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## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Tomas Tranströmer: A Symposium</td>
<td>Pamela Alexander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>A Celebration of Seven Stanzas</td>
<td>Malena Mörling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>The Mystery Passes By</td>
<td>Kevin Prufer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Uneasy Meditation</td>
<td>John F. Deane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Many Shadows</td>
<td>Tony Hoagland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Orchestral Layering and “Streets in Shanghai”</td>
<td>Robert Bly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Toward Blue Mountains</td>
<td>Robin Fulton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Poets without Borders</td>
<td>Jean Valentine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>The Light</td>
<td>Charles Simic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>In My Grandmother’s Time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>As I Was Saying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Bare Trees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Post-Elegy</td>
<td>Wayne Miller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Unsigned Letter</td>
<td>Nance Van Winckel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Dear Yesteryear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Living as Magnets</td>
<td>Bret Shepard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Threshold Gods</td>
<td>Jenny George</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>The Farrowing Crate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Silage</td>
<td>Carol Potter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Field Revealed as Runway by Morning</td>
<td>Julia Shipley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Timothy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne Marie Macari</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Labyrinth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>All Souls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattianne Rogers</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Scarlatti Sonata Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marosa di Giorgio</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>from The March Hare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>translated by Adam Giannelli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff Oaks</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Even in Pittsburgh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Having Read Tranströmer All Night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71</td>
<td>For the Small Hairs of My Nose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Crossland</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Bullet in a Pear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Bullet in an Egg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Bullet in a Rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Bullet in the Queen of Hearts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Bullet in a Row of Chalk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Bullet in a Light Bulb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuno Raeber</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Oath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>translated by Stuart Friebert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chase Twichell</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>Before the Ash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mimi White</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>What the Wind Says</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Howell</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>Desperately Composed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>War of the Worlds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy Fagan</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>Letter to What’s Mostly Missing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>82</td>
<td>The White, the Red, &amp; the Pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In-Between</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonja James</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>Captured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Knauth</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>Visitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>85</td>
<td>Summer Still Comes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>86</td>
<td>The Accident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Salter Path</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce Smith</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>“I rode the bus”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>89</td>
<td>“Pink in the swamp”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Fitchett</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>VCR Paused to the Extra in Teen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wolf Exposing Himself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha Zweig</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>To Distraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>92</td>
<td>Wattle &amp; Daub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan Murphy</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>Faithless, II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilah Hegnauer</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>Jar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilyn Hacker</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>Headlines in October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>97</td>
<td>Contributors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TOMAS TRANSTRÖMER

A FIELD SYMPOSIUM
FIELD’s association with Tomas Tranströmer goes back to our very first issue (Fall 1969), where we published three of his poems in Robert Bly’s translations, along with a brief introduction/appreciation by Bly. Bly noted Tranströmer’s gift for images—“He has a strange genius for the image—images come up almost effortlessly”—and went on to praise the spaces, silences, and distances in the poems.

Around that same time, Bly helped arrange an American reading tour for Tranströmer, and we got to meet him. His presence was compelling without being pretentious, and it was easy to admire and participate in his centered sense of self and his deep love of poetry. David Walker, a student at the time, remembers vividly the generosity and encouragement the poet gave him in producing two translations that appeared in our fourth issue:

The tugboat is freckled with rust. What’s it doing so far inland?
It is a heavy lamp, extinguished by the cold.
(from “Sketch in October”)

Subsequent issues of FIELD featured more versions by Bly, by Robin Fulton, and, once again, by an Oberlin student, Tim Dwyer (in #23, 1980).

There has always been something otherworldly about Tranströmer’s work. As Bly remarks elsewhere, he possesses the spiritual equivalent of night vision. His physical world is as solid and substantial as that rust-freckled tugboat in the lines quoted above. But it is also shot through with spiritual insights (the lamp metaphor that alters our sense of the tugboat’s meaning) and, indeed, with metaphysical possibilities. The dead are a sensed presence, always, uneasily sharing this world with the living. A single tree, properly understood, can instruct us both about its mortality and its immortality. Such facts and insights are presented intensively yet offhandedly, dilating our awareness and privileging us to a share of the visionary power this poet has always possessed, from early in his career until the present. He also has the capacity to tease himself about visionary states and perceptions, an attribute that visionary poets don’t always come equipped with.
Simply to say that Tranströmer has been fortunate in his translators is to fail to recognize how proactive, helpful, and collaborative he has been in reaching out to them, and how quickly he has formed lasting friendships. Poets who have read and admired his work for many years now celebrate him for these qualities as well as for the resonant, majestic poems composed over many years. The recent award of the Nobel Prize for literature was a cause for rejoicing among discerning poets and readers, in the U.S. and Great Britain, as well as around the rest of the world. Thus it is that, as we made plans for this symposium, we had no shortage of writers willing and able to undertake to choose a favorite poem and write briefly about it. We could easily have filled an entire issue with such tributes.

Tranströmer’s voice and manner, while they can be compared to other twentieth-century poets, have always been distinctive and recognizable. Some of our contributors have had the experience of translating the poet; others know him simply from their reading. But all of them recognize the distinction and individuality of his writing, and in quite various ways they pursue a means of discussing and admiring those qualities.

A symposium for this poet, in these pages, might be thought of as overdue. But Tranströmer’s timelessness alleviates guilt. There is no moment that is inappropriate for saying how much we admire this writer, and for how long that has been the case.
ALLEGRO

After a black day, I play Haydn,
and feel a little warmth in my hands.

The keys are ready. Kind hammers fall.
The sound is spirited, green, and full of silence.

The sound says that freedom exists
and someone pays no tax to Caesar.

I shove my hands in my haydn pockets
and act like a man who is calm about it all.

I raise my haydn flag. The signal is:
“We do not surrender. But want peace.”

The music is a house of glass standing on a slope;
rocks are flying, rocks are rolling.

The rocks roll straight through the house
but every pane of glass is still whole.

_translated by Robert Bly_
I have long admired Tranströmer’s “Allegro” for its casual surrealism, which, like a good trope, blends the ordinary and the strange. The reader is taken by surprise but nevertheless, in a state of pleasant shock, recognizes the accuracy of the poem’s imagery.

Most often I re-visit “Allegro” in Robert Bly’s graceful translation.

1. The first line poses the poem’s two forces. “Black” is cold, a cold felt in the extremities, felt in extremis, against which the hands’ small atmospheres of warmth appear weak.

2. Since the keys are always ready, better to go to the muse than to wait for her. We sit on the bench with the speaker, not in the black robes of judgment but in green. Kindness counters the cold day, implying as it does a connection with other people. Or does it? Metta is a Buddhist term for loving-kindness toward all beings, including oneself. The speaker has summoned the reader(s), at least, and so is not alone.

Our spirits rise with the speaker’s; they hear beyond black.

3. Our freedom is ready, too, when we are.

4. How better to make Haydn one’s own than to pocket him? The lower-case h is one of Bly’s many small successes, showing that haydn is Haydn democratized, a hybrid of him and the speaker and you and me.

This year of the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee, thousands of coffee mugs and T-shirts beseech us to Keep Calm and Carry On, a motto created by some alliterative genius (no doubt of Anglo-Saxon ancestry) in the U.K.’s Ministry of Information in 1939. Here the speaker has stopped playing and is able to act only as if calm; the struggle of the first stanza continues.
5. Music cannot be surrendered, nor poetry; they are not available for such rites of war. We want peace, and by now “we” are quite a crowd: the speaker, the piano and its hammers, Haydn, Haydn’s readers, and Tranströmer’s.

6. The house where music and literature live is in danger, grave danger, every minute!

7. And yet it is unharmed by Caesars and by stones. With pleasant shock we see that the house lives in a different dimension from military and civilian harm.

But where is the speaker in the last two stanzas? Gone. We can go where the house lives but we cannot stay.
I drive through a village at night, the houses step out into the headlights—they are awake, they want to drink. Houses, barns, signs, stray vehicles—it is now that they assume Life—The people are sleeping:

some sleep peacefully, others have strained features as if they were in hard training for eternity. They don’t dare to let go of it all even though their sleep is heavy. They rest like crossing gates when the mystery passes by.

Outside the village the road runs a while through the trees of the forest. And the trees, the trees resonate silence between them. They have a theatrical color that occurs in the light of fires. Their leaves are so clear! They follow me all the way home.

I lie about to fall asleep, I glimpse unknown images and signs drawn on the inside of my eyelids on the wall of darkness. In the crack between wakefulness and dream a large letter tries in vain to push itself through.

*translated by Malena Mörling*
What is the signature characteristic of a poem by Tomas Tranströmer? Is it the calm and effortless diction of his self-enclosed lines? Or the precise heft of his unmistakable tone of voice, or his images that are lingering as if permanently in our retinas? Or perhaps it is the depth, the untroubled depth that floats up in his poems to meet the words, the undersides of the words? Or, finally, is it possibly the sleight-of-hand mastery (and mystery) of his use of metaphor? Or is it simultaneously none of the above and all of the above, the spell of it all?

Take for instance Tranströmer’s poem “Nocturne,” from his third collection of poems, *The Half-Finished Heaven*, first published in Sweden in 1962. In it, as readers, we instantly fuse with the speaker and join his journey through a village at night where, as he drives by them, “the houses step out / into the headlights—” and where further we experience that “they are awake” and “want to drink.” Tranströmer knows how to animate what is inanimate, not by describing the external features of an object, but by calmly stating its innermost need. And by doing this, it is as if a spell has been cast as we go on traveling, passing “Houses, barns, signs, stray vehicles—it is now / that they assume Life—” As is evident here, Tranströmer doesn’t stand in the way of what he is saying. It is as if, by avoiding undue description and background information, he nearly allows for the scene and the things that are a part of the scene to in a sense tell their own stories. And further, like an expert cinematographer, he cuts to, brings us up close to “the people” who “are sleeping: // some sleep peacefully, others have strained features / as if they were in hard training for eternity. / ...They rest like crossing gates when the mystery passes by.”

So far in this poem we have engaged with two consecutive scenes reflecting two opposing realities. First, the houses that are generally inanimate are rendered animate and awake in the night, revealing the core need of their thirst. Second, some of the sleeping humans are rendered dull as if they were almost objects. This kind of initial semantic parallel structure is a recurring characteristic in
Tranströmer’s poems. The mention of the mystery is also something that recurs. But what is the mystery?

Tranströmer wrote this poem long before the advent of highways in Sweden. He wrote it when a country road still temporarily turned into the main street of a village or town only to, on the other side of it, resume being a country road. This is why the poem proceeds with: “Outside the village the road runs a while through the trees of the forest.” In contrast to both the aforementioned houses and the sleeping people, the trees are awake, in a whole new manner of being awake. But awake to what? To each other, as they “resonate silence between them”? To the mystery, but what is the mystery?

