VOICES IN THE WIND

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is a collection of poems divided into three sections: "Return," "Garden of Words" and "The Mountain." In these poems I am concerned with the aspects of the return to origins in people, place and language.

The first section, "Return," is a personal exploration of origins mainly in Ireland and Holland. Poems such as "Return" and "The Garden" are narrative expressions of psychic rootspace.

In the "Garden of Words" I use numerous forms to explore the nature of exile: the narrative poem evokes the various tableaux of the lives of immigrants. Some of the shorter lyrical poems explore metaphors taken from nature.

In the final section, "The Mountain," I endeavour, especially in "Nelligan" and "The Mountain," to fuse the lyric and the narrative. In "Voices in the Wind" I have tried for a musical counterpoint, an interplay of voices and tableaux.
Acknowledgements

The Fiddlehead
Prism international
Versus
Waves
Radio Centreville
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Return

The plane descends
toward Greenland's misty
shore, plaid fields of Lilliput;
a green ridge
where black memorial
shadows my birth place.

The castle I climbed
stairs winding
to high turrets
and gazed

upon moon magic.
Great soldier-uncle
ran into the surprise

of bullets, leaving
his name; castle
on the misty
sea.
Over the tracks memories click,
waves break on childhood shores.

We fished from high-cragged rocks
into the green and swirling waves,

ran in sack races through
Coronation tents with Dixie cups,

or rode in Portrush bumper cars.
Nights, the lighthouse beacon

scanned stormy sea. Ancestors
trekked Europe, carved this railway

through the rock. These ties take us
back, past castles, ruined villages.
The mini revs past checkpoints
soldiers guard pulpits
cannons aim
from siege walls.

Banners flutter
crowds of '68
broke through cordon
spilled blood on cobbles.

-Beyond Butcher's Gate
children are soldiers;
we wind among the maze
asylums and schools
down to the family house,
Edenmore Street.

Grandmother greets us
her eyes kindle
an ageless face.
she moves
among relics of anglers
and soldiers.

Grandfather stares
out from a relief
of ships, planes and bombs:
"For God, King and Country."
Sparks explode in the hearth.
Christmas, father and I wound along the lanes to Glasgow house where Emily stoked stories of old men

her face now carved in leather; she laments a turncoat brother, catholic bullets sizzling nightly through her garden.
Down the border road
    beyond the guarded customs
below Gríànan's pagan gaze
  Grandfather cycled
by Lough Swilly's windy shore
    through the time of troubles
  to meet
    and marry
          Sarah.

The beaches at Fahan are quiet
where bards composed verses
and the Earls bade farewell,
  so beyond the gaps in rocks.
beyond the myths of mermaids
    and patriots
trees stretch their knotted
    fingers,
  old men tell their tales
  to the sun-struck stage.

We trace the route
  through collage of rock and tree;
smoke drifts across an Apache trail.
  Down on the beach
a dragon whirls its iron rotors
    and children gather
    under its foreign dominion.
Soldiers with dogs
  climb the rocky slope
    searching.
Most northern point
over the hill
vast glimmering sea,

Malin Head:

a woman frozen
in the wind's imminence
jewels spangle

on her wild water.

Out there

esprit démon,
the moving rocks

and you talk of riots,
murder and massacre.

The waves scrape the pebbled

beach:

I descend to water
venture rock by rock
tempt the tide,
green water bursting
around my suede shoes.

One does not swim here
seven years ago

a cousin fishing

his wife turned
he was gone.

One should not venture
far on these red rocks
bridges disappearing

into the sea.
In town the old men
talk in the eternal politics
of the square.
"Aye, he jumped from the cliff"
the old man says
tipping his hat.

Mountains outline the crimson dusk,
wind blows through the luminous reeds,
sands glimmer against the sea.

Gone are the soldiers,
gone is the young man.
Earth gives up her perfect beauty,
waves break freely on Malin Head.
Bridgend,
darkness shadows
the stuccoed house;
the barn, a crumbling
monastery.

Bobby Gamble rocks
before the stove
through smoke rings
speaks, of a dead wife,
married daughters and
fixing up the farm.

"Aye, was out yonder'
th' other night
and the bullets whistled
through the leaves
tho' wasn't a tune
I cared for."
I come back to this library, 
light falls softly on the legend 
of this map: no family name 
recorded on its green lines. 
Emily, Granny and Bobby Gamble 
are my ancestors.

Among these tomes I walk, remember 
the talk of poetry and country: 
from this turret window I 
look upon the divided city. 
I hold the key chain, 
the emblem of the old man 
exiled from his castle.

