10-1-2013

Writing Sample

Dénes Krusovszky

Includes "Superfluous Shore," "Hart Crane boards the Orizaba," "Hart Crane flirts with the sailors," "Hart Crane gets beaten up on deck," "Last dawn on the Orizaba," "Hart Crane throws himself over the handrail," "The Orizaba's captain halts the ship," "The sailors lay out Hart Crane's dead body," "As If We Were Talking (Mintha beszélgetnénk)," "Forest Belt (Erdősáv)," "Dead Animals (Halott állatok)" and "Cheat Sheet #5 (Könnyített változat)."
Dénes Krusovszky
Poems

Superfluous Shore

You could also say that a poem is like
a ship of the Phaeacians which,
according to Homer, sails straight into the harbour
without need of a helmsman.

GOTTFRIED BENN

CHRIS BURDEN: Ghost Ship, Fair Isle - Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2005

As though you could elevate progress
by gradually withdrawing balance,
layer piles up cautiously
on layer, while a vessel with no crew
traverses the horizon,
not quite empty, actually,
but from where we're standing, what's
aboard can't be made out.

No way of knowing what else
could sail into the crack between
fragility as camouflage and as envisioned thesis.

All you can do is stand, on a
distant, superfluous shore,
while around you the milder components
of silence droop,
that familiar nothingness deep inside,
and nonetheless, some kind of frothing, too.

Three hundred miles across
northern seas without
anybody at the helm, yet
the ship didn't lose its way.
What were you doing all the while?

Till applause greeted an unmanned voyage
finally putting into harbour
what was the business of your palms?

Eyes closed, you still get lost,
all that going back and forth between
cellar and attic had no purpose.

You can't do it. It's as simple as that.
If it has to be distance, then
what separates the shepherd from
his flock, if closeness, one
embracing infinitely more space.

Hart Crane boards the Orizaba

This isn’t the beloved weight I used
to dream of fondly, this is precisely
the watershed, and if it pins me down –
but better not to talk of that right now!

If I could only glimpse a sign or two...
The faces waving from below are still
more vacant than my own. Onshore some immense
shadow trembles which, if I’m not wrong,
has camouflaged my wretchedness so far.
All I am is slaver, some leftover
of love. The sailors are still there, however,

without warning they cast my moorings, and
we’re off. A body generates no waves,
has only its own weight and breathlessness.

Hart Crane flirts with the sailors

Why am I standing here, what bothersome
metabolism do these shores belong to?
The balustrade that rubs against my shoes,
what is it trying to keep me from once more?

Boys, I want to be a thing that’s yours,
some oddly shaped and suspect undertaking.
Ever heard of hormones? If you fail
to get a move on, in the afternoons

their wax will coat us. I don't take the trouble
to write your names down, or your inane comments.
Did I remind you that I don't see colours?

I'm cold, just like a boundary fence, but
attempt in vain a generalised curse –
something or other keeps getting left out.

Hart Crane gets beaten up on deck
The soul is shaking in a darkened cabin.
The sensible thing would have been to dance
or else to wait, and see if he’d return,
pressing my head against the iron rails.

It’s so straightforward. In my hand I catch
a bird, crush it till all of it is soft.
At present this is all I have to say
on the question of trust, and maybe it
can be enough, but nobody is listening.
Nobody is listening, once again,
even though I’ve reached the crucial point.

If you want my opinion, then the soul
is shaking in a darkened cabin, while
on deck they kick the body till it’s crimson.

Last dawn on the Orizaba

Here and now I have no inclination
to talk about the meaning of forgiveness,
but gradually I digest it all,
as if I were the stomach of a larger

body and had barely realised. I
break the dawn up, metabolise sarcastic
laughter, tautened muscles. As I watch
the sun rise at my side, my juices splash
onto their faces, this can be my way
of saying goodbye. The bottom of the sea
is cruel, I said once. But in that case

its surface is still crueller. I don’t have
anything to say about forgiveness.
The ship quivers, a cowardly animal.

Hart Crane throws himself over the handrail

Leaning over the water, I don’t see
a face reflected. All that I could love
has seeped away from me, and what is left
doesn’t add up to an excuse. In front

of me what could have been my Doppelgänger
constantly rises up, the two of us
are incomprehensibly far away
from one another, only scorn could tell

how far. That’s all I have to say, and keep
on saying till my centre of gravity
touches the node, what we can henceforth term

a balustrade I don’t catch hold of. We
two jump, but only I produce a splash,
we two grow dumb as I alone arrive.