In the final stanza of the poem we have traveled with the speaker all the way home to his house where he is now lying, about to fall asleep: “I glimpse unknown images / and signs drawn on the inside of my eyelids / on the wall of darkness.”

Tranströmer has referred to his own poems as “meeting places,” and indeed meeting places they are—especially in regard to the place where dream meets reality and vice versa, in the mind of man, inside the confines of the human skull. Tranströmer has a way of seeing as if through walls (in another poem, “A Winter’s Night,” you will find the lines “And the house feels its constellation of nails / holding the walls together”) and temporarily dissolving the walls of this world so that we may have the opportunity to view ourselves, if only momentarily, as we irrationally dwell in our very own little prisons constructed by our own narrow, conventional human thinking. Because, doesn’t it all begin and end with ourselves, who we are?

In the poem ”Preludes,” from his later collection Seeing in the Dark, Tranströmer expresses it this way: “Two truths approach one another. One is coming from inside / one coming from outside / and where they meet you have a chance to see yourself.”
OUT IN THE OPEN

1.
Late autumn labyrinth.
A discarded bottle lies at the entrance to the wood.
Walk in. The forest in this season is a silent palace of abandoned rooms.
Only a few, precise sounds: as if someone were lifting twigs with tweezers;
as if, inside each tree-trunk, a hinge was creaking quietly.
Frost has breathed on the mushrooms and they’ve shrivelled up;
they are like the personal effects of the disappeared.
It is almost dusk. You need to leave now,
find your landmarks again: the rusted implements out in the field
and the house on the other side of the lake, red-brown
and square and solid as a stock-cube.

2.
A letter from America set me off, drove me out
on a white night in June through the empty suburban streets
among built blocks, cool as blueprints, too new to have memories.

The letter in my pocket. My unquiet raging stride a kind of prayer.
Where you are now, evil and good really do have faces.
Here, it’s mostly a struggle between roots, numbers, transitions of light.

Those that run messages for death don’t shy from daylight.
They govern from glass offices. They swell in the sun.
They lean over their desks and look at you askance.

Far away from that, I find myself in front of one of the new buildings.
Many windows merging into one window.
The light of the night sky and the swaying of the trees are caught there:
in this still mirror-lake, up-ended in the summer night.
Violence seems unreal
for a while.

3.
The sun is scorching. The plane comes in low,
throwing a shadow in the shape of a giant cross, rushing over the
ground.
A man crouches over something in the field.
The shadow reaches him.
For a split-second he is in the middle of the cross.

I have seen the cross that hangs from cool church arches.
Sometimes it seems like a snapshot
of frenzy.

*translated by Robin Robertson*
I've been writing a lot recently about sentimentality. Contemporary critics have an uncannily fine radar for hints of it in literature, and when a literary type accuses a poem of being "sentimental," she damns it completely. But what exactly does the word mean, beyond a general sort of ickiness?

The standard definition, that a sentimental poem is laden with an overabundance of inappropriate or contrived emotion, is wrongheaded in fairly obvious ways. After all, it's easy for any reader to come up with a work of clearly sentimental literature in which the abundance of emotion is neither too much, contrived, nor inappropriate. Is one easily too emotional, for instance, about the death of a small child, or inappropriately sad about the death of one's father? Can a strong emotional response to the ravages of war—at a time when news of war seems to surround us—be so quickly tossed aside as "contrived"? As a literary editor, I have seen many poems on just such subjects that, though clearly sentimental (and, therefore, not very good), are guilty of none of these specific literary transgressions. They are sad, angry, yearning in the right very strong measure, and still sentimental as hell.

Perhaps, I thought, a clue to what we mean when we call a poem sentimental today might lie in the past. And this got me thinking about the great Modernist poets—specifically the World War I poets who saw in sentimentality not mere tastelessness or overabundance, but political danger. For them, sentimentality, the Victorian Romantics' tendency to glorify valor, battle, nationalism, was itself cause for deep unease. Sentimental language lent itself too easily to war propaganda. Too quickly, it became politically dangerous language, arousing in ordinary citizens weird fondnesses for destructive notions of purity, exciting popular nationalism, whipping people into war frenzy. (And if you're not familiar with WWI propagandist Jesse Pope, who figures prominently in Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est," you have only to look to the Bush administration's expert use of sentimental language during the run-ups to our more recent wars.)
Considered this way, sentimental language—in poetry or politics—is simplifying language. It has less to do with too much emotion than it does with reduction, with the sentimentalist's failure to think about a large subject, one we feel emotional about, with complexity. Had we thought complexly about America's role in the world, we probably wouldn't have gotten mired in Iraq. Had the bad poets I alluded to above thought complexly about a God that allows a young child to die, or the situation of being rendered suddenly fatherless, I doubt we'd accuse their poems of sentimentality. This isn't to say that emotion always interferes with complexity—of course, it doesn't—but that great poems think with nuance and complexity about their subject matter and that, at core, a descent into sentimentality is usually accompanied by the reduction of a complex situation into an inappropriately simple one.

With this in mind, I'm ready to accuse a great deal of contemporary political poetry—poetry of outrage, of cool ironic distance, of moral furor—of simplification that at least borders on sentimentality. And, more than this, I'm interested in the idea that many great political poems might not be those we recognize immediately as political—that is, they are poems born of complex situations in which no thinking person could help but feel strongly in multiple, conflicting ways. Ambivalence, not certainty, might be the natural position of the complex thinker at work on a difficult moral (political) subject. Perhaps that complex thinker, who I imagine lives in every great political poem, arrives at a strong conclusion. Perhaps he doesn't. Perhaps his conclusion is continued ambivalence. One version is neither more nor less "political" than the other—though both certainly avoid sentimentality (or its cousin, dogmatism).

Take, for example, Tomas Tranströmer's "Out in the Open," a brilliant, ambivalent, complex, utterly unsentimental poem—a poem that is political because it thinks hard about a political situation. The triggering subject here—the thing Tranströmer says "set me off"—is certainly the "letter from America" mentioned at the start of section 2, in actuality a letter from the poet's friend and translator Robert Bly, who had recently co-founded Poets and Writers Against the Vietnam War and, years later, would assert (in a 2002 interview with poet Ray González) that this poem is clearly "about the Vietnam War." (The
The poem was originally published in Sweden in 1966; Bly would go on to translate it and publish it in his seminal *The Seventies* some years later. What a series of highly nuanced responses that letter sets off in the mind of the poem’s speaker, who, in three unequal sections, shifts from one troubled setting to another, each imbued with symbolic danger, violence, and hints of war.

In the first, Tranströmer sets us near the “entrance to the wood,” in which familiar landmarks fall away. Here, the speaker struggles to describe his experience of the forest, but can only reach for metaphors whose objects are ominous, unsatisfying, and, weirdly, mundane:

> Only a few precise sounds: as if someone were lifting twigs with tweezers, as if, inside each tree-trunk, a hinge was creaking softly. Frost has breathed on the mushrooms and they’ve shriveled up; they are like the personal effects of the disappeared.

Ultimately, the forest landscape, with all its undercurrents of death, anxiety, and victimhood, does nothing to ease the mind of the speaker, who, thinking of his familiar, civilized landmarks, tells himself, “You need to leave now.”

And leave he does, to “suburban streets / among built blocks, cool as blueprints, too new to have memories. / The letter in my pocket.” In America, he asserts, “evil and good really do have faces,” whereas in Sweden things are a little less clear-cut. “Here,” he writes, “it’s mostly a struggle between roots, numbers, transitions of light.” Nevertheless, the speaker imagines evil—“those that run messages for death”—governing shiftily from glass offices, offices that close the speaker out, who must look up at them from below, “many windows merging into one window.” From this bureaucratic distance and sterility, “Violence seems unreal / for a while.”

The third section begins with a scene full of violent possibilities. Here, Tranströmer writes, the sun “is scorching.” A plane “comes in low,” perhaps a fighter plane, perhaps another plane that excites the speaker’s worried imagination. In its shadow, a man “crouches in a field” (or, in Bly’s translation, “a man is sitting in the field poking at
something”). This inspires in Tranströmer two competing images. In
the first, the plane throws “a shadow of a giant cross” that eventual-
ly reaches the man, who, “for a split-second,” is in its darkened
center, perhaps suggesting those—the “disappeared” of the first sec-
tion?—who are now sacrificed in our wars.

Tranströmer moves from here to an image that might be de-
scribed as the reverse of the one he’s just described: “I have seen the
cross that hangs from cool church arches.” Here, the sun-scorched
sky is replaced by the “cool church arches,” and the airplane-like-a-
cross becomes a cross-like-an-airplane, “a snapshot of frenzy” hang-
ing over not only the defenseless peasant, but all of us who could do
good, but do not. Or, as the critic John Wilson has suggested, “Evil
isn’t simply out there somewhere, in someone else, in ‘them.’ We are
all complicit, as we were all complicit in the crucifixion.” In a recent
essay in Antioch Review, critic Mark Gustafson quotes from a letter to
Robert Bly in which Tranströmer explains that the second cross, un-
like the first, is “something positive, helpful...something nearer to us
than everything else and also something we can only glimpse for an
instant,” both an embrace and a reminder of our moral, political
obligations.

Of Tranströmer’s work in general, his translator Robin Robert-
son has written:

Tranströmer’s is a poetry of sharp contrasts and duality—a
double world of dark and light, inside and outside, dreaming and
waking, man and machine, stillness and turmoil—and he is fas-
cinated by the pressure between the world we know and the hid-
den world we cannot deny.... The image of man as a diminished,
vulnerable creature—distanced from nature, protected by his
machine but open to sudden accident, is a recurring one, and this
combination of a natural landscape and abrupt, violent meetings
with the mechanical, the unnatural, is a hallmark of his work.

It is this meditation on contrasts, these shifting dualities that suggest
to me the complex mind at work in so many of Tranströmer’s poems.
“Out in the Open” among them. Reading it, I have the strange sen-
sation of listening in on the nuanced thoughts of another, of someone far smarter and more subtle than I am. He considers a problem—here, his complex response to the letter from his American friend and, more generally, the Vietnam War—and his mind becomes increasingly unsettled. He feels ambivalent, if ambivalence can be understood as feeling very strongly in conflicting directions. That ambivalence crescendos in the poem's last moments, catching us between two visions of the cross, two ways of thinking about political morality and complicity. Little in this poem is, finally, settled—though that is, perhaps, not the point. Rather, our understanding of war—of our roles within it, as elements of a nation, as warlike figures under the shadow of God—has been deepened. And, because he approaches the subject with complexity and intelligence, Tranströmer engages us in vigorous and enlivening meditation.
THE FORGOTTEN CAPTAIN

We have many shadows. I was on my way home one September night when Y after forty years climbed up out of his grave and kept me company.

