

*The Abelard Poets*

EMPTIED SPACES

DAVID JAFFIN



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# EMPTIED SPACES



Artist's proof

J. Mackay  
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DAVID JAFFIN

with an etching especially created for this volume by Jacques Lipchitz

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*Again for Rosemarie, and for my sons, Raphael and Andreas*

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[I]

## EMPTIED SPACES

The candle's spent,  
It was flesh  
He meant to say,  
But the words burned  
Still, left him a  
Room of emptied  
spaces.

## NIGHT-TIME STUDY

*for my son, Raphael*

The stars went out,  
Each of a single in-  
stance, prepared

That night to be  
Indefinably still: the  
Feel of touch, the  
Sense of the real  
Fingers on cloth; stars

went out,  
Each of a single in-  
stance.

## OLD MAN IN THE PARK

An old man sat where he was,  
    wooden-framed  
In the fountained park,  
His thought the same  
As the things about him:

The barely coloured green  
    of grass  
Brought to mind, reminded,  
The emptied pond,  
Swans that gathered their wings  
    there once,  
The sun florescent gold, bold  
    emblazoned sun.

The old man sat where he was,  
    wooden-framed  
In the fountained park.

## FROSTSCENE

In this stillness  
One expects the eye to move.

So much here is hard and cold,  
Wrought/untold between  
us.

If we could touch  
That this silver-silence could thaw,  
Straight out to the tips of our  
Fingers, that this branch  
Could bear its spring of sap,  
Unexpected, and liquid in  
intent.

If we could speak  
That our words could break  
As flower from stone declared,  
That quickened sense  
Impulsed in light . . .

But in this stillness  
One expects the eye to move.

So much here is hard and cold,  
Wrought/untold between  
us.

## IDEALIZED

Transfig-  
urations of thought,  
idealized

That probable af-  
ternoon  
Lighted with sound:

Your feet my plea-  
sure  
Performed in tact and  
measure –

You smiled,  
Peripheral to the  
sense.

## AFTER A PORTRAIT OF LENBACH (1890s)

You stood  
And the world stood still  
where you were.  
And your dress encompassed  
that space  
well-knowing each and  
every care  
It had traced right down  
to that  
Same selected moment  
Where you stood in a world that wasn't  
anymore  
Looking out, looking out  
perpetually silent.

## ROAD BUILDING

They cut a road out of that  
    landscape,  
Planned and contrived to connect two places  
    On the map which they had  
    never seen.

They came with their tools,  
With their rough-handed workers,  
With their skills, with their plans  
And surveyors and at just the  
Right time of year.

They chose the curves and angles,  
They exposed that soft soil  
    to their wants,  
They laid flat that land,  
Poured burning tar on a readied  
    surface  
And let it dry down deep.  
And they curved those sides away  
Proportioned to the proper  
    slopes

And then they took their tools  
And their rough-handed workers  
And their skills and their plans  
And surveyors, packed up and  
    went home.

## NOT BY CHOICE

They found themselves at the same place  
Not by choice but by chance  
Each had decided to come for  
Some other reason of his own and  
That place wasn't final  
Either as a destination but  
More like a point of debarcation as  
Rivers that run together to a  
Common source and then feed out in-  
to the same sea

They came, each separately,  
Each with his own thoughts in hand,  
Underway. It was like changing  
Trains at a common platform  
Waiting at the same time  
For the same thing  
And yet only for themselves –

But that train didn't come,  
The rivers failed to  
Run together and they found  
Themselves there at that same  
Place, not by choice but  
By chance each had decided to  
Come for some other reason  
of his own.

## REMEMBERED

Time is falling,  
Let it step into the past  
    briefly  
And leave no mark  
As words scarcely brought to  
    mind –

I think of you so,  
Of the lightness of fallen  
    snow  
That leaves no mark  
Except when winds (trans-  
    parent) wake.

## THE POOL

Look down into that  
    watered place,

The light's gone out of  
    your transient face,  
Leaves shadows there  
    instead;

That pool's bare,  
Cracked at the edge,  
Thoughts you gathered there  
Will blow and break  
And end for winter's  
                                    sake;

Look down there  
At what you've found out  
    of yourself.

n.y.c.

Perhaps these stones have spoken  
(and their voice conceals  
the want of light),

Or glimmering shadows per-  
petuate here  
A certain sense of desire  
(in the twilight of  
laughter when birds ex-  
hibit their skills) –

Imagined wings of flight  
Awaken not that real sense for  
light;

Perhaps these stones have spoken  
(i placed my fingers to  
feel the want of  
flesh)

And their words passed in  
me  
The coolness of another  
afternoon.

