

1992

## Seven Poems

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# Antimurales Christianitatis (for Croatia 1992)

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IVO SOLJAN

For centuries on the last, crumbling ramparts,  
Stemming the tides from the East . . .  
A deep, spear-shaped, heart-shaped, wound  
In her bosom and belly, gnawing forever.

Meek and ardent like Dante's pilgrim;  
Horse-shoe shaped (for LUCK?);  
Beautiful, bleeding, bare, blessed—  
My home—*Lijepa Nasa!*

The Bulwark of Christianity was the nick-name given to Croatia in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries by the European allies and the Pope, for its heroic defense of Europe from Turkish invasions. Hence the curious shape of Croatia. *Lijepa Nasa*—pronounced *liepa nasha*—is a term of endearment for Croatia and translates as "Our Beautiful Country."

# Campus Notes (*Dissecta membra*)

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IVO SOLJAN

1

A blue, slender, broken skeleton of a barn  
against gray, of blue, or indifferent skies.  
Another piece of the New American Gothic . . .  
Allurements, promises, hopes, directions?  
Go East-West, young *person*!

Hamlet?

Heaven and Earth!  
(Must I remember?):

A string of crescents— erect,  
and a star, white, once red:  
Bosnian/Turkish coffee cups,  
white whale ribs, scattered porcelain, elephant tusks,

And all around, in the spring, cheerful blooming clovers  
stretch for miles, and miles, forever . . .

## Car-Pool Echoes

Another candidate today . . .  
. . . took her around the campus . . .  
Reasonably impressed . . .  
I'd say all the proper stuff—  
class, race, gender—certainly there.  
We'll see . . .

Why not, Tchaikovsky's good for the end of the day.  
Still researching that Tower of Babel?  
. . . No end of speculations! What a lot!  
But I lack the statistics, to make it sound correct . . .  
O, that's where *he* stopped me. . .  
Alleged speeding. No proof. Still unresolved . . .  
Right or left, you say?  
Well, make it right!  
. . . But left could be also right. Right? Write!

## Grand Haven in Winter

Musical waters lie frozen;  
Handel's splendors turned ice;  
On Dewey Hill the angels are deep asleep;  
Grey waters rustle under the grey skies;  
And—locked in the grey-bluish ice,  
Two red fingers point to the grey void . . .

But it is still warm and cosy;  
The promises are germinating in silence.

## More Sad Steps

after reading, again, Philip Larkin's *High Windows*

Groping back to my office after a 201 A,  
I swing the glazed door, and am startled by  
The whiffs of youth, the smell of shampooed hair,  
Four o'clock: Shakespeare's garden breathes  
Under a wet, indifferent snow.  
There's nothing laughable about this,  
The way the young bodies dash or shuffle  
Through bright Pina-Soled corridors,  
Palpable, immediate, and too close and  
Separate still . . .

    The pain of being young . . .

    The pain of getting old.

Well, the "old fart" has gone:

Several years ago he was around.

Jake Balokowski, Ph.D., has finished the biography,

Has got tenure, and is working on Protest Theater.

    And I miss *you*, old chap, miss you a lot.

## The Little Maple Tree (1989-91)

Hi, little maple tree!  
In front of the LMH,  
Bare, pale, and shivering in Allendale howling December,  
I remember you, two years ago,  
Trembling and shedding your fire-red October leaves.  
Shuddering I thought I'd never see you again . . .

    But you are here, and I have returned.

    It looks you have changed quite a bit,

    And I have changed a bit too.

    It looks like I've passed the milestone

*al mezzo di camin di nostra vita* . . .