



**HELICON PLUS**

Peter Curman (born 1941) is a wellknown Swedish poet. His first selection of poetry appeared in 1965 and since then he has published twelve books of poetry, debate books, anthologies and a love novel (Meltdown, 1998).

Curman was for many years the president of the Swedish Writers union (1987—1995) and after (1996—2006) the Chairman of The Swedish Joint Committee for Literary and Artistic Professionals (KLYS) — an umbrella organization for 19 creative unions representing the cultural scenen of Sweden.

He has also been one of the driving forces behind the literary cruises in the Baltic Sea 1992 and in the Black Sea and the Aegean 1994 that resulted in two dynamic Writers' and Translators' Centres under the auspices of UNESCO on The Swedish island of Gotland and the Greek island of Rhodes.

Peter Curman is also the initiator of the new Swedish digital printing house PODIUM — an initiative aimed to introduce new technology as a tool to distribute new literature to the readers worldwide.

Readers are welcome to communicate with the author!

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# THE CHARIOTEER IN DELPHI

Poems  
By Peter Curman

*Translated from the Swedish  
by Verne Moberg,  
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and Peter Curman*

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# Guilt and Forgiveness

Where did our celebrated liberty go?  
We who wanted to revolutionize the world  
to hijack the bourgeois baggage  
and set our course for infinity  
Why, nothing was impossible  
The whole world lay spread out before us  
It was we who were going to write the great novels  
and the poetry that would change the world!  
Where did it all go?

This is how Peter Curman, a Swedish poet, looks back with the disappointment and disillusion of a generation that saw two great wars, rise of Capitalism and the Communism that stood up to challenge it, the ensuing cold war, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the emergence of the market economy and globalization.

Peter Curman was born in 1941 and has ten collections of poetic work to his credit. He has been the President of Swedish Writers Union from 1987 to 1995 and is now the Chairman of the Swedish Joint Committee for Literary and Artistic Professionals – an umbrella organization for nineteen creative unions representing the cultural scene of Sweden.

He has also been one of the driving forces behind the literary cruises in the Baltic Sea in 1992 and in the Black Sea and the Aegean in 1994 that resulted in dynamic Writers and Translators Centers under the auspices of UNESCO.

Peter Curman is also the initiator of the new Swedish digital printing house PODIUM.

His poetry shows a sharp awareness of the estate of man. He is a thorough realist who does not delude himself with dreams. However, despite all disappointments and frustrations, Curman still believes that all that struggle has not gone waste. He sees a positive gain in it. He ends the above poem, *Double-Entry Bookkeeping*, on the note,

But if you ask us  
if we've given up we reply Given up?  
Us?  
Never!

This brings to mind an equally poignant poem by Brecht:

I came to the cities in a time of disorder  
When hunger ruled  
I came upon men in a time of uprising  
And I revolted with them  
So the time passed away  
Which on earth was given me  
I ate my food between massacres  
The shadow of murder lay upon my sleep  
And when I loved, I loved with indifference  
I looked upon nature with impatience  
... ..  
In my time streets led to the quicksand  
Speech betrayed me to the slaughterer  
There was little I could do. But without me  
The rulers would have been more secure. This was my hope

*An Die Nachgeborenen*

Thus, both the poets see hope instead of despair in an effort that could not bear fruit. Obviously, ideals are illusions. But life cannot be sustained without illusions. And the illusions which people call ideals are more concrete than any reality, more real than love, more real than hatred. And they are pursued with passion. Results are not important. Ideals, by definition, are unachievable targets. But they fascinate. Perfect man, perfect woman, perfect social order are only dreams and dreamers also know that. But there is something in them which hypnotizes. These are flames eating into the heart. But they also keep the heart warm. Struggle is its own reward at least it provides a justification to go on living.

There is the same anguish in another poem, captioned *Life: '... we didn't turn out the heroes/ we once wanted to become'*, leading to the bitter realization,

As a part of creation's crown we're aghast:  
So we mean nothing?

But here the confession is more of a resolve.

