

Feast of the Fools

Takao, 1988

[The Feast of the Fools.—In this strange festival, which goes back to the eleventh century], full vent was given by the clergy to the love of burlesque. At first, they were intended to give relief to the otherwise serious occupation of the clergyman and, while they parodied religious institutions, they were not intended to be sacrilegious, but to afford innocent amusement. Later, the observance took on extravagant forms and received universal condemnation.

—David S. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. V

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I. Rites of Passage

PROCESSION

“In the revels shall I be there,
 Night-long dancing,
 White feet glancing,
 Tossing my head in the dewy air?”

—Euripides

In the streets clowns parade.

Fools!

Mocking misfits!

Men sprawl in alleys

while their wives dance with strangers.

Children race from house to house.

Adolescent boys lift up the girls' dresses
 and kiss them on their thighs.

The priest is a jester,

leading them out of the city

to a cemetery behind a crumbling country church.

Preach your sermons to the dead!

Get drunk on the sacrament.

Hang lanterns in the dark,

while prostitutes inside

perform their rituals on the altar.

EXPULSION

Morning came

and the sky fell apart.

We were expelled from paradise

for sins we never committed.

Leaving is only a rite of passage
 from one place to another,

borne along like fallen leaves
 scattered by the wind.

There is no gate to open.
 There is no gate to close.

We can never return to
 the womb from which we were born.

Did we leave of our own free will?
 The garden has been abandoned.

No angel will come to guard it
 with a gleaming silver sword.

AFTER THE FALL

After the fall
 I wander treeless deserts.
 I swirl with the dust.

My thirst cannot be quenched.
 Rivers run without water.
 The lakes are pools of sand.

The wind blows over dry bones
 lying in shallow graves
 marked by scoured tombstones.

Outlaws ride past on ponies,
 crossing the gritty border
 into lands where sinners burn.

Snakes hang from a pole.
 No healer can save us
 from the bites of our own wrath.

Saying prayers in a roofless church
 the sun blazes on
 without clouds.

CITY OF CAIN

The sun has died
 but the heat remains.

Ancient city without light:
 The buildings are abandoned.
 No one lives here anymore.

Emerging from a doorway,
 from darkness into darkness,
 the streetlamps are extinguished.
 The night has no stars.

Footsteps resonate on the stone pavement.
 The long, long march has begun.

What a fine day it was
 when lovers walked hand-in-hand,
 when children from the tenements
 played hopscotch in the square,
 when old men hunched over checkerboards
 babbling at each other.

Now amusements bring no pleasure.
 The canyons of skyscrapers
 have no shadows.
 We live in a place
 where nothing matters.

Men sweat in furnaces.
 Women mop factory floors.

The reverent pose
of stooped-over labor,
cold hopes etched
in the creases of their faces.

The hot wind stings.
Old newspapers rustle like leaves
over curbs and gutters.

A styrofoam cup
is crunched underfoot.

We are in the forbidden city.

I will not be tempted by paradise.
It is not for me
to stroll the streets of gold,
to live in a gilded mansion,
to return to the fenced-in
garden of innocence
or be dazzled by the holy.

I will make my home here
on these streets without light.

FLOOD

The rain fell on dry earth,
seeping through the cracks.

Puddles became lakes.
Lakes became oceans.

She ran out of the house,
a baby in her arms.

Clouds swept the sky.
The earth disappeared under water.

We fled to the mountains
and lived in mountain caves.

Returning, the village was gone.
Not one house remained.

Gazing eastward, the sun rose.
Sunlight filled the valley.

WALLS

You may put out my eyes
but never blind me.
I will leave my hair uncut.

I will pull at the pillars
with all my might
until the walls come crashing down.

Blood will water the ground.
Flowers will grow from the ruins.
The temple again will be empty.

INCARNATION

The word became flesh.
Flesh became the word.

The divine is human,
the human divine.

There is no chasm
to be bridged.

Spirit is matter.
Matter is spirit.

Good and evil
are beyond me.

The one is the many,
the many the one.

The earth is God
and God is the earth.

Holiness is here.
There is nothing to aspire to.

One mouthful of water
from the ocean

and we know what
the whole ocean tastes like.

What lies beyond
cannot be measured.

It remains unknown
and cannot be spoken.

Darkness shines in the light
and the light does not overcome it.

Eternity is the infinity we are
but cannot yet grasp.

BAPTISM

The river flows,
scouring the rocky bed clean.

Wading out with unsure steps
I plunge in over my head.

I bathe naked
in the cold clear water.

At the deepest point,
 where the current is strongest,

there is nothing to grasp,
 not a thing to hold on to.

The current carries me away.
 I drown and am reborn.

BETHZATHA

The angel descends
 and stirs the waters.
 The sick plunge into the pool,
 springing from an unknown source.

Dreamers, pale and anemic,
 lifelessly clinging to life,
 bring their dread nightmares
 to the clear light of day.

Eternal life is tedious,
 the fire of hell pure joy.
 A vision has no power
 without the depth of the cave.

Having seen the bright sun,
 they return to the darkness,
 to the underground streams,
 the rivers without light.

CRUCIFIXION

When the cry finally came
 the last chains were broken.
 Leviathan was let loose.
 Man untamed, expired.

Only nine years old
 and they handed him a gun.
 I saw him out walking
 where the wolf devours the lamb.

