

**COVENANT**

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**To Gloria**



Felix Mendelssohn, *Lieder ohne Worte,* Op. 30/1

*... the caravan of the morning, all dispersed, went their appointed ways. And thus ever, by day and night, under the sun and under the stars, climbing the dusty hills and toiling along the weary plains, journeying by land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely, to meet and to act and react on one another, move all we restless travellers through the pilgrimage of life.*

*— Charles Dickens, Little Dorrit, I:II (1855)*

**COVENANT**

**Part One**

**The Covenant of Mortal Dreams**

**I**

**Dispossession**

1. The Construction of Things

*North Conway, NH - North Truro, MA - St. Stephen, NB, 19 September 2008 - 23 June 2009*

2. *Urlicht*

*Vancouver, BC - St. Stephen, NB - Bowen Island, BC, 24 June 2005 - 4 December 2009*

3. Real Estate

*Vancouver, BC, 21 August 2005*

4. Chrysoglott

*Fredericton, NB - Edmonton, AB, 5 February 2009 - 1 September 2012*

**II**

**Stopover**

1. Nearing the Apex of Midnight

*St. Stephen, NB - Seal Cove, Grand Manan, NB - Bowen Island, BC, 4 August 2007 - 4 December 2009*

2. The Start of My Own Political Campaign

*North Conway, NH - North Truro, MA, 27 September - 17 October 2008*

3. A Little Strain without Violins

*St. Stephen, NB, 28 August 2007*

4. Morning on Front Street

*St. Stephen, NB, 25 March - 5 April 2008*

5. In a Parish of Perfect Pretense

*St. Stephen, NB - Bowen Island, BC, 10 March 2008 - 4 December 2009*

6. The Onset of March

*St. Stephen, NB - Vancouver, BC, 4 March 2008 - 20 October 2015*

7. Self-portrait at 58

*Ellsworth, ME - North Truro, MA - Alma, NB - Bowen Island, BC, 5 September 2006 - 14 November 2009*

8. Waterways

*Gorham, NH - North Truro, MA - St. Stephen, NB - Edmonton, AB, 18 September 2008 - 10 February 2014*

9. Atlantic City

*Absecon, NJ - Alma, NB - St. Stephen, NB - Bowen Island, BC, 20 July 2007 - 12 September 2009*

10. Breakers

*Seal Cove, Grand Manan, NB - St. Stephen, NB - Bowen Island, BC - Edmonton, AB, 26 August 2007 – 17 February 2014*

11. Road to Recovery

*North Truro, MA, 11-15 October 2008*

12. *Spem reduxit*

*St. Stephen, NB, 30 December 2008*

**Part Two**

**Covenant of the Lost Arias**

**I**

**Courting the Remembrances**

1. On the Deck of the Zuiderkruis, with my Father

*Ucluelet, BC - Peace River, AB - Edmonton, AB, 2 April 2010 - 18 January 2012*

2. Alex

*Ucluelet, BC, 5-6 April 2010*

3. Till Then

*Bowen Island, BC - Peace River, AB - Edmonton, AB - Vancouver, BC, 25 August 2010 - 19 December 2015*

4. Magic Gathering

*Ucluelet, BC, 2-7 July 2010*

5. Father to the Son

*St. Stephen, NB - Alma, NB - Seal Cove, Grand Manan, NB - Edmonton, AB, 14 April 2007 - 19 February 2014*

6. Self-portrait at 63

*Banff, AB, 6-27 February 2011*

7. Spirits

*Parksville, BC - Bowen Island, BC - Peace River, AB, 11 April - 1 July 2011*

8. Finale in Several Parts

*Bowen Island, BC - Edmonton, AB, 20 June 2010 - 2 March 2014*

**II**

**Passacaglia Pier**

1. Insurrection

*Ucluelet, BC, 28 June - 8 July 2010*

2. The Clocks

*Longueuil, QC - Ottawa, ON - Bowen Island, BC, 1 July - 3 August 2009*

3. Evangelist

*St. Stephen, NB - North Truro, MA, 29 July 2006 - 25 January 2009*

4. Chamber Musician

*Bowen Island, BC, 14 November 2009 - 21 February 2010*

5. *Largo*

*Ucluelet, BC, 4-6 April 2010*

6. Assault

*Parksville, BC - Bowen Island, BC, 15 July - 15 August 2010*

7. One Horse of the Iron Apocalypse

*Seattle, WA - Bowen Island, BC - Edmonton, AB, 8 August 2009 - 17 February 2014*

8. Bystanders

*Ucluelet, BC - Bowen Island, BC, 31 March - 15 May 2010*

9. “here everything silently screams”

*Bowen Island, BC, 12-20 June 2010*

10. Postscript to Siegfried

*Seattle, WA - Bowen Island, BC – Vancouver, BC, 14 August 2009 - 10 October 2015*

11. Declension

*Banff, AB, 17-18 March 2011*

12*. Réseau*

*St. Stephen, NB, 29 December 2008*

13. Setting Out

*Calgary, AB - St. Stephen, NB – Vancouver, BC, 18 December 2008 - 21 October 2015*

**III**

**The Ferryman’s Obolus**

1. Bedrock

*Bowen Island, BC - Seattle, WA - Peace River, AB - Edmonton, AB - Vancouver, BC, 26 July 2009 - 6 July 2015*

2. Mount Gardner’s Slope

*Bowen Island, BC, 6 September 2009*

3. Identity Amortized

*Bowen Island, BC - Ucluelet, BC - Parksville, BC, 29 August 2009 - 27 June 2010*

4. Symphonic Night

*Bowen Island, BC - Edmonton, AB, 30 August 2009 - 19 January 2013*

5. Adventitious Salvation

*Bowen Island, BC, 19 August - 30 October 2010*

6. The Gospel Truth

*Ucluelet, BC, 7-8 July 2010*

7. Libretto from Leiden

*Ucluelet, BC, 30 March - 3 April 2010*

8. Curtis and the Conclave of Invertebrates

*Bowen Island, BC - Banff, AB - Peace River, AB, 29 September 2010 - 7 May 2011*

**Part Three**

**Covenant of the Golden Shadows**

**I**

**Mahler and Freud Meet in Leiden**

1. Disjuncture

*Edmonton, AB - Vancouver, BC, 10 January 2013 - 6 July 2015*

2. Mahler and Freud Meet in Leiden

*Edmonton, AB, 2 January - 6 March 2013*

3. Even Nazis Can Sing

*St. Stephen, NB - Swift Current, SK - Edmonton, AB, 6 January 2008 - 11 August 2012*

4. In the Lobby

*Fort McMurray, AB - Peace River, AB - Ottawa, ON - Fort St. John, BC - Dallas, TX - Hinton, AB - Edmonton, AB, 12 May - 12 November 2011*

5. This Side of the Infinite

*Banff, AB, 20-24 March 2011*

**II**

**The Underside of Time**

1. The Sixth Dream

*Banff, AB - Edmonton, AB, 15 January 2011 - 24 January 2013*

2. Saturday in New Istanbul

*Edmonton, AB - Peace River, AB, 24 July - 2 October 2011*

3. Worldliness

*Edmonton, AB, 28-29 December 2012*

4. Field

*Calgary, AB - San Francisco, CA - Banff, AB, 15 March - 18 April 2011*

5. Breath

*Peace River, AB - Edmonton, AB, 20 August 2011 - 16 June 2014*

6. The Pockets of the Impenitents

*Peace River, AB - Edmonton, AB, 3 March - 5 June 2012*

7. Shostakovich in Peace River

*Peace River, AB, 2 November - 18 December 2011*

**III**

**Torn by Victory**

1. Polonius Comments on the Journey to Canterbury

*Peace River, AB - Edmonton, AB, 23 February 2012 - 17 June 2014*

2. Michael Rosen

*Edmonton, AB, 15 September 2012 - 15 June 2014*

3. Privilege

*Edmonton, AB, 8-14 May 2013*

4. *Gaudeamus*

*Banff, AB, 18-20 March 2011*

5. *Sotto voce*

*Edmonton, AB, 21 September 2012 - 15 June 2014*

6. Necrology

*Edmonton, AB, 17-19 December 2012*

7. Snow

*Edmonton, AB – Vancouver, BC, 5 March 2013 – 3 July 2015*

8. Sometimes I’d Be Alright

*Edmonton, AB – Vancouver, BC, 23 April 2013 – 21 July 2015*

9. Asseveration

*Edmonton, AB, 18-21 May 2014*

10. Now Worthwhile

*Edmonton, AB, 16-19 December 2012*

11. Revision

*Edmonton, AB – Vancouver, BC, 21 April 2013 - 22 July 2015*

**Part Four**

**Covenant of the River Valley**

**I Countersubjects**

1. Crypt of the Wounded Heart

*Edmonton, AB, 5 June - 10 July 2013*

2. Mathematics

*Edmonton, AB, 5 January 2014*

3. Guilt

*Edmonton, AB, 20 October - 15 December 2013*

4. Concentration

*Edmonton, AB, 19 October - 3 November 2013*

5. Illumination

*Edmonton, AB, 29 July - 15 October 2013*

6. The Convent at Rio San Antonio

*San Antonio, TX - Edmonton, AB, 26 July - 6 October 2013*

**II Landfall**

1. Amethyst

*Edmonton, AB, 28 January 2014*

2. Good Friday

*Edmonton, AB – Vancouver, BC 18 April 2014 – 20 October 2015*

3. Navigation

*Edmonton, AB - San Antonio, TX, 1 July 2013 - 18 June 2014*

4. Captivation

*Edmonton, AB, 9 May - 16 June 2014*

**Part One**

**The Covenant of Mortal Dreams**

**I DISPOSSESSION**

*Ce qu’on doit faire dépend beaucoup de ce qu’on doit croire*

What we ought to do depends largely on what we ought to believe

*—* Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Troisième promenade,”

*Les rêveries du promeneur solitaire*

Gloria: that’s what the masses call me.

