

Tell It In The Negative

What didn't happen? Who are you not? What haven't you done?

I Have Not Lingered In European Monasteries

I have not lingered in European monasteries
and discovered among tall grasses tombs of knights
who fell as beautifully as their ballads tell;
I have not parted the grasses
or purposefully left them thatched.

I have not released my mind to wander and wait
in those great distances
between the snowy mountains and the fishermen,
like a moon,
or a shell beneath the moving water.

I have not held my breath
so that I might hear the breathing of G-d,
or tamed my heartbeat with an exercise,
or starved for visions.
Although I have watched him often
I have not become the heron,
leaving my body on the shore,
and I have not become the luminous trout,
leaving my body in the air.

I have not worshipped wounds and relics,
or combs of iron,
or bodies wrapped and burnt in scrolls.

I have not been unhappy for ten thousand years.

During the day I laugh and during the night I sleep.
My favourite cooks prepare my meals,
my body cleans and repairs itself,
and all my work goes well.

Leonard Cohen
in *Leonard Cohen*
a collection in Everyman's Library Pocket Poets series

The Railroad Station

My nonarrival in the city of N.
took place on the dot.

You'd been alerted
in my unmailed letter.

You were able not to be there
at the agreed-upon time.

The train pulled up at Platform 3.
A lot of people got out.

My absence joined the throng
as it made its way toward the exit.

Several women rushed
to take my place
in all that rush.

Somebody ran up to one of them.
I didn't know him,
but she recognized him
immediately.

While they kissed
with not our lips,
a suitcase disappeared,
not mine.

The railroad station in the city of N.
passed its exam
in objective existence
with flying colors.

The whole remained in place.
Particulars scurried
along the designated tracks.

Even a rendezvous
took place as planned.

Beyond the reach
of our presence.

In the paradise lost
of probability.

Somewhere else.
Somewhere else.
How these little words ring.

Wisława Szymborska
in *Wisława Szymborska:
Poems New and Collected*
1957-1997