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Shadowgraph and Zoltan's food

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Shadowgraph and Zoltan's food

by

Tarisa Ann M. Matsumoto

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Tarisa Ann M. Matsumoto

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

SHADOWGRAPH
  manifesto 1
  bowline 3
  singed 4
  plantation 7
  Anzio 9
  reconnaissance 11
  shadowgraph 14
  exfoliate 16
  inheritance 18
  tattoos 20
  duty 22
  lodestone 24
  when i got my name 26
  cipher 29
  to the woman who wouldn’t let my grandparents buy a house 31
  transept 33
  winnow 35
  the escutcheon 37
  hostage 39
  sleight 41
  brother 44
  kindling 46
  ouroboros 48
  gestation 50

ZOLTAN’S FOOD
  Assumption From the Dry Hands of Mama 53
  Advent of Red 55
  Pairs Opposite North South 58
  Regrowth in Red Brushstrokes 60
  Deposition of the Sentry’s Skin 62
  The Trinity Begins 64
  Migrations 66
  Territorial Boxes from the South 68
  The Wisla Strikes 70
  Ascension Under the Wisla 72
  It is Undone 74
  The Cresting Under Flood 77
  Three Below Red Brushstrokes 79
  Conception 82
  Birthmarks on Striking Skin 85
  The Invocation of Swallowing 88
  The Flood Strikes 91
  Annunciation 93
It is Redone 95
Pairs Opposite East West 97
Visitation of Red Brushstrokes 100
Litany of the Sentry's Skin 103
Presentation From the Dry Hands of Mama 106

REFERENCES 109
My grandfather, a second-generation Japanese-American (nisei), lost a brother during World War II. In 1943 this brother was killed in Italy while serving in one of the segregated units of the United States Army. To support the war effort, my grandfather bought war bonds and mourned and celebrated his brother. He was as patriotic as anyone even though his sister-in-law was in an internment camp living off dust and desert. However, when he brought his family to California from Hawaii in the 1950s, something turned in him. As he was looking for a better way of life, he was told not to buy a house in the southern section of Los Angeles by a realtor who insisted that no one wanted a family like his in their neighborhood. He and my grandmother decided then that if their country did not want them, they did not want their country. They would never vote and never practice their freedom of speech. It were as if this course of action was required of them. Janice Mirikitani tells a similar tale in “Breaking Silence,” a poem retelling the events of Japanese internment during World War II (33):

We were told
that silence was better
golden like our skin,
useful like
go quietly,
easier like
don’t make waves,
expedient like
horsetails and deserts

Perhaps his silent boycott of his country is why my grandfather thinks I am Japanese. He does not recognize my mother’s Irish blood. He considers me Japanese, wants me to eat Japanese food, listen to Japanese music, and sing Japanese songs. In his pidgin English he calls me: “You my Japanese girl.” When I remind him of my mother’s heritage, he simply says, “That don’t matter,” or worse yet, “So?”
He raises a valid question. So what? What does it matter if a child is born of parents with two different racial and cultural backgrounds? Some may think it does not matter, and it is reasonable to consider the possibility that society may be better off without these distinctions; nevertheless, to acknowledge one history and not the other is in essence to deny the self.

Our concept of self is determined by the history we inherit from our society and family. At the very least we are what we are — one of six billion people in the world today. In a world this size we are not merely Smith, Jones, or Williams. Instead, we are American, French, Japanese, Egyptian. We inherit our society's history, twenty-pound books on what it means to be American and what our forebears went through to bring us to this place in time. Our individual history, where the Smiths came from or what the Jones family endured during the Depression, comes from what family members can remember. If they cannot remember, individual history becomes a reworking of our society's history. It becomes a blending of what a twenty-pound book tells us happened in 1930 and what our grandmother can remember of her grandmother. History is created by those who follow events and can examine them after several years have passed, sometimes centuries. This is done by historians and relatives like grandfathers who want to forget those who caused them harm.

And what is to happen to history when nothing is inherited? If an individual does not claim a society for his or her own, what then? What happens when family trees include names like Nagasako, Ogata, and Horihata on one branch and Mearls, Morrissey, and Lynch on the other? History does not include a chapter for people who are silenced because neither branch speaks for them. No matter what a grandfather tells a granddaughter, the inheritance of two histories cannot be resolved by saying, "That don't matter." What happens to people, particularly in the United States, who inherit two histories, two cultures, and two vastly different ethnic backgrounds? When two distinct histories meld inside one body, does history rework itself? Does the individual rework himself or herself? Can the individual even face the differences within his or her family?
Furthermore, what is to happen to history that is inherited and thrown away? Can an individual live without history, without the past of his or her society? Is that twenty-pound book too heavy to carry or is it too significant to leave at the side of the road?

In either case history becomes like an ouroboros: an emblematic serpent represented with its tail in its mouth in a continual devouring of itself and rebirth from itself (Encyclopædia Britannica Online). History chases us. Whether we choose to carry it or run from it, it is always in the background and in our bones turning us instinctually toward our past. Some choose to turn on it and swallow it so as to exist without it. But through that swallowing, we in turn are reborn from it much like the characters in Toni Morrison's Beloved are. We devour history, yet it scurries to catch up with us and stand in our faces shouting, “See, here I am. I am your inheritance!”

The two collections of poetry that follow chronicle the lives of two characters who try to run, manipulate, and redefine history only to accept it — one anxiously, one eagerly — in the end. From the outset, both find themselves lost and silenced. History has not accounted for these individuals. They are two who have been forgotten in the shuffle of writing that twenty-pound book and determining the inheritance of future generations.

In Shadowgraph, the narrator is forgotten in that history has not accounted for people in the United States who have Matsumoto on one family tree and Morrissey on the other — the rapidly growing multicultural population. This is suggested in the section’s title itself, shadowgraph meaning “a photographic image resembling a shadow” (Encyclopædia Britannica Online). We are shadows in the background of larger, more significant events. We are like those “voices muzzled for life” that Alice Walker describes in her essay “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens” (234).

These poems can be considered autobiographical in that the subject matter is taken from my individual and families’ histories. Unlike most of the people in this country, I have never been called American. I have never thought of myself that way, and I know my grandfather stopped thinking of himself that way long ago. Perhaps it is because I was silenced in my struggle to discover where my
two inheritances met. Never Japanese enough for Japanese-American society and never 'white' enough for the Caucasian majority, I spent my childhood trying to break the silence of history, attempting to find a middle ground where two families could be united as one within me. This process is apparent in the form of the poems. The vast majority of pieces in this section resist the left justification. They begin there but drift away in the guise of indentations. This makes the poems appear fluid and song-like which is indicative of the way I feel about the subject matter. Remembering struggles requires a meditative slant. To remember my individual history and face it instead of devouring it is to meditate on it or chant it as if music or song.

On the other hand, the second collection of poems, Zoltan's Food, tells the story of an individual character silenced by history because he chooses to run from it. While fictional in the narrative, these prose poems are based on the very real lives of several Eastern European immigrants and their migrations from country to country in search of a new history. The twenty-pound book has many chapters about the nations behind the Iron Curtain. In these places, unity of the state outweighed the welfare of the individual, but many individuals chose to change that. Here Zoltan, a young Polish boy in the late 1970s, embarks on several migrations over a period of about twenty years. He moves from Poland to Russia to Canada and back to Poland in order to escape the inheritance of his society's history and the violent events that lace that legacy. His silence is broken; furthermore, his story is told despite the call of his society's past. He wants a better inheritance, so he leaves to find it. Because these poems are monumental blocks of memories, they are in a block prose poem form. These events are not up for discussion. These are not meditations on his life, but pages of his own twenty-pound book. The memories are his own written on tablets so that history's silencing of his voice is defeated. He is chronicled and has his own inheritance. Like the ouroboros, he swallows history and forms his own rebirth.

Mirikitani writes in "Prisons of Silence" that "the strongest prisons are built with walls of silence" (5). The silencing of individuals by an expansive yet exclusive world history is the focus here,
and the purpose is to break this silence. Morrison, Walker, and Mirikitani focus on breaking silence in their writing. They acknowledge that history, politics, and simple situations prevent the voices of those forgotten by history from speaking. History does not purposefully silence individuals; instead, other forces are at work. Other individuals, societies, nations, and cultures work to create a unified twenty-pound book of history. It is my hope that there is room in that book for individuals who have not been allowed to write their own pages, individuals like me, Zoltan, and my grandfather.
manifesto

Seijin,
Senshi-sha,
Seishin,

i wish i had
my mother's eyes
green-blue blue-green
her eyes that
blend so well
with the malt-color
base of her face
that blue-green
green-blue on
ivory bedding
over contours
of her bones

one thousand
red origami cranes
strung together
with silk cords
tangle on the floor
behind the headboard
undusted and never
intriguing enough
to unravel
a paper yearmark
of one particular
Saturday morning

SHADOWGRAPH
Seijin,
i have misread
the meanings of
white dresses and
rose bouquets
and veils

Senshi-sha,
i have mistaken
the depths of
one thousand
red origami
cranes

Seishin,
i have misplaced
the color of
green-blue
blue-green
eyes
bowline

i look at the photograph
    my mother and father
    smiling after their honeymoon

once when they were five years old
    each on two sides of a continent
they put their hands in the ocean
    and touched water
    the same water their grandparents did
    sixty years before
both fishermen
    preparing to run away
one from rice fields and an emperor
    one from potato farms and an empire
all of them
    chained by currents and swells
singed

before we burned the cane
fields were so thick
long-limbed and sovereign over
our hunchbacked bodies

we took the place of ants

mornings while the kocha
boiled over the fire
cane harpooned sunrises
and we thought the fields
thousands of rice-paper flames
tinted with pinks and oranges
salt-water air sloping in
over blades and stalks
the wind close behind
humming the same ancient minyo
the one obasan sang

Shina no yoru
Shina no yoru
about the moonlight
turning harbors violet

yume no yoru

on our porches tying hats
tight around our chins
slinging the keke’s
onto our backs
fields were so dense
we thought there was no ground
just row after row
row on top of row
but when we walked through them
digging ditches
throwing fertilizer out in sprays
so the breeze could carry it farther
borders between rows appeared
once we were in them
in and under the cane
blades brushing our hats
carving our fingers as we
marched from row to row
field to field
soil came up in patches
blackened by seasons of
burning down stalks
so the cycle could restart

ashes made the sugar sweeter

when we cut our teeth
into slices of cane
and swallowed
sugar drained into us
our blisters numbed
our backs straightened
and the keke’s stopped crying
for that one moment each day
we stood sweetened and panting
hidden under the cane
from bosses on horseback
and their whips
under the cane
those fields that woke us and
kept watch after ofuro
the moon marking
their outlines silver
branded us with rough hands
squeinting eyes
feet trained not to bleed
on burnt shards of cane
they turned harbors shipless
widened the ocean
obasan's ancient minyo
more faint and foreign
season after burning season
plantation

(plant-ti-shen) n. [<L plantare to plant] A grove cultivated to provide a certain product.

grandma’s stories pelted down
until they smeared us
she told us seishin
ancient ones
senshi-sha protected us
stood forcefield in every corner of the house
lock-armed around cemeteries and
places people died

grandma told us
they stole the tint from haole skin
bled color from their hair
to protect us
from them
demons with light water eyes
the senshi-sha marked each of them
that was their punishment
to live branded without colors
for the sun to burn them
only moonlight was safe

the first time we saw blonde hair
teacher’s arm
that haole woman
who made us speak english
she took a slice of cane to our palms
when our tongues slipped
she wore shoes
we wondered what she was hiding
underneath the leather
we whispered she had lizard toes
the *senshi-sha* made her half-beast
she covered her reptile legs
with long skirts and shoes
if she touched us
we scraped our skin until it bled
to purge her fingerprints
so the *senshi-sha*
would not mistake us for her
and take our colors away
Anzio

my Grandfather held the army letter
    still official after 50-some years
    darkened in a cigar box painted with
    smoking pilgrims in black thanksgiving hats

He looked at it like it was a photo
    searching for landscapes
    villas among vineyards
    monasteries on mountaintops
    and the old typewriter words
    plucked out letter by letter
    told a brief ending to the story

while his Sister tended
    vegetable gardens coughing up
        sunburned cabbage behind Manzanar gates
his Brother sprawled limp on the hill
    with bodies of other slight men
his Brother started to slide down
    into a trench of rats and shrapnel
    helmet still strapped
and the strange thing wasn’t his death
    but the slant of his sealed eyes
    his Sister waiting
        behind a fenced prison
    while Grandfather worked the plantation
    not knowing he had lost someone
the strange thing about it wasn’t
    his death on the hill in Anzio
but the Cousin
    fighting for the other side
the Enemy Cousin sailing the Pacific
destined for the same end
as his American-born Cousin in Anzio
had the same blood
the same blood soaking into hard renaissance soil in Italy
dripped into the ocean surrounding
my Grandfather’s pearled island
the same ocean oiled with the Arizona

my Grandfather pointed to the date
on the still official letter
he said he went on three weeks
working under whips of sugar cane on his face
he went on three weeks
before the army letter came
before he knew his Brother had been killed
he said he thought if something happened
if blood was spilled
he would have felt it
he would have heard his Brother cry
he says
sometimes late at night
or when he’s harvesting cabbage in his garden
he has trouble
remembering his Brother’s face
reconnaissance

screaming

my first memory

on Grammie’s olive-green couch

screaming at Sham
    her shiny smooth-haired dog
    as he jumped to lick my face
    and tackle me

my mother says i can’t remember this
    i was only 18-months old

    but i do

i remember
    feet stockinged
        white anklets with lace
    tar-like cushions pulling
        my unbalanced legs into the couch
    Sham scratching his front paws at me

i remember
    Grammie yanked Sham outside
    while Uncle Buster
        sat me in a highchair
        where dinner waited

i remember
    crying for Grammie to come back
    for Sham to chase me again
    i cried at the noodles in front of me
    and Uncle Buster’s stringed beard
the way he never smiled
or read me stories

at twelve
i wondered why he never smiled
perhaps my dark skin and black hair
black eyes
reminded him too much
of jungles
overnight missions into Cambodia
villagers with round faces
like my father
he missed my parents' wedding
in June, 1969
he was turning moist
in shrapnel laced hillsides
did Uncle Buster learn
to see enemies everywhere
even in my father's Japanese cheeks
my inherited brown eyes
maybe he saw my father and me the same
as those he fought under flares and fire

my mother said
Uncle Buster was protecting himself
from nightmares
scar tissue across his knuckles and chest
but i was still afraid of him
until years later
when Sham died
accidentally strangled by his leash
i cried
missed him so much
i saw him in every swipe of black
lingering in front of me

last April
for one evening
i was caught again
watching Uncle Buster eat dinner
his beard thinned with grey
he asked
if i was old enough to drink
then ordered a bottle of red wine
after we emptied the bottle
i smiled at him
told him i remembered
he used to baby-sit me
he smiled back
teeth stained red
his hands shaking
on the table's edge
shadowgraph

mother,
there is a picture, both
of us, together.
your arms like willow
branches swoop over me, a nest
in the crook of your elbow. that sweep-
breath of willow pulls me
like your hair. we
are still together
linked by platelets,
breath, being inside
each other. that memory still
on the fingertips, memories learned
before speaking,
and your hair that caught the sun
burned out every shadow with its light,
artificially blonde and draping
and burning, raining ash
on my skin, on my hair.
my skin — dark like father's —
my hair — dark like father's.
you sweep around me pouring
sun, molding sun to fit
on my skin, to make it
yours, to make my hair yours.
but it burns
darker, filters
through spools of honey
hair and burns, blackens,
turns me away, floods me closer
to father.
your hair, light and spring
and transparent, it is the light
outside the crook of your elbow,
that one beyond the shade
of willow branches, the black
light underneath willows, father's
willows that limp
around us in undulating
circles.
mother,
there is a picture of you
before you released me, a nest
in the willow catching the snowfall
of light from your hair. you are
unsmiling, round, straight,
brown hair like cherrywood bark.
when did you decide to paint
your hair buttercups,
hide under willows, and twirl
around me lighting my
black hair with riversun swoops
of your own?
...Have you ever had a real democratic experience to begin with?...