The barges float on the river, 
smoke rises from red houses. 
Phantom soldiers hunt 
vague enemies of the land. 
Cold wind blows 
through grass and arteries 
of stone.
Saint Columba

Exiled by clerics you turn
from the green pained hills
where your oak grew in the nourishing mist:
God's design is the raven's flight
high beyond Grianan's pagan walls,
so the hand of God guides you
along the craggy shores of Inishowen
and the devil's currents lash your bark.

Your destiny a shining lamp;
your words rise through mist.
You guide the coracle
out of Lough Foyle into the Irish Sea.
Angeor distills in your bitter heart.

Your laws are strict in a time of darkness
when barbarian hordes ride
to Europe's edge: you keep
the lamp burning low as you write sacred scrolls
and council your secular monks
to watch for the sign of the injured bird.

And could you, Columba, return now
to your oak grove, see how the clerics
and those bitter men of politics
have armed the population; this absolute love
transfixed in the murderer's eye.
Three Houses

Near this country's border
white road winds among green hills.
A thatched cottage is joined to a larger house.
The gardener digs in his garden
ravens caw out to the crude Gods,
water gurgles from a rusty pipe
bubbling beneath rose-blown petals.

Surgeon's house on the hilltop is
quiet beyond the trees and holly leaves,
one night on the Antrim Road
his son shot dead from a speeding car.
In dream river flows through glen.

Old abandoned house
rusty curtains flutter in a broken frame,
inside barrels marked with royal lions,
the bottles of spoiled whiskey,
a calendar from before the war.
"Who's coming around the bend?"
only two cyclists and a whistling boy
human cries echo in the wind.
At Baudelaire's Grave

"Où est la tombe de Charles Baudelaire?"
and the red nosed concierge laughs:
"La troisième pierre à la gauche,"
jerks his thumb as though
directing me to a lost neighbour.

Your name engraved
beneath that of the hated Aupic;
on a slate petals formed
by a child into a circle
or a crown.

And the wind trembles in the leaves.
What is death?

On the path a black cat
looks up with green eyes.

In this graveyard
the old man, the flowers, the cat
are your symbols
and there above the graveyard wall
the marvellous clouds.
The Garden

An early memory, pigeons fluttering
in a garden cage. The Veldhuisens
lived in the Hoflaan after the war,
moon shines over pink blossoms.

And the cinder path winds among the woods,
we return through this arcade
(in the Habitants’ house
a picture of this park hung)
across the field the podium angel
holds the laurel still.

That summer before we came to Canada
mornings we walked among tents
where meisjes sold fish
and old men swallowed herring:
I twirled a pinwheel
ate stroopwafels,
above the town
the windmill turned.

Mother guided me by the lake
where swans glided
past the palace
and the sphinx-like lions:
we stepped over the wooden
arched bridge
and the angel rose
in a Bible vision
her eyes looked upward
powerful wings spread on the air.
I was twenty when I returned
After the funeral of Oma
I stood before the Hoflaan’s dark windows
looked at the gyroscope; Opa sailed
the Zuider Zee, steered cargoes
through the wave-swelling night.

So I approach you again
your wings smudged
but still that silent grace;
in these palace gardens
Wilhelm and his princess
took their tea.

Along this road the Panzer divisions
rolled in to occupy the country.
Was it here Herman sneaked our
gathered firewood
under your watchful eye.
And the V 2’s whistled overhead
destroyed cities in England.

By the pond you and I walk
parents as lovers hid in the tall grass
spying Opa and Oma strolling
in that peace that reigned
after the war.
They were married in that city hall,
(that childhood palace) now the mayor
and his councillors pass by-laws
under chandeliers; we cross
the bridge above the sleeping swans.
In that cottage an artist and his wife
draw the magic of colour on white space
colour wild as animals and flowers
drawing a new geometry
    perhaps an image of you

angel: I recall you
on monuments, graveyards, mountains;
in mornings before school saw you
on the Dutch war plaque,
in Herman's house at dawn
when the light
    broke through the curtains
falling on Athena by the fireplace
    broke through the leaves
into song
    above the milling streets
of commerce.

At twilight this park a genesis
as we move through the shadows
leave the cities in war;
and night comes rustling
in the leaves
    and the fountain rises
mingles with our voices
    breaking into colour
over the dark water.
Josie of Flower Street

The seamy room where father drank
and sisters swarmed around me.
Mornings the odour of bad meat
hung in the air. In afternoons
the sick smell of steam rose
from filthy clothes.

That night the Dane approached me
thrusting more gulden into my hand
than I made in a week at the laundry.
I bought my first red dress.

When the wind rose
sea-air drifted back into the city
and sailors from all over the world
would come and want me then.
I was young, tawny
not those caged birds for tourists.

