2022 UNT Rilke Prize

Valzhyna Mort - *Music for the Dead and Resurrected*

Valzhyna Mort's *Music for the Dead and Resurrected* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) has won the 2022 UNT Rilke Prize. The $10,000 prize recognizes a book written by a mid-career poet and published in the preceding year that demonstrates exceptional artistry and vision.

Songs of grieving, memory, and witness lie at the center of Valzhyna Mort's latest collection, *Music for the Dead and Resurrected*, a book that makes vivid and palpable the upended history of Belarus, a country filled with "forests / of the unburied dead" and tanks driving through the streets. "The empire fell, then snow fell," Mort writes in "Self-Portrait

with Madonna on Pravda Avenue," pravda meaning truth, a Russian word that, under Soviet rule implied propaganda, disinformation, and the suppression of free speech. Here, the poet reclaims the word. She restores truth in lines informed by historical insight--invasions and wars, exile, the nuclear catastrophe of Chernobyl--and by a biting humor so characteristic of the region. "What has kept us alive?" a speaker asks. "Our death songs" is the dry answer. Mort's poems enact both an elegy and an affirmation that survival is possible, that tongues can go on speaking, "tied with a black ribbon of verse."

Valzhyna Mort
Poems