

Poems from

THE RUIN OF ELEANOR MARX

Mark A. Murphy

January Glad Song

Just when you thought
things couldn't get any worse,
the radiator
in the living room goes on the blink.

Not so easy writing a book
in the winter freeze;
especially when your breath slows
to a frozen whisper.

Now, fingers numb as you type,
prompting thoughts
of Eleanor Marx, born
into the slums of Victorian Soho

under the mocking eaves
of Dean Street, one unforgiving
January dawn.

*

Here, our story begins...

Night Soil

for Fawkeschen

Nothing could prepare the Baroness
for the deadly smog
charged
with halos
of sulphuric gas,

manure, cesspools, hand shakes.

No rain like the black
breathless rain
on Leicester Square

as she waits for her husband
with her ideas of love,
violence and the open society.

*

Now dressed for dinner, she smooths
her silk and silver bodice.
Tugs at her German day dress

as if Prussian propriety might hold sway
against potato blight
and back-street vendors, flogging
dogs, cats,
rancid mutton to passing tenement trade.

So loan shark propriety
and pawnshop philanthropy, cash in
on bereavement,
as if to dodge tax, death
and bureaucratic merry-go-round:

where child traffickers
and Drury Lane pimps, trade family
and silver spoons
in the consumptive gin joints
of Covent Garden.

*

How can she know how close
she will come to losing her mind,
after her arrival
and exile in Victoria's London.

Only twelve hours
off the night-boat.

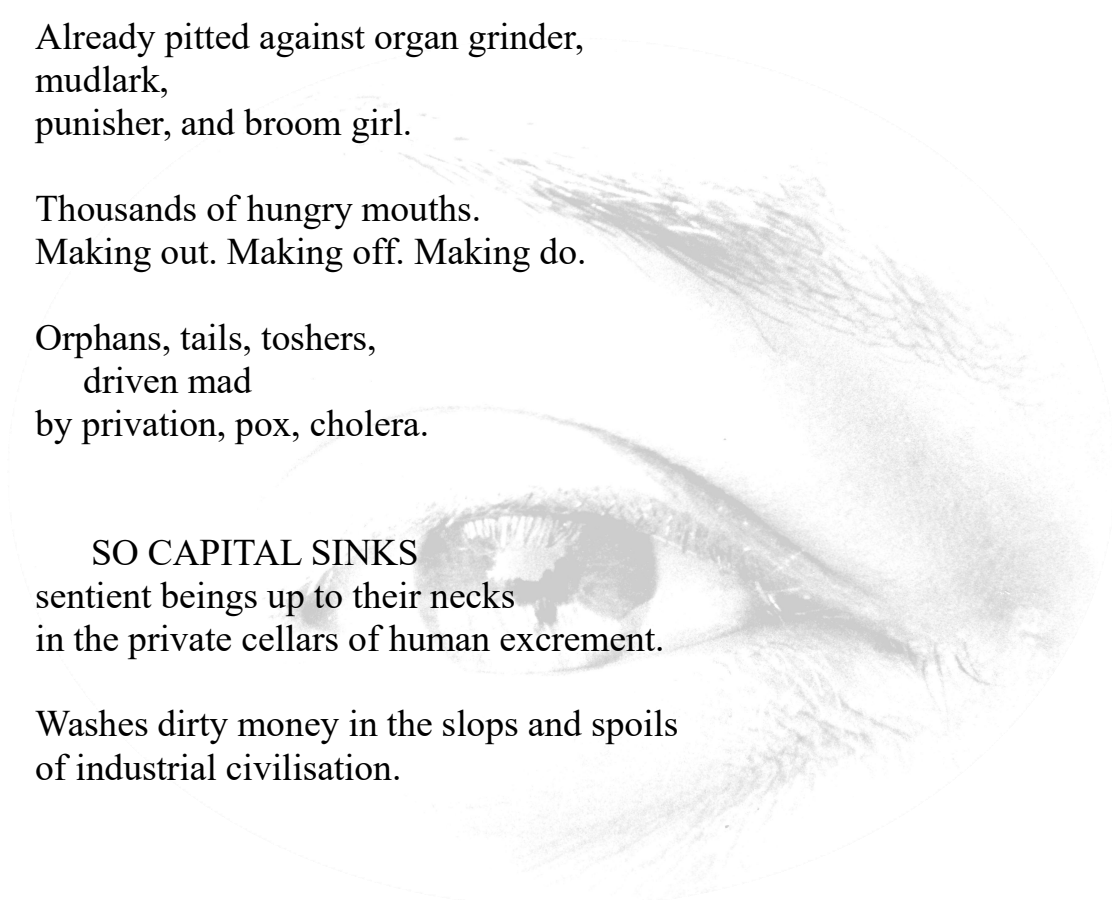
Already pitted against organ grinder,
mudlark,
punisher, and broom girl.