My leg hurts again. Raining,
but not as it did that night
when the car beams blinded me.
Emergency, the priest, enormous penguin
blessed with the dangling cross
digging his fingers into my thighs.

There are not so many men now
the door-knob creaks in my fingers,
students! words drift down
through the smoky light,
books sailors used to read me.
That morning Jan was longer undressing, taking his socks off last, digging his fingers into my back, trying to get hold of something beyond me. Then his cheeks flushed red as he arched into shock and collapsed on my breasts, his eyes cold as the room around me.

I was in my dressing gown when the police came. Their blue eyes gazed at me, I couldn't answer their simple questions just kept smoking, looking down into the grave of the garden.
The Old Church

Past cracked red wall
we edge among gravestones
of merchants, wives and children.

Dust sparkles
blossoms tumble
and birds from the tower
sing.

In luminous wood
black sealed bunker

beyond the dyke
children swim.
*Work Camp*

—for Robert Veldhuizen

After the bombing of Rotterdam that was it.
Next morning Opa and you cycle through
the flaming streets past streaming refugees.
There are new laws, Jews vanish,
an edict summons boys from the villages.
A girl from city hall warns Oma
so when they come you are on the soccer field.
Again they return, the commandant says:
"You must report to the fatherland."
One of the soldiers recognizes you from the game
winks as he leaves the kamer.

All avenues are closed. You have to report.
On the station platform your family
is frozen into sadness, recedes slowly.
You have to stick closely with your friends
in these compartments. You watch the last familiar
light on the lakes fade into the distance of night.
The train rolls over the frontier into the foreign
darkness of the fatherland, on through alien country.

Behind barbed wire windows you cut uniforms
work long into the night. Your only freedom
is soccer on Sundays. After months letters
come less often. You are bent to the will of war,
life becomes machine, uniforms, the barbed wire sky.
A friend tries to escape, is sent to Auschwitz.
At night the Allied planes drone overhead
you wait, listen... One morning you awake
to the deserted compound and the open gate,
the American soldiers are crossing the field.

You return to celebrations in Holland,
parades, flags and welcome lines.
You are treated as traitor,
your son will not go into the army.
That first sunny morning at Katwyk
we climbed the white ribbed sand.
Beyond the dunes and waving grass
the water sparkled blue and gold.
We built castles by the sea's edge.

When I was seven I watched
as by the bedroom window
you sat brushing bright colours
into the shape of the windmill,
the tulips and the canals.
Outside the cherry tree blossomed.

When you painted the country of Canada
it took you weeks to shape your mountains;
stroke by green stroke
pine by pine you formed the forest
the grey-purple glaciers
a white peak shining in a windy sky.
Slowly you painted pictures of your life.

Smoking in your room you described the war:
you dragged firewood through heavy snow
avoiding the patrol; outside the Hague
you gave an orange to a starving man.
You were never a spectator. Recently
you leapt on to the subway tracks
to save a barking dog.

We went to Jasper in the mountains,
sailed across the crystal blue lake
on a wooden raft, Jim and Huckleberry Finn
fishing and diving through clear depths.
In the evening we drove deeper
into the mountains to Honeymoon Campground
pitching our tents at the edge of the forest
among the bears.
Later we headed east, covered
the prairies in a day. At Secret Lake
we caught muskies on homemade lures.
Past the lakehead toward Marathon
we drove, laughed, told legends
of the Indians and the moon
was a red volcano. The grey winding
road guided us home to Toronto.

You loved the earth and its waterways;
nature was your theatre.
So clearly do I remember
how we raced down the mountainside
I following you
as the magic magnet of our skis
obeyed our hearts and we flew down
over the high-banked edges
and the curving moguls
down through the slopes
of that white and silver sea
down through the silence into evenings
around our stove and coffee.

I see you now
no other way than in motion:
sailing across Georgian Bay.
skating down the Humber River
skiing down the mountainside
talking around the campfire.
Herman, you were as generous as the colours
and forms of the earth.
Your pictures became your life.
Garden of Words
Night View

Wind is your voice
breathes in late winter streets
across empty chalk-white roads.
Leave your metaphors
on blue and silver ice
then follow your eyes
to the dark sky's rim,
châteaux, mansions, canticles.
Follow the mountain's road,
the sound and sweep of your breath
along high ridges
down past domed asylums and old lamps
where people murmur in grey breaths
under the cold blue exile of this night.
La Tempête

It is the hour when wind whips down
through trees filling air with snow,
when light is obscured by dark contours
and the snow hurls down diminishing roads.
Rooms blur, movement becomes line.

No longer logic, only the cold sweeping
line of the snow, the desire for warmth
in the veins of men.

