carson, 1907-1968

In La Belle Dame sans Merci  
John Keats writes about the sedge  
That withered from the lake  
And the birds that stopped to sing.

But unlike the poet's merciless Dame  
You, Rachel, you were a Lady  
Of great compassion.

The eels and the scombrids still swim  
Under the Sea Wind somehow  
Yet your Silent Spring evokes  
A verdant season without bird song  
On the pesticide fields.

Half a century ago you warned  
That the abuse of DDT  
And other chemicals harm  
And kill animals and humans.

And then the chemical corporations  
Reacted to your words  
With savage furor and venom.

They accused you with all sort of things:  
Of being a hysterical woman  
Without proper scientific training  
Who did not understand the need  
To weigh potential risks against benefits.

They also accused you  
Of being responsible  
For millions of deaths around the globe  
Caused by malaria  
Because DDT can kill mosquitoes  
And a ban on it would hinder control  
Of malaria transmission.

These were untrue  
And malicious accusations.  
In fact, you never suggested  
To ban DDT or chemicals.  
You just said to use pesticides  
With caution and to spray  
With as little as possible.

Since then your vision  
Has been vindicated  
And remarkably, the poisonous campaign  
Of the chemical industry against you

Backfired.

The public became aware  
Of the dangers of pesticides  
And governments outlawed  
The use of DDT.

However, you became gravely ill  
In the struggle.  
I don't know  
Whether the breast cancer you contracted  
Was caused by environmental degradation  
And pollution  
Augmented by the toxic fumes  
Of a vicious campaign against you.

Who knows?

Rachel, my brave and fragile,  
My wise and farsighted lady,  
We only know that you died  
Of a heart attack.

Paul Hartal

## **Piano Tunes**

For Hsia Jung Chang

I met you only accidentally  
In the cold ether of cyberspace

But perhaps it was not  
A random chance event  
A lordless accident  
Occurring in a disheveled chaos

Perhaps it had to happen  
Through the hidden harmonies  
that bond sentient souls  
To the boned cosmos

Because as you emailed  
This stranger later  
You needed the words  
Reverberating  
With the music of the spheres

I imagine your fingers waving  
Touching gently the keyboard

and they bring alive  
Magic tunes of Chopin  
Born out of the aloof stillness  
Of silent notes

The miracle of the sound of heaven  
Right here on a forlorn planet  
Called earth.

Paul Hartal

## **Post-Hesiodic Poem**

Poets of remote past and eternal present  
Taught me hymns of love, pride and dignity  
They knew so well how to live and die  
Yet we live in the twenty first century.

The light is dim, almost colorless around  
Pollution, nuclear threats, violence, crime,  
Alienation and angst became the essence  
Of life on coordinates of space and time.

Searching amongst meaningless things meaning  
My poems ripple in the cosmos like ocean waves  
I aim and dream to reach the unattainable  
In these Post-Hesiodic Works and Days.

Yearning for organic harmonies, the timeless  
Calmness of solid geometry I wonder  
Hoping that with a poem, painting, song  
Or novel, our world is becoming better.

Paul Hartal

## **Postmodern Light**

If you don't support 'progress'  
You're not politically correct  
Though often it is pure foulness  
A perfect product of the imperfect.

If you believe in freedom  
Yes, you're politically correct  
But one's liberty is another's serfdom  
Power in the hand of the elect.

If you're not a feminist  
You're not politically correct  
So do not swing your fist  
Even when you are erect.

Your values and tradition  
Are politically correct, perhaps,  
If your divorces keep going on  
Imbued with other family mishaps.

If you're not a 'postmodern'  
You're not politically correct  
So just raise high your lantern  
And irradiate for stage effect.

Paul Hartal

## **Rainbow's Birth**

The morning light  
in your eye  
unfurls a sail  
in the solar wind  
of sun rays.

Your fingers move  
like flower petals  
in the breeze  
of June.

In the palm  
of your hand  
the rainbow  
is born.

Paul Hartal

## Richard Feynman's Woodpecker

Under a cloudy sky  
A hammering woodpecker  
Drilled and drummed  
On a tree branch  
With her chisel-like bill tip.

Then a physicist stepped out  
Of his house into the haze  
Billowing over the street.

He scratched his bald head  
And brooded and pondered  
Contemplated and thought  
Of the opaque secret of light.

Well, he said, nowadays  
Of course we already know  
That light can be  
Both a particle and a wave,  
A stream of arcane photons  
Or a recondite river of rays:  
Electromagnetic radiation.

But I still  
Do not understand it,  
He muttered,  
For this whole damned thing  
Remains elusive and mysterious.

The problem is, he said,  
That while sound waves  
Propagate through the air  
And surface waves in lakes  
Or oceans travel in water,  
Light can traverse through  
Intergalactic nothing  
Moving in straight lines  
In the vacuum  
Of empty space  
Without a medium  
As electromagnetic waves.

Now, how does this  
Silly light do it?  
How can it propagate  
Without a medium?  
And how does it know  
Which way is straight?

And why is it a constant?  
He asked, and nothing  
Can travel faster

Than the speed of light,  
That is to say almost  
300,000 km per second.

And he suddenly  
Remembered that once  
Richard Feynman said:  
Physicists do not  
Really understand physics,  
They just get used to it.

And so the physicist just kept  
Wondering and scratching  
His bald head  
Under a cloudy sky.

A dense gray mist  
Billowed then over the street  
And a hammering woodpecker  
Drilled and drummed  
On a tree branch  
With her chisel-like bill tip.

Paul Hartal

## **Rwanda 1994**

The Kagera River rises in Burundi blue  
It sweeps down from the highlands green.

But then why the river runs red?  
Why does it look so sinister?

It hauls the bodies of the dead  
Its currents carry your sister.

The Kagera River rises in Burundi green  
It flows wild to Lake Victoria blue.

But then why the river runs red?  
There is no change in the weather.

Yet on the waters float the dead  
The currents carry your father.

The Kagera River rises in Burundi white  
It drags trees and elephant grass green.

But then why the river runs red?  
The day sunny like another.

Yet the streams tow and haul the dead  
The currents carry your brother.

The Kagera River rises in Burundi blue  
It flows through Rwandan gorges green.

But then why the river runs red?  
Why does the village camp smother?

It hauls the corpses of the dead  
The currents carry your mother.

Paul Hartal

## Samurai Competition

The steel blade of the sword flashed in the bright sunshine.  
Second Lieutenant Toshiaki Mukai clutched the handle in both hands.  
He raised the weapon high towards the sky and took a deep breath.

And then, with a powerful strike,  
He slashed the head of the young Chinese man kneeling before him.

He smiled.  
Did Second Lieutenant Tsuyoshi Noda win or lose?  
On route to Nanjing, the two officers  
Of the Japanese Imperial Army were  
Competing with each other for being the first  
To behead 100 people.

The competition was not a war crime, they said,  
But in the Samurai spirit of *kiri sute gomen*,  
The ancient feudal era custom  
That authorized the Samurai to execute by sword anyone  
From the lower classes who compromised the warrior's honor.

The Japanese media liked the idea of the beheading contest.  
Newspapers celebrated it with enthusiastic reports.  
They explained that cutting heads strengthened military character,  
Increased patriotism and public support, as well as army moral.

The Tokyo Nichi-Nichi Shimbun covered the contest  
Of cutting 100 heads with a series of articles.  
"Incredible Record", announced the newspaper  
In its December 13, 1937 headline:  
"Mukai beheaded 106, Noda 105".

The Tokyo paper also claimed that the two officers decided  
To start another competition with the aim being 150 severed heads.

During the Fascist invasion of China and in World War II  
Soldiers of the Japanese Imperial Army treated people  
In the occupied territories as inferior lower classes and slaves.

Beheading by sword became a common war crime in the Asian theatre.  
Yet Japanese officers saw it not only as an antidote to faintheartedness  
But as a grand act of heroism.

By the end of the Second World War an estimated four million soldiers  
And perhaps up to sixteen million civilians lost their lives in China.

Paul Hartal

## **Sang froid**

The earl picked up an early peach  
Then walked alone to the beach.  
He sailed away in a little boat  
Leaving behind a one line note.

I will be back by five o'clock,  
Said the writing on the lock.  
But a huge wave had sunk his boat  
Forcing him to swim in his coat.

Still, by five he arrived at home,  
Changed to dry clothes, read a tome.  
Then to his wife he said smiling:  
Wet Ocean, but swim was trifling.

Paul Hartal

## Scarlet Flower

The East is Red at the Great Wall.  
My heart and soul yearningly-long  
For my Scarlet Flower all day long  
My love is magenta blood  
It burns with crimson flames.

Scarlet, my beautiful beloved  
Your dark almond eyes  
Glow in tender purity and passion  
With balmy warmth and devotion.

And we walk around ancient Xi'an  
Kuomintang General Chiang Kai-shek  
Was captured here in nineteen thirty six  
At the foot of the Hills of Lishan.

Now the camera has another film roll  
And you pose for the picture where long ago  
Tang Emperor Xuanzong's concubine  
Lady Yang Guifei used to stroll.

The red buttons on your black garment  
Wink with joy in the park, enchanted  
At the white marble-sculpture:  
Backward leant  
Lady Yang Guifei steps out naked  
From the emerald pool  
Of the Huaqing hot springs.

Scarlet, your ebony hair in chignon  
Adorns your delicate ivory skin  
Oh how graceful is your face, my love.

In the afternoon-light the blue scarf  
Beneath your chin playfully converses  
With purple magnolia and red roses  
And golden chrysanthemums.

Paul Hartal

## **She Does Not Talk**

She does not talk  
To me any more  
And does not look  
At me  
Just  
Strolls about  
All day long  
With downcast eyes.

Today  
I saw her  
In the sunshine  
Crouching  
As only she can  
With gentle hands  
Touching  
A flower stalk  
And talking  
To the petals.

Paul Hartal

## **She Lit up the Candles**

When  
her daughter died  
she said  
there is no God  
in Heaven.

Still  
the years  
floated away  
with the waters  
of the rivers  
as life  
went on.

One day  
returning home  
from  
the frozen street  
she  
opened the door  
and stared into  
the gloaming space  
of  
a widowed room.

She  
uttered  
a soft sigh  
and covered her  
ailing shoulders  
with a scarf.

