

— Staffan Olofsson, »Consolation and Empathy in the Religious Worldview of Tomas Tranströmer«

— A B S T R A C T —

The poems of the Nobel laureate Tomas Tranströmer has an introspective quality which alternates intangible between things and events from the exterior world and events from man's inner life. He constantly delves on what it means to be a human being in the world of today and regards insight into spiritual aspects of life as a survival strategy for man, on an individual as well as on a collective level, and something that brings true consolation. In the poetical world of Tranströmer humans are not only rational and social beings but also spiritual and existential beings, and without the latter no authentic life exists. The emphasis in my presentation is on the performative force of Tranströmer's poems for creating consolation and empathy, and the depiction of the religious worldview, conveyed by his poems. I have used the theory of the structuralist semiotician Michael Riffaterre as my main theoretical perspective complemented by the »I and it-relationship« and »I and you-relationship« outlined by the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. I have concretized my study by interpretations of selected poems. The most innovative part of my presentation is a novel interpretation of the poem *Romanesque Arches* based on the presuppositions given above.

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— Keywords: Tranströmer, Riffaterre, Buber, poetry, religious worldview, Jewish mysticism, Romanesque Arches

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■—CONSOLATION AND EMPATHY IN THE
RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW OF TOMAS TRANSTRÖMER

■—INTRODUCTION—■

The purpose of my article is as the title suggests studying Tomas Tranströmer's world of poetry based on the theme consolation and empathy, a theme that I will argue is grounded in his religious view of the world. Although the poems were originally written in Swedish, the respected American poets, Robin Fulton, and Robert Bly made the translations of the poems for English-speaking countries in close contact with Tranströmer himself. Therefore I have chosen to use these translations into English as my point of departure. The use of well-established translations facilitates the interpretation of the poems in my article, since it is written in English.

I have employed the theory of the structuralist semiotician Michael Riffaterre as a main theoretical perspective in my study. For methodological considerations the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber has provided me with relevant tools.

The structure of my presentation is as follows. First, I will outline the theory of Michael Riffaterre and its bearing on the study of Tranströmer's poetry, then elucidate the relevance of Martin Buber's main perspective »I and it-relationship« and »I and you-relationship« for my interpretation, I will go on to specify the performative force of Tranströmer's poems for creating consolation and empathy, and depict the kind of religious worldview which is conveyed by his poems. Further on I will concretize my study by interpretations of selected poems which highlight Tranströmer's religious world view and the performative force of his poems as well as show the relevance of using Buber's philosophy as a methodological tool. The most important part of my study is a novel interpretation of the poem *Romanesque Arches* based on the presuppositions given above.

—MICHAEL RIFFATERRE'S SEMIOTIC THEORY

Riffaterre regarded poetry as a special kind of language use, where the message is an end in itself. In his view the poem does not attempt to refer to reality, but rather to establish a coherent system of significance. In contrast to prose a poetic text must primarily be analyzed with regard to the relationships that

develop between the words along the so-called syntagmatic axis.¹ Another way to express this is that Riffaterre's theory makes a distinction between two levels or aspects of the poem from the point of view of reading. The mimetic level provides information and references to reality in a gradual way, and often gives the impression of diversity; indeed, the poem may even seem disconnected. However, on the deeper level, the semiotic level, which emerges only after a repeated reading, when one understands the text as a whole, the poem can be apprehended as both cohesive and coherent.² On the mimetic level Riffaterre speaks about »meaning«, and on the semiotic level of »significance«.³

The term ungrammaticalities relates to the disturbances and deviations that are caused by the matrix on the mimetic level of the poem, and that makes it defective as description of reality.⁴ The ungrammaticalities become trails that lead the reading from the mimetic level to the semiotic level, that is, to the underlying significance.

Hypogram is one of the most important concepts for Riffaterre. It is an extended notion of intertextuality, which includes as diverse material as other literary texts, clichés and conceptual worlds in its entirety. The hypogram is central for a semiotic reading, because it puts the text in a different context than the mimetic reading, and thus transforms the ungrammaticalities or idiosyncrasies into something that unlocks rather than locks the poem in question.⁵

This theory is an often used instrument for studying modern poetry, and is especially suited for exploring the kind of poetry that makes a distinction between two levels or aspects of the poem from the point of view of reading, a surface level as well as a deeper level, as so-called semiotic level. For example, Sverker Göransson and Erik Mesterton employ Riffaterre as main theoretical working tool in their study of poems written by poets as Edith Södergran, Gunnar Björling, Gunnar Ekelöf, Erik Lindegren, Tomas Tranströmer, T.S. Eliot and Karin Boye. Ingemar Friberg has, to take a more recent example analyzed the poetry of Göran Sonnevi based on Riffaterre's theory.⁶