Men at their windows
watch their reflections, the small cubicles
of neighbours through tangled branches.
They escape into the fantasy of film,
perfect movements across green combat fields.

Now is the hour when the lonely abandon
white solitude and flee into the darkness
of the moving vessel;

everywhere the wrecks.

Tires whine like arguments of couples
guilt caught in the currents of the white drift.
The lonely go out into the whiteness,
leave their animals in empty rooms;
somewhere a solitary child cries.

We listen to the relief of the snow
the blizzard howls into the night
until it expends itself
-a soldier, a lover.
You Should Always Carry a Pen

Looking out of the library
window into the blue city
my reflection sails over
silver buildings
up on the billows of smoke
past radiant rooms
where workers cover machines.

And the words come easily
in the interior of this building;
luminous are the rooms of your mind.
In this library take a book,
any book.

Beside me the woman operates
the amazing xerox, amazing x-ray machine
and turns the sky phosphorescent.
She is the temptress in green
transforming the evening
into the myth of a blue ocean.

You should always carry a pen
especially at twilight
if we are to believe
the chronicles of Coleridge,
his nightly walks by misty lakes.
And the woman is making a book,
slips it into an envelope
and disappears.

And I am framed by evening;
the eyes of students are globes
suspended above their books.
Where is the pen?
There on the table,
a yellow pencil
and I take the Eagle Mirado
ride the lines of flight
over the darkening city.
The Cabinet Maker

The short tanned boss
stands before the empty studio:
clean up this yard he tells us,
the building has to be sold.

The man who ran this business
went berserk;

(in the dead of night he creeps
into the warehouse, seizes
the sledge hammer, punctures
the heart of every machine
with the skill of a deranged surgeon.)

All morning we shovel
garbage into oil drums.
Lunchtime, I slump on the steps
in the cabinet maker's studio
look at the nearly naked Sheba,
a poster of the veteran cowboy.
Beyond the wired windows
sheen of leaves
death of dreams.

The white pale powder
drifts through machines
beside me a green surgical mask
half-buried in the dust.
I can hardly breathe
there is a pain in my head
this man went berserk
crept back into the warehouse.
There is a pain
this man berserk
groping toward the rusty can
desperate scribblings of this man:
Puttana de vie, two gartered girls
naked sisters of justice
flail each other with whips,
a large androgynous devil leers
at me through nausea -- eternity
is a long time, especially
toward the end.

I go to wash my hands
an upside down tap spouts blood.
Past these dead machines I grope
into the open doorway
shovel until I vomit;
through the sweltering heat.
a still rocking chair sits
in the dark showroom window.
High School of Montreal

In the mural Jacques Cartier brings gifts to the Indians. The tarnished plaques were inscribed when Greek and Latin were taught and Pheobus' steeds reigned with Victorian decorum. Dancers danced around Athena. After Somme and Vimy Ridge the bronze boys were engraved outside the office door.

A bell rings and children spill out of classrooms; Europe, China, Africa run beneath headless angels break into the library scramble beneath the portrait of the headmistress scribble their desires on classic pages.

Beyond the circulation desk the librarian reads "Sweetness and Light," recalls Brooklyn's blue nights. Johnny ransacks the paintings -- Botticelli, Rubens, Manet, Renoir -- searching for the naked women.

The librarian lights up another cigarette, looks toward Mount Royal gleaming in the sun.
Christina

1

You sit in the kitchen watch
cars, wind up the autoroute
run fingers over cheekbones
are you fifty already?

On the mantlepiece
your wedding picture, your father
stands by his chrpmium mine
up on Olympus. Below Athena
coffee spilled on headlines.

2

You are nine years old
and troops march down mountain
roads, you stand in the square
singing the anthem of Greece.
Later, as you leave the theatre
your uncle in a tree, swings.

When you graduate the blue and white
flag blows above the lyceum,
the Egyptian visits for afternoon tea,
you sit on the sea-wall
under the blooming oranges
and he proposes and you sail
the Mediterranean.
The day awakes in the music of Arabic jewelled spires coil out of the Islamic desert. Night, the Pharoahs silhouette the Ptolemaic stars, the moon a golden boat, Jason embarked on his ancient quest from your village.

Life blossoms as the lilies along the Nile, yet there are changes in the wind, financial rumours, shifts in government. One night a friend stands at the foot of the stairs, whispers: "You must go, or George goes to prison."

And then the desert is snow, you work in the university on the mountain, speak ancient Greek with a professor, later you work at the Hudson Bay Company, your only friends are immigrants.

