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POETRY USED TO LIVE IN A FORBIDDEN STATE OF COURAGEOUS GRACE

Introduction

Patrick White

EVEN WHEN THE ROAD IS MISSING

Even when the road is missing
like the absence of God, or a woman I love,
I praise that emptiness for the freedom it accords me
to create a way of my own like a river of stars
and for the universe it's left me
like a travelling companion I couldn't improve upon.

The gate shut, the door closed, the window locked,
I slip a key to a poem under the welcome mat
and say my house is your house anytime you call
and then go get drunk with the moon down by the lake.

And after awhile we're laughing at ourselves,
rolling in the leaves like the groundswell
of two happy vagrants with homeless hearts
making off with our lives for free as if
we'd just pulled off some cosmic B and E.
without leaving any sign of culpability behind,
except for the joy of our felicitous crime.

And when my moonboat's in port for repairs
like bedsheets in a backyard fleet of laundry on the line,
I don't mind being land locked for awhile.
I just take a walk along the shore of the lake
and gather moonlit feathers
from the scales of the waves
that have evolved from raptors into swans,
and binding them together
like Daedalus did for Icarus,
take a joy ride into the sun at midnight
not really caring too much about whether
I'm at zenith or nadir as long
as I'm transiting something akin to a threshold.

The sun can hold Venus on a short leash,
and me on the chain of my spine
like a barnyard dog barking at wolves
trying to tempt it deeper into the night
but the last crescent of the moon
will cut right through them both
like the umbilical cords of a new life
where we can both roam free
like rogue planets from star to star.

Empty-handed and full-hearted I come by day
to a low place looking for fire
from the daylilies with a bucket and an urn,
because I'm so tired of what I've had to do
to stay alive for the past fifty years as a serf of poetry
to keep it a calling, instead of a career,
and suffer the consequences of not attending to it
as a business that makes a profit off the stars,
but by night I'm a starling of creosote in a chimney
singing my heart out as if I wanted to eat it
because it has all the virtues of a noble enemy
and there's no poetry or protein in the junkfood of fame,
though I think that might be a trifle ingenuous.

Impoverished Druid, you lean on a crutch for a tree,
as a flying buttress to your sacred folly,
and running out of time to avoid
a head-on collision with eternity
all your devotions the ghosts of yesterday,
you kick the stool from out under your feet
and garotte yourself from the bough of an oak,
like the berry of a single moon of mistletoe
and the last crescent of a golden sickle just out of reach
of the harvest season of the King of the Waxing Year.

Poor heart, what a battered shoe
of a vital organ you've become, a bone box
for the sacred skeletons of hummingbirds and elephants,
a Burgess Shale for the creative fossils and footprints
we both had to evolve through to come to this
inconceivable moment without a time scale
to measure how far it is from then to now
like the last leap of faith of the waterclock of life
into the abyss without a bucket for a safety net
or any deep assurance of even having a bottom anymore
to fall out of the ongoing over the edge of a precipice

as if even the rivers of Eden sometimes
had to seek release from it all and fall
even without a parachute to candle
like an exclamation mark all the way down,
a descent into hell creatively much to be preferred
than stagnating in paradise with nothing but apples to eat.

But still you know you won't do it, given
the number of times now I've come running
with a chair and a rope to let you down
out of the window of a burning building
not knowing whether we were committing suicide
or I was running to your rescue as I always have.

Your daring has always said feathers and falling
has always taken wing like Pegasus before,
and what a wild strange radiant white water ride it's been
across the high unbounded starfields of the shining
with Vega and Deneb goading us on
ever further like spurs of Spanish silver
just you and me, my blood brother, my sister, together
in the vastness of a mutual solitude.

My God, when I think of the flights we've taken.
When I think of the things we've seen,
and the orchards of sorrow that found more bliss
in the fruit than they did in the blossom.
And what did we ever write about all those stars
that didn't declare how impossibly illiterate we are
compared to the lyrics of light and time and wonder
they've been singing all these lightyears
since I first opened my eyes to why I'm conceivably here,
though here can be anywhere by now like a bird
that loses its bearing under the stars everytime
it tries to get a fix on where it's going like a photon
jumping orbitals like tree rings in a flash of insight.
When you're light, when you're foolhardily alive
you don't need to pay heed to where you're going
because there isn't a single stage, place, or phase
that isn't the destination of what you're shining up at.