*— Gloria, listening to Mozart in the kitchen of our house, St. Stephen, New Brunswick, September 20th, 2006*

**1:1**

**The Construction of Things**

The lucent micro-sounds of the highway Flare as smoke-ridden flashes of flame Over the ashen embers of my inner ear,

And collapsing sighs rush like breath fanned

From alveolar forests that know only

The pulse of the heart, the small heave

Of exchange between the silent atmosphere

And the sunstruck photosynthesis of carbon.

The mechanics of materialism press on,

Asphalt underneath rounded rubber, the bolted wheel’s

Motion that makes the shriek of blue jays Cringe, and strike the sky with the contrails Of carriers that whip reclaimed marshlands

At the places of first landing. Where the red fox hunts mallard

In long ditches of design, and expires when the road rises.

Let me clasp the outward form of the quivering silence; Let me regain the calm that needs no interruption,

The fireweed that glows on the embankment

That fell from the hillside to clear the way.

**1:2**

***Urlicht***

*Da kam ich auf einem breiten Weg,*

*Da kam ein Engelein und wollt’ mich abweisen.*

Once I came upon a wide road,

There stood an Angel who wanted to turn me away.

— *Das Knaben Wunderhorn*

To better work the hamstrings, I refine

The settings of the leg extension machine, While on the Walkman Mahler’s second Symphony begins, and new light penetrates

The hour, after when, as I lift a hundred pounds

At the bench press, the last trump sets out.

My routine complete, I walk down the stairs

Of the community centre, and carry

The Resurrection into the automotive

Clutter of Denman Street, the cellphone tapestry

Of the morning, summer warmth spreading

The wings of the solstice over the city’s downtown, The choir of the land rising all around me in

The new breaking of the day, the bells

That ring as joy in the heart’s basilica.

**1:3**

**Real Estate**

At the end of the avenue where time once lived Stands the little house of yesterday, brilliant Under the dust of dreams and the silver threads Of ambition. I would buy that small home now, Its glistening windows of tears, its drywall

Of failure, its unfinished rooms furnished With unexpected destinations. But I hesitate To settle down, however much my fatigue Beckons me; for I am still a little unwilling To become so comfortable in a district

So well known. Yet, if I were to purchase, How easily I could settle into tomorrow, Worry no more about despair, and seeing No more, would find my ease in emptiness.

**1:4**

**Chrysoglott**

The Wurlitzer end of Omphalic fertility,

Whitened in the Fredericton snows, the theatrical Tracery of fools altered to ice as car wheels are spun, And slide into the intersection. Oedipus looks out Over the frozen St. John River; Gretchen

Seeks her lost child on the bridge to Nashwaak; Marco Polo reaches the Friendship Store

On Albert Street, and purchases ramen in bulk. In the Gösser of memorialized time, the Urquell

Of history, little Bardolino plays on the lunar palate

And readies the receptacle for the halls of power.

**II**

**STOPOVER**

*Il ne s’agit pas de vivre, mais de partir.*

The important point is not to live but to set out.

— *Maurice de Saxe, ordered to the front as the commander in chief of the French Army in 1745, responding to Voltaire,*

*in Will and Ariel Durant, The Age of Voltaire*

My whole life is a stopover.

*— Gloria, at the casse-croûte in Deschambault, Québec, May 21st, 2006*

**2:1**

**Nearing the Apex of Midnight**

I am wakened to stumble

Into the Maritime thunderstorm

Of my aging,

Lightning flashing through the blinds, Falling water smashing at the house.

I picture Dürer in self-portrait

With paper almost too wet

To sketch on. Cantata strains

Of *Liebster Jesu, mein Verlangen*

Play very far away

Upon the pace of short sacred chords

In the background of my mind. I know Liù is dead.

**2:2**

**The Start of My Own Political Campaign**

It’s my psyche’s last day of liberty. Already overnight

The blinding blur of the regular day’s trivia

And prevailing demands resurfaced on the wrong side Of sleep. It’s the resumption of my mind’s querulous Testimony of discontent. Chopin’s harmonic thought

And the essays of Charles Rosen will find no welcome at

The place I am to return to. In truth, neither will I;

Nor, any more, do I look for it. Where history has become Excuse rather than exemplar, when only the tides rise and fall In the mangled river, the rallying cry most often heard is

‘We don’t need book-learning—all we need is common sense.’

**2:3**

**A Little Strain without Violins**

I am breaking; breaking apart; my head Fissured by the complaint of thoughts, The entitlements the town thinks its due

Working in the troughs of the interstices— Ants scurrying to carry away the debris

Of rotting vegetation. I anesthetize

These consequences with alcohol of good Quality, and retreat further and further Into the work of poetry and plans

For world peace. If I could save a Somali mother

Or wean ignorance from tiger penises Or stop the last piece of Delaware from Turning to asphalt, I may feel better. But no doubt someone will complain.

**2:4**

**Morning on Front Street**

The griffin rears at the broken brink of the gable, Perpetual rain-water spouting from its carved throat. On the rutted street, vestigial with winter, the rigs Have gathered to idle, dormant reptiles waiting to Slowly slither across the international boundary,

To unburden themselves of cargoes of green timber Amputated from crown lands by corporate leaseholds. The stark spring rains dilute the smeared excreta of

The machines, their streaks of seasonal sludge trickling Towards the destitute river. Citizens of this colony Rejoice in their misfortune, recoil from the empty Storefronts when the channeling rains collect

On their spines, to evade the stare of the basilisks

As they lurch forward, leaving venom in their wake

To poison the falling faith of those who collapse devout.

**2:5**

**In a Parish of Perfect Pretense**

The winter deep drifts away as an ice shelf

Breaking off over an eternal sea, my house consuming Fossil fuel against the relentless assault, the frozen will Of the region as Antarctic as the people who claim it, Their generations’ pride cold within the cataract eye

Of a universe saturated with galaxies of blinded stars,

Nestled beside used needles and spent condoms discarded behind

The crumbling tombstones of Loyalist burial grounds.

Preserved in permafrost, here history is no longer in the making: But remains the talisman revered at coffee shops, the holy relic Of reciters of the prayers, the crucifix that wards away

The infidel. The Fundy rain pours freezing pellets onto the streets, Vast wastelands of ice over the destitute presence of the populace.

The old watchman at the border says ‘there’s no place like it.’

**2:6**

**The Onset of March**

Snow slides from the roof in the middle of the night,

Plummets with a crash, sound effects in a dream

That a moment ago I dreamt in a moment of many decades.

I feel the tremor work its way through the house. I am wary

That my legs will cramp in the blood of my own darkness.

I stare into the open night, the fatigue of lost sleep

Spreading its long loneliness, skin the bloated bag

Of my sometimes life, sometimes here, sometimes elsewhere,

The black wind of the country town working its way

Over the ridges fat with memory. I try to better my breathing

As the approach of day coagulates in my retinas.

I have become the white weather that wears away the street.

I am the tidal river that heaves and then disappears

In the gasp of planetary gravity. I am downstream along the avenue

Of circumstance, carelessly conspicuous, contemptuous till

The last ripple of consciousness washes away every flake

Of falling snow.

**2:7**

**Self-portrait at 58**

I walk in the wilderness of my wayfaring,

Passing by roadside statues of plaster Jesuses, While the rains tumble down onto the windshield Of the SUV. I save Maine lobsters from freezers And warm them with my MasterCard; scramble

Into Hannaford’s for sacramental wine for the hotel hearth, Calm my anxiety-laden uncertainty with notations

On the LCD screen of my Toshiba laptop, And evaluate net worth adjusted for currency Exchange. On the biblical hill will I have Sewer trenches dug, water mains excavated

To reveal terra cotta breaks, and sniff the gas lines Of Lear jets accelerating into the afternoon sky, Engines screaming over the summit fog

Of Cadillac Mountain, luring my wonderment

Up into the troposphere

Of the grey, all-knowing unknown.

**2:8**

**Waterways**

The crystalline chrysanthemum, glittering

With its ultramarine river, does not resist

The September fragrance of sunlight, shores

Of foliage reddening portals, luminescent

In the autumn homeland of my optimism. In night dreams

The blue irises sway in the stream,

Pools deep with the perfection of the afternoon sky,

The petaline artistry remaining the companion

Of glassine water sculpted by

The floral perfumes of light.

**2:9**

**Atlantic City**

Hafiz sings to me that one of the secrets to knowing

The Beautiful One

Is to hold the Lion’s Paw

When dancing.

In Atlantic City,

The casino ghosts of MGM lions stalk

Rain-spattered streets that have become

Front yards for the black poor, the ailing boardwalk

Hemming them in.

Nearby in Absecon

I dream that I take lions to their eternal rest, But first, from each of them,

I sunder the right paw.

Some take longer to break than others. I am saddened by this, and the lions

Watch me with eyes of resignation.