—THE »I AND YOU-RELATIONSHIP« AS INTERPRETATIVE KEY—

In my view a relevant perspective is to understand the significance of Tranströmer's poems with reference to Martin Buber's discussion of two kinds of perspectives in the world, the »I and you-relationship« and the »I and it-relationship«.⁷ Philosophically, these word pairs express complex ideas about modes of being – particularly how a person exists and actualizes that existence. As Buber argues in his famous book *I and Thou*, a person is at all times engaged with the world in one of these modes. This is a hypogram in the Riffaterreian sense of the

word. The »I and it-relationship« have an instrumental character, while the »I and you-relationship« is dialectical, with two subjects meeting each other. The »I and you-relationship« may take place in three different dimensions, in relation to nature, man's social world and in relation to the holy or God.⁸ It can be described as a concrete encounter, »because these beings meet one another in their authentic existence, without any qualification or objectification of one another«.⁹ However, one of the two in the encounter may be unaware of the established relationship as Buber puts it, »Even if the man to whom I say Thou is not aware of it in the midst of his experience, yet relation may exist. For Thou is more than It realizes. No deception penetrates here; here is the cradle of Real Life.«¹⁰ These three dimensions occur everywhere in Tranströmer's poems and one essential significance of the poems are the establishment of an »I and you-relationship« between these dimensions.

Furthermore, any of these dimensions can, according to Buber, be the starting-point for a deeper understanding of oneself, to shape a more authentic life, which for Buber was signified by a transition from the »I and it-relationship« to the »I and you-relationship«. Read in this perspective the poems try to establish a way to see the nature, the world, and the holy as a direct relation between two subjects and thereby create authentic meetings.¹¹

— THE PERFORMATIVE POWER OF TRANSTRÖMER'S POEMS —————

It is not only in the poems, but also in the language itself that Tranströmer tries to evade an instrumental relation; the words are for him not objects, they are not instrumental, but are creative; they are doorways for meetings with an inner self. In order to be able to mediate consolation and empathy the poems ought to have not primarily an informative function, but rather a performative power. They may shape moments of insight that sees the world as a unity and overcomes the contradictions in world for the reader, trying to establish a more authentic inner life.¹² A way to do so is to shape points of contact between nature, the social world and the holy and that is one way to read the poems of Tranströmer.¹³ As Robin Robertson says:

— But the realities of the world we live in are never far away,
and the poems do move with evident conscience, even when
the subject matter isn't obviously political in nature.¹⁴

Whiting argues that Tranströmer's poems themselves can be agents of change in peoples' life, and that poetry can open a breach in the wall of conventional thinking and seeing people have, and even create a meeting with subconscious parts of the human mind,¹⁵ and thereby give them consolation and empathy.

One reason for the choice of Tomas Tranströmer in this study is that his poetry is well known. His poems have been translated into more than 50 languages and as a Nobel laureate his work has been widely spread both in Sweden and abroad. Already with the publication of his first book of poetry, simply titled *17 Poems*, in 1954, at the age of twenty-three, Tranströmer became a respected poet in our country, and still is.¹⁶ The landscape that Tranströmer's poetry depicts has remained more or less constant during more than 50 years under which he has written poetry.

Tranströmer's poems can thus be described as »meeting places« where an individual can encounter what in lack of an exact counterpart can be described as his inner life. Although his perspective is intensely personal, it is based on a universality that sees the poet go up and down through his own psyche before moving outside of himself to others in the world. There is an obvious appreciation of the mystical in his poetry but the metaphors are based on concrete observations from the nature, or the material world in which we live. Thus the forests, the birds, but also the telephone, the newspaper, the subway, are important building bricks in his poetical world. His translator, the famous poet Robert Bly, writes about him: »He has a strange genius for the image – images come up almost effortlessly. The images flow upward like water rising in some lonely place, in the swamps, or deep fir woods«. ¹⁷ However, this external mimesis should not be mixed up with the significance of the poems.

Tranströmer's poetry has the ability to travel to another culture and actually arrive there,¹⁸ not least because he communicates primarily through concrete images. Perhaps that is one of the reasons for him being translated into so many different languages. Everyday objects are transformed: a newspaper, with its pages spread open for reading at the breakfast table, is described as a big, dirty butterfly (»Portrait with Commentary«). Tranströmer himself spoke about »this attachment I have to a very concrete milieu [...] my poems always have a definite geographical starting point«. ¹⁹ As Robin Robertson writes: »The jagged coastland of Sweden, with its dark spruce and pine forests, sudden light and sudden storm, restless seas and endless winters, is mirrored by his direct, plain-speaking style and arresting, unforgettable images«. ²⁰ However, the metaphors, not least from the natural world of Sweden, at the same time provides glimpses of an unseen world that helps man and gives him consolation and assists him in finding his authentic self.

