

Seduva

we learned what to unscrew, shield and bury
what we learned— memory ground by plated
truck— if we are dispatched for outside
labor, lucky— there is the breeze there
and if by chance God might spin a needle
of pine unto our boot, so recall Spring
what mushrooms poison us, the currants
lining the road prove sweetest, my fiddle
for which my hand was mold, the worn saddle
on the horse that forgot how to run away

Vilna Dybbuk

stitching the felt moon in the plum sky, birds
drop through a crack in the roof, pecking apart
the walls of this house— in the afternoon
beside headstones made obscure by time I lie
river stones in the snow and drag the scarecrow
back inside my room— stuffed to look like dad
crows perch along his arms and
shadows left on the wall that used to live
make the bed and blow the candles out

crisp, awake, like a dog galloping through its dream
I've been lying in the dark long enough to know
the fields of winter always return in sepia

crescent moon, river stone, black birds armed
with the flowers of ghosts, I've been trying
to speak with the dead

Ponar

whomever I find washed up here, contorted
omens obscured by time, I have just cause
to dismember and readjust, ham G-d
like kids so stoned they are close to death
stop-motion, pulsing through vanished friends—
a bone-horse woodcut in a charcoal landscape
wild flower *scooping the darkness empty*
post-coital with a birch-white face, a doll
with wings to transport as if by flying
to effect or accomplish, to throw or dispatch
drugged, hoof prints I crushed in the sand
to levee the dead from drifting away—
I killed a crab and placed its hull on my head
I ate its insides and cast my bottle in the sea
with erased names, yours and mine
I stuffed in a broken hand

Ponar

deafening pit, forever echo
fate cast into your womb

Vigilance,
here is where I stab my name

Ponar

into the pit, like I said, a tip
of a finger is better than the hand

here is the scream I let go when you were born
its sound now turned to wind

next to the beryl sink, the rabbi
boiling the milky way

if I pull my head out from the lake

peel back some skin
but don't look away—

I am a horse, he said
and my bones are made of flame

Ponar

like geese following a man made of bread
a scar splits the street

from the country, dense fog creeps over
castle hill and breaks into sheets of ice

with black pea eyes ruffled inside their ivory coats
pigeons fluff up and freeze

when it comes, the hungry wind
reduces a pigeon to pigeon feet

listen

shadows left on the synagogue wall
sing through a hole
in the square where the synagogue used to be

in that kind of silence there is nowhere to hide

a silence is mightier than a prayer

Ponar

listen, here is my hand, here is my heart
a scar inside a light box I left
shattered images of where I broke
an oath inside this
“I don’t love”, circled like birds

into a girl, I thought charred words
and turned into dust like *never forget*

but I was educated only on how to build fire—
only how to forget

aborting language, fire made me profane

because if I am not profane
how can I learn to be sacred

and in this way, like a picture, if I am not captured
how can I exist

Ponar

work and thought, work and thought, for what?

the rabbi shovels them both in the pit
dead men, there
a girl with her hands above her head
dips into the shape of a prayer

she doesn't recognize
the fact she was the answer

she who lived here
stuck her head out the window

to listen to the vixen howl
celebrating the night's first kill

Ponar

but it was not over then, work
on the bonecrust, some blood
shadows lick the walls and spit
thoughts muddied like human ashtrays

after the seasons deregulate
we deregulate

knotting my tongue, plucking the mouth
Jew sounds gulp in separate discord
easy as a void's harp

planted like a cross on the side of the road
arms and legs break off
and get picked up by wind

when it rains

they fall down again

here is the shawl, the shovel

you know where they go
as it continues

rain

Ponar

a black lab gnaws off the rotten end of a wood bench

ghosts are monitoring a fresh wound I dug
inserting long veins of fiber optic lines inside the ditch

for a connection to another world
hunger lives inside the pit

with torn bits of sun bleached rag
wrapped round beaten heads
traversing the ice bridge
to an unknown land in the age of unreason

palms crackle against shovel handles
like cracked eggshells

at night they give us the laptop, a mixer and decks

and we play our degenerate music

we do not know what is promised
here in this place, where ghosts speak

we are hungry for connection

The Commons

just as water
boiled down to a calcified prism
and jumped out the pot
the day you got sick
from just the thought
that time needs the heart to forget
the sea evaporated
into a field of salt
that men break apart
and drag from a rope
the way Romans carry their dead

with his gun
a man may dismount his horse
but without his man
the horse rides into an abyss

dodging trees in the anthropocene
shadows of headstones thin
like rolling out dough
for children, I was pregnant
making bread with

like bullets
that were poorly aimed
you are my greatest mistake
I tell my only

who cut her hands on the moon

Hanging in the Skyline, Unfinished Apartments

who knows how long they have been here
concrete superstructures like false acquisitions
sky farms men forged by locking arms, turning
in circles and spitting seeds— fucked by the bank
I also, a ghost condemned to fog on the window
a theatre curtain stiff without shadow
explain to me how this war will never end
now that we are unable to dream

