

# DEAR ANYBODY

by

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ABSTRACT

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*Dear Anybody* is a dissertation addressed to an anybody, a somebody, and maybe with luck, a nobody. Where its content ends my context begins, but neither truly begin or end, simply intertwine. Anybody can read my dissertation manuscript and understand the poems, but somebody with more knowledge of Eastern Europe's historical, linguistic, artistic, and poetic contexts will, with hope, find even more joy in all its darkness. It is an Eastern European tradition to find joy in darkness. It is one that arose out of necessity and in turn flourished as a kind of mindset. This mindset comes through in the psyche of the inhabitants of the Late Cold War period, particularly those living in the United States, the Soviet Union, and its Satellite Nations. This national proclivity towards dark humour, semi-Patriotic egoism, and messianic cynicism is only matched by the gregariousness and joy of welcoming strangers, laughter, and soulfulness. Before I delve into the historical context I will also mention that this essay will also attempt to offer the reader cultural, artistic, poetic, and linguistic contexts while performing its main task of giving historical context. Like the book and these contexts, these are all inseparable.

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“Slavophile” *RHINO* (April 2015): 14

## Understanding *Dear Anybody*:

### Bi-Cultural Voice and Inherited History in U.S. Polish Poetry

The purpose of poetry is to remind us  
how difficult it is to remain just one person,  
for our house is open, there are no keys in the doors,  
and invisible guests come in and out at will.

What I'm saying here is not, I agree, poetry,  
as poems should be written rarely and reluctantly,  
under unbearable duress and only with the hope  
that good spirits, not evil ones, choose us for their instrument.

-Czesław Miłosz, from "Ars Poetica?"

When the poet and their personae straddle bicultural spaces and bi-national backgrounds as Miłosz claims above, it is indeed difficult to remain one person in poetry. Bicultural poets who explore the intersections of belonging and "otherness" do so out of a necessity to explicate issues that complicate, celebrate, and even diminish their own identity. The creation of poetry addressing these dual identities manifests itself in a variety of ways: migration narratives, diaspora narratives, the construction of bilingual voices, and the exploration of inherited histories. As a historically-minded Polish American writer my poems in *Dear Anybody* continue expanding these traditions of exploring fragmented identity.

This manuscript of poems begins with a poetic series focused on the bi-national identity of the U.S. and Polish revolutionary hero Tadeusz Kościuszko. Kościuszko is the first notable Polish-American, and because of that he is a figure that the speaker of these poems embraces for guidance, inspiration, and determined hope. In reality, Kościuszko's history is a tragic one. After being denied the right to marry his fiancé due to his status in the lower nobility, he focused his life on a career as a military engineer and leader. He so believed in the Enlightenment values of life, liberty, and equality that he heroically decided to join the rebelling colonies in North America to help fight for these basic human freedoms. He was in great demand as an engineer as

Generals Washington, Putnam, and Gates all fought over the privilege of having Kościuszko serve under their command (Pula 41). Kościuszko went on to help the war effort, design and found West Point, and give away all of his war pay (the ownership of what is now the majority of Ohio) to Thomas Jefferson (Davies). He gave the money to Jefferson so that Jefferson might free, educate, and employ his slaves (Nash and Hodges 2). Sadly, Jefferson never honored his promise to his liberty-minded friend. Kościuszko, however remained unaware of Jefferson's failure since his life only continued with tragedy. The Polish revolutionary war he led against the partitioning power of Russia ultimately failed, and Poland did not regain its autonomy for 123 years. In 1817, he died early due to injuries sustained in this struggle for the liberty of the Polish people.

This tragic figure situates my collection because he belongs to the same dual cultures as the speaker in *Dear Anybody*. He is caught between his duties to his original homeland and his adopted one. His migration narrative is one that traverses a bicultural space. For these reasons the conflicts of his dual identity frame the narrative of this manuscript as both he and the speaker attempt to preserve inherited and contemporary histories in one cultural space as well as to adapt to and create new histories within another cultural space.

In addition to embracing the recollection and examination of inherited history, this dissertation continues more broadly in the tradition of Polish poetry written after the Second World War, which is full of wit and whimsy as much as it is gloomy and poignant, fantastical yet historical. The second major influence on this work is the figure and poetry of Czesław Miłosz. Like Kościuszko, Miłosz was unafraid to record the many faces of oppression. His poem "You Who Wronged," for example, is a defiant jab at corrupt and cruel officials such as Nazis and

Communist authorities who laid waste to Poland in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The poem begins with an accusation and then explores the inherent paradoxes of evil.

You who wronged a simple man

Bursting into laughter at the crime,

And kept a pack of fools around you

To mix good and evil, to blur the line, (*The Collected Poems: 1931-1980* 106)

Miłosz's language, like many post-war Polish poets, is not frilly or embellished; it is simple and direct. Miłosz's heavy use of abstractions stripped of imagery continues on into the following stanza,

Though everyone bowed down before you,

Saying virtue and wisdom lit your way,

Striking gold medals in your honor,

Glad to have survived another day, (*The Collected Poems: 1931-1980* 106)

This stanza reveals the cruel necessity for flattery and double-speak as a means of survival. Furthermore these lines utilize another kind of doublespeak in a gesture of infra-politics. By saying that the accused here was virtuous and wise creates their antonyms of immorality and foolishness in the reader's mind.

Miłosz continues this poem in a manner in which he often writes, shifting towards *ars poetica*,

Do not feel safe. The poet remembers.

You can kill one, but another is born.

The words are written down, the deed, the date (*The Collected Poems: 1931-1980* 106).

It is clear that the speaker of this poem will not give into flattery for the sake of survival, but instead memorialize the crimes of the accused in poetry. In addition to this he notes the irrepressible, immortal memory of poetry and poets. This is especially important for Polish poetry since it is often tasked by Polish poets with documenting the many tragedies and injustices of its nation's history. The belief that these memories must endure is the core impetus of Polish poetry. I keep this unforgettable stanza in mind whenever I see injustice. Those committing crimes against humanity may be able to erase official records and manipulate how atrocities and injustices are portrayed, but they can't erase poetry. If they do, then more poetry will be written and poets will continue being the "unacknowledged legislators" of the world (Shelley). In Miłosz's poem the dark tone continues as he replaces abstract words with heavy imagery in the final stanza,

And you'd have done better with a winter dawn,

A rope, and a branch bowed beneath your weight (*The Collected Poems: 1931-1980* 106).

The poem is glowing with anger at this point as it gives readers this quick, sharp list of images. It reminds the reader that human life is at stake as many of the accused who took and ruined a multitude of lives in turn would justly end his own life. Carolyn Forché writes that Miłosz's "poetry is both a magical way of bringing the dead to life and a talisman against that life" (40). These acts of remembrance, as in "You Who Wronged," give an absent other a voice and document their history.

The goals of Miłosz's poetry connect to my own as it too is a bicultural US poetry that is a historically and culturally-informed documentation of personal and private histories. Like Miłosz, who spent most of his life writing in diaspora, I have had to work to reconcile the

disparate demands of my background. The inherited history has been passed to me from poets like Miłosz, Wisława Szymborska, Tadeusz Różewicz, and Adam Mickiewicz, who all created a memorable poetry of witness. In the introduction to her anthology *Against Forgetting* Carolyn Forché writes that “in fact, the poem might be our only evidence that an event has occurred: it exists for us as the sole trace of an occurrence” (31). Because these poems exist as the only markers for history in some cases they go beyond the typical dual camps of personal and political poetry and they become something else—a poetry of witness that is simultaneously political, personal, cultural, and historical.

In fact, I have learned much of my history from poetry. I have been awakened about the imperfections of history from poetry. Often poetry alone tells the truth. Emily Dickinson wrote, “Tell all the Truth but tell it slant –” (Dickinson 506). The slant truth, as I explore it in this introduction, is a complex and sometimes dangerous truth told by poets, poetics, and national poetic traditions. Through these poetic truths the lyrical “I” or speaker of a poem can, by utilizing negative capability (Keats 492), be all at once an individual citizen of a nation state, an entire nation state, or a citizen of several all at once. Our shared “survivance” of injustices allows for this to happen. Through poetry, my dissertation explores what led up to the Cold War as well its immediate aftermath. Poems utilize a lens of my personal Polish-American experience in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, but are not limited to that view.

\* \* \*

I have been writing poems about growing up Polish in the United States for most of my poetic career. My poems try to make sense of the bicultural position I occupy. My mother immigrated to the U.S. in 1972, and my father defected in 1981. At home we spoke Polish, listened to Polish radio stations, played Polish records, read Polish books, and observed Polish

traditions. Our one view into the dominant culture around us was the shockingly violent and also strangely utopic programs on television. Aside from this lens into U.S. life, we were isolated in our “otherness.” Even when my family went to work we did so in a Polish way since we ran a Polish restaurant. We embodied all things Polish, yet we lived in a decidedly U.S. American place. I spent much of my early life trying to fit in to U.S. culture. My first encounters outside the home showed me that life on TV was not the one I was observing. The United States I grew up in was less welcoming of those with a limited or less-than perfect command of English. Given that I only had a few words of English when I entered school I learned English as I learned how to exist in school. I was punished for miscommunications and misunderstandings. As a child I was often treated like a stranger. I came to feel like one too. As an adult I take pride in this existence as “other,” because the challenges of it were great. This endurance and persistence of pride, coupled with the loneliness of childhood, informed several of the poems in this manuscript.

