

## **I: Convergence to the Mystic Consciousness in Transtromer's Poems**

The research makes study on the mystic awareness in the working of Thomas Transtromer's poems with an ample analysis of the poems. The Noble laureate, Thomas Transtromer, excels in postulation the mystic sensibilities with the special emphasis on the mingling on natural and the supernatural elements. Mysticism as a part of Hellenistic philosophy evolved in the transition between Greek and Roman age with the quest of salvation through the implementation of what Plato, Kant and Husserl termed as the transcendental ego or the consciousness. Due to the belief on the transcendental awareness or the transcendental consciousness as the goal of salvation, mysticism focuses on the transcending of the epimeral world to the transcendental world with the help of the transcendental consciousness. Transtromer as the poet of mysticism indulges in the dramatization of the mystic sensibilities in his poems so brilliantly that he composes the poems to present the mystic awareness. Advocating the mysticism in order to critique the globally raising materialistic tendency of the human being Transtromer not only sutures the divine power with the human consciousness but also appeals to the feelings as a soul, and the encounter with the ultimate divine reality in non rational way in the process of ultimate transformation found in Transtromer's poetry unearth the issues of mystic awareness.

Transtromer as a psychologist practiced his profession as a clinician in adolescent psychology for a number of years while writing his poetry at night. He is also an accomplished pianist and his love of music has always worked in tandem with his efforts as a poet. Yet as much as someone like the farmer, laborer, and poet John Clare, Transtromer infused his poetry with the material of his day job and while he may

not have been out in the pastoral fields with ox and horse as Clare was, his experience with troubled young patients also come forth in his poems, often as an undercurrent of counterpoint to the grandness and godliness he finds in nature. To take up each day as one's work the problems of young patients who are bothered by demons and depressed, injured, damaged to the point of needing intensive professional help has to be a taxing venture; certainly, mental health professionals often seem to have one of the more thankless jobs in all of health care. Tranströmer was a man unknowingly ahead of his time, using an arts and medicine approach of therapy of the literary word before such was a trend before entire journals were devoted to the application of literature as a healing modality.

Another powerful aspect of Tranströmer's word-smiting is that he is keen to see man-made objects within natural surroundings in a pragmatic, direct, manner without losing the heart of the poet about it, either. Something as mundane yet essential as a tugboat is not made ugly for ugly's sake nor is it exalted but instead is cast into its role and duties with a no-nonsense approach that would make a logistics officer or accountant proud. Each bird, each airplane, each train, each road, each hill, each stream or creek to yet be forded or crossed with a sure bridge—they're all fair game for our poet. Tranströmer approaches the world as a whole, just as it actually is, as a place to explore, record, and tell about later. This is why his poems, though often quite short and lean on details, seem robust and full.

The poems of Tranströmer such as *Alone*, *Winter's Gaze*, *Prelude*, *On the Outskirts of Work*, *From March 1979*, *Baltics*, *Carillon*, *Stigar*, *Water Under the Earth*, *Allegro*, *Vermeer*, *Grief Gondola No. 2*, *For the living and the Dead*, *Leaflet*, *Organ*

*Recital* and *Late autumn labyrinth* are analyzed in full vigor to confirm Tranströmer's status as a critic of mysticism.

This project focuses on Tomas Tranströmer's *New Collected poems* translated to English from Italian language by Robin Fulton. In particular it explores the modernist trends and impacts of modernism in contemporary society which has been overlooked in the Tranströmer scholarship. Generally mystical poetry conjures fridge-magnet platitudes and joss sticks. But the mysticism of Tomas Tranströmer is grounded firmly in close observation of both the natural world and human psychology. He does not present his poems as nuggets of wisdom to be pondered: instead, they tend to chart a progression from concrete reality to a heightened state of awareness. Grounding on the modality of mysticism the present research concentrates to unveil the relation of union of human soul with the soul of nature.

As this study dramatizes the logic of exploration of the boundary between human consciousness and the unknown in terms of mysticism, it follows the lead of modernist literary critics Richard Foster and Thomas Merton who offer a remedy to the rampant mystical representation of the nature and human consciousness in the modernist texts. Nothing could be more traditionally poetic than to contemplate the changing of the seasons in terms of changing emotional states; but simply by manipulating the timeframe, by having winter arrive with surreal speed, Tranströmer allows us to apprehend both from a fresh perspective. As this collection discloses the interlocution of nature and human psychology paves the way for the implementation of approach of mysticism.

Merton also saw mysticism as having an element of illumination. Merton had a mystical experience in Cuba, before entering the monastery, in which he experienced illumination. In describing it he writes that "it was if I had been suddenly illuminated by being blinded by the manifestation of God's presence. The reason why the light was blinding and neutralizing was that there was and could be simply nothing in it of sense or imagination". (23)

Illumination as blindness is an interesting paradox, and it leads directly into a final aspect of Merton's mysticism. Merton was a follower of apophatic theology. He did not believe that any "idea of ours, let alone any image, could adequately represent God, but also that we should not allow ourselves to be satisfied with any such knowledge of Him" In order to know God, one must cease to rely on concepts as approximate means of union with Him. In his views on such matters Merton was influenced greatly by St. John of the Cross, however he acknowledges the influence of others when he writes that the Fathers and the great Scholastics agree that the via negation is the way to a true contact with God, a true possession of God in darkness.

Thomas Merton believed that the ascent to God involved purification, illumination, and union. He thought that the process must include prayer, solitude, silence, and effort, but within in the context of God's grace. He also believed that one could never truly know God in any positive sense alone, and that the final goal of union with God would not take place until death had worked our final transformation.

The major concern of this research is to find the sense of mystic vision inherent in the contemporary society. It also touches the debate of how the socio-politico and historical atmosphere governs the human behavior. In this way, digging out the

beleaguered identity of the then people of the society and to peep to the mystic vision of the modern time is the objective of the present research. The poems included in the *Collected Poems* follow the rise and fall of modern people through the characterization of the different speakers besides the humanitarian and ecological overtones. The speakers sometimes in the poem see Peace in the Surging Prow; and the wrecks come out of the sea looking for their owners. In this way, the critical lens of the mysticism places the spotlight on the important ways in transtromer's poetry.