Peter Esterházy (109)

and I could not answer his question which seemed directed only at me. Why should it take his hungarian accent to jolt me into american pride? or failure? his series of questions, of statements ending with suspicious curves of inflected punctuation marks, grounded me in the confidence of knowing what is right then slapped punctuation across my face to undermine my own certainties?

I could jolt him right back and reply, Yes. american Democracy, a holy brand of righteousness that allowed my parents — with relative ease — to hold hands in public, breed two-toned children born with blue eyes that turned brown after three days, two-toned children raised with the feeling of relative unease when surrounded by the majority horde of pale skin and the growing horde of asian immigrants and straight black hair.

but I remember the annual census in september in L.A. when elementary through high school kids were interrogated by teachers and revealed — with relative ease — the source of their skin. and teachers, frustrated at my admitted lack of identity and being able to check only one box, decided — depending on their mood and their own sources — whether I was caucasian or asian/pacific islander.

perhaps in our Democracy, some cubicled statistician spent days and nights, sweated through caseloads trying to unmask the secret of Why my sources changed year after year. ‘The Ever-Changing Chameleon Happa Haole of the West Coast’ or perhaps Why my brother was marked caucasian the same year I was tagged asian/pacific islander.

when I was seventeen, standing on the greens across from the capitol in dc, a woman and her camera maneuvered next to me. my first trip to
Democracy where construction workers renovating sides of the Library of Congress whistled at me when I walked past jacketless and mini-skirted. As I took a picture of the white dome and spread-eagle wings in front of me, the woman cleared her throat, caught my attention with *Excuse me*, and looked me straight in the eye, seriously concerned. *How do you feel about the mongrelization of the races?*
inheritance

his black hair
  connects him to the world
  to shadows under his bonsai trees
  the color under his fingernails
  after repotting plumerias
  dirt forced into river beds in his skin

and when he refused his daughter her first date
  his hair rarely escaped itself

he took her curses and tears
  as her first defiance
and when his wife
  smuggled her out of the house
    to go meet the black boy at the movies
he stopped talking
he saw his own skin
  take on even more of that tanned asian hue
his wife’s
  more of that anglo air-colored tone
and his daughter’s hair
  he noticed for the first time
  was not black
    but brown waved in reds and golds
      almost like his wife’s

shadows under bonsai trees
  lure him outdoors
    knowing that those stunted pines
      inherited from his father’s country
        are the only relatives he has left
as he trims
clips
   curves
black pine branches with copper wire
he understands
  his father stopped talking
  the day he brought home
  his blue-eyed girlfriend
and then realizes
  shadows under his bonsai trees
  at dusk
      lean east
  morph into fingers and feet
  limbs stretching long
  until they meld with darkness
shadows writhing together
  connected
      linking hands
  until they reach
tattoos
they despise my father
because my skin
does not remain
tanned and tea-flavored in winter
because parts of him they recognize

dismember from my face and hands
my hair swallowing
permanent hues of red and light brown
the rings of olive around my irises
more conspicuous
his people stare
wondering if i am really his
or a step-daughter inherited
from his irish catholic wife
other second-generation
third-generation
nisei and sansei
keep black hair-brown eye genes
in correct bloodlines
they dance at buddhist temples
during the obon festival
while i watch on the outskirts
listening to taiko drums
pound synchronized spirit rhythms
toward pagoda roofs

i once tried to look more like them
walked in slippers
hair pulled back in a pony-tail
so tight it made my eyes slant
ate teriyaki and rice
but never learned how to use chopsticks
that's when it became apparent
as rice waterfalled
between the two wooden sticks
spilling through my fingers
that I was not enough like him
he was not enough like them
he married outside bloodlines
so that I was blue-eyed at birth
skin blanched
hair wavy
carrying a nauseous distaste
for sashimi and miso soup
but still having to walk
with his name
attached to my hands

I have a tattoo
my last name in kanji
two careful scripted asian characters
needled under my skin
when I told my mother
what I had done
she tensed into the phone
what are you trying to do?
brand yourself?
I answered
I already was
new-formed scabs
on my black-inked skin
itching
duty

my hair should be

brown

dark

thick

undulating

deep scoured brown

like bottoms of iron skillets

used too many times

with oil and dough under nails

the boiled varnish bottom

of iron skillets

oil burned in crescent stains

the blood of meat ingrained

almost my father's hair

not the floured cattail color of my mother

cattails in november

after seeds explode into swarms

of tan fingers hanging from dried stalks

salted sprays of her thin hair

holding their weight up

on the lift of pollened air

this is the way it should be

this red-brown clay hue

coats my hair

hopes for the shade cattails hold

sits bronzed on my head
pulls deep brown stains
farther from my scalp
farther from stains of last names
to look more like her
cattailed hair
colorless face
to burn it to the bottom
until dark deep brown fades
i want slanted eyes

the slanted single-lid eyes
three shades darker than the black of my father
his brother
his mother

those eyes match
bark on bonsai trees
smoke shimmering from pits of kalua pig
shades of kimono worn on the anniversary of Satoshi’s death

i want slanted eyes for the simple reason that the monochrome of this sculptured farmland chiseled by hands of tillers and combines cannot pronounce my name cannot decide why my hair goes long and dark cannot decipher the color of brown eyes not brown enough to blend with farm soil too brown to float in flooded waters of april rivers
and as winters of this midwest
exist closer to my hands
and my skin
digs deeper
    into the color of snow
my eyes have not curved up
    into sharp twists of lotus petals
my name still does not chime
    with tones
    of taiko drums
    koto strings

hands stained by soil
    farms
    threshers
i desire them in sweated palms
    of midwest mornings
as my eyes remain level
    with sheered backdrops of soyfields
    through windows of ochre
    wrapped in caved hills of corn
i cannot undo the scent
    of ginger
    tea leaves
    cherry blossoms
    limping from my father's eyes
when i got my name

i come across your picture every spring and fall
when i go through the same boxes
in the same closets
throwing out scraps and trinkets
i failed to get rid of the last time
because i thought i needed them

you shine behind plastic laminate sheets
last fall i tried to take your picture out
but the back stuck to the page
you’re there forever
and before i laid the laminate back over your face
i saw how soft your eyes were
i never realized that
soft and legato behind your glasses
maybe i always sat too close to notice

remember?
we sat next to each other for eight years
because our names both began with M
Matsukuma Matsumoto
i leaned left
to see the chalkboard
because you were too tall in front of me
remember, Tomo?
the D i got on our first algebra test?
you kept me from crying

i thought it strange
your perfect english
even my grandfather still had his accents
you were so foreign
chopsticks in your lunchbag
smell of vinegar on rice and nori
we ate and laughed in english
even though everyone around us
was jittering in native tongues

remember, Tomo?
you asked me how i got my last name
after you saw my blue-eyed mom
and the next day you brought me that parched scroll
with the kanji calligraphy on it
your father had painted my name out
Matsumoto
‘people of the pine’
and you showed me your kanji name
Matsukuma
‘bears of the pine’
you showed me it was only
one character that made our names different

i still have the paper doll you gave me on Girl’s Day
her featureless face overshadowed
by the red and gold kimono flowering around her
it’s somewhere in these boxes
a little wrinkled
colors faded
that last day of school
while we walked home
i never knew you were leaving
remember, Tomo?
you never told me
your father was called back
maybe you didn’t know
i never learned to use those chopsticks
when i smell vinegar
i think of you
wondering if your english is still perfect
if you still give paper dolls on Girl's Day
if you ever had a picture of me
does it shine in a pine wood frame
sit on your window sill
to overlook views of Yamagata forests
catching glimpses of bears
in its reflection
cipher

afterscent of mahi mahi
filters into the porch
persimmons dry on racks
wrinkled amber pulp
hardens beneath sunned skin
in lauhala slippers
leaning back in a chair
next to a row of orchids
grandfather
laughs

this is how we are taught

with scars from cane
cane whips on his hands
his obake stories
shadow legends of burning sugar cane
black smoke closing in nostrils
separating mothers from children
fathers from mothers
the spearing bosshand
rounding up faces
in the sunrise of flames
spirits walking Saddle Road
between the lips of two volcanoes
fog of their breath like incense
kahuna apparitions
chanting at heiaus
Buddhist fireballs
floating perimeters of the cemetery
behind his home
the red swath spheres of phantom hands
ghosts traveling the Old Hana Road
beneath fern and plumeria
waiting in hunt for wild boar

grandfather
the dried saliva of immigrants and kimonos
crushing his eyes
he laughs to ease our wide-awake nights
caused by knowing
an old island nisei
will not walk into rows of sugar cane
when the moon is absent
when voices of plantation workers
are heard tearing the edge of salt water breezes
bending and ducking under
black-tipped cane at night
to avoid a bossman's whip
shearing across blistered hands
to the woman who wouldn’t let my grandparents buy a house

i do not know what she looked like
my grandparents don’t even remember her face

she may have even won

all they say is her hair
blonde and beehived
thick with teased comb-streaks
shone in their eyes
bright saffron sallow
like mist drawn up from sugar cane fields
in the burning season

they tell this story
when november comes
after dinner
while eating manju and brownies
their house straining from
smells of vinegar and salmon
shoyu and ginger

these two americans
from Papaikou
pidgin english
slipping from their tongues
dark veined
more bone than skin

grandfather
clenches his teeth
raw and ground
after twenty years on a plantation
grimacing in the sweat of stalking cane
words strangle from his throat
she would not let him buy a house
new home
no plantations
no sugar cane
a new home
on the coast where he could still see ocean
grandfather
who marched for workers' unions
bought war bonds
buried his fallen brother

early in fall
when orchids and plumerias
in my grandparents' back porch
begin to invert into hibernating bulbs
this story is told and whispered about
still whispered and gnawed at
when seasons turn into sallow mist
drifting up from oceans they can still see
tiding and pooling like steam off sugar cane fields
in the burning season
they sit in the back porch and watch air turn gold
transept

i can't feel them

in me

my parents

his matte black hair

her saltwater eyes

i trace outlines of my nose

lips

chubbiness of cheeks

in the mirror

but i cannot see them

staring back

what do they see

when they look toward my hair

my eyes that fade each spring

closer to the color of air

do i belong to them

or with them

i am the stem

unsure to desire

sunlight or shadows

which feeds me

separated at birth

would i know them as mine

if they sat next to me

nestled shoulders close in a subway

our bodies stuttering

to the train's tangle on the tracks

could they pick me out
if standing on opposite sides of the pier
sun gasping on my hair
light blending into their faces
if i turned to face them
thirty feet out from shore
caught in fishing lines
buckets of bait
my face stolen in shadows
could they see my eyes
through the heated glass of daylight
as it marked borders
at our feet

she blooms in daylight
he drinks the moisture
under ferns and moss
i am at the edge of a grove
arms wide
both hands growing longer
farther away from myself

i can’t feel them
because this face
fogged in the mirror
cannot find anything of theirs
along pores or irises
even its color is somewhere
in between
if my father knew
the weight of dust in a palm
he would have washed his hands
years ago
scrubbed them until grease and dirt
bled in browned soil droplets
onto pine needles of his bonsai trees
instead he carried it all
the afterbreath of winces and sighs
in his compartment of fingers and knuckles
stiff and toned to defy
the eyes of children
of their mother
if he could not see
through porous dirt
he could not see them grow wrinkles each day
how their smiles were formed
closer to ground

while my father dusted
the blue china vase with lily pads vined on it
one of a pair of twin vases
brought in his arms from Hong Kong
rare intact twin vases from last century
he played too delicate
let it
slip
through his fingers
and when it split in shards
of lightning spark
dust puffed out in smoke signal gasps
handfuls of dust
falling back to ground
the escutcheon

the trade was made
   before wedding bands were exchanged

my father
   Ichiro
   first born son
   was baptized under tents of sugar cane
   sanctioned into christianity
   three weeks after birth
three weeks after
   his grandmother
   obasan
   offered incense and prayed for blessings
   at the buddhist temple
when asked
   his parents cannot remember
   when they abandoned pagodas
   and accepted a cross

this was the trade

my father
   Ichiro
   twenty years later
   baptized a catholic
   under palm trees of los angeles
agreed to move closer toward my mother
her immigrant grandparents
   their accents caught in lilt
like Ichiro's grandparents
   their accents never circling
   around english sounds
so they could be married in church
   in a church where pews on the right
      brimmed with dark island skin
  and those on the left
      tipped with clear blue eyes

the trade was made
   at birth
three weeks after my birth
   when baptized catholic
      in the flesh of a stained glass church
clear water stemmed off my forehead
  and back onto the deep black hair
     Ichiro’s hair
     silking on my scalp
hostage

Lopez's and Romero's
those inside mixtures
of cul-de-sac houses
surnamed
Lee
Alvarez
Huang
have never allowed me to love a blond boy
in the solid ice freezes of my recent midwest

these fine well-mannered farm boys
trekking slush from january
into moats puddling barstools
who drink too much
and tend to say
'thank you'
keep fingerprints from resurfacing on my skin
februaries signaling the body's
my body's
essensuality for the ingrained
color-stoked
water-marked
palm-prints of neighborhood sons on Normandie and Artesia
their veins grown brown from the basin's smog cover

unless
they are in black lowriders
thumping down Western Boulevard
lounged in white t-shirts and khakis
waistbands at their crotchlines
it does not register
in sunburned recesses
that these may be men
who smell the same
feel the same
as ones I knew before

i cannot forget the looks of
Lopez’s and Romero’s
Inana’s and Nguyen’s
Jackson’s
Black’s
and Nakagawa’s
under the gutted sun
two miles from riot edges

i have tried
to gauge the temperature of farmhands
and the luminescence of their skin
which binds them to snow and
the longer summer days of farther north
to understand the landscape of calluses in their palms
find comfort in
their quieter hello’s
but the feel of blond hair on my face
tremors the inside mixtures of me
for color-stoked
prism-palms
cruising lowriders to
the Fifth Street Promenade
they come here
he said
to learn how to make
goddamn washing machines

his fingers stained barley
just one of a hundred
flannel shirted men
caught in the sap of barstools
and pool tables

gorgians
mexicans
even arabs
so their backward slum countries
feeding off our government loans
can finally clean
the shit off their clothes

we get 'em every month
he said

guests on a year or two position
ambassador of their country's dirty clothes

he licks the mug's rim
curling mustard teeth over glass

we teach 'em how to do it right
he said

and his amber breath
choking him
spilled out raw and sewaged
stumbling over
goddamn sheiks
pinkos
greasers
to mix with an ozone of
greased fingerprinted mugs
stains on the bar
lulled gurgles of beer in throats
at midnight

a jap
he said
a jap in newton, iowa

visiting friends
friendly midwestern friends

hell, we got a jap here, too
he said
learning how to make
goddamn washing machines

a real sweetheart
got the longest goddamn hair
i ever did see

fingernails oiled
from years on an assembly line

hey, let me call her
he said
i'll tell her to come on over
and you two can talk

maybe talk some japanese

he stuttered over words
lips unable to fully meet

it'll be fun
he said
two japs in newton, iowa

and he called
while i sat and tapped my foot
in amber puddles on the floor
wondering where my
friendly midwestern friends
had gone

