Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter know, including display on the World Wide Web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

Alicia Marie Brandewie April 2, 2012

Heimat

by

Alicia Marie Brandewie

Natasha Trethewey
Advisor

Creative Writing Department

Kevin Young

Committee Member

Bruce Covey

Committee Member

Marianne Lancaster

Committee member

2012

Heimat

By

Alicia Marie Brandewie

Natasha Trethewey
Advisor

Creative Writing Department

An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Creative Writing Department

2012

Abstract

Heimat
By Alicia Marie Brandewie

My collection explores questions of memory and history through my personal relationship with my maternal grandmother and the public experience of the Donauschaben Germanic people during and after WWII. I utilize the relationship with my grandmother to test the barriers that separated us in her lifetime: language, age, and mental illness. These poems discover how maternal relationships, inheritance, and heritage can supersede those boundaries. The single example of my family's experience expands to the public, collective plight of the Donauschaben. My poems bear witness to their history, returning this small but complex element to the larger conversation surrounding the war. As a member of the postmemory generation—those born after an event but who still feel its influence through their predecessors—I complicate the distinction between perpetrator and victim. My poems seek to rectify an atrophy of memory—at both a personal and public level.

Heimat is both a personal journey and a public memorial. Art and history interplay to explore the emotions of the individual and the empathy that can unite a population. Interlaced throughout is my maturation as a person and as a poet. My poetry enables me to not only face what haunts the past, but to preserve and encapsulate its beauty and positive influence. Among loss and destruction are the gifts from one generation to the next, transcending language, time, disease, and even death.

Heimat

By

Alicia Marie Brandewie

Natasha Trethewey
Advisor

Creative Writing Department

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Creative Writing Department

2012

Table of Contents

Introduction

When I explain that my thesis is about my grandmother's experience in communist internment camps and that she was imprisoned because she was German, the inevitable response is "I never knew about that." She is one of the many *Donauschwaben*, a German ethnic minority, who were imprisoned or killed in Communist Yugoslavia after WWII. I have causally related this story since I learned it as a child, but surprise has been the ubiquitous reaction from my audience. Rectifying this atrophy of memory—on both the personal level of the relationship with my grandmother and the public level of the *Donauschwaben* history—compels my collection.

My poems were initially a means to expand the sparse relationship I had with my grandmother, Mutti. She is thus the locus around which I built my collection—as the manuscript's central figure, her experiences and their impact on our relationship are also prominent. Examining our relationship I test the barriers that separated us in her lifetime: language, age, and mental illness. These poems discover how maternal relationships, inheritance, and heritage can supersede even those boundaries. The inclusion of extended family and friends extends these possibilities even further.

My family's experience expands to the collective plight of the *Donauschaben* during and after WWII. I focus on one example of the micro as an in-depth illustration of the macro. Memory is naturally paired with forgetting. Yet the current WWII and Communist era rhetoric focuses, for many reasons, on a few narrow groups and eschews the more murky histories like those of the *Donauschwaben*. My poems bear witness to one of these particular neglected histories.

Focusing on one victimized group of WWII could be misconstrued as ethnocentric or polemical, but, again, I am using one example to express broader implications. My collection seeks not to impede the historical discussion, but rather to bring the many voices neglected by history back into the conversation. I believe a large factor in why history has avoided these voices, especially when addressing the *Donauschwaben*, has been the question of innocence. They are not easily labeled victim or perpetrator, as my poems illustrate. German, prisoner-of-war, soldier, Austrian, refugee, Nazi, nurse, internee, citizen, conscript, Yugoslavian, and immigrant all apply to this group. Another contributing factor of this atrophy of memory is that the generations that lived through WWII and Tito's communism remained silent, not always by choice, about their experiences. Now, I and many others as part of the postmemory—the generation that did not live through an event but felt its effects through the succeeding generation that was traumatized by it—are rectifying both public and private silences.

Poetry is particularly potent for combating this silence because it is the antonym of silence; it is the elevation of language into art. While poetry is not a common vehicle through which to explore history, it allows me to grapple with abstract concepts and gain insight into them through concrete images. My work is grounded in the historical—photographs, conversations, memoirs—but I am not limited to what is known as absolute fact.

The style and craft of the poems further my contents' aims and expressions. Along with telling my grandmother's story, my other long-standing desire has been to write poems that speak to a broad audience. I aim to write with a clarity that allows casual readers to follow the narrative and feel emotion, even if they cannot articulate how or why. The more sophisticated

reader is also satisfied by tracing themes discussed above, finding the use of forms, and untangling the intricacies of these two elements' interaction.

Turning from content to craft, my basic compositional unit is the image. My images flourish into emotions or concepts through figurative language. I reinforce these figurative turns with full sentences, conscious line lengths, and repetitive forms. Sentences assure that I communicate with the most clarity. Line length for most of the poems is determined by visual unity, which creates a rough syllabic unity and corresponding emphasis on the ending word. Enjambment is one of my favorite techniques to compound the content, and it releases me from length constrictions. The forms I use generally employ refrains— more compounded meanings—not meter. Of the poems that are not sonnets, "Osteoporosis" is the only one conscious of its syllables. Of my seven sonnets—"Elocution," "Light Carol," "*Too,*" "Emulsion," "*Überstezen*: from *Über*, Across, and *Stezen*, to Place," "Cognition," and "Conception"—none completely comply with the form because I am playing with what historically constructs a love poem. To make these poems recognizable as sonnets I have made them all fourteen lines long. Some also employ either the ten-syllable line or a traditional rhyme scheme.

My collection of poems allows multiple voices and topics to speak to one another, creating a more intricate picture while circumventing polemics. This technique is most clearly evident in my twenty-one section poem, "The *Pfaffer.*" It is based on the *Donauschwaben* Catholic Priest Wendelin Gruber's memoir. His experiences in WWII, witnessing Tito's internment camps and as a political prisoner, make his story and point of view parallel to mine. While the poem faithfully follows his narrative arc it also multiple perspectives as each section is voiced by a character from one of Gruber's anecdotes. To reflect Gruber's writing style and

emphasize that this poem is distinct from my voice, I have stunted the syntax compared to my other poems.

On the grandest level, my collection is organized into three sections. The first section represents context. Here are poems that provide the history, memory, and background information to understand my personal story and the *Donauschwaben* story. The second section is the single large poem "The *Pfaffer.*" The variety of perspectives keep the poem from stagnating while also complicating the ideas laid out in the first section. In the final section the poems all learn lessons. They exhibit a greater depth of knowledge and come to new understandings.