At first he was a total blank, a name merely but his ideas swam more quickly than time could run and caught us up.

I put his eyes to my eyes and saw the ocean of war. The last boat he sailed materialized beneath us.

Ahead, astern, ships of the Atlantic convoy crept, the ones that would survive and the ones that bore The Mark (invisible to everyone)

while sleepless days took over from one another but never did from him— his life jacket bulged under his oilskin. He never did come home.

An internal weeping made him bleed to death in a hospital in Cardiff. He could, at last, lay himself down and be transformed to a horizon.

Farewell eleven-knot convoys! Farewell 1940! Here ends the history of the world. The bombers were left hanging on the air. The heather-covered moors came into bloom.
A photo from the beginning of this century shows a strand. 
Six well-dressed boys stand there. 
They have sailing boats in their arms. 
And my! What grave expressions!

Boats that became life and death for some of them. 
And to write about the dead—
that is another game that will grow ponderous
with what is yet to come.

translated by John F. Deane
I was born on Achill Island, an island in the Atlantic Ocean on the far west of Ireland, remote and self-contained, apart from the need of so many islanders to emigrate in order to find work. I was brought up in a Roman Catholic family and culture in which everything in life was clear, established and unchangeable. Between here and eternal life there were simple, clear rules to be followed; outside those rules and regulations there was destruction. In other words, I was brought up to be impermeable to the things of this world. My focus was Heaven; the laws of Holy Church, impeccably observed, would bring me there. In tandem with such a focus, the poetry I read and studied, right up through my Bachelor of Arts degree in English, had forms and regulations that allowed the work to be called *Poetry* (capital P) as opposed to prose. Themes were pretty well established; the language was to be “poetic,” “free verse” was still an abomination, and rigorous classifications of theme and development were to be followed. I had not yet encountered any form of modernism; I had not been introduced to Eliot, or Hughes, or Kavanagh. I was impermeable to the magic of metaphor and contemporary idiom.

And then I discovered the poetry of Tomas Tranströmer, in a Penguin paperback, in translation by Robert Bly. Even the title stirred me to a place I had never been before: “Truth Barriers.” I read the poems through and, because I was still impermeable, a great deal was lost to me. But I was shivering with the excitement of discovery and I knew there was something here I had to make clear to myself. I read and read again. The imagery was astonishing to me, astonishing in itself and in what it pointed towards.

I read in books of glass but could only see the other: stains pushing their way through the wallpaper.
These were the living dead wanting to have their portraits painted.

There was a sense of recognition growing in me, a contact with reality that suddenly opened out into realms of wonder and acknowledgment; I felt, for the first time, that I had broken through some
“truth barrier.” I had no Swedish, and yet I felt that there was something lacking in the translations I had before me. I had become permeable, I believe now, yet there was a blockage somewhere, and I felt it was in the language and movement of the translator’s work; something was not quite right, at least not for me. I can only put that down to some sort of “daimon” that spoke to me out of a hidden place in the work. A daimon that was calling to me from the originals. I believe the most fruitful way of attempting the translation of poetry is to recognise, first of all, the daimon of the poet one hopes to translate. That may be a simple, but true, way of saying that I moved easily and rewardingly into the poetry of this great Swedish poet. Over the years, then, I sent Tomas my versions; he responded, and between us we worked on three collections of his work, which I published in Ireland. The meeting of daimon with daimon has been most fruitful, for me, at least.

Take the poem, in the collection For the Living and the Dead, called “The Forgotten Captain.” The poem takes you at once in medias res: “We have many shadows.” The calmly stated event of a forty-year dead person who “climbed up out of his grave / and kept me company,” as if this were an everyday, unremarkable occurrence, is striking. Tranströmer works often like this, getting in under the skin of the reader without fanfare. This opening echoes well with many Irish poems, vision poems or Ashlings, which begin with lines like “as I roved out one morning” and go on to tell of Ireland’s sufferings under occupation. It is a device allowing the poet to move well beyond the everyday factual into the richest reaches of imagination.

The device outlined next is similarly fruitful: “I put his eyes to my eyes and saw / the ocean of war,” at once distancing the poet from the subject and still allowing him to ‘cast a cold eye’ from the closest possible distance on that same subject as the captain’s boat “materialized.” So we find ourselves on the water, in the convoy during war, and the description moves slowly towards the line “He never did come home.” We are prepared, however, for that line by the poet speaking of “The Mark,” an invisible fate that is stamped somehow on those who would not survive. Gradually, while we sail along with the poet, and the Captain who has been “forgotten,”
Tranströmer is most deftly manipulating us, the readers, preparing us for that exact and exacting sense of fate in life that is, as Tranströmer says in "From March '79," "language but no words."

There is a small surprise when we learn the Captain has not died in the war but in a hospital in Cardiff; if he had his life jacket bulging under his oilskin, expecting death, perhaps, by drowning, fate got in the way and took him, instead, by an internal bleeding. Then we have a fairly typical shift into utter imaginative elan when we learn he could "at last," as if this is what he had been longing for, "be transformed to a horizon." The phrase makes sense only with what comes after; the horizon is in the distance, the limit of what we can make out. The next two stanzas move back from the war to the Captain's youth; the dreadful bleak horror of war gives way to "heather-covered moors" in bloom, and still, as far as the Captain is concerned, the history of the world ends, for him, at his death.

The poem then moves back into private dreams, back some 35 or 40 years to the Captain's, and the century's, youth. The device used to touch on this is a photo of a strand, where six "well-dressed boys" stand with most serious expressions on their faces, their actual dreams in their hands in the form of small sailing-boats. We do not know what the future will bring; "Boats that became life and death for some of them," but not, in fact, for our Captain. This is the moment where we ought to remember the very first statement of this poem "We have many shadows": one of these follows us through life, it is our horizon, it is our death, it is our fate. As the young boys stood with their toy sailing-boats in their arms, life for them—boats, sailing, the sea, the coming war—may well have seemed like a game. So Tranströmer leads us into his last lines, and touches on poetry itself: "to write about the dead," as he has just done, is "another game" that will grow "ponderous" because we do not know what is ahead of us. Tomas Tranströmer uncannily seems to have foreseen his own illness; tragically, in 1990 he suffered a severe stroke that left him unable to speak and caused paralysis of the right side of his body. In "Baltics," published in 1974, he had these lines:
Then, cerebral haemorrhage: paralysis on the right side with aphasia, can grasp only short phrases, says the wrong words.

Beyond the reach of eulogy or execration.

But the music’s left, he goes on composing in his own style, for the rest of his days he becomes a medical sensation.

(in Robin Fulton’s translation)

In “The Forgotten Captain” there are the last lines: “that is another game that will grow ponderous / with what is yet to come.” Robert Bly has: “Even to write about the dead / is also a play that turns heavy / from the weight of what is to come”; Robin Fulton has: “And writing about the dead— / that too is a game, made heavy / with what is to come.” “Play” appears wrong to me, and the word “heavy” does not carry a great deal of sense. So I went for “ponderous,” a word that conveys the sense of heavy, weighty, solemnly and seriously laboured. Such individual words are key moments in a Tranströmer poem; the richness of the vision here links past to future by the first line of the poem linking to the very last, while the present tense comes into focus in the third to last line. Such seeming ease of finding breadth and depth in a poem insists on the reader, too, becoming vulnerable to the world. It is a rare achievement.

Tomas Tranströmer’s winning of the Nobel Prize has been one of the great delights of my life, one of trust, at last, in the Nobel selection process. His poetry is one that opens the world to a loving scrutiny that changes the reader’s view of things. His poetry broke so many barriers in my own life that any poems of worth I may have written, I owe to his original influence. His is a deeply human and resonating voice, capacious, exciting and immensely readable.
I
Many in the park are reading the white butterfly.
I love that cabbage butterfly as if it were a fluttering corner of truth itself!

At dawn the running crowds set our silent planet going.
Then the park fills with people. For each one eight faces polished like jade, for all situations, to avoid mistakes.
For each one also the invisible face that reflects "something you don’t talk about."
Something that emerges in tired moments and is as pungent as a sip of Viper schnapps, with its long, scaly aftertaste.

The carp in the pond are always moving, they swim while they’re sleeping, they are an example for the faithful: always in motion.

II
Now it’s noon. The washing flutters in the gray sea wind high above the cyclists who come in tight shoals. Notice the labyrinths to the sides!

I am surrounded by written characters I can’t interpret. I am illiterate through and through.
But I have paid what I’m supposed to and I have receipts for everything. I have gathered so many unreadable receipts.
I am an old tree with withered leaves that hang on and can’t fall to earth.

And a gust from the sea rustles all these receipts.

III
At dawn the trudging crowds set our silent planet going.
We’re all on board the street, it’s as crowded as the deck of a ferry.
Where are we going? Are there enough teacups? We can consider ourselves fortunate for getting on this street in time!
It's a thousand years before the birth of claustrophobia.

Behind each one walking here hovers a cross that wants to catch up to us, pass us, join us. Something that wants to sneak up on us from behind and cover our eyes and whisper, “Guess who?”

We look almost happy out in the sun, while we bleed to death from wounds we know nothing about.

*translated by Samuel Charters*
Tomas Tranströmer’s brilliance as an intuitive, imagist poet is a celebrated, widely-accepted fact. His imagist work was surely the basis for his initial appeal to the epiphany-hungry American poets of the sixties and seventies. Surely his congruence with the values of the Deep Image movement was a prime reason for his initial translation into American English. Tranströmer’s early poems lean heavily on image for their “leaping” revelatory impact—they are designed to trigger a moment of associative epiphany. And they succeed.

Examples of this aspect of his talent abound, like this image from the short late poem called “Snow Is Falling”:

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The funerals keep coming
more and more of them
like the traffic signs
as we approach a city....
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The intuitive, analogical imagination here is at once simple, startling and deep, and, as is the way with good imagist poems, the intelligence lies *underneath* the images, unarticulated, and therefore “undamaged” by discursive handling. You could say that in Tranströmer, mystery is undiminished by rationality.

This dimension of Tranströmer’s talent is such a key strength, there is no doubt that its deep taproots hold upright all his longer poems as well. But to me, even the most amazing of his remarkable "deep image" poems is essentially a smaller achievement than his orchestral poems. The former are no small feat—they succeed in creating a contact between ordinary consciousness and the ineffable, or infinite. In each of these compact poems is a compressed insight, a flash, a kernelled mystery, a breakthrough.