—TRANSTRÖMER AND A RELIGIOUS
WORLDVIEW—

Tranströmer's poems have been discussed from many different perspectives. Much has been said about his technical and linguistic brilliance, but a little less about his religious worldview.²¹ Although his poems are mimetically related to the external world, that is, abound with concrete descriptions of nature, of the social world of man, and so on, the significance of his works of art, the deeper meaning, is always linked with the inner world of man, often in a way that feels 'religious', or 'mystical'. However, when directly asked about religion in interviews, Tranströmer is evasive, generally giving responses such as this:

— Very pretentious words, mystic and so forth. Naturally, I feel reserved about their use, but you could at least say that I respond to reality in such a way that I look on existence as a great mystery and at times, at certain moments, this mystery carries a strong charge, so that it does have a religious character, and it is often in such a context that I write. So these poems are all the time pointing to a greater context, one that is incomprehensible to our normal everyday reason.²²

On a deeper level, and sometimes even on surface level of the poem, religious and spiritual motifs and themes are prominent. The appearance of something unknown, which could be described as something holy in his poetry, usually as a referred-to presence, occasionally as a speaking presence as well as an image of moral transformation, is one of the most central motifs in Tranströmer's poetry. It is sometimes called »Memory«, sometimes described as »the Room«.²³

What is fascinating from a religious point of view is that this is a famous intellectual who, living in the more or less secularized society that is modern Sweden, sees and feels the spiritual limitations that such a culture has imposed on him, his neighbours, and the earth.²⁴ Tranströmer reports how difficult it is in such a society to keep in touch with his inner richness. He asks how man's inner richness can survive in a technological society like ours, and a society given to a secular world-view.²⁵ In the final stanza of the poem »April and Silence« he puts forth a notion that what he wants to say is hard to understand in a secular society: »The only thing I want to say gleams out of reach like the silver of the pawnbroker«.²⁶ One possible interpretation is that the silver refers to an spiritual and existential awareness that Tomas Tranströmer has devoted his career to make visible through his poetry, which is not always understood, another that the language is not adequate for expressing the meaning of his poems, since the poems are often a way to translate an experience from an inner, mental language to an

outer language with words. Tranströmer himself argues that the experience is hardly possible to translate into words, as a jellyfish, that loses all its form and beauty when it is taken from the natural element, the water.²⁷

Tranströmer's personal world-view seems to have as its base an undogmatic religious outlook, with many impulses from the Christian tradition. As Jenifer Whiting puts it:

— Tomas Tranströmer is a unique kind of secular poet, who clearly sees himself within the active framework of God's continual creation.²⁸

One may observe religious themes through three recognitions that repeatedly occur in Tranströmer's poetry, which Jenifer Whiting, has interpreted in more or less Christian terms: »the recognition of the holy unseen as magnetic forces drawing human beings toward them, the recognition of the self as God's unfolding creation, and the recognition of others and nature as fellow creation – that is, acts of ongoing creation.«²⁹

Tranströmer's view of life treasures man and his abilities and possibilities but he does not push for the perfect. He accepts man with his faults and weaknesses, realizing that he is one of them. Life is about relations, to others, to himself to the nature, and to the holy, whatever its name. Empathy for all the living and a genuine sympathy for man, whoever he is, and a connection with the divine, pervade the symbolic landscape in Tranströmer's poetry.

There is a profoundly spiritual element in Tranströmer's poems, though not a conventionally religious one. As Robin Robertson puts it, »He is interested in polarities and how we respond, as humans, to finding ourselves at pivotal points, at the fulcrum of a moment.«³⁰ The understanding of the world in the poems has connections with many different religious perspectives, but it is not restricted to any of them, although the Jewish and the Christian traditions seems to be the most important seedbeds for the works by Tranströmer. However, his world-view is hardly a conventional Christian one, and the language is seldom that of the Bible. Apart from references to the Christian tradition, there is probably another dominant religious input. Some of his metaphors may have their seedbed in Jewish mysticism, in Gnostic and Kabbalistic thought. When the individual meets reality he, in correspondence with Kabbalistic thinking, redeems the world, unites dichotomy and shapes harmony. In that respect, the poems are focused on overcoming the conflicts in reality.

