

IN THE NAME OF NARID

Andrew Suknaski



HARVEY SPAK

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NEW POEMS EDITED BY DENNIS COOLEY



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A NOTE REGARDING PRONUNCIATIONS:

All accents, as well as Roumanian and Polish words, are rendered phonetically in English by the poet. Ukrainian words and expressions are transliterated according to the Modified Library of Congress System with the exception of such words as Kiev, Dnieper and cossack, whose English orthography has already been established. The following key of approximate pronunciations is therefore designed to help readers decipher some of the more awkward-looking transliterations encountered in the poems.

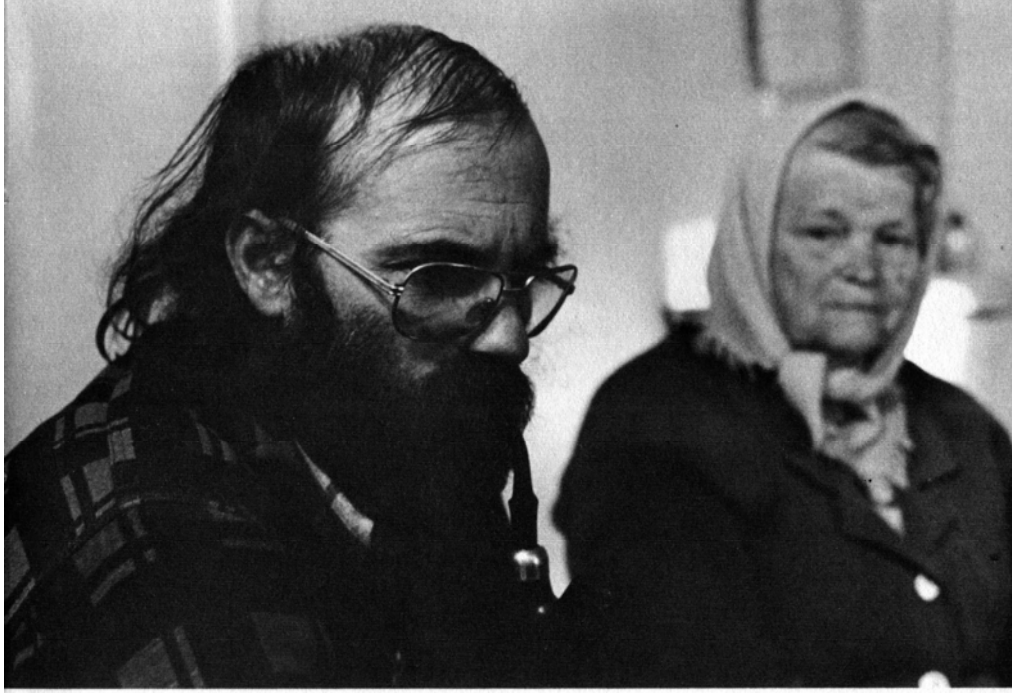
a — as in <i>ma</i> ma	kh — as in Scottish <i>loch</i>
e — as in <i>a</i> pple	zh — as in French <i>Jean</i>
y — as in <i>e</i> xample	iu — as in <i>yo</i> u
i — as in <i>eel</i>	ie — as in <i>yes</i>
u — as in <i>troops</i> !	ia — as in <i>ya</i> cht

Unpronounced Ukrainian soft signs are not indicated in this system. It should also be noted that [y] is used in the plural form of words, one *pysanka* becoming two *pysanky*.

Dedicated to the memory of my father and mother.

I am my father's father,
You are your children's guilt
.....
Child labour! The child must carry
His fathers on his back.

Delmore Schwartz



AFTER 'A PRAIRIE BOY'S SUMMER'

to the memory of william kurelek

suknatskyj listens
to what the dry grass speaks
in the vernacular of wind
across prairie
and who is this sleek cat
invading like a memory
the barnyard of youth?

who is this cat
a ghost
or some god
meowling litanies
in praise to earthly residence
... a man and woman
toiling in kinship
from sunup
to sundown?

my God!
the swallow divebombs the cat
as if the air we breathe
were a territory
to defend

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ХРЕСНА ДОРОГА

під тягарем хреста, прошу Тебе, захорони мене перед усяким упадком в гріх.

Люблю Тебе Ісусе:

Отче наш: Богор. Діво: Слава: І нині:

IV.

Ісус Христос стрічає
Страдаючу Свою Матір.



Величаєм Тя,
животдавче Хри-
сте, і чтем крест
Твоєй честний,
імже спасл єси
нас от роботи
вражія.

Розваж, яка була стріча Сина й Матері на тій дорозі болю. Ісус і Марія поглянули взаємно на Себе, й кілька разів обійнялися поглядом, стільки мечів болю прошило наскрізь Їхні люблячі Серця.

Наймиліший Ісусе! Через лютий біль, що Ти його дізнав

KOSMACH

*home of valentyn moroz
in moscow's vladimir prison no. 2*

Kosmach

where dream of home

lies

curled

in horns

of *baran*



ram

gracing *pysanka*

dream of home

contained

in the carpathian

ram

hutsul symbol

for leadership

and strength

in face of

adversity

2. HUNGER STRIKE

hutsul pride and hoping
for survival of country
moroz today you bid farewell
to your faithful wife
young son
and your father

thin faced
emaciated
and sunken
dark eyes
you said
'i'm finishing
myself off'

saying goodbye you kissed
your son's thin hand
two guards jumped you
believing you passed
something onto him
with your mouth
moroz they
have always failed
to understand
fear itself
moroz
what they fear most
is the strength
you stand for
the simple love
you pass on
your son took home
today

WHAT IS REMEMBERED

to the memory of volodymyr ivasiuk 1949-1979

what is remembered
is remembering
what is

the smell of grass on fresh earth
just after the rain
when you are young and swept away
that day becoming
the first time
again
glimmering
in a blossoming lilac
when wind
rises
where you are older

what is remembered
is remembering
what was

the first story /
that levite woman bearing
a healthy child
later hidden
in a papyrus basket
set among
reeds
on the river's edge
the pharaoh's daughter
sending a maid
to fetch it
someday
to be named
moses
'one drawn
from the water'

what is remembered
is remembering
what is

the common hurt
of parting
where the vast river flows on
far beyond those
who carry
fire
and the cry
'HERE I AM!'
those impaled
on the horns
of a ram
that must be wrestled
to its death
those who
take refuge in
naming
the eternal
parable /
biblical naomi
her natural
losses:
that certain
man
two sons
survived by
one daughter-in-law
who remains in
the alien land
and another pleading
permission
to return

Wherever you go, I will go.
 Wherever you live, I will live.
 Your people shall be my people,
 and your God, my God.
 Wherever you die, I will die
 and there I will be buried.

that other one
 known as *ruth*
 'the beloved
 companion'
 who lonely
 gleaned corn
 in still another
 foreign land

2. MYTH

what is remembered
 is remembering
 what is

myth / names
 rusalka
 some child dying
 unnamed
 rusalka
 a female fetus
 summoned to light by
 a drunkard's
 boot
 rusalky
 do they ever speak
 the dead
 unnamed
 back
 into life?

do they ever see
 didy
 and *baby*
 'the ancestors'
 the ghostly
 plowmen
 and hoeing women
 shouldering
 weaver's dream
 among the living
 who work
 tireless
 on the margins
 of *selo*?*

didy / baby
 some say
 they are the melting of
 snow
 the arrival
 of spring
 warmth
 others claim
 they are
 sustaining
 green things

didy / baby
 some tell
 of glimpsing
 the peaceful
 faces
 shadows
 in ripening rye

**selo*: Ukrainian for village. Also implies a sense of community.

3. REALITY

what is remembered

is remembering

what is

toughs raiding

across borderland

that once was

krai

'cut'

becoming *ukraina*

thugs

digging in

like termites

what is remembered

is remembering

what happened

the great river

dniester

flowing quietly

the dark

undertow

then that final night

in spring

goons deadringing

for ghouls

summoned you

volodymyr

from your conservatory

your name

redoubled

in dark cadence

'VOLODYMYR!

VOLODYMYR!'

'THAT IS YOUR NAME
ISN'T IT?'

'What do you want
of me?'

and they, those state slugs,

bloated on vodka and blood

drove you

volodymyr

to moriah darkness

of bryukhovychi

forest

near lviv

what is remembered

is remembering

what happened

before

those living their promise

of home

in the boundaries

of a woman's pain

along the river's

edge

those immutable things

sealed in the blood

-bound chronicles /

ivan the terrible

first czar of russia

ivan

of goat's eyes

the model lunatic

“maria! dunia!
have you heard volodymyr’s
chervona ruta
‘the red ruta-flower’?
his finest song yet!”

you later found
 hanging
 from a tree
the official KGB
 report
 claiming
 death by suicide.

volodymyr
 your dark cipher
 remains
 ... how does one
 disappear
one week after
 easter sunday
 to be found
a week before
 ascension?

