

ANNE HARDING WOODWORTH

Morimur

The death of [his wife] Maria Barbara [who bore seven children, four of whom died early] must have given Bach the immediate impetus to compose this extraordinary movement. Bach has engraved her name in cryptographic form at the opening of the Ciaccona—Helga Thoene

The unwillingness to speak
how much he loved
became the cocoon of his own sound.

But sorrow, like laughter, even musical,
can be no secret, no spelling
or hidden number.

Its single strain throbs stringlike:
it is energy quaking,
a darkness of words or an avian descant

over a dovecote-rattling
of cities at work, parallel
to a story encrypted in chorale.

It comes clear, deliberate to the ear,
and measure by measure, as in the loss of a child,
it sings a soprano of unending thread,

eternal tremolo. Under a blouse
the breast remembers every feeding,
and the grave never fills in completely:

Bach scores our air with his grief.
Our speeding heartbeats are elation,
and the fugue, reminder.