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Natural Strange Beatitudes: Geoffrey Hill's The Orchards of Syon, Poetic Oxymoron and Post-Secular Poetics
AND An Atheist's Prayer-Book

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AN ATHEIST’S PRAYER-BOOK

Jonathan Wooding

2014
In a materialist society its theologians are the scientists.
W H Auden, The Dyer’s Hand

God does not reveal himself in the world.
Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus

Sematology is a theological dimension.
Geoffrey Hill, ‘Common Weal, Common Woe’
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After God

Dieu est mort! Le ciel est vide.
Gérard de Nerval, Les Chimères, 1854

going real, raven, on your highest perch –
winter sun can catch your beak yet
o, silhouette on the empty sky

larch has lost its colour now,
cattle hold their peace, lichen
prospers on the ancient cherry

sunlight attends the land,
horses pause their houyhnyng,
frost has vanished from glasshouse walls –

susurrating eucalyptus,
cast the gold dust with the grit –
Olber's paradox has it night

should be bright as day – stars
even in a luminous universe –
no voids for light to hide in;

but stars are mortal too, and
run with the running universe –
rays racing to reach us yet!

so, get real, raven, on your highest perch,
catch the gold dust on your beak – and
horses will houyhny in the winter sun
nothing known

There are two atheisms of which one is a purification of the notion of God. Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*

unblemished sky, as if clouds had never been, windows a squirrel’s grey reconnoissance of fruitless January trees; jackdaws crack the air, soil is ecstatic with frost, and the quince too has finally lost its jaunty apples – draped now only with snotty lichen, and a redbreast robin trills

nothing is troublesome – frosted headstones tilt in the churchyard under the clock’s golden numerals, and three starlings glitter and preen in slant sun, gracing a crooked steeple’s goldproof rooster – frostfire grass in the shadow of the church; song-thrush sips the air

we have not reached the point where God exists, or can play at being God – we are land-sick with Simone’s *deifugal force*, unchurched, irreligious, but *surnaturelle* – as if there were no God, and we know better with each returning day, that there is no other life
silent school

trouble me, in a waft of car-shoved air,
to believe in an angelhosting sun,
a red-reeking paraclete,

and in its waterbrizzling feedback
let me meet the shifting figure
of a dust-refracted, polite facteur:

“Summer is quoting her augmentations
as the galaxies shift their ground –
along these lines our universe expands.

A poet in the metropolis
may consider this wry hypothesis
going on over the heads and under the boots

of the skyandearth summit talkers.
Flash your picking brains into every
sidereal nook and quantum cranny.

Say what you like by means of anecdote
and inference, about the force majeure
of data, and the broken lamps of day."

Over the barbecued river trailed
the false mercurial upstart, lapsing
in the lighted smithereens.

Drifting into realtime blather
I hear a voice departing
from a microtonal me.
oxymoron

Oyster, tough with treasure,
candescent inclamation ex-
posed indifferently –

grammar's stultiloquy; bookfire;
event peculiar to yourself –
perpetuity's mirror.

Bound freedom-fighter,
folly's bedrock –
fulfilled loss.

Stone standing for yourself;
scandalous time-keeper –
appalling light.

You undertake me;
speak me; show me.
Stultiloquy I: baragouin

the old Doowhangam has disappeared
from eximious Tiniskoop hills;
now Planck is constant in adversity,
light duplicitous and with horizon.

fissiparous modes prevail –
archaic lisings of holohedral fusing,
its holus-bolus and embonpoint –
an ooidal blind alley! – has failed.

we need an alopecist to deal with this shearing –
to beard the gamin of our hubbub;
our auxesis was never so null.
our anthesis is nuclear waste.

the teleology of smithereens
in the universe heat-death theory,
finds corners for the market in accidie
in the pahlavi of opalescence.
open space

pale, profuse Indian balsam riding
river’s banks, cannot spur September skies
to unseizable dawn fire;

I’m walking the grey river, slicks
of rain-softened cow shit, unvisited by flies,
imaginary maps at my feet.

Glow in the river’s eyes, without doubt
reflected from without, and unconfused
with true luminescences,

with dioskouroi, Leda’s twins –
struggling between mortal light
and immortality.

When I say God – in an open space –
this uncreated space – God is but localized
and seizable; illuminant.