— FROM JULY 90 (THE SORROW GONDOLA) —
The establishment of an »I and you-relationship« can be found almost everywhere in Tranströmer's poems. Sometimes the

relationship is brought into being between man and nature, as can be seen in the poem »From July 90«:

— *It was a funeral and I felt the dead man was reading my thoughts better than I could. The organ was silent, the birds sang. The grave out in the sunshine. My friend's voice belonged on the far side of the minutes. I drove home seen-through by the glitter of the summer day by rain and quietness seen-through by the moon.*

Although the poem may have been based on a personal experience at a funeral it has a general significance and it must be read semiotically. The ungrammaticalities of the poem stares in one's eye from the beginning of the poem: »I felt the dead man was reading my thoughts better than I could«, »My friend's voice belonged on the far side of the minutes, seen-through by the glitter of the summer day by rain and quietness seen-through by the moon«. On the level of significance, living men are contrasted to dead people; the dead are the ones who understand and no one is playing the organ, which was what should have been expected at a funeral, instead the birds are singing. The grave has taken the place of living man, »out in the sunshine«, and not even time is on the side of man: »My friend's voice belonged on the far side of the minutes«. Thus, in the beginning of the poem dead people and nature are compared with the living men and the comparison is to man's disadvantage. They are easily replaced. It is not always man who sees through nature, but nature that sees through man. However, the poet feels that being unveiled by the dead and by nature is a positive experience. It is »the glitter of the summer day«, »rain and quietness«, it is »the moon« that sees through him. Thus, in the eyes of the lyrical subject it is nature that establishes the »I and you-relationship«. Nature is the subject of the act to see through him. This gives the end of the poem a positive note. Thus when the lyrical subject is being unveiled by nature, he feels accepted, being part of the creation. Thus, the poem breathes calmness and acceptance. The funeral is not upsetting it is revealing, it leads to an authentic emotional understanding of life. A meeting takes place, which transforms man's perspective of reality.

The hypogram that unlocks the poem is the creation of an »I and you-relationship« between the lyrical subject and the dead, the grave and the nature and a reversal of the preconceived notion regarding life that living men have the upper hand in relation to nature, an understanding that makes the lyrical subject calm and happy.

— FROM THE WINTER OF 1947
(TRUTHBARRIERS)

The metaphor of the awakening occurs in Tranströmer's poems,

and is a central thought in his entire production.³¹ A significant idea in the poet's works is that man has no clear view of reality, and the awakening is associated with that conception. It represents the first step in the process of initiation into a new consciousness, as in Gnostic thought where man often is described as a sleepwalker who needs to wake up.³² In fact, already in his first poem, »Awakening is a parachute jump from dreams«,³³ he employs this metaphor, which as usual in Tranströmer's poems may have a double reference.

In the poem »From the winter of 1947« Tranströmer writes:

— *Days at school, that muffled thronging fortress. At dusk I walked home under the shop signs. Then the whispering without lips: »Wake up, sleepwalker!« And every object pointed to The Room.*³⁴

The ungrammaticalities of the poem becomes evident, if not before, by the expressions »the whispering without lips«, »Wake up, sleepwalker!«, and »every object pointed to The Room«. The call to wake up, and thus the direct appeal to the lyrical subject, creates an authentic meeting, an »I and you-relationship«, which comes unexpectedly between the lyrical subject and the one who whispers. Furthermore, the impersonal days at school and the anonymous shop signs have suddenly turned into objects that pointed towards a room of freedom. The new view of things is experienced in the middle of the gloomy reality, and it comes from outside, by another person's voice.³⁵

Tranströmer's use of the image of the school as a »muffled thronging fortress« echoes a view of the world as a prison or a labyrinth in Gnostic thinking. Thus the exhortation »Wake up sleepwalkers« fits perfectly the view of man as captive, as sleeping.³⁶ But »the Room« is a place where man wakes up. The Room is a metaphor for the true being. To enter the room of true being is the goal in much of Tranströmer's poetry, but the premise for being able to arrive in the Room is the awakening, an illuminative vision where people can be themselves without pretense or deception.³⁷ Thus, there is hope and comfort to be found in the middle of life, one may see all things pointing towards a possible existence of freedom.

— ROMANESQUE ARCHES (FOR THE LIVING AND THE DEAD) —

A treasured poem that especially emphasizes consolation and empathy is *Romanesque Arches*, which I will try to give an interpretation of my own, with the contrast between an »I and it-relationship« and an »I and you-relationship« as the main interpretative tool.

