

Under the Window: Selected Texts is the sixtieth in a series of texts and chapbooks published by Metambesen.

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UNDER THE WINDOW

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for Tamas

Note:

I suppose we were given two decks of cards at Mount Sinai. One, the Torah, would allow us to love our neighbors, to learn from teachers, to cross the mighty river, to ascend and descend as angels, to drive the chariot, and to walk through the seven crystal halls. The cards of this deck are shuffled for us and dealt to us. As the psalm says, *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies*.

However, the mysteries of the other deck, the Tarot, are the deeds about which the Torah can only be silent: the *shuffling*, the *drawing*, and the *dealing* of cards. Sophisticated schools have evolved interpretations of such gestures as disclosures of *character* and *fate*, but, if we listen to a deck of these cards, we can hear them laughing and shrugging off any determination; they will suffer no tradition, nothing antecedent whatsoever, because the cards we draw guide us, blindfolded, to the origin of writing where there is no law.

Like Miriam, I was given a deck of the Tarot with no instructions in the springtime. I did not know what to do. I drew a card. Under the window, I saw that day in a ragged smock, limping behind a hooded woman in the snow, and

I knew, no matter what else came to pass, I would not die that day.

Whereas the Torah shows us God face-to-face, in the Tarot there cannot be one God or conjugal deities or a three-personed God or ten sephirot or the Great Goddess or any pantheon at all. Pulling any card an unprecedented being is born. So, it is sexual. It destroys the idols. It destroys you and me. For the card we draw inoculates the mind against sameness. It allows us to know the day, to see its figure and divine its meaning, to write its special name. Thus, the Tarot fulfills the prophet's prayer: *renew our days as of old*. The card redeems our days.

FOUR OF CUPS

One cup is unaccounted for, scared because it cannot be numbered; it comes through the door on a vicious gust of wind; it is unassimilated fire that seized Elijah and is sealed, until the end of nature, within every word,

and it darts upon

our order. When the heart reclines with her lovers and ancestors at the table, then we fling open the door.

When we have already served every demanding power, the fourth cup is the only one with water that grows incessantly of the clean silver, that I, to spite my peace, will hold and raise,

to douse

the chariot's axles

with the water of nature, passing death. The long stillness, to endure, closed my eyes.

Closed my eyes and hastened Elijah's cool liquid. Quickness to open my door upwards, such as cools the throat. Within the coolness of a square, there flows a pleasure.

At the threshold of the card, I was frightened by this sight: the aorta was on fire that passed before my house. Lions, who know what love is, were splashing in my kitchen sink. Virginal prophets, who know what blood entails, were picking their tonsils with fishbones. It was my own flesh I opened at the doorway, to let out my name, to let in the moon that pursues your unity. Forces, instead, came to serve me, which I had never seen rise in the Month of Aviv, chauffeurs in black caps and white latex faces, to drive the mind down whichever streets turned in the intentions of the ultimate.

But it was their sensuousness, these several Shekhinahs, that induced my body to prophecy. They doffed their cups, and I, throughout the lower waters, lifted the carcasses of lions, to see, through their grates, today's card. A wind would drink this card. A wind would convene the high mysteries.

A wind—I urged it—, or what you wanted, even as it hid itself in your veins, blew this flimsiest card down the artery. After a month, the heart rose from my pelvis, and the other card of day came out before me to be read. In the roots of the other tree in the garden, milk frothed, and in Eve's sores that would not heal. Elijah had told me: breathe on every reason. Elijah is the wind. He is the woman, and the woman

is the man, within the rose. Elijah is the truant; his body betrays my cards. I breathed, and no heart did not return to someone else's body, a neighbor. Some feared this and hid under reams of paper, stamping their foreheads with pictures of Eden.

My master Elijah had said: Eden is what you drink and thereby find the secret; the four rivers, the square of Paradise, were Adam and Eve's alibi; love is a triangle with five sides, and this cannot be revealed, but when the mouth is open, everything is hidden. He also told me: there is clay, white clay in the fifth cup, preparing newborns' eyes for eternal visitations.

