

*Excerpts from*

***Tilting Point***

*by*

***Peter Dale Scott***

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## **Homing: A Winter Poem**

To Tomas Tranströmer

“You shall carry up my bones from here,” Genesis 50:25

Tundra swans have come back  
from the frozen Arctic

to the delta marshes  
where I far from home

drawn by a view of the open sea  
and by the ancient future

in the fantastic gospels  
of Jubal and Urthona

have spent my years  
building structures for that dawn

each poem a conduit  
from our irreplaceable present

to a glimpse of odyssey  
towards a promised land

structures I at last perceive  
amid the remnant of a tribe

who have lost faith in themselves  
seeing their hands stained with blood

their factory doors closing  
their songbirds silenced

were mostly made of sand  
in a tidal area

but even at my age  
sensing the sad range of human folly

my habits are entrenched  
we are what we have become

still hoping to please  
my dead parents

I go on blindly building  
in the space created by wars

as the tundra swans  
inspired by the tilt of the earth

get ready to leave  
for the exact northern marshes

where they were born

January 13, 2012

For my thoughts on Genesis 50.25, see Peter Dale Scott, *Parashat Vayechi*, Congregation Netivot Shalom, January 7, 2012, <http://netivotshalom.org/5772-vayechi-Scott>. Cf. also Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption*, 234: “For Bloch, . . . [The] great work of art is a reflection, a star of anticipation and a song of consolation on the way home through darkness’ . . . to light the way toward the long sought after homeland.” For my use of the quotes from Ernst Bloch and Wolin, see Peter Dale Scott, *Minding the Darkness*, V.ii, 239; cf. *Coming to Jakarta*, I.iii, 15, etc.

WITHOUT WORDS

until we die we will remember

--- A.R. Ammons

To Barry Goldensohn

That other dawn  
high in the Smokies

looking down as it seemed on the sun  
without words

the young woman then beside me  
now far off

I believe childless  
and something to do with a Zen hospice

that wordless dawn  
and not our laughing escape

from our too brief skinnydip  
under the first bullets

of the oncoming  
dark thunderstorm

is what I remember after last night's dream  
of that other woman much earlier

when I was young and brash  
who dumped me when I would not marry

in the dream she was back  
and we walked together calmly in Toronto

a place we had never been  
without words

this poem is really about words

and the worlds they point to but cannot fathom

*the worlds cohere alright  
words do not make them cohere*

*but aspire to the condition of water  
or is it music*

last night was Hallowe'en  
a seven-year-old rabbit

introduced herself as Alexandria  
and called me Peter

as she reached her paw up  
and warmed the inside of my hand

we walked together  
into the brief gloom

of dangling ghosts and skeletons  
on Russell Street

and reassured each other  
without words

until my bedtime

November 1, 2011

NOT FOR LONG

To Czeslaw Milosz

*“In Book 22 of the Odyssey, there is a description of the way in which Odysseus’ son punishes the faithless women who had reverted to prostitution. Emotionless, and with an inhuman composure rivaled only by the impassibilité of the major nineteenth-century novelists, Homer...compares the women’s appearance as they hang to that of birds caught in a net, ... with the information that the feet of the row of suspended women “kicked out for a short while, but not for long” .... Hope attaches to the fact that it happened a long time ago. Homer offers consolation for the entanglement of prehistory, savagery, and culture by recourse to the once-upon-a-time device.”*

*-- Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, 79-80; citing Odyssey 22:473; Gilbert Murray, The Rise of the Greek Epic, 150).*

*“The inner self... is like a very shy wild animal that ...comes out only when all is perfectly peaceful.”*

*-- Merton, The Inner Experience, 5*

What then should I make of these traces  
of sweet sleeplessness so late in life,  
wistful and troubling as they ever were,  
though not for long?

And from whom can I now seek guidance?

Denise, the author of *What we desire*

*travels with us*, was dead in her mid-seventies,

*Levertov Selected Poems 161*

like Yeats, still muttering *Lust and rage*,

*What else have I?*

*Yeats Collected Poems 312*

Those crawdads heisted from the Big Sur creek  
into the hot skillet -- how they writhed, writhed,  
but *not for long*,

*Odyssey 22:473*

like my innards remembering my first  
idiot clumsinesses  
excruciating once            now ghostly.

Dear Czeslaw, I can only think of you  
pushing ninety, with a glass of whiskey  
in some airport, with your *eyes*  
*weakened, insatiable, peeping*  
*at miniskirts*, lulled by imaginings  
*half from contemplation, half*  
*from appetite.*

*Milosz New Poems 679*

Those glistening beaches when I first came west,  
those adolescents who were laughing,  
shining, in the lascivious swirling tide  
*and were not ashamed*....How sad, how sad  
that innocence quickly lost, fouled by promises  
of a permissive Eden already come!

*Genesis 2:24*

Still *under orders* from erotic phantasy  
You gazed narrowly on *buttocks, thighs*.  
You once told Merton that you loathed your nature  
having learned *the attraction of the Manichaeon*  
from those cracks of bullets, holes in the wall above you.  
(The one stripping leaves just over my head  
was fired by a drunken hunter without ill will.)

*Milosz New Poems 679*  
*Merton Milosz Striving 44*  
*Merton Milosz Striving 45*

an age not of Pan but of Midas,  
and the mutterings of dry broken  
marriages like quivering reeds

To all of you who saw death at close hand  
clamoring to me that old men should rage:  
Should I feel deficient that I am not like Lear  
lost on a heath and circumscribed by demons?  
I was raised like Merton outside history  
as Milosz knew it -- *fires of burning cities*  
and thus am *in deep complicity with nature*  
even to the point of being ridiculous  
as now when craving absurdly deliciously  
what I cannot have

*Milosz New Poems 469*  
*Merton Milosz Striving 69*

I gain in strength  
from my drive's decline, now like an old cat  
that does not come when called, but warms my lap  
when I least wish for it, though not for long.

No longer a circus bear  
with its paws up on my shoulders, frightening me  
with its slobber and hot breath,  
its aging empowers me.

I see an unremarkable  
Japanese photographer on the beach  
who like me is in Vancouver for three days,  
and, as is now my custom, take her picture  
with her own camera, though at her request

*(Not me! Vancouver!)*

I make her small in the frame.

Our eyes contemplate each other for a moment  
like those of two strangers in a dance  
Then click! and my exit line  
is what I have never said to a stranger before:

*You*

*are completely beautiful!*

-- love not as acquisition but as gift --

*When we do not expect anything*

*we can be ourselves --*

*Shunryu Suzuki Not Always So 5*

though not for long

March 8, 2009