In writing this collection I am forever grateful to many poets. My most obvious influences are, of course, the poets I have directly worked with—Nathasha Trethewey, Bruce Covey, Kevin Young, and Jake Adam York. Equally obvious are the poets whose forms I have, in the words of T.S. Eliot, stolen for my own: Eavan Boland, A. Van Jordan, and Edward Hirsh. My narrative elements are made possible in part by Marie Howe, Philip Levine, Ted Genoways, Billy Collins, and C.K. Williams. The sectional poem support is from Stacy Lynn Brown, Campbell McGrath, Patrick Philips, and Terrence Hayes. Role models on handling historical material include Nadine Sabra Meyers, Seamus Heaney, David Roderick, Ellen Bryant Voigt, and Maxine Kumin. Help balancing lyricism with narrative is influenced by David Barker, Gregory Orr, Charles Wright, Mary Oliver, Beth Ann Fennelly, and Mark Doty. I adore the images employed by of all of them.

Heimat is both a personal journey and a public memorial. Art and history interplay to explore the emotions of the individual and the empathy that can unite a population. Poetry

enables me to not only face what haunts the past, but to preserve and encapsulate its beauty and positive influence: among loss and destruction are the gifts from one generation to the next, transcending language, time, disease, and even death.

*

We are determined to speak across borders, even if borders pass through every word

Introduction to Ingeborg Bachmann's *Schreiben gegen den Krieg*

Omen

Yugoslavia, October 1940

Our church dome is fat and round
like the filling in the cream puffs, big as my hand,
that we used to make when there was enough cream.
The ivy growing on Mary's house
looks like a beard, and the ferns by the door are moles—
just like the kings on the cards we play *Fuchs* with.
Where I spilled *paprikash* on the carpet
there is still a stain, red as the sun at the horizon.
It is getting lighter, fading to the orange of a harvest moon.
I speak German
on the way to the fields, but the Romanian soldiers bark only "Papers!"
before they let me cross the border—the irrigation ditch—onto our plot.
The oldest chicken,
her feathers hanging like an ugly mourning dress beneath the red
handkerchief of her comb, has begun to follow me around the yard.

Ekphrastic

I try to write a poem but every metaphor is beaten
by my mother's hammer—twang of steel on gold,
teasing my concentration until it is planished flat.
While I am writing down a luminous image she appears:
could you come hold this bezel so I can stamp this ring?
Pinning down the gold circle, I listen to the ultrasonic
vibrate away the grit between settings and stones.
I wonder if the whirr of my grandmother's sewing
machine ever snagged Mother's sketching; the click
of the feed dogs made her pencil skid across the page;
and as she erased the offensive squiggle she heard
could you come hold this pleat so I can hem this dress?

Fettle, 1929

The thirty-four villagers and children
stand before, and on, and in the hay—
not stacked as bales but as monuments.
The sweet grass rises in drifts taller
than the nearest roof. A great metal
machine, with its smoke stack crown
and mantle of wheels, nests within
the mountains of their harvest
while its chute reaches into the trees.
Most of the farmers are reluctant—
pitchforks still in both hands and bodies
only partially turned toward the camera—
to give away this moment of the harvest,
wanting to keep the machine
pluming with their loose, flying gold.

In the foreground, my ancestors pose:
great-great- grandfather juts his chin,
shirt sleeves ruched around his elbows,
fists anchored to hips. His wife's head,
swathed in a handkerchief hides
one of his buttress elbows. Her body
is round as the full sack pressing a worker
into a stoop. She stands in the valley
between her husband and their youngest son,
Matthias. His toddler daughter—sitting
on the table, foremost in the shot—leans
against his stomach, safe in the cradle
of his tan arms. Her legs are stretched,
wide like a ballerina's around the small dog
sitting between them. I stare, trying to recognize
the old woman I know who struggles to walk.

Their only dream of America is there too:
Peter. He must be the man behind the camera,
because his parents, younger brother, and niece
are the focus of the picture. He is visiting
home, and these snapped shots will fertilize
his life in Cincinnati. He cannot know, not yet,
that his images abounding with the gold of hay
and amethysts of grapes are all we will have left

of home, of our bounty yielding from the earth.

Elocution

Even if I am reading the *Deutsch* words,
my speech is tangled. Inconsonance,
my tongue was trained to blend consonants
and abandon the *e* tail on words:
meine, Zuhause, spreche, little barbs
of humiliation. Called on in class, my incompetence
is not the mangled sounds but a consciousness
that this linguistic debris girds
the accent purring in my memory. I know
these sounds from my grandmother's language—
when she had returned to the elementary—
her second language, English, having long ago
become ensnared in the bondage
of her tongue's *Muskelgedächtnis*, muscle memory.

Zinzinnati

Queen City signs decorate
the streets and, thanks
to full size swine replicas,
they still celebrate Porkopolis,

Yet the young professionals'
district is known as OTR—
few remember that it was
shaped by immigrants
who built the neighborhood
tight as machine stitches
on the banks of the Ohio
like their homes Over The Rhine.

The Beitz Family, 1934

There is nothing behind them,
save the blankness of light canvass.
Of the eight adults—four men
and four women, half of whom stand
above the jury of heads sitting before
them— and three children, I know only
that some are my distant relatives.

Only one man is wearing a hat,
as if he is already poised to flee.
He is behind the rest of the group,
like he stepped there just before
the shutter fell. One last thing
nearly forgotten in haste.
The cocked brim points along
his line of sight, almost perpendicular
to the camera's lens. He is the only one
looking beyond this moment
into the world that has begun to fade,
smudges already dappling the edges.

In The Closets the Hangers Rattled like Bones

They moved when I was still young,
so it is possible that I forged my memories
from my mother's photo album.
But there are only a few snap shots—
holiday dinners with so many relatives
the dining room wallpaper is hidden
and self-timed portraits by the picture
window. The sisters in matching outfits,
standing with their mother. Their father
having dropped into the arm chair
a moment before the camera's shutter
blinked like a pair of shears.

*

In the hallway there was an alcove,
the imprint of a relic. Mother explained
that a Bakelite phone once hunched
in it. It was tethered to the center
of the house by more than its cord:
when there was only one unit per house,
dialing as not a metaphor, and party
lines left you wondering whose
breath you were hearing in the background.

*

Though Mother succeeded in removing
the border of China red she painted
around her room as a teenager—
it took seven coats of white as her father
had warned her *that stubborn color
will show through anything*—my aunt
still slept there, in her half of the twin beds.