On that day the earth shook.
 The rocks were split.
 We nailed God to the posts
 and killed him.

Master, I will not bow before you.
 I have ascended the mountain
 and seen you face to face.
 I have wrestled with you and won.

Zarathustra descended from the clouds
 and entered the marketplace drunk.
 "Here is the wine I have tasted!" he shouted.
 "Dionysius, save us!" he cried.

Whirling, he overturns tables
 and smashes idols.
 "My temple shall be this house that I live in,
 the house that I am."

Having dinner with friends
 in an upper room,
 we get fat on bread, wasted with wine
 and think we are free.

Gethsemane is a garden.
 Look deeply at the primitive passions.
 Be an artist who returns to the jungle,
 a witch who dances herself to death.

Everything has been stripped.
 We are naked, running wild
 through forests that go on forever.
 Barefoot I bruise my heel.

The child I find here is innocent.
The child I find is myself.
At a faraway place,
the Lord of Hyssop greets his lady.

In the wilderness there's a cabin
the old man built himself.
He passes his days sitting under a tree,
carving his life with whittling knife.

Battles are fought,
wars lost and won.
Yet the rain falls on everyone
and we all have seen the same sun.

RESURRECTION

I awoke in the morning
to a bitter wind
and a bitter silence.

The earth was destroyed,
the houses leveled.
I climbed a treeless mountain.

I looked as far as my eyes could see
and on that day they saw nothing.
I confronted empty space.

The cities had been laid to waste,
all the contradictions,
every point of view, every relativity.

Nature was no more,
 the earth a barren landscape
 with no place left to flee to.

I stood alone on the mountain and wept,
 not for what had been lost
 but for what had been found.

Crying out for an answer,
 to the moon,
 to the stars,

I heard only the echo
 of my own voice
 crashing against the rocks.

This is our lament,
 this our damnation:
 Our God has disappeared.

Tomorrow the sun will not rise.

PENTECOST

The wind came down.
 Fire danced on my head.
 I spoke all the languages
 of the earth.

In every tongue I proclaimed
 the divinity of man.
 Our birthright
 will not be stolen.

Christ ascended into heaven
 and we the earthbound
 were left to wander
 from city to city.

A mark of defiance
branded on our foreheads,
we cast away old visions
and dreamed only of the new.

The sun is now dark.
The moon turns to blood.
Fire and smoke rise
yet the end will not come.

This is the voice of the spirit:
the cry of a newborn baby
abandoned to die
in the wilderness.

II. Outside the Gate

DEPARTURE

I am leaving.

At dawn I go to the shoreline.
A gray winter sky
meets a gray winter ocean.

The water that splashes
on the rocks
is cold.

Alone, facing east, there is no sunrise.

I stare at the endless horizon,
at vast empty spaces,
broken only by waves
approaching
from some unknown there.

It's ugly.
The city, I mean.
Buildings rise.
Streets are paved.

Streetlamps flood the air
with an orange glow.
The sky cannot be seen,
just shadows of the morning.

Cars stream past.
The traffic light changes
from red to green,
from green back to red.

The cars start.
The cars stop.
You cannot see
who is driving them.

Rudderless ghost ships hum along
in channeled canals.

I could never return
to those four blank walls.
I have no home.
My house is abandoned and vacant.
My soul will never again be occupied.

People walk. Children shout.

Sometimes someone will run
and the drum
of their feet
on the sidewalk
sounds like wild, angry thunder.

TRIPTYCH (1)

I.

Beyond the gate
the pavement is hard.

I wind my way
through mazes of streets,
past houses so close
they could kiss each other.

The lights of the city
compete with the stars,
torches in the hands
of an angry mob,
extinguished one by one
as curtains are drawn
and the day is put to bed.

An orange moon flies
like a ghost across the sky.

The dipper climbs.

The constellations
assemble themselves
around a fixed north star.

The night's so clear
you can smell it.

Across the footbridge
the fields spread out
like an endless ocean
to an unseen horizon.

For the very first time
I can hear my own footsteps.

With something
approaching a prayer
I shuffle, kicking up dirt,
leaving behind me
a wake of mosaic patterns
on ground that has
never been plowed.

II.

Inside the woods
it's incredibly dark.

Protected by a crease
in the hills,
the path is invisible.

I hesitate, pondering
whether I could get lost
with no lights to guide me.

Night sounds are inaudible,
not even the tremolo of crickets
in the forest canopy.

I cannot see my toes
as they tramp over
rotten leaves and branches,
nor feel the mud
underfoot as at last
I reach the interior.

III.

Shielded by an umbrella of trees,
I make my way back.

The hilltop's head is tonsured
like a monk's.

Returning the next day,
the sky is gray with rain,
the city lost in mist.

On the freeway below me
truckers shift gears
and tune their horns.

I careen through empty space,
coming from nowhere
and returning to oblivion.

Fence posts rot in the dampness.

Tangled and rusted barbwire
is strewn about the ground.

There is no one to keep in,
no one to keep out.

I pass freely through all barriers.

ESCAPE

Test your legs against the earth.
 Run until they are lean and hard.
 Feel the power surge within you.
 Share your strength with no one.

Let your muscles stretch
 into gentle rolling hills,
 your lungs be panting bellows,
 your heart a pounding drum.