Pond skaters becalm the shallows
holding the lens together over
minnows, broken pipes, a snagged overall,

and lichen fondles each crooked
twig and branch of the drinking
alder, its woody fruit in waiting.

A trapeze of ready house martins
swing multiple arcs in the airspace,
piping beyond potency –
and look! a snail high-wiring alone
on hollow, ruined hogweed;
gilding its labia over brown filaments
of the tall, seeding stem, head back
and upside-down, in ecstasy
of transphorescent gloop.
vanishing act

cuckoo flowers in the graveyard
herald sooty wings of jackdaws
clapping round the clock tower
of this lingering April frost;

marigolds flash on eye
glancing glacial water,
and weeping cherry blossoms
over Solomon, son of Solomon, in his grave

hawthorn, your blossom too is
unbelievable – a gladder of the earth –
parousian, paschal candles
giving birth to bliss

cuckoo flowers in the graveyard
and weeping cherry blossoms;
hawthorn’s bliss and the unseen clock
of God’s greening hands
original copy

skittish ivy flickers on boughs, where
buddleia stoops to dense brambles;
rain is all mist without fall, and
mottled with grey motions, the sky
sees black between bristling firs
in the winter-wooded valley

glass a leafy canvas of aspen and maple,
sea-roar in leafless sycamore;
eucalyptus leads the cheer, throwing
jackdaws in streaming perichoresis
about the pale, unbleeded sky,
all radiance bleached away

all stars outshone by this grey earth,
no trace of last week’s meteor-shower –
branches Christmas-green under costive sun,
its moonish alteration eclipsed too
by this scallop-shell of cloud cover;
buzzard files a final gyre above

connaissance and breathing space –
but zero is our maximum –
imperishable, irreducible –
Simone would not hear God’s silence
were our noise here below with meaning;
currents of high air high for Epiphany

never not need to pray – unquenchable
instinct; heart, soul, strength
and mind – addicted to the épatant,
requiring no spectacles, building
our meeting-house from open air;
and poetry without words

justice is truth, truth justice –
a lone bull traverses the lilac sky
raises his head above the far horizon
then dips away into an eastern valley;
God does not wish to be all in all –
*nihil ex nihilo*
silent school II

I break the primary windows
of a summer-stilled classroom;
I'm through to an unkept blackboard
of a quarter century past.
What am I to chalk for me to read there?

Aquinas weighed nigh three hundred pounds,
A dumb ox to all who knew him.
He wrote that God did not want
to be everything, nor estimated people
as windows through which to look on Him.

There are no symbols.
God has no other legs to stand on
but your own. Be weighty
and speechless. Give amnesty
to the wordblanks alive in your cell.

I rub through the chalked up palimpsest
and find the starving sentences
of a teacher taught teaching without ploys –
imagination is a mind changing place
from a loss to a compensation.

Outside the infant windows
I see myself looking in, clocking back
from this millennium
to that vigilant word-triggered schoolchild.
He had no symbols to toy with.
yud, hay, vav, hay

God alone is worthy of interest.
Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*

jackdaw, take your turn –
ravens are breaking bread
before you, under the orbital eye
of morning’s winter moon

sing yud hay vav hay
before the black ravens;
before the groaning cattle
still in valley shadow

brazen sun, blinding eastern skies –
sing yud hay vav hay
before the hooting woodpigeon
before the rinsing river

grassblades, ease
your frosty burden
into the flick of caught light
sing yud hay vav hay

thunder-jets, blast
the unlistening land,
whorl of threat, throated roar
but yud hay vav hay

look down, look away –
beneath the cold garden –
cold clamps my toes, and
i sing yud hay vav hay
Life Writing I: Berlin, 10 May 1843

The day after my arrival I was in a very bad way, on the brink of collapse. In Stralsund I went almost mad hearing a young girl overhead play the piano, among other things Weber’s last waltz. The last time I was in Berlin it was the first piece that met me in the Tiergarten, played by a blind man on a harp.

It's as if everything was designed just to bring back memories. My pharmacist, who was a confirmed bachelor, has married. He offered several explanations in the matter: one lives only once, one must have someone who can understand one. How much there is in that; especially when said with absolutely no pretension, it hits home.

In the Hotel Saxon I have a room looking out on the lake where the boats lie. Heavens, how it reminds me of the past. In the background I have the church, and its chimes when it sounds the hours go right to the marrow of my bones.

