

THE ABSOLUTE IS A ROUND DIE

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# THE ABSOLUTE IS A ROUND DIE

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by Hugh Hazelton



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*things move so quickly  
that every time you cross the street  
you risk getting run over  
by your destiny*

*beings evolve  
so slowly  
that every time you cross a life  
you risk repeating it*

## Alcohol\*

---

\* From the Arabic *al-kohl*: pulverized antimony.

## The Omar Khayyám Hotel

one day I'll go to Nishapur  
to the earthly hotel of Omar Khayyám  
I'll drink wine or beer or arak  
I'll refuse all water that doesn't come from the sky

I'll sail without a ship I'll empty my head  
the skull is an astrolabe blood is a stream  
I'm a rumi from Occitania  
a wop from Quebec

I'm a rumour from nowhere other  
than my mythmaking out of truth  
a hummingbird flies by and  
never closes the door of air

I get ready for the worms with ashes  
I'm an innocent without naïveté  
beauty is both warm and cold  
and never forgets what it is

a poem is a mind-carrier  
that searches for the deep heart of things  
I plunge my eyes into the sky  
that plays marbles with them

I've almost sung I've almost loved  
I've almost poemed I haven't believed myself  
I've moved about in a room of illusions  
I've pronounced words others reach out their fingers

in the desert a stone is a dial  
in the café words are hookahed  
in the hammam nakedness is the soul  
in the mosque man is a carpet

against drama all we have is gambling  
against order all we have is poverty  
against the day all we have is the sun  
against love all we have is a heart

there's not a single steeple that doesn't ruminate about spiders  
there's not a single temple that doesn't regret infinity  
there's not a single tower that doesn't protect itself from the depths  
all that's left is a Bedouin over there not far off

to make us hear the camel driver's silence

### Rumi Tavern

time is an alcohol we fear  
it's neither time nor alcohol  
that we should fear  
but fear itself

I'm alcoholic for the call of truth  
I'm not a realist of sobriety  
it's at night that I see what glimmers  
not in the oven of day that cooks us all

the present is a fox of light bulbs  
the present is a wine skin filled with beyond  
the present is a neighbour who's afraid if I don't sleep  
obedience only pleases those whom we obey

who is poet enough to be drunk from never sleeping  
I say that knowledge is being born with the other  
I say that wisdom is dying without myself  
expecting nothing of life fearing nothing from death

I know I'm lost  
others will say I'm distraught  
everyone makes fun of themselves  
as soon as they think they've found out who they are

my love my friend you want me to tell you  
I've spent my life trying to tell myself  
but life's done nothing but live me  
without knowing which life it was

when I say my love my friend  
I repeat my love of life  
which perhaps is not yours  
but a simple orange blossom

that doesn't even await a fruit  
 that doesn't doubt its seeds  
 that's humble enough to give  
 its colour to transparency

I am no longer I or another  
 just an impersonal abandonment  
 as over-personal as the water  
 of a hookah smoked with arak

don't forget anything are you able to  
 if so you're no longer yourself  
 if not you're no longer the self  
 this nothingness happier than happiness itself

happiness and misfortune are the same drunkenness  
 they only depend on my glasses  
 whispers the seer to the blind man  
 when the void sounds in their bones

but he who can see life  
 without life having looked at him  
 can answer with the carrier pigeons:  
 I fly without stealing

evidence should illuminate  
 innocence is the principle  
 utopia could be the norm  
 joy is burning

I drink water from the Euphrates  
 I drink beer from Alep  
 I drink arak from Damascus  
 I am drunk by my tears

### The Night of Al-Ma'ari

the door is death  
 if you don't understand  
 it's because you're not yet dead

the path leads through death  
 if you try to return to where you were happy  
 then you're no longer what you thought you were

the foot returns to the earth  
 if you try to go further  
 then you haven't found anything here

if you refuse your bones' agenda  
 then you don't understand  
 the gestures of trees

the wind leads to the wind  
 tell me more  
 if you can then you're no more

than a breath of light  
 among the rustling of the dead  
 and of the dead to come

## The Calm of Patrice Desbiens

I'm free without a country without time  
what came before couldn't care less it's dead  
what comes afterward doesn't exist  
music is a loop  
that encircles the void  
the décor makes me feel peaceful  
love doesn't bother me  
the invisible recruits me  
I make another poem out of it  
I finish my drink  
I'm going to make believe I'm sleeping  
no it's not true  
I open my door onto the night  
a tree offers me the northern lights  
eyes are good sometimes  
a wind blows through the leaves  
and carries off my vague desire  
to say more

Art

## It's Only a Morning

No one can steal my dreams, except for the annoyance of not being able to take charge of them.

I often dream of losing my bag. Since every skin is a bag, it seems I dream of dying.

Only dawn can remove the moon's radiance. Exactly real. As much as I am when smoking in front of the wood stove in my lover's house. Or, if it's not too cold, going out on the balcony the better to go up in smoke.

Now that the morning is blue, can I close my eyes to the orange street lamp? Even if symbols show my poverty in the face of a misunderstood world, I make a cup of coffee from these words, all but the black ones. The infinite is awake if I don't owe myself anything.

I warm up the coffee too, if I swallow it.

## The World is a Sickness: Get Cured of Everything

I die every day the way you'd pour yourself a glass of water. The way you'd throw chicken gristle to a stray black cat that lives on the sheet-metal roof over the fish shop next door.

I'm worried: I'm a seagull who eats whatever he finds. After each bite, he spins around to check if he can keep on ingesting his pickings. As if he weren't worthy of those innumerable pieces of garbage.

