

## Swimming

We sang union songs and recited  
the Johnny Appleseed grace  
at that socialist camp, where we made our beds  
with regulation corners,  
and floating docks divided the lakefront into rectangles,  
an easel standing on the shore for tags  
to keep track of us in the water.

Advancement was measured  
from ankle deep to waist high  
to in over my head,  
and then I swam across the entire lake.

My reward — to pilot row boats, and canoes.

And responsibility,  
to be a gondolier  
for a girl with thalidomide arms.

Today I move back and forth in a pool  
in a disorderly place I never dreamt of.

Here there's no child's color war.

Now that lake

like everywhere else

may be damaged,

the first nature

I knew and desired

where the summer berries

grew wild

inside their own borders.

## **Immigration**

Her German mother  
smoked while washing dishes,  
ashes dropped into the sink. But  
her overweight father.  
was the one to die first, after they moved,  
of bad habits. My family  
stayed in America. But  
almost by mistake  
I showed up in the same place,  
20 years later. But  
I hardly see her,  
she had one kid,  
I had two, she doesn't  
have a husband,  
I had one sometimes. But  
now she has a disease,  
stage four, and she wants  
to give me a bunch of 70 letters  
I wrote in high school  
and which I asked her to keep  
in chronological order.  
No doubt they are filled with  
lies and preposterous  
wishes. I don't want

to remember, I'm here,

that's it, that's all

that counts.

## Letters

We wrote in summers,  
on vacations,  
from college or work,  
sometimes not even  
from the same continent.

She saved  
what she received  
for decades,  
my stationery, bearing  
name and address  
in lower case, a sure sign  
of recalcitrance:

Don't picture me  
in my absence, only  
imagine the new world  
from my words  
published in  
broadsheets, a thesis,  
little magazines, smaller newspapers.

Hidden words.

I wish the letters could fly  
and the sentences return,  
folded back into the envelopes. Hard  
copy. Come back to me,

from those days. Come back,  
days.

## **Magnolia tree**

Before there were bees

you were there

in Asia and North America

transnational

bisexual.

How many times do you flower in a year?

The one in our front yard on Long Island

burst briefly, in spring.

It's gone. But no matter.

It has migrated

to Alexandra's garden in Colares

where it makes her think

about philosophy,

even the smallest flower,

closing at evening, returning,

then leaving after three days,

polite guest,

and like a favored guest, not dying,

just falling onto earth

to breed again. See you

soon.