

# Old Europe

## Old Europe

Nothing happens here by chance –  
not the flight of a pigeon  
nor the tumbling of dead leaves  
in the wind. Here centuries  
of living have lent significance  
to the smallest things. People  
will argue that these are random –  
but if you say so, you must hold to it  
strictly. Allow one iota of significance  
and it becomes a seed crystal;  
faster than you can stop it,  
meaning crystallizes  
until the whole world becomes meaningful,  
leaving nothing  
without meaning and importance.  
This land swells with mystery,  
neither unfriendly nor inhuman  
but much more than it appears to be.

## Perhaps All Will Settle

perhaps all will settle  
with this fog  
                  moving in.  
few people, silence  
anonymity,  
the peace of being unknown  
in a world unknown –

once on a Swedish train  
northbound miles upon miles  
empty sunbright frozen  
taiga and a clear decanter  
of sparkling cold water  
in each car

again a tiny German medieval  
village basking  
under a mild winter sun  
feet propped on my bag  
waiting for the one-car train –

the fog obscures  
anything not present

                  all quiet  
slow –  
          little to be seen  
white, clean

standing outside  
life, its headlong momentum  
          broken  
stopped

open-mouthed  
here.

## Dombühl in Winter Sun

The morning bus winds unhurried through a countryside  
of tiny German towns gone off to sleep for centuries.  
Hawks glide down into fallow fields and stand alert.  
I have no books, nothing to read, nothing I have to do.  
We arrive at the little backwater of Dombühl,  
where at noon the train to Dinkelsbühl will stretch, yawn  
and shake itself awake. The track goes nowhere  
that is not here. Having nothing better to do,  
I lean back with my feet on my bag under a weak winter sun.  
From here I have a view of the centuries as they pass,  
a slowly winding summer river. No one who knows me  
knows where I am. No one can find me.  
I rest with no thought, lacking nothing.

## St. Stephan's Dom

a ghost nearly as forgotten as this memory  
shouldering its bulk heavenward  
I wandered, seeking to get lost  
turning a corner – unforgettable  
iced with moonlight  
white as if a giant had frosted  
its Gothic steeple and slanting roof tiles –

St. Stephan's Dom

starkly colorless and shadowed  
over its left shoulder near full  
the moon backlit a cloudy sky

I sat on a bench  
the Dom and I in the moonlight

near midnight – but people  
kept on arriving and going in the massive  
doors, through the vestibule  
swept immediately into dark religious space  
the interior rose dusk  
sculptures and paintings on all sides

lost to sight  
rose through the dim interior  
to God

at side alters bank upon bank of votive candles  
flickered in their white and red glass cups  
absorbed in peace  
enormous intimacy  
the cathedral seated me within moments  
people on every side, rich German voices  
rising in the evening mass

leaving, wandering through midnight Vienna  
I rose and rose and never pierced the Dom

## Evening Mass, St. Stephan's Dom

old men and women arriving for six p.m. mass  
blunder into St. Stephan's Dom like big, clumsy insects  
out of an April evening (and the tulips,  
the daffodils have today, at last, unfurled their reds,  
their yellows) oblivious to us  
(who have become insubstantial  
as the Cathedral recesses, shadows  
that continually fall away from the center  
at great speed). they come  
almost like men and women might come from  
a death camp, each step just able  
to catch the forward-falling weight,  
so that their frail bodies almost sail,  
almost float down the center aisle.  
i think they almost forget to stop and take a seat,  
almost keep right on going into the cross  
to be consumed. but they pause, seem momentarily  
bewildered, seem to shake their heads,  
then painfully genuflect. to see them  
come sailing down that central aisle,  
the inner light balanced, undistracted, going home,  
you might think, as i did, that the little votive candles  
banked in their red plastic cups along a side altar  
had come down, their small flames stretching  
up eight, ten feet high – in each the face,  
the hands and arms barely distinguishable – so that  
they swept down the floor, a strong vigorous  
procession, returning to that place where they  
belong, knew once, and now know again.

## You are like Europe

making love in the dark, still time  
before the alarm  
you are like Europe  
dark beneath me.  
*it was not yet 4:00 a.m.  
when I stepped off the train in Florence.  
it was the morning of New Year's Eve Day, 1983.  
her uninhabited streets that narrow  
and run away between looming buildings  
drew me in; the thin starred sky  
squeezed down between.  
early in the morning I walked  
into a strange city, looking for a bed.  
the world makes itself for the one who is there.  
someone leaned on a bridge, looking  
at the moon reflected in the silent Arno.  
it was the Ponte Vecchio. it was me.*

you rise against me.  
you, like Florence at this hour,  
lie somewhere between sleep  
and timelessness.  
like Florence, somewhere within you  
is Titian's Flora.  
*at this early hour, for Florence, only such dates  
as that of the Ponte Vecchio, 1345,  
lie between her and an endless fall  
into ageless time.  
At 6:00 a.m., I began knocking on pensione doors.  
All were full.  
I knock. You tremble a little.*

