

TOKEN CREEK CHAMBER MUSIC

Texts & Translations

March 30th 2024

Harbison: *Of Mere Being*

Poems of Wallace Stevens (1879-1955)

1. *Re-Statement of Romance*

The night knows nothing of the chants of night.
It is what it is as I am what I am:
And in perceiving this I best perceive myself

And you. Only we two may interchange
Each in the other what each has to give.
Only we two are one, not you and night,

Nor night and I, but you and I, alone,
So much alone, so deeply by ourselves,
So far beyond the casual solitudes,

That night is only the background of our selves,
Supremely true each to its separate self,
In the pale light that each upon the other throws.

2. *Banjo Boomer*

The mulberry is a double tree.
Mulberry, shade me, shade me awhile.

A white, pink, purple berry tree,
A very dark-leaved berry tree.
Mulberry, shade me, shade me awhile.

A churchyard kind of bush as well,
A silent sort of bush, as well.
Mulberry, shade me, shade me awhile.

It is a shape of life described
By another shape without a word.
Mulberry, shade me, shade me awhile —
With nothing fixed by a single word.
Mulberry, shade me, shade me awhile.

3. *The Woman in Sunshine*

It is only that this warmth and movement are like
The warmth and movement of a woman.

It is not that there is any image in the air
Nor the beginning nor end of a form:

It is empty. But a woman in threadless gold
Burns us with brushings of her dress

And a dissociated abundance of being,
More definite for what she is—

Because she is disembodied,
Bearing the odors of the summer fields,

Confessing the taciturn and yet indifferent,
Invisibly clear, the only love.

4. *Farewell Without a Guitar*

Spring's bright paradise has come to this.
Now the thousand-leaved green falls to the ground.
Farewell, my days.

The thousand-leaved red
Comes to this thunder of light
At it's autumnal terminal —.

Head down. The reflections and repetitions,
The blows and buffets of fresh senses
Of the rider that was,

Are a final construction,
Like glass and sun, of male reality
And of that other and her desire.

5. *Of Mere Being*

The palm at the end of the mind,
Beyond the last thought, rises
In the bronze decor,

A gold-feathered bird
Sings in the palm, without human meaning,
Without human feeling, a foreign song.

You know then that it is not the reason
That makes us happy or unhappy.
The bird sings. Its feathers shine.

The palm stands on the edge of space.
The wind moves slowly in the branches.
The bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down.

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Schumann: *Liederkreis, Op. 24*

Poems of Heinrich Heine (1797-1856)

Morgens steh' ich auf und frage:
Kommt feins Liebchen heut?
Abends sink' ich hin und klage:
Ausblieb sie auch heut.

In der Nacht mit meinem Kummer
Lieg' ich schlaflos, lieg' ich wach;
Träumend, wie im halben Schlummer,
Wandle ich bei Tag.

Es treibt mich hin, es treibt mich her!
Noch wenige Stunden, dann soll ich sie schauen,
Sie selber, die schönste der schönen Jungfrauen;—
Du armes Herz, was pochst du so schwer?

Die Stunden sind aber ein faules Volk!
Schleppen sich behaglich träge,
Schleichen gähnend ihre Wege;—
Tummele dich, du faules Volk!

Tobende Eile mich treibend erfasst!
Aber wohl niemals liebten die Horen;—
Heimlich im grausamen Bunde verschworen,
Spotten sich tückisch der Liebenden Hast.

Ich wandelte unter den Bäumen
Mit meinem Gram allein;
Da kam das alte Träumen,
Und schlich mir ins Herz hinein.

Wer hat euch dies Wörtlein gelehret,
Ihr Vöglein in luftiger Höh'?
Schweigt still! wenn mein Herz es höret,
Dann tut es noch einmal so weh.

„Es kam ein Jungfräulein gegangen,
Die sang es immerfort,
Da haben wir Vöglein gefangen
Das hübsche, goldne Wort.“

Das sollt ihr mir nicht erzählen,
Ihr Vöglein wunderschlau;
Ihr wollt meinen Kummer mir stehlen,
Ich aber niemanden trau'.

Lieb Liebchen, leg's Händchen aufs Herze mein;—
Ach, hörst du, wie 's pochet im Kämmerlein?
Da hauset ein Zimmermann schlimm und arg,
Der zimmert mir einen Totensarg.

Es hämmert und klopft bei Tag und bei Nacht;
Es hat mich schon längst um den Schlaf gebracht.
Ach! sputet Euch, Meister Zimmermann,
Damit ich balde schlafen kann.

