On Heroism

Tolstoy’s portrayal of history
was like a dream come true,
no individual in control of what happens,
each man monumentally effaced.

And then there was Mark Strand
telling us in a Hilton bar
that he preferred to make the self happen
“in the language of the poem”
instead of basing it on personal history,
a singular past. We perfectly understood.

We were psalmists at heart,
ready with ornate praise or lamentation,
but we would never look as ridiculous as Napoleon
pacing and waiting
by the Kamerkollezhsy rampart
for a deputation that would never show.

Our poems would be deep water.
Our father would be forgotten.
Our mother and brother too.
Our song was made of a silence only we heard.


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