*They think of the Tuonela of swans, far from*

*The Beautiful One.*

**2:10**

**Breakers**

The harbour seal surfaces into the fog, eyes

The cormorants on the seaweed of the rocks.

Distant trawlers hawk, disfiguring

The ocean’s face with diesels that disquiet

The discourse of whales.

*The silverback gorilla looks down*

*On the mountain, as the bullet distorts*

*His greenery of light.*

*Bush meat on sushi tables*. Exotic plantains

Next rare orchids. Deer farms on this island.

**2:11**

**Road to Recovery**

At the Cape again. Thank god for the peculiarities

Of Provincetown, where, says a T-shirt, the women

Are strong and the men are pretty. Give me exuberance, The energy of differences, and that bookstore that Stocks a treatise on thorough-bass. Where wild turkeys

Flock over the highway between the dunes. Where lap dogs

Proliferate as ornaments in purses and strollers,

Where filet mignon and wi-fi are at the ready. I’ll take This kind of America, with its wicked individualism, Imported wines, and rental condominiums. The sun Blazes over the long line of peninsula, over the distance From the past, over the renewed stirring of ambition, Even as the October winds move inland with autumn.

**2:12**

***Spem reduxit***

Your Toxes and your Chickses may draw out

my two front double teeth, Mrs. Richards, but that’s no reason why I need offer ‘em the whole set.

— *Susan Nipper, Dombey and Son, III*

Now the dead must rise

From the little Loyalist cemetery on King Street And repopulate the generations, so that Reverence has rationale, and rejection purpose,

To vindicate an ossification of arrival without departure, The amalgamation of degeneration with delusion,

And deceit with unearned entitlement.

Samuel de Champlain may lie beneath the basilica

Of Notre-Dame-de-Québec, but even in his grave he moved on

After a Christmas death, leaving all to the Virgin Mary. But the abandonment of Île Ste-Croix presaged

A cruel and clear awareness, the next readiness to assure

The viceroyalty of New France.

Above the bay, No Order of Good Cheer flourishes,

The Loyalist hinterland suckling its recollections of fealty

And slaves, the skeletal coronets of history languishing At this place of refuge, partitioned from progress, Indifference perfected by the indolence of insularity.

Their bones are beyond restoration, their

Silent serenity shrivelled with the damage of semblances; Neither pieced together by glory, nor the inheritors

Of the touchstone of history, the ghosts of time

Only are only remembered and touched for their emptiness.

**Part Two**

**Covenant of the Lost Arias**

**I**

**COURTING THE REMEMBRANCES**

*... the sunbeams struck into his room through the rustling blinds, and quivered on the opposite wall like golden water*

— *Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son, 16*

**1:1**

**On the Deck of the Zuiderkruis, With my Father**

***July 1952***

The black and white snapshot of the forecastle

Of the transatlantic steamship

Holds us together in a wicker deck-chair:

I am four and you less than half my current age, Your hair tangled, your eyes looking at

The camera, an anxious look tensing with arrival.

It seems a warm and sunny day somewhere In the middle of the Atlantic, now displayed On the ocean of my laptop computer

In a cottage at the rain-soaked edge Of the Pacific—you so forever gone And I with only a hole in my heart

To hold you in. Would I have loved you More, would I have understood you better, For part of me wanders without you,

Its inextinguishable, unstilled grief

That travels so often to live there.

**1:2**

**Alex**

It is over twenty years ago. My father-in-law And I leave the parked car and walk towards The sheer cliff of stone in the midst of

The Rocky Mountains. He smiles slightly,

Pleased. I myself am not sure what I’m looking for. However, it is a pleasant day, despite the gap

In communication as high as the mountains And as long as the years. It is not deliberate, As both our skills are inadequate. Both of us Want to say something more, but cannot find

The way. We walk beside the cliff face, looking Upwards from time to time to make a silent point About immensity, and it is into this that he enters Some years later, crazed by life, and all of us

Still unsure what to say and what to look for.

**1:3**

**Till Then**

I listen to the Mills Brothers, your

Favourite songs from the album

I bought for you the year you died

And never got to give to you; and

My heart begins to ache, knowing I

Should have asked these questions

When it seemed there still was time:

When you escaped from Hamburg

During the RAF firestorm, were you

Injured? How did you get through

The ruined city? Who was the companion

You had? Why was it him? Who else

Did you know in the labour camp?

How long were you imprisoned?

What work did the Nazis set you to?

How did you get from Hamburg

Back to the Netherlands? What route

Did you take? What danger did you

Encounter? Did you kill enemy soldiers?

Where did you hide in the countryside?

How did you manage to survive?

Who were the farmers who sometimes fed you?

What did you do for those two years?

Did your family know where you were?

How did you get through the Hunger Winter?

Were you even in that part of the country?

How did you feel when the Germans were

Conquered and peace declared? When

Did you return to Leiden? What

Did you feel when you returned home?

When did you decide you wanted

To leave, forever? When did you meet

My mother? How did you fall in love

With her? Why did you love me

As you did?

Had I asked, even without answer

I could have known you better

Than I made an effort to.

I would have known more of myself

That I now can never know.

How I misunderstood you. How careless

I was in my support. How little did I think

That my leaving wounded you forever,

And that what I do

Would be impossible

Had you not done much more

First.

**1:4**

**Magic Gathering**

The lyre tinkles amongst the priests, who sing

A merry song as they drift from the sacerdotal dais Towards the casks filled with holy wine—a *singspiel* In northern Alberta sung before dinner is served

At the Legion hall, the aroma of overcooked moose meat

Hovering in the air, the fragrance of cinnamon

Above the trays of apple pie, as the clinking of glasses Announces the speech of the local politician, holding Votes like communion wafers—never mind if you

Really believe, as long as you stay a member of the church.

Afterwards in the parking lot, considered concerns

Are expressed with the sureness of dogma, absolution

A desirable thing before the truck weaves off

Into the crystal aurora of night. At the 3000' landing strip, The twin prop plane is readied to fly the speaker

Back to Edmonton, tomorrow’s cabinet session

A requisite for the sometimes religious, beer fumes

Rising towards his nostrils as his intestines fight

The remains of the ruminant. Nearby, the lyres tinkle.

**1:5**

**Father to the Son**

Maybe my father was right after all:

Maybe there are a lot of good people.

And maybe stardust binds heart and soul.

It’s the winter moon of misery, though,

That gives me pause; the vagueness

Of good intentions, the assurances

Of selfishness, the underlying capacity to exterminate.

Perhaps, having survived the firebombing of Hamburg,

Watching the dawn rise upon the pulverized city,

Creates an optimism I should accept.

Maybe the risk of leaving everything behind

Place, language, culture, family, friends, history

Rests on a decision so deep and profound

That pessimism has no place.

Yet he worried.

All the time. He worried about loss, especially

The loss of others. And it entered into

The very sanctuary of his heart. Sometimes I think

That is what he gave me that means the most. With that, I too

May be able to weep myself into paradise.

**1:6**

**Self-portrait at 63**

My wife opens the curtains on the day after

The beginning of my 64th year: the mountain

Forest framed within the glass of the window

Is pale with snow, like a scene from a painting

By Bruegel, or of Dutch countryside

In the Golden Age. Sitting at this composition,

I think of Vermeer’s *camera obscura,* then

*The Love Letter* seen in Vancouver in 2009.

Already two years ago and three provinces

Since. I have returned to become a hunter

In the snow, looking at skaters on the frozen

River and curlers at the Banff Springs Hotel.

Fleetingly, I see images of my Vienna of yesterdays,

Knowing the last third of my masculinity

Will continue to crumble, at last to fall

Upon an icy slab in the remote silence

Of the northern forest, like the disappearing

Sounds of a last symphony by Sibelius.

The scene fixes me. Yet I cannot seem

To relinquish where I came from, its history

That transfixes me still. I stand on

The promontory of this winter, looking to

The jagged mountains whitened by cold,

Magpies flying precariously from frozen tree

To tree. I am near and far, my past

Silhouetted against the snow. The glassy

Rectangle before me is the tableau that waits

For the film of creation. Snow begins gently

To fall.

I am warm. I am nearing home at last.

**1:7**

**Spirits**

I descend into the drinking of destiny: Personal control abdicated by its presence; Fate that will wake on the doorstep of

The sanatorium of the mind in convulsions

Of contempt, already waiting for the relapse

Of obliterating resurrection, the resumption of belief

Buoyed by redemption so certain it sways

In the moonlight that illuminates the night.

**1:8**

**Finale in Several Parts**

In the confines of the countryside fortress, Leonore’s expressive areolae are repressed

In the politics of the dungeon. Go slow, said the jailer, Raising and rolling the Jesus stone from the cistern, Coveting the approbation of her anonymity,

Private enemies chaining the nobleman Beneath the choral breathing of convicts; Thinking forward to

The Friday music in Parsifal’s forbidden meadow, And the tam-tam at Babi Yar that reverberates Over the sudden corpses cast into the ravine: Guarding the gladness

Of difference, newborn suckling blue-eyed

At the nipples of eugenic handmaids.

When the order sounds, Leonore uncovers herself

In the courtyard, the nearby hamlet spilling in, Overlapping suspensions knocking three times at the gate, Schikaneder tinkling amongst the men’s chorus

As he watches acts of commission free of tax,

The performance overseen by ministers of the state

Who recognize the onset of urges too old to be new.