You walk down small casual beaches how to live without the sea, the village the dancing Aegean nights, those myths carved out of the sheer white cliffs. You throw a stone into the mirror of the lake, the maple reflects in the clear water.
You return to Greece, something has changed
the land knows you, but the people
don't understand why you stay up
all night watching Galactica
over the Mediterranean.
You become angry when Greeks
take you for an American
and you fling out your best Greek
for you are Greek to the bone,
Greek as those cliffs
standing against the invading sea.

Something in you has changed,
you see it in your son, his music
the measure that is in him;
you look out over the autoroute
feel that ancient quest
stir within you
flow into your precise fingers.
Salmon Run at Streetsville

Down past the old red house
the Credit sparkles, flows
beneath the white mill;
up on the dam
a hundred fishermen
try to catch the red running salmon.

The fishermen hook them
by tail, fin, back:
their laughter spills
across the dazzled foam.
They argue with one another,
their lines become entangled.

Lost in their desires
their twisted smiles
enjoy the silver death.
Mothers and children
watch and wait,
roe dry on the rocks.

Salmon fly up against the foam
lunging toward clear birth shoals
again and against the falls
they jump
until they are snagged
on one of those hundred hooks.
Music in the Snow

Now is the moment when things fit in
the bankbook drops into a secret socket
out there money again
and the boundary is clear,
the halo around a lightbulb
seen from a distant forest.

This is the moment, the resumption of music
when the moon parts her curtain
and logic is a fence
following the slope of hills.
Now is the moment, striking of the baton
twirling of gold coins on counters,
meeting of lips;
here too one will dance on snow
and not act on the tragic stage.

This is the moment when it follows
the picture lifted out of the canvas
swirled back deeply into the cosmos
back into the creator's heart,
the strong rush by semi-lunar valves
love you moon, of my heart, my heart.
Girl Walking on Friday Afternoon

Over the sidewalk she moves
her coat dark above her hips.

Nor does she alter that pace
moving under the stained glass
myths, the gothic domes.

Evenly she moves
through melting snow
by running water
up toward mountain boulevard.

She stops, turns
raises three curled fingers
to the strands of her hair
glances into the bright wind
steps down into the street.
Pinballs

Under fingertips machine is music
moves to your inner rhythm
the ball springs into trajectory
slides down fortune's alley
spins through the gates
of paradise
past pyramids
tempting sirens
pillars of Hercules
the liberty bell
out into a space odyssey.

You are musician...soldier...lover
dexterity is your art
in this world of light, action, colour;
you press, flick, gyrate
and the silver ball
contacts the coloured points
breaking into chimes.

Among grey-haired businessmen
expert boys and timorous girls
you combat the machine
parents
and governments

follow the movement
of your fortune
as the machine
lights up your dream:
Hollywood...hockey...disco
immersing you in this coloured
synesthesia
and you fight against
the score until the light flashes,
"Game Over."
Walk into Autumn

Walking out toward the bridge
the morning clear overhead
the white road winding
  a clear path of thought
the brown water stirred
  flowing round the river bend
the leaves already turning red.

We mature as the season
the gold leaves still against the sky.
What is time beside that crooked fence
and those stones?
  Something seen in 'les beaux-arts
old man saunters through the wood.

Birds veering
into arcs of migration
as we move toward winter.
Toward Rimouski

Recall the river
the long, low glimmering of gold
on the blue-grey water,
the green islands in the flow
and the ships.

Clouds: domes, cupolas and pyramids
we could almost get up and walk
through corridors of those kingdoms
where stories and the songs
of fishermen and sailors rose
blue voices in the wind.

Tents hug the hillside:
voices of mothers and children
sing, echo in another language
cars drift across the slopes, satellites
blue slowly dissolves
into dark resonance of space.

Settle into the sleeping bag
dream of ships moving across water
away from the city
out toward the island,
swim through warm water and snowflakes
and the ship bringing us back.

The spirit breathes lightly
mist on water,
the Indian singing in the poplars.
Sunlight wavers on sky-blue tent
we have a hunger for the morning,
the fuzzy figures of campers
move through valley's distant smoke
and by the fire we take our coffee
and world slowly assumes its outline:
mountain, valley, brook, auberge.

In the grass,
    the purple sage flower
    buttercups and marigolds
    the games of older days
    strawberries ripen near rocks
    bees hover around the bursting daisies
    here the exact flowering
    under the black giant hills of morning.
Midnight Hunger

Out of darkness
these words shine as fruit:

I forget their texture
the taste on the tongue

how syllables move in the mouth
and the flavour of diction

released as I peel the leopard
skin, those ripe Latin vowels.

The golden pomme sings
out of the primal garden

and the mysterious orange
shines over a violet sea.

In these roots and stems
is the flower's form.
Two Oranges

Snow hangs on the fence,
the air is cold blue,
death a dark window.