**Curman is bitterly aware of the tragedy of the modern man. His tragedy is not a futile struggle for the impossible. His tragedy is that what he is seeking is possible, but not available. He is only asking for the minimum:**

Someone has to be with us when the moment has come  
Someone has to close our eye-lids and bind up our jaw  
Which gapes dumbly at the ceiling

...            ...            ...            ...  
Someone has to continue life after us  
On certain things, love,  
we can always agree

**A sensitive heart feels for itself as well as for others. The poet suffers, and with the acute sense that this is not the limit, and that, in a way, he too has contributed to the sufferings of humanity:**

No pain is so great that it cannot grow greater  
No debt so heavy that it can't become heavier  
With a blindfold over your eyes  
You have stumbled along in life  
as if you were alone in the world  
behind you people and cities collapsed  
but you noticed nothing  
...            ...            ...            ...  
The Great Forgiveness Day would be  
for everybody  
Just not for you

*The Great Forgiveness Day*

This brings to mind Bertrand Russell's assertion that everyone living anywhere at this moment is directly and personally responsible for any injustice or cruelty being perpetrated anywhere in the world. Silence is crime. Neutrality only strengthens the oppressor. There are only two possible positions: either one is an exploiter or a victim. There is no middle way.

Curman carries this acute sense of guilt with him. This is every honest man's guilt. He sometimes even feels that he has bartered away his own fighting spirit for the easy way of compromise. He shouts:

Almost all I own  
has already gone on the block:  
my wives, my failures, my dreams  
Now I am auctioning off the rest of my life!  
What will you give me for this little life lie?

"life lie", that is unauthentic and unrealized life. Man, and all his relations, and even ideals, have been reduced to commodities in this world that is being commercialized so fast.

In the final note to the small collection of poems, *The Charioteer in Delphi*, Peter Curman states that these poems “can help me and you to endure life’s paradoxes more easily and to make us see ourselves in a more forgiving light. We are not alone in our longing and agony; we live in different bodies but in the same life.” We may be lost but we have not lost our guts.

At least one thing is definite, that human sympathies have enlarged. Miserable men of the whole world are rapidly developing into a community. St. Petersburg, Jerusalem, Nicosia, Helsinki, all are growing into a pattern. Suffering is breaking the barriers of cast, color and creed. The sparrows will find their nests, though at the present moment, when the world is torn in so many strifes, it does not sound plausible. But the poet believes that life is invincible. Pakistan and India may go ahead with their race for death, detonating their nuclear devices, Hiroshima is again bristling with life:

Today Hiroshima is flourishing and dynamic  
On the sight seeing boats the guides talk of the catastrophe  
While families spread their picnic cloths out on the banks  
And the weather is just as beautiful  
as on the sixth of August, 1945

But the birds must wait a little more:

Why are there so many birds in Sophia?  
Early every morning they wake me up  
sitting in the trees outside Hotel Bulgaria  
People say they are refugees from Kosovo!  
The bombs made them fly  
like black clouds over the mountains  
to this sacred place  
But what do we do to get them back?  
Birds don’t listen to orders, nor do the poets  
Like waves on the open seas  
They choose their own way!  
Still the question remains  
How do we bring back the birds  
to the silent trees of Kosovo?

*Birds*

**Rezi Abedi**

*The NEWS, Pakistan  
19 August 2001*

# THE CHARIOTEER IN DELPHI

Champs-Élysées:

La vie est plus belle  
quand on l'écrit-soi-même

(Life is at its beauty  
when it writes itself)



## ***What a poet can do***

*What can a lonely poet do against the war?  
My answer is: a lot!  
Poems are not bullets that kill  
Poems are bullets of life  
When a poet shoots at you  
He widens your mind  
A poem can suddenly highlight  
What has been hidden in darkness  
We all wear secret worlds inside ourselves  
A poem may change your life  
And make your heart beat faster*

*Therefore:*

*Poets all over the world – shoot!  
Let your bullets of peace kill the war!  
Your words shall disarm the armies!*

*(Istanbul, 27 January 2003)*

## Auction

Here I stand  
a poetic auctioneer  
holding an auction midlife.  
Almost all I own  
has already gone on the block:  
my wives, my failures, my dreams.  
Now I'm auctioning off the rest of my life!  
What will you give me for this little life lie  
nicely assembled, well tended, choice?  
Or this weightless dream  
even now hot with longing?  
Little did I know  
there was so much trash left over.  
Before I auctioned it off  
one stick of furniture at a time, piece by piece,  
but now I let it all go  
in one lot.  
So, my friends,  
who are still dreaming of a find:  
Here's your chance!  
What will you give for a life?

