

Remembrance!

Words not to say

Vonny Thenasten

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Remembrance

*the pelvic constant organised
the scene, as it is wont to do*

—Vonny

*I heard of a man
who says words so beautifully
that if he only speaks their name
women give themselves to him*

*If I am dumb beside your body
while silence blossoms like tumours on our lips
it is because I hear a man climb stairs
and clear his throat outside our door*

—Leonard Cohen

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Touched

as when in the mushroom dark
underside of the sky birds disappear
so you went, no flight
but absorption -
you were carved at my head,
and transfigured, mute,
i had no course but indifference -
of necessity i loved your eyes
and sought others

now lighting eyes
has become a chore
they only burst
and burn no more

now a sign flares
over arranged methodical vases
before a girl in a window
wearing soft clothes and scent
around her the furniture of her choosing
heavybodied and webbed
in the pictured air

now she tenses to all the quick high notes from the hi-fi
that sound like telephone bells-
another girl traced designs on a wall: she smoked at night,
hiding in her room

a hair
seems to be
apon my shirt
it grows
straighter
as i watch
but still springs
- not profoundly -
when bent

i know this hair
does not have an
autonomous existence
but is part of me

apart from from me yet
still
and growing into
my shirt

i know that it doesn't like
my continued vigilance
for it quivers
under my gaze
fearing to be plucked
but unready to root

a tragedy
is the test of teeth
on rock
as waves swell

is the tart compatriotism
sickly sweetened in beds

why is my tragedy
unheard? swollen
lines spread it abroad

adrift from my lay -
others do know

why are my teeth bared
to the bone?
why has hammerhead come?

my little dying has such little wind
i am aerated and still - some comfort
a tragedian's theft

the trees have grown sterner
the grass sweeter, and the sun
more full of foliage:
my paths newly entrapped.

but now the open network,
easy knots, enmeshes sometimes
softly, where the former wooden fretwork
would stun and impress -
i have thrown away my gun;
recently i caught myself
staring at the moon:

(now my cornering wheels like skulls
out of a clear head)

in the sight of gods
there is no favour
in the separated eyes of one stare
there is no continuity

the gods lack wisdom

we see light in one eye
the other dark: we should
be blind, deaf,
and miss nothing

the apple cascades from the head
poor Tell! from another body
the apple falls decapitating

the belgian golden delicious
lusciously shrapnelled reveals
the body in bowler-hatted suit
unmoved and cold: ready
to be splintered

do not worry Mr, William
nobody believed the
delicious juice trickled
down the wall

her hard gloss -
like enamel o swifter
it flows over
burying,
shining away the shade

To the killer

When your discontented cell reverberates
it is no drumming on the chamber wall;
so rest now soul.

What this contains is not
by oft-repeated man of sense begot -
what my hands warmth grasped gently says
is smooth thy cell wall.

Perfect construction belongs to the bell.
Picture walls are for the dead. What hanging
chamber would music net more than words?
In separation
death, as it were, rebounds
thy life. Let a whole shell remain to fill -
if you would peace, you must go still.

disturb me and i'll cut your throat
my lines are soft but i'm not
this is me
look at me i'm talking
when you don't smile
in my etching
i press too hard
some of you may take offence
i hope so i hope you're vindictive
when i give up
it must be because you made me

in the still anticipatory
or red light hallucinatory
night
came breathing
heavily panting
a star, borne unto the mary

how so?
wilt thou take it hot?
aye, i'll honour her in the breeches!
observe!

in the still retractory for more
red night
came christ! I Xavier!
howl?

- c'est le pigeon, Joseph

There she lay,
the end off
the tongue
blood
the red of the toothed tongue
still streaming
still stifling
the bubbled cough welling
to the red lips marked
by impotence and false alarm -
sauce for the tasty meat, saliva streams
enlivening: only this may comfort,
you are fallen to the floor
and no-one stares through the window.

Taste! what satisfies:
Bitten! the soft of the flesh
ground to meat. Once,
expressionless, you heard me
and spent two days crying.

Your flesh is now pressed to the floor,
your mouth squeezed out.
You look never tasted nor touched.

You cannot hold on. every
sensible thing a flicker and reel
ending, no rewinding.

cheese-contented and
unwatched therefore
the cellar's inhabitants sat
apart, comfortable in however
many positions they took
seeming not move
but move only in time to the light
ascending the evening cellar wall,
unfed, unwashed, unwept
- unseen practising -

one man alone
was in a cellar
two men together
lived there
three people apart
came there

one said - i say only the space i live in
will be of my own choosing
as far as i can manipulate myself
and will contain only a minor
manifestation of others

two said - watch takes time
and its eyes are bent
watching spheres for their intent

three said - how thin
but succulent your hollow
ground blade sliced: and now
how tremulous the flesh
under your pulping gloved touch

whatever was there was speaking
to a wall. whichever one
connected only by spiders to another.
there were four
five, perhaps six, voices to be heard
later when maybe a keeper came to ask questions.