I'm useless, like a poet faced with a poem that's better than his life. I'm as happy as rainwater, satisfied at having lightened the cloud so it can dilute into the sky.

The sky is perfect smog in a splendid evening light. Everyone will get something for supper and then return to their cell to swallow the pill. What's wrong with everyone thinking they live better than their neighbours?

I don't always know if happiness is worth the sorrow of the misfortune it reveals.

## Earth Cell

while men tear apart other men  
a little village drinks and eats in a barn

while lambs are led to the slaughter-house  
ducks take a nap among the arrowheads

while clouds can no longer take care of spruce trees  
turquoises climb onto women's necks

while deserts receive the light of stars  
eyes close to their own dreams

## By Default

I write but I have nothing to say  
all I've got to say is nothing but  
I write it obsessively

tomorrow is an old day  
at any rate older  
than what I think is new

and so I gallantly  
keep telling myself  
without believing it much

everything we believe has an end  
because right from the start  
we're finite beings

we work hard at dying well  
we're lazy from having a hard time  
we've never succeeded in being we

there's no choice except being  
outside the terrestrial parenthesis  
that will complete the sun's apprenticeship

everything that's true in life  
dies with death  
endorphin is a casual candy

words only tell us one thing  
we don't know what to do with what's muzzling us  
unless it's war or music

I chose my camp and naïveté  
the buffoon is perfect when  
he gets the better of himself

if I were truly alone  
I wouldn't want to be alone  
and I wouldn't write what I've just said

## With

the mouth doesn't have the powers of what the heart says  
 I get old so I perfect my nothingness  
 the days are right every day  
 why be so meticulous about the toys of war

because it's natural to ape cacti  
 immense progress from the hedgehog to the soldier  
 I terrify I kill therefore I exist  
 paltry justice always just as fresh

the lamb on my plate  
 my salad torn apart  
 the wind I turn to ashes:  
 that's my earthling condition

as pleasant as always because I approve of it  
 a pigeon shits on me  
 I accept this gift from heaven  
 with a smile and humility

sit here in the sun right on the ground  
 wait eight light-seconds  
 open your skin stop all your intentions  
 we only are through what we are not

do things exist because we can see them  
 I thank everything by which my senses  
 escape their finite habits  
 leaving me defeated orphaned free

eye with that which is eye  
 I read through what I am written  
 spirit of that which intertransforms itself  
 from sand to glass from crystalline lens to wind

I'm the eye's pupil through my roundness  
 I'm the gust of wind through my arabesque  
 I'm nothing through the unnameable  
 the secret lies in not calling yourself

## Today and a Bit of Always

when I'm no longer there I'm reading it to you slowly  
 I'll fall asleep in the drowning of memories  
 it's good to sink straight down into the elevation of what's forgotten  
 the success of anonymity is in the serenity of absence  
 which is only possible through a presence which falls silent  
 orgasmic loved to such a point  
 that it has no need to continue  
 after having been  
 it's just a bit short  
 nothing is worth assenting to nothing  
 if everything passed on has been smoked sniffed captured  
 in a first last second  
 where there's no longer a logic of numbers  
 the irrational is the metronome of the reasonable  
 I plead for this in all stillness  
 there's a joy in the world  
 which transforms passing into exceeding  
 I don't believe in what has to be believed  
 I dissolve without really understanding  
 the friend the lover give me the immeasurable  
 I'm weak: the twig bends beneath the chickadee  
 today almost without pressing on it  
 the screen supports the message  
 the message holds up the appearance  
 every age has its mass  
 it's not so easy as you think  
 it's not so difficult to never have understood it  
 we live above all to give ourselves pleasure  
 you can smile at yourself  
 you taste the indulgence of others  
 you fall asleep filled with your day  
 you couldn't care less about being wrong  
 you bite into a cherry  
 you light up a cigarette  
 you're not dead yet

## Spiritual Exercise

when you let your hands grow  
 from doing nothing useful  
 time is a fly  
 that we watch as it prays  
 without fear of being killed

I see clearly that eyes are wrong  
 not to see each other as flying pebbles  
 the sky is solid  
 may it not displease your feet

it's not a question of convincing death  
 the shadow is the invention of a poet  
 who's afraid of himself

## Bar Sky and Wave

the pride of understanding the depth  
goes by like a butterfly  
on the surface

I detest the selfishness of sleep  
I prefer opening the porthole of night  
and letting myself be breathed in by the heights  
above the cumulus of dreams

art is a personal truth  
that lets you take the basting out of social lies

I detest the selfishness of sleep  
that closes itself up in dreams  
and forgets them upon awakening

here the only work is seeing  
through closed eyelids  
the power of our star

I detest the selfishness of sleep  
that abdicates out of obedience  
and grimaces out of absence

love still shines down on me:  
if poetry is an exact science  
science is random poetry

I detest the selfishness of sleep  
that lets eternity go by  
the better to be part of time

I write to return the gesture to the word  
the wind opens and closes the door of the sky  
an eye sees the turnstiles of births

the wind doesn't beat  
against the wings of butterflies  
conquerors are to power  
what nudists are to the sun

the poor are to the earth  
what airplanes are to the sky

the clarity of light changes  
humans so little

I can't forget that the night  
is a field of eyeless  
suns

## Insignificance and Serenity

we wait for rain  
so we don't have to water the garden  
the sky and water are slate

there are times when you see  
farther than your pupils  
the thing in itself the rainbow in itself  
the interminable beginning of the world  
where the wind will reveal us to ourselves

the wind doesn't speak  
it makes us speak  
drizzle that won't make  
the potatoes grow

it's raining in my black coffee  
the sky reminds me of the elements  
I'm made up of 90% water  
more or less like coffee  
the other 10% is annoyance  
another name for the will

what is life  
if it doesn't let us feed  
on the carrion of our own death

I don't understand any more  
I receive I give back  
death renews

I will have passed on  
a fly between two windows  
beneath the magnifying glass of the sun