## Life

It's time to look life in the eye  
without any qualifiers or disclaimers.  
To realize that we didn't turn out the heroes  
we once wanted to become  
— but rather a collection of chipped and  
ragtag survivors  
operated on for cancer,  
with either a bypass  
or just plain gout.

The Old Oak Savings Bank suggests we save our way  
to security in old age

but life evidently is headed elsewhere:  
some of us don't manage to reach any age at all.  
others land in the hospital or in nursing homes  
while the nest egg goes for expenses and business lunches

Life is impudent enough  
not to adapt to our special calendars.  
It goes its own way  
without concern for our irate protests.

As a part of creation's crown we're aghast:  
So we mean nothing?

## The Jump

In the middle of the jump  
between the boat and the dock  
I am still closer to sixteen than sixty  
The body's carbonation will never go

My legs have their own memories  
of nimble raids  
over boulders, up mountain slopes.  
There's still a screech from my gym shoes  
when they pivot upon the shiny floor.

Consider my surprise  
when suddenly I feel my legs give way  
and I fall like an ox  
going smack down on the dock.

Lying for a long time on my belly  
with a twisted foot and aching leg:  
ox and fallen angel in the same person:  
definitely closer to sixty than sixteen  
And of the carbonation?  
Not one bubble!

## **My Mirror Image**

My mirror image and I  
do not agree.

My mirror image is inflated and fat:

I myself maintain my weight, within a few pounds or so.

My mirror image clowns around,  
swaggering like a red-jowled preacher;

I myself keep my intellect well in hand.

My mirror image is cowardly and quick to compromise;

I myself do not bend one inch and hold a hard line on my integrity.

So the question is, who's I:

My mirror image

or myself

who lets me be reflected in such an odd way

## Intertextual

Henry Parland, the Finland Swedish genius, once wrote:

“Coffee or tea? Hamlet said it more beautifully...”

That was around 1920.

Today, just at the turn of the millennium, I wish to add:

“Pass by or bypass?”

Probably no one would fault William Butler Yeats

for having carved on his

tombstone:

“Cast a cold eye on life, on death. Horseman, pass by!”

I don't think he would mind

a change in word order

## On Certain Things, Love

On certain things, love  
we can always agree.

Someone has to sit with the old when they die.  
Someone has to sit with ourselves when we die  
Someone has to hold the withering hand in his  
Someone has to guide the glass to the dry lips  
Someone has to keep vigil over this fragile life  
that is imperceptibly trying to free itself from the bird-thin body  
Someone has to be with us when the moment has come  
Someone has to close our eyelids and bind up our jaw  
which gapes dumbly at the ceiling  
Someone has to make the final inspection  
and make the necessary calls.  
Someone has to continue life after us.

On certain things, love,  
we can always agree

## Death

This thundering Greek summer  
when the sun rays poured down  
you walked beneath your dreams' parasol  
When  
your face suddenly darkened  
it was not  
you who thought of death  
It was death who thought of you

## Heart of Stone

And I who thought  
that all the trains had left and all the clocks had stopped  
Never again  
would a sense of joy touch my stone heart  
And then this!  
There's a rippling and singing from nowhere.  
The second hand spins around like a drunk ballerina  
on the dance floor of eternity.  
The sea has turned and is coming back  
with all its force and longing.  
It's too comical:  
Me and my heart of stone

## Roots

Sitting alone in the kitchen in the summer night  
Quiet  
only my heart dutifully trotting along  
inside my curling ear canal.  
The paper lies there white, without writing  
under an unwilling pen  
Someplace in my subconscious is  
a stirring of thoughts and inklings  
that refuse to let themselves get transformed into words  
What can I do but write about the quiet  
about the absence of words  
that at the same time are the presence  
of something else and tangible  
But I don't write but instead listen to the quiet  
which all the while is heightened and condensed

Outside the window  
the birches break loose from the ground  
They stretch their branches' net toward the light night sky  
in an ample gesture of freedom  
I can almost hear them grow  
What a longing there is in the soughing leaves  
What is it they're trying to tell me?  
Someplace deep inside me  
I understand their secret language

For my life and the life of the trees  
writhe down into the same root system  
withinin the earth  
that will soon take us back

## The Dream

My dream  
My deep wish  
I think every poet's dream and deep wish  
is that you who are reading this,  
way into the poem  
way down into the language  
in the secret-filled region  
where words are born,  
will become conscious of  
the scarcely audible  
murmur  
from the wellspring within us

if you do  
and don't deny yourself  
you are entering into an alliance  
with the inner part of poetry  
which is to dare to name and to hold on  
to what is ungraspable