I am learning to feel.
Before me two oranges
in a brown bowl.

I hold them,
feel their weight rise
through my fingers into my arms.

In this silence before sleep
I place two oranges
within the rim of our lives.
Balcony

Glancing at my directions
for the number of your house on Ste. Famille
those Parisian fronts with Brooklyn railings
across Sherbrooke tarnished figures from antiquity
then you two waving from a balcony.

On the doorglass a pastel flower
blooming:
  bound up the stairs
as they give way, waves
leap up into the light of your apartment
  music of Morocco swirling
through Greek pillars, crystal chandeliers,
  a mosque glimmers in dark water
in an alcove of a photo
  people are waiting
you on the balcony by a rusty railing
waiting: pigeons, grey, mauve, green feathers
rise through heat
  vertigo
and so here we sit on this shaky balcony
above Ste. Famille
and talk
about Indian rhythms, Black rhythms
and one floor down
a girl in a blue garb
sits before her round red table
  café, fromage et croissants.

Soon in the yellow kitchen
the lady and the unicorn singing
singing of Mallarmé's angel
and out there
in the lavender light skies
the sun setting on the green mountain
our dark bodies outlined,
the balcony,
  glowing.
After the Blizzard

Snow whirls round balconies
sweeping against the sky
grey clouds gather in the zenith
as the wind rises beating the snow
pulling the base chord of air.
Down in the pool girls laughing
as boys splash around them,
sky darkens beyond the snow screen.

Someone is talking about apocalypse.
The swimmers are gone, pool is aquamarine.
Above the mountain's black and white rim
touches of orange, yellow, rose.

In the blue sea of the sky white fish swim
darker clouds, horsemen riding across
the pathway of the evening
riding over the city
across the pastel meadow
round the sapphire world

drifting deeper into night
we lie in bed
smoke drifts through darkness
a white beacon scans a starless sky
somewhere a door bangs
someone steps into night
the electric current of the orange clock
trills in rapids over pebbles,
a cat meows
the wind is a child's plaintive cry
echoing through dark alleys.

In a Chinese pagoda a candle glimmers
burning its violet and yellow flame.
We are all colours now,
calm as the river.
Nymphae

In the Botanical Gardens
pale people stroll
among the blooming flowers,

the water-lily,
a Pre-Raphaelite Ophelia
French, *La Nénuphar:
a yellow butterfly I saw once
on a stamp of Mozambique,
but the Greek, *Nymphae,
lady, that's my flower,
bride of water, amphibious beauty
whose fibrous body grows
down through those depths
into the earth.

What tragedy have you blossomed from?
You sang out of the wood of Delphi
the destiny of lonely women,
you appeared to metaphysical poets
in late English nights,
you attracted Monet
who spent his final years
painting your body of petals.

Cool air wafts the lacy willow,
along the white path we walk
solitary in the dazzling summer air,
some drowsy lotus aroma
drifts to us in the wind.
Silence

To be in touch with things
mist bathes the coasts of the world.

Should I type tonight
cause the Chinese man to waken.

Upstairs a boy cries out from a nightmare
his Japanese mother slips out of bed.

Soon she will stand before the waterfall
in the rock gardens of Kyoto.

The little boy will say "hello"
to the ancient guard of the gate.

My typewriter is a silent temple
blue mist drifts across a distant shore.
The Mountain
Spring Winds

By the window I wait
as you read, an unusual air
breathes open the curtain
across the grey sea of snow:
yesterday, black man at the bus stop
cars rose from subterranean shadows
into mind's bright intersection.

And the bed is a moving vessel
I want to awaken
snap these cold, tight moorings
escape this silent movie
that entices the city
in a strange sleep.

Already the sea recedes
things push themselves up
snow thaws and now we
renew correspondence,
make levee in these warm
white billows, the cats
dash through the changing air
and resolution comes.

Locked in the dark cell,
my cool room in this ice-palace
I rise, open curtains
see beyond asylums, schools, bureaux,
beyond the gothic utopia of the mountain
with its legends of snow and
frozen boundaries.
Nelligan

Getting off the metro on the way to work
I would see you Nelligan in that bronze
constellation with Garneau and Cremazie
as the crowd eddied on:
your thought was the colour of distant moons.

Through these years I have gathered the tableaux
of your life: the house where you played down
on Carré St. Louis, your walks with Dahtin
through old winding streets, that voyage
to Liverpool and Belfast
and that clear night in the Château de Ramezay.

Waiting for work in the manpower office
down on Bleury, waiting with the other workers
reading their Montréal Matins and Gazettes.
Adam Star looked across at me with red eyes:
"Find out about the real story of Jesus
and Mary."