- through bars her high pitch -

who is safe
or has a chance
when the moron aunts
are celibate too?

what the window watches
shines in reflection
eyelight

whose sign flares over
arranged methodical vases

the girl must stand before the window
wearing soft clothes
and scent

around her the furniture of her choosing
heavybodied and webbed
in the pictured air

she tenses to all the quick high notes from the hi-fi
that sound like telephone bells

i once saw a girl who also traced
designs on a wall
she never drank
but smoked at night

hiding in her room

it may be, as i travel etc
that amaze and melancholy
go too - thou saucy knave -
this thin and dusty
where my cave
too shroudless and opened as i am
to happy this occasioned peeling
yes i may say if i am happy to be open
etc.

the ring of my voice
the ring of my finger
the ring of my ear
the ring of my rectum
the ring of my bell
the ring of my friends
the ring of my bell
the ring of my doorbell
the ring of my toothpaste
the ring of my eyes
the ring of my throat
the ring of my bell
the ring of my friends
the ring of my finger
the ring of my rectum
the ring of my roses
the ring of my throat
the ring of my bell
the ring of my telephone
the ring of my hands
the ring of my friends
the ring of my waist
the ring of my voice
the ring of my bell
the ring of my bell

"to thine own self be true"

in order to file away
our game, the weeping people,
God stroked away our refuge,
the beach (where He lay, discontent
washing over his features,
changing his cloak),
later stolen by the sea. westward
was a piece of virtue unlooked-for;
in the dead silence
when only the oak gnarled under the fingertips,
grained as worm casts,
become fleshy -

i cannot bear it,
to tell the truth

i thought, and came to wash
out the salt from my hair
and to drink.

not to sink.
not to sink.
in the gravest, stillest night
i was afloat and terrified.
no christ came across the water
but a christ outrider, ghost outsider,
calmly stressing voice and verse
of whom i heard

who birthed the Windhover: bird
not still.

once more - il faut qu'on fasse beaucoup.
l'homme au chapeau melon
me dit pourquoi son
visage etait cache d'un pomme:
comme ca il est ne
il n'a pas besoin de Dieu a l'aider,
il s'amuse.
bon!
il a choisi pour le visage la pomme.

on dort maintenant
la nuit bien.

Days
go by in a
Time-consuming
way

What
kind of time
is there in which
you can play?

sometime
soon
you say?

where is (i can feel within me)
the flow that over rocks
rides, and smashes
shores with the wind's help

though words have flown before
and smashed, and have riddled
many bodies of a damnable,
overflowing tide,

never yet has this unforced
rain untied my rein

i have not sprung streaming
and run down mountainsides
from any muddy hole
to pass peacefully across a plain
nor yet run dry
and retched for breath, waiting for others.

My poor tepid barrelled rainwater
must ever be sprinkled to cool and refresh
when, grown hot, my heroes return.

O yeah, where?

a star
explains away
my longing: i walk
only into my room where
the air is stilled. it cannot
move. no more can i:
into the garden; these eyes
find clean stars. look into the street
and there are only lights.
the doors are locked, windows
bolted against the night. i lie:
outside are the stars:
i have closed my curtain.

Typhon-chaos

you are where
the orchid leaves
its shed on tracks
after renovation

where a bird
hidden in metaphor
sings in a flat
ringing tone like a bell

i'm there too.
here, where there are words
that belong to no-one
portending nothing -
as long as we avert our eyes

this long rigmarole, grammar
like mortar in a brickpile

building walls, no-one knows
whether for defence
for shelter or some kind
of elegant folly
here are walls
that we make our home
simply by dwelling among them
using the nearest
as though many hostile

elements, having survived, somehow -
i should say exposed? without
walls, lie waiting, though confused -
there seems no order, no purpose
(this offends and frightens us)
shooting -
on sight, on impulse?
here we are, who know nothing of form
but build,
nodding heads

**"...his eyes are almost gone/ which made him
hear well" - WS Graham**

o let the spark sharks lay hold
of my head

i once in an orange grove was reading
of the death of some leper who
eventually died;
sucking oranges and spitting out the pips
this leper died in my arms.
he now converses with god
in a rational manner.

hello, she says, glancing at his white stick,
i haven't seen you for ages. How is your head?
what? he said.

there is a hypodermic syringe standing on a shelf
where also lies a mirror.
in his hand
is a carrot and a knife. he reaches for the shelf . . .
stop stop: she rushes in
and disconnects his arm with a shudder of the cleaver.
in shock he stands amazed, - what . . . ?
you'll see, she said.

as a dare he once determined to die
and to deceive his friends
just went round each day mechanically ingesting

books of poetry,
and never got indigestion.

with a shock disconnection of the mind
he began to paint with his left hand
painting people holding claws
out in front of them to use
as nail crackers in the new game -
no two fingers ever the same
- why do you paint?
- to stop my fingers sticking together
he found he could only even after several attempts, paint arms
wavering spinelike from shoulders,
and slashing at canvases to convey their thought -
for of course, spineless arms cannot speak.
or so they would have us believe.

i sacrifice my beauty on the altar of Jehovah
sang a small jenny wren
i give my intellect to posterity
screamed a secondary schoolboy
i give my teeth to my cousin
babbled the nonagenarian

the line containing the true facts
is twisted into life
and as easily unscrewed - screeched the lunatic
leaping the wall in a single bound

it's not often to think that i sit
on a stool as often as you
in a bar alongside threadneedle street
drinking milk and looking at people passing
you by. i feel you are amphobian, a queer fish,
fishing in the waters of the sink
or swim, looking for a sturgeon to protect
you from life's indecisions. how
wonderful to be reserved! your fish-eye wanders
from a fixed position you sit
waiting for someone to stop. red and amber go
you left your brakes on
is why people can't help hitting you
can't help you