*It is not for you to know
times or dates that
the father has decided
by his own authority...
you will be my witnesses
... to the ends
of the earth.*

but tell me
 volodymyr
 how does a suicide
cover his own body
 in lacerations
 and bruises?

or drive broken branches of
 the redberried
kalyna tree
 through his own ribs
or climb
 to tie
 a rope?

tell me volodymyr
 how did you really ascend
 the kalyna tree
whose rueful wood
 your *didy* and *baby*
 hewed
 into a ladder
 of enduring
 dumy?

what is remembered
 is remembering
 what is

unnecessary
 to imagine
 beyond

the first
 grim act /

“so maestro!
you’re the famous composer
are you?
 very well then ...’

‘HOLD DOWN HIS HANDS
ON THAT STONE THERE!
FINE’

'now maestro
play your great *kozak* opera
for your God
when you arrive'

what is remembered

is remembering

to ponder

the final question /

why

would a suicide choose

a forbidden military zone

to pluck out his own eyes

like notes erased

from a music sheet?

i suppose your assassins

volodymyr

feared

bob dylan

and joan baez

in your songs

perhaps

it was the smell of tight

new levis

some herbal dream

pillowed

on balsam thighs

nudging

every stanza

that haunted

partyline metaphor

or that other country

turning

the simple lyric

into dayold

mashed

potatoes

perhaps it was only

the absence

in your art

of some nightmare utopia

latticed in ozone shadows

of sheol

where lenin and stalin

rule

foraging a river

of blood

what is remembered

is remembering

what is

the ordinary fate

of suffering servants

those gazing

through the glass

darkly

those who

must witness

the others

who sleep

dream

their thin bodies slit open

never to rise

from the riverbed

those sleepless

on the margins of *dummy*

still

as berries

on a dry autumn branch

motionless

till a sudden wind

passes

each *dumka*
 'thought'
 fading
 like the harmonic
 signature
 of a blind *banduryst*
 his *bandura* angled
 away
 from wind
 that became
 a song
 to live again
 in carved
 wood
 of a new land

*wherever you go
 volodymyr
 wherever the vast
 river
 flows on*

*we go
 with you*

*wherever we live
 you live
 with us
 all these things
 wherever there is
 ample love
 to will them
 back into life
 volodymyr*

PHOTOGRAPH FROM POLAND

the photograph arrives
 three months after suknatskyj's mother has died
 with it a letter
 suknatskyj cannot read
 the place is a poor home
 where his mother was born
 in the photograph a middleaged man lies
 in a simple coffin and stapled to wood
 is black cloth trimmed with white ferns
 a printed text reading
 SPOCZNEK WIECNY
wieczny 'forever eternal'
 the only word
 suknatskyj understands

Dear Andrei,

*First, I want to tell you that,
 I was very surprised when I've got a
 letter from you. I have expected a
 letter from my sister Julia. When the
 letter was delivered and I saw a
 photo copy I knew, that my sister died,
 and she will never write to me.
 In first minute I could not believe that
 it is true, that I haven't a dear Julia,
 that she is not alive.*

in the photograph he lies with hands
 folded in prayer
 a rosary threaded through them
 the ten mourners are all strangers to suknatskyj
 except for the elderly lady on the far left
 the lady looking so much like suknatskyj's mother
 must be his aunt maria
 beside the head of the dead man
 a yellow candle burns

*Now, I sometimes think about my
Canadian family and I can not understand
why you, or anyone with family, didn't
come to Poland so far. You have a big
family in our country. In Poland lives
my youngest sister Emilia. She wrote
letters to your mother too.*

suknatskyj lost in reverie
... eleven strangers to me
yet were she living beyond her bluegreen eyes
blurring she would silently name them all
their names orbiting the yellow cross
in her memory ... name them all
from other photographs and letters
remembered

*In former times I had a hope, that I
would see Julia or anyone from my
Canadian family. Now, when she isn't
alive, I've lost hope. Andrei, your
mother often wrote me about you.
I will be very happy when I can see
you in Poland, in my home.
What do you think about it?*

Your aunt Maria

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suknatskyj turning the photograph
vertically

... stand dead man
stand stranger
a moment
in those brand new shoes
laced on your dead feet
new shoes for your long journey
... stand dead man
and let the mourners lie
while i read your face more
oriental than anything
your face still brown
and burnished
by faraway sun and suffering
your face forged by all things
chinese
tartar
hutsul
viking
cossack horsemen
who forded the rivers
of your frozen
blood

28

A LETTER TO MYKOLA

dear mykola

dearr? *shcho vam za dilo?*
vbat cohncerrn eez eet off yourz?

peace mykola
sheathe your tongue a moment!
i'll address you as i wish
mykola your granddaughter
who no longer believes in salutations
or formal endings to letters
bears the loneliness
of your absence
mykola do you know she still searches for you
departed from this earth at 35?

spokii! peace! mykola
time no longer presses into your face
and i am older than you now
the search mykola
that mad slavic compulsion!

*'I will never never give up
till I find that place
all I want is to place
a tombstone there
in his memory'*

you know mykola my father
homesteaded on canadian prairie
the year you arrived in america

mykola on a sleepless new york city night
your granddaughter wrote a letter
arriving on my 36th birthday

29

*'I had to see the city
that didn't hear my grandfather's pain
that appleblossom night in 1914.
He had fled to America
a dream needling his brain.
And I returned to miss him
in the archives' dust.
There is no photograph of him anywhere.'*

mykola how does one just vanish
from ships' lists
stored in a computer's memory bank
in one's port of entry?

mykola it would be so easy
if you were the only one
but there was someone before you
and the record only hints
at the strange features
of that face its light
pulling paul blinded
to his knees
that other face
a light knocking the breath out of
teresa de jesús speechless

mykola a man called jorge luis borges
claims that's the way
it was meant to be that other man
faceless that God might become
all of us

i don't know mykola
i wonder do any of us
ever ascend to margins where things
become a human face?
what do we do with the unknown
philosophical farmer
that old ukrainian in manitoba
leaving behind

30

a diary and a second edition of ДІЛО
a newspaper published in lviv
november 14th 1933
two columns on the right side
of page one blanked out
the story gone
plate photo and type
lifted out to satisfy a censor's whim
no one out there must see these
thin faces chronicling the homeless
and cholera 7½ million dead
in those years of famine
forced by russia

mykola what does one make
of the cyrillic irony
at the bottom of that blank space?

'1000 invalids from the Ukrainian
Army of Halychyna await the
community's aid. Honour their
achievements and dedication.
The dignity of a people demands
a guarantee of life for those
who gave up their health
in defence of their homeland.'

what does one make of the next page
the simple cyrillic plea
on the margins of a white space

SPREAD OUR WORD!

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God mykola
what do we make
of all these sad things?

liubov,

Andrei Suknatskyj

p.s. mykola last night
i touched the soft light on the edge
of your granddaughter's face
and you knuckling the pane
33 stories above a park
did not allow her or me
any sleep ...

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IX.

Ісус падае третій раз пад
тягарем хреста.

Величаем Тя,
животдавче Хри-
сте, і чтем крест
Тво́й честний,
імже спасл еси
нас от работи
вражія.

Резваж, як Ісус третій раз падае пад хрестом, бо був дуже обезсилений, а жорстокі кати мимо того сплували Його, щоб прискорив ходу, коли Він вже ледви крок вперед міг поступити.

О так немилосердно мучив мій Ісусе! Через заслуги Твоїх з'усиль, які Ти довільно зносив в дорозі на гофту, благаю Тебе, склади мене таким запалом, щоб я вже більше не оглядався на люд-

WEST TO TOLSTOI, MANITOBA (CIRCA 1900)

the story of the young ukrainian immigrant
imprisoned in his language and ghetto
his name no longer remembered
but an aging woman in assiniboia
tells the rest about him
spending those lonely winters in montreal with nothing
but a friend's letters from tolstoi
ukrainian hamlet in rural manitoba
whitewashed straw and mud shacks
with thatched roofs
the way it was done in the homeland

others who relate the story are not certain
how many times he left montreal on foot
each spring
with never more than a couple dollars change in his pocket
and how he always followed the railway tracks west
stopping at some station to check a map
to see where he was
occasionally helped by some station agent
who offered food and a bed
hassled by railway officials
who always failed to understand his talk
and sent him back on an eastbound train
free

no one knows how far he got each time
until one year he met some ukrainian immigrants
at a station in central ontario
where he embraced one of them and told his story
'please take me with you
i never want to speak
to another englishman
for the rest of my life'

THE FIRST SYROTA

suknatskyj's father remembering

*syrota she an herr fahderr
dey leef long ago een karpateh
she noh heveh mahderr
pohany vaz pagenz!*

*fahderr vent vay somverr vonc
dey vahzzeh verry poorr
he vent vay vorrk forr vile
sommeh nunz dey commeh geev herr food
starrtink tell err bout chrrist
all deem storry*

*fahderr commeh bek hom
ketch herr prrayink
he starrt beatink herr
tole herr forrget evrrytink
nunz telleh herr
she say 'noh!'
she be likkeh dem beauteeful storry
soh he putteh lohgz een fireplec
ven good firre goink
he drehggeh herr crross florr
'you noh stahpeh behleevink
i troh you een firre!'
she noh frraid noh say nhotiink
he putteh herr clohc to flemz
she feeleh nohtink
he trroh herr crross florr*

