



**while
sitting
in darkness**

VAGIF SAMADOGLU

SELECTED POETRY

**Vagif
Samadoghlu**

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Samadoghlu**
Selected Poetry

Song to the Sun
While Sitting in Darkness

AZERBAIJAN
INTERNATIONAL

Literature Series
Vol. 2

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**Song to the Sun while Sitting in Darkness
Selected Poetry by Vagif Samadoghlu**

Vol. 2: Literature Series

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Photo of Vagif Samadoghlu

Betty Blair



Vagif Samadoghlu, 2012
Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy

Vagif's poems

According to their first lines

- 1 Paths are long, paths are short
- 2 How should I run? Why should I run?
- 3 If I light a lamp in darkness
- 4 Darkness exists in this world
- 5 You are my own mother—Freedom
- 6 Seems to me as though 15 years ago
- 7 The evening is lost in darkness
- 8 Where am I? Where? Tell me
- 9 Oh, my God! They're killing a man
- 10 See how fate has separated us
- 11 You can arrest me and convict me
- 12 Today along the shore I was standing
- 13 So many trees became crippled
- 14 God, can the sobbing of a child
- 15 Does God exist? Or doesn't He?
- 16 My something has disappeared
- 17 I wish there were someone on earth
- 18 The shadow of my two hands
- 19 Everyday when I open my door
- 20 Vessels launch out to sea

21 Why are you barking?
 22 Sometimes—when there is no joy
 23 I neither lifted a stone, nor rode
 24 I'm like a dove that soared
 25 No, don't be afraid of us
 26 There's an old man sitting
 27 I wish it were 1932 now
 28 Wind roaring in my ears
 29 My God, when the crazy winter rains
 30 From whom? Why? When?
 31 God, in what language
 32 I might forget your rules of grammar
 33 It is not us but God
 34 My address: Infinity. Time. Place.
 35 Teach me how to write poems
 36 I'm caught in a spider's web
 37 Please, for God's sake, don't change
 38 During evenings amidst the shade
 39 I want to die as a poem, not a poet
 40 Hello, there, how are you, my shadow

41 Close your notebook, hide your pen
 42 I need a bit of rain, a sip of cognac
 43 The gossip of this world
 44 Don't be afraid that I'm appearing
 45 Some day towards evening, at sunset
 46 I want to be congratulated
 47 How do birds sing in the Garden
 48 When I want to see Heaven
 49 Come on, take my hand
 50 Once upon a time, there was a boat
 51 Rain pours down onto the earth
 52 Step aside, make way, a raindrop
 53 Not now, wait a while longer
 54 If the Caspian disappears
 55 The sky is full of stars at night
 56 To remain silent forever
 57 Don't say so, it can't be true
 58 I'll have a cat
 59 Now it's time to flee from grumbling
 60 Never will a man be stronger

- 61 Fog has rolled in over Baku
- 62 Hide the moonlight
- 63 There's a street in my city
- 64 I was born in 1939
- 65 This place is not so claustrophobic
- 66 What hasn't man created for woman?
- 67 You smell of dreams
- 68 The clouds between us are swaying
- 69 A smile suits you as do tears
- 70 We met, we drank, we ate some
- 71 To Nushaba
- 72 Look, we'll finish reading this book
- 73 Chopin... these sounds
- 74 Sometimes the places
- 75 In which Spring will you enwrap
- 76 I told you that I loved you
- 77 I remember you as a dismal
- 78 If you change your phone number
- 79 Don't forget when you go to bed
- 80 I never want anyone to dream

- 81 Show some sympathy
- 82 My heart is opening and closing
- 83 How suffocatingly hot
- 84 Thunder struck
- 85 Once I was a horizon
- 86 Let parting and death
- 87 Step aside, make way, a raindrop
- 88 Don't pass on by, my brother
- 89 I heard three kinds of voices
- 90 No guests, no white dress, no veil
- 91 If one more wish lands
- 92 It's cold. I wish I had a candle
- 93 I've lost two grandfathers
- 94 They're lying. It must have been a lie
- 95 I wish I had a cottage
- 96 Since the day when I started
- 97 Will my notebook die
- 98 I'll comb my hair
- 99 There goes that constant buzz
- 100 Today they told me that I've grown old
- 101 If I die an untimely death
- 102 God, how's it going?
- 103 Don't place a marble stone

Foreword

By Betty Blair

Editor, Azerbaijan International

"The day I took up my pen, I discovered that I was a slave," admits Vagif Samadoghlu (born 1939), reflecting upon what it was like to be a young writer, growing up in the 1960s in Soviet Azerbaijan. His first poems were published in 1963—a decade after Stalin's death—when he was only 24 years old.

A slave? How else can one describe the Soviet government's insistence that writers, artists and musicians praise and glorify the ideology—Socialist Realism—of that vast state that spanned 11 time zones.

Vagif couldn't. He had too many complaints, too many concerns about injustice, too many yearnings for a different system—a different world. Instead of focusing on politically correct topics, Vagif was writing about God, death, love, nature, and the realities around him.

