MOVING FAST BETWEEN THE LINES

(three fragments after Zukofsky and I.M.)

I.

Truth's way all one where it begins
in time through space the carbon laid down first
and only later feet on turf that first sea
dried up a desert of salt in one huge valley
buried now three hundred feet below
the muddy bed from then till now a new beginning
new after aeons awaiting perfection the slow
blink of a spatial eye 'not one death but many
not accumulation but change' a progress
of ancestors plate movement endless seasons
to scale the now our moment in time
today three birches outlined against the shore
freighters lined up in the long straight
under wide grey clouds these spores remain
behind sweet wrappers our plastic and our madness
black logs on the grey sandy beach a life
returning to itself inside a problem stated
a picture of the end and on the outside
only a sole thrush voicing its freedom
the sky grey above the freighters painted
on the horizon these are what is given
what is ourselves blind but not from darkness
but moving within this time a peace
waiting for its end a shadow lifted
the last threatened note of speech.
II.

Inside this little world nothing but breath
'Yes, and then ?' he asked but the image
not a description is what's needed
song against speech light against dark
one thing put against another because
looking backward everything not the aim
is worthless so much dross except as respite
what can be said is said again faces recalled
a lens focussing in time through space
the sound of music through the open window
'Cape Cod girls they have no combs, Heave away, heave...' a world in the space between
each moment of these moments orchids storm
temples gardens in growing dusk 'a vinarydist' he said nurture the words say what one can
too little solace here to find out all 'the Truth'
giving up too little of ourselves like graves
lashed at by time and seasons and outlasting
all beneath their mounds desiring mastery
over things but finding none within ourselves
the things possess us wait for us 'I'd like to...'
he said the sentence dying out like all the others
words falling step by step into a darkness
the shadow of a shadow a moment passing
and re-passing waiting out the night.
Thought is now the time of coral a thickening of light over water a picture not a selective description
the land green and expectant open the winged wild geese who know the pathway cold current south warmer north once nothing here but cells forming and re-forming in elemental tissue only a momentary ephiphany stones piled high upon stones two hundred paces round the cairn each one a warrior's lament marking this particular turf for whoever has eyes to see it a heap of stones will last forever not the flesh on the fragile bone two sacks full dug from the soil on this spot seven bodies in a single compartment cist grave two in a double compartment cist one unprotected with a pillar stone raised four feet high above it the maker's 3,500 year old thumb print fixed in the fired clay of the pot sherd we have walked a long way through the darkness a peopled earth moving and changing moving and changing in each perishable season bones laid down in a time before this time those ancestors without number one commodity replacing another mist autumn green nights tides and sunsets the pull of the moon it could be the last day of life past the dead and past the living and at last this is where we stand shaped by knowledge finite as breath
we go the way of birds animals weather
a child learns on the blank pages
an old man remembers nothing
the palimpsest continually restructured
a single breath upon the vastness
growing out again into the world.  

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IAN ROBINSON

Notes

1) "I think I may move faster between the words than most people. And I never want to describe. I want to present things quickly by scenario or story. The image is not a description. You put one thing against another and the poem is its own little world again." (L.Z. to Edward Lucie-Smith)

2) "I wanted it clear that there is a world outside, and if you want to be a poet you exist in it, and make your own little world which eventually goes back into the greater one." (L.Z. to Edward Lucie-Smith)

3) "An Objective: (Optics) - The lens bringing the rays from an object to a focus. That which is aimed at. (Use extended to poetry) - Desire for what is objectively perfect, inextricably the direction of historic and contemporary particulars." (from 'An Objective' in Prepositions, Rapp and Carroll, London 1967)

5) from Ferdinand, Cape Editions, London 1968.
7) Charles Olson
IMAGINATION & DREAM

PREFACE

The city sleeps. One by one
We waken into its dreams
Beginning to dream of ourselves, like children
Throwing stones at a statue.

The word is scrawled on a coffin
Or over a mirror: I saw.
The sleeping town
Is verbal tangles. Although not

Obsequious, not like us, these eat
And breathe and sleep and are without hope
Till going from us
One by one they waken into their dream.

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In a sunlit corner of that city
Where I was and was not
I came on someone fallen quiet
Who was myself and not myself.

Lifting his eyes he addressed me.
'I am beside you now
Riding the breath but not staying.
What you need is this distraction.'

When I wake the mirror clouds
With bloom of my exile breath.
I trace my name
And smile into my absence.
I asked if they return in dream.
In dreams they do return
But today
There are so many colours in the wind.

Waking as day breaks in a stone city
To hear the birds all sing away like mad
And so go back there: the lock sticks.
Listen for the faintest footfall.

Raising the shroud of waters
He comes back as I cross the bridge.
So he begins:
'This silver pillar - it accepts my coin.

I've found the charm to let me out and back
Through a gap high in that stained building.'
On the river's far side sun moistened
A distant facade for a moment.

A light wind pleats the tide
Where he crosses into the city.
'I am the horn of change, I fade.
Like sunlight from a statue.'
There are men in uniforms
That are hard to identify. There is
A smell of singed meat and petrol
Over the funeral carpet of snow.

Light’s dragged in through an opening door.
He waits by that suspended entrance.
Corpses of chickens, stained red,
Turn in the breeze that is

Lifting him up beside them.
He says, 'And my imagination
Is not what I'd imagined -
Between the two I fell.'

Whisky and water are the taste of evening.
A live coal rests on lips too tired to explain.
'The hairs along her arm', he said
And the fire-bird fell from its perch.

The truth's revealed, too early to explain
By taking your hand away like that -
All that is humanly possible
Here in the old world is waiting for the new.
No longer able to transcribe each blaze
You drag the disgraced body homewards
Where daybreak dissolves arrivals into air.
'Once we were awake and now we sing.'

You must dream it all through her mirror.
In her nightdress she arranges herself
In its glass. There is birdsong.
Her book throbs with light in its pages.

Puzzling end-stopped lives.
Some trees inflamed with early sunlight
Hold steady in the painting
Where puce rocks burn by the water.

Out in the street there was something
That lifted away, and the afternoon
Was spent pacing its vacancy -
Pavement, pedestrian pausing, a tune.

'Should the dreamer dream he is dead and not wake.
Should he wake and die with that word on his lips.'
The fourteen geese like worlds are floating
On islands of imagination.

JOHN WELCH