*nextteh he boilink beeg pot bearr fet
den he tekkeh herr by hairr
'you stabpeh behleevink
all dem storry oh i troh you een!'
she say 'noh!'
he putteh herr een nohtink heppin
she noh crryeh
by ghalley he tekkeh heez ehx*

*datzzeh be da firrc syrota
orrphan chile*

37

CORNELIUS WARKENTIN

late winter
he journeys from calgary to saskatoon
to see a daughter and her children
then rides the greyhound down to regina
where his celibate son
will pick him up
and drive him out to the farm

in the front seat
he and suknatskyj gaze at the breathsweeping blue sky
cornelius enjoying the day
with one good eye
speaks

“the dneiper ... it is as blue as the sky out there
i remember it perfect
perfect clear blue water me
and my boyhood friends swam in
my home town was
nyzhnakhortytsia ... khortytsia
that's the 'she skunk'
anyway we would walk along the river
to some pools near big stones
they called *poroby*
there were rapids there
but we swam in the pools downstream a bit
beautiful water
crystal clear water ...
you walked out of the water
and just brushed the sand off your feet
anyway down from the pools
was the village named *zaporoby*
my town *nyzhnakhortytsia*
was just across the dneiper
from there
... and just down the river from there
up on the hillside

38

there were some other stones
just like *porohy* and on one of them
stood a huge sculpture of taras bulba
in our country then
we always chose a hill like that
for a monument always
because at the back of our mind
we always had clear image
of *mohyla*
'the hill' where the hero
lies buried"

cornelius tells of his blind saskatoon daughter
who teaches braille
his right workswollen fingers
now a feminine white
delicately move across aluminum rivets
just under the window
as though trying to decode
some cipher or mystery there

in the other dead eye lingers
the memory of a steel splinter
that darkened the blue july sky
40 years ago
on his farm

cornelius confirms
"yes ... village is *selo*
if you were walking somewhere
and you saw a place
maybe a church steeple rising to the blue sky
you thought ... *selo!*
see people there had spirit
and strength
... any other place
without that
was *dereva*
'dead trees!'"

PROSVITA

for george morrisette

sidestreets surrounding *prosvita* hall
vanished with games
cowboys an indians and *run sheep run*
became prairie for him and his playmates

cattle bellowing death's cold inklings
in the stockyard across the tracks
were his buffalo
slaughter houses spewing guts' steam
shacks his hills
where trapped gods sent smoke signals
a boy could read
while sledding spumed rapids
in a river of stars
on a winter's steelcold night

on a friday night when friends fled
to the warm hutch of home
wailing fiddles drew him from the lonely
st boniface street
and he would quietly sneak into that hall
teeming with laughter
another people still not his own
they speaking a language
he could never comprehend
held by some mystery
where the small tired children
slept on wooden benches
he would wistfully gaze at dancers
tirelessly dancing to all those slaviv tunes
so haunting and unlike
anything his metis stepfather
teased from a cracked fiddle
and there he dreamed

*someday one day
i'll play fiddle
'the devil's dream'
jus like them old men
bless their gypsy souls!*

a man later cursed
by the bastard's search for home
he slowly learns all
old fiddle tunes remembered
clear enough that gypsy joy
glimmering beyond slavic soul
never be mistaken for anything else
until metis fiddle and gypsy
slavic fiddle become a single spirit
shouldering the soundpeg
beneath wooden structure
where ghosts dance 'the devil's dream'

he remembers it all that small hall
a certain beginning
in that place
with a slavic name
prosvita

41

LETTERS BETWEEN TWO PRAIRIE FRIENDS

for j.n.

dear john

i'm sendin you a contact print
from some photographs found in the album
of an 80 year old widow
my mother shared a house with her
a few winters in assiniboia
told me about her recent fall
spoke of kneelin among scattered
japanese oranges down in the cellar

'lohrra ... lohrra
how deed you get herre lohrra?'

mother cradled the frail small woman
like a child in her arms
tried to rock her awake

anyway

these photos john i donno
donno why i send em
wonder if you've ever seen em
think it's mostly something to do
with the bottom of stairways
where our lives cross

anyway the story is

your mother an laura taught at tolstoi
manitoba 1916
their school house was called *chervona*
'the red one'
they shared a thatched roof teacherage
an after they went their separate ways
they always wrote letters

i remember

the old widow sayin that last time

42

TULOVA / 1979

tulova

that final peace
with spirit
and earth

she naming it
after that *selo*
her parents left
in *ukraina*

she buying it
with hardearned
writer's money
remembering
the sacrifice
it took
to turn horizon
and forest
into something
of remembered
steppes

45

2. THE PHOTOGRAPH

it is noon
in late summer
where shadows lengthen
when she
and good friend
suknatskyj
stand
arm on shoulder
arm on waist
among tall
corn stalks
on the margins
of sunflowers
bright yellow
and dark
brown heads splayed
against
blue
sky
... that ancient
daguerrotype
like a bush burning
.. in the memory
of men
and all women
that other woman
kneedeep
and alone
in a field
of alien grain
she in revery
weaving thoughts
through
centuries

46

'... small feet and hands
have still not swum
in my sea
 tiny elbows
have still not
bruised my womb
 movements
of flesh and bone
swaddled in luminous dreams
have still not become
a moth's wings
 brushing the spine
of that man
my other self
sleeping
 with his back
to me

i donno
 ... he vanished
 all too soon'

in the evening
 blood red borshch
 savoured
and the last crust
 of bread
 broken

3. MARX' WOMAN

she hands suknatskyj
 her rifle

'try that tin can
on the barn windowsill
gun's ready jus flip it off safty
the red dot should be showing'

PTZWWAAAAAaaaaaannnnnnng!

on the garden's edge
 the sunflowers stand
 motionless
like a firing squad
 behind her

left of the window
 where a poster engraving
 is pinned
to the crumbling wall
 karl marx
winces
 frowning at the hopeless
 marksmanship
 of suknatskyj

'myrna can i try agen?'

'jus keep squeezin the trigger
there are 12 more'

'mhuuu ... guss sleepin with this
thing by your bed summer nights
you don't really have to worry
about any strange wackos
comin round'

'never'

LEBRET MISSION / QU'APPELLE

for myrna kostash

spring
three years now when gimli's odin
she and suknatskyj
walked the clearing
by trembling aspens
and saw
a young man revving a honda
slowly ascending
the stations of the cross
beneath the mission
suknatskyj remembers
her amazing dark eyes
widening
her face
flattening
in dismay
remembers something
freezing her there
today suknatskyj
notes the luna moth
resting
from all her journeys
she now sleeping
in the first
morning sun
where she
clings
to the screen
of the east window
down from
the mission

suknatskyj remembers
how he once caught one
kept her
captive
in a small
clear container
and then
on a summer evening
baited a hook
casting her
far to a dark pool
among deadwoods
of a mountain
lake
remembers
the wide circles
she beat
with her
soft wings
the way
they moved out
through mirrored
stars
when the great
bulltrout
rose through
orion
to crush her

remembers
 standing there
 gently touching
 her delicate
 head
 a moment
 she
 scarcely stirring
 before
 stapling
 down to wood
 the moving
 window screen

 sleep peacefully
 woman dreams
 heal you
 from your long
 journey

51

NOVEMBER HUNT 1975 / MOOSE JAW SOUTH TO WOOD MOUNTAIN

for glen sorestad

sorestad at the wheel
 as the car bucks the cold morning wind
 5 AM saturn above southern hills
 two hours to scout lake and sunrise
 the hunters talk very little
 smoke comfortable in the quiet
 language of plains and ancestors
 the sleepheavy silence nudges thoughts closer
 to something very old painted shadows
 flaking from walled memory

two sage hens sighted in pinto horse butte country
 the week before still softly trample
 the frosted stubble in sukhnatskyj's memory
 like gods forsaken

sorestad murmurs 'got any matches on you?'
 sukhnatskyj hands him a wooden match
 they light up gazing out over southern prairie
 where orion is a kite
 some chinese boy flies in a dream
 on the other side of the world

sunrise approaching scout lake
 sukhnatskyj tells sorestad of kerrila buccatar
 living in the corner of the hamlet
 'las time at sunrise when gallagher
 marty and i came this way
 kerrila was shaving in that window there
 likely gettin ready to take a bus to assiniboia
 for his monthly gallon of wine
 when ee still lived back in wood mountain
 the roumanian kids an i used to call im *babbok*
 the word for duckling in roumanian'
 turning right they drive up into high hills
 above the scout lake
 both only an eye now
 they spot a covey of partridge

52

knowing this late in the season birds are spooked
only sorestad shoots a miss
and the covey wings far down into the coulee
seeking refuge on the edge of the hamlet
suknatskyj wonders if the shot disturbed *babbok's* sleep
he maybe drowsily mumbling to himself
what he called children back in wood mountain
babbokolie!

late afternoon driving the north and west gridroads
through vasile tonita's farmland
and on to the abandoned sidorick farm
the hunters stop by the old house and gate
where a sign has been hung on a single barbed wire