Vagif's contemporary, the distinguished writer Anar (Rezayev), who witnessed the development of Vagif's entire literary career, considers him to be one of Azerbaijan's most independent thinkers. Anar summed up the political context that shaped writers of the Soviet era: "A person doesn't choose the time and place of his birth nor the atmosphere in which he lives. That period, which is in the archive of history, had its own positive points and strengths.

"But we—the youth of that period lived with the hypocrisy, falsifications, lies, ignorance, and misunderstandings all around us. We lived in a state when any independent thought was subject to death. We breathed—more accurately—we tried to breathe. We tried to express our thoughts and feelings indirectly, between the lines by allegory and symbols."

And it was this attempt to breathe that gave meaning to Vagif's life. "Poetry isn't for everybody," Vagif admits. But for him, it was a way to express his emotions—a way

of being heard. "When your world is governed by totalitarianism, poetry is a way to gain freedom and independence in your own struggle."

In Azerbaijan, however, it wasn't always possible to protest, according to Vagif. "One could be a dissident if you lived in Moscow or Leningrad, where you had access to foreigners coming and going, but it was impossible to be a dissident in Azerbaijan. If they suspected you of trying to criticize the system, they would plant drugs on you or foreign currency—like dollars—and you would end up in prison."

And so, for the most part, Vagif stashed his poems away in drawers. Some few circulated secretly via *samizdat*—copies forbidden by the state. But the majority of his poems never saw printer's ink before Azerbaijan gained its independence from the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.

Anar observes that one of the reasons that Vagif's body of work is not so well known is that "he never had enough patience to

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get into heated discussions with editors, or to explain himself to some censor, or to argue with critics. The amount of energy that a human being has is not limitless. One either has to spend his energy on creative work or in making his work known. It's very difficult to do both at the same time."

People often ask Vagif why he doesn't write like his father Samad Vurghun (1906-1956)—one the most celebrated Azerbaijani poets of the Soviet era. They wonder why he experiments with free verse and doesn't follow traditional patterns of rhyme and rhythm.

Vagif makes no apology for his own style and perspective, and he notes that much of his father's work was characterized by what came to be known as "locomotive poetry"—acquiescence to the state or flattery of its officials in order to facilitate one's own agenda. "What my father wrote—praising the Soviet system—is enough for three generations!" he observed.

From his poetry, it's clear that Vagif so desperately wants to be remembered for his contribution to literature:

*I want to die as a poem,
Not as a poet.*

*I'm living with the wish
To be read by someone some day,
To be read
 from the very beginning
to the end.*

*I want to be memorized by heart
 by somebody.
I want to be remembered always.
I want to be liked, to be loved.*

*And I want all these things
 so desperately!*

*Not as a poet,
But as a poem
 that will never be forgotten.*

Although Vagif's works were reactions to living in a specific time and place in a political system that has since officially collapsed, his poems still resonate truth. The irony, and perhaps, the tragedy, of his poetry is not that he so eloquently documents the pain of that period but that those realities persist far beyond their original historical time and geographical space.

Today, 30-40 years after he penned many of these lines, his poetry is even more relevant to an even broader readership as freedoms throughout the world have corroded even more. For example, it's not likely that Vagif anticipated the world-wide electronic surveillance system that threatens individual liberty and rights today, yet his imagery somehow anticipates an eternal watchful eye:

*Some day towards evening,
At sunset,
Somewhere in the sky,
The sun will suspend itself
And not want to set.*

*And from that day onwards,
The world,
mankind,
animals,
The entire universe
Will grieve for the night.*

What advice does Vagif have for youth who want to write? "Go sit down, and write, write, write. Isolate yourself. Write alone. The days of coffee bars are over. Go and write your own feelings, not thoughts that will gain favor with others—but your own feelings about life."

The poems that comprise this volume—the first book of Vagif's poems ever to be published in English—are taken primarily from two volumes: *I Am Here, God (Mən burdayam, ilahi)* 1996, and *Far Green Island (Uzaq yaşıl ada)*, 1998.

They include poems beginning in the 1960s and conclude with some of his most recent thoughts during the summer of 2014 as he reflected about his own mortality in the face of his own struggle with cancer.

Vagif was named National Poet of Azerbaijan in 2000 by President Heydar Aliyev. This was 50 years after his own father Samad Vurghun had been recognized with this same honor.

Vagif's elder brother Yusif (1935-1998) was also an author—and acclaimed novelist and short story writer. Both of them were elected to Parliament after Azerbaijan gained its independence.

Vagif went on to become one of the six Parliament representatives from Azerbaijan to the Council of Europe shortly after Azerbaijan was admitted into this European governmental body in the early 2000s. ■

For more of Vagif Samadoghlu's insights and perspectives about the Soviet period (1920-1991), read his articles in *Azerbaijan International* magazine.

Search at AZER.com.

"Stalin's Personality Cult: Three Times I Changed My Mind," Vol. 7:3 (Autumn 1999), pp. 27-29.