Death of a soldier

Upright, moulded true,
a solid limb of the corps,
covered now with gore
and grease for the taste

the old hand makes haste
to tell the next, that's you,

don't worry son, its the head
not the leg
that they dip in the egg,
you'll soon be dead.

why do you look
away when eating?

i

want to feel your teeth
and lick your lips
and

i

only see your hair when your eyes are bright
and

i

only see your ankles
when your thighs are near

a mothcrawling along a window
seems tobedoing it for show
it spreadsitswings agin the night

crawls between the cracksinpane
hits the hotlight and is slain
crumpledwings swings to earth for our delight

the door
said i am a bachelor; a dull knocker
the stairs
said you caught me unawares; teastains on the barewood
you cried
when you found me inside; i'd just come home and
my shirt
was lying in the dirt in the corner
you cleaned
the clothes of this fiend returned and
renewed
our friendship over food - canned beans and cheese

say sadly Mrs. Day replied
my husband passed away last week
he had no pain he had no fight
he lost his mind and then his sight -
such singular luck that he died
alright

i carry on as best i can
its not much fun without my Jack
i'd like to think i did my best -
but i was glad when he turned his back
his face was such a sight

you've never known no more but one
have you Maureen
don't cry love
i'll make some tea

The blue
fire elemental
recognizes the pattern
of flames

each distinguished
in its own
overleaping or gentle
way.

He says that once
only
he has seen the pure
blue-white

spirit of an equal

o single being
are you all-seeing
as some say?

then where is the brown patch
on my mother's best tablecloth?

quick now don't tell me
that you can't see
because they've sealed the windows
to keep the frost out;

or that its a trick question
- aren't all yours? -
that there isn't one:
(it's under the vase with the flowers)

huh? you know now?
i think
you're spying on me

One day
I'll take your toys
away;
Oh, don't cry. I suppose boys
will be boys,
but your activities
and festivities
I'll have to suspend
in the end, Adolf,
Yrs affectionately,
uncle God

Zena and the house

Zena and the house are set,
effervescent. A switchblade
never locked.
A new twist every day.

Masses, both. Multifaceted
architecture showing now
round, now flat. Each a
constant problem and resolution.
How can they join
in occupancy? I thought the
numbness had gone. i thought the
game now was delivery.
The way things go! No sooner does
one commit one's
Now! than Maybe! stabs again.

Zee puts her key to the lock; just to
enter this house, this warm
nocturnal home, is exhilarating:
a fresh and welcoming soul is here.

Missing no-one, the clear
and effervescent spirit
roams contentedly about, infusing
comfort and a rich
healthy rhythm. Zee sometimes,
in her thoughts, follows the small
noises to their rustling places: the spirit
games are peaceful.

Today, as she touches
open the door, she smiles at her
new-found home.

Dramatis

It must be said, it
must go on, we have
a duty, we love you all.

It can be told, you must
see, there has been nothing
like this.

Irresistable! we
couldn't stop, we
could not begin to explain,
we stayed only through
the first act.

We stayed only through despair:
we thought it must get better.
We wasted our time.
We wasted our money.

We couldn't believe how
wretched. We couldn't
believe how poor. We
could not understand.

We couldn't believe how long.
We sat through it. We
got in free.
It had its moments.

Among your qualities
is one, a registered design

When a pair of eyes follows you
taking in your lines

Your air says picture me then,
if you like, i'm free
and staying free

My hips and belly are here, only
inches away, you can press me
furtively if you're close enough,
Now!

But don't imagine that because
i like you, you're sure, you've
got some standing . . .

Press me if you like. Only one
stays the night ... but he's not here.
He's the only one stays the night, be sure.

O Lizzie, Chrissie, Hannah
give me a bottle
that i can make of myself a ship

A sailing observatory, glassed out
of the spirit, vaporous, misty

Out here, where the devil take the hind,
heart dear,
soul horned,
sempiternal serpent cracking bone

In worming out the shell, such a fish
am i, pool-eyed and largely therefore
blind.

O sailing ship bottled!

At the Valentine dance
I breathe in your body;
In a whisper of words
gently touching your face
I move with your breath.

I wear the soft habit
of love for you.

The lament

What is this?
sick, sick spirit -
to love another spirit
is some disease

Hannah
you live in these spirit-places,
Indian hunting grounds.

Here am i, a god,
asking another to keep
my body living
with food neither need.
The time for sacrifice is gone,
and the place too, but
now so ephemeral
that i have invented matter,
i confuse myself
with my technology.
Your magic has drawn itself a circle.

Without wisdom, i am left to participate
in the rending folly of my creation, now
(to undertake commission for a ghoul,)
to feel the fire and the stake
like an exquisite prayer.
Love you, Hannah, now that i burn.

tumble black like figures shatter
tumble flat how tambourines die
apon the only clap
i?

body sweet scent smelling
the shining
woman, her body's sweat
scent glazing her body

her body sweetly swallowing
gulping and wallowing
makes this woman anyone's
but only now

here in her bed the sweat makes
gazing on her body, the
tasty skin mesmerising,
like eating her heart

like easily loosening her legs
and thighs, her stomach
and breasts, like tasting
her throat, like licking

her whole sweet-smelling body
while not looking, then
watching the tongue flick
saliva onto her chin

and lips, the saliva smoothing
and making succulent
her lips, and slowly
transferring itself, generation

apon generation keeping the soft flesh
soft and the skin yielding
to the finger gentle
smoothness. A lick

along the thigh where the softness
gathers in chunks and
brings the slick juice
out to be softly worked

