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Passage through the 21<sup>st</sup> of the centuries (as we count these things)

I.

This century is weary, it's already too long,  
seen too much for Innocence's gaze.

We stare out the train window, as the landscapes rush past,  
haunted by the ruins of what we'd hoped would last,  
skeletal tatters, trailing in the wind,

    Ravens mocking over picked bones,  
I see their black uniforms on the blood-peach horizon,  
their geopolitical psychologies hunting cranial bounties,  
I gape into the refuge of your tear-stained eyes,  
    forehead to forehead, for maybe the final time,  
suspecting the destination of this outbound Zug,<sup>1</sup>  
    fearful of the stench-choked terminus that awaits.

And then we arrive, and then we dispose  
    with baggage from our former land stuffed with defeat.  
Paraded before the Iron Cross,<sup>2</sup> wolves ready to rampage,  
each to each contesting to build  
    a fortress from the rage.

    "*Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate*"<sup>3</sup>  
glowers from the lintel over the iron gate,  
the rusted letters glaring with sinister finality;

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<sup>1</sup> German for "train"

<sup>2</sup> The Iron Cross is a German military symbol that originated in the Middle Ages with the Teutonic Knights, a Catholic military order defending Jerusalem during the bloody Crusades, followed by its use in the kingdom of Prussia in 1813, the German Empire (1871–1918) and Nazi Germany (1933–1945).

<sup>3</sup> "*Abandon all hope, ye who enter*" – inscription above the Gates of Hell in Dante's *Inferno*, Canto III, c. 1320.

tragedy of humanity stripped naked on the stage, inside the walls  
we descend into the darkness of the age,  
stumbling down the throated tunnel of stairs,  
the only way to rescue the stolen Chalice still captive,  
its Golden Promise beckoning in the gloom,  
glowing amidst the whispers from the deepest origins;  
inside, it reeks of a tomb,  
we breath the humid soot, sticky like crematory ash,  
grope across the Anthropocene floor,  
inching toward the confused core,  
we pray that courage lights our way  
toward the wisdom of dreams once promised:  
by the cartas and the compacts, and  
the declarations and constitutions,  
by the covenants and concordats  
chiseled into stone tablets  
now shattered into shards, remains of Civilization,  
the journey now collapsed into this perilous descent:  
Hold me now,  
for the darkness wants me, I do not want it,  
I feel you behind, your worry, panic,  
crisis of conviction, I nearly lose my prayer  
saved only by the touch of your soft downy hair.

## II.

Inside the fortress stand the stiff-armed Salutes  
as we approach the gauntlet of their cold, dead stares.  
Their young cadet faces occupied by their Fatherland wound,  
shoulders squared, at-attention, in their death-fear compliance.  
Masks atop masks in the shadows of the tiki torches  
hide the grim faces of history's betrayal:  
now their ticking blood-pulse of biology  
yearns for the hormonal rush of populist roar,  
now their tribal DNA beheads  
the exposed neck of the trembling Law,  
Trumps the forged consensus with jackboot fervor,  
deeper, darker, mass graves of the era,  
all are finally equal when the wolves arrive  
gnawing on the national prize, tearing flesh from the bone,  
unleashed by the invisible hand of the free market auctioneer,  
exhumed bodies praying for a fate far from decided,  
my soul gropes for prayer in this moment divided  
into a purgatory buried under charnel house skulls,  
while the uniformed Ravens strut over the Tombs of Heroes,  
their Blood of conquest planting a flag in captured Soil.<sup>4</sup>

I reach for your hand and the warmth that remains:  
*"I am so sorry for this, my love"*

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<sup>4</sup> "Blut und Boden," Blood and Soil, was a Nazi slogan expressing the nationalist ideal of racial purity united with geographic dominance. US President Donald Trump has invoked similar language in a speech, saying immigrants are "poisoning the blood" of America.

*"I did my best with what I got"*

I think but I don't dare say – what good would it do?

Under the guardians' glare

it would not delay our descent even one more sunrise.

So I grasp your hand, trembling with its fragile grace,

we silently renew our vows to the stars that cannot see us now,

our personal package of fallacies pulse

searching for our dignity amid faltering courage,

aching limbs follow with hollow embrace,

uncertain where this winding passage will end—

*"Me first...?"*

*"Can't we go together?"*

The way too narrow for lovers abreast,  
downward we go, single-file, into the nostrils of fear.