And then  
she lit up the candles  
and prayed.

In  
her struggle  
with God  
she got  
the lower hand.

Paul Hartal

## Shoes on the Bank of the Danube

On a sunny day in Budapest  
The Danube Promenade offers a serene stroll.  
The Royal Palace perched on Castle Hill  
Greets you under an azure sky  
And the mountains of Buda wave brightly  
Their wooded hands across the river.

But along your peaceful walk listen  
To the quiet murmur of the Danube  
Listen to the shifting waves that whisper  
About bottomless grieves and sorrows  
The river drifts irremovable memories  
On the flowing waters float  
Myriad sad stories.

Not far from the Parliament building  
And the Academy of Sciences  
Sculpted shoes cast in iron  
Line the left bank of the Danube  
Between Roosevelt Square and Kossuth Square:  
Sixty period-exact footwear  
In the style of the 1940s conceived  
And created by the sculptor Gyula Pauer  
And the poet Janos Can Togay.

Attached to the top of the stone embankment  
The shoes symbolize real shoes of real people  
Who lost their lives here.  
They commemorate thousands of persecuted  
Men, women and children,  
Mostly Jews, who were murdered  
By Nazi thugs in the terrible days  
Of the Hungarian Arrow Cross terror  
Between October 1944 and February 1945.

While the Soviet Red Army had encircled  
Budapest and its units were already fighting  
In the suburbs of the capital, Arrow Cross  
Militiamen rounded up Jews in groups of fifty  
To sixty and led them to the bridges linking  
Pest with Buda.

When they reached the river bank  
The executioners told their frightened victims  
To remove their shoes and put all their jewellery,  
Watches, money and other valuables inside.

And then they shot them into a freezing death.  
Drift ice floated on the winter Danube  
The water turned red from the blood of the victims  
As the river carried away their bodies.

On a serene walk along the Danube  
Listen to the quiet murmur of the river  
Listen to the shifting waves that whisper  
About bottomless grieves and sorrows  
The river drifts irremovable memories  
On the flowing waters float myriad sad stories.

Paul Hartal

## **Slanted Eyes (Yeux Bridés)**

In a red coat she walked on black high heel shoes  
In a crowded street between men with neckties  
As we passed by she cast a casual glance at me  
And I admired her radiant almond eyes.

Once on a sunny afternoon in late August  
I saw her again in a park under blue skies  
The wind moved gently lacy cirrus clouds  
And I adored her graceful Asian eyes.

My ancestors did not build the Great Wall  
Nor did they belong to ranks of Samurais  
But when the Moon rises west of the Silk Road  
I dream about the girl with comely oblique eyes.

As the years slip by and we grow old together  
We walk hand in hand on fields of butterflies  
Why do you love me? She asks and I tell her:  
For your beautiful soul and your slanted eyes.

Paul Hartal

## **Sometimes**

Sometimes,  
I don't know how,  
I hover over  
The Tropic of Capricorn,  
Riding on a cirrus  
Wispy, white and torn,  
Looking at the azure sea  
Below.

Sometimes,  
I don't know why,  
I am suddenly  
At the Arno in Florence,  
Listening to Dante's  
Sweet verse at the fence,  
While Beatrice is flitting, pure  
And shy.

And sometimes,  
I don't know what  
For, but I would like  
To assist Peter Schlemihl  
Finding his lost shadow,  
Hammer the anvil  
Without iron or purpose  
On a yacht.

And sometimes,  
I don't know when,  
My heart desires  
To become a remote fjord,  
Aurora borealis  
Playing harpsichord,  
Or, in the frozen tundra,  
Cyclamen.

Paul Hartal

## Subway

He saw her at the subway station  
Standing on the platform waiting for the train.  
Inside the car they sat in front of each other.  
She was quite young.

Though not strikingly pretty  
She was good looking and attractive  
And he liked her back-combed black hair.  
It was long and lustrous and gathered into a chignon  
And softened with a purple satin ribbon  
That matched her elegant blue dress.  
She wore high heeled black shoes  
And her ivory skin shone on her comely legs.

The train moved and stopped  
And moved again  
At the stations the doors opened and closed  
And people streamed out and in.

She sat quietly in her seat  
And then opened her purse  
And pulled out a candy  
Wrapped in golden paper.  
She removed carefully the wrapping  
Put the candy slowly into her mouth  
And then folded neatly the paper  
And put it back into her purse.

He watched her discretely for a short while  
And then closed his eyes  
And when he opened them he saw  
That she cast a timid glance looking at him.

He liked her.  
He wanted to start a conversation with her  
But somehow it just did not seem appropriate  
To address a complete stranger on a train  
And besides he was afraid to say something silly.  
So he remained silent.

He wanted to say something to her  
But he did not have the courage.  
And then suddenly he panicked  
Because he realized that he cannot speak  
That he cannot pass through the invisible barrier  
That extended between them

That despite her presence  
He cannot reach out to her  
That he is unable to have her in his life  
And that they soon will get off the train  
And he probably never will see her again.

The car wheels  
Kept clacking and rattling over the rails  
And they both sat silently on their seats  
Two lonely islands in a withdrawn crowd.

Then the subway pulled into a station  
And it was time to alight from the car.  
Without saying a word  
He walked through the door  
And across the car window he saw her.  
She was looking at him.

The train began to move slowly  
Along the platform of the station  
A moving image melting away  
Like an ice dragon in the heat of summer.

In a few seconds it vanished  
Into the thin air through the dark mouth  
Of the subway tunnel.

Paul Hartal

## **Tail Chasing**

The search  
for the meaning of life  
Is not unlike a cat  
that chases its own tail  
because the search  
is part of the meaning.

Paul Hartal

## Talking Back to Parmenides

He was taller than I expected.  
Standing at the white city gate  
Parmenides of Elea patiently waited.  
What year is this? He asked.  
2005, I said.  
All these years, he murmured.  
Yes, I nodded, you were born  
More than twenty five centuries ago.

You were writing in hexameters  
About the Way of Truth  
And the Way of Seeming,  
I reminded him.  
Yes, I remember that, he said.  
My memory is as good as in my youth.  
I used to delve into the Enigma of Being  
In the quest for finding the hidden heart of  
Certainty and permanence.

We were silent for a while.  
And then I said:  
I read in a Dictionary of Philosophy  
That you believe that reality does not change  
And is unknowable.  
Well, I still believe that, Parmenides said.

In that case let me ask you this:  
If reality is unknowable  
Then how do you know  
That it does not change?

Paul Hartal

## **Teddy Bear**

Modern teddy bear  
My cyber teddy bear  
Your walk  
Is clumsy  
And your fur  
Polyester  
But the battery  
In your heart  
Is real and solid  
Like the soldered  
Lead lid of coffins.

When I was a child  
You were different.  
A little worn out  
And soft you sat  
Obediently  
Next to the pillow  
On my bed,

Until one day  
You vanished,  
Like the shadow  
Of a Monday Moon.

Yet last night  
I saw you  
In a dream.

A young man  
Played the violin  
Somewhere  
And you sat  
In an armchair  
In my old room  
Crying.

Paul Hartal

## **The Boy Who Came Down from the Cross**

He stood beside his father before tumbling into a deep pit.  
A split second later a volley of shots were fired.  
His father fell with the others into the abyss, shot dead.  
But sixteen year old Zvi Michalowski was alive.

It was a pitch dark night when he climbed out of the pit.  
He was naked and his body covered with blood.  
He heard the Lithuanian executioners singing, laughing,  
Celebrating the shooting of the Jews.  
They were all drunk by now.

As Hitler's armies were advancing on Moscow  
The murderers arrived with an Einsatzgruppen unit.  
They entered Eishyshok, an old Jewish town in south Lithuania,  
On September 25 of 1941. On the same day and the next  
The paramilitary SS units massacred about 5,000 Jews  
From Eishyshok and adjacent villages.

Zvi Michalowski knew the place like the palm of his hand.  
He passed the Jewish cemetery beyond which Polish and  
Lithuanian families lived. He knocked on the door of the first house.  
A peasant opened the door. In his hand he held a lamp  
With a Star of David, which he looted from a Jewish home.

'Let me in, please', the boy implored. The man raised the lamp  
And looked at the blood covered naked body of the boy.  
'Jew, go back to the grave that you came from!' he said  
And he shut the door in his face.

Zvi Michalowski knocked on many doors on that night  
But nobody wanted to take him in. In his wanderings he arrived  
In a wooded area. He knew the old widow who lived in the house  
And knocked on the door. She was shocked to see the boy.

She held a burning piece of wood in her hand and spurned him.  
He stood there nevertheless. She cursed him, sending him away  
With angry words. When he did not move she threatened him  
With the fiery wood she had in her hand.

But the boy refused to go away. 'I am your Lord, Jesus Christ,  
Who came down from the cross', he told her. 'Now look at me,  
Look at the blood of my body, the pain the suffering of the innocent.  
Please, let me in'.

Shaking all over, the old woman began to pray.  
She fell on her knees at the bloodstained feet of the boy.  
Then she slowly rose to her feet, opened the door and let him in.  
'Oh, my dear God, oh my dear God, oh my dear God',  
She kept repeating her prayer, crossing herself each time.

The boy asked the woman not to tell anyone about his visit.  
She asked him to bless her family and her, which he promptly did.

She gave him food and clothes and prepared for him a warm bath.  
He stayed in her house for three days and three nights.

When Zvi Michalowski left the house he was dressed as a farmer  
And carried a food supply for a week. Soon he reached  
The nearby forest and went into hiding. He survived the war  
Fighting the Nazis as a partisan.

Paul Hartal

## **The Chestnut Tree (For Anne Frank)**

On a winter morning  
you climbed the ladder to the attic with Peter.  
He chopped wood for about a quarter of an hour  
and you watched him silently.

Then you looked out  
from the open window  
and marvelled at the stunning views of the city,  
the roofs, the streets and the canals of Amsterdam.

An azure sky curved down  
kissing a pale blue horizon  
and white seagulls with outstretched wings  
were gliding on the wind.

Standing bare in the inner garden  
Shiny silver drops perched on the branches  
Of the lonely chestnut tree  
near the house at Keizersgracht 188.

And you found comfort and solace  
in all this simple beauty of nature.

