



Andrew McMillan

**ókunna þér runna**

*translated from the Skaldic poet Egill Skallagrímsson*

there are dead in countries  
who will never know how  
little I despised them  
I wanted the penblade  
not the bootsplatter trenchlife  
the night I ran there was  
sky concealing thunder  
a white feather of moon

\*

the words give heavy page  
the words bleed out of me  
bullstrong I like to think  
of guns the sound of rain  
Hemingway's forearm thick  
as tree root men are dead  
who never wondered what  
I thought or why or not

\*

I am deadheavydrunk  
sharpen penblade moonglint  
now think of Hemingway  
swallowing a shotgun  
now think of bulls enraged  
now think of men who can't  
be men without dying  
of rain of Thanes of Harr

This poem happened because of Dr. Debbie Potts who was working on a project called 'Modern Poets on Viking Poetry'; Debbie provided a literal translation, and brief synopsis, of sections of Egill's work to me - I then set about fashioning it into something which I thought could speak to the contemporary time. It's a re-versioning, or re-telling, rather than a strict translation; I was interested in how the ideas of violence and masculinity were still resonant today, and I'd been thinking a lot about our legacy of war, what it does to masculine identity and how writers like Hemmingway might fit into that as well. (A. McM.)

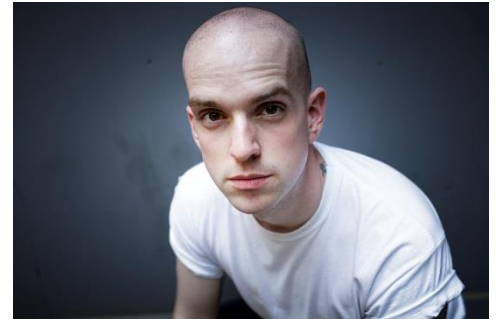


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