we'll just see if she comes
he said
another goddamn person

trying to learn how to make
washing machines

tracing each breath that bar took
i didn’t know how to tell him
if that other jap ever arrived
that my grandparents
never taught me how to speak
their second language
brother

you are the color of sugar cane
sugarcoal reaching in smoke
toward a slumped ribbon sky
while workers watch from roads
sweat masking charred muscles
under seared skin

you are the color of bonsai trees
black pine parchment bark
your arms and legs
bound by copper wire
mold your branches
into curves of our father

you are the color of the obon
black kimonos celebrating the dead
you are in the center of their circle
listening and waiting
for taiko drums to strike their drone
and lift your feet to walk past them

but i know
you are lost in that circle
the taiko beat of burning cane
snared bonsai
because you are our mother’s son

inside
you are her winterwater blue eyes
your laugh her cattail hair
the downward curve of your eyes
that swallows your face in perpetual rue
is her eggshell skin
fainting closer toward ground

inside
you are her son
blue eyed and pale
panting against the strain
that turns your flesh into cane
cindered smoke of burning cane
your eyes into bonsai bark

and now i know
your struggle is worse
it has left you unable to speak
because you are nowhere in between
you are split in the center
branches pulled apart
you walk each foot in the ash of cane
each hand stretching toward
a nest of blue eyes
kindling

a red-headed boy with freckles
taught me how to use chopsticks

his snow-polished skin
caved color of seaweed eyes
smiling
laughing
pointing at my fingers
then his own
he picked up a grain of rice
with two sanded pieces of bamboo
cockled his fingers over them
and that grain of rice
thin as a strand of rabbit fur
made the journey
from his bowl
to his mouth

this is when we are taught

when the seishin are gone
sugar cane burned
kimonos coffined in attics
this is when grandparents are reborn
stories retold
and forgotten words
obasan
kawaii
hana
grow hands and feet
unfold from soil
build skeletons

this is how we are taught

by a red-headed boy with freckles
   able to see better than ourselves
plantation fields straining
   under creviced hands of nihonjin
kimonos keeping rhythm with taiko drums
   as they dance during obon

he is the seishin
   teaching me

a red-headed boy with freckles

he is the seishin
teaching me what I could feel
only after grandparents are gone
   unfolding themselves beneath
   the shade of burning cane fields
ouroboros

her weight
against mine

between her shoulders
she is hollow
her skin marbles
like salmon scales
silver and pink streaks

she is the down
i slept on

on top of her stomach
breathing with her
remembering how she breathed
from the inside

my stomach on hers
her stomach on mine
the bloated fullness of her breasts
holding my head steady
her fogged skin
hair long like folds of sap
crowning my kage-colored skin

my father took photographs from the hallway
his dark asian fingers
burnt from the glint off Papaikou
snapped shutters on pictures
of his wife and newborn
napping stomach to stomach
their faces both turned toward him
in silver and amber tones
here is the down
i slept on

hollow from the inside
i want to put my stomach to hers
my face
my lips
my eyelids
trace the lines that held me
shape her body again
with my breath
give her the air she gave me
her body that can no longer stand
can no longer walk

now his dark asian fingers
squeeze edges of the doorframe
he watches his wife
hollow
marble
her salmon skin sink
watches me lie next to her
my shadow hair
falling in pools around her
our faces both turned toward him
eyes shut
in silver and amber tones
gestation

dilemma that i fought against
which chromosomes to lean toward
has raged under my skin
a self-contained firefight
since that dusk hour
when my black hair manifested
from between my mother's pale thighs
since i was three days old
when she realized my eyes had drifted
from her rainwater blue
to my father's mud-soaked brown

i feel it now
inside me
those bickerings of hair and eyes
that my mother once knew
when she looked at me through blue eyes
past barley tinted bangs

who was this girl she birthed
scoured hair
deep soil eyes
skin tanned persimmon

who was this girl
from inside her
the one she felt lift her stomach
climb toward her throat

to blend closer to my mother
closer

i tint my hair more blonde each spring
my father stopped asking
when my hair will return to its font
i think he has come to admire
the red-shaded russet glow of my hair
that has never been able to hold blonde dye

colored chromosomes
are the ones most tagged

now i have taken my mother's place
he my father's
i watch him in the yard
my accomplice
red hair matching october leaves
skin bleached in the sun
eyes the only green left in midwestern falls
starred with freckles
it seems he is the sun's refuge
all light cadences from him
his luminescent colors lure in
every whisper of winter

and at the ends of my hair
those cherrywood tips
my waist sits flat
but i feel it
a pollen tip of movement
a pulse that tells me
i will pass this dilemma on
in chromosomes
that pulse will explode in blood and salt
from between my legs
gain color from light outside me

i feel it now
inside me
this inquest
which chromosomes
    will spawn into demigods
it tethers me
this pulse
    beating new and unnoticed inside me
will know what it means
    to collapse under
    the tangle of a mother's eyes
    and a father's hair
it begins: four-year old boy walks streets in front of Kremlin the Kremlin the manifestation of pictures in newspapers sounds of his heels on streets matching stiff-leg punches of soldiers' boots stomping in wide symmetrical bands on May Day that stomping marching drumming heel-click of their boots throwing the reverb of booteels into the square that red square no that Red Square no that plush cool red square that stews him as they stand in line for hours to see the purplish plush face of Lenin embalmed and lounging behind his glass coffin in the Mausoleum holiday vacation holiday in Moskva his mother's hands balmy around his she hums a gypsy waltz while his father takes a picture the Kremlin's red brick walls and towers like luminaries in their background watching meditating memorizing his black hair his father's slight hunch in his back — click-zhhhh-t — one picture of Zoltan and his mother in front of the Kremlin that part of the Kremlin rarely seen inside inside where five cathedrals wait to feel the scent of incense and burning candles on their walls wanting incense burning candles smoke stains on the ceiling new smoke stains to replace ones from one-hundred years before to layer over ones from a century before to texturize the ceiling make shadows where the sun always reaches. His father insists one more picture in front of the Cathedral of the Assumption his mother moves to the steps pulling Zoltan behind she poses picks Zoltan up tells him to smile at the camera and when the negative is exposed to their upside-down image she does not smile Polish women do not smile she stares determined so she might take the picture herself just concentrate hard enough on her husband's hands and she can take the picture with her will Zoltan's face itches on his mother's cheek itches in her unsmiling until those strange Russian voices interrupt him again Prokhoditye lyudy soldiers their beautiful straight uniforms long overcoats their bright toy-like pins and medals tell them to move along Zoltan knows this language is not Polish
Prosze posuwacie it is not Polish it is Slavic but it is not Polish not embalmed in mountains of the south or the Wisla but his parents understand their commands so he knows it is close to Polish understands most words except he finds he needs to work past a more ingrained accent Prokhoditye, zdyes nyelzya stoyat that smooth sinking accent of Russians smooth curved accent of Russians smooth buttery accent of Russians Zoltan sees a picture of the Kremlin Lenin Stalin in a book his older brother has he sees a picture of the Tour Eiffel in a book Baba Ewa keeps under her kitchen sink Baba Ewa takes care of him when his parents go to the theatre Zoltan crawls under the sink to look at Baba Ewa's book with the picture of the Tour Eiffel she catches him scolds him for being sneaky nosy but she shows him all the pictures he remembers things called the Louvre Champs d'Elysees Arc de Triomphe but one picture he remembers is the Tour Eiffel the Tour Eiffel he imagines it taller than red brick walls enclosing the Kremlin taller than fences around his family's apartment building in Warszawa taller than the crest of moon on the Wisla he wants the Tour Eiffel but Baba Ewa warns him not to mention it he is not to tell his mother and father Polish parents do not know what the Tour Eiffel is. Zoltan wants his picture taken in front of the Tour Eiffel his father snapping the picture while his mother holds his hand the negative exposed to their upside-down image on the Tour Eiffel Zoltan wants the Tour Eiffel holiday vacation the Kremlin Brezhnev his shadows holiday Zoltan's mother she lowers him to the ground his father hurries them avoiding stares of the soldiers stares of them with smooth curved accents smooth buttery faces Zoltan watches his parents step farther away the soldiers' sinking accent digresses into a background wash turbulent swarm of sound he watches his mother motion for him his father open his mouth to yell for him this is the last time his mother carries him
Advent of Red

Pani Grabowski's hair red red like the blood juice of borshch red like the flesh of winter currants red red but that does not mean she is Jewish people have red hair red even in Warszawa but Pani Grabowski's hair is curly red and his mother stops in the kitchen dough for the chleb beaten down with imprints of her fists and knuckles she looks at the dough her eyes circling around its plump edges the maslo-colored shade of its body scans ridges and valleys left by her hands for stray pieces of hair that fall in into the moist ferment staring at her in anticipation of being molded baked buttered into something fantastic succulent artistic slices of chleb risen yeast air-pocket canvases of blemished baked dough she exhales long tired like the Wisla running wide the north-south pull of the city wide and tired she takes her fists beats the dough again beats kneads tosses reworks until it sits in a bloated sphere on the kitchen table until she lifts it into a buttered bowl as if it is a rook's egg and whispers No running around the house, Zoltan Zoltan on his toes as always while dough rises crouches springs into the delicate pale puff of prebirth he is forced not to run jump from bed to floor couch to table his shins strain after only minutes and his feet pound waiting for the rise of dough elastic strain of risen dough the elastic rise of preborn chleb the cost of causing dough to fall worth straining for the rise of elastic dough. He on his toes his mother setting dirty bowls spoons crumbs distracted miscues of sugar flour into the sink and trash she does everything without a sound no vibration in the air no distraction of the flow of air even when she places bowls into the porcelain sink two solids hit silent Zoltan wonders about his teacher he dresses himself in his ironed uniform his mother presses the night before while he lies in bed unable to sleep thinking of his first day of school finally he in first class able to eat lunch with other children able to walk home by himself he hears his mother spit water onto his uniform dark blue pants jacket searing white shirt he hears the gush pshhhhh as she sprays water on them with her mouth the hiss of the iron running against the material steaming it smooth smooth the wide long water of
the Wisła in spring. Zoltan wakes he dresses combs his hair careful to get the part on the left straight he has new bookbag new pencils a notebook books a piece of chocolate his father slips him as he takes him to the school’s gate Be good and listen to your teacher his father waves and runs back toward the trolley stop that takes him to the university Zoltan marches into first class alert confident impressive like guards outside government house like strange soldiers in Red Square red he meets Józef from the apartment next to his they laugh brag about how they will beat second class at football during recess Józef invites Zoltan to sit next to him and Józef’s cousin Janek soon class is twirling with sounds of five-year olds giggling little girls making sure white ribbons in their hair are in place little boys wrestling each other little children discovering how many other little children there are to play football with giggles laughing roars of childhood giddiness of separation from parents of freedom for eight hours when Pani Grabowski walks in shimmering smiling so bright you can see the breath coming in and out of her mouth like starshine in late June nights streaming down on the Wisła’s reflection Dzień dobry, class! My name is Pani Grabowski how delicate her voice she has a violin tucked inside her throat that plays when she speaks her voice high lace-like string-like as she calls attendance rearranges first class’s seating teaches mathematics history penmanship reading leads them outside into September lungs of air mourning trees Zoltan watches her smile her white teeth red curly hair bouncing bangs just over her eyes her hair just combing the space of her back right below the shoulder blades right below the simple basin after the bottom of her shoulder blades. Józef pulls him to the shroud of a tree Józef Janek a boy named Henryk who says Pani Grabowski is a Jew the other three deny it but Henryk says his father tells him anyone with red curly hair red like the flesh of plums is a Jew the man who takes Henryk’s father’s job at the factory has red curly hair his name is Aginsky a Jew from Minsk Mama, is Pani Grabowski a Jew? Zoltan’s mother stands at the window looking down at the courtyard between four apartment buildings The leaves will be falling soon, Zoltan he tugs at her apron his feet aching his toes dig into the floor straining with the elastic stretch of preborn chleb Mama,
Henryk's Papa says . . . she silences him places her hand on his black hair
her canvas of pale skin she strokes pulls his bangs out of his eyes Nie,
Zoltan. Grabowski is a Catholic name
two suitcases two two oversized lunchboxes two like bookends on his mother's shelf two like two loaves of rising dough in the oven two two strangely like the two carriers of life between his growing legs too tall at six years already taller than ten-year olds on the playground two suitcases carry his life his six-year old life the flow of the Wisla the straining north-south pull of the Wisla in two suitcases cotton white underclothes two pairs of pants two pairs of pants for the rest of his life three shirts for the rest of his life socks sweater winter jacket three pairs of shoes galoshes tennis shoes school shoes shoes shoes take up too much space in two suitcases carrying his six-year old life Baba Ewa's book the book with the Tour Eiffel that book stains with her wishes her farewell of hoping his feet touch the space over Paris over Paris standing on the heights of the Tour Eiffel facing the direction of the Wisla someday after he leaves his six-year old life in the East going further East he goes further into the Slavic tongues of those Russian soldiers further East he goes further East from standing over Paris suspended in steel scaffolding of the Tour Eiffel. He wonders how his mother will pack her thirty-one years in the allotted two suitcases per emigre to Moskva to his father's new job better job Brezhnev they decide who leaves when what city why his father is needed further East to teach Polska Polish to smooth buttery faces how will his mother pack two suitcases per emigre her dresses coats necklaces purses picture frames on walls shelves of books sofa beds how does she pack furniture how does his father pack furniture beds radio books frames with the image of his brother Karol before the trouble pictures of his brother at six-years old Zoltan's mother squeezes his six-year old life into one suitcase squeezes stuffs stumps his life tensing at the corner of the suitcase she develops a method of sitting on suitcases as they are ready to explode ready to burst she pushes her weight down over their lives their clothes shoes picture frames photographs his father's grandfather's gold pocket watch Karol's six-year old jacket red jacket with blue zipper his favorite jacket still unwashed with stains of mud from the football field at school on the
sleeves full full with lives she squeezes pushes propels so they close without erupting lock close without traces of air filtering in close lock for the train trip East. she takes Zoltan's one empty suitcase saved to carry years beyond the six he lives puts a camera his father's camera rearranged photo album vaporous black and white images of grandparents great-grandparents himself Karol four books beautiful books infested with his mother's careful penciled notes praises critiques lace curtains almost white from his grandmother's maiden home green glass vase fired in Praga gift from an uncle a traveling uncle is wrapped in today's newspaper barrettes clock His father yells he yells to hurry there is nothing left the taxi waits in the courtyard for two suitcases each the fare to the train station his father Papa takes two suitcases he returns for two more he yells from the courtyard I'll wait here. Hurry! his father does not cry the Wisla his thirty-five years unpacked furniture wallpaper abandoned books books left books abandoned one suitcase by the door his mother overfilling the last one it is almost closed she runs to the kitchen not smiling Polish women do not smile not crying she grabs the cast iron pan burned black beyond its original silver her mother's pan she says food tastes better cooked in rusted black cast iron pans at least thirty-years old it must fit she pushes urges begs she pushes almost closed almost snug between books and curtains but she cannot she cannot so she takes the green glass vase tosses it over Zoltan's head into the corner. she sits to close the last suitcase his father yells the taxi honks Zoltan visions the countryside visions the encroaching train trip the Wisla behind the Wisla becomes West approaching smooth curved accents of Russian soldiers approaching East approaching his father's new university approaching only two suitcases allowed allowed by government by party by dictum per emigre only two suitcases per immigrant only two two suitcases farther from the Tour Eiffel his mother sits strains grunts bounces forces the suitcase closed last suitcase his father yells the taxi honks Zoltan at the door looks down empty hallway toward the staircase then click it is done
Regrowth in Red Brushstrokes

