

oleg pupovac

it helps me sleep when i remember
my mother guiding my hand to the oven
holding some rosemary wrapped in twine
telling me to repeat a prayer after her, slowly
i don't remember the prayer
but i remember it included my uncles
on the night before christmas
me, my mother and an oven in the middle of a desert
it helps me remember what her chest smelled like
and how her dyed blonde hair thinned at the edge
i wish i did not forget the prayer, what i repeated
when the bedouins went about their business
preparing for the cold night, working in the scorching heat
i wonder if they thought then about ahura mazda
about the priests who have washed up on their shores
i don't think so, i think they only knew eternity and coffee
and on occasion trampled an empire before theirs
a carcass of a learned leviathan hunched out of the sand
cautioning the future like some stern father
like some mother whose suspicion was ritualised
whose superstition was surpassed only by tradition
i wish i had the presence of mind to say
mother write down this prayer, i may need it at thirty three
it may help me sleep to pray for my uncles in the desert
and for their wide fingers and blind blue eyes
if that mother, the one bent over the eight year old, could
imagine a fire from an oven and a parish in the desert
then i can imagine how my wife's waters billow
and how the back of her neck sees no sun, only closed eyes