*I pushed open a door. No one answered.  
The foyer was lit, but deserted.  
I wandered through, looking at all the closed doors.  
(you behind one of them, asleep.)  
no one at the desk, but somewhere coffee brewing.  
a surly, ill-kempt Florentine appeared, scowling  
down at me, over the bannister.  
I need a room, I explained;  
she disappeared, then returned,  
leading me to a small, top-floor room.  
it was overpriced. I took it.*

*as she left with my passport, I pushed open the shutters  
your eyes flutter; morning light begins to enter our room.*

*before me, rising out of all view,  
the huge, round, red-tiled dome  
of the Santa Maria del Fiore,  
the Duomo, pride of Florence,  
largest cathedral dome in all Europe,  
symbol of Florentine pride, domination  
and arrogance.*

*pigeons fluttered in the stupendous space  
suddenly created; my breath  
like a white bird too  
at last regained the sill.  
leaning on the ledge, I watched  
the sky – the only rival she has –  
pale behind the Duomo. the stars winked out  
and all that was somber gave way  
to exuberance.  
you make a soft cry, no longer dark  
beneath me.*

## Holy Bruges

the clatter of children off to school over narrow cobblestone streets,  
briefcases on their backs, like flocks of crows that cannot fly.  
each leaning further out than the others, the spires and towers of massive  
green-scaled Sint Salvatore's Kerk where since the 12th century  
Christ Bound has sat in sorrow and in a side chapel knelt where the air itself  
cries and white our breath came out and hung, a mist. we saw hardly anyone here  
in March the canals frozen the winter-gripped trees  
entire streets of ancient brick sloping red-tiled roofs at odd angles.  
Holy Bruges, a place that wants to be lived in, wants me to live in a small  
apartment

with a green door and a brass center knob, lace hung in the windows  
near the chapel under the Basilica of Holy Blood left unchanged since  
the 11th century rough stone walls blackened by 900 years of candles  
thick with the presence of God small side chambers entered by arched  
stone passageways corroded metal grates set high in the walls  
shadowed and dim – where sits another Christ Bound sorrowful seen  
through a door ajar to His small chamber where I sat where there are only two  
seats

a room for hours of prayer where the hushed prayer of thousands  
of hours has settled quiet and thick. I sat thinking of my own bondage  
binding myself over wholly to things that pass sat sunk in thought  
in this chapel half-sunk in the ground and in the next chapel Christ  
stretched on His cross where He has hung on the wall for centuries  
and another where Mary cries holding the dead Jesus in her lap.

later at dinner in De Koeste (The Carriage) we sat in a gold-glazed  
window with a candle and double carriage lights under a green ceiling  
sprinkled with tiny bulbs stars where the solicitous proprietor's  
black-haired thin daughter who spoke little English hung her head  
on one side trying to figure us out serving us a Grand Marnier dessert

## Füssen

Not arriving until 3 in the afternoon! The slow train pulls into München – and for this we passed up Dinkelsbühl! The S-Bahn to Dachau – it's closed. We call ahead to Italy. Our Locanda plays dumb: doesn't know me, doesn't know anything about the money order sent last month, doesn't have a room waiting for us; it's full, all full, call back. Neuchwanstein isn't open. It will be impossible to take the scenic train from Garmisch into Switzerland. No choice but to ride on into Füssen

where the entire three-story hotel seems empty, the upstairs halls cavernous and dark, the lights automatically switch off moments after they're turned on. A large restaurant looms dark behind the nice dining room that is open, blue-trimmed chairs and walls, served by a shy Bavarian girl with slim hips.

Our iron-grille balcony  
looks out on silver-white alps  
under a sparkling clear night sky cut by razor-sharp stars.  
Adumbrated in dark foreground shape,  
the Hohes Schloß  
set on a promontory  
above a black town.

Our after-dinner walk  
unwinds deserted streets that lead  
directly into the approaches to the Hohes Schloß.  
It rises suddenly, up from the very stone.  
Notwithstanding Marian's trepidation,  
I start up the stairs that lead up one side. Far up  
on a corner tower, two windows picked out in yellow light  
overshadow rows of shapelessly dark windows set  
in the massively dark wall. The stairs clamber  
around the silent Schloß, pass through a cleft  
between two megaliths, the rock faces sheer,  
30 feet above us.

A long sweeping turn to the left brings us  
through several rings of gates and curving drives,  
a courtyard, and the long encircling arms  
of the Schloß that slope down on either side.

the evening  
and the moonlight and just the two of us.

The walls are magnificently painted to simulate  
three-dimensional frames and windows  
protruding from the walls, all manner of wood and brick  
tracery –

                  none of which exist, but in the beguiling  
moon       impossible to tell.

Silence impassive as the walls – and from it hangs lightly  
a moment belonging to us alone,  
and the blank stone  
and something that

                  wants to be found  
out: what is it that makes sense  
in the context of *our* lives only?

The grand church  
incorporated in the walls towers  
over a swift river glittering in the dark,  
reflecting the moon, a flock of swans, flapping  
in disputes among themselves. Then –  
caught staring at woven metal gates crafted  
to resemble a swarm of bees  
frozen in midair – we are stopped  
by a far-off sound, the human voice  
in song,

                  arias ascending, gaining flight  
on a rising tide of organ, musical prayers  
climbing one upon the other  
towards God. Hushed, mouths a little open,  
the music glowing like a tree  
that puts out leaves and even branches of sound  
that glow dimly gold –

                  and then it's over and we walk  
back around the castle – the light high in the tower  
back between cloven rock walls  
down to the river where swans still float; back  
over the bridge where a cat, startled  
to be addressed in cat-language,  
stops, half backs up,  
and then hugs a wall as it scuttles home.