Let vapor spurt from your mouth
 as you sprint away
 on a cold winter day,
 cleansed of all that has passed.

Escape into wide-open fields,
 out of the maze to places
 where there are no walls
 and nothing can hold you.

LANDSCAPES

Breaking out of infinity,
 flying under moons,
 the harmonious spheres
 shatter like crystal.

There are no more
 spacious landscapes.
 Dreams are overthrown.
 Borders are drawn in the sand.

Surveyors rule the universe,
 dividing the world
 into good and evil,
 the living and the dead.

The earth has been scored.
 Longitudes. Latitudes.
 Pythagorean fantasies
 never seem to cease.

The city was built by Daedalus,
 the streets mapped by Euclid,
 the buildings plumbed by Newton.

Skyscrapers scratch clouds
 cathedrals could never reach,
 touching a heaven without mystery.

My lawn is a patch of weeds
 shooting up through cracks
 in the broken concrete.

My art is graffiti
 scrawled on the walls
 of hollow buildings.

The earth has been chastity belted.
 Grass cannot seed.
 My windows are boarded shut.
 I cannot see out of them.

I pass through chartered streets,
 over chartered streams,
 between brick walls,
 lost in a maze

of one-way boulevards,
 narrow avenues,
 and dead-end alleys,
 everywhere encountering

the geometric patterns of the city:
 its squares and circles
 its polygons and right angles,
 its arcs and corners.

To find one's way
 you must be learned, informed,
 one of the initiated,
 a visionary who has no vision.

No, I do not wish
 to cross over boundaries.
 What I wish is that
 there were no boundaries.

What I want is not a garden
 where everything is perfect,
 but a wilderness where everything is free
 and there are no assurances.

Who will become a mendicant,
 searching for a life
 that looms larger
 than thoughts about life?

Who will stretch out his arms,
 to the unembraceable
 beyond what is already thought
 to be reckoned?

Who can cross this line?
 Who can transcend these planes?
 And who can shatter through stars
 a lifetime has been spent hanging?

VAGABONDS

Vagabonds flee the city,
 hiding out in caves,
 slithering through crevices,
 seeking solitude
 in wastelands
 no one else has visited,

drinking from vessels
that hold no water,
moving beyond
good and evil,
finding their way
to the fringes of things,

where fires burn low
and the moon
is always hidden.

SOLITUDE

He may never come to know
the force which moves him
like the wind
of an approaching storm.

He will spend his years
traversing landscapes,
pursuing
unknown destinations.

He will walk
the ancient streets
of cities
without light.

He will hear
the click of his heels
on pavements
made of glass.

He will ponder
the emptiness
of a moonless sky
and a starless night.

He will peer into windows
made frosty

with the breath
of human conversation.

At the church he will pause
not to offer prayers
but to raise his hands
in silent gestures.

HORIZONS

Watching the mist
rise from the sea,
ships sail
for unknown destinations.

Dawn spreads her arms
round the earth.
In the rosy gray of the morning
everything's hazy.

Yesterday has almost been forgotten.

COLD MOUNTAIN

Walking the frozen ground,
daydreams at night,
everything empty
is suddenly full.

Pine trees,
the path I'm still on,
still looking for a place
to put up my shack.

There's no road through.
To get here
you must follow the clouds
climbing the mountains.

MONODY

Once the wind pushed him
gently from behind,
nudging him on
toward unknown destinations.

He would wander
the wide-open highways
and never be lost.
Swept along by the effortless current,

he curved smoothly between the banks
and danced over rocks.
He could sing.
He could shout.

And his voice would echo
from mountain to valley.

Now, with the wind in his face,
his eyelids blown shut,
there is nothing ahead
to be seen.

With faltering steps
he asks himself, "Where am I?"
He sprinkles himself
over dry, dusty soil.

There is no breath left
to carry his words.
His stifled scream
cannot be heard.

REMEMBRANCE

In a dream
 you came back to me.
 Out of the shadows you stepped
 like a ghost
 into the winter street.

Lightly,
 slightly above ground,
 you walked,
 and I followed you
 through the maze of avenues
 out of the city
 into the mountains,
 up the twisting mountain road
 to the cabin.

I saw in the night then
 the reason.

With light from neither moon nor stars
 you led me into the forest,
 to beside a trickling stream.

And there,
 beneath a canopy of tangled tree limbs
 we sat together in silence,
 listening till the gunshot
 rang out.

HOURS

On a distant snowy peak
 two barefoot monks
 bow before
 the rising sun.

Hungry ghosts
live in wooden shacks
built on the sides
of mountains.

From time to time
they descend
to enter
the maze of the city.

In the valleys
smoke rises from chimneys.
Windows are frosted
with ice.

Outside in the street
a priest passes by
in coarse, seamless robe,
wooden clogs on his feet.

Crowds of worshippers
pull the ropes,
ringing the bells
of ancient temples.

At a quiet café
coffee is poured
into delicate cups
and served on an elegant tray.

In the evening rain
beggars with broad straw hats
carry their begging bowls,
rims to the ground.

At night the barmaids go home.
The streets are deserted.
The streetlamps burn
like a thousand frozen moons.

PARTING

The night's sinless dome
is full and expansive.

Clouds have parted,
revealing a wide-open sky.

No overbearing arches
hold in the psalms of men.