As long as such beauty exists in the world,  
You said, and you may live to see it,  
'this sunshine, the cloudless sky,  
while this lasts', you 'cannot be unhappy'  
you wrote in your Diary on February 23, 1944.

By now, for almost two years,  
you and your family lived in hiding  
at the house behind the Prinsengracht.

I was still free in my native land then  
and attended the public school.

Paul Hartal

## **The Crocodile That Ate Computers**

There once was a cute crocodile  
He lived happily in the River Nile  
He liked the river a lot and its fish  
Was really his favourite daily dish.

Since school was less his favourite  
He remained for a long time illiterate  
How to catch fish though he knew  
Albeit his days in class were very few.

But a good tutor taught him math  
A genius and polymath  
The teacher earnest, tried his best  
Explained everything with great zest.

Yet his student was always hungry  
He could listen only hardly  
Once he swallowed two computers  
And found tasty all the numbers.

Paul Hartal

## **The Dalai Lama Who Loved Wine, Women and Song**

Here the May lilacs blossom in the garden  
Their fragrance sprawls in the air of spring.

Yet my mind drifts on wings of a daydream  
To a far away land of peach-treed valleys  
Embraced by snow-capped mountains.

One night there on the Roof of the Earth  
A young man in the holy city of Lhasa  
Listened to the chanting of mantras  
Not for the sake of enlightenment  
But in order to sense her breath.

That month he span all the pray wheels  
Not for the sake of freeing his soul  
But in order to touch her finger prints.

That year he prostrated on the ground  
With his hands clasping the earth  
Not for the sake of adoring Buddha  
But in order to sense her warmth.

That incarnation he crossed green forests  
He passed through farmlands and deserts  
He climbed a hundred thousand mountains  
Not for the sake of afterlife  
But in order to meet her on the road.

Who was this young man?

Descending from the Monpa Tribe  
He was born in 1683 at Urgelling  
In the Monastery near Tawang in India.

His parents gave him the name  
Losang Rigdzin Tsangyang Gyatso  
In the Tibetan language it means  
Ocean of Melodious Songs.

His trunk of life was cut short though  
Just a child yet and he became  
Like an uncrowned king in the land  
And even so he remained modest  
Humble and unassuming.

He traveled about on foot  
He kept no personal servants  
He brewed his own tea  
And served his guests himself.

And he wrote magnificent poems  
They are still loved and revered

And sung throughout Tibet and China.

He loved women, friends and wine  
Although he was chosen as His Holiness  
The Sixth Dalai Lama of Tibet!

But he had no plans to accept the role  
Renounced the vows of a novice monk  
And then asked the forgiveness  
Of the Panchen Lama  
For refusing to accept the duties  
Of full ordination.

He had rather lived his life  
As a rake and stud.

He gambled and practiced archery  
Grew a long hair embellished with jewels  
Called himself the Turquoise Bee  
Acting as a playboy and dressing as a layman  
A gadabout debaucher in blue silk brocade.

He roamed through the countryside  
Reveling with his friends  
In the parks in daylight  
And then spent the dark hours  
In the taverns of Shol-town.

Drinking barley beer stuffed in bamboo barrels  
Or enjoying the intoxicating rice chang  
White and sweet and pungent in taste.

He had 'never slept a night  
Without a sweetheart'  
He wrote in one of his love poems  
To the indignation of the opulent Potala palace  
As servants traced back his footprints  
In the fresh snow leading to the brothels.

However, the Dalai Lama had a broken heart  
He wanted to wed his beloved lady  
The sweetheart who truly loved him  
But she "has been stolen to wed another"  
And he became sick with hankering sorrow.

That night in the holy city of Lhasa  
He listened to the chanting of the mantras  
Not for the sake of enlightenment  
But in order to sense her breath.

That month he span all the pray wheels  
Not for the sake of freeing his soul

But in order to touch her finger prints.

That year he prostrated on the earth  
With his hands clasping the soil  
Not for the sake of adoring Buddha  
But in order to sense her warmth.

That incarnation he crossed green forests  
He passed through farmlands and deserts  
He climbed a hundred thousand mountains  
Not for the sake of afterlife  
But in order to meet her on the road.

Then turbulence shook the Roof of the World  
It was now the fragile year of 1706  
And a Mongol army invaded Tibet  
Their leader Lhasang Khan did not believe  
That the Dalai Lama was the real one  
And he wanted to depose him.

A foreign army besieged Lhasa  
And Lhasang Khan ordered the Dalai Lama  
To relocate at the Mongol military camp  
In Lhalu Garden.

Soon afterwards, on June 27, 1706,  
The Mongol warlord ousted  
The Head of Tibetan Buddhism.

And since the Chinese Emperor Kangxi  
Approved it the Mongols took the Dalai Lama  
On a journey to the east to banish him  
To the imperial court  
Of the Manchu-led Qing Dynasty in Beijing.

It was a long voyage, joyless and exhausting  
Escorted by a group of Mongolian soldiers  
In the fall of 1706 he reached Gunga-Nor Lake  
On the road to the Chinese capital.

However, the Dalai Lama did not want  
To spend the rest of his life in humiliating exile  
And on the night of November 14, 1706  
He escaped under the veil of darkness.

A Mongol sentry noticed the fleeing figure  
And placed a fir arrow on his birch bow.

The archer aimed his weapon  
At the running target, he drew the curved bow  
Gripping the string  
Between his horn-ringed thumb and index finger

Until his left arm was fully extended  
And then released the metal-bladed projectile.

The arrow took to the air  
With a sharp snapping sound.

A moving shadow emitted  
A subdued moan of pain  
But vanished away  
On the nightly lake shore.

White crane, lend me your wings  
I go no further than Lithang  
And thence, return again.

While in Mongol captivity  
At Lithang Monastery in Kham  
Tsangyang Gyato, the Sixth Dalai Lama  
Predicted his own rebirth.

In 1708, two years after his disappearance  
The Seventh Dalai Lama, Kelsang Gyatso  
Was born in Lithang in Kham.

Paul Hartal

## **The Dancer of Melody Palace**

How is your beer?

Good. Bavaria brews the best beers in the world.

That is true. So what did you do in the war?

I was in the Russian front, wounded three times. How about you?

I was an SS guard in Auschwitz and Birkenau.

Was not that boring?

It was routine work. But unusual things had happened.

Don't tell me that you ran out of Cyclon B for the gas chambers.

No. But on October 23, 1943, we had some trouble with a transport of 1,700 Jews who arrived from Bergen Belsen.

What sort of trouble?

Well, as usual, before gassing them we told them to undress. In this group was a young and beautiful dancer, Franceska Mann. She worked at the famous Melody Palace nightclub in Warsaw.

This sounds to me more like a musical than real trouble.

Just wait. Ogling Franceska, Sergeant-Major Schillinger ordered her to undress completely. Yet she stood there hesitating. Since others were slow as well we began to deliver blows to the women to speed up the process. Then suddenly this Jewess, the dancer, threw her shoe or something into Schillinger's face.

What? Are you serious?

Yes, I am.

And he did not shoot her on spot?

Well, the sergeant-major tried. Astonished and furious he opened his gun holster but Franceska was faster. She seized his pistol and shot him twice in the stomach, wounding him mortally.

It is hard to believe this.

Yes, indeed. And she also managed to fire a third shot injuring SS Sergeant Emmerich. In the ensuing commotion the desperate women attacked the guards, severing the nose of an SS soldier and scalping another.

How could you let this happen?

We were taken by complete surprise. This thing never happened before.  
I am embarrassed to tell you this but we fled from these women.

So what is the end of the story?

We returned of course soon with machine guns and grenades,  
led by camp commandant Rudolf Hoess.  
We took the women outside and shot them one by one.  
This ended the revolt of the Jewish women in Birkenau.

What about Schillinger? Did he survive?

No. he died of his wounds. Some say he was groaning  
and asking God why he has to suffer like this.

Paul Hartal

## **The Eighth Unwritten Ballad**

On the dark lake of the unplumbed  
Mixed with the orchestrated arias of winds  
The eighth unwritten ballad floats.  
Somnolent sparks coruscate  
In ethereal tints  
Gutta-percha words struggle and wither  
Tired syllables reverberate  
Chocolate sounds stretch and gather  
Marvel in the sunshine  
Collapse, unfold and mingle.  
As remote tambourines jingle  
Eight seagulls fly in a curved line  
Like pilgrims in the formless stratum  
Of the unknown.

Paul Hartal

## The Exercise

One day in the lager  
I saw a young and arrogant SS officer.  
I was then a prisoner near Vienna,  
In Strasshof an der Nordbahn,  
Strasshof on the Northern Railway  
In Southern Austria.

This haughty Schutzstaffel (SS) man  
Was dressed in a spiffy black uniform.  
Under the eagled swastika symbol,  
The insigne of the cross-boned skull,  
Emblazed on his visor cap,  
Stared menacingly at the world.  
He wore his hat at a rakish angle  
And in his right hand  
He brandished a stick.

Like a conductor of an orchestra  
He wielded the baton,  
Entertaining himself jollily,  
Using it to engage a dozen or so people  
In military style drills.

He made them to crouch  
And then to stand up together,  
To squat and to rise,  
To stoop and straighten up,  
To bend their weary knees  
And to crouch and stand  
Time after time afresh.

The men and women, young and old,  
Were exhausted and sick  
And this Nazi officer forced them  
To repeat the exercise  
A hundred times over and over again.

He punished them  
Because they dared to request  
A break for rest.

I watched quietly the scene,  
Standing adjacent to the wall of a barrack.  
The SS man ignored my presence.

Although I was just a little boy,  
He taught me an indelible lesson.  
He gave me an edifying demonstration  
Regarding the idea of man's cruelty  
To his fellow human beings.

Yet at the time

I just watched silently  
The humiliating scene.  
Stunned and dumbfounded,  
I did not grasp its full meaning.

In the middle of the punished group  
Was also my mother.

Gasping for air with her tired lungs  
She crouched and straightened up  
Along with the others.  
I saw pride and dignity in her eyes;  
Only her face was covered with tears.

Paul Hartal

## **The Garden of Questions**

Begetting burdensome outcomes,  
Remember quiet qualms clad in benumbed bandage.

Let the clandestine rejoinders boil on a heyday of blossoms;  
Let them rise in a fiery fury in thunder of rage.

