

## Selections From MISE-EN-SCÈNE



*Andrew Zawacki*

*for Aleš Debeljak*

What you have come to is nothing known to the senses: not a blazing fire, or a gloom turning to total darkness, or a storm; or trumpeting thunder or the great voice speaking which made everyone that heard it beg that no more should be said to them.

—HEBREWS 12:18-19

KINZUA

To walk out here is to assume a cartographer's twitch: charting the flooded river swills below the dam, noting the undulations in the bean field, marking the angle of birches and their ratio to barren spaces, measuring the rail-line through the overgrown cotoneaster. The hail is a god eroding into the past; the runoff accretes into knuckles and broken incisors. Keep going in any direction: darkness is a matrix of pain and belief in the cataract's law. You have graphed the forensics of deer spines and their deterioration. It's not that you can hold the bone and marrow together; it's that you will not allow the sinews to be torn apart.

CO. GALWAY

Discipline, to reduce the world to integument: charred jawbones among the peat smoke and fir cinders, skin on the estuary pleated and braided with bubbles, the arrogance of pond rushes frozen to angled follicles, and forgotten. Coiled in their nest like wrinkled ghosts, newborn mice open to hunger and the stringent hawk. What the weather vane does will not alter the weather, iron flecking off in the pipes and a fire starting blue in the hayloft. Seek to unravel impatience and align yourself to meanwhile: the stigmata trail stops at the salt box, the backdraft emerges cauterized through bladed branches. Only a sewer line away, the cliffs hang slashed to a sickle swipe, and the painted light of a crude star years ago.

## CONEWANGO CREEK

Submerged now in the tadpole slaver and creosote thaw of spring, rotting in strands and cased in rivulets like bronchial tubes, it's not worth finding out where this bridge might lead. It was laid makeshift out of railroad ties by boys playing guns or the old men they became, foraging golf balls. The dampened soot of a pheasant hunter's camp fire and sow bugs aerating stagnant earth urge you to stay on this side, the owner is away and you don't belong here. Everything leans in as if passing a rumour: what the charcoal eye of the crayfish says to the stone, what the mushrooms shelving the pine stump say to the thrush, is bound to have changed by the time it reaches a clearing.

## COVENANT

Follow that noise which beckons you on toward the border, your breath beginning to harden over the hills. The road through the forest passes an arsenal of gutted gasoline pumps and a trailer park sunk in the field like a cellar. Children administer the last rites to a strangled jay and guard the vacant parking lot, holding pattern to the next world. Take your spark plugs and pistons and bile to the landfill: the work in this valley is weather and death, with never an extra hour. And all the while the rain will not let up, chamfering the fevered mud and scrawling hieroglyphs. The ground swells to talc and tallow and the flooding delays the night, as though water were keeping the light from leaving too soon.

## DIACRITICS

Out past the granite quarry, a train hurries somewhere else, its click and clack and coal-combustion bringing dawn to the garden. The grammar of everything moving: the fricatives of a woodpecker shaving an oak to less and less, the sibilants of bumblebees in their cargo-runs from one rhododendron to another. There's little to do these days but sit in a lawn chair and measure how your shadow eats itself slowly and spits it back out. Everywhere the morning tearing up into daybreak through the bald roots, the scribble of crossed wires beneath the fertile arras. For every inch of dirt here, there is a country accounted for somewhere over those green-ruffled peaks, unconjugated and tenseless.

A murmur under the tilted redbird feeder, a scurry and nip in the pachysandra, leg-vein and leaf-vein, worm-glaze and wasp shell, calico blight and bruises smudging the pear, frost and unfreezing, the water and where it goes, dark knot of rain unknottling: ask to be that diver falling haček into this wave.

#### CORONA

The sky moves one way and the ground goes the other. Between auro-  
ra borealis and the methane-bleached clump of grass at the gulch's rim,  
there has always been this window, knotted with ligaments scoring the  
forest to crosshatch. You cannot trace it, it will not offer its name.  
Fog cresting in off the lake, the mailbox etched with snow at the edge  
of the orchard, a russet fox nubbing the privet, skullcap bulbs in the  
hillside: it is out behind the house, parting the shadows webbed  
between the tar barrels. Already it is slipping into the tissue of the  
next moment where it will not be born or recalled. Turn back to the  
fire in the ditch and the boneless tracks. Walk over crab apple stubble  
and ice-lathered twigs: November will follow another sound.

#### NOCTURNE

There's a restlessness back in the elm grove tonight, tugging at the  
whitened seams of your voice. This is familiar weather: the starched  
moon strung in the capillary branches, a rustle before the squall and  
the sky making room. The streets are empty, the air is straitening the  
rooftops to finepoint. One corner is always at the cost of another, the  
blackened hedge or messages squibbed on the lake. Keep your eye on  
the ridgeline, never lose sight of winter's hem. This is how you'll like  
to remember yourself: standing slightly apart and moving away, and  
knowing in that last tawny rush of the leaves: what goes out there, it  
never comes back.