

INTRODUCING THE *SRPR* ILLINOIS POET:
DANIEL BORZUTZKY



Photo by Patri Hadad

Daniel Borzutzky is a poet and translator. His latest books are *Written After a Massacre in the Year 2018* (Coffee House Press, 2021); *Lake Michigan* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), finalist for the 2018 Griffin Poetry Prize; and *The Performance of Becoming Human* (Brooklyn Arts Press, 2016), winner of the 2016 National Book Award for Poetry. His translation of Galo Ghigliotto's *Valdivia* (co•im•press, 2016) won the 2017 National Translation Award in Poetry. Other translations include Raúl Zurita's *The Country of Planks* (Action Books, 2015) and *Song for His Disappeared Love* (Action Books, 2010) and Jaime Luis Huenún's *Port Trakl* (Action Books, 2008). He lives in Chicago.

Day #1103

That we cannot move our securitized feet. That we cannot move our privatized hands. That we cannot move our debt-filled fingers. There is light in our debt-filled fingers. There is light in our securitized feet. Money makes the light turn from orange to yellow to purple. The embarrassment of nature. The light that blazes in the fingers we do not own. The fingers in the body of us all. The body of no one. The foam in the hand of the suffering lake. The crisis-lake in the hand of the performer becoming human. The lord-becoming-human in the hand of the fictional bank. I am floating in the fluorescent lake foam without feeling. I don't know the name of the contamination. I don't know the identity of the sludge. I don't want. I don't ask. They don't see me.

Dot Dot Dot Dot Dot Dot Dot. Period.

End stop the light end stop the movement. End stop the song we sing to the blasted bodies we do not know. End stop the song we sing to the privatized bodies we do not hear. We sing it to the broken bodies we don't want to become. We sing it to the bodies we hurt. The bodies we frame. The bodies we bake. The bodies we smoke. The bodies we paint. The bodies we cannot pay for.

Our body we deposit: how much does it cost? Our body they loan us: how much does it cost? The labor. The interest. The ratio of debt to asset.

I don't know what to do I need a few dollars. I need four
I need five I need four I need another dollar. I need to
pay the debt I owe on my body. What are they willing to
take? What are they willing to give me in exchange for
myself? Bank says I cost too much. Bank says I cost too
little. Bank says I must repeat life, again. Bank says the
strongest part of me has already been foreclosed upon.
So gently. Like a sweet little burden. The debt drops. It
hears us. So gently. It translates our griefshame into: the
poem of the broken lung, the poem of the broken bed
under the drowning nation, the poem of the drowning
nation that lives beneath another drowning nation.

The lake and the beach are closed again. The sand and
the geese have disappeared again.

*Thirty-six people died here today,
sing the authoritative bodies.*

Tough break folks.

An unforeseeable act of God.

The city is filled with corpses.

Lake Michigan, Scene 520

Beloved is the body who remembers its organs are not equal to its neighbor's organs. Beloved is the body who remembers its prayers are not equal to its neighbor's prayers. Who knows that even in death you must conceal your labor so that those who survive cannot see how their bodies have been fabricated out of your body. Beloved is the poor body, the rich body, the obliteration of my body. The obliteration of a body more important than mine. Beloved is the wind that blows the ashes from east to west. The bodies they set on fire with the proper precautions. The expensive houses at the edge of the beach. Beloved is the body they refuse to save. Beloved is the dying water, the fertilizer, the geranium, the zinnia, the marigold. The blooming gardens that fulfill the aesthetic requirements of those who own the city. Beloved is the gag in the mouth. The mud in the mouth. The street they hang over the city. The body they pin to the outside of my body. The lake filled with diseased bodies. Beloved is the rich body who has the right to stay alive, the poor body who has the right to die. The regulation. The regulator. The ratio of risk to reward. The entrepreneurial body who sings: *How much for his body fat? How much for his healthy hands? How much for his scabby fingers?*

Before I die they warn me: *You must weep but only in private. You must love but only in private. You must die more privately.* But I did not believe them and they told me I would die from so much griefshame. They sing: *It is shameful to eat. Shameful to sleep. Shameful to pray. Shameful to love.* Beloved are you who dies because it is your fault. Who dies shamefully from the disease because you fail to protect your tongue from your arm, your right cheek from your left hand. Your lips from your teeth.

I am dying again and I hear them saying to another body: *you can stay alive as long as you remember you don't have the right to be anything more than what we need you to be.*

Beloved is the starving body on the beach. The particle that drops to the soil. The river that carries the rock to the mountain. The mountain that turns into a melting glacier. Beloved is the city stuck between time and death. Beloved is the shrieking, the hunger, the malleable worker, the malleable flesh.

The breath that refuses to stop.