He speaks wide curves of Russian new accent transparent accent wide curving tongue Polish tongue speaks Russian tries to speak Russian tries to inherit smooth curves still reverts to Polish when he does not remember a smooth curved language odcie’n ogrodzenie okre’sla’c do not resemble otthonok prilozheniya oprydehyat. Zoltan remembers train East approaching onion domes that red square no that Red Square two suitcases each him with his father at the Universitet Moskva first glimpse of comradeship new life Polish and history Slavic History Before 1900 Polish and history his father expert in both Zoltan in the history faculty offices sits next to his father knows he is expert too shakes Pan Nikolai Vladimirovich Krasnokov’s hand no Gospodin Nikolai Vladimirovich no Tovarishch Nikolai Vladimirovich’s hand dented moist hand cannot answer Tovarishch Nikolai Vladimirovich’s Pleased to meet you Ochyon priyatno can only say Przyjemnie mi pa´nstwa pozna´c to Tovarishch Nikolai Vladimirovich’s fat-lipped grin his father speaks different different he changes his tongue conversation in smooth buttery accents bounce back and forth Zoltan in the middle watches the trace of phrases arch back forth Zoltan in the middle his father his two suitcases needs new books more references secretary assistant overview of the university’s class requirements no no not necessary do not worry Nikolai Vladimirovich has outlines of the courses his father will teach has the books his father will use has the notes his students will write down has his lectures typed up not necessary to research they decide in smooth buttery tongues who teaches which students learn what students learn two history courses on Slavic Cultural Conflict in the 1800s one course of fourth-level Polish no secretary assistant overview research his father gets a desk in the corner office empty bookshelf three classes of smooth curved tongues lighting the room Zoltan is tested placed in the art school second class they decide which students learn what students learn they decide he will not become engineer teacher doctor politician no he is placed in art school art school he becomes familiar with curved accents non-Polish Slavic History new alphabet
drawing sculpting painting the Wisla clean moonlit Baba Ewa walking on the banks her cane wrestles with her hand he plays football he tallest boy in second class he quickest goalie everyone with smooth curved accents cheers him his classmate girl Natasha her hair straight black like his smiling under her bangs. Stas speaks Polish too his mother Polish his father Lithuanian Zoltan walks home with Stas in an accent like his like his tinted by the feel of the Wisla incense burning in the basilicas two Catholic boys speak Polish-tinted Russian after school running home run home jump into puddles on sidewalks jump over fences run under shaded trees talk of Natasha the accidental red brushstroke of paint she caught on her cheek in painting class Stas's goal against third class run run through the park sun out parting clouds bright brightening red maroon gold of mourning leaves ready to fall brightening cable wires of trolleys Zoltan and Stas hopping over the tracks running laughing Polish-glanced Russian wind clamors gnaws at their ankles Stas says when you can feel the wind between your toes winter is coming Stas says this says this is Zoltan's first Moskva winter Is it different? different from snow falling on the Wisla turning it into a long black strip burning with thousands of lights wind freezing snow into icicles at windows the Wisla grey sky grey his mother's chleb tastier warmer different from snow on the Wisla Stas laughs Tak, there is no Wisla Zoltan paints a red brushstroke over the Wisla red paints Natasha's eyes over it the Wisla paints winter is coming his teacher Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna Aginskaya commends his Russian bending Polish-hued Russian in December his perfectly enunciated wide accent accent Polish-hued smooth wide commends him Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna his father's bookshelf slowly inhabited by Polish books Polish books in translation Russian books Slavic History Before 1900 Zoltan he sees Natasha smile
Deposition of the Sentry’s Skin

her eyes like jelly gelled like jellied water water-troughed like water so she is thick water transparent fluid undulating limbs waving lithe like fins she is underwater with fins fins silk fins waving through water through jellied water she is below the surface. this is how her eyes appear today below the surface below watery jelly moist balmy her eyes water like jelly thick water today the thirty-first of March she cannot return to Warszawa Warszawa the Wisla she cannot visit Karol his father cannot visit Karol Zoltan cannot sit on the snow behind the headstone cross-legged and wait staring at Karol’s stone lettered headstone Karol six-year old brother older brother Zoltan now older than his older brother. His mother floats smoothly through the apartment soundless watery unable to return to Warszawa unable to return the Wisla Karol his headstone unable to go back touch his headstone cold smooth she stares at a picture frame on the wall Karol six-years old smiling toothless smile straight black hair watery eyes pastel eyes smiles in his uniform smiles at lives beyond his six years smiles he is smaller Zoltan sees he is smaller than he is smaller even at six-years old unable to cry Polish women do not cry the thirty-first of March he dies Karol blue purple unable to cough spits out blood red red like the flesh of winter currants cold blue pastel skin Karol he dies in the hospital after three months of medicine shots heat compresses blankets over his chest x-rays coughs with blood six years of life shrinking he dies Karol six-years old the thirty-first of March blue pastel like snow below hospital windows like his eyes Karol same color as his mother as he dies her hand cold frozen on Karol’s hand his fingernails pasty his eyes water he dies Zoltan preborn inside his mother balmy coated with red red flesh like plum flesh floating in water waving transparent fluid Zoltan inside of her like silk undulating in water Karol dies six-years old their mother’s heart stops for three seconds Zoltan twitches she begins to breathe again pastel like snow Zoltan remembers train trip East at the border East passports visas papers documents six-years old smooth buttery soldiers Russian soldiers inspect his passport inspect his face his
photograph his face smooth curved accents determine if he is him if his face belongs to him his face his photograph two suitcases each belong to him after crossing the border before his mother puts passports in her handbag his father takes Zoltan's looks at it looks smiles intrigued at his face his face You are much bigger than your brother this Zoltan much bigger than Karol his mother watery unable to cry stares at the picture frame at six-year old boy snow on ground outside onion domes the Kremlin two kilometers away Zoltan at the window thinks he can see the towers red brick towers surrounding the Kremlin two kilometers away snow making gold domes of the cathedrals muted mute pastel dulled under the grey sky. His mother does not bake chleb today she is water thick water like transparent jelly gelled water he is taller than her standing beside her when she sits sits staring at the picture frame at Karol he wants to sit on her lap he will sit on her lap warm her stomach like he does when Karol dies inside her floating in transparent fluid but he cannot move to sit on her lap he cannot move frozen cold her eyes watery on the thirty-first of March his father in the kitchen eats yesterday's chleb kielbasa borshch warm borshch soundless his mother stares at Karol Zoltan wants to speak he cannot cry Polish people do not cry he places his hand on her black hair his canvas of pale skin he strokes pulls her bangs out of her eyes I love you, Mama she bends her head down Zoltan strokes pulls her bangs out of her eyes she twitches her shoulders looks back up at Karol hanging on the wall Zoltan, you have an accent
two kopeeks Zoltan buys ice cream after school cones of chocolate vanilla out of a kiosk on Novii Arbat two kopeeks his father gives him every morning before after May Day ice cream kiosks bloom reappear two kopeeks Stas’s father gives him two kopeeks too two but he worries Stas’s father binds books at a factory his mother does not. Zoltan two kopeeks one chocolate ice cream cone walks down the sidewalk thirty-one centimeters taller than Stas licks ice cream holds the cone sun brightening each day brightens gets brighter gold domes bright green summer Zoltan hears rough accents hears tourist tongues not Polish not Russian taking photographs other Slavs he sees straight-edged line of uniforms Russian soldiers watching watching tourist tongues they watch two kopeeks Zoltan tells Stas his mother should work at the bulochnaya with his mother he tells Stas their mothers can work together at the bulochnaya bake chleb knead dough mix flour sell chleb to smooth buttery faces he says if Stas’s father runs out of kopeeks Zoltan’s father will give him four kopeeks everyday for two ice cream cones two he tells Stas his mother can work with his mother two Polish women baking chleb the Wisla Zoltan still paints the Wisla wide red-streaked paints it in class the Wisla tinted by daylight moonlight winterlight Junelight the Wisla from the East he is now the East Baba Ewa wrestles with her cane along the banks of the Wisla Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna does not teach painting she her hair red red curly like the blood juice of borshch she red tells Zoltan she admires the Wisla the many-lighted Wisla she red curly hair like Pani Grabowski red curly red admires the Wisla from the East she a Jew from Minsk tells Zoltan she wants him to keep painting the Wisla she not his painting teacher who condemns him for non-Soviet subjects he Tovarishch Vladimir Nikolaevich wants him to paint the red square red no that Red Square no that plush cool red square profiles of Lenin Stalin Gagarin not the Wisla not the Wisla but the Moskva the Neva the Don the Volga Russian smooth curves of Russian rivers not the Wisla everyone is tired of the Wisla. there are no more empty spaces on the walls in his apartment his
mother hangs each painting the Wisła runs down each wall in their apartment Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna she wants the Wisła tells Zoltan to paint himself then the Wisła one canvas the Wisła running down his face his face pastel the Wisła wide over him pulling north-south tinted with red streaks red points tips foaming where currents break the Wisła over him

Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna teaches French next year fourth-class Zoltan will learn French he asks Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna if she has been to Paris **Mai, oui** Zoltan stunned by silk accent her fluid silk accent curving lithe like violins in the air like sounds of the Wisła in spring overflowing with the runoff of snow near flooding moving fast giggling silk accent her silk tongue Zoltan new accent he does not understand but he knows she is laughing behind her words **Vy byla v Tour Eiffel?** the Tour Eiffel standing over Paris suspended in steel scaffolding of the Tour Eiffel Baba Ewa **Da,** I have even eaten ice cream on the Champs d’Elysees she says it ice cream in French **glace** he memorizes it next year he will learn French with Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna French the Tour Eiffel Baba Ewa **glace** chocolate vanilla

Zoltan and Stas cross the street ice cream cones in hand pastel Polish hands listening to tourist tongues laughing they laugh cross trolley tracks the sun bright over them two kopeeks two each two ice cream cones they pass a bulochnaya Zoltan sees Natasha inside Natasha Zoltan and Stas watch she buys a loaf of black khleb Russian khleb now two loaves of khleb Zoltan smiles he sees she has torn a hole in her tights a hole at her right knee it is tinted red like the blood juice of borshch she falls playing football today
Migrations

painting red painting Natasha she speaks silk her fluid accent stretches around silk traces of light brightening from her mouth her ten-year old mouth her accent buttery silk chanson neige fruits des mer glace ice cream she speaks French after Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna's silk tongue curves around transparent words French words glace ice cream Zoltan sits at his desk next to Stas sits listens to violin strings bowed in the air behind his ears their voices like violin strings Natasha like violin Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna like violin the Tour Eiffel steel scaffolding in the air suspended silk accents buttery silk accents he wants Zoltan wants to devour sound swallow it feel it in his stomach balmy tinted red by his insides silk floating within himself the sun smooth into the windows mourning trees give up their leaves to the winter it is gnawing between his toes the Wisla is between his toes the Wisla Baba Ewa Baba Ewa moves to Brzozów moves she undresses her apartment she her books furniture clothes picture frames vases are undressed sent to Brzozów her father is born in Brzozów born in foothills green bright summer brightening sun hills mountains surrounding Brzozów Baba Ewa takes her cane too old she says this too old Warszawa the Wisla is running dry she has trouble seeing it in daylight moonlight winterlight Junelight the Wisla running dry she wrestles with her cane along the banks the night before she leaves she leaves the Wisla sends furniture photographs books jewelry winter coat to Brzozów she migrates she does not immigrate she moves south to Brzozów her father she does not know two suitcases moves to mountains where boxmakers live she sends a telegram her new address no phone to Zoltan's parents a telegram Brzozów hills green she sends a letter after mountains boxmakers her father's home she writes Zoltan, do you still see the Tour Eiffel oui glace chanson silk accent silk buttery tongue he speaks French he speaks he closer to the West the Wisla he learns rivière river the Wisla north-south rivière still running full floating through Warszawa the Wisla fluid silk the West the Tour Eiffel the Wisla are West he is closer to the West rivière he paints the Wisla his face over the Wisla his face Baba Ewa wrestles with her
cane over the red-pointed Wisla. Natasha answers *Qu’est-ce que tu études maintenant* she answers silk *j'étudie le français* she silk buttery silk accent Zoltan thinks her hair black straight black hair *les cheveux noirs* his hair *les cheveux noirs* straight black hair *czarny* his mother’s hair *czarny* in smooth buttery tongues *chornyye* Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna her hair red curly red in smooth buttery tongues *ryzhyevolosye* like Pani Grabowski red *czerwony* now silk *les cheveux roux* she is red curly red Natasha her hair black buttery curved accent turns to silk floating fluid French he is closer to the West the Wisla Stas says he hates French refuses to speak the West he speaks Polish-tinted Russian shaded Polish tells Zoltan after school withering ice cream cones two kopeeks in hand two ten-year olds run over trolley tracks Stas he hates French he wants the Wisla Zoltan does not know the difference *Is it different?* different from the West the Tour Eiffel Karol lies under cooling ground ice cream on the Champs d’Elysees Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna suspended over Paris the West Baba Ewa the Wisla different the wind Polish-glanced Russian wind clamors gnaws at their ankles Stas says when you can feel the wind between your toes winter is coming this is Moskva winter comes in thousands of snow lights on the Wisla in Warszawa it does not snow in Paris the West does not know clamoring gnawing at ankles wind between toes Stas says he hates rivière the Wisla it is not rivière it is reka no no it is rzeka the Wisla they eat ice cream cones withering toward winter two ice cream cones two kopeeks each Zoltan hears silk the West two suitcases away
Territorial Boxes from the South

foothills hills green brightening two months two-month-long visa holiday to hills Tatry mountains Karpaty return Zoltan returns Polska Baba Ewa south in the mountains the Tatry Brzozów linden trees green fields silk on hills green silk mountains not foothills not hills mountains Zoltan sees mountains linden trees. Baba Ewa is in the doorway of a wooden house waving two months closer to the West Brzozów his mother pastel hands she hugs Baba Ewa his father carries suitcases into Baba Ewa’s home smell of chleb buttered baked sliced on the table cucumbers tomatoes kielbasa juice winter currant juice strained from jars of preserves sitting underground under floorboards during winter winter currant juice chleb Zoltan smells them smells linden trees fresh leaved trees giggling their leaves in the breeze green giggling mountains bright green Baba Ewa takes Zoltan’s hand her pale canvas of skin she strokes pulls his bangs out of his eyes black straight hair asks if he is home home the Wisla smooth curves of Russian-tinted Polish Slavic-hued French the Wisla rivière. Zoltan walks with her he returns mountains green linden trees fields painted with sallow red purple specks flowers fleurs their shoes scuffle skip on the dirt path deep to the trees everything becomes green green shaded everything under linden trees green he sees another wooden house deep to the trees lindens Baba Ewa asks if Zoltan still knows the Tour Eiffel the Wisla *Da, Baba Ewa* the Tour Eiffel the Wisla West she takes Zoltan’s hand his canvas of pastel skin leads him into the open door of the wooden deep to the trees house Zoltan hears scraping *zzzzssshh* scraping *zzzzssshh* scrapes linden trees he walks inside he sees old man grey bent curved smoothly curved at the shoulders the old man is grey leans over a bench scraping wood palmsized squares fixes them together scrapes them smooth it is a box small box it fits in his hand linden box closes without gap no gaps closes together smooth feathered corner joints raised interior lining brass inlay he burns burns fire etches with fire patterns pictures on linden box stains paints it red orange gold paints linden boxmaker of the Tatry deep to the trees. Zoltan watches he watches he wants to feather smooth raise inlay
burn stain paint he paints the Wisla runs down each wall in their apartment Moskva the Wisla runs in Moskva but this is Brzozów linden Tatry mountains green Zoltan wants the Wisla this boxmaker he is the West he is Polska's southern half only in the Tatry boxmakers only here only here the Wisla rivière he speaks in smooth buttery accents Teach me, please the old man does not understand Baba Ewa tells him him the grey man to teach Zoltan he teaches Zoltan he learns to feather smooth raise inlay burn stain paint he makes boxes without gap he two months is boxmaker Tatry Brzozów mountains the Wisla the West he smells of linden he speaks in scrapes smooth feathered scrapes Zoltan linden burn stain paint his mother scrubs him scrubs brushes at night she cannot clean linden off skin pastel skin Zoltan smells of linden in bed not sleeping seeing moonlight Junelight pass windows of Baba Ewa's wooden house he hears outside cooing at night birds insects mountains green he hears outside outside his mother cannot clean linden off his skin Zoltan he is boxmaker for two months the West the Wisla he the grey man teaches him to burn stain paint Zoltan does not paint he returns to the East after two months does not paint he becomes East smooth buttery curved he is East he tells Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna he does not paint his face the Wisla he burns stains paints him painting is not the Wisla Tatry Brzozów mountains linden Baba Ewa they are not painting grey old man linden boxmakers he is boxmaker burn stain paint linden is the Wisla the Tour Eiffel Baba Ewa. Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna smiles Très bien, Zoltan, burn stain paint
The Wisla Strikes

