**Dominic Symes – ‘Tell me like you mean it’ Reading Transcript**

Hi – my name is Dom Symes – I’m a poet. I’m reading today from a borrowed house in Port Willunga, South Australia which is on the traditional lands of the Kaurna people. In the spirit of emerging writers and emerging writing, I’m going to share a short piece I’ve been working on for about a month which started as a pitch to Australian Poetry Journal’s ‘Modern Elegy’ issue. Thinking about elegies, I began with Rainer Marie Rilke’s ‘First Duino Elegy’ and translated it by using the Auslan Signbank, a website which plays short videos clips demonstrating words used Australian sign language. My translation method is a more or less themed description of the movements of the signer, which I then try to weave a narrative through by placing it in a time and place and enmeshing it within a particular lexicon of language. I don’t like saying what poems are ‘about’, but I guess this poem explores the ineffectual way that cis men try to deal with grief and loss. As a mood board for this poem, I was thinking about a film I had recently watched called, ‘Somersault’ starring Abbie Cornish and Sam Worthington and wanted that cold, regional hinterland to be where the poem took place. The poem starts with a quote from the English translation Rilke’s elegy, then a quote from the movie. The poem finishes with a quote from one of my favourite poems by Frank O’Hara, ‘In Memory of My Feelings.’ The poem is not yet titled, but I’ll just start with the quotes.

***(Untitled)***

Rilke asks: “Should not these ancient sufferings be finally fruitful for us?”

In the film the scene between Joe and Richard goes as follows:

[**Joe**](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0941777/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): You know when you were a kid, did your mum ever used to spray perfume in the air and sort of walk through it?

[**Richard**](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0860997/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): [*nods*]

[**Joe**](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0941777/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): She's like that.

[**Richard**](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0860997/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): Like perfume?

[**Joe**](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0941777/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): No... see, when you leave you still feel her on your skin

as feelings catch you let the kite string run

like fishing line you can’t

mechanical sound concentric circles spinning

year over year

the tears cried a life of their own

and sweeping

leaves you dazed and dizzy

exposed: to have both eyelids

pulled all the way down on you

the gp checks for anaemia

then for tinnitus, the waves

appal your ears while you sleep: water working

up all night

washing its myriad selves away

smoothing down the cow hide

on the jacket’s front

& clearing froth off a top lip

come clapped backs at the first sip

then funnelling through: a belt

snakelike

pulled through eyelets

left on a pile of clothes

come skin against car seat

come rubber against road

come steam rising against glass

commenting on low clouds rolling through

Rilke describes the following as “intimate flight”

though we couldn’t ride with the RFDS we drove all night

in the Pajero without music looking for its tail in the dark

under sagittarius

it is said to hope is to cancel your disappointment

for fog to form then lift

you witness the act of pulling back

& watching how the arrow

splits the core in two

we all go for beers

the same day

a year later

any excuse

to speak your name

the sound of one hand clapping

clasping at a another, mine

moving through the air

trying to recreate the sound

a natural sound

lips moved looking like words

until they were confirmed

breath

stuck like an old man’s arthritic hand

in the morning cold

a finger to your lips

shut like a gate

it’s as simple as outlasting speech

setting it aside like furniture

too heavy to lift alone

though I want the weight of it

to bring it slowly down on my chest

then to puff out

press back against it

I split myself in two:

one to lift and one to spot

stop it now, he said

you’re scaring your mother

& in the shower scrubbing yourself

from yourself, when the adrenaline

recedes like a hairline there’s death

staring at you

a goal umpire

drawing their two fingers down

walking away then circling back

to wave their white flags

like linked script trailing

off of the page like *eternity*

forging your signature

burning rubber circles

mortal coils

onto the empty

roads

those straight lines that invent the landscape

by interlocking it then unlocking it

sorry officer

we’re only letting off

a little steam

or a knife

raised like a heartbeat

appointed to the jugular

coring yourself

to be received in two parts:

like a blanket pulled over a body that isn’t my body

a flag that on being raised is refused by the wind

seeing smoke from a chimney

a signal fire from an empty house

gum leaves

ascending ghostlike

how’d you like

a broken fucken arm?

straight as an arrow

splinted

yet without attachment

to one body or another

these thoughts

I have or haven’t had

my quietness

has a man in it

he is transparent

& he carries me quietly

through the streets

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