

A Good Death

He snuck a smoke on the porch
when his daughter left for work,
when his daughter left for work,
a shot of her brandy in his coffee,
watched the morning shows in her
living room on her tv, then rambled
over to the roadhouse where it was dark
inside and he could stare at the rows
of bottles behind the bar and talk
to his dead wife, dead parents,
dead friends, dead almost everyone,
even the crushed dog, then wander back
his glasses on the dresser, stretch out
on the bed and remember everything
all at once where she found him
when she got home.

Pompeii

A dog made of tile embedded in the floor,
the rising price of olive oil still
faintly outlined on a wall.
Inside a roofless villa, a mural of a couple
in careful ringlets, a touch of rouge
still smile at each other across the years,
happy that France and Belgium have not
yet occurred, no one has ever thought
of Russia and the German tribes hunker
in bark huts along the Rhine: it is still
such a long way until history becomes itself.
Their eyes are dark and shining, as if they've been
drinking excellent wine for hours from
the vineyards creeping up the higher slopes
toward the little cloud above bald Vesuvius.

How to read Crossing Brooklyn Ferry

You will need a darkness well past midnight,
a single cone of desk light to guide you
sightful with its long white hand.
And you will need to need these words, spoken
across three separate centuries, his whisped
breath against your ear from narrow streets
of horse manure with drying sheets and longjohns
stretched between brick walls, spoken from
eyes that also heard these human musics,
saw the sky upside down in glistening water,
and just like you knew the motionless wings,
soaring slow circles of the gulls.

Taking Apart the Map

Road signs erased, the freshly
nameless highways unravel
west to east, the sputter of billions
of tires sighing with collapse.
All the small towns fade into horizon,
the faces of their houses wilt, the broken
eyes watch prairie distances return,
the sky hangs out its weary sheets to dry.
No more heads for the pigeons
to crap on, no more pigeons,
those old men bitching on the bench
before the empty storefront,
their thoughtless paper skulls,
died childless, mapless
long before this poem began.

Teaching with chalk dust on my back

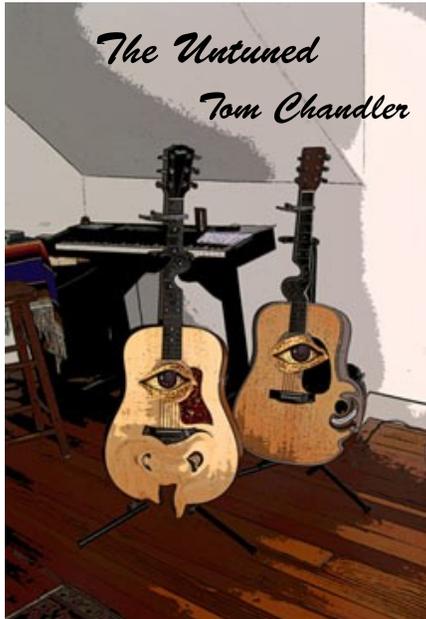
and car keys jiggling in my pocket
and a nagging crick in my right knee
I stand before the class
with Robert Frost in my mouth.

I can see the stone walls in my head,
the dark forest of which no saying will
quite be dark enough, tree line of pine
and birch as frayed as these sentences
I keep trying to mend, word placed
solid against word against the sweep
of snow across abandoned farms,

the ruined barns and broken glass,
ache of memory and why the gray
disguise of years could never hide
the aging boy who lived inside himself
and made this music out of pain
that walked beside him all his life.

Credits

“A Good Death” - Prairie Schooner
“How to Read *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*”
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