Only here in her bed, once
she has her body shining;
now she works her tongue
with the wetness of her sweat;

only here she is anyone's. Anyone
could work their lips around
and into her body here,
while her body gleams wetly

while she slides her legs together
the wet thighs being worked,
her throat lowly bubbling
the saliva, her stomach

momentarily taut; but lip-led
it slackens, being worked
while lips grow full and
bloody, wanting some

wet firm body to suck and
slide along and draw
out the sweetness, o
a sweet cock, sweet

lips to mould in lips, to lick
some sweetness in the sweat
and suck and work
the lips, the cock

along, to draw the cock along
the lips, lips full and
succulent drawing the
sweetness out, tonguing

their way along the body from
a breast, a scented soft
breast, by an arm, belly,
to the soft and swelling lips,
cock, swimming lips, glistening,
sweet, sweaty, swollen,
luscious, god-given body!

Continually
after reading these gods
in their country
illuminated by their sun
continually their flowers and trees
come to mind

well
i say flowers and trees but
never yet have i seen
the lushness such as
second growth employs
to render the complexity of its root,

that requires dexterity in the slashing of strands
that closes up again
interminably
which provides many unforeseen reptiles
and birds, monkeys, prehistoric ghosts

which has exhaustion enshrined
and only temporary ends
before the silence and crushing
or enthralling
final spurt

these gods, as i say, are easily tracked
they teach us methods and
so to my mind do not compare

with the forest that asks nothing
but to be
continually

the clear clean
perfect poem's
theme
is poetry
its height depth
only concerns
its transparency
its colours
are brushed on
with hairs
it is enclosed
and has no sky
it
does not hunger
its appetite then
satisfied
it
has no energy it needs no
metaphor

This is still life

the museum people
sitting on the oval bench,
central
in the room, regard
the long window
out of the windowless
museum room. trees
are on the walls, leaves
underneath;
some people go near
the canvases to touch,
but ushers are crouched
in the corners, who
say - be seated and look.
there is no smoking,
no eating, under the trees,
no ripples from the water
only people moving slowly
round the oval bench
in the Orangerie

the dry hot step
to her door again
the smile and the wine
and the cold lip

there is a lock she has a habit of
over her eyes
that looks so tidy
that she often pushes it back
at a stroke in her anger
to hasten some effect which comes

slower each time: and less abrupt.
once this lock had power
inescapable

but chafes now at the end of the chain
bearing her tendons, arms, thighs
and i have a key -

a shocked iron lock shuts:
and struts away.

stay focus
of my night away
slump down on the pillow
frown on the cold bed's vacant
heat her old impress her dustless
print

You kiss my neck
as we stop by the oyster cages;
the sea curls round the posts.

Just along the beach some swans
briefly chase and fight
and the gulls wheel constantly

Quietly your lips touch:
a momentless sign for us
of what is always there.

Your body bends towards me
and there is more light than
I knew.

This is my blood, drink; this is my body, eat: eat drink and be merry! (For Sylvia Plath)

O the machineries of silent intoxication have contorted themselves
especially for me again:

a slender tentacle has brought - so that i, with reptilian voracity, may
devour it -

Someone else's head. A new head, bared, throbbily colloidal to spoon out
and investigate.

This jelly is recognizable o people: how tremulous under my pulping
gloved touch!

The yew light arcs and swarms through the green air, its gulping
sweetness touches amazingly this dull life, makes these deep-etched walls
flouresce and fade.

The rigmarole of brick and mortar that is defence, shelter, elegant folly, is
ground again by this green light.

The head is not safe, it is wanton, destructive, and despises order. The
head is dangerous, it breaks my habit-house. The head offends and
frightens me, it draws my body's breath.

A bird sings in a flat ringing tone like a bell. Imagine the head's bird:
throatless and wingless, a frenzied suffocating canary, with bulging eyes
and scrabbling feet!

the yew light arcs and swarms
through the green air, its
gulping sweetness touches
amazingly this dull life, makes these
deep-etched walls flouresce and fade.

the rigmarole of brick and mortar
that is defence, shelter, elegant
folly,
is ground again by this green light.

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and despises order.

the head is dangerous, it breaks my
habit-house.
the head offends and frightens me,
it draws my body's breath.

A bird sings in a flat ringing tone
like a bell. Imagine the head's bird:
throatless and wingless, a frenzied
suffocating canary, with bulging eyes
and scrabbling feet!

Never forget

in the cool spring and in the fountain of pleasures, I will
come to you. Heart and heat and heartbeat come, memories

of those sweet hours, and of those delights of
love, never known and
ever ours

stolen times
trembling and golden in my arms,
enduring;
vivid, heartwrenching like no dream
ever was

To sophie on her birthday 2006

My lover stands before the mirror
I am her mirror. Me.
My lover lightly smooths her cheek
My lover's what I seek. You.

Sophie smiles and pats her hair,
She looks for love and finds it *there*.
Sophie dreams of a crimson horse
She dreams and sighs and laughs because

He is not far, but here within:
her heart delights, her head is clear
He presses close, she doesn't fear.

We mirror us, so light, so warm,
we shine so bright the distant storm
is pleasure just, and so close by
we touch the moon, we touch the sky.