*

In the living room the round eye
of the television was cooped
in wood and riddled with dials.
The plastic wafer 45s could still sing,

but the threat of scraping the needle
across the groves meant I left them
hibernating in their paper sleeves.
The cuckoo clock did not trill either.
Its pinecone weights balanced,
it seemed, in the same position
they hang at in Mother's prom
portrait. The little bird forever judging
her olive and orange polyester jumpsuit
and my father's ruffle encrusted shirt.

*

Emerging through the backdoor—
the screen slapping the frame—
It took a moment for my eyes
to adjust to the dining room
after the rainbow of the garden.
If my immediate family
were the only guests, we wedged
between the table and walls
ignoring the ceramic Hummel
children peering down at us
from the cabinet. If more
guests joined us, we spilled
into the kitchen—already filled
by the roasting pan and its bones.

*

Though not a shotgun house,
I could see out the front
picture window as soon
I emerged through the back door.

Osteoporosis

If I had absorbed German
it would've grown with my bones,
flexible model at birth,
quickly ossified. Fusion
marking my maturity.

Instead my memories dry,
and rarify—images
becoming porous without
knowing the card game *Fuchs* or
its suits: leaves, bells, acorns, hearts.

The accordion's notes split,
fracturing the polka down
to wheezes and squawks. Never
fortified with the lyrics,
I can't cheer with the chorus.

My pallet is so holey,
my tastes so brittle—nothing
swells my tongue, it remains dry
while I'm reading the beer list.
Lager. Pils. Hefeweizen.

The stories I heard compressed
because I absorbed white bread,
soft and pale as nougat, not
Schwartzbrot, the black bread thicker
than their German compound words.

Too

Mutti sits in the dining room corner.
I am relieved Mother sat her where we
cannot get caught by the six footed gait
of her trudging walker, or German words.
Throwing out his arms, my uncle says *Auf*
Wiedersehen. She smiles and nods at
his pairing of a welcoming gesture
with *goodbye.* A blonde toddler shuffles to
Mutti, braced in her own wheeled frame. I see
how life has circled—limiting legs and
language from both—but I don't understand
why the child points at the full-sized bars,
why laughter erases the wrinkles on
Mutti's face 'til the child says *I have one.*

Schooling

At home I heard German, in a low accent,
while listening to old people from the old country.
Like Mary, my great-aunt's childhood best friend,
who explained how she joined the Red Cross
to avoid being conscripted into the Nazi army.
Then she biked across Europe at the war's end
with a soldier fleeing the victors—deserter or not
he knew that he would receive only sneers
or jail from the Americans or the Russians.

At school we did not learn about the people
in the Battle of Britain, or the Battle of Moscow.
The millions of soldiers, millions of civilians, millions
reduced to a two digit numeral and cardinal noun,
not even given the string of zeros to hold their place.
We learned no name for what happened to the Serbs,
homosexuals, Poles, Soviet prisoners, Slavs, gypsies,
Freemasons, and Jehovah's Witnesses: minorities
of the casualties, they lost the game of numbers.

In sixth grade our book report was a scrapbook,
to go along with *The Diary of Anne Frank*,
When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit, or *I Never Saw
Another Butterfly*. Already it was unbelievable
to the other children that a German Catholic
could be put in an internment camp. The roles
of victim and perpetrator were drawn as prime
numbers. No one wanted me to divide them
with anything but themselves, to muddle
their exactness with a clumsy remainder.

When we read *Night* in tenth grade
English class I spoke only, as I had learned,
when the discussion turned to form.
I was too blonde to speak on any other matter,
and so they never heard how my grandfather
was drafted into the Nazi army.
Nor that he refused to speak about the war,
so I could not, will not, judge him—
nor let someone who cannot identify
the integer of his face in a photograph's line up.

Only in college, for my independent project,
did I read *In the Claws of the Red Dragon.*
I found, for the first time, in print the name
I had grown up with—*In post war Yugoslavia*
the Danube Swabians *suffered a higher per*
capita loss of life than any European people
did during the worst war years—and that numbers
can always be calculated to prove who lost,
but the answer can never provide a winner.

.

Candid

In the foreground you see gnawed chicken bones on a paper plate,
and the bride's bouquet laid in front of her mother like an offering.
Christina—sleek in a short sleeved, v-neck wedding gown—stands
behind the table talking to Margarethe, her mother who is seated.
You do not understand their German, but seeing smiles—blooming
brighter than the deep purple flowers on Margarethe's dress—
you bring the camera to your eye and capture mother reaching out
for her daughter's hand. Margarethe's fingers cradle Christina's palm,
whose fingers hanging just before they curl in response.
This close together Margarethe's blot of brown handkerchief—
looped over her graying crown and tied under her chin—
with the wisps of hair escaping, is a foil next to Christina's
ribbon trimmed veil—held by a filigree of pearls—and dark curls.
Christina's eyes are drawn as she goes to kiss her mother's cheek,
leaning down the way an adult reaches to kiss her giggling child.
Margarethe's eyes are pleated at the corners, and her cheeks are round,
so round you, too, feel what must be joy—looking at the album decades later.

Surname

After A. Van Jordan

Noun:

1. (A) A name, title, or epithet added to a person's name or names, esp. one derived from his birthplace. As in *Han's full name was Hans Beitz of Hetin, Yugoslavia*.
(B) A second, or an alternative, name or title. Such that *somewhere between Hetin's record books, and his daughter's birth certificate, the vowels were tousled like baggage during immigration and he became Baitz.*

2. The name which a person bears in common with the other members of his family, as distinguished from his Christian or given name. *His fiancé's name was Strunk, and he sailed to America with that family—leaving behind his own father and step-mother but not the German equivalent of John.*

3. A family, clan. *The eldest Strunk, later known as Peter Uncle, had been sent to America as a child to learn a trade. Instead he became a hairdresser in Cincinnati. Peter's little brother, Hans's future father-in-law, stayed on the family farm. The place where Peter's niece grew up certain she would marry Hans. Then when the world's second great war deported certainty by the box car; refused to admit it into the losing countries or the winning one; and finally reinstated it as starvation in its homeland, Peter sponsored its immigration to America.*

Light Carol

From the street, the tree overwhelms
my grandmother's picture window.
Our tree at home is only allowed to wear
strands of dignified, white lights.
Tinsel is forbidden because it sheds,
taunting the vacuum until the cellophane
Easter grass usurps it. But this tree is strung
with vintage, colored lights which are puffed
big and round as roasted marshmallows.
It is glazed in tinsel that sparkles and twirls
in the currents of heat released by the oven
door when the *Vanille Kekserl* are golden.
Nesting in the branches are bubble lights—
antiques—that dance through the nights.

