

AN  
INHERITED  
OCEAN

By Morten Søndergaard

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## **Acknowledgements**

The poems that appear in this chapbook are taken from two books, *Da Vinci, Later* and *Bees Die Sleeping*, translated by John Irons.

## Euphoria

It's really summer now

summer in the drawer with plastic animals

summer in my horizontal soul

and on the walk with open shirt

it has become summer in the self-searchings

summer where the elbow hits the doorframe

and in the bag with rabbit feed it has become summer

in my night-time vigil and inside the washing machine

it has become summer in the lists of suicides

summer among the cold pastas in the drains

summer in the doll's pram and in the market forces

it has become summer at my feet

and at the French border

it has become summer

at the bottom of each full stop

summer where the cats frequent

summer on the ansaphone

summer on the staircase leading from child to adult

from melon sap to night lap

it is summer now in a milky impossibility

## **A Dog-Fight**

A wild-mint fragrance  
    beneath the twilight ladder  
there must be a language  
so things can be said as they are  
    neither more nor less  
there must be a hole in the lid  
    in the body so it can rain  
down into the heart  
evening of granite of nothing  
    the dogs are fighting and goodbye sugar  
sprinkles onto the fax  
there must be many houses  
so death gets lost  
everything is here for a little longer  
    and the horseradish is in flower

## Swan Mill

Last night I got the answer to

what goes on at Swan Mill.

There is a machine there to mechanically debone swans,  
for swan meat tastes good.

But according to a doctoral thesis

I apparently had written about the subject  
there is not much meat on a swan.

Most of it is eustatic

I explained during my defence,  
without wondering about that word.

The meat is chopped fine with the aid of oblique  
rotating knives, the so-called cutters,

and the intestines are emptied in long trails of sea grass.

Afterwards, the carcass is hoisted up by its webbed feet  
and driven off for incineration.

Then the surroundings changed.

The foreman began to explain

about the new political situation,

the rules for offside and the recipe for mock turtle.

I was to read out a poem,

but had the feeling

that the things that took place

were part of a socio-psychological experiment,

and that those responsible for the experiment

were themselves part of a socio-psychological experiment.

It is reality on all channels.

## **A Duck's Confessions**

My language: Goodbye. I am a duck. Oh.

Eat lots of snails. Occasionally grab a house sparrow.

Devour their frail winter songs.

Forwards, eating my quack! Eating: Everything.

Hey, word-catcher. Your name's something else.

Quickly around. Hello, hello. Flew out of what christened me. Jabber in another one now.

Like comparing a duck pond with an ocean. Mess up the grass. Endeavour to keep up the endeavour.

I say: I am obligingness. Oh.

A feathered will. This my cackling through everything, purely and simply not to be on the safe side.

## Self-portrait Erupting

At the foot of Sundoro the farmers are planting rice,  
and the sun is rising behind Asama-Yama.

Water buffaloes are bathing in the mud of the rivers  
on the plain below Galunggung, and the clouds  
are reflected in the water-filled crater of Keli Mutus.

Oyoye reports yet another peaceful night  
and a flight of starlings lands on Oshima.

Nevado Ojos del Salado continues  
to stare up at a cloudless sky  
and Loloru is quiet.

It is snowing on Fujijama,  
inside Soretimate a poem is melting.

A female researcher gazes lovelornly  
up at Monte Pelee, which in 1903 killed  
29,580 people in a few seconds.

It is gleaming beneath the ice-cap of Karymsky,  
and from Longonot a column of steam is rising,  
migrating swans can be seen across the contour of Kuttyaro.

A flock of sheep sweeps down over Ararat,  
and Pliny the Younger relates that people in Pompeii  
bound cushions around their heads when fleeing from Vesuvius.

La Palma is whispering about Cerro Azul,  
And Ischia raving about Batur.

In 1450 BC Thera (Santorin) exploded  
and the Minoian kingdom was wiped out, now only  
the sea-filled caldera remains, where the tourists bathe.

Chimborazo stands proudly in the early sun, and a fisherman  
pulls his boat up onto the beach at Tambora.

An agave begins to blossom on Ruminahui,  
and hoopoes screech in the flowering broom  
on Monte Somma.

Pinatubo counts its eruptions,  
and South Sisters is calling to Hekla.



Lightning is flashing in Monte Pelato's obsidian,  
and the snow is melting along the crater edge of Kilimanjaro  
5,895 metres above sea level.

It is amazingly quiet on Jebel Marra.  
Uzon and Voon speak their names.

Karthala is meditating on its volume.

Something has unsettled the animals on Mount Camerun,  
and Pematant Bata is singing for Meru.

Citaltépetl is writing silicon letters to Ziminia,  
and while El Misti is slowly counting down,  
eight mountaineers are setting off  
for the summit of Tangkuban Perahu.

Kuntomintar does not reply.

Activity in the arctic volcano Mount Erebus  
is linked to the earthquakes  
that have just hit Kilauea,  
6.6 on the upwardly open Richter scale.