Transcendental Lake Kingdom (for Minnesota)

in the fierce river that splits your country
I swim inside the ribcage
of the invented self, diagramming
the memory of a field I called home

home, sawing a hole in the ice and stuffing
pebbles in the pockets of their coats

after laying them in the lake, I linger
with crows on the shoal, picking teeth with fish bones
to see what form my lovers take
when they rise from the bottom of the lake

and at night with bruised feet I also return
with thin lips from a fish, cold— I am by your bed
in the porcelain bowl, I am melting
a ball of snow

Pizdukas

what I regret is that which I love most
I whittle to idols with the buoy knife
slung close to my breast— repeatedly I
mount regrets upon this beast, ironic corpse
of grade tender meat, simpler flesh plays host
to a misfit spring— saint loathing I
regret to distrust what I most despise—
this fatherland— patriot slag to a molten home
discards close persons like broke flowers
numbered bodies in trash bags, sands down bone
to chalk dust, the ilk of my blood recants
nothing— uncoil miles of intestines out
raveling them back in the mouth, I know
only what is spared, promises unkempt

Nightmare Machine in the Kingdom Of Og (For Illinois)

when I put on my pants I forget my name
throw on this shirt it says I am yr savior
and change the oil that's left from the dead car
that was my closest friend— here's the mainframe
of promises I offer— soften it with this shamed axe
ostracized from the flapjack house from whence
it came—Wisconsin pointing at your head;
please understand when Nascar ends it drains
the evening from our lives— all night hollows;
we grab the barbecue and wash the blood out—
my father worked in a meat plant
my mother canned the meat— I followed them
into the factory that makes dead dreams
and these ghosts circling home they say
looking for a kind of country

From the Imagined Country
in memory of Steve Orlen

you can tell how high the moon hangs by the way light sags on the river
I know what you are thinking—this knowledge is trivial if there is no river
and our interest in the sound ice caps make digging their way into the moon face
our fascination with the chime interstellar clouds create when they crash
can only mean one thing
soon there will be no river
perhaps popular interest should shift to the fresh mound in my backyard
that's a dog's grave I shoveled to see how long it takes
him to turn into a tree
or how the mold on the grip of this aluminum bat perfectly fits the hand
I cracked his legs with so he can never jump out to haunt us
remember when we scoured the sand bank for the flattest stone to skip
on the river's skin—the age when we didn't know or understand
we had eyebrows
watching the blood ribbon wrap round the gunmetal beak expand as the raven
guttled the luck out of a mouse in the grass
in the morning fog, barely able to recognize your hands, how long did you spend
in that imagined country, fighting with words to mean something
while we are on the subject, I'd like to mention that on the bank of the river
cloaked in moonlight, I waited for you until winter
and never saw a single fish
and now that you are gone it seems that things have finally fallen
out of their symbolic hierarchy and molded back into demythed
selves
a tree is leaf and bark, the dog, dog— wind blows, rivers flow, no more, no less

and I hate to say that in this country is a different version of that old woman
you might have imagined picking seeded grapes out her lunch box
on a rotting bench

this land you envisioned with a crowd of young peasant girls
heads wrapped round with hand-knit shawls
flanking the dirt road you might have returned on
plain, beautiful women screaming your family's name

I'm sorry to report all those ladies no longer have teeth

this town doesn't remember the names of its ghosts

and in the remotest of cafes I ate a potato pancake stuffed with ham
and cheese

and to my complete surprise and imagined mother's horror
I found it to be delicious

Steve, here in this first age where each war never ends
what am I able to say

do newspapers unfold, are the clouds confused, which parts of my life
aren't published online

on the bank of the river the old woman is skinning grapes
with the back of her front teeth

she is watching the little lights cascade the scaffolding like butterflies in Spring

under the green bridge the moon fully suspends on the river
in perfect weightlessness

what you love most dies when you least expect it

and even though it may be true, truth is something I less and less believe in

on the bank of the river, what have I learned from this imagined country

there is more to life than faith

Lunch Report

they served fried potatoes for the first time
today and I thought about how angry you'd be
at the unadulterated absence of sour cream
then a magpie smacked into a window
and a man lifted his head out his soup—
the space around the table felt vacant
because the chairs were missing persons—
a girl in my class glanced at me then went
in the direction of the bathroom door—
I arrived before the queue that had now formed
and felt a small but important victory
to my day, which otherwise is uncompetitive—
when I finished my kimchi soup I walked
and thought of everything that cannot exist
unless we believe