— *Inside the huge romanesque church the tourists jostled
in the half darkness.
Vault gaped behind vault, no complete view.
A few candle-flames flickered.
An angel with no face embraced me
and whispered through my whole body:
»Don't be ashamed of being human, be proud!
Inside you vault opens behind vault endlessly.
You will never be complete, that's how it's meant to be.«
Blind with tears
I was pushed out on the sun-seething piazza
together with Mr. and Mrs. Jones, Mr. Tanaka and
Signora Sabatini
and inside them all vault opened behind vault endlessly.*

The external mimesis of the poem is the description of an occurrence that, if we choose to read biographically, can be exactly dated. The background of »Romanesque Arches« was an experience that Tranströmer had in San Marco Cathedral in Venice when he visited the church with his wife Monica after he received the Petrarca prize in 1981. The occasion for the church visit was thus one of elevation and fame for Tranströmer, which may have tempted him to regard himself as something special. In a conversation with his biographer Staffan Bergsten, he confirmed that what he experienced was portrayed in the poem.³⁸ The poem, however, was published many years later and it is mediated through reflections during several years. The »me« in the poem thus always refers to the lyrical subject, and not the poet, and the poem is interpreted only as a textual entity not as a reflection of an historical event. This is further emphasized by the fact that the mimetic reference of the poem collapses when the angel without face emerges, whispering consoling words. Then a semiotic reading is necessary, bringing forth the hypogram and thus also the significance of the poem.

Buber's paradigm with its »I and you-relationship« and »I and it-relationship« is the hypogram, the basic hermeneutic key, in my interpretation, and I interpret the significance of the conventional metaphors as a part of the non-mimetic context. The hypogram is emphasized by the repetition of the figure »vault behind vault« endlessly, which may suggest infinite possibilities, in the sense that man in himself is a universe, but more in line with Tranströmer's way of thinking is to regard it as infinite depths. These conventional metaphors can be seen as contrasting pairs, darkness in contrast to light, restriction and un-order to openness and order, inside to outside, public to private, collective to individual, active in contrast to passive.³⁹ Although the poem can be structured in different ways it has main directions of motion; it goes from the church

building to the piazza, from the lyrical subject alone to other individuals.

Even though the use of an explicit individual lyrical subject »me« is not so prominent in Tranströmer's poetry,⁴⁰ it makes its appearance explicit in this poem after a transition from a collective lyrical subject in the beginning of the poem »the tourists«.⁴¹ The poem is, contrary to many other poems, resonant with subtle nuances in the wording that guides the interpreter. He has a handrail in the dark.

The poem starts with an anonymous »I and it-relation«, with a collective body of people »the tourists«, which the lyrical subject was not any part of. They are »the other«. The tourists are in a »huge romanesque church«,⁴² and they »jostled«, and it was hardly any light, »half darkness«. The interior is negative »Vault *gaped* behind vault«, and there was »no complete view«. Thus, although the church is huge, the tourists »jostled«, it is dark and the interior is hard to see. The possibility for an »I and you-relation«, was thus non-existent.

Then comes perhaps a transition with a different kind of metaphor with a positive touch, »A few candle-flames flickered«. However, the definite change in mood occurs with the positive words »angel« (or »messenger«), »who embraced me« and »whispered«: »Don't be ashamed of being human, be proud!«. This entails communication and physical contact,⁴³ and it suggests an epiphanic moment, a revelation. The word »whispered« implies that the communication was not frightening, »through my whole body«, that it has a strong effect on the lyrical subject; it affects him as a whole. That »an angel with no face« gives the message may denote that anyone can bring the good news to the lyrical subject and it is done in a crowded place, with people he was not acquainted with, anonymous people. Staffan Bergsten suggests a more overt religious interpretation, the possibility that »angel with no face« associates to God in Old Testament, who has withheld his *panim* »face« or »identity« from man,⁴⁴ or »angel« refers to a God-sent messenger, with reference to the etymological meaning of the term.

The meeting is, as usual in Tranströmer's poetry, abrupt, unexpected.⁴⁵ The lyrical subject is surprised and passive; the activity comes from what is described as »an angel with no face«. ⁴⁶ Interpreted in relation to my main interpretative key, the »I and it-relationship« and »I and you-relationship«, the lyrical subject has yet not reached a full »I and you-relationship« because the messenger has no »face«, which relates to his lack of identity.⁴⁷ Although the angel has personal contact with the subject, »embrace«, »whisper«, he is not completely in a »you« relation to him.

Now the lyrical subject sees that in himself »vault *opens* behind vault *endlessly*«. Thus the unstructured view of the vaults is changing, they are now something that imply endless-

ness.⁴⁸ Thus, the negative »no complete view« stands as a contrast to »endlessly«. The soul of the lyrical subject »Inside you« is turned into a church that is characterized by openness and infinity. However, that which is incomplete, that is not perfect, is not only accepted, it is »how it's meant to be«. To be a human is to be less than complete, and at the same time man is carrier of the infinite.⁴⁹ This middle part of the poem entails the conversion, the change of meaning,⁵⁰ a change from outside to inside. »Conversion transforms the constituents of the matrix sentence by modifying them all with the same factor«.⁵¹

The lyrical subject was pushed out »together with« the tourists. This was not described as an active choice. He did not actively search them up, because he did not know them. Outside forces accomplished a sense of »we«, »together with«. The lyrical subject first looked at them from outside as an anonymous mass, »tourists«, now they became as real as he himself. They have names and thus become individual persons in the poem, »Mr. and Mrs. Jones, Mr. Tanaka and Signora Sabatini« and he is one of them, and he establishes an »I and you-relationship« with them.