The white moon shouts.
The stars are bright torches.

Spirits return,
welcomed by warm, red fires.

Children clap their hands and dance
while women sing songs and chatter.

An angel falls to earth,
returning to the soil.

From the womb of the living
there can be no damnation.

Your descent is a resurrection
and ours is a celebration.

Mute, we can only gasp
and grasp at the smoke with our hands.

Curl upon curl spirals
into the empty void of the night.

The bell in the cemetery
gives its knell.

The knees now dancing
will never bend in adoration.

The hands now clapping
will never press themselves together in prayer.

The night is already too full.
All that remains is the remembrance.

Hoarfrost reflects the cold, clear light.
The time has come for parting.

III. The Primitive Passions

DESCENT

Falling down the slope,
 the path is strewn
 with broken tablets.

There is no law
 for one who has been
 to the top of the mountain.

He has tasted the spring air,
 sucked the sky into his lungs,
 inhaled the wind itself.

The descent is a stumbling.

Crazed, unable to speak,
 he pushes his way
 through the staring crowds.

For a moment the music stops.
 The dancers pause uncertain.

Then the flute begins
 and the drum,
 and he himself dances
 round the calf made of gold.

DIONYSIUS

God can be found
 at the bottom
 of a glass of whiskey.

Drunken visions
 wake up to sober mornings.

Senses deranged
 reorder themselves.
 Patterns reappear.
 My sight is clouded with smoke.

Tears cleanse the eyes
 and make them clear.

I have tasted water
 flowing out of the earth,
 rain as it pours down from heaven,
 hemlock from a broken cup.

Everything pure has been filtered out.
 Only the intoxicating dregs remain.

I plunge back to
 the source of all things.
 In the melting ice
 visions flow into each other.

STUPOR

Numb and insensate,
 frozen on the floor,
 slouched over in the corner
 of a room painted white,
 a room without windows,
 a room without light.

Wrestling with demons,
 blind, without sight,
 I tumble endlessly through space,
 through the void of the night,
 rolling over and over,
 conquering worlds
 without moving.

DEBAUCH

Go out into the mad night—
 splattering dreams,
 kissing angels.

On the roadsides
 under countless unseen stars
 we drank wine and smashed bottles.

The snow fell.

I stumbled to a ditch and listened
 to cars streaming by.

Mud oozed through my fingers.

One foot in the water,
 soaking through my boots,
 through my socks,
 an icy moon
 rent the veil of clouds.

Silver moonlight flooded down.

Out of my mind, no thoughts,
 no feelings, no sensations—
 emptiness.

The snow turned to rain
 in the gray silent dawn.

TRIPTYCH (2)

I.

Sunlight drips down golden.
 Salt-wind spring air
 drives clouds
 over the tops of mountains.

Blue-jeaned, flannel-shirted
 buddhas
 with full heads of hair
 sit alone under waterfalls,

refusing orders,
 drinking ripple wine,
 staving off hunger with Hershey bars,
 content to breathe the cold air,

contemplating eternal finitudes,
 mediating on the level-headed
 levelness of a world shared by
 people, birds, fishes, and stones,

pursuing the middle path thereby
 and wondering where
 it all will lead,
 if not to the same place it started,

going to sleep not dreaming,
 no visions, nothing to tell,
 returning invisible,
 unknown and unnoticed.

Water tumbles down.
 Rivers flow.
 Trees rise.
 Unseen rocks bruise heels.

What will they amount to?
 —those nights sleeping out
 under stars,
 talking out loud when one is listening,

covered with dew as the morning sun
 spreads itself across the horizon,
 darkness quenched,
 wanting but unable to return.

II.

Flash:

rain, thunder, and floods.
 Lightning sketched across skyways,
 grass soaking up water

as dark eyes watch
 out of windows
 crying in the night
 like a baby wanting milk.

The midnight train
 flies through the air,
 jumping tracks
 breaking circuits.

Somewhere in the misty gloom
 the doomed soul cries out
 “Am I, too,
 one of the damned?”

Hands rise: “Stop!”
 Crashing hail
 crushes crops
 as soon as they are planted.

Out in the fields
 children run dangerless,
 filled with fantasies
 of the hapless night.

Old women fall to their knees
 in prayer.
 Men stare up at the sky
 unable to move.

Mothers give birth to demons.
 The fixation—
 all is fixed,
 destiny crowding out rainbows.

There is no hope but in what is given.
 Painting the moon with blood,
 a dog howls
 and the sky is white with his breath.

III.

Drinking bitterness from silver cups,
 the banquet is laid.
 Grapes hang
 over the corners of tables.

In a distant land
 caravans cross deserts
 bearing gifts,
 seeking the eastern star.

The sun goes down
 over waterless plains.
 A man alone
 thinks of nothing.

I am the god
 who never speaks,
 who has no voice,
 who gives no revelation.

Gladiators sleep.
 Wives cling to their husbands.
 The streets are empty
 at 5 a.m.

The sun comes in
 through closed curtains.
 The bass player
 lays it down low.

Whiskey-drinking jazzmen
 fold up their pianos
 and tuck them
 away in their pockets.

Smoke lingers.
 Half-full glasses remain on the table.
 Mermaids pose
 on the ice-cube islands.

On the horizon
 the pied piper
 blows his breath across a flute,
 dancing on one leg.