## Czechoslovakia

Dark trees, black against the afternoon sky  
line the roads. The dead, all of Czech history  
still live and inhabit the walls and the forests.

Quiet, an unobtrusive people.  
Absent are the flocked Japanese, the babble of French,  
Italian and German that we have grown used to hearing,  
the hordes of tourists, the slicked-up feel.  
We enter towns and rooms side by side  
with the people who are living out ordinary lives around us.  
Not flamboyant or temperamental, but with a depth  
behind doors and faces that would take a lifetime of knowing  
to open. A home such as I had in the 1950's,  
a boy in a simpler time, when public places were bare and scrubbed –  
imposing in their own way but not ornate or neon or plastic.  
A home forgotten long ago still alive and unspoiled.

Vilem, a Czechoslovakian Ingrid, a little white-haired old man  
with a worried round face, anxious to herd and hurry us hither and thither,  
had daffodils for Marian when we disembarked the bus from Brno.

At the Cathedral of St. Peter & St. Paul are four simple wood carvings  
Christ contorted, his face twisted down to meet Mary's uplooking  
gaze, the agonizing removal from the cross.

At Spilberk, a bearish Slavic man sprayed us as he spoke,  
warming to his work, describing for us  
the dungeons, chill and gruesome.

At the stand-up high lunch counter –  
open-faced sandwiches sliced egg pickles  
pea-mayonnaise salad dressing and the thick brown soup.

Litomyšl, Vilem's home for more than 50 years,  
its huge long square bordered by old buildings yellow, gray, and rustic red  
the gymnasium he attended as a boy, the river where he played,  
the path he took to school,  
his childhood home in a now-ruined building  
on a street of old buildings slated to be torn down.  
The main square small, the shops old,  
their sparse window displays struggle to be Western,  
the new 50's-style groceries and markets.

Vysoké Mýto: our hotel landlady an old wrinkled raisin  
who mumbled and shook her head over our passports  
and needed so much clarification that without Vilem  
we should never have had a room.

Once in our rooms, the sense of foreignness pervading the night  
as nowhere else on this trip, the rattles of doors  
and echoes of voices that come funneling down the hall,  
the walls and streets and buildings almost animate with memories  
and shades of times and people who lived and walked here  
40 and 50 years ago.

At Vitus' Cathedral, huge vaulting gothic arches  
subdued golden-brown, ribbed  
soaring toward God – prayer would come unbidden  
out of so huge a space  
to fill the soul. Its foundations  
a half-dozen structures dating from the ninth century  
to the 16th. Here in Prague so much dates from Karol IV,  
the mid-1300's an undertow  
that sweeps back 600 years to a time medieval and golden  
Prague a lamp of culture and learning over darkened Europe.  
From Vratislav's Palace, its wooden floor worn to bare board,  
arched passageways lead away hung with purple drapes  
and through those gigantic windows all of Prague  
falling away below.

## The Old Jewish Cemetery at Prague

Suddenly we are at the train station and I must struggle for the words to say goodbye to this woman who has been my constant traveling companion. And realizing how well we have taken care of one another and having come to understand her and love her now how much more deeply and with less reservation, memories of her crowd in blurring rain and together they blur the train as it pulls away.

See: she packs snow, forming little snowmen on the trail down from some ancient pile.

I hear her squeaking to alert me to stop for another store window that has caught her delight.

Playing with my hand as we walk – little girl and mature woman, telling dreams in pensioné beds and sharing café in the little shops with croissants in the mornings.

And today she travels alone her own way home like the Wandering Jew, like a star that crosses

slowly toward the widening West as day breaks like a wave that washes over it.

Left behind, Petr and I find our way at last to the old Jewish synagogue, the oldest still in use in Europe. Here the immemorial cemetery is crowded with gravestones;

superstition walks; the spirits of the dead can be felt crowding about – on cold winter nights I've seen them rise out of the earth, sheets of gauze filming the night,

arms outstretched like gusts of wind, mouths stretched open, pulled by the wind into long O's.

Oh stony centuries, stones that stand so close – sometimes 3 or 4 lean on one another;

oh dominoes so weathered and pitted that the inscription itself no longer words the mouth.

The Terezin Children's Art Museum occupies the synagogue hall; their drawings and their poetry. A simple child's stick-drawing – but on the stick the man's ribs stick out and the face is hollow; the round eye sockets see no redemption and one face has given up to death and lies in wrenching submission on the breast of another. Other faces look out with mute, animal-like incomprehension and make pleas no one now can answer. The crudely primitive interior of the synagogue

is filled with a hush that can be disturbed by no one's entry. The living God who once walked

up and down in the cool of the morning paces here sick with self-recrimination for these dying children; that God who spoke from a flaming thornbush, whose flames and thorns are inhuman, caring nothing for human suffering.

