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## THE BEZEL

The dark that hides inside the dawn  
is precious, precarious. Take it,  
that lump of amber just this side of opaque  
worn smooth by my thumb  
and wear it in the hollow of your throat.  
Method of remembering me.

Help me. I was born  
in an opera, grew up in a book,  
had puberty in Greek,  
turned fat and sad in symphonies  
until one day I was a cathedral  
more Byzantine than Romanesque  
with a weird bell tower made of glass  
and goats are living where there should be bells.

So reading a poem is like walking  
through an unknown house,  
stormy night, power failure,  
every now and then a lightning flash  
shows clear a picture on the wall  
of the one whose house this is,

so love songs end in self-portraiture  
which is only rational, you know who you are  
so the song should explain the I in I love you.

And that's what happened to the pretty  
song about amber and your throat and dawn.

30 July 2002

## WORDS

Corporal. A cloth  
to hide your body in.

Mildew. A honey  
made by time  
coloring the edge  
of things.

Lichen. The corpse  
of color  
sprawled on bedrock.

Weather. I  
am all you ever have  
to call your own.

30 July 2002

## COSMOGAMY

Why is *tin*  
assigned to Jupiter?  
Because in alloy  
it makes copper hard.

The gods are elements,  
do not exist in a pure state  
unmingled. A wedding  
comes before anything

at all can be. Just so  
I can go nowhere at all  
without you. You live  
in and as my mind.

Which is why we're also gods.

30 July 2002

## THE OLD

responsibility comes back.

To have to say  
more than I know

to run trembling  
after the last thing I said  
to see where it goes

to see what it knows  
over there  
where the road  
bends away from the river

but I go down anyhow  
airless under trees  
to a bleak shore and absent house  
startled birds escaping

and something knows.

30 July 2002

## PORTRAIT BUST OF A LATE EMPEROR

A kind of genius, a telephone  
plugged into the rock. He hears  
but gods knows what he hears,  
who is talking on the other end.

If camels wrote books they would write his,  
or if ships could spread their arms.  
There are so many women on his mind.

30 July 2002

***L'égalité de leurs plaines n'est que de temps en temps délicieusement interrompue par des petits bois composés d'arbres, qu'on appelle sacrés pour une raison que je vous dirai demain.***

Casanova, *Icosameron*, Day II

I need to tell you this, I don't know why,  
I think the woods are holy because foxes  
live there, are beautiful and kill modestly,  
only what they eat. Because the foxes  
come to visit you at night, bringing  
obscure messages from me. And you answer,  
tying delicate ribbonwork of words  
into their red fur. Then they come to me.  
They love what they are doing,  
they love what they were born to do

which is one reason we like them so.  
But that may not be his reason for the wood,  
he may be thinking of wolves and panthers,  
or slim half-naked nymphs and naiads  
no longer quite young, left from some old  
Greek dream of what the trees are for,  
bowers and enlacements of the flesh.

And that is lovely for us too. But we  
who have our own tomorrows  
will build our own reason there,  
and that is all a building ever is,  
the structure outward of how much we understand.

30 July 2002

## CROSS NO

(like Orpheus bent over his knees  
listening to the lightning in his bones,  
the blue will of the wisps  
that run through the blond  
hairs of his thighs,  
listening half in love  
with his posture alone

*I love a world  
that makes me  
do this to me)*

Cross no  
word out.  
So what key  
shook me  
from the dictionary?  
Know this junction  
caress this salve  
we try on all contexts  
to soothe the dark ones'  
square dungeons,  
what kind of hell  
have we chosen  
or have they sucked down  
*wirklich*, shussed  
like a bad child, *kakos*  
*pais*, squaring to murder  
a squirrel,

Clara,

let me bring you  
milk after milk,  
another and other,  
whatever you ask me  
this will be done,  
this will be John,  
that's the calendar,  
town clock  
run down  
will crash, key  
I woo from  
kingly Nagas,  
open, open!  
Chaff me all you like  
(or all your life)  
my spirit's loom  
says everything true, sharing  
shampoo with a bald man,  
that's my own memory  
broken into your lap,  
take your shoes off,  
this star loves folk,  
don't argue with the pupil,  
watch out, the eyes' satchel  
chooses what to carry  
cut from rock,  
just we can opt for  
challenge, call  
cock all you want,  
it will crow will  
come more of a hurry  
than you, than you.

