



THE ABSOLUTE IS A ROUND DIE

essential translations series 31



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THE **ABSOLUTE** IS A **ROUND DIE**

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Translated from the French
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 transparence

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 ingest-
ing 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 forget 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 Homsî & 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

* "The Beauty of Damascus" in Arabic.

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)
sahab '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 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^{*}

* *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."

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
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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.