Stas leaves for Lithuania Vilnius his father takes them his mother Stas his father they leave Stas's father is fired from the book bindery Polish people cannot strike crisis Polska Warszawa the Wisla they fight rise brighten strike Polska boxmakers crisis smooth buttery faces spit at Stas's father Stas's mother is afraid to touch dough in the bulochnaya she is afraid Stas the Wisla there are rumors rumors Polska is rising the Wisla is rising lindens are rising they strike Polska is striking smooth buttery tongues whisper at Stas his father they leave Natasha glances like silk her hair straight black hair she tells Zoltan Russia will invade she hears Russia will take the Wisla Brzozów lindens the Wisla Baba Ewa workers cannot strike workers puppet workers cannot because Russian workers cannot they decide smooth buttery workers cannot strike will not strike Natasha is smooth silk she her accent speaks French tells Zoltan he is East East the East will invade armed intervention the Wisla workers cannot demand she glances fluid transparent her tights do not have holes in them anymore. Zoltan his father he teaches fourth-year Polish he has six students he tells Zoltan there is Slavic History After 1900 now now his mother does not speak when she bakes chleb kneads dough mixes flour sells chleb to smooth buttery faces she does not speak Polish-tinted Russian crisis the Polish Crisis there are rumors armed intervention rumors to invade the Wisla green summer sun withers mourning trees begin ice cream kiosks glace leaving soon two more weeks no glace two kopeeks summer workers strike refuse burn stain paint Zoltan walks home Stas is gone he walks home across trolley tracks ice cream cone chocolate glace he waits for wind to gnaw at his ankles Stas says when you can feel the wind between your toes winter is coming Stas says this says he may not feel it in Vilnius Zoltan makes boxes boxmaker Tatry Brzozów mountains Baba Ewa lindens boxmaker in art school fifth-class boxmaker from the Wisla he does not paint he sees grey old man when he feathers smooths raises inlays burns stains paints he makes boxes without gap they are not Russian boxmakers are not Russian are linden mountains green he is placed in art
school not painting he will be boxmaker Tatry boxmaker in mountains
linden the smell of linden he cannot clean the smell of linden off his
pastel skin he Slavic not Russian speaks in smooth buttery accent curved
accent silk soldiers watch him curved smooth accents of Russian soldiers
watch him know he is Polish know this they watch they smell linden on
his pastel skin in Polska Polska workers are striking demanding rumors
Russia will invade to quiet suppress workers cannot strike. His father is
afraid his last name is Kiliński Kiliński is not a Russian name he is
afraid they will invade the Wisła Tatry Baba Ewa workers strike
Tovarishch Nikolai Vladimirovich tells him not necessary no do not
worry he will still teach classes Universitet Moskva wants Polska the
Wisła it is theirs it is the East boxmakers are not Russian but they are
Soviet Russian soldiers the heel-click of their boots throw the reverb of
booteels into the square that red square no that Red Square no that
plush cool red square in a more ingrained accent that smooth sinking
accent of Russians smooth curved accent of Russians smooth buttery
accent of Russian soldiers' sinking accent digresses into a background
wash turbulent swarm of sounds of eyes watching they watch for
workers painters boxmakers to strike demand refuse stand brighten he
makes boxes he boxmaker he will be spit on like Stas's father he is
Kiliński he is the Wisła rivière he is he is the smooth sinking accent
smooth curved accent silk like fins accent
Ascension Under the Wisla

solidarity no Solidarity no Solidarno's 'c it will be stopped the Kremlin says this the square that red square no that Red Square no that plush cool red square will stop it smooth buttery faces say this Solidarity Solidarno's 'c Solidarnost the Wisla strikes puppet workers strike they will be stopped by the heel-click of boots throwing the reverb of booteels onto winterlighted water of the Wisla they will end this strike armed intervention workers will work build drive teach burn stain paint Warszawa Brzozów Tatry the Wisla the West linden they will work Brezhnev Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev he will invade they at Polska's border there are rumors rumors float silk in snow-glanced March air in Moskva the Kremlin that Red Square they will invade workers will work Lech Walesa will lose his accent they will invade Polska they decide who will work where they will make workers work rumors curved buttery faces will heel-click along water-tips of the red-pointed Wisla Zoltan's father worries Baba Ewa she in the lindens boxmakers Brzozów Polska wrestles with her cane behind striking workers rising workers Polska is rising, he teaches Polish and Slavic History Before 1900 at Universitet Moskva Tovarishch Nikolai Vladimirovich teaches Influence of Soviet Socialism in Eastern Europe books books in translation Polish books in translation do not come to Zoltan's father's desk this year Polska is rising Solidarno's 'c Solidarity Walesa workers are rising the Wisla is rising Zoltan's father gives history to Zoltan rumors Natasha's rumors they will invade Russian Slavs will invade massed at the border workers cannot strike they decide Polska will not rise Zoltan asks when the Wisla will flood Zoltan's father answers When you can feel the Wisla between your toes the flood is coming Zoltan says the Wisla has always been in his toes the Wisla farther West over Karol over his stone lettered headstone the Wisla will rise Karol will see the underside of the Wisla the Wisla from below the surface of water silk fluid floating Polska will rise His mother quiet in the bulochnaya Zoltan's mother does not speak Polish people do not speak but Polska rises in Moskva runs down walls of their apartment his mother hangs each painting the Wisla Zoltan's paintings the Wisla
runs down walls in their apartment she does not speak she strikes Polish people strike rise burn stain paint she hides her accent wide Polish accent there are rumors Russia armed at Polska’s border will invade workers cannot strike rumors there are rumors Stas’s father is fired from the book bindery Solidarno´ś´c Solidarity Walesa the Wisla Polska rises Polska strikes solidarity workers run like brushstrokes of daylight moonlight winterlight Marchlight on the Wisla thousands strike workers solidarity rise workers are attacked Zoltan’s father worries armed intervention solidarity workers are beaten by police beatings Zoltan’s father worries Polska is rising linden Baba Ewa wrestles with her cane among wooden to the trees houses boxmakers workers will rise beatings Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna tells Zoltan she pulls him after French class he makes a box linden box he is boxmaker he makes her a box red orange gold burned stained painted she puts her necklace in it after school Star of David she pulls him aside after French class whispers Solidarité, So-li-da-ri-té. Est-ce que tu comprends? solidarité Solidarité the West the Wisla the Tour Eiffel Baba Ewa Polska is striking rising Polska rises strikes Zoltan sees soldiers he walks home from school along Novii Arbat Russian soldiers their beautiful straight uniforms long overcoats bright toy-like pins medals watch him whisper invade workers cannot strike they whisper in that smooth sinking accent of Russians smooth curved accent of Russians smooth buttery accent of Russians Zoltan knows this language is not Polish it is not Polish it is Slavic but it is not Polish not embalmed in mountains of the south or the Wisla rivière workers strike the Wisla rises floods Karol is lifted from ground by the red brushstroked water of the Wisla Solidarité
It is Undone

Baba Ewa Brzozów linden mountains snowlighted snow winterlighted snow mountains boxmakers grey old man in wooden to the trees house smoke floating silk from the woodstove burns stains paints in Tatry south Polska in March thirty-first of March snow mountains linden unleafed skinless pastel in snow but smell smell of linden on mountains the Tatry Karpaty boxmakers Baba Ewa cannot sleep smells preborn linden in bed not sleeping seeing moonlight winterlight pass the windows of her wooden house she hears outside still at night mountains white she hears outside outside they are at the border armed intervention ready she smells linden burning in the grey old man's house he burns stains paints at night light bulbs candles better light than daylight Marchlight in the south Polska mountains mute muted light off snow Baba Ewa cannot sleep

Natasha cuts her hair straight black hair czarny les cheveux noirs chornyye cuts her straight black hair above her shoulders she straight black short hair below her ears she glances at Zoltan between lessons Zoltan fourteen-years old Zoltan sits next to Natasha Stas leaves Stas in Lithuania gone Zoltan sits next to Natasha she glances says workers cannot strike we will invade workers cannot strike Slavic people do not strike martial law no Martial Law in Polska she says this curfew visas end telephones disconnect theatres cinemas concert halls closed in Polska she says this Polska cannot strike Martial Law workers do not strike it is done. Zoltan sees snow pass windows of the art school onion domes the Kremlin two kilometers away outside the window he sees towers red brick towers surrounding the Kremlin two kilometers away snow making gold domes of the cathedrals muted mute pastel dulled under the grey sky Martial Law in Polska the Wisla Brzozów Baba Ewa no visas Moskva he cannot leave Moskva Natasha glances Zoltan whispers Slavic people do not strike, Polish people do she glances cuts her hair straight black hair short. Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna French only French curly red hair frames her face she Jew from Minsk speaks silk accent silk like fins accent to Zoltan French she speaks the West the Tour Eiffel the Wisla rises to Zoltan only French she asks Solidarnost? En
Zoltan answers snow muted gold domes of cathedrals muted pastel dulled Baba Ewa cannot sleep the Wisla the West the Tour Eiffel two suitcases closer to the West he answers, Solidarité Zoltan’s father applies for visas no no visas martial law no Martial Law no visas Warszawa closed no gaps Brzozów Tatry mountains linden Baba Ewa closed no gaps Polska closed no visas the Wisla closed red-tinted red-pointed workers cannot strike Polska cannot rise burn stain paint they cannot visit return Baba Ewa cannot sleep Zoltan’s father his mother Zoltan no visas Martial Law Walesa interned Polish workers arrested internment camps camps they are sent to camps Walesa closed camps swallow wide curved accents workers cannot strike they in camps are swallowed arrested they cannot sleep the Wisla cannot sleep Zoltan’s father pleads Kiliński is a Polish name applies for visa no. Tovarishch Nikolai Vladimirovich says do not insist no visas suspicion Zoltan’s father teaches two courses Slavic History Before 1900 he says Slavic History is now now he teaches Polish language one course he says Polish History is now he wants to return Tovarishch Nikolai Vladimirovich says not necessary Slavic History is in Moskva the Wisla closed red-tinted brushstroked red Brzozów the south mountains linden smooth buttery faces of Russian soldiers massed at borders they decide there will be no suspicion Zoltan’s father will not be suspicious he teaches Slavic History Before 1900 two courses Polish language one course he has six students curved sinking accents six smooth buttery faces look at him in curved Russian-hued accents. Martial Law the Wisla linden boxmakers Baba Ewa Zoltan’s father tells him curfew no visas no telephone no theatres cinemas concert halls there are camps prisons internment camps flooding the Wisla is flooding no visas they will not return to Polska Warszawa mountains boxmakers lindens Baba Ewa the Wisla Martial Law Zoltan his father his mother they cannot return Karol thirty-first of March feels the Wisla sink under him into snow frozen red-tinted soil under him Baba Ewa cannot sleep smells preborn linden in bed not sleeping seeing moonlight winterlight pass windows of her wooden house hears outside outside they at the border ready she smells linden burning in the grey.
old man's house Polska muted muted light off snow Baba Ewa cannot sleep she whispers no visas no telephone Martial Law the Wisla runs over her under her through her she whispers Zoltan, the Tour Eiffel the West teach him she sees moonlight winterlight pass Karol Zoltan smoke floats silk from the woodstove burns stains paints Baba Ewa sleeps teach him she sleeps thirty-first of March Martial Law snow muted moonlight she dies
The Cresting Under Flood