Another step is taken when the insight of the lyrical subject is applied to these persons »inside them all vault opened behind vault endlessly«. That the lyrical subject is on the same level as the other tourists in this regard is an insight that met him outside the church, outside the official meeting place with the divine, »on the sun-seething piazza«. However, these people were already with him in the church, but he had not seen them; they were just »tourists«. But now they are, so to speak, meeting-points with the holy, when the lyrical subject is able to see them as individual persons. Thus, the church as a building is changed into a metaphor for humans as churches/temples, associating to e.g. »For we are the temple of the living God« (2 Cor 6:16).⁵² Another way to put it is that there is a dislocation from the public to the private, and the full extent of the insight is only found in the private and in the meeting with individual persons.

Thus the transformation of the »I and it-relation« to an »I and you-relation« is completed outside the romanesque church when the insight is applied to other people individually, not collectively, as for example, »tourists«. On the other hand they are not individuals, but persons,⁵³ who have their origins from different cultures, »Jones«, »Tanaka«, »Sabatini«. The change of perspective to other people in the poem occurs in »the sun-seething piazza«. Furthermore, the strong light »sun« is not within the »huge romanesque church«, but outside. The poem thus starts with negative visual metaphors, with »half darkness«, »no complete view«, makes a transition to »a few candle-flames flickered« and concludes with »the sun-seething piazza«. This light metaphor implies a development in understanding, a development in insight.

Even if the revelation for the individual lyrical subject was within the church, the complete insight is found outside the church, in meeting with the people *from inside the church* on the »the sun-seething piazza«. If this is read in harmony with Tranströmer's poem »The Dispersed Congregation« it could suggest a critical view of the official church and an emphasis on the persons, as »the church«, regardless if they are inside the church building or not.

The new way of seeing also includes the main metaphor itself, the vault. In the »half darkness« the vaults were perceived negatively »Vault *gaped* behind vault, *no* complete view«, but afterwards they are regarded as something positive »and inside them all vault *opened* behind vault *endlessly*«. Thus, although the vaults in the church that was the building blocks of the metaphor are the same, they are perceived differently, they are now »open« and they are »endless«. ⁵⁴

The place metaphors that refer to the inside and the outside are employed in a subtle way. The inside of the church »vaults« is re-created into the inside of the lyrical subject, and this perspective is applied outside the church to the inside of people that went outside the church. After the revelation, the lyrical subject leaves the church in tears because he can feel deep affinity with the other people, sensing their hidden spirituality.

There are two different perspectives here. One is the emphasis on that the people who was recognized was already with him in the church, but he did not see them as individual persons at first, because he had an »I and-it relation« to them, another that the experience of the lyrical subject in the church is, although his own, an experience with wide ramifications »being human«, »[y]ou will never be complete, that's how it's meant to be«. It is not individual in a restricted sense; it is rather something that applies to humans generally. Furthermore, what are emphasized are not only man's capabilities, but man's imperfection presented as good news »Don't be ashamed of being human, be proud« and »You will never be complete, that's how it's meant to be«.

The significance of the poem expresses a humanistic view of man. It refers to an existential call to become a true human being, or rather the discernment what man already is. Man with his frailty is after this insight regarded as something that is meant to be, and at the same time a meeting-place for the divine. It has positive implications; man, with his flaws, is created with an infinite potential, in Christian terminology, he reflects the image and likeness of God.

It is as usual in Tranströmer's poetry no clear-cut distinctions between the metaphors and the applications. The transformation is on both sides, in the words of Birgitta Steene, »this rapprochement of the poet to the outside world leads to

a mutual transformation, so that, neither reality nor vision remains the same. Reality confronts vision, and vision absorbs reality, but the result is that a new world is born«. ⁵⁵ it is a world where nothing is treated only as an object.

— This is a poem that really breathes humanism, consolation and empathy and at the same time clearly reveals the religious worldview of Tomas Tranströmer.

— With reference to Tranströmer's choosy style I will conclude with the words of Niklas Schiöler: »Seldom have so many had so few words to thank for so much meaning«. ⁵⁶

■ ENDNOTES

1 See e.g. Johanne Prud'homme, Nelson Guilbert (2006), »Poetic Language«, in Louis Hébert (dir.), *Signo* [online], Rimouski (Quebec), <http://www.signosemio.com/jakobson/functions-of-language.asp>. (access 201501)

2 Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington, 1978), 6f.