Several criticisms and reviews have been received by this anthology since its publication. Different critics have criticized the text from multiple perspectives. In this line Allen Frank claims;

Transtromer's haunting poems, which frequently explore the boundary between human consciousness and the unknown, have long been admired by Robert Bly, among others. This selection of over 100 poems (rendered by 12 translators) bears ample testimony to the Swedish poet's gift for conveying the truths of time and selfhood that lie adjacent to the mundane routines of our technological welfare society. On a pilgrimage through a world that is half contemporary Sweden, half dream landscape, he shows us "the blue wind flowers" that "open a secret passage to the real celebration, which is quiet as death. (13)

Similarly, displaying the uniqueness and seriousness along with the compactness of transtromer's poetry, Bergsten, Staffan says;

The major contemporary poet of Scandinavia, and a perennial Nobel Prize candidate, Transtromer and his compact, sometimes grim lyricism

have long enjoyed a serious following in the United States. Tranströmer's preferred land- and seascapes, drawn from the "spruce-clad coastland" of his native Sweden, have not changed much over his 50-year career: flat seas and frosty storms, swarming birds and contrapuntally beautiful summers, from which "society's dark hull drifts further and further away." His forms, however, have varied impressively: Sapphic stanzas, haiku, imagist lyric, prose sketches and several-page sequences all speak to one another. A clear competitor to Bly's well-received *The Half-Finished Heaven*, this more comprehensive collection concludes with the rarely seen short poems of Tranströmer's recent years. Some will note political undercurrents yet Tranströmer's dominant moods are almost warily inward-turning while given to hope. (23)

In the process of giving different qualities and color to the anthology, New Direction Publication quotes;

In day's first hours consciousness can grasp the world as the hand grips a sun-warmed stone. Translated into fifty languages, the poetry of Tomas Tranströmer has had a profound influence around the world. *New Collected Poems* gathers all the poems Tomas Tranströmer has published, from his distinctive first collection in 1954, *17 Poems*, through his epic poem *Baltic* and *The Sad Gondola*, published six years after he suffered a debilitating stroke in 1990, to his most recent slim book, *The Great Enigma*, published in Sweden in 2004. Also included is his prose-memoir *Memories Look at Me*, containing keys into his

intensely spiritual, metaphysical poetry. Firmly rooted in the natural world, his work falls between dream and dream; it probes "the great unsolved love" with the opening up, through subtle modulations, of "concrete words. (262)

Taking leaf out of such humanitarian ecological and linguist critiques, the proposed thesis reads the dynamism of mysticism, yet untouched by the critics, as being subversive to the so-called possessiveness of reality over the world of imagination.

The proposed thesis being based on library research, to dig out the mystical conceptions inherent in the poetry incorporates the terms and vocabularies from the mysticism emphasizing basically Thomas Merton. Guidance from the lecturers and professors is taken as the supportive tool. As the focus of the research is a relation of human consciousness to the world of unknown which displays the power of the human mind through a spotlight on the mystical experiences undergone by the characters. The lines of the poems are taken to prove the hypothesis.

The limitation of the research is that it has not touched the debate of other aspects apart from the mysticism. The eye of Thomas Merton in *The New Collected Poems* is used neglecting other aspects to make the thesis prove the hypothesis. The schizophrenic condition of the characters and valorization of human values and positioning them in the center confirms the features of modernism. But, the delimitation of the research is that it only sticks to the notion of the mysticism.

In Sweden he has been called a buzzard poet because his haunting, visionary poetry shows the world from a height, in a mystic dimension, but brings every detail of

the natural world into sharp focus. His poems are often explorations of the borderland between sleep and waking, between the conscious and unconscious states.

Tranströmer was born in 1931 in Stockholm, where he grew up, but spent many long summers on the island of Runmaro in the nearby archipelago, evoking that landscape in his early work, which draws on the aesthetic tradition of Swedish nature poetry. His later poetry is more personal, open and relaxed, often reflecting his broad interests: travel, music, painting, archaeology and natural sciences. Many of his poems use compressed description and concentrate on a single distinct image as a catalyst for psychological insight and metaphysical interpretation. These acts as a meeting-point or threshold between conflicting elements or forces: sea and land, man and nature, freedom and control. Robin Fulton has worked with Tomas Tranströmer on each of his collections as they have been published over many years, which has involved detailed exchanges between translator and poet on the meaning and music of numerous poems. There have been several translations as well as some books of so-called versions of Tranströmer's poetry published in English, but Fulton's prize-winning translation is the most authoritative and comprehensive edition of his poetry published anywhere.

Comparing Tranströmer with the poet Rilke on presenting the uncertain world of every human Seamus Heaney states:

In its delicate hovering between the responsibilities of the social world and the invitations of a world of possibly numinous reality, Tomas Tranströmer's poetry permits us to be happily certain of our own uncertainties... Like the animals in Rilke's first sonnet to Orpheus, they



are alive to the god's music which 'makes a temple deep inside their hearing.' (4)

Tranströmer gathered compliments not only for his poems but also for the style of living his life. For Jaan Kaplinski, he is able to breathe life into some of the most uninspiring realities of modern existence. He says;

One of the most outstanding poets of our time Tranströmer has succeeded in achieving a synthesis between the modern and the traditional, between art and life. He has been able to breathe life into some of the most uninspiring realities of modern existence...He has worked for more than thirty years as a practicing psychologist, helping people, giving them something of his remarkable integrity and strength, and achieving a depth of vision into our human condition that he is able to express in his poems. (78)

Tranströmer is a vivid evoker of both landscapes and cityscapes. The writer, he says, is 'at the same time eagle and mole' (12), looking down or looking up from the vantage point best suited to catching life before it disappears. Tranströmer is especially good at memorable moments of panic, uncertainty, displacement, from which the speaker can recover but which remind him of darkneses and worlds no one would want to inhabit for long' – Edwin Morgan, *Northwords* Tomas Tranströmer suffered a stroke in 1990, which deprived him of most of his speech and left him unable to use his right arm. But he is also an accomplished classical pianist. Unable to speak more than a few words, he can still express himself through music, despite only being able to play left-hand piano pieces. Swedish composers have written several left-hand piano pieces

especially for him to play. This film by Pamela Robertson-Pearce and Neil Astley combines contemporary footage of Tranströmer, including his piano playing, with archive film and recordings of earlier readings. The English subtitles to Tranströmer's readings of his poems in this film are Robin Fulton's translations from *New Collected Poems*. A Swedish writer, poet and translator, whose poetry has been deeply influential in Sweden, as well as around the world. He was the recipient of the 2011 Nobel Prize in Literature because, through his condensed, translucent images, he gives us fresh access to reality.

Tranströmer received his secondary education at the Södra Latin School in Stockholm and graduated as a psychologist from Stockholm University in 1956. He began writing at thirteen, and published his first collection of poems, *17 dikter* in 1954. An English translation by Robin Fulton of his entire body of work, *New Collected Poems*, was published in the UK in 1987 and expanded in 1997. Following the publication of *Den Stora The Great Enigma*, Fulton's edition was further expanded into *The Great Enigma: New Collected Poems*, published in the US in 2006 and as an updated edition of *New Collected Poems* in the UK in 2011. He published a short autobiography, *Memories look at me*, in 1993. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 2011.

Other poets especially in the political 1970's accused Tranströmer of being apart from his tradition and not including political issues in his poems and novels. His work, though, lies within and further develops the Modernist and Expressionist language of 20th century poetry; his clear, seemingly simple pictures from everyday life and nature in particular reveals a mystic insight to the universal aspects of the human mind.

Tranströmer and the American poet Robert Bly are close friends and their correspondence has been published in the book *Air Mail*. mystical experiences not only tend to experience a kind of union with the ultimate, and in a theistic system, union with God in such a way as to make oneself identical with God in a unequivocal way is not acceptable but it also tends to give the person a sense that God is somehow present in all things.

