

Two Poems: “Trees at Night” and “Field Near Rzeszow”

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Trees at Night

Until the storm arrives from Chicago they will rock or sway
their uppermost stick-bundles & leaf-crowns,

buffet the jay fledglings in their straw & twin bit
nest, then settle them back down, then take a quick breather or two

until they restart the tipping & the rustling
whose sound if properly recorded would be soft as dust

under the nests of lightly scattered star-cover
Their graceful fans lave the pavement & sift astringents onto

the strata of fryer grease & bar smoke, sewer acid,
gathering, anointing themselves, flexible leaf-skins

pliable stems veined chlorophyll channels processing rain mist fog snow-
ghosts & sound-memories of hail pellets & wind squalls Branches work

their genius of variation, no dip or arc repeating any other
no particle of reflection too small to miss the dance upon railings

& bumpers, eyeglasses & bottle shards, lamp-steel, mailbox
handle, & human eye-white all under the spell of the late October New Moon.

Field Near Rzeszow

—*family field in the Carpathians originally passed down through
the line of women*

*How I had thought
This field, that meadow*

*is branded for eternity –
H.D., “R.A.F.” 1941*

If these young rye flowers
stand up every summer
then fall under grindstones
& fists of bakers,

if the stalks return to earth, rough,
& return green every spring,
and if the ditches the aircraft wheels made

exist only in a censored photograph
and in grass-tracings above tiny black *allées*
down where worms made their tracks

why am I standing on an open balcony
dreaming for my own land,
& hers before me?

Two men play guitars
down in the street on the edge of town
and sing about the sky—
say, then shout, *niebo*
in a high laughing song, then

a woman’s voice interrupts, in English,
I see the back of her head
which looks tired, but she sounds intent,
we are all shouting

and I wish I knew Polish well enough
to hear the song again,

backstitch whose sky
whose field, and who owns

the fernbanks across the field.

If I really owned this land
I would like to lie down on it through thirty seasons.

Go into the woods
get the black dirt
for the flower pots

save the brown water
from the sinks & tubs,
save the dregs of the soup pot
for the geraniums,
save the coffee grounds for the roses.

Dig for the best nightcrawlers
under the shadow of boulders
at the edge of the meadow where the table-
rock piled with the big rocks
writes its story in long lines—

I would do these things.
I would study the scars
& glyphs the moraines clawed
in granite & limestone when the mammoth
plates scraped the land. When they stopped
moving they left overhangs & ledges,

& rock-niches for succulents & rock-rose.

I get the hair-on-the-back-of-the-neck sensation
at the edge of a field
and like to read
in the grass of a ditch
where weeds show
spitpockets inside their blades,
and the thatchings give groundcover
to pebbles usually brown & black & sometimes a white
quartz fragment sits there reflecting
light up into the bird & butterfly paths.

Snakes, insect clouds & rabbits
must like the heat of the earth of that
close range. And the tall blue

flowers rimming the deer beds—
like hairlines.

Don't
work late,
the field spirits come out at dusk—
Night lasts all night.

Not much to go on, my field's war-time biography—
the photo:
a simple field stolen x times over.
Unseal it and see:

the original wedding gift,
the furrows turned,
moist, open.

One word, *niebo*,
translates part of the song:

If I say I like your *niebieska* blouse
I mean *blue*.
When I say
the only *niebo* for me
is the one in my family field
I am calling it heaven.

From Judith Vollmer, *The Water Books* (Pittsburgh, PA: Autumn House Press, 2011)