3 Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, 2f.

4 Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, 2–7. The ungrammaticality encompasses »displacement«, »distortion«, and »creation«.

5 Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, 39–46.

6 Sverker Göransson, Erik Mesterton, *Den orörliga lågan: analyser av femton 1900-talsdikter* (Göteborg, 1991). See also Ingemar Friberg, *Puls: om relationen i Göran Sonnevis tidiga poesi* (Skellefteå, 2013), 27–42.

7 This understanding is novel and not mentioned in the secondary literature on Tranströmer, although Tranströmer himself at least once mentions poetry's capacity to create Martin Buber's »I and you-relationship«. See Leif Sjöberg, *The American Swedish Monthly* 59 (1965:5), 57. I have been inspired by Friberg's use of Buber in his analysis of the poems of Göran Sonnevi in Friberg, *Puls*. See especially idem, 44–86.

8 See e.g. Fridberg, *Puls*, 30.

9 Duco A. Schreuder, *Vision and Visual Perception: The Conscious Base of Seeing*, (Bloomington, 2014), 93.

10 Buber, *I and Thou*. Translated by Ronald Gregor Smith (New York, 1958), 9.

11 See e.g. Tranströmer's own affirmation in Kjell Espmark, *Resans former* (Stockholm, 1983), 90 n. 74–75.

12 Friberg, *Puls*, 27–42. See e.g. Rönnerstrand, »Ord som simmat«, 159.

13 Friberg, *Puls*, 12.

14 Robin Robertson, »The sound says that freedom exists«.

(<http://aburningpatience.blogspot.se/2011/10/sound-says-that-freedom-exists.html> , access, 201501)

15 See e.g. Jenifer Whiting, »The Recognition of Faith in the Poetry of Tomas Tranströmer«, *Logos* 7:4 (2004), 69–70, 73.

16 The English translations of the poems are from Tranströmer's official translators, Robin Fulton and Robert Bly.

17 From the preface to an English edition *Twenty Poems Translated by Robert Bly* (Madison, MN, 1970). See also the review by Robert Bly, »Tomas Tranströmer and 'The Memory'«, in *World Literature Today* 64:4 (1990), 570.

18 Bly, »The Memory«, 570.

19 Tomas Tranströmer, *Selected Poems*, translated by Robin Fulton (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1981), 155.

20 *The Guardian*, Saturday 28.10 2006.

(<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/oct/28/featuresreviews.guardianreview31>, access 201501).

21 Bo Gustavsson, »Tre nycklar till Tranströmers poetiska kod«, *SvD* 22.11 2006.

22 Tomas Tranströmer, *The Great Enigma: New Collected Poems* translated by Robin Fulton (New York, 2011), XIV; Tomas Tranströmer, *Selected Poems*, 156.

23 See e.g. Gustavsson, »Tre nycklar«.

24 Whiting, »The Recognition of Faith«, 65–79.

25 Bly, »Memory«, 571.

26 See e.g. Tranströmer's discussion of language in Torsten Rönnerstrand, »Ord som simmat genom många texter – om språkuppfattningen hos Tomas Tranströmer«, *Språk och fiktion*, Moira Linnarud, Torsten Rönnerstrand, Yvonne Leffler, Reinert Kvillerud (eds.) (Utvecklingsrapport / Högskolan i Karlstad 95:2, 1995), 139–147. He discusses the inner language on pp. 143–145.

27 Tomas Tranströmer, *Dikter och prosa 1954–2004* (Stockholm, 2011), 235. See also Rönnerstrand, »Ord som simmat«, 139–147.

28 Whiting, »The Recognition of Faith«, 78. See also Michael C. Jordan, »Preface«, *Logos* 7:4 (2004), 12.

29 Whiting, »The Recognition of Faith«, 66.

30 Robin Robertson, »The Double World of Tomas Tranströmer«, *The New York Review of Books*, Blog, October 14, 2011, 9:25 a.m.

31 Gustavsson, »Tre nycklar«. See further Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (New York, 1996).

32 Gustavsson, »Tre nycklar«.

33 Tranströmer, *17 poems*, from *The Great Enigma*.

34 Tranströmer, *The Great Enigma*, 147.

35 According to Buber, the »I and you-relation« can only be instantaneous, it can never be a permanent possession. Thus, the »I and you-relation« in time always turns into an »I and

it-relation«. See e.g. Friberg, *Puls*, 48. Furthermore, the meeting comes from the outside of the lyrical subject, never from inside, the meeting is a response, which can be reflected in poetry as well as in art. See e.g. Friberg, *Puls*, 46–51.