Also included in this work are migration narratives of leaving, exclusion, and genocide similar to those in Ilya Kaminsky’s *Dancing in Odessa*, a collection that has served as an important inspiration for *Dear Anybody*. The prologue poem of Kaminsky’s book “Author’s Prayer,” begins with the lines,

If I speak for the dead, I must leave  
this animal of my body,

I must write the same poem over and over,  
for an empty page is the white flag of their surrender (1).

This collection of poems begins with a certain hesitancy about the exploration of a tragic inherited history by the bicultural Ukrainian poet living and writing in diaspora. However, his reluctance to speak is outweighed by the necessity of writing those histories to preserve them. The first line cleverly breaks after the words “I must leave.” The “if” alludes to not only the speaker’s going beyond the confines of his own body to find ethereal truth, but points toward the poet’s real life exodus from Ukraine. It would have been politically impossible for Kaminsky to write this book still in Ukraine because of the injustices it exposes, yet Kaminsky feels compelled to write it in order to attest to his position as a refugee no longer welcome in his home country.

The paradoxical gesture of leaving behind and looking back simultaneously is often found in works by Slavic writers living and writing in diaspora. Tadeusz Różewicz’s “The Survivor” reimagines pairs of obvious antonyms such as “virtue and crime” and “courage and cowardice” (36). He demonstrates that the line between these dichotomies becomes blurry when faced with annihilation and injustice. He looks behind to his time in a concentration camp and he expresses incredulity at the idea that he survived. He bookends the poem with the stanza,

I am twenty-four

led to slaughter

I survived (36)

Różewicz’s poetry has often been called an anti-poetry because of the bare, unaesthetic treatment of a tragic history. There is no better example of anti-poetry than this poem. There are poems in *Dear Anybody* where the lines between good and evil are blurred. For example, the poem “Who Speaks for These Bones?” is one that comes to terms with the mass death of the Holocaust that Różewicz examines above. My poem asserts “I giggle genocide” in order to make sense of the

ridiculous tragedy it is tasked with confronting (Burzynski 75). The phrase finds a balance that is a confusion between good and bad through one's conflation of the other.

Like Różewicz, Wisława Szymborska also engages in a poetics that is both a memorialization and exploration of historical tragedy. Her poem "Vietnam" is a short, simple dialogue between a male soldier and a woman. The soldier asks her a series of questions regarding the war, and each time the woman responds with the anaphora of "I don't know." This continues until the final question and response, "Are those your children?" "Yes" (90). This allows the reader to weigh the importance of a known history of a major war and the more important, yet forgotten personal history of this woman and her children. Szymborska delves into the history and tragedy of a culture that is not her own to document these events. She performs a similar transcultural remembering in her poem "Photograph from September 11." The poem humanizes the man caught (still living) falling to his death in the infamous photograph by Richard Drew. She notes that she can only describe his flight and not add a last line. Both descriptive specificity and absence of an ending are crucial gestures for poets such as those discussed above. These tactics demonstrate the act of remembering tragedy and through that memory preserves life. Similar to Szymborska's work, poems in *Dear Anybody* such as "Artifacts" and "How to be Drawn" resist finality in similar ways, though perhaps not as overtly.

There are several poets outside of Slavic traditions that influence my work as well. They are poets who also tend to document historical and contemporary injustice in a way that bridges two or more cultures. Craig Santos Perez's *from Unincorporated Territory* series addresses the experiences of writing in diaspora and also touches upon colonization or the sort of half-citizenship granted to those living in not fully-incorporated territories and provinces belonging to the United States. Perez struggles with the boundaries between his Chamorro and U.S. identities.

This is evident partly through the fragments of imagery and macaronic language. *Dear Anybody* makes similar attempts to unapologetically present un-translated language interjected among the dominant language. However, its narrative is not as recursive and episodic as that of Perez in his multi-book series. My poems are instead isolated incidents in which memory, identity, language, and personality all collide.

Juan Felipe Herrera is another poet outside Slavic traditions who has influenced this manuscript. He constructs bilingual voice in his poetry that seamlessly weaves Chicano-Castilian and English together. Stylistically, Herrera's fearless attempts at a variety of forms shows how such poetic dexterity can become a tool in effectively addressing a bilingual, bicultural, and bi-national identity. Furthermore, Herrera's seamless balance between levity and poignancy has had a great deal of influence on my work. Herrera's book-length poem *187 Reasons Mexicanos Can't Cross the Border* achieves this balance by juxtaposing humor with tragic reality, often code switching and changing languages as he delivers his list.

\* \* \*

Macaronic poetry such as Herrera's and Perez's creates tension and imbalance; it looks to multiple parts of a single self and acknowledges the imagined condition of not belonging enough to either culture. Likewise in my own struggle of belonging I create poems that directly address mis-navigating culture. "Kindergarten Graduation" is written about some of the earliest cultural tensions in my life. Painful memories led me to compose this poem. The poem touches upon guilt at theft of Lego blocks, bathroom etiquette, social norms, and most importantly, the impossible trouble of being a child speaking a language that no one around understood. The poem builds a defiant voice that embraces a contrarian response to these cultural misunderstandings. Initially the speaker of the poem is instructed to be defiant by an outside

speaker (Burzynski 63). Her instructions are given in Polish and English. They implore the subject to engage in a gesture of appreciation that is acceptable in Poland, but awkward in the United States—kissing your teacher’s hand in gratitude for lessons taught.

“Kindergarten Graduation” finds its foil in “Today in Bethlehem.” My troubles in school extended beyond the weekdays at my American school and into Saturdays at Polish school. As Christmastime approached during my final year at Polish school, I was cast as King Herod in the Christmas play. Everyone was asked to participate in all scenes and songs. However, the final number was one that joyously celebrated Christ’s birth. I protested on logical grounds. I learned a great deal about the Bible in my English-only Catholic school, and I sought to apply my knowledge of the New Testament. As King Herod, my goal was to eliminate the potential threat to my power and cultural standing. Why would I sing in exaltation to the play’s main character? I made my case and was asked to resign from the play and from attending Polish school all together. My lessons in grammar were incomplete as my formal interaction with language was severed. My reading knowledge was limited until I picked the study of the language back up again in college.

The righteous indignation that I remembered feeling in those moments as a child came back when I wrote “Kindergarten Graduation” and “Today in Bethlehem” (Burzynski 46). These poems were greatly influenced by Czesław Miłosz’s “You Who Wronged.” Miłosz’s poem allows the reader to apply his words to figures of injustice from the past, present, and future. As a reader and a writer I have applied these words to large-scale injustices (as in “Who Speaks for the Bones?”) as well as tiny ones, such as the one I wrote about in “Today in Bethlehem.” Miłosz’s poem also offers a solution for poets who have been wronged—the ability to preserve documentation of injustice that would otherwise be redacted or silenced by the perpetrator. The

speaker in “Kindergarten Graduation” laments his inability to be understood in a confusing, unjust world during a precarious time in a child’s life and development. Like Perez’s, the poems about my early education also speak to a state of non-belonging. I was too ethnic to fit in at my English-speaking school and too outspoken at my Polish-speaking school to be allowed to stay. However small these indignities were in comparison to those suffered by Miłosz and others, I needed to get them on the page because poetry remembers.

After rebuilding my tools to employ written Polish I began using it in my poems. Bicultural poems started becoming bilingual poems, which are further complicated by influences of the New York School. New York School poets, such as Frank O’Hara, offered vulnerability in their direct address to the reader. This type of vulnerability is necessary for my poems to engage with the topics they are addressing. The New York School’s influence on my work is seen in a shift towards a more conversational delivery. “Macrosmatic” is one such poem where there are bits and pieces of Polish culture and then one sentence, an interjection of imagined dialogue, that is written in Polish (Burzynski 23). The poem is a messy gallery of Polish-American paraphernalia, dreams, and nightmares. The poem laments an American dilemma: having too many things and too little space. The dream in the poem explores how difficult it is to find an affordable living space in New York City and it shifts to create a catalogue of items tied to the memories of growing up. Like Frank O’Hara’s “A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island,” “Macrosmatic” exhibits a conversational style of poetry that flits about from one image to the next in a surreal sort of place. In O’Hara’s poem the speaker of the poem addresses the reader directly and recounts his earlier conversation with the sun (O’Hara 306-7). O’Hara refers to Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky’s poem “An Extraordinary Adventure Which Happened to Me, Vladimir Mayakovsky, One Summer in the Country” in which the speaker has

a conversation with the sun. My poem's intent is to continue in this tradition of conversational, casual poetry taken up by the Russian Futurist and carried on by O'Hara. O'Hara even wrote a mock essay titled "Personism" where he jokingly asserts that poetry should no longer be written and read on the page and instead should be delivered through everyday telephone conversations (498-9) Ultimately he did not replace his poems with the telephone, but he did embrace conversation as the major force behind the voice in his poetry. O'Hara uses his conversational tone to describe his experienced reality in New York City in many of his poems. Similarly, I use conversational voice in "Macrosmatic" to convey the fragments of memory and Polish history while addressing the shrinking and gentrification I experienced during my time in New York City.

