

MICHAEL PALMER

FROM ELEGIES FOR SISTER SATAN

SECOND ELEGY

Sister, is it not time
for us to learn to speak

now that the infernal machines
have captured the breathing word?

Now that drones fill the sky
over Santiago de Chuco,

Central Park and Unter den Linden?
Is it finally too late

in this welcome winter rain
to cross the singing bridge

to that place where
memories of the future

bend like cypress limbs
under ancient snow? Where

the plague years melt away
and the shrill voices of children

explode from the mist
with nothing but pain

and praise to sing,
as if one and the same,

like two bodies joined
in a last embrace?

And these cypresses,
ministers of mourning,

how is it we applaud them
in their grace?

THIRD ELEGY

The clock is a fiction, dear Sister,
yet we live within it,
Sister, its arms are ours,

and the fiction is as real
as a rose in the steel dust
and you will recall, dear Sister,

that each of us is the sum
of the two preceding numbers
in the talismanic series

and that this ever expanding,
radiant and more than perfect
spiral will swallow us

so said – was it Zoroaster –
from a distant cliff
his spider-arms outstretched

on the face of a death's-head clock.
And it is there
within the span of those arms

that we recall
what we were not.
We were not what we thought

to be and to become
not the architects of desire
not the thieves of fire

nor gardeners nor plumbers
nor workers in steel,
only the painted puppets

of parallel lives, only
the uninvited guests – ghosts –
at the beggars' banquet.

Elegy for whom or for what?
We watched the frothing tide
gather time in

and it meant nothing
at all to us then
or at most some spare thing

that could not be freely said,
a wound of salt-laced water
and a gasping

mouthful of sand,
while deaf to those measures
which draw us together.