Then  
something remarkable occurs,  
the more you withdraw  
the realer you become

## The Great Forgiveness Day

We all dream of The Great Forgiveness Day  
when our sins will be lifted from our shoulders  
even as we forgive those who have sinned against us...  
Once and for all  
to draw a line across all the evil deeds  
and everyday shortcomings  
that we in our foolishness have committed —  
it certainly would be an act of mercy to pray quietly for!  
But don't think any mercy will be granted here:  
interest is charged upon interest here.  
No pain is so great that it cannot grow greater  
No debt so heavy that it can't become heavier  
With a blindfold over your eyes  
you have stumbled along in life  
as if you were alone in the world  
Behind you people and cities collapsed  
but you noticed nothing  
Sunk into your own world  
you let the world go under!  
Therefore don't be struck with wonder  
if the incredible should occur:  
that The Great Forgiveness Day would be  
for everybody.  
Just not for you.

## Double-Entry Bookkeeping

Like the animals in their cages  
we pedal about in our lives  
Through the bars we see  
life spin by  
We fence with our arms  
like the hen with her stumpy wings  
but don't move an inch  
Where did our celebrated liberty go?  
We who wanted to revolutionize the world  
to hijack the bourgeois baggage  
and set our course for infinity  
Why, nothing was impossible  
The whole world lay spread out before us  
It was we who were going to write the great novels  
and the poetry that would change the world!  
Where did it all go?  
Now mostly like dogs afraid of the whip  
we rub up against  
the nearest pant leg.  
Discreetly we clench our fists in our pants pockets.  
Trained by the terror  
we balance our dream upon our nose  
instead of sinking our teeth into the ones  
who want to take it away from us.  
But if you ask us  
if we've given up we reply:  
Given up?  
Us?  
Never!

## The Seasons

Winter:

Soundlessly  
the first snowflake floats  
to the ground  
and is received by a great racket  
from the town snowplow

Spring:

Along about March there's an insurrection:  
The boats don't want to lie in their catafalques any longer  
They want to go down in the living water;  
Feel the sea's breathing  
and a curl of water tickling beneath the stem

Summer:

Stretching out and falling asleep in the grass.  
And suddenly the lawnmower comes!

Fall:

October shakes the gold coins out of the trees  
The ground's impoverished congregation takes up the collection.

## **Why Isn't the Sun Shining on Lysekil?**

*(In Memory of a Stormy Weekend)*

Now the sea comes in:  
Foaming white it marches into Gullmar Bay  
wave by wave:  
occupation by sea!  
In the harbor an infuriated conductor conducts a sea symphony  
in the sailboats' rigging  
and drifting over Shaft Island  
like crippled ships  
are low-flying clouds

Where did the summer go?  
Is autumn already here?  
Why isn't the sun shining on Lysekil?  
Don't let yourself be fooled!  
As it happens a sailor's pant leg can be seen between the clouds  
— and then another one!

If there's any more blue the whole sky will burst!  
And everything will be the way we want it:

Gullmaren like a glittering mirror  
the expanses of water filled with sails  
And when the sun goes down  
the windows in Fish Creek glow  
and Shaft Isle Mountain yellows against the horizon  
Then once again with a silver spoon we can all  
skim the gold shimmer off Gullmar!

## Quicky

A quicky off in Europe to check things out:  
that the rocks on Rhodes's beaches are still there  
(I take home a fistful to put in the double windows)  
that the restoration of the old Mussolini hotel, Hotel des Roses,  
is progressing  
like the subway construction in Athens  
so the Olympics guests can ride the rails through Hades.  
In Sophia I ascertain  
that the Thracian gold coolly gimmers in its glass cases  
despite the disheveled life on the street.  
Everything is as it should be.  
It's just our unwieldy life that isn't;  
this unreliable life that suddenly abandons us  
or transforms us  
to graying heroes with hearing aids and canes.  
Everybody now seems to find themselves  
in a flexible middle age  
lasting from forty to seventy.  
Bleary-eyed we regard the young race  
that sleeps in till twelve and never reads the obituaries.  
But don't think we're giving up!  
Our longing never leaves our blood  
and although our toiletries these days  
aren't just an issue of impotence  
our lust burns as rankly as ever in our veins.

