

**To those born later**

I

Truly I live in dark times!  
Frank speech is naïve. A smooth forehead  
Suggests insensitivity. The man who laughs  
Has simply not yet heard  
The terrible news.

What kind of times are these, when  
To talk about trees is almost a crime  
Because it implies silence about so many horrors?  
When the man over there calmly crossing the street  
Is already perhaps beyond the reach of his friends  
Who are in need? 10

It's true that I still earn my daily bread  
But, believe me, that's only an accident. Nothing  
I do gives me the right to eat my fill.  
By chance I've been spared. (If my luck breaks, I'm lost.)

They say to me: Eat and drink! Be glad you have it!  
But how can I eat and drink if I snatch what I eat  
From the starving  
And my glass of water belongs to someone dying of thirst?  
And yet I eat and drink. 20

I would also like to be wise.  
In the old books it says what wisdom is:  
To shun the strife of the world and to live out  
Your brief time without fear  
Also to get along without violence  
To return good for evil  
Not to fulfill your desires but to forget them  
Is accounted wise.  
All this I cannot do.  
Truly, I live in dark times. 30

II

I came to the cities in a time of disorder  
When hunger reigned.  
I came among men in a time of revolt  
And I rebelled with them.  
So passed my time  
Given me to on earth.

I ate my food between battles  
I lay down to sleep among murderers

I practiced love carelessly  
And I had little patience for nature's beauty. 40  
So passed my time  
Given to me on earth.

All roads led into the mire in my time.  
My tongue betrayed me to the butchers.  
There was little I could do. But those is power  
Sat safer without me: that was my hope.  
So passed my time  
Given to me on earth.

Our forces were slight. Our goal  
Lay far in the distance 50  
Clearly visible, though I myself  
Was unlikely to reach it.  
So passed my time  
Given to me on earth.

III  
You who will emerge from the flood  
In which we have gone under  
Bring to mind  
When you speak of our failings  
Bring to mind also the dark times  
That you have escaped. 60

Changing countries more often than our shoes,  
We went through the class wars, despairing  
When there was only injustice, no outrage.

And yet we realized:  
Hatred, even of meanness  
Contorts the features.  
Anger, even against injustice  
Makes the voice hoarse. O,  
We who wanted to prepare the ground for friendship  
Could not ourselves be friendly. 70

But you, when the time comes at last  
When man is helper to man  
Think of us  
With forbearance.