

The Abelard Poets

EMPTIED SPACES

DAVID JAFFIN

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Artist's proof

J. Mackay

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with an etching especially created for this volume by Jacques Lipchitz

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Again for Rosemarie, and for my sons, Raphael and Andreas

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[I]

EMPTIED SPACES

The candle's spent,
It was flesh
He meant to say,
But the words burned
Still, left him a
Room of emptied
spaces.

NIGHT-TIME STUDY

for my son, Raphael

The stars went out,
Each of a single in-
stance, prepared

That night to be
Indefinably still: the
Feel of touch, the
Sense of the real
Fingers on cloth; stars

went out,
Each of a single in-
stance.

OLD MAN IN THE PARK

An old man sat where he was,
 wooden-framed
In the fountained park,
His thought the same
As the things about him:

The barely coloured green
 of grass
Brought to mind, reminded,
The emptied pond,
Swans that gathered their wings
 there once,
The sun florescent gold, bold
 emblazoned sun.

The old man sat where he was,
 wooden-framed
In the fountained park.

FROSTSCENE

In this stillness
One expects the eye to move.

So much here is hard and cold,
Wrought/untold between
us.

If we could touch
That this silver-silence could thaw,
Straight out to the tips of our
Fingers, that this branch
Could bear its spring of sap,
Unexpected, and liquid in
intent.

If we could speak
That our words could break
As flower from stone declared,
That quickened sense
Impulsed in light . . .

But in this stillness
One expects the eye to move.

So much here is hard and cold,
Wrought/untold between
us.

IDEALIZED

Transfig-
urations of thought,
idealized

That probable af-
ternoon
Lighted with sound:

Your feet my plea-
sure
Performed in tact and
measure –

You smiled,
Peripheral to the
sense.

AFTER A PORTRAIT OF LENBACH (1890s)

You stood
And the world stood still
where you were.
And your dress encompassed
that space
well-knowing each and
every care
It had traced right down
to that
Same selected moment
Where you stood in a world that wasn't
anymore
Looking out, looking out
perpetually silent.

ROAD BUILDING

They cut a road out of that
 landscape,
Planned and contrived to connect
 two places
On the map which they had
 never seen.

They came with their tools,
With their rough-handed workers,
With their skills, with their plans
And surveyors and at just the
Right time of year.

They chose the curves and angles,
They exposed that soft soil
 to their wants,
They laid flat that land,
Poured burning tar on a readied
 surface
And let it dry down deep.
And they curved those sides away
Proportioned to the proper
 slopes

And then they took their tools
And their rough-handed workers
And their skills and their plans
And surveyors, packed up and
 went home.

NOT BY CHOICE

They found themselves at the same place
Not by choice but by chance
Each had decided to come for
Some other reason of his own and
That place wasn't final
Either as a destination but
More like a point of debarcation as
Rivers that run together to a
Common source and then feed out in-
to the same sea

They came, each separately,
Each with his own thoughts in hand,
Underway. It was like changing
Trains at a common platform
Waiting at the same time
For the same thing
And yet only for themselves –

But that train didn't come,
The rivers failed to
Run together and they found
Themselves there at that same
Place, not by choice but
By chance each had decided to
Come for some other reason
of his own.

REMEMBERED

Time is falling,
Let it step into the past
 briefly
And leave no mark
As words scarcely brought to
 mind –

I think of you so,
Of the lightness of fallen
 snow
That leaves no mark
Except when winds (trans-
 parent) wake.

THE POOL

Look down into that
 watered place,

The light's gone out of
 your transient face,
Leaves shadows there
 instead;

That pool's bare,
Cracked at the edge,
Thoughts you gathered there
Will blow and break
And end for winter's
 sake;

Look down there
At what you've found out
 of yourself.

n.y.c.

Perhaps these stones have spoken
(and their voice conceals
the want of light),

Or glimmering shadows per-
petuate here
A certain sense of desire
(in the twilight of
laughter when birds ex-
hibit their skills) –

Imagined wings of flight
Awaken not that real sense for
light;

Perhaps these stones have spoken
(i placed my fingers to
feel the want of
flesh)

And their words passed in
me
The coolness of another
afternoon.