## Direct Light in Helsinki

Finally Helsinki: Mannerheim Road in strong, direct light.  
People move like shadows across the asphalt, trampled soon  
by time as by our thoughts, our memories.  
Only Mannerheim on horseback  
continues his bronze ride through history unconcerned.

So many stirred-up feelings, thoughts, hopes  
that now lie subdued in the asphalt beneath my feet.  
And yet this heart filled with joy.  
The caf s were full up with promises, life knew no bounds.  
Everything was here and now; all was lips, skin, nearness.  
It was quite a ways till then, the future out of sight.

On Observatory Street the sunlight darted  
through a cognac glass  
while Vivaldi rejoiced in the loudspeakers.  
On a park bench outside there Bj rling  
could have made poems for the sparrows.

So long ago now.  
In the direct light today no heartbeats are heard, no music.  
The traffic flows quietly as in a silent film.  
The streetcars slip soundlessly by.

Heavily I myself walk on the trampled life.  
I still feel the pain of what I have lost:  
The Dream of a life  
that filled me with presence and reality.

## St. Petersburg, June 1997

Hot summer day:

Drifting with the current down Nevsky Prospect:  
one human remnant among others  
in brutally nouveau riche, newly poor St. Petersburg

finding my way into the shade along Gostinyi Dvor  
— the department store arcade with its many store windows  
that people without money call “the museum” —  
while the taxis on the street slide  
on the lamellae and the taxi meter

Here and there under gleaming onion cupolas  
lie fallen people; in alcohol or religion.  
An old woman in black stands on her knees  
beating her head in the street  
while her hands hug a cross.  
The Central Committee has adjourned its meeting.

Down by Alexander Platz, right by the Neva  
Louis Armstrong still sings about Mack the Knife  
for shiny nylon knees in the bar at Hotel Moscow  
while the advertising sign for Lapin Kulta goes on and off  
like a hope that won't die

On the sightseeing boats the guides do their best  
to bring order into the historic muddle  
their nasal lectures blend with the screech of the the gulls  
and a pigeon has made its way into Isaac Cathedral  
and is flying in full freedom over the visitors' heads

Leningrad has thrown off its soldier's coat:  
A stone's throw from the human current on Nevsky Prospect  
the Maffia's Mercedeses line up outside of Hotel Europa:  
It doesn't help that St. Petersburg has taken its old name back:  
The seige continues!

## Pitsunda 1988

A little fly  
was buzzing around  
in the cabin of the hugh Iljus  
It followed me  
all the way  
from Moscow to Sofji

In other words:  
*I had company!*

I have put myself in a house arrest  
inside the Writersrhotel in Pitsunda by the Black Sea  
For hours I sit  
following the blinking cursor on the screen of my laptop  
Rolling my life forwards and backwards  
trying to find out what it all has been about

From my transistor I comes news bulletins from BBC:  
Train stopped on the rails all over Georgia, claims for a new multi  
party system  
40.000 people locked in into heated compartments without water  
Iraq invades Kuwait  
The security council calls for an extra session  
The US and Sovjet get prepared for joint actions

Millions of words flying in the air, images are lining up in my eyes  
On the blue screen of the sea  
A heavily loaded vessel slowly moves  
like a cursor  
from left to right on its route to Bosporos Straits

Optically I register  
what can be observed from my window  
The sudden words that gather on the screen of my computer  
The ugly cement Sovjet style hotels outside  
The tourists sleeping like seals on the beach

Everything is present at this very moment:  
What I see and what I don't.  
What I hear and what has not yet reached my ears.

How tempting it is to join the tourists on the beach!  
Let the world sweep over your body like a mild wind from the sea  
listen to the language of the pebble stones in the waterfront  
But I remain  
in front of my screen, in front of these repeating words  
I am a prisoner of the past

Later: in the dining room downstairs  
The Famous Patriotic Writer  
is having his meal.  
He eats slowly and methodically, big portions.  
His sports wear, trousers and stripes  
- just as elastic as his political moral –  
give no restrictions in eating.  
No hindering belt.

Somebody whispers:  
He is the writer who wrote the famous, often quoted lines:

«I was born in Russia.  
I was born by my Mother»

Now the man who as born by his mother is missing his Father  
A hard but good hearted Father  
That could foster and keep order in his homeland  
where everything is falling apart, no respect, no order.  
People are betraying each other and laughing  
As if he was just a joke

Perhaps he also has put himself in a house arrest  
Perhaps he also in his room  
is rolling his life forwards and backwards on the screen of his  
computer?  
He might also be a prisoner of the past  
Longing to join the tourists on the beach!