When the sun is born from the carcass of the lion Samson killed, a titan holds the fifth cup to the sun's lips. I did not wonder what Elijah, my mummer, meant to teach me. I am taught. I receive the images he twice redacts among shankbones and parsley on a Saturnian saucer, not to eat but to tell the story. To tell the story. Once, in Egypt, I saved a woman who sat lonely under a gigantic carnelian, a khalkedon, a Chaldean woman. So might the story begin. Once, in Egypt, I glimmered, and a Pharaoh was burnt into existence. So, starts our annual telling, perhaps, of truant history. Once, in Egypt, after a day of the Lord's work, I took a breath, and on a snow-capped mountain in Lebanon, a panther was set free.

*

Once in Egypt, we tasted, my mistress and I, the sundry juices. But she said: save thy jism for Jerusalem. And my mistress said: render unto me excessive patience. And she said: once, in Egypt, I was in love with a man who wanted nothing more than to sit very far from me. I took this to heart. When she completed her statement, I ferreted out my old teacher, Elijah, with local flames and Red Sea recipes. I had loved him. Once, he had moved in me. But, now, I pleaded with him, be gone. I move myself today in her iridescent proverbs, her hapax legomena, her worries and stories. And she said: there is one word we will not know when we say it, which is the trapdoor, the separated waters.

The knees of my body parted, the folded hands of the student who ponders what the mistress will not repeat—I sat down in the shadow of pleasures, cups passed, wings stretched to the delicacies laid forth, the banquet of ibises. Under everything, I danced what I was not told. It was an unwritten goat-play under the consequent feasts of angels. I sat in her throne, as I once sat on the grass without a single thought of her.

My mistress taught me: there is no lover; there is no recorded memory of our sitting down together. One sits alone without a single thought. My body is a fourfold

mimicry of the dance that will ravish earth once and mean no more. A dance of sitting down,

the four dancers waiting for the wind.

She said: the phonemes of sex are echoes of Eden's chatter. I said: you are my mistress, my mystery; from you flow the hints that encircle me. You guard every woman's fluency in solitude. I don't know what a man is. But I know he cannot cross any sea until he sits down, and dies to science. I admit the four cups overflow with ravens, which I cannot understand, so long as my womb has gone abroad. For so long, I wept alone. There is so much hair between my breasts that searches for the old, fertile solitude of my heart. My mistress said: if you want to love, you must suppose you pulse in the angels' fluttering; the heart comes down to Egypt in a time of plenty; the heart comes from outside.

Once I sat down, I could not see the minarets of Jerusalem, over the ridge of the fallen moon. I sat, instead of seeing. I could not see her, my mistress, whose magisterial, doubtful suffusions kept their distance from my empty cisterns. I basted a spear of grass in the heat of the instant. Under a window, there is a smelting flame that once changed the mind of Egypt into a horn, and there I sat, changing. There were four cups in my four hands. Now and then I put my lips to them, first the sirocco, then the graigos, but I couldn't hear her again. So I closed my mind, and opened my arms

to receive the thrusts of a crazed nun, to receive Elijah, roaring and furred, to receive you. And you were still not within my stillness, but therein I perceived the burst of secret purple from a grape.

KING OF SWORDS

I.

When I was walking, as I am obliged to, through that ordinary Rhode Island forest by the side of a marsh, a strange fatigue came through me. It rose from my legs to my hips. I had to lean on a tree. When this tiredness reached my groin, it blessed that region with warmth—a warmth like candor—a strange fatigue. Where does the light go? I needed to know. What is the groin? What is the prostate? What secrets, what light, does that organ guard? It is but an iron bell, hanging from the spine, which weighs on a man when he is out walking. Even that morning I had felt myself grow so weary of being a man. And I was wearier now, exhausted by that minimum of heat.

The tree I leaned on bore me up just fine, but its cold, living firmness did not make me any more alert. Where, I wanted to know, does that light go, when it leaves the scrotum? Sometimes I had touched an amethyst by accident, on the bedside table, and woke up. Now. But then, perhaps, I misremembered. I had so much time to think slowly against the tree. Newts seemed to freeze in my eyebeams. I may have looked slowly away from a particular spot. I fell asleep.

In fact, I almost fell asleep. I ate a carrot for nearly an hour. Parts of my belly were warm, instead of being my own thoughtless body. When I looked inside me, I saw the mercurial orange unction, the smooth steps of a cathedral, surely too slippery for a man to walk up. I felt almost pleasant, leaning on a tree's rough bark. In that state of unexpected calm, I ate another carrot, and I knew then that I had little light left, but plenty of time.