Ninth Circle darkest reeks of bitter fruit and hanging flesh,<sup>5</sup>

no sign of the Chalice within the cavernous depths,

twisting shadows fall to their knees,

against gaps of shorter breath, extincted memories,

inside the black I see x-rayed like nerves on a screen,

the pogroms and parades, the burning embers of libraries

the jailing of knowledge and expertise—

*which century is this?—*

flames gutting the Reichstag, telephones tapped

(1933 AD)

Sachsenhausen savagery championing alternative facts,<sup>6</sup>

(1938 AD)

Tulsa whip across the back, shredding flesh of my flesh,<sup>7</sup>

(1921 AD)

Confederate nazi statues hagiography of death,

(1865 AD)

Genocidal cotton coffee sugar cane tea

Enlightened Jefferson's mud children, half-bred to chained seed,<sup>8</sup>

(1797 AD)

the machines of terror we created in our desires to do good,

have left us lost leaders, with no fear to lead.

Paintings on a cave wall, nanoseconds unbowed

(40,000 BC)

trickles of water the only hush sound,

come the return of primal genetic codes

come the tracks of encoding on a cuneiform,

(3200 BC)

the first blood marker tracing the hominid lines

Australopithecines marching forward in time,

(3,000,000 BC)

First origins seeded, the end of the beginning,

crossroads of Neander half-breeds, footprints intersecting.<sup>9</sup>

(45,000 BC)

Millennia crawl past the first Sumerian sounds,<sup>10</sup>

(5400 BC)

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<sup>5</sup> Dante's *Inferno* (c. 1320) recounts the story of the poet's journey through the underworld, which has nine Circles of Hell that are full of sinners and the condemned, some of them famous figures of the early 14th century; bitter fruit + hanging flesh = Strange Fruit, Ms. Holiday.

<sup>6</sup> Sachsenhausen was the first Nazi concentration camp, which imprisoned political opponents and dissidents. It was a forced labor camp located close to Berlin, outfitted with a gas chamber and a medical experimentation area. Prisoners were treated harshly, starved and murdered.

<sup>7</sup> Racial massacre in Tulsa, Oklahoma, June 1921, in which white mobs attacked black residents, murdering hundreds of black men, women and children and burning the black neighborhood and businesses of Greenwood to the ground.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Jefferson fathered six children by his slave-mistress Sally Hemings; he kept his seven-eighths (octoroon) white children as slaves...because they were one-eighth black.

<sup>9</sup> Neanderthals lived alongside early modern humans (Sapiens) at least 50,000 years ago, and even cross-bred -- some modern day humans have inherited around 2% Neanderthal DNA. Yet Sapiens eventually out-competed and destroyed Neanderthals.

Golden Hat in a bronze age, the first Levant row plowed,<sup>11</sup>  
Come the coins of Iron Aged law<sup>12</sup>  
Come the crossing of the Caesar's fell legions,  
the horrors encoded within us, dynasty's retribution  
the invaded turned invaders, goose-stepping to vindication,  
sword the first unwritten word, the first act unfaithful,  
sets the drama which replays endlessly upon the stage:

(1000 BC) (9500 BC)  
(1200 BC)  
(49 BC)

*"Quick, take my hand, my love, reach while you can"*

*"I can't see it in the gloom, I-- "*

*"Reach out further...quick, grab!"*

*"I'm trying, I'm reaching, I'm..."*

tumbling, tumbling into the merciless Circle of Hell,  
serpent voices echoing in the deeper, darker still,  
you plummet out-of-sight, forsaken by the Super-man  
into the blackness inside the blackness inside the char.

Alone without respite, I grope  
for the trails of your vanished warmth,  
among the stalactites hanging like teeth,  
missing your fragrant hair against my cheek,  
I mourn for what I've lost, for all I had under-valued,  
frozen alone in the gloom, falling down,  
against the sorrow of nothingness, from lost to unfound.

God (*what is God*) retreats before the hooded torches,  
competing across (*what is God*) the carnivorous centuries  
the pyrite gaze (*what is God*) of civilization wavers,  
fool's gold sparkles falsely, written into lore,  
my mumbled prayers echo feebly  
against the cold cavern floor.