In Chicago I miss you  
we worked and waited  
all the energy silted  
homeward, forsaken oil,  
remembrance's headlock  
where the jocks  
tried to take you dark  
after. But you recede  
in over-tuning, sound  
je ne comprends  
what we discover  
by the measure  
ladly, this is that glad star  
gaggle, whose wings  
over moors go scuffing  
daylight's pale shoe.  
Summon us,  
gate's key,  
shrub dark in the bleak,  
eschew Thai teak that  
elephant slaves  
portaged home,  
rouse to groan  
your own dismays,  
or is it a brilliant lust  
for constellation?  
Check the latest information,  
cut the umbrageous,  
not sad, clear the bona fide  
laughter, turn diurnal  
an alphabet of talking  
delicate book shadows

a guru to make you,  
so we shall marry  
cobalt and nickel,  
for streetly we brought them,  
your sheltering back, shy  
at so much emptiness,  
contacts we throw  
despair and cotton shirt and where  
is she, let the weather  
swallow my invocation,  
a marble sky looks at us.

30 July 2002

(for Dorota, hearing *Krosno*,  
through Anglo-Deaf ears)

## **SPIRAL CITY**

If it let me I would break the river here  
just before it slips through our harbor into the sea  
and let it pool out to lap a pleasant city  
built on a new plan — a house  
for everyone, we are born alone, will die  
alone, we should live so, in tiny houses  
with seagulls stately on the roof beam,  
and all we have to do in our snug quarters  
is write down clearly the memoirs of our exile and captivity.

Each house will have a sleep room and a work room  
a kitchen garden with squash and corn and coriander  
a kitchen to cook in and a bathroom tucked away  
and a little room upstairs where you can sit all day if you like  
in reverie or studying the tracks of stars or do those weird  
gymnastics of the soul called hobbies, like whittling the faces  
of dead queens out of bass wood, or making mosaics from bottle caps,  
you know, the way we do.

And every house a cellar hath  
— we must know the on and the over and the under,  
the three tastes of time, the three vestments of living on earth.  
Some will make the cellar their secret place for secret things  
and some the attic, there are always some choices left,  
some will use the garden, or even carry it around inside

when they go visiting. For going is licit, and visits are virtues,  
in the quiet hours of the day, or at night to sleep with someone  
else's earthly presence, touch and such,  
then wake in a new geometry of limbs —

that sort of thing is good for the soul,

the cell

that lives in us as we in our dear houses

cochlea-spiralling out around the river and the lake, Helicopolis,

up the blue hills and down the rusty slopes on the dry side

for those who love not rain. But I do,

so choose the dampest chilliest parish for my own,

harbor mouth and fog. Live alone! Know everybody!

Be a lighthouse! Be at home! Those are our few laws

but infinite the Talmud on them grows.

Walk with me around my foggy spiral town and watch the birds

dispute the acres of the air — we have to note

which birds settle on which houses, for they are messengers to us

bringing the rules of the game, new every day,

by which our memoirs are given form and kept coming, fresh,

mysterious, vivid as another person's smell,

and a bird is a noisy little piece of weather that means you.

Their cry wakes you. You hear them

as you hear everything, as a word.

A lyric, an explanation, an equation,

a lucid compromise. You write it down

and go from there. One word is rule enough for a day.