no visas no telephone grey old man sends telegram tells Zoltan’s father Baba Ewa dies Zoltan’s father his mother Zoltan they do not cry Polish people do not cry telegram East Baba Ewa dies they cannot return no visas Martial Law she is buried in Brzozów mountains linden boxmakers bury her through snow frozen ground thirty-first of March she dies. Zoltan’s father he wants to leave Zoltan’s father says this Solidarno’s co workers cannot strike dammed they are stopped dammed crested rise burn stain paint he wants to leave the Wisla crests dams Bonn Zurych Amsterdam Paryz he wants the West strikes free the Wisla floods East the Wisla runs down walls of Moskva it is approaching into the red square no that Red Square no that plush cool red square Martial Law the Wisla it approaches Bonn Zurych Amsterdam Paryz Zoltan hears him he says this Paryz no Parizh no Paris Paris the Tour Eiffel glace chanson neige fruits des mer Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna Baba Ewa the Tour Eiffel Oui, Papa! Paris! Zoltan’s father wants to leave the Wisla crests East it approaches Zoltan cannot sleep he sees moonlight Junelight pass the windows he hears outside cooing at night he hears outside outside gold domes of cathedrals red towers of the Kremlin two kilometers away Martial Law for eighteen months in Polska Martial Law Paris the Tour Eiffel two suitcases away from farther West Zoltan’s father wants to leave Zoltan Paris he cannot sleep he hears his mother tell his father no visas Martial Law they are still Polish they cannot leave they decide who will leave when what city cannot leave cannot Paris the Tour Eiffel the West escape armed two suitcases each again the Wisla runs down walls of their apartment they will leave the Wisla rivière in Moskva Zoltan cannot sleep they will leave the Wisla in Moskva the Wisla runs down walls in moonlight Junelight red-stroked red-pointed Wisla his face under the Wisla Natasha’s eyes in the Wisla the Wisla dammed cannot strike they are stopped dammed crested Karol Baba Ewa approaches He sees her Natasha Zoltan sees her she holds Misha’s hand Misha older sallow student at military institute holds Natasha’s hand Zoltan glances he sees them across the street across trolley tracks holding hands eating
ice cream glace sun low below trees below the red square no that Red Square no that plush cool red square flooding with tourists sun in Junelight lighting day until two hours after midnight they walk holding hands between tourists Slavic-tinged accents of Russian sun low Zoltan across the street he eats chocolate ice cream glace he walks home from art school he makes boxes boxes even in summer burns stains paints linden boxes he cannot return Baba Ewa linden mountains the Wisła Martial Law another year in Polska Martial Law for eighteen months in Polska soldiers still whisper sun shades gold on Natasha’s hair straight black hair looks gold smooth buttery faces curved sinking accents they laugh Natasha Misha laugh hold hands they kiss Zoltan sees them kiss laugh hands Natasha does not wear tights anymore. smells Zoltan he smells of linden speaks in scrapes zzzsssshh smooth feathered scrapes Zoltan linden burn stain paint he scrubs brushes at night he cannot clean linden off skin pastel skin Zoltan smells of linden walking home from art school Natasha kisses Misha they walk down the street step into a trolley east to Slavyanskaya Ploshchad east of the Kremlin east Zoltan sees them kissing East Zoltan tells Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna his father wants to leave she pulls him aside whispers pulls him by his shoulder her hair red curly silk floating around her face whispers scolds Ne parle pas, Zoltan! Ayez de la patience. Solidarité. Liberté. They will decide who leaves Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna pulls him aside Martial Law he must be careful the West floods farther away the West moves farther no visas no telephones Paris farther West he patient must be patient he will leave West the Tour Eiffel Baba Ewa Karol he will leave Martial Law in Polska workers camps prisons stares of Russian soldiers smooth buttery accents Kremlin Moskva they will leave Solidarité burn stain paint Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna pulls him aside whispers Even when I leave for Paris, no one will know
officially borders are free Zoltan's father says this officially Martial Law ends officially no visas no telephone no theatres cinemas concert halls there are camps prisons internment camps Walesa dammed beatings but officially Martial Law ends workers work build drive teach burn stain paint Polska crests Solidarno's 'c is banned Martial Law ends officially smooth out floods the Wisła Warszawa Walesa Baba Ewa Brzozów boxmakers mountains lindens ends workers do not strike Polish people do not strike camps prisons internment Martial Law officially ends. Natasha glances smiles short straight black hair les cheveux noirs glances with eyes straight black eyes Zoltan remembers she her rumors they will invade we will invade workers cannot strike armed intervention Slavic people do not strike she has the mark of Misha on her skin smells of drab military uniform of Russians that smooth sinking uniform of soldiers smooth curved accent of soldiers smooth buttery accent of soldiers Misha she smells of Misha in October Martial Law ends workers work Natasha smiles Misha leaves his imprint on her face his smooth sinking lips on her face Zoltan sixteen-years old Karol sixteen-years in snow frozen red-tinted soil over him crests dams Solidarno's 'c dams Misha lives on Natasha her skin her hair cut short straight black glances workers cannot strike the Wisla floods approaches East approaches Moskva they mix dam crest over each other Zoltan's father cries Polish people do not cry but Zoltan's father cries after school Zoltan late burns stains paints boxes linden boxes he scrubs brushes he cannot clean linden off pastel skin Zoltan smells of linden walking home from the art school soldiers still whisper workers do not strike he sees his father cries in the kitchen borshch cold unbaked chleb preborn frozen kielbasa Zoltan's father says Father Jerzy is dead Father Jerzy Popieluszko Church of Saint Stanislaw Kostka Warszawa Warszawa their church their church in Warszawa the Wisla Baba Ewa Father Jerzy bright gold striking he Father Jerzy strikes Solidarno's 'c floods workers will strike he gold shining brightening over the red-pointed Wisła Solidarno's 'c hero priest hero he is dead Zoltan's father says this Father Jerzy is dead sermons to
strike rise Solidarno’s sermons dull mute sermons to strike rise burn
stain paint. there are three Zoltan hears this kidnapped Father Jerzy is
kidnapped nineteenth of October murdered three police secret police
throw his body kidnapped murdered throw his body Father Jerzy in the
Wisla the red-pointed Wisla muted in snow dulled black snow falling on
the Wisla turns it into a long black strip burning with thousands of lights
wind freezing snow into icicles at windows the Wisla grey sky grey
Father Jerzy flooding the Wisla Father Jerzy is kidnapped murdered
thrown in the Wisla Zoltan’s Wisla Warszawa’s Wisla Polska’s Wisla
workers cannot strike they will be stopped dammed crests the Wisla
crests Father Jerzy spills over the top cresting on the red-pointed Wisla.
they kill Father Jerzy Polska will rise burn stain paint Walesa Baba Ewa
Karol Warszawa the Wisla will rise Father Jerzy rise burn stain paint the
Wisla past cresting Father Jerzy’s body floats silk floats lithe silk like fins
on the red-pointed Wisla

Zoltan Martial Law
ends officially Father Jerzy floats silk floats Baba Ewa she cannot sleep
Karol is lifted from ground by the red brushstroked water of the Wisla
there are camps prisons flooding Solidarité flooding East it approaches.
Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna Star of David glances Zoltan his eyes
flooding in class he nears crying Polish people do not cry Zoltan she says
Ayez de la patience she says this Zoltan mute dulled burn stain paint
Solidarité he boxmaker burns stains paints glances at Natasha her Misha-
stained skin the Wisla runs down walls of his apartment the Wisla rivière
runs bloodstains down walls of his apartment the Wisla runs Father Jerzy
down walls of his apartment he paints boxmaker must paint Zoltan
Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna pulls him aside whispers pulls him by his
shoulder her hair red curly silk floating around her face whispers
Peinture n’existe pas Painting does not exist, burn stain he knows Zoltan
knows but he must paint the Wisla over his eyes crests over his eyes in
his toes he can feel it in his toes he paints the Wisla over his eyes Karol’s
hand Baba Ewa wrestles with her cane along the banks of the Wisla red-
pointed Wisla Father Jerzy crests in the Wisla Natasha’s eyes flooded by
red brushstrokes of Father Jerzy floating silk like fins in the Wisla Polska
Warszawa Tatry Brzozów Baba Ewa Karol mountains linden the West
approaches floods East the Wisla two suitcases away the Wisla red-hued Father Jerzy’s blood tints the West pulls it East Karol’s headstone Baba Ewa’s cane camps prisons Martial Law officially ends there are camps prisons internment camps no visas no telephones Martial Law officially ends Father Jerzy they kidnap murder his body floats silk like fins in the Wisla
Zoltan glances linden box burn stain paint linden box on Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna's desk her desk French silk accent like fins accent letters on chalkboard yesterday's words finned like silk on chalkboard white dust on east-west pull of blackboard linden box on her desk students wait for class to begin Natasha glances at Zoltan her hair short black above the shoulders smiles she smiles Misha has a different hand to hold but she smells of Misha Martial Law Natasha smiles Misha leaves his imprint on her face his smooth sinking lips on her face Natasha is looking for a new hand. bell rings class must begin French silk accent smooth silk accent of Slavic-tinged French should begin now now in art school waiting for Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna she is never late never red curly hair Solidarité Liberté Patience she curly red hair frames her face she is never late Zoltan Natasha they speak she giggles Zoltan does not laugh Polish people do not laugh sound of teacherless students floods into hallways floods crests other teachers look inside inside where French is French in Moskva silk in Moskva Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna a Jew from Minsk speaking the West the Tour Eiffel Baba Ewa Karol she curly red hair glace on the Champs d'Élysées rumors there are rumors Martial Law officially ends still camps prisons internment Father Jerzy workers wait work workers do not strike workers cannot strike Solidarno’s%c floods crests dams the red-pointed Wisla the blood-hued Wisla rumors there are rumors Natasha says Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna a Jew from Minsk is seen on a train West West two suitcases West her family her husband her two daughters red curly hair two suitcases each they family from Minsk leave they are seen on a train West West to Paris the Tour Eiffel their feet touch space over Paris over Paris standing over Paris suspended in steel scaffolding of the Tour Eiffel two suitcases West farther West they leave East burn stain paint Natasha says this there are rumors Zoltan knows Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna leaves linden box on her desk his linden box he is boxmaker Polska Warszawa the Wisla Father Jerzy Brzozów Tatry mountains lindens boxmakers Baba Ewa Karol burn stain paint she leaves linden box on her desk only two
suitcases each per émigré West she eats glace on the Champs d’Elysees
Zoltan waits the Wisla runs down walls of his apartment approaches
crests East into the red square no that Red Square no that plush cool red
square it approaches waits the red brushstroked Wisla Solidarité silk
floating accent he misses riverwalls of red curly hair Tovarishcha Vera
Isaakovna she leaves. Zoltan opens his desk pencils pens scissors paper
erasers pastels envelope white envelop long folded three times he does
not recognize this envelop Natasha glances Zoltan opens it in the folds of
his hands pastel skin watery thick opens three-folded envelop looks
inside inside gold Star of David charm gold Star of David in gold
Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna’s necklace linden box she puts her necklace
in it after school she a Jew from Minsk leaves gold a strip of paper words
finnen in silk Solidarité she leaves she is the West the Tour Eiffel
Solidarno’sc Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna leaves Zoltan her necklace
linden box Star of David he a Catholic boy from Warszawa the Wisla runs
down walls of his apartment workers cannot strike they will be stopped
dammed crests the Wisla crests Father Jerzy spills over top crests on the
red-pointed Wisla burn stain paint Walesa Baba Ewa Karol Warszawa the
Wisla will rise Father Jerzy rise burn stain paint the Wisla past cresting
Father Jerzy’s body floats silk floats lithe silk like fins on the approaching
red-pointed Wisla Baba Ewa cannot sleep she among
boxmakers soldiers smooth buttery accent of soldiers whisper at Zoltan
when he walks home from school his Polish-French-hued Russian accent
workers cannot strike Zoltan’s mother stops working at the bulochnaya
she cannot bake khleb anymore Polish people do not bake khleb they
bake chleb Zoltan’s father applies for a visa visas Martial Law officially
ends prisons camps internment Walesa beatings police beatings Father
Jerzy anywhere visa Bonn Zurych Amsterdam Paryz gaps Zoltan wants
the West the Tour Eiffel visas two suitcases farther West Father Jerzy
Baba Ewa Karol his stone lettered headstone pulling like jelly thick like
gelled like jellied water water-troughed water pulls them farther East the
Wisla crests East it approaches soldiers whisper louder East two suitcases
Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna the Tour Eiffel. His mother does not cry
Polish people do not cry the Wisla crests dams West they want farther
West Solidarité Liberté Star of David Zoltan knows Father Jerzy Baba
Ewa Karol flood they under red-soiled ground he will not feel the Wisła
between his toes again
Birthmarks on Striking Skin

visa it is his Solidarité it is his visas they are theirs they leave Natasha
glances from her desk at the art school two kilometers from the red
square no that Red Square no that plush cool red square the Kremlin its
gold domes mute muted dulled by pastel March sky thirty-first of March
they leave the Wisla running down walls of their apartment red-pointed
Wisla runs down walls of their undressed apartment two suitcases each
passports visas West two suitcases closer West the Tour Eiffel Solidarité
the Wisla floods East books are left books Polish books in translation
furniture clothing picture frames paintings of the Wisla on walls linden
boxes two suitcases two two oversized lunchboxes two like bookends on
his mother’s shelf two like two loaves of rising dough in the oven two
two strangely like the two carriers of life between his growing legs too
tall at eighteen years already taller than eighteen-year olds on the street
he graduates from art school it is done. He knows how his father packs
books picture frames with the image of Karol before the trouble pictures
of his brother at six-years old how his mother packs years in allotted two
suitcases per émigre from Moskva picture frames on walls how she packs
the cast iron pan burned black beyond its original silver her mother’s pan
she says food tastes better cooked in rusted black cast iron pans linden he
cannot scrub brush clean linden off skin pastel skin Zoltan smells of
linden leaving his paintings the Wisla running down walls of their
apartment in Moskva train trip West train West the
Wisla approaches East too far East soldiers mark Polska on his skin pastel
skin the Tour Eiffel Martial Law officially ends his father strikes he does
not teach Slavic History Before 1900 two courses refuses Polish one
course to smooth buttery faces at Universitet Moskva he strikes
Solidarno ’s c smooth sinking accent approaches he strikes train through
Minsk Warszawa they pass Warszawa the Wisla they cross Zoltan crosses
the Wisla floods silk like fins water thick jellied water red brushstroked
water of Father Jerzy’s Wisla they cross the Wisla at night black unseeing
through Praga Sztutgart Sztrazburg Zoltan cannot sleep. two suitcases
each closer to Paris the West the Wisla is East East Father Jerzy’s body
floods in the crested dammed Wisla red-tinted currents red like the blood juice of borsch Paris before him Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna Zoltan has her linden box burn stain paint necklace Star of David in one suitcase he will mail it in Paris from a post office under the Tour Eiffel steel scaffolding of the Tour Eiffel the West train stops in Paris two-hour stop in Paris the West silk like fins they will stop two-hours then plane they board a plane West over water pastel water jellied water-troughed water to Toronto Canada West farther West two suitcases farther West they will decide they decide who goes West how far where what city Zoltan is on an airplane West Toronto he does not know Toronto Canada West the plane lifts rises burns stains paints he sees the Tour Eiffel Baba Ewa Brzozów mountains linden Karol Karol is East under red-tinted soil below flooded stone lettered headstone Baba Ewa cannot sleep the Wisla Martial Law officially ends he sees the Tour Eiffel steel scaffolding suspended over Paris as they leave. small the Tour Eiffel is small dented steel scaffolding over Paris suspended Solidarité small Karol smaller than the Tour Eiffel Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna somewhere Solidarité below the Tour Eiffel the West the Wisla is East Father Jerzy Baba Ewa Karol East Moskva East the Wisla floods East workers cannot strike the Wisla floods approaches East soldiers know the birthmark of striking skin Natasha glances she is East Stas leaves for Lithuania Stas's father is fired from the book bindery Father Jerzy's body kidnapped murdered thrown in the Wisla red-lighted Wisla Walesa camps prisons internment the red square no that Red Square no that plush cool red square soldiers their beautiful straight uniforms long overcoats bright toy-like pins medals that smooth sinking accent of Russians smooth curved accent of Russians smooth buttery accent of Russians East it is all East airplane over water thick like jelly water pastel under beneath them his father his mother Zoltan he can feel the Wisla in his toes Zoltan looks he cannot send Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna her box linden box Star of David Solidarité her red curly hair over glace on the Champs d’Elysees the Tour Eiffel below brightening the thirty-first of March they leave West farther West two suitcases each the Wisla now East Baba Ewa Karol East now East his mother does not cry Polish people do not cry Baba Ewa Karol the
Wisma Warszawa lindens the Tour Eiffel behind Zoltan does not stand suspended over Paris in steel scaffolding of the Tour Eiffel the Wisla crests red-tinted falls over wings East
The Invocation of Swallowing

Solidarité the Tour Eiffel the Wisla rivière East Baba Ewa Karol East Moskva East the Wisla floods East workers cannot strike the Wisla floods approaches East soldiers know the birthmark of striking skin Natasha she is East Stas Father Jerzy’s body kidnapped murdered is thrown in the Wisla red-lighted Wisla Walesa camps prisons internment the red square no that Red Square no that plush cool red square soldiers their beautiful straight uniforms long overcoats bright toy-like pins medals that smooth sinking accent of Russians smooth curved accent of Russians smooth buttery accent of Russians East it is all East