## Jerusalem

Now I too have leaned my weary head  
against the Weeping Wall in Jerusalem  
For a long time I stood with my forehead  
against the rough temple wall:  
How many prayers, hopes, and wishes  
have not been wept into the stones through the centuries?  
Heavy and tired from sorrow  
the wall stands there — a monument to our idle wishes.  
For the true believers the wall is a door, an opening:  
on the other side shimmers paradise, God's wondrous temple.  
For those who see God's light streaming out where  
we others see only clay  
the wall is a seal, a portent of an act of grace  
that we others never can participate in  
However  
we stand united next to the wall: believers and nonbelievers  
Our pain and our longing we have in common  
like the dream of a possible liberation  
observed by the Internet's spying camera eye  
standing side by side next to the wall of dreams  
whispering our most private secrets.  
Is there deep inside the wall  
a pounding heart?

## Nicosia

An imaginary river flows through Nicosia:  
a river of grief and longing.  
It flows between the Venetian walls  
straight across Liberty Square.  
It flows past the border police by Ledra Palace  
where the world comes to an end and the UN begins  
It passes through the locks up to the mountains  
and then tumbles down to Kyrenia  
and the waiting sea:  
Thalassa! Thalassa!  
Deniz! Deniz!  
No one can stop this river  
for it streams through people's hearts;  
it exists in their eyes and dreams  
The green line  
is a knife cutting through Nicosia.  
with its watchtower and border patrols  
but it cannot cut through the water  
Neither can the tangled barbed wire keep back the river of longing  
It's only the people's bodies that still can be checked  
but not their thoughts  
It's only in the passports you still can distinguish between  
Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots  
But no occupation army can prevent  
them from belonging to the same earth  
and the same mountains and the same  
dreams  
The sea is one and indivisible  
and sounds just as beautiful in Greek as in Turkish:  
Thalassa! Thalassa!  
Deniz, Deniz!



## The Middle of the Earth

Why shouldn't Horndal be the world's center  
since every human stands alone at the the earth's heart  
whether standing in line  
in Oscarsson's Food Mart or New York City's subway  
All humans beings are wrapped in their own lives,  
hear the rush of the blood in their ears,  
the steady beat of their hearts  
though it does different guises, takes different steps  
in different parts  
Maybe  
it's just plain easier to endure life in an Indian village  
where the roles are assigned in advance,  
life's manuscript composed,  
than here in Horndal where it's at least theoretically possible  
to break out and set off?  
But most people go on living anyway where they are.  
It isn't the great discoveries  
that anchor us in life but the little ones.  
Being able to read the signs.  
Knowing something about the tracks time left behind.  
Knowing where the wild strawberries grow.  
If there will be lingonberries down by the lake in the fall.  
Those who travel around the world may well blister their retinas.  
One view on the heels of another.  
But those who live slowly in a quiet scene  
may take a longer trip.  
Under each stone hide hidden worlds  
awe-inspiring as the cities' glow at night beneath the plane's wing  
A cantarelle patch can illuminate more  
than a city of millions.  
Life, like Metropolitan Transit, has its own timetable.

## Rustic Duties

Slow day in the country: baking bread and cleaning out closets.  
All these wraps, are they really mine?  
Neat little suits at attention on their hangers —  
why, what little gentleman has been wearing those?  
And these bell-bottom Beatles pants — were they mine?  
There's a good-looking corduroy jacket!  
I remember I bought it in Tenerife over ten pounds ago  
I was nursing a divorce and writing the preface to "Footsteps" —  
hiking on Teide's snow-clad slope.  
Each garment has its own history, its name and year.  
The dark of the closet broods upon memories, lost opportunities,  
infatuations.  
I go into my pockets and find matchboxes, phone numbers,  
reminder notes.  
But did I remember?  
For a moment I inhaled the scent of the past; tasting of life like a  
voyeur.  
Then I resolutely stuff the whole bundle down  
into black garbage bags  
where the past belongs.  
Time to take the bread out of the oven!