**II**

**PASSACAGLIA PIER**

*was du bist, bist du nur durch Verträge*

what thou art, art thou only through treaties

— *Fasolt to Wotan, in Richard Wagner, Das Rheingold, 2*

**2:1**

**Insurrection**

From inside Esterhaz emanate the frail sounds

Of an evening’s symphony by Haydn, while

In the forest the darkness whispers like flutes

And crackles like the breaking notes of hunting horns.

The insurgent lies and waits, furtive in needs and longings, The moisture of the night weighing upon his clothes,

Sleep dropping onto his eyes. They close slowly to

The nearly unheard coda of a movement played muted and *sostenuto.*

In the disconnections of morning, staggering away

From skirmishes to rejoin the partisans, he searches

For songs concealed in the countryside. Banished men, They are unexpectedly fraught with freedom, contemplate

Form that explores content, like the composer who makes clear

An ever-present newness, as if all truth were its statement.

**2:2**

**The Clocks**

The clocks in André’s home chime relentlessly Every quarter hour, bent over the aging of time Like a woodworker turning cherry wood on

The lathe of the saints who no longer keep faith.

The grandfather clock is adorned with fleurs-de-lys: The keyhole, *j’ai dit*, *“la clé du coeur Québécois*,” like The peregrinatic soul that nearly froze

Four hundred years ago

On the isolation of Île Ste-Croix. Champlain,

And amongst the orderly clutter on the refurbished walls, A formal picture of Lévesque,

A photo autographed, *amitiés*, by Guy Lafleur, Everywhere devotions to Jésus,

All adorn the timeliness of passing: the remembrances

Of what we all recall,

Time striking once more in the middle of the Montreal night, Thinking,

*Je me souviens.*

**2:3**

**Evangelist**

Into an afterlife of anathema stalks the zealot, Treasured prophet of worship, the pastor

Of peace who preaches parsimonious tolerance, Exile of the unbeliever, the convert’s contempt Of the unfaithful and changeless world. In any Acapulco, fondling the skin of naked rigours, Soaking in tequila and tonic to quell his distress, Heaven finds him, a certainty so abstract

He vacations with the blessings of his god.

**2:4**

**Chamber Musician**

Castrato Farinelli sings to the monarch,

Catches her Spanish attention with lurid ornamentation On the words of Metastasio, while her husband Accompanies on the harpsichord in the style of Scarlatti. Farinelli consummates the aria, and taking up

His viola d’amore to play with the king,

Carefully strokes his Order of Calatrava, and stands

In his place by the portrait by Velásquez, Diamonds on his long supple fingers,

His royalty befriended by the sway of his voice.

**2:5**

***Largo***



— *Dmitri Shostakovich, Symphony 6/I*

BlackBerry off, Zinfandel in glass:

The sixth symphony of Shostakovich Moves through the coastal cottage, elegy Respiring like the green, massive waves

Of the nearby Pacific that crash on destitute

Beaches, the waters’ roaring arrival

A majesty before which the kingdoms of men Are nothing. Hail falls suddenly in the twilight. The birds fall silent. Black cars drive

Along the highway. The symphony goes on, Further and further into a wordless realm

Of sensation, killing squads and the KGB At the margins of wonder, fatality filling The chambers of rifles with lethal lead.

**2:6**

**Assault**

Clandestine collusion cavorts

In the artificial

Courtyard on the hill, olive tapenade And Pacific lox on the too large table In a room too calculated for

The too new piano next the

Violin too prominent on its stand.

The listless fissures

Of the mind’s geology inhabit This eerie asylum where Delayed fractures of ideology

Drop unregenerate into night pools

Of disintegration—the moonlight as cloudy

As expedient revisions

Of history—all

Authenticated wrong or right, No matter the legislature

Of reality, and all

Either worshipped

Or disdained, despite the counsel of

The obligations of power.

**2:7**

**One Horse of the Iron Apocalypse**

The homeless rest beside the Seattle Safeway,

Where Neil Young is played inside

And the ATM is out of service. But past

Pagliacci Pizza on Queen Anne the unkempt

Swarm into PesosYoung men with uninspired

Stubble, and young women demonstrating

Breasts too bare to touchthe tin drummer

Sleeping at the corner of Mercer, the old woman

Calculating senior rate at the three-for-one-cinema.

Across the crumpled concrete sidewalks,

Litter swirls in the ocean breeze,

Whirls round feet and whispers away:

The wonder of America this tantalizing taste

Of encroaching prosperity, cigarette butt

By cigarette butt approaching the bus stop,

Where veterans in wheel chairs wait for

Public transportation to kneel at their feet.

**2:8**

**Bystanders**

Desdemona takes in his prowess, whereas

Othello venerates his wife overmuch. Yet the storm overtakes Cyprus, Iago

At last revealed by the rain, the malignant

Quest of destruction no longer

That troublesome illusion of imagination.

Those bystanders who would kiss know him. All through the centuries the armies march,

Burn children and crops, execute partisans, Exact tribute. On the starving shores

Of icebound lakes, peasants wonder

Whether to take to arms: the intruder

Is an emblem of confidence, and sleeps

With those who have slept with the dead.

**2:9**

**“here everything silently screams”**

The muck collapses inward as bones seep

To the surface, a broken ulna with lost carpals, Rotted marrow mixed with the mire of men.

The grave heaves towards the relentless gift of the rain, Reveals its concealments

As patches of linen bleached black by

An overpowered earth, dead lives blinded by bullets

Unseen by both murdered and murderers, Gentle tremors taking both

Into the silence.

**2:10**

**Postscript to Siegfried**



*Isamu Noguchi, Black Sun,*

*Seattle, USA*

Near Noguchi’s *Black Sun*, the man

From the silver Porsche

Trains his Doberman bitch—cana lilies,

Translucent orange in the noon light,

The fragrant barrier to the Asian museum.

Perhaps the dog daydreams of torn flesh,

Of guarding Hitler’s score of *Das Rheingold,*

His fingers running over the staves, as

Bombs fall above the bunker in Berlin.

Perhaps where manufacturers of cars

Ignored internees, invisible

Across continents, convincing

The Chancellor with prototypes. Perhaps

The black sun’s eccentric air

Absorbs the rainbow to Valhalla,

Confiscates the eagles’ lair

Where conquerors quarter spirits

They hunger to hate.

**2:11**

**Declension**

Stumbling broken-legged into the nuclear crater

I become the radiation of the elements, an atomic

Chemistry boiled in blood. My stomach

Draws and quarters itself, the stochastic damage

Of my humanity. The dead Kurosawa dreams

Of my ionizing molecules undetectable

By human senses. My prodrome completes. Ulceration overcomes what is the best of me.

I am a blistered act of fission. Necrosis is my universe.

**2:12**

***Réseau***

Flora MacDonald is in Afghanistan,

And the television images of the five lakes of the Band-e Amir

Palpate the spiritual tithe of my five senses, As if the healing of my destiny devolves

From the shattered kismet of the Bamyan Buddhas,

Liberation that declines the gift of insult at the occasion of intolerance.

The obsidian reflections of the silk routes open themselves Before the nomadic pilgrim, long beyond the Hanseatic League Of the Netherlands Circle, who has left Venice to embark

For the calcite light of Alexandria, seeking still the delta of the Rufiji

From the stopping point where he looks out over

The Indian Ocean at Dar-es-Salaam.

It is the music of his heart that he hears:

Until now ever more faraway, yet now ever so near,

It trembles, as a cluster of tones that seek themselves

In one another, soars through the gates

To the traders who gift dried fruit to the sayer of

The glorious, sobbing panegyric that desires to challenge love, The caravan masters who travel to bring musk and pearls

To adorn the ravishing face of the world for the eye of the seer.

**2:13**

**Setting Out**

Alone on the highway with the blizzard,

Like the grey menace of a Kurosawa image.

Along the faint trajectory of the disappearing road

My thoughts focus on self-preservation,

Yet debate alternatives. I drive on slowly,

Wondering if time will win. In this country

Of the north, we are visitors permitted by fortune,

Are supplicants before the power beyond us,

The great snows over all the roads of endeavour.

**III**

**THE FERRYMAN’S OBOLUS**

*For a walk in the late afternoon, and listened to Shostakovich’s fifth symphony in full....*

*At one point I found myself looking at a frozen brook off Union Street, then on Hawthorne Street*

*staring down the length of the snow-covered railroad tracks, and later on West Street looking up at the moon;*

*and, Shostakovich’s music in my ears, conceived the notion of* ... *a sort of cordial* rapprochement *with this town ... at the same time to be the point of real beginning*

*for the* abschied *that is inevitable.*

*(Journals, St. Stephen, New Brunswick, January 19th, 2008)*

**3:1**

**Bedrock**



— *Joseph Haydn, Symphony 51/II*

Metamorphic mountains of the north—

Sediment of marine drift the Quaternary erosion

Laid before the Salish sun glancing into

The blue shimmer of sunken islands of the sea;

Emanating a partial, impartial perpetuity

That buoys the ship’s bow in

The pelagic waters of Pacific sound

Greening with waves whose dramatic flourishes are

The chrysalis of the sea change of arrival.