In 1990, Tranströmer suffered a stroke that affects his speech, but he continues to write. Tranströmer has in the past been mentioned as a candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature, and many consider him one of Sweden's foremost poets. Tranströmer's awards include the Bonnier Award for Poetry, the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, the Oevalids Prize, the Petrarca-Preis in Germany, the Golden Wreath of the Struga Poetry Evenings and the Swedish Award from International Poetry Forum. In 2007, Tranströmer received a special Lifetime Recognition Award given by the trustees of the Griffin Trust for Excellence in Poetry, which also awards the annual Griffin Poetry Prize. His poetry has been translated into fifty languages; Bly, and the prominent American blues writer Samuel Charters have translated his work into English.

In addition to his work as a writer, Tranströmer was also a respected psychologist before he had his stroke. He worked in juvenile prisons, and with disabled, convicts, and drug addicts. He is also a piano player, something he has been able to continue after his stroke, albeit with one hand.

Born in April 1931, an only child, his parents divorced when he was three years old and he was brought up by his mother within the educated working class of Stockholm: a Social Democratic system infused with the traditional Lutheran ethics of

moral compassion and generosity. He took up a career in psychology, working in a young offenders' institute in Linköping. In 1965 he moved with his wife and their daughters, Paula and Emma, to Vasteras, a small town west of Stockholm, where he continued his work with juvenile delinquents, convicts, drug addicts, and the physically handicapped.

It was during this time that his poetry began to reach its full maturity and an international audience. It was translated into over sixty languages and brought him a host of awards. In 1990, however, his life was changed irrevocably by a serious stroke. While his disability did not end his writing career, it did impair his ability to communicate, and the Transtromers now live quietly in the Södermalm district of Stockholm—near where Tomas lived as a young boy, and overlooking the sea-lanes where his grandfather worked as a pilot, guiding ships through the Stockholm archipelago—and in their cottage on the island of Runmaro, where Tomas spent his childhood summers.

The landscape of Tranströmer's poetry has remained constant during his fifty-five-year career: the jagged coastland of his native Sweden, with its dark spruce and pine forests, sudden light and sudden storm, restless seas and endless winters, is mirrored by his direct, plain-speaking style and arresting, unforgettable images. Sometimes referred to as a buzzard poet, Tranströmer seems to hang over this landscape with a gimlet eye that sees the world with an almost mystical precision. A view that first appeared open and featureless now holds an anxiety of detail; the voice that first sounded spare and simple now seems subtle, shrewd, and thrillingly intimate. There is a profoundly spiritual element in Tranströmer's vision, though not a conventionally

religious one. He is interested in polarities and how we respond, as humans, to finding ourselves at pivotal points, at the fulcrum of a moment.

Swedes are unusually keen on poetry. They have a powerful relationship with their old poets through songs, ballads and hymns, and new poetry is regularly reviewed in the arts pages of newspapers. When the Swedish Academy awarded the 2011 Nobel Prize for Literature to Tomas Tranströmer, therefore, it was little wonder that people cheered all over Sweden.

The Swedes' love of poetry is and always will be a fairly exclusive art form. But for anyone interested in starting to read poetry, Tomas Tranströmer is an unusually generous and welcoming bard. In Tomas Tranströmer's work, the Swedish countryside is a natural forum. Here we find the lakes, the rivers, the forests, and the Swedish archipelago. As a poet, he moves unusually quietly and attentively through the landscape and follows the changing seasons and the shifts in the weather. Few Swedish poets have captured the balm of the brief, intensive Nordic spring with such delightful precision. The sun is often visible in Tranströmer's poetry. Darkness and night may seem more common, but if you look carefully the yellow sun is shining there over people's lives. His sun is warm and benevolent, but sometimes frightening as well; it burns, glows and shines. Tranströmer once said "I don't write about God, I write about the sun." (22)

Thomas Tranströmer the 2011 Nobel Prize winner is highly esteemed by the world's poetic elite. A number of distinguished poets make translations of his work in this volume. Tranströmer is a poet's poet who is admired for his metaphorical brilliance, mystical awareness and technical skill. His memoir of childhood justifies the admiration

he has been awarded to. He was an only child whose father left the family when he was very young. His maternal grandfather was a strong and stabilizing presence. He in one interesting story tells of how he as a very small child was swept away by a crowd and lost connection with his mother. He figured out the path home by walking back the way of the tramway line. His resourcefulness in dealing with a dangerous and terrifying situation seems to also somehow mark his poetry. He tells of other incidents which are difficult including one in which he is beaten by a schoolteacher.

His poetry gives a powerful sense of what it feels like to contemplate the world from a small country in Northern Europe, especially during the Cold War. In the 1960s and 1970s, relations with the Soviet Union were a sensitive matter, in both the political arena and the literary. Tomas Tranströmer was one of the few poets who wrote about the people kept under surveillance and wiretapped in our neighboring countries across the Baltic. In his small book of prose, *The Memories See Me* (1993), Tomas Tranströmer describes how at the age of five or six he was separated from his mother in the crowds at a downtown Stockholm square, Hotorget. Frightened and worried, the boy sets off alone on the long walk to the part of town where he lives. He passes house-fronts, street crossings, grown-ups. The heightened perception this experience gave him seems reflected throughout his work as a poet.

## II: Mystic Awareness in Tranströmer's Poems

Tomas Tranströmer, an 80-year-old surrealist or mystical poet from Stockholm, became the fourth Swedish writer to be recognized by the Swedish Academy with the Nobel Prize in literature. He was the first Swede to be honored since the novelists Eyvind Johnson and Harry Martinson shared the prize in 1974. In course of dealing with mysticism, Tranströmer is associated with Robert Bly's "Deep Image" movement. Bly explains helpfully that the "deep image" is a geographical location in the psyche, but the critic Kevin Bushnell seems to be on firmer ground in saying that it is the first attempt in American poetry to incorporate fully the theories of Freud, Jung and other depth psychologists into the poet's expression. Tranströmer, a trained and practicing psychologist would be attracted to such a conception for obvious reasons.

Tranströmer's poems are serene and unfazed, even when describing the "terror" of an automobile accident as in *Alone*:

One evening in February I came near to dying here.  
The car skidded sideways on the ice, out  
on the wrong side of the road. The approaching cars—  
their lights—closed in. (4)

Antitheses such as isolation and society are brought together, generating a powerful field of force, Batchelor says in his *Guardian* review, commenting on this poem. The poem offers no explanation for its abrupt change of scene, and we soon learn that a Tranströmer's poem can change with the speed of a dream.

The mysticism of Tomas Tranströmer is grounded firmly in close observation of both the natural world and human psychology. He has worked as a psychologist all his life. He does not present his poems as nuggets of wisdom to be pondered: instead, they tend to chart a progression from concrete reality to a heightened state of awareness, as in *Winter's Gaze*:

I lean like a ladder and with my face  
 reach into the second floor of the cherry tree.  
 I'm inside the bell of colours, it chimes with sunlight.  
 I polish off the swarthy red berries faster than four magpies. (16)

Nothing could be more traditionally poetic than to contemplate the changing of the seasons in terms of changing emotional states; but simply by manipulating the timeframe – by having winter arrive with surreal speed – Tranströmer allows us to apprehend both from a fresh perspective.