## The Course of Time

The years pass  
You notice in your children that you're growing up  
and in increasing interest from the funeral homes.  
Have you made arrangements with the white envelope?  
I often used to sleep with my daughter's little foot in my hand  
but who dares to do that today?  
In the dream  
life comes back strongly, uncensored:  
This night I was on a film shoot  
I saw my parents sitting in a forties apartment  
while I myself was creeping around on the floor  
playing with rationing coupons.  
Outside the darkened windows was the war  
But it never entered the apartment  
where I'd built a playhouse out of blackout screens  
The memories remain like splinters in my feet  
Some ache and still hurt  
What you've lived never leaves your body  
In the dream you drag your whole life with you  
like a mighty fishing trawler  
In the dawn I awake  
with a sweet taste of sadness in my mouth

## The Charioteer of Delphi

Still in his gaze  
the statue in Delphi's museum stands  
on the victory chariot under the triumphal arch:  
Straight-backed and without moving a muscle  
he is the emblem of the harmony  
that transcends time and death  
— his own and ours.  
Untouched by the surge of incidental victory  
he holds the reins gathered in his right hand.  
His tunic hangs in heavy folds  
as if untouched by the passing breeze.

His facial features are still as handsome and absent  
as they once were when sculpted in the honor of Polyzalos  
His eyes with their alert pupils  
look at us right through the prison of time  
To keep your calm in the midst of life's eddies  
is what the driver of Delphi teaches  
Not to let yourself be seduced by the moment's victory or defeat  
To stand strong and tall through life's ups and downs  
With a firm hand steering this unmanageable  
life

## **The sea remembers everything**

Now the sea comes in from the sea  
with all its memories, longings and drowned seamen  
White headed waves gallop and burst upon the beaches  
Leaving traces of broken ships and oars.  
Also your life lies there in pieces  
Among trashes and sea wood;  
All your dreams, your hopes and shortcomings.  
The sea is a hugh aquarium  
Where everything is present and alive.  
Not one single word you said is forgotten.  
Not one single move you made unseen.  
Mirroring the sky  
The sea remembers everything.  
What was your life about?  
The soft skin of woman you loved?  
Some words of poetry that burnt your lips?  
A dream you wanted to come true?  
But time has no compassion.  
Your life already belongs to history.  
But the white headed waves never cease to confirm  
Their message of no return

*(Dingle, Ireland, May 2001)*

## The Birds

Why are there so many birds in Sophia?  
Early every morning they wake me up  
sitting in the trees outside Hotel Bulgaria.  
People say they are refugees from Kosovo!  
The bombs made them fly  
like black clouds over the mountains  
to this sacred place.  
But how do we do to get them back?  
Birds don't listen to orders, nor do the poets!  
Like waves on the open sea  
they choose their own ways!  
Still the question remains:  
How do we bring back the birds  
to the silent trees of Kosovo?

## War

The night the war broke out  
I felt your little hand  
Light and tender as the wing of a butterfly  
Squeeze my arm  
Silent we were lying side by side  
My 50 years body close to your 11 months  
Your life sheltered by my life  
While swarms of bombers were floating over Baghdad  
Leaving butterflies behind in the darkness

## Homecoming

Every time I fly over Thessaloniki  
Something happens to the light:  
It gets much brighter, more intense,  
My chest expands,  
I sense an extra heartbeat.

Now weré over Attica,  
High above our past, our heritage  
Eternal Greece,  
Like wool all round me.  
Every arrival is a coming home.  
I want to rest my head on the clouds below us.  
Lambs pour down the mountainsides like milk.

We swing out across the glittering water  
Weré over Pireus,  
Making the descent  
For our landing in Antiquity.

*(Translation Jim Potts and Karin Altenberg)*

## Sentimental Journey

One day in my middle aged life  
I want to make sure that the Greek islands still exist  
(and that I myself exist!)  
In Piraeus I again embark on "Yallisos" –  
This old and tired Swedish vessel  
That thirty years ago carried our youth happiness over the sea  
We lay under a blanket direct on the deck  
Looking for jumping dolphins alongside the ship  
For passengers in First Class  
We felt only disgust

When I a minute ago  
Tried to pass that army camp of sleeping bags and guitars  
I found the whole mess rather charm less; dirty and screamly.  
Rather I would like to sit in the First Class Bar with an ouzo  
— not more luxury than an ordinary Swedish railway station —  
look at the headlines in "Ta Nea" or watch the latest news on TV

Why did the magic feelings disappear?  
Where are now the hidden secrets under the horizon?  
What was the meaning of the message that the vibrations sent  
through us those days?  
Was it just the usual romanticism – the exotism of youth?  
Surely you will find two backpackers in love out there  
Holding hands and dreaming like we did  
Poor people!  
Nothing is new under the chimney!

