for hope, she is careful to differentiate a desire for hope and hope itself. Unflinchingly, she ends the book on a somber note: “How to speak the beauty of the world / when life’s hope / crumbles like yarrow.” The perfect words do not yet exist.

Todd Fredson ably captures the images, structure, and tone of Boni’s poetic landscape in a project supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts. No doubt Fredson’s extended visits to the Ivory Coast (first, as a Peace Corps volunteer, and then as a Fulbright Fellow), as well as the fact that he is a prizewinning poet in his own right, have informed this exciting translation.

Nancy Naomi Carlson
Silver Spring, Maryland

Akiyuki Nosaka
The Cake Tree in the Ruins

The Cake Tree in the Ruins is a collection of short stories from Japanese author Akiyuki Nosaka. Famous for the short story from which the Studio Ghibli animation of the same name is derived, “Grave of the Fireflies,” Nosaka lived through the firebombing of Kobe and suffered through the deaths of several family members on the Japanese home front during World War II.

In this collection of short stories, Nosaka transmutes the pain of his personal

Olga Tokarczuk
Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead

From the opening chapter of Olga Tokarczuk’s Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead, we already know that the aging protagonist, Janina Dusezjko, has a special understanding of the world. Her interior monologue is dotted with odd proper nouns—Animals, Ailments, Night, Being—lending them weight and taking a cue from the Old English of poet William Blake. The novel’s title is lifted from Blake’s The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. “The fox condemns the trap, not himself,” Blake writes, setting the tone of this ecological thriller. Published in the wake of Tokarczuk’s well-deserved win of the Man Booker International Prize, Drive Your Plow is a wunderkammer of human and animal struggle and interdependence.

Janina lives alone in a remote community in the Polish southwest, in a region called Silesia that straddles the Czech border. She is the village eccentric, with a passion for astrology and animal rights, making ends meet by tending to her neighbors’ empty cottages in the dead of winter. Then, a string of deaths transforms the sleepy hamlet into a crime scene. Janina’s stewardship of the woods is challenged by the dogmatic hunting culture of the prominent authorities—including the police chief and the priest—as she becomes embroiled in the bureaucracy of the murder investigations. She transforms into a modern Miss Marple, in the company of equally curious, complex, and
experiences into sharp, heart-wrenching depictions of a country in desperate destitu-tion. Each of the stories explores a differ-
et facet of the traumatic experience of war or situates the reader in a new perspective.

Aside from the content itself, perhaps most striking is that the translation renders each of the stories in a style and tone resem-bling that of a children’s fable. There is an ethereal, almost dreamlike quality in the language at odds with the grim reality of the stories, which makes the despair even more present when the inevitable misery and suffer- ing come to be.

Take, for example, the first story in the collection, “The Whale That Fell in Love with a Submarine.” At the outset, it’s a story in which readers peer into the mind of a lonely whale on a quest for love—a story that would not be out of place in a children’s book. However, the whale falls in love with a Japanese submarine that he mistakes for another whale, and the horrors of war mark the rest of the story.

This isn’t to say that every story is sim-ply depressing. Rather, within these bleak realities, Nosaka displays the beauty and power of tenderness between individuals. “The Parrot and the Boy” is about the bond between a young boy and his pet parrot as the two starve in a bomb shelter. “The Mother That Turned into a Kite” is a moving expression of a mother’s self-sacrificing love for her child. In each of these stories, the
capacity to make a story so compelling that it ascends into the public consciousness.

The detective plot is juxtaposed with Janina’s astrological predictions and meta-
physical ruminations on the future of the natural world. The trap this ambitious tale has laid for itself—a knotty copse of ecological and political issues—is deftly circumvented because its characters’ principles develop organically from their personal histories and present conditions. The trapings of translation mean Drive Your Plow has come to the anglophone world a decade later than the original, though no worse for wear in Antonia Lloyd-Jones’s delicate translation.

Once again, Tokarczuk proves herself to be a master of the “thinking novel,” fashion-ing what is simultaneously a compel-ling narrative, measured essay, and fierce manifesto. She never hesitates to preach from the literary pulpit, but her lessons have aged gracefully; what could be a trope of eco-feminist dystopia has arrived in such a fitting contemporary context that its implications have never been so far-reaching or so urgent. Drive Your Plow is both a joy and a call to arms.

Hannah Weber
Brighton, United Kingdom

unruly sidekicks. Tokarczuk’s professional background in psychoanalysis is most evi-dent in her character development—while many authors write characters, she writes people who retain their capacity to surprise the reader.

Border regions have always occupied a special place for writers, and Tokarczuk is no exception. The cold woods and low winter sun emit an eerie familiarity. Janina makes a game of crossing borders: “It gives me pleasure, because I can remem-ber the time when it wasn’t possible. I love crossing borders.” Her dissatisfaction with her increasingly conservative and religious country is especially pronounced in her romantic notions of life on the other side. “Oh yes,” she thinks, “Venus goes to bed in the Czech Republic.”

The fictional Janina has become a pro-test figure in Poland; her name appeared on placards at the demonstrations to save the UNESCO-protected Białowieża Forest from logging. Her witty criticisms, which balance that joyful, acquisitive laughter with the other kind, wry and irreverent, are precisely the kind to get under the politicians’ skin. Tokarczuk proves that the novel can absorb philosophy and politics without losing any-
thing of its unique identity, that magical