

## Persistence in three languages

### I. Always repeating itself

**Finnish:** *Ken meni meidän edessämme?*

**Hungarian:** *Ki ment mi elöttünk?*

**English:** *Who went us before?*

Who went us before? Who came before us, here?  
Dragging ancient words for sky and suck and soul.  
Long past the hard years (the leaving of the swollen marsh  
the cleaving to the Finnish woods) a blink of four millennia;  
our sounds still hold their music, our ideas string yet  
like daisy chains, those same Uralic vowels of mothers' lullabies,  
their rhythms stamped by riding boots in landlocked goulash kitchens.  
All of us pronounce (in common tones) on fish and water and hands.  
On blood and butter and brothers-in-law. On stones and tears and ice.  
Once, they came here, strangers; their nouns and verbs corralled  
behind their teeth. Now, like pebbles smoothed by tongues  
we press them through our lips. Mouth to ear, as kisses.

### II. Listening to rocks

**Finnish:** *Kivistä verinen oli vävyn käsi.*

**Hungarian:** *Kövektől véres volt veje keze.*

**English:** *By-stone bloody, was brother-in-law's hand*

By stones  
my brother-in-law's hand  
was bloody.

It was all the fault  
of geology -  
not the flint

tongue of his wife,  
nor the sullen slouch  
of his eldest son.

It was the stones  
that did it -  
that cracked open

their heads  
in the chimney nook.  
That poured out

their blood on  
the timber floor.  
It was the stones'

hard hearts that could not  
forgive, that would not  
accept that love

needs tending  
like a fire. That love  
is never set in stone.

### **III. Giving and receiving**

***Finnish:***      *Miniäni antoi voita.*  
***Hungarian:***   *Menyem adott vaját.*  
***English:***      *Daughter-in-law-my gave butter.*

My daughter-in-law  
gave butter.  
It was all she had  
to soothe my burns  
from the scald  
of the sauna stove.

My daughter-in-law  
gave shelter  
to the dog with mange  
that skulked the yard  
that whimpered  
and scabbled for bones.

My daughter-in-law  
gave comfort  
to the widowed smith  
whose smelted words  
stoked fires  
that fattened her smile.

My daughter-in-law  
lies buried  
under sighing  
snow-bent pines;  
my own son's hands  
still bloody from the stones.

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