NO TRESPASSING

jip a 17 year old dog slowly emerges
from the poplars suknatskyj calls him
'JIP ... HERE JIP'
jip doesn't come as he used to
remembers suknatskyj and gallagher the week before
he keeps his distance suknatskyj thinking
*if jip could only speak he would have told baba
the full story the day she came out nostalgic
from assiniboia to bathe his neck wound
limping away he would have muttered
'that goddamn fuckin suknatskyj
he an some friend of his an this big black
huntin dog they always come tramplin
through the garden lookin for pheasants
i watched them las week
till that sly black var'iat 'that bastard'
jumped me*
*anyway that asshole poet suknatskyj
was good enough to come
an kick the himno outta that black didko
chewin my neck while i squirmed
on my back'*

suknatskyj tells sorestad to shut the motor off
and tries once more
'JIP ... HERE JIP'
'COME ON BOY!' jip doesn't move
only looks their way a moment
before fading back into poplars

when the car starts up a cock and hen
swiftly rise from the tall weeds
in the corner of the garden and fly far beyond
the house

the hunters drive on suknatskyj glimpses jip
still watching from the trees the lonely place
*so much fled
from my slavic memory*

SUKNATSKYJ TAKING A GREYHOUND NORTH

for the sorestads

suknatskyj no longer favouring the back
sits right in front
the bus bucking the great north wind
to saskatoon
suknatskyj bushed again
in the hutch of urban despair
and fleeing across prairie
that becomes an incurable need
at least twice a year

suknatskyj nods into reverie
where snow sifts across cold pavement
while the bus driver struggles to keep awake
under the blizzard's hypnosis

*... somewhere in another century
in another country
a young girl walks leaning into storm
to take refuge
among pear trees
near home
and somewhere deep in her mind
a dido sings*

*'orphan ... orphan
are you made of snow
or frost
moroz is that
what makes you so cold?'*

*the song's orphan child
replying:*

*'dido ... dido
i am not snow or frost
only tears!'*

suknatskyj drowsing in the gathering storm
remembers baba's story
how she never *did* hear
the end of the song looming
in her transylvanian dream
or in the new land another home
where she fled to weep
in nearby willows
returning only when her father
came home from work

suknatskyj somewhere between sleep and dream
where forms assume
a ghostly density

*... a new home
another decade
a scantily dressed girl searching
in storm for the lost
horses ...*

where a ghostly voice
is murmuring

'she lost all her toes
to frostbite that time
13 when she ran away from home
some home with that miserable bitch
of a stepmother
anyway an old neighbor woman
took her in
baba stayed there a couple years
then went to work as a waitress
in moose jaw
lived in a rooming house where dido was
another guy there proposed to her
an she said to him

*'ia kalika! i'm crippled
but if you want me
you'll have to take me
the way i am kalika!'*

well i guess the guy wasn't too much interested
in a woman with no toes
so he shied away
anyway dido came along
an she told him the same thing
they married a few weeks later
then headed south to the homestead
an you know baba she was 77 this year
went up to buchanen this summer
with sister mary
they asked some ole ukrainian farmer
about that woman
who took baba in that time
the ole guy pointed across a field

'she lives right over there'

when the woman opened the door
baba whispered her name

'laura'

well my God! that ole woman embraced her
nearly crushing baba's back

*'sy:rota ... my child!
why did you wait so long?'*

*a wind blast rocks the bus
while suknatskyj wakens to remember
baba's bitter words*

*'vhat ees to say now?
dhat sohn een law
on heez brrahderr
dido vahz always call dhem
tasybhany! geepsiez!
dhat sohn een law
dido vahz say bout heem
'he deeg myne ggrave
an he fall een et heemself!
dido vahz say dhat
afterr funerral
on die von veek laterr
i'm sohrry forr boht now
eetz all ohverr dhat hating
on now dhat sohn frrom ceety
leefink vife
on runnink roun veet nahdderr von
las veek she an mahderr veet heem
pohkink nohz roun farmm
vhat me an dido slayfink forr all deez yearz
i tole dhat sohn
'you got not von
but two kurvy now!
two kurvy!
dhat be mine life herre now
like dhat syrota
dhat orrphan child
ohnly tearrz!
crryink boat dhay an night
ohnly tearrz!'*

suknatskyj tired and hungry
weary of aloneness
while the bus wheels into the new concrete depot
looming in the storm
like a fortress
suknatskyj rising in the evening light
a passing thought

*you enjoy baba's bitter tea
and say*

*dobranich!
'good evening!'*

*you do not feign a kiss
on baba's purple lips
soft as lilacs*

*and she embraces you
the way a strong northern wind hugs
a cornerpost
on the flat
prairie*

59

PASKA I KHMARY

after linocut by george melnyk

suknatskyj's mother savouring black current wine
he has squirreled away for 8 years
she gazes at the print
on his shack's wall
asks what it is

too long from home
and unable to speak ukrainian
the way he used to
he cannot translate his friend's title

the land also rises

so suknatskyj tells her
'paska i khmary'
easter bread and clouds

studying details
she asks
'vhat be dhat underr clouds?'

'polia
... fields' he murmurs
'navit polia
v nebi
even fields in
heaven'

she finishing wine
to add
'orr myte be rrayz ov sohn
ahbofh cloudz brroken
by geese koming norrt
yah i see
nice day today
might you be deek myne garrden?'

60

LEAVING HOME AGAIN

leaving home again
suknatskyj knows
it will not be easy
in the darkening avenue
of memory
is fully aware
there'll be no
absolute forgetting
that thursday night
burning grass
in the church yard
that evening
of good intentions
or wakening
from deep sleep
on the sofa
the whole living room
glowing
red
his terrified mother
framed
by the doorway
struggling
for breath

'the choorrch
the choorrch eez burrnin
poorr ... churrch'
never will suknatskyj forget
the vaulting
pyramidal flames
his heart rising on
bitter tide
people gathering
to stand helpless

swollen with spring
runoff
the cold thoughts
never will suknatskyj forget
the whole edifice crumbling
to the foundation
his whole mind
numb
the bell
tumbling
to CLANG!
on the concrete
hallway

*yes you
who were so certain
the evening dew
had strangled every spark*
the great bell
glowing
red
in the embers
suknatskyj's mother
next day
she kneading tears
into bittersweet
dough
she braids
in lonely thought

*gone myne choorch
wherre i vahshed floorris
on myne kneez forr twenty yearrz
gone gold crross
chableec an candlesteeks
i ahlvayz pahleeshed
teel i saw myne face
gone iconz*

his broken mother
suddenly there
like a visitation
from some charred
village
in the ukraine

she knuckling
the burnt broom
in her right hand

'vehrr verr you burring
lahss nite?
tell me
vehrr?'

stony silence
only sounds
of the old priest
beyond caraganas
where he ambles in ruins
retrieving
candlesticks
chains
and incenseburners.

"eet vahss you
you veel pay forr dheec
'pohanyn' ..."

the schoolchildren
at recess
ringing the grey bell
with small stones
flung from the road

suknatskyj saying
goodbye
to his mother
who does not
face him

only stretches out
her left hand

'tek dhis lohff easterr bbread
myte you be get hahgrry
vehrr you goink'

suknatskyj
on a northbound
bus
where the dark
window
mirrors
nothing
moving alone
in thoughts
of home
and sleep

DOMINION DAY DEPARTURES

julia suknatskyj (1899-1978)

north of lac la ronge
 a saturday
 clear blue sky
stanley mission road
 suknatskyj
 back in boyhood magic
tries to snare a pike
 with wire loop
 and willow
when two young
 native women
 going west in an old hack
 stop
 ‘hey you seen an ole woman
 come by here?
 woman wit fishin pole?’
‘no i’ve only bin here
bout an hour why?’
 ‘she wen west dis way
 yesserday never come back’
suknatskyj
 fishing again
 in niggling cold of morning
on the third day
 late night
 suknatskyj returning
to the city
 to find note
 on door

65

PHONE LEE BACK HOME — IMMEDIATELY.
PEOPLE HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU
SINCE FRIDAY NIGHT.

