Poet and novelist Lars Amund Vaage was born in 1952, grew up on a farm in western Norway and trained as a classical pianist. His fiction includes the award-winning novel *Syngja* (Sing, 2012) about a writer father and his autistic speechless daughter, the short-story collection *Den vesle pianisten* (The Little Pianist, 2017), and *Det uferdige huset* (The Unfinished House, 2020). Among other awards he has won the Gyldendal Prize, the Nynorsk Literature Prize and the Dobloug Prize for his life’s work. *The Red Place* is Vaage’s third poetry collection from Shearsman.
Also by Lars Amund Vaage

In English

The Sheep Farmer Poems
The Institution Poems
Outside the Institution. Selected Poems
Cows, in Leopard VI: The Norwegian Feeling for Real
The Mute

In Norwegian

Poetry
Det andre rommet
Utanfor institusjonen
Den stumme
Den raude staden

Prose
Øvelse kald vinter
Fager kveldssol smiler
Kyr
Dra meg opp!
Begynnelsen
Guten med den mjuke magen (children’s book)
Oklahoma
Rubato
Den framande byen. Ein roman om Wilhelm Reich
Guten og den vesle mannen (children’s book)
Kunsten å gå
Tangentane
Skuggen og dronninga
Syngja
Sorg og song
Den vesle pianisten
Det uferdige huset
Baronen (play)

Translations
Lorine Niedecker: Nord sentralt
Joy Harjo: Å koma tilbake frå fienden
Tennessee Williams: Katt på heitt blekktak
Art Spiegelman: Maus: historia til ein overlevande
Bob Arnold: Sanndrøymd, Dikt for ungdom
Frances Horovitz: Dikt i samling
Lars Amund Vaage