Dimly lit passages wind through the catacombed netherworld  
revealing buried sorrows refusing to be forgotten,  
mass holes in the mineral earth, filled with the fallen,  
the barbaric score in my ears, signaling impending defeat,  
dead ends of false promises hiding behind phantoms of malice,  
broken paths and blind offshoots, none leading to the Chalice.

Overwhelmed by the millennium's verdict, I pause again and pray:

*"Please protect me from betrayals in the dark, sneaking up from behind,  
from spotted scavengers preying*

*on those who fall behind,"*

I witness the End of History in the Zionist seizing of the land,  
in the annexation of bones  
the melting of gold teeth  
internment of the truth

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<sup>10</sup> Sumer is the earliest known civilization in the ancient region of southern Mesopotamia (now southern Iraq) where human's first cities originated, such as Uruk around 3800 BC.

<sup>11</sup> The Golden Hat is an artifact from 1000 BC (Bronze Age, Germany), shaped like a 29 inch tall cone made of thin gold leaf. The ceremonial hat is covered in bands of symbols that represent lunar/solar calendars, and mark religiously important events such as the solstices. Ancient humans were capable of sophisticated symbology and consciousness.

<sup>12</sup> The Iron Age (1200 to 600 BC) was preceded by the Bronze Age (3300 to 1200 BC), so named because of the metals used for increasingly refined tool and artifact production.

the swinging of the noose  
in the bombed out homes and famished children,  
shortages shouting for murderous attention,  
plotting to snatch the other's plot  
while the orphaned children await the clarity  
of the still water to return;  
and for their rebellion to push up through the parched soil of austerity,  
with the vigor of Spring they wait and they wait  
straining to understand:  
that sideward glimpse of themselves in the mirror,  
the lesson of the aged founders, grown toothless and blind,  
captives on a one-way outbound train  
with limited rations and then and then,  
Babel-ing<sup>13</sup> like beggars, hoarding what we can,  
artifacts stolen from the ragged wasteland,  
trial-and-error feast for evolution's gamblers,  
torchlight glinting off the swords of the coup,  
when it rains Salt it pours down a Blood river,  
I reach for your memory, for something that's true.

### III.

*But wait: in the darkest hollow of this winding pass,  
when the air is thick and my way is lost, and  
hope itself is on its last gasp:*

Suddenly -- *a pinprick of daylight* -- like a distant North Star  
the smallest joy, the sweetest inspiration,  
accompanied by the faintest rush sound --  
Is that you -- *whistling softly – to yourself? – in the dark?*

I feel your defiance trying to crawl forth and flower,  
I see your face emerge from behind a veil of hair,  
your bruised and dazed spirit reaching for my face to touch,  
I recognize your tune, we heard it that time on the coast,  
the salty sun so forthright over the water lapping so sweetly,  
we ate *moules marinières*  
from the sea-sweet steamed in garlicky lemon broth  
with a tall frothy beer that we split to save the Euros;  
Yes, the Euro must be saved.  
And then you smiled, your invisibly warm smile,  
it lit my constellation in that purple bruised firmament,  
by some miraculous spark that remembrance lifted from the grave,  
reappearing to inspire our search for the Chalice,  
in this “Father why have you forsaken us” age.<sup>14</sup>

Yes, my sweet, in your return, finally we understand –  
we who have lived most innocent lives,

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<sup>13</sup> The Tower of Babel was the mythical cursed place where a jealous God, threatened by humanity's growing governance, scattered the humans into tribes speaking different languages incomprehensible to each other, sowing the tragedy of human disunity.