Nonetheless, for me, what makes Tranströmer a great, world-class poet are the grave, multifaceted visions contained in his larger, more dialectical or polytonal poems, poems like "Baltics" or "Carillon" or "Streets in Shanghai."

To put it a little differently, it is Tranströmer’s ability to orchestrate multiple realms in a single poem that most deeply meets my
needs as a reader. As a result of the nuanced, profound complexity of his best poems, Transtrømer is one of the few poets with whom one can actually use the term “reality” without feeling entirely foolish.

Do I short-change the brilliant image-poems? If so, I suppose it is because I have personally had enough flashes in my time, enough deep but fleeting insights, to feel that, in the end, they are not transformative. All those bright moments put together will not construct a foundation upon which one might live coherently.

Another way in which Transtrømer’s larger poems are significantly distinct from his “flash” poems is that the former are deeply modern: dialectical in their diversity of materials, and dense with irresolvable relativities. When a poem can collate the psychological, the pantheistic, the scientific, the semiotic, the economic, and political dimensions, it is safe to say that its ambitions are more than transcendental. In his orchestral poems, Transtrømer is not just a student of human nature, but a student of the age.

This reciprocal need that exists between reader and poem—how can we ignore, or underestimate it? Great art presents itself, at a given time, in a given culture, or at a particular point in a person’s life, as an instrument of responsiveness in tune with the human beings around it. In Transtrømer’s greatest poetry what I most value is the narrative it provides about the experience of a modern human being, agonizingly, deliciously, in touch with many layers of actuality at once.

SHANGHAI STREETS

The poem “Streets in Shanghai” is a spectacular example of such orchestral layering of tones and counterpoised realms. In three sections, and inside those sections, the poem wanders, dips and rises between levels of the real, giving each layer its due, nodding to it, positioning its various observations.

The general terms of the poem are these: “Streets in Shanghai” is a meditation set in China, narrated by a foreign speaker whom we easily identify with the poet himself. The perspective of the speaker is mobile, and includes many shifts in scale, and shifts of reference: thus the poem manages to be both a romantic and an existential
soliloquy, as well as a more detached survey of the human condition. The speaker, who stands in as a kind of philosophical pilgrim, moves through states of relative omniscience, childlike natural wonder, psychoanalytic observation, and existential fatality. It is the “layering” of data, scale, and responses to experience which gives the poem its remarkable resonance.

To illustrate Tranströmer’s consummate ability to suspend and orchestrate different systems and realms, I would like to point out some specific moments of “Streets in Shanghai” which I think invoke particular perspectives of the real. At the risk of being clinical, I wish to label those moments and comment on them in terms of the systems they invoke.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL

Then the park fills with people. For each one eight faces polished like jade, for all situations, to avoid mistakes.

For each one also the invisible face that reflects “something you don’t talk about.”

Though delivered off-handedly, the perception here is a distinctly psychoanalytic version of the human condition, of the protective masks humans wear, of their general condition of anxiety, and more specifically, of their psychological repression of unwanted feelings. Each individual is enclosed and hidden in his own selfhood, secretive and disguised from others. Even more frightening, these selves are concealed from themselves.

THE EXISTENTIAL

Something that merges in tired moments and is a pungent as a sip of Viper schnapps, with its long, scaly aftertaste.

This wonderful image extends the preceding perception, yes, but the strangeness of the image carries associative echoes of folkloric or medieval origin. It tastes of superstition. In this image, we catch a whiff
of the devil of medieval (maybe North European) Christianity. However, the sentiment it recognizes, of being exhausted with one’s own illusions, seems existential in affect.

**THE OMNISCIENT**

At dawn the trudging crowds set our silent planet going.... It’s a thousand years before the birth of claustrophobia.

Although it may seem obvious to point out, these sweeping, encompassing statements made by the speaker of the poem establish a framing perspective essential to its cumulative impact: the omniscient capacity of consciousness. All other variations, tones and systems in the poem are in some way sheltered by such overarching “establishing shots.”

**THE SEMIOTIC**

I am surrounded by written characters I can’t interpret. I am illiterate through and through.

Overall, section II of “Streets in Shanghai” is elegiac in tone, and hits notes of both ironic self-mockery and personal pathos. It is the most emotionally “attached” part of the poem in terms of the speaker’s voice, and thus crucial in the development of the poem: its tone of grief asserts an emotional investment that would not otherwise be in the poem.

More specifically, section II’s overall structuring metaphor, of illiteracy, has a semiotic lilt, depicting, as it does, the world as a place composed of unreadable signs. That metaphor seems clearly drawn from modern notions about language and meaning-making, the insight that language is not merely a transparent medium, but at times a broken bridge, a blank wall. In the poem, the speaker finds himself in an epistemologically poignant predicament: he is unable to “read” reality, which may in fact be ultimately illegible. He is a blind man: the speaker’s illiteracy is existential. What I wish to point out is how
this metaphor invokes a modern idea and the network of understandings it is attached to. That evocation greatly amplifies—and contemporizes—the power of the poem and its resonance.

THE SOCIAL-ECONOMIC CONTRACT

But I have paid what I’m supposed to and I have receipts for everything. I have gathered so many unreadable receipts.

Section II also invokes another common dimension, or system of human understanding: the commercial, and more specifically, the consensual social contract, its pressure, and its reality. The speaker’s tone here may be droll, but this sense of having “done what I’m supposed to” invokes the powerful code-words of the social contract, and its very particular kind of bondage. In order even to approach a visionary perspective, a modern poem must acknowledge the shackles of social consciousness.

THE RELIGIOUS

Behind each one walking here hovers a cross that wants to catch up to us, pass us, join us.

Something that wants to sneak up on us from behind and cover our eyes and whisper, “Guess who?”

The image of the cross, and of its “pursuit” of the individual, is inevitably suggestive of Christianity, of course, yet the image is also enigmatically vague, as if evoking a distant memory of Christianity, Christianity at a great distance. It evokes a dimension which is recurrent in Tranströmer’s eclectic, fluid metaphysics. More importantly, these moments evoking the presence of religious reality play a crucial role in the poignant balance of Tranströmer’s large poems: the balance between ignorance and hope, between the existential perspective and the speaker’s respect for the actuality of spiritual commitment.

Other religious evocations haunt the poem as well. The next line’s imagination, of “something” which whispers, “Guess who?”
seems drawn from a different tradition than the Christian, perhaps one more resonant with the cosmic playfulness of Sufic or Buddhist (or many other) systems of ecstatic spiritual understanding.

The final and climactic image of the poem, of an "unknown" wound which afflicts the human condition, resonates with both the existential diagnosis of a tragic situation, and with the traditional archetype of Christ's crucifixion. The fine, poignant irony that the wound is invisible and *unfelt* resonates with the trope of the unexamined life.

**NORDIC PHILOSOPHY MEETS ECCLESIASTICAL LEGACY**

I am thinking that one source of Tranströmer's special gravitas and modern relevance might be the confluence of these two spiritual rivers—Existentialism and the religious legacy of Northern European Christianity. This collaboration between existentialist perceptions and the noble legacy of the "faith tradition" is a powerful layering, one that in some way recapitulates and crystalizes Western cultural heritage in a stirring way. One of Tranströmer's greatest poetic gifts is the quality of sympathy which runs through his poetry, simultaneous with a steady conviction about the limitations of human consciousness—that is, our permanent condition of ignorance. This fusion of a religious (for brief moments, even ecstatic) temperament with the profoundly fatalistic sensibility of artists like Kierkegaard and Ingmar Bergman helps describe a rich and paradoxical temperament.

**IN CONCLUSION**

Any good poem can be reliably and well read in different ways. One could quite happily read these distinct tropes, "discourses," and trace elements of "Streets in Shanghai" in terms of their tonal rather than their dialectical interplay. Surely the composition of poetry is not a clinical enterprise of "collating systems of knowledge" in some biotech research lab (or poetry workshop). Yet, whether the architecture is conscious or unconscious, I love the rich breadth and manifold resonances that can coexist in a single poem; this quality of
panoramic reference is one of the powers of poetry I value deeply. Tranströmer’s diversity of images and tones do derive in part from worldly systems of thought and belief, and the ways his images and statements invoke networks, histories, and layers of understanding make “Streets in Shanghai” an astonishing and poignant poem.
APRIL AND SILENCE

Spring lies abandoned. A ditch the color of dark violet
moves alongside me
giving no images back.

The only thing that shines
are some yellow flowers.

I am carried inside
my own shadow like a violin
in its black case.

The only thing I want to say
hovers just out of reach
like the family silver
at the pawnbroker’s.

translated by Robert Bly
This is a lovely poem, remembering those times when we do not accompany our shadow but actually are our shadow. But instead of complaining about that, Tranströmer says we are like a violin in its black case—capable of music but just not playing right now. So this is a poem about depression, a depressed poem. But he cunningly doesn’t use the word. He makes depression sound rather charming. It’s like being inside your own dark side, like a violin in its black case. So the poet sometimes is lucky, not projecting his shadow but climbing inside it.

The last stanza is really very funny:

The only thing I want to say
hovers just out of reach
like the family silver
at the pawnbroker’s.

What has happened in the family that they had to pawn the silver? We must have needed money, but it’s too late now. Being a poet means you always owe money to the pawnbroker.
from HAIKU

The white sun, lonely
orienteer on the way
to death’s blue mountains.

translated by Robin Fulton
Robin Fulton

TOWARD BLUE MOUNTAINS

For many years before Tomas Tranströmer was subjected to the glare of publicity occasioned by the Nobel Prize in Literature 2011, his renown both at home and around the world was spiralling out in a manner which few poets have experienced. His poems have been translated into at least sixty languages, with complete editions in about two dozen. How many of these translators have worked directly from Swedish is hard to say: some have apparently worked at second hand via English, German and French editions, for instance. Recent years have seen a growing number of translations into English, some by English-language writers with no knowledge of Swedish, a few by native Swedish speakers with perhaps a less than sure touch in English. Some variety is of course desirable, but a limit of usefulness seems to be reached when four or five English translations of a poem, when set side by side, show only marginal differences.

The reason for this lies probably in Tranströmer’s use of his own language: the language of his poems, the statements he makes, are relatively straightforward, with little wordplay for its own sake, as if all he is doing is relating the facts of a situation. This does not mean that he “translates easily,” but it can give a misleading impression that his images will slide over from one language to another without much difficulty. What gives his poetry its remarkable quality is of course the way in which these statements are put beside each other, creating unexpected combinations and collisions. It is often said that the enigmatic nature of many of his poems is due to the fact that he hides or omits logical connections, but I doubt that. If we were somehow to “fill in” those connections we would still face some kind of irreducible enigma, something we feel is meaningful and not to be explained away. The spell of his best poems is unbreakable.