And then,  
While the silky lens of molten music  
Refracts the colours of life in trance,  
The muses distil the soul; remove the chains of heart,  
Empower and lead the dance.

Now your memory renders the train of events.

Look:  
A poet is strolling slowly  
Through the garden of questions that are hidden  
Under the viscous veil of answers.

Paul Hartal

## **The Ghost Machine**

Wittgenstein took a sip from his tea.

"You're wrong Descartes, I can tell you,  
because body and mind are one".

"Wittgenstein is right", seconded Ryle.

He looked very angry

and shook his head as he continued:

"In claiming that your thoughts are separated  
from your body you created a dogma  
of the ghost in the machine."

"Gentlemen", Descartes said, "relax.

Where were you when I talked about these things?

You were not even born then".

"Wait a minute", said Bohm. "You're all wrong."

"What? " snapped out Ryle.

"You heard it correctly. You're all wrong", insisted Bohm.

"You have to explain", Wittgenstein said.

Descartes looked to be perplexed.

"Well", explained Bohm,

"since everything in the universe is information,  
the existence of matter is nothing but a myth.

The universe is an enormous thought, a giant computer.

It is the machine, which is the ghost."

Paul Hartal

## **The Goat Convention**

The goats held a convention.  
"We want liberation! "  
They bleated boldly.

"I want to hear concrete suggestions",  
Advised the chairman gently.  
"And tabula rasa", he added.

The result, however,  
Was only a long and silent pause.

Eventually though one goat rose  
To say something.  
He cleared his throat  
And valiantly addressed the assembly:

"Our liberation and the struggle  
To achieve equal rights go hand in hand.

So, in view of the fact  
That men can wear goatees,  
I propose that we goats also start  
To wear manly fashioned beards".

Paul Hartal

## **The Hiding God**

Brutal, hard and tough  
Life is like Teflon  
You say God is hiding  
And we are all alone.

But since we are skeptics  
We must doubt such faith,  
The heart has its reasons  
That reason cannot state.

Look how the soul rises,  
Though the light is dim,  
Let me hold your hand,  
In love you may find Him.

Paul Hartal

## **The Illusion of Gravity**

Gravity is an illusion, says the Scientific American in its issue of November 2005.

Well, then how come that I cannot fly like a bird?

Oh no, smiles Professor Juan Maldacena. Gravity, he explains, is one of the dimensions of space, and it might be a holographic phenomenon caused by the interactions of quantum particles and fields in a lower-dimensional domain.

It sounds good, professor, but are we closer now to the understanding of reality than we were last October? As you know, Newton thought that gravitation was the attractive force between masses of matter but Einstein concluded that it resulted from the warping of space and time by objects that follow the geometrical curvature of the cosmos.

Now let us change a bit the topic and talk about evidence. We still do not have the evidence that the sun will rise tomorrow. Yes, the probability for it is high. But science is an evidence-based enterprise and we just don't have the evidence for tomorrow's sunrise, have we? Mind you, chaos, chance or quantum entanglement show that nature does not care much about laws of causality.

Hi, a bunch of atoms just defied gravity in my room and jumped to the moon.

Well, class starts at 8: 00 in New York but now it is already 8: 13, so I am late. Did time cause me being late? Or maybe it was the traffic. Or perhaps I was late because I misplaced my briefcase. No problem, gravity is just an illusion, let us hop to San Francisco, and I am early.

And now, if you don't mind, I have a question: Does your mind create holographic phenomena? And can we comprehend the concrete universe through the abstract metaphors of matter, energy, space, time and gravity?

Paul Hartal

## **The Kiss**

She turns her head gently  
From left to right  
And from right to left,  
Avoiding my blazing lips.

Her shiny ebon hair  
Gracefully frames her charming face.  
I look into her eyes  
And I see in them  
The blue waves of the sea,  
The flight of birds very high,  
The azure serenity of the sky.

I look into her eyes  
And I see in them  
The green tranquility of the forest  
Happiness and sadness,  
Her beautiful soul, suffering and love,  
The pristine spirit of an ivory dove.

I look into her eyes  
And I see in them  
The pure white blossoms of Lily  
And the sun rising over the mountain,  
The bliss and joy of life, the sorrow and the pain.

She turns her head gently  
From right to left  
And from left to right  
Until my lips meet with hers  
And I kiss her enchanted, throbbing and trembling.

Time stands still, only the hour grows thin,  
Her delicate fingers plough my bare skin.

Paul Hartal

## **The Messiah in Strasshof**

Inside the grinding burden of the crusty past  
dreary facts hide, jubilant verities hibernate,  
haunting memories trumpet and overwhelm the poet  
he is compelled to tell what cannot be told.

But this is a true story and it must be told.  
It happened long ago, as the ordeals of 1944  
curled into the agonies of 1945  
over the tormented body of war-weary Europe.

Exhaling anguished stench soaked in torrents of blood  
mighty armies clashed in apocalyptic combats,  
against the forces of darkness.

In the unrelenting wintry cold  
the fighting intensified along frontless fronts.  
There were daily air raids and dog fights in the skies.

Humming allied bombers flew towards their targets  
and the German flak firing from the ground  
pelted across the blue firmament feathery clouds  
of bursting explosive shells.

Turning his back to the barbed wire fence  
a slim and hungry eight year old boy  
lifted his ebon eyes to the heavens,  
beclouded with melancholic despair and oblivion.

A prisoner in the Nazi concentration camp Strasshof,  
a forlorn suburb of waltz-loving Vienna,  
he stood dazed, almost catatonic.

And then suddenly as if appearing out of nowhere  
a teenager started to talk to the boy.

And he listened eagerly,  
drinking the words with zest and fervor,  
his eyes widely open  
and glow in wonder and fascination.

For, the boy heard from his mysterious friend  
that one day swords will be beaten into plowshares  
and no nation will rise against others to wage wars.

Oh, then the days of halcyon will arrive,  
wild lions will play peacefully with timid children  
amid blossoming flowers on quiet river banks.

The day will come and people will be free and happy  
because the Messiah is round the corner,  
bringing redemption to the hungry,  
the wretched and the hopeless.

Paul Hartal

## The Mix-Up

One winter morning  
Upon awakening from a long night sleep  
All characters got mixed up with their authors  
Including Pinocchio  
Who could not decide what was real:  
Had he dreamt of being Carlo Collodi  
Or was it that Carlo Collodi was dreaming  
Of being Pinocchio?

This occurred long after  
Upon awakening from a long night sleep  
Zhuang Zi woke up from his dream  
And was at a loss to figure out  
How real was real and asked:  
Had he dreamt of being a butterfly  
Or was it rather that a butterfly  
Was dreaming of being Zhuang Zi?

The next day  
As she woke up from a long night sleep  
An elephant got mixed up with a crocodile  
And she could not decide what was real:  
Had she dreamt of being a crocodile  
Or was it rather that a crocodile  
Was dreaming of being an elephant?

Two years later  
Upon awakening from a long night sleep  
The moon became confused with the sun  
And it could not decide what was real:  
Had it dreamt of being the sun  
Or was it that the sun was dreaming  
Of being the moon?

And in a rare unguarded state of mind  
Upon awakening from a long night sleep  
God got embarrassed for the muddle  
But she could not decide what was real:  
Had she dreamt of being Man  
Or was it rather that Man  
Was dreaming of being God?

Paul Hartal

## **The Moon Remembers the Astronauts**

Neil Armstrong arrived first,  
Landing the lunar module of Apollo 11  
At the Sea of Tranquility  
On July 19, 1969.  
"That's one small step for man,  
One giant leap for mankind",  
He said,  
And Edwin Aldrin stood next to him.

Later others came.  
In all a dozen men walked on the moon  
Perturbing her pristine lot with rhythmic dockings.  
Conrad, Bean and Mitchell,  
Scott, Irwin, Young and Duke were there,  
Strolling in moon dust, before Schmitt and Cernan  
From the crew of Apollo 17  
Touched down in the Taurus-Littrow valley  
On a December day of 1972.

But since then human foot did not step on the moon  
And she stares at the frail blue sphere of her neighbor  
With the abandoned hills of Hadley Apennines  
And a quiet Ocean of Storms.

She orbits the Earth with desolate lunar craters;  
A convivial loner, shining unfrequented,  
Her arcane face keeps waxing and waning;  
And although forlorn, reclusive and remote,  
In her silent yellow solitude  
The Moon remembers the astronauts.

Paul Hartal

## The Optimistic Cucumber

Once upon a time  
There lived a cheerful cucumber  
In a lovely vegetable garden.  
Optimistic and happy in its green dress,  
The cucumber was born toothless;  
Yet it made a firm decision to resist  
The learned advice to visit a dentist.

In the garden the days quickly trickled  
And on an early summer morning  
The cucumber timidly asked  
Its gentle neighbor and kin,  
A yellow and plump pumpkin:  
"Excuse me, but don't you think,  
That you are a little fat? "

"Oh, I don't mind to be like that  
After all I am not an adipose cat.  
And besides, as a humble pumpkin  
I would be embarrassed truly  
Not to be as I am, corpulently brave  
And unflinchingly yours, roly-poly."

Then suddenly a jolly July breeze  
Blew through the morning garden  
And the gardener stepped in warbling.  
He praised his good luck  
And surveyed several vegetables  
Ripened with sun shine to pluck.

And thus before the clock  
Struck a forenoon ten, unbiased,  
The wholesome cucumber ended up  
In a glorious Greek salad for breakfast.

Still, just before being eaten like that,  
It turned to the pumpkin and said:  
"Remember this beautiful garden  
With its comely butterflies unfurled  
And never-ever lose your faith  
In the goodness of the world."

Paul Hartal

## The Phantom of Time

Many years ago  
I imagined time flowing  
Like a river without banks.

Then I read some books  
Of science and they said  
That time is an irreversible arrow,  
A relentless, unhaltable train,  
That moves irresistibly, like fate.

It travels from Past to Future  
On invisible wheels  
Neglecting to stop  
At the railway station  
On the road, called Present.

But I was not absolutely sure  
That this was all true.  
So I watched the clocks  
And I saw their hands moving,  
Undoubtedly showing,  
And with mechanical precision,  
The exact hours every day and night.  
And I was very impressed that  
The scientists had the evidence:  
Time was really moving unstopably.

However, if you think carefully  
You will notice that the clock hands  
Do not actually show time, because  
What they show is movement in space.

