Half-light

by Hanne Busck-Nielsen

The drum of night upon us
we become shadows
slipping on mud and flat stones;

between tufts of grass and moss,
water blinks – a trickle
of voices
underfoot in the squelch.

Spruce trees and ochre larch,
dim to black silhouettes
 against the sloping sky,
their lowest branches layering with mist –
elverkongen's døtre dance.

Clod-clowning troll *Bobbarækus* rumbles.
Misshapen heartbeats. A beast.

I'm a disappeared child –
 see six revelling *elver*-girls,
 their tree-rot hollow backs sway;
 the moon stays impartial –
 a freezing glare with no grace

yet a lost line remembers itself –

Aldrig ræd for mørkets magt
Do not dread the might of darkness –

it weaves through bracken and heather
until at last we step back
 onto the road curving the fell,
dumb to dark, night eating silence
 and no owl or wind to make us real.

Note: '*Aldrig ræd for mørkets magt*' is a line from a Danish hymn by Christian Richardt, 1867.

Prayer

by Hanne Busck-Nielsen

Faðer uor som ast i himlüm, halgað warðe þit nama

We watch night climb
the fells around us. The scree slope buries its face
with dark and below Wast Water puckers
a last flutter-dash across its pewter sheen.

Tilkomme þit rikie. Skie þin uilie so som i himmalan

Its depth is foreign to me,
these serious mute mountains not mine;

so oh bo iordanne. Wort dahliha broð gif os i dah.

only the names: Eskdale, St Olaf's Church
feel almost homely – almost like relatives
you've never met but for your parents' memory.

A bird calls above us,
then a rustle in the margins along the lake.

Wast Water, black omphalos of a wounded earth –

Oh forlat os uora skuldar

we are soon gone, our lives hidden again –
but you draw deep, back to the source.

so som oh ui forlate þem os skuöldihi are.

In this darkness there is no pretence, not much at least.

*Oh inleð os ikkie i frestalsan utan frels os
ifra ondo.*

Here the scale is another, requiring a growing stride.

Tü rikiað ar þit oh mahtan oh harlihheten

The mountains mutter their knuckled prayer *i ewihhet. Aman.*

Both poems © Hanne Busck-Nielsen

From the Archives

Yeast

by Jean Sprackland

You can get drunk on the air
in this town. There's a wild smell
the locals love: malt, hops
and yeast, which is tricky stuff,
doesn't like to be controlled.
Microscopic spores escape from the breweries,
filling the air with excitement.
Carried like seeds all over town
they find out sugar
and corrupt it. You open a cupboard
and find marmalade transfigured
into froth, spreading over shelves,
dripping spoilt and heady.

Saccharomyces cerevisiae.
It spreads like scandal,
creating bubbles of discontent
wherever there's a bit of sweetness.
It makes things unstable.
Even places you'd think were safe
– a home, a bed – disordered.
The song of a blackbird
Exaggerates a restless night
and you wake, feverish,
ready to make something happen. Anything.

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Hanne Busck-Nielsen is a Danish poet and translator, living near Oxford. Her work has been published in *The Interpreter's House*, *POEM – International English Language Quarterly* and in several anthologies, published by Corbel Stone Press, White Rat Press, Oxford Backroom Poets and Albion Beatnik Press. In 2015 her entry, 'Prayer', was awarded a special commendation by the Oxford Brookes International Poetry Competition for English as an additional language.

Jean Sprackland is a poet and writer. She is the winner of the Costa Poetry Award in 2008, and the Portico Prize for Non-Fiction in 2012. Her books have also been short-listed for the Forward Prize, the TS Eliot Prize and the Whitbread Award.