DREAM

Visions out of tune
 like carnival music
 on a sweltering
 summer night.

Old men in top hats
 line up in rows,
 waiting for kisses
 under nebulous lights.

The fiddler,
 violin tucked under his chin
 dances his fingers
 over the strings.

Leaping a jig
 on the red-brick street,
 no one sees
 the death look in his eyes
 as he shouts farewell
 across his shoulder.

Out in the woods
 women dance.

In long billowing dresses
 they swirl through the air,
 hair sweeping across their breasts.

Men chained to trees
struggle to be free.

NOMADS

The skulls are empty.
The brains have been eaten.

Paintings of wild beasts
in obscure caves
pierced by imaginary arrows—
where is the ancient power?

Eyes once cast down
to the fertile brown earth
have drifted heavenward,
drawn by the bright illusions of stars.

Cities of gold
with impenetrable walls
have no crannies to hide in.

Where have they wandered to,
those once-nomadic tribes,
living wild and free in the desert?

Sweating in factories
chained to office desks—
the ancient harmony
can no longer be heard.

On a mountain in the wilderness
a lonely hermit pauses at midday,
feet planted firmly on the summit,
looking at the sun
and seeing his own face.

TOTEM

The disc of the sun
 reflects light from the moon.

The trees are filled with spirits.
 The rocks and stones are alive.

The roar of waterfalls,
 the crashing of thunder.

I roam the forest,
 pursued by hunters.

Shamans cover themselves
 with the skins of magic animals.

At night by the fire
 raw meat is cooked.

Its power is now my power.
 A dead wolf howls in the wind.

HARVEST

The wine is clotting.
 The bread is black.
 The flesh is rotten and putrid.

Water from underground streams
 cannot quench the thirst.

The land is famished.
 Grain will not grow.

The harvest is a harvest of weeds.
 In the fields cattle are dying.

Raise up the posts.
 Hang snakes from the treetops.

The forests burn.
 The guests have arrived.
 The feast is laid
 but no one can eat.

AGORA

Lives rotate like planets
 around suns growing cold,
 stars dying.

Painted masks,
 perfumed bodies
 draped in prophylactic veils
 glide from alley to alley.

Layer upon layer
 the garments cover us
 from head to toe.

Afraid to strip them off
 we cower at the uncovered night,
 preferring the comforting noise
 of unruly crowds
 to the stark, disturbing silence.

St. Francis ran away
 and stood naked in the morning sun,
 forsaking his father's fortune
 to marry Lady Poverty.

To the marketplace he returns
 with a wine gourd in his hand.

The men in the streets
 do not look up.
 The women he passes
 do not turn their heads.

ICONOCLAST

“Not the man who denies the gods worshipped by the multitude, but he who affirms of the gods what the multitude believes is truly impious.”

—Epicurus

Night-riding, out
 under starry sky,
 Vincent Van Gogh visions
 dripping down
 like unmixed paint.

Mother earth
 came to visit one day.
 I stood alone watching her
 disconnect herself from
 the fatherless sky.

Once more I will descend
 into the Michelangelo gloom.
 I will penetrate impenetrable mysteries.
 I will survive
 the last judgment.

I will spend insane nights
 drinking my imagination
 straight from the bottle.
 I will contemplate cosmic wonders
 that can never be explained.

I will live in a foreign country
 among people who do not know
 their own past.
 I will absorb the secrets
 of ancient civilizations.

Behold the great iconoclast
 smashing idols,
 destroying temples.
 There is nowhere to hide,
 no place to rest.

The divine descends
from mountaintops.
Midst the garbage and the dung
on the empty city streets
God walks in the cool of the day.

All slips again
into a cup of coffee,
the one I drink each morning,
my sacrament
for the day.

FURY

Bodies move
blown by the wind,
pulsing to a rhythm
only they can hear.

A fire blazes.
Flames spiral skyward.
Heat dissipates
into a halo of light.

Rite of spring:
dancers spin
till they fall from exhaustion
into the final pyre.

IV. Mystic Union

Once I am united with God, both God and I cease to exist.

ASCENT

Scaling the summit,
 the Milky Way spreads itself
 like a blanket
 over the cold, clear night.
 The winding paths lead nowhere.

Alone I climb
 to high barren places
 where trees do not grow,
 to dizzying heights
 no one has ever visited.

I myself am this mountain.

Clamoring up at dawn,
 the sun is reborn.
 I stand suspended between heaven and earth,
 feet planted firmly on the rocky terrain,
 stretching my arms to the clouds above.

Peaks reach for an unseen sky.
 The horizon is unbroken.
 The skyline has no vanishing point.
 The wind blows
 and the stones are silent.

NOTHING

Smashing through barriers,
 nothing remains.
 The mind is empty,
 clear and receptive.

A pool reflects
 the winter moon.
 The cold penetrates
 layers of clothes.

Here is the moment
 to look beyond the stars
 that fill the night,

deeper into a sea
 that has no bottom,
 a soul no longer there.

LITURGY

There is a place no one knows.
 If you shout no one will hear you.
 If you whisper no answer will come.

To find this place first shed all your clothes.
 Run naked through the forests.
 Bathe in the mountain streams.
 Scoop up the water in your hands.
 Drink the reflection of your own face.
 Sit beneath your own tree.
 Look beyond the arches of the tree limbs.
 Find out what the pine trees are pointing at.
 Gaze deeply into the fire.
 Inhale the smoke.
 Watch the smoke as it rises.
 Follow the smoke wherever it leads you.