There are also moments where the speaker of my poem voices a shared history of loss. "The air is being/ conditioned. I sometimes smell Birkenau. It haunts me. This shared history. This space. Entirely open space. Is it?" (Burzynski 23). The speaker didn't experience the losses and pains of Polish history firsthand, but inherited them. The poem's title implies that the speaker has a good sense of smell, yet there is only one smell in the poem as the imagery and narrative overloads the other four senses. Singling out the sense of smell asks the reader to pay greater attention to the single smell that is there—the inherited memory of genocide. This poem finds inspiration in O'Hara's "Why I Am Not a Painter." O'Hara's poem blurs the senses of experiencing "sardines" rather than "oranges" in a painting as intended. He does so with explicitly quoted dialogue between him and painter Mike Goldberg (261-2). This move to hide the true intent or the true sense experienced in the poem is similar to my gesture of masking the smell of historical genocide.

I also express the inheritance of a shared memory of loss in “Finis Poloniae.” This poem is another fragmented narrative. “There are seven different/ accounts of Eastern European history” (Burzynski 79) makes a general statement about the troubled history of Poland. Poland’s fate, existence, and temporary lack of existence are often forgotten in narratives of Western history that focus on the fates of dominant European countries such as Austria, Germany, and Russia. There is also a commentary on suicidal patriotism in my poem.

The idea of suicidal patriotism dates back to Polish Romanticism. Poems by the great 19<sup>th</sup> Century Polish bard Adam Mickiewicz such as “To a Polish Mother” embrace matryrology. Mickiewicz asks Polish mothers to send their sons to the death in order to restore the Polish state. This gesture embracing suicidal patriotism is perhaps why Western Europeans mocked the Poles willingness to create futile rebellions for autonomy or eagerness to die for unworthy or unwinnable causes. My manuscript comments on suicidal patriotism through the exploration of the contrasting dichotomy between Mickiewicz and the bi-national Kościuszko in the manuscript’s “Serf Sunrise/Sans Serif.” The differences between the two figures (a poet who called Poles to fight but did not actually join himself and a humble hero who actually did) are important to understand the conflicts that the speaker of my manuscripts faces (Burzynski 38-9). Is it indeed enough to write about history and injustice or call others to do something to stop it, or should the speaker leave poems for the page and actually do something physical or political?

As seen in my poems and those that influenced them, there was indeed a great deal of violence throughout Polish history. For example, in the poem “Finis Polaniae,” the continued lamentation of all the violence and subjugation in Poland’s history is expressed by tying battles from the past to the mass graves of WWII and the Holocaust. It ends by asking the reader, “How many borders will make us concise?” (Burzynski 79) This line looks for an impossible solution

to impossible problems. The poem can't change history or stereotypes, it can't rewrite those histories and undo negative stereotypes that pervaded our culture, but it can resist them by telling the stories of subjugation, oppression, and genocide over and over again.

My dissertation makes a point of retelling of the historical losses of Poland. "A Short Lesson in Eastern European History" celebrates and resists the image of the Pole as a drunken fool. Despite the Polish people's disastrous history, my poem asks the reader to celebrate life. "A Short Lesson in Eastern European History" and other poems in the manuscript lament loss and embrace hedonism all at once. This grotesque mix can be seen here in the poem,

"I guess, elegance  
is a broken chess board. A life spent wasted is not wasted

on me. I once knew how to pronounce death in Polish  
but soon after all words in Polish came to mean death" ( Burzynski 31).

This paradox is a strange place to exist, but it is possible through negative capability. Keats described negative capability as "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (Keats 492). "A Short Lesson in Eastern European History" and other poems in this manuscript exist in uncertainty by addressing and experiencing diametrically opposed emotions such as despair and joy simultaneously, blurring the line between opposites just as Różewicz did in "The Survivor." Again, tragedy makes our definitions of opposites less certain and less different.

The poems explained above are representative examples in this manuscript. All the poems in *Dear Anybody* are written as assertions of an existence which preserves memories, desires, and the inherited history. They are acts of defiance—poems written because poems need

to be written in spite of all the tragedy and cruelty in the world. In his conclusion to “Cultural Criticism and Society” Theodor Adorno wrote,

The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own. Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today. Absolute reification, now preparing to absorb the mind entirely. Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self-satisfied contemplation. (Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society” 34)

In the development of these poems and this poetry manuscript, I have come to understand that it would be barbaric not to write poetry after the Holocaust, because of Miłosz’s assertions that poetry and poets will continue to endure no matter what crimes they document and no matter if documenting them seems vulgar or uncouth. In the immediate aftermath of the war, Miłosz asked, “should the poet engage in such a pastime?” (Miłosz *The History of Polish Literature* 458). He went on to note that writing in 1945 required superhuman strength, though he himself proved that poetry should be written since he continued to write.

This necessity to write out my inherited history despite Adorno’s words drives much of this manuscript. It defies Adorno almost as quickly as Adorno defied his own words. He later recanted this famous line. Carolyn Forché adds that, “Adorno wrote this just after World War II, and in the context of the essay in which it appears his indictment extends to all forms of art” (41). It was an extreme reaction to extreme events fresh in Adorno’s mind. It becomes clear in Adorno’s later work *Minima Moralia*, that poetry was necessary after the Holocaust because, “he

did not wish to banish art from an ideal republic. He wanted art to become conscious of the sins it had to suffer and withstand” (Forché 41). The work of the above poets and the poetry found in this manuscript are written because they are conscious of the sins of history. They all must exorcise and remember them at the same time.

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## Macrosmatic

I wonder about my sense of smell but then  
dream of my father instead—

a home for free on NYC. 168th St. His picture is hidden behind the painting of the pope. A semi-nude polaroid camera with an overwrought rendition of a boxy bra tucked into it as it hangs on the corner of the painting's gold-paint frame by its straps. He asks us why not live a little Who else is here with me? Big wood planer in the middle. Sawdust everywhere. I smell the death of a thousand birch trees. Their forests linger wherever I go. Pool and Jacuzzi side by side out back? Way, way uptown, the yupsters call it. Dad, why didn't you tell me before? University-owned. 168th street. Gentrified. North of Spanish Harlem. South of Inwood. It is not yet under water. Bookshelf in the middle with Socialist-Realist paraphernalia/Solidarność now moot. Hourglass-shaped holes in the floor, and metal flower pattern ones like Franklin and Rachel have in their apartment walls in MKE. The air is being conditioned. I sometimes smell Birkenau. It haunts me. This shared history. This space Entirely open space. Is it? It ended with uncontrollable giggles. Began with clear plastic sandals to cover my normal shoes during the rain. What are we going here? I wanted to show her downtown and where the protestors were. Who is she? Dad said to follow him instead. Deep closet so many people have no space and here this is. Muddied grass outside. some reason there is still fresh food in the cupboard. Google (Earth) everything.

„Ojciec nie żyje”. Zawieszam słuchawkę.

I had a dream. I uprooted lampposts to uncover their rust. The dream began in my sleep. Rather than turning my ihome on I unopened the window and listened to the rain. The cat was cradled in her bed on her chair and I put extra blankets over both of us. This case is accusative, sometimes locative.

There was fake chrome lining the awning on the abandoned movie theater (extreme riot comes to mind) nevermind, I mean, like how it wraps around a diner table.

I.

## Tadeusz Kościuszko

The trees sprawling with popcorned  
blossoms bursting, his blood spread  
in thin pulses of fermented jelly. He rode a  
horse into battle wearing peasant clothes. The  
Cossacks did not recognize him as a general.  
The horse that has its left leg lifted means  
the rider was injured in battle;  
the right, missing; all four down somewhere  
in bed; both front reared, dead.

Washington and the other generals fought to have him in their armies. They gave him slaves as gifts. He freed those men.

He freed those men. They gave him slaves as gifts. The generals fought to have them in their armies.

Try to remember what is green was once copper.

He left his fortune to Jefferson so that Jefferson  
would also free his slaves.

Jefferson

took the money  
and kept his folks close.

What is a cavalry without cavaliers?

In Polish, kawaler means bachelor

both  
Kościuszko and Pułaski were

Patriots  
jilted before the altar

their nation was not  
a nation, but  
a people who  
tied themselves  
together  
how the feathers  
of a birch tree  
wilt and are bound as brooms and scarecrows

so many books  
tell us that both of them were heroes  
and not that Pułaski had lost every hand  
dealt him in the places that used to be Poland.  
He had no choice but to gamble on American colonies.  
He held his cards close  
a dealer already dealt out and with.  
Now, his luck squealing to the moon.

Look over there! In Milwaukee there is a Polish Moon that is bigger than Big

Ben

It is the world's second

largest four-facing illuminated clock

(after the one in Mecca)

and it watches our men

and women go home

to bars after fights

in factories their

muscles gleaming,

their brows painted

straight, ready to work

again, to make the world

again without true failure,

but frailty, but in fight.

Kościuszko lived

on a cliff's  
face facing East  
at West Point.

