

# Vilkas

by

Vidas Mykolas

SMASHWORDS EDITION

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## Vidas Mykolas and Vilkas

Vidas Mykolas' parents came to America as World War II refugees from Lithuania. The poems in Vilkas are about street prostitutes in St. Petersburg Russia, the Armenian Holocaust and stickball, reviving dead brothers, Caligula eating pearls, mythical wolves in the primeval forests of the Baltic, dumpster diving, White Nights, ravaged family cemeteries, Disneyworld in the despair and hope of Eastern Europe, a pig roast, heroes of the American revolution and French women in tight jeans, a hill in Lithuania covered blind with Christian crosses, the brutal war of Lithuanian resistance, TV series Bonanza the best family, knocking the balls off St. Paul, dark lost friends of youth, instructions on catching a salmon, Mexican bands in Oregon, a war insane mother, Dante's lover, and other poems.

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**Email:** 99centpoet@gmail.com

Notes on some poems (end of book)

Acknowledgments to magazines (end of book)

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## **Vilkas**

Each morning the women of Gargzdai  
take busses into birch forests to pick  
mushrooms, and with luck,  
amber charms. I watch them return  
as the town exudes dust and mist  
below ochre clouds. Their heavy buckets  
squeak and tock, squeak and tock while  
the old ones ask if anyone saw a wolf .  
The last one died decades ago stepping  
on a land mine during the partisan war.  
But they want to see the bronze wolf  
who appeared to Gediminas in a dream  
on a cold Baltic night and showed him  
where to build a city. They want the vilkas  
to cry in a voice of silent silver, to run  
with shimmering paws deep into a white  
forest, to the only clearing where an act  
of creation, or death, is the finality  
of all gathering and plump mushrooms.

\* \* \* \*

## **Who Remembers the Armenians?**

The games began early on autumn Sundays  
before Midwest snows could hide broken  
glass and sharp cans in the alleys. We took  
our mother's brooms and swept passages  
a piece at a time like ushers before a big game.

We chose to invent a fast and brutal game  
beyond what boys played in the open streets.  
The skills to win this game could not be gathered  
by statistics nor reference to a hero selling  
plastic sliding on television in the homes of

steel workers: the Greek boys played defense  
with diligence, the tall Serb saw no obstacles,  
the Mexican kid reveled in his speed, the Armenian  
brothers played untalented and totally fierce.  
The setting sun always called the games off;

we could no longer see the clouds foaming

swirling and colliding their way to the cold lake.  
Drenched with sweat we went to recite victories  
over large gifts of pilaf and stuffed grape leaves.  
Our boasting stopped when the old woman sitting

in the corner of the living room pounded on  
her chair, jumping up more than her body  
could take. The youngest brother as always  
did not look up from his food, and as always  
explained: "she saw all her family killed."  
Endurance is the only skill you need to win or lose.

\* \* \* \*

### **Dostoevsky's Whores**

If not for the Monastery's peeling pink  
walls the hookers on Nevsky Prospekt  
could see Dostoevsky's grave and think  
of redemption. They begin in twilight  
at the tram and bus stops crossing their legs  
like tourists at the Summer Palace posing  
in costume. Bible-saved drunks beg  
his girls to remember the short route to hell.  
But nobody reads him: Sonja's grandchildren  
came home to buy French jeans, the killers  
got amnesty and cruise the streets for action,  
not finding relevance in loud Russian suffering.  
The Necropolis closes and the smell  
of unwashed clothes comes out the Metro  
station worse than London and Paris.  
Sperm and purpose mix in the humid  
breezes off the Neva, in the dark urine  
stained passageways leading to run down  
apartments where people prepare for winter.

\* \* \* \*

### **Despair in Disneyworld**

What if The Magic Kingdom were built  
in forests outside Klaipeda on muddy rich  
ground where Lithuanians gathered  
mushrooms for centuries?  
What if Cinderella's Castle opened  
each morning in a Medieval fog

more dense than the fumes of bombs?

What if the Country Bear Jamboree  
used real brown bears like the ones  
trappers in Vilnius sent to the French  
to maul criminals just for fun?  
What if Space Mountain stood so high  
that excited riders could glimpse  
the Baltic Sea reflecting silver light  
in the shape of running wolves?

Would invading armies have stopped  
awhile and enjoyed themselves  
among the tours and rides, leaving  
peaceful and happy while shaking  
their heads and whispering  
"whoop-di-do", wanting only to bring  
their families back for a visit  
and have their pictures taken  
at Mickey's Birthdayland?

Would the Siberian exiles have received  
letters and trinkets from Kretinga  
telling them that all was well,  
and Boy! did the Norwegian EPCOT  
exhibit ever have real food like stuffed  
cabbages, potato cakes, and herring,  
and when were they coming home  
because the fun was only now beginning?