EVAN

descends the long stairway
 walks past lush lilacs
next to the greening
 caraganas
 ‘friday night tomorrow
 10 o’clock’
‘thanks sorry to wake you up
goodnight’

*no longer her thoughts
of all those lone years back on the farm
ghosts in a wind forever
curling around eaves that sigh
like lost souls dreaming
no more the memory of her rasping speech
long after she went away
no more whatever
changed her
children forever*

*her slavic prayers kept her
her easter litany kept her
the fireazed church
across the street kept her*

66

*the bright sun hot
in the garden of summer
and bare feet in the damp warm earth
kept her
hers now that last wish
to lie near the corner of the village cemetery
find vast sleep within the triangle
the eternal partridge covey flies*

under high sun
of the windless day
the river flows on
suknatskyj rises
to ascend the steep path
back to his refuge
moving alone
in his black
flowering

67

THE GIFT

though some suspect
the old metis woman
south of town
no one is really certain
who it was

but the gift
... a jar
of sweet water
containing
a handful of lilacs

was there
on the western edge
of the open grave
long before
suknatskyj's mother was
buried
midmorning

68

GENESIS

long before the word
or someone to hear it

the garden grows
furred and taloned things endure eating

long after naming
dreams of lineage

the garden grows
south of sun

and north of the hands that seed it
far beyond

the paleo-ikons of the cave
and colourd runes

easter eggs
hidden in the grass

the garden grows high
above the old hands

that seeded
with care laying it out

in the subtle precision
of a rembrandt painting

PYSANKY

she gone now
leaving three
pysanky

in a fruit jar

one mantled by
prussian blue
night
alive
with stars

white lines binding bud
and leaf
to ferns
rooted
in dark heaven

a yellow cross
adrift
near four
moons

another
deep purple
space

graced by
white
green

and yellow
runes
suknatskyj
cannot
decipher

the final one
darker than
transylvanian
myth
a single yellow scrawl
half cross
half white
barb
clinging
to dense
night
the final
pysanka
a sign
though nothing
works out

KISTKA

wooden splinter
the edges
shaved away
with a paring
knife
to make
the stylus handle twice the length
and thickness of a wooden match
in the split
end
a fragment
of soft metal
curled
into
a tiny cylinder
strung with
black thread
down to white
binding
tightly

suknatskyj trying
to imagine his mother
parsnipthick fingers
delicately crafting it
to colour those *pysanky*

angular designs
a web
to catch rainbow
and stars
barbed in boyhood
memory

73

PEREPOLOKH IN ASSINIBOIA

suknatskyj's father's father back in the old country
whenever he was plagued by birds ravaging the garden
he always built *perepolokh* 'scarecrow'
magical word for any ukrainian youth
perepolokh 'to scare something'
'to blow through or clear over something'
pere po lokh there was sound
and poetry in the word and if you had frightened horses
it was 'rozpolokhani koni' that galloped away whinnying

suknatskyj's father now in his 87th year
small sparrows discover the two rows of wheat
and row of flax he plants each year
on the edge of the garden since leaving the farm
wheat blended with winter cereal for body strength
flax for a medicine mixed with local herbs
in a strong tea

once again he builds *perepolokh*
his father's old sayings braided like easterbread in his memory
leavening
'ah ole dido beginning to wander an ramble
we ought to prop him up in the garden
where he can be of some use *didoperepolokh!*
a good place too for nattering ole baba
where she can beat her gums
at crows *babaperepolokh!*'

soon *perepolokh* is ready
neighboring widows laugh at motheaten overalls
tattered shirt and hat
while the innocent sparrows harvesting sweet hard wheat
don't even notice *perepolokh!*
old man suknatskyj goes to the house
finds a dress his new woman has discarded
pulls it over *didoperepolokh*
the voluminous brightflowered dress
waving like a flag in the wind

74

cuts his wheat and flax with a knife
 ties three sheaves and tucks them
 under the hem of the dress
 'there that'll do the trick *babaperepolokh*
 will protect em!
 he retreats to the house brews some coffee
 and celebrates the day's work
 a while later goes outside to inspect
 can't believe his eyes no wind
 and yet there seem movements under the dress
 suddenly the sparrow's song and women's
 cackle reaches him
 he runs to *babaperepolokh* salvages remains
 takes the sheaves into the basement
 for further ripening

hearing the story in some other town
 his former wife reveals a faint trace of jealousy
 'huh these canadian burds
 dhey not be so stupid'
 young suknatskyj only smiles

75

THE GARDEN

andrew suknatskyj (1889-1978)

Andrew Suknatskyj
 born April 4, 1891
 Lemberg, Galicia, Poland.

Entered Canada
 May 23, 1912.

Certificate No. 12620 / series 'A'
Nationalization
 June 23, 1921.

suknatskyj jr
 returning home another fall
 to make peace
 with presences
 lingers by the tall sunflower
father
 following the sun
 to another place
were you as tall
 as this
 sunflower?
father where did you lose
or gain those three years?
are you really only the two men
you sometimes seemed to be?
 silence
 the splayed shadows
 reveal nothing

76

*father the 10 crisp 100's
you sewed in your underwear
next to your heart
while you prayed for death
as reprieve from insomnia
... did you actually believe
you might use it
for some eternal homestead?*

*speak to me sunflower
raise your sleepfilled head*

suknatskyj standing
frozen
by the sunflower
and hollyhock
remembers a neighbour
in the silence

*'the sunflower
it was the only one that grew
this summer
it didn't bear any seeds
... the hollyhock
it jus grew one year
it never flowered
this summer*

*your mother
was havin these pains
in her chest
but insisted on finishing the garden
one day the pain was too much
and she got helen
to plant the last two rows
of poppies'*

suknatskyj leaving
to pause
on the garden's eastern edge
left hand
brushes a dry poppy pod
the seeds rattle
remembers seeing his father
that last time
in the hospital
he beyond speech

*what does it mean
his right hand extended
rosary tangled
in those gnarled fingers?
does he know i've lost my faith?
has he himself
lost faith?
and tells me there is only
the futility of prayer
or is it simply
one last gift?*

remembers
that lonely silence
threading it through
the left hand's
fingers
before returning it

*'no father i think it's
best you keep it
with you'*

remembers

chiding the younger sister
before the funeral

'my God he was a cobbler once
we can't bury im shoeless
can't have im walkin barefooted someday
across stony fields
Christ! i'll buy im a pair right now
myself'

'no they can't puttem on now
his feet would have to be broken'

suknatskyj

remembers the funeral
taking the old crucifix

where his father fastened
the falling Christ
with a red ribbon

recalls

one dry poppy pod
and some

braided sweetgrass
under the ribbon

then slipping

the crucifix
into his father's suit pocket

*sleep well
i'll be around some night
with a paira shoes*

79

FIRST BORN

mahzabkazab whiskeylonely once again on his way
across golgotha prairie to winnipeg
young balding head humming electric
with oletime fiddle tunes he slowly falling asleep
at the wheel to dream

*man man dat muddah fuckin fiddle man!
idda jumped off dat
maddah fuckin brooklyn bridge man centuries ago!
if it wassin foh that fiddle*

mahzabkazab nodding to dream of his female jewish
new york psychiatrist who once advised
'love your metis stepparents you must
but remember you are white
and their world is not yours
your salvation lies in the green army tin box
your stepmother keeps the adoption papers in
you must find out who your real parents are
you'll never be happy or know where you belong
unless you do that!'

AYYYYYYEE! WAKE UP!
WATCHDATDHEREDITCHMAN!

mahzabkazab who in several hours
will be stopping again at the same gulf station
owned by a greying man in east kildonan
mahzabkazab uncertain
'filler up please ...'
being very careful as always never to say 'father'
mahzabkazab who will continue
another 34 blocks into st boniface
to his metis wheelchair stepfather
in a house forever home and share with him
a few more intravenoused years

80

and then there is suknatskyj
who in a time of difficult love
grows more fond each day of the young *aircanada* woman
where home is fixed in the immutable coördinates
taken by the first power stars orion
north star southern cross
over cities pulsing in the veins of journeying earth
suknatskyj growing more fond of her for there can be no other way now
far beyond yellowrange poplars on the garden's edge
of boyhood memory

*a young woman cries
as she digs
a small hole
with a coalpail shovel
and a young man returns from the straw barn
to hear and see her
he going over to console her
'dohnt cry ... dohnt cry
dehrr vill be abderrz ...'
he holding her close
where they kneel*

suknatskyj now far beyond where deeper still
in chlorophylled boyhood memory
a father tears legs and heads
from christmas eve dolls
while the family sleeps
severs them one by one
before casting them all into the heater
suknatskyj now far beyond another time
where the heater lid is slightly open
the firebox's light becoming bright crescents
embracing shadows along the ceiling
where a rolling pin eclipses both
the straight razor and the axe
while tartar horsemen
still ford the rivers of
slavic blood

suknatskyj far beyond
the moon
holding a baby's
death certificate
indecipherable
while the wind turns the late
grocer's death ledger
page by page
in the nuisance ground
where something dark
cries through earthfilled
mouth

'MAMO! TATU! MAMO

PETER!

OUR FIRST BORN
I DO NOT KNOW YOU PETER
WHERE YOU LIE
IN YOUR UNMARKED GRAVE
HIGH IN THE HILLS

PETER!

I DO NOT KNOW YOU
OR YOUR FATHER

DO NOT DO NOT WANT TO

DEAR GOD
LET THE NIGHTS
KEEP THEIR SECRETS'

to the memory of peter suknatskyj

... on the margins
of all things

1. Name of Deceased in full
If an unnamed child give surname preceded by 'unnamed'.

Died unnamed

to hear the cock crow
to be gone
the third day
before
naming
by water

to not bear
the chosen name

2. Date of death. 26 day of Sept. 1922

... on the margins
of all things

6. Place of Death
If outside the limits of a city, town or village, give sec., tp. and rge.

32 · 4 · 2 · W 3

to lie under

mantling darkness
like a sin marked
by the nameless
stone
in the NE corner
of a cemetery
in the game
preserve
where whitetail deer
descend
the hills
spring to fall
heads angled
under barbed wire
to graze
the tall green
grass

Remark:
(For Registrar only)

Child reported very frail at birth and died suddenly on 3rd day.

to be discovered
in the charred
records
flung by the new
storekeeper
into
the nuisance grounds
on the margins
of all things
lost

любити, а крім Тебе нічого іншого не бажаю!

