

An aerial night photograph of a city, showing a dense grid of lights and a prominent, winding road illuminated by streetlights. The overall scene is dark, with the city lights providing the primary illumination.

REGINA DERIEVA

**IMAGES IN BLACK,
CONTINUOUS**

Translated by Frederick Smock

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On the back cover: bath-relief of Regina made by the NYC-based artist Arcady Kotler shortly after her death

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IMAGES IN BLACK, CONTINUOUS

BLACK MIRROR

1

Polish a piece of hematite,
and the black mirror that emerges
mirrors the window
from which each Chinese emperor watched,
as he borrowed the throne.

2

Polish a piece of hematite
into a black mirror
by which widows
of Chinese emperors watched,
as they borrowed the thrones.

A BLACK SEPTEMBER

Before the accident
and afterwards
the black day remains —
black.

This day will not be cleansed
of ashes and dust,
nor could the day be reconstructed
on film, because
not only Electra but everyone
and everything else has
the lawful right of mourning.
And other rights just do not exist.
So now your world is blowing up,
strewing ashes over heads,
as a Swedish pastor from Gävle
did from a helicopter —
the black fireworks
of a black holiday.

THE SUM OF BLACKNESS

The sum of blackness in the world
is much larger
than the store of charity.
A man's own share usually lasts
his whole lifetime,
which is replete with
ineradicable illusions.

STYLE IN BLACK

All in black, Hamlet stands
for Scandinavian style,
a high style,
if one remembers
his irreproachable camisole and speech.
A pity he is
a Dane and not a Swede.
But was William mistaken perhaps? —
So the Swede Hamlet
goes to the podium,
dissatisfied with the state of the world.
His mood shows in black velvet —
eternal mourning for the ideal.

BLACK RAGE

“The seashell is all too perfect,
its mother-of-pearl delights the eye.
But the clam, that ‘artist-in-residence,’
must be destroyed.
Acid? Scalding water?
Loathsome creature presumptuously at home
in its own jeweled palace.
No, the slimy creature isn’t fit for such a place,
nor, of course, has it anything to do
with mother-of-pearl!
And it never will.
So, no qualms at all — Out!”
Is it not so with me?
For neither am I
up to mother-of-pearl.

BLACK NEWS

Before falling unconscious
the herald gasped, "Fuit Ilium."
But with the passage of time
such news has ceased to excite,
and now bystanders only shrug,
"A worthy man, surely,
poisoned by the bitter honey
of his message."

BLACK HOLE

Between the past and future looms
an intermezzo, a black hole, bottomless.
How long to knock about the galaxies?
How long to live in Pisces,
at the bottom of the sea,
in the Ram, in his pen?
Between the future and the past yawns
an intermezzo, a certain interval,
which lasts and lasts,
until some beginning is made.
But if at this moment
doors were not slammed
and windows not closed,
and blinds not drawn?
From the black hole
reaches us no light of consolation.

LETTERS TO THE SORBONNE

*Go, catch the wind,
stop the waves.*

FEBRUARY 7

I was born in the middle,
wasn't in time to die at the end.
It has given rise to itself,
has given rise to the husband,
has given rise to the son,
has given rise to an image of life,
but not through relations with Zeus.
If born, I am in debt
to Existence, as to others,
which has given rise to itself,
as to others. Otherwise
why do I and Existence exist?
Existence is full of inquisitive people:
if you sit, they sit beside you,
if you stand, they approach,
if you run, they run along.
Thus my existence, at times,
prevents my writing verse.

