

EXCERPTS FROM *EN MÖLNA-ELEGI**

- On Mölna
jetty* I sit on a bench of the past,
I write on a page of the past.
September snows down in red leaves.
October flows away in yellow leaves.
One stands with me staring, a lurid fool who plays
crazy-eyed into November while he plays
his wordless ballad for the deaf—
- That was another season, when the legless sprang
and the fingerless played their guitars till they rang . . .
- 10 The institution for cripples rented the past last summer
for a few weeks of illusion for its captives
Like pullulating pools the ancient echo-chambers
of most instructive and threatening memories,
of abortive larvas and lemures,
of twitching goose-stepping twisting grey chimeras
And their amusements resembled the ballets
of clumsily manipulated dolls.
Now blankness here again and the same sadness
—or else another.
- 20 What do I care. My life stands still.
- A flying moment robbed me of my future . . .
- Wave song* Windrush and wavespray
waverush and windspray
Waters' rush and winds
cool on the forehead and cheek—
solitary, and you
forever on your one tack:
An endless then turns to now
An endless now turns back
- 30 Time arrested, flailed:
The sun nailed
to Bedlam's spire
Silos and towers—
- Windrush and wavespray
Waverush and windspray
Waters and these shifting

* Translated by Leif Sjöberg and Muriel Rukeyser.

bellringing waving
winds—dancing, advancing
Calling, recalling
40 as if the clouds were ringing
glissandon over ice, wild grebe shouting
ice-ring round the horizon—

Waters and windspray.

The sun setting
glows through fading
The return greens . . . clucking of jetties
journey along the canal, grading
receding ebbing subsiding
under the propeller's sucking
50 backwash . . . The reeds bowing . . .

The brant who paddle sideways . . .
And the fishing ones, half daft,
mute shadows laze in wonder
over a cork sucked under
a tarnished sheath that dances
with jellied pauses
Corno after love-fests of summer:
Little Eros' armor . . .
—The ferry's horn of Charon blows,
60 past leaning willows goes
in by the bridge—

Windrush and wavespray
Waverush and windspray
He begins spray of the roller's blow
to trans- cool upon cheeks and brow—
form isolation and I:
the selfsame or another
I or not I?
The future—now—the past
70 time running wild
years last for minutes
with a tail of yellow leaves
or time held
stockstill in the elms'
wetblack branches held—
Clotho cutting your coat—
Proud city—

80 I have an appointment with the past.
 I am here waiting and waiting for the past.
Old actor I was just considering a memorandum
 on the punctuality of ladies . . . —Victoria!
 I belong alas also among your captives,
 by the victory chariot—Ha!—
 (The sapphire on the little finger, raised,
 mouth against crook of cane . . .)

“A flying moment—”

90 All of this in the season when the legless sprang
 and the fingerless played their guitars till they rang
 and the deaf heard it all
 and the crippled did not fall
 the blind came running to the call.
 (curtain)

(dance of the lame elves)

*He falls asleep,
 nodding*

100 Trees of the park
 (in unison behind him)
 How he has aged since last time!
 A blind window
 (on Moelna's gable)
 I saw him Lord knows how many years ago
 as Prospero—
 A mirror in the window
 Now he is at the most an old dandy
 serving a life sentence on his island.
 A drop
 (falls in the green barrel)
 Blink!
 110 A blackbird
 (calls a warning in the park's silence)
 An apple
 Thuds dully, bumps, lies dumb.
 The mill-gnome
 (cap in hand)
 It's just like that at the mill, too . . .
 Elf
 (in the snowberry bushes)
 It's just like that with our parts! Who were you?
 Surely you were the punk?

120

Mill-gnome

Shame! Who were you yourself?
 (reflectively) No, only one of the drunks,
 so thoroughly that I really don't remember
 who the hell I was! And you?

Elf

Of course I know who I was . . .
 (points at blackbird who hides in the bushes)
 Do you see that one?

Mill-gnome

130

So what?

Elf

He too is transformed.

The Mill-gnome

Hah! Do you think he used to be white?

The Elf

I well know what he was . . . He used to sing,
 I remember it clearly, high in a treetop,
 so beautifully that one stood still and blushed,
 or in the cornfield on a summer night
 so that one stayed there at the open window,
 but that was long ago, another cry,
 I think it was a feeling only—something
 that now is dead. Now he has only
 his warning cry, but then he sang! Ah,
 now in the spring my flowers are so small,
 so very small! And these white berries,
 who'll turn to look at them?

140

The Mill-gnome

What rot! Surely they'll do for sauce!

The snowberries

150

Pt. Pt. Pt.

The Elf

(hides her face, disappearing)

My God! What has become of me!

The Blackbird

(escapes)

The Biedermeier sofa

(in the society pavilion, struts about, three turns)

Unheard of! Un-holy! Unimaginable!

160

The front gable clock

(black clock-face with traces of gilt figures, the hands missing)

Trr! Timeworn curses! My watchworks hurt!

Clockstroke!

The Mill-gnome

(cap in hand, sneaks away with a crazy-eyed squint, to the mill)
I promise you! It was only when I was stinking drunk.

The Mirror at the window

(looks at him coldly, through a lorgnette)

170

The Blind window

(as before, stares absently)

—But how can Prospero
be alive? And here?

