

**Seven Poems by Elżbieta Cichla-Czarniawska**  
**translated from the Polish by Barbara Kaskosz and Nancy Abeshaus**  
**NTM 2016**

In this installment, we're happy to share with you seven new beautiful poems by the award-winning Polish poet Elżbieta Cichla-Czarniawska, translated in English for the first time by Barbara Kaskosz and Nancy Abeshaus. Fresh and lyrical, these poems are meditations on love, loss, and loneliness, the small blood sacrifices the soul makes on the altar of every day life. We hope you like them as much as we did.

—*Claudia Serea and Loren Kleinman*

**a banal subject**

do not touch my loneliness  
it is inflamed it hurts

and you stay away from mine  
it ruffled its feathers like a wounded  
carnivorous bird  
it will be nasty if you come close

and my loneliness is a grande dame  
I lifted her high above humiliation  
what use can one make  
of something as strange  
as isolation in a crowd

I have cursed mine  
it made itself at home inside me  
it showed me magic tricks  
but finally it slashed both of our wrists

mine doesn't cry doesn't complain  
it doesn't blackmail with a midnight suicide  
only sometimes crazed it grabs my shoulders  
and throws me down onto the sand  
of that huge arena under the tent of darkness

and the one that is tamed that eats from your hand?

that one opens another reality  
in which the head of the earth becomes more beautiful  
surrounded by the aureole of the horizon

beautiful it floats away into the eternal dream  
about happiness  
and there it vanishes

### **from literary theory III**

the first poem  
is almost always about love

afterwards things happen  
we swear off love or poems  
so many matters that are more important  
sit at the tip of our pen  
nag at our conscience  
or so it seems to us

we prefer fixing the world  
or breaking it  
that toy gives unlimited possibilities  
to adult children

we prefer to watch  
how the nerves of continents pulsate  
how smoking swamps sag  
filled with unfathomable human ideas  
how hope sinks into them

then poems wane  
blood is showing through broken skin

still the last poem is always about love  
even if it is about death

### **in a different language**

it may well happen  
that you will search  
for your beautiful love  
until you do not find it

no one promised you  
the promised land here

you merely reside  
in the land of exile

in the drawers of time  
the past neatly arranged –  
longing that smells of lavender

what was – dried into a sliver  
what is – is just passing  
what will be –  
may as well not be

yet you track fiercely  
what cannot be tracked down

behind you  
gates of moments close  
but you remain empty-handed

still ignorant  
try to write your autobiography  
in a different language  
perhaps in esperanto of silence

### **futile sacrifice**

last night again  
ruins as far as the horizon and deformed phantasms  
impotent hours carved into stones  
petrified nocturne of emptiness inside  
the gods' casual indifference

you love the world with an imperfect love

seemingly your poem  
needs a sacrifice of fresh blood  
but the much awaited word  
whose throat you slashed too eagerly  
is exhaling its last breath  
with a piercing ostentatious  
whistle in the dark

## **returns from the glacier**

forgive me spirits  
for clinging to your satiating  
past words and gestures  
and even to that which never expressed  
barely glowed inside you long ago

I return from the glacier smuggling under my skin  
embers of hope  
my head held high

barren gravel  
cuts as it crunches under my feet  
wind lashes my face  
heroes and gods go blind  
the corrupt world tribunal  
issues sentences  
the executioner keeps lowering the lever  
of secret trapdoors

still  
once again I walk down from the glacier  
I change within myself the order of events  
turn you back from your path

this is what lets me  
taste life again and again  
frosty phantoms run away

the shadows of your hands warm  
my every hair one by one  
my every tissue one after another  
my every breath minute by minute  
my every thought fiber by fiber

**who?**

on a beach almost unreal  
where time stopped to catch a breath  
yesterday perhaps a thousand years ago  
a slender woman  
rests her sandal-clad foot  
on a glacial boulder  
I or not I?  
shortness of breath  
the same questions fear and hope  
a random wave washes off a footprint  
whose is it?  
ask the boulder

**the fractured world  
whose half flew away  
into silent space  
(an attempt at description)**

we were children  
we walked  
holding hands  
one side wasn't there  
there was only the other side  
there was fear  
and the crackling heath  
where fire burned  
warriors threw stones at each other  
a night bird cried in the thicket

we walked

a remote market tempted  
there on the cracked ground  
strange things were sold  
whips made of snakeskin  
balls rolled up by dung beetles  
pea-shooting popguns  
a book written with the blood of a tree frog  
magnetic pins  
gaudy color prints covered with dust  
also for sale were lofty ideas  
in rustproof cans

everything was on one side  
of consciousness  
perhaps  
a dream and not a dream?

farther up – a forgotten village  
(right? left side of the street?)  
on black gravel  
awkward youngsters played soccer  
a shaggy dog ran toward us  
it was panting  
as it ran through sharp grass  
the night was steely and flat  
we walked glancing  
always to one side

we kept walking  
growing up all too quickly  
(that nervous grasp of intertwined fingers)

a man on the road  
– how far is it to town H? – you asked  
he replied  
– miles away –  
we realized that by walking  
at an ordinary pace  
we would never get there

vast empty land  
distant power lines  
showing faintly on the horizon  
– there are no trains from here  
to town H – the man added  
– they haven't passed through here for a long time

it was incalculably far  
to the nearest stop  
(H stood for Hope)  
the world was happening only  
on one side  
there was nothing on the other side  
across the fields ran fears and fantasies  
fatigue poured  
through the moldering riddle of imagination

we walked  
dusted with ash that grew denser  
the night shined dully with diffused steel  
of the lifeless full moon

we suspected there was no e x i t  
from this situation  
probably in the past  
we had become entrapped  
through the act of e n t e r i n g

were we on a journey from nowhere to nowhere?

meanwhile  
the road was quickly  
sinking into a dream  
the bird at last became silent  
under the rocks lizards shed  
their shiny scales

everything was one-sided  
imposing surfaces opened into blind paths

we walked  
lumbering  
marked with a deep imprint of doubt

yet we walked  
faithful to our destiny

we still walk



**Elżbieta Cichla-Czarniawska** is an award-winning writer whose body of work spans many genres. She has published twenty books of poetry, as well as eight novels, a collection of short stories, and a memoir. Her poetry has been translated into German, Bulgarian, and Lithuanian - and now for the first time into English. For her work she has received several awards, among them the Jozef Czechowicz Award and the Boleslaw Prus Award. Elżbieta Cichla-Czarniawska lives and works in Lublin, Poland.







**Barbara Kaskosz** was born and educated in Poland. She received her Ph.D. in Mathematics from the Institute of Mathematics of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. She emigrated to the USA more than 30 years ago and took a position at the University of Rhode Island. She has worked there ever since as a Professor of Mathematics. Her lifelong interest and second love after mathematics has always been literature, especially poetry.



**Nancy Abeshaus** was born and educated in the USA. She holds a Bachelor's degree in English and a Master's degree in English Education from the University of Rhode Island. She is a published writer.