\* \* \* \*

### **The Family Watches Reruns of Bonanza**

Little Joe and Ben have a fight  
over lost cattle by the winding river.  
Ben yells angry and harsh words.  
In the bedroom my stepfather lies  
fetal and yellow. My sister opens  
the door and I smell oil from his  
toolbox. His last directions to me:  
preserve the tools of his angry precision.

Little Joe storms into a bar, but runs  
into cattle rustlers: a fight,  
drawn guns, hostages and the truth

about the lost cattle. Ben rushes  
into town to save his son. One night  
he came home drunk and cooked  
for me. We stared at each other  
like coyote and rabbit before they  
recognize each as the hunter  
and the hunted. He fell asleep on  
the kitchen table and I opened  
his toolbox and examined awls,  
a metal ruler, worn out hammers,  
and found nothing I could use  
for the projects and plans  
I hid in the back of my closet.

A gunfight erupts. Ben is a man  
possessed. The fury of his rifle  
cuts through men like a buzz saw.  
"He's dead. He's dead."

Everyone rushes to the bedroom  
except for me. Ben and Little Joe  
struggle to each other in the debris  
of righteous death and broken  
whiskey bottles. They embrace  
arm on arm and separate quickly.  
I go inside and close his toolbox.  
Little Joe tells Ben the family is safe.

\* \* \* \*

### **To "Max Stern of Paris, 1944**

Max, the crows still nest on the prison  
outskirts. I first see them from the empty  
parking lot flying thick and slow over  
the jagged memorial. Inside Fortas IX  
the cold and damp seem a movie  
stunt to the hot summer day. An old  
woman even follows me turning  
on the lights of each cell I visit.  
I first know of you in the Death Room,  
where you waited to be taken outside.  
You must have been a strong man  
because you scratched your name deep  
into the cell's wall. Even now,  
the comma remains insistent.

You would like Kaunas now.  
Laisve Aleja is lavish with shops  
leading up to the old white cathedral.  
The men favor short bristle haircuts  
and shout with baritones wet  
from fortified beer. The women wear  
tight spandex skirts and act bored  
while shopping. Cheap Russian Ladas  
careen through the old streets.  
Most people live in ugly apartment  
buildings; I can see them from the hill  
where the Germans executed you.

The day they shot you, I know spring  
was thawing the ground, the wind blew  
hard with traces of warmth, and crows  
screamed with delight over pieces  
of your brain. Their young have never  
learned to leave the spot.

\* \* \* \*

### **The Photo Booth**

The mother doubtful, the father cautious  
circle the possibility of remembrance  
for five dollars. Close by a neon light  
puts a patina on a pair of ski boots.  
They push the curtain aside and look in.

The parents gather the children  
to practice poses of cute deference.  
One picture is sure to go to a sunburned  
drunken uncle living in a Siberian  
town where each year winter blinds  
all memory. They enter the booth  
serious and leave giggling with success.

I silently urge them to frame the cheap  
pictures in the hardest woods, metal even,  
for the time when they will lose this world  
so their children might search for this moment  
and find it among storage boxes smelling  
of vegetables from the local supermarket.  
The father holds the pictures like

the center of the universe.

I circle the booth. Touch it and take out  
five dollars. I go in alone and imagine  
a family sitting with me, even a vague  
silver emulsion of the one before me.  
We have our positions. Press.

\* \* \* \*

### **The Dumpster**

Our love seat, stark tables, toolboxes  
and stool came from the dumpsters  
of apartments offering free parking.  
In Volgograd we could sell our plump

gifts for a small profit and even attract  
thugs demanding protection money.  
My wife finds them easily like she once  
found berries along the boiling Volga

in the last days of summer. My son and I  
hurry and pack away at night what she  
proudly claimed in daylight. The next  
morning she drinks chocolate coffee

and plans what edges to sand, the way  
her chisel will cut links in the deserted  
wood. Tonight, a new bookcase sinks  
and wobbles in our bedroom carpet, but

strong enough to hold Bulgakov,  
Nabakov and Chekov. As we wait  
for the moneyless days before  
my paycheck arrives, we read them

together and mind how old words become  
burnished, never peeling and falling  
away: Late hours in sparse rooms find  
all matters of tactility disappear.

\* \* \* \*

### **White Nights**

Nevsky Prospekt slams our window:  
drunks bellow as hurting, slow  
engines from Ladas shake the glass.  
After midnight when echoes pass  
from hookers to johns, the clapping  
of a horse floats into our room.  
I always miss the animal as it  
disappears into short horizons where  
unseen voices drink to a midnight sun.  
Maybe it's Peter looking for someone  
to tour his city and help him teach polite  
manners to a savage people whose bright  
teeth obsessed him into science and sadism,  
pulling out as many as he could find  
in the back rooms of the Summer Palace.  
Maybe it's a baba yaga weary and done  
with casting spells and singing charms.  
The mystery is never solved; I return  
to your arms and you take me to the place  
where night is day.