## Truce

the gulls  
as they let themselves glide  
don't trace circles in the sky  
they follow ascending spirals of air

I'm still waiting  
for man to rise  
like a sun on the water  
water is the lock on the rose of bloods

perfection exists in this world  
when you can't take anything away from it  
or add anything of yourself  
time is what we haven't been

love is clear  
it gives time to space  
we're all on the same plane  
the sun is still the pilot

a breeze plays the accordion  
over the water's skin

# Love

*for Yasmine Mish-Moush Halabiyé*

## Love Letter 1

Love, I can't do it any other way: death speaks to me, and so I speak to you of love. I've already told you – it can't be said too often: the awareness of death is the only cause of love.

That's why you and I have never been afraid of the sun, unlike those fearful of order, who remain in the shadow of their shadow. I know we won't even have as much time as they do, but who cares? You and I never cease to feel that no time belongs to us, as if we were at once of all races and yet of none in particular.

There are no more countries now, except for the ones without territory. I see you filled with wonder for the whole earth because the water contains it, because you're a woman, and I love you, I, the man who no longer believes in humanoids, I, the man of the third millennium, no longer believe in man. I'm made of air; I'm a being of the wind. I'm the one who doesn't believe himself, I've never been able to and I never will – that's my only game, love.

The champagne of words deludes me, as do the bubbles of your gestures. And if, after saying "I am," I add, "a poet," it's more to defend me from myself than out of fear of abandoning myself to you, love – you who offer me the awareness of life in an effect of absolute reality.

## Love Letter 2

I'll take care of your tulip like the lane of my skies. I'll slip the letters of your skin into the envelope of my hands. You'll rest while I keep watch. You'll decant your suffering into the fluid song of my only sword. My pen will say it all; no one but you, my soft tumultuous one, will understand.

You'll be reborn through my eyes, which will take yours far from shouts and swine. You'll become strong again, you'll go through other doors; I'll take you by the hand to where we'll never need more tomorrows.

I know too well these words won't change the world's malice; I write them just for your beauty, for you alone and together, with me.

## The Great Gap

I drown between the least painful and the most painful which are equal  
 I can't find out anything about us two gobbled up by the daily lawnmower  
 passion is an immolating cannibalism with this banal liquidation to boot:  
 walking alone crying in the rain  
 you come to get me even there where I collapse  
 I'm only hungry for alcohol saliva  
 real music true art  
 that raises the real up to the heart  
 you offer me other transparent glasses  
 in situations with no more dips  
 into the still waters of sorrow  
 I'll give you back word-hands  
 so we can peel the destiny  
 that we danced another way  
 exhausted mortal flamboyant  
 ripped open naive necessary  
 it's the hour of the sun  
 more or less our throbbing  
 skin

## Not Really One More Song

detach yourself my love if you feel like it  
 even if you think you don't want to  
 life is a store full of images  
 that we buy and throw away

the best way to love death  
 is still to celebrate all the lives  
 look at me you are your love  
 I'm a little boy who knows it

I'll die soon with pleasure  
 if it happens smiling  
 at the sky your eyes beauty  
 I won't speak anymore of illusion

let's dance with the truth of our nothingness  
 where our sole freedom lies  
 I'll die as many times as it takes  
 to be happy to search no longer

happiness love or silence  
 pebbles will keep on being an opinion of time  
 trees will remain the cellos of the air  
 cats will continue their Buddhist works

yes the earth is perhaps a mistake  
 where the universe learns it's not perfect  
 the game goes beyond laws: a way for matter  
 to pass through all the states of fire

here's a poem that won't tamper with anything  
 it simply sings the bittersweet  
 softness of a little boy  
 who has loved to love and believed believing

who goes off peacefully  
 with his words fingers and joys  
 now he's a man who knows  
 that identity doesn't make things any less identical

let's stop blaming drunkenness  
 madness raises the eyelids  
 real life finds its heart  
 certain hands are snowdrops

you don't have to be afraid  
 forget what you think I am  
 I'll be what you forgot to be:  
 an instant's alcohol, strong and pure

lips open to the night  
 the aptness of being nothing more  
 than a small explosion  
 of tenderness

## April in Montreal

spring returns with its honeyed airs  
 its downpours of tears its dog droppings  
 sometimes I make myself feel better by saying  
 that I'm sick of being human

what's truer  
 is that I'm still naive enough  
 to believe that walking around alone  
 in lanes at night  
 I'll find a poem  
 through which someone will love me

I walk less and less  
 in what too many call real life  
 for the simple elevating reason  
 that certain birds have a better life

sometimes I just don't look anymore  
 and find that the rain smells  
 like our entry into the world

then I go wake up love  
 I make it what it is  
 a few gestures of anti-death  
 a wordless saliva  
 a habit-burster

## Eyes Lose Their Scales

sometimes I just have to do like the rain  
 because nobody loves himself enough  
 to truly forget himself  
 for the moment that's what I believe is least false

a sort of very clear cloud  
 a way of considering the things of human life  
 a lightning bolt so strong it surpasses the light  
 of usual days and used nights

the ocean gives wise counsel  
 the great cities window in their destinies  
 I hope we have an interview with the sky  
 the blood of earthlings is a fountain of fire

we think we speak through words  
 we're only well or badly lived by life  
 for no longer knowing if we're capable  
 of hoping for anything other than not waiting for ourselves

a seagull cuts through the rain  
 to shelter in the tears of the river  
 angels in yellow raincoats demonstrate  
 for a few frayed images

between bells and a siren  
 I don't know how to digest this world  
 a shower of leaves unrolls a red carpet  
 when I return toward the solitude of words

you leave again over the great waters  
 toward the glory of your gestures lambs almonds  
 and the reconstruction of your heart  
 in the pears of your breasts