The Orizaba’s captain halts the ship

No shadow upon us from bird or cloud,
this is the darkness, though, you find inside
a body that’s discarded. All I ever
cared about, I confess, was to keep

things going, maintain an arrogant course,
while now I have to stop the engines. Someone’s
gone missing, has jumped overboard, I’m told,
I screw my eyes up momentarily.

What greater freedom could there be than this?
My efforts to imagine it don’t take
me anywhere, there are too many voices,

the space up here’s too watery, beneath
the shadow of a faultless plunge I hide
my awkwardness by issuing commands.

The sailors lay out Hart Crane’s dead body

We bid farewell to someone who’s no longer
with us, but it’s not because of him
we’re gathered here, nor was it for our sakes
that he jumped overboard. We met each other

close to where egoism intersects
with sensuality, but both of us
cannot move on from there. The next moment
terrifies with its emptiness, the future,

the only adequate response is to
say no. In any case, plenty of tasks
are waiting to be done. We liberate

a coffin with no contents then, as if
believing understanding could still be
attained, we let the good news circulate.
As If We Were Talking
(Mintha beszélgetnénk)

When the soup bowls are stacked
they make a sound like
a slow train
I don’t want to be anywhere near.
Not because I’m afraid,
but in suburban afternoons
it is very difficult to keep
the balance between anger and boredom.
As if both my hands were ending in shopping bags.
Moreover these never-ending questions,
like now, how should I figure out
what I have in common with this
rusty pipe jutting out from the empty wall?
Collapsed movements. A foot
or a body part sticking out.
To feel the smell of another human being
is almost like
we were talking to each other.

Forest Belt
(Erdősáv)

Something is still missing,
I can only show its empty space,
the marks of nails on a big white wall,
trees with white-washed barks.
*
I have a cage at the end of the garden,
but I don’t have a dog in it,
a bit further off there’s a forest belt,
at night, when the wind blows
it is audible even from here the garbage
captured between branches whispers.
*
If I wasn’t afraid of the next line,
I would not continue.
*
He sits on the bench across the way and
does nothing, doesn’t even
move, eyes
closed, but under the stretched skin
and the thick fat I can still 
recognise the body of the young man. 
How should I address you? 
Father of remorse. 
*

This was the place, exactly here. 
We lie in the same bed, 
back to back, 
we are inhaling, 
skins touch, 
exhaling, separate. 
Touching. Separating. 
I will use up 
your face like a soap.

Dead Animals 
(Halott állatok)

Until then, he loved those afternoons. The silent building, the empty corridors, and mostly that one room. Then that all went wrong too. He stepped in and knew something had changed. He looked at the glass cabinets, but had almost no strength left to open them. It’s like when the first bad mood falls upon us: we feel it but cannot name it yet. Only this much: now, for the first time, forever, he saw many dead animals, pathetic. Nevertheless he started, wavering, the way we visit the places of lost joys. He stopped at the platypus, took it out of the case and blew off the dust. He passed his hand over its back, but nothing happened. Not this time. He read it out in vain: Ornithorhynchus anatinus, it did not help. Then he stepped over to the birds but suddenly there were too many of them. He could not understand why he cannot be glad. A hunter who feels remorse for what he’s done. The hyena’s eyes were two marbles, not dreadful, much worse. And suddenly everything was different, the school biology specimen collection, and himself as well, though just a little. The feeling that he cannot forget is this is all good for nothing. He sat on the floor and looked slowly upwards, two eagles fastened with a screw to the ceiling circled overhead. On his palms the last unsuccessful attempt, he started for the exit with the memory of an unbearably dry body. And he did not look back, because there was nothing to see.

Cheat Sheet #5 
(Könnyített változat)

In a moment like this I should at least 
say something reassuring, 
because the way I look at you now, 
it has something to do with nourishment. 
But instead I only confuse the words. 
To deceive you I compare you to 
something that you cannot recognise, 
and even if you could, I would deny it, 
and when you are shouting, I still won’t stop. 

Translated from the Hungarian by Jonathan Garfinkel

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