

Salt on the eye

Also by Hanne Bramness

Korrespondanse
I sin tid
Nattens kontinent
Revolusjonselegier
Regnet i Buenos Aires
Salt på øyet

for children:

Kysset
Trollmåne

Also by Frances Presley

The Sex of Art
Hula Hoop
Linocut
Neither the One nor the Other, with Elizabeth James
Automatic cross stitch, with Irma Irsara
Somerset letters
Paravane
Myne – new and selected poems & prose 1975-2006

Hanne Bramness

Salt on the eye
selected poems

translated by

Hanne Bramness & Frances Presley

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Murder in Uppsala in June

1

Time
was it a clock
that struck?

four dark eyes
and twelve strokes

we are together but
still alone
here

each in our time
imprisoned
by the stories
from our lives

you speak
and you are back in a mosque
where you chanted for
a dead conquerer
in his language

you a stranger
in a strange land

2

The murderer
was also a stranger

on a different street
in this same town
a Kurd
a Turkish informer
is killed by a Kurd from France

a strange darkness
in his shadow
that made his way through the crowd

he was caught without
a comprehensive explanation
as expected

3

Strangers
and in the name of war
the death of strangers becomes
a motion

rolling! there is
no turning back

twenty thousand deported
is a necessity

like the flight of swallows
or the migration of whales

turns! rolling over
mountains of sand

forces a path through dark forests
drives on
onwards

4

How shall we
speak our history?

– I hear her voice

when the news that reaches us is
the statistics of strangers

need is no alibi
it is the nature
we live by

but the papers write of terrorists

– I see her dark eyes

5

We must love the sources
of the knowledge we chose

we have no choice

we must attend to
the words

not pure ideas
geometrical experiments lines
drawn on a map:

*I write to you my friend
from Qamishli*

...
*time here is a car
driven by the police*

Stockholm days

From this plane
to the stars

city of night's darkness
in frozen silence

how
shall I enter?

it is never quiet
or completely dark

seen from the outside
from the island
by the bridge

Morning comes
a pale sun's pattern
on the glass
lights through the window's frost

the city rises

The city rises

smoke from ice holes
swans on heavy wings

a January day lifts
from the fjord in front of us

I note:
the eye does not see
where change takes place

I read history
into the stones
of the Old Town

buildings painted
new strokes of
red blue yellow
the colours were all baroque

in the
falling snow

City that rises
in snow that falls

two speeds of time touch
their histories

Now
earth tilts its axis
from the sun so that
early afternoon
the day turns
light fades
over bridges and under
sleeping birds float by
on ice floes

The eye sees
its harmony with
those pictures of its time

one that shows
a city rising
1535
when distant orbits of stars
were inscribed
on the Stockholm sky

a landscape
half covered by water

A city that rises
in the snow that falls
nights that halve
the days

I note:

for the eye
the horizon's limit
is always the same

from

Salt on the eye

Vacuum

In the bath when light falls
the murmur from the water dies
the bubbles of lather disappear
remember how big the bar of soap felt in the hand
how the hand strained to hold it?
In the milky water soap fat floated like fish eyes
caught all reflections in the gathering darkness

Passenger

Returning to the car, with an egg-white and red interior,
to steer it not as a driver but as a passenger

On our way through the landscapes of night over bridges on
invisible pylons along a steep coast towards mountain passes, a
floodlit stage. The driver is willing to take the risks involved. I
must keep awake but sleep creeps up on me, alongside the car,
and overtakes me some time in the evening or early morning

Bungalow

It is possible to return to where you have never been
catch sight of a bungalow, almost a shed, on an island
in a river, the spring moon – see how it rides
the river's oily back spreading its dead light
Pay attention when the wind rises at dawn sweeping
the dead-pale moon under the carpet of clouds as it
starts to rain

Hear how thunder drops on the corrugated iron roof (but
distantly) while the flood rises above the threshold
threatening to set afloat this home, a dark nest
Suddenly, perhaps, discover the children in the rowboat
trying with the boathook to get a grip, first on the doorknob,
then the chimney. When the bungalow is pulled under and
lost they cast off, their faces like dimmed glass in the shiny air
above flames