**3:2**

**Mount Gardner’s Slope**

Nedra Talley is the Baptist in the black and white

YouTube frame, so won’t you be

The coastal forest’s rainfall freighting its grey fog

Over the flanks of the mountain, Stalin

Looming by Shostakovich, Hitler

Leaving Linz to be resolved by Mahler. Then, Gaze wandered westward, the bombed-out Munich opera house morning light

On the ocean at the cape, the shoreline bluffs

Awakened from a gracious dream, the people saying

‘Honour your masters, even should the empire

‘Dissolve in mist.’ After the award, Walter thinks she says, “I’m Estelle of the Ronettes.” so won’t you

**3:3**

**Identity Amortized**

Noon falls free from the humpback mountain,

Absorbing carbon from the road

That sections the island, scar chafed red

By imported riches depleting aquifers

And complaining about amenities, smug

And self-satisfied where the drawbridge rises

Before midnight, and the stars are only ours.

The second-growth hills are congested by

Internal combustion; the forest pockmarked

By sub-divisional smallpox. The pollution

Of permanence falls from sight behind

The swing of golf clubs on greens too flat

For Nature, by-laws to be amended when

Theres nothing left to regulate when

Theres nothing left to consume.

**3:4**

**Symphonic Night**



— *Anton Bruckner, Symphony 8/I*

Bruckner’s providential flax pulls through The hackles of hair at the base of my neck. He sees what I do not. It is immersed

In faith. He sees beyond Death,

Bleak sentry before Whom music subsides.

It is night on the island. A disturbed Silence breaks against Mount Gardner. The closing hours of August collapse Into the darkness. Like a wanderer From the spirit world of the immortals, My quest comes closer to the apertures

Of my heart. Will It now drink all this blood? Empty the heart of its nervous motion? Still The overt emptiness that is as restless

As sleep? Or will I be released again

Into the being I cannot quite grasp? announcing, That the thread of myself will be fully spun,

And the cloth, glorified by the terror of music, Be at last made whole.

**3:5**

**Adventitious Salvation**

Rasputin stalks his victim inside

The Romanesque halls of the legislature, Identifying politicians who might Assassinate him, who forget

The invulnerability of his reputation, The regard he is held in

By the church and its occasional followers. He has the measure of these supplicants,

Is able to balance self-interest

With all the attributes of good government.

Rasputin paces the ferry dock,

His imperial knapsack that is woven From purple silk and embroidered with Orthodox crosses in sun yellow,

Slung on one shoulder. The knife

Slides between Romans and Corinthians, Psalms cut to order with proverbs

At the ready. He tramps onto the boat, Beard wild in the afternoon wind,

To determine which motorcycle he covets.

Rasputin soon drops the dislocated biker Beside the toilet seat, and crashes down stairs To the open deck. He races the machine

Over the ramp and up the two hills

In search of the engineer’s wife. This Accomplished, he runs the Harley off The edge of a steep slope, adjusts

His sandals, and walks back on the ocean.

Rasputin knows that they are bloodless. Even prophets cannot defeat him; we die For the resurrection;

And I, he thinks, am its temporary anti-Christ, The devil’s stand-in who desolates the land, Even though the czarina, ever grateful,

Thanks him for it while waiting for him

To die.

**3:6**

**The Gospel Truth**

My ultimate sin is my resurrection: it was

A statement of faith I looked forward to. Lazarus, too, felt it had merit, and informed The media accordingly. Television ran

The tape loop without end, and the cathedral Bells of hand-held devices pealed in offices And automobiles across the city and deep Into the countryside. Ornithologists Complained that the errant sound disturbed Nesting herons, but the bald eagles cackled

As they flew through the shafts of searchlight

That sought further answers in the heavens.

I myself felt a certain sense of renewal,

The air fresher when the stone was rolled away. Rock musicians were enthusiastic, and Classicists pondered unendurable music

That cluttered the ears of governments in power; But I knew that the second coming was going

To last when Charon backed up the ferry

At the wharf near the marina, handed me

A coffee from the ship’s canteen, and said:

‘Welcome back; Mike’s waiting on the mainland.’

**3:7**

**Libretto from Leiden**

Violetta’s *cantabile* entangles the silences

Of my pleasure, my salon ensnared with laughter

Lured by last night’s cognac, self-pity Softening its *cabaletta* behind the murky arras, Sparefucile scurrying over from

An antecedent opera to drive the point home.

Prince Hamlet lugs my guts away, chortling about Falstaff’s kidney; the proscenium is my precious Admixture: limelight readying to go aflame

And immolate all lands east of the Rhine, Vermeer in the gods of the sunken theatre Catching the gleam for his luminous palette.

I am ready to come home.

Van Swieten assures me a commission

Can be found. Rembrandt has sent round

A note to come to dinner. The night watch

Assembles in my deepest past, and I

Pass through the darkest part of the canvas

Into the dark invisibility behind

The image of myself.

**3:8**

**Curtis and the Conclave of Invertebrates**

Curtis waded ashore, the sole survivor

Of the wounded quinquereme,

Carrying with him his Aristotle and his bag

Of forensic tools, unsure if the example of Alexander

Had reached any furtive inhabitants, cloistered

In the forests, indistinguishable as a kill of venison. So did Curtis come to town, his erratic journeys

At their manifest end, while the grey rain drizzled

On the grey, feral road that rose from the cove.

But as the last of the broken vessel sank

Into the silent sea, sudden denizens, crammed with discontent, Unleashed scores of dogs in wayward queues,

And positioned prams and amphorae up the incline, Where Mr Hyde and Brutus, both double exposures, Were coiling tongues in front of the market gate, Dissecting constitutions and the idiosyncrasies

Of academies interiorized in forgetfulness.

‘The law must be said, or the law will be dead;’ Said they, as the mixed aroma of their breath Turned down the cut flowers, the daisies withering

As the repetitive appetite of the snail wound through them— Elemental electricity wrestling against scholars’ theses,

Lost as spent perfumes in a late afternoon

Of prepossessed politics, playing out

In the peripatetic minds of portions of an indignant populace. Porridge it is they think they do not want. Ungainly

Sinecures are what the worms thrive on.

Brutus, ever at his water-flea length, is a spectacle

As lost as errant corneal transplants, speaking possibly Of impossibilities he cannot master, another creature Who wants to feel free of conscience, held upright Only by the vagaries of the breeze that twirls round The cruciform shaft of a purloined sceptre wanted

By the authorities. Porcia stands nearby, swallowing

Live coals, nervously eyeing the crowd for signs

Of Calpurnia. The marks upon her forearms hiss

In the maritime wind, bleach the smoke that crawls about

Her frame; Brutus intent as he slides down the shaft

Of the sceptre, while Mr Hyde inches into the roadway

And marshalls his mass into a forest filled

With nesting herons fast with plans disowned by Plutarch; While the cross-bearer Brutus, chokes in the fire of the zodiac.

Mr Hyde and Brutus were two of the conclave

Of invertebrates who met weekly, whether they wanted to

Or not; whether there was anything to determine

Or not; but, in any case, never to decide a thing. Rapt With their own succession and the banalities of their Sacrifice, they now approach yet another Curtis

To mask this inertia, having in advance prepared

The usual plans of assassination. Their namesakes dipped

In a vivisected dishonour of blood, the conclave wants no change, And so drops in disguise into the chambers of the damned.

And amongst them all bobs Dr Moreau, a jellyfish in a basin

Of bathos, revolving a geology of faults as a stone

Of immobility, high on the hill where the sun strikes

Men hard, where the flood rose to where the ark was undone

By by-laws, and all possessions carried away

In a sacred noise enclosed by a flash of secular light

In the darkness of the night that knew no paradise.

The conclave communicates in a semblance of tongues, Infesting haphazard heaps of scraps for sustenance, Consuming so much that more is wanted both early and late, Quickly consumed on table to ensure endemic confusion. Convened in secret council, the conclave instructs Curtis that

‘All that is needed is to kill the sons of Caesar, and uphold

‘The laws, while we turn the land to the fate we the conclave

‘Have decided upon. For this we will reward you well, for a while.

‘Remember always: Return us the Garden of Eden, by the shores

‘Of the guarded mountain. And burn without mercy all the boats

‘Of weary transports over the Acheron, and turn Orpheus away.

‘Here is the poisoned chalice. Drink deep of its deceit.’

Pandora archives the plague papers of the royal house, Obsessed with order driven asunder in the starless night On roads she cannot see, even as she crabs across Nocturnal surfaces seeking out broken grammar, Cluttering the ground with uneven locomotion and Incomprehensible leavings—accounting for everything

That needs no summation, and summing nothing that needs

To be accounted for. Transparent as desolation, Not ever remorseful in her elisions of reality, She scurries from place to ever remote places

Of pointlessness, history exiled from all the islands of The sunken archipelago, chartering protocols held still By spiders’ webs, the unwilling wind clamouring Through them, cleansing conspiracy of all its dupes.

Robespierre, whose house stinks of dead dog

And mammalian dirt, shakes his bowl of wine

As he posits theorems of life and death, squirming Through fields of rotting grain, unerring as the passion That feeds on the leavings of eagles, persistent

As the maggot that would blind every eye of those

Who see through his shrunken soul. The stones in the meadows

Recoil from his touch, debauchery lying upon his rings Like anger in the silver evening gleam of truculent Village squares. He is enamored of his guillotine, slides Himself over its wooden edges, wondering where

The planks were taken from, and if the curtsies

Of the woodcutters’ wives are deep enough

To warrant his barren attentions, raging on

The lost terrace as he approaches yet again with his cape.