Thousands of hungry mouths.
Making out. Making off. Making do.

Orphans, tails, toshers,
driven mad
by privation, pox, cholera.

SO CAPITAL SINKS
sentient beings up to their necks
in the private cellars of human excrement.

Washes dirty money in the slops and spoils
of industrial civilisation.



Humanness

for an unnamed infant

Barely breathing, and too young to carry
a name, you died choking
in the back streets

of Kentish Town, without doctor
or medication,
like Col. Musch and Guido before you

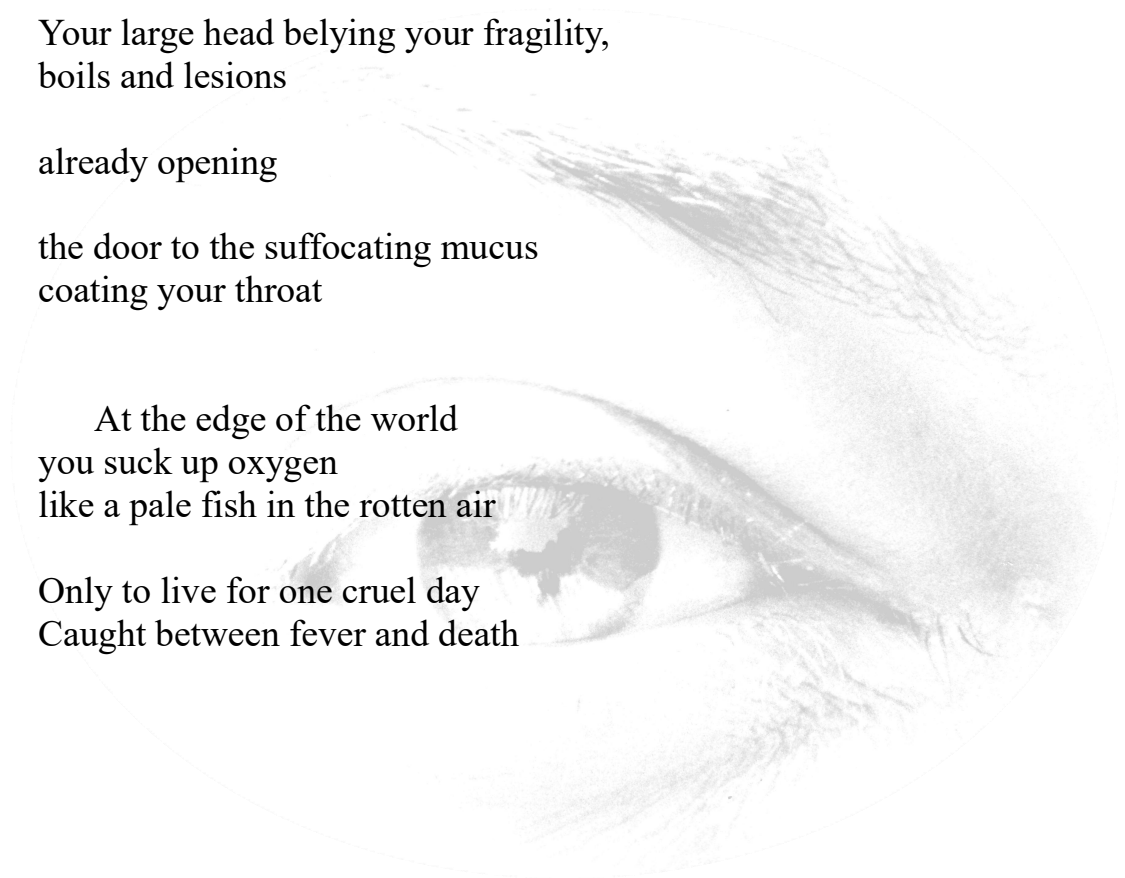
Your large head belying your fragility,
boils and lesions