The moon in Loo's house

It clears up towards evening, the road's wet shoulders shine in the moonlight that pours down and forces its way into the house where Loo's mother wades on a well-trodden carpet path (visible from the moon) between the kitchen and the lounge. She juggles with titbits, tumblers and elastic smiles, which she practices in front of the mirror all day, with mewling sounds. Jack Daniels and slim Johnny Walker have come to supper, they get a golden glow from the moon that resembles a lemon slice in the bottom of the tumbler. Loo's father's pale moonlit-hand beckons us. We must greet his pals, put our arms around their necks and kiss them, although we are afraid. He flings his hand out so the bottles dance on the table reflected in the TV-screen where pictures from the moon landing roll, the great step for mankind this night in July. As the flies sail on waves of moonlight in the clammy room, ether produces images of the earth from afar. It seems almost impossible to distinguish which heavenly body, earth or moon, is the more distant

The admirer

I flee into the bathroom
shut behind me the pale-grey door
with its glass of irregular drops
unaware that someone is already there
(or did she manage to sneak in?)
until I glance in the mirror and see
a figure sitting half hidden behind the laundry basket
in tights that are too long
the feet tied together
While I think of what to say she speaks:
“You must forgive me I don’t want to impose
but I must make myself known to you once in a while
to feel that I am real”
She tries to get up
“a need that you evidently don’t share”
she adds as she falls forward

Terri's house

It is possible to return to Terri's house. The cemetery is probably still there right opposite on a small hill. The house blinks its windows in the afternoon heat and the garage gapes over a darkness larger than itself with a musty smell. The wire door to the house screeches as it closes. It takes a while before my eyes can see us sitting there in the lounge on the sofa with legs glued together. I enter the uncomfortable shadow of my small body, each finger a thumb and my mouth a trunk, I suck up the powdered milk served in blue glasses by Terri's mother (she seems like her grandmother even though I know that they cut corners in their time). My eyes water, sweat runs down my back, like last time, the sofa's polythene cover is sticky with deep scars. In the burning silence I can hear the moth hearts of our shadows mixed in with the buzzing of flies behind the terry cloth curtains. A kind of devotional atmosphere spreads, the clock on the wall strikes heavily, our midriffs swing, the glasses chime on the coffee table. Terri has the quietest shadow, it bows and thanks us for coming. I stare at the wrinkly hands entangled on her lap, the silvery stripes in her soft childish hair, when she slowly lifts her shadow head she catches me red handed again. Now with hindsight I can tell her gaze is bashful and hostile, but I still cannot fathom why her smile begs to be slapped

Halloween

The darkest most receptive time of year forms a tract
of silence and dead voices in a strange buzz of echoes
But it is possible to distinguish the slight weeping that rises
from a festive photo, make contact with the restlessness that
can break open or bang shut
It is time to peep into the living room where the picture was
taken, dare to enter, walk around on the flossy carpet
with a crunching sound in the layers of crumbs
and insects, leaving no tracks
take a deep breath, cleanse the nostrils with the smell of
pungent dust
pull your hand over the damp back of a chair with
protruding shoulder blades
try the false piano (with fingers stiff from fear the way
you always played, the music unattainable, it never came to
your rescue)
time to throw a glance at the coffee table with shades
of spots from thirst-quenching drinks, the white rings
under a film of fatty polish
and dare to gaze at the five figures on the sofa, and be terrified
by a ghost, two vampire princesses, a pirate
and a small unhappy goblin

**“That the juices may flow in them/
And the juices lie.”**

He spoke of the pearls that followed the dancer's motions back and forth, crowding in waves that rushed after her over the marble floor in the centre courtyard, like glazed grains of salt on a solidly frozen lake in the field of her inconstant shadow. “Then she stopped” he said, and it was impossible to read from his face if he was making it up or telling the truth, but what is the difference? “Her dark blue skirt waved and sparkled for there is always some sand in the wind there, like moon dust” he added. “A wisp of hair stuck to her pale lips, she looked straight ahead towards the darkness behind the columns, her gaze introverted. She remained like this, standing with her legs planted apart, lifting her arms while the fingers ignited the stars in the night sky, and one by one the pearls started to float. Gathered into a small cloud, they began to rise up her legs under her skirt.” He wanted to turn away but couldn't move his eyes, controlled by something other than will. How long she held the pearls inside her before she let go he had no idea, but when the cascade hit the floor it felt as though he had wept