Mother of Those Who Were Driven Out

After the Königsteiner Madonna

You do not look
like someone I would pray to:
lips battened tight
as the ordinary
Donauschwaben matrons,
squat in their antique
portraits. The sculptor
did not grace you
with pupils, even so
your eyes are cast beyond
the people huddled
around your feet.
Your left arm sweeps
out your cloak—
a gesture that could
be herding or avoiding
the six devotees.
The other arm mantles
your son, a baby
with a fully grown
expression. At least
his head is turned,
looking at the man
whose face is raised
and palm cupped.
While your son's right
hand could be offering
help, his left hand is also
stretched out—a crooked
cross that he is not old enough
to bear. There is another
man—crumpled on the ground
like the previous regime's
pamphlets. Splitting
the pole of your knees
are the women folk.
Another mother kneels
with only her arms
to wrap around her baby—
no archangels swaddling
its future. Her eyes stare

at your unnoticing face.
Her kneeling little girl
watches her father
watch the ground.
Standing behind them,
back pressed into your cloak,
is a young woman
about the age my grandmother
was during the war.
She is the only one
looking straight ahead,
and her gaze addresses
the audience.
They could all be begging
please pray for us
as it says on your pedestal,
but I believe this
young woman is contemplating
the poem on the back
of your picture. She sees how
your face lies in shadow
totally black and haggard,
no candle light flickers,
just as I do, but still her fingers
are braided together
believing in your power.

*

Noone
Bears witness for the
Witness

Niemand
zeugt für den
Zeugen

Paul Celan “Selections” translated by Pierre Joris

The *Pfaffer*

On the Tightrope of World Politics
Belgrade, 1944

We have no use for the myth of Eden.
My Comrades, and the rest of the continent,
know this land is the breadbasket of Europe.
We are sowing our workers' paradise here
where the crops have always grown twice as plump.
While the Soviet flag waves a symbol, we strike
our hammers and slash our sickles. Comrades
you know the harvest is near. Remember,
we did not need help from the Soviets to expel
the fascists. We came together in brotherhood
and unity to reap the invaders from our land
like thorny weeds. When we bind together tight
as warp and weft nothing can penetrate us.
No bourgeois greed, papal lies, or ethnic bullying.
I am sailing our country straight by the light
of the true north star. This unblinking, red point of light
guides us through the night of capitalism. Comrades,
the horizon is glowing. The dawn will break
into the days of proletariat prosperity.

*

"Cleansing" the City of Their Enemies
Zebreb, 1945

The Partisans snatched me from home,
but their probable cause was my job.
I do not even know the name of a political
newspaper. My crime is that for twenty years
I held open the door to the Parliamentary Palace.

Before the Partisans the Nazis had boiled
into the country. They had noticed me
as much as the banisters. These Partisans
will probably tear them from the walls too.
I can give these new roughens as much information
as those brass bars. Had I ushered in flat owners
instead of velvet clad diplomats I would not know

the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs existed.
It came to me on sneeze of a bureaucrat
after the Great War infested the Kingdom
of Croatia-Slavonia. Then the Allied victors
splinted together Kosovo, Vojvodina, Bosnia,
Herzegoina, Macedonia, Croatia, and Slovenia
together into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia
the way a field medic can only wrap a wrist
shattered by shrapnel with cardboard and twine.

*

Salve Amice

The Communists are cranking the death mill.
Anyone they consider a threat becomes the grain
stored in this silo of prison. I never thought
a chemist would be threatening, but here I am
like oats. The priests are barley, the politicians
wheat, the professors oats. All are crackable.
Many will not even need the pressure of the grinding
stones. Waiting in here will burst them. It happened
to me. It exposed the germ of God's spirit within me.
The Communists will be shocked when they open
this dark, airless container and find a green shoot.

*

Ego Crum Tecum
Zegrab, 1946

Father Gruber comes to me for medicine.
It is not for him, but the internees.
If he were anything other than a priest
I would send him to a psychiatrist.
I know the conditions in these camps.
The refugees who escape often came to me.
Dysentery, typhus, scabies, rickets, and scurvy
parade through my office. The cure
is a government that does not starve
its people. The Father knows this.
So he has something to offer the internees,
I marked a dozen vials with dosages
and instructions. I also prescribe medicine

for the Partisans. *Only the best whisky*
and the most expensive liqueur may save your life.
Understand? His ruched face explains
that I am speaking in a tongue he cannot
translate nor communicate with. I know
he will martyred within the year.

*

Danubeland! To Utter this Name Is To Speak of Music
En the route to Gakowa

The land rushes by the train windows
like crepe paper streamers in a parade.
The birds look like confetti in the sky.
As if our new home is celebrating with us.
Four years we fought to liberate our nation
from the Browns and capitalists. We earned
this nation. Now Tito is rewarding me
and my fellow Partisans with the most fertile
part of it. We are colonists. The party seized
our land from the kulaks. For generations
those greedy Germans, Slavs, and Hungarians
left us with only the southern mountain scrub.
Or they taxed our share of the crops until we were serfs.
When the train stops there will be a house waiting
for me. A house I earned not inherited. My bride
wants the train to hurry so she can see
if we have an orchard. I tell her to enjoy the ride.
We are with our friends. The new sheepskins
make the floor comfortable. There is plenty
of tobacco. I lump some into a piece of newspaper
and smoke it. The man behind me coughs.

*

Kosaritis "the Partisan's" Disease

A young Comrade starts howling
in the train station. The waiting crowd
gathers around to watch him. I remain
against the wall to watch the crowd.
He drops to the floor and flails
like an upturned roach. A few souls

look away. I doubt they are polite.
They have seen the uniformed men
scream, kick, and foam before. So have I,
unlike the priest. I recognize him
from a neighboring town. The priest stares
without blinking with his mouth open
like a fish on display in the market.
Since the rabid howling began
only the priest's hand has moved.
Father's fingers tapping on his forehead,
chest, and shoulders. Father has done it
so often there is a red mark on his face.
Several men jump on the partisan.
Mothers tuck their children's
faces behind their hands and skirts.
"Djavolska posla," a devilish thing,
I whisper behind the priest. The hand stops.

*

A Spirit of Tolerance
In Grakowa

I know by the slant of the shoulders
that the man entering the cage
of our room is Wendelin. His years
abroad vanish as I hug him.
When Papa died I thought I was all alone.