Zoltan his father in Toronto farther West does not teach Slavic History Before 1900 Polish he strikes he does not teach at Universitet Moskva he strikes smooth buttery faces farther West they cannot speak universities will not will not hire must speak English that currant accent currant like winter currants bitter red winter currants short currant accent Zoltan knows this language is not Polish it is not Polish not embalmed in mountains of the south or the Wisla. it is not that smooth sinking accent of Russians smooth curved accent of Russians smooth buttery accent of Russians new accent not silk like fins accent Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna they have nothing nothing two suitcases each linden box Star of David nothing they decide who will leave when what city Toronto near Kensington Market they live in an apartment undressed walls bare walls Geremek family they must live there immigrant organization places them with the Geremek family Polish immigrants the Geremek’s are farther West for three years they are farther West they Solidarité must live with the Geremek’s they decide who will leave when what city who will help help Zoltan his father his mother they live in one room of the Geremek’s apartment near Kensington Market Toronto farther West the Geremek’s speak currant-tinged Polish Pan Geremek tells Zoltan’s father there is work at the harbour work he can work at the harbour tinted blue silver under sun loading unloading he does not need to speak English on docks blue silver like fins harbour docks he can work Zoltan’s father works at the harbour blue water silver sides of ships he works blue at the harbour
loading unloading his mother Zoltan’s mother sits in the bare-walled Geremek apartment she stares thick like jelly gelled like jellied water his mother watery unable to cry stares at a picture frame at six-year old boy his headstone cold smooth at a picture frame Karol six-years old smiling toothless smile straight black hair watery eyes pastel eyes smiles in his uniform smiles at lives beyond his six years 

Zoltan walks streets of Kensington Market streets blue-grey paved streets no manifestation of the Wisla rivière Father Jerzy he is farther West accents bitter red currant accents no one stares at him no soldiers soldiers unseen on streets no soldiers whispering he is Polish no one knows the birthmark of striking skin Polska Warszawa the Wisla Father Jerzy Brzozów Tatry Baba Ewa mountains linden Karol the Wisla. trees green green brightening in noonlight bluelight westlight of Kensington Market currant accents shed from tongues no one stares at him he cannot understand words it is not Polish Russian French deaf like silk in thick jellied water thick water-troughed water Zoltan walks sees ice cream kiosk in Kensington Market chocolate vanilla ice cream glace Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna the vendor calls trills in currant accent accent currant like bitter red winter currants short currant accent not glace but Zoltan sees glace chocolate vanilla ice cream he walks faster he does not know how to ask for glace 

linden he smells of linden scrapes smooth feathered scrapes Zoltan linden burn stain paint he scrubs brushes at night he cannot clean linden off skin pastel skin the Wisla approaches East workers cannot strike Solidarité Martial Law officially ends the Wisla floods dams crests Zoltan paints he must paint the Wisla over his eyes crests over his eyes in his toes he can feel it he paints the Wisla over his eyes Karol’s hand Baba Ewa wrestles with her cane along the banks of the Wisla red-pointed Wisla Father Jerzy crests in the Wisla Natasha’s eyes flooded by red brushstrokes of Father Jerzy floating silk like fins in the Wisla Zoltan paints burn stain paint makes linden boxes burn stain paint he rides the subway to the harbourfront he cannot speak currant red accents but Zoltan knows he knows the color of one dollar gold five dollars blue twenty dollars green he knows the color of one ticket to the harbourfront gold he takes the subway gold in the turnstile
to the blue harbourfront silver he sells paintings linden boxes at the harbourfront sells them for blue purple green bills unspeaking that bitter currant accent he speaks colors to currant accents red currant faces blue green purple the Wisla runs down their homes the red-pointed Wisla linden boxes burn stain paint they bitter currant accents buy Zoltan’s paintings linden boxes a customer buys the Wisla Father Jerzy cresting in the Wisla the Wisla running bloodstains down walls of his home he a customer buys the Wisla East asks Zoltan his name nods Kiliński, that’s a Russian name, right?
The Flood Strikes

West farther West the Wisla rises East it rises floods flood again Martial Law officially ends workers cannot strike Polska cannot strike but the Wisla rises Father Jerzy crests spills over top of the red-pointed Wisla strike rise burn stain paint the Wisla rises again workers strike again Solidarité the Wisla floods approaches East further East floods approaches that red square no that Red Square no that plush cool red square there are rumors rumors farther West rumors Polska strikes Polska strikes again Polska rises floods the East crests rumors Geremek apartment there are rumors from the East Polska strikes the Wisla rises daylight moonlight Junelight whitelight on the red brushstroked Wisla it rises workers strike Father Jerzy crests there are rumors in the Geremek apartment Polska strikes Martial Law officially ends but Polska strikes again workers strike the Wisla rises Solidarno’sć Zoltan says the Wisla has always been in his toes the Wisla over Karol over his stone lettered headstone the Wisla rises Karol will see the underside of the Wisla the Wisla from below the surface of water silk fluid floating Polska will rise again Zoltan farther West Toronto Canada near Kensington Market rumors Zoltan hears rumors the Wisla strikes Polska rises again farther West he smells of linden scrapes smooth feathered scrapes Zoltan linden burn stain paint he scrubs brushes at night he cannot clean linden off skin pastel skin he speaks Polish-tinged English he cannot match the pitch of bitter winter currants that red currant accent of customers at the harbourfront blue silver sun brightening over blue-water thick like jelly water of the harbourfront customers they buy the Wisla linden boxes they hang the Wisla on their walls they buy linden boxes at the harbourfront from Zoltan Polish-tinged accent Zoltan. Wojciech Geremek teaches Zoltan at night they speak Polish-tinged English Wojciech teaches Zoltan he knows the birthmark of immigrant skin Zoltan learns learns wide curved accents of English Wojciech fluent teaches Zoltan red currants bitter Zoltan cannot sleep he learns English wide curved accent of English rumors they move rumors Polska strikes the Wisla floods East floods crests Father Jerzy
Baba Ewa Karol further East the Wisla strikes floods Zoltan his father his mother they move into an apartment two blocks from the Geremek's they move live in their own apartment bare-walled apartment dressed with the Wisla they move two blocks from the Geremek's near Kensington Market Toronto Canada farther West Zoltan his mother hangs Karol his image six-year old image on walls of their apartment Zoltan runs the Wisla down walls of their apartment the red-lighted Wisla riviè re flooding cresting approaching runs down walls of their apartment rumors workers strike Polish people do strike Polska Warszawa the Wisla Father Jerzy Brzozów Tatry mountains linden Baba Ewa Karol they strike approach East Natasha she glances she sees the Wisla approaching East approaching the Wisla strikes rumors Zoltan sells paintings the Wisla linden boxes at the harbourfront colors he takes the subway to the harbourfront the blue silver startling move of the harbourfront Toronto farther West bitter currant accents winter red accents tint blue silver of the harbourfront rumors Zoltan he knows workers strike Solidarité Solidarno’s’c he knows the Wisla approaches floods East Martial Law officially ends workers organize Solidarité workers strike his father does not teach at Universitet Moskva he strikes refuses to teach smooth buttery faces Zoltan he feels the Wisla over his toes running up his two legs too tall at twenty-years old he sells the Wisla over his eyes crests over his eyes he paints the Wisla over his eyes Karol’s hand Baba Ewa wrestles with her cane along the banks of the Wisla red-pointed Wisla Father Jerzy crests in the Wisla Natasha’s eyes are flooded by red brushstrokes of Father Jerzy floating silk like fins in the Wisla new strike crisis Solidarité. sky brightening the sun on blue silver blue of the harbourfront farther West Zoltan sells the Wisla Solidarno’s’c the Wisla floods Polska strikes the Wisla strikes workers strike the Wisla approaches East floods the Wisla is his Zoltan he takes down his paintings linden boxes he takes them down from the harbourfront the Wisla under his arms linden boxes under his arms he walks back to the subway Kensington Market he does not sell the Wisla anymore burn stain paint
Annunciation

workers cannot strike Zoltan's father strikes he does not teach Slavic History Before 1900 Polish he leaves visa to farther West they decide who will leave when what city workers cannot strike burn stain paint the Wisla Polska rises floods the Wisla approaches East approaches Moskva. Natasha she glances she sees the red-pointed Wisla approaching gold mute dull domes of the Kremlin flood breaks elections Martial Law officially ends Solidarité the Wisla Warszawa rises burns stains paints Russia East that red square no that Red Square no that plush cool red square crests crests at the face of the Wisla armed intervention over borders arms at the borders over undone workers rise burn stain paint strike now now history Slavic History is now that red square crests dams Polska strikes elections there is news news from the East Polska strikes rises floods breaks away news on streets of Kensington Market Polska floods runs over that red square Polska the Wisla Warszawa Father Jerzy Brzozów Tatry mountains linden Baba Ewa Karol flood they flood flood free wide accents Polish accents free elections there are elections they are their own Zoltan speaks Polish-tinted English his father at the harbour loading unloading blue silver blue water at the harbour does not speak English he does not speak he cries Polish people do not cry but Zoltan's father cries elections free flood Polska the Wisla leaves their toes floods East floods rises burns stains paints he cries Baba Ewa Karol they float silk like fins lithe on jellied water water-troughed water they float over the Wisla free elections there are elections Polska free. Zoltan free he free farther West the Wisla linden mountains speaks Polish-tinged English to currant accents red currant accents he works at a restaurant downtown under lines of blue silver glassed buildings downtown he takes the subway downtown to a restaurant works washing dishes he washes dishes tells everyone in Polish-hued English Free, Polska is free they smile everyone smiles they do not know the birthmark of striking skin he works hands in water thick like jelly gelled water-troughed water he works with currant accents bitter like winter red currant accents at a restaurant downtown in Polish-painted English
he works free flooding floating on the red-lighted Wisla his hands in
water free elections smells of linden he boxmaker
free burn stain paint he paints the Wisla red-lighted Wisla floods down
walls of his apartment floods down streets of Kensington Market floods
into the harbour silver like blue silver water of the harbour he paints
Zoltan paints the Wisla north-south pulling east-west he paints he
boxmaker makes boxes linden boxes burn stain paint he smells of linden
speaks in scrapes smooth feathered zzssssshh scrapes Zoltan linden burn
stain paint he scrubs brushes at night he cannot clean linden off skin
pastel skin Zoltan paints the Wisla makes linden boxes boxmaker Zoltan
cannot sleep free flood float on the Wisla red-brushstroked Wisla free
elections he hears outside outside at night he cannot sleep he hears blue
silver water whispers of water he smiles Polish people do not smile but
Zoltan smiles he smiles the Wisla runs East further East the Wisla floods
Polska the harbour his father loading unloading silver blue like water
ships at the harbour free. His mother does not smile Polish women do
not smile she stares Zoltan's mother sits in their Wisla-flooded apartment
she stares thick like jelly gelled like jellied water his mother watery
unable to cry stares at a picture frame at six-year old boy his headstone
cold smooth at a picture frame Karol six-years old smiling toothless smile
straight black hair watery eyes pastel eyes smiles in his uniform smiles at
lives beyond his six years free elections Baba Ewa wrestles with her cane
on the banks of the Wisla watered up from under red-tinted ground free
It is Redone

his mother Zoltan’s mother sits in their Wisla-flooded apartment she stares thick like jelly gelled like jellied water his mother watery unable to cry stares at a picture frame at six-year old boy his headstone cold smooth at a picture frame Karol six-years old smiling toothless smile straight black hair watery eyes pastel eyes smiles in his uniform smiles at lives beyond his six years free Baba Ewa Brzozów linden mountains snowlighted snow winterset snow mountains floating silk in March thirty-first of March snow on farther West Toronto Kensington Market pastel snow Zoltan’s mother cannot sleep smells preborn linden in bed not sleeping seeing moonlight winterset pass the windows of their apartment pass flooded free floating Wisla that floods down walls of their apartment she hears outside still at night white she hears outside outside she smells linden Zoltan he burns stains paints at night she hears him feather scrapes smooth feathered scrapes paint across canvas on linden muted mute light off snow Zoltan’s mother cannot sleep He works at a restaurant downtown snow-sheared downtown in March thirty-first of March he works now a waiter speaks to bitter currant red like winter currants bitter red winter currant accents speaks he is a waiter free farther West Zoltan sees snow pass windows of the restaurant two kilometers away from Kensington Market the Wisla flooding down walls outside the window he sees towers blue towers snow making the blue silver glass of buildings downtown muted mute pastel dulled under the grey sky. Polska the Wisla Brzozów Baba Ewa Slavic people do not strike, Polish people do Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna French only French curly red hair frames her face she Jew from Minsk speaks silk accent silk like fins accent to Zoltan French she speaks the West the Tour Eiffel the Wisla she is further West the Tour Eiffel Paris it does not snow in Paris Solidarité he is free his mother cannot sleep the Wisla the West two suitcases she coughs coughs like blood blue purple cough spits out blood red red like the flesh of winter currants cold blue pastel skin Zoltan’s mother he worries Zoltan’s father works in snow at the harbour there will be elections free elections in Polska Warszawa the
Wisła Father Jerzy Brzozów Tatry mountains linden Baba Ewa Karol the
Wisła red-tinted red-pointed elections there will be elections rise burn
stain paint Zoltan's father Kilińński is a Polish name he strikes Slavic
History Before 1900 he says Slavic History is now now he teaches Polish
language he says Polish History is now he wants to return elections the
Wisła red-tinted brushstroked red Brzozów the south mountains linden
he works at the harbour loading unloading from silver blue lighted silver
by snow in March thirty-first of March he works smiles elections he says
Free he smiles other workers smile they do not know the birthmark of
immigrant skin red currant faces look at him in bitter currant English
accents the Wisła free floods floats he wants Polska Warszawa mountains
boxmakers lindens Baba Ewa Karol his father thirty-first of March feels
the Wisła float flood under him into snow frozen red-tinted soil beneath
him she Zoltan's mother cannot sleep smells preborn linden
in bed not sleeping seeing moonlight winterlight pass windows of their
Wisła-flooded free apartment free farther West hears outside outside
snow muting ground elections there will be elections she smells linden
muted mute light off snow Zoltan's mother cannot sleep she whispers
the Wisła runs over her under her through her she whispers Zoltan, Karol
is your brother she sees moonlight winterlight pass Karol Zoltan snow
floats silk on the harbour burns stains paints Zoltan's mother sleeps she
sleeps thirty-first of March elections snow muted dull under moonlight
she dies
Pairs Opposite East West

restaurant downtown Zoltan he works a waiter at a restaurant downtown serves food to red currant accents under shadows of blue silver glassed buildings downtown he works farther West hearing bitter currant accents of farther West his mother is buried flooded her stone lettered headstone farther West elections free Polska is free his father does not smile Polish people do not smile but Polska Solidarité is free Solidarno’s c Polska Warszawa the Wisla Father Jerzy Brzozów Tatry mountains boxmakers linden Baba Ewa Karol his mother the Wisla free flooding floating free Martial Law officially ends Star of David beatings camps prisons internment Walesa is elected president president free the Wisla rivière Walesa is president his father strikes he does not teach Slavic History Before 1900 now Slavic History is now he does not teach Polish burn stain paint to smooth buttery faces Polish History is now Solidarno’s c his father rises strikes works at the harbour loading unloading blue silver blue ships on thick jellied water thick like gelled water at the harbour unspeaking his father does not know bitter currant accents he says Polska is free other workers smile they do not know the birthmark of striking skin he wants to return Zoltan’s father wants to return free the Wisla free Father Jerzy leaks out of his father’s eyes leaks floods red-pointed out of Zoltan’s father’s eyes he wants to return East to return the Wisla Zoltan worries. the thirty-first of March they bury his mother Zoltan’s mother is buried farther West her pastel skin watery gelled thick like jellied water-troughed watery eyes are buried under the blue tint of frozen soil farther West red hair red curly hair silk like fins lithe floating red curly hair frames her head Zoltan glances she sits at the window in a restaurant downtown hands tinged blue by blue silver glass reflections of buildings downtown she red curly hair sits with another woman at a table Zoltan glances she silk like fins orders strawberry crêpes and ice cream glace vanilla glace she orders crêpes ice cream she laughs silk like fins giggles water breaking like snow falling on the Wisla burning with thousands of lights the Wisla she laughs speaks silk currant accent silk like jellied water English eats
strawberry crépes ice cream glace he laughs Polish people do not laugh but Zoltan laughs she silk red curly hair frames her head silk smiles she smiles asks his name Zoltan she asks his name Like silk. Zoltan. It's like silk she says this Zoltan smiles her name is Sofie a Polish name he says this Zofie is a Polish name she says Sofie, Zoltan, Sofie he says this Zofie is a Polish name she smiles laughs