Meantime all over town we're all doing it more or less in synch,

each one with her different bird heard word,

and the sun outside, pale mistress of my morning fog,

keeps us moving more or less together

to find where all those words go. Someday we will know,

someday the Queen will come

riding on her white barge over the star-struck sea

with gannets over, with geese barking, her dolphins flirting,

in she'll come and in her arms will be the scroll  
where someone lovelier even than she has far away  
read all our memoirs and put them all together  
so she can chant out loud to us this gospel of the absolute,  
ourselves alone have written it with all our lives  
but no man knows how to read it till she comes,  
and tells us in our own words the documents of time,  
the why and who and how of our long exile,  
children as we guess we are of some vanished star.

Speaking of children: a child as soon as he can walk and talk  
some kind of sense, is given a house of his own.  
You're on your own, the mother cries, proud and sorrowful,  
though she and its sisters spend a lot of time each day  
visiting it and telling how to live.

*Listen but don't hear*, we tell the children  
as soon as they come to school,

*Memorize but don't remember*, *Use words without speaking*,

*Sing inside your body*, *Kiss a mirror but don't marry*,

mottoes like this are worked in stucco on the classroom walls  
where we teach them random languages, random facts,  
random histories of whatever country comes to mind —  
whatever the individual teacher knows or thinks he knows  
and cares about. Any good teacher

needs to care about something very much — not the children,  
not his own life, but something else, else will save him, else  
is what he can give from the heart of him to the heart of them,  
doesn't matter what, stamp collecting, rock climbing, Persian poetry,  
let him teach that with ardor and exuberant detail and confusion  
and leave it to the children to work it out, see how it fits  
into the hugeness of the world, let them ardently guess  
and whatever they finally fall in love with will be right,

right, and relevant. Because they are the only ones who understand.  
Don't you remember? When we were children we too  
knew everything, and the happiest of us still keep some  
of that preposterously noble certainty. We heard what the old  
were saying, but we listened with our bones and not our brains  
so their sad bibles never stifled us. We understood,  
we chose our words thoughtfully or rashly  
each day for the game from all they spouted or whispered tenderly,  
this lopsided sailboat with the pretty russet keel  
or that Grammar of Old Prussian, whatever we found  
we picked up and used and sang with and then forgot. But I digress.

31 July 2002

*desiring all of the other's presence*

and then I wonder  
the unbearable totality  
I yearn for, the whole  
identity, wouldn't it kill me  
if I took it and held it  
all at once, thigh and mind  
and speaking lips,  
dark chapel of her  
intuition, her logic  
and her science,  
her shadow and the leaves  
around her house,  
the lies she even tells herself,  
all,

    this strange word *all*  
pierces me with longing.

And then I know  
there's more I yearn for,  
all her absences,  
trajectories of her departures,  
round dance of her  
hidden hours,  
I want her silences.

Everything and all  
if I could know  
entirely it would seem

a forgiveness of me  
at last, a knowing  
like the last light  
over the mountain,  
everything finished,  
everything held  
in the twilight  
where distance ends.

31 July 2002

## DESIRE

A wise man traced desire to its source:  
it maps the mind that feels it.

The face of the one you love  
is the map of your mind at last.

31 July 2002

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Learning to know the moon  
he learns the man.

Learning to touch the woman  
sun burns his hand.

We are all that is left of the world.

31 July 2002

[Maybe this is finally that famous song Adorno says only a Barbarian will 'sing after Auschwitz.']

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After the cool dawn hours  
now the sun rises hot over the linden tree,

flowers that stand guard above us  
all our lives, linden and maple and ash and yew,  
guard me and my house. Linked we live

and say so little to each other, a word  
here a shadow falling there.