Rudanov still looks like a sleeping Cyclops,  
and the three who were killed on Tungurahua  
are commemorated at a church service in Quito.

While a glacier torrent prepares itself over Grímsvötn,  
Dieng tries to make contact with Gunung Api.

Mauna Loa begins to moan.

A stray dog howls at the foot of Guntur, and even  
though Gelai's eruption is harmless, it has attracted  
scientists from all over the globe.

Four million years ago three prehistoric  
people passed by Mount Sadiman,  
one can still see their tracks in the ashes.

The tremors from Semisopochnoi can be felt by everyone  
within a radius of 15 kilometres, and a helicopter  
is circling Mount Isabella.

Tiatia is full, and Toba is becoming increasingly restless,  
during the catastrophe of 1783

Laki killed a fifth of Iceland's population.

Usangu Basin continues to babble about Dukono.

Beneath Mauna Kea a herd of horses is beginning to run,  
and tired men are crawling up from Kawah Idjen  
with pieces of sulphur on their shoulders.

Usu is calling to Tarumai.

Bogoslof is calling to Akutan.

On Klyucevskoi a rift has opened up,  
and the snow-clad trees are beginning to burn.

Makawu can go off at any moment,  
and magma is shooting up under Cereme.

A gleaming cloud is forming in Komaga-Take,  
and who knows what Ngauruhoe has really thought of doing.

Pincate phones Krafla, and the animals know  
that Nyamlagira is about to erupt.

The situation is critical on La Soufriere,  
and Popocatpetl is feeling far from good.

Stromboli no longer understands the word "I",  
and a state of emergency has been declared on St. Helena.

Mashu loves Lolo.

Herdubreiden is mainly formed of glass,  
and at night Karangetang lights up the clouds.

Pichincha is writing chemical e-mails to Yali.

While silica tears are falling from Halemaumau,  
Shishaldan is dreaming of phosphorus.

There is no telling how long it will take  
before the cone on Osorno collapses.

Seen from space Izalco resembles an angel  
with enormous petrified wings.

In 1883 Krakatau killed 36,400 people,  
and the blast wave went three times round the planet.

Glowing ash rises over Piton de la Founaise,  
and Ixtaccihuatl is in a state of shock,

Kohala is fantasising about liquid quartz.

Katla has a subglacial eruption underway  
and cascades of lava are being hurled up over Surtsey.

Santa Maria to Gaua.

Adagdak to Nisyros.

Lengai has given up its perfect symmetry,  
and Colima seems to have woken up,  
while the rocks are melting on Piton del Teide.

El Chichn is about to say something, and new material  
is pouring into Opala.

Baitoushan yearns for Usu,  
and Lewotolo is beginning to dance.

Lokon is turning in its sleep.

Now Srednii has started, now Mount Terror has,  
and percolating ground water in Aoba  
causes the pressure to rise in the liquid silica.

Steller is calling to Goodenough.

Now Guagya Pichinch is on the point of raving.

Now Ili Boleng has changed colour from yellow to red,  
and a column of fire is rising two kilometres above Rajabasa.

A lavine of ash is rolling down from Agung at 300 kilometres an hour,  
and rivers of mud are flowing out beneath Kialagvik.

Now Llaima has covered itself in ash.

An earthquake on Paricutin causes the earth's crust  
to crack and even major buildings collapse  
on Tibesti.

Redoubt says that the world is still only just beginning.

Boiling mud crashes down along Nevado de Ruíz,  
and Mahukona is raging now.

On the south side of Nyiragongo a rift opens up  
and peasants flee while their banana peels  
burn.

Fuego is thinking of dissolving in its own name,

and now San Miguel is saying goodbye.

From Kelut a lavine of floating stones is rolling  
down over densely populated valleys  
while Momotombo calls and calls out for Puracé.

Now Askja, no Kavachi, now Shiveluch,  
now Motir, now Tenerife are erupting.

Now Koko is copulating with Maui.

Now Merapi is sending a pyroclastic cloud  
down over a sleeping village,  
and murky clouds of pulverised rock  
are being pumped up over Sakurajimas.

Now there is not much left of Katmai.

Now Unzen is not itself any longer.

Now Galeras, now Smirnov,  
now Tristan da Cunha are erupting.

Etna has not decided yet,  
but Mayon is exploding.

**[A crowned darkness spreads out in our voices]**

*from* "A Sequence Suggested by Time"

A crowned darkness spreads out in our voices,  
    we pour blood into the drinking water,  
in the event of fire: Crush the glass! That's something for us. . .  
    A row of thoughts wriggles out of our hands.  
What is happening? Electric fisticuffs, chemical lips!  
    Everything seeks shelter in the clouds' enormous bunkers,  
and sine tones get through, a form of life set vibrating  
    in the grey substance to which we so gladly lend a body.  
Get ready, leave a message, the red light's on,  
    "we are recording"

## [A touch-me-not explodes]

*from "Biopsy"*

5.