In the helpful introduction Fulton accounts for how well Tranströmer's poetry has travelled: "The images leap out from the page, so the first-time reader or listener has the immediate feeling of being given something very tangible"(23). This immediacy and gift status of Tranströmer's imagery make one want to share it with others, as when we see the statue of a saint smiling, helpless, as if they had taken away his glasses, or when an espresso is "carried out from the gloomy kitchen / and looks into the sun without blinking", or the way sleeping figures "rest like lowered crossing barriers when the mystery draws past" (13). Such ingenuity is attractive, but, more importantly, the observing eye is always in the service of the poem: the poet does not allow it to make decisions for him. While Tranströmer is never self-aggrandizing, he does offer this



image of the figure of the poet: "But the writer is halfway into his image, there / he travels, at the same time eagle and mole"(12). Through the majesty of the eagle and the quiet rebellion of the mole, the image conveys the combination of lofty aspiration and humble diligence that poetry demands. That the writer should be halfway into his image is significant, too. Tranströmer's poetry is full of stolen moments when he seems to have caught himself off-guard:

I pause with my hand on the door handle  
 take the pulse of the house  
 I stand under the starry sky  
 and feel the world creep  
 in and out of my coat  
 as in an ant-hill. (33)

The pairing of the eagle and the mole is also typical of the poet's use of contraries. Fulton has written of how Tranströmer's poems often work by bringing together a series of contrasts – light and dark, self and other, sleep and wakefulness – and arranging them so as to open up huge areas of experience within short lyric poems. This is what happens in the extraordinary poem *Alone*. The first half of the poem describes a car accident:

The approaching traffic had huge lights.  
 They shone on me while I pulled at the wheel  
 in a transparent terror that floated like egg white.  
 The seconds grew – there was space in them –  
 they grew as big as hospital buildings. (23)

The rest of the poem is a meditation on the speaker's need for solitude and the deleterious effects of always being in a crowd, ending with an image of city life followed by two single-word stanzas: "Many" and "One". Antitheses such as isolation and society are brought together, generating a powerful field of force. The poem offers no explanation for its abrupt change of scene, and we soon learn that a Tranströmer's poem can change with the speed of a dream.

What most distinguishes Tranströmer's poetry is an almost preternatural knack for metaphor. This was obvious in his first book (1954) from the first lines of the first poem, *Prelude*:

Waking up is a parachute jump from dreams.  
Free of the suffocating turbulence the traveler  
sinks toward the green zone of morning. (24)

Each of the metaphors is startling and sheds new light on a common experience. At the same time, each seems, in retrospect, to emerge naturally from its subject, in part because the poet makes so little fuss about what he is doing, in part because his sly sense of humor leads us to lower our defenses. Tranströmer isn't a comic poet, but he can be quite funny, albeit usually in the service of a serious point. When, in the poem *On the Outskirts of Work*, he says "The moon of leisure circles the planet Work / with its mass and weight," this reader, at least, has to chuckle, albeit through gritted teeth. Or take the gallows humor in "Balakirev's Dream," which feels like a cross between *The Seventh Seal* and *Life of Brian*:

He turned to the nearest sailor,  
made signs despairingly and begged:

“Cross yourself, like me, cross yourself!”

The sailor stared sadly like a blind man,

stretched out his hands, sank his head—

he hung as if nailed in the air. (25)

One of Tranströmer’s chief preoccupations is with the difficulty, or even impossibility, of communication. That’s not a surprising concern for a poet, particularly in the modern era, but Tranströmer is at once more obsessive and less hectoring on the subject than some others. Unlike many poets who share his reservations about language, he seldom embodies those difficulties by “problematizing” and dislocating everyday speech. In terms of syntax, he can be as straightforward as Billy Collins:

Weary of all who come with words, words but no language

I make my way to the snow-covered island.

The untamed has no words.

The unwritten pages spread out on every side!

I come upon the tracks of deer in the snow.

Language but no words. (45)

On a superficial level, this has similarities the setting, especially with the “deep image” school that Robert Bly inaugurated with *Silence in the Snowy Fields*. Indeed, Tranströmer has said that he recognized Bly as a kind of kindred spirit upon reading that book, and the two have been friends for decades. The differences are at least as important as the similarities, though. Bly shies away from editorial comment on the images in those poems, on the assumption that an explicated image is necessarily a limited or shallow one. Here, by way of contrast, Tranströmer provides a rather neat

summary of what the deer tracks, at least in the context of the poem, mean. He doesn't seem at all worried that the last line will exhaust that image of tracks in snow.

The poem *Baltics* constitutes a profound meditation on the nature of the human person. Immediately following the lines quoted above comes the story of a composer in an unnamed country, presumably behind the Iron Curtain, who is first praised by the authorities, then condemned, then, after his official "rehabilitation," crippled by a stroke:

Beyond the reach of elegy or execration.

But the music's left, he keeps composing in his own style,

for the rest of his days he becomes a medical sensation. (13)

He wrote music to texts he no longer understood;

in the same way

we express something through our lives

in the humming chorus full of mistaken words. (14)

Individual identity is sacred to Tranströmer, and he is repelled by anything—the state, the crowd, a church, that threatens to subsume it. The critic Staffan Bergsten has pointed out that while there are strains of mysticism in the poet's work, it is never of the variety in which the self is simply dissolved in the divine.

In a poem from the early 1980s, *Carillon*, the poet widens his perspective to include the superhuman, a move that does not so much leave the human behind, as clarify its relative place in the scheme of things:

I lie on the bed with my arms outstretched

I am an anchor that has dug itself down and holds steady the huge  
shadow floating up there

The great unknown that I am a part of and which is certainly more  
important than me. (33)

Stretched out in the form of an anchor, the speaker also resembles a cross, and, by implication, an inverted cross, like the one on which Peter, who didn't judge himself worthy of dying in the same manner as Christ, was crucified. Fulton had ended the final line of his translation with the subjective form of the first person pronoun, as Tranströmer does in the Swedish, not simply because it would have been more correct to do so, but because it would have been another way to highlight the central importance of identity and mysticism to the poet.

Tranströmer is a quiet poet, and in 1989 he got quieter in an all too literal sense, when, in what seemed the fulfillment of an unintentional prophecy made in *Baltics*, a stroke crippled his right side and deprived him of most of his ability to speak. He still plays the piano, albeit with one hand, and he still gives interviews and entertains visitors, though his wife Monica has to interpret his mumbled words. Parallel to this health crisis has been the poet's movement toward shorter and shorter poems, a process which has presumably reached its limit in his most recent collection, *The Great Enigma*, which consists almost entirely of haiku.