<sup>14</sup> Jesus of Nazareth, hanging bloody on the cross of crucifixion, cried out, “Father why have you forsaken me?”

all equal in guilt before their eyes,  
    become relentless spies uncloaking democracy's tattoo,  
we shall be the stone inside their shoe;  
we who have passed through the hellish gate,  
    dancing to entertain Death's dark entry,  
stranger now to find ourselves on the other side  
    hatching love in rebellion  
    against the triumph of the Deceiver.  
One day evil will bow to mountains of glory,  
    but we can't wait for that now,  
years later they will unearth the bones of the massacre,  
    the fossil record of this wrong turn which  
    at the time seemed so right.  
Right enough that they could slay the endless hope of summer,  
gathered 'round the campfire with their newest shiny technology:  
    atom pixel drone missile  
    quantum virtual AI digital  
the hard, hard embrace before the dawn battle  
shivers of the night-before-death rattle,  
the pagan past fades into the robotic future  
    as the techno death-denial collapses into make-believe mastery,  
as the Invisible Hand attaches to a cold cyborg arm  
    and algorithms count down to the End of the End;  
we have become a People of flesh-and-blood hardware  
    commanded by the software,  
human dignity sacrificed on the altar of techno efficiency,  
private data is scraped from our bribed possession  
    reducing us to 1's and 0's, 0's and 1's,  
a dollar sign slapped on our sacred lives with  
the future paved over by the present monetized,  
    nano-danced Reality gets repackaged and sold,  
faked and zucked in a new civil war  
    waged over the Chalice with electrons and bytes,  
    clay of Si stretched over Cu wires,  
chainreacting all over the weaponized Volksgeist.<sup>15</sup>

    If only we could turn love on with a switch  
    if only we could turn on courage with a switch  
and turn off the terror of our imminent fall into the abyss,  
because that would make it a matter of  
    who holds the switch  
    instead of our internal eternal deoxyribosed flaws;  
if only we could recuse our biological clumsiness from,  
if only we could hope to find an armistice serene from,  
    a fate worse than fatal than the Widow Liebermann's rescue from.<sup>16</sup>  
Our salvation awaits its fate inside  
    the tolling of the Western gate,

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<sup>15</sup> *Volksgeist* is a German term referring to a spirit ("geist") of a people ("Volk"), i.e. a "national spirit" or "national character."

<sup>16</sup> Martha Liebermann, the 85-year old widow of Germany's famous Jewish painter Max Liebermann, was to be deported by the Nazis to a concentration camp in 1943. Instead, she committed suicide in her Berlin home.

if the right fork of the fork we choose,  
    if the right fork of the fork of the fork in the dark,  
too far back to begin at the original begin  
    we would get lost uncertain upon our return,  
Hell, we could end up nailed to a cross, suffering for this century's burden—  
    Yes, that *does* happen you know, haven't you heard?

One day even the mountains will crumble, but we can't wait for that here.  
I know in the end, something's gonna get me,  
    but with you by my side I don't fear.  
So it's forward, my love, without the Seven Sisters to guide,<sup>17</sup>  
    like a Wandering Buddha, hugging the candle close,  
holding fast to the Truth, in the dark like a firefly,  
become a light unto thyself, say the Blessed Ones.

But how will the Word find us, you ask? What manner of Law will bind us?  
What CGI superhero will save us?  
Answer: look to the Promise.

So sometimes it's better to say nothing in the dark,  
    since you can't see what hears you,  
    or at most write it down  
since that's what Hammurabi<sup>18</sup> did, and the  
rest, as they say, is: look to the Chalice

So the Christ-man is in fact the conundrum,  
a big heroic 'C' splashed across his lance-gored breast,  
forty days in the desert just to make you thirsty, and  
obey voices whispering dreams of grandiosity.  
    No one human can follow in those Footsteps,  
    without a close God we huddle in huts of mortal relief,  
Love it turns out is battered  
    by our insatiable desire for divinity,  
awaiting the fanged demon's  
    seduction of our grief.

So forward, my sweet, forward  
do not be afraid,  
let us not shrink from the only path we had,  
the Chalice still ahead, our fate cannot be stolen,  
through the dark, whistling,  
sad, I know, sad.

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<sup>17</sup> Seven Sisters refers to the ancient Greek story of Pleiades, the seven daughters of Atlas, who all killed themselves out of grief over the death of their other sisters, the Hyades. They then formed the constellation Pleiades, the most sparkling jewel in the night sky, reminding humans of their sorrow.

<sup>18</sup> Hammurabi's Code is one of the earliest written legal codes in human history, a precursor to modern society. It was issued in 1754 BC by the king Hammurabi of the Babylonian empire, which ruled central Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq) from c.1894 to 1595 BC.

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