

Vassalboro

In this house, with shadows moving
up and down the walls
he sits all by himself, contemplating
time's evanescence
Of every moment all that's left
is this evasiveness, time is
disappearance, feather-light: nothing
is
apart from this
annulment

His love for his little daughters
is so huge, the more he loves them
the more he longs for loving them
deeper deeper
as if they were drifting away, ever more
unreachable, from this father immobilized
by overwhelming love and
gloom
For not altogether being there
In his love
In the moment

They moved here for peace. For
the concentration

To this house where icy shadows climb
the walls
and white light beats
through swaying apple trees
The forest here is never friendly, swamps
give way for one's steps, and poison ivy
etches your skin. Cars hastily rush through
on narrow countryside roads,
the neighbour lady watching
all your steps
But he loves the meadows
around the house, though even there

he is distracted, in this world
where every thought opens up
so many other thoughts, and every choice
means loss
of other possibilities

There is an innocence in just living
Every life becomes its own history, even though
he is convinced
that real life takes place elsewhere, not realizing
that his history is with him, his sorrow
and his losses, all his love, even
his conviction that he no more masters
the distinction between depth
and surface

Things do not become less important
with time. They grow
overwhelming, everything
gets bigger, his tenderness
so powerful
That speech does not
suffice, his words have become
like mighty stones, thrown to and fro
by the current of a river, they roll around
in his mouth
so heavy

Already when he was the young man
in the deep-green album
on the upper shelf, he longed so strongly
to be moved, to really
love
*"But I must, once I must
be allowed to fully be"*, he prays
as if everything were an obstacle. Like when you
stumble down the stairs, like
when you lose the thread
because it is so crucial

*"Maybe we do not get wiser with time", he says
with his heavy granite words, and nods with the despair
of a bear, "but we know more. We can discern
In those days I was just running about
like a confused insect
Because love is lonesome. Everything
important is so lonesome."*

And every day a little more of language disappears,
of time, of body

and the house is shaking in a whale-gray wind
that runs through
crew cut lawns, mansions throning in
deceitful glamour, Gothic, perfect

O, endless conversations, nightly labyrinths!
Of love and loss
he speaks, arrests himself, and speaks. He cries
and in the widening dark
he curses the flight of time
in the house of shadows, here
In Vassalboro, Maine

Temple

Your body is a Temple, she said
to her children. *Your body,*
your matter, the clay
you were given

And she drew the contours
of their baby bodies
with her ample Russian hands,
lovingly and much too much

She was altogether
much too much
for all these fragile children
she had gotten, one
after the other, children
of longing and wanting
For clarity, for
Order, for that center of each life
which nobody knows
what it is

These windy London days
with dwindling light, pursuing fruits
for the children, apples and pears,
goods for the children. For
survival
Streets looming over something or
other, maybe
that secret, maybe that thing
Perhaps in the garden, deeply hidden
in London's age-old soil
where honeysuckle
blossomed, daffodils and roses
And in the autumn, gold
and bronze, in shivering shadows
of cold and need
their childhood wilderness

in rooms too huge and darkened
by antiques and memory

Your body is your temple, and they nodded,
jumping rope and wildly
bicycling their Temples to the river and the parks,
to Battersea, into adulthood, its thorns
and uphill, and he

Who was the largest, strongest
the most handsome
of her jewels, he rushed ahead
before and further,
walked too much
too far, too fast
Carrying his Temple like a head-stone, carrying
his evergrowing pain, and in the year
Eleven, smashed it all
He threw his head-stone, crushed
his Temple, gliding by that force
which chokes all matter, high up
In a tree, like wood-gods do, like
Odin

And in a flash he saw the faces
All the faces he so much
had loved, he saw
with all the roses, all
the soil that he had worked, he saw
his most beloved
Assembled in that lonesome bit
of time, the time
of gliding down, the point of
pivoting, the micro-edge that cuts
between the lands
of Life and Death

Perhaps, right there, he also got
a glimpse of bliss
Of beauty, of

that innermost, that thing
he longed for all these years
of strain exhaustion carrying
his Temple-stone through all this land
of numbing deafness

Green

Madame Arditì in her
chaise longue chair
keeps talking about God's existence
while the sun light
beats the marble ground.

Madame Arditì
offers good advice
and biscuits, and sometimes a piece
of her perfumed
soap, lavender or mimosa,
sandal wood and musc, her hair
is whiter than the marble ground, as pure
as her ancestors' wisdom

Come here girl, and sit by me, and tell me all
your news, how is
your dear mama? Come and sit
you darling girl. This jewel
is an emerald, it is
my Monday stone.
Monday is a special day, its light
is green, like hope
and springtime rain.
I see that suffering and joy will come to you,
an affluence of everything.
A need
of love, come here, my child, and sit
by me. The hours are long
and much too light,
I think one day I'll leave the ground
and just
fly off in brightness

This book was owned once
by my uncle, a very special man
of rare

enlightenment. He knew ten languages, and he
could speak
with the deceased. Look here, into this mirror,
do you see that face? It's him, my uncle, looking
after us who sit here.

Let us have
more limonade, our glasses have grown empty,
all this heat
cannot be normal. Say, is your mother
at the Club today? She looked so ill
last time I saw her, I hope that she is
doing better.
I hope everything is doing better, everything
must steadily
grow better.

I hear your father went away.
again, the French ambassador has asked
about him, such
a charming man, your father, nobody can read
his thoughts
They say he fled from Russia by the North Pole, it was
such a cruel revolution, he was brave.
They say
he was a spy
Now, child, eat up your biscuit.
Nobody can tell
one's fate. We used to go each summer
to the coast, I was the youngest
and my father
loved me, we swam for hours
out in the ocean, so crystal clear and warm.
I often
dream of it, the happiness
in that green water. It's
my colour, I believe it was decided
long before my birth
Yes, green. There is no green, no grass
here, only
marble and chianca, sometimes

when I dream, I'm back
in my Puglia, with the fisherman
who used to bring us
to the island. I was only fourteen
when he kissed me, o, no, my dear,
I talk too much. My sister
was a beauty, somewhat like your older sister,
but when she died, it was the Spanish flue, her husband
took his life
O, I'm so sorry, child, you should
not hear
such speech!

I wonder when your mother
comes to see me, do you want
to stay for lunch?
We were so free in Puglia,
my auntie's house was by
the ocean, her husband's was a famous
Treni erudite.
My brother's still alive, I think, but
it is fifty years ago.
Say, will you all
return to England? It's probably
a bad idea,
it is safer here in Cairo.
My two sons are elsewhere, one
in Paris, and the other in America, it's hard
to be so far away from them.
It is too warm
out here, let us go in.

There was a tree with mulberries behind the house
we used to sit there
when the berries ripened.
These mulberries were so delicious
I never had something like them again. We also had
a plentyful of raspberries and strawberries,
but you were born here
weren't you, you wouldn't know these foods.

Well I suppose
you leave for England
once it all gets calmer, then
you'll have delicious English strawberries.
But you must wait, there
is this crazy man in Germany, some say he is about
to start a war. O, pardon me, my darling child,
I should not frighten you.
A war? A war is the most frightful thing,
so dreadful, but don't worry, it's
just gossip. Come now, let's
go in, your mother must be
on her way.

