



Dark Matter

Aase Berg, Johannes Göransson (Translator)

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Poetry. Translated from the Swedish by Johannes Goransson, Berg's hallucinatory, post-cataclysmic epic takes place in an unremitting future-past. The bodies mutate and hybridize. They are erotic and artificial, art and adrenaline. Available for the first time in English as a complete collection, the poems of this contemporary Swedish classic contaminate as they become contaminated--drawing on and altering source texts that range from The Texas Chainsaw Massacre to string theory. Calling on fables, science, the pastoral, and the body, DARK MATTER aggravates their perception while exhausting poetry down to its nerve: "a faint spasm of cheers before this, the nervous system's last chance to communicate with the dying I." The result: a monstrous zone of linguistic and bodily interpenetration, cell death, and radiant permutations. "Extraordinary and urgent, a coded warning smuggled out of dark." --China Mieville; "Aase Berg's poetry is discomforting because it lacks boundaries....When I read her I notice how my consciousness tries to separate, divide up and make sense of her almost hallucinatory images, but they always glide back together. I get nauseated and almost seasick from her texts." --Asa Beckman

Dark Matter Details

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From Reader Review Dark Matter for online ebook

Erica Wissick says

Has Berg met the author of "The Thirst for Annihilation", Nick Land? They'd get along fine.

Ben G says

The book "Transfer Fat" left me cold, but in this one Berg's knowledge and research on science, math, probability, string theory, etc., ties powerfully to a pastoral narrative set in a world recreated following some sort of environmental catastrophe.

These are prose poems. There's narrative movement and acquisition of new data, but also moments of stasis - which brought to mind the Norwegian novelist Tarjai Vesaas - and the occasional conclusion. ("Now the things are not playing dead; this world wants out of its skin.")

Great translation by Johannes Göransson.

Joe says

I want it all--everything of Berg translated & in one place.

There's a tonal shift from Berg's first translated work--With Deer--as this moves more from post apocalyptic horror to drawing on science fiction in how it telescopes from the body (With Deer being radically body centered, the prose rarely escaping the agony of the body in change or that agony always refocalizing) outward into architectures, cities, seas, planets. Here ecopoetic resonances are stronger--models of matter which emphasize importance of the clinamen, the swerve of all matter out of itself, and nested breathtaking layers of flow. This could be called entropy or here in the positive-negative formation of dark matter. What's fascinating and original is how those kind of "heavy metal" inflections invest & complicate this with value:

"Matter is pure evil,
deformity pure will;" (149)

"search machines gnaw dig, drill the ether steel through
the empty Nothing's non matter

which obscures and bans me from death" (97)

& sometimes shit just gets beautifully weird. From "Herbaphrodite":
Thickets of vine ensnare cathedrals, the foliage of dark herbs climbs along the beams, far-leafed hortensia and anemones, radiant coral animals, most moray eels."

See also use neologisms, deformity, utopic possibility--

Kathleen says

“It was the autumn when the weather came wrong in the atmosphere. How to predict that the pattern will overwhelm reality? How to know that one is watching particles until they change form?

Everything has to go somewhere in the logic of the great redistribution. Everything must be reevaluated even though the dimensions are breaking. When matter leaves chasms in the hollow after its removal. There is nowhere at all to die in the mirror halls of concretion. But I will meet the gaze never lose hold of the gaze.

I will reach into the strata’s anxiety to read matter’s brain. I will reach into the gaze’s anxiety to shelter the nervous things.”

Jamie Grefe says

This review appears at: <http://shreddedmaps.tumblr.com>

Aase Berg’s DARK MATTER (trans. Johannes Goransson) has left me garbled and pale, grasping stripped skin. I entered this book. The first entrance was a stumble and an engrossment of wonder. Berg’s word-shards snap, form space: frozen, tremor, horror, stillness. The second entrance was from last poem to first. I shuddered no less, felt a vague inability to articulate solid meaning in any cohesive way other than by the weak phrase, “splendid void.” My mouth drips. Splendid, though, is the mastery of Goransson’s translation whose own work gratifies and haunts. We are in fine hands. The third entrance (night/kitchen/blue light/hall): poems out of order as if this reach would somehow wrap my tongue around the fullness hole. I read poems like, “Cryptogram,” “Aniara,” “Rubber Cathedral,” “Glass Deer.” I remain pale with little air. These, my first encounters with Berg’s voidscapes, have wounded me beautiful. I am a pile of flesh. I have slipped, willfully, towards dark matter.