## Erosphere

irrational sometimes reasoning  
 I consider the morning and evening equal  
 even if I feel the morning more woman  
 and the evening more man

only the stars are androgynous  
 in the womb of perpetuated night  
 it's so rare for four eyes  
 to be united in a single vision

so that love will still appear to me  
 like a conscious sun  
 I pick up the phone of the sky  
 and speak to the swallowed void

life loves me much stronger  
 because I'm loved by death  
 forgetting the nostalgia of what I haven't lived  
 I whisper to the world what I've not yet become

there's a lot of infinity in the end of a day  
 a woman knows who makes her fingers coil  
 a mouth stops moves on to another  
 in lip mode

## Gaspépoetry

the round moon  
 has bitten into the mountain  
 the rain doesn't want to cross the bridge

here the land is red  
 you feel like the living fossils of the sun  
 these rocks millions of years old  
 next to the moist agates of your eyes

over where the herons are  
 there are multiple sandbars  
 to drink up the interminable blue

the day the flashing woodpecker  
 came through the green door  
 I picked an ant off my head  
 and threw it to the tides of wind

rain-filled peonies  
 bend to return the water to the grass  
 poets simply plagiarize birds  
 searching for verse-worms after the slightest rain  
 that returns to the earth

I listen to a brook in the night  
 putting my hands behind my back  
 because I can't pick up anything more  
 without being naked

a butterfly has died  
 so your chrysalis can open

## Love is an Idea We No Longer Imagine

I bring you the colours  
my gaze may have  
I still don't know  
what love should be

the birds are propellers  
for those with tired feet  
death provides a project  
every day

living offers mourning  
for each light  
we learn something  
from the meanders of a scent:

the invisible can make you  
want to keep on breathing  
the rent of an instant's paradise  
costs a lifetime

## Atomize Me

I put birds in glasses  
they're made of paper lips come on in the shower  
I cut up beings in mouth slices  
tell me what poet lives out his verses

I wait for you calming my nerves  
all the televisions are preparing for war  
you turn in my blood  
I don't believe the screens

I love your cry that pierces my carotid artery  
you burn with something that's not lukewarm  
you go you gesture you roar what's left  
a truth of love without a jacket

click of fingernails splash of kisses  
shells of ears silence laps against the window  
we only obey what dazzles us  
come love evaporate me

## The Mystery of Banality

I sit down on the edge of your bed  
receiving the sunshine till it drenches my tears  
I'm two-thirds of the way through life  
tell me why it's just when there's two  
that we'd like to be one that's all  
and never sleep again  
you cough a depth of cold  
I go off to shave the animal  
leaving the skaters at the right  
to enjoy their agile feet  
I walk in love  
with what's left for me to see

## 24 Hours in the Life of the Hourless

in the morning a woman sobs in my arms  
I tell her what we're perverting in the world  
is just a theatre with multiple dimensions  
we play as much as we are toys  
of a child in ourselves greater than we are  
at noon I take the road that goes no farther  
than the flowers named baby's breath  
among the red dragonflies with their four wings  
next to a heron fishing in the water lilies  
I sneeze the beyond when beauty breathes me  
now is so long it makes eternity fleeting  
I want to tell the woman I love:  
your tears are the dew on the grass of your eyelashes  
your body is the earth where my body sprouts  
towards the open air exhaled by the great spirit  
then a child comes up stops dumbfounded  
before the heron as tall as he is  
two worlds see each other motionless  
I see fear in respect  
much love in abandonment  
filled with dusks during battles  
a plane passes overhead in the night of advances  
I raise my tomb to the old age of dawn

## To the Aleppan Woman

over this pale ochre earth  
 cedars bend to comb the wind  
 pink and white laurels follow the roads  
 welcome is the first flower offered  
 by those who've been deepened by the clarity  
 the sheep are the same colour as the rocks  
 deserted watchtowers guard electric poles  
 two camels led by a mule  
 head off in a direction unknown to history  
 flowers are the first crosses  
 without crucifying anyone  
 they're the crusaders of beauty  
 for softening fleeting glances  
 the silence of the woman I love  
 enters me and whispers  
*I'm in the city that bears my name*  
*I'm between the doors where my blood comes from*  
*I'm bright with a face thousands of years old*  
*and wouldn't I still be?*  
 she takes a sip of light  
 opens her apricot and tells me,  
*I let the birds deposit*  
*the dust of time on me*  
*a caress from my love*  
*brings me back to the present*

## An Afternoon in Aleppo

in this dogless city  
 where it never rains  
 my girlfriend goes to the hammam  
 while I smoke a hookah in a café  
 a boy on a donkey makes his way through the taxis  
 and disappears in the dust of the citadel  
 love we've got to move softly  
 in this antique angular world  
 to give ourselves back the thirst for a self  
 that comes from a raw light  
 completely indifferent  
 to our mania for sorting  
 objects from beings

## The Truth of the Apricot

I'm not afraid of being understood  
I come from afar I come from here  
with a bit of rotten meat between the senses  
I drink from the sky with languorous eyes  
I rest sometimes in a question  
as efficient as the wind: am I  
I am a bit of earth chewed up by words  
I am what a god despaired of being:  
the joy of not being taken for a man  
a ponderous phoenix flying again  
a tear on the cheek of a woman  
an unequivocal tenderness  
no warrior would suspect  
I come from here I come from you  
to never again return down here  
to never again say I  
to open the clouds with one sweep of a pen  
disappear without any fear  
without any assurance  
without any motto  
except that of the apricot:  
every fruit will be eaten or will rot  
everyone knows that story  
not the apricot working on the softness of its skin  
the hardness of its stone  
no need to be a monk to understand the monkey  
or in the least necessary to be a fruit to harvest the night  
in no way compulsory to be a stone  
to dream you're sand in the eye  
of the blue man

## Friendship

## Band-Aid

There are times when you'd like to drop it all. I'm as fragile as you. In this world every tear is the price of the sun in your eye.