And I never thought the day would ever come
when sadness would sweeten into wisdom enough
to take pity on the mirrors like the eyes under our lifemasks
when we went down to the river to drink
our own reflections like faces from the lifeboat of our hands,

like a rain of mercy far out at sea far from the sight of land,
when we first began to understand how clarity like unity
can be broken down into little pieces of sand
that reflect the whole universe as readily
in their mystic particularity
as the stars and the sun and the moon do
when they lay their swords and feathers
and flying carpets like wavelengths of light
down in tribute to our third eye weeping its way to the sea.

And you were surprised, admit it, weren't you,
to find so many white horses like you running ashore,
mustangs from the waves, to check out the new guy's wings.
And me standing there like an avalanche of winged heels
wondering why I didn't make as big a splash
and if all we walked away with was a detailed starmap
who could say the journey really wasn't worth it?
Let the shore-huggers do what they want with it
to find their way around in the dark like fireflies.
Leave it to them. We were ever explorers
from the beginningless beginning to the endless end,
and we'll rise up again on a gust of stars
caught up like a dust-devil at the crossroads of earth
and ascend on a thermal of the sun, the stairwell
of a star-studded chromosome that could
take a coil of flypaper and turn it into a poem.

Joan McNeerney

Rendezvous

That was the name of a paint
can from J&M Hardware.

With sweat lingering on her
face, she colored her room.

Tinted now like insides of
ripe plums, like perfect grapes.

When the sizzling lemon sun
dropped from heaven...night
became moist and black.

Her fan whirled thick air
stained with cigarettes
coffee, turpentine, white wine.

She sank into her wicker couch
as fog horns trail the horizon.

Lotus screech relentlessly for water
always wanting more more more water.

Closing her eyes, remembering him
now tasting the feast of his smile.

Scarves

I want to make scarves from the sky.
Since I'm not much of a seamstress,
here's hoping it won't be too hard.

To start I'll just pick up a fleecy
white cloud to cover my neck.

Maybe create a dove grey scarf
and cut out pale blue ones too.
Make entire closets full of them.

At sunset I will fashion boas
of bright ruby and tangerine.

My midnight shawl will be long
gleaming ebony covering my
shoulders keeping me warm.

If lucky I'll find some rainbows...
kaleidoscopes to wrap up in.

I will list them on eBay and Craig's,
hang pictures on my Facebook wall.

Imagine, everybody will want them!
Would you like one too?
Better put your order in now.

Invitation

Would you like to unwind
an afternoon at the lake?

Solar sparks spilling over us
in showers of golden sizzle.

Put on short shorts, skimpy tops,
stick our toes into oozy mud.

Breezes will shake treetops
while we listen to birdsongs.

Why not float on new grass
facing an Alice blue sky?

Read celestial comic strips
from mounds of clouds.

We can count sunbeams,
chase yellow butterflies.

Devour bowls of cherries
painting our lips crimson.

This noontime is perfumed
with millions of wild flowers.

Let's go away all day...be
embraced by the goddess.

Birthday Present

I wanted to bring back the
best gift from the country
for you, just for you.
I wanted to.

Some sky would be nice,
lots of lovely sky with
light fleecy clouds.

So I rushed through
stores and bought the
biggest shiny box and
looked for a perfect bow.

All shades of blue, violet
with red and yellow.
An entire rainbow of
colored ribbons for the
box to put this sky into.

Then on the bus my bow
fell apart. Somebody
stepped on the box. It's
all crushed and dirty.

By the time we got to
the city it was late. Did
my sky fly away?
The box is empty now.

I wanted to bring back the
best gift from the country
for you, just for you.
I wanted to.

Old McDonald's Algorithm

An automatic cow institutes
a spark like a semicolon. Halfway
to useless (but not quite), the trust
increases with company. An absurd
energizer elects an awful designation
[for safety]: critical navigation inside
a milk-carton canyon.

With Mental

chalk I trace outline of where
my body will lie.

I imagine the scene, stark
tragedy, me, bloodless
against lazy accumulation of ink.

Wells of unwritten will have
consumed my conscious, leaving
only a paper trail of mind's relics
for the authorities to pick,
parts scavenged from earth and truth.

Dream Weaver

I paint darkness through
your mind
with a whisper

ed kiss.

Hints of fang hang
from that moment.
Dripping [lip] stick
and something darker.
Stains.

The wind
at my touch.

You tremble.

