



How Fire Descends: New and Selected Poems

by Serhiy Zhadan

**translated by Virlana Tkacz
and Wanda Phipps**

foreword by Ilya Kaminsky

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HOW FIRE DESCENDS: New and Selected Poems by Serhiy Zhadan, translated by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps ([Yale, £12.99](#))

“The start of a book is like the beginning of a rainstorm,” says the celebrated Ukrainian poet and activist in this momentous collection spanning seven years of resistance, witness and unending hope. Zhadan’s poems are pithy and prophetic, elegant and radically accessible: “No one will remember you for your silence. / No one but you can name the rivers nearby.” I say radical because Zhadan yokes the pedestrian everyday life of eastern Ukraine with the invisible orders of existence and is spiritually attuned to a deep understanding of the forced transience and fragility of buildings and social orders in the post-Soviet east. So the “frightened soul” is “like a dog locked in the kitchen”, “carefree folks” are “like / fish [driven] by the rhythms of ground water”, trees recognize each other “like two people who once shared the same hospital room”. If Zhadan’s poems are universal, they echo the horrors of the contemporary warmongering in the Middle East as well as in eastern Europe: “They didn’t explain that death is local, / it doesn’t run out of the hospital yard, / it is of little interest to anyone, / not part of the funeral procession.” *The Guardian*, “*The best recent poetry – review roundup*” by *Oluwaseun Olayiwola, January 5, 2024.*

HOW FIRE DESCENDS: New and Selected Poems, by Serhiy Zhadan. Translated by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps. (Yale University Press, paperback, \$18.)

In these poems, compiled from 2016 to 2022, the Ukrainian poet commemorates the plight of his compatriots in the face of Russian imperialism and mourns their deaths, “limited / by the silence that comes with it.” *The New York Times*, “*Newly Published Poetry, October 25, 2023.* A version of this article appears in print on Oct. 29, 2023, Page 4 of the Sunday Book Review with the headline: Newly Published Poetry.”

HOW FIRE DESCENDS: New and Selected Poems by Serhiy Zhadan translated from Ukrainian by Virlana Tkacz & Wanda Phipps. Yale University Press. ISBN 9780300272468. Among Ukraine’s most distinguished writers, in prose as well as verse, Zhadan has borne expert witness to Russia’s fire-blasted impingement on his country since the 2014 invasion of Crimea. This volume collects poems dating from 2016 onward, with the most recent reflecting the 2022 invasion (“mutilated landscape... slashed by moonlight”) while proclaiming that “pain and hope unite us.” *Library Journal*, “*Best Poetry of 2023*” by *Barbara Hoffert, December 4, 2023.*

Serhiy Zhadan’s “Of all literature,” from *How Fire Descends* on Poetry Society of America website: <https://poetrysociety.org/poems-essays/visiting-poet/visiting-poet-ilya-kaminsky-on-serhiy-zhadan>