So I have had a question.  
If time is indeed in a state of flux,  
Flowing like a river without banks,  
Or moving and passing  
Like an undeviating train;  
Then what is its speed?

And since  
We measure speed  
By the ratio of traveling distance  
To the periodic motion of the clock,  
How are we supposed to measure  
The velocity of time?  
By time itself?

Thus,  
I came to the conclusion  
That the flow of time  
Is just an illusion:  
The years do not pass by.

We pass through the years.

Time does not really exist!  
And nevertheless, it does.  
It is its own phantom.

Paul Hartal

## **The Philosopher's True Scotsman**

He was not a Scotsman  
But the other himself  
He cheated on his wife  
In Berlin and Guelph.

No Scotsman would do such thing  
Although once one did  
Well, redefine the notion  
No true Scotsman would, indeed.

He was not a Scotsman  
But a foreigner in mist  
He robbed banks often,  
Just twice, he insists.

No Scotsman would do such thing  
Although once one did  
Well, redefine the notion  
No true Scotsman would, indeed.

He was not a Scotsman  
But an immigrant in town  
Elected to office  
Let his voters down.

No Scotsman would do such thing  
Although once one did  
Well, redefine the notion  
No true Scotsman would, indeed.

Paul Hartal

## **The Restaurant Keeper**

In the City of Toronto there was once a restaurant owned by a man named Imre Finta. Born in 1912 in Austria-Hungary, Finta spent his years of youth in my hometown Szeged, immigrating to Canada after the Second World War.

Settling in Toronto, in 1953 Finta bought the Candlelight Restaurant but it did not go well, so he closed it. Then he opened The Moulin Rouge on Avenue Road at DuPont Street. The old fashioned Hungarian gentleman greeted his guests warmly, politely kissing the right hand of his female patrons.

I had never dined at the Moulin Rouge but I encountered Finta in a brickyard and at the railway station of Szeged in the summer of 1944. At that time I was eight years old and Finta, aged 32, was a Captain of the Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie. He was also a Nazi collaborator who supervised the deportation of 8,617 Jews to slave labour lagers and death camps. I was one of them.

A few months earlier, on March 19, 1944, the German Army occupied Hungary and Adolf Eichmann arrived in Budapest. His Mission was to implement in Hungary the "Final Solution", a Euphemism the Nazis used to disguise the mass murder of the Jews.

In June 1944, swearing gendarmes pushed a group of Jewish prisoners from the ersatz ghetto of Kistelek onto a freight train. My mother, my three year old sister Vera and I were among them. We travelled thirty kilometres to Szeged where the gendarmes led us to an abandoned brick factory that was turned into a makeshift concentration camp.

The brickyard camp commandant was SS captain Angermayer, whom I remember as a tall and lanky silhouette moving among the prisoners in a black uniform. He was assisted by ruthless gendarmes in cock-feathered hats, armed with bayoneted rifles and swords, who terrorized the captives.

Living conditions in the makeshift ghetto were dreadful. Only one water tap served almost nine thousand people and the latrine

did not deserve that name. Garbage was strewn all over the place. The silence of the night was broken by the screams of the mentally ill.

Captain Finta, head of the Department of Investigations in Szeged, appeared in the brickyard day after day. Accompanied by a group of his detectives, he repeatedly threatened to shoot every person, who hides his or her own money and valuables.

This chief of "investigations" and his police thugs had beaten and tortured innocent Jewish men and women in order to find and confiscate their private property. Many of them committed suicide.

Aided by doctors and midwives, the gendarmes conducted the bodily searches, including anal and genital inspections. Not everyone in Hungary was impressed though by the efficiency of police investigations. Endre Hamvas, the Catholic Bishop of Csanad, for example, was shocked and sent a protesting report to church officials on the brutal police searches.

On June 21, Finta initialled and submitted a memorandum to the Mayor stating that the German SS command decided to deport the Jews from Szeged on June 25, 27 and 28, on three freight trains.

The deportations occurred under dreadful weather conditions, amid thunder storms. A lot of rain fell on the city in June. The dark skies opened their gloomy gates. The heavens were weeping for the sorrows of mothers, the anguish of fathers, for the misery of the world.

Finta came to the railway station to oversee how the gendarmes pushed us onto the crowded cattle cars. About eighty people were squeezed into each box car like sardines. The guards provided for every car a bucket of water and another bucket to serve as the toilet. When a woman called out, "please, give us more water", a gendarme replied: "You don't really need water because you will be soon dead".

Finta stood at the station cursing the Jews. His former fiancée was among the deported, and he told her that she was "a Jewish whore".

Three months later his police career was over. The advancing Soviet Army crossed the Tisza River and on October 11, 1944, had taken Szeged. Finta did not wait for their arrival and fled from the city.

After the war a Hungarian People's Court in Szeged tried him in absentia for his complicity in torture, robbery, forcible confinement, kidnapping and manslaughter. In 1948 it convicted Finta for war crimes and crimes against humanity. He was sentenced for five years of prison with forced labour.

Yet Finta was free. He and hundreds of other Nazi war criminals arrived in Canada, hiding their terrible secrets. They committed harrowing atrocities in their own country. Then they fled and found safe haven in Canada. Not knowing their horrific crimes, Canada welcomed them with open arms.

However, in 1987 Finta was arraigned in Toronto and prosecuted for war crimes. But, how do you deliver justice half a century later? The crimes were committed in another country, in a different era, while the memories of the witnesses have faded.

Mind you, the judicial system is not about justice but the power struggle between prosecution and defence. And the Finta trial was very poorly designed. He was not judged for robbery, torture, kidnapping, deportation and murder but for his mind set in 1944. Thus Finta managed to pass the responsibility for his crimes to his superiors.

In 1990 the 78 year old Finta walked out of the court hall as a free man, proclaiming his love for the Jewish people. He did not forget to add that he used to have many Jewish friends and that once he even had a Jewish fiancée.

As his victim, I do not feel any anger or bitterness over his acquittal. I do not believe in punishment for revenge. Moreover, what sort of justice can result from a trial? After all, courts cannot compensate us for our sufferings, for our lost years of youth. Nor can they bring back to life the dead.

Paul Hartal

## **The River of Permanence**

It is not possible to step  
Into the same river twice,  
Said Heraclitus of Ephesus.  
Since other and yet other waters  
Keep flowing on,  
The river is never the same.  
And like the river,  
Everything in the world  
Is in constant change and flux.

Nonsense! Retorted Parmenides  
Of Elea. Nothing is in flux.  
Things never change, he said,  
The world is permanent.  
Objects of thought and speech  
Must exist all the time.  
They cannot change  
Because change consists in  
Things coming into being,  
Or ceasing to exist;  
Whereas words have  
An immutable meaning.

Of course a table differs from a chair  
Parmenides continued,  
And so does the nightingale  
From the elephant.  
Or the land from the sky.  
However,  
We live in an illusionary world.  
Things only appear to be different.

And mind you,  
There are no opposites in the world.  
For warm means merely not cold  
And dark means no light.

More than a century later,  
Aristotle scratched his head rumbling:  
Is not this talk a next door to madness?  
After all even a lunatic  
Would not confuse fire with ice.  
How can one argue,  
From thought and language  
As a frame of reference  
To the world at large?  
How can one reconcile  
The existential with the copulative?  
The past with the future?  
Tell us Parmenides,  
How can Socrates be alive  
If he is dead?

Yet Parmenides  
Remained unperturbed and smiled.  
Your logic, Aristotle, is not flawless.  
It does not hold water.

Look:  
On a deeper level of reality  
Things are always the same,  
Belonging to an ultimately  
Homogeneous cosmos.  
In the final analysis  
There is neither past nor future  
Only an eternal present.  
When you refer to Socrates  
Your memory unfolds  
Not in the past but in the present.  
Your recollection happens now,  
Right in this moment,  
Immortalizing him.

Paul Hartal

## **The Royal Air Force Hero and the Luftwaffe General**

Britain fought for her life.  
Hitler's armies prepared  
For an invasion of England.  
Savage air battles took place  
Over the skies of Albion.

Then a miracle happened:  
In the summer and autumn of 1940  
The Royal Air Force defeated  
The numerically superior Luftwaffe.

This was a turning point in the war.  
Lacking adequate air support,  
The Fuehrer could not carry out  
His invasion plans.

Deeply touched by the heroism  
Of the pilots, Winston Churchill said:  
"Never in the field of human conflict  
Was so much owed by so many  
To so few".

Only three thousand young aviators  
Defended the skies of England;  
Among them scores of Jewish pilots.

The British ace pilot Robert Stanford Tuck  
Was one of the outstanding Jewish heroes  
Of World War II. He was born in 1917  
And grew up in the Greater London district  
Of Catford. In 1935 the 18-year-old Robert  
Joined the RAF. During the war  
He distinguished himself in the skies  
Of Dunkirk and in the Battle of Britain.

A Flight Lieutenant and Wing Commander  
With 92 and 257 Squadrons, Tuck became  
One of the top ace aviators of the RAF,  
Credited with 29 confirmed victories  
Of downed enemy airplanes. Flying a Spitfire,  
He had first engaged in aerial combat during  
The Battle of France and claimed  
His first plane kills over Dunkirk.

In September 1940,  
As the Battle of Britain  
Gathered momentum,  
Tuck was promoted  
To lead the 257 Squadron  
Of Hawker Hurricanes.  
He had an exceedingly eventful  
Combat experience; was shot down

Four times, collided twice, crash landed,  
Got dunked in the English Channel  
And was wounded twice.

On an August day of 1940  
Tuck was on patrol in his Spitfire  
And got into a dogfight  
With a Junker 88 over Kent.

His plane was hit by enemy fire.  
He managed to bail out  
While the aircraft crashed  
On a nearby farmland.

Tuck found himself descending  
with his parachute towards Plovers  
In Horsmonden. He reached ground  
On the estate of Lord Cornwallis.

The Lord was curious to see  
The unexpected visitor.  
He gave a warm welcome  
To the vertically arrived guest  
From the sky and then invited him  
For a cup of tea.

One day in the winter of 1942  
Tuck flew over northern France  
Outside Boulogne when his airplane  
Was hit by enemy flak.

He force landed and was captured  
By the same German units  
That he strafed just a short time earlier.