Southwest of Providence, below Fall River, in the plantations where everything green is heavy and slow in that springtime mist, the earth depends on one of us, perhaps you, perhaps me, to write. I was too tired, so, changing colors, I waited and fasted, and read the entire poetry. Where does the light go? Where does it go, by what paths, with what haste? I would have gladly had my loins nibbled by birds, or any other part of me, and my lymph and worn-out blood leeched, and let the inner rings of this trunk suck all the past from my loins, and all things to come, if only I could know. Let my feet be my feet, fleet and swift to answer. I thought I could know. But I did not know what to think next. And then the hungry birds came, but they didn't consume my flesh, or the flesh of things, only squawking as they circled. In their presence, the tree I was learning from took almost a day to become skinless and transparent fine. O, eli, eli! I could only blush. The carrot was cold and brilliant.

Call them the planets, because they make us wander. He wondered what that might mean. The train raced through the forest, and none of the trees moved, but were still leafless, in April, almost Passover. Why had he drawn that card? A man, crowned, robed in sky-blue, with red eyes, holding a sword that erred a little from the vertical. A king, a woman. He thought that the king's face seemed feminine, but then he considered that every face seems feminine if you look long enough. Hereabouts, in Christendom, the woman is flesh, jawline, jowl, rouged cheeks, lips, muscle, and the expression of joints, and the man lives in invisible stupefaction. Supposedly. So he had been taught. So any face whatsoever, if not wasted in chastity, if not ruined by crusades, is not a man's. I am not a man, he thought.

The train was shaking. He looked at the student sleeping in the seat across the aisle, thinking of what? He was not a man. Yet he was different from the woman, sitting behind him, somehow.

Reading, she was very beautiful and charitable, moreover, to the place they both were sitting in. He could see in her eyes a worldly concern for each word, everything written whatsoever, from the signatures of clerks to scribbles in the

journals of titans. This was not his way of discrimination and restitution, but he believed in her. Rims of glasses, red eyes, chewing gum, the East. And her shirt was more than any color, it was flashing bright and loose in the sun.

He was reminded by the way she held her book—the spine, tilted—of the way the King held his sword. What did he himself hold? Not this pen. What did he grasp with such majesty and poise? He thought he did not deserve description, or worse, he didn't stay long enough in one perfect posture, the right arrangement of arm and neck, which seemed, in this world, so easily accomplished by them. Now he wore grey, yesterday blue—inconstant. What was his name? Who, even if they loved him, who among the nations, even if they wished, could picture him? How could he be seen?

In his crotch, he felt a sharp symbol. A scorpion, it seemed, wanting to make itself known, interrupted his thinking. He looked down and was not a little surprised to see it twitching and swelling under corduroy, formless but not void. What harm would an ounce of blood do? He considered that he had the heart of a King, at least today, and, feeling sure of himself, used his pen to let a little fluid out of the organism. It felt good, but it did not relieve him of his need to understand. If anything, his flesh avenged itself, reddened, wandered about, divided the heavens, and rose up. The woman, who had been reading, remarked that

his scorpion could be demonstrated to form exactly the angle her book formed with her lap. Then she returned to reading.

What was this indifference, this angelic diffidence? He smiled to himself, even as he cried. What are our signs for, what are signs for, if no one cares? What do we know? He couldn't believe he had been seen and measured, seen and not found wanting, in the presumptive geometry of at least this day. The paschal earth was beyond wonder. I will keep crying. I will smile. I will keep changing. She will keep to herself, her instruments and methods, tilting them to receive the light, tilting her head away from the two axes. What does she read?

The card told him to shut his mouth, shut up. He laughed. He slammed his teeth down, blushing, but no one could see what happened inside of him. He was not a man. He was a secret. Yet this secret, he had a strange feeling, was someone else's. At that moment, he knew wonder beyond measure. And he was convinced, finally, to change his mind, to revise his usual cosmology—not geocentric, it couldn't be, not any more. There was a point, a center, that no planet could occupy, not even the earth, though it was closest of all them. Even so, the earth also wandered. Everything wanders, eccentric, off-center, or it issues from a unitary source. I was born from my mother, yet my

member swings around a point in back of me, which is always a radiant body, human or animal or vegetable.

He thought he had not brought the card with him, forgot it at home. Forget where you live. Get away from the Tarot, concentric circles. But the train shook again, and it, the card, the King, fell out from his notebook. It was not what he remembered. Why were there crows in the sky over the King's head? The sword, in his right hand—do swords wander? He supposed he might have misheard the universe, misconstrued the planets, not only the woman on the train, but the whole universe, every day, at all hours, taking it to mean one thing when its plain sense was the other.