"The Sixties: A Road Map to Independence," Vol. 6:1 (Spring 1998), pp. 44-47.

"The 90th Jubilee of Samad Vurgun, Poet and Playwright (1906-1956)," Vol. 4:1 (Spring 1996), pp. 20-23.

"Vagif Samadoghlu: To Live Forever as a Poem," Vol. 12:1 (Spring 2004), pp. 14-20.

Poetry

I

Paths are long,
Paths are short—
Does it matter
In what country,
Or on what path
 You lose your way?

Thousands of lands,
Thousands of languages—
Does it matter
In what land,
Or in what language
 You keep your silence?

2

How should I run?
Why should I run?
Where should I run?

The world is small,
As small as a prison yard!

1970

3

If I light a lamp
In the darkness of tiredness,
Where will it cast its light?
What will I see?

I'm so afraid of seeing
something bad
I don't know what to do,
I don't know.

Besides, I'm afraid to light a lamp.
And I'm afraid that some day
I might get used to the darkness
And be able to see in it.

1982

4

Darkness exists in this world...
And darkness can be
 as dear as Mother,
Or as disgusting
 as a drunken woman.

And man can become
 dazzled by the sun
even in darkness.

And you can sing
 a song to the sun,
while sitting in darkness.

5

You are my very own mother—
 Freedom.
I am your child,
Who has been reared
By strangers.

You are the white flag
That my last hope has raised—
 Freedom.

I am the wind
Unfurling you!

1969

6

Seems to me as though
Fifteen, perhaps 20 years ago
In Moscow streets,
I woke up after a dream
 which was as long as death.

Upon waking,
I became startled,
And the word "Motherland"
 fell out of my hands
 and shattered into pieces
 in Moscow streets.

1982

7

Evening is lost in darkness,
And day is shrouded in fog.
If life is just five days long,
Then why are the days
 creeping by so slowly?

The sky is like a tattered quilt,
Clouds are its patches.
I swear, it's difficult to live
Leaning against this stone wall!

It's been so hard,
To divide this life
Into hundreds of pieces every day,
And to stand on the sea coast
And die, longing for the sea.

1982

8

Where am I?
Where? Tell me.
Please, cast some light
On this place for just a moment,
And let me see where I am,
Even if I can't get out
of this place...

1986

9

Oh, my God!
They're killing a man
In the forest,
In the presence
of so many trees!

1982

10

See how our fate
Has separated us
From the forest trees,
The mountain grasses,
And the stones in the river.

See how much
We have frittered away
Among men
The life that God
Has bestowed upon us.

1966

11

You can arrest me
and convict me
within a day.
And that very same day,
you can make me lean
against a wall.

But, but you'll have to shoot me
for a thousand, or perhaps,
a hundred thousand years.

You'll have to shoot me
day after day,
month after month,
year after year.

1969

12

Today
Along the shore
I was standing like a cross
Over the dead body
Of a seagull
Which had been soaked
with black oil.

Mother, now I am starting
To resemble a grave as well.

1967

13

So many trees became crippled
this winter
A number of forests met the spring
Without hands and legs.

Now the leaves are like kids,
Noisy and innocent,
Unaware of the winter
that has just passed.

1970

14

God, can the sobbing of a child,
once beaten,
Be heard today
 beside this fence?

Forty years later
Can his teardrops
Fall upon the earth
Here by this olive tree
Where the leaves are so dusty?

Perhaps, weeping
 in the presence of a tree
Is one of the greatest sins

Maybe, a teardrop
Shed under a tree
Is much worse for the tree
Than even an ax.

1985

15

Does God exist?
Or doesn't He?
Neither today, nor tomorrow
Am I going to get
 into the sea
 of this question
And drown there.

Nor—in my pursuit
 to find out the truth—
Am I going to throw a lasso
 into the sky,
Instead of a prayer.

1998

16

My something has disappeared,
I've lost something.
The string of something
Has broken somewhere.

My life starts talking
Only when the wind blows,
Like a forest oblivious to the birds.

The days, joys and sorrows
of this life
Have escaped from something,
They have fled from somebody.

And now they are alone
somewhere.
They've become useless
Like a prophet in a godless world.

1982

17

I wish there were someone
On earth
To sit and talk with.
You feel so bored
When you're left alone on earth.
I wonder if there is someone
Or some place
To go and complain
about God.

1986

18

The shadow of my two hands
Has fallen onto the paper.
The wolf-like howl of my loneliness
Has risen again to its highest pitch.

I've lost all sense of time,
I don't know what time it is.
There's a half moon,
 the stars have disappeared,
This is a night
 when I just want to die.

I have neither fortune,
 nor furnishings, nor blankets
In which to wrap
 my life's belongings.
My God, kill half of me,
But leave the other half to weep.

1982

19

Everyday
when I open my door
 just a bit wider,
All the dogs in the world
 start barking.

It's as if the world
 were a stranger's garden,
That I'd been dropped into
 at the break of dawn.

1980

20

Vessels launch out to sea
from thousands
of shores, mother,
I'm feeling heaviness
in my heart.