The thought that God is love in the sense that he is always the same is so abstract that really it is a sceptical thought.
**podcast**

*In memoriam, Jacques Pohier, (1926-2007).*

sunyolk in eggwhite welkin hides, leaving
only rose-of-Sharon still
to burn for autumn’s shortening day;
furled flower-pods wait yet to unfold,
mocking our sun to run again

over sunflower seedheads buckling
and popping, dew-bowing grasses
bearing mercury-droplet rain,
unharvested Jerusalem artichokes,
and *every trifle my eyes detain.*

rags of cloud occlude our turning wood –
mutability is history without shame –
God is all over the place, it would appear,
as three scrotal red peppers girn
from the glasshouse, over a dish of seeds

and a bowl of home-grown, variegated toms,
a grapevine on its knees –
*detotalitarization* of God, (O, Lord!):
Jacques’ crown is broken, tumbling
with these leaves, beyond the pale.
silent fields

Ermington, 11th November 2011

as Ben Hartley has it, a grey-lilac sky
magnetising fieldgreen, brackengold, pondsilver –
luminescent light in fetlocks, and forehead
of that dray-horse’s lifted muzzle –
look! look! through Ben’s white window frames
at eleven, eleven, eleven, eleven.

radio-silence in doubting light –
two saw-flies cling to a lingering
white hogweed flowerhead, swagging
and soughing in soured wilderness;
all-over grey but still shifting sky,
an intemperate smoke in my eyes.

twelve sheep, two blanketed horses graze
the high field falling to riverline –
ash and oak tango and rattle in unseen billows
as rooks abandon ships, and burnt and gold
horse chestnut leaves palm out frailty,
skulking and scuttering a winter’s song

for our windshook shtetl, outriding Eurogeddon;
I have come to garden’s end for the armistice –
see mossed builder’s rubble, cracked tiles,
eroded bricks, roll of wire fencing netting
leaves like fish, warped and crumbled
corrugated sheets, rusted lengths of pipe,
a pile of dampening Christmas trees; this is

BBC News at two minutes past eleven;

I look again, palms out in frailty,

see unripened berries – pale green – through rain,

pairing pecked and rotted familial blackberries,

their white and lilac flowers open
God’s spies

windless this morning; sumac’s crown
shaped in kingfisher-blue skies,
its stag-horns unlit candles, flames
withdrawn, leaves burnt away

kindly König cold in
interstellar space –
Søren’s father helpless to fulfil
creation’s earthquake knowledge

wall’d prison, receive us –
ideas my only joy – people
inconsequent, gilded butterflies
burnt by God’s hand

pray and sing, and tell old tales
of no trace found
oxymoron II

Storm’s teacup – cryptic clarity;
clamorous taciturnity –
you’re intrinsically apostrophic!

Centrifugal closure,
blurred scrutiny; disclarity –
babbling pentecost.

Hypocritical palimpsest
of the modest ego,
immediately retrospective;

*negative capability* –
revelatory concealment;
not a little litotes.

Play on in earnest, selfsome –
consuming mass.
**cold light**

For many centuries incandescence ['hot light'] has been the universal method of practical illumination; the sun, the torch, candle, oil lamp, gas or tungsten filament have served both to heat and to light.

*A History of Luminescence*, E. Newton Harvey, 1957

salted scatter of sheep on high meadows,
and a cavalcade of creeping clouds;
roadwater runs off a fringe of windfalls,
crab apples, beechnuts and leaves;
foxgloves let themselves rot upright,
and stormbeaten bracken lies still.

dying wasp sucks apple core and is gone,
fig tree gloves her empty hands,
hazel saplings vault this sunken lane
and my boots say *God, God, God, God*
to the crown of the hill and the backbroken
ivied oak by the gate and the view of beyond.

the death of God is no real loss –
we’re luminescent still in failure,
and atheism is mere scientism
masquerading as metaphysics;
*take leave of God*, says Meister Eckhart,
it’s no real loss, but a life of its own.
appetitor silentii