already opening

the door to the suffocating mucus
coating your throat

At the edge of the world
you suck up oxygen
like a pale fish in the rotten air

Only to live for one cruel day
Caught between fever and death



The Aspiring Utopian

for Kieran

Unless you experience knower

and known

as a kind of rebellion

AGAINST FAILURE

You cannot know what it means

to be at loggerheads

with party, spouse, offspring

And the institutionalised cruelty

that lays a man low

As if all he believed in,

or fought for, was irrelevant

like a dog's bereavement,

or the buried bone

The swarthy eye
of SUFFERANCE
FAITH
PANIC

ALL but FORGOTTEN

in the unravelling of a life

devoted to the millstone

of historical imperatives

Liberté

Egalité

Fraternité

Thesis on Demuth

for Nora

i.

It is said that Frau Demuth is illiterate.
She has a bastard son,
and no means
with which to support him.

It is said that Frau Demuth is a goose.
She has no education,
beyond nursing
the sick, tending house, and serving.

ii.

If you watch her, as she peels
potatoes, sweeps
the boards, plays chess,
or launders worn-out linens,
you will observe a woman
who looks at life without blinking.
A woman who looks
to no man for crumbs of approval.

A WOMAN AT THE END OF TIME.

A woman who wears SILENCE
like a Boadicea Cameo

for solace, courage,
change, for a SON she cannot raise.

iii.

If you meet Frau Demuth,
if you are lucky enough to hold her eye
for more than a few seconds,
she will draw your pain, and join it
to her own, before kicking it
into the dustbin of our mutual sorrows.

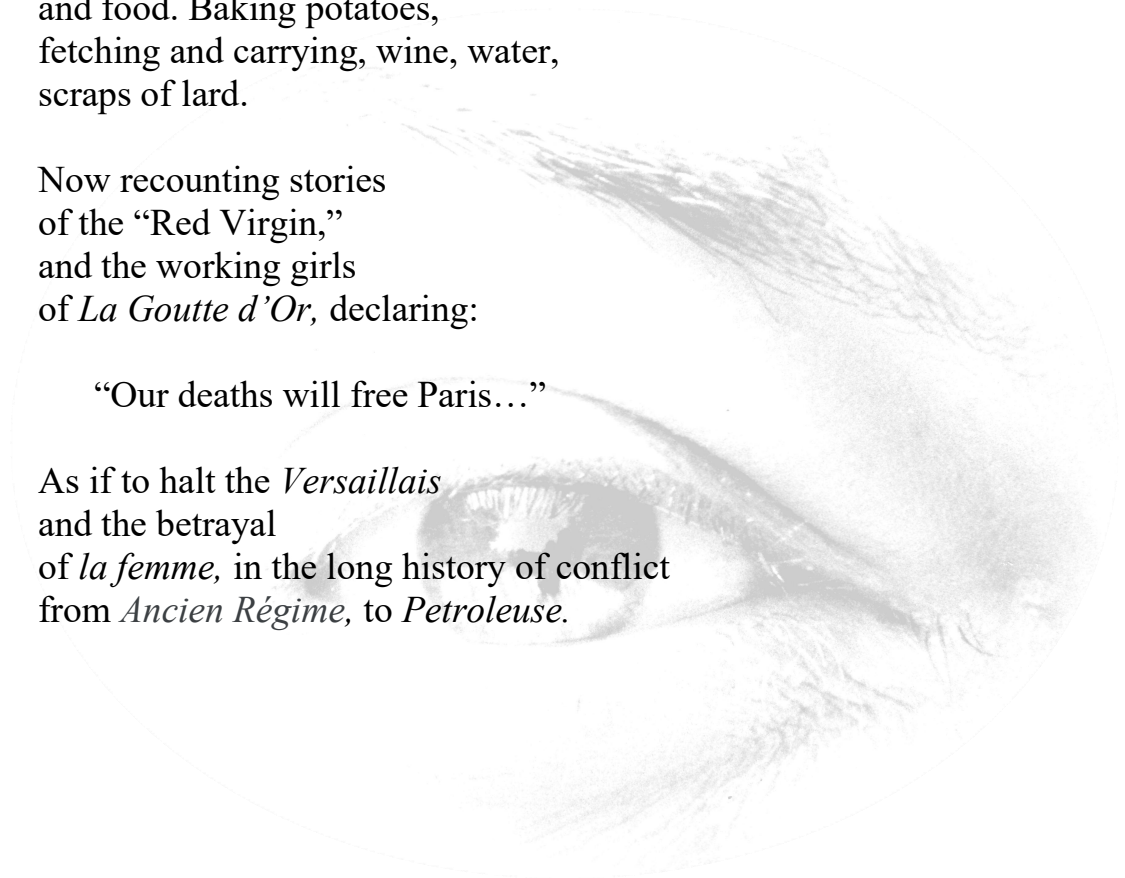
iv.