At night say nothing.
 You would not even know your own voice.
 If the stars spoke to you,
 you would not be able to hear them.
 The silent moon will pierce you.
 When you sleep there will be no dreams.

VISION

The path leading up the mountain
is narrow.

It disappears as I wade
through the brush.

There is a place known only to me
where I sit and wait.

I have brought no food,
no water, no clothes.

The days pass over my head.

The chills of the night cover my skin.
From a distance come the howling of wolves,
but I hear no human voice.

Lean and hungry,
sleepless and cold,
visions come to me, wild hallucinations
I cannot understand.

The moon turns black.

Stars die.
My fire burns out.
There is no longer any light.

I am blind to the darkness.

I can no longer feel
the earth beneath me,
no longer touch the sky.

All things flow into one.

It is no longer I
who sit here.
No longer I—someone else.

BIRD

A wingless bird
stands at the precipice,
one foot in the air.

If we jump in our dreams
we will neither fly nor fall
but enter another dimension.

The void
is not emptiness, but space
in which new things can happen.

If we turn away from the edge
we will never wake up.
We will live forever in our dreams
and never return.

To conquer the emptiness
we must first pass through
the illusion we have become.

Our tears and our smiles
have the same source.
Our stumbling and dancing
draw from the same power
but take us in different directions.

When the sun rises
we will walk on solid ground.
There will no longer be a heaven to fly to,
no hell into which we can fall.

We will have become
what we already are.

MIRROR

I stand before the mirror
 looking at my own reflection,
 wondering who is this person
 staring back at me?

Just as I reach out to touch him,
 to caress his bearded face,
 the mirror shatters
 and my image shatters with it.

BOAT

Peeling my onionskin life away,
 the transparent sheaves on which
 it is written, words disappear.
 There is no center when nothing is there.

Adrift on a boat,
 no wind blowing the sails,
 I float with the currents,
 avoiding shipwreck.

Wanting to rest but finding no island,
 I make my home on these waters,
 looking up at a sky beyond language,
 smiling a knowing smile.

EPIPHANY

Suddenly the wind blew through me.
 Where had it come from?
 Where was it going?

I see the sun with the same light
 that the sun sees me.

HYMN

The Unknown God is silent.
 It is not in the wind,
 the earthquake or fire,
 It is not in the still small voice.

From the beginning
 there is no revelation.
 There is no law from the mountain.
 The curtain of heaven is not rent.

Humans are that which they are.
 I am only that which I am,
 an infinite vastness contained
 in a point that is infinitely small.

The Unknown God is not made
 of gold or silver or stone.
 It is not an object of art,
 not even in the imagination.

The God we can imagine
 is the God that we must kill.
 The idol we have fashioned
 must be melted back into nothingness.

God itself must be sacrificed.
 The veil covering our eyes
 must be lifted, so that we may finally see
 what has never existed.

There is no being beyond being.
 It is that which cannot be thought,
 that which is formless and empty,
 that which can never be known.

The God of whom we know nothing
 cannot be shrouded in mysteries.
 The Unknown God itself is the mystery
 and can only be worshipped in silence.

GLASS

A shattered window
lies on the sidewalk
like a mosaic.

A spider spinning its web
picks up the slivers with its silk.

Pieces dangle
from the threads,
dancing like a marionette.

Cut the strings and the shards fall,
crashing to the ground like a cymbal.

Fragments imprint themselves
on the cold gray concrete.
A new icon appears that has never existed before.

QOHELETH

I refuse to sit here moaning
over what could have been.

Haven't I seen the mountains,
the trees, and the water falling down?

Is there not something new
at the end of every pathway?

I have watched uncountable stars at night
filling up spaces too vast to be measured.

TESTAMENT

A breeze blows across the dark water.
The wind impregnates the oceans.
From the deep the rivers flow
giving birth to life in the desert.

This is my beginning:

a plunging into the deep,
an immersion under the waters.

Deeper and deeper I go
into the bottomless pit,
going back to a time
when the earth was without form,
no wind moved over the waters.

Before the light there was darkness,
the absolute nothingness
of a God that does not yet exist.

Who was I before I was born?

I am what there was before the creation.
I am made out of nothing.
To nothing I return.

V. Dark Night of the Soul

RITUAL

The shadow of God departs.
 The candles emit no light.
 I dance in flames that cannot be seen.

A chalice is filled with blood.
 The dead are baptized in boiling cauldrons.
 They return to life with no voice.

A very old man,
 wild with white beard waving,
 blesses himself with a bouquet of flowers.

DAMNATION

The damned soul cast down,
 hurling obscenities upward,
 as mothers in ankle-length gowns
 dress children for church,
 he stands in the shadows,
 refusing sunlight.

Black-haired master,
 eyes of pure ice, mouth of fire,
 preferring darkness
 he returns to the cave.
 Knees will not bow.
 Candles will not be lit.

The flesh burns but is not consumed.
 I refuse to be guilty.
 Summertime comes.
 The water is cool.
 The sun falls. The river flows.
 I sit on the banks, laughing.

RECKONING

Shining cathedral spires
 touch the blue of the night.
 The red doors of churches
 are permanently closed.

