

NATURAL HISTORY

In Block 18 the professor from Amsterdam
traded his shirt for a stub of a pencil
and a school notebook, ruled in sections

for beating, by implement — rifle butt, hose
or hand; transgressions of the Hippocratic Oath;
making people watch death, by kind of death;

making people steal. Not to remember, he said,
but to learn, the way in 1652 Menasseh
ben Israel listed demons — possessors, imps,

snatchers of purses and cats, poltergeists,
dybbuks, child killers — evil put in order,
like Brazilian vipers, inventoried, soon

understood. Before they took him to the KB
he paid Jean two crusts to guard the book. Who
sold it, page by page, for rolling cigarettes.