DARK MATTER refuses access to the main chamber. Tentacles. Deer. Leatherface in the dark. The shreds, snuff images of these spaces, this body in transition, this hybrid longing leaves me bewildered and smiling to Alexander, to Zachris, to the nameless others.

She speaks poems like “In Darkful Lande:”

Lights burn in a darkful lande.
Here the dogs of Dovre, their cold wails.
Hear the shriek of the tall fires,
hear the wings of pain drag
across the land.

The tone presented here, this ominous world in ruin, has begun to seep, does not end in silence. I cannot shut the book. Float. Dissect. Trace love to the most inward parts of the empty shell. Through these poems it is the body and the places of the body and how the body collapses under longing that I felt so intimately in passages like, “I now lick my tongue against the outer claws of the fingers to tear life into the ions, to make sores bitter in the tongue’s blue ventricles.” The tongue of the reader must speak (tongue) this line to the

desolate horror-zones, where Berg gnaws, splatters traces from the inside. She writes, “The darkness of matter is soundless.” My mind refuses to hold.

In the section, “Cathedral Formations:”

When a tool or a machine part has burst,
the fracture surface is usually investigated to determine
if it is fine-grained or coarse-grained.

Broken, I have no way to wrap myself around Berg’s shell, but to sink in wonder. I wonder how, to the poet or the character of these poems, this may be wisdom or a warning or a love-trail of abandonment. And if these lines deceive you, too, know that to enter DARK MATTER is to drift in a zone where terrors bubble up, fester. It is not an easy space to enter. Prepare. Judging by the inadequacy of the words written here today, it is a much harder thing to articulate in terms of a “review.” Perhaps these pieces are “The temptingsondepth’s hearing” of its own howls. This is how space would sound if you were enclosed in a shell, a shell to float into the black of space. There we could be silent knowledge. It could be there, in a poem, where we finally disappear.

Donald Armfield says

This fantastic text is a matter of hallucinatory portions divided into parts, images that decodes time and space, but at the same time you’re lost on the lonely star rotating the earth.

I’m a proud owner of a copy of this book and will be diving into more of her work. Some of my favorite parts listed...

In Dovre Slate Mill
The Lemur Hypothesis
The Animal Gap
Red Giant
Mare Imbrium
Eons
The Hydrogen Song

C. Varn says

Goransson's translations of Aase Berg are particularly evocative and atmospheric, including physics with alienness of H.P. Lovecraft, into something that seems positively expressionistic and yet apocalyptic. The phrasings are often odd and stilted, but Black Ocean's edition includes the original Swedish that makes some comparisons possible. Berg's ability to incorporate bleeding edges of science and math into a convincing poetics is almost unique and shines particularly clearly here. An excellent work. should be read as a whole.

Stefanie says

[enjoyed that actually... Still hated the book. (hide spoiler)]

J.A. says

Having loved *With Deer* and *Transfer Fat*, I knew I'd dig this new one from Black Ocean, but I didn't expect for it to tell such a darkly pretty narrative in such a shattered way, so that was an added bonus. Goransson and Berg are the perfect match. Can't wait for the next from this poet / translator-poet team.

Kyle Muntz says

Like a grotesque SF dream: distorted silhouettes, mutilated bodies, suspended cathedrals, dark water. One of the best books of poetry I've read in a long time.

"And I will wait for you inside the black shell, Zachris."

Nate D says

There and here borders cut between different ways of being a life form. I, with my silhouette: without *becoming* a tree I dare to rest here beneath the tree. This endless faith in rims, edges, cutting points and the loyalty of objects. With an endless trust in the silhouettes, in thst the straps and cuts, the stitches will hold things in place.

Out of a trust in matter.

Swedish surrealist and Lovecraft translator Aase Berg writes prose poetry as a kind of science fiction, conjuring apocalyptic landscapes and biological uncertainties in service of some feverish and occluded vision of the world. A lot of the imagery, striking line by line, are rather hard for me to hold onto with my incomplete understanding of her project (and generally hit-or-miss ability to connect with poetry) but occasional bits shine through.