## TO THE HISTORICAL

Imperfectly known,  
Abandoned in time to touch  
and stone

This sanctity of fact finalized,  
idealized

The tentative act itself  
Imperfectly declared  
As the fictions of waste:

Flesh, blood and bone,  
And the fictions of time:  
Touch and stone.

## DESCENT

Those steps led  
down,  
Casements (enclosures)  
Of equalled sound  
Consecutively apparent

We came to the  
river  
(river of dreams),

Though your hand ceased  
to touch  
(river of lights).

## TO THE DEATH OF CHIEWITZ

Death has a separate room,  
A single door that leads  
    in  
And light at the  
    window's edge

A glass cleaned dry,  
Sheets propped high and the  
    smell of flowers;

It has it all  
That room it calls its  
    own

And the flesh that wears  
    away there, un-  
    observed.

## MIRRORED

I looked to your face,  
It reflected mine;  
You smiled, I was cold;  
Your voice tremoured –  
No, it was the leaves;  
And when I pressed your hand,  
The pulse stilled.

## EMPTY CHAIRS

They stood in their own  
separate place  
Gathering sounds they wound a-  
round themselves as  
Carefully as cloth's matter  
of taste  
Concentric/preconceived

eyes  
That peered from under  
cover out  
Preconvicted to stone

They stood in their own  
separate silence  
Chilled by the fires,  
Rubbing their hands  
And renewing the cold of their  
stiff and back-boned  
chairs.

## FOR THE FISHERMAN AT VOULA

Irreconcilable stood the  
night,  
It's armour of stars –  
Light fires of the vaul-  
ted wind,  
Begin, but beware  
You have raised a fish  
from my heart,  
That cold moon watching  
through its mountain  
of glass.

## THE ROOM

The room prepared,  
His steps neared against mar-  
ble stone,

Left a cold presence  
That wasn't his,  
But came with him, in-  
cidentally;

The door was high,  
Beyond reach as he passed  
by  
A shadow became;

He stood alone,  
Columns of marble stone  
Marked off to the  
place where he stood.

## FIRING SQUAD

They stood them up as  
Tabled chairs turned  
Over to be shot  
at

Inside/out suspended to  
The vacant airs of pro-  
bability framed with-  
out care of more or  
less than hap-  
pened there

Tabled chairs turned  
Over to be  
shot

at.

## CYCLE

They stood him in a room  
And told him to stay there.

At first his hands were warm,  
But he could feel their heat de-  
cline.

He stood as high as he could  
That room was still  
Four cornered, walled and  
made of wood.

He sat at the centre of  
Things that he thought.

And then he began to walk,  
side to side,  
Increasing the step be-  
tween.

He stood straight again as  
A tree stripped of its sound in  
the autumn rain.

And he began to dream,  
Crouched and crumbled in  
shadow.

And they came at last to  
carry him off.

## HUNTERS

Through the wood,  
Through the porous-chained  
darkness  
Break-combed pines of  
shining stillness  
Fabled high, foot naked-  
marked

Scent, as scent they  
come  
shadows  
cornered-turned

## COMMAND

Calling that light forth

Through the wood  
And at a step  
And at that stance  
fired

Finger- pressed steel  
fired  
To the veins  
And at that still-moment  
light.

## RETREAT

You wouldn't have known where  
They were going, backwards,  
retreating

If it weren't for the sun in the  
westwards sinking to  
That stillness those flags  
became

And their faces cleansed with  
dust, protective now –

They didn't know either and  
Weren't going to ask,  
But simply came as they had  
gone

One after the other,  
Keeping time to what no one  
knew,  
A music perhaps, long since  
forgotten

They were retreating  
As they had from the first,  
But from what they weren't  
certain

Nor why, nor when, nor where

But simply came  
As they had gone, one be-  
hind the other,  
Keeping time to what no-  
body knew.

[II]

DOOR PARTLY OPENED

You let the light  
    in,  
Angled-off,

Your hands closed as a  
Shadow hanging there

You let the light  
    in  
As far as your face  
    could allow.

ON THE 7th

It was on the 7th  
    that she died,

I remember dates exactly  
    since then,

She closed her readied  
    eyes  
To the dead of that  
    winter

As shades  
That should be drawn a-  
    round her yet,  
Tentatively uncertain,  
Broken at the sides

A circle we chose to  
    frame her there.

## A BOUQUET OF FLOWERS

The fundamental truth,  
perhaps, was,  
That you held strange thoughts  
in your hands,

But the flesh,  
Your own, was warm, the  
blood receded

Though these fingers would  
urge their way  
Prompted by an unfamiliar  
sense  
To the flower itself –

But they were many,  
That light as if blown by  
The suddenness of your  
thoughts.