I know, mother,
my heart knows
that what is lost
in this horrible sea
is never found.

Not even a boat passes by
during one's lifetime.

1963

21

Why are you barking?
Whom are you barking at?
People are smiling
as they pass by,
But you are barking at everything
in this world.

Perhaps, you remember
the wolves that tore
your grandfather to pieces?
So what...
Who can survive a wolf's attack?

Why are you barking?
Whom do you see with your eyes
which are as red
as the setting sun?

Don't bark! The world is big.
Who will know
What you are trying to say?
Who will try to get to know you?

You're not a lie,
For your barking
to pass
from mouth to mouth.

How to convince you...
Don't bark, my dear!
You won't find anything to bite
or to bark at in this city.

Keep your silence for awhile.
We'll see what the end
of this beginning will be.

If need be, we'll bark
You, by yourself,
Me, by myself...

1963

22

Sometimes—when there is no joy,
Even a sparrow
On the balcony
Can make your heart rejoice.
As can a pleasant summer day,
Or even being insanely drunk.

Sometimes when spring
has not yet arrived,
Even a single flower,
Can make a spring.

Sometimes
when there is no freedom
The moon in the sky is freedom
As are the sleepy children
playing on the rooftops
that the moon chases home
for the night.

1986

23

I neither lifted a stone,
Nor rode a horse.
Nor was I able to set free
 either myself
 or anyone else.

I was born into the world
 only as spectator.

1971

24

I'm like a dove
That soared into the sky
On a sunny summer day,
Lost its way among the clouds,
And found its nest
On a frosty, snowy winter day.

I lost my way in childhood,
And have been standing
In front of a closed door
For so many years.
Blood is dripping from my beak.

1986

25

No, don't be afraid of us,
Beware of those who follow.

No one knows for what reason,
And with what intentions
they will come.

No one knows
From where they will come.

How will their songs be?
How and what will their lyrics be?

Will they come just to kill?
Or will they say something
Before raising their swords
To sever your heads?

Beware,
Beware of those who follow us.

1985

26

There's an old man sitting—
Sitting in front of the ashen sea
That's as gray as he is.
His sight blurs the distance,
Which is without horizon.
There's no youth on this earth,
None!

There's a child playing—
Playing among flowers and grass
That are as colorful as he.
He looks at the sun
Without squinting his eyes,
There's no old age on this earth,
None!

1982

27

I wish it were 1932 now
And I were in Chicago.

I wish I were sitting
in a café there,
smoking my pipe.

And I wish some "swing"
were being played.

I wish it were being played
on a brown grand piano
which was out of tune.

I wish I were playing
that grand piano
as a black man.

1983

28

Wind roaring in my ears,
Dust from the earth in my eyes.
An empty well on my right,
The squeak of the rusty gate
on my left.

A cottage behind me,
A fence in front of me.
My right hand in my pocket,
My left hand against the wall.
I am here, God, here!

1982

My God, when the crazy winter rains
are pouring down
and washing the houses
of this tired city.

When the desperate loneliness
of the rusty gutters
is flowing into the street, weeping,

Remember me,
Remember the place
where you left me
And find me, find me, my God!

And be aware, be aware
That I'm standing by the window
and watching.
I'm watching the fate of humankind
who has remained bareheaded
and barefoot
out in this rain.

And the owner of this fate
Believes, believes, believes in You
Even in this godless world.

30

From whom? Why? When?
I don't know.

To whom? Why? At what time?
I don't know.

By whom? Why? When?
I don't know.

From where? To where?
I don't know.

Why? For what?
I don't know!
I don't know!
I don't know!

1985

31

God, in what language
should I beseech You?

Is one prayer enough?
Or shall I beg Your favor
Over and over again?

I'm not laughing at You
nor the world.
I'm laughing at myself.
Because I know only two
of the thousands of languages
that You have created.

And one of these two languages
Is known neither in heaven
nor on earth.

That's why I'm beseeching You
in the only other language
that I know:
"God, help me, God!"

1982

The last line of the poem is in Russian—
Gospodi, pomogi, Gospodi—not in
Azeri as is the rest of the poem.

32

I might forget your rules of grammar
But I can never forget
Your vocabulary
Nor your various idioms.

If some day
The sudden, cold winds of life
Cast me into a sea
of other languages,
I won't forget—even for a moment
Your sorrow,
Your joy,
Your hope.

And I will never forget your passion
My mother tongue—Azerbaijani.

1964

It is not us
But God who doesn't believe us.

He doesn't believe us
When we shed blood,
When one man throws a stone
at another.

But when the sky
Looks like a child's smiling face,
And when man says,
"The world is beautiful,"
Facing the sea.

It is not us,
But God who believes us.

1983

My address:
Infinity.
Time.
Place.
Yesterday
Today.
And tomorrow.

What is seen.
What is not seen.
What is heard.
What is not heard.

Galaxy.
Solar system.
Globe.
Earth.

A bit of Europe.
A bit of Asia.

A large country.
My native land.
Azerbaijan.
Baku.