11 hours at sea is a long time.  
No dolphins in sight.  
But there are first class cabins available.

*(Translation: Peter Curman)*

## **Panormitis**

Inside this white monastery  
sheltered by mountains on the island of Syme  
I search for my own presence  
Far away from the cities and everyday life

Like secret water streams  
My thoughts, drifting deep inside myself  
Slowly, whirling  
Under the surface of consciousness

The light of a fisherman's lamp is slowly moving over the water  
While you hear the noise of the electricity machine  
A bird sounds: Kali nichta! Kali nichta!  
The cows send their messages behind the monastery

Still some minutes until the electricity machine stops  
And the stars switch on thousands of lamps  
But the tavern already sleeps  
With the shutters closed

Like an unsteady star  
The light from the fisherman moves further away  
I light my candle  
Ready to meet  
The attacks of silence and the stars

***(Translation: Peter Curman)***

## The Monastery Madman

The old man under the olive tree  
Has the whole cosmos inside his head  
He tells stories to the geese he feeds,  
About star-signs, solar eclipses,  
Earthquakes, cities that have been submerged.

“In my microcosm I walk round feeding geese”, he says,  
“You’ll find yourself, and me and the whole world as well  
in every drop you drink.”

They say he’s mad.  
Anyone who has inside his head  
A macro- or microcosm  
Must be mad  
But the geese flock round him  
They make shrill hisses  
If anybody comes to close.

*(Translation Jim Potts and Karin Altenberg)*

## Today

Today  
Like all days  
The hugh montains  
Stand unmovable  
While the nervous waters licks around them  
Still  
Some few pine trees do not give up  
but stick out like beard straws  
on a giant's cheek.  
The waves are angry  
claiming  
demanding  
begging for a love  
they will never get  
Unmovable and newly born  
The mountains  
Allow to be observed.

*(Translation: Peter Curman)*

## Where are the writers?

Where are the writers  
Paulo Mouro from Portugal asks.  
My answer is:  
In Bagdahd, Falluja, Teheran.  
There are our colleagues  
But also here in Neptun  
by the Black sea.  
But what do the writers do?  
They talk, they dream, they write.  
They try to break the silence that surrounds them  
like the sea the fishes  
Writers where ever they live  
are fishes in the same sea  
So what do we do with our words?  
We try to keep us alive  
We try not to forget  
always to be a pain in the ass  
of those who sit on us  
Poetry is not  
as we once were told  
"a thing of beauty"  
Poetry is a hard strone of reality  
Poetry is not decoration  
Poetry is detonation  
Our task: to invade the minds of the invaders!  
With our words build a new world  
where Neptun is a suburb to Bagdahd and Teheran  
and where we all can meet next year in Jerusalem!  
But, again I must ask the same question as Paulo Mouro:  
Where are the writers?

*(Written at a Writers meeting  
in Neptun, Romania, 20 September 2005.  
Translation by Peter Curman)*

## Content

<b>Guilt and Forgiveness</b> by Rezi Abedi .....	5
<b>What a poet can do</b> .....	11
Auction .....	12
Life .....	13
The Jump .....	14
My Mirror Image .....	15
Intertextual .....	16
On Certain Things, Love .....	17
Death .....	18
Heart of Stone .....	19
Roots .....	20
The Dream .....	21
The Great Forgiveness Day .....	22
Double-Entry Bookkeeping .....	23
The Seasons .....	24
Why Isn't the Sun Shining on Lysekil? .....	25
Quicky .....	26
Direct Light in Helsinki .....	27
St. Petersburg, June 1997 .....	28
Pitsunda, 1988 .....	29
Jerusalem .....	31
Nicosia .....	32
Hiroshima .....	33
The Middle of the Earth .....	34
Rustic Duties .....	35
The Course of Time .....	36
The Charioteer of Delphi .....	37
The sea remembers everything .....	38
Birds .....	39
War .....	40
Homecoming .....	41
Sentimental Journey .....	42
Panormitis .....	43
The Monastery Madman .....	44
Today .....	45
Where are the writers? .....	46

# THE CHARIOTEER IN DELPHI

*Poems*  
by Peter Curman

*Fourth Added Edition*

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