After founding West Point  
After laying the foundation  
he found himself  
secluded behind the trees.

He was chained as freedom's prisoner  
in Katherine's cell.

In New York, he forged a new camp  
stuck inside his own bars.

Dear Kościuszko,  
If I could  
escape my gambling debts  
    and my drinking debts  
and never return to a Poland  
that wasn't even there.  
I'd see you crowned and speckled.  
I'd see a border I'd not bothered  
to see bare.

    You can search,  
perhaps even make a map.  
    On the other side of X  
you find there is no X, just  
a bit of drink marked with a small x.

## A Short Lesson in Eastern European History

The epitaph reads: Dear anybody, it's not that I'm afraid of death,  
I only fear tangles, the intangible untangled,  
a nation rectangled, concentrate my dear triangle. An anthem bedraggled.  
What a peacock. I am indeed an empty trombone, unnatural laughter.

Dancing bears, an unknown genus, re-corked vodka, the intangible untangled.  
A young genius. I was a proud horn's plunger wanting for a home.  
A whole symphony of Slavonic swoon, an empty trombone of laughter.  
My dear anybody, I can't define how, but I feel elegant

like a tombstone. What a word to howl! Peacock plume! A plunger longing for a home  
to stop and sop and sob. How I'd sob. A lost map, a torn leaf. In Polish  
Daisy means a hundred short. *Stokrotko*, how I love you. I guess, elegance  
is a broken chess board. A life spent wasted is not wasted

on me. I once knew how to pronounce death in Polish  
but soon after all words in Polish came to mean death. Bedraggled  
dragon guard the castle! Imposter! Darling jester, come be wasted in our waste.  
Bring your horn, red banner, damned November. I'm afraid it's death, maybe, laughter.

## **Building Blocks**

I learned to blink a sign language, forgot  
everything. Babies on valium and hard-won

sleep. К сожалению, мне не удалось.  
И я уже всё забыл. When I was

young, say two, I lost my sense  
of why/because/almost, dissolved

as a cube of probables  
I don't ask questions.

Softly, I pretend to sing behind  
gratework hoping that

perhaps there are rats in this world who are  
willing to unhinge, read.

## Peccable

I've split my tongue in two. It's a charred  
cheese crepe—dual-minded

as a crumpled rose trombone  
licking the ornate tiling of my mouth,

reminding me that my tongue  
could also be yours. Sometimes

I'd like to forget all this tongue sorting  
and put a cork in my eye sockets,

open them and see the world  
for what it is, what it pretends to be—

a sawdust collective spitting upwards  
into its own dry air.

## Dom Solidny

Pierwszy pokój w tym domu  
nie jest pokój, on jest niepokój.

Druga, oczywiście, to kuchnia.  
W niej nie istnieje dużo.

Kiedyś było kielbas, jaj,  
różnych owoców. Teraz to tylko

kwaśnia kapusta, czyli ciasna  
kapusta, trochę kaszy, puste ciało.

Trzeci, sypialnia gdzie noce  
bezsenne są zwykle

jak szarość nad cmentarzu.  
Oprócz tych jest ubikacja

bez wanny, bez papieru,  
mimo tego, jest lustro

pęknięte ale w nim zyja,,  
marzenia, ale nie pamiętają,,

Dzisiaj pusty, głodny,  
pacząc za czegoś, za kogoś.

## A Solid Home

The first room in this home  
is not a room, it is unrest.

The second, of course, is a kitchen.  
Not much thrives there.

There was once sausage, eggs,  
various fruits. Now there is only

sauerkraut, or should I say *tight*  
sauerkraut, a few groats, an empty body.

The third is a bedroom where nights  
without sleep are standard

like grey in a cemetery.

Apart from these there is a bathroom

without a tub or toilet paper;  
despite this, there is a mirror

cracked, but in it live  
dreams that cannot remember.

Today empty, hungry  
looking for something, someone.

## **All the Empty Bottles in the World**

Is a broken cactus  
a fractus? Does it need

rain? I won't know  
until I'm rich and famous.

I must become those things.  
I must learn how to defy history.

"I knew you would come back  
for money," he says as he punches

my kidneys. "Enjoy your fucking  
drink, enjoy your monster."

## **Edukacja czyli bunt**

Na starym uniwersytecie  
jest stan wojenny. Moja okupacja  
zaczęła w domu, teraz jest na miejscu,  
ale w takim miejscu gdzie tylko  
niebieskie pająki człowieka  
znajda. Dużo tu krwi się lało.  
Teraz co? Babol z nosa czekając  
na wygodę szytej chustki.

Moji drodzy,  
tłumaczenia i tłumaczenie  
zmieniają wszystko.

## **Education (In Other Words Rebellion)**

At the old part of the university  
there is a state of martial law. My  
occupation  
started at home, now it's here,  
but in the place where only  
blue spiders can find a person.  
A lot of blood was spilled here.  
Now what? Eager, my nose drips waiting  
for the comfort of a sewn handkerchief.

My dears,  
translations and explanations  
change everything.

**Serf Sunrise/ Sans-serif**

*Matejko, Jan. "Battle of Raclawice." Oil on canvas, 1888, National Museum, Kraków*

If I had eight fingers I'd have eaten  
Mickiewicz's bigos and cried.  
I'd have enjoyed the exoskeletons

of fireworks past; I'd take  
everything back if I couldn't.  
Instead, there was a call

to say something and I  
stood back, I away from war  
and threw some flour

into the air only so I could  
catch the grains on my own  
pale hands. If I had been more

reckless with my ego  
perhaps I could have one day  
held elected office,

but instead, I do this: bully  
for me. Please excuse my  
fatal flaws: the reciprocating

saw indulgent of my own  
thoughts, the myopic  
indigence of a spent charm,

the verbicide of other  
people's strife, countless  
other things. I could keep

apologizing or I could do  
better. Kościuszko  
led a band of farmers

armed with scythes  
wearing a ratted peasant's  
wool though he was born

for epaulets and proper steel.  
Another one of my heroes  
wrote poems and watched

as the soldiers went  
to war and passed  
spitting at his feet.

## Slavophile

Your tears don't impress me.  
I have this grave image of you singing

to the bacon brown birds that flew over  
the lids of your eyes. You were standing

tippietoeed. I like that you have mud  
beneath your nails. I like that you have mud.

I bought a new scythe on Tuesday,  
but I'm not going to share it with you.

You taught my father numbers, Russia,  
but you made him play with yarn.

I'm growing weary of excuses. You're slow.  
Don't blame it on where you fell from the clouds

filled with soap and lye. Don't blame it on the tsars,  
you've been singing lullabies to their throne.

You've been a child, bullets boiled, cubed,  
and bursting in a bag.

You've been a mother, churning the cud  
spitting the beets and grain.

You've orchestrated your shell. Don't say it's heavy,  
it's filled with hay. I've buried potatoes with you

and tried to learn your game. Pawn to E-3, pawn  
to save. I wish we could dig up all the pets we've lost.

Build them a palace. Their bones alabaster thin,  
now candles to stave off the darkness of ghosts.

You're a swine. You've eaten my bees  
and I can't have flowers without my bees.

## II.

## Urbanity

When the forceps are drawn  
and I look into the deep pink  
of my navel I begin to understand  
the purpose of gravel. We have filled

lives with rock and salt and pondered  
the light-drawn peeling of skin.  
I take mine off from time to time. Skin  
needs to breathe. It has holes, but

holes are never enough. Consider  
the elegance of locusts, the scales  
of scalp we bring out with our fingernails.  
We are so frail.

I will never admit to it in front of a mirror.  
Glass is made of grains and so are we.  
A dry archipelago of spoons awaits  
our corpses. The tines of hands

will welcome us not as lovers,  
but as thieves.

## The Pyromaniac's Heart-Balm

This is a fetid mess of gasoline and gaucherie.  
There are rickets and gadgets that creak  
when the wind piles them into bends.  
A cornucopic gallery of hoses, rakes, wrenches,  
and sleds. Mismatched, duct-taped, and saved.

Not liberated, but kept. Each rung a ladder  
onto its own ladder. The top, rainbow-like,  
unexplored. Histories ignored. Some learned  
with soil and primroses, others by hammers,  
or minacity, in pylons or books. Memory repined—

How to touch this world without gloves?

## **Rabid Rapid Rabbit**

So where do we go from here, dear  
rabbit? You are beginning to teach

me the difference between zest and zeal.  
I failed. No matter how hard one studies

the turns of a globe, the kernel pops  
of individual histories one can fail.

Often I repeat myself. I don't know  
what I am doing. I do it all the time.

## Forest of the Bodies

The low drum of white noise  
equal to silence. The soulful  
tendons of trees. The breakneck

speed of beams: illuminating,  
separating leaves. It granted me  
the first calm in months.

I grew so old here. I escaped  
energy and kept still  
at a final constant—

a buzz of small fists.

## Today in Bethlehem

I got kicked out of Polish school  
because I was King Herod  
in the Christmas play  
and I thought it would be silly  
if I sang in the last number  
*"Dzisiaj Bethlehem."* Why would  
Herrod rejoice at Christ's birth  
and survival just because he was in the cast  
of the play?