Now, if you EMBRACE
her good natured welcome,
you will see the crack in the door
OPEN as she bids farewell
to the Commune DEAD, gathers
the unsung heroes,
connecting FALLEN
to FALLEN. Now offering shelter
and food. Baking potatoes,
fetching and carrying, wine, water,
scraps of lard.

Now recounting stories
of the “Red Virgin,”
and the working girls
of *La Goutte d’Or*, declaring:

“Our deaths will free Paris...”

As if to halt the *Versaillais*
and the betrayal
of *la femme*, in the long history of conflict
from *Ancien Régime*, to *Petroleuse*.



Time Travel

Prophet of the twentieth century dead
driven mad by disease,
poverty, stricken multitudes.

We first read you back in '84,
mesmerized by your long view of history,
doubting everything.

*

If you didn't see the terrier
in the rat pit – we did. Clock-watching
servants of time, keeping time

in the Planetarium
with only our shared sense
of injustice to equal the opening shot.

*

Life is like a movie you've seen
too many times already.
Except we can never go back.

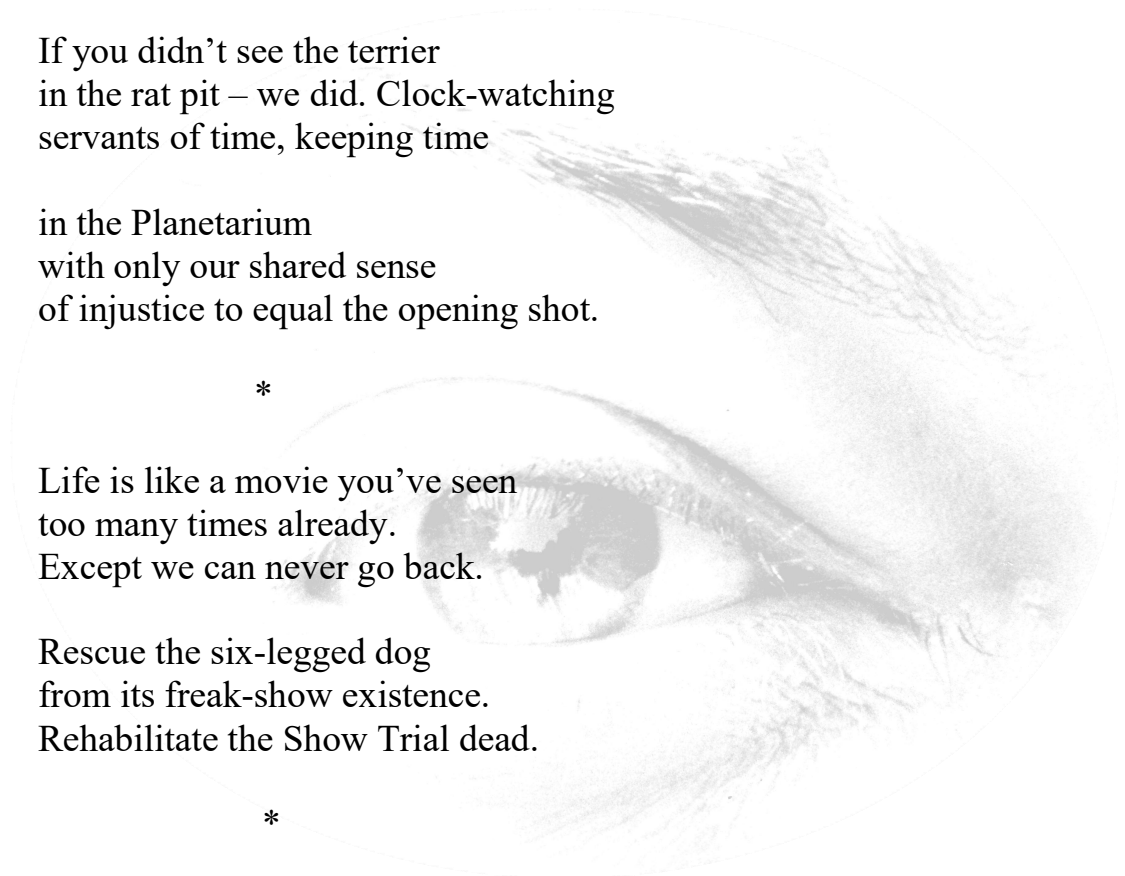
Rescue the six-legged dog
from its freak-show existence.
Rehabilitate the Show Trial dead.

