

Night Practice

I
 will
 remember
 with my breath
 to make a mountain,
 with my sucked-in breath
 a valley, with my pushed-out
 breath a mountain. I will make
 a valley wider than the whisper. I
 will make a higher mountain than the cry;
 will with my will breathe a mountain, I will
 with my will breathe a valley. I will push out
 a mountain, suck in a valley, deeper than the shout
 YOU MUST DIE, harder, heavier, sharper, a mountain
 than the truth YOU MUST DIE. I will remember. My
 breath will make a mountain. My will will remember to will. I,
 sucking, pushing, I will breathe a valley, I will breathe a mountain.

CHRISTINA BRATT AND ROBERT BLY

Translations from Gunnar Ekelöf

Gunnar Ekelöf was born in 1907. Most critics consider him the greatest living Swedish poet. The inward thought of the Orient and the surrealist poetry of France have been his deep concerns, and have provided foundations for his own poetry. Yet his poetry is perfectly Swedish. His imagination in "Trionfo della Morte" for example reminds one strongly of his younger contemporary, Ingmar Bergman. There is a similar walk on the borders of religion and witchcraft, and inside the work of art visual images that seem to float.

In America, we assume that only a cracker-barrel sort of poetry can be popular. Swedish poets, particularly Ekelöf, do not follow this old rut of thought. Ekelöf is the most difficult Swedish poet, and yet his audience is large. His new books of poems are published in numbers comparable to printings of 200,000 in the U. S. In his poetry there are linked successions of thoughts which are difficult to follow. These thoughts are embodied in high-spirited and colorful language. He is an uncomfortable poet, who tries to make the reader conscious of lies. His work attacks the moralistic personality. He divides all personalities into the innocent, the moralistic, and the uncommitted. The innocent temperament is primitive and intuitive; the uncommitted is the most highly advanced. The moralistic personality, overpowering today in numbers, sees in life only the fight between the dragon and the knight. It does not see the virgin at all. But the virgin who does not participate in the battle is life itself. What is behind and beyond the battle between good and evil is more important than either. As he says, "There exists something that fits nowhere."

—R.B.

"There Exists Something That Fits Nowhere"

There exists something that fits nowhere
 And yet is in no way remarkable
 And yet is decisive
 And yet is outside it all.
 There exists something which is perceived just when it is not
 perceived (as silence)
 And is not perceived just where it is perceivable
 For there it is exchanged (as silence) for another thing.

See the waves under the sky. Storm is surface
 And storm our way of seeing.
 (What do I care for the waves or the seventh wave.)
 There is an emptiness between the waves:
 Look at the sea. Look at the stones of the field.
 There is an emptiness between the stones:
 They did not break loose—they did not throw themselves out,

They lie there and exist—a part of the rock sheath.
 So make yourself heavy—make use of your dead weight,
 Let yourself break, let yourself be thrown away, fall,
 Ship-wrecked on rocks!
 (What do I care about rocks.)

There are universes, suns and atoms.
 There is a knowledge carefully built on strong piles.
 There is a knowledge, unprotected, built on insecure emptiness.
 There is an emptiness between universes, suns and atoms.
 (What do I care about universes, suns and atoms.)
 There is a second viewpoint on everything
 In this double life.

There is peace beyond all.
 There is peace behind all.
 There is peace inside all.

Concealed in the hand.
 Concealed in the pen.
 Concealed in the ink.
 I feel peace over everything.
 I smell peace behind everything.
 I see and hear peace inside everything,
 One-colored peace beyond everything.
 (What do I care about peace.)

Trionfo Della Morte

Three knights stepped out
 lifted three virgins on the saddle
 Three knights stepped up on their horses
 with falcons on their gloves
 Who cuts down, and who binds up?
 In a lonely valley full of trees
 they met the six open coffins
 three women corpses, three man corpses in shrouds
 in a lonely valley full of trees

lured there by their falcons
But in the bushes stares
the owl with yellow eyes

The plague had not yet reached that valley
Who cuts down, and who binds up?
The plague was everywhere present in that valley
That was during the death of the Unicorn
That was during the watching of beautiful corpses
That was during the violation of virgins
beneath the yellow witchlike gaze of the owl
The ladies and lords rode on
icecold in their bowels, stiffened in their limbs
and what they did to each other
that I will not tell
Each knows best himself

But there were, in that city,
three men beggars whom they all knew
three women beggars whom they all knew
Who cuts down, and who binds up?
In the six caskets they waited, hidden
as if in a winding sheet of terror and hope
stored up and kept only in their waiting
as if in a winding sheet of terror and hope
They did not see the journey of the ladies and lords
They did not see the flight of the falcon
or the valley or this forest
They saw only clouds in the light heavens

"The Knight Has Rested . . ."

The knight has rested for a long time
straight in the saddle
high in the mountainous land
so desolate that the eye hesitates
Wonderful stretches of smoky hills that never come near!
Beneath and far off his companions are chattering

The falcon waits on his breast
it has laid its head on his cheek

O strange tenderness in my heart!
—Then he raises his hand
and the bird flies out
away
He sits there and watches it climb
in gyres always higher and higher
He rests still straight in the saddle
when the night falls
Feared night!
Longed-for night!

“When One Has Come . . .”

When one has come as far as I in pointlessness
Each word is once more fascinating:
Finds in the loam
Which one turns up with an archeologist’s spade:
The tiny word you
Perhaps a pearl of glass
Which once hung around someone’s neck
The huge word I
Perhaps a flint shard
With which someone who had no teeth scraped his own
Flesh

“So strange to me”

So strange to me
this rose, this thing delicately bursting out
this absent thoughtfulness
or light over a turned-away cheek . . .
As on a spring day
when you sense something and hold it firmly
an instant, a second
unchangeable
something that shall never turn to summer