36 Gustavsson, »Tre nycklar«.

37 Gustavsson, »Tre nycklar«.

38 Bergsten, *Ett diktarporträtt*, 186–190; Bo Gustavsson, »Tranströmer och V-effekten«, *Kulturen* 5.12 2011.

39 För en tolkning som avviker från författarens, se t ex Gustavsson, »Tranströmer och V-effekten«.

40 Magdalena Slyk, »VEM är jag?«: *Det lyriska subjektet och dess förklädnader i Tomas Tranströmers författarskap* (Avhandling Uppsala universitet, 2010), 88. For strategies concerning the lyrical subject, see idem, 88–131.

41 Slyk, *Vem är jag*, 139.

42 The italics in the poem are from the author.

43 The physical contact is often a sign of the true meeting »embraced me«, and is often part of the »I and you-relation« (Friberg, *Puls*, 55–56).

44 There are some possible allusions from the Old Testament to this meeting, e.g. Gen 32:24–32, with its mysterious depiction of God's blessing and the identity of Jacob (the people of Israel), who got the name Israel, because it is said »you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed«, but he has a defect »limping because of his hip« (New Revised Standard Version). Cf. also Hos 12:3–4, where God is identified as an angel, »in his manhood he strove with God. He strove with the angel and prevailed« (New Revised Standard Version). This is in harmony with Buber's use of face, as a description of God's identity, especially in the Old Testament, according to Friberg, *Puls*, 46 n. 23.

45 The meetings that constitute the »I and you-relationship« are always abrupt, they are only experienced at a glimpse and can never be the lyrical subject's permanent possession. Friberg, *Puls*, 48–49, 73.

46 See Ylva Eggehorn, »Tilltal, inte spegel – tiden och jaget i Tomas Tranströmers lyrik«, *Tomas Tranströmer. Poesifestivalen i Nässjö 1997*, 17.

47 See e.g. Friberg, *Puls*, 46 and n. 23.

48 It is when the dichotomy between the external reality »vault« and the inner reality »vault« is overcome that an authentic meeting is possible. See e.g. a similar analysis by Friberg of Sonnevi's collection of poems in *Utfört*: »Dikten dokumenterar ett förlopp som inrymmer övergångar mellan ett inre och yttre rum. Relationen till duet beseglas slutgiltigt via den taktila kontakten ... Dikten, den mystiska processen, kulminerar när dikotomin mellan det inre och det yttre slutgiltigt upphör och verklig närvaro upprättas: Närvaro upprättas.« (The poem documents a process that entails transitions

between inner and outer spaces. The relationship with the you is sealed definitively through the tactile contact ... The poem, this mysterious process, culminates when the dichotomy between the inner and outer finally comes to an end and true presence is established). Friberg, *Puls*, 63.

49 Although I agree with some of Bergsten's interpretations, I am far from convinced that the angel's message »går stick i stäv med Luthers lära om arvssynd och människans grundfördärv« (is at odds with Luther's doctrine of original sin and human depravity). Bergsten, *Ett diktarpporträtt*, 188. On the contrary, there is an awareness and an acceptance of human weakness in the poem »You will never be complete, that's how it's meant to be«; thus it rather confirms Luther's position in this regard.

50 Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, 63ff. See Inger Ring, *Minnet regngardinen genombryter: en studie av Ragnar Thoursies lyrik till och med Emaljögat* (Eslöv, 1997), 57 and n. 21.

51 Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, 63.

52 See further, Rom 12:1 (New Revised Standard Version); 1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19.

53 According to Buber, the authentic meeting can only occur between people as persons, not as individuals. See Buber, *I and Thou*, 69 and Fridberg, *Puls*, 30.

54 The word »complete« in the poem is ambiguous, not because it is used in the description of the vaults in the church »no complete view«, but not for the vaults inside man »Inside you vault opens behind vault endlessly«, which is in line with my understanding, but because the same word »You will never be complete« is also applied in a positive way to the lyrical subject by the angel. It does not have to be a contradiction here. I interpret the first as the capabilities of man, which can be regarded as infinite, but the second refers to the moral aspects, the insight that man is never perfect, which Tranströmer regards as something good; he never has to pretend that he is, a pretention that could be regarded as a prime obstacle against achieving an authentic self.

55 Birgitta Steene, »Vision and Reality in the Poetry of Tomas Tranströmer«, *Scandinavian Studies* 37:3 (1965), 241.

56 »Sällan har så många haft så få ord att tacka för så mycket mening«. Niklas Schiöler, *Ledstången i mörkret: texter om Tomas Tranströmer* (Stockholm, 2011), 28.