

## Daily Bread

*Hungary, the late 50s*

At night you keep to yourself you cover  
your windows with wrapping paper indigo blue so  
no one can see the light of the single  
light bulb over your mother's knitting machine

everything is communal – you are told –  
even your grandfather's blacksmithing workshop  
where the State lets him keep working  
because it is a wing of his house  
and the State lets his only son work there too  
until the State promotes the son, your father,  
to a foreman of gypsies who enamel  
white and avocado green pots and pans and stove  
pipes but he makes so little money that your mother needs  
to work too so we can buy  
bread and milk in the fourth week of the month  
with her *Gymnasium* education  
and a dream on hold for college the knitting machine stowed  
in a box labeled "rags" she drags  
into the house from the sawdust shed and tapes up  
all the windows in the room where you  
and your sister sleep and rare parties are held  
and hundreds of books make the shelf sag  
and the piano stood there too until it had to be sold  
she takes the same indigo blue paper everybody uses  
to wrap school books and notebooks or to complement  
the blue smocks every schoolchild wears  
over tattered clothes for *a nice unified look* and she turns on  
the radio to drown out the clicking and whooshing  
of the machine that first unravels clients' nylon stockings with runs  
then from the same shimmery tan thread miraculously knits  
knee highs with a little looser pattern the ladies pick up  
in small brown bags as if they were  
seeds and the money is slipped  
into her hands in envelopes like birthday cards  
she cranks up the radio again and you fall asleep  
to Callas and Caruso by the light of the 100W bulb over her bowed  
head and shoulders so there's  
bread again the next day and you watch  
your mother draw  
the cross above the brilliant brown steaming crust  
you know this is another thing you should  
never tell the neighbors.