The same drop

(down into the barrel)

Blank!

The same apple

Thuds dully, bumps, lies dumb.

The same wind in the trees

Away! Away!

180

The black bird

(is heard calling a warning at a distance in the silence of the park)

Then do you wake, and hear to your amazement
like parrot-screeching from an old maid's apartment:

How-are-you?—Beautiful Laura, Laura . . .

And then a laugh, as from a used-up whaura:

How aaaaare you?

Aunt Grey

(grave-faced, with hairy wart on her chin)

190

How he has grown since last time!

Tante Grün

(her hair is an unreal henna-color)

I remember him Lord knows how many years ago
when he was no bigger than that!

Tante Louche

(strangely smiling, sees everything sidelong)

How aaare you?

Thank you. Fine. Splendid.

Really excellent!

200

Or bad, very bad!

(It does not matter what you say—)

Time has abandoned me long since.

It has deserted me

as I did time.

(A flying moment . . .)

And do you remember, remember

old china with seashells encrusted

—how long has it waited in the sealed-up hold?—

the Tula box, painted with scenes, filled with dried rose-leaves

210 of a moist fragrance, the bulging wallpaper,
the curling-iron heater forgotten and the gnarled candles
like yellowing relics in the bracket-lamps
beneath Madame Mont-Gentil's portrait, a rara avis
at thé-conseilles . . .

I remember, remember . . .

1809 It was the day when all could again breathe freely
and the city exulted. The weather was also so splendid
that ladies went shawled as to a spring party
(toward which pleasure's inner warmth also conduced).
220 The initiates (and they were many) had gathered
at Castenhof and sang the windows open
and somebody handed out a glass of champagne
with which to toast freedom. You took it
and drained it although your admirer
was the Royal Governor . . .

And do you remember
old china with seashells encrusted,
—how long has it lain in the green depths?—
an engraved calabash, the shell of a sea-turtle,
230 the Indian hammock, its complicated plaiting
and the slaves' song from the muggy middle-deck
so like the underworld when one stood in the fresh air
and heard the roar of the sails?

—Yes, I remember

1786 a night on circa one degree north latitude.
Heaven stood clear and in godlike majesty.
On the horizon was seen the wellknown light
which emanates from all the myriad beings
with which the ocean is so rich endowed.
240 I promenaded on deck with the first mate
when suddenly in the east we saw a great star
which increased every second in greatness.
I reported to the captain who soon came up,
gave orders to summon every man on deck
to reef the sails, heave to and lash the rudder.
And then the star or meteor burst open
into a thousand rays or with the speed of thought
over the ship the rushing of these rockets
that covered the whole horizon with a shining
250 so dazzling that you could have seen a hair
if one had been hanging from the masthead!
Just then arose a hurricane, so violent
that we dreaded the capsizing of the ship
and soon after such an abundant rainfall

that all the water vessels could have been filled
with what washed over the deck in a few moments.
This phenomenon lasted hardly forty minutes.
Air and sky cleared, the stars grew visible,
the wind the same. The sails set.

260 The watch was relieved and allowed to turn in
and the ship proceeded on the same course as before.
But in the clarity of night was heard again
now slack, now strong, as in rhythmically varied choruses
locked in, below decks, the singing of the slaves . . .

So I feel

in the depth of my midriff these dead:
The air I breathe is clogged with all the dead,
the thirst I drink is mixed with all the dead,
they are my hunger and they are my food:
270 I die their life, they live my death.

Then you remember also

a summer afternoon of unspeakable closeness
mindless hammering from the manor's plate-workshop
and somewhere far away on empty streets
a sideless wagon clattering on cobblestones
but as if in a surge of silence . . . All were gone
out to the country . . . And the red ball,
the high fever-ball, dazzling and inflamed,
came rolling over you, in one moment
280 of intolerable speed and in the next unendurably slow.
And the windows' slant suncross on the floor
came relentlessly crawling closer to the bed.
And the wagon came clattering on cobblestones
without ever once stopping . . .
To the linden woods
they had all gone, or to the country.

—Yes, I remember

the meadow with the mushrooms under the oaktrees
the big oaks,
290 and as reward for *hic haec hoc* and *avoir être*
one hamper packed for a *fête champêtre*
and our games, mostly "heavy-hangs" jokes
where Arrasmiha presided beside
Camilla, after milking—

And do you remember the lindens, the old lindens?
Monsieur Petter and Cousin at the locked gates,
the high locked gates?

300

Tittle-tattle in the attic boxroom,
the big boxroom,
by the foxes,
the little foxes,
spoilers of vineyards—

His left hand rests under my head
and his right arm doth embrace me—

And do you remember the junipers on the hill
the tall junipers?
You drilled them as if they were soldiers.
And do you remember the boulders, the big boulders?
You gave names to them all.

310

—I remember:
Even time has its vineyards.
How risky though their harvest-times,
how unpredictable!
And then I remember the hours clocked, the long hours clocked,
the ticked minutes, minute minutes tocked,
slowly lockstopping, slowly
shoulder-borne—
I remember the seconds, the dropped moments
or the held, riveted ones. I remember
Time,
I carry it in me,
I bear it in me like a rock, a child of stone,
complete and unborn—