Open fields stretch out
 towards a broken horizon.
 Mountains stand tall
 in the distance.

I stumble out,
 down country lanes,
 past harvesters cutting grain
 and loading it onto wagons.

How many souls have been lost
 waiting for the dusk?
 How many days have been spent
 seeking confirmation?

I look through the barred window
 beyond the gray arches
 to the terrifying wonder
 of the world outside.

In bed I contemplate
 the hand that pulled the trigger,
 saying farewell to principalities
 not yet understood.

DELIRIUM

My life was a banquet
 Every heart revealed itself.

I let my hair grow long.
 A pipe dangled from my lips.

I set out over seas of stars,
 across the galaxies.

Eyes wide open, from field to field
 I drank in the open air.

At night I stopped along the roadsides,
 spinning dreams and having visions.

Blasphemers curse each steeple
 on the top of country churches.

Jesus is crucified in the sanctuaries
 by white-collared priests,

as women genuflect
 and altar boys light candles.

I spent my evenings in the city,
 in violent unlit alleys.

A match struck in the dark
 fills the room with smoke.

In a corner, seated at a table,
 I eat bread and drink wine.

Waiting for dawn,
 I stumble into bed,

a vampire vomiting bloody nightmares
 into buckets at his coffinside.

Dreams are no substitute
 for an unimaginable reality.

Unwrinkled and unborn—
 what is there to think about

looking out at the dusk
 on those monotonous summer evenings?

In a delirium, dying unrepentant,
 one leg short and a shriveled-up soul,

I receive my last rites
 and descend into hell.

What ecstasies will flow out of my heart,
 like a chalice emptying itself?

LAST DAYS

In the last days
 the old shall dream dreams.
 The young shall see visions.
 Sons and daughters will prophesy.

A new heaven
 and a new earth
 will fall down
 from the firmament.

The land will be cleared,
 with room again for flowers,
 for plants yielding seed
 and trees bearing fruit.

Wild beasts shall roam the forests.
 Cattle will stampede through the pastures.
 Creeping things will walk.
 Birds shall swim and fishes will fly.

We shall find again
 our untainted image,
 becoming what we originally were
 and always have been.

Out of the core
 of a superficial star,
 the interior expands
 in larger and larger circles.

Away from the center,
 beyond all boundaries
 we escape to a sky that has no end,
 to an ocean that has no bottom.

Until then we live
 in the hidden crevices of mountains,
 in caves where our fathers
 once built fires for warmth.

Dusk is approaching.
 Against a skyline
 of tall immaculate buildings,
 the horizon grows redder.

THE DEEP

From under these waters
 waves are born.
 They surge undisturbed
 to the surface.

The wind blows
 across a rough sea.

Jesus stumbles
 and is pulled into the boat
 by a sailor catching saviors
 in his net.

Across the sky
 a light flashes.

We disappear
 into the eye of a hurricane.
 We descend into the vortex
 of a maelstrom's black magic.

The boat sinks.
 The men drown.

All is a returning
 back to the waters of birth,
 to what there was before:

The wind moving over
 the face of the deep.

IMMOLATION

I scratch my name
 on the wall
 of a fallen building.

The glass is broken.
 The roof has collapsed.

Outside on the streets
 we huddle for warmth,
 pounding our feet on the pavement
 as if dancing.

One match sets the sky on fire.
 The horizons are blazing.

Scooping up ashes
 and casting them back to earth
 I paint the entire world
 on the palm of my left hand.

CONFLAGRATION

Fleeing, not looking back
 lest our bodies turn to salt,
 fire and brimstone
 fall down from heaven.

Houses are leveled.
 Buildings are flattened.

Churches are bombed.
 Spires topple from heaven to earth.

The roofs of temples collapse,
 leaving only the wide open sky.
 Smoke rises from the ground
 like prayers to an unknown God.

The Tower of Babel has been razed.
 The Parthenon demolished,
 symmetry reduced to stones
 tossed about at random.

Everything lies in shambles.
 Not one stone remains on another.
 All my thoughts have crumbled to pieces.
 This indeed is the new revelation.

Beast turns on beast:
 Floggings, beatings in windowless rooms,
 martyrs dying upside down on crosses
 made of trees cut from mountaintops.

Cities, kingdoms, science, progress
 have all been defeated.
 What phoenix will arise
 from the ashes of our civilization?

No palaces will grow from this soil,
 no steeples pierce the clouds.
 No cathedrals will take form
 in the whirls of the wind.

Is man the final measure?
 Protagoras proved right?
 A little boy lost in the crowds
 knows no family or home.

We searched for a virgin wilderness
 untouched by promiscuous hands,
 an earth that had not yet been raped.
 We pursued our Eden.

Over mountains and prairies,
 through fields and forests we ran,
 one foot in front of the flood.
 There is nothing to look for, nothing to find.

In the solitude of a black night
 we pray for the end to come.
 Apocalypse:
 a new heaven, the earth cleansed.

Our pilgrimage is a circle.
 With no place to flee
 we return to the city again,
 with dirty hands just like the others.

The debris will melt in the sun.
 The streets flow away like water.
 Who would not smile to see a flower
 bloom in this quagmire of mud?

APOCALYPSE

Beyond life
 are only the elements.
 A fiery wind passes
 over the barren earth.

