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Story from the West Side

Milorad Pejić

Of a hundred inventions and brilliant discoveries,
we profit most from the export of ropes for hanging.
We satisfy charming tyrants with toys of terror,
and these feathers of freedom with which we adorn
ourselves were plucked live from the wings of the
oppressed birds of the *Archipelago of Cancer*.
We raise our voices occasionally, but faced with
overstuffed meat stalls and barrels of wine, our justice,
as brief as a dog's shame, quickly dilutes into spit.
But, understand me, we have nightmares too!
The enemy does not rest, and according to reports
from the watchtowers, the barbarians again ride,
wearing their inside-out sheepskins like armored shirts.
We have doubled our eastern borders with a people
who do not sleep. Each day, our punitive expeditions
plant, like bee-stings, the Empire's victorious flags
on small charred ruins, but they return home without joy.
We advance, but with fear! And there is no end to it,
savages simply do not understand defeat.

Translated by Esma Hadžiselimović

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