\* \* \* \*

### **Kryziu Kalnas**

On Kryziu Kalnas you will find  
thousands of crosses crawling over each  
other. Examine them. Some are held  
together with clean honest joints. Look  
and you might find a large one with Jesus  
sitting on the ground and lamenting  
the job he must do, as if a crucifixion  
were the start of the midnight shift  
in the small factories outside Vilnius.  
Wait long enough and the wind will touch  
the crosses and give you such a gift  
of rattling clicking moaning that you would  
be tempted to believe the very earth  
wanted to speak to you and to you alone  
about something terrible and sad.

\* \* \* \*

### **Only Then, and Until Then**

If you would touch me, then touch me

until the outdoor florists along the Volga  
can not feel the velvet petals of their roses,  
until dancers cannot stomp to polkas  
and ride the shock up their spines  
as hot sweat flows in dresses of shiny taffeta.

If you would see me, then look at me  
until a gardener's eyes cannot draw  
out rows of summer peas and tomatoes,  
until Naberezhnaya candle makers claw  
out wax figures of apples and owls  
not able to see wick, blackness, and flaw.

If you would hear me, then listen to me  
until your son sings lullabies to you  
when your guitar has been silent for years,  
until the winter when the breath of two  
lovers crossing the frozen river does not  
sing on the cold air like the clouds on blue.

If you would love me, then love me  
until the baker can no longer taste  
the sweetness of his fat pastries,  
until children forget the joy of racing  
the streets of Volgograd to the river  
where they splash their happy hot faces,  
only then, and until then.

\* \* \* \*

### **The Minija River Has No Current**

A butterfly with a tattered wing lands  
next to me on a blade of Buffalo Grass.  
It lurches forward but holds on.  
An old woman with a babushka looks  
for something among the birches. Rumor  
has it that she is looking for a mass grave.

She pokes the moist ground with a cane  
and stoops for flowers. The butterfly  
remains still and exhausted, gathering  
strength for one more flight. At the edge  
of the park in an old building, the local  
Mafia boss has opened a tavern with  
wall to wall mirrors and plastic



to the cold and meaningless air.  
The seasons came soft and unnoticed until  
the end of all migrations and hungers.

I wonder at the children of the first  
starlings. They fly out a tree in every  
direction unable to remember how  
to gather into a flock. In a few minutes,  
in groups of three and four, they land  
on a field and peck at each other. By next  
summer they will have wandered miles  
from here to nest in the crevices of factories.  
The noise from trucks and the loud mills  
does not drown their blind complaining  
about the lack of a clear and cloudless sky.

\* \* \* \*

### **Fairy Tales**

Holidays were the best times  
for stories because she drank  
passing the line between the event  
and pain, memory and tongue.

At the start of the war  
when she was in Hamburg  
some Poles stole a chicken and blamed  
a Frenchman. The Germans  
shot him by the hospital.

I learned to watch her  
for the moment when  
I could reach cautiously  
for her memories.

In 1943, she had her first  
baby boy but it died  
because there was no blood.

This was always the last story.  
After, she would stack  
the forks and spoons  
so they cupped each other  
in neat cold rows.

While in bed, I could not let  
the memories bleed and sink away.  
To the baby boy I gave blood  
until he awoke,  
a fat red happy tomato.

\* \* \* \*

### **Family Plot, Vezaiciai**

In one night at the time of *laisva* thieves  
stripped all the copper and precious metals  
from the graves. The women who came  
every Sunday to sweep and replant flowers  
discovered naked crosses sprouting  
like bent daises and wailed. The men left  
drinking parties and rode dirty buses  
to see their relatives left naked to the woods.  
The women spent days finding sandpaper,  
files, rasps, anything with sharp edges  
to reshape and make holy the cheap iron  
skeletons the thieves did not want.

My family lies four deep  
in the old section where in the spring  
primrose, tulips, and brown mushrooms  
shelter the edges of the crowded plots.  
I am not meant to be buried here. The village  
and countryside did not raise and give  
me who I am. May the dead ones in an act  
both generous and miraculous take a place  
too small, too tight and make a spacious  
room lacquered with inlays of oak and smelling  
of smoked sausage, and welcome me  
to a grave where everyone lies together,  
room to spare, even for thieves.

\* \* \* \*

### **Birute, Dream**

*To a Lithuanian partisan who wounded,  
killed herself by biting into her wrists. 1947*

Your mother died soon after our visit.  
She died alone near the birches where  
you slit your wounded body with teeth

still white and pure with no wear.

She died alone near the forest where  
you read about wolves and soft opals  
translucent with no visible wear,  
hoping for the day you could elope.

In the woods you read about wolves and opals  
not knowing it would be where you died  
hoping for the day you would elope  
looking for a final answer in a blue sky.

Not knowing it would be where you died  
you crawled blind and bleeding  
looking for final answer in a blue sky  
that filled with gunfire and pleading.

