

Philip Brady

*An Introduction to Torild Wardenær's "The Drift of Days and Nights"*

*I FIRST MET* Torild Wardenær at Fundacion Valparaiso, a writers and artists colony on the coast of Andalusia in Spain. In fact, it was there in that brilliant swath of desert between the Mediterranean and the white cliffs of the town of Mojacar that Torild composed "The Drift of Days and Nights," which Artful Dodge now has the privilege to offer to American readers. Though she and I spent a few languorous afternoons transposing her Norwegian into English, it wasn't until a year later, when Torild sent me John Irons' translations, that I saw laid out before me a landscape as magical as the Andalusian desert where these poems were conceived.

But the landscape of "The Drift of Days and Nights" is not one a tourist of Spain or Norway would recognize. Nor is it solely an internal landscape, a map of the mind at play, though it is that too. These poems instead explore the space where the sublunary and eternal touch. That sounds like rarefied air, but here it's a recognizable, even intimate space, teeming with the quotidian and the cosmic: fennel, car mirrors and nebula. It is a stratum created from the aura of named things; no, not the aura; the fever, a vitality threatening to implode. Whether Wardenær describes traffic in a city tunnel, or the contents of her refrigerator, or "toes that feel squeezed even in the best shoes," always these poems spiral out from a force inside the enclosed space.

Their power derives not only from the plenitude of things seen and named, but from the reassertment of the great and small; the world shaken and reassembled slightly off the mark so that we almost see the fault lines. "All of it," Wardenær reminds us, is "caused by a friction, a movement which I begin." But friction here does not sand the world down to the merely ironic; we are not asked to choose between alternative realities. Rather, "The Drift of Days and Nights" is just that; a permeation, a drift, a fabric made from striations of light and dark.

Much has been made of the question of form in prose poems; whether such a thing isn't an oxymoron. These prose poems address that question; not directly; these are not reflexive or rhetorical pieces. But they address the question by revealing one source of poetic form: the need to make something that feels as liberating and as pressured as the life of a human form. With relaxed speed, in a voice that shifts from comic to elegiac, Wardenær shows us that poetry is never a matter of scale, that its gift is to make us see Blake's "eternity in a grain of sand, infinity in an hour." Ultimately, the form of these poems derives from the tension they maintain; gracefully, elegantly; between poetry and prose, day and night, air and space, identity and anonymity, life and death. This is their form-though not perhaps immediately apprehended. It is a form that comes to us slowly, by accretion, and it asks more from us than our attention: it asks our participation, asks us to enter the in-betweenness and feel the consequences of "the small movements [we] perform: a rolling of the neck, nails across a slightly shaky surface, the decision to add extra weight to the short day."

This issue of *Artful Dodge* is the first I've had the good fortune to be involved in as Poetry Editor. I'm especially proud to facilitate Torild Wardenær's first appearance in print in the United States-grateful for the chance to revisit and share, in English, in Ohio, the inspiring landscapes of "The Drift of Days and Nights."--*Youngstown, Ohio, December 21, 2000*