The inconstant sides
(in and out)
of our circle shimmer and
shift. Iridescent
skin.

Untouchable.

Unwavering.

Un . . . wait.

Make a wish

and . . .

Pop!

John W. Sexton

With Every Atom

the pond princess ...
by frogspawn light
you'll find her

the porcelain sky
is white ... blue swallows penetrate
a slice of heart

with every atom
of its being ... Plutonium
loved her to bits

a disquiet of green
goes through him ... the ghost
of the mown lawn

his shoes of water
lost in the sea ... many
walk in them unbeknownst

nothing on the afraidio ...
Nanna Voompyre
knits a rock

our ears cocked ...
the hundred and one damnations
of Lucifer's poodle

the translucent palace ...
an abstract emperor
puts thoughts in our minds

the invisible lift ...
we arrive
at the heard floor

Eternity is Never Done

he dials “angels”
on the Otherbox ... a goldfish
forms in her bladder

never saw us coming ...
a glass car shatters
the light barrier

a soft invasion ...
the treacle robots
just poured themselves in

eternity is never done ...
in her grey mousecoat
she dusts the moon

polishing the crooked shoe ...
an odour of Stilton
grants three wishes

mind-snails enter
by spiral ladder ... something niggles
the bad conscience

a whale breathes us in ...
night in the sea
is deep

Face of Bloody Ruby

twilight, the pines
heavy as waves ... cyclopic
owls hunt ribbons of dream

blue-black Martian night ...
stone-pence sift ice crystals
from sand

a phlumpling wakes us ...
spermy luminescence
surrounds the mothgirls

x-twins a hard labour
teleporting in and out
of mother

thinkship docks
in brainware ... another idea
has traversed the stars

forest bright silver ...
specks falling from the moon's eyes
all night long

cancerentity
spills through the bloodstream
my name is Lesion

fleshroom farm ...
cuttings from the vampyres
burgeon in the loam

full hair of quartz,
a face of bloody ruby ... sunlight
through her cold heart

Loose Floorboard

six-tongued
lispingsnake
xis xis xis

red red
thy irkish delight
candied humans

peeling the shadow
of a cat ...
the New Origami begins

a low fume ...
silent the slammed doors
of the mercury car

Carnival of Low ...
three goldfish souls
in a polythene bag

methanes of Titan
pure intellect ...
one whiff and you're theirs

a loose floorboard ...
Uncle Will-he-not
shows us his hidden mind

Martin Burke

RUT TRACKS

And Breugel painting rut-tracks and harvest
And Ensor's clowns entering Brussels with Christ
And three barges led by the barge named Galilee
And that shadow crossing mine on the towpath walk
And Breugel painting the blind leading the blind
And the delicate lines of Permeke
And the over-hanging branch becoming knotted in the ivy
And the word that sends a poems trotting towards its conclusion
(But a poem has no conclusion, only a pause)
And the blue sky of March
And Breugel painting the procession to Calvary
And the weight of the wood on human shoulders
And water too precious to spill
And the hesitation before you go on
And then the going on
On the rut-tracks and song-lines of Flanders

*

There was and there is
The past and the present
Water flowing in several directions
Though it flows from the self-same source.
Which is how memory works –
Bedding down and branching out
To touch the extraordinary
It calls up to embrace;
Which is not to say that everything is understood
It isn't, but what does that matter
As water brings with it
Fresh details of the annunciation –
Something which if not fully understood
Is at least subscribed to.

*

There are no names for places such as this –
Flatlands embracing fields embracing the sea
Each holding itself apart yet joining the other under the same sky –ruffled, grey, but not threatening.
But there is more
Roads meet and join to pose a proposition Kant would understand
Who proposed such moments as dynamic or mathematical –
His definition of the sublime you need no nothing about as you experience it at the crossroads which
cancel the question it raises.
Whatever is asked can be answered but need not be
So will we walk with ruler and compass or stand at the joining absorbed into that landscape of
flatland, field and sea where the world it what it is –
Vivid beyond definition
A shimmering which holds?

*

Gent: St Baaf's, a March afternoon gone suddenly spring

Gent: the Patershol, the Vrijdagmarkt, the Kouter

The Nederkouter, the Korenmarkt, the St Michiel's helling

The tree towers, the river, the quay, the poem written on stone

The lovers, the revelers, the afternoon strollers

The sense of expectation and achievement

The dialogue of the city with time, the reaching into time, the reaching beyond time

A clock striking three, a girl on a bicycle, a shadow-lit lane saying welcome

The word I make in reply.

