LISTENING TO DUNCAN IN THE HEART OF UPPLAND

A return to
this island these woods
this ancient lake
here
the sentence
if it speaks does it speak in a foreign tongue?
I took this island to be
my meadow
and now the more I speak the more I see it
changed
- as we look things change
beyond recognition we read
travel into thought
artistry and the seven colours of the rainbow
into flowers
heart beats into clocks
senses
revolve in reading; the deep recognition of the lake at night
calls me - as I call out
this is
Linnaeus' landscape
but I can only believe it or know it
so constructed; I pulled up a small tree to get an idea of the roots
Duncan's voice
carves a space in the night like light
the silent notes of the wind
a peace of no certainty
a meadow where the flowers turn hardly detectable now
beyond this porch
I would
  lift up my eyes
  see the evening
sink down into the light
descend on
  words streets I knew were there
and grass
  the room high up still warm
from the sun
abundant unattainable sun
  (of no return in its own
turning) lingering still
quietly on birds' wings
over the city
  and Rosa Luxemburg
- for her part
  would continue standing in the middle of
the street
numbering the stars as they came out
lit it would seem
by the birds
flying high
  in the warm sky the unfathomable depth
of the eyes
counting reading another day's end
into night-fall
caught
  between following the day's procedure out of habit
and not wanting
its
indefinite ending
caught between rest and making
the moment last
between being impressed by — and making
an impression
  unwilling to leave the mild air
seeing the grocer's boys and other boys running
shouting out
  into the disappearing light
and the twilight
  that opening
between work and supper and
  carrying the garbage out
lovers leaning toward each other
imagining the air
caring
  in which day and night were so gently caressing one another
A NORTH MEDITATION

a north larger than what I remember memories interfered with
by notes
taken on the boat
going past the Shetlands
at night
yellow harbour lights floating on white air
the diary order chronology does not recall how when
at the first sight of the Faroes
the eyes foretold
what I knew of tales told about that place
the north
horizontal rains
islands behind the clouds
now memories
of summer cold
hard grass
stones and more stones
a landscape almost untouched almost
colourless
transformed with the eyes of Mikines
into deep blues
and every stone has a story to see it with: at dawn
night's creatures turn to rock
their hearts freeze at the sight of sun
locked into tales the rocks stand
vast human shapes
looking out
toward the east
committed to memory MacDiarmid's words read: We must reconcile ourselves
to the stones and the stones to us
for we see that other
not outside thought
the poet took me to Kyrkjebuir
in the rain
running in streams down
the hillsides into the sounds
between the islands
one night he said the sea broke through
this strait
so hard
divided the rock beyond the church from the island
the sea
constantly eats at the rock
you tell me what you see
in the ruins of this church
for I played here
climbed the steep walls
swam in the sea here
I know this place too well
to see it

fixed memories fix
my eyes on these walls
I see myself balancing along the top edge thirty years back
but I see him there too

and the painter
the poet’s cousin
his Chinese-like paintings of Faroe boats
and rocks
are of that place too
recorded
and read into

the north
a north larger than memory

Hanne Bramness was born in Norway in 1959. Her publications in English are: Impulse Tests (1982), Slow Climb (1982), and Urgent Wave (1983). In Norwegian she has published Korrespondanse (Gyldendal, 1983) and I sin tid (Gyldendal, 1986).
(or, in Old Norse, thing said at root from Indo-European seqw, to see hence, to cause to see

history
oral, reciting perfectly
generations after
dealing with the family, tracing
movement, & feuds
& how many cattle, & where

Vikings,
a claustrophobic feeling
trapped in northern Scandinavia
where even the slightest provocation could start a skirmish, a raiding party, a war

their laws, also oral
cconcern themsekves with settling feuds & valuing dead feudees.

My grandfather, blacksheep, came westward from the Arctic Circle & met my grandmother, from her Baltic island, in the new land. Two Swedish immigrants finding the promised work in Connecticut's rubber plants and steelyards, & children...

I was 22 before I knew my father & aunt had a brother who died in infancy, buried in the cemetery on Davenport Avenue where I sometimes ate my lunch when I worked in the auto-electric across the street.

The Celts called themselves Westmen & were surprised to discover Iceland further west; their monks used it for a hermitage. 874, Vikings, following the underwater mountaintops with lead & line, came to Iceland, drove away the monks & created an independent state with a parliament, the first of its kind.
Emigration: between c. 1850 & c. 1900 more than 1 million Swedes moved out to Nord Amerika. There were only about 5 million Swedes at this time...

In 982, Eirik, banished with his father from their third community, sailed west & found Greenland, seeing land unseen by sending ravens out ahead of them, signs of land returned from over the horizon, & they settled there.

I was 23 before I knew I shouldn't take Pop to Red Cody's after his haircut, where he hadn't been in years & where they still said "Hey, Otto," and set up a shot & a beer before his coat was off.

1000 AD Leif Eiriksson used the ship & the crew of Bjarni Herjolfsson who, in 985 had sailed past Greenland in a storm while following his father into exile from Iceland, & had sighted three landfalls, blown far past his destination, before turning around & finding Greenland on his way back, & sailed Bjarni's course transmitted orally, & remembered

Leif found three landfalls, naming them Helluland (Slatestone)
Markland (Timber)
& Vinland (here is a question 1920s, what kind of a voyage was it? My grandfather refused to ever go back. My grandmother returned once, in 1950 on the same ship that brought her over, & missed my parents' wedding...
Enterline places Vinland in Ungava Bay below Hudson Strait, interpreting vin as an already archaic Norse word for pasture which the Greenlanders in their isolation might have still used & passed down & which was later mistaken by scribes, writing down the stories they heard, for the Latinate vin, meaning wine.

More likely is Newfoundland Nova Scotia & Cape Cod (where grapes can grow

I was 30 before I asked my grandmother, after Pop had died six months before, how she coped & she said, I still find half-pints hidden round the house you know, it's like he never died.

From Vinland, the Vikings explored perhaps as far as Alaska, if we can read Eskimo maps, & down to Mexico, if we can believe the Aztec legends.

I was 34 before I knew my grandfather had married my grandmother only a few weeks before my father was born under pressure from the Swedish community, & blamed my father all his life.

By the twelfth century after Christ Christianity & writing have both reached Iceland, & the sagas begin to change their form, & with that, the stories too begin to change.

By 1450 Greenland is deserted & forgotten, its Vikings disappeared, as if they never existed, & with them the memory, of the North American settlement.
& my grandfather as he lay at the bottom of the stairs, he couldn't make it up, & fell
& my grandmother, still a little woozy from her stroke three years before, & taking it for granted, after 50 years of benders that he'd be there, helpless, forgetting the time, & each new day...

& when he was strong enough to be moved from that spot, my father took him to New Haven, where the X-rays showed nothing broken, but they weren't about to keep a 75-year old chronic alcoholic...

So admitting him to Milford Hospital my father's doctor said he hadn't seen anything like that not since he'd interned at Bellevue.

Chances are Columbus had looked at Viking maps & knew exactly where he was going (though he never figured out it wasn't India.)

MICHAEL CARLSON was born in New Haven, Connecticut in 1951, & has lived in London since 1977, working as a journalist & in television sports. His fifth collection of poems, ZOMBIE FOOTWORK, was published in April by Hardpressed Poetry.