Author’s Prayer

By Ilya Kaminsky

If I speak for the dead, I must leave this animal of my body,

I must write the same poem over and over, for an empty page is the white flag of their surrender.

If I speak for them, I must walk on the edge of myself, I must live as a blind man who runs through rooms without touching the furniture.

Yes, I live. I can cross the streets asking “What year is it?” I can dance in my sleep and laugh in front of the mirror. Even sleep is a prayer, Lord,

I will praise your madness, and in a language not mine, speak of music that wakes us, music in which we move. For whatever I say is a kind of petition, and the darkest days must I praise.


Source: Dancing in Odessa (Tupelo Press, 2004)