*

Ghosts return to where the living wait
For their arrival under the cherry tree
And shadows meander across the grass
And leaves flicker to the world
And the quiet afternoon makes you suspect
Something silent is being said
Where ghosts return and the living wait
Between the not said and the said
Nourishing the living and the dead.
So why should I force a memory out with a sigh
Why force anything more than the rate it travels at
To arrive where I am patient or fidgety?
Across the grass the shadows move and nothing stops at those borders

*

The straight line of a slanting shadow on the Stadhuis gavel divides the world

There is the world of light and the world of absence

Walk between them

Balance on the balls of your feet

Give one word to your heart and one word to your mind

Take note of the fecund dialogue

Call it the yeast of spring

Shape your life about it

*

The precedents came upon us

Some were vibrant, some were not

Some were like beautiful women and some were like three sisters dressed in black

Some were ships with an eye on the prow

Others has black sails.

Then someone spoke of tradition and someone disagreed

Someone spoke of rights and someone spoke of rites

And the discussion went on as it has always gone on

And you felt yourself back in Antwerp when the humanist flower rooted

Because someone said yes and someone said no when they were both saying the same thing.

*

August

Storm-prophets came, storm-prophets went

However, if you asked a signal of the signal-man...

Yet these stones imply the dead continue a life within my life

Who in the guise of birds come to my garden table

Save this and the world will not perish

Ignore it and it dies.

*

To make a painting is to make love to the wind
Is to make of circumstance an occasion of grace
To say to the future that the present exists

So as the wind curls in from the coast
I see that nothing changes and nothing will –
It is always the light which astounds us.

*

Sea bird I do not know the name of
Their brightness essential, defining
Equaling the rightness of evening
Into which these lines are taken

For their sake and mine
For the little of beauty that I know
For boats with names
Expressive of Island and Faros

Towards which they will soon be headed.

*

Essay the river and essay the docks, the dock-workers

The goods of merchants stocked in containers

The cranes and lifts, the pulley wires and ropes

Say something about this, place it in a time-frame

Decry what's lost but love what remains

See the river continue beyond the bend you cannot see beyond.

*

History happens

Arriving like a messenger reluctant to give up its message

We'd make a bargain –our shadow for its, its word for ours

The message carried forward

Which is how Vondel's breath happens -

A breath from a mouth given to a mouth, inhaled, exhaled

Never withheld, never repeating itself or reaching exhaustion.

*

Perfection of the seemingly unintended –
The spiders' web I am reluctant to disturb

*

The way things change
Become themselves, become something else
Restless time, serene timelessness
River and towpath, cloud and shadow
Morning into evening into morning again
A hand on a page and then a new page
Becoming something else so as to be what it always was.

*

And I think of them, the beguines,
Those soft footed women in their cobbled enclosures,
Their ardent prayers, their calm assurance,
The sense of that which is holy being tangible to them,
Who called themselves to their vocation
Much as a poet or a mason would –
Addressing the stone, freeing the stone,
Then returning to the silence of the workplace
As if everything and nothing had happened.

*

These are the rooms Hans Memling painted
These are the words borrowed from Vondel
This is the snow and this is the light
And this is Ensor's parade.

These are the rooms and these are the words
And the world is the same but other:
Light on leaves turns the world green and brown
The world is green and brown.

*

It is enough –

Water fills the jug

Hands have clay enough to mould a world

Memories take on a life of their own

It is enough

Nothing else is needed

Clay moulds the hands which think to mould the clay.

*

Rut tracks leading to ten Ede show me the life I (must) lead

Roman James Hoffmann

The Lord of the Desert

Adorned
with the barren touch of desert winds,
which tear the blue down from the sky,
the dragon roars
through the naked night
disciples of the day despise.

Abhorred,
the fallen stars
illuminate
and lay waste the lines of paradise.
Standing over fields of ash
watered with ravaged women's weeps,
they pledge cracked lips
to countless condemned kisses.

Under weight of raining flame
and execration
old affections lie collapsed;
baptised with stains
disgust
and fear.

