

George Szirtes

*Minimenta:
Postcards to Anselm Kiefer*

I. Rubble, Light and Voice

1.

Concrete and rubble: the Word

Produces its monuments.

Monstrous overheard

Conversations. Lost tenements.

Attics open to the elements.

2.

We were leaving the wreckage.

Soon it was dark and the queue

Lengthened into a sleepless dream

We had somehow to live through

And, finally, to redeem

As if night itself were the passage.

3.

A lost glove hanging on a fence,

A shoe without laces by the roadside,

The hand's abstraction, the foot's absence:

Marriage of invisible inconvenience.

Bridegroom stripped bare by the Bride.

Lost glove. Lost fence.



4.

The rubble was the frightening thing.
So much had fallen and the rain
Was as much inside as outside.
Tiny pebbles were pretending to sing
To keep fear off. And then more rain
With nowhere to hide.

5.

We were clerks of forgotten states.
We scribbled memos
That none of us would read,
Opened deals that would not close,
Followed leaders who could not lead.
We traded our empire for a single bead
Of light that broke us like cracked dinner plates.

6.

The evening, shrimp-coloured and cool:
A late mild header into winter.
Soon enough dark morning, soon
Enough the splinter
Of ice stuck in the window, the moon
Stuck fast in the deserted lido, the pool
Blossoming into night,
Black as anthracite.

7.

Sometimes you want to sing but as



You open your mouth the world shunts
Like a train and voice fails.
The failure is unimportant, hardly counts
In the scheme of things, but you're off the rails.
Sometimes voice is all a man has.

8.

Under the rubble sleep the dead
Barely visible, as always.
You hardly want light there. Days
Collapse into visions. Night is preferable.
Light looks for trouble
Between broken limb and marble head.

9.

A clear voice in the temple. The choir
Slowly focuses around her, holding her still
Like a glowing electric wire.
The charge travels through her and beyond.
The air is light and blond,
Sustained by oxygen, faintly surgical.

10.

Layer upon layer of brick and cement.
In the park over the road trees blend
With evening. People cross
Roads, move along the pavement
With a certain pathos
Towards the day's end.



II. Wind, Cloud, Drilling

How often have we watched trees
move against dark cloud, their frail
armature part collapsed, part thrust
against the wind, the leaf-sail
of each bud billowing to squeeze
light from dark, energy from dust?

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Unrest. The un-ness of things. Twig
like a broken No . Concrete steps.
A drill. A bulldozer. The cold lips
of November pursed for a kiss
that is more like a blow and all this
far too late, too troubled and too big.

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Everywhere the human voice. How can
we help but hear it in grass and air?
Even a wall is only a tall noise with brick
syntax. High clouds whisper human
non-sequiturs that turn to rain. Where
can we hide? Why this sense of panic?

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A man and woman in a field. The rain
starts and they take shelter. The grass
runs all one way. They embrace. They hold
each other as if they could not do so ever again.

Above them leaves fold and unfold
in the downpour that will quickly pass.

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The construction site constructing.
The square empty but for machinery.
The cafeteria with its litter of trays.

Everywhere institutions. The lost days.
All this will be broken up, everything.
There will be no drama, only scenery.

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And then he turned to her and ran
the back of his hand against her cheek
very lightly. It was as if wind had stroked any
surface whatsoever. He was an old man
or a young man, and she could not speak
or find words because there were too many.

