

I

“I was born June 28, 1891
on a small farm in Minnesota.”

sunrise in the river valley

mew mew wail mew
baby talk, not much meaning

shocks of swaddled wind

thirst like dreams if you had em

hunger then death

maybe some fresh cream if you're lucky

II

“My father and mother split up when I was
about seven or eight years old.”

vatti where you going

off, pulling out

should have done all along

the scale of disaster, unspeakable

the split, the disappearance

who can blame him
just a man, not worth a piss

III

“As fast as the older boys grew up, they also pulled out.”

One died

A sister, a brother, a mother

and a thief and a liar remained to live

meanness upon meanness

work upon work, on a farm that wouldn't give

school, a misery, and work from daylight til dark

Americans under our own truncheon

toil and beatings without check or sense

for a boy not yet nine times round the sun

IV

"I have done as I was taught to do.
I am no different from any other."

Drunk, disorderly

at nine years old, a visit to juvenile court

mother in her poor dress, her accent thick
with the old country

the judge cock-eyed and stern

Stern means star, in German

Not that you give a shit
your honor

V

"At about that time I began to suspect that there was something wrong about the treatment I
was getting from the rest of the human race."

it ain't enough to suffer alone

so we share suffering

it is our thievery, our delight
the itinerary of our rage

we are the vehicles of it
the horse and buggy and traincar of pain
in a numb world, without justice
we hammer each other into form

til we cease to exist as children
til childhood erodes, for those
to whom it was never destined

the Pullouts know this differently
from those who remain