You crawled blind and bleeding  
and were captured by an insistent dream  
that filled with gunfire and pleading  
where love should have been the theme.

Captured by your last insistent dream  
your mother told us about the last hours  
when love should have been the theme,  
not your life spilling on wildflowers.

Your mother told us about the final hours,  
offering us stale cake and a few more words  
about your life spilling on wildflowers:  
"Such is life" she said like a wounded bird

still offering us stale cake and few words  
about mercy, a daughter. "Such is life"  
she sang out like a wounded bird  
as we walked home through a forest of birches.

\* \* \* \*

### **Caligula's Pearls**

After I served Mass for Brother Jonas,  
he told me stories about the Romans.  
His special treat. Caligula the worst  
demon ate pearls. He ate them like popcorn  
at feasts with dates, wine from Egypt,

and living eels cut open and sucked dry.

Christian slaves harvested the pearls  
off the coast of Greece and were drowned  
to keep the spot secret and unpoisoned.  
But God sent Saint Paul a dream to protect  
the brothers. To every apostle he gave  
a special stone: Peter jasper, James  
chalcedony, John emerald, and even Judas,  
amethyst. He said never wear that one,  
although the parish priest could use it  
to ward off drunkenness.

For weeks I searched crumbling streets  
for the stones of the apostles,  
a holy gemologist gathering rocks  
into bursting pockets. The screaming  
shift whistle of the steel mills ordered  
the start and end of my search.  
Nothing ever matched.

Brother Jonas always finished Mass  
before the school children arrived  
for he could give no Communion.  
Finally, I asked by what stone would  
a father not beat a mother.  
Malachite he said.

\* \* \* \*

## **Latkes**

The potatoes that hid and covered  
you for three days were thick  
and harder than stones. In the distance  
rifles and pistols seemed like bursts  
of hot grease on the mornings you helped  
your parents cook potato pancakes.

You grated the potatoes into a soft  
mush, then sliced the onions  
into pieces as transparent and delicate  
as butterfly wings.

As a young man in Gargzdai, you  
wooed the girls with this recipe.

The ones who thought of marriage  
exclaimed "A man who cooks is a wonder.

Now my mother teaches me  
your recipe as she tells me how  
you erupted from that cellar  
like a white ghost and asked her  
"Are the Germans gone?"

The day was warm and promised  
a cool breeze off the Baltic. Within  
a barn a few hundred meters away  
you hung yourself. The Germans  
made their soldiers watch  
as they burned your letter.

I try to slice the onions as you  
might have. I cradle a wad of mush  
into my hand, and, without a spoon  
lay it softly in the hot grease,  
my hand burning and alive.

\* \* \* \*

### **Pig Roast**

My father places hot smooth stones  
in the pig's throat and belly, wraps  
the pig tight in chicken wire, sewn  
metal cutting deep into the flesh.  
He lowers it into a hole weaved  
with baked bricks and thick banana leaves.

My twelve year old sister skips  
among her aunts. Already, she tries  
on their gestures, watching the men  
from the corner of her eyes.  
Uncle Milan enters through the back  
gate, still unwashed from the dirt  
of the mills. He strips off his shirt,  
sweat streaking diagonals across  
his chest. We drink, speak about the coming  
layoffs; about the farms and small towns  
our parents left; the 1961 Yankees.

Hours later, the pig's ears are sliced

for soup. Father wraps the pig,  
gentle, honoring its flesh and our  
hunger. We eat the meat with rice,  
warm beans, and watermelon.

The silence of full bellies comes upon us.  
At the edge of the quiet, a twilight  
whistle blows, calling men to the darkness.

\* \* \* \*

### **Throwing Snowballs**

My brother and I scoop old snow  
with eager paws. If the scoop is bad,  
we throw it down and dig up more.  
The snowballs must be packed tight  
with a thick cover of ice and pebble.

Brother coyotes, we weave our way  
through abandoned cars, garbage cans  
overturned by hungry animals,  
and mounds of snow plowed high  
by drunken city workers.

We fight and play in the backyards  
of apartment houses where poor  
mothers watch behind windows  
fogged in patches from boiling soups.  
Our growls and shrieks stop  
near twilight when the fathers  
come home from the steel mills  
in small packs. As we run home,

a snowball punches a window  
making us proud of our craft.  
We escape into the street as new  
snow begins to fall, softening  
the pavement and our howling hearts.

\* \* \* \*

### **The North Bridge**

The costumed red-coat British soldier mocks  
the tourists before they cross the North Bridge.

He cannot hide his tin drunkenness from me:  
my father taught me the complacent rage of gin.  
His eyes lock on a pair of French women in tight  
pants who are glad not to hear his insults.

I cross the bridge and see the Minute Man  
with his ready flintlock and plow. Growing  
up he was a backdrop, a plan and verb  
for a new land. Now not much of him remains:  
chopped from newspaper ads, stamps, and Knights  
of Columbus flyers, blank like the holidays  
when we drank liquor fermenting with sour herbs.