Hours later the Partisans released me
from roll call. I went back to Papa.
None of the snow around him,
around the body, had been disturbed.
A Partisan had trampled Papa
like a child making foot prints
in fresh snow. The trench in the hip
high snow had been only wide
enough for one person. He had
been shuffling while leaning on my shoulder.
I had waded into the bank to avoid
the approaching communist.
Papa did not have the strength
to move even snow. When the communists
ordered us to roll call. I should have left

him at home. At least being shot
would have been instant. He had often
told me of being a prisoner-of-war
in Russia during the First World War.
There he had gone hungry, but nothing
like this starvation in his own homeland.

*

The Highest caste, an "Osnasi," an "Infallible" Murder

I love the thwacking, hard on
the ground, that my boots resonate.
against the ground. When I stalk
around the camp the inmates scurry
away like rats in an opened cupboard.
My men kick down their doors.
We find the Swabos clustered like fungus
in their dark, dirty corners. They are praying
for our downfall. Their god is clearly
not answering them. We answer their prayers
with our rifle butts. They do not like
that their bones crack the same as a field
hand's or communist's. Now they cannot
make us sign papers full of words too big to read.
Tito rewards those who are good at their job.
Swabo eyes follow my swishing crop,
and pinch when I smack it on my boots.
My soldiers do too, but they think
I do not notice because they laugh.

*

Beside The Man of Sorrows She Would Be the Mother of Sorrows

The priest came yesterday.
He gave my husband his last
rites. Otto smiled at the sight
of a collar. I did not. The priest
merely crouched besides Otto.
They held hands, but not even
the priest's cloak touched the straw
Otto lay in. Today the church bells
are chorusing. We have not heard them

since the Partisans herded us here.
I am sure the priest got Schutzo
convincingly drunk in order
to allow the bells to ring. To Otto
they must sound like angles.
I hope he goes with them
up to his god. Here the our
only master is Schutzo.

*

Praised Be Jesus Christ

I say as the priest's eye appears like tonight's full moon
at the crack of the door. Only locals say this, but his brows
are rumpled. He extends only his hand through the crack.
Then his brows knot. His eyes stay on the red star on my cap.
I have lost my rosary, Father, and am unable to say
those beautiful prayers. Would you have a rosary for me?
He asks why with an even tone. His face does not change shape.
I explain that the only possession my mother had left to give
to me when she died was the protection of her rosary.
His scrunched face tells me he believes I am trying to trick him.
I try again. When the Partisans came into my Croatian
town I could join them or go to jail. He uncrosses his arms,
but his brows remain clamped like knuckles in a fist.
He asks me how I can pray without revealing myself
to the atheist communists. In the two hours
of my midnight shift. I am the only guard on the road
to Bezdan. He launches into a sermon about murder. I snort.
When ordered to shoot I aim too high. Finally the spark
of what I am saying catches a hold of the wick within him.
His face brightens and softens like warm wax. He tells me
to let the people sneak out under my watch. It will be
too dark to see anyone if I am looking in the other direction.

*

For All flesh Is Like Grass. All Its Glory Is Like the Flowers of the Grass

When they push us into the fenced church yard,
I see that we are a flock of sheep. The same analogy
the priests used. Now our shepherds are Partisans.
We were lambs. Now we are mutton. They pick out

the choicest cuts: ram sized farmers, wooly breeding
aged boys, and professionals with distinctions curling
thick as horns. The butchers herd us off. In a field
they make us shear ourselves. Then we dig,
sinking into the earth with the sun. When the moon
comes out and our pits are gravely deep
the Partisans become wolves. Flesh, wood, bone,
and metal crack in every direct. There is so much
screaming and thudding that the gunshots are muffled.
Like a dueling ram the body of the town carpenter
crashes down into the cordon of uniformed men
howling around us . I see tree trunks in the distance.
I run. I know they are trying to shoot me because the wood
around me splinters into the night like fireworks.

*

Our Faithful Family Dog Azohr Did Not Jump Up to Greet Me

The front gate scrapes. My sons
should not be coming home until dark.
I dart from the sink and peer through
the front door's lace curtain.
There is a priest in my yard.
He licks his lips while standing
under the twine of old grape vines.
Turning to the barren pear tree,
his fingers dab at his face and chest.
He looks down and touches the flower
pots full of tinder. When he steps
onto the porch I step outside. "*Zdravo.*
Good morning. What do you want?"
I ask. He asks to look at his parents' house.
His words knock together like thunder
clouds. He tells me his father built it.
His accent is like lightning. Swabian.
Greedy fascists. One has never spoken
to me before. They only shouted
that my cart was blocking the road.
If my sons were here they would know
what to do. *"The state, our great Tito,*
donated this house to us. My husband
was killed in the war against the fascists."
Swabos are rich, but I did not find any money

in the house. I let him in but stay right by his side.
I want to see if he looks in any cupboard
too long or bounces on a certain floor board.

*

A Row of Narcissus in Full Bloom Had Been Broken Off By a Soldier's Boot

The other girls freeze when the priest comes in
but I continue peeling potatoes. *"May I speak
to Commandant Schutzo?"* "*You mean Comrade
Schutzo,"* I tell him. I flick the skins off my knife
to the ground in the direction of the dining room.
His eyes wince as he enters into the next room.
As the door slaps shut the other girls begin twittering
like a flock of migrating sparrows. I continue working
on my potatoes. The voices in the dining room crescendo.
That priest snuck in here like a criminal, but wants
to be treated like a saint. He stares at our makeup
as if we painted our lips with our dead neighbors'
blood. He weighs us with his eyes and condemns
with a twitch of the head when we are heavier
than the other internees. He tells us and the nurses
at the children's home to bolt our doors.
If he had his way only the grandmothers
would work in the orphanage and here at headquarters.
He would rather I starve like the rest of them,
than let a Partisan call me pretty or pet my hair.
A single voice suddenly cannons the dining room.
I flee with the rest of the flock from the trees
of our seats. We wheel away into the open yard.

*

In Those Bitter Hours I Really Got To Know My Divine Master
Sarajevo, 1947

The prisoner was like any other pair
of poor man's work boots. The shoes
worn because they are a poor man's only pair.
The sole is worn through so it is only a cardboard
flap. Twine keeps the upper around the ankle
like a child playing dress up. That must be why
he had four arrests but four releases. I will not

make the mistake of pity again.

Priests make the best prisoners.
The politicals are easily made brittle
after drying out in their cells for several months.
The petty soldiers serve their time
like punished siblings always tattling.
The priests settle into their sentences
Like gulls nesting on rocky cliffs. No wind
screaming or hail beating, will budge them.
They remain protecting their eggs
of delusion long after we have smeared
their yolks across the rocks around them.