Zeerer Gottenyu! The cold!
horses on the hill across the valley
move through freezing mist
behind these ivied sycamores,
this lavender stain of frosted grass

mist rides apace, obscuring
morning’s sun – sun becoming
moon to a hostile planet,
seabirds winging through, dogs
barking, nettles stiff with ice

there’s no undoing midnight’s frost fest –
land carries cold as a curse;
grass a field of frozen surf –
supra-temporal, extra-timetabular –
AND sumac’s fires all out

incomprehensible descension, Tom –
this is in fact summer, beyond sense –
the unapprehensible
descent of the dove
on the blackberry thorn (still) still
Stultiloquy II: ecdysis

the orismology we make for pain
is the scapegrace hermeneutic of night;
our catachresis is nugatory –
catachthonian neologisms
to avoid the tautophony of cries.

the model for us – the ecdysiast;
systematic eidoloclasm, quantum
indeterminacy of disguises,
heuristic predilection for the strip.

our stochastic eidouranion,
neoteric peroration for plus,
is the congelation of gluon jitters –
propaedeutic paralogism,
Punchinello’s perambulo of quarks.

in our satrapy, aleatory justice,
solifidian necessities,
bushes beaten about with mensonges,
logophobic silences to sign.

the implex of our sematology
forms its ataraxia on calends –
the drift of our earth-bound photopsia
is the enchiridion of need.
we scotch the panopticon lie of the snake.
empty vessels

“The sea is the powerfullest thing in the world.”

moorland waste on the move
blanching the shores;
another wave there –
foaming horses’ mouths

gifting extinction
to God’s *metapoiesis*;
high, white, scribbled cumulus
mirrors the race

wren, steal attention –
infinity at your toe-tips!
shy theology away
from your bleeding hawthorn

silverfire presences,
pampas grasses, breathe –
make minds biology can’t make;
us, then

aporetic, cataphatic –
God in place;
sightless, unhearing sea –
homophonous

speak, Orlando,
powerfullest boy;
hands and feet to God
turning with the tide
oxymoron: decreation

burn on, cauldron of winds –
bear back waves’ foam-seed
to flame-glammering cliff;

impede stampede – entropy's
perpetuity; and boiling sea, then,
pique in iridescence.

cadenza’s chaos – flecked pitch
of ocean’s waved avalanche;
ruinous rhodomontade.

horizon withdrawn in cloud-conquest
calamitous – leaving fulsome
brillade; wavebreak’s void.

womb’s mortification; life’s seminar –
clamant earthwash.
not silence, but early days

at St Beuno’s College, Wales

biocrats know whether I can speak
of God at all in disconfigured world;
on Offa’s Dyke path God unpreempts
delivered speeches, withdrawing light
    from single strand
of wind-flickered spider’s webbing.

frost-buds – grey-haired – for apple blossom
(not for me to be original)
and hail falling on Moel Maenef;  
how to forsake “your damned subjective rot”
    powerless power –
I never get far enough into it all.

delay is play in this labyrinth –
simultaneity and separation –
resistance and reassurance –
hieroglyphics and let’s say birdshit
    at the centre
and all this eccentric unseen is nó móre.

how I love to take notes (which will never be seen)
on birdshadow inflecting our following eyes,
triggered caprices of irate birdsong –
no omniscience out there, checking
    on me, tswit, tswit;
shimmying grass leaves in an icy wind,

the way tree roots break the woodland surface,
bridled and brindled by cone and needle
and last year’s leaf, and the gathering, great
encampment of leaping-dolphin ramson leaves –
of lilies
stinking up the narrowing pathway.

primary meaning of God (Onions’ Shorter)
as ‘what is invoked’, wha’ever that is –
‘what is worshipped by sacrifice’ – this mar-
tyrology won’t budge will it? believe
you me ‘He-
brew’ means ‘one from other side of the river’.

how do you ‘share silence’, Greenleaf Whittier?
must I share silence
as vinegar bibles into vineyard
the disfiction of God – impartial
nothing
whatsoever changes God, and vice versa.
buying time

for Brân Maenefa at St Beuno's College in 1875

God is not a poem
but holiness –
suspend a while belief –
wrap time behind

wade the sky, grey heron –
snap your castanet cry –
vagrant, hunch beside waters,
ponder and wait

site of God – unguarded –
Gerard’s unwild west;
embarrassed with holiness,
silence of stress

tetragrammaton, vanish!
a weight through waters deep;
hold my mute tongue –
bright exotropy!

shame of innocence –
snowbright sunset
through orange and smoke
in the fish-scale sky

white lichen, split rowanberries
on the churchstone steps
beyond clocks
beyond clouds
silent school III

Mute with muddy futility, I
long for the passional colourings
as slipped through the air come silently
the loosed, irredeemable smatterings
of leafy surrender to ash.