A quiet street.
Building 4.
Apartment 37.

Room.
Triangular writing table.
Pen and papers.
Poems.

1962

35

Teach me how to write poems,
Teach me, footprint of the wolf.
Teach me so that others will know
Where my words come from
and where they go.

Teach me so that my poems
will have the right
to live and remain
on the ground
like you.

Teach me, footprint of the wolf.

1982

36

I'm caught
In a spider's web of poetry.
I cannot live
if I set myself free.

But, perhaps...
I would rather write poems
than live.

1982

37

Please, for God's sake,
don't change,
Don't change this world.

If rivers change their minds
some day
And don't flow into seas.

If islands sometimes get lost
in the mist
and become invisible,

And if a human being
is happy forever
Unaware of grief,

Then not a single poem of mine
Will be remembered
If worse comes to worst.

1985

38

During evenings
Amidst the shade of the olive trees
And the tender whispers
 of breezes,
On my white sheet of paper,
I would never give up
 the loneliness of my pen
 which challenges the logic
 of the world.
Not for the shade of a state's flag
Nor for a woman's voice,
Nor for the breath of my own child,
Not even for you, God,
Forgive me.

1982

39

I want to die as a poem,
Not as a poet.

I'm living with the wish
To be read by someone some day,
To be read
 from the very beginning
 to the end.

I want to be memorized by heart
 by somebody.
I want to be remembered always.
I want to be liked, to be loved.

And I want all these things
 so desperately!

Not as a poet,
But as a poem
 that will never be forgotten.

1985

Hello, hello there,
 How are you, my shadow,
 That falls across the fence
 of the garden?
 I'm so terribly bored
 Of winter without shadows,

My shadow, at which
 I'm looking now.
 I'm also greeting the Sun
 behind me.

Hello, light.
 Hello, summer.
 How are you, heat?
 Hello, my longing
 to have a shadow, hello.

1985

Close your notebook,
 Hide your pen
 when you want to write a poem.

Forget both your happy
 and unhappy days
 when you want to write a poem.

There is no song,
 which has not been sung,
 There are just songs,
 which you remember
 over and over again,
 spontaneously.

It's late night.
 Go, lie down, and try to sleep
 when you want to write a poem.

1983

42

I need a bit of rain,
A sip of cognac,
And just a few teardrops.
And I need them
 so desperately,
This room, this light,
 this pen and paper,
 this day.

I need a grave,
The key to which is in my pocket.
I need all these things
 just to write poems in peace,
Sitting in this room,
Behind this door.

1982

43

The gossip of this world
And its hypocritical truth
Are filling my ears.

Today this world
 is distracting me
 from writing poems.

1982

44

Don't be afraid
That I'm appearing
 in your dreams now.
Wait now! You can look
 at the flowers after I go.

Don't be afraid, my dear,
I won't be drunk
 when I appear.

I'm never drunk
 in my dreams
 or in my poems.

1982

45

Some day towards evening,
At sunset,
Somewhere in the sky,
The sun will suspend itself
And not want to set.

And from that day onwards,
The world,
 mankind,
 animals,
The entire universe
Will grieve for the night.

1983

I want to be congratulated
But even a phony announcement
Of good news doesn't come.

My heart wants to be encouraged,
But there is nothing
 nor anyone
To encourage me.

For a long time
I haven't rewarded anyone
For bearing happy news.

I have become invisible
 in the darkness
 like a black crow.

By God, I'm not complaining
 about my fate.
But no one wants to die
 with sorrow on his face.

One wants to join the silent majority,
With his face all smiles.
And his heart cheered up
By one or two bits of happy news.

1986

Azerbaijanis have a practice that a person, bearing good news, is to be rewarded—often monetarily. This tradition is often associated with the announcement of the birth of a male child but here Vagif broadens the idea and welcomes any good news, especially in the face of death.

47

How do birds sing
In the Garden of Eden?
Do they sing in a high pitch
Or in hushed, quiet tones?

How do poets cry
In Hell?
Do they scream,
Or weep like we do?

1982

48

When I want to see Heaven,
I close my eyes.

When I want to see Hell,
I open them.

1964

49

Come on, take my hand,
Let's go to the zoo.
My heart is full of words,
I want to share them with you,
Facing a big lion,
Slumbering in his cage.

1970

50

Once upon a time
There was a boat
On the Caspian Sea.

I haven't heard anything
about that boat for ages.
I know not upon what shore
it lies rotting
Or at what spot
it sank into the sea.

But the water is rising,
It's rising
And rising
in these places
that are so carefree,
where I'm left
without a lifeboat.

1983

The rain pours down onto the earth.
Raindrops are drawing
 strange continents
 on the map of the window.

The countries
 become smaller,
 then larger,

They disappear,
Then reappear.

But the rain pours down
All day long
And all through the night.

1982

Step aside, make way,
A raindrop is streaking down
 the window.
A raindrop is streaking down,
It's streaking down
 at no one's command.

It has addressed itself
Neither to God,
Nor to the world,
Nor to man!