## WAITING

I've sat by the fire now  
These six days and  
Waited – I'm not sure

For what; once  
(somehow distinct) I  
Thought I knew

As leaves blew in the  
Wind and fires  
Raised their flame;

But I've forgotten now  
What it was these  
Six days I've waited

for, just sitting and  
Thinking about  
nothing.

## A MAN AT HIS DESK

It was night,  
The dark drawn down and  
He grew accustomed to  
    himself

In contrast: less dark,  
    less severe;

The cylinder lamp,  
Its ample string,  
Desk of grained/surfaced  
    wood

Became understood as  
    objects

As he to himself,  
Of which he was pleased  
    and certain.

## PERSPECTIVES

It was too finished to  
    be true,  
That fibre set to a  
    single mark  
You had been told to  
    believe –

Truth behaves less justly,  
To the eye at least

Perspectives change  
But for the time and to  
    the moment

It was too finished to  
    be true,  
But too fine to be left  
    concealed.

## A GLASS BOWL

Spoken of  
glass, words re-  
flect the

Ordered sound,  
Placed on the ped-  
estal,

Turned round,  
That form appreciably  
diminished –

touch is less than  
sound.

## SOFA

When you sat there,  
Upon that silken cover at  
the farthest edge,

Your dress drawn out as  
Long as could be re-  
membered,

Consciously concealing that  
shyness of yours,

We came to think of it  
as old  
And softer than it  
really was;

But now that you've gone,  
We've redressed the  
surface  
To provide another ap-  
pearance

And we don't think of  
it at all,  
Though it sometimes  
watches us.

## STILL

Night has  
Closed its curtains,  
There's a still in the  
House that won't stay  
In place. I wake.

I cross the  
Sounds of my steps,  
But the silence re-  
turns.

I open the window  
The moon can be seen,  
Almost touched if  
I think it clear enough

The dark becomes ap-  
parent but the  
Still is, is still  
Even in this light

I close myself behind,  
Recross the steps to  
My room, open and  
Close the door,  
Consider myself in sheets  
and sleep

But the night is wake  
And the moon a hollow  
disc  
The windows keep looking  
out  
As silence thinks.

## STATUE IN THE PARK

This visible sun compoun-  
ded of silence  
As thought placed and pro-  
vided for  
(obscured in stone)

He found himself prophe-  
tically alone  
(the man and the mir-  
ror)  
Suspended in time upon  
its horse.

## ON THE HANGER

You left your clothes, out  
on the hanger

Prim and clean  
Pretty and closed

I could have thought of  
you without them

If you hadn't posed  
quite that way  
for me

At least in the morning light  
Hanging yourself out  
Without apparent  
Cause so pretty and clean

And each of those but-  
tons clipped to  
my fingers.

## OLD ROMAN ROAD

There were a few markings left.  
They ran through a field  
Planted with corn and  
Into a wood at the other side,  
Out. They didn't disturb.  
They kept to their own  
Ways as if they were useful  
Still and a drawn carriage  
Would soon come running  
Through. The corn concealed their  
Wants and the wood closed  
Them in from observation,  
But they remained  
As an organ with discontinued  
Use, directing traffic in  
two directions.

## EXACTLY AS IT WAS

There was no need to look  
again, everything could  
Be remembered now,  
Exactly as it was, where

You stood,  
A bit off to the right,  
Uncertain of yourself,

The table set,  
Reflected glass that wan-  
ted warmth,

And we should ease our-  
selves  
(somewhat further per-  
haps) into those  
Cushions and smile, almost  
out loud;

And when we talked  
That room seemed further a-  
way,

All that light and glass  
That reflected nothing  
of ourselves.

## A BOWL OF FRUIT

It was placed  
Not quite to the centre,  
It was alive as colour  
To be turned but  
Partly upwards  
Concealing shapes and the  
shadows below.

It was a thing to be  
touched,  
Accentuated from as  
Fingers creased to that  
glass of surface.

It was placed  
Not quite to the centre  
To be perfect, to focus ones  
Thoughts, but alive as  
Colour extended slightly,  
upwards.

## AUTUMN ROOM

*for my mother*

We are used to the  
Flowers there,  
That room composed to the  
Shades of your hair  
And colours your dress  
Made there as you  
Moved about, con-  
sidering, preparing;  
Used too to the lights  
on the wall,  
Leaves falling,  
That lateness of scent  
When smoke tells  
And winds relent their force . . .  
That room as silent still as  
Flowers faded there.