Every morning I awake and ask:
Will my sweetheart come today?
Every evening I lie down,
Complaining that she did not appear.

All night long with my grief
I lie sleepless, lie awake;
Dreaming, as if half asleep,
I wander through the day.

I'm driven this way, driven that!
A few more hours, and I shall see her,
She, the fairest of the fair—
Faithful heart, why pound so hard?

But the Hours are a lazy breed!
They dawdle along and take their time,
Crawl yawningly on their way—
Get a move on, you lazy breed!

Raging haste drives me onward!
But the Horae can never have loved—
Cruelly and secretly in league,
They spitefully mock a lover's haste.

I wandered among the trees,
Alone with my own grief,
But then old dreams returned once more
And stole into my heart.

Who taught you this little word,
You birds up there in the breeze?
Be silent! If my heart hears it,
My pain will return once more.

'A young woman once passed by,
Who sang it again and again,
And so we birds snatched it up,
That lovely golden word.'

You should not tell me such things,
You little cunning birds,
You thought to steal my grief from me,
But I trust no one now.

Just lay your hand on my heart, my love;
Ah, can you not hear it throbbing in there?
A carpenter, wicked and evil, lives there,
Fashioning me my coffin.

He bangs and hammers day and night,
And has long since banished all sleep.
Ah, master carpenter, make haste,
That I might soon find rest.

Schöne Wiege meiner Leiden,
Schönes Grabmal meiner Ruh,
Schöne Stadt, wir müssen scheiden,—
Lebe wohl! ruf' ich dir zu.

Lebe wohl, du heil'ge Schwelle,
Wo da wandelt Liebchen traut;
Lebe wohl! du heil'ge Stelle,
Wo ich sie zuerst geschaut.

Hätt' ich dich doch nie gesehen,
Schöne Herzenskönigin!
Nimmer wär es dann geschehen,
Dass ich jetzt so elend bin.

Nie wollt' ich dein Herze rühren,
Liebe hab' ich nie erfleht;
Nur ein stilles Leben führen
Wollt' ich, wo dein Odem weht.

Doch du drängst mich selbst von hinnen,
Bittere Worte spricht dein Mund;
Wahnsinn wühlt in meinen Sinnen,
Und mein Herz ist krank und wund.

Und die Glieder matt und träge
Schlepp' ich fort am Wanderstab,
Bis mein müdes Haupt ich lege
Ferne in ein kühles Grab.

Warte, warte, wilder Schiffmann,
Gleich folg' ich zum Hafen dir;
Von zwei Jungfrau'n nehm' ich Abschied,
Von Europa und von Ihr.

Blutquell, rinn' aus meinen Augen,
Blutquell, brich aus meinem Leib,
Dass ich mit dem heissen Blute
Meine Schmerzen niederschreib'.

Ei, mein Lieb, warum just heute
Schaudert dich, mein Blut zu sehn?
Sahst mich bleich und herzeblutend
Lange Jahre vor dir stehn!

Kennst du noch das alte Liedchen
Von der Schlang' im Paradies,
Die durch schlimme Apfelfgabe
Unsern Ahn ins Elend stieß?

Alles Unheil brachten Äpfel!
Eva bracht' damit den Tod,
Eris brachte Trojas Flammen,
Du bracht'st beides, Flamm' und Tod.

Berg' und Burgen schau'n herunter
In den spiegelhellen Rhein,
Und mein Schiffchen segelt munter,
Rings umglänzt von Sonnenschein.

Lovely cradle of my sorrows,
Lovely tombstone of my peace,
Lovely city, we must part—
Farewell! I call to you.

Farewell, O sacred threshold,
Where my dear beloved treads,
Farewell! O sacred spot,
Where I first beheld her.

Had I never seen you though,
Fair queen of my heart!
It would never then have come to pass
That I am now so wretched.

I never wished to touch your heart,
I never begged for love,
To live in peace was all I wished,
And to breathe the air you breathed.

But you yourself, you drive me hence,
Your lips speak bitter words;
Madness rages in my mind,
And my heart is sick and sore.

And my limbs, weary and feeble,
I drag away, my staff in hand,
Until I lay my tired head down
In a cool and distant grave.

Wait, O wait, wild seaman,
Soon I'll follow to the harbour;
I'm taking leave of two maidens:
Of Europe and of her.

Stream from my eyes, O blood,
Gush from my body, O blood,
That with my hot blood
I may write down my agonies.