When a Tranströmer poem says something in what appears to be a matter-of-fact way, then the translator must try to match this, even allowing for a degree of literalness. The language of the original must not be made more dramatic than it is, must not be jazzed up. I know nothing about Edmund Prestwich except that he doesn’t read Swedish, but in his blog he remarked on the “groundedness” of my
Tranströmer translations, which means that the poems “don’t just begin in the ordinary prose world, they stay in it even as they make us see that world in a startlingly new way.” I think that is a reasonable description of at least part of the habit I developed over three or four decades of trying to translate Tranströmer. (Bloodaxe Books, U.K., have been publishing my translations for over a quarter of a century, the latest complete edition appearing in 2011, and an American edition came from New Directions, N.Y., in 2006.)

Here’s one of his shortest poems, from *Sorgegondolen / The Sad Gondola* (1996):

*Den vita solen*

träningslöper ensam mot
dödens blåa berg.

I have often wondered how an oriental poet might regard Tranströmer’s haikus because many “haikus” published in Western languages are just three-line poems with 17 syllables. I have come across various requirements that a genuine haiku “must” fulfill, but not all of these are visible in all (or any?) of Tranströmer’s haiku. But his Japanese translator has assured us that his efforts are fully worthy of the leading Japanese haiku masters, and that ought to be good enough for us.

My first version, as printed in the Bloodaxe 1996 edition, was not good:

The white sun’s a long-
distance runner against
the blue mountains of death.

The syllable pattern here is 5+6+6, but if the poet went to the bother of fitting his haiku into a 5+7+5 pattern then the translator ought to do likewise, just as he ought to match the metrical patterns of the poet’s verses in classical forms.

“Orienteer” seems to have come into common use in English fairly recently and is more accurate than “long-distance runner,” who
may just be running round a track with no need of maps. There's only one syllable of difference between them, but one syllable can make or break a haiku. A runner "towards" would sound like a mistake for a runner "on the way"; *mot* as "against" perhaps might do if we think of the mountains as a kind of barrier, but not at all if we think of the runner competing with the mountains. And we must keep *ensam*; if we weren't counting syllables we could say "all on his own." Fifteen years after my unsatisfactory version appeared, my improved version finally emerged:

The white sun, lonely
orienteer on the way
to death's blue mountains.
LIKE BEING A CHILD

Like being a child and an enormous insult
is pulled over your head like a sack;
through the sack’s stitches you catch a glimpse of the sun
and hear the cherry trees humming.

But this doesn’t help, the great affront
covers your head and torso and knees
and though you move sporadically
you can’t take pleasure in the spring.

Yes, shimmering wool hat, pull it down over the face
and stare through the weave.
On the bay, water-rings teem soundlessly.
Green leaves are darkening the land.

***

TWO CITIES

Each on its own side of a strait, two cities
one plunged into darkness, under enemy control.
In the other the lamps are burning.
The luminous shore hypnotizes the blacked-out one.

I swim out in a trance
on the glittering dark waters.
A muffled tuba-blast breaks in.
It’s a friend’s voice, take your grave and go.

translated by Patty Crane
Jean Valentine

POETS WITHOUT BORDERS

From my first reading of Tomas Tranströmer, I remember that very rare feeling that you can have as a child: "This is MY book. This is MY writer."

Maurice Sendak said that once, at a book-signing, a little boy would not let him sign his copy of *Where the Wild Things Are*. He was crying, and he wailed to his father, "He's going to crap all over my book!"

Sometimes I don't want to know what other people think about MY poets, like Tranströmer, or Elizabeth Bishop.

*

In "Like Being a Child" and "Two Cities," we see, as always, Tranströmer's lifelong calling to cross borders of many kinds, political, spiritual, temporal, borders between species, between the living and the dead, between a listener and a speaker. Between two parts of oneself. Between a great memory and a small memory. Between illness and health. Darkened, muffled, but there is still a Yes, there is still a swimmer, still the tuba from Tranströmer's much earlier poem, "Balakirev's Dream."

Both Tomas Tranströmer and Elizabeth Bishop come from sea-faring people. In Bishop's grandparents' house in Great Village, Nova Scotia, where she lived for some years as a child, the stairs are almost steep enough for a ship. They both seem to love islands. They are both playful, as well as both being at home in a mysterious world.

They are both on a good footing with dreams, especially Tranströmer, perhaps; though in Elizabeth Bishop's youth, George Herbert came to her in a dream, and said that he could be useful to her. Praise God, she said!

Tranströmer, in talking about his poem "In the Nile Delta," says that a dream he had while he and his wife were there helped him in "seeing such suffering without running away."

Both Bishop and Tranströmer, I think, come to the surreal naturally, especially once they have hit their stride; it seems to them not something poetic to seize upon, but as something most real. I think of Bishop's "The Man-Moth" alongside of Tranströmer's "Traffic":

46
The long-distance truck with its trailer crawls through the mist and is a large shadow of the dragonfly larva that stirs in the mud of the lake bed.

Headlights meet in a dripping forest. One can't see the other's face. The flood of light pours through the needles.

We come shadows vehicles from all directions in the twilight, drive together behind each other past each other, glide forward in a muffled clamor out onto the plain where factories brood and the buildings sink two millimeters each year—the ground is eating them slowly.

Unidentified paws set their marks on the brightest products dreamt up here. The seeds try to live in the asphalt.

But first the chestnut trees, gloomy as if they prepared a blossoming of iron gloves instead of white clusters, and behind them the company office—a faulty strip-light blinks blinks. There's a secret door here. Unlock it—look into the inverted periscope downward, to the openings, to the deep tubes where the algae grow like the beards of the dead and the Cleaner drifts in his dress of slime with feeblower and feeblower strokes, on the point of suffocating. And no one knows what will happen, only that the chain perpetually breaks, perpetually joins together again.
Tranströmer is more openly spiritual than Bishop, I think, though both are deeply interested in the other-worldly. And certainly both shied away from being thought religious, though Tomas has said, "I respond to reality in such a way that I look on existence as a great mystery and that at times, at certain moments, this mystery carries a strong charge, so that it does have a religious character, and it is often in such a context that I write." "...an incomprehensible context.... incomprehensible to our normal everyday reason." There can be "a sense of immanence," a sense that "a strangeness has crossed our path." Reading this, I think of Bishop’s moose.

To finish, I think that one reason people love these two poets so much is that they write, apparently simply, at an unusual depth, and so we never get to the end of them.

And another reason is that they have a sort of cool moral authority. Not the old kind, but—especially Tranströmer—a sort of affectionate, baffled authority. Here he is about his poem "The Outpost":

...But then gradually the poem came to deal with how I find myself in an absurd situation in life generally, as I often do. Life puts us in certain absurd situations and it’s impossible to escape. And that’s where the poem becomes very serious, in the fifth verse, which ends "I am the place / where creation is working itself out." This kind of religious idea recurs here and there in my poems of late (1973), that I see a kind of meaning in being present, in using reality, in experiencing it, in making something of it. And I have an inkling that I am doing this as some sort of task or commission. It recurs further on in the book [Paths] at the beginning of “December Evening 1972”:

Here I come, the invisible man, perhaps employed by a Great Memory to live right now...

All quotations except Patty Crane’s translations are from Tomas Tranströmer, The Great Enigma: New Collected Poems, translated by Robin Fulton (New Directions, 2006).
Charles Simic

THE LIGHT

Our thoughts like it quiet
in this no-bird dawn,
like the way the early light
takes the world as it finds it
and makes no comment
about the apples the wind
has blown off a tree,
or the horse broken loose
from a fenced field grazing
quietly among the tombstones
in a small family graveyard.
IN MY GRANDMOTHER’S TIME

Death asking an old woman to please sew him a button, and she agrees, gets out of bed and starts looking for her needle and thread with a lit candle the priest had placed over her head.
AS I WAS SAYING

That fat orange cat slipping in and out of the town jail whenever it pleases, how about that?
BARE TREES

One of my thoughts
eloped with a leaf
the wind blew off a tree,
with two crows
setting forth from another
in hot pursuit
across the bleak landscape,
like a frantic father
with a minister in tow.
You were the vanishing point
where the painting pinched shut.

I stood before it for months.
People came and went behind me—
sometimes they bumped into me,
their voices flashing like mirrors.

The skylights lifted and lowered
the room as though on a pulley,
your assemblage of colors
dipped with each passing of clouds.

When, finally, I turned away,
there was still the long walk out
through those marble halls,
past the thousands of paintings
lined up so perfectly their details—
their emanations—disappeared
inside their collective symmetry.
The building was empty. My steps
echoed outward from my core
to be caught by the canvases,
the intricate tapestries, the dark
drapes and cushioned benches
along the balustrade. The guard
inside the arched entranceway
nodded vaguely, held in place
by his flickering screens. Then

I was outside on the street.
It must have rained—the trees

in the arbor were heavy and slick,
the pavement was stained—

and all the cafés were mottled
with people, their conversations

hanging between them. I was thirsty,
I realized, lonely and ravenous.
UNSIGNED LETTER

History with snow at its edges whitens my hair. Marks me as the youngsters’ master for the hour that precedes their mockery. I remain. Truly. Since you asked. Of whose childhood were you once a fleeting guest? You there at eye-level with the bravado of big stogies. Poses struck like matches. Real losses in the guises of real losers. Hiss, flare, and the heart rasp hewn away. All manner of zeroes—made by the tongue punching through—go on dissipating from your century into mine. Ever yours. I remain. Deepest gratitude. Sincerely.
DEAR YESTERYEAR

The kind weather won’t hold so what the hell, for six bucks we take *The Caesars*, volume VIII. Paging in deeper...and three or four centurions ago was the last we saw of the royal brooch. Lost, lost to history. Who can know which kiss becomes goodbye? Look, look up. Airport-bound on our bus, the pilot has no idea where he’ll fly. Told he’ll be told at the gate. Rain around the white pod of us bobbing along. Toward the gate... though the gate, the gate wanders.
The mood of the oven—
plastic is more than plastic
when it burns. Did we design this room to smell of plastic? The open floor-plan circles us into each other.
And who cares.

And who suffocates. Fields suffocate as snowfall pulls our bodies outside.

It shouldn’t be shameful to breathe.

Wheat stubble crunches as feet sink into snow. The ground pulls us.

For as long as I can remember, the ground has been pulling us, as if iron laced our bones, promising last breaths, a few

last clear breaths.
Jenny George

THRESHOLD GODS

I saw a bat in a dream and then later that week
I saw a real bat, crawling on its elbows
across the porch like a goblin.
It was early evening. I want to ask about death.

But first I want to ask about flying.