In the above passage I believe she's commenting on the somewhat illusory perception of the world as a set of discreet things, objects and entities existing in clearly defined terms apart from each other. In fact these discriminations may be more conceptual and linguistic than actual -- the subatomic reality is much less clear about it. When we dare to rest against the tree, there is an active exchange of matter, a concept that also turns up in *The Third Policeman*. There, it's a jab at the absurdity of reality once we start to look beneath the simple surfaces. Berg's goals are something more elusive and beautiful. To be returned to in order to glean further.

Antonio Delgado says

Berg's poetry is cosmic, machinery, without organs, in time, outside of time, empty of words, full of words... These poems are of cosmical proportions and deal with the human existence in time and space, after time and after space. They delve in between science fiction and abstraction.

Erin Lyndal says

I love Aase Berg. I do. Her rhythms, fixations, and unnatural phrasings really get me. So I had been beyond thrilled since I heard Dark Matter was coming out.

I just finished it. All of it. And while there's nothing wrong with it or bad about it, I have to say that nothing about it made me feel. At all. Much less feel in a surprising way. And nothing about it made me think, much less think differently.

I had to give such a bad review to a wonderful poet, but perhaps this just isn't the book for me.

Bridgette says

In a repertoire of enigmatic, post-cataclysmic passages, her audience are hurled violently within and out perspectives to explore Dark Matter from a metaphoric sense to the concept of its very molecular structure. An intensely bleak and delightfully exhausting hallucination to immerse one's self in, Aase Berg has provided an escape from the accepted human perception of existence.

In order to depict the larger catastrophe at hand while also delving within micro storylines, her work integrates the source languages of; Geologic Taxonomy, English, and Astronomic Terms - particularly Quantum Physics to create a strata of allegories for the reader.

Berg offers the possible reality of the world as one organism overcome by sickness, depicted by a disruption in the space and time continuum and potentially caused by mankind's own doing due to ravenous abuse of the land. A concept introduced to us in Shaft; where "ions get sucked loose" and "magnetism [can be felt tearing] cells out of their sheaths".

From the most commonly recognised piece, Aniara, to The Lemur Hypothesis we notice a shift in context and perspective. Where beforehand the setting was more relatable to landforms contrasted by humans and machine, The Lemur Hypothesis - while also involving beings and landforms - lends itself more to the internal functioning of a body.

The first of multiple references to 'glass animals' is the lemurs; whether they be representative of positive or negative molecules, they are clearly in distress as their sounds are "as a whole deadly" and only appear at rare frequencies. The narrating character mentions navigating optical wavelength bands and locating the cornea where the "queen lemur" resides, which would suggest our setting is an eye. The result of the "concentrated spectrum[s]" and it's "sharpness" is the melting point of Purgatorius, assumedly another 'glass

animal' within the eye, perfectly representing Berg's ability to warp references to create a sense of surrealism.

Despite the ever-changing contexts throughout the prose collection, the struggle to function against such a surge of dark energy is exhibited through organisms living amongst and on a larger terrain-like organism, and then further within an organism remains the focal point. Bleak political and moral views, or possibly even personal experiences of life are also represented through the experiences of characters; such as Ivo, Zachris, and Alexander.

Zachris most likely represents mankind, described as "born from the same mammalian egg" as the narrating character - a lizard-like creature - yet also "unnaturally older". He is the one who "gave [the lizard] the name 'Amphibian'" as man has done so, and his descent within the shaft could be seen as the loss of hope for mankind. Supporting this theory is the interpretation of this name as 'Zachariah' - "God has remembered" in Hebrew. The concept of a defined higher being is known to ease the human mind in the face of the uncertainty, where this piece lacks any assurance and therefore is intentionally unnerving.

The unique lingual amalgamation between organism and geology that attribute to this masterpiece can be best exemplified in Cathedral Forms. The chapter enters with reference to Palaeomagnetism, from a point of reflection on a fossilised aftermath such as the Kermadec Trench in New Zealand. Pre-context to this, "a contorted gene had travelled through chaos" and "epidemics rage violently though the world" which pertains to the post cataclysmic sense we are observing what once was, before destruction in the Kermadec "Grave".

A delightful book that is best left to each individual to explore and discover themselves. The interpretations will surely flow and when they do, I would love a response to my general review so far, as it is one thing to refer to outer existing references for a surrealist piece, but another to share and describe opinions formed - as nothing is ever certain. That, I believe is the true beauty of this piece.

Ellie Botoman says

PEONIES OF MEAT