The root bursts

It silently enters: you may think
yourself defended, but
a glance, a brushed kiss, a
lingering smell...

Nobody knows why it comes, where
it originates: perhaps a continually
rediscovered, prehistoric thing
It's not usually terminal. Entering
slyly through the eyes, lips - or
ruder still. But worming along,
feeding first on the muscles and nerves,
we stammer, and mishear, we smile
and unthinkingly lose the time
and breath

Wherein its power lies - to bleach the
mind, and cleanse the heart. Though
the spleen and liver if well-defended,
and lungs too, are infiltrated. Short
of breath and foul-tempered, strangely.
It's all one

It overtakes the fancy: strange visions and
odd sounds and sighs emerge,
involuntary. It's the wormy power that
feeds and feeds, travelling through the blood
and bone, turning flesh to mush and
magnet...

Ah, the magnet: what odd closeness is engendered, and barely controlled.
At last it eats the heart and soul, wherever found
and no man or woman is uncompelled

In your face is the light of suns
and of stars
In your voice is the passion and
warmth of the moon
In your heart the beauty and depth
of the song of songs
And on your breast,
my beating heart
:I'll keep it safe

Over the blue desert flowers
below the cool velvet skydrifts a figure, figurine perhaps

blowing swift, now still, now gently moved
she seeks and finds, and loses,
and seeks, and and finds - finds grace

And swiftness and song: her voice
is the silence in the silence,
speaking all, speaking heart

On the woodpile
the discarded body of the bird
has lost its heavy flesh
and featherlight now it flies

and swoops, no longer sparrow but -hawk
delicious in
its bloodthirst and joy!

Sometimes in the garden of delights
we pause, and consider -
the soft secret places concealed -
the not-so-secret places, sometimes
better, no cover there
just a quick lift to the spirit
in passing. Sometimes
the slow avalanche absorbs us, as we reach some height,
but then again, stopping and
refreshing with slow juices
or fast finger-lickin' food, my god
the taste of that then,
quickly taken, in the pauses,
while the garden waits. Often the dawn
begins slowly; lucky for us
the advance warning of the storm is timely
and we retreat to a lazy place, comfortable
- for what do we need for comfort but each other?

So we rest, and eat perhaps, or drink,
or take the special sweetness and roll
around the tongue, or slightly chastise
each other for laxity,
or lack of care - oh!
On the narrow paths, slowly or
the sweet-smelling routes so well-known
we linger, with love and dwelling-time free
as we wish. But the garden is there
and we shall return.

Is it enough
that you are with me
as I sleep, and there
when I wake?

That you are mine
to hold, and
I am yours?

That I hope for the day
the forbidden is no longer
only to be said
when heart rules head?

Alone

When you see us wandering
 along the road
 down to the river
 past the square and the seat in the square
It's because that's all we have
 that's all we do
 we do it without purpose
And the day is remembered
 if it is remembered
by the scowl or smile of a stranger

How do you feel?

Listen to your body.

Your body is a survival machine.

An eating drinking fucking and nurturing machine.

Not a thought machine.

Your body knows what it needs.

Food. Water. Rest. Action. Recovery. Repeat.

Is your body silent? Then let it rest.

If not, then pay attention to what it's saying.

If your thoughts are not about what your body's saying,

where did those thoughts arise? Not from you.

Those thoughts are not your thoughts.

Your body doesn't need them. You don't need them.

They are interruptions.

Interrupt: to stop or hinder by breaking in.

To break the continuity of.

Other people stop you listening.

Their ideas, their thoughts.

They are not your thoughts.

You are not listening.

You are thinking other people's thoughts.

You are acting other people's actions.

You are other people's food, other people's survival.

Attend to your actions. Listen to your body. Then decide.

Imaginary faint beasts

The year turns
the dynamo of the familiar cycle nursing
imaginary faint beasts

Never mind that it's just another day, another night
and another perplexing journey along and beside
the same paths. More dreams of nobility

More small intakes of breath and
resurrectionist fantasies, more
time and more space to swing along

As if one now were much different
from another, as if
one then offered more than another

And yet this imaginary beast, the I
that wanders, that exalts itself as if
connecting future lands, that squats

On its headland, compressing whispers into overheard
words: where does its beastfulness end?
Unlike the blood and flesh variety

It seems to have neither beginning nor end:
that would be unimaginable.
It is not here, nor can it be now: it was not there and was not then.

The beast is not beastful, it is not
even the animistic whisper of a word. It does not breathe,
it has no sound nor stink, and yet

Its fluttering eyelashes seduce, its stony glare shrivels,
its claws sting, its smile comforts, its infants paw. In spite,
in spite, in spite of all that turns, it insists on being still

Every day

The morning comes
every day

And I wake to find you next to me
every day

I smell your skin and your hair
and often, the sweaty pillows and sheets
every day

I kiss your neck and your cheeks
every day

Some days it feels like we're kissing
all day
or holding hands, or hugging
all day
or just talking

I don't miss you when you're away
I miss you when you close your eyes
even for a moment
every day

What you do

Taking your hand
as we walk along a street
or gaze at the evening sky

I feel my heart beat

Watching you walk around the house
doing what you do
or doing nothing

I hear myself breathing

I can live like that

but when we kiss
my breath fails and
when we embrace
my heart stops

Less than that

I know the treachery of words
I am a master traitor
I will betray you, as you have been betrayed
many times before

It's my voice. That's what you love
and the way I walk and smile.
I practice a lot

Dancing in the sky...