The Nazis knew very well  
That Tuck was an ace pilot of the RAF.  
General Adolf Galland himself came  
To interrogate him.

One of the top pilots of Hitler,  
The general was a war criminal.  
He developed carpet-bombing tactics,  
Which he tested during the Spanish Civil War.  
He flew with the Condor Legion  
Of the Luftwaffe and participated  
in the terror bombing of Guernica.

By the way, the 1937 horrors  
of that Fascist atrocity moved Picasso  
to paint one of the grand cultural icons  
of the 20th century, titled "Guernica".

Now dissatisfied with the performance  
Of his air force in the Battle of Britain,  
Goering promoted Galland to the rank  
Of Inspector General of the Luftwaffe.

When Tuck fell into Nazi hands,  
Galland was curious to meet him.  
The Luftwaffe general  
Treated the British ace pilot with respect  
And even provided him with a slap-up meal.

Tuck became a prisoner of war  
But in February 1945  
He succeeded to escape.  
Walking eastwards he reached  
The Soviet Red Army lines.

The Russians allowed him to travel  
To Moscow where he showed up  
At the British Embassy.  
He returned to England via Odessa.

After the war, it was Tuck's turn  
To interrogate Galland.  
Then a curious thing happened:  
The former German Nazi  
And the British Jew  
Became close friends.

In celebrating the metamorphoses  
Of a new era wherein former enemies  
Turn into allies, Galland made Tuck  
An honorary member  
Of his old German flying squadron.

Tuck and Galland struck a lasting friendship  
And instead of shooting at each other  
They went together for game hunting.

Then the year of 1969 arrived  
And they both accepted the role  
Of serving as technical advisors  
For the film of the Battle of Britain.  
The war became a movie.

Robert Stanford Tuck died in May 1987.  
A few days after his death an obituary  
In The Los Angeles Times said that  
Many consider Tuck "as the greatest  
Spitfire pilot of all times".

The article paid homage to the courage  
Of the ace pilot who went to combat  
Facing death in the eyes with the bravura  
Of a guarded levity of the heart  
Combining it with excellent technical aptitude  
And sterling flying skills.

In 1940 the King personally awarded Tuck  
With the Distinguished Flying Cross,  
Stressing the aviator's initiative  
And personal example over Dunkirk.

During the war Tuck was also decorated  
With the medal of the Distinguished Service Order.  
The life of Robert Stanford Tuck affords intriguing  
Insights into the strange peculiarities of wars  
And the irrational nature of human conflicts.

It poses an array of inquisitive questions  
regarding the historical context and futility  
of organized violence, the unnecessary sufferings  
and avoidable horrors that we humans inflict upon  
Each other.

It also reveals some bizarre ironies  
Of the Holocaust. After all, a friendship  
Between a Nazi Luftwaffe general  
And a Jewish ace pilot of the RAF  
Stands out as a very odd alliance.

Yet human history offers  
Countless bizarre stories.

Paul Hartal

## **The Science of Freedom**

For Joseph Beuys, 1921-1986

The coordinates of history are the masters of fate:  
Where and when we are born determine paths of destiny.

You were fascinated by art but worked as a circus acrobat.  
You enrolled to study medicine but Hitler's war came  
And you volunteered to fly in the Luftwaffe.

Diving almost vertically from the skies  
You were a rear gunner on a JU 87 Stuka bomber.

Plunging downward with accelerating speed,  
The sirens on the wheels screaming terrifyingly in the wind,  
Your plane descended on its targets, bringing devastation  
And horror to distant lands and nations.

And then,  
On a deadly mission in 1943,  
Russian fire hit your plane  
And you crashed in the Crimea,  
The co-pilot killed.

You were severely injured  
and say Tatars rescued you,  
Covered your body with fat and wrapped it in felt  
To keep you warm and so they saved your life.

You created a personal myth out of your wounds  
A resurrection and the longing for warmth,  
The yearning for caring human contact.

After the war, when you were released  
From the British prisoner camp,  
You went to study art in Düsseldorf.

You became a professor of sculpture fond of performance.  
Once in 1965 walking in a gallery, your face covered  
With honey and gold leaf, you held a dead hare  
In your arms and explained to it the pictures.

For you, art was the science of freedom  
A healing force capable of saving the planet.

In the last years of your life your hands planted  
Seven thousand oaks in Kassel.

Paul Hartal

## **The Searcher**

He rode on bus to the Andes  
Villagers burnt tyres at the road  
They brandished menacing axes  
Fear made the pavement corrode.

He sailed the rivers of the Congo  
Dreaming about his tender lady's heart  
She played Schubert on the piano  
Yet Babylon waited with a dart.

He walked the streets of Moscow  
Burning with desire for her embrace  
Fiery lava streaming from a volcano  
But his lady vanished without trace.

Trouble found him in the port of Rio  
Exhausted he was but tried to relax  
Times were better in Ontario  
The beer foamier in Halifax.

He walked the streets of New York  
Dreaming about his lover's embrace  
He bought a bottle of wine to uncork  
But his lady vanished without trace.

Paul Hartal

## **The Seven Shortest Poems In The World**

Thought:

Brain  
Train

Architecture:

Brick  
Trick

Bad Habit:

Quit  
It!

Insomnia:

Nap  
Gap

Plagiarist:

Edits  
Credits

Elderly Love:

Last  
Lust

Whore:

Quick  
Pick

Paul Hartal

## **The Silence Of Love**

You talk not about your love,  
For the greatest love  
May envelop itself  
In a lacy veil of serene secrecy.

You talk not about your love  
Just look into my eyes  
Silently, long  
While the time resounds  
And then recedes slowly  
To distant shores of indigo seas  
In my soul.

The wind carries quietly the clouds  
No sound shatters the still of zephyr.  
You talk not about your love  
Only the heart throbs loudly.

Do you hear it?

A heavy bronze bell  
Tolls involuntarily  
In the placid interior  
Of the sombre belfry

And the tower trembles  
Soars in its immobility.

Elated, you and I walk wordlessly  
In the deserted boulevard.

Like the snow of spring I melt  
In your presence  
While timid shadows  
Of my dense vulnerability  
Coagulate silently in the sunlight  
Darkening the asphalt pavement  
Of the afternoon street.

The wind carries quietly the clouds  
No sound shatters the still of zephyr.  
You talk not about your love  
Though its flames burn my flesh.

Then the hours pass by  
And wondrous stars flicker  
In a magical night.

But now  
I am alone in my room  
Listening to a violin concerto  
Of the Butterfly Lovers

A poignant story  
Of eternal love

On a Compact Disc  
That you gave me.

Paul Hartal

## **The Sobbing God**

It was 1942 in the Warsaw Ghetto  
And Rabbi Kalonymos Shapiro posed a question:  
Did the God of Israel abandon his people?

And then he heard the voice of Jeremiah:  
"My soul shall weep in secret places  
And my eye shall weep sore and run down with tears  
Because the Lord's flock is carried away captive."

As the dark days descended on the earth  
And the flames engulfed the ghetto  
The Lord bitterly sobbed,  
Mourned in agony the innocent souls.

But God hid his tears in inner chambers.  
He wept lonely in solitude  
He concealed his immeasurable sorrow.

For, the Lord loves the world immensely  
He suffers silently with his infinite pain.

Had his boundless grief touched the world  
It would destroy it.

Paul Hartal

## **The Sunset Splashes**

The sunset splashes  
Misty gold light snaps  
On the humpy trees,  
Nightfall advances.

The frothy forest  
Shuts its bird mouth,  
Lanky sights swim  
Slowly in the south.

The weltering wind  
Gyrates dark sorrows,  
Sultry stars trickle down  
The earth's frosty sigh,  
Whistling moon dances  
In the foamy sky.

Paul Hartal

## **The Test of Love**

The Sun  
Shone high  
Above.

Under a clear sky  
They walked  
Hand in hand.

I love you  
Like I love myself,  
She said.

And I love you  
More than myself,  
He said.

But love  
Is proven by deeds  
Not by words,  
She said.

Paul Hartal

## **The White Rose of Stalingrad**

Her nickname was Lilya.  
In the Great Patriotic War  
When Hitler's armies invaded the Soviet Union  
She became a Soviet air ace,  
Known as the "White Rose of Stalingrad".

Lydia Litvak was born  
Into a Moscow Jewish family.  
In 1935, at the age of 14, she joined a flight club  
And a year later she had her first solo flight.  
When the Germans attacked Russia,  
Lilya joined the Soviet Air Force.

In the summer of 1942 she was assigned  
To the 437th Combat Regiment  
Fighting over the skies of Stalingrad.  
At first the men were reluctant  
To take her seriously  
But soon it became evident  
That she was an excellent pilot.

Lilya was a pensive and beautiful young woman  
Who got into trouble because of deviating from  
The prescribed dress code of the Soviet Air Force.  
Once she cut off the fur lined trim of her boots,  
Producing from it a fur collar for her flight suit.  
She was jailed for the offense.

Nevertheless, her desire for expressing  
Her feminine individuality was irrepressible  
And she continued to design  
Her own military outfit.  
Among other things she bleached her hair.  
Military regulations permitted this.

And then she took pieces of parachute silk,  
Sewed them together,  
Painted them in different colors  
And wrapping them around her neck  
She created her own air combat fashion.

Lilya flew a Yak-1 fighter plane,  
Which she embellished in painting white roses  
On its sides. She made her first kills  
Of enemy planes on September 13, 1942,  
Shooting down two Luftwaffe aircrafts,  
A Ju-88 and a Bf 109 G-2.

The German flyer of the downed Bf 109  
Was Erwin Maier, a decorated combat pilot.  
He bailed out and parachuted  
In Soviet-held territory. He asked his captors

To see the Russian ace that shot him down.

When the Soviets brought in Lilya,  
Maier thought first that they made him the butt  
Of a Bolshevik joke. But after Lilya showed him  
Her flight maneuvers in the dogfight,  
The German pilot's disbelief turned  
To surprised admiration.

Once, during a mission, Lilya was wounded  
And she belly-landed in fascist-held territory.  
German soldiers were rushing from every direction  
On the field to catch her. She could see them  
Running towards her with their weapons in hand.

Yet before they could take Lilya captive,  
A Soviet aircraft appeared from the clouds  
And landed next to her. Its pilot helped her climb  
Onto his plane and took off as fast as he could  
Under intense enemy fire.