Plants—they do wander. It was a fact: his lap was strewn with seeds, and no scorpion could be seen or its rattle heard. If the sky sounded like a snake, the sky was another earth, to which, possibly the winds lift our symbols, pebbles, and seeds. What else could it be that raises a man or woman among the constellations?

By the amaryllis that suddenly sprouted from the lap of the boy across the aisle, all green but with fat red petals, he knew there would be no consensus. The planets are also stars. It was his stop. Get off from every thought. It has taught you, as, once, the earth learned all its wisdom from a point in space, a point of light in space, just to the side,

behind your ear, in your hair. Yes, Gargantua was only a giant amaryllis, who flung at his enemies planets that his braids would catch. He knew that his task was less than that. Become, just once, a picture of the world. Become that picture, and go walking, ride on locomotives, so others can read in your dainty deportment, your folded legs, your stillness, your pinky finger, and your changes, the gladness of all their remaining days. It will be your stop, sooner or later, disembark, report to Pluto.

Instead, in the station's lobby, he embarrassed himself by reciting all of history to the first woman he saw wearing black. She was eating a salad, of corn and dark bits of meat, and her lipstick was the color of amaryllis; all of her words were round. What sort of explanation, he needed to know, what does my body explain? He wanted, at last, to be known, and to know when his work would be at end, and end in silence, someone's quiet. But that wasn't it—not at all. She stopped and looked up, weeping, grinning, having heard everything and interred it in a trash bin. He could not hear her last word wander into his heart. Feeling. Finally, he felt. But how? How, from our viewpoint, could he have not? It was the earth, dirt, and trees, cool snow caps, globe, waters, a perfect orb in his hand; he did not know it; he palmed it mindlessly. It was the earth in his hand, without a thought, cool in some regions and hot in others, mindlessly feeling. It was the end.

THE MOON

for BC

One of us is the other's daughter; we are the selfsame adelphic color. One of us coughs, the other gives birth to a wolf, a river, or to a child, a flash of summer snow. On the head of a mature amaryllis, there is a crystal, the ancestor. I am walking along the river, trying to understand.

It is only when I've passed the moon-mill, where the road turns inwards, that I can think at all about this blank pearl of barley. Then, I can perceive, in the most miniscule impedimenta, signs of our kinship, that grain for instance, hominy that won't ever soften, wheat that won't ever leaven. I can see that the road never goes forward on its way to the liberty and salt of your house. What else would waking be? Fleeing, truancy. A voice says, *turn around*. The Law is: *turn back*, which means, not one soul distant from the source. Walking along this river, I am walking back to Delphi.

Back to Egypt. Oracles and all things living speak wherever the sky is clairvoyant blue at night, day-blue, hand-blue, black at daytime. The blue-hearted air, the see-through deck of cross-currents and converging wings, transparent wings of daughters and sons gone too soon, prophets who spoke too soon, are in that sky; there are ancient moons and unborn mothers. Back to Egypt, that narrow place.

That periscope we look through, look up from dark searoads and stations along the way. From the blue heart of matter, we can, wanting backwards, see clearly the colors of our past, how is it I stand here and you stand here. We can see each other's signs and wonders that reflect in a thousand heavenly postures and there grow in fame, but these signs are taken and given. Tokens are passed between wanderers who rest all day at Miriam's well, near Hagar's gate.

Today, against the seasons, counterclockwise, I turn to you, while dolphins swim backwards over waves to your source. I sent them; I urge them on. I commit the silent prophet on the threshold of Canaan to go back to the widow, the hovel, the sick. Alone at last, the face of my wristwatch opens, and the glass disarticulates in countless grains that smell of the ocean, that run quickly down the drain. The hand of the clock I reattach to my forearm. And there is the moon! I can see it now. I can glimpse it deep in

the levers and gold switches, beakers and compasses, each instrument aglow, breaking the light. I shall not take the light. So I leave it with her and turn back to the sheep dying on my kitchen counter. They have too many horns, too dry, but the savory lanolin of their white and black wool teaches me not to fear scorpions; they are only crabs in exile. When the moonlight through the window finally strikes the sheep's face, its horns catch fire. At night we all live in blue palaces. The moon will show us the water in time.