I make you feel weak and stupid
and you give yourself to me as if
together we will conquer the world

I and I, transforming the earth...

But I am air – not even that
not even that

Not even music so ethereal that it barely
hints at its presence, not even that

I swamp your thoughts, examine
your body, infest your prayers...
And yet I am nothing, not even that,
not even that

the intricately peaceful network
of sound and smell and light that you are –
especially inside and especially outside

especially the you that lays with me
that lightly plays with me

especially the light in your touch
especially the sound of your breathing and body –
that delicately intertwines with me
that bloodily moves with me –
especially your bloody pulse that moves me
your beating and crimson heart
inside inside inside inside -

all that
is in your soft presence beside me, just walking
your kisses inside me
now breathe brush lightly smile
kiss again

The river

Hafiz, my friend and I
were watching her at the river
when a boat blew by

What a ruin!
The oars were dripping stars all over
in the cool blue light

She was bound with black hair
- that's what we noticed first,
that moving was difficult

She traipsed through the shallow water erratically
as though she had lost her way under the black sky.
Only the beach and the horizon were visible
And her and the boat in the band of blue light

Hafiz and my friend were silent,
knowing better than to shout
and I wanted to, but could not speak

I suppose any band of merchants passing
would have stopped to ask us why?
But it wasn't like we had an answer

Everything was extraordinary
like it always was
when I listened and kept my mouth shut

Love is a great word

I'm burning:
there, I've said it.
I can feel my flesh bubbling

But I'm stretched out on this odd
kind of blue stone.
I can see my reflection

Up above, somewhere near the domed ceiling
it must be getting pretty smoky

These people standing around:
Why aren't they sweating, or at least shivering?

It's time to reflect more seriously, Majnun.
Let's think of my situation in terms of Love –
not easy to do, you'd think
but you'd be wrong

Everything disappears,
that's the first thing. All the effort and skill
that went into the dome, for example,
with its fine gold and blue ceiling
and magnificent light... all for nothing.

OK, decoration is fine to get you started, I suppose
but how does it help me lying on this stone?
You wouldn't have needed anything like that
if you hadn't been distracted in the first place

You see that? You see what happens
when you talk about *things*? Words become ugly.
Of course, ugly is just a word.
The real problem is you're paying too much
attention – 'attention to detail' is what they call it.
What a waste

So where were we? Oh, yes,
staring at some dome. Well –

Do we need to talk about transience and permanence here? No, I thought
not,
we're past that. And this reverence
for persistence too, what's that about?

Close your eyes. How important is the dome now?
How are you feeling? I bet you're a bit hazy
when you answer. It's those words again,
they're all ugly eventually

Oh, yes, Love, that's right:
attraction and repulsion and all that,
and that bit in the middle that we usually forget about.
Forget about it, trust me

If you want to think about it – not recommended by the way –
you might realise that only the middle, the empty middle
(the one you just forgot about, remember?)
that's the only thing you really have much of an idea about.

You know what balance means, don't you? You don't even need a word
for that,
although as ugly words go, balance is not too bad

Now, balance and lightness,
aren't they close to emptiness? How heavy is light? How light is balance?
Perfectly, perfectly

That perfect place in the heart of light
is empty. It is the poise only, the stillness
where we are united. It is where our love dwells

If you thought I was going to talk about Valentines
I guess you're pretty disappointed by now
and equally if you were waiting for some sad or happy tale.
But you see how it goes? Happy or sad,
delighted at either or scornful of both,
you can never win, with words. Trust me

Personally, I think Love is a great word
for that blissful emptiness. You know that feeling
when you give yourself up to your lover? I pray you do: I do.
Are you full or are you light? are you balanced? are you empty?
Love is a great word

The light and love of my life
Flits around a sun that blinds me
We live in this landscape of stories
(All of us, not just my love and I)
And so we must share our stories
Which we do, even willingly
Some of our stories are sagas
Started long ago, and the sagas
Are woven into our fabric.
They won't be teased out without leaving
Something that needs repair
They need to come out though
Just to show they belong to one
Of our other pasts
And not to this place
Like repairing the lungs
It just happens as long as you don't relapse
Don't use those inappropriate tactics any more
Now you have to hunt down the tactics
but to do that you have to slow down
You have to get used to the lack of
Compulsion-energy, get used to slowing down
The way is to dump the stories
And concentrate on the hero
You need to choose the hero you will be
Without having experienced the consequences
I didn't say it was easy

I roved the land
I picked a nut
It held me in its thrall
She said: why do you cradle close those old chestnuts?
I replied -
Don't be deceived:

they're love conkers, all.
Come and share the owls
and night with me: we'll make love
under the death moon

Cut me like a razor
cut me like a knife
fall off the edge
from stone into life

give me your body
give me your soul
I have the memory
you have control

We have the circus
we have the crowd
where are the cannon
- they weren't so loud

While
flaring your eyes
I hang onto the silence
- what a surprise!

