

GEORGE STANLEY / After Akhmatova

for Sharon

He shows up in my dreams less often now.
I don't run into him everywhere I go.
A low white fog has settled along the road.
Shadows start to race across the lake.

All day the ringing did not stop,
ringing over the wide, ploughed fields,
deafening ringing of bells from St. John's
Monastery bell towers over the fields.

I was pruning the lilac bushes,
snipping off twigs that had lost their blossoms.
Out on the disused military embankment
I watched two monks stroll by.

World, familiar, understandable, tangible,
come back to life for senseless me!
The Tsar of Heaven has healed my soul
with the icy calm of non-love.

Yes, I loved them, those late nights at the pub—
the little round tables with beige terrycloth covers
a-tinkle with glasses of cold to lukewarm draft.
The pub overheated, winter blowing outside,
sarcastic laughter at a literary joke,
and my love's quick glance—helpless, shattering me.

1917

Everything looted, privatised, sold.
Death's black wing strobed ahead.
Everything chewed up by ravenous boredom.
Why, then, for us, this lovely light?

By day, cherry-scented breezes waft
from a hidden grove in the suburbs.
By night, ever novel constellations glitter
in the deep, clear July skies.

Something miraculous approaches
our filthy, decrepit houses.
No one (no one!) knows what it is,
but we have expected it for centuries.

1921



Sharon

Photographer: Nancy Boyd