*The blind man sees himself
by the dark side of the moon,
his sight reverts to his soul.
And the bird in the tree
sings a song, a song without end.
To the lilac has come
a bird with a cherry,
and it mates on a jasmine.
The blind man touches blossoms
as if to play a harp.
Their light squeezes a sea of tears
from his eyes.*

TWO DAYS LATER

I cannot find myself.
I'm present nowhere,
not in life, not on paper.
I sit at table more silent
than the silence under it.
Then my shadow rises
and moves to the street.
One has to go somewhere,
though maybe better to lie
on a wave of beds.
My blood is light blue,
my mother and father is the sea.
I hardly walk, hardly sit.
During dreams I weep.
I lived through eight waves
and the ninth assailed me,
beat me on the rocks,
drowned me in the abyss.
I came up foamed over,
twinkling stars on my head.
Salty I have dried my life
on sand and shingle.
Then I awoke gray-headed.
I'd become the sea.
I fall, I rise.
I have been flung against my stony heart
and all my coasts and dams and breakwaters.
It has abated.
I am in silence.

FOUR DAYS LATER

Ruins are always
in fine speaking form, so —
When Charon made holes in his boat
to become captain on a long voyage,
I was nine years old, only nine,
the very number of days required
to exile me from the sea,
to another wet residence
of snow, rain,— of blood.
Thus I have seen my very blood of sea blue.
I have learned in the dead languages of the poets
everything about varieties of exile.
Thirty years I passed in one,
ten in another,
for the sea-blue blood of freedom,
for my dead language,
for devotion to great and minor prophets.
In the black crypt of Malachi
high on the Mount of Olives
I saw a bird flash as white lightning,
a particle of the light
of the Sun of Truth.

JUST A WEEK LATER

In summer winter is wanted;
in winter, summer.
So man is made, so the world.
While the senses live we await miracles.
When we cease expecting, death comes up behind.
—A fine way to outdistance death!
Long for summer instead of this blizzard.

Fragments of wind I've brought home
and sat down to stick together,
impulses, by my bitter saliva.
I will cry, and then the flood
will drip from the ceiling.
I'll bring out the zinc pan
in which I passed my infancy.
I'll sit sticking together
splinters of time with dark blue tears,
licking all the cracks,
because time is already old.
Really it's not time at all,
but some unnecessary organ
which the surgeon is just about to cut off.
Well, no more time.

TREATMENT

for Muje Thibblin & Nina Alhanko, with gratitude

One doctor told me:

“Open your mouth! Wider! Now close!”

Another doctor told me:

“Breathe more deeply! Turn around!”

A third told me:

“Tell all about yourself! Tell all,
and it will be easier!”

So I began to distinguish
words of other’s languages.

SESSION THE FIRST

I shall tell you how
I came downstairs, yet rose
on black ladders,
and every step failed,
opening black abysses,
as though a black courtyard
led onto black
streets, where ran
a man dressed all in black.
Each day blew off
from things a black dust,
washed from drinking glasses
black soot. I lived
a draft copy of a black life,
disallowed a fair copy.
Black coal-storage
towers littered
the horizon. On the black steppes
they carried out fatal
nuclear tests, with the hope
that all the world would die
from black envy.
I came down with smallpox
and by mistake was sent
to the hospital morgue for the night.
There a black death came to me
but I turned away,
preferring more days
for my unskilled labours
over poetry.

SESSION THE SECOND

I shall tell you how
someone has cut Lorelei's hair
close to the skin
but not allowed her
to go crazy and drown herself,
having counted it a too
easy death,
but placed her in a camp
of marxism-leninism-
stalinism near Karaganda.
There they begin to starve her,
though the louses eat their fill,
and the chinchies get drunk.
Someone has cut Lorelei's hair
close to the skin
so that her long blond
tresses do not prevent her
from working, nor distract
her escorts... And her head is
ringed by frost, like
a cracked bell
of the Catholic church,
dug up from underground
near a coal mine
named after
comrade
Heinrich Heine.

UNCONDITIONAL RELIANCE

USELESS OCCUPATION

I do not have enough good impressions
to begin to collect them.

To collect. Useless
occupation. Might as well
collect clouds. However, why not?
This cloud, for example, I just
met on the road from Jerusalem
to Bethlehem.