I learned a great deal about the Bible  
in my English-only Catholic school,  
I wanted to apply what I knew of the New  
Testament. Logically, I made my case  
and was asked to resign from the play  
and leave Polish school all together.

My lessons in grammar fractured  
formal engagement severed. I wouldn't  
read or write much Polish  
until college where I found its heart  
not in hymns but in verse.

## How to Cultivate Enemies

„Miałeś, chamie, złoty róg,  
miałaś, chamie, czapkę z piór:  
czapkę wichher niesie,  
róg huką po lesie,  
ostał ci się ino sznur,  
ostał ci się ino sznur.”—Stanisław Wyspiański, *Wesele*

*You churl! You had the golden horn.  
Oh churl, you had the feathered hat:  
the hat is now carried by the wind,  
the horn is mute in the forest,  
you've salvaged another string,  
you've salvaged another string.—  
Stanisław Wyspiański, *The Wedding**

Get to know them.

They speak like peacock feathers  
loosely strung to a hat.

Let's try to find  
the golden horn.  
Let's try to call  
the folk to their scythes.  
Let's try not  
to lose it  
now that I've gotten so far.

I am drunk  
at a wedding.

I am a jester  
because the alternative  
is onerous.  
You say this is onerous.  
My humanness has made it

so. So

it's not a jest anymore.  
It's infinitesimally more clever  
than mice playing cat.

I will grind and quibble,  
excuse my excuses,  
lose my self.  
Be a loser.  
Perform becoming  
human. How can  
I act human this time?

I will lose that hat.  
Better than my head.

I will lose a hat.

It doesn't matter anymore  
at whose wedding. It doesn't  
matter who is there.

I will lose the hat  
because the way  
history is written means  
that I am *not* from "Europe"  
but from the unspeakable  
cold part of Europe  
where everyone loses  
their hats.

## On the Eating of Hearts and Tongues

People say that they would have died for you.  
I can't help you. I'm just some Baltic churl  
fettered down by books, faltering between tongues.  
I've long forgotten the road to Czarnolas.

Let's favor the wild abandon over guns. I'll scribe it  
on mole's thighs. Let's make much of time, drawn  
with a huff, possibly a bite. You're almost sucked  
in. Let me tell you about blocks I stole from school

when I was young. Let me tell you that I've come  
from broken gentry—no money, just tongues.  
Mother's family sleepy painters singing to the impotent  
sun. Father's farmers gasping at the sight of pregnant

moon. Let me convince you that I'm not at all deserving  
of generalization. Let me convince you that I'm not worthy  
of gold and grapes. Let me seduce you into skin. Let me  
seduce your logic until it has drowned in the mutterings

of kidneys, hearts, and lungs. I'll let your blood.  
if you allow mine. I've hungered for it long.

## Getting Bureaucratic Static

an unofficial examination  
of the Armia Krajowa  
will tell you that I have  
a refrigerator full of books  
I didn't have time (to write)

an official examination  
of the façade will tell you  
that I have a couple of eggs,  
a bottle, a block of cheese,  
and an old bag of darlings.

## **Of Everything Coming, Crashing and Destruction's Mindful Plumbing**

The daffodils are so nice, aren't they?  
Their stems so green, yet  
so thin. I can tell you  
that all numbers are just, but none  
of them is fair. And for all the Earth's  
squawking, quaking, and crapping it'll end  
up cracking and giving way  
to someone, someone, but

whom?

Fruitless, thin, I ask again  
why us? Why host the battles of Europe?  
Why be the largest cemetery the world  
has known? We carry on harvesting  
fields sewn, littered with bone.

## **Milwaukee, New York**

*“Old Milwaukee, that’s the place to be. Old Milwaukee, happy as can be. Old Milwaukee for you and me.”*—Don Grzanna, Milwaukee Accordionist

I sit here at 235<sup>th</sup> and Henry Hudson Parkway—so far away from Rockaway and the rest of New York. No, no one means the state. I’m so far from New York, but I’m in New York, and all I can talk about is Milwaukee. I annoy my friends with Milwaukee. I penetrate ears

with Milwaukee, with cheap beers, how the Bears still suck, and how I never understood the point of a walkie-talkie until I slept with a cell-phone in my hand. Where do I go from here? On Milwaukee? On Wisconsin Avenue. Oh, I could

tell you about the museum whose greatest work is its design. I probably will tell you of beers and cheese and beer cheese and the grumble of motorcycle parts. But for now, let me tell you that my bookshelf is filled with New York and London and Kraków and Paris and Boston and damn it, I’m going to fill it

with Milwaukee. It’ll Milwaukee you before I can tell you about Milwaukee’s best. I’m Milwaukee and I’ll Milwaukee you and Milwaukee all the rest.

## Body Count

Eastern Europe moves  
slowly. It often forgets  
to be counted as Europe.  
Its clouds hang heavy over graves.

There once were rain drops  
cut with salt. I grew  
like a potato; eyes  
underground and open

rising fermented into  
a still sort of night air.  
I used to say that I would  
never touch a gun, but

then I understood  
the cruelty of waiting  
for a bus with no one  
there to pick you up.

I found better relief  
in sulking destruction,  
the unveiling of my own  
set of teeth.

## **Artifacts**

The ovens were smashed.  
The blood fertilized the soil.  
Everything left was left.

## Sunset Leaves

You could just taste the rust—  
eye-licked lovely balding Tree,

my favorite time  
of year is coming—

## Mourning

The wooden panels  
of the floor were shaking,

gleaming. Halloween  
costumes strewn about

the floor. One of us nudes  
convincing the other

that tricking ourselves  
was treating ourselves.

Newspaper clippings  
about the previous war

were attached to damp  
coasters. The present war

went on. I recalled the helmets  
they wore. You thought

of them as pretty. Boots  
were pretty. The film reels

and then the ticker tape  
parades began celebrating

and then people began  
celebrating and forgetting

all of those things so that  
the forgotten could go on.

## **King Kong Undone**

An ape clings to Empire  
with his fingers crossed  
in hopes that the empty,  
dark starlets will cross  
avenues and bring him  
the hard, plain stare of  
the home he is looking for.

# III.

## **Dear Anybody**

Once again this dawn cracked  
and I have nothing.  
I have you,

## Nature

Pry open a globe. Find where its art lies.  
Overgrown fingernails of the sun will be  
beating a child to bruises with purple-ended rays.

I myself do not read the dazily gazette  
everything is okey if not dokey as well.

Antler was more precise. Antler moved  
the semen through the waterfall singing  
softly as the pale bodies played.

I sing now with shining rocks for teeth,  
brighter than cocaine cut and fried to feed

the men that lie lingering under the bed.  
They have nowhere to go once the evening  
news is done. I will not go quietly into fighting

to the death for our free tongue. Listen, I'm  
hungry. Bite down, a molten stick of chocolate

waits for hot and bitter in its case. I musn't eat  
or I'll be bound to my hands, softly taped,  
tongue-tied, aching to be printed black.

Unlike Antler I will not be able to work  
in factories now gone. I will have to fuck

for my keep in society. Work to eat. I want to.  
I would kill a walrus to eat his hide, kill  
the next with his tusks. People eat ketchup

on everything. Tomatoes have an irksome texture,  
but prostates get cleaned. People do not eat them.

## **Inherit the Earth**

Take the would-be teeth  
and talons of a newborn  
crow. Examine its slightly misshapen  
beak. It'll be beautiful.

There'll be tendons and tissues  
and tight little pockets of spit.  
The crow will drip, will weep  
and come back into it's own life.

The crow will bite  
down on your finger  
and know that he's growing  
stronger. Human flesh

is weak. It bends, pulls,  
peels, sloughs off  
in assorted variations  
of the traditional rhombus shape.

He'll eat you alive  
one nugget at a time.  
He'll eat your finger  
and won't let you forget

that you are fragile  
and that he has power  
has hard little sticks  
for legs and hooks

for feet. He'll eat  
you alive, not letting  
any part of you let up  
or get away.

## To the Ghosts of You

I assure you it is like this  
in death's sleeping kingdom  
at least when waking alone  
at any hour. All trembling.

Straw and rat and knaves and oh  
the cheeses molded and mold  
engraved. Cheeses from a disarrayed  
cluster of islands that consist of those

who take showers and are owned  
by those who can pick and choose  
how to bathe. Demons may come  
to play—dictating each flimsy

ember of breath. Demons giving way  
to bone and sleep and blessed death.

## Kindergarten Graduation

Mom said, *Kiss her hand.*  
I didn't want to kiss my teacher;  
especially not on the bulging  
green vein of her thin hands.  
I think she had red hair. She was  
kind. She sent a memo home:  
"the boys shouldn't drop their pants  
all the way when using the urinal. Fathers  
teach zippers to your sons."  
Zippers were beyond her grasp.

I said: No, I'll just hug her  
like everyone else  
when they get their diploma. At home  
I spoke a language of stolen kisses.  
*No. Pocatuj jej rękę. Show the Americans  
that you are not American.* Unfortunately  
that was abundantly clear. Already  
I had kissed the face of that girl  
who was always sucking snot  
back up into her nose  
under the table  
(also full of boogers)

and I stole  
I stole Legos and I cried  
and cried so hard  
on the first day  
when mom left me  
and I couldn't explain the awesomeness  
of Mark Buttrock's Ninja  
Turtle sneakers  
except in a language  
no one bothered  
to listen to,  
that no one heard.

