

JOHN MATEER

On Translation

Behind the white gables of Perth mosque,
around the corner from the block of flats where she used to live,

she who held my heart in her hands like an injured bird,
whose laugh tinkled like a meditation bell waking me,

down a narrow street of old workers' cottages, in a friend's backyard
a bearded man, whose eyes are Sumerian,

whose deep voice is calm and burning like Zoroastrian fire,
recites a classical Persian poem:

*When I am drunk I wander down the street
unaware that I am passing the house of my beloved.*

Then the poem modernized:

*I'm so drunk when I wander down the street of my beloved
that only when I'm pissing against the wall I realize it's hers.*

O were I drunk enough to lean against my ex-beloved's door
having nothing in mind but the words of an Iranian's poem!