

**PHILIP METRES**

*At the Dump with Van Gogh's Peachtree  
in Blossom*

—for Olga Leontievna Lepedina

because his daubed blooms  
leap still  
along scrawl of limb

as twenty years ago, at tether

end—

& his peach tree hoists  
    & hosts a mauve blaze

& the earth beneath  
roils to a froth under his palette knife

as twenty years ago my I—

& even the cockeyed fenceposts lunge  
to be undone by that impasto sky

twenty years—

wanderjahr of shock  
capitalism & still-Stalinist cashiers  
behind closed grills at end-  
of-the-line train depots  
Snickers bars & statue graveyards

where I tried to live a year  
like a Russian  
if a Russian

were bootless & coatless—  
from Russia to Amsterdam in spring & everything suddenly too  
easy, machinery  
of late capitalism lubed  
& so smoothly

the machine is unseen & all-seeing—open-armed  
bridges & sidewalk cafés & glassed-in  
lingered Natashas  
drowsing on bar stools without bars—

year of midnight tea to quell delirial chills  
after post-Soviet winter of diesel cough  
same old new brutalism & permafrost  
mushroom hunting & crumpled piles of Lenin  
rubles gray ice the onion domes of  
drunks & dumpsters overflowing

because ruin  
is the mother of future

& Olga dear physicist babushka  
oven-warm & worried  
over my arctic dark & day sweats  
with your blue nervous big-breasted  
kindness

in your our sultry two-bedroom  
apartment of knitting magazines & broken-  
egged breakfasts left for your insomniac

word-weary non-son you doted on  
more than your own  
you'd say, *you're an impressionable person*  
*you need to rest*

after the unspeaking overcoated crowds after  
stone elbows after the solid exhaust after the lying  
& the lyres all pawned or hidden

you'd say, *don't write too soon what takes a life*  
*to say*

after the coup of coupons when ex-Party oligarchs  
bought everyone's share  
for kopecks because everyone feared everything  
Soviet would be worthless

& everyone could be bought  
& everyone fucked  
up or over—

as if the whole country were tilting  
then tipping  
into ice—

because at the Van Gogh Museum  
I took home "Peachtree in Blossom"  
thinking of you—

the print buckles, heavy with humidity

greens & blues & clears  
yellowed like midlife teeth & too much tea—

because pain haunts the mention—

because paint hints dimension  
the print could never show  
except when swallowing  
the very air—

& in Amsterdam the buildings flowed  
upside-down in the canal  
like currency—

Olga, dear cold-fingered in unheated labs  
you stayed

& everywhere spring now  
immolating winter

& at a Cleveland dump twenty years later  
with a carload of broken-framed basement prints

because Olga I failed by leaving & leaving  
you & what I had been

because botched copy of all that blazing

I refuse to leave you

& yet I leave you again