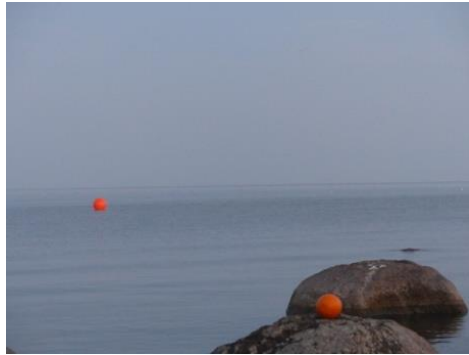


Danish Island and Russia, in the Back Mirror



Denise Newman

we hate it but we do it
we explain the poem
we make a post
we cost manage a war
to hide the bleeding eye

tap tap my little red card
and she hands me the shriveled
mackerel wrapped in paper
what did it cost?
a life!

thin red cards transcend currencies
like fish swimming
from Kalningrad to Bornholm
like poems breathed by any language

just avoid the nets
who's setting the nets?
a man's gotta make a living
a man's gotta live



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wake up first morning
fighter jets
ripping open the sky
 manning the border
wake up to our past alive
in a stone house
on a Baltic island

what I ran from (in my clogs)
ran back to (checked back on)
and ran from

time folds like an accordion
now back 30 years later
 everyone's either old
or roux
thickening the dew

toast a piece of ryebread
eat it in the grass
eat the grass
smeared with butter

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who's hosting *the past* this year?
must be Russia
invitations sent out on coarse
pre-war toilet paper



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in the back mirror, he says,
meaning what?

in the back mirror I saw I was hiding
in the back mirror I saw I wanted to be seen
not as one hiding
but how it felt to be me on the inside
it made sense as long as I didn't have to explain it

once I dropped a sock in the toilet
and washed it off watched by the women
lined up to pee
I saw them in the big mirror over the sink
it was a silent meditation day
so I didn't have to explain
so I didn't feel shame for my pee-soaked sock
that's a silent image in the back mirror
that's how silent it can be



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a wave might hold back
in the wave
association meeting
not to seem too pushy
then hit the shore
resentful

those with floors hold them
that's how the new order gets maintained
by old retaining walls

Nietzsche wanted to call the new philosopher
the attempter
that's the poet—
to attempt is to *tempt*
—peep holes in walls



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you're flying along then
BAM *you're wrong!*

you roam
the solid air up and down
side to side, looking for an opening
you push you rest you panic and push

have you noticed how
perfection produces
a lot of anxious people
and bland produce?

maybe on the other side of order
isn't chaos but freedom, posits the Danish poet
free out of doors like freesia
legs open to sky
in a free-for-all with pollinators



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hear a car pull up—clench at the sink

hard to put a face on so early in the day
 is a face in need of a face?
it's automatic
the mother nudges the child—
 say hello, louder, say thank you, say
you're sorry

sorry for the poor acting
but I never want to forget
we're acting

like diving under the wave and
lifting to feel it rumble

 —thrill of the real
roiling over
belly down, half naked
eyes shut, mouth sealed
caressed by death's hands down
the full length of my body

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in the back mirror, a führer sees
 one people, one history
beguiled by his own face

starting over with Danish soil
 Ukrainian men work the fields
starting over in Danish
 Ukrainian women work the shops

 tap tap my thin red card—she thanks me
for my country's support—

there's no—*you're welcome*—in Danish
they say—*it*
was
so
little

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once walking home from a wedding party
middle of the night is dawn
walking back across the heather
fields with low-lying fog
we meet a woman with long gray hair
leading her white horse
by the reigns
she nods with a faraway look
and I realize
we're in *her* dream

mine to interpret
in the mirror, a secret door
leading out the oppressive order
go, ride off on your dream
young woman
get on your poems and go



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wind picks up and
slams the door—
know what you're running from
or you'll run right into its arms
attached to something else

at the trial, the father speaks last
all this time she was hiding
the enemy in plain sight
the crowd gasps
I did it out of love, I say

maybe it's only a thought
because love never comes up again
the trial is prolonged and I realize
until there's love, laws will be needed

in the back mirror my interpretation—
I'm my own worst enemy?

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a butterfly flat
on the path—its juice leaked out
having traveled
backwards 30 years to the same
green teapot, same bare
feet down to the sea

nej, nej, nej

who are you quarreling with little hard-
nosed philosopher, little bronze-
plated go-getter?
you'd better spare
something for the imagination
make a donation
before it's too late

it doesn't sound like depression to me, he says



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there's Henrik in his orderly garden at dusk
he's been out playing sax
with his jazz band
is it your joy?
he nods solemnly

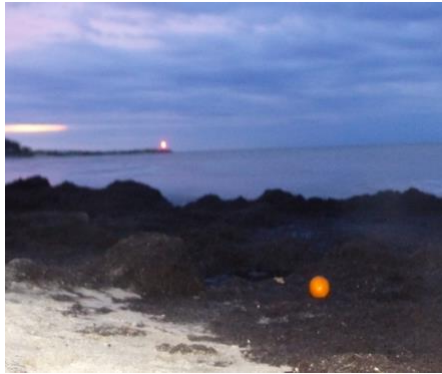
like the joy bands of blackbirds and song thrushes
the chaffinch and the yellow hammer
in their satin jackets
you lose yourself
you walk at dusk until you can't see your feet
you hear the crows talking before bed
in the tall oaks by the water
maybe on the other side of order
is nothing
like when a cloud drifts apart
and you go in to eat
and you go in to sleep
and you go in to feel
the spectral resonances