On another occasion, in the course of air combat  
Lilya was wounded in her leg but kept engaging  
The Nazi aircrafts. She had whirled between  
The enemy planes painted with black crosses  
On their fuselage and the underside of their wings,  
The swastika insignia hectoring on their tails.

She fired at the enemy aircrafts  
With high explosive ammunition  
From her 20 mm cannon  
And 12.7 mm heavy machine gun  
And at the end she managed to bring back  
Her Yak-1 to base.

Lilya's daring exploits included the destruction  
Of a German observation balloon,  
Which the Wehrmacht used  
For artillery targeting against Red Army positions.

The hydrogen-filled balloon was protected  
By an alignment of anti-aircraft guns that created  
A deadly fire wall. The balloon flew high and far,  
Out of the range of the Soviet artillery  
And no Red Air Force pilot succeeded  
To shoot it down.

Lilya volunteered to do the seemingly impossible.  
First her commanders did not endorse the sortie  
Because they regarded it as a suicide mission.

But Lilya devised a plan

Of approaching the balloon  
From an unexpected direction, flying over  
Enemy-held territory.  
She succeeded to shoot it down.

August 1, 1943, was another exhausting  
And bloody day of the war.  
Lilya already completed three sorties  
But was sent again to take off with her squadron  
And escort a formation of Ilyushin II-2 planes.

As the Soviets were returning from their mission,  
two German Bf-109 fighters dived on Lydia's Yak-1.  
Her plane was hit. Smoke began to pour  
From its fuselage.

The German pilots recognized the white roses  
Painted on the aircraft and now as many as eight  
Messerschmitt Bf-109 fighter planes joined  
In pursuing the damaged Yak-1 plane  
Of the Soviet ace.

She could not bail out.  
Her plane crashed but did not explode.  
Lilya was killed of a head wound.  
She was twenty one years old.

Lilya shot down 12 enemy air planes in the war  
And was the top scoring female fighter pilot  
Of the Red Air Force. She and her close friend,  
Katya Budanova, were the only two female aces  
Of the Second World War.

In 1990 USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev  
Posthumously awarded Lydia Litvak  
The gold medal of the Hero of the Soviet Union.

Paul Hartal

## The Women of China

Once a crowd of beautiful ladies descended  
to the waterfront in Xian and Du Fu saw them.  
It was the third day of the third month, the time  
of the Lustration Festival. In those days  
the ancient capital of China was still called Chang-an,  
the city of Perpetual Peace, and Du Fu was a famous poet  
during the reign of the Tang Dynasty.

However, he disliked the wasteful luxury of the women  
he saw at the waterfront and the depravity  
in which they were immersed.  
These beauties, he said, were as flamboyant and arrogant  
as gentle and elegant. The skin on their marvelous bodies  
was delicate and jade pendants framed their temples.  
They wore exorbitant gowns made of silk,  
embroidered with gold peacocks and silver unicorns.

But the women that I saw in China thirteen centuries later  
were very different. I saw them working hard on the fields  
and in factories. Simply dressed, they walked  
or rode their bicycles, and I found their bodies attractive  
and comely even when they wore uniforms.

Yet 5,000 years of civilization also taught these women  
to apparel themselves stylishly  
with sophisticated refinement. They also like to dress up  
for a charming look in traditional garments,  
pacing gracefully in colorful silk chipaos.

The women that I met in China  
were easy to sing and dance and laugh. And they liked  
to clap their hands with joy. I saw warmth in their eyes  
and friendliness in their smile.

Once on a sunny day I admired the bronze statue  
of the street-sweeping girl on a Beijing boulevard.

Paul Hartal

## **The World Has Changed**

The world has changed  
Because you left it  
I feel your presence  
But where are you now?

I know that you are alive  
Memories do not descend to the grave  
I touch a flower and touch your soul  
I talk to you  
And you return at dreamtimes.

You are in heaven now  
You are in paradise  
But where is paradise  
My angel, my darling?

Some say the Garden of Eden  
Was an island in ancient seas  
In Bahrain or Babylon

Others say  
Paradise is an inner chamber  
On a magic astral plane  
On rainbow wings of love.

In enchanted castles of the soul  
Flames in every corner  
The love of beloved soars  
Along corridors it flies elated  
The rhapsody of spheres.

And when night falls  
In gentle harmony  
The golden door of dreams opens  
And we walk together again  
Hand in hand.

Paul Hartal

## **They Fought with their Bare Hands**

To Mordecai Anielewicz (1919-1943)

Facing formidable forces,  
Supported with tanks and artillery,  
You knew that there was no way to win.

Nevertheless, you decided to fight,  
Not for victory, but for Jewish honour.  
So, one day in the spring of 1943,  
You were 24 years old then,  
The Zionist banner was hoisted  
Over the Warsaw Ghetto wall,  
Along with the Polish flag.

The SS troops preferred to use  
Artillery fire, flamethrowers  
And gas, or to blast the houses  
By dynamite squads, rather than engage  
In direct street fighting with untrained  
And poorly armed young Jewish men  
And women.

And soon the whole ghetto was aflame.  
The news about the uprising spread in the world.  
Broadcasts by the Underground Polish radio SWIT  
Operating out of Warsaw were picked up,  
As far as Sweden. The radio said that women  
And children are defending themselves  
With their bare hands.

The uprising galvanized resistance movements  
Throughout Nazi occupied Europe. It was on May 8,  
After three weeks of Combat, that you threw  
Your last grenade from the bunker on 19 Mila Street  
And fell together with your beloved bride Mira.

But, as you said, you realized your dream,  
Because you had lived to see Jewish resistance  
In its heroic greatness and resplendent glory.  
You had stood up to the brutal Nazi empire  
Of Adolf Hitler.

In spite of all his Military might,  
The Fuehrer failed to drag you away to  
Treblinka and you died as a free human being.

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising  
Transformed Jewish submission to resistance.  
You helped to turn hopelessness to resolve,  
Despair to vigour, degradation to courage.  
You formed Dignity out of humiliation,  
Sculpted from misery the grit of honour.

Like the North Star showing steadfast direction  
To Desperate sailors, the light of your heroic command  
Shines through the darkness of the Night.  
Your young life sacrificed on the cruel altar  
Of History is a luminous monument  
To soulful conscience, a lofty triumph  
Of the human spirit.

From your spilled blood that sunk into the earth  
Of Poland, poignant sprouts of bravery and dignity  
Blossom forth, flowers of freedom and buds of hope  
Bear blooms of sacred petals.

Paul Hartal

## Three Miniatures in Fast Verse

True Lover:

Dares  
And  
Cares

Break Up:

Kiss  
To  
Miss

Life's Meaning:

Live  
To  
Give

Paul Hartal

## **Time's Arrow Arrested**

Dusky shadows hide under the leafy boughs of the lanky trees. Beyond the dark sky the sun carries the bright promise of a lustrous morning. But it is merely a promise. For, the experience of the past is not evidence of future events.

And how perturbing can be the obvious. This ever present and precisely dissected substance that we break to exact hours, minutes and seconds, and call it time. How mind-boggling is this historian's palette, Newton's infinite attribute, Einstein's finite fourth dimension.

Astronomers say that a colossal firecracker called the Big Bang exploded about fifteen billion years ago, marking the beginning of time and the universe. Yet this sophisticated modern myth does not really solve the enigma of time or the mystery of existence. After all, why does the world exist, rather than not?

Newton viewed time as a mathematical duration, an absolute temporal dimension in which time flows steadily without relation to space, matter or human affairs. Many years later, Einstein dropped the notion of absolute space and time. In the Theory of Relativity he demonstrated that time slows down as velocity increases. Clocks can run at different speeds.

Time became the fourth dimension. However, in the tiny world of the atoms, quantum physicists discover a bizarre universe of eleven dimensions. In Superstring theories higher dimensions are curled up within the deep structure of space-time. Moreover, the number of higher cosmic dimensions is not limited, because scientists might invent as many dimensions as it takes for their theories to work. Unfortunately, in relation to nature mathematical propositions are uncertain.

Physicists nowadays conceive time as an asymmetrical arrow, flying in one direction, from the past to the future, through the present. They devise ingenious schemes to ride on the arrow of time into the future; or to reverse its direction of flight and travel back to the past.

I believe that time is an illusion. It does not really exist. The hands of the clock does not really show us time but movement in space, an artificial human invention of hours, minutes and seconds. And what we measure with our objective instruments is not identical with the subjective psychological experience of duration. External time and internal time are not the same.

Now, if time really flows like a river without banks, if it is indeed in a state of flux, then what is its speed? And since we measure speed by the ratio of traveling distance to the periodic motion of the clock, how are we supposed to measure the velocity of time? By time itself? Time does not exist. And nevertheless, it does. It is its own phantom.

Time is a relationship between before and after. Paradoxically, it is the nothing that allows everything. But time is a mysterious nothing, an arcane cipher, the magical fountainhead of bondage and freedom. All events unfold miraculously in it while it also prevents them to happen all at once. Time is not a river without banks but the ocean of eternity.

Events did happen of course yesterday and before. They leave their marks and traces through history. However, the idea of time moving from past to future is an illusion. The invisible hands of titans do not shoot arrows of time out of nature's bow. Hence, time travel is a tough assignment because there is nothing to ride on.

There is no arrow of time. The future and the past do not exist. Time stands still. Thus the years do not pass by, we pass through the years. Our life always enfolds in the here and now, sailing aboard an invisible boat on the mysterious ocean of the eternal present.

Paul Hartal

## **Tired Light**

The distance is enormous  
The universe is vast  
I am the light  
I travel fast.

The cosmos is monstrous  
I am tired now  
But space is boundless  
I continue to plow.

Space is tremendous  
My energy is lost  
Between galaxies  
In darkness and frost.

The universe enormous  
I am tired now  
But space is boundless  
I continue to plow.