Even if they sell emotions by the ton, nothing and nobody could carry for you the space in you so near the void of time. Drop that too, and let's move on.

You'd like to believe in the goodness of life but the tearing at your being is too strong. You go on, dragging your armour along. You wouldn't want it said that you've given up or that you're lost.

Why leave nothingness in order to be born if not to die in the illusion of ugliness or beauty. The world seizes us, radiates us. We have no other defence than to smile at being nothing.

## The Improbables

there are indeterminable lovers  
 they've never slept together  
 they order up the mist in their eyes  
 they make millennia impatient  
 through doors called books  
 that they write or distribute  
 to uninvented beauty  
 infinite lovers are fragile  
 they're drunk with their placeless fragrance  
 their silences speak unplaceable shivers  
 their lack of mystery disturbs  
 skin is a silent accordion  
 that makes silk nostalgic to the fingers  
 unsurprisable lovers enrage  
 handkerchiefs alcohol sheets  
 limitless inimitable they drink elsewhere  
 from springs of a bottomless simplicity  
 they take part with an outrageous trust  
 that ridicules passions the frustrated  
 their compass is spherical immediate  
 that's why they're ignored  
 irretrievable lovers  
 lovers without date  
 lovers without river  
 lovers without hourglass  
 they've come through the suicides of affect  
 they're innocent of their eternity  
 their zero-shaped mouths lengthen verticals  
 they're sometimes seen  
 on certain unforeseeable nights  
 exchanging their woody souls  
 like oriental children  
 making this long scarf of uneventful lives  
 twirl on their laughter

## State of Excitement in the World

*for Otto Ganz*

tonight the sky is half cloud half blue  
 some would say it's the image of life  
 I myself agree with the astronomers  
 this world takes more than a star to be a world  
 more than a croissant to be a breakfast of infinity  
 more than a cross to suffer from a belief  
 more than a void to be so full of itself  
 in the name of which the world would hold  
 our perception isn't enough  
 it travels in an incoherence  
 that transcends everything until  
 I'll-never-know-what  
 in every poem I'm always stuck  
 on the legacy of my birth

## Pastoral Letter

*for Paul Chamberland*

I'm not a great traveller  
 if not a hiker of the soul and spirits  
 if not a passenger of the earth  
 who as he ages is more and more  
 taken aback by humanity  
 irradiated by his own humanity  
 so I look at a stone angel  
 an inquisitive man who draws back the wrinkles of a shell  
 and I repeat this lieless mantra:  
 eternity is time  
 that has lost its memory

## Damascus

mandarin fig pistachio and apricot trees  
 fructose roses things and neuroses  
 souks Mamelukes and neo-looks  
 hijabs and mihrabs

the weigh-man who doesn't weigh anyone  
 the young boy softening cotton  
 the little vendor of goldfish  
 the more I am the less I can sleep

they sell sell and sell again  
 they sell not to sell themselves any longer  
 they want to escape the power of others who possess  
 sweat suffering and silk all sleep in their caravanserais

poverty is always counter to nature  
 the culture that ignores it plays the dictatorships' game  
 pain causes revolt  
 the earth can't take it any more

what men  
 have made of this world  
 is truly too narrow  
 for us to obey them

## Al-Jamal Al-Dimashki\*

for Nada Homsi &amp; Maya Helwani

we're innocent voyagers  
 apprentices of light in the night  
 we try to capture the depth of beauty  
 common to all these worlds so different  
 we search for the truth of beauties  
 we're as fragile as the swallows of chance  
 we wish lavender could wash the heath of the heart  
 we want to give them back their uneasy souls  
 we believe in the crossroads of consciousness  
 the star has its place in the boat of the moon  
 we're still idealistic enough  
 we're troubled by the clarity of passionate destinies  
 we're passionate about softening passions  
 we're original pilgrims who say:  
 beauty is a gift in the wind that comes  
 beauty is a prayer that gets forgotten by every god  
 beauty is a future as immediate as eternity  
 beauty is as motionless as everywhere  
 beauty is on the terrace of millennia  
 beauty is arak shared in songs  
 with Nada Maya and all their friends  
 facing Mount Qassioun and its thousands of generations  
 we want to learn the word infinity again  
 so it merges with the word peace  
 the absolute is a round die  
*sièh-sièh i-shin-den-shin*  
*kapkumpka kapkumpkop in the hope*  
*Tlahuitzcalplantecutli*  
*gracias así se da el spassiba*

*per lou fantounel nasdrovié*  
*tudo bem prego hello sky*  
 I see the height that calls me  
 through a simple drop of zero  
 which also means five  
 the hand gives its fingers  
 the minarets are lit up in green  
 I believe in the poem about love drunk with awareness  
 pure in its madness of being one  
 in the oblivion of the one  
 tear me away from a single world  
 sugar salt mix together in a falafel  
 that the dawn gives to all those hungry  
 for soundness for joy for pleasure  
 to those who wish for an end to fear  
 (courage is intensified despair  
 a quarrelsome fear a manipulated naïveté  
 or else the truth of necessity  
 or necessity of truth)  
*sabah 'ablan* to Nada and Maya  
*'una shaaeir* I'm nothing and well  
 I'm illusion I'm us  
 ourselves unravelled  
 to the sweet lilac soul  
 money is god if all the gods forget it  
 God is money if all the moneys forget they're gods  
 Omar Khayyam said,  
 "Going and coming are the never-ending cycle.  
 Where is the weft in the chain of life?  
 The eyes of the pure burn with the sky's fire.  
 Yet the smoke itself is gone."  
 and you what do you think  
 in the hotel of the infinite

\* "The Beauty of Damascus" in Arabic.

