

Bokor Country, Boreal Body

It happens so quickly it's hard to believe it even happened at all. You're breathing and alive and warm in the snow against a dead world, and in the next moment there is only that dead world and the cold snow.

“The well wasn't always dry. I'm sure there were years when I was little that there was still water at the bottom of it, although it's been so long ago now that it's hard to say if it wasn't just a machination of a child because it's been dry for a while now. It was a few years ago people stopped wandering over to it and clear the brush away in case it had filled up, and yet it never did. It's just a pile of stones now; in the forest under a bush and maybe in a couple more years no one will remember that there is a well there or if we even had one. Down into the gullet of nature in one gulp.”

In a village fading, a boy did grow.
Where fields once green, now wilted and poor,
his childhood spun 'neath in sun's bleak glow.

Once, in forest thick, where shadows bestow,
He wandered far from home to explore.
From a village fading, a boy did grow.

He stumbled on a well, bricks covered in grow.
A relic none could see on earthen floor.
His childhood spun 'neath a sun's bleak woe.

Down he peered, where the roots did sow,
And caught a glint 'neath the green leaf store.
In a village fading, a boy did grow.

He climbed and dug where the well did show,
Beneath weed a tale of the days yore,
His childhood spun 'neath a sun's bleak glow.

He took the chain, from its bones and woe,
Around his neck, warm white would adore,
In a village fading, a boy did grow,

Yet, time did pass, as time does forego,
He left the village, its woes, its lore,
His childhood done 'neath a sun's bleak glow.

And fate would led him where warriors go,
To battlefields cold, where all crows tore,
With a chest of arrows, a head laid low.

In some far-off land, 'neath winter's snow,
With neck light and only silver adorned,
and a chest of arrows, a head laid low.

Thus ends him, a boy not so long ago,
who now lies in fields he once never know.
Away from forest thick evermore.
His childhood spun 'neath a sun's bleak glow,



The village had been growing smaller and smaller from one day to the next, the fields sit idle/empty and the pasture has no beasts to roam it. None are left to work the earth. Dry and cracked hot straw gets blown in by the late day summer gusts, and it just passes through because everyone is already in bed. There are no children on the cobbled streets, no youths in their prime being barked at, and no crowfooted faces to watch over the harvests. There are only the elderly in twilight, waiting until they will be whisked away from this place by their kin. For this is such a terrible place for a person to grow old, among the abandoned houses that no one claimed and the unused dust filled streets.

But an even more terrible fate for the last one left, one day looking up and seeing nobody around. And that's why it's better to leave now; to leave as soon as possible, because no one wants to be the mayor (or king) of a day gone by.

And what after that lone soul has passed? What happens then to that place? Left to be swarmed by the forest's minions in the night, reclaiming the space that people had tried so hard to carve out and settle. Only being driven off by the rise of a new sun, exposing the carcass of the town for someone to see. Until that is, the next night and the village corpse is besieged again.

“When I finally left, I began by trudging down the dusty road out of town, a path I had once seen carts carry goods along, always disappearing under a hill far before they reached the horizon. Now, it's just me heading off to where the carts came from and went to. The summer had been hot, its relentless heat beating down on me through my hat, soaking my shirt with sweat, and searing my skin from above and below.

The field crickets were also at play, their incessant and deafening cacophony of chirps becoming a wall that most daydreams couldn't penetrate. All that rattled around my brain was the anticipation of reaching the top of the next hill in hopes of escaping the insect-produced clamor and catching a sweet chilling breeze.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, I crested the final hill of my jaunt and looked out from my grassy perch, the glimmering city stretched out before me in the dim blue light of the evening.

Maybe if I had a moment, I could have heard myself think and saved myself from the gripping feeling as I lay in my lodging that night. I could have mulled over how I had left the only place I had ever known, how the future I had planned for myself isn't as certain or grandiose as I would have liked it to be, and I could have considered the consequences if I failed.”

It's no wonder they who come from the backwater parts of the country begin to detest the city they live in; they are unequipped and unable to seamlessly conform to their new reality. For a city has no land, it only has buildings, streets, and the works of man that have displaced the land(/soul). And whether it be the hottest or coldest day, the hicks will complain that they are

cold and they feel that they are dying, some may mutter that they “have died in this cultural Siberia”. And yet here they are and here they stay.

Can a body live beyond the land that it grew? Maybe; the city folk have bodies without land, but they are also a different kind of creature. The feeble among them died or fled long ago, and now the crowd that is left is something different from a person. All is for work, nothing is for play or pleasure, and in some insidious way even the scraps of sport is work. The quickly disappearing ownership of their body extends to some dim recess of their mind. Maybe this is why the hicks are so odd in this space, they are bodies of a land that they do not inhabit. In a space that has no land in the first place.

“I had an uncle in the city. He arranged that I meet with one of the fish peddlers out on the dock that processed the fish that a big man's boats hauled in. I walked into the shop and asked to be a helper and was hired. That autumn there wasn't a day that I headed back to the lodge not smelling of fish and other deepsea stink. My uncle had said that it was good honest work and that I was lucky to have found it, but I didn't feel very lucky. I could not use my sizable wages, they were too meager if spent in town.