Next door the tarnished green plaque
erected for you by friends. There you wrote
by candlelight after you quit college
wandered down sloping, misty streets
past dark studios, sawdust taverns
in search of that ideal state of art.

Each day was a different job,
moving carpet rolls, unloading cotton bales,
painting trucks, cleaning out factories.
Lunchtime I translated your words
to the humming of machinery, your paintings
of gardens, saints and black angels.
You left family and friends
sailed to Belfast.
Out of the mist the dung-shaded
city rose as the vessel glided
among skeletal cranes, prehistoric
creatures rising out of the ancestral land;
and the morning of my return
the sea was amniotic green, spilled
under the pinklip of the sky,
swans glided through tar-water.

This was no golden vessel,
no Celtic world of green song;
among marines you were a stranger.
Night and the ship rolled
and the poems would come in dreams:
half-naked women wandering
among bombed naves, women
draped in nuns' habits
shining brightly as ravens' wings.

Again you move in your natal forests,
and the purple mountains and green hills,
where lecherous Capuchins revel
with the languorous women of Rubens.
Your thought was the colour of distant moons
the white boat sailing
through the psychic night.

At the Rotterdam auctionhouse I worked
behind glass and later along midnight
lanes walked recalling Zarathustra;
crows flew across the brilliant moon
swerved through the fevered air
as the laughter of lovers
spilled over canals.
And waking in the Polynesian room
leaves grew around me,
from the walls
the eyes of dark jungle gods
stared.

And I wandered through the music museum
violins, pianos and scores,
up the stairways to the attic,
the talk of Provosts, Cuba and revolution;
and the blue blade of moonlight
sliced the cathedral dome.

And then your return to friends
and the outpouring of poems
that night you did become poet
reading to the crowd
as to the sea.
Your voice rose into song
burst forth with night purity
for the beauty of woman
by the gleaming leaves
then the world rose
to the symmetry of a chandelier
and the notes chimed
on the unknown scales
of the constellation.

And it was a purity,
a whirlpool in the blood
and your vessel searched for form
but there was only the frozen sea
so you strung the lines tightly
until the nerves around the heart
began to strain.

And that energy rose in me,
nights I paced the circular streets
of an Irish inferno,
at every gate, a soldier,
that fortress
I could not break out of
and the energy broke.
It was plainly a lie.
Rimbaud seeing no answer
took off to Africa
where he was more at home
with the forces that moved him, move man.

And you, Émile,
'searched for pure beauty
gazed through words' violet radiation
toward the blazing mountain
until that night the songs
flooded your vessel
and you collapsed in fever.

Nietzsche saw the man whipping the horse
high up on the mountain,
the sun lashed the blister of the sea
and the moon's broken lute
sank under the waves.

That night I heard your poems
sung by the chansonnier
at Le Patriote, your face
in that of the young woman,
but above the shouting and laughing
to popular songs, the stamping
to an Irish jig and on her
invocation of your death
you expired to Volare.

Walking up Jeanne Mance
before the storm
toward the old convent
I stopped at a friend's
and listened to Brahms'
Requiem. Across the road
they bombed Concordia.
You sat in that dark room
locked across the years
and years of snow and heat
toward the memory
of the song of the mountain.

It began to rain,
the mountain lost in mist,
thunder cracked the sky.
Two girls at the door,
"Nous cherchons une chambre."
h her father was the inférier
in whose arms you died.

The silence claimed you
I walked home through mist
lamps glowed like eyes in the night
and the green shoots sprouted
through the cracked earth.

Sometimes walking the city
I see your house, hear
the piano composing your music
across Carré St. Louis
echoing through the sunset,
your song that is forming
in the trees.
The Mountain

1

Approach the north slope
as road winds round
"La tour des vierges."
Light among coloured leaves
glances off gravestones
ski-slope weaves
down to scrimmaging boys,
beyond theatres, churches.

2

Down to St. Viateur where Hassidic Jews
stroll past the shop of baking bagels
and Greeks eat souvlaki in rusty Fords
before the posters of the Acropolis.
Here an old fisherman tosses up candy octopus
as crabs claw the air,
their underbellies, sky-blue porcelain.

3

Cruising down Park Avenue past the mountain's
coloured garment. Workers have scrubbed
the angel, the lions and the politicians.
Angel, protector of language
your wings rise out of concrete
fly before the mountain's smoky colours.
You linger before the last white credits, 
listen to scraps of other people's lives. 
The crowd moves beyond the film's music, 
the mother drowning in the sea, 
the daughter's angry soliloquy. 
Old people stare at the closing curtains.

Night's hunger gathers around the mountain. 
People move out among the dark statues 
of politicians and poets; in a theatre window 
a circus, ballet dancer, unicycles, clowns! 
Pastels of lake, house, a woman: 
an artist smiles at the imaginary country.