Starting from the everyday experience of being in a car heading into the city on a clogged highway, the winner of the 2011 Nobel Prize in Literature, Tranströmer, in *Stigar* wrote:

I know that I have to go far away,  
 straight through the city, out  
 the other side, then step out  
 and walk a long time in the woods.

Walk in the tracks of the badger. (34)

More than an invitation to wildness, or a marker of the contrast between the civilized and the natural worlds, this, the first badger to appear in Tranströmer's poetry, was a manifest nod to Robert Bly and his role as guide.

That omnivorous, tenacious, apparently fearless mammal, sometimes solitary, digging in the dark earth, has been a fixture in Bly's thought and poetry. The wild animal started appearing in his poems, first in *The Light Around the Body*, and then in *Sleepers Joining Hands*, including this example, from *Water Under the Earth*:

I am only half-risen,  
 I see how carefully I have covered my tracks as I wrote,  
 how well I brushed over the past with my tail.  
 I enter rooms full of photographs of the dead.  
 My hair stands up  
 as a badger crosses my path in the moonlight.

It also turned up in his letters to Tranströmer, once when he criticized another Swedish poet's book as too intellectual, with too much defense of poetry in it. In the book's introduction, Bly added;

His poems are a sort of railway station where trains that have come enormous distances stand briefly in the same building. One train may

have some Russian snow still lying on the undercarriage, & another may have Mediterranean flowers still fresh in the compartments, and Ruhr soot on the roofs. (56)

To this last remark, Tranströmer reacted: "Nothing written about my poems has made me so glad as your railway station metaphor—it is so beautiful in itself, a poem, and I can only hope that it is true too." (47)

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*New Collected Poems* makes available to American readers Robin Fulton's translations of all of Tomas Tranströmer's poetry collections as well as some unpublished poems and a selection from his 1993 memoir *Memories Look at Me*. The collection takes us from his first collection, *17 Poems*, through *The Great Enigma* from 2004. Tranströmer, one of the most distinctive European modernists of the 20th century, writes with one foot in the high Surrealism of Paul Eluard and René Char, and the other foot in the Swedish Romantic nature mysticism of Vilhelm Ekelund. In difference to Surrealism's violent struggle for the total liberation of the mind, Tranströmer conceives of his poetry as contemplation. For Tranströmer there is no need for struggle because dream and reality are not separate; they come together in a mystical vision of nature.

When Tranströmer's first book was published, there was clear influence on him of Lindegren's. There is still a hint of it, but the poetry has become much less dramatic, much more relaxed and mystical. While Lindegren had something of an Icarus-obsession, repeatedly using the Greek myth as a metaphor for poetic creation, Written a few years after Tranströmer suffered a stroke that left him unable to speak, *Memories Look at Me* is Tomas Tranströmer's lyrical autobiography about growing up in Sweden.

His story opens with a streak of light, a comet that becomes a brilliant metaphor for “my life” as he tries to penetrate the earliest, formative memories of his past. This childhood life unfolds itself slowly in eight glistening chapters that gradually reveal the most secret of treasures: how Tranströmer discovered poetry.

Transtromer begins with the new classic inversion of image:

Waking up is a parachute jump from dreams.  
Free of the suffocating turbulence the traveler  
sinks toward the green zone of morning. (56)

While Lindegren held a Shelley-like concept of the poet as someone who earns truth by breaking through the barriers of normal human existence, Transtromer sees poetry as a letting go. A brief inventory of setting and subject matters will give the uninitiated reader a good idea of Transtromer’s poems.

Transtromer's favorite settings include trains, train stations, cars, motels, the side of roads, the site of urban sprawl, Egypt, the Congo, the US, museums and other forms of exhibition spaces. In other words, places in flux and transition, the settings of unexpected meetings and dislocations. These spaces are generally peopled by tourists, travelers, dreamers, sleepwalkers and children. The speaker and his character seem to constantly experience the world anew, as if they had no memory. For this reason, his poetry could be seen as an extremely accomplished version of Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky’s concept of defamiliarization – he perpetually makes the reader experience the world as a stranger might:



The office windows are open. You can still hear  
how the horse is tramping inside.

The old horse with the rubber-stamp hooves. (46)

It is difficult to write about Tranströmer without falling back on such now cliché ideas as mysticism. Many translators have tried their hand at Tranströmer. In difference to a poet like Paul Celan, whose deformative language play and radical use of neologism forces translators to commit overt acts of violence on the English language, Tranströmer challenges American translators with an unpoetic slackness of language. His lines are often so casual that translators feel the need to inject poetic flourishes. Here is the translation of *Allegro* by Robert Bly:

Jag spelar Haydn efter en svart dag  
och känner en enkel värme i händerna.  
Tangenterna vill. Milda hammare slår.  
Klangen är grön, livlig och stilla. (67)

Here's Bly:

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. (52)

Every reader and even writer feels they have the right version. What we should care about is not, perhaps, whether one gets it more right than another, but that Tranströmer's poetry calls forth a variety of ways of trying to change or deform the

English language to make room for his poetry. We're all sleepwalkers wandering through an amazing mystical hotel.

The true marker of Tranströmer's poetry is not deep image's desire for unmediated process or the current fascination with stylistic bricolage, process liberated from its historical origins. His intention isn't to suppress or outmaneuver the shocks of experience for the sake of primal purity or a portentous, knowing tone, but to make the poem a place where these shocks can occur. The eerie coolness and detachment of his poems are a summons to these shocks that constantly forebode imminent catastrophe. The catastrophe hinted at is the intrusion of irrational forces into moments of shock that seem on the verge of erupting into visionary transcendence that would compensate the poet for being at the mercy of these same forces.

Yet this potentially consoling vision is always short-circuited into a direct confrontation with these forces: the vision becomes the moment of this confrontation, while the possibility of transcendence is deferred until the next trial. In his poem *Grief Gondola No. 2*, an homage to Liszt's piano pieces by the same name, "the green cold of the ocean that presses upward through the palace floor" transforms later in the poem to "the deep that loves to invade humanity without showing its face." (55) Both of these visionary moments, which start off by registering the shock of artistic creation, unpredictably veer off into the irrational world of the poet's own dreams that develop in ways beyond his control, or the control of the structures of art.

This moment of vertigo, of the sense of the non-human void revealing itself beneath the invisible, but human face of the deep, is one of the triumphs of Tranströmer's poetry. His sensitivity to the deep as the source of human creativity in

response to the timelessness of the void suggests how alert his imagination is, always poised on the brink of revelation, but infinitely patient, careful to let these otherworldly revelations take place on their own terms. "The still, sad music of humanity" (67) that resonates from the deep, and the intimation of the void underneath that music, can't be counterfeited by a blind trust in unconscious processes or by appropriating other poets' hard-won intuitions, as if those intuitions could be reproduced at will, regardless of their historical and personal contingencies. By contrast, Tranströmer's poems imagine the spaces that the deep then inhabits, like ground water gushing up into a newly dug well. And those spaces are anything but ahistorical. In fact, history itself is the main force that occasions his encounters with the deep.