Gold and azure of the pre-Raphaelites,
it got stuck at the checkpoint.

QUESTION

When you have decided
I can ask you,
well, that is something
you know about me,
if I know myself
much less than Socrates advised.

A DIFFERENCE OF PERCEPTION

After a number of years
it's not so good to see
and hear. This is not a surprise.
I look on the world
through the eyes of others,
I listen to the world
through the ears of others,
repeating all the time my question.
I'm asking those around me
to explain this or that stain,
and to greet someone on my behalf.
In addition,
I force myself to not answer letters
and to not answer the telephone.
One names my condition
as boorishness, another as wisdom.

SATIETY

I feed
impudent sparrows
bread. "There you are!"
I say. "Take the manna from heaven."
But they don't peck, waiting
for me to crumble them
sponge-cake.

INCOMPLETE COLLECTION

I collect everything that has
no price: bowls, pebbles
painted by the Hokusai Sea,
acorns from oaks of Mamre and less
famous oaks, feathers of birds...
There are no people in this collection:
no one thinks he's worth less
than a million dollars.

THE ALMOST-IDENTIFIED OBJECT

The almost-identified object
has flown,
crimson from excitement.
Not identified by anybody.
Turns in a circle,
twinkles and departs
my galaxy in order to blow up
a few minutes later,
only because it
doesn't recognize me as its Halley.

SECOND-HAND

Buying second-hand clothes
is easy and convenient.
You are not responsible for them,
since they already had an owner,
who did with them what he wanted.
These clothes always go out of fashion.
But here's an article
whose price is a bargain:
having a previous smell,
and a previous mood,
this clothing in essence has died,
but has not turned to tatters,
having been renewed,
having been filled by others,
having been forced to live.
As new emigrants are forced to live,
a very old Syrian woman
looking
after their children.

“What I like about Regina Derieva’s work is its directness and simplicity, by which I mean that it speaks directly to me and that it is lucid.”

— *Daniel Weissbort*

“Her veiling illness helps underline the poetic impersonality that Eliot argued makes a real poet and that is a key to her greatness. For while like all metaphysical poets, Derieva does share a portion of her psyche with us, she never does so as a confidant; but rather in a spirit closer to that of the mass. It is almost blasphemous to say that when we read her we consume a part of her psyche.”

— *Fiona Sampson*

“In Derieva’s poems soul depth is united with a supreme lack of sentimentality, solid awareness of tradition with an equally desperate sobriety.”

— *Aris Fioretos*

“Intimate variety. Regina Derieva is remarkable for the range of voices she deploys.”

— *Les Murray*



REGINA DERIEVA (1949–2013) was a Russian poet, writer and translator who published around thirty books of poetry, essays, and prose. From July 1999 until her death, she lived in Sweden.

Her work has been translated into many languages, including Swedish, French, Arabic, Spanish, Chinese, Polish, and other languages. Regina Derieva’s books in English translation are *Inland Sea and Other Poems*, *In Commemoration of Monuments*, *Instructions for Silence*, *Alien Matter*, *The Sum Total of Violations*, *Corinthian Copper* and *Earthly Lexicon*. Her papers are at

Stanford University. Between 2002 and 2007 Regina visited the Northeastern United States (mainly Massachusetts and Connecticut) a number of times and in 2003 she and Frederick Smock presented a joint reading of their poems in New York City.

FREDERICK SMOCK was Kentucky’s 2017/18 Poet Laureate. He is a Professor of English at Bellarmine University in Louisville where he received the 2005 Wyatt Faculty Award. The founding editor of the international literary journal *The American Voice*, he is the author of a dozen collections of poetry and literary essays including his *The Bounteous World* and *On Poetry: Palm-of-the-Hand Essays*. His work has appeared widely in US and international journals, and his prizes include the 2002 Henry Leadingham Poetry Prize, the 2003 Jim Wayne Miller Prize for Poetry, and the 2008 Kentucky Literary Award for Poetry.



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