

Tending Towards the Horizontal: Text

France Daigle

The bird flaps its wings slowly, steadily, relentlessly.
It follows some rectilinear path only it can know.
The bird has been flying like this for an indescribable
amount of time.
Slowly, steadily, relentlessly.
The bird keeps time to itself just as it keeps to the
one invisible direction of its flight.
Over this vastitude comprised of ocean, sky and
horizon all around, the bird keeps to itself.

Cent fois sur le métier remettez votre ouvrage.
Vingt fois sur le métier remettras ton ouvrage.

A figure sits on top of a hill behind a house.
There is a creek at the foot of the hill and there is a
railroad on the other side of the creek.
The figure is one of a boy or man.
It sits alone on a bale of hay, looking at the city just a
little ways off.
Sometimes a train passes by.
The noise or sound the train actually makes depends upon
the direction of the wind.

Jerusalem the Golden. From the summit of the Mount of Olives, the
ancient city stretches away. Quiet slopes, unpretentious mounds.
Somewhere beyond lies the desert of devastation.

A woman walks amidst the long study tables of a library.
There is no one sitting at these tables.
There seems to be no one else in the library.
Closed books lie about here and there on the long wooden tables.
The woman stops at one of these tables.
She opens a book at any page and starts reading.
The woman then sits down and keeps on reading for a while.
Then, without closing the book, the woman gets up and starts walking again amidst the long tables of the library.

The bird does not stop along the way.
It neither rests nor eats.
Holding its head pointed towards the same invisible direction,
the bird ceaselessly flaps its wings in the same regular motion.
The bird does not seem to tire.
Nor does it try to do anything else.
Steadily, relentlessly.

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The figure is seen leaving the house and walking to the bale of hay on top of the hill.
It moves as a shadow against the night.
Beyond the creek and the railroad, the numerous lights of the city sprawl and stretch away into the distance.
From where the figure sits, it is not possible to hear the flowing water of the creek.
The figure picks a piece of hay from the bale, brings it to its mouth and holds it between its teeth for awhile.

The creek is very slow and one must get considerably closer in order to hear water trickling by. Nevertheless, there is an odour of water in the air.

The Pool of Bethesda, where Jesus healed the lame man, was once part of the systems of reservoirs and cisterns that supplied Jerusalem with water. The Well of Souls and the Abyss of Chaos are also connected to Jerusalem's ancient water system. Nearby Mount Ophel, the underground spring of Gihon is connected to the Pool of Siloam.

The woman in the library stops at another table and opens the book lying there. Again the woman opens the book at any page. She reads for a few seconds and then she pulls a chair, sits down and reads for another while. Everything is quiet in the library. The woman does not care for the books that are on the shelves. She reads only what others have left behind.

February 26th, 1987

Dear Barbara,

I've taken many notes for our film. The same three images keep recurring to me. One is of a bird flying tirelessly and undistractedly over the ocean. It is completely alone of course, and it feels like it is going to Paris or someplace like that. I don't really know why this bird is on my mind much of the time but I know that this image is a soothing one for me. It is somewhat like my own heart beating, my own pace, my own rectilinear direction... in spite of all appearances.

Because it keeps to itself, the bird is entirely alone
crossing this ocean.
Occasionally a gust of wind.
The consequent ruffling of feathers.
Despite the wind, the bird keeps the same regular motion.
Steadily, relentlessly.
Occasionally an odour.
The bird knows when to start expecting land.
It knows at exactly what point land will appear.
It also knows the particular aspects of this first appearance
of land.
The bird does not have to wait for land.
Waiting thus keeps it unnecessarily occupied.
The bird does not wait for land because land will eventually
appear on its own.

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Vingt fois sur le métier remettes ton ouvrage.

The figure moves to and from the house and the bale of hay
on top of the hill nearby.
Whenever it crosses the yard we hear the ruffle of silence
moving around in our chest.
We can only see this figure moving when it is nighttime.
Occasionally a train whistles by.
If the wind comes over the Atlantic from the east, then the
sound of the train is more like noise.
If the wind is blowing from the west and moving towards the
Atlantic, then the sound of the train is somewhat pleasant,
a kind of gentle reminder of time passing by.
When the wind blows from the west, it blows in the figure's
back.
If the wind comes from the Atlantic, then the boy or man feels
a resistance to something, maybe a resistance to change.

Valleys on three sides: Valley of Kidron, Valley of Tyropoeon, Valley of Gehenna. Jerusalem of the Upper World, Jerusalem of the Heart.

The woman doesn't really care about what she reads.
She just reads.
Everything means something.
She reads out of books others have left lying about.
The woman doesn't want to have to look very far.
Some pages are interesting enough.
The woman pushes another book away, gets up and walks over to another table.
She opens another book at any page and continues her reading.
The woman doesn't move while she reads.
She is absolutely still.
Only her eyes move across the page.
Nothing stirs in the entire library except the woman's eyes.