The unadorned 12<sup>th</sup> century walls frame rich purple cushions and draperies curtaining

the holy vessels and scriptures, making them almost exotic, Middle-Eastern.

Those who have departed travel far far from us without cushions and drapes;

stars wheeling the rim of the known universe travel no further from us than they.

## Description of Last Photograph of Marian

Most of the photo is black, but in the lower half  
a dim underpass is faintly visible  
leading to a Bruges courtyard behind,  
the cobbles washed out by a too-  
brilliant cold March sun

which actually seems to shimmer  
like a mist rising off an impossible sea  
whose fingering light throws the rest of the picture  
into an indistinguishable lack of light  
and backlit silhouette.

On the far side of the underpass,  
unrecognizable to any but me,  
your black shape  
(that will be leaving into the light  
in a moment) stands facing me

next to a brick pillar –  
one side of an arch of bluish light  
that cuts the blackness of the photo,  
rising above the overexposed sea of white.  
unknown Bruges lives

recede in further rows of blue-tinted  
brick arches ascending in stories  
above and behind you – not contributing  
to our story, in which you stand  
turned to look back at me

through a black passageway  
through which you came  
and I didn't, as if reflecting a last moment  
on what our life had been  
before going on into that lit place,

your face and all detail  
lost to me  
(but your red hair catches fire too  
on top of your head in that sun's  
extraordinary redemption

which has already carried so much  
of the partner I shared  
out of the figure looking at me,  
except for the unmistakable push  
forward into life

of your chest and shoulders  
hands pushed into the pockets of the too-  
large down coat we borrowed for the trip  
and which I know was blue  
but which looks black) –

that forward-leaning attitude of yours  
arches your back like a bow  
so that your face is lifted up and out  
like an expectant child's  
ready to laugh

(your eyes really did dance then, but  
that's lost too) – this posture  
balanced by rocking back  
on your heels, lifting your toes  
a little, like an elf's.

A peninsula of sunlight reaches  
through the dark passageway almost  
to where I stand with the camera  
but does not  
quite reach me –

a picture taken unaware  
that I was actually getting  
the last picture, how you would look  
going away from me  
at the last.

## Ecce Homo

*(Matthias Templon, Budapest)*

this pride hunches  
sullen  
as stone  
until, carved  
into Christ Bound,  
it sinks to His toes  
where

– rubbed  
by the innumerable fingers  
of prayer  
that approach,  
hesitate,  
and touch the Holy Feet –

it at last  
begins to wear away.

## Train Travels North Through Scandinavia

The cold here runs wild; frozen fields,  
thick ice where summer lakes  
were brushed by quick breezes;  
forest that stretches north hundreds of miles  
thousands of lakes and rivers frozen all winter  
wolves, wolverine, elk, beaver, bear –

the silver moon sails behind  
tall white birch and dark green pine.

All day the train, north through the Swedish  
countryside. Rural towns villages  
old houses churches and where the forest opens –  
a flat white, glistening.  
There is little to say. The train cars open –  
no closed compartments;  
dark wood paneling, soft seats  
a carafe of crystal cold water in each one.

The people of the North know a thing.  
The men's eyes piercing their faces, thin, sharp lines  
always the interested look of the fox –  
how things work how to fix them or improve them –  
men who accomplish. The women fresh  
amused but reserving the reason why.  
Pleasure uninhibited. Poetry indistinguishable  
from laundry. A few old buildings not burnt down  
in the fires of the past dozen centuries, fires  
that Swedenborg saw in visions. They know  
the rigors of paring back to the necessary to live  
amid immense forests, to walk on peat and moss  
springy sunk between so many lakes it's hardly dry land  
to carve out a place in immense being  
whose coldness and whiteness and shaggy hair  
overwhelms the last little station of civilization  
that falls behind on the track.

On the way to the train it began snowing lightly.  
That little indrawn breath with which Swedes  
punctuate their agreements. Away is where you go  
after things have changed enough to forget  
both who you are and who you owe.

A countryside under snow slides by our train window  
scattered farm houses painted red and yellow  
houses deep in isolation and silence  
the dripping woods crowd around.

A man in red wool, far away, traverses a frozen lake.  
His going is slow – even from the train, across the lake  
we see the slowness with which he lifts his staff.  
He trudges on. What he sees of us is all the views we have  
of him, all of us strung down the long red length of train,  
looking out its windows. Soon he will reach open water.

Riding over the top of Norway, a frozen waste  
of snow, a few stunted trees.  
Now and then a cross-country skier  
turns and squints back at our train through his goggles.  
A fine mist of snow blows continually.  
The white hill's outline cannot be discerned  
against white sky; snowbound slopes simply climb  
into forever, disappear into nothingness.  
Now the doors are blocked by snow and only the peaks  
of roofs and black caps of rock give definition  
to a picture painted all in white.  
Meaning is shrinking, purifying.  
Little exists; there is little to grasp.  
Whatever we had clutched for so long is let go  
and the soul is blown onto these rocks,  
twisting like paper in the wind.