THE RED PLACE

don poemi

translated by
Anna Reckin with Hanne Bramness

Shearsman Books
The Red Place
SAMPLER
THERE IS A YOUNG MAN inside me
I see him standing
by a dark wall
somewhere in the forest
Light from the fjord
is trickling through
Who has chased this youth
out into the open?
He says not a word
has nothing to tell
He is standing on the far side
of a trail
by a wall made of wattle
or rotten timber
He is standing there, lean
and strong
His hands open
His bike thrown aside
nearby
He might have brought gifts with him
or messages about where we come from
but things and time
are not his concern
WHEN JUST NOW I said
there is a young man inside me
I would also say:
I do not envy him
I am not happy to see him
nor do I mourn him
I do not approach him
and will not greet him
This is not the time for words
He can stay behind
He is only some youth
I met today in the forest
The forest that grows
inside me
I caught a glimpse of him
Then I let my gaze wander
over the ridges
and gaily
walked on
BUT IN THAT instant
I saw the young man move
he stirred into life
in the moment before
he disappeared
Maybe it was I
who left him first
but then
he too was keen to get away
from me
or maybe he just
dissolved
into life after death
or time
gone by
I saw
that he ran
or fled, at least
he moved on
flapping his way
out of my life
I did not stop him
not wanting to think
about him any more
but I could not
deny
he had left
a stain
on the wall behind where
he stood
invisible black, invisible
white, a
watermark
a sting
on the
inner eye
I CAN STILL see the young man
as he leaves me. What he disappeared into
– a forest, a world – is also gone
It closed itself off, was emptied
of memory while I
sat there still living
I do not know
how great my loss
He jumped on his bike
was soon through the forest
and somewhere in town, an area with houses
and people I have never
met. But there is
a darkness which is white
It shines empty
of objects, where I still see
that young man, little
glimmers of him. A hand
or foot
rising out of
moss
SOMETIMES I SEE real young people. They come dancing out of the edges of the forests or from bedrooms or bathtubs or school buses where they are packed together the way words lie waiting under the larynx or gather themselves up into penholders or behind the soft computer screens. The young people come they are jumping around showing off all their limbs and muscles which simply want to stretch and lift. They have not lost childhood in their movements, but have kept the free pull of the skin and the dimples at their hips. They are not yet grown-up autists like me who only have movements resembling something else
I HAVE ANOTHER young man
on the outside
I pulled him along
throwing him on like a jacket
as I ran out
Now he is stuck to my skin
I pass through the dark area
behind the ramshackle outhouse
What before was a small field
has become a dumping ground for garden plants
I pass over the wire fence
cross the narrow tarmac road
and go out into what will be the pasture
for spring has found a place in me
I take a deep breath
all the way down to my roots
My jacket is grey
The edge of the woods is drawing near
comes to meet me
Birdsong can be heard from the trees
My skin is smooth
my eyes keen
my step easier
each day
THERE IS A YOUNG MAN here with me tonight
He is sitting over by the stove
Why have I not noticed him before
He is plant-like, tree-like, bows down
hides what is innermost in him among the leaves
He counts how old he is
with his fingers and toes
and sings without words of a time that did not come
things that will never come to pass
He has not come to keep me company
A boundary crosses the room
a line, a grave
He doesn't look at me
doesn't know I exist
THE YOUNG PEOPLE hang in the air
floating in the clear blue
youngsters, cherubs, weightless
invisible. The young people are ready to burst
brittle as ripe fruit
bulging with invisible juice
The young people are not dreaming, not
descending, they will not be landing
for a long time yet
The sun shines on the young
some will say
It will take them away
out of the firmament
MOTHER WENT to the red place
with grand gestures
as if she had made up her mind
but it was not so
Mother went to the red place
and passed through it
She did not notice she had been there
When she had come out on the other side
she immediately went to another red place
She went from one red place to another
passing through them all
The red places formed a ribbon
round her life
Mother held this ribbon together
with grand gestures
and a will to live
The red places were a burning necklace
around mother’s life
Mother fell from her childhood
through the red places
which hung from the sky
Mother fell through the red places
while she went from one to another
Mother fell in toward her own hot, red centre
while she carried out
the grand gestures
Mother fell and moved around in a circle
which was impossible
Finally she found herself in a red place
She found a haven in a red rest-home
There she sat
inside the red place
Her feet would go no further
IT IS NOT the dead I see come to the wood’s edge
I stand where I often stand, behind me the steep cliff
rises, and before me the green plain, grey
with dew. To the other side is a stone wall
built by the old ones and the woods stretching
toward the distant sea. Did not the dead say
that they would come like this someday, did they not promise
me this in a dream, a vision, a feeling
that nothing will pass? Life does not die
but changes shape, they said, this sleepless night
I stand motionless, see them coming through an opening
in the wall where it fell down in times no one remembers
see them coming out of the woods, also steadily
drawing nearer, wanting to reclaim the plains
They are the dead. They must have gathered
somewhere, not in the woods, not on the pink forest floor
but further in. First they sank into the ground
and woke lonely in the kingdom of the dead
they have never been so lonely, all they had loved
they had left behind, involuntary. Thus many years passed
but they must have found each other, they must
have recognized each other, and got together
in new ways, with other loves than are
revealed to the living. They must have rubbed off against each other,
melted into one another. For they share the same hair, same skin
and bodies, facial expressions, the same age
I can see that. They have cancelled out the distinctions
between themselves and the other dead, here they come
like wild animals who no longer want to linger
in the forest, but are teeming forward, into the green, the open
that is colourless, morninglike, now
almost out on the plain, they are one
creature, one body, one circle, hear
them humming, singing, they dance, do not turn toward me, but are gazing and gazing at each other
How could I think they would come to me
I WAS HERE before the land
I come with the boat
and think this
Islands, holms, flies
shivering in the windowpanes, quivering
in the noise from the engine
I was here first
it occurs to me
before the rocks, the water
and the salt
of the oceans. I
was here, a silent
seed, a poor codlin
among the planets
in the magnetic fields
this stagnation