The swimmers talk quietly, standing waist-deep in the dark lake.
It’s time to come in but they keep talking quietly.
Above them, early bats driving low over the water.
From here the voices are undifferentiated.
The dark is full of purring moths.

Think of it—to navigate by adjustment, by the beauty
of adjustment. All those shifts and echoes.
The bats veer and dive. Their eyes are tiny golden fruits.
They capture the moths in their teeth.

Summer is ending. The orchard is carved with the names of girls.
Wind fingers the leaves softly, like torn clothes.
Remember, desire was the first creature
that flew from the crevice
back when the earth and the sky were pinned together
like two rocks.

Now, I open the screen door and there it is—
a leather change purse
moving across the floorboards. It’s unsettling.

But in the dream you were large and you opened
the translucent hide of your body
and you folded me
in your long arms. And held me for a while.
As a bat might hold a small, dying bat. As the lake
holds the night upside down in its mouth.
THE FARROWING CRATE

A cage-like gestation unit large enough to hold a sow but too narrow to permit it to turn around.

For months she points in one direction, a zeppelin bumbling toward the rising sun. She drinks from her spigot. She is big as a doorstep. They say she doesn’t know she cannot turn around.

When I turned nine my mother hung a piñata from a tree, and spun me—blinded, dizzy with anticipation—until my heart was a blur, then let me loose to strike at the thing. It took ten minutes of hard beating to split it, and then turned out to be filled not with candy but cheap, Mexican toys.

They say her brain does not conceive of turning. But after farrowing, back in the pen with the others, she’ll circle herself for days trying to bite her own tail.
Selling the farm is not the same as buying the farm. Buying the farm means you die. Selling the farm means someone else died. Someone died and left you it. It’s not easy selling a farm. There’s the mound of shit you can’t move. The bones of the farm animals dragged off into the upper pasture. Here’s some teeth. Here’s a thigh bone. Here’s the pelvis. Big enough to make a house out of almost. The cows lumbering across the acreage and the problematic mother refusing to move. It’s like selling something you can’t get your hands on really though it’s big and it smells bad. What to do with the grass silage fermenting? What to do with the turkey buzzards still circling that field where the cows give birth? What to do with the calf just now coming out of the cow? The calf lands on the ground in a splash of bone; flies land on her eyes. On her new mouth. Nothing you can do about the flies. Meanwhile Mother is sitting in Father’s vacant chair. She is deciding not to go anywhere. She doesn’t want to sell the farm though it’s not up to her any longer. 

So it goes, she says. This is the last calf, brother says. You take pictures. You stare at that calf on the ground. How hot the sun is you think. How still the air. How loud those blackbirds are in the trees. How big the trees.
Julia Shipley

FIELD REVEALED AS RUNWAY BY MORNING

In case the pilot calls from his farm, *hey what are you doing?* and in case you succumb, listening to his grin, fourteen gauge wire bent with a hip into a crest of mirth, in case this is distraction, as he tries to barter your admiration for his impunity, chocks are stopping the wheels of this engagement, and will stop, or at least trip the rubber ...well. I am an unfenced field about to take delivery of snow.
TIMOTHY

When one grass head
casts its shadow:
bear fur, the boy’s nape
your mane, your hay field leaning,
towards the woods.
and painted onto my inner
skull, pigment
blown through bone,
your voice, blown through,
your handprint
inside my skull
*
In that labyrinth got lost
and the thousands
of old lives
herds, so quiet
*
Only paint on rock
only sandstone lamps,
ash-boats
*
Earth’s phantom limb—
under-heaven
hung with slick calcite
moonmilk
*
Tallow lamp, tooth
in the rock, can’t see them
running along the walls
How did you come here?
In a dream I fell
through a hole in the earth
ALL SOULS

Cougnac Cave, France

Many corners turned beneath pencil thin stalactites, thousands like upside down candles, wet flames dripping. Beyond my mind’s violence, there, an ibex painted in calcite-milk with wall-ooze for a shaggy coat. Will it always be buried? Memory stumbling into mineral stillness, crystallized, almost lucid, or carried—a forgotten animal across my shoulders, radiant and awash in lactation, made with hand, mouth, spit. Dear friend, I remember being painted in coal and blood, and the long gallery where all souls parade.
Listen...all white foxes, all white owls, all snowy silver geese. Attend...all casual fish holding on in the icy beads of a silver current. Snow leopards, white bears, silver baboons, mottled white mice nosing at autumn seeds...pause in unison, lift your heads. Still your wings and heed...silvery blue moths fluttering like flakes of moon. Long-haired, spike-horned goats on precipitous cliffs, white spiderlings floating mid-cloud...take note and remember. Each barb of every feather, every black-tipped ivory hair, every luminous scale and fan-like fin, each knob of spine and nail, each red drop at the pith of the marrow, at the root of all glare and mettle, every breath quiver, every one, every single one, is beheld and declared.
Marosa di Giorgio
from THE MARCH HARE

I stood in the moonlight. In the distance, incredible beings: Mario, unicorns, werewolves, the peace dove, the March Hare.
Things made of white stand out sharply, bones and roses.
The house is unlocked and empty. And it knows that someone outside is watching. Although sometimes, from its doors, a horse leaps and sinks right away, or from a window, and disappears.
On the roof—and I don’t know how they’re visible—there’s a dove, which simultaneously is perfectly still and grows, two or three eggs, now, forever, fused and flawless. And a cup.
I want to say goodbye, to leave; once I went all the way to the royal road, hopped in a carriage, but I stepped right off.
And I ran back desperately, almost flying; I crept through the tall grass, and then, invisible, kept watching the house.

* * *

The snail, that whorl of smoke that never rises, with a radiant pink rim, a cherub, a cherishment. Suddenly, it pokes out its forehead and invisible feet, and walks like a man, a maiden of the heavens, of the dirges, its carnal trumpets are never heard. It is, simultaneously, man and maiden. In that white shard dwell Hermes and Aphrodite; just like that, it stops and mates with itself. And after an agonizing second, it continues, across the pink facades of the roses, like a carriage, a wandering porcelain figurine.
Until I stop watching.
Or that little box, round, empty, falls in the grass.

* * *

Outside, the quince tree and its pink flower.
Inside, the dolls whisper softly.
The south wind, the north wind, the east and west, like horses they cross the meadow, where one day my father hoisted me in his hand, pulled me out of the pumpkin leaves, and I wandered with hares and rabbits, butterflies with only one wing, which flew through
the air like carnations, scavenging, desolate. And on the shadowy edge, the fairies, the dark spirits, in their black armoires.

The wind beats its hooves; its mane, like a bundle of branches, brushes over the house.

The toys cry softly.
And the quince tree pounds on the doors, trying to enter.

* * *

(Concepción Silva Béliznzon)

The dark grove tossed like the sea. Rain was falling. Little stones were left in the street, and large ones; there were many of them, like bits of stars.

They shone furiously, desperately. I thought they would scatter like hares; and they didn't.

I ran inside; but everything had changed. The armoires, open. The saints—out of their frames, standing upright!

A little bird, completely blue, was flying, forever, in the same place, within my reach; I couldn't catch it or frighten it away.

The braid fell from my hair, the dress from my body, the white lilies fell, and the cup.

I was left hanging from I don't know what, and from nothing.

* * *

Suddenly, at night, mysteriously, silently, the butterfly appeared. She settled on the rim of my cup, defying solemn laws.

She was wearing a large, modern dress, almost shapeless; it was a celestial green, with dark or silver dots.

I didn't want to draw attention to her since I was afraid of my companion across the table. That he might reach out with his cigarette and light that gauze on fire.

I was afraid of my companion, and I'm afraid of the whole world.
The butterfly wouldn’t go away.
I trembled a little; my partner wore an inscrutable expression.
To escape from the situation, I suggested, “Let’s dance.”
And then, “Let’s go to the garden.”
And suddenly I said, “I wish Irma had gone away.”
Without realizing it, I had named her Irma and spoken out loud.
My companion replied:
“But he was a boy.”
Acting naturally, I asked, “Who?”
“In the sky-blue shirt, there on your cup.”

* * *

The houses in the country store bones, eggs.
When lightning lit the night, from my bed, I saw them shine.
Under the tables raced dogs, cats, and bats, each in pursuit of its pursuer. In the air fluttered little horses like flies; that hive of horses was murmuring.
All the paths of life unfolding, but where to look?
Cream-colored chrysanthemums, curly, surrounded my bed, as at a funeral.
I reached in with one hand.
Or the wind ruffled my hair.
And I never knew how to step down from the altar.

translating by Adam Giannelli
Jeff Oaks

EVEN IN PITTSBURGH

Just before we go to bed every night, the sound of the dog lapping the water out of his big silver dish in the kitchen becomes a body hauling itself, after a long night swimming in the ocean, onto a strange shore, a shipwreck's sunken weight behind him somewhere darkly grinding sand into further dissolves.

I take the black leash from the top of the refrigerator and clip it to his collar. We walk down to the end of the block, a lot abandoned to weeds where he pees a long thoughtful moment. Tonight's full moon, earth's old inoculation scar, our constant Otherwise floods the street. It's a light with weight, that makes the sound of someone else in the room.

At home, I turn off the lights, knowing the house all the way through, preferring it that way sometimes. Turn all the locks. The dog follows me with a glow-in-the-dark ball in his mouth. It's like a joke he's been waiting to spring on me and which I can't figure out until I hear his tail wagging him up the stairs. I rub my eyes like a sailor signing a contract. We strip to skin and fur, climb back into the sails.
HAVING READ TRANSTRÖMER ALL NIGHT

Woke up inside a keyhole. Coughed a nest of mice out of my throat. I asked the dog if he’d been driving the bed last night, because it looked like we’d crashed into something. He shook his skin. It was the sound of keys.
FOR THE SMALL HAIRS OF MY NOSE

Given the chance I would go around apologizing for everything I do.
Given half a chance.
Given even an opening.

As if there were a sniper trained on me while I drive to work.
As if a serial killer were following me and listening
for evidence I beat my dog.

As if everything depended on my tiniest attention
not failing to register a shift in the wind,

Morning’s thumb and forefinger pick me up out of bed
where I would otherwise lie in my various crusts.

Light flicks around me, a flock of pigeons
the neighbor keeps emptying out bags of bread for.
They startle, a plume of iridescent dust at the slightest sound.
They circle the houses then come back down
to her tiny cement patio full of plastic flowers.

It helps clean the air, she told me once.
Sarah Crossland

BULLET IN A PEAR

On a stone slab, husk of a ripe pear paired up in smoke, chimneyed and hollowing out. Arctic halo, top hat, the deconstruction of a green breast and its cloud.