Hundreds of feet of iceblue waterfalls stopped in place  
frozen where they plunge down cliff walls.  
Here and there, circled by rock and ice walls, a settlement,  
a few dozen buildings. The colors brightened by the sun –  
again yellows and reds.

## Göteborg Konst Museum

Three of Per Hasselberg's sculptures at the Göteborg Konst Museum!  
His white marble – only he made it soft, like skin.  
One can actually see the pores on the arms. His Little Mermaid's  
nipples haven't hardened, drops of incredible softness.  
His Näckrosen, her back arched in ecstasy,  
full lips parted, slides perfectly into place –  
night-blooming water lily, she floats on the surface  
of crude men's erotic dreams.

Ivar Arosenius paints a small girl who stands  
in a dark-shadowed 19th century living room,  
transfixed by a candle placed high above her tiny body  
on the shelf of the stove. The candle's weak yellow flame  
gives the only light that allows the picture to be seen,  
the only light in her young life, something to which  
(so young) she is oblivious.  
Hung next to it, a painting in which she reaches out,  
but reaches for nothing; she is looking at the gigantic  
shadow her small hand casts on the wall, the cooking fire behind.  
Everything here is unspoken, the tension  
rampant, no word given, only the terrifyingly  
huge shadow thrown by her small hand is allowed to speak,  
and then only to we who view this painting,  
more than a century too late.

One must not stand too close to an Anders Zorn painting.  
In order to see it one must step back – what  
on close inspection seem vague and fuzzy blotches  
resolve into great depth, the lovely full-breasted model  
undressing in the artist's studio emerges from the grays of clay.  
Even the small ones require five or six feet; the large ones  
best viewed across a large hall or glimpsed  
through a passageway several rooms away. Most patrons  
are up close, peering intently, baffled. With distance, light  
plays; Zorn's light on arms and legs, breasts round out,  
a young woman throws off her wrap, her shoulders back,  
– the sudden exposure of her naked body to fresh cold air,  
one can feel the body heat as it blows away.

## Ersta

### I

Ingrid is not waiting for me at the dock  
and my bags are too heavy to carry to Brähegatan,  
so I take the T-bana to Slussen,  
struggle up the long rain-soaked hill, and come exhausted  
to the harboring safe-haven of Ersta  
only to find the doors all locked.  
A small café in the building is still open – a few questions  
and a helpful woman is making phone calls.  
They have no record of a reservation but the girl who normally  
handles them isn't there, so they aren't sure.  
Nor is there any listing in the Stockholm phone book  
for Wikner. I have written their number in my travel  
notebook, but it's the old one. When I called ahead  
from San Francisco, Information gave me the new digit  
that has been added to all Stockholm numbers, but now I've forgotten.  
No one at the boat, no reservation at Ersta,  
no relatives in the phone book – maybe I don't exist.  
At last, someone remembers – Ingrid picked up the key  
last night. That person and the helpful woman decide  
it was a 6 that was added to Stockholm phone numbers.  
Now the phone works and Ingrid is on her way.  
I sit, drinking a complimentary Apelsinjuice and wait.

### II

Back in my old room at Ersta, the one I had in 1983,  
I am surrounded again at once by its deep consoling silence.  
I go out to the sitting room to write, alone among the flowered couches,  
the large room with its carefully arranged antiques,  
the ticking of the lovely old wall clock.  
It hasn't changed at all, but I have – how young and enthusiastic  
I was then, hardly able to believe I was here, delighted  
in anything European, in the long dark hotel entryways,  
their unprepossessing fronts, the long climbs up dark steps,  
fumbling keys for hall and stairway doors  
that suddenly opened to reveal this calmly waiting, richly furnished  
silent space within. Returning three years later with Marian, wanting  
her to have it too, trying to direct it all, nothing measured up.  
Now, returning a third time, alone in its supernatural calm,  
I realize that it was not Ersta but me that did not  
measure up. I stand in the antechamber

and apologize aloud; the aching echo  
has no one to hear it, there's no one here but me.  
So this is what I've made of my life,  
trying to apologize to things so long ago,  
so fruitlessly too late; these facts speak for themselves.  
What do I ask for that I have not already been given? I apologize  
to have come back thinking I could recover  
my life, as if it were up to Ersta to have held it safe,  
and to my memories, that I should return here to walk with feet so muddy.

## Elfsborg Fortress Dinner Dance

Dinner at Elfsborg fortress, 40 or 50 human ecologists, white-haired old wise men from Sri Lanka and India; Reusong, the energetic entrepreneurial academic from China; Britta, our Swedish hostess, who discusses world literature with me sheltering under a shared umbrella as it showers at Koster, “Sweden’s sunniest place”. The kindly German philosopher, Dieter, walks the narrow dirt country road to the fortress, his umbrella keeping a steady cycle – planting the tip, stepping past, the arm rising in a natural easy swing, the umbrella level with the road a moment, thrusts forward, and plants again. Finn, the tall, thoughtful slow-spoken Dane, his long black hair pulled back in a ponytail, very quiet and reserved but with friendly good humor – I tease him “you never give me an unqualified yes!” as he ponders carefully the treacherous byways of thought. He smiles shyly if so big a man can be shy and laughs a little behind his full beard. Jonathan and Suzanne, so strong in each other, the American couple whose presence makes others immediately feel better, who make whatever room they are in seem a little larger.