*

Shake Hands In Front of Our Godless Enemy

The beasts throw me into an already occupied cell.
The other prisoner's unshaved face and large eyes
remind me of a sheep. He extends his hand
almost before I have regained my balance.
He is Father Gruber, Catholic priest. What a blessing
from Allah that my metaphor should suit him so well.
He would get high marks in my jurisprudence
class. He very much admires his Archbishop Stepinac,
who I often use as an example of high moral standards.
As we discuss Allah he bounces on the cell bench
like a wren on a bird feeder. His enthusiasm is contagious.
We agree that we worship Allah in different ways,
but it is the same Allah. That night I dream of Mecca.
In the morning a soldier demands that he gather his things.
What bread I have I tuck into his pocket like a candy.
After the liberation please come and see me.

*

The Great Social Revolution Kindled by Jesus Christ
In the Glavnjaca, Belgrade 1948

Prisoners do not break at night.
They unravel. Yank them awake
after a few hours of sleep.
They do not have time to smooth

their frayed edges. We have a friendly
conversation. The prisoners doo not notice
that I am combing the fabric
of their convictions for the hem.
When I find it I pull. Some need just one tug.
Others need to be ripped. Maybe I will
not need to unravel this priest.
Many of the priests have seen
how we are helping the proletariat
and patched themselves into our quilt.
But I find that this priest's hem is double folded
and blind stitched. I tell him that *I believe
in Christ because he was a Communist*.
He nods, "Unlike the church which has *veered
from the ideals of the liberation.* You think
that it has turned into a bourgeois institution?"
I see his eyes pleat slightly before I notice
that he is talking about his church in communist
terms. He thinks he can find my hem.

*

Mysterium Termendum and Fascinosum
Zagreb

The file that came with this prisoner
is stamped "unstable". It says he sings
hymns at full volume in the middle
of the night.It is his first day here.
As I patrol by he is not singing,
but mumbling. I suspect he calls it prayer.
Indoctrination does stranger things to a mind
than being locked in prison for months.
When I open up his cell to take him
for questioning he cannot stand.
He crawls to the interrogation like an infant.
When he yells his voice is loud as the commander's
conversational tone. But the commander
is not calm and conversing. Soon the prisoner
is crying like a baby that no bottle, song,
or fresh diaper can soothe. The commander
stamps his file. A red rubber kiss
of death that reads "case closed."
He will be executed within the week.

To get back to his cell he slides down
the stairs on his stomach slower than a toddler.
I think the criminals deserve their punishment.
Yet seeing a gray bearded man act like my youngest
children makes me give him a double ration of soup.
I also make sure that what few beans and barley
kernels are in the kettle get into his last servings.

*

His Disciples Would Be Persecuted for Espousing Truth and Justice
Neusatz

This morning it is as if there is a crock
of sour milk sitting in my court room.
Zivko Boroski, the prosecuting attorney ,
stagnant in his chair. He opens his speech.
It is like a whiff of acid that makes me nauseous.
He represents the state. He cannot loose.
Yet his speeches are like Hamlet.
He over acts so that the rabble audience
can understand. He screams his conclusion,
I demand that he be removed forever
from the human community.
I ask the defendant why he *consented*
to act as a spy For the Vatican, a foreign power,
in order to harm our country? He denies
any wrong doing. Denial is a minimum
sentence of ten years. The ones that admit
to their crimes get five years. Denial is a minimum ten.
Maybe the defense attorney will be able to salvage
this. Or at least turn my curdling mood
into something productive like cottage cheese
for his client. The defense calls the priest simple.
The priest reinforces this when he objects.
The defense offends him. He asks to defend himself.
My day is already spoilt, so I let him. His screaming
makes me feel as if I have swallowed
some of this rotten milk. The dairy color
of the walls is not helping his case either.
He stops after ten minutes. I give him fourteen
years with hard labor. Let him rot instead of me.

*

Never Before Had I Been Among so Much Spiritual Misery
Mitroitza, 1949

That pest of a neighbor wandered
his furrows farther into my field every year.
Everyone knew it. Not my fault
that when I went to settle the matter
his punches were as straight
as his furrows. Got me twenty years
for manslaughter. Two decades
of free meals does not bother me,
but I will be out in less than five years.
It is easy to make the warden purr
like a cat in the sun. All a prisoner needs
to do is dangle a rodent of information
before him. The other regular criminals
are small brown mice to the warden.
The political prisoners are fat sewer rats.
A priest arrived a few weeks ago.
He thinks no one sees him playing tea party.
I watch him mush grapes and dunks in thin biscuits.

*

The Monster Received Tender Loving Care, like Nothing Else in the Pplace

Norm. This word goads my senses
like seeing a lover out with a partner
more attractive than yourself.
I must produce 6,000,000 bricks.
In three months. Divide by fourteen
hour days. That is eighty bricks a minute.
The only supply I have enough of
is labor. The prison provides for me.
What the laborers lack in skill they make up
for in numbers. Every other troop of workers
pours the wrong amount of water or soil
into my machine. But there is always
the next troop waiting. I shout *voda*.
They dash to keep the bricks from being stale.
I call *semlj.* They rush to keep the bricks
from being wet like pudding. My machine
could handle the norm if I had enough oil

to keep her purring. Or extra belts
for when she is snagged by clay rough as the workers'
hands as if they were to stroke a lady's hosed thigh.

*

Although It Was a Stormy Night, the Wind Did Not Blow Out the Candle
1952

On Christmas we have to labor as usual.
After our shift we hold a mass quietly
in the corner. We configure an alter
out of a cardboard box. The only incense
we have is the latrine bucket in the corner.
The Catholics are our sentries,
since they celebrate our Savior's birth
by the unorthodox calendar.

After the ceremony we arrange our treats.
The other men arrange their cardboard
box tables in a circle. They display the few cookies
their wives have managed to bake and send.
I cover box with paper almost as white
as my mother's linen table cloth.
The other inmates surround me like feral dogs.
I carve a strip for everyone of the roast suckling pig
that Mother sent me. It would be more offensive
to her if I she did not share a piglet with me
than if I did not celebrate the mass. I pile
bacon and sausage onto my table like the gathering
shepherds. The garlic and onions hover on the edge
like a chorus of angles. The saltcellar I smuggled in
stands tall and proud like a magi. In the center I lay
the piglet like the swaddled babe in the crèche.

