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(draft translation of)
ALBAN BERG'S LYRICS
DRAWN FROM ALTENBERG'S *PICTURE POSTCARD TEXTS*

1.

Soul, how you get lovelier, deeper, after snowstorms.
That's how you are, just like nature
and over both of you rests a gloomy breath before the clouds clear
away.

2.

Did you see the woods after the rainstorm?
Everything resting and sparkling and more beautiful than before.
Look, woman, you need a rainstorm too!

3.

Beyond the boundaries of the world you looked thoughtfully out;
If you were worried about house and home,
life and dream of life, suddenly that's all gone.
Beyond the boundaries of the world you still looked thoughtfully out!

4.

Nothing has come, nothing will come for my soul.
I have waited, waited, o waited!
The days will slip away, and all in vain my ashblond
silky hair floats around my pale face!

5.

Here is peace. Here I cry myself out about everything.
Here my incomprehensible immeasurable sorrow that scorches my
soul is loosed...
Look, there are no people here, no settlements,
Here is peace. Here the snow falls softly into the puddles.

(15 August 2010)

= = = = =

On a day like this
everyone's an outsider

and joyous, close-textured
poetry is all I trust

Poets! Don't give music
a chance to waffle on—
make it strike.

Keep texture close.

15 August 2010

ADVENTURE

Raid moonlight
shape of friend
you and the light
between.

 Something
knows how to come.

15 August 2010

Poughkeepsie

= = = = =

This is the ultimate and in the sense of a window opening on someone else, as if a traveler had passed seen a lighted window and leaned his loneliness against it for a few minutes without even leaving the road just standing there milking the light for all it's worth in presence and palaver and someone. Someone the traveler has looked for all life long, will never find because he does not tarry. And only being in a place a long long time lets the place come to you and bring its necessary someone in plain moonlight to fill the otherwise empty road with understanding.

15 August 2010

OSSIA

Now we know who we are.
Never say we when I mean you.
Never talk to the mailman
Pony Express rider link-boy
the centurion. Stone
is your skin and bird cries
your complex family tree.
That is our fate. Purgatory:
all grammar and no language.
Life is special effects in a mute world.

Or:

We'll never know and you'll never say we.
We'll eat the birds and break the rocks.
Technology ages us terribly. Every invention
is born obsolete.

Once a thought
becomes a thing
the sparrows they

forget to sing.

By which I mean
the only word you ever really need
is one that many languages make do without.
The idea always finds its thing.

16 August 2010

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What would it mean if I kept
looking at you, trying
to understand you, understand
why I stand there looking at you
and then I said the things that
would let me take you home?
Would you go? What kind
of persuasion would I use?
Always the best: to manifest
in myself a relevant identity.
Something you need
who happens at just this moment
to need you too. Or want.
I need nothing—a seductive stance.
It just so happens that we are sunrises to each other.
We stand and watch the growing light,
the red of morning. Sunset
to each other. You can't bring a sunset home
though I try year after year.
You can't undress a sunset, tug the tight sky
down from her hips, you can't smell the ancient
smell of love between the pillars of heaven,
you can't make love with the sky
whether morning or evening or dark

but I try. I can tell looking in your eyes
that you have tried too.

You know what it means to go home with hope
and pick your clothing later off the floor
and feel not dirty exactly but something lost,
not a vital thing, not your soul or your mainspring,
but one more small part of your fine engine
corroded, the one that loves the world
absolute, and some parts of it relative
from time to time. This could be me.

I watch you do what you're doing, doing
what you do, and everything done
coaxes me further and further away.

We don't want to lose each other
but we only know later, much later,
that we were there to be had. Tonight
we could have been us.

And would that have mattered so much?

Yes. As it matters so much, so terribly
much that we didn't. But still are.

16 August 2010

FATE

To tarry
is to marry.
It matters
early, long
as you go on.
The center
finds you.
To stop
is stone.

16 August 2010

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Clean fresh sweat of the workingman
sour sweat of the scholar
the smell of a poet is in between—
works hard all day long
studying nothing.

17 August 2010

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Are they the same
to be pierced by what I pierce
to pierce what pierces me?

17.VIII.2010

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We have plenty of time for remembering—
but to accumulate
material-important-to-forget
there's no time to lose.

17 August 2010

STRANGE MORNING

It's not quiet enough for me right now
to make any meaningful sound

every perception seems to be an elegy
as if the afternoon were the tomb of morning

vague women walk in the deepening shadows
grieving softly for what they could not name

will not name. We all lose
the same thing and lose it every day.

17 August 2010

INVENIRE

The bridge over the under
is the same as now.
Never the plowman
ever the furrow. These
are drenched with speed.
We don't have to be here.
We chose. Mostly love
led us here but the signed
protocol runs true. Through
Switzerland to Compostella!
A brass let in to the sleek
kind of marble you walk on,
lucky one, down the narrow
Jansenism of the nave.
No man and few women recall
the name of the ship
that brought us here.
But the pale face of the Captain
we see vivid sometimes
in memories, all our dreams.
Memory is commonplace,
invention rare.
Genius (the sly new
word for old alchemy)

turns former to latter.
From lead make gold,
from memory make invention.
Beneath the city's
thrice-used building blocks
use all you've got
to excavate deep, deep and find
the True Cross that heals all ills.

18 August 2010

PIANO

Beyond my element
a scale
formed by the cracks
between the keys

I also was a traveler
the little time left
is always more than need
the face itself is music
all notation strives to draw
for some kind of instrument,
a magic that converts
sight into sound,

even these small
mouse-chittering
broken silences
I make between one
key and the next,
the keys are identical
in their substance,
only far, far away
the differences are made,

sound, resound,
like human figures
far down the beach,
you think they're naked
but that might just be you,
they seem to be playing in the surf.
Or is that just your eyes?

18 August 2010

NIGHT JOURNEY

To be in the night journey
to open a door

such doors open
only in—
who stands there
looking in at you?

journey means
sitting still
one whole day
visitors come
to your house
a mouse in your kitchen
studies a chunk of bacon
be like the mouse
stay where you are
let the journey
carry you,

the visitors walk
in their white shirts
their black pants
around your rooms,

name them as they come
reaching their hands out
to you, who knows
what such things mean,

hands, hands?
coax them to take off
their names
and accept what you
have to give them,

they sit around and study you
like children bored in civics class,
you are their government and rights-of-man.

You are all alone together.
For a while
this is called Accepting
the Roof Over Your Head.

Travelers never.
They belong to the beyond.
A roof is a shallow insult

they endure you endure
their skeptic silences

of glance and look away—
the Guest is God,
you read that in a book
in your last life and now you don't know.

Anybody could be anything.
Even you. Close your eyes.
That means close the door.

18 August 2010

IMPORTS

Things travel so far
they bring their countries with them.

It is the subtlest virus of all,
in plain sight: the shape,
the form of elsewhere.

We live now where everything is *from*
and nothing is here.
Everything is immigrant.

18 August 2010

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I am king of the whole world.

I am the anointed universal monarch,
lord of the earth.

 But I have feeble and deceitful viziers,
seditious harems,
 generals hungry for a coup,
ministers who do not know my royal will
and do not do what I tell them to.

Nevertheless, for all my pilfered treasury,
my ratty infrastructure
jury-rigged by dissidents,
my empty larder, my mildewed archives,
my books in languages I cannot read,

despite the mockery or indifference of my subjects
I am their king, in charge of everything,
it's all my creation. It's all my fault.

18 August 2010