People hurry past him to the Visitor Center  
as if he were an empty toll booth. My family did  
not look forward or backward and ignored whole  
years as my father slept drunk rolling in his own  
urine. I learned history as omission, how to place  
a gap in every story, never of this country and never  
from the old villages lost in the holes of tenements.

I follow two women from Texas who have a plan  
to trace the battles along lawns hiding  
the insistent and hidden war. They cherish imagined  
sightings of Barrett, Joseph Hosmer, and Major  
Buttrick. I can hear Isaac Davis shout his  
order by the Concord River as he lay dying.  
"Fire, fellow-soldiers; for God's sake fire!"

A voice carried by a hard inland breeze reports  
the closing of the park. I barely see the Minute Man  
in the approaching orange darkness. The British  
soldier sways alone as a young woman approaches.  
He is too drunk to say anything and falls to one  
knee. They cling to cold planks of the North Bridge.  
I leave sober, flintlock and plow in hand.

\* \* \* \*

### **Saint Paul, Before the Demolition**

You pose within the dull window  
ready to tell the truth to Roman  
hecklers and punks, the ones who  
rather believe Caesar and lay a  
few coins at the feet of Jupiter.

The foreskin part went right past  
them. Never played well in Ephesus.  
Some ancestor of those Roman  
punks has taken a slingshot  
to your image and popped it full  
of holes, making you vanish a bit  
each day, but always a piece  
remains. They haven't given up  
and neither have you.

\* \* \* \*

### **Season's End**

I threw you out at third base to end the game.  
We gathered at the spot, caressing our worn  
gloves and dirty bats, speaking the blossom  
of each flaming hit and pitch, how we broke  
our stats for home runs, doubles, triples  
and diving catches. And then my brother  
came, easy in his eighteen years with stories  
of how quiet steps could steal precious things  
and how bitter powders could silence our fears  
of tougher boys and softer girls: another game  
of skill. You and I did not back away and hide  
our gloves as the others did. We took our  
hidden fill and listened until the darkness  
came. That night we threw a hardball against  
a full moon and with eyes closed caught it  
with bare hands, never minding the sting,  
nor the end of the season.

\* \* \* \*

### **A Sunday Stroll**

His head hovers in the middle rows  
of the Glee Club and Future Teachers  
of America. The camera shows his

sleepless eyes no mercy and inflates  
the cheeks and chin. Years from now  
everybody will assent to his revulsion.

We hung out on hot summer days  
waiting for passing carnivals to set up

in the parking lots of strip malls.

Our strutting was strong and sure  
on those nights among the tented  
games where people pitched dimes,

balls, and rings hoping to win florescent  
bears and plaster Godzillas. He signed  
my yearbook with words about friendship

and getting drunk in Woodshop. And now  
I see him in a park near the school cackling  
in the voice of a crow. He endlessly gathers

bottle caps and tosses them. After all  
these years I am beyond sympathy  
and remorse even for myself, and stroll  
away taking the airs of a hard Sunday.

\* \* \* \*

### **The Carpenter**

Out of the back window I see  
a carpenter stroke and measure  
a two-by-four. He does not hurry  
against the evening as his body  
turns to shadow in the warm  
setting sun. My brother also did not  
hurry as he worked a lathe  
in the basement of our apartment.  
He preferred to work in the last  
hours of the day as if eyesight  
were the cause of bevels cut  
indifferently, and the smell of sweet  
oak was all that he required  
to tell him where to make a joint.  
He used that precision and calm  
to cut those who harmed us  
in the first years in a new hopeful  
land. His fists gouged heads  
and chests with such skill  
that everyone feared his craft.  
His hardness passed away as he  
raised motherless children and worked  
a machine deep in the holes

of the steel mills, drinking too much  
but always sure of his hands in any light.

In the dark, I hear the carpenter  
lay plastic sheets to protect his work  
for the next day. The house he  
is building will be solid and safe  
for those who will live in it.  
The carpenter cares about his work  
and his death.

\* \* \* \*

### **Return**

You and I have come to Mule Creek  
to watch the moon,

to figure the summation of smooth  
waterworn rocks, pine trees.

The creek is too low, the atmosphere  
too quick for us to avoid

the light that weaves and rumbles  
about us. We hear the wind

dip black branches into the creek  
and we watch to the sound.

You have come to Mule Creek  
escaping smiling eels, gill

nets, and hooks. I have come here  
by leaving, by driving off

a road. This morning you begin  
your trip back to the ocean,

past dying and exhausted salmon.  
You will not let yourself

die at creek's end. Today, I will  
also return. We gulp hard

the water and the air.

\* \* \* \*

### ***Los Bukis* Play the Salem, Oregon Armory**

Even the women are  
searched. The men open  
their coats, roll up  
their pant legs if they wear  
boots. The women must open  
their purses. No one  
is disdainful. It's the price  
of admission to the soft belly  
of a Saturday night.