Walking off the Elfsborg boat, I ask Britt-Marie, a black-haired black-eyed Swedish beauty who staffs the small gift shop, “may I walk with you?” and we fall into talking. She invites me for a beer, a lovely competent woman committed to public service, peace, and the common good; I wonder if she has a private life. She had one live-together lover eight years ago she says, an alcoholic – she left. A lovely intimate conversation, but then a shadow of fear in her eyes.

And then there is Briggita, daughter of a leading Swedish human ecologist, lovely, sweet, a caretaker, working very hard to succeed, a physician in her last year of residency, accomplished cellist, attractive, talented, intelligent – and yet there’s something unresolved about her, something entangling, an unconsciously deliberate lack of knowledge of men. Jerry says he would move to Sweden to woo her. I don’t know. Inexperienced, inhibited, and, if she stayed in at all costs (and she would) ultimately lethal. You can see it in the way she dances, a little wooden, stiff, even Jerry notices – “she has no more rhythm than an old shoe!” We find ourselves drawn into the family web, implicit and dangerous. At the center is Torsten, the petulant, demanding old fat man; the patriarch who plays the jolly old fellow so long as he’s humored. His wife, daughter, and son all three such pleasers, who work so hard to smooth over, appreciate, take care, extending their services to everyone in range, not just papa. Ole, the pedant, the son driven to repeat his lessons, to show that he has learned well – a bit of a pedagogue, almost patronizing if he weren’t so practiced at self-effacement. Why have both son and daughter seemingly no experience of the opposite sex as they near 40 and 30 respectively? Something is concealed here in a conspiracy of success and kindness.

Dancing at Elfsborg – a comical, 1950’s sockhop forced on a highly self-conscious international group of aging professionals who among them represent nearly as

many inhibitions as they do cultures. And the tapes! Really terrible – Frank Sinatra, unclassifiable bop, the occasional Caribbean rhythm to which Teresa, the playful Spanish beauty dances, black hair, black eyes, teasing all the men. Each reaches for her willing hand a moment in the dance, flying with sudden wings far into imagined times and intimacies, falling into voids larger than space as she releases them and moves to her next partner. She knows what she's doing, but it's not her fault. The men grasp for her and she in a kind of akido allows them to fly by and fall over themselves. She will let me know if she wants me, so I do nothing.

## By Rail to Östersund

Thick, dark forests, cold water  
deathly at the feet  
of firs that wade to their knees.  
black water, bleak bark,  
ponds, moss, gray skies, and never a house.  
If I marry Jennifer, I'll bring her here.  
Beneath the trees, thick mats of sedge,  
pale green lichen. If I marry Jennifer,  
there would be space and silence.

If I marry Cindy, nest-builder,  
there would be companionship  
and warmth. She would make  
up her home, wrap me in comfort and care.

Reading Wehr's biography of Jung –  
his study of primitive culture and symbol  
draws a boundary that outlines  
the human form against a photographer's  
blank background. Collective  
unconscious, but no evolutionary frame,  
the leap from hand  
to branch to myth and archetype;  
the savanna of language; the forest of cognition;  
the ecology of knowing.

Munkflohögen, named for a 14th century  
monk who died on his way to warn  
this northern monastery of the Black Death.  
A gray cow moose runs alongside the train  
through the border clearing, not  
graceful as a deer, but powerful, like a bear,  
steaming in her forward-surgings gallop.  
No one I've known pitches in to help  
get work done like Cindy does. Yet  
Jennifer gives of herself most gracefully.

Jung did not simply leap into the unconscious;  
he used the ancient tools – I read:  
“on his life's important decisions,  
Jung customarily consulted the I Ching.”

A shadow flashes past, a reindeer  
shrouded behind a thin row of trees.

The further north I travel, the more clear  
it all becomes. It is necessary to travel  
far to see what is close at hand.  
The train slows to a roll along a huge beaver  
dam. In Jennifer there is immense space.  
Rilke advised love against a wide sky.

Yesterday the arm of my leather jacket ripped out  
Luckily I have saved a few safety pins  
and borrowing one more I am able to pin  
it together serviceably and in not too  
noticeable a way. If Cindy were here,  
she would sew it right.

At Ulriksfors everyone piles off the train  
buying hot drinks from a red minivan parked by the tracks.  
I converse haltingly with a sweet old Swedish gentleman  
at the door of our car, taking the fresh air.  
Having lent him my binoculars, he now returns  
to fill my hand with a sweet marshmallow candy.  
Sometimes I just want to cry at such human kindness.  
I can see in Jennifer a lovely young mother.  
Cindy would be most motherly.

Jung wrote of an inexpressible longing for light  
in the eyes of African primitives.  
But what of this inexpressible longing for the dark?  
These endless tracks through Swedish marshlands  
and unbroken forest. The Will does  
what neither the rational nor the creative mind  
can, grasps the world directly, bends it to itself.  
I struggle to choose.

