

Reading A Swedish Poet

LOU LIPSITZ

This man, Werner Aspenstrom, was born
in the country and lived in the big city for years
but was never entirely comfortable anywhere.
That's good. I like that.

He went out into nature, as we call it:
farmlands, thick forests, river valleys where
torrents of snowmelt roar along.
He saw the black butterfly
with orange stripes alight
on a pile of deer droppings.
He noticed the spot of sunshine
that edged its way into a clearing
among great fir trees. Some people
say such encounters help to heal us.
The Swedish poet is not so sure. I like that too.

OK, he says, they help a little.
And a poem can help too, insinuating itself
into our bewildered psyches
like a tiny man on a distant hillside
waving his arms. He wears a bright blue shirt.
Is he signaling us to stop? To come over?

We begin to drive in his direction, but then
we lose sight of him and realize
we don't have time to keep looking.
We have to get back soon. It's
starting to snow. The tunnel's
coming up; the glare of headlights; our
own headlights racing toward us from the future.