On Old Women

by Tadeusz Różewicz

translated by Ela Rosmiller

I like old women
ugly women
bad women

they're the salt of the earth

they're not repulsed by
human waste

they know the other side
of the coin
of love
of faith

dictators come and go
clown around
their hands stained
with the blood of human beings

old women get up at dawn
they buy meat fruit bread
they clean cook
stand silently in the street
with hands crossed

old women
are immortal

Hamlet struggles in his trap
Faust plays a cruel and ridiculous role
Raskolnikof strikes with an ax

old women
are indestructible
they smile tolerantly

god dies
old women get up as usual
at dawn they buy bread wine fish
civilization dies
old women get up at dawn
open the window
remove human remains
humanity dies
old women
wash the corpse
bury the dead
plant flowers
over the grave

I like old women
ugly women
bad women

they believe in eternal life
they are the salt of the earth
the bark of the tree
the humble eyes of animals
cowardice and heroism
greatness and smallness
they see everything in its proper perspective
and rise to the demands
of everyday life

their sons discovered America
perished at Termopol
died on the cross
conquered the cosmos

old women go out at dawn
to the city to buy milk bread
meat they add spices to soup
they open the window

only idiots laugh at
old women
because they are beautiful women
good women
old women
are an egg
a secret without a secret
a rolling ball
old women
are mummies
sacred cats

small
wrinkled
dried up
fruits
or fat
oval buddhas

when they die
a tear will fall
from the eyes
and land
on the mocking lips
of a young woman