He wants to return free Polska is free Warszawa the Wisła Father Jerzy Brzozów Tatry mountains boxmakers linden Baba Ewa Karol his mother Zoltan wants to return free flooding floating wants the Wisła he cannot sleep smells preborn linden in bed not sleeping seeing moonlight winterlight pass the windows of his apartment the Wisła flooding down walls of his apartment he hears outside smells linden he burns stains paints at night feathers scrapes smoothes paints across canvas on linden he paints he boxmaker makes boxes burn stain paint he smells of linden speaks in scrapes smooth feathered scrapes Zoltan twenty-three years burn stain paint he scrubs brushes at night he cannot clean linden off skin pastel skin Zoltan paints the Wisła makes linden boxes boxmaker Zoltan cannot sleep free flood float the Wisła red-brushstroked Wisła free elections Walesa he hears outside outside hears blue silver water whispers of water. He smiles Polish people do not smile but Zoltan smiles he smiles the Wisła runs East further East floods Polska the harbour his father loading unloading silver blue like water ships at the harbour free he wants to return his father Zoltan they want to return his mother lies flooded underground farther West free farther West she Sofie she silk red curly silk like fins English accent laughs at a restaurant downtown strawberry crépes run like jelly thick gelled jelly on her plate vanilla ice cream glace she silk laughs she leaves Zoltan rushes he rushes floods free farther West runs from the restaurant downtown after red curly hair Zofie he stops her they laugh Polish people do not laugh but Zoltan laughs storm snow white mute snow approaches floods grey sky floods blue silver glass buildings downtown the harbour silver blue lighted silver like snow falling on the Wisła turning it into a long black strip burning with thousands of lights storm snow they run take the subway west to Kensington Market they run laugh in snow under snow through
snow he invites she red curly hair Zofie into his Wisla-flooded apartment
his father cannot sleep snow storm power goes out farther West three
days power gone Zoltan Sofie in his Wisla-flooded apartment the Wisla
running down walls of his apartment they laugh smile his father cannot
sleep they laugh smile three days
Visitation of Red Brushstrokes

elections free elections Walesa is elected president Polska is free farther West Zoltan his father free burn stain paint his mother Baba Ewa Karol the Wisla rises Father Jerzy rises burns stains paints the Wisla crests Father Jerzy's body floats silk floats lithe silk like fins on the red-pointed Wisla Karol is lifted from ground by the red brushstroked water of the Wisla two suitcases away the Wisla red-hued Father Jerzy's blood tints the West pulls it East Karol's headstone Baba Ewa's cane camps prisons Martial Law officially ends camps prisons internment camps no visas no telephones Martial Law officially ends Father Jerzy they kidnap murder his body floats silk like fins in the Wisla. He wants to return two suitcases away Zoltan his father they want to return Polska is free they are free farther West the Wisla Star of David the Tour Eiffel Paris Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna eats glace Solidarité her red curly hair over glace on the Champs d'Elysees they want to return Zoltan remembers train trip East at the border East passports visas papers documents smooth buttery soldiers Russian soldiers inspect his passport his face his photograph his face determine if he is him if his face belongs to him his face his photograph two suitcases each belong to him after crossing the border his father takes it looks smiles at his face his face You are much bigger than your brother curly red hair silk like fins lithe like silk floating she Sofie she Zofie laughs smiles Zoltan feels her hair silk riverwalls of red hair runs down walls of his apartment the Wisla runs down walls of his apartment he boxmaker paints the Wisla red-lighted Wisla floods down walls of his apartment floods down streets of Kensington Market floods into the harbour silver like blue silver water of the harbour he paints Zoltan paints the Wisla north-south pulling east-west he paints he boxmaker makes boxes linden boxes burn stain paint the Wisla over his eyes crests over his eyes he paints the Wisla Karol's hand Baba Ewa wrestles with her cane along the banks of the Wisla red-pointed Wisla Father Jerzy crests in the Wisla Natasha's eyes are flooded by red brushstrokes of Father Jerzy floating silk like fins in the Wisla Zofie red curly breaks the red-tinted Wisla burn stain paint sky
brightening the sun on blue silver blue of the harbour farther West
Zoltan’s father works at the harbour loading unloading silver blue fins of
ships Sofie she laughs smiles Zoltan he smells Zofie Sofie her accent silk
lithe floating like silk on thick jellied water they laugh smile Zoltan works
at a restaurant downtown Sofie meets him after work weekends
everyday they laugh smile he works at a restaurant downtown paints at
night feathers scrapes smoothes at night linden boxes canvas he gives
Zofie linden boxes linden free Solidarno’s ´c he wants to return Polska
free Warszawa the Wisla Father Jerzy Brzozów Tatry mountains lindens
boxmakers Baba Ewa Karol his mother the Wisla free he wants to return
he speaks in Polish-tinged English he says this he wants to return he
cannot clean linden off his skin pastel skin Sofie says she likes the smell
of linden Silk, like silk she says this he speaks in Polish-tinted English
Zofie, Sofie his father cannot sleep he hears Zoltan Sofie laugh smile he
hears outside free he wants to return free Polska the Wisla he cannot
sleep return Zoltan’s father wants to return
strikes he does not teach Slavic History Before 1900 he says Slavic History
is now he does not teach Polish refuses strikes burn stain paint he says
Polish History is now he works at the harbour free farther West loading
unloading blue silver like blue ships at the harbour Zoltan’s mother is
buried the thirty-first of March they bury his mother farther West her
pastel skin watery thick like gelled water-troughed water her eyes are
buried under blue tint of frozen soil farther West. His father Zoltan’s
father wants to return free Polska is free Father Jerzy leaks out of his
father’s eyes leaks floods red-pointed out of Zoltan’s father’s eyes he
wants to return the Wisla he cannot sleep at night Zoltan Sofie they
laugh smile at night loading unloading blue silver ships lithe on the
harbour Zoltan’s father works free farther West Father Jerzy leaks out of
his eyes Father Jerzy they kidnap murder his body floats silk like fins in
the Wisla Zoltan’s father wants to return he falls falls floods floats silk like
fins in the harbour falls he cannot sleep Zoltan’s father falls his mother is
buried Zoltan’s mother is buried farther West her pastel skin watery thick
like gelled water eyes are buried under blue tint of frozen soil farther
West his father falls floods floats silk like fins under the harbour he falls
he wants to return Zoltan wants to return his father blue like silver blue 
at the harbour falls into thick gelled like jelly water-troughed water 
Father Jerzy floats silk like fins in the Wisla Zoltan’s father he falls 
loading unloading at the harbour he falls he dies
farther West his father is buried flooded his stone lettered headstone he
dies he cannot return he is buried Toronto farther West near Kensington
Market Zoltan buries him in thawing ground Zoltan he boxmaker free
burn stain paint paints the Wisla red-lighted Wisla floods down walls of
his apartment floods down streets of Kensington Market floods into the
harbour silver like blue silver water of the harbour he paints Zoltan
paints the Wisla north-south pulling east-west he paints he boxmaker
makes boxes linden boxes burn stain paint he smells of linden speaks in
scrapes smooth feathered scrapes linden burn stain paint he scrubs
brushes at night he cannot clean linden off skin pastel skin boxmaker
Zoltan cannot sleep free flood float on the Wisla red-brushstroked Wisla
free elections he hears outside outside at night he cannot sleep he hears
blue silver water whispers of water his father blue like silver blue at the
harbour falls into thick gelled like jelly water-troughed water Father
Jerzy floats silk like fins in the Wisla Zoltan's father he falls loading
unloading at the harbour he falls he dies Sofie she smiles
she red curly hair smiles laughs floods like silk silk like fins into Zoltan
Zoltan holds he does not cry Polish people do not cry but Zoltan holds
she is the West the Tour Eiffel Solidarno's c Tovarishcha Vera Isaakovna
her necklace linden box Star of David he a Catholic boy from Warszawa
the Wisla runs down walls of his apartment workers cannot strike they
will be stopped dammed the Wisla crests Father Jerzy spills over the top
crests on the red-pointed Wisla burn stain paint Walesa Baba Ewa Karol
his mother his father Warszawa the Wisla rise burn stain paint Zofie Sofie
she asks when the Wisla will flood Zoltan answers When you can feel the
Wisla between your toes the Wisla rises Zoltan says the Wisla has always
been in his toes the Wisla over Karol his stone lettered headstone Karol
will see the underside of the Wisla the Wisla from below the surface of
water silk fluid floating Sofie smiles how delicate her voice she has a
violin tucked inside her throat that plays when she speaks her voice high
lace-like string-like she red curly hair there are
no more empty spaces on the walls in his apartment the Wisla runs down
each wall in his apartment the Wisla running down his face his face
pastel the Wisla wide over him tinted with red streaks red points tips
foaming where currents break the Wisla over him Sofie asks him asks the
East his mother his father the East Zoltan remembers the red square no
that Red Square no that plush cool red square soldiers their beautiful
straight uniforms long overcoats bright toy-like pins medals that smooth
sinking accent of Russians smooth curved accent of Russians smooth
buttery accent of Russians East it is all East workers strike the Wisla rises
floods Karol is lifted from ground by the red brushstroked water of the
Wisla Solidarité he remembers his mother she poses picks Zoltan up tells
him to smile when the negative is exposed to their upside-down image
she does not smile Polish women do not smile she stares determined so
she might take the picture herself concentrate hard enough on her
husband’s hands and she can take the picture with her will unsmiling
until those strange Russian voices interrupt her again two suitcases two
two oversized lunchboxes two like bookends on his mother’s shelf two
like two loaves of rising dough in the oven two two strangely like the
two carriers of life between his growing legs two suitcases carry his life
his six-year old life the flow of the Wisla winter comes in thousands of
snowlights on the Wisla red-hued Father Jerzy’s blood tints the East
Karol’s headstone Baba Ewa’s cane camps prisons Martial Law officially
ends there are camps prisons internment camps no visas no telephones
Martial Law officially ends Father Jerzy they kidnap murder his body
floats silk like fins in the Wisla Sofie Zofie she cannot smile Zoltan
knows workers strike Solidarno’s ’c he knows the Wisla approaches
floods East workers organize Solidarité workers strike he boxmaker free
burn stain paint he paints the Wisla red-lighted Wisla floods down walls
of his apartment floods down streets of Kensington Market floods into
the harbour silver like blue silver water of the harbour Zoltan cannot
sleep free flood float on the Wisla red-brushstroked Wisla free elections
he hears outside outside at night he cannot sleep he hears blue silver
water he wants to return his mother his father are buried farther West
Zoltan wants to return return free Polska is free Father Jerzy leaks out of
his eyes leaks floods red-pointed out of Zoltan’s eyes he tells Zofie Polska
is free  Sofie does not smile Zoltan does not smile Polish people do not smile but he cries Zofie
there are three Zoltan wants to return the Wisla he can feel it in his toes over his eyes the Wisla crests over his eyes he wants to return two suitcases two two oversized lunchboxes two like bookends on his mother's shelf two like two loaves of rising dough two two strangely like the two carriers of life between his legs too tall at twenty-six years two suitcases carry his life his twenty-six year old life the pull of the Wisla in two suitcases. Sofie helps runs to the kitchen not smiling not crying grabs the cast iron pan burned black beyond its original silver his mother's pan food tastes better cooked in rusted black cast iron pans at least thirty-years old it must fit she pushes urges begs almost closed two suitcases almost snug she says Like silk. Zoltan. It's like silk he wants to return Zoltan watches his parents step farther away the soldiers' sinking accent digresses into a background flood swarm of sound he watches his mother motion for him his father opens his mouth to yell for him this is the last time Sofie will carry him Kiliński his name is Kiliński Polish name Zofie Sofie she learns how to speak silk his name she says Kiliński silk like fins lithe. Zoltan knows workers strike Solidarité the Wisla free Martial Law officially ends workers organize Solidarno's 'c his father does not teach he strikes refuses to teach smooth buttery faces Zoltan he feels the Wisla over his toes his mother does not smile Polish women do not smile she stares Zoltan's mother sits in their Wisla-flooded apartment she stares thick like jelly gelled like jellied water his mother watery unable to cry stares at a picture frame at six-year old boy his headstone cold smooth at a picture frame Karol six-years old smiling toothless smile straight black hair watery eyes pastel eyes smiles at lives beyond his six years free elections Baba Ewa wrestles with her cane on the banks of the Wisla watered up from under red-tinted ground free Zoltan's father works at the harbour blue water silver sides of ships he works blue at the harbour loading unloading in snow they run laugh under snow through snow past Kensington Market he invites she red curly hair Zofie into his Wisla-flooded apartment snow storm power goes out farther West three days power gone Zoltan Sofie Wisla-flooded they
laugh smile three days airplane over water thick like jellied water pastel under beneath him Zoltan he can feel the Wisla in his toes he cannot see Sofie her box linden box red curly hair over glace at a restaurant downtown he leaves West farther West two suitcases the Wisla Baba Ewa Karol East he cries Polish people do not cry but Zoltan cries Zofie the Wisla lindens farther West Sofie behind Zoltan the Wisla crests red-tinted falls over Zofie West. Sofie she looks at the dough her eyes circle around plump edges maslo-colored shades of its body scans ridges valleys left by her hands for stray pieces of hair that fall into the moist ferment in anticipation of being molded baked buttered into chleb slices of chleb risen yeast air-pocket canvases of blemished baked dough she beats the dough beats kneads tosses reworks until it sits in a bloated sphere on the kitchen table until she lifts it into a buttered bowl as if it is a rook’s egg remembers Zoltan she remembers this recipe he teaches her chleb she remembers he smells of linden he boxmaker free burn stain paint he boxmaker the Wisla floods down walls of his apartment floods streets of Kensington Market floods into the harbour silver like blue silver water of the harbour he smells of linden speaks in scrapes zzzsssshh smooth feathered scrapes Zoltan linden burn stain paint he scrubs brushes at night he cannot clean linden off skin pastel skin cannot sleep free elections he hears outside outside at night he cannot sleep hears blue silver water whispers of water his Polish-hued English Polish-tinged English Sofie she feels pre born linden inside inside her like silk like fins lithe linden inside her balmy coated with red red flesh like plum flesh like the red blood juice of borshch floating in water transparent fluid Zoltan inside her like silk undulating in water He leaves farther West returns Polska is free he cries Polish people do not cry but Zoltan cries his mother his father are buried farther West he leaves them Zofie he leaves farther West Sofie Zofie he leaves her he returns Polska the Wisla linden boxmakers he is in the doorway of a wooden to the trees house Brzozów his pastel hands carry suitcases into a wooden house smells of chleb buttered baked sliced on the table cucumbers tomatoes kielbasa juice winter currant juice strained from jars of preserves sitting underground under floorboards during winter winter
currant juice chleb Zoltan smells linden trees fresh leaved trees giggling their leaves in the breeze mountains bright green his pale canvas of skin he strokes pulls his bangs out of his eyes black straight hair asks if he is home home the Wisła smooth curves of Russian-tinted Polish Slavic-hued French Polish-painted English the Wisła Sofie Zofie Zoltan hears silk the West two suitcases away Zofie. it begins:
REFERENCES