Люблю Тебе Ісусе:

Отче наш: Богор. Діво: Слава: І нині:

XIV.

Ісуса Христа вкладають до гробу.



Величаєм Тя,
животдавче Хри-
сте, І чтем крест
Твоєй честний,
імже спасл еси
нас от роботи
вrajія.

Розваж, як ученики несуть мертвого Спасителя на місце, де мають Його поховати. Многострадальна Мати йде за ним і власними руками складає Тіло до гробу. Потім замикають гроб і всі відходять.

**Похоронений Ісусе! Я обі-
ловую той камінь, що закрий
Тебе, та по трьох днях Ти вост-**

FOUND FRAGMENT

after a letter from margaret laurence

*the way we torture ourselves
is it essential
to register
all births marriages and deaths?
what better burial
than to lie among poplars
under that huge blue
blue prairie sky
and is it not sad
that your father should feel
the weight
of having done something
which was right?
the parents are those who bury
the dead child
with love and mourning
the baby was theirs
and they buried that child
under the poplars
the right and natural
thing to do
and 'no one knows to this day'
your father said
and why should anyone?
and it's sad your father*

carrying the guilt
of all these years
for not declaring
the child's birth and death
for not filling out
all the official papers
 'there will be others'
he said comfortingly
so right
and so wrong
there *were* others
but they never replace
the lost one
gone forever
and i think both your parents
knew this but they
will never be able
to say it
you have these words
and will

SUKNATSKYJ ADDRESSING A SECOND UNCLE

uncle they say you always got anything
you wanted
you know uncle had you been caught
you would have surely received
the requisite number of lashes
but women then were far too afraid
ever to speak

i am grateful never to have known you
except your faceless name
in my memory
where sometimes
another strawstuffed doll
drifts up to my mother's face
at christmas time
my father leering

'herrez a nyce von live too
on eet eesn't even
heez'

somewhere deep in my memory
a potbellied heater
and severed doll's straw bodies
burn forever
kindling the thought
of all those julian calender christmases
straw rustling under the tablecloth

GODDAMN
GODDAMN YOU UNCLE!
may maggots evolve into high order consuming
your live bones uncle
if we all rise someday
as some say we will
don't you ever cross my path
in these sad prairie hills
because i'll club you
with a femur bone into still
another boneshattering
death

ХРЕСНА ДОРОГА

165

заслуги болю, який Ти витер-
пів при здиранню з Тебе оде-
жі, прошу Тебе, поможи мені
позбутися всякого привязання
до річей сотворених і цілою
моєю волею прилягнути до Те-
бе, бо тільки Ти найгідніший
моєї любови.

Люблю Тебе Ісусе:

Отче наш: Богор. Діво: Слава: І нині:

XI.

**Ісуса Христа прибивають
до хреста.**



Величаєм Тя,
животдавче Хри-
сте, і чтем крест
Твоєй честної
Імже спаси нас
от раба
вражія.

Розваж, як кати кидають Ісуса на хрест
Він з розпростертими раменами прино-

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN / RE: MISS EVE SUKNATSKYJ, AGE 29

*13th april friday good it's not a
how weeks many shock since electricity now
long treatment passed my through brain
they how will be it form can till I
than more a day sentences two?*

November 27, 1958

Above mentioned patient was seen for the first time on Oct. 24, 1958, at the psychiatric O.P.D. of the St. Boniface Hospital.

She appeared unclean, untidy, apparently unable to look after herself. Although she was fairly co-operative she refused to be hospitalized for 'multiple sclerosis,' in 1956.

*saturday bells winnipeg of them loved i use to
who wonder lives now in room that to left top at
of stairway north kildonan house that
sister pauline to walked st boniface daily
from hospital 40 blocks stolen with food for me
more 40 blocks to back walk that winter ...
in the end did why i never that door open?
made me what cruel so when her loved i most?
food by left door cold she and often crying
sitting few moments that stairway on to
warm up before home going ... write in her
as always daily diary*

*1957 Jan 6th
Today my thoughts fly back
to when I was a little girl
when we celebrated Dad's willia.
How time does change things.
Tonight he sits alone on the farm
with no one to carole to him,
or even to sit with him.*

91

With the help of Social Service and Welfare Departments, patient was coaxed to come in on Nov. 6, 1958. Her neurological findings displayed ataxic nystagmus, 4 limb pyramidal tract syndrome, moderate cerebellar disease, sl. intention tremor and slow scanning speech. Mentally she was about the same as on Oct. 24th, when seen at the O.P.D. she was well oriented, her memory seemed unaffected although occasionally she seemed incredible. There was no psychotic symptom. Her mood was somewhat flattened. At times she giggled and behaved in a silly way. Generally she displayed some euphoria.

*why do they treat us this way? why do we have to
leave these crumbling walls, and
go out into the city on week days, to scrub and
polish floors for prominent doctors — all for
nothing? and here ... why can these sane young
men, who are suppose to be caring for us, take us
anytime they wish? and do whatever they please.
i remember that day, them behind the divider —
their groans, and her young muffled voice. did
they really believe, they could erase it from
her memory with electricity the next day? today,
i must write a letter.*

92

dear mom & andrei

*it's so lonely in here. it's so long since
anyone has come to see me. they don't give us
very much to eat in here. metro, could you
please send me a few apples and oranges?
and maybe a few chocolate bars. my favourite
bar was always cuban lunch.*

love,
eve

*p.s. mom, please pray for me. pray i will
get better.*

Patient's greatest problem was her addiction to Equanil and her wish to have a job. She was discharged on Nov. 20th, 1958, placed on Sparine and promised to appear regularly at the O.P.D.

After a few days however, it was reported by the Social Services Department that patient apparently had slipped back into her habit and was unable to look after herself.

*as a small girl, my life began shelling peas from the garden
on the farm. now, it ends shelling peas again. me seated
on the hard green chair. these hands once held the needle
or a patient's wrist. my face once resembling a beautiful
serene nun. my face now like some escarpment crumbling
into a river. joy now the light in the eyes of the baby
crawling between thin feet of the young girl who helps
me shell these chrisly peas. the baby was born here last
christmas eve.*

93

Since she is not co-operative, it is necessary to institutionalize this patient.

Yours truly,

Wolfgang Helm, M.D.
Assistant Resident
in Psychiatry

*it ends with this. hydroemichysis. i am no longer fed
intravenously. long needles inserted
directly into me – my world now,
pure oxygen, crystal memory, a tent. all sounds
and voices still there, clear as the sharp ring
of a coin falling on stone.*

'eve, can you hear me now?
mom took the greyhound from
moose jaw last night.
the village took up a collection
for the fare. she's coming
to see you ... eve'

of course i can hear you sister. but how can i tell you now

94

NOW IT ALL BEGINS LIKE THIS

mostly one lee soparlo speaking

now it all begins like this in primal meaning of name
suknatskyj namesake listener on margins
of lineage hero yearning to make it true
suknatskyj carder and weaver of carpathian wool
to clothe comrade in war
suknatskyj who questions the very earth others stand on
calling it theirs that place
mantling his parents in a single season
there is the whitehooded priest confirming fears
'maybe you're right out at the end of the plank,
all over again, without a fixed voice again ...'
and there is *mabzabkabzab* clown turning agony
into an absolving joke
'hey man that soparlo he was king man
back in yer village that man man
he became yer memory you've had yer say man
give im back iz hills you kin live somewhere else now ...'
that man whose perfect roman profile assumes the shadow
vectoring towards the bar's clock indicating
three minutes to closing time when he says
'now it all begins like this each day
with the morning parade
yer wearin yellow coveralls an yer all lined up
three ranks: first center an rear
45 guys to a platoon an it's rifle inspection
wen the sargent clears the barbed wire
from iz throat

PORT ARMS!

you remove the mag from yer rifle
you place yer sloped rifle at port
yer right foot extending forward

you cock the action sliding the bolt back
an returning it five times
then pull the trigger this uncocks the weapon
you then slide that bolt
back an leave the chamber open
you lick yer thumbnail an stick it in the breech
then swing that barrel straight aheadda you
the sargent peers a second intta that barrel
that better reflect the light yer thumbnail mirrors
face to face with the sargent you stare right through im
an wen ee looks away moves on to the nex man
you close the action pull the trigger
replace the mag an slope arms
then you stand at ease

... now during target practice
it's a whole new game yer rifle that lee-enfield .303
it has an accuracy range of 1200 yards
now the flipup peepsight starting at 300
is marked for every 100 yards
now wen you flip up that backsight vertical
that peephole is adjustable
so by way of loosening a knurled knob
which wen tightened down again holds the reticule
in place you kin slide it up
an set it at say 900 yards
now wen you stare through that peephole
everything'll grow a tad fuzzy but in aboutta second
a clear spot'll appear right in th center
clear as a bell
you take only another second situating the target
so as to be able to place it within the sight reticule
and bring it in line with the blade of the foresight
you then breathe in drawing that bead on the silhouette
of a man's head that pops up outtova trench
you breathe out while you
squeeze the trigger

YOU GODDDIT!
DEADCENTER!

now that's only halfa the game
if it's for real
an the wind's blowing say ten miles per hour
you aim for the man's chest you consider the windage
then take a lead about the width of iz body
an that silhouette ain't gonna be eatin
no more apples ...'