## The Time Factor in the Laneway of Morality

for Yves Boisvert & Antonio D'Alfonso

time is not a feeling  
 perhaps eternity  
 in our desire for it  
 but being neither eternal  
 nor of my time  
 I persist in believing  
 by suspending my origins  
 in the inanity of my ends  
 which self has no trouble  
 convincing itself of its goodness  
 no response is shared  
 because misfortune is a feeling  
 which can be sold if you embellish it  
 happiness an embellishment  
 which can be bought if you believe in feelings  
 believing equals not believing  
 the dependence is parallel  
 the infinite is a shattered convergence  
 why would what's unfinished  
 be only imperfect  
 why would the present  
 be the slave of the future  
 if fear is not a church  
 whoever has no fear is dangerous  
 1. because he believes he has no fear  
 2. because he believes feelings are weakness  
 3. because he believes time is subject to him  
 but whoever is afraid hides away and remains  
 a sentimental mode of life  
 there are many who wish to die  
 because they were not born from love

there are few who are  
 because they no longer need  
 to be reborn

## The Circle Opens the Eye

*for all the members of the Cercle de la Tourelle*

all passengers travelling to the light  
are asked to bring their eyes  
it's good to throw your eyes into the sea  
so the cormorants can bring them back

the finish is as prickly as a sea urchin  
that a seagull will eat  
the better to fly off  
toward infinity

the infinite is the nearest star to the present  
when you know the present is never finished  
in the same way a star rises over the ocean  
which is only one of its mirrors

no light can keep itself from shining  
why do humans crucify each other rather than cross paths  
I breathe in through the mercy of the universe towards itself  
I exhale for the best of the love I am not

one night or another every being is immolated at a sacrifice  
that goes beyond him if he agrees to it: the truth of the ideal  
seated for an instant on the porch of eternity  
I lose the game just to win the moment

if a being digs through the garbage cans in his path  
perhaps he'll stop fleeing its waves  
the future is a fiction for those who consider  
the present a sickness of the past

heaviness is only the refusal of evaporation  
even the sun will go up in smoke  
other beings will ask themselves  
about the fossil of the earth

my childhood is an airplane that flies between the stars  
without knowing anything of wings or fire  
the farther a being goes on earth  
the more the circle becomes an egg

spirals are the condition for flight  
to leave the circle of the eternal return  
at night we can see more clearly  
what blinds us by day: our poor eyes

how when constantly faced with the infinite  
not to be indulgent with the finite  
for which humans are only the paltry carriers  
better a tardy word than a perpetual silence

the ordinary finds mad the extraordinary  
which doesn't judge the ordinary  
myth is the daily bread of the invisible  
sought by the eye that cherry of the sun

good fortune opens the gates of the sea

## Beyond Ordinary Eternity

*for Fernand Durepos*

tonight I write you this thing my brother  
 I'm at least as alone as you  
 I understand your solitude through my solitude  
 which is no better settled by the recognition  
 that all the literary milieux could give us  
 the flatterers bootlickers two-faced bastards  
 know nothing of the faithfulness between us  
 since before during after their time  
 your words have more important silences  
 now you light up a cigarette  
 reading this rereading your poems  
 you understand that writing is always still-born  
 if it runs after exterior eyes  
 that only look to be seen  
 without noticing the elegance of the desperate  
 who surround them everywhere  
 lucidity is an intimate modesty  
 exchanged by those injured by love  
 in a friendship that outmatches them  
 because it comes long after  
 their deaths to ordinary eternity

## It's Definitely for Living

*for Linda Bonin*

do ideas die  
 like autumn leaves  
 carried off by people  
 in the land of their head

the eye is a medusa that fishes  
 for the origins of the sun  
 that rounded it  
 in an ocean of tears

poetry is never said to be  
 just a bit inhalable  
 the lungs of the universe  
 do not fear the cancer of humanity

the hair of fire comes to the table  
 pressing luck to repeat itself  
 in a doubling-up of destiny  
 I climax to remake myself a birth

for a better acquaintance with the other  
 today I walk along with a seagull  
 tomorrow I'll do nothing more original  
 than detach myself from my shadow

I thank life for liquidating me this way  
 faded lotus leaves on their stems  
 migrant herons from late autumn fly overhead  
 each passer-by emerges through his eye

beneath a sky  
 quilted with clouds  
 a solitary mallard on the pond  
 surrenders to the acupuncture of the rain

## The Glory of Dust

*for Lynn Diamond*

they've told us a thousand times  
 the spiritual sky begins at our feet  
 every life is a bit of opium that floats off in smoke  
 happiness is real when it weeps  
 unhappiness is old when it laughs  
 how many gazes have been snuffed out  
 because a spark was refused them  
 I pity the lighthouses sparing of their night  
 every fly has a thousand eyes for flying  
 and I have as many deaths to make it through  
 no password to enter love  
 even less fuss for obligations  
 I still want to believe at every moment  
 that the light spares no one  
 I'm the fruit of the toys that formed me  
 religions stab their swords into skin  
 politics pierce the bread of bodies  
 culture anesthetizes pleasure  
 I'm just the faithful follower of my death  
 death reveals one of its secrets  
 every time eternity sees its reflection  
 in one of the moments loaned to me:  
 there's nothing but the knife of light  
 to carve out a glory to dust  
 I'm sure we're nearing purity  
 when we transform pain into beauty  
 the butterfly's trail is more than obvious  
 it's not aware of its effects on the wind  
 and other boastings of thin air