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think of the twinkling stars' quiet virtue
think of the order of meter
the vengeance of *make it new*

think of Alfred Starr Hamilton ordering
life in his rented room in Montclair
and years later, me at 18 in my rented
room in Montclair reading *One Hundred
Poems from the Japanese*
feeling free—
freedom's source no doubt of a
sexual nature then



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the sea dribbles out at breakfast
soaking my underwear
it's like that, immensity speaking
through oblivious lips—water
leaking order, oil burning water

Henrik managed the local well well
years pass, now he and the well will retire
we don't ask—
what's next?

hold your breath, go under
touch the sandy seafloor—a good place to rest
your regrets package
where nothing can hatch

^

look up the Danish word for sheep
ask the farmer, *where are all your fâ?*
think about the words *sheepish*
shame, lambs of God
how we sacrifice
the most *natural* parts of ourselves
for whom, for what?

think about the word *casual*
in the word *casualties*
about our forefather's foreskins
and all the cruelty pushed
by a vague sense of loss

think of *before* never meeting *after*
and the poet from Berkeley saying
paradox is where it's at
bank on surviving despite
knowing we won't

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wind blushes when someone
announces—*it's Windy!*

Windy dries our soggy pairs
of sad sacks
our paper masks and bucket lists
blowing wildly on the line
now free of our heavy bodies
our *heavenly hurts*

he asks if the problems we have
are the problems we need

you mean, is
what we call *my life*
just a set of problems?

ask Windy



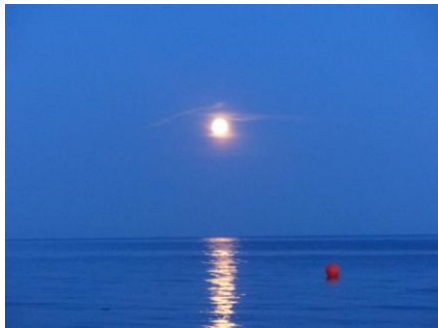
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air mends after
his ripping statement—*they've forgotten*
how to love

this is how I do love
this is how I do it
between us we do love, modifying it
so the other's version
looks like love against mine

my gushing, his silent drawing of a heart
made of native flowers of the island

with all the clutter
to sort through
someone might
not bother to write poems
about love



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try playing *on my deathbed*
try organizing in that light
out beyond *good* and *evil* is where?

the fact that I was hiding in poems
the fact that I didn't want to be caught as a solid thing
the fact that I was looking for love in *not-*
knowing, *no-name*, or *nondescript*

girl asks why the baby is crying—
they do that before falling asleep
does it hurt?
mother shakes her exhausted head

hej hej, thanks for today
they say to the host

then he tells me about their struggles
in the background, also a mirror
Johan's depression, the family history of depression
can't get out of bed

what about the children? I ask
imagining me crouching
unseen in that dimly lit chaotic house



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telling *our story* we make
the air sovereign

in the back mirror Russians call it
the great patriotic war

we roam the solid air like flies up and
down, side to
side
the talking animals
keep talking to wash
the brain

in the back mirror the Soviet
bombardment
of Bornholm the day after
armistice—then the long year
of occupation
he's born into disorder

don't put that back wet—

when did I start *manning* my own mouth
making it hard to speak from my
anterior and interior mouths?

^
jelly smears the glass as
the rounded knife tip scrapes
at the last days here
the last *brombær* that gave him
my power

by way of a *goodbye*
he points to the heaps of puffy
clouds—
what are they there for?
to make the blue bluer, I say
oh yeah?

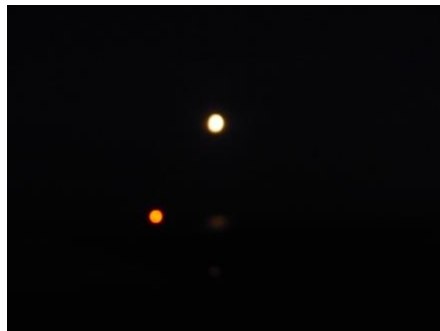
you'll lose him, too—you know that
but to what—where is *beyond* now
that this life includes the *virtual*—
from late Latin, *virtuosus*

don't cry

we haven't changed much, I say after
much thought
surprisingly not, he says

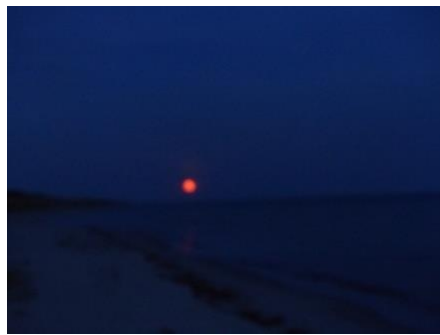
now he too wants to see himself
in the back mirror
was I depressed a lot back then?

if I say *yes*, he'll say *no*
if I say *no* he'll say
no?



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from a distance the back mirror is closer
—distance being the back mirror
look in the back mirror and think—these reflections
are as empty as the obsessive
thought of ancient stones—
I can't move my arms



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flag down the boxy red
bus of the rural route
—haul my suitcase
up two steps

waving waving
the wavering rye
goodbye friend
goodbye