

AMBUSH ME AGAIN

You with your hazel kestrel eyes
Your soft controlled explosions
You bring coffee, Benjamin Britten
is playing, your sweet agenda
is what, today, exactly?

We, we swam cold inlets
Together, not knowing
whether we were in Canada
or “the Home of the Brave,”
Splashing back and across water borders,

You japed my gifts of osprey, jumping
silver pike, gliding oars, my unpicked
bouquet of purple lupins, Silurian pebbles
almost blue, beds of club moss soft under
your wet bare feet, you reached down for Wild Sweet William.

I loved you in our island hut at night
stepping barefoot on wild mushrooms,
Canadian cool at August’s haunted end
the bright dark-spun the Milky Way
a loop of Ferris wheel, our foreplay

Lielupe Riverbank July 2013

The Zemgale sun slants warmest today
at seven in the evening, brushing across green
not-ready wheatfields, they shimmer against
black backgrounded trees, the light

surges across the gentle oscillation of the stalks
each lit its incandescent instant through
our eyelenses, it
is impossible to move just now.

Black swallows swoop in arcing glide high
above this landscape cut by its meandering
Lielupe/big river, not so big really, we can
find a small sand clearing at the banks

Water's down, a few bathers sun or venture
down to the edge heavy and shallow this year
with canary grass grown high and ignited
by this same day's seven twenty sun
and water lilies, *Nymphaeaceae*, thick
with flowers pink and white and something yellow,

The river weeds under a foot or two of water
will slow you down, caress your legs, ensnare
and likely leave you with a bit of a river rash later
that evening, the price for seeing giant minnows

in the shallows engorged in aquatic feast,

We find a tall grassed patch partly shaded by willow
and by seven thirty are sunbathing with honey schnapps
and black bread and-- yes festive caviar
and now the sweet conceit of imagining Tolstoy
not really so long dead, doing the same as we, simply at his dacha
streams not really so far away at Yana Polanya, across the
Russian border.

SWEET SKULLS OF JERICHO

By about 7000 BC Jericho, based on a natural spring, had developed into a large settlement which may have contained as many as two thousand individuals, and was defended by a substantial wall. The dead were often buried beneath the floors of houses. In some instances the bodies were complete, but in others the skull was removed and treated separately, with the facial features reconstructed in plaster. British Museum exhibit plate

Maybe men labored under a yellow sky
bent under barley sheaves they'd cut,
returned behind limestone walls and leaned
to splash water on each other at the well.

You can see its crumbling curve today, in one
city as old when Cheops' pyramid was built
as pyramids are to us right now.
Jericho, not so far away from Egypt and,

our archaeologists tell us, likely really didn't hear
the blare of Joshua's trumpets shuddering down
old Canaan-cursed by-Noah, coaxing walls
to quiver, teeter, list from Israelite raids.

You see one barley-bearer shaking dry,
descend stair-tunnels to his flat to kneel
before his hungry daughter, hungry wife,
waiting for evening's barley bread to cool.

He joins as they resume *their* business of the day
to gently set the cowrie eyes in Grandma's face,
two priests removed the rest of her last year,
but left the precious head to decompose at home
scented in the wall with sweet Netufian herbs,

And now the family gathers near small fire,
desert nightbreeze filtering through the cracks
tenderly to soften Mother's bony head
with daubs of plaster re-create her nose,

and gaping eye sockets, softening too
those black orbits with white plaster.
Slowly her death's head touched tenderly
by younger finger tips becomes
something like a human head again,

If not quite living, cowrie shells complete
this vision of a vacant queenly stare
befits a family shrine. When things are done,
small granddaughter now squeals with delight
her own dark eyes reflect the fire-light.

Sudanese Boy Adopted by Putnam County Couple

This being October
The wine-sap light drawn across
City, River, Palisades
I think I will tell
young Tarik
about Pumpkins,
He has never seen these
Vegetable suns.
His life has advanced to date
utterly unimpeded by their absence,
Yet he has missed something---
not giraffe sized ferns
not papayas
shouting markets nor
bathing in great puddles
by the roadside's edge
in the unending summer
of that former life,
He knows little of cold,
less of Indian corn
of frost,
of aster stippled fields
and owls
and hurrying
and pumpkins.

Distraction

The about sixteen girl, slim in a breeze-blown,
cornflower housedress
carries a basket of bedlinens white- fresh from the line
across the late March yard to unpainted porch steps.

This time though she sits with the basket on the top step
a chore not finished, her head at a three quarter angle
gazing with feral eyes tense toward day's near- finished sun,

Lost in something, distracted
waiting for her Aunt Claire to scold gently
bring these in for folding, get the rest of the socks.

Still she hesitates, rapt, just this once
an almost warm Oklahoma breeze across purple sage
a last ray lighting up a crocus cluster by the porch

I could be somewhere else not here, she thinks.

The old farmhouse and barn and her freckled cheeks
are bathed in rose light, she wonders
if her mother is OK lying there
in that pine box placed seven feet
under the hard earth
by the pear tree
a year ago today.