Nary’s a pond of blood so deep as that cultivated

By Mme Defarge, knitting nothing save her faith

In the revolution. She keeps to her judgment chair, Squatting on the national realm, tarantular consequences Immaterial to her land-lust; as she watches,

Ever so closely, ever without trust, as the blade Slices through the necks of the condemned, as Heads fall before her into the basket set upon The uncut grass, birds singing from the gallows

As the tumbrels pull into the centre of the universe, The wool from the sheep that Cassius keeps

Woven into a garment so misshapen it has no name

But the names it counts; and though she swells

In the marketplace, she is the butt of Robespierre, And in the end he will make her end another of his.

Cassius lives with Brutus in the mouth of Satan, Where Cassius burdens Hell with celebration

Of the birth of Adolf Hitler. Not made contrite By his inheritance, nor humbled by the hubris Of history, an insular propensity has impaired

His appetite, embittered his betters, and exposed

His proclivities for broken orchards and ploys Amongst the young who are penniless but not proud. He cannot explain his secrets, for they are empty

And want only typographical semblances of allure, And when Satan sleeps, Cassius stands on

The burning road from Hell, thumb outstretched Wishing that foot-candles of fire will take him in And take him at last to the luminescence that

His mind seeks to describe in many, always lost, syllables. And so he reticulates through the foamy brim

Of earthworm sentences hidden behind his teeth, and slithers on.

Curtis considered his instructions, and then his instructors; Wondering why any man would undertake

To execute such a plan without a plan; and decided:

‘From this I best depart,’ but first let me find the island’s

Fabled compost heap near the fen by the foreshore,

Lock these invertebrates upon it, and let Nature take her course.

So did Curtis govern himself, and soon after sailed on

On a raft built of ethics, for his artistry, and Aristotle,1

Did not fail him.

1... we ought, so far as possible as in us lies, to put on immortality, and do all that we can to live in conformity with the highest that is in us; for even if it is small in bulk, in power and preciousness it far excels all the rest. Indeed it would seem that this is the true self of the individual, since it is the authoritative and better part of him; so it would be an odd thing if a man chose to live someone else’s life instead of his own.... [w]hat is best and most pleasant for any given creature is that which is proper to it. *Aristotle, Ethics, X:vii* (J.A.K. Thomson and Hugh Tredennick, tr., Penguin Books (1976), pp. 330-331).

**Part Three**

**Covenant of the Golden Shadows**

**I**

**MAHLER AND FREUD MEET IN LEIDEN**

**1:1**

**Disjuncture**

Yours is the voice particulate awards,

Its incipience a suspension in which

Natural selection works its way:

The song of passerine finches

Inside manuscripts by Darwin;

The Old Rhine’s Roman castra

That stall and stalk the flow of history.

Small pinpoints of pain inside the heart,

Unable to understand what the heart remembers.

The sentries peer into the hardening darkness

Where partisans conceal their presence

In a resplendence of night.

I dream of rooms I wandered within as a boy,

Rooms I slept in with lovers,

Places I do not recognize

But know I must have known.

Spectra of spectres

In the open air sepulchre, spectacular

Mausolea in the bright dying of day.

I hear your attention, I see your indifference.

**1:2**

**Mahler and Freud Meet in Leiden**

The agonized dawn, crimson red

And amber yellow,

Crawls back into the ardent sky, Fills the crease of the horizon, Momentary flame discharged

As another small death of flagrant resurgence.

Jan Steen, no longer in the tavern, his drinking Companions gone, the monopoly of the guild No longer shielded by the town

From illegal imports,

Lies buried in the family grave in the now unconsecrated Ground of Pieterskerk, on the site near the stronghold Where the counts of Holland came to chapel.

Two streets north, at the turn of the 18th century,

Hendrik Johannes Jesse rebuilds

Den Vergulden Turk on the Breestraat

While, in Vienna, Freud is still contemplating *das Es.*

At the Beethoven-Haus in Bonn,

At Bonngasse 20, I look into the room where

The composer was born. The sensation is an odd, Unusual kind of *frisson* of relentless connection. In Another room of the museum, I look at

The two fortepianos from the Vienna years, Imagine the strings snapped by the force

Of frustration.

By Stephansdom, at Domgasse 5, I wander Through the four rooms of Mozart’s apartment; My sensations filled with a kind

Of spirituality, heightened by the too close *nearness* Of Graben. At the Staatsoper, we gain *Stehplätzen* For *Fidelio,* and Gundala Janowitz;

Not escaping the validity, the enclosed rapture

Of the Prisoners’ *welche Lust*.

The pale afternoon of August 26th,

Freud returns by steam trolley from Noordwijk;

Gustav Mahler steps off the train from Cologne.

They meet at Breestraat, number 84, the café-restaurant

Built in 17th century Dutch classical style,

Its pediment, by Flemish sculptor Pieter Xavery, Showing the carved Neptune with his trident, The eponymic, gilded, mercantile Turk,

And Mercury with his caduceus, Apollo

The half-brother’s gift for the gift of the lyre.

The herald has travelled far beyond the sovereign sea, Inspirited by the strength of its song

That at last, lastingly, transforms Tieresias.

I no longer withdraw my love.

And even though half-divided, I will always be broken

Without you. For you flow around me, And hold me, where I became.

**1:3**

**Even Nazis Can Sing**

Schwarzkopf sings the Marschallin’s lament

To the assembled throng of gauleiters and obersturmführers, Tannenbäume in the four corners of the room,

The Teutonic hum of Christmas, may we adore Him, In the atmosphere. Down the cobbled street, soldiers Crush the fingers of the pianist underneath

Hob-nailed boots; then shoot away his throat.

It is said of the singer that she wanted her love to last, And did not mind the black burial of the truth. Strauss’s music winds down the alleyways

Of the ancient town, festooned for the party

And the festivities of the season—a light covering Of snow brilliant with the reflection of silver light From the moon. Except for the gurgling of death, There is quiet, extermination wintry and calm Over half the human race.

**1:4**

**In the Lobby**

In the latitude of the oil sands,

Syncrude proverbs on the Internet are pronounced

Like unfunded infrastructure, Red ale served cold in the bar and grill.

Into the Clearwater valley

Clamber caterpillar fauna, Monster tires caked in bitumen;

And *in situ* lounges spill meaningless music

Over reception carpets bordered by

The car rental booth—

Mannered mayors from throughout the province

Hedging a sharp meanness that ambles among

Predictions of success— Drilling down

Into the Canadian west

Like hot water entering

The pores puncturing our skin.

**1:5**

**This Side of the Infinite**

Into a Mecca of molecules move the morals Of civilization, monstrous and divine, Abandoned and found, beloved and Contemptible. In this Jerusalem of human Neurons, excitations collect in the jagged Streets and holy sepulchures, in the echo

Of Saint Mark’s Basilica and the fallen spire Of Gedächtniskirche; their voltage sent to The membranes of the olive groves,

The garden of Gethsemane pitted with Drops of blood buried for assumption Into agony. Into the purulent blister

Of belief pours the antibiotic of our Weapons; shields of the partisans shattered In mountain passes and great ravines

Where our embrace cannot withstand, And the sea, with all the tears it takes in, Cannot wash away, our molten evidence.

**II**

**THE UNDERSIDE OF TIME**

*While the flowers, pale and unreal in the moonlight, floated away upon the river;*

*and thus do greater things that once were in our breasts, and near our hearts, flow from us to the eternal seas.*

*— Charles Dickens, Little Dorrit, I:XXVII (1856)*

**2:1**

**The Sixth Dream**

I

Yesterday evening snow fell furiously

In the mountains, and we missed

The rest of the Bartók string quartets.

This morning, we find large clearings left in deep snow:

Elk sheltering from the blowing wind.

Away from the impossibility of the office,

I read about Shakespeare, of whom next to

Nothing is known, having departed as invisible

As the great cervids who vanished with the night.

At breakfast, I cannot any more read

The tiny PLU code on an apple.

Sometimes my mind whitens in the vertigo of the day;

Sometimes my body tingles with the wrong

Kind of sensation; often I cannot sleep

As I descend into darkness. In the snowstorm

Of my mind I hear symphonies by Sibelius;

In the invisibility of what I still do not know

About my portion of fate, late sonatas for piano

By Beethoven search in my mind. My uncertainty is like

A constant curtain of falling snow, through

Whose drifts I have no choice but to wander on,

Fragments of dreams images that re-appear,

And then disappear into the mislaid past.

II

In the blizzard I have lost the sound

Of Bartók and the sight of the sun;

And the temptress of the snows

Unveils her sleep-filled eyes and stares

Into the depths of mine. She wants

To embrace me in the lovelessness

Of time, icy intercourse amongst

The cold drifts white against

The vastness covered in the darkness

Of white. The art of choked sounds

Squeals into my failing ears, her hand

Turning my cheeks ever more into

Solid flesh. I seek the encampment

Of my joy, and my release, but I

Falter; and as I do, I wonder what

The sad melody that repeats itself

Will find at its end; or will the end

Not ever be known, not ever felt.

**2:2**

**Saturday in New Istanbul**

The belly dancer’s dance warms testicles wanting

Turkish spice, money

Slipped between her skin and the cloth below

Her belly-button, men’s eyes dropping

In between her thighs. The music of the Bosphorus

Pounds the air of the little restaurant

In the strip mall set back from one

Of Edmonton’s many numbered avenues.

After the kebabs, the customers walk

Into the northern night of day, cluster into cars To crisscross the city, dangling thoughts Incompletely bare.