March 2nd, 1987

Dear Barbara,

It is getting more and more difficult to tell a story. I really don't know how to put these images together. Maybe I'm dying or something. Nor do I understand this ambiguity concerning boy or man. The figure sitting on top of the hill is definitely part of me, but why all this dealing in shadows? Also Jerusalem. Kind of a contradiction here. I feel the old inside me everywhere whereas the new is outside. Whenever I open my eyes I see new. Such is the quality of new. Darkness is old, light is new.

Neither does the bird care to know for how long it has been flying thus.
Ceaselessly the wings, day and night.

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Sometimes the back of the boy or man's foot strikes against the bale of hay, but otherwise the figure hardly moves.
In the darkness, sounds become something like sculptures. They more readily take form.
From where the figure sits, most of these sounds generally move upwards.
Only the whistle of the train passing by travels horizontally in the darkness.

Mount Zion, Mount Scopus, Hill of Evil Counsel, Mount of Offence. Still further beyond, the Judean Hills and the Moab Hills. Down below, the Garden of Gethsemane.

The woman has no strategy.
Whenever she speaks, she always says the same thing.
The words always come from the same exact place in her chest.
She feels it like a sort of round space somewhere near the heart.
The woman knows that she rarely speaks quite from the heart.
Sometimes she tries to move this little ball of space to where her heart is.
Sometimes she succeeds.
Sometimes she actually feels the space where her heart is.
This lasts for a few seconds and then the little ball of space floats away from her heart again.
It comes and sits where the woman always feels her words coming from, somewhere beside the heart.
The more the woman thinks about this the less the woman speaks.

And whenever she speaks, she always says the same thing.
The woman has no strategy.

Tirelessly the bird.
There is a problem however with light never being constant,
never being the same.
This grappling with light and with time.
With memory.
For days, but how many days?
For how long will the light stay on in this vast stillness
of being?
Slowly, steadily, relentlessly the bird, keeping time to
itself.

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The figure shoots the piece of hay out of its mouth, picks
another one out of the bale and brings it to its mouth.
The figure is sitting on the bale of hay and yet it also
seems to be walking back to the house.
This dealing in shadows is like the ruffle of silence
inside our chest.

Trodden paths, rock and scentless scrub. Shepherds with their flocks,
ancient olive trees. The Jewish cemetery.

Nothing is ever still enough.
In the library, words carefully lift themselves out of books
and enter the woman's mind.
But everything is quiet in the library.

Only the woman moves amidst the stillness of books.
Only words enter the stillness of mind.

March 5th, 1987

Dear Barbara,

Why do you suppose the woman reads in all of these book? It is hard to believe she is actually looking for something. She seems vastly knowledgeable than what the mere fact of reading suggests. She is probably reading from somewhere behind the words, from somewhere behind the pages. I have reasons to believe such a perspective exists. This woman strikes me as being very real. She reminds me of those circles of thought that link us permanently to movement in all directions even though we are immobile. Poetry is such movement within the vast stillness of being. It moves us who cannot be moved. It has all directions whereas we only have intuition of direction. Poetry is irreducible. It cannot be destroyed. It constantly changes form in order to be recognized. Poetry is not simply a matter of words. It is but a specter behind words. It endures longer and dies sooner than any word. For poetry cannot last. It must give way always in order to last forever.

A bird alone crosses an ocean.
Ceaselessly the wings, keeping time rectilinear.
Slowly, steadily, relentlessly.
No incidence of variety nor play.
Only direction.
Not a picture.
Not a film.
Vastitude cannot be framed.
Vastitude keeps time to itself and leaves us devastated,
groping for memory and light.

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In the darkness a figure detaches itself from a house
and walks a little ways.
There, from the top of a hill, it looks at a city spreading
down and beyond.
At the foot of the hill there is a creek, and on the other
side of the creek there is a railroad.
No trickling of water can be heard from the top of the hill.
Occasionally a train passes by.
The figure sits on a bale of hay.
A gull flies over the creek.

Quiet slopes, unpretentious mounds. The Pool of Bethesda, where Jesus
healed the lame man.

The woman now reads a grammar book.
She already knows all the rules so this reading is particularly
easy.
Somewhere between the words the notion of desire occurs to her.
But the woman is not generally concerned about desire.
She is mainly concerned about words leading away from
darkness.
But even so, the woman rarely ventures this far into thinking.
She usually just wears clothes and reads books other people
have left behind.
The colours of the woman's clothes are all bound together
inside of her.

March 9th, 1987

Dear Barbara,

I think your title "Tending towards the Horizontal" is absolutely superb. I'd like to use it for my next five books. Here is the text I could come up with for the film. If it is not long enough you can just use it over again starting at the beginning. I think it can stand the repetition. Hope to hear from you shortly,

France

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