A touch-me-not explodes

    soundlessly among snowberries and broom.

Small puddles reflect branches and black leaves.

Two white plastic chairs are hanging hovering in the air.

A toad tumbles out of the compost heap

and looks love-stricken at another toad

    in amongst the stinging nettles.

It has always just stopped raining, it smells of soil and rotten wood.

A croquet ball gleams yellow in the grass.

    The trees are standing with cool evergreen shadows.

A white system of roots spreads down from tulip bulbs into the soil.

    A bindweed twines slowly up a wall.

What creatures lie buried here?

The stones begin to wake up, they set up deep bass sounds,

an organ gathering itself before a crescendo.

6.

The dark is a gigantic vessel ploughing through the landscape,

    horses sleep standing up in the fields,

ice crystals glitter in their breath,

tufts of dry grass are covered with hoar frost.

    Everything listens, everything waits for a signal,

but the sounds freeze to ice in the air,

nothing moves.

The frost moves into the armed vacuum

    amongst the things and that which must happen.

The horses' eyes move in their sleep in small desperate jerks.

Strips of white in the white, flashes of time behind the living.

Frozen clothing hangs stiffly on a blue plastic washing line.

Open water is covered with ice.

Chrome and silver are mixed in a slow and soundless chemical process,

trunks of birches lie loosely on the ground.

    The horses wake up with spastic movements,

they come galloping out of the frosty mist with white wild eyes,

and send flakes of grey sediment whirling over the fields.

    A smell of ozone.

## **Broca's Convolution**

*from "Public Announcements"*

### Broca's Convolution

To fly over a landscape of grey granite  
with bated breath,  
    a ferry-dream simply laid beneath a hand,  
a withheld, transposed pain  
    foaming up from throats,  
a growth that cannot be stopped,  
    lacinated faces, a rose  
dipped in liquid nitrogen  
pulverised at my shoulder blade,  
to change position  
    just before sleeping and to regret,  
to feel an inherited ocean  
    sluice over one's brain with salt,  
to turn  
like the bronze of a shoulder in a green darkness,  
    to rise like bubbles from electrodes  
in a copper vessel.

## One Experience Less

*from* "Public Announcements"

for JHS

From wastepaper basket to plastic bag to the skip in the yard,  
    some shavings from a pencil sharpener, a CD wrapping,  
a blue bic biro that just for once did not get lost  
but ran dry in the middle of a sentence,  
    an invitation to a ceremony I did not dare attend  
or had forgotten was going to take place,  
the top of a glue-stick, a broken knife,  
a cotton bud, an envelope that contained a cheque,  
and one from a bill,  
    drafts of nightmares, brain waves and heart fibrillations,  
seconds out of step, a plaster, a face,  
sunsets, sports shoes, waterspouts, letter bombs,  
    books come apart in water,  
a whole life disappears each time down  
    into the gnashing innards of the dustcart,  
now it's rumbling off towards the incineration plant,  
    now it's too late to repent.



## **Et Cetera**

*from* "Public Announcements"

It is said!

It finds a form, numbed by language,  
the things return like dogs:  
cyanogen, hearse, bloodstone, vanilla,  
the the sun eats off the living,  
and you are the same as ever,  
the worms whisper it to you,  
just come this way,  
the set watch and coins pressed into the skin.

It is real enough,  
the chair beneath you spins round insanely fast,  
you are suddenly the whirling centre of the world,  
a fore sight that is magnified and flows outwards  
until it fills the whole horizon:  
There is more than enough to come to terms with,  
you don't need to add anything else.

## Victoria Street

*from* "Public Announcements"

At night the Rosenæ river runs through me,  
the water is red, almost black,

    it penetrates the cellars of the houses  
and within a short while undermines all the street,  
I'm dreaming that the butchers are running out and in  
past each other with removal boxes full of meat,

    and that someone is stacking body bags on the pavement,  
I'm dreaming my own brain and know it's impossible,

    but keep on doing so nonetheless,  
from a gallows a figure is swaying to and fro in the wind,  
a woman licks the sperm from the hanged man,

    a cat eats its offspring under a skip,  
and conversation wanders from room to room

    like the torches of burglars,  
but the flat is empty, no one lives here any more.

MORTEN SØNDERGAARD was born in 1964 in Copenhagen. He studied literature and has published five poetry collections: *Sahara i mine hænder* (Sahara in my hands, 1992), *Ild og tal* (Fire and Figures, 1994), *Bier dør sovende* (Bees Die While Sleeping, 1998), *Vinci, senere* (Vinci, later, 2002), *Fedtdigte* (Fat poems, 2004); poetry in prose: *Ubestemmelser* (Indestinations, 1996), and *At holde havet tilbage med en kost* (To Hold the Ocean with a Broom, 2004); and a novel, *Tingenes orden* (Order of Things, 2000). He received a grant of Danish National Art Council for three years and was short listed for the Nordic Literature Prize. He has translated works of Jorge Luis Borges and worked as an editor at various literary magazines. He is translated into several languages.

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