See in that autumn a bruise on my eyebeam,
a tarnish contracted through pain –
an anger quenched to a smouldering torpor
in the visceral self, unregained;
self-divesting trees make ending plain –

eyebeam, a tarnish contracted through pain – an anger quenched to a smouldering torpor in the visceral self, unregained;
self-divesting trees make ending plain –

they’re postures of yogic holding, turning
to tensions, sensations we normally
take as the framework from which we can’t move
into structures of self we are frightened
to feel; I stick at the shoulders and neck.

To wash in an autumn chill downpour,
or smokily burn in that crackling park fire –
to tumble and whirl with a rowan leaf,
take footprints like grass after freshening –
these are the emptyings of the epicure.

Treescape of raining dyes and dabs,
conflagration of kindling rags,
sky snowing embers of seasonal jetsam
ablaze under indigo vaults – today my
kenosis is veinous and branched.
gospel of Christian atheism

scratch the scratch track, play the wild track,
wild sound starting from silent scratch;
can't write religious without being
holy; fritillary's flight, after event,
metaphysical incandescence.

divine silence a kyrielle
of heat-basking scarlet pimpernel –
poor man’s weatherglass in heat
enough for vineyards; greenfly
like seed-clocks drift

I can only refuse to speak of the death
of God, by ceasing
to speak, in this gospel –
author of graft, grace preventing
all hurtful things

at the gates of the morning, honest Kant
declares talking to God
a derangement, chimerical.
So too – so Søren – involvement
with someone invisible.

in this orchard the sikerer partye
kepe scilence; time's smears
skirmish with sky-writing –
still the raging – fruit
unto holiness, wages of sin

and at this abandoned wrought-iron table
(though correlation is not causation)
sat a radiance of apprehension,
a miniature vortex of intuition,
a dance of intelligence among words.

insects’ playground, a tortoiseshell’s slow handclap graces young nettles,
(where apostrophe is not redundant)
and the larch raises her arms
to the cool of invisible sky.
Idled away the morning with sleeping and reading newspapers.
Afraid to finish a review for the Prager Tagblatt.
Such fear of writing always expresses itself
by my occasionally making up, away from my desk,
initial sentences for what I am to write, which
immediately prove unusable, dry, broken off long before their end,
and pointing with their towering fragments to a sad future.

I observe the old tricks at the Christmas Fair.
Two cockatoos on a crossbar pull fortunes.
(Mistakes: a girl has a lady-love predicted.)
A man offers artificial flowers for sale in rhyme.
When Mrs Klug sings there is a warm shadow
in the soft red of her mouth.

I remember the Jewish streets in Paris,
rue Rosier, side-street of rue de Rivoli.

Before falling asleep yesterday I had an image
of a drawing in which a group of people were isolated
like a mountain in the air. The technique
of the drawing seemed to me completely new and,
once discovered, easily executed.
in our hands

skylarks establish nesting rights in low summer ferns, whilst angelic twitterfire conceals airborne cousins; polypoid I of solipsist pride vanish in moorland high

kestrel, sun makes light in crescents of your crucified wings – distant tors surely awry with real evanescence gusting in persuasive wind

lichen as like stone as to make stone live, grey bleaching the grey and the ancient comes to light proleptically making these lines want to pass into this

that God’s got to do with it seems unlikely, where boulders buried only partially are like fallen warriors on a radiant battlefield approaching a summit of all places
mind is fugitive, giddy,
lighting on hawkweed,
slow-flitting Heath,
as a *celestial stranger*
leaving no trace
as she feels
shadows race
peacock

metaphysician’s bird – polysemous peacock –
seneschal of this solarium
and key for a diamond-green planet.
Your fire-alarm cry pranks
all clear, *akakisukpok* –
all lights deeply indifferent;
frolicsome aurora.