Why today of all days, my love,
Do you shudder to see my blood?
You've seen me pale and with bleeding heart
Stand before you for years on end!

Remember the old story
Of the serpent in Paradise,
Who, through the evil gift of an apple,
Plunged our forbears into woe?

The apple has caused all our ills!
Eve brought death with it,
Eris brought flames to Troy,
And you—both flames and death.

Mountains and castles gaze down
Into the mirror-bright Rhine,
And my little boat sails merrily,
The sunshine glistening around it.

Ruhig seh' ich zu dem Spiele
Goldner Wellen, kraus bewegt;
Still erwachen die Gefühle,
Die ich tief im Busen hegt'.

Freundlich grüssend und verheissend
Lockt hinab des Stromes Pracht;
Doch ich kenn' ihn, oben gleissend,
Bringt sein Innres Tod und Nacht.

Oben Lust, in Busen Tücken,
Strom, du bist der Liebsten Bild!
Die kann auch so freundlich nicken,
Lächelt auch so fromm und mild.

Anfangs wollt' ich fast verzagen,
Und ich glaubt', ich trüg' es nie;
Und ich hab' es doch getragen—
Aber fragt mich nur nicht, wie?

Mit Myrthen und Rosen, lieblich und hold,
Mit duft'gen Zypressen und Flittergold,
Möcht' ich zieren dies Buch wie 'nen Totenschrein,
Und sargen meine Lieder hinein.

O könnt' ich die Liebe sargen hinzu!
Auf dem Grabe der Liebe wächst Blümlein der Ruh,
Da blüht es hervor, da pflückt man es ab,—
Doch mir blüht's nur, wenn ich selber im Grab.

Hier sind nun die Lieder, die einst so wild,
Wie ein Lavastrom, der dem Ätna entquillt,
Hervorgestürzt aus dem tiefsten Gemüt,
Und rings viel blitzende Funken versprüht!

Nun liegen sie stumm und totengleich,
Nun starren sie kalt und nebelbleich,
Doch aufs neu' die alte Glut sie belebt,
Wenn der Liebe Geist einst über sie schwebt.

Und es wird mir im Herzen viel Ahnung laut:
Der Liebe Geist einst über sie taut;
Einst kommt dies Buch in deine Hand,
Du süßes Lieb im fernen Land.

Dann löst sich des Liedes Zauberbann,
Die blassen Buchstaben schau'n dich an,
Sie schauen dir flehend ins schöne Aug',
Und flüstern mit Wehmut und Liebeshauch.

Calmly I watch the play
Of golden, ruffled waves surging;
Silently feelings awaken in me
That I had kept deep in my heart.

With friendly greetings and promises,
The river's splendour beckons;
But I know it—gleaming above
It conceals within itself Death and Night.

Above, pleasure; at heart, malice;
River, you are the image of my beloved!
She can nod with just as much friendliness,
And smile so devotedly and gently.

At first I almost despaired,
And I thought I could never be able to bear it;
Yet even so, I have borne it—
But do not ask me how.

With myrtles and roses, sweet and fair,
With fragrant cypress and golden tinsel,
I should like to adorn this book like a coffin
And bury my songs inside.

Could I but bury my love here too!
On Love's grave grows the flower of peace,
There it blossoms, there is plucked,
But only when I'm buried will it bloom for me.

Here now are the songs which once cascaded,
Like a stream of lava pouring from Etna,
So wildly from the depths of my soul,
And scattered glittering sparks all around!

Now they lie mute, as though they were dead,
Now they stare coldly, as pale as mist,
But the old glow shall kindle them once more,
When the spirit of Love floats over them.

And a thought speaks loud within my heart,
That the spirit of Love will one day thaw them;
One day this book will fall into your hands,
My dearest love, in a distant land.

Then shall song's magic spell break free,
And the pallid letters shall gaze at you,
Gaze imploringly into your beautiful eyes,
And whisper with sadness and the breath of love.

Translations by Richard Stokes, author of: *The Book of Lieder* (Faber)
provided via Oxford International Song Festival (www.oxfordsong.org)

Rebecca Clarke: *The Seal Man*

Text by John Masefield (1879-1967)

from *A Mainsail Haul*

“Them that live in the water, they have ways of calling people. Them who passed this seal-man, they felt the call in their hearts. Indeed, if you passed the seal-man, stepping the roads, you would get a queer twist from the way he looked at you.”

And he came by her cabin to the west of the road, calling.
There was a strong love came up in her at that,
and she put down her sewing on the table, and “Mother,” she says,
“There’s no lock, and no key, and no bolt, and no door.
There’s no iron, nor no stone, nor anything at all
will keep me this night from the man I love.”