## Definitely Not

I am the son of immigrants.  
Movers,  
defectors.

All men are created equal.  
Countless others wait for the sequel.  
We hold these truths

to be self-evident. I feel bad  
for not feeling  
bad when my grade-school

bully died of heroin overdose.  
He was human. He used to shove me  
and call me a dumb Polak

because I was the smartest kid  
in the class and he barely got by  
with D's. Also husky, he made fun of me

for my choice of favorite wrestler (Kane,  
duh) and stole my candy bar to give  
it as a present to Mercedes Torres.

I wonder if Mercedes also is dead.  
I'm surprised I'm not dead. My bully's  
father sold boxes for a living.

## **A Corn Maze is Redundant**

Follow the darkest path or take the dimmest way out.  
You found true darkness. It was a lonely semi-colon,  
a pregnant locomotive, a fruit only ripe enough to be  
stolen. You wove it into creature. There are only a few  
options for people: you wait, you drink, you lie, you beg,  
you eat. You see enough hollowed out tissues of lottery  
tickets and you begin to grow uneasy. There are reasons  
we always lose as a people. For every grain in the liquid  
there are ten grains in the bottle. Don't make failure  
repeatable. I understand it's not easy to enter a tram  
hoping to repeal the shards of millions of murdered  
people. Who says ghosts are permanent? It's a sure  
way to giving up histories to unused easels. Death  
is easy if you know which habits are treatable. Dust  
is the rust of people. I can't even count all the reasons  
onions are necessary. Sometimes I feel absurd, like a tornado  
made of helicopters or a bunch of baby tornados.  
Do you know how hard it is to raise a baby tornado?  
I'm not as charming as I am lying. I invented the human  
condition. What I mean by the human condition is  
all the reasons we wait in line for bread, the reason  
we believe that people can be better people.

## Expert

You're an expert in completely arbitrary things.  
I knew you didn't go away. Sunshine. Little seitan

sticks holding up your chin; keep it up, you'll win. We'll  
win. Friend, stripe your tigers, get your key in.

I know you puked on the driveway. Brunch.  
I know it froze. Good sir, I'm not mad. Your

spatter has style. Confetti. Debris or denial?  
Tell me. Wide-eyed. All teeth, no tongue.

## **Tree in Spite of Its Leaves**

My love for trees  
I got from my father

who was always  
cutting them down.

## **To Term (Dr. Stork)**

On skis delivering  
babies downhill  
he searches for  
a way to impregnate.

Trees sway heavy  
and thin like pubic  
hair pulled straight  
with a comb.

He tells himself  
it is not a race thing,  
it takes months,  
she can wait.

## **Born Again**

The body curved and twisted  
pretzeled until its petals of salt  
come shivering down, dusting  
the dead, dry cavern of a high  
chair long chilled. The effortless  
manner in which we fold  
our thoughts into fists and flitters  
is something so extraordinary  
it becomes boring.

This is how we speak  
to emptiness, this is how  
we foreshadow the hollow joys  
of our own graves.

### **Is it Advisable?**

To forget? Is this business  
or just busyness?

Spaces are numerous and beautiful  
and in the dog's dreams they become graves.

## **My Favorite Lie**

She leaned  
over, gave  
me a kiss.  
wondrous,

something  
unexpected  
like Poland  
taking over

the world.

## **Ziggy Died**

I bought myself a bed  
in a home so that I could lay me down on it.  
You don't need a queen  
size or above unless  
they are sick  
of one another.

I remember the old German man  
who once gave me a manila envelope  
filled with pornography (the hairy kind).  
He didn't need it anymore,  
he had his memories. Cancer,  
they say, I suppose they never need to  
say it twice.

## Half-Eyed Grey of Morning

I was naked, depeanutted,  
flesh clanging against flesh.  
It had been raining since noon  
and the way in which you vomited  
earlier was so sweet. You called  
for *deus ex machina*. “Oh, God!  
Just let me get this done and let me go  
back to sleep!” While pulling  
back your hair I took notice  
of the kettled-out moraines  
and drumlins of your skull.  
“This one means that you worry  
too much.”

“What? Why? I didn’t eat  
any dairy, oh God, watch  
your feet.” You heaved and spattered,  
buzzing your esophagus green.  
You heaved, coughed out  
a little butter packet parcel  
of your lungs. “No, love,  
there’s a divot in your skull.  
It means you worry  
too much.” You pulled  
yourself up grabbing me  
where my belt should have  
been. Before we went back  
to bed I opened the windows  
and let the mist tickle our skin.

# IV.

## Who Speaks for the Bones?

I've spent so much  
time on the shovel,  
sure it's real, even  
grotesque, macabre.

Have I wasted a minute  
on being wasted? Sure,  
but I've thrown pillows  
and ruffled folios, made

fraud. Everything  
is foreign to me. Before  
the score is when I lick  
my lips. I only salivate

when I sleep. I should  
tell you something  
true, truly beautiful:  
a duck united with pond,

a flower reignited  
with its spawn. I'm not  
about April. I giggle  
genocide, I break

talons, beaks, tremble  
through November  
because I'm god-damned  
afraid of the dawn.

## Top Five Temporary Cures for Ennui

5. Masturbation

4. A pillowcase filled with nothing  
but other pillowcases.

3. Being self-paralyzed  
by a sudden yet fleeting  
suspicion that your lower  
half is actually a dragon.

2. Waking up  
outside  
of a tuba.

1. I won't tell  
you;  
it's permanent.

## *Nephology*<sup>i</sup>

by Burzynski, Peter George<sup>ii</sup>

### **7 Deadly<sup>iii</sup>-ish Epigrams<sup>iv</sup>**

*“For Goldsmith's poetics, social issues are fodder and manure for art, and that's troubling because, ironically, they're often deployed without deeper multicultural regard.”*

“Even before the narrative begins,  
a hint of disquiet creeps in  
with the epigraph.”<sup>vi</sup>

It is impossible to lust  
when one's iron has turned to rust.<sup>vii</sup>

A true glutton  
knows no button.<sup>viii</sup>

There's no such thing as greed  
when it's absolute need.<sup>ix</sup>

One can't truly defy sloth  
defending the planet “Hoth.”<sup>x</sup>

“The devil sends the beast with wrath  
because he knows the time is short.”<sup>xi</sup>

How can one not envy  
the loves friends send for free?<sup>xii</sup>

To perform false pride  
is to not decide.<sup>xiii</sup>

“We press into our little knotted wombs,  
wonder about our ends, then, our beginnings.”<sup>xiv</sup>

<sup>i</sup> “nephology, *n.*: [‘The scientific study of clouds’]” *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*. Vers. 5.2.34. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Computer software. 5 March 2016.

<sup>1</sup> “Certification of Birth [Short Form].” State of Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services. 9 Nov. 1986. Print. 12 March 1987.

<sup>1</sup> “7 Deadly Sins.” Source unverifiable.

<sup>1</sup> Kennedy, X.J.. “Gists, Piths, and Poison-Pills: The Art of the Epigram.” *An Exaltation of Forms: Contemporary Poets Celebrate the Diversity of Their Art*. Eds. Annie Finch and Katherine Varnes. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2016.

<sup>1</sup> Kilwein Guevara, Mauricio. “English 816: Seminar in Poetry Writing: Constraints & Open Forms.” University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Milwaukee. Spring 2016. Lecture. 29 Feb. 2016.

<sup>1</sup> Cohen, Leah Hager. “ ‘The Man Without a Shadow,’ by Joyce Carol Oates.” *New York Times* 12 Feb. 2016. Web. 5 March 2016.

<sup>1</sup> Burzyński, Władysław Jerzy (George). Personal interviews. Polonez Restaurant, LLC./W&A Properties, LLC. 1998-2015.

<sup>1</sup> Keys, Alicia et. al (Alicia Keys, Shawn Carter, Al Shuckburgh, J. Sewell-Uleplic, A. Hunte, Bobby B. Keyes & Sylvia Robinson). “Empire State of Mind (feat. Alicia Keys).” *The Hits Collection, Vol. One (Deluxe Edition)*. Perf. JAY Z & Alicia Keys. Def Jam/Roc Nation, 1998-2009. iTunes mp4.

<sup>1</sup> Rhianna. “Stay ft. Nikky Ekko.” Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 12 Feb. 2013. Web. 5 March 2016.

<sup>1</sup> *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back*. Dir. Irvin Kershner. Perf. Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, and Billy Dee Williams.


<sup>1</sup> Harris, Steve. “The Number Of The Beast.” *Best Of The Beast [UK]*. Perf. Iron Maiden. EMI, 1996. iTunes mp4.

<sup>1</sup> Markie, Biz. “Just a Friend (Official Video).” Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 3 Aug. 2010. Web. 5 March 2016.

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet* III.i 55-89. *The Riverside Shakespeare: The Complete Works*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997.

<sup>1</sup> Herrera, Juan Felipe. “We Are All Saying the Same Thing: *After Szymborska*” *Half Of the World In Light*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2008.

