

DOS GESHRAY (THE SCREAM)

*Erd, zolst nit tsudekn mayn blut
un zol nit kayn ort zayn far mayn geshray
(Job 16:18)*

“practice your scream” I said
(why did I say it?)
because it was his scream & wasn’t my own
it hovered between us bright
to our senses always bright it held
the center place
then somebody else came up & stared
deep in his eyes there found a memory
of horses galloping faster the wheels dyed red
behind them the poles had reserved
a feast day but the jew
locked in his closet screamed
into his vest a scream
that had no sound therefore
spiraled around the world
so wild that it shattered stones
it made the shoes piled in the doorway
scatter their nails things testify
—the law declares it—
shoes & those dearer objects
like hair & teeth do
by their presence
I cannot say that they share the pain
or show it not even the photos
in which the expressions of the dead shine forth
the crutches by their mass the prosthetic limbs by theirs
bear witness the eyeglasses bear witness
the suitcases the children’s shoes the german tourists
in the stage set oshvientsim had become
the letters over its gates still glowing

still writ large
ARBEIT MACHT FREI
& to the side HOTEL
and GASTRONOMIC BAR
the spirit of the place dissolving
indifferent to his presence
there with the other ghosts
the uncle grieving
his eyelids turning brown an eye
protruding from his rump
this man whose body
is a crab's
his gut turned outward
the pink flesh of his children
hanging from him
that his knees slide up against
there is no holocaust
for these but khurbn only
the word still spoken by the dead
who say my khurbn
& my children's khurbn
it is the only word that the poem allows
because it is their own
the word as prelude to the scream
it enters
through the asshole
circles along the gut
into the throat
& breaks out
in a cry a scream
it is his scream that shakes me
weeping in oshvientsim
& that allows the poem to come