And she went out into the moonlight to him,
there by the bush where the flow’rs is pretty, beyond the river.
And he says to her: “You are all of the beauty of the world,
will you come where I go, over the waves of the sea?”
And she says to him: “My treasure and my strength,” she says,
“I would follow you on the frozen hills, my feet bleeding.”

Then they went down into the sea together,
and the moon made a track on the sea, and they walked down it;
it was like a flame before them. There was no fear at all on her;
only a great love like the love of the Old Ones,
that was stronger than the touch of the fool.
She had a little white throat, and little cheeks like flowers,
and she went down into the sea with her man,
who wasn’t a man at all.
She was drowned, of course.
It’s like he never thought that she wouldn’t bear the sea like himself.
She was drowned, drowned.

Harbison: *Songs of Separation**

1. *The Taxi*

Amy Lowell (1874-1925)

When I go away from you
The world beats dead
Like a slackened drum.
I call out for you against the jutted stars
And shout into the ridges of the wind.
Streets coming fast,
One after the other,
Wedge you away from me,
And the lamps of the city prick my eyes
So that I can no longer see your face.
Why should I leave you,
To wound myself upon the sharp edges of the night?

2. *A Farewell*

May Sarton (1912-1995)

For a while I shall still be leaving.
Looking back at you as you slip away
Into the magic islands of the mind.
But for a while now all alive, believing
That in a single poignant hour
We did say all that we could ever say
In a great flowing out of radiant power.
It was like seeing and then going blind.

After a while we shall be cut in two
Between real islands where you live
And a far shore where I’ll no longer keep

The haunting image of your eyes, and you.
As pupils widen, widen to deep black
And I able neither to love or grieve
Between fulfillment and heartbreak.
The time will come when I can go to sleep.

But for a while still, centered at last.
Contemplate a brief amazing union.
Then watch you leave and then let you go.
I must not go back to the murderous past
Nor force a passage through to some safe landing.
But float upon this moment of communion
Entranced, astonished by pure understanding—
Passionate love dissolved like summer snow.

3. *Like a white stone*

Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966)

Like a white stone deep in a draw-well lying,
As hard and clear, a memory lies in me.
I cannot strive nor have I heart for striving:
It is such pain and yet such ecstasy.
It seems to me that someone looking closely
Into my eyes would see it, patent, pale.
And, seeing, would grow sadder and more thoughtful
Than one who listens to a bitter tale.
The ancient gods changed men to things, but left them
A consciousness that smoldered endlessly,
That splendid sorrows might endure forever.
And you are changed into a memory.

Britten: *Selected Songs*

Poems of W. H. Auden (1907-1973)

To lie flat on the back with the knees flexed
and sunshine on the soft receptive belly,
or face down, the insolent spine relaxed,
no more compelled to cower or to bully,
is good; and good to see them passing by
below on the white sidewalk in the heat,
the dog, the lady with parcels, and the boy:
there is the casual life outside the heart.
Yes, we are out of sight and earshot here.
Are you aware what weapon you are loading,
to what that teasing talk is quietly leading?
Our pulses count but do not judge the hour.
Who are you with, from whom you turn away,
At whom you dare not look? Do you know why?

Night covers up the rigid land
and ocean’s quaking moor,
and shadows with a tolerant hand
the ugly and the poor.
The wounded pride for which I weep
you cannot staunch, nor I

control the moments of your sleep,
nor hear the name you cry,
Whose life is lucky in your eyes,
and precious is the bed
as to his utter fancy lies
the dark caressive head.
For each love to its aim is true,
and all kinds seek their own;
you love your life and I love you,
so I must lie alone.
O hurry to the fêted spot of your deliberate fall;
For now my dream of you cannot
Refer to you at all.

Fish in the unruffled lakes

Their swarming colours wear,
Swans in the winter air
A white perfection have,
And the great lion walks
Through his innocent grove;
Lion, fish and swan
Act, and are gone
Upon Time’s toppling wave.

We, till shadowed days are done,
We must weep and sing
Duty’s conscious wrong,
The Devil in the clock,
The goodness carefully worn
For atonement or for luck;
We must lose our loves,
On each beast and bird that moves
Turn an envious look.

Sighs for folly done and said
Twist our narrow days,
But I must bless, I must praise
That you, my swan, who have
All gifts that to the swan
Impulsive Nature gave,
The majesty and pride,
Last night should add
Your voluntary love.

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