Notes on the text: The margins and scope were unintentionally narrow. The fonts “Monotype Garamond” and “Times New Roman” were used to produce this text. “Garamond is the name given to many serif typefaces, after the Latinized name of the 16th-century French artisan Claude Garamond, often written as 'Garamont' in his lifetime”

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garamond#Monotype\\_Garamond](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garamond#Monotype_Garamond)) “Times New Roman is a serif typeface commissioned by the British newspaper *The Times* in 1931 and created by Victor Lardent in collaboration with the British branch of the printing equipment company Monotype” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Times\\_New\\_Roman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Times_New_Roman)). Both fonts have been modified by the Microsoft Corporation and were accessed by virtue of Microsoft® Office for Mac 2011, Version 14.6.1. It was typed on an  MacBook Air with OS X El Capitan which has access to the World Wide Web via AT&T® U-Verse. It was originally printed on paper made from trees using ink from a Canon Inc. MP480 series printer. All of these materials were purchased or accessed at a student/educator discounted rate, paid for with human labor, and stolen by human hands. Much of this Earth’s resources and life have been plundered or destroyed to produce this art. All words and other forms of media were experienced by the human senses. This book’s intent was love.

## **Finis Poloniae**

Grow more gophers. Are they necessary?  
What is your newest necessity? Is it blue?

I know the way you've spent sorrow  
isn't enough to split lungs into doves.

Flutter, Fortinbras. Look at this! Look!  
My head is wrapped in foil. Aluminum,

tin, twine around tungsten. It's hard  
to be your friend. I can't tell you

all of my habits, because you're no priest.  
Resist confession. Omit oppression.

You'd be wise. There are seven different  
accounts of Eastern European history.

Please tell me which invader is quainter  
than the Reich? Polonius plots unwise.

Polonia plots graves. Gravel over stone,  
stone over gravel. Is it mass or private?

No plots. They took it away. We're full.  
How many borders will make us concise?

## My Unmentionables

It's not about art  
it's about marketing:  
its pesto, it's poison.  
It's a trick with  
(out) an apostrophe.

This is what I say  
my hands are doing  
while my mouth  
is dripping daisies  
and hollow points.

It used to be  
something like hunger,  
now it's nothing  
like pangs at all.  
It's: me, a corner,

a crooner, a cave,  
a new Sarcophagus,  
a crumpled up piece  
of dove. I once  
believed in art,

but that was when  
soft, when I believed  
that there were  
bits of cloud  
hiding a coroner

caught in the midst  
of humans spitting  
poetic to all gods  
found here, below,  
and above.

## **The Nowcast**

Rain,

and then

I make it

a little darker

than lovely.

## Two Guitars

*Roma song*

### I.

Northern-Indian Slavs  
know a song  
that is told somewhere  
along the banks  
of the Vistula  
as their waters spill  
into the Bug, eventually  
into the Dnieper  
into Chernobyl  
and back.

### II.

There is a special brand  
of sadness that creeps in.

It has the scent of cold  
rain cracking the sidewalk's

unparalleled parallels.  
A tiny Cossack defends

his borders as ardently  
as his oppressors rename

them. There are names  
like Kolya, Genya, Dima

and others like Marysia,  
Stasia, i Irena. Суржик

cuts our tongues  
like vodka cuts out

our tongues, like it  
cuts blackberries down

outside a train station overgrowth  
somewhere that is really not

anywhere but is a stop  
on the way to Smolensk.

### III.

There is a forest here.  
There is a forest there.

You can find buttons  
amongst the birch peels.

You can ask the trees  
in whom they believe.

You can ask them  
the best ways to winter.

The poppies run red  
and the music dies.

If you turn your ear out  
on its left side you can hear

some patient words and  
avoid the worst.

## **How To Be Drawn**

### *An Inaugural Poem*

My sister called me  
earlier today crying  
about how she cried  
when she tried to explain  
to my twenty-two month  
niece that our father  
had defected to a land  
of rape and hate and  
missed opportunity.

My sister is somewhat conservative  
economically, but socially liberal.  
She likes the money  
she studied for, but hates  
the reasons we die  
for progress.

I can't explain  
rape to my niece.  
I can only tell her  
that we are alive  
and that we'll keep  
chanting if only  
to keep our margins  
alive.

## **Hammock**

Upon waking you only thought  
of dying, how easy it could be,

whom you would most distress.  
And then I thought of the tree

outside your window. How your heft  
would strip bark from branches

and so disorganize the leaves.

## **Infrared and Ultraviolet**

*to S.P.*

I don't know how you can stand me anymore. I can't stand me. I've been panicking, truly panicking.

I watched all of the new Cosmos TV series two nights in a row and I thought I gained some perspective. I thought Neil deGrasse Tyson was right about just about everything humans should be doing.

But today, I woke up and I panicked. I mulled around, panicked some more, took the bus to a big chain haircut place and told my barber I also didn't have a car anymore and that without my beard I would feel naked and alone just like in the reality show but nothing like the reality show. I put on a hat and took the bus to a big chain everything store. I bought my admiral blue medicine and panicked some more.

I apologized to you for apologizing to you and you told me to get over it.

I went back outside into the cold still panicking. I waited for the bus again, made an orbit of ground-down teeth.

The bus pulled up. In front of me a stroller whose canopy had been snow and wind-torn now bulldog-clipped together with a garbage bag and the façade of a frozen pizza box.

A pair of teal mittens reached out. It was our child, no not ours, but our collective child. It looked so blue, so red, so you. Like us, but not dead.

I stopped panicking—I didn't know what in the tiny blue hell I was panicking for.

## Or Dialect

Wednesday—  
I just began  
listening  
to my body.

I did not know  
it was talking  
because I am  
always talking.

I talk too  
much. I talk  
too much and  
do too little.

Please understand  
that I am a roulette  
wheel of anecdotes  
and nearsighted

tambourines.  
I should listen  
to the crumbling  
gills of my body.

I do not know  
anyone else  
who ignores  
a pancreatic flutter.

I do not know  
what it means  
to die quickly.  
I should listen

to my body.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

PETER BURZYNSKI

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### EDUCATION

Ph.D. in English/Creative Writing-Poetry, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, expected 2018.  
Dissertation: *Dear Anybody* (book of poems and essay)  
Advisor: Mauricio Kilwein Guevara

M.A. in Polish Literature, Columbia University in the City of New York, 2013.  
Thesis: *Words, Words, Words: Wyspiański's The Wedding and the Tropes of Shakespeare's Tragedies* (essay)  
Advisor: Anna Frajlich-Zajac

M.F.A. in Creative Writing/Poetry, The New School, 2012 (With Honors).  
Thesis: *Ghosts of Salt* (book of poems and essay)  
Advisor: Mark Bibbins

B.A. in English/Creative Writing and Polish Language and Literature,  
University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2008.

Certificate in Polish Language, History and Literature, Jagiellonian University, 2016.

Certificate in Polish Language and Culture, Jagiellonian University, 2006.

### PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT

Marian University, Adjunct Professor, 2018-Present  
Courses Taught:  
Eng 105-Expository Writing (3 Sections)

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Graduate Teaching Assistant, 2015-Present.  
Courses Taught:  
Eng 233-Introduction to Creative Writing, 2015-2018. (6 Sections (1 Online))  
AIS-203 American Indian Studies: History of Great Lakes Tribes, 2018-Present (5 Sections)

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Assistant Creative Writing Coordinator, 2015-2018.

DeVry University-Milwaukee, Visiting Professor, 2015

Course Taught:  
Eng 105-Advanced Composition, 2015 (1 Section)

University of Wisconsin-Waukesha, Associate Lecturer of English, 2014-2015.

Courses Taught:  
Eng 102-Introduction to Critical Writing, Reading, and Research, 2014-2015 (5 Sections)

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Writing Tutor 2014-2015

Polonez Restaurant-St. Francis, WI, Executive Sous Chef, 1999-Present

## **VOLUNTARY EMPLOYMENT**

Assistant Editor, *the cream city review*, 2013-2018.

Publishing Sales Intern, *Perseus Books Group, LLC*, 2011-2012.

Assistant Editor, *The Madison Review*, 2007-2008.