The forests grow shorter, skimpier.  
Everywhere, rubble left by glaciers,  
boulder fields the size of trains  
and glacial moraines. We have hit a reindeer on the track.  
The train stops, backs up, finds him, stops again.  
He is still alive, lying beside us, his side heaving,  
eyes big with fear, one antler snapped off.  
When the train stops, he thrashes his broken legs  
attempting to roll to his feet, but cannot.  
This mortally wounded creature dying now beside a railroad track  
in the Swedish wilderness he roamed only a moment ago –  
I feel in every part how I too someday I will die like this.  
And who would I want with me then?

A short nap; we turn east between Sorele and Arvidsjaur.  
The train whistle blows, an entire herd of reindeer scatter.  
It is easier to say what Cindy has given me;  
what Jennifer has given is not so easy to say  
and yet it is something I cannot live without.

Jungian psychology is thoroughly Western; it addresses  
problems peculiar to Christian culture  
such as reintegrating the missing feminine  
and the repressed shadow, and an alchemical dissolution  
and reconstitution that only the formed ego can need.  
We have stopped for 40 minutes. I walk up a little hill into town  
and buy two cartons of juice and a banana. Walking back,  
the train releases steam as if from the bellows of a  
bull moose's lungs, snorting a great swampy sigh.  
Our train has been reduced to four cars, and even so  
is barely one-third full –  
about evenly split among families with small children,  
old couples, and young groups in threes and fours,  
including this merry group of four girls in my car. A less  
attractive foursome could hardly be imagined, yet they giggle  
and are full of friendship and life – who could resist them?  
Cindy would befriend them. Jennifer is reserved.

Our conductor, a man in his 40's, brings to mind  
the longling country gink of my Grandfather's bedtime song  
"He var six feet two in his stocking feet, and he kept getting thinner  
the more he'd eat. But he var strong as he var thin..."  
And so he seems, long in arms and legs.

Our stewardess is a beauty, perfect in every curve, a creation  
God made lovely through her unselfconsciousness.  
She should be photographed, painted, sculpted – her brown hair  
falls over her shoulders, her smile charms the little Scandinavian  
tomtens who make the landscape come alive. Jennifer's  
sweet modesty preserves something mysterious,  
something feminine no man could resolve into words.  
It is in her the way a bird sits quietly in a wood.  
It sits in her without her knowing or willing.  
It sits where it belongs. Where others fly about,  
Jennifer sits composed, wings folded,  
until at last, I settle beside her, composed too,  
as in Goethe's night-wanderer's song.  
In Cindy there a great gravitational center of mass  
to which all about her compose themselves.

At Kåbdaks, a stone obelisk tells us that we are 1187 km  
from Stockholm. The sky has cleared and become bluer.  
We have arrived at a nameless little stop where Lapps

offer reindeer leather and fox fur. At another tiny stationhouse  
an artist has rendered the midnight sun in geometric designs  
and multi-colors, like a Jungian mandala. We cross the Arctic Circle.

I have crossed the circle and now as I write, I talk to Jennifer or Cindy,  
looking up in surprise that they are not there.

We arrive at Gällivare, which looks like a small eastern  
Washington town from the 1950's. The boys here have nothing to do  
so they park, turn up their radios full volume,  
and talk to one another from their driver's side windows.

I find a small hotel, get up at midnight, and photograph  
the sun, low and red on the horizon.

Having crossed into the mandala's center  
I have chosen and I will marry.

## Moose on the Menu

It tastes like bugling over rainy northern tundra swamps  
on a cold, misty morning.  
It tastes like great mouthfuls of wet green vegetation  
tugged up by their roots.  
I have just seen a dwarf, dressed as a waiter  
run up the candlelit stairs two at a time.  
Old walls of mortared stone lit the ancient way  
by shadow-leaping fire imprinted  
these tens of thousands of years in us.  
On my way out, the old man who runs the garderobe,  
grotesque old scarecrow with vulture claws,  
insists on seeing my dinner bill before unlocking  
the restaurant door to let me out.  
I am at a loss – what establishment would  
have their coat-check staff scrutinize their guests' dinner bills?  
As he greedily pours over the slip of figures  
clutched in his bony fingers it dawns on me that  
he is looking for his tip! I pluck it from his hand –  
“I think you've seen quite enough” – unlock the door  
and let myself out. The old man slams it behind me,  
with feeling. The moose is outside, head raised, grazing  
the moon, pulling at the tender tips of its branches.

## Rock Church, Helsinki

Holy Rock, God and music of flute  
and organ. 14 miles  
of copper wire weave the ceiling.  
Acoustics choir silence into ardor  
and vanish  
vanquishing feeling into mute poverty.

An officious mousy man attached to a camera  
lines up his family in stage whispers  
which the excellent acoustics carry faithfully  
to the ears of All. Two daughters, mortified  
at this scurrying mouse afraid for winter –  
afraid of the Hawk but more afraid to go without  
what he came to gather –  
stand facing the eyes he himself holds off  
(the eyes that are his alone) while he tries  
every angle, exploring all the corners  
except those that matter. Having hastily  
come and taken what he could, he hurriedly  
leaves, nursing a sick uncertainty whether  
he had consumed too much or not enough.

The flutist comes to the end of the duet;  
the organist continues on alone.  
The Presence  
this church let be like death  
goes on sinking like stone  
in water that receives it, unowned.