*

Secrets inhabit the borderlands of memory. Secrets, in fact, are a necessary condition of the stories we are prompted to tell about our lives…

Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*

Circulation

After Edward Hirsch

Give me back my grandmother, her ponderous
circuits round the kitchen and dining room—
the muffled thudding of each step following the groan
of her walker. Mother urging *around again, around again.*

Bring back the ace bandages, those long
white flags of surrender, and the hydrogen peroxide,
hidden in its opaque brown bottle—used to force
the blood to flow through her legs, keep the rot away.

Give me back the days I thought nothing was moving
inside her head; she had reverted, no longer speaking
English. After she died I learned that I just had to ask.
After she died I learned how to understand German.

Bring her back, now
that I have these questions
that no one else can answer. We will start
with *Wo bist du gewesen*? *Where have you been?*

Regime

After a week swinging in a ship's belly, that dank sanctuary,
the immigration office must have been the prayed for sanctuary.

Their homeland clutched by communism, the *Donauschwaben* fled
to the hills of Cincinnati, Over-the-Rhine, and claimed it as their new sanctuary.

My grandparents settled on Highview Drive; there, in a strange land,
they could still speak their own language, turning the house into a *Heiligtum*.

My mother set waves in her father's hair— part of his two hour
Sunday ritual before their visit to the Catholic sanctuary.

As Mother spooled my hair, golden shades I inherited from my great-grandmother,
she told me these stories, and I came to understand how memory is a sanctuary.

While we wove memories, my grandmother was unmade by memory: those thin,
grimy months of Partisan internment recurring as anything but a sanctuary.

Eclipse

When my grandmother died
I was thirteen—old enough
to remember the phone call
that came at the end of dinner,
and how my mother's face set
like that December's sun: dark
early, sudden and startling.
Though Mother was forty-nine
and knew the cycles of the world—
had anticipated this end—
knowledge did not ease the quick
falling and long following darkness.

At twenty-one I started
a poetry collection—thinking
I knew enough to write
about love and death.
I knew my grandfather died
years before I was born,
but in my research—
calls home everyday—
I discovered how my mother
watched each cigarette
hang like a dry leaf
from his lips until the last
one fell on October fifteenth.
My mother was twenty-one.

When she was thirty-five
she gave birth to twins—
a day that could have been bright,
like the blushing forest—
on October sixteenth.

Pearls
When Hans bought the jewelry set—three pearls,
each cradled in the tips of four gold petals—
he was thinking only of his younger daughter.

A present from his solo return, his last, to Europe,
the homeland. He had made the trip only once before,
a family vacation when his little girl was seven.

He did not think of the possibility of her becoming
a jeweler—no longer wearing manufactured jewelry—
and the earrings and necklace being packed away.

Or that his granddaughter—born after his death—
would find them in her mother's collection of scrap,
and would wear the drops in the American South

among girls in full strands—passed through generations
or bearing expensive brands—but from the tilt of their heads,
highlighting their luster, there would be no difference.

Emulsion

It's clearly a wedding dress in the black
and white portrait, but would the picture be
better if instead of extremes of light
and dark I could distinguish gradients:
edelweiss cream or the milk beneath it,
snow in European sunlight, eggshell
from the red or brown chicken, the dazzle
of a farmer's skin in the height of summer
having just removed his shirt, the pavement
in American sunlight. I cannot
answer—satin that can't be my something
old because, as the one complaint Mutti
had about life, they sent all their nice things
back to the family that had not fled.

Paramnesia

Again I have let my notebooks lie fallow
and pens stand like weeds.
I do not want to write.

I do not want the smell of forsaken flesh,
the strike of geriatric steel support,
or the blur of a fled home

to gnaw on my senses the way the survivors
of internment camps chew on chicken
bones fifty years later.

Instead I read what I have already written—
a dream that I do not remember having,
draws my throat tight as

I return to my grandmother's house,
which has always been too small
for privacy but still

Mother and I search. The house is empty;
instead of furniture it holds awkward
and unwanted memories

which is why we snap at each other. We cannot
find her. There is nothing left.
Then the neighbor—

another short, round, gray haired grandmother
who could be my mother's Oma—
had I known her—

begins shouting. Her voice radiates across
the cloudy street, "She is with me.
She is with me."

Antecedents

I see my grandfathers daily, though both died before my birth:
their matching wedding portraits crown the staircase.
Harry, my father's father, in his bellbottomed uniform,
and Hans, my mother's father, in a dark suit.
Two couples in the same pose. Husband a step behind
his wife, her satin train sweeping out like the future:
both men having survived the war and come home
to Cincinnati. Harry returning, and Hans immigrating.

Too old for the initial draft, Harry was scraped up as the war
became tedious even for the ocean barricaded Americans.
A technical man, Harry tended a battleship's boiler in the South Pacific,
but as a farmer Hans' valuable skill was his language—
accented but the same as the invader. Those khaki soldiers
who inhaled Hans's country , then sent him to sow fields
until they bloomed bones. I know no other photos
where either man is smiling.

Oriens

I tried to teach my friend to iron—
wrinkles webbed into cotton
like the lead seams in stained
glass—but it is not the shirts
he pulled taut across the board.
It was his patience and soon
he was hissing like the steam.

Now he has his shirts dry-cleaned
because he sees it as a chore.
A skill-less job for an immigrant
with a limited vocabulary
and heavy accent, to do cheaply.
He did not know my grandmother—
clouds rising between her hands,
elbows winging out as she skimmed
the wrinkles with the hot blade,
poised like an eastern window
over a congregation.

Überstezen: from *Über*, Across, and *Stezen*, To Place

The letter is swapped—the difference
between an open or a closed circle.
The lack of such a small arc changes
nothing. This conjunction holds
an identical meaning regardless
of which vowel is set in its consents
like a gemstone. I am almost finished
reading the sentence when an itch
in my subconscious snags me like a sweater
on a ring's prong, halts my eyes, and I return
to unhook my brain from the word.
An *und* instead of *and*—not even a syllable's
difference bridges the gap across two languages.
I realize this was not originally written in English.

American Pastime

Mother puts the tickets on the fridge—
a pair of nosebleed-nowhere seats rewarded
to every student in the city who gets straight A's.
Baseball is boring even with good seats,
I protest. *I am not going to that game.*
Mother tells me that she got a pair in high school—
freshman year too, because she could not drive.
It was the only baseball game her father went to.
A European immigrant, he learned to love
the game while working the assembly line at Ford.
Even as she says it, I know that *he would never*
have spent the money to buy such a thing.
Mother remembers the radio blaring
play-by-plays all weekend as he tended
to the yard. He yelled back at it in German—
so the neighbors would not understand
his cursing—when his adopted-hometown Reds
lost a base. He never yelled in the stadium
but clapped the entire time. As Mother
readjusts the magnet against the paper,
it clicks against the metal like a tiny gavel.