**2:3**

**Worldliness**

Walking to Churchill Square today, I heard the young evangelist, Opposite Edmonton City Centre mall and the CBC,

Hectoring the empty winter air and selling pocket Bibles, Wanting to ensure we were washed in the blood of the lamb, And causing the Muslim women with hijabs

To whisper amongst themselves at the bus stop

About the oddities of Canadian society.

I’d somewhat hoped he’d’ve asked me to repent my sins,

So that I could inquire which ones, why, and to what extent; For I'm a believer, believe me;

But you'll sooner find me communing with a Corona or Sleeman

Than standing on a green milk crate

Extolling what the good book is purported to have final say on, Ecclesiastical royalties notwithstanding,

On any sales on a 102nd Avenue downtown.

**2:4**

**Field**

In the lounge—away from

The restricted area where oil and gas and pilots

Gain access without boarding passes no one looks at, I wait with red eyes.

Bitumen lies unheated

Beneath zoned grounds of endeavour, Waiting for the boarding call

Of distant commerce, the sirens’ response

Of imprisoned economies, buried in

The distance of civilization

And the business it conducts.

Soon the tar sands will ooze

With black promise, swarthy Corporations extracting tax holidays And jobs that can be sent back home. It’s the newly found land of Petroleum opportunity, the loons

Of condemned lakes plangent and unheard

Over the circular noise of drills.

Time to fly. I duck into the plane, Strap myself in, align my body at a

20º angle—in the flight plan

Beside the great mountains, I work

My way towards liberty.

**2:5**

**Breath**

After the sacrifices at the feast

Of Saturnalia, Bacchus, silent

And wanting to be more than half-naked, Slouches in front of the banquet table, Thyrsus dripping with gathered honey, Locutions silenced by

The savage quiet of the crossroads.

After the anger of the uplands,

The fading fragrance of the summer light

Falls like breath on the broken landscape.

The river is quiet, the vivid descent of the sun

Yellowing the sand-filled current,

Its surface curling against the stream,

As thunderstorms break once again, clouding

The inconstant inebriation of the valley.

**2:6**

**The Pockets of the Impenitents**

“Dahling,” said the mannequin, looking south Behind his back, “carry on.” And Dahling, Ever so forlorn, yet looking north of idolatry,

Cleaned off his extricated head and murmured “yes,” All the while texting the same, more or less,

Into his iphone; as if he were the aurora borealis, Wanting the North-West Territories to stammer Against broken drive trains, to have conference halls Fill with the illusions of easy money in prefectures And comedy club appointments of political promise. But, they waited too long, and it was then

That the pizza boy arrived with his purloined ears, Wanting to know what he was to say when it became His anointed turn to dress and address the mannequin. So there they lounged in bribed leisure suits

By the empty fountain on the snowless ski hill, And threw Irish tarpaulins over leftover stew

And mulled drink, while needy and perplexed hamsters Clamoured for instructions for a way out of the light; And darkness fell over the plenitude of the valley.

**2:7**

**Shostakovich in Peace River**



**The 15 String Quartets**

*Consciousness precedes Being, and not the other way around, as Marxists claim. For this reason, the salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human humbleness and in human responsibility.*

— Václav Havel, Address to the U.S. Congress, 21 February 1990

1

*Modulants expérimentaux près des* thinning peripheries of tenebrosity.

2

A plea that enters an abyss of the void, at the shore of the placid Peace as it flows towards the edge.

3

Noon over the wind-tangled river: jocosity inside the body gnawing outwards into the gasping air.

4

The sullen and rejected wind that skirls through the windowless room where the motionless snow cannot rest.

5

Broken *sostenuto* dissolving into the faltered firmament of the winter river.

6

The forced dream of the trapeze artist arcs without trapezium till at last the small audience resolves to unravel earth.

7

Quivering quavering quickness, becalmed in a quietude whose care is collapse.

8

The black ghost of nothingness emerging in the half-shadows of the silhouette of emptiness.

9

Bruised flowing disconnections, slivered by the remoteness of the recollection of pain.

10

Conjoined opposites, apposite contraventions in a conflict of interlinear collusion.

11

Raw, severe sonorities, probed by intervallic isolation in an infestation of time.

12

Fogged sinuosities rising to the low-lying winter sun – snows dotted with the cries of ravens.

13

Hard, harsh plaints of the soul unconstrained, strain restrained by a flotsam of ice afloat in the river of the heart.

14

Then moving into, stepping forward to, the shadowy, shadowed illuminations.

15

Towards the loneliness of the river as it blackens within snow.



**III**

**TORN BY VICTORY**

*Two bars before the flute solo,*

*where the horns almost pre-echo the opening phrase, I felt completely isolated,*

*almost as if on a thin mountain ridge with a drop either side— perhaps even with life on one side and death on the other.*

*The music searches for peace and finally as it drops down,*

*for me I felt a sense of acceptance of what will be.*

*— Gareth Davies,*

*in Norman Lebrecht’s Why Mahler?, p. 246*

**3:1**

**Polonius Comments on the Journey to Canterbury**

Concede that often the day will be

Imperfect—reflect that This particular road Was not yours to build.

On these travels,

Be prudent, and expect many enemies, People who will despise you

For no good reasons but their own;

So be vigilant, but nonetheless anticipate

More defeats than victories;

And should by chance it be the reverse, Recognize that fortune, in its cryptic way, Has decided to smile upon

Your unexpected fate.

Destiny is a harsh disciplinarian, But it has come to this place Unannounced and misunderstood. Therefore, be kind to it,

Even when it seems to leave you, and depart.

**3:2**

**Michael Rosen**

**‡ 13 May 2012**

We return in this distant urban night,

On the high slopes rising from the unvoiced river. You knew I thanked the spectral shades

For their compassion, and I am thankful

You are one who chose to guide me.

And you know I cannot yet re-pay this,

This greatness inside the beauty of our country, Where I encounter you, transformed

Into a longing for our earthliness.

We remain the ones, Michael, Who were; who proved ourselves The ones who stayed to become.

**3:3**

**Privilege**

‘You have this gift,’ Aristotle

Said to me, as we walked in the grove, Listening to the Japanese pianist

Playing Mozart. ‘It is a form of privilege.

‘And as you are able to do so, and have

‘Learned to recognize what life teaches,

‘It has without question brought to you

‘That it is your own life you must

‘Choose to live.’ As Uchida began

To play a fugue by Bach, ‘Listen,’ he said,

‘And hear the logic of complexity,

‘For it simplifies the quest—

‘Even if, in the unfolding, the lines

‘Sound unclear, they always hold

‘To themselves.’ He added,

‘Talent is not what matters. It is

‘The obsession to express oneself

‘That cannot be put aside. For whether

‘Great or small, it is utterly

‘What one is made of; and that

‘Is the self in its realization

‘Within existence. Though it cannot be

‘Explained, it must be made manifest,

‘For the privilege is none other than

‘Oneself.’ And so we walked for a time

In silence, our minds touching

The crystals of music that combined

In the counterpoint of commentary.

And when we came to the edge of the sea, I looked into his eyes, and, thanking him, Took his hands in mine; and then Embraced him, tears beneath my eyelids, While, in the great and near distance,

The pianist played her song, the golden sun

High above the harmony of

The companionship of the world.

**3:4**

***Gaudeamus***

The very statuary of Maecenas administers The culture of the empire, Horace was heard To say, before his youth began to founder Upon odes spoken on the Esquiline Hill.

Many years later, on yet another birthday Too many, Horace told the young poets That the only way to touch men’s hearts Was to show you had touched your own.

A statesman of diplomatic verse, his patron

Admitted none unworthy of his intimacy, and so Horace

Poured into the golden goblet his very blood

Held in the cup of his hands, the glory and majesty Of poetry his reconciliation to the orders of change, Bringing on the bright carmine of the birth of death.

**3:5**

***Sotto voce***

In the narrowed discoveries

Of the morning light that seeps

Along the wetland rushes, sacred reptiles Claim the edge of the lake of fire, Diamantine idols slithering

Inside the aqueous pantheon, Their glances imbued

With the mysticism

Of sorcerous intercourse. For here it is the progeny

Of the sun who are well, and the shadows

They emerge from were long ago golden.

**3:6**

**Necrology**

After a long internment in places recalled And forgotten, what remained of the body Of the poet was interred in a cemetery of No particular name on what may have been French or Spanish soil, perhaps near

The Pyrenees, perhaps near the sea. After these

Imprisonments he had thought himself

Of no consequence; but often this thought

Was evanescent, like his speech and His memories of northern coasts and The kiss of sunset that fell away into The darkness of solitude. Impaired

By ravishments, and the entrancements

Of a beauty that does not fade as it attracts The golden tinge that shadows hide, he Imagined the last light as yet one more Destination to explore, to know better,

To want to reach it so much that to be

Buried within it obligated the obliteration

Of all that had been and all that he might be.

**3:7**

**Snow**

It is midday; as I walk, alone, in winter,

Listening to Shostakovich’s third quartet,

its passacaglia with the quintuplet turn.

The surface of the North Saskatchewan River

is frozen white with snow;

the Groat Bridge is behind me in the distance.

The cloudless sky is a pale and wonderful prairie blue.

The quintuplet reminds me of Mahler’s in

the synagogue of his symphonies.

The riverside pathway is icy, and it is difficult

to walk without falling.

And I feel as if my life is slipping through me,

the past gone but episodically recalled,

the present moment covered

by the shadows in the quartet. Not a soul in sight

except my own, bewildered and wondering where

it will go on to; old age longing quietly for spring.

