

## Trying to Keep Quiet: A Poem Constructed around Fragments of Leslie Norris's "Borders"

*Simon Peter Eggertsen*

*I could give all to Time except—except  
What I myself have held. But why declare  
The things forbidden that while Customs slept  
I have crossed to Safety with? For I am There  
And what I would not part with I have kept.  
—Robert Frost, "I Could Give All to Time"*

*The border I knew best as a child was halfway over  
the swinging bridge in Provo Canyon, between the shade  
of Wildwood and the Sundance road, just opposite  
Dr. Weight's place. Beneath it, white-cold waters from  
the diminishing glacial edges of Mt. Timpanogos fell,  
jumbled along the North Fork, then moved on to mark  
other boundaries further down stream.*

Still do.

I hopped across that bridge at least once most days in summer. Never tried to stop and guess its measure. Never thought about who put it there for us or what we were supposed to learn midstream, midair. Rather, I *lived each crossing in adventurous leap* toward some kind of nervy limbo, rising, as the unsteady bridge pushed back, lofted me up, away, whenever another child jumped on the tread I was walking on—like riding the ruffle in a sheet tossed to fit a bed. I swear I *stood on air then*. Imagined I was taken across borders to parts of the world unknown to me, some other nowhere, seeking things to remember far from that small canyon's walls.

*Where was I then?*

*I was whole there, but felt an unseen line divide me,*  
send my strong half forward, out and away, curious, to  
the twisting brown-cobbled lanes, the spice sense,  
the bui bui-clothed women, the sliding afternoon shadows  
of Gizenga Street in Old Stone Town, Zanzibar, or  
the shredding and crushing, the angry ripping apart,

ten Chinese words for death etched in the night air  
air by arced tracers spat errant about Tiananmen Square,  
or the medieval chalk figures, the peace of green,  
beech-covered hills at Wandlebury near Cambridge.

My other half was held timid, *nearer home, family,*  
delighting at the rapid “pop, pop, pop” of the firecrackers  
we’d buy after we visited the frog pond, or savoring  
a mid-day sun that softened, then melted a drop at a time,  
the five-cent Popsicles we bought from Mrs. Offret at her  
rustic country store on Highway 189, or the moist warmth  
of our breath as we sat close together, three at a time, in  
the caboose of the Little Red Wing Train at Wildwood,  
rueing the day we would grow too big to ride there.

*I have always tried to live this way, crossed borders*  
resolutely, looking back over my shoulder, then forward  
again, nurturing each time two views from the same place,  
all the while trying to keep quiet about the memories I carried

with me as I crossed back to safety, even if someone with  
authority insisted on knowing where I had been, what I  
had brought, even if what I remembered was thought  
to be contraband, something forbidden or something  
entrusted to me that I could not part with.

–Wildwood, July 2011