It's just streaking
 down the window
Washing away the dust
 of many, many months.
Just streaking down, down.

1982

53

Not now, wait a while longer.
Some day I'll come myself
And whisper to you, "Wake up..."

Wait now,
Now the whole world is awake.
Now the fissures in the cliffs
Are the softest places in the world.
I'm afraid to breathe in vain,
And I'm also afraid
 to write poems in vain.
Enough, my dear,
Don't stir now, wait a while longer.

God knows, perhaps, this spring,
Or maybe a thousand years from now,
Passing through centuries,
Asking the location of this world
 from the stars,
I'll come to you and roar, "Wake up!"
But now, just wait.

1985

54

If the Caspian disappears,
If the seagulls stop screaming
And if the shadow
 of these rocks disappears
 while I'm alive,

If the Caspian disappears
 from my life
Like a ring on my finger
 while I am alive

What shall I do?
What shall I do
If I lose the sea as well?

1964

55

The sky is full of stars at night.
 Some of them
 are a thousand times
 larger than the sun.
 Then why don't we see their lights?

Why don't they warm us
 like the sun?
 Perhaps, because they are far
 from us, too far,
 as far away as the troubles
 of others.

1980

56

To remain silent forever...

Even when talking to your mother,
 Even when meeting your lover,
 Every moment and everywhere
 To remain just silent forever...

Everyday to go down
 Into the silence
 Of your friends' conversations
 With your voice.

Every day to meet
 Speechless people
 Who sing like nightingales.*

And to understand that man
Is in need of a whisper
Inside this voiceless scream.

Oh, my God, how difficult it is
To remain silent while talking.

And it is much more difficult
To be heard
When you're not talking!

To remain silent, just silent...

1983

* In Azerbaijan, the nightingale
(bulbul) is considered the most elo-
quent song bird.

57

Don't say so, it can't be true,
I won't believe it.
Even if you swear,
And even if you call upon
God as your witness,
I won't believe it.

I can't believe that
The cherry plum trees
Have blossomed
By the side of the road.

But how?
But why?

1982

58

I'll have a cat,
The softest one in the world.
I'll find an armchair
Wider than the world itself.

Smoke from an English pipe
Packed with the finest tobacco
 in the world
Will enshroud me.

And a grandfather clock
Standing in front of me,
 will remind me
 of the most beautiful moments
 of my life.

1982

59

Now it's time to flee
From grumbling and complaint.
It's time to open wide the doors
Before they are knocked upon.

Now it's time to turn to silence
From noise and hype.
It's time to come down to people
From the peak of nation
 and statehood.

It's not time for promising *nazirs**
and praying,
Or for cursing and blaming.

The world should keep silent now,
It's time to help God...

1995

* When a person pleads for God's help, he often promises a *nazir* if his prayer is answered. In gratitude, he will make a sacrificial contribution to the community or to a mosque.

60

Never will a man
Be stronger than that rock.

Neither will he disappear
Or appear in time,
Like the shade of that old oak tree.

Never will a man be divided
into five parts
And live in five places,
Like that cloud in the sky.

Nor will he ever be born and live
In the place
where he was expected
and desired,
Like that willow growing
In the yard of the insane asylum.

1982

61

Fog has rolled in over Baku—
Don't tell anyone.

It has rolled in so thick.
Don't tell anyone.

A lamp was lit tonight,
It was lit and went out tonight—
Don't tell anyone.

I lost my way in this fog
As I went out the door.
I've written poems again—
Don't tell anyone.

What will the fog do to me
Amidst the stone houses?

My love, I'm still alive—
Don't tell anyone.

1982

62

Hide the moonlight
Somebody might see us.
I'm afraid
That they can even take
the night away from us.

If it snows, don't tell anyone:
"Winter has come."
They might arrest spring.
While tracking down winter.

If you hear that spring has come,
Don't leave your home.
No, my dear,
Don't pin a flower on your chest.
It might be taken
 as a symbol of some sort.

When did this fear begin?
In what year did this fear begin?
In what year of what century?
I can't find the right words
 to describe this
 in the language of this land.

1983

63

There's a street in my city,
A quiet, narrow street.
Seventy steps down,
And 70 steps back.
One cigarette down,
One cigarette back.

1965

I was born in 1939.
In 1937, I was arrested.*
My granny died in '48,
And I wept for someone
 who had passed away
For the first time in my life.

I kept some fish in an aquarium.
My window remained open
One winter night
And the fish froze to death.

Now it's a January night in 1965
And it seems I want to live.

1965

*1937: reference to the Stalinist repressions in the Soviet Union when many intellectuals and others suspected of being politically dissident were arrested, executed or imprisoned in Gulag labor camps. The poet refers to the impact that this Great Purge had on his life although it occurred even before he was born.

65

No, this place is not
so claustrophobic.
There's a way out of here as well,
Because the world
is much bigger than this place,
And God is much stronger
than the people here!

No, this place is not
so picturesque to look at.
There are other places
more worthwhile to see,
Because the world
is much bigger than this place,
And God is much more beautiful
than the people here!