**3:8**

**Sometimes I’d Be Alright**

Roy Orbison offers me a smoke, as we

Settle into his Lincoln Continental,

And drive away from the dust of Dallas

Towards Plano on the vast Texan plain.

There, we stop at Kelly’s Eastside Bar

To escape the heat, and talk of what had been,

And what had not. ‘Like me, you’re a wayfarer,

‘And unsatisfied too often. Music

‘Has helped me through, but no matter

‘How high I reached, I could not

‘Bring myself back to where I’d left.’

He slid the car keys across the table.

‘Here, you drive: it doesn’t matter where.’

**3:9**

**Asseveration**

This vertigo has no calibration. Capitulating at cliffside, its speed is air,

As I caress the captivity of anger, fondle its mistrust, And fingers of endocrine secretion

Refracture into coagulations

Wary of the distance, and the answer, Of the fall.

You would not see me torn apart, For I am invisible to you, however much

You think you can see me. Your vanished affection Will not reach the remnants of my unseen body, Slivered to feed the spinning

Of my vestibular consciousness.

Once I might have loved you, but now we are lost.

**3:10**

**Now Worthwhile**

We have met before, Orpheus,

On the slopes of Hades, where Kurosawa fell, Where Beethoven heard the inner want of mankind,

On the morning the Maenads dismembered your body, And your spirit was returned to Eurydice. It is your shrine

I worship at; where, because of you, your lyre plays my heart

And cannot escape it. Often I have thought

It had been different, but today, released

From the underworld of my shadows, sparkling Like clouded stars in the nightingale constellations, I say my goodbyes to the Bacchae, they

Whose wine poured more and more each day, Whose intoxications made empty the deepness

Of my desire, who went into the holy mountain night

To recover the ecstasy of their rites; until now, When the force of my existence crosses back To the day. Perhaps we have not really met

Before, though I have heard Aeschylus and Rilke Sing for you, strange languages caught within

Inescapable elegies; but I, now that we are face to face,

Will venerate your poems, and your places, for I am only mortal, And now must live what I had put aside

To return to what I am. Let me take your hand, Orpheus, And love you, as the Orphic nymphs look on

In the light of Apollo, the Delphic oracle watching Each of the Muses on the slope of Parnassus, assisting At the purification of our consummation.

**3:11**

**Revision**

Sibelius, smoking a cigar and slightly drunk, stands

Before the concert house where Nováček premiered

His concerto for violin. It is 1904. He is almost forty.

He lacks both money and domestic tranquillity.

The white cold of winter surrounds him. Perhaps

He is thinking of Mendelssohn. Crisis

Now stalks him constantly. His mind needs

Equilibrium. The northern skies remain

Indiscernible with blowing snow. Flakes drift

Upon the house of performance, and cover over

Ever diminishing hopes of confidence. A distant visitor

Shakes his hand. Eyes meet. A terrible despair

Is encountered and reaches once more for itself.

**Part Four**

**Covenant of the River Valley**

**I**

**COUNTERSUBJECTS**

**1:1**

**Crypt of the Wounded Heart**

Edified by the density of the jungle

The insurgents sliced open

The broken chest of the mercenary, And watched his heart beat against The captivity of the open air, Ventricle and auricle congesting And emptying in succession; until A child lowered the machete

Over the aorta, and blood flowered, And held fast to the tangled dust.

The men released the pointless bonds, And watched his disappearance

With eyes locked to his, the wounded heart

Inert in its own aftermath, filled with

The immobility of the light upon

Its excavated crypt, open to

The blotched video of the sun-filled

Camera frame, catching droplets

Of dying time for all this world to see.

**1:2**

**Mathematics**

Every phantom of the vortical phalarope

The inchworm above any delectation of its fading earth Brought to the shuddered clinging of the water of the marsh

A corporeal gleam of envenomation by each pelagic snake

Lacrimosa penetrated for the ashes of leopards awaiting guilt

Sacred cattle sheltering in byways of purgatorial dust

Sacrifice of the ox flayed with the brushed radiance of reverence

Celestial glow of northern wheatlands at the solar horizon

Each line returns to itself, never itself again

Each curve journeys beyond its yielding perfection

Multiplication of perception within the insistence of refraction

The eye of the antelope measuring the Serengeti

Parabolic clusters of despair emaciating the polar bear

Belugas poisoned for the infinite bay alongside the Saguenay

The St. Lawrence coursing as a tidal ghost at an emptiness of sea

**1:3**

**Guilt**

Yesterday

I heard the recitation of the endless fugue

Of the dead, its counterpoint without consolation,

And then I dreamt of the white milk

In the kitchen of my mother’s house,

Seventy years after the ending of the war that stayed

Her constant counter-subject all the years after. Yesterday

I spoke with her, whose mind is leaving her,

Of the beauty of the autumn, of the preparations

Of age for death, and then, she alone, of the love

Who has left her behind, he who was

The composition that sang her life,

And the episodic and free flow of her melody

Was a poignancy of pain, and broke my heart, too.

Yesterday

Three and a half thousand kilometres apart,

My mother and I prepared for the snows,

Whose wintry certitude will cover over with cold

The fugal answer consumed by silence.

**1:4**

**Concentration**

I would have been one of the prisoners; for

I am not cruel enough

And do not anticipate the permanence of starvation.

I would be exploited by the ignorant, much as I am now, When the imminence of death

Remains at a distinct yet somewhat variable distance, Ascribed only to probability.

My physical weakness would betray me, but my mind

Would seek a different consequence, and in the end be proud

Of the finding, a condition to be wrenched away by emissaries Of the state; a self-worth that vanishes

Into the claims of survival.

I would be inexorable,

Imprisoned or imprisoning; carrying and carried in

The ark of the covenant at the gates of Jericho.

**1:5**

**Illumination**

It is 1662, when Rembrandt

Once more looks at himself.

In self-portrait, he is 59, and aged; Saskia, dead for thirty years; Hendrikje, in her thirties,

Nearing her death.

The city council of Amsterdam will

Reject *The Conspiracy of Claudius Civilis*, Later to be mutilated by

Monetary need, leaving

The one-eyed Batavian

Crushed by the Roman legions.

Looking into his eyes, and into What he sees, the paint placed over Being with a trowel, then

Carefully scraped away to reveal What the gloss overshadowed; Comes the darkness

Rembrandt closes his eyes upon; Impecunious, as he sells

Saskia’s grave in

Oude Kerk;

the gold-filled light of The naked and replaced Danaë, Raising her arm, recognizing

A nameless place in Westerkerk,

Finding his burial within reach Of Hendrickje’s arms nearby, The world in love

With all who love her.

**1:6**

**The Convent at Rio San Antonio**

In the garden of the Ursulines, Silent intimations open

The music of the adorations, Restore a hidden heartsease; A heavy light instilled into The court of the convent

To pervade the aging grove And its well-worn stones Beside the river. It is still, As veneration reaches out To renew the covenant, Marvelling

When the hand of the supplicant

Returns its trace of touch.

**II**

**LANDFALL**

**2:1**

**Amethyst**

In a violet decay of midday into the winter

Of the afternoon, it is another I driving

The narrowed street where I walked

So many places gone by. The black Sentra Smells of a newness that slowly encroaches The coming end of everything that was here In this small block of time, as if

I were the no longer indigent, but a distant

Incubus hovering unsteadily, away upon

The arcane hands broadcast by the theremin.

The compression of the sky thickens

Into the foreshortening of the gorge,

A slackened traffic of trucks, plows, pedestrians

Current deposits of perfused motion

In the sluice where fragments of what were

Engraved gemstones of what was

Glint in the watercourse of age

That so long ago carried me through, away from

This where I was when a child, and where,

In the ravine where the future unfolds, I yearn

For the mystery that is leaving me forever.

**2:2**

**Good Friday**

In that opera house, demolished

After the time of spectacle,

For an ornate and elaborate settlement

That once was,

The conductor probes into the silence.

Elegant eyes long extinct petition

Pillars of cloud and fire, supplicants

For the blood-filled song of a sanguinary Sea.

At Tribschen on Lake Lucerne,

Wagner’s piano is stillness.

The air before him falls aside

Like the parting of waters at exodus;

All the mortal gods assembling

As the music summons

One more orchestral transfiguration

Of the ostracisms of time and space.

**2:3**

**Navigation**

At the siege, distant cannons fire

For the founding of the country,

Summer flowing thróugh the open window. Exactly sixty-one years earlier,

We are on the Atlantic, the European port

Under the horizon, its water watching the west.

The ocean wind rises

Derelict with light, sustained

In the salt of the sea— The silence of departure

As we sail, histories forgetful

As they slip from what they were: Destitution craving

The certainties of its dreams.

Today, eight floors up, the wind rustles

The tethered flag.

When I look out over the land, I understand I am its disciple,

That the seas sought to protect me, And that the wind brought warnings Of what is evil, and what is good.

**2:4**

**Captivation**

Agamemnon

Kills the stag in the sacred grove. The Carmelites at Compiègne resist The spiritual expropriations

By the Reign of Terror.

Accepting everything he has lived, Oberon looks up at

The perfect blue at the convergence

Of earth and sky between the bare poplars.

Nuns guillotined,

Iphigenía sacrificed at Aulis

To placate Ártemis.

For even after

This later lament Does Oberon speak:

“All that has been your history is

“The preparation for your purpose.”

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