The Poetry of 9/11: The events of 9/11 occasioned a tremendous outpouring of poetry; people in New York taped poems on windows, wheatpasted them on posts, and shared them by hand. In Curtis Fox's words, "poetry was suddenly everywhere in the city." Outside the immediate radius of what became known as "ground zero," aided by email, listserves, websites, and, later, blogs, thousands of people also shared poems they loved, and poems they had written. By February, 2002, over 25,000 poems written in response to 9/11 had been published on poems.com alone. Three years later, the number of poems there had more than doubled. Often invisible in American culture, poetry suddenly became relevant, even-and perhaps dangerously-useful. People turned to poems when other forms failed to give shape to their feelings.

Photograph from September 11.

By Wisława Szymborska

They're still within the air's reach,   
within the compass of places   
that have just now opened.

I can do only two things for them-   
describe this flight   
and not add a last line.

They jumped from the burning floors-   
one, two, a few more,   
higher, lower.

The photograph halted them in life,   
and now keeps them   
above the earth toward the earth.

Each is still complete,   
with a particular face   
and blood well hidden.

There's enough time   
for hair to come loose,   
for keys and coins   
to fall from pockets.

They're still within the air's reach,   
within the compass of places   
that have just now opened.

I can do only two things for them-   
describe this flight   
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Full Flight

By Bob Hicock

I'm in a plane that will not be flown into a building.  
It's a SAAB 340, seats 40, has two engines with propellers  
is why I think of beanies, those hats that would spin  
a young head into the clouds. The plane is red and loud  
inside like it must be loud in the heart, red like fire  
and fire engines and the woman two seats up and to the right  
resembles one of the widows I saw on TV after the Towers  
came down. It's her hair that I recognize, the fecundity of it  
and the color and its obedience to an ideal, the shape  
it was asked several hours ago to hold and has held, a kind  
of wave that begins at the forehead and repeats with slight  
variations all the way to the tips, as if she were water  
and a pebble had been continuously dropped into the mouth  
of her existence. We are eighteen thousand feet over America.  
People are typing at their laps, blowing across the fog of coffee,  
sleeping with their heads on the windows, on the pattern  
of green fields and brown fields, streams and gas stations  
and swimming pools, blue dots of aquamarine that suggest  
we've domesticated the mirage. We had to kill someone,  
I believe, when the metal bones burned and the top  
fell through the bottom and a cloud made of dust and memos  
and skin muscled across Manhattan. I remember feeling  
I could finally touch a rifle, that some murders  
are an illumination of ethics, that they act as a word,  
a motion the brain requires for which there is  
no syllable, no breath. The moment the planes had stopped,  
when we were afraid of the sky, there was a pause  
when we could have been perfectly American,  
could have spent infinity dollars and thrown a million  
bodies at finding the few, lasering our revenge  
into a kind of love, the blood-hunger kept exact  
and more convincing for its precision, an expression  
of our belief that proximity is never the measure of guilt.  
We've lived in the sky again for some years and today  
on my lap these pictures from Iraq, naked bodies  
stacked into a pyramid of ha-ha and the articles  
about broomsticks up the ass and the limbs of children  
turned into stubble, we are punch-drunk and getting even  
with the sand, with the map, with oil, with ourselves  
I think listening to the guys behind me. There's a problem

and probably Americans now, which is what the flesh  
of this country has been, a grafted pulse, an inventory  
of the world, and just as the idea of embrace  
moves chemically into my blood, and I'm warmed  
as if I've just taken a drink, a voice announces  
we've begun our descent, and then I sense the falling.

in Alpena with an inventory control system, some switches  
are being counted twice, switches for what I don't know-  
switches of humor, of faith-but the men are musical  
in their jargon, both likely born in New Delhi  
  
Alabanza: In Praise of Local 100

By Martín Espada

*for the 43 members of Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Local l00, working at the Windows on the World restaurant, who lost their lives in the attack on the World Trade Center*

across the night sky of this city and cities to come.   
Alabanza I say, even if God has no face.

Alabanza. When the war began, from Manhattan and Kabul   
two constellations of smoke rose and drifted to each other,   
mingling in icy air, and one said with an Afghan tongue:   
Teach me to dance. We have no music here.   
And the other said with a Spanish tongue:   
I will teach you. Music is all we have.

Alabanza. Praise the cook with a shaven head   
and a tattoo on his shoulder that said Oye,   
a blue-eyed Puerto Rican with people from Fajardo,   
the harbor of pirates centuries ago.   
Praise the lighthouse in Fajardo, candle   
glimmering white to worship the dark saint of the sea.   
Alabanza. Praise the cook's yellow Pirates cap   
worn in the name of Roberto Clemente, his plane   
that flamed into the ocean loaded with cans for Nicaragua,   
for all the mouths chewing the ash of earthquakes.   
Alabanza. Praise the kitchen radio, dial clicked   
even before the dial on the oven, so that music and Spanish   
rose before bread. Praise the bread. Alabanza.

Praise Manhattan from a hundred and seven flights up,   
like Atlantis glimpsed through the windows of an ancient aquarium.   
Praise the great windows where immigrants from the kitchen   
could squint and almost see their world, hear the chant of nations:   
Ecuador, México, Republica Dominicana,   
Haiti, Yemen, Ghana, Bangladesh.   
Alabanza. Praise the kitchen in the morning,   
where the gas burned blue on every stove   
and exhaust fans fired their diminutive propellers,   
hands cracked eggs with quick thumbs   
or sliced open cartons to build an altar of cans.   
Alabanza. Praise the busboy's music, the chime-chime   
of his dishes and silverware in the tub.

Alabanza. Praise the dish-dog, the dishwasher   
who worked that morning because another dishwasher   
could not stop coughing, or because he needed overtime   
to pile the sacks of rice and beans for a family   
floating away on some Caribbean island plagued by frogs.   
Alabanza. Praise the waitress who heard the radio in the kitchen   
and sang to herself about a man gone. Alabanza.

After the thunder wilder than thunder,   
after the shudder deep in the glass of the great windows,   
after the radio stopped singing like a tree full of terrified frogs,   
after night burst the dam of day and flooded the kitchen,   
for a time the stoves glowed in darkness like the lighthouse in Fajardo,   
like a cook's soul. Soul I say, even if the dead cannot tell us   
about the bristles of God's beard because God has no face,   
soul I say, to name the smoke-beings flung in constellations