The women show off in  
faded sundresses with no  
curves and old prom dresses.  
On the edge of the dance  
floor stand young brown men  
wearing their bones  
tight and unafraid. They drink  
with eyes open and alert.

The warm-up bands come  
from nearby towns,  
*Los Reyes* from Hillsboro, *Los  
Papagayos* from Newberg,  
and the *Caballeros*  
from Cornelius.  
*Los Papagayos* begin. The Armory  
is warm and sweet as a corn  
field. The *Caballeros* sport huge  
cowboy hats and beg  
their voices into excited  
sadness. People dance  
under the spell  
of guitar and accordion.

*Los Bukis* finally play.  
Electric guitars and organs build  
an intro as a dry-ice fog  
obscures the stage.  
Bright silver  
costumes suck and reflect

stage lights as the *Bukis* jerk  
and blare. In the parking lot  
the warm-up bands drink  
tequila from plastic cups  
and admire the richness  
of the moon.

\* \* \* \*

### **Love at the Factory**

Your delicate fingers follow copper  
traces that tie each resistor, logic device,  
and jumper into a body  
of joined plastic and ceramic.

Your thumb strokes the microprocessor.  
You admire the symmetry of registers,  
memory access, the transfer of data  
following paths chartered by humans  
on this assembly line.

The board does not hold itself  
beyond you. Your fingers know  
how to follow the pulse of electrons  
as they course and warm  
tunnels deep within the board;  
you tell me they are like Egyptian  
gondolas racing the Nile at night,  
and I am thrilled.

\* \* \* \*

### **Instructions on Catching a Salmon**

For the first year, find maps and books  
about coastal rivers: Nehalem, Klaskanie,  
and the Rogue. Trace their geographies.  
Read the classifieds and find  
an old man selling his rods and reels.  
Drink coffee as he tells you stories  
about the salmon he has caught, his family,  
cancer. For the second and third years, go  
to these rivers and watch them grow  
and recede. Cast your line without  
bait and hook to learn

the tug and warble of the current.  
Ignore the men who laugh at you.

Afterwards, put your gear away and wait  
for a sign telling you to return. The sign  
will be sudden. Your daughter's smile  
or just the sun reflecting off a window  
in the early morning.

Find, then, the end of a stream  
where the salmon are spawning.  
Sit and watch them. Do not take  
your eyes off them. Watch their tails,  
fins, how they wag in the water.  
Watch them late into the night until  
their eyes rise above the stream  
into our world. When the salmon  
see the moon for the first time, naked  
and without obstruction, look with them,  
beyond the boundaries of water, air.  
You are ready to catch a salmon.

\* \* \* \*

### **Oh My Beatrice**

I did not first see my Beatrice in a fit  
of literary lunacy looking for a subject  
to fill lonely nights just because the sun  
reflected so nicely on that purple dress  
as she strutted down shit littered  
Florentine streets. You were insane  
forcing yourself into sweats and visions  
to justify your poems to Philosophy.

Listen, I first saw my Beatrice working  
at inventories of utterly useless things.  
Her hair is black and her skin is sweet pale.  
She bends too close to ledgers trying  
to find lost entries for she has the curse  
of administrative zeal. At lunch she meets  
a boyfriend to jog through clean artless  
suburban parks. Shall I become insane  
thinking she is brave Athena helping  
Agamemnon fight the women thieves?

But let us finally tell the truth:  
we are not loved by those we love.  
Beatrice never proclaimed her passion,  
not even a medieval wink and a hard swish  
of her arse in your direction. Love did not  
find a voice; poetry found lonely men  
and we called it love. So we turn to illusions  
and whelp out words in our bare rooms.

Dante, today is the first day of winter  
and the sun is burning hard the cold  
streets as I watch for immortal runners  
in their golden clothes.

\* \* \* \*

### **Municipal Rose Garden San Jose**

I do not come here to look at the flowers  
but to gather in the inadvertent harmony  
of people strolling between beds of Duets,  
Montezumas, Fragrant Clouds, and Shining  
Hours, to circle the inaccessible  
white fountain which the roses watch  
as if in a theatre, forever set in their seats,  
forever praising and applauding  
with the slow acclaim of falling petals.  
The roses remain innocent of any  
influence as people gather and leave  
inarticulate but with no compulsion  
to give a voice to all the redolent colors.  
The fenced garden closes an hour after  
sundown; time enough to see the moon  
lay the paradox of night on the content  
and dying roses. I leave the garden last  
and alone, a step slower, a step forward.

\* \* \* \*

### **Wash Day**

The ticking of buttons colliding with dryer walls  
raises up and gathers with the odor of burning  
lint among the open stairways of the building.  
Under dryer vents in the shade of the unkempt

trees, ferns sway happy in the hot blowing air.  
Last night the man and woman below me stabbed  
each other. I can now sleep long and easy.