It’s working  this attention-seeking –
your hawkish Venetian mask conceals
nothing but common garden green
in concave mirror of indigo feather,
frizzed electric sycamore
in a procurator’s solar disk;
ultracrepidarian iota.
**White**

tips of her wings in the flame
of sun's absence, jink and prank
and flitter
one another

not looking for knowledge, but dwelling –
pieris immaculata, White, on wing
unblemished, sempervirent –
and a pale philosopher's pride;

rain-cold clouds brim
their grizzled grace, like rippled
shore, electric grey –
opulent emptiness ours
Stultiloquy III: parerga

the propagation of immiscible light
is the condition of information;
the silence of sight is ever in advance
of the time-question begging brouhaha
in the wake of the flambeau of photons;
nomothetic so-to-says arrive
before the scratch from which we started.

the goods are delivered in glimpses and blabs,
in mesons and gluons and quarks.

the poet in the metropolis
considers the Hubble hypothesis,
going on over the heads and under the boots
of the nuclear disarmament talks –
spring is quoting its dissatisfactions
as the galaxies are shifting their ground;

Hubble perceived Messier 31,
beautiful Andromeda nebula,
extragalactic existence receding
and approaching through curvatures of space.
along these lines the universe expands.

cosmological time-charts are human,
parsecs and light-years bear relation;
we flash our picking brains into every
sidereal nook and quantum cranny.

quaquaversal approximations to fact.
Yeshua

bee and a cabbage-white select
a radiant dish of sow-thistles;
see tortoiseshell’s *ephphatha*
on sunhot valerian, whilst dandelion’s
unclocked star brags summer’s loss

thus Yeshua’s beatitudes –
mere emendations of scribes;
Aramaic *tzetels*
perpetually frail –
they raise the nap on native finery

sugar-burn in chestnut leaves
blackspot spattering sycamore;
under this ginkgo’s still dance
scarlet pimpernel reduces
to thin pickings

wild teazle gathers dew in leafcups,
and world is growing cold –
its breadth and length, depth and height –
petrichor of burnt waters
of *deicidium*
concert pitch

striking orange lichen blots headstones,
splatters church wall, cottage rooftiles –
it's high on the clocktower, and
mottles the kissing-gate pillars;

eight claps of the bell for the half-hour –
nothing's prepared to make a move –
a new grave decked with flowers,
green alkanet at the holy well.

nothing is saying anything I've not
heard and seen before, alas;
I can't make it can I?
a nameless bird ticks tunelessly out

of an oak tree – dry pebbles rolled in the hand;
is any of this worth it?
A portfolio of failure and irrelevance, when
red leaves are early in an extra-seasonal sun
oxymoron: cracked pastoral

periissem nisi periissem

numenfall in flame-lined fields, rapture-red and fire-grained;
over an hour of great care

flamboyant superterrane of radiant, raddled mud-mire
defiled as it is

leaves are moths of distress, detonated tree limbs
fingermarks and blood

dirt in the weather, rain sprackles the wind –
shall sun be darkened

storm-birds in skyplay vanish through opacity;
re-appear
blind chance

goat willow, kick up a fuss for February
with fur-frosted catkin *goslings*;
throw up your arms by the still pond,
its duckweed riming frogspawn

one daffodil finds its face
too soon turned to the mud, a whit
too hasty to exorcise winter
with its eye-outwitting, chitterling gall

rotifers and tardigrades are no *happy accident* –
ergastrine philosophers sought
a parent fire, carried live scions
of fire for barter – not yet *ab initio*

original replicator, *gaseous invertebrate,*
stretch in the strengthening sun
Life Writing III : Tegel, 18 November 1943

We get up at the same time, and the day lasts til 8pm; I wear out my trousers by sitting while you wear out your soles by walking. I read the *Volkischer Beobachter* and the Reich, and I’ve got to know several very nice people.

Every day I’m taken for half an hour’s walking alone, and in the afternoon they give me treatment in the sick bay – very kindly, but unsuccessfully – for my rheumatism. Every week I get from you the most marvellous things to eat. Thank you very much for everything, and also for the cigars and cigarettes that you sent me while you were away.

I wish I could play Bach’s *G minor sonata for flute and piano* with you and sing some Schutz, and hear you sing Psalms 70 and 47 – my cell is being cleaned out for me – I can give the cleaner something to eat. One of them was sentenced to death the other day – it gave me a great shock – what heavy consequences may follow trivial acts of folly.