He Sees the Name

your Name against Mine
fought under December skies
will
and breath
burn
in hearts, pounding
calling for blood.

unafraid of fire we stand
victorious
over the father
in his empire of ash
a rapt gallery of memories applaud

the triumphant

adversary

A photo

On the beach
the backdrop: a dune,
the sky faded grey by the abandonment
of being buried in boxes,
in cupboards,
and in attics,
...these purgatories where our memories mildew

my older sister
a baby
essays a resplendent cherubic smile
safe by the side
of my mother
whose protective arm props up her pose

their silenced explosions
echoing
the corruption of agony into innocence:
my mother's fragile happiness

as the pain no-one will know
gives birth to beauty
and light finally escapes
her eye-lined
black-holes.

The Sun behind the smog

What do we owe,
for the confidence of the Gods?
...for the admission to a substitute Heaven,
dimly lit from behind an ignored Tragedy
by a lost Sephira?

I forget:
what was the price we agreed to pay
to purchase the fascination of our fathers?
...and how desperate were these dreams
that defiled themselves so readily,
that so eagerly cut the Sun down from the sky,
traded the sacred for the commonplace,
and made us tire of looking Angels in the eye?

Tasting the Wasted (To Those that Beat God)

With my fingers I rummaged
through the shit of generations;
buried alive in the body of a boy
I picked through digested ideas
and tasted the wasted souls
that filled the ground above me
with their bankrupt beliefs.

Patiently my fingers wandered
through generations of misspent familial faith,
my nails bruised and swollen
from the soil and excrement lodged under them.
I wept; and I mourned the ugly trajectory of my tears.
Broken, I conceived of such audacious heresies,
and with diabolic intent I stole the design of men
and with divine measures set out to
transmute my agony into unimaginable ecstasy.

No Grace was to account for the
eventual crowning of my Promethean glory.
Instead through infernal fortune
my soul was forged in flames and
was born strong as Sin.
After spending many moons on fruitless alchemical endeavour,
I at last distilled the essence of the Sun,
which on a morning whose memories escape me,
I drank.
My body burned, and my skin flew away from my bones in flakes
like a grotesque snow
...but my cries birthed celebrations,
jubilant and victorious,
that increased in volume as the boy I knew flew away like litter
and my soul, forever thought of as fugitive,
with blinking eyes met the world
and christened it with laughter at all the love to be seen.

.

Carolyn Gregory

STAR UNDER STROBES

Thinner than thin
and swathed in white
like a crescent moon made flesh,

she strolls on designer heels,
only her stiff resolve propping
her up, a quiet doll.

Fêted as a luminous beauty,
her collarbone prominent
above strapped breasts,

it's hard to imagine her feeding
her children as she takes the arm
of the limo escort,
tottering among stars.

The cameras flash like strobes
around her huge long lashed eyes,
her silence now glacial.

She is thin enough to be begging
for alms somewhere else,
her lips a red wound
hiding her screams.

CABIN FRAMED IN ICE

Ghosts walked down the narrow hall
in single file
draped in gray suits

One carried a brass key
with scripted plate
scrolled with "The Jane"

A century ago,
they had watched the ship sink,
its lifeboats and chandeliers
filling with ice

The ghost with the key
beckoned me into a room,
small as a steward's cabin

All night
I drifted among ice floes,
my small mattress a life raft
into my dreams

AMONG FLOWERS

I left my room,
walking among the stunning
purple lilacs.

Rain poured gently
over dogwoods and green
near the nursing homes.

Inside the walls,
I could hear muffled breathing
on Mother's Day

when some receive tulips
and others lie alone,
listening to the rain.

CHIHULY (for the False and the Real)

Pushing the high ceiling,
the green tree of icicles was not
fabulous as she had expected
from all the hyperbole
expanding notions
of glass and artifact,

turning color on its ear
with red, green, yellow
in the same giddy room
of tentacles and manta rays.

Of course, the children were happy,
looking up at glass disks
melting overhead.

Tourists snapped shots
for their grandchildren,
climbing stairs into the new wing.

The only room drawing awe
was the one with bowls.
Inspired by baskets,
they were pale tan and yellow,
their edges folded as if
water rolled over clay
left to shine in the dark.

RETRO POLITICS

If he were president,
he'd bring back the guillotine
for stealing bread or sedition.

Traitors would fill jails
next to thieves and immigrants,

half of Hollywood would feel
the axe along with budgets

and the ones who worked
until they died.

THE BLUE DRESS

The dress was buried in a captain's chest
in the basement
beneath a fox stole, tail in its mouth,
keepsake of a magical world.

During the war, my mother danced
at the Stage Door Canteen,
her red lips perfect above an orchid,
her light step accompanying each partner.