OKAY PEOPLE! CLOSIN TIME
DRINK UP! LET'S ALL GO HOME
CLOSIN TIME ...

and when the lights are out
there is still the needling question of that man who became
memory he still telling you stories
their power prevailing to change you
when already acolytes to the mercurial word
urge you to move on wary of
unwavering faith in language choosing you
while voices bear gifts for the worthy
betrayer knowing his lot
there is still the nuzzling question of earth
you stand on claim
but you know you must move on
shouldering into strong wind at night
where you light no more than two matches
per cigarette
taking heed among friends
and lighting no more than two cigarettes
with one match
the flame the eternal ghost gun uses
to draw a bead ...

THE GHOST GUN

*'I promise you I won't die
on opening day...'*

Robert Raurk

gallagher cleans it yearly now
reverently draws the rod and oiled gauze
through the barrel
a light rag seems to move at its own will
polishing dark blue steel till it gleams
like a hint of memory drawn
from dark past
gallagher finally polishes the walnut stalk
till the ghost gun mirrors
his face

opening day of upland
when gallagher points his station wagon south
down number 14
and takes the first long pull of *calgary* ale
eternally nestled in his crotch
the ghost gun is always there now
snug in its case
lying on the back seat where the other gun
leans angled
and he knows it isn't easy
hunting alone now
where a lonely straying thought creases
the flowering black spot
at 11 o'clock

... now you remember son
the way da hunt huns is yeh gotta form
this mental image ovva partridge
in yer mind's eye an then
yeh transfer it to that stubble
you stop the car son
shut the motor off

... and you listen
you wait till that weed or clod
grows a beak an the head
shifts its angle slightly
yeh know what to do after that ... son

sometimes on the timeburnished margins of memory
when gallagher is on foot
along the edge of rosehip cover
that suddenly explodes with grouse
he will draw a bead on one
lead it an imaginary bird or two
depending on the wind
it is mostly then someone seems always there
at the blurred edge of vision
one good eye squinting
the *over and under* in life the ghost gun
deadrings for
in the hands of he whom
gallagher mirrors dropping
a perfect double
everytime

a covey flies in tight
... formation

FARM DOGS

bill hanowski remembering

yeh well like i say
we couldn't raise enough dogs
to keep up with the horses
kicking them to death
most of them would run behind a horse
an snap at its feet like i say
they would just bark an bite the hind feet
until a horse would catch one of them with a hoof
an that would be the end of that dog
some of them just never learned
others became good farm dogs learned to snap
an then duck low
so the horse kicked over their heads
yeh well like they say
'a dog's a man's best friend'
he'll follow you anywhere
but that's the trouble
you got to watch them
leave your dog at home tied up
when you go to the field
i had one once that followed me
where i was swathing
got chasing a rabbit and i lost sight of them
the rabbit did a somersault
ass overteakettle on the canvas
an my dog lost all four feet
in the blade
best dog i ever had
yeah well like i said before
'a dog's your best friend'
but you got to be careful at harvest time
or when you hay

UKRAINIAN CHRISTMAS EVE / *January 6th 1976*

the other janitors are throwing away christmas trees
that brightened government waiting rooms
for the last three weeks
tonight is ukrainian christmas eve
suknatskyj decides to leave his tree for one more day
the tree's thirteen gingerbread men gazing across partitions
an acre of welfare offices
and he is haunted by thoughts of the ukrainian baker's dozen
thirteen gingerbread men
reminding him of his father's mother
who sold eggs and bread buns by the dozen
thirteen items carefully packed each time
the one bun or egg extra
a gift for good luck

near midnight the work completed in sukknatskyj's area
he pilfers one gingerbread man
remembers an ancient ukrainian custom
when his family always left something
out on the table overnight
after the dishes were cleared away
the table cloth straightened over its fine layer
of grass or straw
remembers how his family always believed
some relative would return
from the dead and stand there savour something
and listen for voices of past christmases
remembers how his mother said
the spirit must never go hungry
and always left a small piece of white fish
the northern fisherman sold to the villagers
each winter and how she placed
a spoonful of *kutia* in a small dish
that sweet boiled wheat
like some signature of her scattered family

ole bill hanowski and sukknatskyj wait
for the rest to be through
stand by the table in the book repository
sukknatskyj pulling the gingerbreadman from a pocket
asks hanowski
'you remember the old custom bill?
that leavin somethin behind for some spirit
after ukrainian christmas eve supper?
i stole this one from my tree
still up in welfare tonight'
sukknatskyj then breaks off the head
with raisin eyes hands it to the old man
who smiles takes it
an wistfully murmurs
'yup well?
like i said before
those were the good times
it's all different now'

TONY TOPOROSKY / WINNIPEG BUS DEPOT

suknatskyj perplexed
what sort of ukie drinks tea
reading the saturday globe and mail
down in the depot café?

suknatskyj deep in art theory
and national consciousness

'The fact that Harris
believes in the spiritual
energies of the world
were beamed southward
from a source at the top
of the world'

at the edge of suknatskyj's vision
an old man in a brown fur coat
nearly reaching his ankles
wears a fur cap
with flaps partly covering his ears
he holds a small box
under one arm
and a tray with a bowl of soup
bun and butter
in the other hand

he sits down at the table right of suknatskyj
gently places the cardboard box
in the middle of the table
then removes the food
from the tray

and that Canada,
being closer to

'nice day today cold
good day forr dha sleep
put bottle homebrew underr pillow
wake up drrink few ounces
go back to sleep!'

suknatskyj stirring back to life
from his newspaper
'yeh tz'okay
where you from?'

'arrboorg! farr norrt!'

'what's your name?'

suknatskyj shameless

'ahntohny thorrne'

'but you have
a slavic accent!'

'yah tohny toporosky
vahz rreal name
eenglishmenz shorrtten it dhey say
ahntohny thorrne shorrtterr
easierr to rememberr'

the source, would
eventually surpass
America in the arts
and culture ...'

suknatskyj curious

'you in town just for the day?'

'no herre von veek now'
tony nudges the box to his right
and rubs his fingers
one by one
'lohking forr job'

'how old are you tony?'

'64 get pension
in von morre yearr'

*'that's admirable tony
lookin for a job
when so few young people
can find anything today
knowing there's no where to go'*

*the soup finished
tony picks up his small box
rising to leave
while suknatskyj also rises
both walking to the doorway and out
to the waiting room for local departures
suknatskyj finally asking*

'do you think you'll get a job?'

*'oh i look round nudderr veek
hehv to mehkh sohme mohney to get hohme'*

'where's arburg?'

'farr norrt farr norrt!'

*'how far? what's the fare
by bus cost?'*

*'mahbe hundred milsh!
farre? \$4.10'*

*'if you don't get a job
how will you get home?'*

*tony lifts his box a bit higher
under his right arm
'oh peek few cohke bohttlez'*

*'if you had the money
would you take the next bus?'*

'oh yes i goh rright now'

*a bus idling outside
suknatskyj slips a blue bill
from his pocket*

*'here's your fare tony
tz'bin nice talkin to you
... tz's good day for sleep
whiskey under the pillow'*

*'yah yah! good!
tehnkyou i got bohttle at home!'*

*tony places his box
on the chair walks directly to
the ticketwindow*

*'von vay to arrburg
please sebr!'*

WINNIPEG TO SASKATOON / NIGHT JOURNEY

waiting for the next flight
suknatskyj reads *the tribune* and *the free press*
till the announcement unsettles him

BECAUSE OF STORM CONDITIONS
IN EASTERN CANADA
AIRCANADA FLT 620
WILL NOW ARRIVE AT 10:00 PM

suknatskyj fuming turns to st sanku
even reads a stray *midnight magazine*
left on some lonely seat

finally the plane taxis towards the runway
eternity glimmering on the burnished
aluminum nose

T A K E O F F !

the city dropping in sheer moments
like the trap door of a scaffold
suknatskyj musing

*down there friday night beer and whiskey
flow as peaceful as the red river
under ice*
*where will it all end
this flight into oblivion?*

an hour later the plane touches down
in saskatoon

A R R I V A L !

107

subzero night threatens to crack
suknatskyj's face in half
at the edge of *departures*
where he flags a taxi
suknatskyj warm in taxi
delights in the driver's first words
the rolled r's welcome as home
'you must be russian or ukrainian
what's your name?'