TO THE HISTORICAL

Imperfectly known,
Abandoned in time to touch
and stone

This sanctity of fact fin-
alized, idealized

The tentative act itself
Imperfectly declared
As the fictions of waste:

Flesh, blood and bone,
And the fictions of time:
Touch and stone.

DESCENT

Those steps led
down,
Casements (enclo-
sures)
Of equalled sound
Consecutively apparent

We came to the
river
(river of dreams),

Though your hand ceased
to touch
(river of lights).

TO THE DEATH OF CHIEWITZ

Death has a separate room,
A single door that leads
 in
And light at the
 window's edge

A glass cleaned dry,
Sheets propped high and the
 smell of flowers;

It has it all
That room it calls its
 own

And the flesh that wears
 away there, un-
 observed.

MIRRORED

I looked to your face,
It reflected mine;
You smiled, I was cold;
Your voice tremoured –
No, it was the leaves;
And when I pressed your hand,
The pulse stilled.

EMPTY CHAIRS

They stood in their own
separate place
Gathering sounds they wound a-
round themselves as
Carefully as cloth's matter
of taste
Concentric/preconceived

eyes
That peered from under
cover out
Preconvicted to stone

They stood in their own
separate silence
Chilled by the fires,
Rubbing their hands
And renewing the cold of their
stiff and back-boned
chairs.

FOR THE FISHERMAN AT VOULA

Irreconcilable stood the
night,
It's armour of stars –
Light fires of the vaul-
ted wind,
Begin, but beware
You have raised a fish
from my heart,
That cold moon watching
through its mountain
of glass.

THE ROOM

The room prepared,
His steps neared against mar-
ble stone,

Left a cold presence
That wasn't his,
But came with him, in-
cidentally;

The door was high,
Beyond reach as he passed
by
A shadow became;

He stood alone,
Columns of marble stone
Marked off to the
place where he stood.

FIRING SQUAD

They stood them up as
Tabled chairs turned
Over to be shot
at

Inside/out suspended to
The vacant airs of pro-
bability framed with-
out care of more or
less than hap-
pened there

Tabled chairs turned
Over to be
shot

at.

CYCLE

They stood him in a room
And told him to stay there.

At first his hands were warm,
But he could feel their heat de-
cline.

He stood as high as he could
That room was still
Four cornered, walled and
made of wood.

He sat at the centre of
Things that he thought.

And then he began to walk,
side to side,
Increasing the step be-
tween.

He stood straight again as
A tree stripped of its sound in
the autumn rain.

And he began to dream,
Crouched and crumbled in
shadow.

And they came at last to
carry him off.

HUNTERS

Through the wood,
Through the porous-chained
darkness
Break-combed pines of
shining stillness
Fabled high, foot naked-
marked

Scent, as scent they
come
shadows
cornered-turned

COMMAND

Calling that light forth

Through the wood
And at a step
And at that stance
fired

Finger- pressed steel
fired
To the veins
And at that still-moment
light.

RETREAT

You wouldn't have known where
They were going, backwards,
retreating

If it weren't for the sun in the
westwards sinking to
That stillness those flags
became

And their faces cleansed with
dust, protective now –

They didn't know either and
Weren't going to ask,
But simply came as they had
gone

One after the other,
Keeping time to what no one
knew,
A music perhaps, long since
forgotten

They were retreating
As they had from the first,
But from what they weren't
certain

Nor why, nor when, nor where

But simply came
As they had gone, one be-
hind the other,
Keeping time to what no-
body knew.

[II]

DOOR PARTLY OPENED

You let the light
 in,
Angled-off,

Your hands closed as a
Shadow hanging there

You let the light
 in
As far as your face
 could allow.

ON THE 7th

It was on the 7th
 that she died,

I remember dates exactly
 since then,

She closed her readied
 eyes
To the dead of that
 winter

As shades
That should be drawn a-
 round her yet,
Tentatively uncertain,
Broken at the sides

A circle we chose to
 frame her there.

A BOUQUET OF FLOWERS

The fundamental truth,
perhaps, was,
That you held strange thoughts
in your hands,

But the flesh,
Your own, was warm, the
blood receded

Though these fingers would
urge their way
Prompted by an unfamiliar
sense
To the flower itself –

But they were many,
That light as if blown by
The suddenness of your
thoughts.