Ostrich feathers plumed the neck
over layers of pale skirt,
rising and falling.
Dress for a princess in paradise.

I wore it when I was seven,
doing a can-can for the kids
in my neighborhood,

wrote my own script
for the dancehall girl I pretended to be
showing off my fancy steps.

ENDANGERED

One late night,
I turned into Ceabook Cylityy
in cyberspace,
threatened by goblins.

Some hacker tapped into
my electric pipeline,
threatening me with extinction.

Would I go the way of the Dodo,
forced to plod along a lonely beach
to nowhere?

The hacker said I violated policies,
warned that I could lose my account
full of family photos, poems
and notes from friends.

I fought back!
Checked my face in the mirror
several times
and fired my keyboard into space.

Post Scriptum

Patrick White

POETRY USED TO LIVE IN A FORBIDDEN STATE OF COURAGEOUS GRACE

Poetry used to live in a forbidden state of courageous grace
but now it's palpably culpable of cowardice.

Paper-mache lifemasks with all the characteristics
of a gaping sin of omission. As F.R. Scott said of E.J. Pratt
in his poem about the building of the CPR
where are the coolies in your poem, Ned?

The ten thousand that died lining and tamping track.

Now the real subject matter of most works of art
is not what was put in, but what was left out,
where's the heart, the soul, the imagination,
where's the grief and the longing that slowly matured
into the black flames of the charred roses
that immolated themselves in their own fires
for the love of someone they couldn't live without
like the other wing of the song of a bird
maimed by the oversight like a tree in chains.

The applause of trained seals isn't praise
and celebrity isn't fame. Everyone's good
at divining the well, but who takes the time
to dig one any deeper than their own shallow grave?

Maybe there's a sleeper out there who's fighting
for his life in a dream, enduring excruciating transformations
as experience shapeshifts his voice into poems
we'll get to overhear one day after he's dead
like the sound of distant water in a mindstream
or the ashes of an unknown soldier
that couldn't be contained by a broken urn
or buried under a monument to anonymous violence.
A hero or a heroine who didn't play to the crowd
like an acrobat of words faking it as a wizard
in a literary scene of very unsacred clowns.
Tiger-striped arsonists that couldn't burn
their way through a matchbook. Where are

the thieves of fire, the Promethean criminals,
the fore-ordained demons of nihilistic doom,
the mad who used to sacrifice their shadows
on the altars of the mountains of the moon
and came down into the valleys in tears
with a message like an avalanche of the underwhelmed?

Are there no more Druids? Is the bloom off the mistletoe
of myriad moons that have lost their atmosphere
to the bright vacancy of the vacuum on the reflected side of things
and forgotten the dark abundance of the occult originality
of the true face that's turned away like a perennial eclipse
of the black sheep of a severely depleted family
that doesn't want to talk about such things in public?
No more shamans risking death in the cradles of the treetops
at the hands of the visions that cut them to the bone
to see if they've marrowed suffering into lunar gold
they scatter on the waters like feathers and bread?
Even the deer miss their hunting magic more than they realized.
Now the flies stalk lions in zoos that know better
than to fight back. And poetry reads like a tourist trap
for expired prophets glad-handing their coveted awards.
Bleed a bit, damn it. Weep like a mountain. Write a poem
like an amputee in a straitjacket with the pen in your mouth.
Pour the ocean into a seabed, not a teacup
that tastes vaguely of life, and down a deep draft
of your own blood in a single gulp from the vessel of your skull,
then wipe it from your lips like the petals of a rose
that knows how the heart feels when it's sealed
like a blood bank and the hungry ghosts of ideas and ideals
have been summoned to it like a seance of vampires in lieu
of the living metaphors that animate the lives of real things.

I'm not saying that the morning is without singers,
or that one should only listen to the night birds
or that the old stumps aren't sprouting tender green branches
out of their Medusa-headed roots. There's fire
in every generation if you get close enough to it
sufficient to singe your eyebrows on or at least
walk toward on a cold night in a cruel landscape
to spread a few stories around to scare the children
into listening to their imagination unbound
from the usual lullabies that keep their parents lyrically young
in a state of arrested development. Where are
the dangerously dissociated ones who yell Merd!
at the choirs of cant and stab an established

pigeon of a poet through the hand like an osprey
then walk off the stage into oblivion as if
a mediocre morality play were beneath his felonious dignity?
Where are the black-robed, outlaw, poet priests,
the sybils, oracles, witches and warlocks,
the vatic rebels hiding out in caves to amplify their voice
like the anarchic mountain they're trying to bring down
on everybody's heads like a meteoric shower
of portentous space junk in a degenerating orbit
that cremated their body parts separately as if each
had nothing in common with its fellow asteroids
except they couldn't keep their cornerstones together long enough
to establish a small planet they could live on in anarchic accord.