In *Vermeer* the poet confronts the rising of the deep as it announces its own arrival in historically defined circumstances, the 17th century alehouse in the former case, a World War II convoy patrolling the North Atlantic in the latter. Tranströmer's sense of the continuity between history and our private fates sets up what Baudelaire called "correspondence" in which "the lyrical stirrings of the soul, the wave motions of dreaming, and the shocks of consciousness" (47) vibrate with and against the specific social conditions we are born into. Tranströmer's poems are acoustically perfect chambers in which all of these contradictory vibrations can be heard without straining. In "Streets in Shanghai" the intoxication of the crowd resonates against darker notes: "We look almost happy out in the sun, while we bleed to death from wounds we know nothing about." (64)

Tranströmer's work constructs spaces that allow us to penetrate to that void, but without denying the contingent nature of the poem's historical moment. By this quiet

way of confronting the void in which the deep sea cold rises into our being, he makes his poems hospitable to the abyss while still acknowledging the vertiginous feel of too much emptiness underneath us. At the ending of *Vermeer* he takes this dynamic between the void and private subjectivity a step further:

The airy sky has taken its place leaning against the wall.

It is like a prayer to what is empty.

And what is empty turns its face to us

and whispers:

'I am not empty, I am open.' (26)

Objectively voiced, this simultaneous denial and affirmation points beyond itself with unsentimental cool to a realm where the void itself hints at the correspondences between us and it, an invitation almost to inhabit that openness. Perhaps what we most need to learn from Tranströmer's poetry is the grave tact of his making, his wary refusal to march into that void accompanied by linguistic flourishes and salvos, while allowing the tenderness of this moment between us and that instant of openness to resonate and expand.

*Brief Pause in the Organ Recital* is a lyric poem that contains twelve carefully balanced four-line stanzas of free verse. The immediacy of the experience recounted in the poem is emphasized by the fact that almost all the verbs in the poem are in the present tense. The poet/speaker is attending an organ recital in a medieval cathedral. The sudden silence during a brief pause in the program breaks into his elevated mood and makes him aware of the traffic noises—"that greater organ" (49) outside the cathedral. He perceives that though it lacks the rigidly formal structure of

the organ music to which he has been listening, the traffic noise has a freer rhythm of its own. Next, he becomes aware, as if it were part of the street noise, of the pulsing of his own blood, what he calls “the cascade that hides inside me.” (32) The passing of a trailer-truck heavy enough to shake the six-hundred-year-old walls of the cathedral brings to mind an experience he had as a child of four: Seated on his mother’s lap, he listened to the distant voices of contending adults. Though he initially appears to reject the idea, he senses a similarity between the mother’s lap and the sheltering church. In effect, he is reinventing a metaphor that became a cliché in an earlier age of firm religious faith: the Church as the believer’s mother.

Gazing at the pillars that support the roof of the cathedral, he appears to rediscover a common Romantic symbol, that of nature as a vital, protective force. The mental image that likens the interior of the cathedral to a forest serves as a transition to a remembered dream with an outdoor setting. The poet vividly relives this dream: He is standing alone in a churchyard that is surrounded by blooming heather; he is waiting for someone, a mysterious friend who is never identified, even though the dreamer soon notices that this friend has already arrived. The setting of a graveyard and the heather, a familiar portent of death in Swedish folk tradition, suggest that the awaited friend might be Death; indeed, in the following lines, when the dream reaches its climax, the reader learns that “death turns up the lights from underneath, from the ground.” (67) If what the dreamer is experiencing is a vision of his own death, however, it seems to hold no terrors for him. When death intensifies the purplish (heather-colored) light, that light is transformed into a color that is beyond human experience. Finally, this hue converges with the rosy light of dawn that whines in through the eyelids of the dreamer and

awakens him. This example of synesthesia where color becoming sound- finally gains semantic content and is articulated as a word Perhaps. Tentative though it may seem, this message from beyond the grave gives the poet enough hope to sustain him in this unstable world and to persuade him that he must not expect to be able to reduce it to an abstract picture anymore than he could hope to find the blueprint of a storm.

The moment of insight comes, therefore, not from the poet's perception of outer correspondences between man and nature but from within his own psyche—at the end of the dream that is the spiritual climax of this poem. So to gain the mystic experience it is not necessary to mingle the physique to the soul but it can be achieved through the meditation of oneself. Tranströmer, a trained psychologist, has more than a clinical interest in dreams. He believes, as one can tell from many of his poems, that dreams not only link one's inner with one's outer self but also enable one to penetrate more deeply into one's essential self than is possible in the waking state. The manifest content of this dream might lead one to conclude that the dreamer has an overwhelming awareness—if not fear—of death. Tranströmer is, however, more interested in conveying the emotional impact of the dream than in interpreting it.

*Late autumn labyrinth* begins with a fragment, as if a stage direction were being given in a play. The idea of a labyrinth is appropriate for this poem because of the mystery in it as a whole and because of the abrupt and sometimes baffling changes in direction that take place, especially between sections. This first section of the poem follows a thin narrative: Someone waits at the edge of the woods, and then decides to enter the woods, and then leaves. While in the woods, he hears a few sounds, notices the mushrooms have shriveled up, and decides to get out and find his landmarks again

before it gets dark. The scene is somewhat frightening, mainly because of the associations the reader might have with woods and darkness; the reader has no idea, however, why the person is in the woods or why exactly he needs to find his landmarks again. The section is evocative and startling in its metaphors, but it is certainly also opaque. His poetry seems to work directly on the senses, to wake you up to wonder, often by allowing the mechanical world to come alive just as nature does, in mystical symbiosis.

In the short poem *Homewards*, from Tranströmer's stunning 1978 collection *The Truth-Barrier*, we get the essence of Tranströmer in all its strange, innocent beauty. What seems to be offered in the poem to replace the redemptive quality of the cross is the power of the poet's own imagination. Tranströmer is admired widely and has been translated by a number of poets because of the power in his lyrical voice. He banishes the normal hinges of a poem and creates a fresh vision that benefits from surprising metaphors and innovative transitions opening the gateway for mysticism. Tranströmer, however, recognizes that all of his verbal pyrotechnics really end up not affecting the world in the least. His image of death's errands being run by office workers is horrifying; but equally horrifying is the idea that poetry does nothing to stop the devastation. A stunning image might make violence seem "unreal/ for a few moments," (55) but the perception is false. Tranströmer admits that violence is real, suffering is always present, and poetry, like the speaker in the first section, can enter nature or a sheltered realm, but it also must return eventually to the central facts of life. As W. H. Auden once said, "Poetry makes nothing happen," (43) but Tranströmer might counter this by saying that poetry lifts the reader, for an instant, from the realm of dull logic and

violence to the pleasures of images moving at tremendous speed and metaphors operating with the logic of dreams.