Soul

## He Who Hides His Soul

After a public reading, a woman came over to see me and burst out, "You're a man who hides his soul." Being the idiot I am, I didn't know what to answer. Once I was home, I told myself I should have fired back, "My soul is invisible, like all souls. It can be read, though, if you find it worthy of ocular exercise." Obviously I'm still late for reality. That will teach me not to have money and, in all sincerity, excuse me for writing what your salary doesn't allow you to live. Just between us: I may not have a soul, I don't have a computer, I don't have a house, I don't have a car, I don't have a child. But it's amazing how comfortable it is when you've never really believed in the earth.

## To the Four Winds

*for Michel Depatie*

to the north

light gives the eye the feeling of space  
 space isn't too worried about looking well placed  
 the place goes from blue to white on its way through the night  
 time is the road at the end of all roads

to the south

the earth's carrousel turns and warms me up  
 life has given me the mobile motel of my body  
 form reflects a roulette of elemental particles  
 the present continues packing its bags for the future

to the west

nothing shows the present is conditional  
 the rose of time plucks the petals of the order of chaos  
 cloud you only move by changing and say:  
 I'm as much smoke as your air of leaving

to the east

the silence is the moment in which  
 you don't need to appreciate yourself  
 let's invent this punctuation:  
 the elevation point

## Outside of Nothing

a poem descends  
 from the clouds of March  
 it's snowing sun

the light breakfasts on me  
 when I stop travelling  
 at the speed of days

the heart is a one-way ticket  
 for the laundry of the eyes  
 or the smoking room of desires

gills of tears  
 the proof of what we are not  
 undresses or puts up a hood

leniency debones the soul  
 when you think of skin  
 as the dew of night

life gives voice  
 to the silence of muscles of air  
 to give birth to a bird

the stars are afraid  
 that I don't look at them enough  
 when I neglect my firefly vocation

## Random Hike of Poetry

you have to drink your eye  
to give it to the other senses

for whom are the stars hands  
that bees carry to their sisters

we can dream of purity  
in front of a black window

I still don't know anything more  
than an identical present that's never the same

in the branches of gestures  
it's easy for leaves to be hard of hearing

why does the instrument precede contact  
when fire is made of air

we put things in perspective to live better  
we love to die less

everything we need  
is in what cuts us down

the justice of solitude is useless  
when you don't know how to travel

the silence of others doesn't speak  
to those who have a lot to say

is taking action writing yourself in the world  
so as not to read yourself in what goes wrong

if I move from here  
will I leave myself

if I find myself there  
will I be lighter

here or there time loses me  
space will pulverize me

we're suitcases  
looking for their traveller

does a bird beg for air  
does the air moan about the wind

there is no void that awaits us  
perhaps another bridge of lips

all the moons I've seen  
are the same woman though never identical

all the suns are travellers  
before arriving at the customs of metamorphoses

if I'm afraid when I see a man  
then I can't face myself

the world is a fruit that bites into me  
the eye is a drop of water in the general desert

humans are paperless ideograms  
in the childhood land of their death

I'm breathed while I breathe  
it's the blood given to the hike

## The Body's Tale

I'm a body that I'm not all the time  
 I don't worry about the dust I'll become  
 I don't pester the bones I contain  
 I don't stress the muscles that entwine me  
 I jumble the blood that irrigates me  
 I breathe in souls and breathe out my weapons  
 I rest in other bodies  
 I emit sounds to awake myself  
 I shout at my brain when it takes advantage of me  
 I'm not bothered by the ashes that I'll be  
 I recognize the ones that have let me believe I'm in the world  
 and believe I'm of the world of the soul

## The Soul's Tale

I'm a body without a body  
 I trouble the words that want to speak me  
 I'm music that does without translation  
 I come out of the heart toward other hearts  
 the seagull that carries me has no fear of garbage  
 I'm the soul that comes through misery  
 I give another chance to beauty  
 I'm elusively present  
 I accept all the colours attributed to me  
 because I'm translucent  
 I migrate I transmigrate  
 I'm a vision without eyes  
 I make solitudes drunk I vomit up the violent  
 I piss on jails and I water the beyonds of the spirit

## The Spirit's Tale

I am the soul of souls  
 I pass through all matters of debate  
 I'm homeless and coatless  
 except for the suit of wind that comes and goes  
 there's nothing less certain than I  
 who am nothing and everything at once  
 I have no need to believe myself  
 I have no need  
 I have nothing  
 I'm born through death and die from being born  
 I'm born through my death and I die if I'm born in all others  
 I'm the dimension beyond dimensions  
 whose only body is the breath  
 I'm given

## Inbreath-Outbreath

I always come to you with my hands  
 play them like the keys of a piano  
 the trees won't be annoyed with you  
 they're used to wind  
 nourished by light and water  
 I truly believe  
 we're between the fingers of sun  
 birds at the end of its branches  
 yes I'm there at the end of the road  
 like at the beginning of your eyes  
 I can't set you up  
 or find a place for myself  
 so untie me  
 from the gallows of the earth  
 so the roots of my head  
 can return to the soil of constellations  
 I'm less and less afraid  
 the poem has made me feel like a stranger  
 the universe doesn't have any orphans  
 just a few scattered notes  
 on the score of the indistinct  
 the supernatural sings what we're missing  
 horror suspends all dexterity  
 origin and end:  
 I come from the present  
 and it's there I return

## Servant of Grace

there's a cloud in my glass  
I feel like my living room's a plane  
light is the stewardess of the soul  
especially when I bask lizard-like in the sun

take it as a personal weakness  
a polished laziness to warm up my meaning  
I never go to the souk that sells running shoes  
except to understand my own state of things

one day you'll be dead one morning I'll be too  
till then I'll swallow lots of poisons  
without making a fuss  
and will thank the earth

for setting me down awhile in worm-verse next to the sky

## Az-zahr\*

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\* *Az-zahr*: “The die” in Arabic, and the source of the words *azar* in Spanish and *hasard* in French, both associated with “chance” and “randomness.”