WAITING

I've sat by the fire now
These six days and
Waited – I'm not sure

For what; once
(somehow distinct) I
Thought I knew

As leaves blew in the
Wind and fires
Raised their flame;

But I've forgotten now
What it was these
Six days I've waited

for, just sitting and
Thinking about
nothing.

A MAN AT HIS DESK

It was night,
The dark drawn down and
He grew accustomed to
 himself

In contrast: less dark,
 less severe;

The cylinder lamp,
Its ample string,
Desk of grained/surfaced
 wood

Became understood as
 objects

As he to himself,
Of which he was pleased
 and certain.

PERSPECTIVES

It was too finished to
 be true,
That fibre set to a
 single mark
You had been told to
 believe –

Truth behaves less justly,
To the eye at least

Perspectives change
But for the time and to
 the moment

It was too finished to
 be true,
But too fine to be left
 concealed.

A GLASS BOWL

Spoken of
glass, words re-
flect the

Ordered sound,
Placed on the ped-
estal,

Turned round,
That form appreciably
diminished –

touch is less than
sound.

SOFA

When you sat there,
Upon that silken cover at
the farthest edge,

Your dress drawn out as
Long as could be re-
membered,

Consciously concealing that
shyness of yours,

We came to think of it
as old

And softer than it
really was;

But now that you've gone,
We've redressed the
surface

To provide another ap-
pearance

And we don't think of
it at all,

Though it sometimes
watches us.

STILL

Night has
Closed its curtains,
There's a still in the
House that won't stay
In place. I wake.

I cross the
Sounds of my steps,
But the silence re-
turns.

I open the window
The moon can be seen,
Almost touched if
I think it clear enough

The dark becomes ap-
parent but the
Still is, is still
Even in this light

I close myself behind,
Recross the steps to
My room, open and
Close the door,
Consider myself in sheets
and sleep

But the night is wake
And the moon a hollow
disc
The windows keep looking
out
As silence thinks.

STATUE IN THE PARK

This visible sun compound
ded of silence
As thought placed and provided for
(obscured in stone)

He found himself prophetically alone
(the man and the mirror)
Suspended in time upon
its horse.

ON THE HANGER

You left your clothes, out
on the hanger

Prim and clean
Pretty and closed

I could have thought of
you without them

If you hadn't posed
quite that way
for me

At least in the morning light
Hanging yourself out
Without apparent
Cause so pretty and clean

And each of those buttons clipped to
my fingers.

OLD ROMAN ROAD

There were a few markings left.
They ran through a field
Planted with corn and
Into a wood at the other side,
Out. They didn't disturb.
They kept to their own
Ways as if they were useful
Still and a drawn carriage
Would soon come running
Through. The corn concealed their
Wants and the wood closed
Them in from observation,
But they remained
As an organ with discontinued
Use, directing traffic in
two directions.

EXACTLY AS IT WAS

There was no need to look
again, everything could
Be remembered now,
Exactly as it was, where

You stood,
A bit off to the right,
Uncertain of yourself,

The table set,
Reflected glass that wan-
ted warmth,

And we should ease our-
selves
(somewhat further per-
haps) into those
Cushions and smile, almost
out loud;

And when we talked
That room seemed further a-
way,

All that light and glass
That reflected nothing
of ourselves.

A BOWL OF FRUIT

It was placed
Not quite to the centre,
It was alive as colour
To be turned but
Partly upwards
Concealing shapes and the
shadows below.

It was a thing to be
touched,
Accentuated from as
Fingers creased to that
glass of surface.

It was placed
Not quite to the centre
To be perfect, to focus ones
Thoughts, but alive as
Colour extended slightly,
upwards.

AUTUMN ROOM

for my mother

We are used to the
Flowers there,
That room composed to the
Shades of your hair
And colours your dress
Made there as you
Moved about, con-
sidering, preparing;
Used too to the lights
on the wall,
Leaves falling,
That lateness of scent
When smoke tells
And winds relent their force . . .
That room as silent still as
Flowers faded there.