In his 1993 autobiographical prose essay *The Memories See Me*, he charmingly dismantles all notions that he raised himself up as a poet. A single child, he was a devoted bug collector, amateur zoologist, and visitor of natural history museums. "The scientific method I was closest to was the Linnean: discover, collect, examine." (65)

"I was out on endless expeditions," he writes. "I moved in the great mystery. I learnt that the ground was alive, that there was an infinite world of creeping and flying things living their own rich life without paying the least regard to us." (89)

One of his strongest memories is of being shamed by a stern librarian for trying to borrow a book called *The Animals of Scandinavia: a History of Their Migration*.

Another time a respected but feared teacher arrived in class with a big mushroom—a *Russula aerugina*—and set it on his desk. Tranströmer reports it was "both liberating and shocking to have caught a glimpse of his private life. We knew now that Malle gathered mushrooms!" (11) This is about as self-revealing Swedes as of Tranströmer's generation tend to get.

But the telling line for those seeking clues to Tranströmer's literary flight path comes in a single deft blow in his autobiography: "Once given the free run of the library I devoted my attention mostly to non-fiction. I left literature to its fate." (47) Over the decades, Tranströmer has risen and risen not only for what he puts into his poetry but for what he has so steadfastly kept out: recrimination, political fire, self-pity of any kind. He is probably the most mild and forgiving writer who has ever received the prize. It is as if he has done away with the very wound that has seemed to fester at the heart of



the literary world, forever. “There is one who is good. There is one who can see all without hating.” (35) He writes in one poem, presumably a reference to a Christ, unmentionable in secular Sweden, but perhaps just as applicable to Tranströmer’s own role of as an innocent in the tortured, envy-driven world of literature.

Metaphors are often used by poets to give unity to a poem, especially one that stays away from the other more conventional unifying forces such as rhyme scheme or narrative structure. Tranströmer is no exception. The woods that the speaker enters in section 1 are described as “silent abandoned houses this time of year.” (21) When the speaker leaves the woods to find landmarks, he looks for a house on the other side of the lake. He enters the house of the woods and leaves the woods to find a house. The metaphorical description of the house is both intriguing and odd. It is a “reddish square intense as a bouillon cube.” (56) The description helps the reader see the house, and serves as a link to section second when the newborn suburban blocks are cool as blueprints. Readers leave the woods for the suburbs, the red of the rusty machine and the reddish square of the house for the metaphorical blueprints, and they abandon that intense bouillon cube-shaped house for the cool blocks of suburbia. The inversions and playful reshaping help keep the poem centered.

Another pattern emerges when the images associated with the city and the woods are compared. In the woods the near silence becomes mechanized. The few sounds the poet hears are compared to a person moving twigs “with pincers” or an “iron hinge whining feebly inside a thick trunk.” (76) The same type of reversal takes place in the city. The constructed world becomes naturalized when the building windows are

transformed into a mirror like lake with no waves. These transformations do not seem to have thematic importance; they serve as structural aids only.

Tranströmer's poem is a modern journey through the hell of human violence and evil, but no hope is offered at the end. The cross of the plane's shadow or the cross in the cool church vaults might perhaps serve as a symbol of suffering, but there is certainly no hope of that suffering having any purpose. For Christians, the cross represents both suffering and hope, but Tranströmer's use of the image seems stripped of nearly all transcendent meaning. In the center of the cross made by the airplane's shadow lies no savior, but some nameless man "sitting in the field poking at something"; and the cross in the church not only appears to be empty, but also turns into something else, something stripped of value, "a split-second snapshot of something/ moving at tremendous speed." (15) In crossing the border between dreaming and the waking state, Tranströmer appears to have glimpsed the divine, timeless world that has always been at the heart of religious belief. He senses a meaningful order in the universe. This is the point at which humankind usually takes refuge in belief, but Tranströmer seems to feel that it is as limiting to believe in the existence of meaning where none may exist as it is to deny its existence on the grounds of insufficient evidence.

Deep image as a doctrine of composition gave countenance to poets to indulge in a different species of mental flux, one conditioned by the mythology of an Edenic return to language as a sacral instrument. This mythology ignored one of the prime concerns of Tranströmer's poetry: in order to record the shocks of contemporary life, the poet must be willing to enter into history, to conjure it not merely as chronological

sequence, but as unique texture and feel, what Walter Benjamin called "aura." (56) Deep image, however, was committed to locating itself in a world of prehistory, as if the mind were a direct conduit to the eternal collective unconscious, and the time bound structures of poetry were only a hindrance to the reception of archetypes.

This inclusive, paradoxical habit of vision contributes to what I find most appealing in Tranströmer's work (and perhaps most damaging to our current period style). You can see this rare quality hinted at in the title of his short prose memoir included in *For the Living and the Dead, Memories Look at Me* Baudelaire's lines "L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles/Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers" (23) "Human beings wander through forests of symbols/Which look back at them with a knowing stare," (42) suggests the reciprocity between the forests of symbols that we make of memory through the means of art, and the actual lived events which will have been our lives. Tranströmer's sense that memories have eyes that look at us from their own vantage point independent of our attempts at remembering insists on the objective quality of the past while acknowledging the contingent nature of memory. All is not at the mercy of language sieved through the ceaseless processes of mental flux; nor is language necessarily an enemy of recollected emotions objectively recorded through poetic form.

Tranströmer's comprehensive understanding of how the forests of symbols establish deeply personal correspondences to our imaginative lives argues quietly against certain premises of post-structuralist language theory. In terms of personally experienced emotion, there is nothing arbitrary or politically coercive about inherited poetic structures that challenge us to greater coherence in the face of our own fear and

confusion before the menacing paradoxes Tranströmer proposes at the end of *Streets in Shanghai* or in *Island Life, 1860*: "This moment's stain that flows out for eternity, / this moment's wound that bleeds in for eternity." (78) The poet's recognition of two kinds of time and their interrelationship through the stain and the wound demonstrate how individual fates impinge on categories like eternity. The poet's notation of the date signals his respect for the manmade, historically situated forests of symbols that buffer us from the void, but also resonate with its unsettling influences.

In a poem called *Preludes*, from the collection *Seeing In The Dark*, as in so many of Tranströmer's poems, the theme is not truth but the elusive processes involved in grasping it, especially if we only look outward at the world.

In *Baltics*, he notes jellyfish losing their form when out of water, "as when an indescribable truth is lifted out of silence and formulated to an inert mass, but they are untranslatable, they must stay in their own element." (29) It is a rare reversal of the intellectual tradition of knowingness, and no small wonder Tranströmer, who spent his career as a psychologist for delinquent youth, side-stepped the literary world deftly all through his career, always working a normal job to support his family.

Over the decades, Tranströmer has risen and risen not only for what he puts into his poetry but for what he has so steadfastly kept out: recrimination, political fire, self-pity of any kind. He is probably the most mild and forgiving writer who has ever received the prize. It is as if he has done away with the very wound that has seemed to fester at the heart of the literary world, forever. "There is one who is good. There is one who can see all without hating," (17) he writes in one poem, presumably a reference to

a Christ, unmentionable in secular Sweden, but perhaps just as applicable to Tranströmer's own role of as an innocent in the tortured, envy-driven world of literature.