\* \* \* \*

### **Ballroom in Fong's Restaurant**

Above the dance floor hang ribbed tubes  
softening the florescent lights.

They sway:  
confused pendulums searching  
for the true path  
of gravity.

The dancers, men and their sad women,  
touch each other like the sticking  
skin of lips  
when they part  
kissing, a fragile membrane  
forever passing  
half of each  
to half of each.

It does not help to know all people  
in all times have danced  
for death and life.  
Plato saw the Athenians dance  
and drink  
beyond sense and into  
one death. He watched  
and did not dance.

The smell of urine  
and cheap deodorant  
is the breeze  
which cools  
the dancers. Glasses  
of beer and whiskey  
make everything  
important and less so.

The song ends and the couples leave  
the dance floor.  
Unimportant words  
fall from their mouths.

New and better  
words will be found  
in the next song.

\* \* \* \*

### **Algorithms and Love Songs**

1.  
My only brilliant idea in two years  
was the use of a Gantt chart  
to brown-nose my manager's secretary.  
I figure by my next review she'll  
have whispered into his ear  
what a good worker I am  
as they lie in bed on a wet muggy day.

2.  
Management has gone to a mountain resort  
to study Quality Circles, work modalities,  
and the habits of successful executives.  
For lunch they had prime rib.  
The cafeteria's microwave is broken.

3.  
I wonder if the woman from Marketing  
thinks I'm a geek. As I speak  
about virtual memory problems,  
her eyes, so brown and autumnal,  
look straight into the eyes  
of the QA engineer.

4.  
Through my window I see dirty pigeons  
perched on a highway light pole.  
They crowd each other like in one  
of my department meetings  
to hear my boss chew me out.  
To hell with Theory Y companies.

5.  
The guys from marketing are always  
telling stories about their trips  
to Asia, the warehouses  
in Manila and the expensive hotels  
with service that doesn't talk back.

A memo said to watch expenses.

6.

She would swagger into our meetings  
and give us vision and enthusiasm;  
made engineering the art  
of creating fire and cathedrals;  
made us feel like Darwin  
cataloging turtles in ragged notebooks.  
She left. We don't know where.

7.

The field engineer from Oklahoma  
really lost it at the annual sales review.  
"To hell with your god-damn  
bourgeois thinking and morality.  
Don't you know what's going  
on out there? You're all asleep.  
You hear me? Asleep!"  
What was the question?

8.

The first rumors of a layoff  
spread. No one asks me  
if I know anything for  
I have no friends in high places.  
My co-workers stop talking when  
I approach and watch me  
without politeness.  
For they know I have  
no easy way with managers  
who whisper knowingly  
the terms of employment and life.

\* \* \* \*

### **The Bread Machine**

On a mild autumn night my mother must  
make bread by candlelight. As I go to a lifeless  
market to buy flour I see her consulting  
the dancing astrology of shadows on the kitchen

walls, the darting portends on family pictures.  
She retreats into the pantry, the umbral cave  
where she can observe and take the note

how an unwatched place behaves when she

is thought dead. When I return she moves  
carefully into the shadows so that constellations  
form safety and undo currents of burning wax.  
I read the recipe slowly while she pours rough

portions of butter, sugar, yeast, and flour. I point  
to all the buttons that were once so familiar  
to mix and bake the inner eclipse of secret things.  
In three hours when the sun is ready to walk,

the bread will be done; I know she will wait  
until the candle and machine can no longer map  
revolutions of softness and metal without reference.  
She wakes me when the bread is finished.

The neat slices are hot enough to melt butter  
and give slight boil to jam. Cocking her head  
to the side as if she is lying on the easiest of pillows,  
she smiles at me. The truth is all simple royal  
and unobstructed: we learn to live by dying.

\* \* \* \*

### **Like No One**

At sixteen you became like no one  
among us: standing alone in the park  
drinking your father's cheap whiskey,  
lost and undone in the shadows of trees,  
whispering words no one could hear.

You always played too hard against boys  
we met in pick-up games, throwing your  
body at them, howling coy threats  
and wishing a violent loving dance  
where embrace and fists spun together.

I swore never again to help you  
in those fights. But you would call  
and invite me to drink beer in your  
bedroom. Strife between us ended  
as the alcohol and friendship softened

our lost lives. We talked and laughed

as our bodies evaporated and disappeared  
until the morning sun charred the mist  
and I awoke alarmed by your strange  
body, whose loveliness I could only fear.

\* \* \* \*

### **Broadway, South Boston**

One long snake. A thick skin  
of double parked cars and buses  
peeling scales. People pelt the beast  
with drunken shards.

\* \* \* \*

### **The Tour**

You show me the wilted corn stalks where last  
summer you grew your first garden since  
the divorce. Next to the corn lie the bodies  
of tomatoes and a mound haunted with potatoes.

