

Two Harry Martinson Poems

Translated by Robert Hedin

After

After the battle of Heligoland
and after the battle of Tsushima
the sea began breaking down the drifting bodies.
Treated them with its secret acids.
Let the albatrosses eat out their eyes.
And using its strong dissolving salts
slowly turned them back into ocean—
back to a rich Cambrian water,
for a new try.

An Old Lady in Bremen

An old lady in Bremen stirs up a memory
and recalls the splendid evening
before the British fleet sailed away.

The dance aboard ship the 23rd of July.
The ladies a cluster of blossoms, the polite cadets.
The light paper lanterns strung between the cannons.
Gaiety, fireworks, a glorious, waltz-like dream.

Then years later another evening ball,
this off Heligoland, but without any ladies.

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Harry Martinson (1904-1978) was one of Sweden's most distinguished twentieth writers, producing numerous books of poetry, novels, essays, memoirs, plays, and radio dramas. In 1949, Martinson was the first poet of the working classes to be elected to the Swedish Academy, and in 1974 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Robert Hedin is the author, translator, and editor of more than two dozen books of poetry, most recently *At the Great Door of Morning: Selected Poems and Translations* (Copper Canyon Press) and, as editor, *The Uncommon Speech of Paradise: Poems on the Art of Poetry* (White Pine Press). He lives in Frontenac, Minnesota.