In Tranströmer there is no fear of the borders between reality, dream, waking-dream, life, or death. It's all one symphony of sound, melody, metaphor, perception, imagination, or maybe a true portal to other realms. His persistent yet reassuring alienation is evident in the first line of the first poem, *Prelude*, from his 1954 debut collection, "Waking is a parachute jump from the dream." (69) With a few exceptions, he avoids the word "I" altogether in his first poems and introduces himself as the traveler. Slightly critical of the pretensions of his debut collection, his later poetry becomes more intimate, warm, generous, and finally so gripping as to virtually transcend whatever it is we believe we mean when we say poetry. By the 1970s, he began to transmit something so pure and radiant it seems to dissolve all linguistic self-consciousness—the very skins of poetry.

Everything in poetry that seems to want to separate the poet from the meanings he gleans, or put distance between himself and the reader—everything lofty—is blessedly missing. He is reassuring and uplifting, even about death. In one poem he calls it the real party, likening the hue of violet wild flowers to an ecstatic invitation from the underworld. In another, he calmly states, "At long last, when space is black, a plane will come. The passengers will see the cities beneath them glittering like the gold of the Goths." (78) When asked in an interview if his fear of death, which afflicted him when he was younger, was still with him, he said simply, no.

In one often quoted stanza from his poem *Leaflet*, included in his 1989 collection *For the Living and the Dead*, he actually uses an exclamation mark to drive home the Tranströmerian view of death, supplanting Ingmar Bergman's dark vision, which earned Sweden a bad rap for half-a-century:

We living nails hammered down in society!  
 One day we shall loosen from everything.  
 We shall feel death's air under our wings  
 And become milder and wilder than here. (20)

His poetry seems to work directly on the senses, to wake you up to wonder, often by allowing the mechanical world to come alive just as nature does, in mystical symbiosis. In the short poem *Homewards*, from Tranströmer's stunning 1978 collection *The Truth-BARRIER*, we get the essence of Tranströmer in all its strange, innocent beauty.

In Tranströmer's work, death is often stealthy and unpleasant. We human beings live out our lives while death bides its time. As in the poem *Black Postcard*, where he writes: "In the middle of life, death comes/ to take your measurements. The visit/ is forgotten and life goes on. But the suit/ is being sewn on the sly." (43) Tomas Tranströmer has been translated into 60 languages. It is no secret that previous Nobel laureates, such as the Irish poet Seamus Heaney, the St. Lucian Derek Walcott and the Russian-American Joseph Brodsky have all argued that he should be given the award. All have testified to the power and inspiration of his poetry. Tomas Tranströmer may have been born in the small country of Sweden but he is a great poet on the world stage.

While Tranströmer is never self-aggrandizing, he does offer this image of the figure of the poet: "But the writer is halfway into his image, there / he travels, at the same time eagle and mole". (51) Through the majesty of the eagle and the quiet rebellion of the mole, the image conveys the combination of lofty aspiration and humble diligence that poetry demands. That the writer should be halfway into his image is significant, too. Tranströmer's poetry is full of stolen moments when he seems to have caught himself off-guard: "I pause

with my hand on the door handle, take the pulse of the house", or "I stand under the starry sky / and feel the world creep / in and out of my coat / as in an ant-hill". (77)

The pairing of the eagle and the mole is also typical of the poet's use of contraries. Fulton has written of how Tranströmer's poems often work by bringing together a series of contrasts – light and dark, self and other, sleep and wakefulness – and arranging them so as to open up huge areas of experience within short lyric poems. This is what happens in the extraordinary poem *Alone*. The first half of the poem describes a car accident:

The approaching traffic had huge lights.  
They shone on me while I pulled at the wheel  
in a transparent terror that floated like egg white. (29)

The rest of the poem is a meditation on the speaker's need for solitude and the deleterious effects of always being in a crowd, ending with an image of city life followed by two single-word stanzas: *Many* and *One*. Antitheses such as isolation and society are brought together, generating a powerful field of force. The poem offers no explanation for its abrupt change of scene, and we soon learn that a Tranströmer poem can change with the speed of a dream.

Thus, Tranströmer becomes the spokesman of mysticism in his poems in his postulating of the belief of the quest of salvation becomes possible only through the transcendence: the transcendence of the physicality and merging into spirituality. Spiritual awakening after one disowns the sensory world is the crux of Tranströmer's mysticism, which has been dramatized by Tranströmer through *The Collected Poems*. His incorporation of mysticism in the poems makes him the advocator of spirituality on the one hand whereas on the other hand he rejects the time bound mechanical world of the west to count the success and progress in material possession.

### III: Conclusion

Tomas Transtromer shunned the epithet mystic already in the 70s. In a 1972 newspaper interview he says that “A mystic is someone who has seen God face to face. I’ve only seen his silhouette as he ran past me. And sometimes I’m not sure of that either.” (35) Regardless of the poet’s reservations, critics often describe his works in terms such as epiphany and secular prayer. And psychologist of religion Owe Wikström quotes several Transtromer poems in a book titled (in Swedish) “On the Stubborn Refusal of the Sacred to Disappear”. In Sweden he has been called a ‘buzzard poet’ because his haunting, visionary poetry shows the world from a height, in a mystic dimension, but brings every detail of the natural world into sharp focus. His poems are often explorations of the borderland between sleep and waking, between the conscious and unconscious states. Transtromer’s most famous works include the 1966 “Windows and Stones,” in which he depicts themes from his many travels and “Baltics” from 1974.

The phrase Mystical Poetry conjures fridge-magnet platitudes and joss sticks. But the mysticism of Tomas Transtromer is grounded firmly in close observation of both the natural world and human psychology. He does not present his poems as nuggets of wisdom to be pondered instead, they tend to chart a progression from concrete reality to a heightened state of awareness; Mysticism is usually defined in dictionaries and encyclopaedias as a spiritual discipline used to make contact with the divine. However some people have had mystical experiences without contemplating the divine. Also many who have contemplated the divine have not been successful in their efforts to have a mystical experience. The mystical event is a personal experience



during which one feels as though one has been touched by some higher or greater truth or power. This may occur inside or outside of a religious setting, within or outside a religious tradition.

In some cases mystical experience is seen as an important component of a religious tradition because it can offer validation of a tradition's belief system. It also can be important in attracting adherents because many people hope to have similar experiences. However, because the mystical experience is so powerful and has the capacity to provide moral, ethical, intellectual, and emotional direction, it is frequently mistrusted. That is to say a sense of unity in all things. Experiences which have other characteristics of Mystical Experiences but do not have this feature are said to bear a 'Family Resemblance' to Mystical Experiences but are not Mystical Experiences proper.

Mystical Experience of Tranströmer mixes sense of unity, Sense of timelessness, Sense of having encountered ultimate reality, Sense of sacredness, Ineffability and Loss of ego/sense of self, Accompanied by feelings of euphoria Throughout poems ,Tranströmer has put forward the defining features of a mystical experience.

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