* * *

BULLET IN AN EGG

Twenty-two caliber, hovering like an asterisk at the egg—the shell is psychic with what will happen: it will Roquefort itself, vein away, vitellus humble and peeking as a hand-drawn sun.

* * *

BULLET IN A ROSE

The petals extend the powder of a pink tongue—a toxic event, all latitude, all blushing ruffle of six sepals exposed in dry stockings. The flower itself a cup sleeping upright in somniloquy.
BULLET IN THE QUEEN OF HEARTS

For a paper woman with crows' feet: twice the decapitation, a black canal torn where her chest would be. And gathering to the left, a nebula of card parts, smiling.

* * *

BULLET IN A ROW OF CHALK

Lined up in Easter egg pastel: first the mint, then mango, bare lips, violet. The shape the fog makes is of a fish and how holy—watch it swimming inches from the sky.

* * *

BULLET IN A LIGHT BULB

Or is the ice of a frozen soap bubble mounted in wound metal, the glare of the flash superimposed in two white eyes? The geography of glass, forged craquelure—an echo of the body.
Kuno Raeber

OATH

I
But we wanted to make
a bullet together
compact reflective
and smooth on the outside so
the rain would run down lightning flashes
bounce off and when it fell
to earth simply roll
away unharmed.

But inside would be
gardens with fountains with beds
full of roses would be
soft meadows and mountains
blue as of Bassano
and woods above all
woods the under-
growth impenetrable.

Interior wilderness for you
and for me interior refuge
a bullet
for you and for me
that’s what we wanted to make.

II
Warm and powerful
soft
carried unchecked
outside and without knowing
give yourself surrender yourself
carried outside
and no
coast and no
mountains behind
but the roar the voyage carried outside
rudderless and without
a wheel give yourself
to the waves and without
knowing being
carried outside
surrender yourself.

III
Counter-steer against
the current and ever faster the wake the crimson swirl and the ribs of ships and the burst crates strewn buried in the mud the coins of doges the gurgling cold counter-steer against the lion winged overpowering.

IV
No stirring inside you hear nothing of the turmoil the noise outside in the shade of the tree the stillness for you inside stillness for me.
V
Trees the last
at the edge and inside
the thornbush about to
arrive and to
burn up and ashes and at one
with the sand the desire.

But the swamped woods afterward
but
the lament of the birds.

*translated by Stuart Friebert*
Chase Twichell

BEFORE THE ASH

No other species leaves its dreams strewn across the earth, its dreams and its trash, the scars of its wars.

"I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought," said Albert Einstein. "But World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones."

All the killing, centuries of it.

Where will we bury all the bones? No need to worry. In the end, no one will be doing any burying.

Let's go back and live in Pompeii, where olives burst from the trees and all the dogs are still alive. Before the ash, and with ignorance of the ash.
Mimi White

WHAT THE WIND SAYS

There is no sadness
when wind topples a pine
and leaves a hole for light to find
and darkness, too,

just the letting go
of boughs across the century,

then the long return.

The mind inhabits,
slowly, methodically—

birdsong, shelter.

But imagine an emptiness so vast,
no forest, field, or rabbit hole;
no warren, den, or hollow log;

no voice in the wilderness,

who then will scribe for the wind
when the wind has nothing to say
and no place to go?

for David Carroll
DESPERATELY COMPOSED

I wake on a small raft
and see her swimming away
with a cat under each arm
and wearing the sun
like a kind of sombrero.
Again I have not been chosen.
What will I drink, so far from land?
Where will I find flowers enough
to keep me breathing what
St. Francis called "the Perfect Air,"
the pneuma of hope's tiny bells
announcing the hours of supplication
and grace?

She is far from me now, a speck
rising and dipping on the dazzle,
on a glinting of green trumpets
that call and call as Mahler drifts past

in a clef-shaped canoe and I toss him
a story in which a man dreams himself
beyond thought, beyond the farthest
point of land, where what he loves
has left him widened and cloudy,
the great sky somehow come
into his broken-fingered notation
turning slowly all night, lifting
as I do, waving to her, imploring
the angels to open themselves,
tune their instruments and pretend
that he is one of them, or they
more of him than he can count.
WAR OF THE WORLDS

The creatures from beyond Andromeda arrive at noon in little egg-shaped tubs of pink water. Their blue eyes are also hands grasping everything in a wink. Their mouths are sky-sized presumptions containing all the dictionaries in all the tongues of all the worlds drifting forever toward “God” or “Oblivion,” the mysterious final words it is their theology to regard as a single possibility.

The national debt, the new improved Buick, Gay marriage, strength of the yen against the dollar: these, and much else, wake in them a singular lack of fascination. In fact, they’ve barely noticed ourselves, their minds having splashed on toward a teleology beyond all substance but the sun. They love the sun, its perfect placement and moderation, its heat in which they evaporate, condense, and are born falling, soaking us all, sweeping like breath over the lakes and streets and gardens where we muse or toil at making the world that is already here.

Each night the clouds and straight, wet streets enact their perfect form. “All things exist because they do,” they say. But we’ve had enough. We call out the National Guard and make them pay.
LETTER TO WHAT’S MOSTLY MISSING

after Christopher Howell’s “He Writes to the Soul”

At first I thought I’d write
you about the sycamore that won’t dress for supper,
preferring its white limbs bare, and how the oak
it dotes on returns the favor by offering chartreuse
hankies on every hand. Then I thought that’s just me
again, swapping summer for supper, canopy for canapé,
and surely we’re beyond that now. So instead I guess
I’ll give you news of the silver lining, which was dreaming
until Wednesday when it woke to say Cloud, Sun,
Sliver of Glass. Lucky for me I was wearing my safety
goggles and asbestos gloves at the time. Lucky the pink
heat had my hair to burn or who knows what limestone
brimstone Joan of Arc shit I’d be subjected to next.
It was the meteorological opposite of that time
in the graveyard cracking ice with my boot heels
off the headstones to find her. All that pristine weather
and footwear later to discover: dead is still dead.
That’s what our ghost says anyway. She says
she hears us best when we can’t speak. She’s
nicknamed you Kodak—for the colorful memories
we create, I suppose—or perhaps it was Kodiak she said
through the ice. In any case, one can only ask how many
names for the past there are. I am one. You may be
more like the alarm clock sounding off out of nowhere,
and the boy sprinting toward it and me on his way,
who met me as warmly as if he were mine. I think,
for a moment, he thought that, too. When we refer to
parallel lives, can’t we mean lives lived besides?
That’s all for now, except to say that, unlike other trees,
the sycamore’s bark can’t expand, so just breaks off,
which accounts for its Bernini-like sheen. The old ones
are nearly hollow, therefore unstable. The fox and rabbit
like to make their dens inside. Empty isn’t always
the opposite of perfectly full. The oak says Let me spread
this mantle of blue over your cold marble shoulders,
Sycamore. And what can she say but yes.
THE WHITE, THE RED, & THE PINK IN-BETWEEN

When the wall I say I’ve hit gives
under my hand like skin I’m told

Breathe deeply

but if I did my ribs would crack like a book
like the nave’s ceiling with its grayed teeth grinding
away on the old story

She must be
in the pages somewhere
in the drifting snow of February

She must be
here
in the petals held aloft like planets & suddenly
soft as bathwater on the back of my hand

in the cottonwood flurry & catalpa trash of May

& like film catching fire
here
at last
in the hemorrhage of summer roses
the canopy of crisp
blood & cro-magnon brow of the Japanese maple

She must be here
somewhere
within the gothic bones of my ribcage
riding the twin gales Sorrow & Desire
queen of the rodeo

Once I held her to me
I held her

long &
in me
our skin breath bones blood one
story
chewed off like a limb
Embracing the dream's verity,
I crave more words
that are true.

Elastic words. And words
without roots. Words so dry
even the desert rejects them.

Solemn instruments. Wizards
of investment. Describing fiddle
& bow. Also, what occupies

the middle of the road.
The mouse wears socks.
Yes. He does.
VISITATION

In his room we sit
eating pumpkin pie off orange paper plates.
He pulls his *Semper Fi* throw blanket up over his legs,
looks around slowly, doll-eyed.
When asked, he says he feels great,
really great, you know, like Alexander the Great,
buried in a glass sarcophagus
filled with honey.
SUMMER STILL COMES

After raising all those children
and lowering two husbands in the ground
she’s not too tired to step out
for a late dinner in a neighbor’s darkened field:
six cherry tomatoes, two ears of Silver Queen—
gentle stalk-rustle, crowning moon—
salt shaker in the back pocket of her jeans.
THE ACCIDENT

Driving the mountain with the windows down we hit a damp low-slung cloud. The air cooled, the radio slurred its speech. A minute later, on the other side, the sun was shining, but the cloud had already passed through us.
SALTER PATH

Waking up late on the beach
the twenty foot shadow
of a sandpiper passes over me.
Its pale belly
reflected in wet sand
foretells the night’s full moon—
yohaku-no-bi, “the beauty of extra white.”
Bruce Smith

“I rode the bus”

I rode the bus to my becoming with the boys from rehab who wanted my shoes.

Nice shoes, they said, starting somewhere to want more than a hot, a cot, and oblivion.

My shoes were made from the skin of children, a tongue, a welt, an outsole, a land grab, a lord, a gun, a living. Our looking made bridges [glue, sticks], made gashes.

I offered gum like soldiers to children whose country has been overrun.
"Pink in the swamp"

Pink in the swamp, spring occupation, good if you have the orchid inclination, Dickinson says, good if you want to root in the ooze of the fetid ditch dowsed by a god, to divine the pink flag of the flower, stink and spill, you in the insurgence of a paper, unsecured borders, the whispering campaign of wind, newsprint leaks a story: when snipers get a hit, makes a pink mist.
And somehow it is noble. That through it all he’d done what he was asked, to be completely human, totally there—and totally not there—

to get past the script supervisor, post production, and Michael J. Fox, the extra like a convict creeping past the spotlight, the night-watchman and his dog. His hand-carved decoy stiff in bed, and his corpus, in light, breathing free air. And now frozen on my screen in the bleachers, beside him, Teen Wolf, in short-shorts, game won, hugging his true girl, Boof. Teen Wolf’s horrifying wolf dunks surpassed by an extra’s penis.

Do you remember how hard it was to walk your body over to that line of girls stuffed into their dresses and ask one just ask one to dance? What it is like to be cast in this body of involuntary breathing, of maybe holding a ball you pump up and let free like a moon made of leather and sweat and practice, one of the many moons under which we go wild.
For instance, if I fancy fancy
bedclothes with a sex stain in the satín,
an ancient Christian
saint in Latin with lions
munching his loins & the chic civic
ladies in bleachers flapping the flies, flies
& sighing ooh ah will intrude.