1983

66

What hasn't man created
For woman?

Nations.
Languages.
Tribes.
Countries.
He established borders,
And made war stand sentinel
over them.

What we have gained in this war
Waged for woman
Is only poetry and music.

1982

67

You smell of dreams,
You've wrapped yourself up
In a warm world.

You're as tasty as hot bread,
And as lazy as a mugham*
Heard in summer.

Even trees and mountains
Want to sit,
When they see you.

And I want to be a poem,
Not a poet
When I see you...

1983

* Traditional modal music in Azerbaijan

68

The clouds between us
are swaying
Like the big bronze cross
on my chest.

The drone of the plane
is the distance between us.

The Black Sea without you
is like a church
whose candles have gone out.

1965

69

A smile suits you
As do tears.

You are as beautiful
As the trees in the forest,
And the distance in the desert.

You appear like the mist
On the mountains,
Or like the sound of waves
On the seashore
As though the world
Was tailored just for you.

Life suits you so well.

1983

70

We met.
We drank.
We ate some
of what was on the table
and some
of what was in our memories.

Sometimes our hands reached
Out toward the future.

The bread was old,
Our memories bitter,
And the future
turned out to be an illusion.

We woke up
And we parted.

1968

71

To Nushaba

I am your dream,
I will die if you wake up.

I am your way,
I will die if you stop.

I will die if you wrap yourself up
inside a stranger's dream.

Destiny has brought us together.
This is your fate,
As well as mine.

1996

72

Look, we'll finish reading
this book as well.
We'll know who the killer is.
Then we'll fall asleep
With our heads on the pillow.

We'll lead our lives this way,
Sharing the same house
and the same children,
And our heads
on the same pillow.

So close, yet so unaware
of each other.

1968

73

Chopin...
These sounds and these chords
Are always with me,
Like a faithful woman.

No matter how far away they are,
They are always close to me,
Like a faithful woman.

No matter how often I hear
These sounds and chords,
They are always fresh to me,
Like a faithful woman.

These sounds and these chords,
They are summer all year round.
They are like the southern clime
Throughout the world,
Like a faithful woman.

1982

74

Sometimes the places
that you've once seen,
And the woman you once loved
Are lost in your memories,
And sometimes
they are even forgotten.

Sometimes there are days
When you even forget
your own child.

And sometimes you have a day
When you completely forget
Death, and God himself.

But there are three things
That will never be forgotten,
Even for a moment:
Today, this place, and you.

1982

75

In which Spring
Will you enwrap yourself
After you quit this one?

From where will you be seen?
Will your voice be heard?
And if heard,
 will your laughter be heard?
Will your voice resound
 from your chest
 with words or screams?
Or will you just keep silent
 after this parting?

Where should I wait for you:
 at home,
 in the courtyard,
 or in the grave?

1982

76

I told you that I loved you,
You broke my heart.
But again,
 I told you that I loved you!

I asked you to forgive me,
You cut me short.
But again,
 I asked you to forgive me!

I asked you not to forget me,
You broke our memories.
But again,
 I asked you not to forget me!

I gave you my life,
But you broke it.
Now, how can I give you
 another life?

1969

77

I remember you
as a dismal
and sorrowful song
In the silence
of these musicless days
My ears are yearning
To hear a merry song
With a lively melody.

I can't hear anything!
I can't see anybody,
Or, perhaps, nobody can see me.

You were my only hope,
And I remember you
As a dismal and sorrowful melody
With no lyrics.

1983

78

If you change your phone number,
whenever,
Please write down
the new number
on a sheet of paper.
And bury it in my grave.
Do you hear?

1982

79

Don't forget,
When you go to bed tonight,
To close your eyes tight,
Wrap the blanket around yourself
And pull it up to your forehead
So that you'll be covered
 in darkness.

And there in the darkness
Remember me for a moment.
Then you'll see
That my eyes cast a light
 upon you
 though ever so weak.

1982

80

I never want anyone
To dream of me,
When I am no longer in their heart.
I would rather they forget me
Before offense turns to hatred.

I have lied
But I have never deceived anyone.
Twice I wanted to commit suicide,
But a thousand times
I changed my mind.

1968

81

Show some sympathy
To the one who is laughing.
And he who is glad,
Give him some sorrow.

Show some sympathy
To the one
Who has lost his way in the dark.
Give him some light.

Show some sympathy
To me,
And give me some poison,
If I can't do it myself.

And the moment I close my eyes,
Let God know about it.

1982

82

My heart is opening and closing
Like the door
of an abandoned cottage
on a windy autumn day.

I'm drawing the sketches
of my days with my finger
on the dusty window glass
of the world.

My God, please,
At least, stroke my head.

1965

83

How suffocatingly hot...
And the book I'm reading,
And the woman I'm longing for
Are in this stuffiness.

I seat the killer in the book
In the coolest place,
And send the woman
 I'm thinking about
 to the seacoast.

And there again we remain
Sitting shoulder to shoulder
In this wearisome, stuffy heat.
Me and freedom.