*

So, we scribble, with no intention
of making sense, leaving
out the Doomsday Clock.

No transitional demands
to cheat time.
Only the self-important gnawing
of mice, who are yet to disavow

death as a form of critical criticism.



Ends and Means

*...even those who were on the friendliest of terms,
found themselves victimized, sooner or later...*

George Hendrick

Do the ends ever justify the means?

Certainly,
Doctor Aveling thought so.

Habitually borrowing to finance
his Soho blow outs.

Indeed, the party stickler
was not averse to filching party funds,

or milking party die-hards
to bankroll
his itinerant debauchery.

Hardly surprising, then, that the man
about town,
and would-be-playwright

even made a run at Ellen Terry,
who only knocked him back

on account of George Bernard Shaw –
one-time suitor of Eleanor Marx.

*

The Chucker Out was so incensed
by the zoologist's *anything-goes* morality

that he wrote *The Doctor's Dilemma*,
exposing the alarming heart of the moral brush-off.

However, the Darwinian populist, was long gone
by 1906, and his *Gospel of Evolution* –

glorifying his right to every pleasure
of the flesh, died with him. Leaving nothing

but sex crime, fraud, and kidney failure,
as his lasting footprint, for the ascent of man.



Volte Face

for Prof. Stuart Toddington

Each new discovery tips the balance
for and against conceit

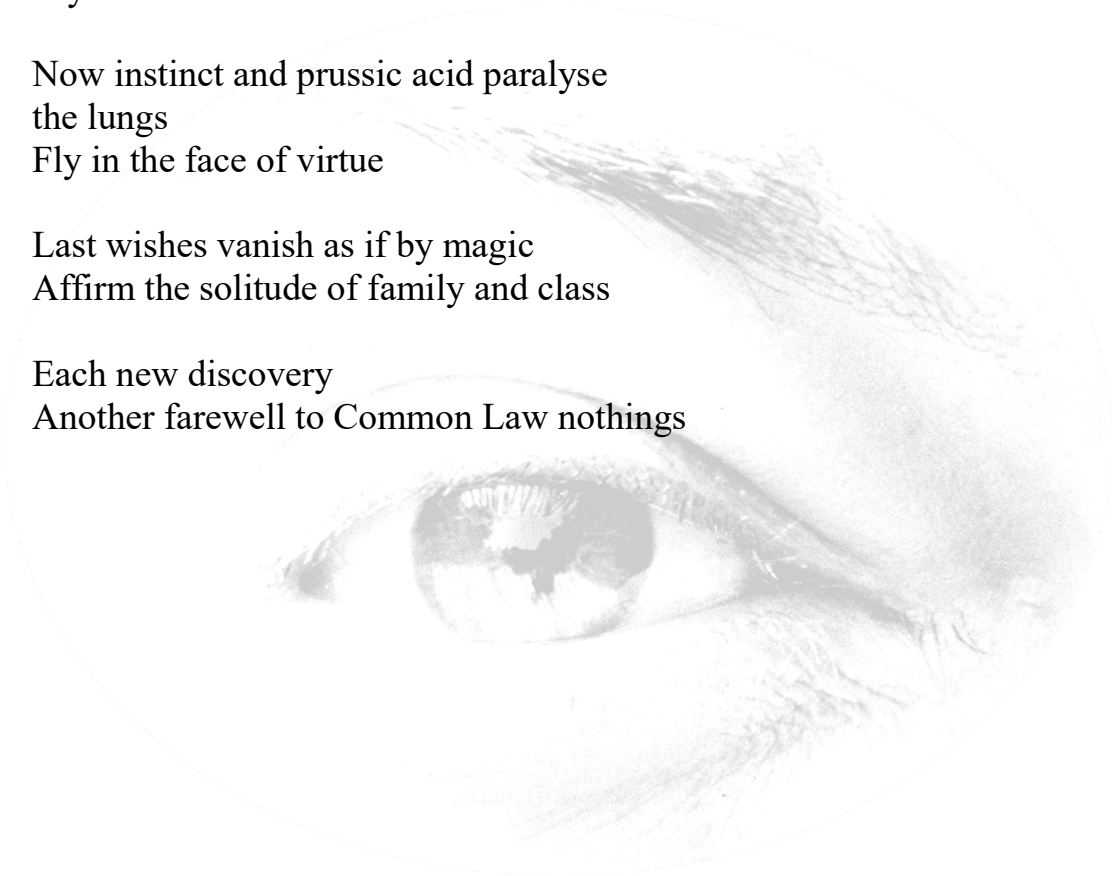
The doctor of the body
cannot know what smokes in the grate