## Helsinki, Mid-Summer 1991

A permanent sunset hangs over the northern horizon  
above the coast of Finland, a bloodred streak  
that metamorphizes into a sunrise without our knowing  
just when.

Helsinki, warm, its skyline low,  
self-sufficient under the long-lasting afternoon,  
in no hurry to go anywhere, not caring who comes  
or goes. The sun through birch leaves.

Lying in my bunk on the Silja Liner to Stockholm.  
I have traveled so far to be able to see  
what is with me always.

The sun at 10:30 p.m. is like a spring afternoon.  
Time means nothing, not for sleeping  
nor for eating. At 1:15 a.m. I arise and wander  
through the liner, its dance floors still lively.

9 a.m. – sheets of rain;  
no longer a land of midnight sun.  
The Viking Liner that had slid so long alongside  
has somehow moved ahead,  
silently leading through twisting passages,  
island channels.

Long white swans dip their necks  
gracefully in the cold water.  
This is a land of water and rock  
inundated by water, rock sinking in water  
or rising out of the sea, the water streaming off.

## Air Travels

### *Frankfurt – December 1983*

The Lufthansa Bordbuch in the seat pocket in front tells me it is 5,680 miles from San Francisco to Frankfurt, a Great Circle cutting over Reno; Helena, Montana; Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan; Hudson Bay; the tip of Greenland; Reykjavik; Newcastle; Amsterdam and Köln. Flying through the perpetual night of polar winter, here it does not matter what the hour is – it is dark. I stare out the window at unfamiliar stars, a sight I never took into account in planning my trip. The night sky of polar ice and sea. The black-tinged blue of sky pierced by vague white stars shining away, irrespective of human adventure. That even in the aftermath of nuclear war these stars would still shine in this polar dark is oddly comforting.

On the return flight, the horizon of sunset, a red line below and to the left, leads us west for hours. The sky, which never does drop into black but only the deep blue of early dusk, now lightens perceptibly and that same line of sunset has now become a horizon of sunrise toward which we turn, running against the streaming tide not only of air but of time, journeying all morning backward through yesterday to the west coast of North America. The sunrise spreads an increasingly scarlet lap over the edge of morning – here at the far northern turn of our circle this thin red line stands for noon, the sun's river on the farthest edge of view. At last the intense red sun peeps and then rears itself above the line-at-the-edge-of-the-world, brightens into intense gold, then becomes white.

### *Bruges – March 1986*

Far down, tiny whitecaps on the vast Atlantic through momentary partings of cloud. Once in a while, an infinitesimal boat. Then the cloud banks ride up, as if coming up a small hill or long ridge and England rises up out of the endless water.

### *Stockholm – June 1991*

We pass over the Lofoten Islands, the coast of Norway. The sun is out, all clouds blown away; the mountain chains of Norway, flooded to their giant waists, wade into the North Sea and stretch away to the North so far as the eye can see; the sun sparkles on blue seas. Looking directly down, mountainsides plunge into the sunlit water turning yellow-white for a little distance before disappearing into measureless depths where the water becomes blueblack and cold. Now we come to the vast blue sea, to touch land again only over northern Greenland. Glancing out the window while eating a Scandinavian Airlines' lunch, I see at last the fairytale city in the clouds. Far off on the northern horizon, an entire city with castles and spires, many tall buildings and walls rising up like the shining bright destination that rises at last into the traveler's weary view at death after so many day's dark travail in a thick forest. It is a glimpse of Oz, of Camelot or Tolkein's elf city – something heard of, never thought to have seen. I take one last look back

over my shoulder as we fly; it's still there, the Spirit assuring me that I will come home.

We pass over Greenland, a waste of frozen rock and ice, the rock smoothed and rounded by millennia of glaciers. Now and then I look down to see uninhabited tracts of massive islands – Canada's Northwest Territories. Then blue water with the whitest icebergs floating in it like a giant cool drink. We come onto the coast of Canada where the sea is once more frozen solid for miles out from shore. Mountains rear up; clouds gather. The frozen islands and arctic seas go on for ageless time. At length we are over the trackless northern wilderness of North America. The clouds clear and I can see miles and miles of taiga; no sign of human habitation. The Great Slave Lake opens below us – like a deaf and dumb person who gives no sign of having heard our passage nor response to our encounter. No roads lead up to or around its rim, no small clusters of houses, nothing but the vast, silent, aching wilderness.

After some hours I see the distinctive patches that indicate agricultural development and tiny towns clustered around crossroads that run off, straight as arrows for distances that vanish before they end. Over the Rocky Mountains and Cascades, turning left at Washington and down the West Coast, I look with longing but the clouds have closed in. They finally part over the brown earthtones of California. Passing over Sacramento, off to the West I can make out Davis, Lake Barryessa and the coast ranges dividing the Sonoma and Napa Valleys. Just give me a parachute; I'll get out here.

### ***Jakarta – August 1994***

Here's the mystery: the Pacific is wide enough to contain all of night. Flying over it, flying into morning, we leave Japan, fly several hours, then fly into and through the night, coming out into a bright Monday morning still two thousand miles out from shore.