

At the Edge of the World

*I have nothing in common with those
Who are afraid of burns.*

—Apollinaire

This is the last barricade, firebreak, red line.
Across it,
We will no longer shake hands
As friends, politicians, or drinking buddies.

The final day, the last sentence, the last chance.
At the border the word *we* will go up in flames.
The word *you* won't make it through the fire.
Only *they* will remain.

Tonight let's sit awhile on our suitcases filled with reason,
Our backpacks bulging with feelings of honor,
And count a lifetime's worth of pocket change
For the road ahead, or back.

Let us sit until the morning.

Carl Maria von Weber's *Invitation to the Dance*

I needed to come here.

I needed this infernal university
where wisdom is taught by
convoy dogs.

Thanks!
Here I understood *Invitation to the Dance*
in ways
a dozen Webers, composing this opus,
could never have imagined.

To stand listening under the loudspeaker
in freezing weather, with wet feet—
that, in plain language, would be called stupidity.

Strange
and yet logical
that the heart,
hidden under a stained smock,
is clawed the most cruelly

by all kinds of baroque and rococo.

I feel a hand,
extended in a stylized, gallant gesture,
not so much requesting a dance
as pressing into my palm
half the midday ration of bread.

I Hear

Silence.

 Silence.

 Silence.

Gagged.

Disenfranchised.

And I hear how the black pines
Shout against a yellow sky.

Roots revolt. Pines want to rise,
To fly on black wings.
And I hear how the sun, whispering sadly,
Burrows into blue ashes.

I hear how my left hand
And right hand talk.
The right doesn't know what the left is doing,
The left rails against sloth.

And I hear what the light bulb says,
And I hear the lies that paper tells,
The beautiful, flowery words

It breathes into my face like a drunkard.

Silence.

 Silence.

 Silence,

Blowing like an invisible flag.

And I hear at this hour how passionately

The earth's core lives.

“the sky cuckoos”

the sky cuckoos, the sun outsings the nightingale,
pollen chatters, and wind soundlessly glides—
I have stood on the earth only as long as a pine,
but the road, like a snake, coils around me and pulls
me out of the ground: you, an outsider, will be worthless
as lumber, you might as well come dance with me—
over thrice-nine lands, through farmyards and towns,
through thick and thin, with pinecones, pitch, and resin,
with woodpeckers and squirrels; let witchgrass
sprout from your pallet, let war be hatched by ants,
you and I will dance to the rim of the sun,
wish it good-day, and rise to the stars: our woodpeckers
will hammer gold, and blue goblets will ring,
and you won't have to stand on an open plain
another crippled lifetime

Lanterna Magica

Look:

those are Normans,
their beards a merciless yellow;
warships abandoned on the strand,
they crowd aboard a jet, frightened
as children

the fellow over there
is Francis of Assisi,
feeding his doves and sparrows
fortified birdseed

the people wailing are
geneticists and sociologists
making obeisance to a blazing tree
struck by lightning

at the top,

Prometheus unbound
invents each day a different liver,
a different eagle

at the bottom
Sisyphus:
sentenced by a harsh regime
to forced labor

all of them, synchronous

Cogito, Ergo Sum

They can take my last coat,
Throw me out into the wind like a dog,
Threaten me a hundred times with a coffin
And lying, laugh in my face;
They can bring me gifts and laurels,
Torment me with riches,
Sacrifice the last crust of bread for me,
Lie prostrate on the ground.
Something survives and lifts its green head
Above everything taken and given:
That is thought. As long as I give it rein,
I am armed.

To a Dandelion Blooming in November

If you know you must bloom
Don't ask if the time has come
Don't ask if the time has gone
If you know you must bloom

Heed the voice coursing in you
When sap disturbs your roots
When your greenness torments you
Heed the voice coursing in you

Lift up your yellow crown
Muddle plans and calendars
Muddle rules, muddle minds
Lift up your yellow crown

With you, we feel we are home
You bloomed unasked
You bloom unasking

With you, we feel we are home

Unexpected

“The lost knife has been found.”
—From a handbook for learning Swahili

My friend is back in place:
My knife.
Those who seemed not to know me
Will know me again.

This morning the sun appeared
Splendid as before,
And I slice the world like an apple—
In half.

Today is again a day
Never encountered before,
And today as never before
An old scar begins to ache.

You will ring and sing, my friend,

KNUTS SKUJENIEKS
Selected Poems from *Seed in Snow*
Translated by Bitite Vinklers

Wherever you are sent:
For to tell the truth,
My knife is in my head.
My knife is in my mouth.
My knife is in my breast.