

Robert Archambeau

Misremembering Szyborska

I read your poem in a magazine, the one about how
after every war, someone

has to tidy up, about how,
as years trudge on with shovel and with trowel,

bridges are rebuilt, windows glazed, doors set back
into their jambs, until someone,

propped broom in an arm's neat crook, a hand-back wiping
at his brow, tells how it was to a nodding neighbor, until

the task-bound crowd of a rebuilt city finds such talk
a little boring,

until those who were there
are gone, and those who knew them, until, at last,

someone lies in the grass, over all the old and rusted arguments,
“a corn stalk in his teeth,

gawking at clouds.” I read it, there, but
remembered it differently. Somehow

in the tired and task-bound wearied mind those final,
placid, resting limbs



became a body in the earth, not on it,
a corn stalk growing from that place in which it lay.

I see your poem now, again. “The End and the Beginning,”
and know I’ve carried my mistake for months.

That soldier I remembered — that’s what he must have been,
that body under earth — he would have dreamed

of days spent gawking, on a hillside, at the clouds.
Perhaps he fought for just such days, that he should have them, perhaps

that dream is where he lingers even now.
Perhaps he can lie beneath your dreamer, a rightness, there,

each in his way the other’s end. Perhaps, too,
we could say my poem lies in the grass of your poem’s dreaming,

forgetful, pulls at cornstalks, gawks at sky.

This poem was first published on the Samizdat blog, 9 ii 2012

