

Хлебников via странников (+ two tombs from Mallarmé + one more)

by strannikov

Once more, once more—

I am become your guiding star.
Woe to the sailor wielding sextant wrong,
who takes the wrong angle, misses this star:
he'll smash to bits strewn over shallows' rocks.
—and woe to you who angles wrong my heart:
you'll smash to bits on shallows' rocks,
and long the rocks will laugh at you
as long as you have laughed at me.
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A Lone Performer

Akhmatova wept, and as her songs
over Tsarskoye Selo rained down,
I had to unwind the enchantress's threads
and drag into the desert my drowsy corpse
where impossible unlikelyhoods died.
An actor fatigued with numerous roles,
a lone performer, I trudged along.
—but beneath my feet in darkened caves,
the curly head of a subterranean bull
bellowed with bloody gnashing, gnawed on men
in the smoke of impenitent threats.

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Then wrapped in the moon's resolve,
a pilgrim in his drowsy cloak,
I leapt above abysses deep,
I steppt from cleft to cliff,
I crept along blind 'til from behind
the wind of freedom led me
and slasht me with its slanting rain.
And I tore the bull's head from its muscles and bones
and ploppt it upon the wall.
A knight of truth, I shook its bloody face:
"Behold! Here it is!
Here's that curled head that made so many burn!"
Then did horror dawn,
I understood—no one was seeing me:
I learned that eyes would need to be sown,
that I would need be a sower of eyes.
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Up to me, a butterfly flown
into this hall of bored human life,
to paint my dusty signature
upon this smeared and greasy glass,
the prisoning panes of windowed fate.

Human life is hung with greyed shreds,
the papered peeled rot of tattered years,
translucent panes commanding "NO!"
By now, I've lost my bluish dust,
dotted shapes, the blue storms of my wings—

first freshness fades, my palette dries dust,
my wings tremble stiff, colorless, frail,
fatigued with fruitless, ceaseless beats
against these windows of man's world:

eternal numbers call from outside,
they summon through panes of greasy glass—
numbers call my number, call me home.

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The Tomb of Charles Baudelaire

Entombed, the temple dribbles drool
and through the grate ooze rubies with black sludge,
incarnate desolation of some dire dread Anubis,
baying jowls ablaze with fumes of shrieking howls—

the fetid gases burn with dirty flame,
assuaging advertised disgrace, meditated shame,
lighting blood and juice in deathless pubic mounds
flying lamp-height all night long with sleepless moths:

wreaths hang desiccate and dead in prayerless towns,
their consolations weigh in vain atop
the marble lid o'erhanging Baudelaire—

lights aflicker veil their hushed retreat,
evaporate them from his poison still
with calibrated fumes we breathe, no matter if they kill.

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The Tomb of Edgar Poe

To himself at last the ages have transformed
the Poet, waving wide his unbated blade,
slicing at this era that chose not to be warned
of the deaths his voice sang, the deaths now on parade.

A poison hydra, flinching from the speech
an angel poured out pure to squalid souls,
esteemed the voice within some bottle's reach,

dismissed its portents, griefs spilled from its bowls.

Endless wars of lethal lands—unending griefs!
If from them we can't carve a bas-relief
to decorate the dazzling tomb of Poe,

block dropp't serene from heaven-heighted woe,
then past this stone may nothing ever go
to where black streams of Blasphemy must flow.

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Lay of the Last Survivor (Beowulf, ll. 2247 through 2266)

Hold you now, Earth, now hold again
what earls once held! What they took from you,
war-death has robbed them of all treasure.
My kinsmen, all slaughtered in battle,
sunk into hungry graves, have left this life
and its sweet drams. Now I stand alone,
no one to wield sword or polish the plated cup,
the precious cup: all retainers are gone.
The hard helmet hammered in gold
waits to be stripped of its plate. Burnishers
sleep who once made the visor gleam and shine.
The linked coat of mail worn out of each fight,
through shield-bashing fights and sword-slicing fights,
decays in his dust who once wore it.
It is no more borne on the war-chief's back
beside his fighting men. No harp now hails,
no wood sings mirth, no good hawk
swoops through the hall, no swift steed
paws dirt in the castle-yard. Woeful death
has emptied earth of an ancient race.