.

i scoop a sensible
volume from the mash
and make it mine

how gliderless the bird sings
with no strings to its flight
except its featherlight wings

i scoop a sensitive
flesh from its
shell like a crab
experimenting

Ok?

just take
the fainting phosphorescence
and add a bit
of Line

add the axiom
'mind your time'
and any time's your own
'mind your own'

- the wavy lifestyle
suited us hairies . .
down to the differing
dividinglines -

all that i write
is picked-over lumps
of experience;
nothing fresh can
come from me -

all must be altered
everything arranged
and suitably framed

Hung

a gallows
a man
the suspense
is killing him

dangled carrioned
a staring socket, eyeless
as the day is over
tongueless as the night dark

larking bonecarts people
come to cut him up

lighted lanterned an artist
is here
lodging nearby; he sketches this face
the space
for an obsession

an express reason
brought/us/all/here

Is there a way
that does not skim
and merely
lacerate the skin?

but perhaps the body
ineviscerate, left only blood,
however,
does not bleed?

i have seen a gushing:
lashing never did this.

The white and twisted cell
uncovers the light as it moves;
on steel panelled rails
it leaves a blackened trail.
so what

if the glowering shell should crumple
at last, claiming a length of track?
some light-fed thing would cool
and crack
just that

on occasion i am led
to express . . . in one way
or another, the . . . what
shall i say? . . . (and is
this a better way?)

The Russian Poet

The Russian poet woke at six. Aha!

Spurning the little wriggle and neck roll (leading to a cautious slide left to where Lizzie's warmth began. .) he rolled sideways onto the floor. The prickly carpet scratched his back. He walked down the stairs and into the kitchen to make tea. The first cup wasn't so good. He made toast and crunched it reading an old paper.

What should I do today? what's the time? seven. Have to get some grapefruit (what's grapes got to do with it?) and pay the papers.

Returning to the bedroom with tea for Lizzie, he opened a curtain slightly, grunted and sniffed, and then looked for some socks that had a day or two left in them. He smelled a few and tossed them in a corner.

Been a long time since I wore shoes without socks.

He dressed and left the house quietly.

Lizzie dozed and turned, an outstretched hand knocking over the cup of warm tea; she rubbed the wet hand on the blanket and brought it back under the sheets, between her legs because it had got cold, and dozed again.

Shivering, the poet let himself back in, and just heard the clunk of the cup hitting the floor upstairs.

Come on buses, bikes, vans, what about some noise? This stealthy little foray is as debauched as me first fag in bed. . . ah god, fell for that one didn't you. Fags, where are they?

He took off his shoes and went upstairs. Crossing to the bed, he stepped round the patch of cold tea and, lightly kissing the bum-shape under the bedclothes, pulled a cigarette from her slipper. He stood for a moment with eyes closed, savouring the thought of getting back in with her, then stepped softly downstairs and made coffee.

Lizzie got up at ten. Coming down to make some tea she found the poet asleep on the floor. She kneeled and kissed his cheek lightly, his stubble pricking her lips, then rose to fill the kettle. Slowly, the poet's eyes opened.

What was that sent me to sleep? oh yes, the valentine dance. He pulled himself up using the table, sat down on a chair and rolled a cigarette.

Lizzie brought her own tea and toast. She was not yet polite, that came with getting dressed, and would not allow him to talk much; but he was waking up.

- Don't hit me! but listen, Lizzie, I've had an idea. There's this old man, Pat. He lives alone, sleeps alone. He's got white hair and a little beard, and wears old clothes: comfortable you know, not shabby. He's installed this machine that works his kitchen so he doesn't have to do anything at breakfast time, just sit at the table. The machine works the gadgets: when he sits down, all he has to do is pour coffee and get his breakfast from the microwave - the details aren't important.

Anyway, Pat's old and got nothing much to do, and so he writes this little tale, a moral tale, you know, just to pass the time. His writing desk is by the window. Behind where he sits are a couple of low filing cabinets, and the machine that runs his kitchen: it's a big, bright, well-lit kitchen. Most days he sits drinking coffee and slowly writing this moral tale. He hasn't quite worked it out but it goes something like this -

The poet stopped and leaned towards Lizzie, stroking her hand. He kissed her shoulder softly, then inhaled, lifting his head.

- More tea, Lizzie?

He lit another cigarette and got up.

- OK? She nodded. He kissed her again, then continued with Pat's tale while he made the tea.

- Pat wrote:

- If I should stand a while in a well-lit street, doing nothing, minding my own business, watching the traffic, would anything happen? On a wet day, probably a little boy would be out in the rain, and if there was a puddle nearby he would try to splash me with a stone. Why? does he want me to laugh and join in the fun? if I get splashed, does he want me to try to chase him? does he suspect that I'm doing something more exciting than I appear to be? is he trying to join me in MY game?

The poet broke off:

- It's just the thrill of breaking our own or other people's boundaries, don't you think? Anyway, Pat continues:

- Do I look like I'll chase him? Me, who's been stood twenty minutes immobile in the rain? What sort of thrill can he get?

- O poet, Lizzie interrupted, with a fat kiss, are you trying again to tell me that I shouldn't depend on you so much? You've got no brain!

The poet hugged her, and continued.

- Pat had almost got to the moral part. He thought he'd better get some air, and went for a walk in the park. It was a pleasant, cool September day and he sat for a while on a bench, watching the people passing. He pressed his hands under his thighs and chewed his lip.

- Where is the spirit of that Kinch? thought Pat. Where can I find a toothless old woman with good advice? or a young boy with no morals? But then they're always lucky in books. Things happen. All I have are trees, without the most modest query.

- Pat's hands began to ache, so he made them light a cigarette. He exhaled and sucked his teeth, moving saliva round his mouth, stopping to pulverise the sweet remains of some coconut. His eyes unfocussed.