'ukrainian andrei fedak jr'

'hey! that's amazing!
i'm andrei suknatskyj jr
we both have our fathers' names'

the older andrei murmuring
'my fatherr 1926
he went to eenglish forreman
want get job mit rrailroad crrew
building ttrack to churrchill
forreman say

'andrei fedak
that's be name too tohff
forr payroll keeperr
we give you nice eenglish name
you worrk mit us
lotts ukrainians herre
father say
'BULLSHIT! UNGLEEKEE!
STICK JOB UP YOURR ASS
NO JOB WORRRTH MY NAME!'

so he went homesteading in 1928
nearr dauphin manitoba'

108

old andrei tells how his wife left him
20 years ago and how he had one lung removed
6 years later
'was the left one
that cushions the heart'

remembers the doctor telling him
'you have only four years
even less if you continue to work
i suggest welfare'
'bullshit! if i stop working
i die from pure boredom!'

he tells of continuing to smoke
a pack of *players* a day
and having never felt better
while he drives a taxi 14 years now
since he quit carpentry
tells how he and his wife bear no illwill
toward each other
still spending each christmas and easter
together at the oldest daughter's home
in winnipeg
claims it's never been better
'we never got divorced no need to
we never took up with anyone else'

tells of nearly going blind
while studying the bible after his wife left
he figuring things out for himself
'those *gideon* people
they pirrated words from us
when we always talked about the old men
we say
'*ti didi*
those didos ...

109

well those englishmen magpie thieves
they stole words from us
call their bible for salesmen
gideons!

suknatskyj curious
"andrei tell me about *ukraina*
'ukraine motherland'
didn't taras shevchenko first use the word
in a poem?"
metro wincing
"no was taras bulba!
you see it first mean

*that place where you was look out from
that place surrounded by
other places ukraina!
other people other countries
round us
like word ohliadaty
'to go look around'
same with ukraina
be in one place
look round at others
we all getting along
speaking several languages
an how you call it?
survive ..."*

110

suknatskyj suddenly suggesting
'eclectics we're the eclectics!
weave the spirit and other things
together ... like combed *konopli!**
that kievian centre an the frontier lands
the cossaks rode to
like a carpenter's plumb line
hanging perfectly
in our memory of all things
east an west ...

'rright!

metro drops suknatskyj off downtown
where he catches a bus
to the city's eastern edge

* Ukrainian for 'hemp'.

111

ESTEVAN, SASKATCHEWAN TRANSPORTATION COMPANY BUS STOP

three of us walking the empty street where the bus is parked
we enjoy the silence and fresh evening air
while the driver has another coffee
before carnduff the end of his route

finally the old woman in a babushka
protecting her from the flowering cold
stands beside the coke machine by the depot
while i edge over closer
to ask her how far she's going

'i going bienfait spen tenksgeeving dare
veet ole veedo fren'

i tell her
'i'm going there myself?'

'you knoh peeplee dare?'

'no i'm just going there
to find someone who can tell me
about the three miners
who were shot during the estevan riot of 31'

'oh ...'

she says quietly
turning slightly away from me
in the cooling silence
to gaze into the southern sky
where dark clouds
knowing no country drift south
through her evening dream

112

CENTENNIAL BARBER SHOP & BILLIARDS, BIENFAIT

once it was harry bronfman's liquor warehouse
when locals drove souped up hacks nightly
south into north dakota
where gunny sacks of overproof booze were unloaded
logging chains magically dropped
from beneath black bumpers
pluming dust a quarter mile high
to blind RCMP cars
but those times are only a withered memory
today is thanksgiving
and it's 9 AM as retired miners wait
for alex ronyk to open the door
so the gin rummy for dimes and quarters
can begin

ronyk resembling a friendly alligator
soon arrives to open the door
and shortly four men are seated at an old table
covered with faded green felt
cards shuffled and dealt
it all begins again with laughter and gentle curses
growing till an old buck shouts to a skinny oletimer
'PUMP ME UP!

PUMP ME UP!

YOU OLE PISSCUTTER!'

loud laughter is lost in the rafters
ronyk pothers around the counter
where i lean with one arm to ask him
about the place he muses
'yeah it's a good pastime for the ole boys
loota fullas here ain't missed a game
since i opened in 35 after quitting the mine'

laughter rises while the fat man kids a small wizened guy
who like some pheasant crouches lower
leaning into the game

'*baniak baniak** you ole fucker!
you're tighter than hogan's goat!
baniak only smiles
a perfect smile
squeezing his
cards
into a tighter
fan ...

ronyk remembers the old mining days
when he was only a kid in 1912
taking care of horses in the stable
deep underground
'it was spring the year i started
but then so what we never saw the seasons go by anyway
we got up before the sun and came home after sunset'

at the table more insults
'judge you ole fart
you bin sittin on your cards you ole fucker!
while someone counts up the points
'*tak samo tak samo* this also'
ronyk digressing from memories of the mine
says
'ole judge he's bin among us so long
he even talks ukrainian now'

while the men eye me suspiciously
i lower my voice not to alter the game
ask ronyk in our common language
about three men murdered in 31
and the way to the cemetery
'*kuda tzvyn'tar de spochyvaint
ti try zamordovani kblopy?*'

'*bez streku* "over the railway tracks"
he says with tense quietness
'most of the others
are there by now'

**baniak*: Ukrainian for cooking pot.

MIKE KALAPAKA'S POOLHALL

alvena saskatchewan
last night old man kalapaka
fitted new felt on the snooker table near windows
light brown felt something
suknatskyj's never seen

'much cheaper these days
green's too expensive anyway
ain't too much business here anymore'

kalapaka and some young french man run a fast game
fast for the young guy in early forties
who still believes he has somewhere to go
in the next ten minutes
kalapaka casually pauses
carefully plans each shot

beyond the shiny worn barber chair
men even older than kalapaka
sit in the bright light near the window
and watch the way they've watched others play
20? 30? 40 years?
deep breath held
kalapaka sinks
another perfect 8 ball
in the far corner

115

VASYLYNA'S RETREAT

vasylyna
retreating into wilderness
had it

po vukha!
'to the ears'

with people
vasylyna
perfectly able
building herself
adobe house
with straw roof

vasylyna
constructing
a simple shelter
of shakes
and scrap lumber
for a goat
one milk cow
and a few chickens

arrive alone
on the margins
of vasylyna's
poplars
and the ghostly

flatbreasted
figure
with a doublebarrel shotgun
delicately
angled
across the right shoulder
will call

KHTO TAM?
'WHO GOES THERE'

116

suknatskyj
 uneasily stirs it all
 muses
 where
 are my broad beans
 tasting of prairie earth?
 stirs that dollop
 of sour cream
 becoming a dozen
 hopeless islands
 something
 reminiscent of ice floes
 in a sea
 of thin
 raspberry juice!

flatfaced suknatskyj
 takes a tentative spoonful
 to tease
 tastebuds
 ‘UGH!
 ICECOLD!
 MANHATTAN
 BORSHCH!’

cornercafé mamma
 casually explaining
 ‘well honeh
 maybe some *jewish* place
 heats it up
 bahddats the way we shevvit heeh ... honeh!
 ICECOLD!
 reeeffrrrehshin! onna hot
 new yok day’

119

HURAKAN

ukrainian sound poem in spring (for sonia sorestad)

viter vüe
viter vüe
 wind blowing
 wind blowing
 wind blowing
 wind blowing
 viter vüe
 viter vüe
 HURAKAN!
 kan
 kan
 gone cities
 kan
 kan
 gone the trees
 kan
 kan
 gone

2. ZHURAVLI

zhuravli
zhuravli
 letiat
 letiat
 letiat
 cranes flying
 cranes flying
 zhuravli
 letiat
 bez mriaku
 bez mriaku
 de vsio posypaietsia iak
 popil
 popil
 nad selom

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cranes flying
flying through mist
through mist
where all floats like
ashes
ashes
over the village

dukh
dukh
do nykh
letyt
letyt
krychyt

the spirit
spirit
flies out to them
flies out to them

zori
zori

de vony
letiat
letiat
i krychat
biz svit
biz nas
biz svit
biz nas
biz smert!

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to them
village lights are stars
stars
stars
where they fly
fly
and cry
over earth
over us
over earth
over us
over death

3. LIOMPA

lioom paaah
lioom paaah
lioom paaah
oom paaah
oom paaah
oom paaah
paaah
paaah
moroz vlizaie v kosti
frost creeps into bone

dusha vidlitala
allah
allah
allah
the soul
has fled

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OLD COUNTRY ALCOHOLIC ORPHAN

*adaptation after anon. ukrainian song
as remembered by michael demjanew of winnipeg*

*kokain
kukulu
kokain
liquor from kukulu
ah how i love to drink you*

for you i give all
silver and gold
and in return
you give me sleep
in the soft cold mud

*kokain
kukulu
kokain
kukulu*

lying down i sleep
like a bull calf
and when i waken
the day is pure white

*kokain
kukulu
kokain
kukulu*

returning home
i weep walking slow
and often rest
then finally run

*kokain
kukulu
kokain
kukulu*

for you i sweat like the dew
grow old grow old
all too soon
kokain kukulu

kokain kukulu
i need you
for you i give all
silver and gold

*kokain
kukulu
kokain
kukulu*

* 'Kokain' ukrainian for cocaine and a special poppy plant from which some say ukrainians, back in the old country, brewed a kind of ukrainian 'white-lightning'. others say it was *kokil*: a weed with black seeds growing wild. i imagine *kukulu* was a word the first singer generated for his kokain-tongued dream of home.

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