Those verses that I wrote have also made a considerable impression here. The prisoners and guards here keep saying how they are amazed at my tranquillity and cheerfulness. If only I could share some Krossin smoked goose with you. Can one send anything?
harm's way

darksome states-man, let rook stand in for you,
fearful miser, the carrion crow;
doting lover, woodpigeon purrs,
down-right epicure, the sparrow –

Dietrich, your phraseology
turns, now, to reality
and God is beyond
in the midst of life

grace rings true too –
an esprit de finesse,
a case of credible
parthenogenesis

glamorous rook, raucous crow
purring pigeon, feasting sparrow –
world's powers untold
and all her train hurled

as penultimate turns ultimate
in place of worship and prayer –
as not writing
plays out without echo
omnium gatherum

The truth is that we could not say what an 'illogical' world would look like
Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus

odding bee, take your bearings, quickener,
burr and bless from bud to breaking brier;
caper through lamb’s tails, pussy willow –

weave and waver spring’s salmagundi
as, having nothing, yet possessing all;
dash thy feet over seeded nooks

and crannies, where your treasure also is.
Then, bathe your peacock wings, nymphalis io,
turn ye even with all your heart

your coppery ommateum
to sun’s ocellus and this pale-blue sky.
Give us prospicience,

now, and in secret,
and for all our days.
pensée

sparrows sing *fanfaronade* this morning
as if God didn’t dare to compete;

and a coin is spun at the end of infinite distance
before nothingness
spem in alium nunquam

phone wire hosts invisible walkers
high on north winds taking hold;
and spirals of sycamore leaves clatter
in dung-brown abandon –
mindful of our lowliness

smoke’s palette of luminescent greys
raises an eastern prospect
of sunfires burning beneath our timespace;
sparrows flurry and squabble, then
hunker down beside berries’ fires

never put my hope in any other heaven –
last evening a delta-grid of stripped sycamore
branches handling a coldfire sunset
gashed over hills’ purpled shoulders;
so farre surpassed by Mr Tallys’ song –

strong eucalyptus scored by aeolian whim,
forty parts (and more!) rustle and sough
a contrafactual matins
to a god-forsaken God,
an ordinary immortal
shadow

within sun’s via affirmativa,
a jackdaw trio tramp and spring
the rusty branches of the autumn larch;

its spread limbs the fissures
and crystal-cracks of a smash
in unbroken ice –

glacier of time
seered with seasonal noumena –
imprimatur of God’s day

jackdaw, black fire,
token of time’s ignition –
of God’s silent pyre
**Stultiloquy IV : velleity**

the inhumanity of poetry
is the pellucid theodicy of doubt –
singular loss as a presence of mind

I change my mind with the landscape,
giving the benefit of an optical doubt
to the light on the head of a beggar
beingstalk

rain under wind-shaken sycamores
while the unbuttoned sun burns
its lens of washed air over
a cock-sparrow hunting a butterfly

goblins – herb-robert – are pricking up
everywhere; they gather immodestly
outside the east window, alongside
wheelie bins, watering cans, wheelbarrow

and red valerian, (kiss-me-quick), puffs
all along the village wall, reminding
the rowan to prepare her berries,
the dead that we do this for you.

the poem’s an inconclusive proof,
(that’s Aristotle’s epicheirema) –
hopelessly tending towards completion,
where finishing isn’t an end.

half ankering after bliss, John Clare,
compose your shepherd’s calendar –
put time herself in quotation marks,
and God as a number uncounted
cuckooland

bright bees riffle clover flowers
about my feet, and Spring’s dozen daisies
are honeystalks, and Chaucer’s eye of the day –
to hem have I so gret affeccioun –
timor mortis conturbat me

willow and sycamore are fully fledged
though buddleia drags still
last season’s burnt flower offerings;
yellow Indian bean leaves unfold –
timor mortis conturbat me

birdsound slips into alphabetacles
in the pestering peetings of courting coal tits,
and liquefaction of the thrush;
sky-tracing house martins cry
timor mortis conturbat me

befriending Earth, ground of all paradox,
let us see everything that is there, and
the everything that isn’t; not the nothing
that is there but the nothing that is not;
timor mortis conturbat me
silent school IV

Three high windows give us
the movement of summer trees
and light on a central table,
water jug, vase, flowers, books.

I sit here involved in how long
I take to mend things – reality
keeps breaking in and telling other tales;
I am freed from a plot to a poverty.

Our liturgy might be a stomach rumbling,
a shuffle, exhalation, cough;
we fidget, and swallow, decorating
this hideout with nothing but ourselves.