## **HONORS/AWARDS**

2017 George Niemczycki Memorial Award, from Polanki (Polish Women's Club of Milwaukee)

2016 Wisconsin Study Abroad in Poland Scholarship, The Kościuszko Foundation, NYC, NY

2016 Wisconsin Academy of Arts, Sciences, and Letters 2016 *Peoples and Ideas* (Honorable Mention)

2016 Władysław Cieszyński Fellow, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

2016 Tennessee Williams Poetry Prize (Top-Ten Finalist) Guest Judge: Yusef Komunyakaa

2014 Edward Ryan Prize, The Academy of American Poets

2014 Writer's Block Prize (Honorable Mention), Louisville Literary Arts

2008 Janet Dziadudulewicz Branden Award for Polish Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison

2007 PNA Scholarship for Polish Studies, Polish National Alliance

## PUBLICATIONS

### Poetry

“Salted Pepper Pizza Slice” *Eat Local, Read Local Project of Wisconsin 2015* (April 2018)

“seeing believing” and “Pantoglottism” *jubilat* (Winter 2018)

“Ruptured Duck” *Storm Cellar* (Summer 2017)

“To the Throne” *Eat Local, Read Local Project of Wisconsin 2017* (April 2017)

“Merica” *Masque & Spectacle* (December 2016)

"To Squeak and Bend and Sleep" and "Let's Get Those Pants Off"  
*Fog Machine* (December 2016)

“Kindergarten Graduation” *Wisconsin People and Ideas: 55* (December 2016)

“Narkokleptocracy” *Rabbit Catastrophe* (December 2016): 29-30

“Uncle-hood” and “Several Swallows Later” *Mannequin Haus* (November 2016)

“What is Lovely, You, My Dear Grotesque?” *The Gordian Review* (November 2016): 44

“The Good Voodoo” *Prelude* (Winter 2016): 6-9

“Arc and Saw” *APRICITY* (May 2016): 11

“Forty for Fishy” and “No Matter” *No Assholes* (Winter 2016): 21-2, 26

“Dawn Flower” *Eat Local, Read Local Project of Wisconsin 2016* (Reprinted) (April 2016)

“Uncanny Valley” *3Elements Review* (January 2016): 74

“Adiaphory After Many” *Coalition for Justice Chapbook in Memory of Dantre Hamilton*  
(January 2016): 4

“Oriflamme” and “Leda Needs a Gun” *Local Nomad* (January 2016)

“Road to Wrestlemania” and “Sons of Adam” *Working Stiff* Josh Olson, ed. Gimmick Press,  
(December 2015): 26-7, 28-9

“Dear Cyclist” *The Rain, Party, & Disaster Society* (November 2015): 11-2

“Fragile,” “Consensual Cannibalism,” and “Dawn Flower” *Chariton Review* (Fall 2015): 46-8

“Fin de siècle” *Off the Coast* (Fall 2015): 13

“Who Art in Heaven,” “Holy Father,” “Ninja School,” “Delicious,” and “Safe Serve”  
*Fog Machine* (November 2015)

“Pennyweighting” *The Harpoon Review* (November 2015)

“Where There is Rust” *truthdig* (October 2015)

“Maundy Ceremony,” “A Talon, a Sword, a Grave,” “Portrait d’un Faune,” and “Traveled Around” *floor plan journal* (September 2015)

“Just Ten Minutes Left” and “This is Meaning” *Mayday Magazine* (September 2015)

“Cannon Ball Take Me Home, *Whiskey Island* (September 2015): 86

“Deviant Equation” and “What is the Correct Amount of Sex?” *Blue Lines* (Spring 2015): 14-17

“Artifacts” and “On the Eating of Hearts and Tongues” *Anamesa Journal* (May 2015): 1, 36-7

“Poet Matters” *Pilcrow & Dagger!* (April 2015): 38-40

“Slavophile” *RHINO* (April 2015): 14

“Eating Eden” *Eat Local, Read Local Project of Wisconsin 2015* (April 2015)

“Drop the Anchor” *Thin Air* (April 2015): 52

“Who Speaks for the Bones” *Forklift, Ohio* (Spring 2015): 136-7

“Pie-Eyed” *Bar None Group* (February 2015)

“House of Corrections,” *Fields Magazine* (Winter 2015): 155

“Dangling in Winter.” *Bar None Group* (January 2015)

“Agnoiology,” *ZO Magazine* (January 2015)

“Failing to be One’s Own Father,” *The Inquisitive Eater* (December 2014)

“Marplot,” *Bar None Group* (December 2014)

“Bloviation,” “Raised to Sip,” and “Where the Sea Meets the Spry,” *The Portland Review* (November 2014): 46, 72

“Mediatization,” *Bar None Group* (November 2014)

“Sunbox” and “It Is Imperative That You Fail” *The Mackinac* (October 2014)

“Said Arthur,” *White Stag Journal* (October 2014): 28-9

“The Pyrobolist’s Heart-Balm,” “Nickel Hi-Lo Yo,” “The Ancients Had Achilles,” *White Stag Journal* (October 2014): 32, 53, 63

“Madame Shouldn’t Sleep,” “Not Swan,” and “Breaking the Mule” *Souvenir Lit Journal* (October 2014)

“Order Operatic,” *Prick of the Spindle* (September 2014)

“Inventory of the Universe,” *Thrush Poetry Journal* (September 2014)

“Hot Mama,” “Rice Petals,” “You Have Teeth, Too,” *Yes Poetry* (August 2014)

“North Dakota,” *the Unrorean* (July 2014)

“Horse Blasphemy,” *Great Lakes Review* (Summer 2014): 250-1

“Objective Correlative” and “Black Jacks,” *Hobo Pancakes* (June 2014)

“Mud-Honey” and “Vile Concerto # 9, Opus 2” *BORT Quarterly* (June 2014)

“Emeralds and Olives,” *Your Impossible Voice* (Summer 2014): 46-7

“After Common Era,” “Dearest V-,” “Six Kilo Freedom Fry,” “Unintentional Impressionism,”  
 “Vast Veranda,” “You’re Well/Enjambed,” *Zombie Logic Review* (April 2014)

“More or Less, An Apology” and “Song of Myself (2011 Version)” *FUCK Poems:*  
*An Exceptional Anthology*, Vincent Cellucci, ed. Lavender Ink, (2013): New Orleans: 44,  
 45-7

“Journal of Autonomy” *The Best American Poetry Blog* (March 2012)

“Cemetery Sideshow” *Bar None Group* (November 2011)

“Wracam,” *Kritya* (May 2009)

### **Translations**

*This is My Earth*. Translated from the Polish. Martyna Bulizańska. (under contract with New American Press, expected February 2019)

“rubella, misha.” and “fasting: recourse.” Translated from the Polish. Martyna Bulizańska.  
*MAYDAY Magazine*

“Android and an Anecdote.” and “Until the End of Time.” Translated from the Polish. Grzegorz Wróblewski. *MAYDAY Magazine*

### **Book Reviews**

“Review of Matthew Cooperman’s *Spool*.” (Spring 2017), *MAYDAY magazine*

“Review of Magdalena Zurawski’s *Companion Animal*,” (WoodlandPattern.org November 2015)

### **PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS/ LECTURES/ READINGS**

2018 Guest Lecturer, The Rise of Polish Poetry, Polish Center of Wisconsin, Franklin, WI

- 2018 Guest Speaker, Indian Community School, Franklin, WI
- 2018 Reader, *Eat Local::Read Local* Reading, Pizza Man, Milwaukee
- 2017 Reader, Anja Sieger Release Reading, Woodland Pattern, Milwaukee
- 2017 Host, United We Read Reading Series, Art Bar, Milwaukee
- 2017 Reader, Poetry in the Park, Milwaukee
- 2017 Visiting Poetry Reader, Dubuque University, Dubuque Iowa
- 2017 Reader, *Eat Local::Read Local* Reading, Pizza Man, Milwaukee
- 2016 Panelist, Marquette University and UWM Graduate Student Humanities Conference Conflict and Liberation
- 2016 Presenter, Radical Writes English Graduate Students' Conference on Writing, Southeast Missouri State University, Cape Girardeau, MO
- 2016 Reader, *Eat Local::Read Local* Reading, Pizza Man, Milwaukee
- 2016 Host, United We Read Reading Series, Riverwest Public House, Milwaukee
- 2015 Speaker, Warsaw: A History of Celebration and Subjugation-Warsaw During the Interwar Period, Polish Center of Wisconsin, Franklin, WI
- 2015 Reader, *Eat Local::Read Local* Reading, Pizza Man, Milwaukee
- 2015 Contributing Author Reaxer, *RHINO* Reading, AWP Conference (Offsite)
- 2015 Guest Lecturer, Sienkiewicz's "The Lighthouse Keeper" and Adam Mickiewicz's *Master Thaddeus: The Positivist Approach to the Romantic*, Polish Speaker's Group, Polish Center of Wisconsin, Franklin, WI
- 2015 Host, United We Read Reading Series, Boswell Books, Milwaukee
- 2014 Reader, Poetry in Celebration of 25 years of Polish Autonomy, Wieczór Poetycki (Polish Poetry Evening), Polish Center of Wisconsin, Franklin, WI
- 2014 Reader, Great Lakes Midwest Friendlies Reading, Polonez, St. Francis, WI
- 2014 Reader, United We Read Reading Series, Polonez, St. Francis, WI
- 2013 Reader, Poetry Celebration, Wieczór Poetycki (Polish Poetry Evening), Polish Center of Wisconsin, Franklin, WI
- 2013 Guest Speaker, Poland: A Brief History, Wilson Commons Assisted Living Community, Milwaukee
- 2013 Reader, KGB Open Mike Competition, KGB Bar, New York

2013 Contributing Author Reader, *Fuck Poems Anthology* Reading, AWP (Offsite)

2011 Reader, New School Graduate Student Reading, New York

## MEMBERSHIPS

2016-2017 Modern Language Association

2016-2017 Student Member, The Kościuszko Foundation

2016-present Student Member, The Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America

2011-present Member, The Association of Writers and Writing Programs

2009-present Member, Academy of American Poets

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