

The Outcast: Montreal, 1988

*"Ghetto of the elect. A wall, a ditch.
Expect no mercy. In this most Christian
of worlds, the poet is the outcast Jew."*

—Marina Tsvetayeva

The exploding gas carried his bride
of fire across the hotel's fifth floor,
tossed a glass bouquet to the street below
and showered the wedding guests
with rice and rain and crystal night.

We dressed by rote, collecting
credit cards, passports, one another
and started down the concrete stairs.
And within that smoke of dreadful dreams
with death and danger imminent,

I became the musician who played
for time in Dachau and the poet
wordless from the fumes that churned
in perfect German ovens. And she
became Hanna Senesh¹ dancing
with torn feet, while corroding
into yellow billowing soot.

And our vision transmuted: expatriot
snowbirds washed up on a foreign beach,
still burning with music and holocaust,
now belching retsina and feta cheese,
reading Leonard Cohen in his golden years
because he is an old/poet/Jew.

And in the last, the streetlamps
on the boulevard showed
the ash had run wet and cold,
so we gathered our remnants
together, and returned our outcast

selves to that Montreal room, where
we prayed and swayed, until morning
also ignited and left us consumed: two
old/poet/Jews.

Hanna Senesh (1921-44): poet & Haganah fighter, parachuted
into Nazi Command to rescue Allied P.O.W.'s. Later captured,
tortured & executed by a German firing squad.