In the other corner, the weight of apples ripped  
two large branches off a trunk, and the cherries  
were good for pie filling, but not much more.  
Your son stomps into grass held together by moss.

Drainage is a problem. You walk for me the path  
of trenches you will dig, stop and point out  
the remaining path to the house, and explain how  
the buried pipes will suck away the run-off.

Near a rotting row of two-by-fours you want  
to put in a hot tub with an unobstructed view  
of the suburban sky. It's all you seemed to own  
the past year. From the center of your yard,

you scoop a handful of moist dirt from a flower  
bed and walk to me and smear it across my  
white shirt. I finish the tour thinking sanity  
is all connection, and all the color black.

\* \* \* \*

### **I Saw My Brother**

I saw my brother's soul in a happy mason  
building a fountain in the morning light,  
his muscles laboring, his eyes listening.

Crafting his work, he slowly sanded pagan  
blue rock to make the floor and water ignite.  
I saw my brother's soul in a happy mason

pondering how to place limestone in a basin  
and find a tight intersection; with his slight  
muscles laboring, his eyes listening

he chiseled water spouts to cool sons  
and daughters on humid unbearable nights.  
I saw my brother's soul in a happy mason

who shed smiles as he saw the unison  
of his skill in the final orange twilight,  
his muscles laboring, his eyes listening.

This cold morning's dream will fasten  
my dead brother to me on tranquil nights  
because I saw his soul in a happy mason,  
his muscles laboring, his eyes listening.

\* \* \* \*

### **The Left Fielder**

*For Floyd Skloot*

You lost your throwing arm going  
After one in the left field corner.  
You ran into a makeshift fence  
Held together by barbed wire.  
In the major leagues, left fielders  
Can easily run with abandon  
Into the left field corner,  
Their fences are high  
And padded. Now you run  
Poems into fences more twisted  
And dangerous, testing their  
Courage, their ability to run  
And catch the thing that counts.  
The catch is always made.

\* \* \* \*

### **Notes on some of the Poems**

**Title.** Vilkas is the Lithuanian word for wolf. The vilkas of Lithuanian history appeared in a dream to found a nation. The old relatives in my mother's village would often discuss the dreams of the previous night as messages from another world. Strange, my earliest memory is a dream.

**Who Remembers the Armenians?** This is a paraphrase of an infamous comment by Hitler. His staff was worried about world reaction to the extermination of European Jews and Hitler replied with the question.

**Dostoevsky's Whores.** At one end of St. Peterburg's famous street Nevsky Prospekt is the Necropolis, where the great writer is buried. It is enclosed by a wall. When night starts, prostitutes begin to line the street.

**Despair in Disneyworld.** A fantasy poem. Klaipeda is the major port of Lithuania.

**The Family Watches Reruns of Bonanza.** Who remembers this long lasting TV show about a mother-less family of males and their loyal Chinese cook?

**To "Max Stern of Paris, 1944.** Outside of the city of Kaunas is a prison used by Nazis to gather up Lithuanian Jews among other people. Prisoners were held in a special room before being executed. In the walls of room prisoners would etch their names. Hard to miss Max's name.

**The Photo Booth.** Anybody remember how poor people took family pictures way back when?

**Kryziu Kalnas.** Means "Hill of Crosses". Starting in the 1950's Lithuanians would go out in the night and plant Christian crosses, any type of crosses on the hill as a protest against Soviet rule.

**The Minija River Has No Current.** The river that runs along side my mother's village. The reference to the graves is about the Partisan War. This area of the Lithuania saw the heaviest and most vicious fighting against the Soviet occupation.

**Family Plot, Vezaiciai.** This is the area outside Gargzdai, my mother's village. After the Lithuanians gained their freedom, thieves stripped the cemetery of any metal worth selling. Also, on any Sunday you could walking into any cemetery and see many people busy sweeping, pruning, and keeping in order the family plots.

**Birute, Dream.** True story about the daughter of my mother's grade school teacher. Both my mother and her were the same age. During the Partisan War she was wounded, and rather than let the Soviet soldiers capture her, she bit through her wrist veins to ensure she would die. Birute was a pagan princess who began a goddess worshiped in Western Lithuania. Very powerful female force and symbol.

**Los Bukis Play the Salem, Oregon Armory.** The Bukis were a very popular Mexican rock band. Very slick, high tech concert with smoke, etc. Nothing down home for sure.

**The Left Fielder.** Learned much about writing poetry from Floyd Skloot. One of the best poets in America.

\* \* \* \* \*

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*Painted Hills Review:* Instructions on Catching a Salmon

*Snail's Pace Review:* Latkes

*bite to eat place:* Pig Roast

*Red Wheelbarrow:* Oh My Beatrice

*Oregon East:* Season's End

*Northwest Magazine:* Steelhead

*Acorn Whistle:* Throwing Snowballs

\* \* \* End Vilkas by Vidas Mykolas\* \* \*