Scorched grass,
 brown but still alive
 conceals frightened earthworms.

They cry out in words
 that can no longer be understood
 to ears that can no longer hear,
 “What has happened?”

The angels’ lyres are out of tune,
 their flutes no longer enchanting.
 The songs they once sang no longer echo
 in the bewitching corridors of heaven.

The sun disappears.
The stars die.

Beyond this is only
the absence of sound,
the silence of mystics,
of a planet tumbling mutely
through space
unspeaking, unnoticed.

In the forests which remain
we gather
to dance the ancient dance.

We have not forgotten
how to move our feet
to the syncopated throbs
of our hearts,
how to sway our bodies
to the dissonant music
of our unkempt souls.

Wild and primitive,
we hear the beat
of a rhythmless drum.

In a frenzy
we leap into the hot night air
grasping at pure white stars
arms are too short to reach.

Worshippers of Dionysius,
of insanity, madness—
God himself is sacrificed
on this altar.

YGGDRASIL

Where explanations cease,
wonder begins.
And fear.

The tree groans and trembles,
roots point toward hell,
branches reach for heaven.

Climbing the ancient limbs
ascending to undreamed-of heights,
I look down

to see the whole of humanity,
axes in hand,
chipping away at the trunk.

The wolf has broken its chains
and is running in a rage
through the forest.

Fire and ice storm down.
A serpent thrashes in the ocean.
Waves sweep over the earth.

Man and beast are drowned.
The bridge above them
collapses in the twilight.

On vast, infertile plains
the final battle begins.
Heroes are defeated.

The gods themselves are destroyed.
Flames shoot higher.
Chaos reigns over Order.

And when the waters
have drenched the last fires,
a new earth will rise up

from the depths of the sea,
 an earth without heavens,
 an earth without gods.

THE NEW JERUSALEM

After the first earth had passed away
 and the sea was no more
 I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem
 coming down out of heaven.

Nuclear rain fell on Sodom and Gomorrah.
 Noah flew away in his spaceship ark,
 leaving behind Lot's wife,
 a statue of melted salt.

Armageddon flowed with the blood of martyrs.
 The Holy City lay in ruins:
 no streets of gold or flowing fountains,
 no diamond palaces or marble temples.

The landscape was a heap
 of twisted iron and rubble.
 The soil was gray with ash,
 the green foliage turned to black.

Eternal night!
 The broken asphalt streets were empty.
 No prophet remained to cry out from the wilderness:
 "Man is purged, the earth cleansed."

The trumpets of the Lord were silent.
 There was no weeping.
 Only insects remained
 and the never-ending winter.

CREDO

How hard it is to celebrate
that which is perceived as despair,
to accept that we have no soul,
that we are nothing more than dust
which will return one day to earth,
that nothing separates us
from the lowliest of creatures,
that we must reap what we sow
and give back whatever we have taken,
that the world is shapeless,
still in its primeval form,
without meaning, eternally silent,
uncaring and utterly indifferent,
that there is nothing but ourselves
to sustain us and save us from the pit,
that reason must be destroyed
to give us room to grow and perceive,
to see and to feel and to be alive
even if only for one short moment,
that we might die singing like cicadas
and say yes to life even when
the blossom falls,
the sunlight fades,
the snowman melts,
the infant dies.

Feast of the Fools

The epigraph is from David S. Schaff, *The Middle Ages: A.D. 1049–1294*, Vol. 5 of Philip Schaff's *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1979 [1907]), pp. 463–464.

PROCESSION: The epigraph is from Euripides, *Bacchae*, trans. Henry Birkhead, in *Ten Greek Plays: In Contemporary Translations* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957 [5th century BCE]), p. 350.

BETHZATHA: *Bethzatha* is the name of a pool in ancient Jerusalem described in John 5:2–3, which the infirm attempt to enter in order to be healed.

CRUCIFIXION: *Zarathustra* is the name of the protagonist in Friedrich Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra (Thus Spoke Zarathustra)* who proclaims the death of God.

COLD MOUNTAIN: *Cold Mountain* (寒山, “Han Shan”) is the name of a Chinese poet associated with a collection of poems written during the Tang Dynasty.

HOURS: “Hungry ghosts” (*preta* in Sanskrit) are mythological figures in Buddhism and other Asian traditions who suffer because of their insatiable cravings.

DIONYSIUS: *Dionysius* is the name of the ancient Greek god of wine, celebrated by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* as a symbol of passion, irrationality, and disorder. “Senses deranged”: cf. Arthur Rimbaud's letter to Paul Demeny, May 15, 1871 in *Arthur Rimbaud: Complete Works*, trans. Paul Schmidt (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 102: “A Poet makes himself a visionary through a long, boundless, and systematized *disorganization of all the senses*. All forms of love, of suffering, of madness; he searches himself, he exhausts within himself all poisons, and preserves their quintessences.

AGORA: *Agora* is the ancient Greek word for a public meeting place.

ICONCLAST: The epigraph is from Epicurus, “Letter to Menoeceus” in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Books 6-10, trans. Robert Drew Hicks. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 649.

QOHELETH: *Qoheleth* is the Hebrew name for the book of *Ecclesiastes*.

YGGDRASIL: *Yggdrasil* is the name of a sacred tree in Norse mythology, believed to be located at the center of the cosmos.