31 July 2002

*jo home de bona voluntat  
i de poca fe  
espero un monument  
al desertor desconegut  
de tots els exèrcits  
de totes les guerres*

— Tadeusz Rozewicz, from “The Deserter.” in Catalan translation

*I'm a man of good will  
and little faith,  
I want a monument to me,  
the Unknown Deserter  
from all the armies  
of all the wars*

more than that  
I want to be able  
to want something new  
something no soldier  
ever wanted something no  
civilian ever got,

a horn blowing  
in the street  
an angel  
in dirty underwear  
shouting at me  
“get out while you can,  
amigo”

for I would be the friend  
of your every mind  
every mood  
I love I hold  
in my heart  
while I run,  
I have to,  
the voice tells me  
Be the far friend  
of every friending

the voice banishes me  
into the lovely woods  
where cowards  
come into their own.  
kings of shadows

and always  
hearing keenly  
since all I am  
is listening

I whisper your name to the water brooks  
I mumble your name against maple bark  
until my lips bleed

who could love you  
longer and truer?

31 July 2002

**ELS  
DESERTORS**

I

jo home  
de poca fe  
reso per la pau  
d'aquestes ànimes mortals  
per les ombres  
que no poden  
trobar lloc  
de descans etern  
errants entre el cel buit  
i la terra pàtria

jo home de bona voluntat  
i de poca fe  
espero un monument  
al desertor desconegut  
de tots els exèrcits  
de totes les guerres

un monument dreçat  
d'amagat al cel  
sota terra  
un monument dreçat amb  
els ulls  
de les mares mullers  
germanes amants  
un monument dreçat  
de vergonya desesperació  
por  
amor odi  
un monument sense nom ni  
cognom

La valentia del desertor  
és difícil de suportar  
per al proïme  
qui ha fugit del camp de la  
glòria  
qui ha fugit de l'escorxador  
no trobarà perdó  
entre els coetanis  
ni entre els descendents

qui s'ha apartat de matar  
s'ha matat a si mateix  
i s'ha soterrat viu  
en l'oblit

coronat amb fulles de roure  
penjat en la flor de l'edat  
de la branca d'un arbre  
o d'un fanal  
el desertor  
déserteur  
Fahnenflüchtiger  
Landesverräter  
fuig fins a la fi del món

pobre d'aquell  
que en la flor de l'edat  
sense haver satisfet els seu deler  
vital  
ha caigut víctima  
d'un punyal desamic  
pobre d'ell i pobres de nosaltres  
els seus compatriotes  
o conciutadans  
la seva ànima no coneixerà el  
descans  
es manté entre nosaltres  
ultratjada i ferida

## II

el poeta resa per l'ànima  
del desertor desconegut

Posem-nos a resar  
els creients en Déu  
i els creients en No-res  
per les ànimes mortals  
que erren  
pels camps boscos vergers  
pels carrers de les ciutats  
per esglésies i cementiris  
Resem tots pels desertors  
de la Primera i de la Segona  
Guerra Mundial

vulgues donar-los Senyor  
descans etern  
resem tots pels desertors  
de les guerres defensives i  
ofensives  
de les guerres justes i  
injustes  
resem tots pels qui  
renunciaren  
a les insígnies als uniformes  
a les armes i als estendards  
«No mataràs»  
digué el Senyor  
i calla  
«Gott mit uns»  
digué l'home  
i marxà a la guerra  
empunyant  
la creu

Jo Us convoco  
a l'Homenatge als Caiguts...  
Desertors!  
De tots els exèrcits del món!

que una companyia d'honor  
llenci una salva apuntant  
als vostres cors caps  
ulls tapats

que els vostres col·legues  
afusellin una volta més  
els vostres noms  
la vostra ombra  
el record que ens queda de  
vosaltres

l'apoteosi dels cabdills  
dels generals dels carnisers  
dels genocides dura

ells decideixen la guerra  
i la pau  
el dret a la vida  
el dret a la mort  
i les mares infanten encara

infanten herois  
infanten desertors  
infanten persones

pobres éssers humans  
els únics mamífers vestits  
amb uniformes d'opereta  
sota bigarrats estendards  
es preparen per a la guerra  
per a la guerra per a la  
guerra

es preparen per a l'última  
aparició  
en el teatre de la guerra

i jo espero  
un monument  
al desertor desconegut  
de tots els exèrcits del món

Traducció de Josep-Antoni Ysern  
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