The Sleepwalkers
Also by Will Stone

Poetry

Translations
Selected Poems of Emile Verhaeren – Arc Publications (2013)
Will Stone

The Sleepwalkers

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and my cherished parents.
But paradise is locked and bolted…
We must make a journey around the world
to see if a back door has perhaps been left open.

Kleist
SAMPLER
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SAMPLER
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Baudelaire
SAMPLER
The Sea off De Haan

Silent now in darkness
are the marram grasses.
With stillness as sustenance
only the cicadas sound.
The black sea moves blindly,
a body turns, awakens slowly
like something beginning to burn.
Always the precipice, the abyss
always the curling lip of the falls,
always the mind seen slipping away.
Solitary walkers on the silver shore,
a dog shape that cavorts, lovers
forced apart by the moon’s
strengthening blade of bone.
Out there patrols the immensity
with its sheathed claw of beauty.
Have no fear, child to come.
A place is held in dawn’s aquarium
for our last ripple, our final
tail fin twist.
Balloon Ride

Silent and smoothly darkened
pass the baskets, with the strange reluctance of evening doves.
A last flight swept by flame roars,
space seen and space missed for
the beautiful sadness of the balloon signing God’s acre, the ochre wheat
and shadow on the foliage as it drifts westwards then east, closer or away
like the riders’ lives dangling beneath,
charcoal to the moon’s chalk smudge
and thin cries that fell to our garden
and lay on the table like browning petals.
Conjured from day’s offcuts, the newly enchanted passed over us, somehow maintaining their footing on death’s loosening scree.
The Bear of Bern

It’s a perfect circle compass-measured by man, where the bear lives.
Concrete is the lip of the pit over which the freshly enthralled fling their nuggets of fruit, so he might catch them in mid air, standing up like a seal for a ball swaying on his henge hindquarters, power still, but theatrical, vulnerable a half-naked general no one believes in, waiting for his uniform.

The bear is beckoning down the harvest of shrieks and gasps, the reviving burst of juice as his crone tooth works the fruit, then all this repeats, shadowing the sadness of a wave against the dark sea wall.
The young mothers grip their infants, rest them on the balustrade above the bear’s great half-senile head, so they kick their feet, mewl and drool as his giant paw pads slap the wall then like collapsing soil, he falls and with blunt claw scratches the floor for errant raisins.

Now he’s up again, and the growth on his neck swings like a leather pouch
and he leans like an old tree
weighing its chances in the first
scout breezes of an oncoming storm.
Then suddenly he sits down, head up,
noble as a dusk-combed mountain.
But they do not see, nor do they feel
how deep this pit, how long the fruit
takes to fall...

The pitted muzzle sweeps testily
from side to side, the eyes they thought
lifted from a fairy-tale turn a deeper black,
disappear abruptly into the boulder head,
a pride glimpsed, power half drawn,
then a great weariness, he slumps down
the blade remains sheathed, the raisins fall.
The Sleepwalkers

For one last night of song
they ascended the sacred hill
where, like a vessel waiting to sail
over black woods and ochre fields
that immense inverted crypt of stone,
the Madeleine, swallowed them all.
Till dawn their burly wave bore down
and eddies of chant lapped at the door.
They sang unwearying, and in the houses,
sleepless, they cursed.
At dawn the singing mass spilled
onto the grey rose tinged square.
Invalids they pushed in barrows,
and the mad, with colours of all nations
like feathers in their hair. They sang on,
faces flushed with conviction
and began their descent
down the dark pipe of silent villagers,
incandescent faith, unstoppable
the lava forged its course
and the square was empty but for
a speechless sun and the abbey
now held by the air alone, like
a honeycomb released of its worker load.
The double doors swung closed
and the monks furtively returned
like svelte swallows to a cliff,
from the alleys and tortuous lanes
they darted in their dark grey robes,
while the Ursuline sisters tiptoed
through their secret tunnel
beneath the road and emerged
on the lofty terraces of their Eden.

Years passed, then decades
and the white dust road
did not darken. Some said
they heard song in the distance
and the foreigners had returned.
But no one came and time
ground the event into grains that
slipped through the grates of even
the keenest memories.
Then war and furious men
came with hammers and axes to
relieve the angels of their smiling faces.
The abbey was abandoned and lay
in ruins. A century passed.
Only doves broke the silence
rustling around the cloven heads of saints
and excited swifts left their imprint on
the stonework of the tower.
The village beneath survived
and there was death and new life, love, guilt
envy and power and there was sloth.
In this warren of ever sprouting pulses
a new breed slowly shaped,
born without the memory of song
and in time they spread their kind
through all the neighbouring lands.
Plague did not finish them
and neither did the floods, they endured
melting ice, storms and quakes
they just kept coming back, stronger
like a willingly beheaded plant.
So successful was their wisdom that
today there is no more room for them. They point vaguely to other planets and sigh for the lost knowledge of how to sing together. For every evil, they blame each other, on how to go forwards or back they cannot agree, or decisively act for they have still not woken, and will never wake from their delicious and diverting slumber, this race named beyond their sight, by those who must soon step in, as *The Sleepwalkers*. 