

Classic Poetry Series

Anna Swirszczynska
- poems -

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Anna Swirszczynska(1909 - 1984)

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

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

Happy As A Dog's Tail

Happy as something unimportant
and free as a thing unimportant.
As something no one prizes
and which does not prize itself.
As something mocked by all
and which mocks at their mockery.
As laughter without serious reason.
As a yell able to outyell itself.
Happy as no matter what,
as any no matter what.

Happy
as a dog's tail.

Anna Swirszczynska

He Was Lucky

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

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

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

Anna Swirszczynska

I Knocked My Head Against The Wall

As a child
I put my finger in the fire
to become
a saint.

As a teenager
every day I would knock my head against the wall.

As a young girl
I went out through a window of a garret
to the roof
in order to jump.

As a woman
I had lice all over my body.
They cracked when I was ironing my sweater.

I waited sixty minutes
to be executed.
I was hungry for six years.

Then I bore a child,
they were carving me
without putting me to sleep.

Then a thunderbolt killed me
three times and I had to rise from the dead three times
without anyone's help.

Now I am resting
after three resurrections.

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I'll Open The Window

Our embrace lasted too long.
We loved right down to the bone.
I hear the bones grind, I see
our two skeletons.

Now I am waiting
till you leave, till
the clatter of your shoes
is heard no more. Now, silence.

Tonight I am going to sleep alone
on the bedclothes of purity.
Aloneness
is the first hygienic measure.
Aloneness
will enlarge the walls of the room,
I will open the window
and the large, frosty air will enter,
healthy as tragedy.
Human thoughts will enter
and human concerns,
misfortune of others, saintliness of others.
They will converse softly and sternly.

Do not come anymore.
I am an animal
very rarely.

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Large Intestine

Look in the mirror. Let us both look.
Here is my naked body.
Apparently you like it,
I have no reason to.
Who bound us, me and my body?
Why must I die
together with it?
I have the right to know where the borderline
between us is drawn.
Where am I, I, I myself.

Belly, am I in the belly? In the intestines?
In the hollow of the sex? In a toe?
Apparently in the brain. I do not see it.
Take my brain out of my skull. I have the right
to see myself. Don't laugh.
That's macabre, you say.

It's not me who made
my body.
I wear the used rags of my family,
an alien brain, fruit of chance, hair
after my grandmother, the nose
glued together from a few dead noses.
What do I have in common with all that?
What do I have in common with you, who like
my knee, what is my knee to me?

Surely
I would have chosen a different model.

I will leave both of you here,
my knee and you.
Don't make a wry face, I will leave you all my body
to play with.
And I will go.
There is no place for me here,
in this blind darkness waiting for
corruption.

I will run out, I will race
away from myself.
I will look for myself
running
like crazy
till my last breath.

One must hurry
before death comes. For by then
like a dog jerked by its chain
I will have to return
into this stridently suffering body.
To go through the last
most strident ceremony of the body.

Defeated by the body,
slowly annihilated because of the body

I will become kidney failure
or the gangrene of the large intestine.
And I will expire in shame.

And the universe will expire with me,
reduced as it is
to a kidney failure
and the gangrene of the large intestine.

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Myself And My Person

There are moments
when I feel more clearly than ever
that I am in the company
of my own person.
This comforts and reassures me,
this heartens me,
just as my tridimensional body
is heartened by my own authentic shadow.

There are moments
when I really feel more clearly than ever
that I am in the company
of my own person.

I stop
at a street corner to turn left
and I wonder what would happen
if my own person walked to the right.

Until now that has not happened
but it does not settle the question.

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She Does Not Remember

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

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

Translated from the Polish by Czeslaw Milosz and Leonard Nathan

Anonymous Submission

Anna Swirszczynska

The Ghetto: A Mother

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

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

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

Two seconds earlier than she herself leapt down.

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The Greatest Love

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

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

Her children say:
"Old fool."

Translated from the Polish by Czeslaw Milosz and Leonard Nathan

Anonymous Submission

Anna Swirszczynska

The Same Inside

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

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The Sea And The Man

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

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

The eternal sea
will never learn to laugh.

Translated from the Polish by Czeslaw Milosz and Leonard Nathan

Anonymous Submission

Anna Swirszczynska

The Second Madrigal

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

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

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