But even adulation has its negation
beyond the bonds of the will

Now instinct and prussic acid paralyse
the lungs
Fly in the face of virtue

Last wishes vanish as if by magic
Affirm the solitude of family and class

Each new discovery
Another farewell to Common Law nothings



Chasing Akhmatova

for L

Shadow play and stellar separation
finger our cut of the sky –

Disentangle the sacred texts
between Perseus and Cassiopeia

Too late to dismiss the dusk
that divides the morning constellations

Brush aside the immense sigh
of the *Gulag*

We wait for Anna of All the Russia's
through veils of gas
and dust

Dismiss the centuries
that relegate us

before bureaucrat
and *Yezhovshchina*

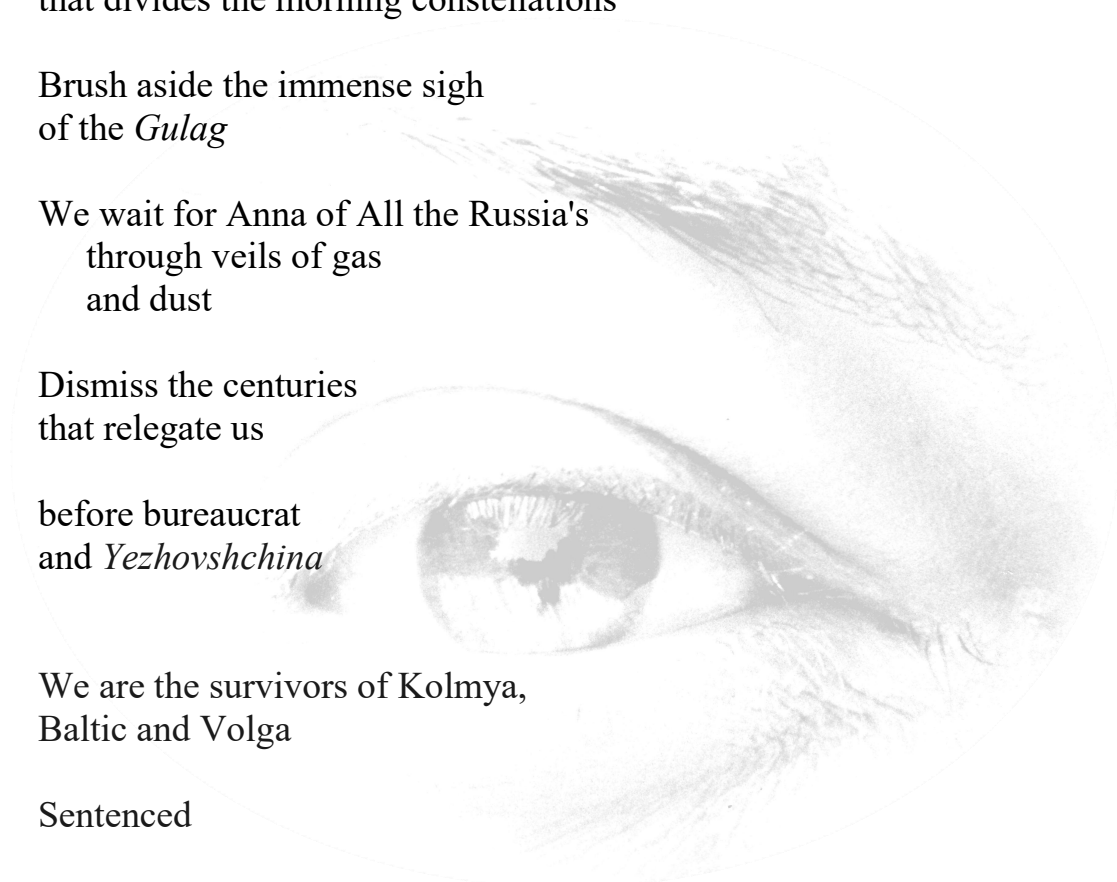
We are the survivors of Kolmya,
Baltic and Volga

Sentenced

to the observatory for Ghost Nebulae
Where stars expire

And love is just another word
for torrents of radiation, dissipating

ALL WE HOLD DEAR



The Dreaming Dead

We have left Eleanor Marx dreaming.
The date, April 5th, 1898.

