

A VOYAGE FROM STOCKHOLM
TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF LOWER PRICES
ON THE FINNISH ISLAND OF ÅLAND

Out through the frosty archipelago
card-players, morning beer-drinkers,
parsimonious housewives
and Nick Carter readers:

the derelict bum
seems to have a universe
of oddities folded, wrapped, stashed
in his filthy bag:
his tireless attention
to a thousand scraps of paper.

Someone hums a love song
while the others sleep.
No matter how far he might travel
his secret story is written somewhere,
in the generous air, in the distance.

A little patch of sky between suburbs,
about the size of a football field,
or maybe it's a dusty parkinglot,
sees him waving, and is reminded of;—
and in the distance the distance . . .

This poem has never left me alone: Jim's oddball ferry of oddballs out on a crossing on the Baltic Sea, each packing some small mystery, and in the middle of it all, "the derelict bum." A love song for nobody, a secret story "written somewhere." And how by the final stanza the poem sets about dissolving, only to open out with that marvelously haunted vision of the sublime—