Sodden with speech, I turn my mind
to the plain vase gifted with flowers;
my eyes linger on the water jug, pouring
a glass of light unobserved.
maker

*The more I see of humanism the less I like it*
Wallace Stevens to Hi Simons, January 9 1940

stay in your window-seat Wallace –
detect that force which outwits
nihilism, merely by gazing

tzaddik, hear the pilpul of bird sounds –
*seelensfriede durch dichtung* –
asides from woodwind’s disbelief

driven, tipped with ice, each sumac candle
is minded to give us back to ourselves
in a January mist not yet willing to rise

shadows longer than the longest tree,
the bramble-patch weighted with frost,
crocus clusters cluttering up

where grass is a shattered crystal vase –
between the sitter and the idling sun
points of blue, red, green light

are a scattered rainbow dispensed
by a cloudless, windless sky, casting
a spell for spathes of spring snowflakes

so the birds have it – their claim on mossed rubble,
valley's riverrun, oak leaves caught in pond ice,
and you, Wallace, just being human
**Stultiloquy V: amphigouri**

the end of tethering
is suppression of contingency
in face of sciagraphy – faculae!

our trouvaille, to compute the burr of mischance –
hard luck’s harder, fine story, knocked
into corona sparks; this

diegesis lingers clock and wise –
curvature of absolute circle; the
straight line’s determinable zero.

haphazard hall of imperfect mirrors,
herrings redder than imagined
in the warp and woof of the beholding eye;

we pull parallax after events,
sporting paralipsis in hiding, then

seriatim, take up our zetetic,
hoping for paracmastic calm.
orchards

Among the minted greens this summer –
new is nothing under such a sun as this –
I'm only too happy – words rattling

on my gravid mouth's tongue tipping
scales from televisual (still!) eyes, reaping
grace recalcitrant,

and Job's joy is coefficient, (finally).
Greenwood pleroma – what more! Let's
commonly call (out) poplar, whitebeam,

alder, hawthorn, ash, oak, beech –
green decreates green indifference –
act exact – rub ochre on the bones.

Twenty-first century cribrations turn on
oxymoronic manoeuvres (sayable),

as these smashed camellias still outride
broken cuckoo-flowers; and God's broken
grammar, hailing crushed and clustered bells,
stands out alone; stone (tacitly) standing.
leave your carriage and walk, Confucius –
exaltation will not save us – feel discomfort when
_**I Ching**_ offers its hexagram of grace,
white horse speeding as if on wings,
the changing fire before mountain peaks

Fire! on Monday the twenty-third, November, sixteen-fifty-four – no God
philosophers or scientists know

hear rigolo of laughing sparrows
kerfuffle of gusting winds, see
raindrops drumming leaf-clogged ponds,

Tom Tickell’s _**vegetable snow**_
set loose from monastic cemeteries,
teeming and keeling below
glossolalia

let shadows lie – golden larch –
embrace long sunshine;
know that I am God

true task – interrogation
of silence; whereof we cannot speak,
thereby remain

each leaf holding
flakes of gemmed ice – faville –
swiftest sparks, away!

one leaf left on gingko –
plenteously bringing forth
fragments – God remain!

jackdaw pow-wow – sacred motet –
finch, squabble the territory –
inveterate trespass – metaphor!

conclude rivulet – beat
and shock your unscientific
postscript – sabotage!
silent spring

seed-motes falling from crack willow
fill dewy gaps between leaves of grass
with a snow of spring's own making
nothing new

like a creature swathed
in Dante's silk, concealed
in solar rays' reality
On the day they dug the pits
Zvi Michalowski toppled forward
a fraction of a second before
the volley of shots that killed the others.

The Lithuanian, Ostrovakas,
sang with his executioners
as they drank to successful work.
Zvi’s father had been killed.

Zvi went to the Christian homes
beyond the cemetery, and asked
a neighbour to take his blood-soaked
nakedness in – he was told

“Go back to the grave where you belong.”
Zvi went to the widow whom he also knew –
she chased him away with a piece
of burning wood, to exorcise him.

But Zvi returned to her, saying
“I am your Lord, Jesus Christ,
I came down from the cross, look at me –
the suffering of the innocent. Let me in.”

The widow fell at his bloodstained feet,
“Boze moj, Boze moj” – my God, my God –
and she crossed herself
and let Him in.
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