Paul Hartal

## **To a Raindrop**

You tiny  
Shining drop  
Of late afternoon  
Rain  
Liquid pearl  
Kissing the green  
Chlorophyll  
Of May  
So innocent-looking  
Now answer me  
Are you indeed  
Harmless  
Or rather acid  
And radioactive

Paul Hartal

## **Train and Plane**

I take the train  
I board the plane  
I ride the train  
I fly the plane

I go by train  
I come by plane  
I go by plane  
I come by train

I land the plane  
I board the train  
I take the plane  
I ride the train

I come by train  
I go by plane  
I come by plane  
I ride in rain

I fly the plane  
I board the train  
And again  
I ride the train

Oh the train  
Oh the train  
That wished to be  
An airplane

Paul Hartal

## **Travel in a Box Car of the Fuehrer**

Armed with bayonet-fixed rifles  
And hurling vulgar insults  
Royal Hungarian gendarmes  
In cock- feather- plumed hats  
Shoved us with vicious force  
Onto a shabby cattle car  
In the railway station of Szeged.

And then they locked the doors.

With my little sister in her arms  
Mother and I found ourselves  
Amid eighty men, women and children  
Squeezed together like sardines  
In a hermetically sealed tin can.  
The wagon was ill-ventilated  
Its small windows were barred and wired.

The Jewish prisoner train  
Departed slowly with the deported  
Gathering clattering momentum  
On a dreadful journey  
Into the gloomy unknown.

The box car came with two buckets  
One was filled with water  
The other empty for human waste  
And soon was filled to the rim  
With urine and feces.  
The car became a stinking latrine  
Rolling on rusty wheels.

We travelled day and night  
And sometimes the train  
Made a halt on the open track  
In the middle of nowhere  
Waiting idly for a long time.

We arrived at the concentration camp  
After a horrible voyage of three days  
But not before the Hungarian gendarmes  
Were replaced by SS guards  
At the Austrian border.

During the ordeal of this voyage  
I sat next to a sick old man  
Who was lying on the floor exhausted.  
My shoes were touching his face  
And I began to play with my shoe lace  
Passing it over his mouth and nose.  
He had sighed and groaned in delirium  
And when my mother noticed

She scolded me in an angry voice.

So I stopped and apologized  
For my uncomprehending mischief  
But the old man did not hear my words.

The train wheels kept rattling  
Over the railway tracks  
Across meadows and towns.  
Some time passed  
And then I looked at the old man:  
He became very quiet.  
Mother told me that he died.

Paul Hartal

## Two Sphinxes

Time has taken you into its arms  
Bringing you to the room  
Between new sunrises and antique sunsets.  
While the tangle of fog covered the foliage  
Beyond the carved clouds and subtle vapours  
Pulsating remote landscapes with Sun-Moon eyes  
Were receding to the fading horizon.

Look! The golden carpets of fallen leaves  
Lie on the October grass.  
The drooping willow at the corner  
Between a pine and two maple trees  
Stands like an eroded camouflage  
And silver shores with restless waves  
Emerge, sink and penetrate  
The hidden galactic system of our love.

Time has taken into its arms  
Bringing you to the room  
Between new sunrises and antique sunsets.  
While the tangle of fog covered the foliage  
Beyond the carved clouds and subtle vapours  
Pulsating remote landscapes with Sun-Moon eyes  
We turned into two solemn soundless sphinxes.

Paul Hartal

## **Until We Meet Again**

The crawling moments of yearnings  
Are permeated by rousing desires  
Immersed in celestial thirst  
And earthly passions  
But the soul protests fervidly  
What the flesh cannot afford.

It was just yesterday  
That I held you in my arms  
But you are now  
Thousands of miles away  
In a remote metropolis  
Where a great river  
Kisses the northern sky  
And I long  
For your tender love Soul Mate  
In a southern harbour  
On the shores of the mighty ocean.

Thus and so life unfolds  
As a story of hello and goodbye  
Welcome and so long  
A time together and a time to fly.  
Yet the soul protests fervidly  
What the flesh cannot afford.

The crawling moments of yearnings  
Are permeated by rousing desires  
Now time and space  
Drive unyielding wedges  
Building disjointing walls of farewell  
But on the horizon flowers blossom  
Greeting us with blessing  
Until we meet again.

Paul Hartal

## Using Art and Science

In  
this  
Strained Epoch  
Of Man  
And  
in my own  
Over-organized  
Cyclic sphere  
I need 'useless' Art  
More  
Than I need  
'Useful' science.

Therefore  
Art  
Does not exist  
Merely  
For its own sake  
For my part  
Art is directly  
And  
Extremely useful  
Whereas  
Science  
Is directly useless.

Paul Hartal

## Valentine Day

Six hundred and fifty six days passed  
Since my wife left this world  
And I still miss her dearly  
For my love of her will never end.  
Now she rests in a beloved land  
In a remote grave  
Surrounded by yellow sand,  
Beyond dark mountains  
And deep waters of the seas.

I am thousands of miles away from her,  
In a distant city.  
Crying over her pillow on the empty bed  
I can embrace only her sacred memory.  
Yet by her grace,  
She visits me sometimes in my dreams  
As the frosty wind weeps and sweeps  
Through the white nights of deserted streets.

Now on Valentine Day  
I reread a poignant poem  
By the Sung Dynasty poet Su Dong Po.  
It created a bridge to my Valentine.  
Almost a thousand years ago,  
On the night of the twentieth day of the first month,  
Su Dong Po had a dream about his spouse  
Who died ten years earlier.  
In the dream she sat before a little window  
Sorting her dress and make up.  
And then the poet and his wife  
Looked at each other without a word  
And a thousand tears began to flow.

Su Dong Po himself did not think of his spouse often.  
Neither could he forget, but his heart was broken.  
Oh, reading his moving words I understood again  
That all love is one domain  
And the throbbing past  
Is intense present.

Paul Hartal

## **Vanilla Gate**

Come sweet Red Flower and enter my life  
through the vanilla gate of fate.

Hold my hand Red Flower and walk with me  
in green fields of grass and tranquillity.

Let us climb together snow-capped mountains  
in a fiery sunrise of passion.

Let me kiss your graceful mouth when the wind rustles  
among the leaves of apricot blossoms.

Let my lips wander onto hidden places amid orange trees  
and citrus fragrance praised by bird songs.

Magic rainbows adorn the night sky  
diamond stars strew strawberry sparks on our embrace.

Paul Hartal

## **Venus and Candor**

Beauty is not truth  
But a transient mask's shadow  
Across the foamy sky  
Opaque flight  
Separated from the blue fire bird  
Of a convulsive life.

In dazzling charm  
Narcissus may revel  
And celebrate vanity,  
Yet grandeur, glory and grace  
May also radiate  
Through unsightly wrinkles.

Truth is not beauty  
But a chequered meadow lark  
Discovered among dense saffrons  
Of lilac harmonies  
Over pastures of violet discernments  
A colourful bobolink singing  
Pragmatic lilts.

Paul Hartal

## **Weeds and Hyacinths**

They yelled at her and spat in her face,  
Messengers of turpitude threw insults,  
Stripped her dignity and deprived her grace:  
Well-meaning people from dubious cults.

But she neither lost faith nor confidence;  
As her garden was trampled, her windows broken,  
She still heard the music, the choral cadence;  
Compassion, kindness facing acts of madmen.

She suffered humiliation and abuse;  
When her man left her for an affluent bride  
They treated her badly, as a useless refuse:  
Life became a burden, a pitiful ride.

Still tender light can enter tart labyrinths,  
Weeds may look nicer than fading hyacinths.

Paul Hartal

## When is a Painting Finished?

I paint.  
On my easel  
pictures in oil and acrylic grow  
like stalagmites in limestone caves.

I think that painting is a magical act  
that transforms invisible thoughts  
and feelings into visible colors  
and forms.

But I never can tell  
when is the work finished.  
After all it is always possible  
to change a line, a hue, or a color  
or even the whole composition.

Painters have different opinions  
about this.

Some say that when the artist  
successfully planted  
all the details onto the canvas  
the image expresses itself  
as a severed autonomous entity,  
which frees the painter from  
the task of continuing to paint.  
From then on the painting gains  
an independent inner life of its own.

However, abandoning a work of art  
involves a moral decision  
ripened by the stiffening tension  
between skill, creativity and integrity.  
At what point does the polished image  
meet the artist's expectations?

And then, even if it does,  
no single image can express  
all that an artist wants to show,  
and consequently his muses  
compel him to carry on with his work  
and create more paintings.

Hence the oeuvre of the artist  
evolves as a set of different images  
of the same single thrust and grind.

Many years ago I was wandering  
through the countryside  
of southern France in Provence.  
Once I stopped to look at the road  
where the village met the meadow.

A sturdy artist stood there  
in front of his easel  
painting the landscape  
with skilful brushstrokes  
on a well-stretched canvas.

I stared for a while  
at the burgeoning picture  
and then asked him:  
"How do you know  
when is the composition complete? "

He gave me a piercing glance.  
"Well", he said,  
"if you take a hammer  
and hit me on the head  
I know that the painting is finished."

Paul Hartal

## **Whispering Forest**

You are a whispering forest  
Enchanting, dusky, intense,  
Inviting, wild boreal scent,  
Unfathomable, hearty and dense.

You are a murmuring ocean,  
Swarming with fish, recondite,  
I swim in your azure water,  
Along your shore I glide on kite.

You are the rain in the desert,  
Lightning and thunder of the storm,  
And the calm dawning, fresh and clear,  
The flowers springing from the corm.

And you are a redeeming monsoon,  
The grace lighting lamps on the moon.

Paul Hartal

## **Why Tears My Love?**

Why  
tears  
my Love?  
I gave you  
my heart  
and  
you cry?

But  
then  
why do I  
cry?

Men  
don't cry,  
you say.

But I do.

Paul Hartal

## **Woman with Train**

She rides her bike  
Along the railway  
Crossing the tracks  
Where the long trail ends.  
Her gray hair shines:  
A flying silver kite  
Over clover fields of August.

And at night  
When crickets sing  
The praises of star light  
And pale shadows bath  
In the dense void of darkness  
She dreams  
Of pink-skinned breast-fed babies  
Of white butterflies  
Or red grapes and rye bread  
With black olives.

And as she sleeps  
Her lips puff sometimes  
Like locomotive engines  
Of bygone days.

Paul Hartal

## **You are not the wind**

One summer day

Walking on a sunlit street

I plucked a leaf from a tree.

"Why did you do that? " she asked.

"Just playing", I said.

"Don't harm the trees", she said.

"They have their own life".

"But the wind yanks leaves all the time",

I averred defensively.

She gave me a pensive look.

"But you are not the wind",

She said.

Paul Hartal