

Hölderlin's Window

Bruno Gulli

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*"...and the philosophical light around my window is now my joy;
may I be able to keep on as I have thus far!"*

– Friedrich Hölderlin

(letter to Boehlendorf, December 2, 1802)

Nothing but being remains

When

In the strong silence that doesn't go

Unheard

The planes of time shift

And thought appears

In all its brightness:

The plane of memory

And the absent other – of the future.

But moments and modes

Of consolation are rare.

We anxiously seek

Thought on one side

The word on the other

In the void of time.

Quiet was earlier

Later there will be quiet.

Behind the window this new light

Exuberant with nature

In the warm evening

Finds us empty and cold

In the time of indifference

And revives us.

Perhaps a new thought
From the forest and mountains,
Perhaps in the crowded stations
Of forlorn cities
A young eternal face,
Ancient in its gaze,
Renews our passions, the fire
That lights the evening sky.
Yet simple are clothing and manners.
Here on the train going downtown
And losing itself into the woods
Set on fire by the new sun,
In the remote corners of the earth,
Talks are simple,
But high and real,
Conversations between pariahs and gods,
As to how war and blood and death
Reign all over.
The world sees no light.
Neither in the sweatshops in Pakistan
Or Thailand, nor those in New York
Or California does the void of time bring
New being. Laughter in Washington, London,
And the other capitals. Neither on the streets of La Paz,
Nor among the rubble in Baghdad is being nothing.
The laughter that calls itself democratic
Doesn't see
The new coming freedom
That flows like lava down the mountains,
A river that breaks its banks.
The absolute and free being which is coming,

With a wide brow, comes from the future.
It carries with it immense spaces.
Like a new god, it crushes
Under its bare strong feet
Temples of a fake intelligence.
New cities arise everywhere in the world,
New centers of life. To the crescendo of festivity,
To the free coming and going of people
The unexpected gift of a genuine word
Adds itself, the presage, which is memory,
Of enlightenment.

To the usual window, tired, I return
Like he who due to a long absence
Through an exhausting journey
And a laborious search
Has lost his mental strength,
His bodily sense, to whom even rest
Appears to be action and effort.
Nor do you, thought, hide your presence.
Sleep is good in these circumstances.
It envelopes in the twilight the trembling walls
Of houses, the sound of our steps,
Solitude.

In this vortex
Of memory and of that which to equal status
Aspires, labor finds its elements.
Upon waking, the light of thought,
A new sun, floods eternal spaces.

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Translated with Rosemary Manno
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