Practical

While they spent their days tending the fields,
Mary's Mutti and Vati were not offended by death—
they kept their coffins stacked in the attic
to guarantee they would be respected in death.

Mary's Mutti and Vati were not offended by death,
but she did not know what would happen next so
to guarantee she would be respected in death,
she fled before the Nazis could draft her.

She did not know what would happen next
when she joined the Red Cross as a nurse.
She was fleeing before the Nazi draft,
but the communists replaced the fascists.

When she joined the Red Cross as a nurse,
her elderly parents stayed without concern
but the communists replaced the fascists:
declaring all German speakers to be Fascists.

Mary's elderly parents stayed without concern,
but they were deported when it was
declared that all German speakers were Fascists.
A slow starvation sponsored by the state

after they were deported—when it was
granted that all Germans had to be Nazis.
A slow starvation sponsored by the state
made Mutti and Vati valuable only as dirt.

Granted that all Germans had to be Nazis—
their empty homes as their only witnesses—
Mutti and Vati were valuable only as dirt
and so they were shoveled into a pit.

Their empty homes as the only witnesses—
the Partisans' attention only on control—
Mary's parents were shoveled into a pit
as the covering for other mutties and vaties.

With the Partisans' attention only on control
the Bosnians were imported as colonists.

As the covering for other mutties and vaties,
Mary's parents lied under a roof unfulfilling coffins.

When the Bosnians were imported as colonists
they found the coffins stacked in the attic;
they lied under a roof of unfulfilled coffins
while they spent their days tending the fields.

Cognition

Mutti, what I did not know then
I know now.

That *Mutti* means Mommy.
You were too young to be called Grandmother,
and your daughters already called your mother *Oma*.

Sewing is hard, straight lines the hardest.
I salvage my blanket with a slightly squiggled trim,
marveling at the matching outfits you made for your girls.

In order to cook fresh peas, I must shell them first.
The art of unzipping their thick coats is not easy:
I snap the ends, and pull them open with a gentle tension.

Some women go crazy when their hormones evaporate.
The doctors thought maybe that is why it started,
but Vati would not take you to the asylum.

You were not out of your mind you were trapped in it.

Epiphany

Sunday night I stay up too late: the essays
for my graduate class, *Memorial Cultures*,
are too florid for undergraduate comprehension.
When I finally get into bed, I expect nothing,
but my grandmother comes back to me
in the night. I see her in a full body halo,
illuminated from behind by eastern sunshine.
She reaches down to pet my cat—also long gone—
whose gray spade head stretches towards her.

There is no sound in the dream, so when I find
myself in my college bed I do not hold my breath
when the floor board creak. Only the next morning
do I remember how the shriek of aluminum
would have haunted me as a child at home,
waiting for the thud of her steps to dollop
like batter off a spoon. The sounds that woke
only me when she went to the bathroom
during the night, and I remained awake until I heard
the mattress groan again with her weight.

I go back to sleep holding onto that image
of her smile—the better source of illumination—
and its reflection in the cat's curling tail.
I know when they touch its purring
and her sentiments will have the same pitch.

Heimat

After Eavan Boland

In my sophomore year
of college I set out to learn
my grandmother's language.
I had yet to find

that her tongue was already lost to me
in pictures and maps as I noted
foreign words with a sweet clatter
and known translation.

And when I came to the words
Danube Swabian
I saw that language is pliable
and the lure of Oktoberfest—
which I had danced in the correct
month as a child because
the *Donauschwaben Volk*
ate and were merry—came back.

Wie Geht's. Auf Wiedersehn. Nichts. Long gone
snatches that mean without interpretation.
How I remember where each of them lived:
one for each direction through the front door
and one used with a card game
that was simple enough for all our minds.
I can hear her. I could say to her

we will be—we have been—
where meaning is not tethered
to language. Is transcendent.
We were—we still are—relatives
of a river dialect. But it has been too long

to try absorbing whole books
of descendant phrases,
to wedge too far open
this afternoon, rank with the memory
of three days smelling of sauerkraut.
When the sun shines on my timid
questions and choppy memories
and mother unwinds the stories

that I never asked for.
Never thought I could know
all the dear titles
Mutti, Vati, Oma, Otta
as they stick in the American air,
echoing from the place
we have come from
and are going into
where words like *Spätzle*,
and *Goulash*—savory still
as they always will be—
simmer and are simmering
with anticipation, to nourish.

Conception

I do not want to have a child but here he is
between my hands. Tiny eyes as intent to know
my features as mine are to memorize his.

He is attempting to be serious, as he has been asked to,
but he is too young for his jaw to be pulled taut
or his brow to pinch his eyes like his father's.

It may be a consequence of the light flushing his face,
but I find myself drawn to him, ignoring his sister's
face. She is off to the left scowling under her bangs.

Tracing my finger along his pointed Strunk family
nose, *spitz nase*, my womb wrings. It knows I could hold,
I could carry—just as well as my hands cradle
this century old family portrait—a baby
with his great-great-grandfather's handsome face.

NOTES

"Schooling"

The Danube Swabians are a German ethnic minority from Eastern Europe. The name expresses how in the seventeenth and eighteenth century the group left Swabia, in what is today Germany, and settled further down the Danube river, in the area that is today Hungary, Romania, and the countries of the former Yugoslavia. Today the term includes several more distinct groups, as they have been fragmented over three hundred years of shifting territorial boundaries.

The line "in post war…war years" is from Frank Schmidt's "Translator's Notes" in *In the Claws of the Red Dragon*, by Wendelin Gruber

"Mother of Those Who Were Driven Out"

The quote is from "An die Schwarz Muttrgottes" in the collection *Weitrleewe: Gedichte in Apatiner Mundart* by Eva Mayer-Bahl. Translation by Marianne Lancaster.

"The *Pfaffer*"

Each section of the poem is titled with a line from the memoir *In the Claws of the Red Dragon: Ten Years under Tito's Heel* by Wendelin Gruber. All of the poem's other quotes are also from this book. He details his imprisonment and observations of the murders and internee camps of the Donauschawben people in Yugoslavia immediately following WWII. The Communist gruella group the Partisans had taken power of Yugoslavia during the war and were the ruling political regime throughout Gruber's account.

"*Heimat*"

The German word *heimat* is a complex concept of heritage, location, and identity. It is often simplified in translation as 'homeland.'