1982

84

Thunder struck.
It was as firm
 as a dictator's signature,
 and as clear
 and short as hope...

Then it poured.
The excessive load of the heavens
Poured down onto earth...

And then stuffy heat...

1964

85

Once I was a horizon.
Fog came over the sea
And I became invisible.

Once I was a path.
No one passed over me
And grass covered me
And I became invisible.

Once I was a smile,
I don't know what happened,
But I became invisible.

1969

86

Let parting and death
Always be your companions
along the way.

Rely upon their faith.
Trust in them,
So that you can follow
Your path with ease.

1982

87

Step aside, make way,
A raindrop is streaking down
The window pane.

A raindrop is streaking down,
It's streaking down
with no expectation
for anything from anyone.

It has addressed itself
neither to God,
nor to the world,
nor to man!

It's just streaking down
the window pane,
Washing away the dust
of many months.
Streaking down, down.

1982

88

Don't pass on by, my brother,
Stop, my sister!
Stop just for a moment
At that corner.

Then turn around
And look at me.

I'm greeting you
From the window,
I'm wishing you long life
From the window.

1982

I heard three kinds of voices:

A hoarse voice,
A normal voice,
And a soft voice.

The hoarse voice asked:

"How are you?"

The normal voice asked:

"How are you?"

The soft voice asked:

"How are you?"

I replied:

"So-so!"

"So-so."

"So-so..."

No guests, no white dress, no veil...
In the crowded train station
of a strange city
or in the Metro,
rocking with tired people,
filling up, emptying,
You might see a woman.

She might appear
as suddenly as an earthquake,
She might be seen unexpectedly
In the Metro or in a train station.

And that day
you might either collapse
or become surprised,
or forever
you might keep in mind
that there is a God.

And that the world was small
Until you came face to face
with that woman.

And you might understand that God
Has not let you live
A meaningless life.

1982

91

If one more wish lands
on my shoulders,
Someway, somehow
I can bear its load,
Even if my waist breaks
under its weight.

But I can't stand
I can't take the load any more
of even one more single hope.

1991

92

It's cold.
I wish I had a candle
to warm my body.

It's hot.
I wish I had a leaf
over my head
to cool me.

It's the world.
I wish there were another one.
To take us all under its protection.

1991

93

I've lost two grandfathers,
And two grandmothers.
I've buried one father.
I have a mother
And she is now ill.
So, who will console me now?
In my native land,
When worse comes to worst,
The graves of my ancestors
And even the illness of my mother
Should have been able
To help share my burdens.

1986

94

They're lying.
It must have been a lie.
I can't believe that Mozart
Created his music
 with such ease,
 smiling.
A man can't die that way—
So easily with a smile.

They're lying.
It must have been a lie.

1983

95

I wish I had a cottage
With a round pool,
And I wish I had mature trees
 in the garden,
Not so many,
Just five, ten, fifteen, twenty.

I wish I could do morning exercises,
Then jump into the pool,
And reverse this age of mine
Back to twenty-five or thirty.

I wish my soul
 would become younger,
And I wouldn't become stooped.
I wish I could celebrate
 my Jubilees—
 my 90th, 95th and 100th.

1995

96

Since the day
When I started expecting
Help from my fate,
I'm not caring
About my life anymore.
And all day long
 you're telling me
 that I must live.
Now I don't need life,
I need to write poems.

1970

97

Will my notebook die
As someone whose chest
 is bursting with words
Or will it tell everything
 that it knows?
Will crows circle its corpse?
Or will doves?

Who will remember
Any of these thousands of words?
Will this last page of my notebook
Be closed tonight or forever?

If it will be opened,
Who will do it?
 My nation,
 An enemy
 Or a breeze?

98

I'll comb my hair
A little while before my death,
I'll wear a neat white shirt
A little while before my death.

The sky will be blue,
And the clouds
 will be like white foam
A little while before my death.

I'll write you a letter,
I'll tell you:
"I loved you, love you,
 and will continue to love you."

A little while before my death,
A little while before my death.

1964

99

There goes that constant buzz
In my brain again.
It has started again:
Who or what needs me,
My God?

Are there many doors left
In the corridors of this life?
I'm like a photo
In the hands of a blind man.

1982

100

Today they told me
 that I've grown old.
Don't tell me
 that I'm going to die.
Today I was told that
I've grown old.

1971

101

If I die an untimely death,
Say: "He lived long."

If I die when I am old,
Say that I died prematurely.

If I lie in bed for a year
 and then die,
Say that I died unexpectedly.

And if I die unexpectedly,
 say that I died
 after a lingering illness.

1962

102

God,
How's it going?
Any news of me?
The nights—I can count them myself.
But how many mornings
are left for me?

Will you like me?
Through what eyes
will you see your creature?

God,
Shall I come on my own?
Or will you send for me?

2014

103

Don't place a marble stone
upon my grave,
Nor erect a monument on it.
Just leave a pair of shoes there
For someone barefoot to wear.

1963



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