JOSÉ ACQUELIN

## The Silent Heights

We've always been seen, in our lives as low-lying clouds, by beings with refined eyes. We sometimes feel them in us like eggs already hatched beneath another sky than that of footsteps. You have to believe in the incredible because there isn't anything else. Man has exhausted man, no one will be right in refusing. I'm another who has understood that walls are launching pads outside the throbbing, useless effort of obeying.

## The Unimagination

It's the real more real than reality. It's when someone speaks and says something more than what he says, something stronger than anything he could have imagined saying in such simple words. It's when you don't do anything anymore, when you couldn't give a damn about what you are, when you enjoy being there, for everything and nothing – before, in and through the madness of electrons, calm as a satellite sailing between the stars and the earth, without any theatrical gravity or poetic relativism.

## Words on the Table

there's hardly a thing in my house  
 a few circles of music  
 clocks of wisdom  
 a bit of alcohol  
 that comes from an indefinite light  
 to sing of a skeleton  
 that's learning who it is  
 nothing much except  
 a clear drizzle of everything  
 that's not myself

so if I leave  
 make of it what you want  
 though not money  
 or hatred  
 I'm telling you again  
 I'm often ready to leave  
 but I stay there to keep trusting  
 the evidence of love given  
 at each of the bird's appearances  
 as an example of the soul

it's an involuntary simplicity  
 in the face of multiplying suns  
 a stunned sloth at not being able  
 to do anything other than write yourself  
 outside of important actions and actors  
 it's a calm restlessness  
 that sees the fine hailstones of things  
 and the endless bursting in of beings  
 an invitation to take myself  
 for a bouncer of the void

## Humility is Invisible or It Isn't

the wind changes the clouds into beams  
the present becomes a gift when it's empty  
the gift alone removes all desire  
you could call it full nothingness  
or the suspended song of solitude  
each reality of the world is its student  
the disinterest of the sky is confirmed  
by the absence of beings from their matter  
love never supposes  
light filters pain and happiness  
so space can space itself out  
so time can dissolve  
the day that's ending takes the night with it  
there is no other secret to death  
all the rest is absolute  
an infinite gambler

## Whendor

every being can recognize that it's a new bridge  
between the fire of the core and the fire above

it comes through the equinox of the rain  
it rises back through the solstice of the sun

water goes to fire through the earth of the air  
being emerges from the knot oozing out of the egg

it walks between the stairs and ladders  
neither games nor laws can stop a tree

the leaves of trees are its wings  
the feathers of birds are its signals

it crosses nations of ancient stones  
it learns from them the dust of deserts

it returns to the snow of light  
passing through the flame of its depth

it opens its eyes when it's finished being old  
it's no longer itself when there's no more when

## Grace

for Marcelle Bénédicte Soulié  
& Gilberte Nedjmâa Cohen

you've got to say it all right off  
but above all you've got to  
let it all  
live itself  
right away  
before yourself  
while yourself  
after yourself  
out of yourself  
like the sun lets us believe  
in upside-down rain  
a water so fine  
that it rises  
toward fire  
and never once thinks  
it will fall back again  
that it's falling back already  
to nourish the beings of earth  
then air is suspended  
so that souls awaken  
to what cannot be seen  
it's the privilege of a gentleness  
without hope or despair  
we don't believe in it all the time  
we're not crazy  
we feel we keep silent  
we let silence bead  
and the suffering is understandable  
we're seized with rapture  
in a tenderness as agonizing

as the truth of death  
that offers love  
to be less than a word  
more than a mirror  
because identity is useless  
if we're not like everything else  
that is not ourselves  
in the face of things  
yes for a being to arise  
it can only come out  
without ever being able to do anything at all  
I say this about an instant  
that doesn't belong to me  
or anyone else  
it's the flower of nothingness  
that never fades  
that we forever turn our back on  
it's the nothing of a flower  
that can be an open hand  
free as any time  
eternity is forgetfulness of eternity  
infinity is less sad than eternity  
there's no other heaven than that  
there's no other god than that  
there's no other that  
than this extreme here  
so sensitive  
that no body  
can mean anything else  
yes humans go by  
and the camel brays  
and each word falls silent  
sun of silence

silence of the sun  
here is the only prayer  
close your eyes  
and be  
and see

*Québec, Mexico, Syria  
Occitania, Catalonia, Vermont  
August 2002 – August 2005*

## About The Author

José Acquelin (b. 1956) has published fifteen books of poems, in addition to the various collective works in which he has participated, and has recorded several CDs of his work. Writing has always been his profession, especially poetry, and he is a tireless organizer of literary events and poetry readings, often with musical accompaniment. An extensive traveller, he also has a strong interest in the poetry and thought of China, the Middle East and Latin America. His poems have been translated into a number of languages, including Spanish, Catalan, English, Italian, Romanian, and soon Arabic as well.