I can remember when poems were written in blood,
not bleach and fabric softeners. Not anti-bacterial detergents
that shoot at their own troops over the heads of the enemy.
And how the poetic toads that hibernated for seven years
in the dry creek beds suddenly woke up one day to a flash flood
and started singing sexually naked in the downpouring rain,
not these isolated ripples and trickles of acidic dewdrops
that burn the tongues of the flowers with trademarks and name brands.

Where the savage mystic who wanders in out of the desert
reeking of stars and the wisdom of a snakepit
that could make a whole village stop work, and listen
to the unexpurgated desert wind that spoke through him?
Where are those who ennoble the miseries of life
by living their way through them like diamonds in a black lung?
Now it's the association of the sensibilities into elitist cliques
of enculturated memes with homogeneous life themes
that never leave home to save their children, as Rilke rightly observes,
from having to do it for them. Domesticated lapdogs
never very far from the begging bowls that feed them
like the awards and grants of an institutionalized paternalism
that lets them know when the silver-tongued should be heard
at the table, each in their proper place, and when
Skinnerian censorship, like repressive tolerance, is golden.

Poetry's as old and as dead an art as prostitution.
It's been dying since the first shaman
imitated the song of a bird with its feathers on fire
or the first stripper teased her nakedness with boas.
Or the first wounded wolf let out a warcry
that chilled the moon with its unwaning sincerity.
And the ultimate angle? To be the thing itself

until it breathes you in and out like a way of life
the petty won't risk aspiring to for fear of falling
and being found out like a candling parachute
tangled in its own life lines like a labyrinth of axons
that have lost their nerve for heights. Twenty-five million
children dying of starvation every year on the planet
and you're lying in the lap of the luxury of literature
writing about the rustic quaintness of making home-made jam,
the same way they turned totem-poles into telephone booths
and minor domestic tragedies into recyclable myths of origin.

Let the stars burn deeper into you. Befriend the darkness
like the largest room in your house. Salt your tears
with oceans where your sorrows can learn
to swim like fish without ever swimming out of your eyes.
Ladies and gentlemen, this is it, this oneness,
of the dirge and the lyric you're never going to hear
the same way twice, this mystic specificity
that encompasses us wholly in the mystery
of what we're doing here, what we're saying
and thinking and feeling and shrieking and seeing here
in the presence of each other bearing witness everywhere
as if even the void we flash out of like the morning dew
and return to with the dust of the sunset all over us
were also in some inconceivable way, though
we can't put our lips to its eyelids, sentient
and playfully absurd, but never frivolously recognized.
Don't live like the dress rehearsal of a play you didn't write.
In the pursuit of an earthly excellence that expresses
our human consternation of who we are and are not,
neither this, nor that, say deeply what you mean
so that we can all draw water from it like the sun.
So there's lightning in the clouds of your depression
and the fireflies take over where the starmaps leave off.
Be a great high priestess of the sacred syllable
and when you enter your venerated groves
like the night wind among the crowns of the trees
be at least as engaging and beautiful as they are
and as at home among warriors as you are homeless among saints.

Awake and alert in the unsayable silence. Wait.
And the metaphors will come like bridges that burn
and go up in flames like an orchid and bridges
that collapse under their own weight into the river
they were trying to cross to the colder, lonelier shore
where purity's just a long, slow annihilation

of everything you still insist upon cherishing.
Let go. Fall. Revive. Return. Go up the mountain.
Find the mother lode. Bring it back down into the valley
like a strong river brings its knowledge of gold within.
Behind every explorer is a child who likes to discover
and share things. So what's worth finding that you can't?
You just have to look into one eye to see the history
of everything that can be seen. And when you open your mouth
prompted by a rush of stars, you sing
for thousands of dead poets who used to occupy
these green boughs and leafless branches, you sing
as if you were the last surviving member of the choir,
and the silence, the enraptured silence, were listening.

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Submission must be in the body of an email unless otherwise agreed on.