

Dénes Krusovszky  
Poems

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## 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  
caught 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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