So when the fishing season started to slow down, and I felt my time at the docks was numbered, me and some guys working at the docks trolled around town looking for work that winter season. I also wanted to look in the shops and leer at the nicknacks I'd try justifying in buying. One of those days we were out, we tromped through the post office so one of the guys could check for mail and on a notice board there were all these city and civil job postings. The guys had said don't bother looking through those jobs because they paid a pittance, but I was getting a little desperate, so later that week I walked in the city hall to get a job as a street sweeper.

For that winter and spring I would wake a little after the sun had risen, put on all the layers I had before I slid into my ragged uniform, and would clear the streets of snow, litter, and trash. The fish workers were right, I made almost no money, the majority went to paying for lodge and food, but it wasn't like I was buying much before anyways. It might have been fun, wandering and peeking through the city. I think that I was still looking at the outside of the city, the facades of a thousand homes and shops, but what did the inside of all these buildings look like? This I do not know. Although, by the start of summer I had been in almost every nook and cranny of the city, its character still slippery in my conception. And yet I have come to know that it did not inspire much within me.”

It might be the little concessions made on the day to day that has robbed us. Just for today I will wear the uniform, just today I will speak the lingua franca, just for today I will assume an identity that is not quite my own. And then the identity and culture that you've practiced up until now is in the dirt.

In winter's grasp, the city stands so bare,
Its streets deserted, in frosted embrace,
A silent realm where only cold's the heir.

When venturing out, a chill bites the air,
A cutting frost that robs skin's warmth in haste,
In winter's grasp, the city stands so bare.

The wind, relentless, whips through the threadbare,
Through layers worn, the body's heat displaced,
A silent realm where only cold's the heir.

Inside, a candle winks in waxing wear,
Its warmth diminishing with quickened pace,
In winter's grasp, the city stands so bare.

Within the house, the dim begins to scare,
A creeping cold cradles each of man's space,
A silent realm where only cold's the heir.

'Gain outside heavy silver burdens bear,
It gleams as a savage and cold disgrace.
In winter's grasp, the city stands so bare,

Now the wax is a pool upon the sill,
And the silver weights leaden on the neck,
Where once a flicker burned dim, now lies still,
In sunless days, lies a city a wreck.



“The little route I had carved out for myself was well worn by the time spring came around. I was feeling an itch behind the eyes and was sick of the city, I was sick of the people and its streets and its choking miasma of toiling bodies. Bodies beyond owning property, but more importantly bodies without land.

I doubt these creatures are my countrymen, for they don't have a country and it's hard for me to even imagine I had one too.

People were chirping of the war that had been declared that spring. These savages had always been hostile to the country, but then they stopped exporting to the country and people began to get antsy. Without the money or jobs that were hampered by the savage nation, something needed to be done against this economic aggression. I'm not sure exactly what started it but the savages eventually attacked a country port that was still trading with the neighboring people in the region and that was it. The only option was retaliation.

I had previously dodged conscription by playing up my mangled arm from when I fell into a well as a kid, but this time I freely signed up. Everyone was talking about wages to be made, the benefits after, and more importantly the loot to be gained.”

It might be well and good that bodies without land go out looking for something, looking for that other that may save the mangled thing they call the self. Even bodies with land will go out, because sometimes you don't know any better and sometimes you simply don't care. All these people destined for foreign lands may one way or another find the place where their bodies end.

“It's strange that just a little while ago I was toiling away in that dull city and now I'm so far away. I was conscripted, immediately loaded onto a bus, and then sent to the army training camp about 2 days south where me and the other recruits were trained. I suppose training wasn't so bad, it's really a simple job; not a lot of thinking involved. It took maybe a month for us to be deemed at a satisfactory level of combat readiness and we were churned out for deployment.”

There might be an ironic barbarity to fight for something so abstract as a nation, not for the kin or the land, but for an amalgamation of many people and many lands. Unlucky it is, or perhaps sheer stupidity, that some may bear the sin of many so that the nation can exist. It's fitting that their vicarious atonement is to die in foreign lands far from home, just as they have come from a cultural Siberia they will go back to the nothing in a frozen waste. But before that happens we like to imagine what they think they are doing there; how can they exist in land as the other and the hostile foreigner. And if it were always that way even when they were in the village.

“We have been deployed now for 2 months and to put it simply nothing has really happened. We sit in the frigid cold behind a berm and wait. We wait and wait, sometimes there is a shout and some commotion but mostly we wait. It is so mind numbing that I am almost unable to contain myself, I dream of the order to charge and dash over this infernal berm; the fear of dying being toppled by the fantasy of bloodshed in the hopes of having a brief respite from this purgatory.”

*The country is but a false idol, a wraith,
Too vast for one to see its grand array,
A spirit's guise, its work a body scathed*

*What does a country mean when foreign bathed,
When life and limb against arrow sprayed?
The country's but a false idol, a wraith.*

*The body takes the land, an eerie swathe,
Like germs, it spread, with plundering bray,
A spirit's guise, its work a body scathed*

*A rootless form, an ideal chalice chained,
An empty vessel filled with country's sway,
The country's but a false idol, a wraith.*

*"Charge o'er the berm!" commands the dead's fate,
Grunts fall in lines, their respite brief, grim preyed,
A spirit's guise, its work a body scathed*

*In arctic waste, where cold and fight contained,
A landless body meets its end this way,
The country's but a false idol, a wraith,
A spirit's guise, its work a body scathed*



“That was it, but here I am again. I have risen. They say it has been many years since that war and I am unsure of exactly how long (I am even unsure of where I am exactly). My body was needed, they say; and I have been put to work. It's work after death; I must work again.