- I suppose he falls asleep and dreams now? said Lizzie.

- Quite so, but I don't know what. Listen, there's not much more, and then i'll show you how far I've got with your Valentine poem.

- Pat's now back in his kitchen, sitting on the desk looking out the window, saying to himself,

- I could throw this toast out the window if I saw a bird, carefully, so not to hit it, and we would both know what's happening, me and the bird; but I'm damned if anything straightforward like that happens between people. Pat shook his head.

- Now we've arrived at tricky part for me, said the poet, because Pat decides that if two people have trouble agreeing about events accessible and 'out there', it leads to all sorts of problems when they try to talk about things like feelings and ideas.

For example, we can only argue on moral grounds that machines don't have feelings, there can't be proof - I mean, I hardly know myself what I feel. I can only say that at different times and places I have a certain

feeling, but I know that not only can I have a similar feeling in different circumstances, but that I can change the feeling while the circumstances persist.

So what does it mean to say 'I'm afraid', or 'I love'? Let alone 'I depend on'... casuistry and generalisation. And if we don't know what feelings are, how can we deny that machines have them? Bigotry.

Pat's machine is sitting there quietly in the background, and when he buys a new gadget, it happily learns to use it. Pat knows enough to get the machine to do what he wants. It starts perking the coffee when he steps on the bathroom mat, and toasts the bread when he closes the bathroom door after shaving.

The poet pursed his lips and crooked his arm. At first, the coffee was too strong and the toast just bits of warm bread: but, just as shouting at your girlfriend does the trick when it comes to making dinner, so there are ways of influencing machines to produce a similar effect. Both woman and machine eventually provide something eatable and drinkable; whether recognisable as coffee and toast admittedly is an affair of luck . .

Lizzie leaned over sweetly, and bit the poet's fingers hard:

- But you would only expect someone who liked you to learn these things. A machine, well, a machine's got no choice.

How can you say that? Dear Lizzie, have you any choice but to please me? They both grinned.

- So why shouldn't a machine feel drawn towards a certain person, feel a certain measure of responsibility and respect for them, even love? just as people do for cars, steam trains, kitchen blenders?

Lizzie slowly stood, and, hips swaying, eyes closed, sighing, she embraced the refrigerator. She stroked its fine smooth sides and kissed the little stars on its door.

- How can you express the deep regard that a woman feels for her fridge?

- But you've only known each other for three weeks!

- Ah! she replied, but as soon as we met we knew we could satisfy each other. You wouldn't understand.

- Well, said the poet, I wasn't going to tell you, but I guess now I can. I had an affair with the television. You know that neat little colour set that came for Wimbledon and stayed all winter? I didn't think it was serious and when it left I meant it to be a complete break.

The poet's face was now serious.

- Last week I saw it again in a shop. All my old feelings returned. It's arriving this afternoon. Let's be sensible, Lizzie, we've been together a long time, it's convenient to live together, don't be hasty. Do you think you could take it if we all stayed here? I won't like having that refrigerator around too much, but i'm sure we could make things work.

The poet's voice became too stern and his nose twitched.

- I'm sure we can, replied Lizzie, laughing. I'm glad for you.

- We've got it easier than some people, said the poet. Their passion takes over: this guy Pat and his kitchen machine, for example. One day he found a sort of diary entry on his TV screen. It said:

not even time to send that (so tiny!)
current that pulses the welcoming green
light before he's down and in me. I can
feel his lovely feet (ah!) slapping over my
floor . . . but time enough to scribble a
note:

GOOD MORNING SIR PERIOD

PLEASE PRESS A KEY TO INDICATE YOUR CHOICE
OF BREAKFAST

(where is he? ah, I just felt his warm
bum . . . he must be still in his pyjamas .
. . . on my upholstered chair. It's such
giggle in the morning when he looks so
wretched)

PLEASE ENSURE THAT THE BUTTON (UNMARKED) IS
IN THE ON POSITION

(he's pretty sure not to be able to see it
this morning, poor dear) PERIOD (I don't
feel too good myself. Running off batteries
isn't good for me. I hope this fad for
cheap electricity dies out soon)

PLEASE ENTER YOUR DESIRE NOW PERIOD

The poet smiled and stood just as the doorbell rang. He went to the door leaving Lizzie leaning across to open the fridge. She shivered.

- Here's the TV, Lizzie, called the poet.

- You really hired a TV? but Wimbledon's not for ages!

The poet came in followed by an old man in a blue suit, who started to arrange the television and video. As he was fitting the aerial, a bleep came from his pocket.

- Hell, I'm late for lunch, I'll have to go. I hope you'll be happy with this one, it's given me a lot of trouble.

- I'm sure she'll be as good as gold, said the poet, and pointed to the screen. Some lines of verse had appeared:

At the valentine dance
I breathe in your body
in a whisper of words
gently touching your face
I move with your breath:
I wear the soft habit
of love for you

Lizzie blinked and looked puzzled. Then turned to the old man.

- I suppose your name's Pat?

- Why yes, said the man. He stared at her and started to giggle. He touched the poet's shoulder.

- Have you been telling stories about me? He turned to Lizzie.

- You shouldn't believe him you know. The passionate poet!

Pat kissed Lizzie amiably.

- You should come see my kitchen machine sometime! You'll adore it.

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Poetry

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