Crick of sunshine cripples a cornice
into my mossy alley & here lurches that tipsy &
lingo-overladen clown-taxi again,
straight into the “Permit Only!” I posted affront
of my sweaty setup wordshop:
applecarts’ upsets & multiplicities’
upshots altogether ungainly sprawl

upon, say, last week’s snub (I’d assumed
subsumed by now) rousing in vivid yellow
bruises to spout my verse. Overhead how many
lightbulbs does it take to change
which one into what next? Puff of what dust
I kick into what ashes I will, won’t my own eye
wink & wrinkle a grin, taking its shine to me?
WATTLE & DAUB

Anna put the fire to rest
in its kitchen slot. Then under
the window loosened a mouse
latch a little, or some other such
hinge itching with rust
against a molding.

Dark out: fields of bat stitches,
the cabbage & potato patches,
a pocket crust or crumb just
about to get plucked up. I lost
my love, oh, oh. Rags adjusted the body
to size. Whose shoes best fit.

For some time owls grooming
the premises kept in touch.
Dust sat minding things.
One adventure after another Anna
yet missed most her spider,
having admired it: Oh, web!
Dan Murphy

FAITHLESS, II.

The skies infested with stars, their heckle and bawl, infested fields of scourge and tic, tic and bawl, scourge of twinkle and cotton-frayed spool. The dye is in the wool, the dye-stained glass—3/5 empty, 3/5 full—of human cargo, its bone-draggling melody.

The skin is sign—say, skin is mine and packed like matchsticks and like medicine that spreads meaning through blood. We see on shore the black-fingered trees at dusk open-armed, and swear: by God who deserted this ship for the bruise of purple sky, I am innocent as the day I was torn to fuel the green fields without name, without end.
Lilah Hegnauer

JAR

for Bruce Hegnauer

Late April, almost
light: a fishnet,
a crab pot,

a salmon head for bait,
my father makes
of this passage

an ocean. Lost watch,
that we could know
anything

beyond this. Certain
in the half darkness,
near dawn cave,

yaw, tunnel of self,
under a hillside
covered in brambles,

love. He who once fell
through the plaster
of a new ceiling

is still the ground of me.
Addictive day starts with the lit-up screen against the backdropped window, while the street's still dark, the gray slate roofs oily with rain. Distraction of four newspapers' front pages clicked on to spiral into distant windows and distant, virtual and dulled encounter.

Better to go down to the café counter (above which, on a television screen, the same heads talk) and watch, beyond the windows a drizzly morning's intersecting streets that used to open into day, their pages etched with the calligraphy of rain.

One more fall day, whose uncertain rain is the most probable, least vexed encounter. From left to right, from right to left, on pages or posters, paravent or movie screen, spectators are the spectacle, when streets unwind their bobbins below open windows.

Addicted, then transfixed behind the window's barrier, slant light, slant fall of rain, a mystery enacted on the street's begrimed and glittery parquet will counteract the dire pronouncements you can't screen out, the bad news on the daily pages.

You write what someone wrote on other pages when lives were flexed and fixed in different windows, a nightstand's pile of books enough to screen out anguish. Morning whispers through fine rain. Upstairs, on the blue-tiled kitchen counter, the coffee-maker waits. Perhaps the street's
doubling for the discovery of streets
paced briefly or long-viewed on midnight pages.
Elsewhere’s green eyes, an elsewhere you encounter
lowering the shades, turning from the windows
to walk downstairs and veer into the rain,
thrust your borrowed double through the screen.

Out of the rain, a cup chinks on the counter;
out there, the street’s, and here, the morning’s pages
fold like a screen. Time to open the windows.
PAMELA ALEXANDER has published four volumes of poetry, the latest of which is *Slow Fire* (Ausable/Copper Canyon). Work of hers is forthcoming in *Subtropics* (poetry) and *The Cimarron Review* (nonfiction).

ROBERT BLY’s most recent book of poems is *Talking into the Ear of a Donkey* (Norton, 2011). In 2013 Gray-wolf Press is publishing *Airmail*, the correspondence of Robert Bly and Tomas Tranströmer.

SARAH CROSSLAND is a Poetry MFA candidate at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, where she teaches creative writing and serves as the Managing Editor of *Devil’s Lake*. Her website is www.sarahcrossland.com.

JOHN F. DEANE, the Irish poet and novelist, founded Poetry Ireland and *The Poetry Ireland Review*. His *Snow Falling on Chestnut Hill: New and Selected Poems* is out from Carcanet Press this fall.

Uruguayan MAROSA DI GIORGIO (1932-2004) has one of the most distinct and recognizable voices in Latin American poetry. Descended from Italian immigrants, she grew up in the countryside near Salto. *Los papeles salvajes* (*The Wild Papers*, 2008), published by Adriana Hidalgo, unites fourteen of her books. ADAM GIANNELLI’s book of translations of di Giorgio’s poems, *Diadem*, will be published by BOA Editions this fall.


KEVIN FITCHETT received his MFA at the University of Mississippi. He holds second place for most goals scored in Lakeland College Soccer history and is a “racked” caller on the *Jim Rome Show*.

ROBIN FULTON is a Scottish poet and translator who has lived for many years in Norway. Recent Swedish poets translated include Kjell Espmark (Mariant Press), Harry Martinson (Bloodaxe, UK) and Tomas Tranströmer (Bloodaxe and New Directions).

JENNY GEORGE lives in Santa Fe, where she helps run a foundation for Buddhist-based social justice. Her poems have recently appeared in *Indiana Review, The Collagist*, and *Painted Bride Quarterly*.


LILAH HEGNAUER is the author of *Dark Under Kiganda Stars* (Ausable, 2005). She teaches in the English Department at James Madison University.

TONY HOAGLAND has published four collections of poems, of which the latest are *Unincorporated Persons in the Late Honda Dynasty* and *What Narcissism Means to Me*. In 2008 Graywolf Press published a book of craft essays, titled *Real Sofistakashun*. 
He teaches in the writing program at the University of Houston.

CHRISTOPHER HOWELL's most recent books are Gaze (Milkweed, 2012) and Dreamless and Possible: Poems New and Selected (U. of Washington, 2010). Other recent work may be seen in Crazyhorse, Gettysburg Review, The Journal, and Hubbub.

SONJA JAMES is the author of Baiting the Hook (Bunny and Crocodile Press, 1999) and Children of the Moon (Argonne House, 2004). Among her honors are two Pushcart Prize nominations.

STEPHEN KNAUTH is the author of The River I Know You By (Four Way, 1999) and several other collections. His work has appeared in North American Review, Virginia Quarterly Review, Poetry Daily, Drunken Boat, and Water-Stone Review.

ANNE MARIE MACARI's most recent book is She Heads into the Wilderness (Autumn House, 2008). She teaches in the low-residency MFA program at Drew University.

WAYNE MILLER'S third collection, The City, Our City (Milkweed, 2011), was a finalist for the William Carlos Williams Award and the Rilke Prize. He edits Pleiades and in 2013 will be Distinguished Fulbright Scholar of Creative Writing at Queens University, Belfast.

MALENA MÖRLING is the author of two books of poetry, Ocean Avenue and Astoria, and is editing the anthology Swedish Writers on Writing. She teaches at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington and in the Low-Residency MFA Program at New England College.

DAN MURPHY works as an elementary school teacher in the Los Angeles public school system. He has been published in the Beloit Poetry Journal and Image, as well as other journals. His manuscript, The Book of False Rhyme, is looking for a suitable house.

JEFF OAKS is the author of three chapbooks, most recently Shift from Seven Kitchens Press. A recipient of three fellowships from the Pennsylvania Council of the Arts, he teaches writing at the University of Pittsburgh.

CAROL POTTER has recent poems in Open Field, and poems forthcoming in Rhino, Blue Line, and the Otis Review. Her fourth book of poems, Otherwise Obedient (Red Hen Press, 2008), was a finalist in the 2008 Lambda Literary book awards. She teaches for the Antioch University Los Angeles MFA program, and lives in Vermont.

KEVIN PRUFER's newest books are National Anthem (Four Way Books, 2008) and In a Beautiful Country (Four Way Books, 2011).

KUNO RAEBER (1922-1992) was a much-acclaimed Swiss writer of prose, criticism, and poetry, but remains virtually unknown in English save for a number of poems STUART FRIEBERT has published. Be Quiet, a volume of Raeber's selected poems translated by Friebert, will appear in the next year or two. "Oath" appears here by kind permission of Raeber's publisher, Carl Hanser Verlag.

PATTIANN ROGERS has published eleven books of poetry and two prose

BRET SHEPARD is currently in the Ph.D. program at the University of Nebraska, where he also teaches writing. Recent poems have appeared or are forthcoming in American Letters and Commentary, Copper Nickel, Whiskey Island, and elsewhere.

JULIA SHIPLEY is the author of Herd (Sheltering Pines Press, 2010). Her poems and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in Fourth Genre, Hunger Mountain, and Poetry East. In 2011 she co-founded Chickadee Chaps and Broads, a small spirited letterpress project. She lives, teaches, and farms in rural Vermont.

CHARLES SIMIC’s Selected Poems 1962-2012 will be out from Harcourt early next year.

BRUCE SMITH is the author of six books of poems, including The Other (U. of Chicago Press, 2000), which was a finalist for both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize, Songs for Two Voices (Chicago, 2005), and Devotions (Chicago, 2011).

CHASE TWICHELL’s most recent book is Horses Where the Answers Should Have Been: New and Selected Poems (Copper Canyon, 2010).

JEAN VALENTINE’s most recent book of poems is Break the Glass (Copper Canyon, 2010). She is co-translator with Ilya Kaminsky of Dark Elderberry Branch, poems by Marina Tsvetaeva, to be published by Alice James Books in November 2012.

NANCE VAN WINCKEL’s sixth collection of poems, Pacific Walkers, will appear in 2013 from U. of Washington Press. She is also the author of three collections of short fiction and a recent recipient of an Isherwood Fiction Fellowship. Her poetry-off-the-page work may be viewed at http://photoemsbynancevanwinckel.zenfolio.com.

MIMI WHITE’s most recent book, The Last Island (Deerbrook Editions, 2008), won the Jane Kenyon Award for Outstanding Poetry, and her chapbook, The Singed Horizon (Providence Athenaeum, 2000), won the Philbrick Award. Her new book-length haibun, Memory Won’t Save Me, is forthcoming from Deerbrook.

MARTHA ZWEIG’s collections include Monkey Lightning (Tupelo Press, 2010), What Kind (Wesleyan, 2003), Vinegar Bone (Wesleyan, 1999) and Powers, a chapbook (Vermont Arts Council/Stinehour Press, 1976).
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