

YVES BONNEFOY

---

## From *The Great Snowfall*

First snowfall, early this morning . . .

First snowfall, early this morning. Ochre, green  
Huddle under the trees.

The second, towards noon. Nothing  
Is left of color  
But needles from the pines  
Falling sometimes thicker than snow.

Then, towards evening,  
The light stands poised.  
Shadows and dreams balance on the scales.

A faint wind  
Writes in the snow a word beyond the world.

## The Mirror

Yesterday still  
The clouds sailed across  
The dark end of the room,  
But now the mirror's empty.

Snow  
Disentangles from the sky.

## The Plough

Five o'clock. More snow. I hear some voices  
At the edge of the world.

A plough  
Like a three-quarter moon  
Shines, but then is covered  
By the darkness of a fold of snow.

And from now on that child  
Has the house all to himself. He goes  
From one window to another. He presses  
His fingers against the misted pane. He sees  
Drops forming where his fingertips stop  
Pushing the condensation towards the sky that falls.

## Spot of Water

To the snowflake  
Poised on my hand, I would  
Grant eternity,  
Understanding my life, my warmth,  
My past, these current days,  
As simply a moment, this one, limitless.

And yet it melts: already  
Only a spot of water, strayed  
Into the mist of bodies moving through the snow.

## Our Lady of Mercy

Everything, now,  
Gathers in warmth  
Under your light mantle,  
Barely more than mist and knotted lace,  
Lady of Mercy of the snow.

Against your body  
Creatures and things,  
Naked, lie fast asleep, and your fingers  
With their clarity veil those closed eyelids.

## The Garden

It's snowing.  
Beneath the snowflakes the gate  
Opens at last on the garden  
Of more than the world.

I enter. But my scarf  
Catches on rusty iron,  
And it tears apart in me  
The fabric of the dream.

## The Apples

And what should one think  
Of these yellow apples? Yesterday,  
They surprised us, waiting that way, naked  
After the fall of leaves.

Today they charm,  
So modestly their shoulders  
Are traced  
By a scallop of snow.

## Just before dawn . . .

Just before dawn,  
I look out past the windowpane, and understand  
That it's stopped snowing. A small blue pool  
Spreads out, shining a bit, in front of the trees,  
From one wall to the other of night's enclosure.

I step outside.  
Cautiously, I descend the wooden staircase  
Whose steps are heaped level with fresh snow.  
The cold surrounds and sinks into my ankles,

It seems as if cold clarifies the spirit,  
Which better appreciates the muteness of things.

Is he still sleeping  
In the tangle of the woodpile  
Stacked up under the window,  
The chipmunk, our plain neighbor,  
Or is he already up, scrabbling in the cold?  
I see some tiny prints before the door.

## The Torches

Snow,  
Which has ceased to give, which is no longer  
The one who comes, but rather waits  
In silence, having brought what none  
Has yet taken up, and still, all night long,  
We glimpsed, through misted windows,  
Even sometimes streaming,  
Your glittering across the great expanse.

Snow, our path,  
Still immaculate, where we may go to take up  
Under the branches, curved and as if waiting,  
These torches—what exists—which one by one  
Appeared, and burned, but seemed to fade  
Like the eyes of desire when it gains  
The gifts it dreamed of (for it often happens  
When all could be perhaps resolved, that the reflection  
Of the sky, in mirrors, dims  
In us, from room to room), o snow, touch

The torches again, rekindle them  
In the chill of this dawn; and by the example  
Of your flakes that already assail them  
With their lightheartedness, clearer fire,  
In spite of so much fever in our speech

And so much homesickness in memory,  
Our words no longer seek out other words, but live nearby  
Passing beside them, simply,  
And if one grazes another, and if they merge,  
It will still be only your light,  
Our transience that disperses,  
Writing that vanishes, its task done.

(And a snowflake lingers, our eyes follow it,  
We'd like to watch it forever,  
Another poises on the open hand.

And another, slower and as if lost, recedes  
And whirls, then returns. And isn't that to say  
One word, then another word, to be invented,  
Might redeem the world? Yet we don't know  
If we understand this word, or dream it.)

## Hopkins Forest

I went outside  
To draw some water from the well, beside the trees,  
And I was in the presence of another sky.  
Gone the constellations of a moment before,  
Three quarters of the firmament were empty,  
The deepest blackness alone held sway there,  
Except that on the left, above the horizon,  
Mixed in the crown of trees,  
There was a mass of glowing stars  
Like a brazier, from which a coil of smoke arose.

I went inside  
And re-opened the book upon the table.  
Page after page,  
There were only indecipherable signs,  
Aggregates of forms that made no sense

Despite their vague recurrence,  
 And underneath a whiteness, an abyss  
 As if what we call spirit were falling there,  
 Quietly, like snow.  
 Nonetheless, I turned the pages.

Many years before,  
 On a train at dawn  
 Between Princeton Junction and Newark,  
 That's to say, for me two accidental places,  
 Where two arrows from nowhere happened to fall,  
 The travelers were reading, silent  
 In the snowfall that swept the gray train windows.  
 And suddenly,  
 In an open newspaper one seat over,  
 A big photograph of Baudelaire,  
 A whole page  
 As if the sky emptied at the end of the world  
 In order to consent to the disorder of words.

I compared this dream and this memory  
 As I walked, at first throughout an autumn  
 In woods where soon enough the snow  
 Triumphed, in many of those signs  
 That we receive, contradictory,  
 From a world devastated by language.  
 The conflict of two principles resolved,  
 It seemed to me, two lights commingled.  
 The edges of the wound were closed.  
 The white mass of the cold fell in great heaps  
 Over color, except for a distant roof, a painted  
 Plank, set up against a fence,  
 There was still color, as mysterious  
 As he who might have walked out of the tomb and, laughing,  
 Said, "No, don't touch me," to the world.

Truly, I owe much to Hopkins Forest.  
 I keep it on my horizon, along the line  
 That abandons the visible for the invisible  
 Where the blue of distance shimmers.

I hear it, across other sounds, and even sometimes,  
In summer, pushing my feet through dead leaves from  
Other years, pale in the shadow  
Of oak trees crowded together among the stones,  
I stop, I think the ground has opened  
Onto the infinite, that these leaves fall here  
Unhurrying, or indeed mount, for high and low  
No longer exist, nor sound, except for the soft  
Whispering of snowflakes, that soon  
Multiply, draw near together, knot.  
—And I see then that other sky,  
I enter for a moment into the great snow.

*[Translated from the French by Emily Grosholz]*