The road winds through the day. 
These images rise through me: 
you bending down and releasing white seeds, 
words rising through tall grass 
into the patterns of the sky, 
fiery pinwheels turning high above the graves.

And I cut into the pomegranate 
bite through the rind 
suck the thick red seeds. 
Blood spills out of the pulp, 
I forget the bittersweet taste 
of the path we walk along each day.
Down the mountain past the Acropolis
and the sky-blue crab, the octopus
and the milk-pod with its bursting buds,
down past the angel, the lions and the workers
past the painter and the lake
down to the fruit of language
that I eat.

As the day closes and the night opens
I am going down into sleep
winding past parks theatres
churches,
the graveyard in the coloured forest.

Open the rind and it will come
the music of words
in sleep, dream and thought
and I reach out
hold this fruit once again.
Changing Seasons

We are the dream awakening
you unfold as a warm blue night
golden light in a dark forest
moving to the sea's silent rhythm.

And snow of April melting
crystals dissolve into water,
the night is stark,
the stars are cells.

And in the turning of the seasons
light flashes upon the earth
as on a cheek and in its turning
we are the dream awakening.

And we move into the night
to rhythm of sea, stars, turning earth
moving clearly into the path of light,
we are the dream awakening.
Voices in the Wind

Each day a different school
and mornings the bus stops
takes on new immigrants
weaves out of the labyrinth
of the city,
language
debates and advertisements.

So we rise out of headlines
dreams, move up Mount Royal
past Plato College,
search for a new republic;
Atlantis sank
beneath the waves at Knossos.

And we pass among

Aristotle's Creations
Librairie Papyrus
Electra's furniture
Pascal's hardware

looking for the real.

Who are you today?
Each day a different subject
English, French, History...

In the staff room
the grey-haired Phys. Ed. teacher
lights up another cigarette
recalls playing on Nesbitt's farm.
-Your deal.
-Money's going to Vermont.
-Za, Sam packed up Midnight moved to Palm Beach.

And we played among the hills could see the nuns knitting in la collège classique.

-Your play.
-Wife's suing him for all she can get.

We used to play hockey on the pond before the big house shot between the boots.

-What's trump?
-Hearts.
-As long as you know the rules you can stay.

They put the highway right through there, out of date the day it was built.

Bell rings we move deeper into the maze: disco beat, accents of Caribbean
and Aegean. Lockers swing open to sounds of John Travolta, shapes of Charlie's Angels.

-Boy, you should have seen her parabolas.
Among the desks,
the broken routines I walk
recall the exiled neighbours.

Next door the Chinese man
stirs, dreams of sunlight
shining on the Yangtze.

And the Polish man polishes
his machines in the Coin-O-Matic
reflects on his lost son.

The corner grocer eyes
the snow-ploughs,
tanks occupying the Ukraine,
recalls four years in the Black Forest.

Behind the grill
the Greek director
wipes sweat from his brow
thinks of an old film.

    And the wind blows
through Carré St. Louis
ghosts of Nelligan
    and exiled Crémazie.

Winter occupies us,
we move through this maze
of magasin windows,
look at masks, politics,
Theseus and Jesus;
winter's giant filibuster
conspires against us.
Spring brings us out
leaves blossom
wind whispers through galleries
strangers emerge onto balconies
gazing down onto the stage.

We enter the mountain park
follow the contours
of the road
when morning sunlight shines
on the childhood sea
and waves break into words.

We move beyond the walls,
the barbed wire and memories of war,
climb among these rocks
until we reach the summit.

Below the city glistens
in a twilight tapestry
bridges span the dark currents;
our lives,
a labyrinth of streets
spread before us.
Vigil

I am brought back to this room
this late vigil:
that voice in the dream
and waking. Can you go home?
No. Home is a place in the head:
this room, this page, this night...

I do not know what to carve out of this air.
What place where I live
in what bivouac
in what intense enterprise, my life -- the circus.
No, it is more an idea than a place
a voice that is always correcting itself.

And you, this person I am talking to,
how can I know you
except by listening.
We are exiles
hearing the same sounds in different places.
Are they so different?

The world is dark at my window,
the voices of people clamour in their dreams,
but we go on,
as runner or explorer;
moves through darkness
to a still vision,
the pain in the lover's eyes,
the old woman at her window
looking up at the lamp

the lamp that shines on the street
no matter what we call it.
We shall not suffer
the pain of purity.
but move down the rolling hills
over harvested fields toward the sun
see our shadows grow over the cold earth
and the moon rise

and here,
the earth is blue and green
the colours of the eye.