Too late in the day to cry rape,
disjunction, murder.

Too late to explicate opium
or abulia, but we join

our minds to hers as if to undo
bridle and squeeze.

In her mind's eye, a thaumatrope.
Twirling in the dark.

·
On the anterior a bird.
On the inverse a cage.

So thought slips away
and the persistence of memory fades.

ii

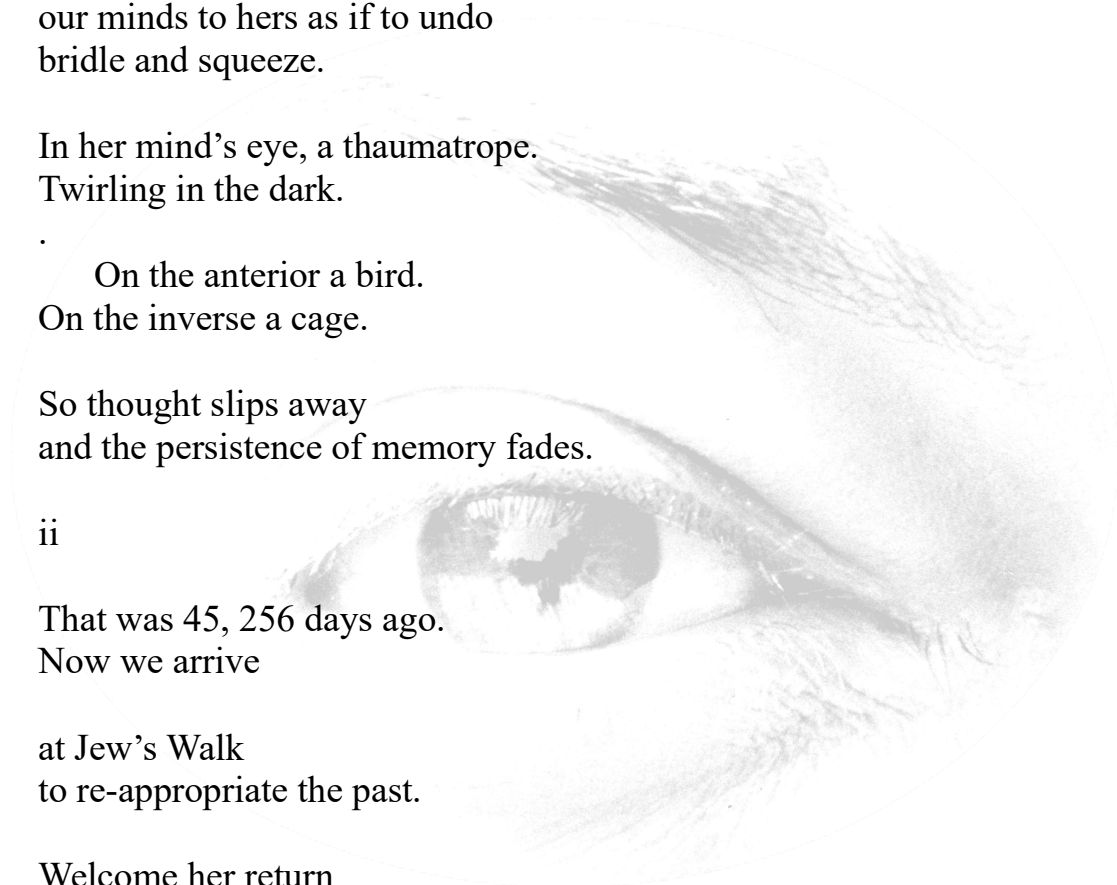
That was 45, 256 days ago.
Now we arrive

at Jew's Walk
to re-appropriate the past.

Welcome her return
from the dead.

Trace the fire flowers in her mind.
Another thaumatrope.

On the anterior a cart wheel.
On the inverse the world.



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