

Vona Groarke



Gallery Books

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René Descartes' La Géométrie (1637) introduces the use of the first letters of the alphabet to signify known quantities and the use of the last letters to signify unknown quantities.
— Florian Cajori, *A History of Mathematical Notations*
(Chicago, 1928)

A Pocket Mirror

The day the first snowdrop in my winter garden insists
in its own insistent way that the promise I buried
last September would finally come to light, I wake
to the hoops the woodpigeon puts himself through.
Either that or to bells, bells on a loop, going over
and over the selfsame crucial news as yesterday.

What is it I keep this tentative record of? For what reason
do I step along high words with immeasurable care
or list the fanciful logic of one moment, then another?
Is it to do with allegiance, perhaps, with how a snowdrop
keeps faith with the world, or a pocket mirror,
matt on one side, is true to life on the other?

The White Year

I am told that memory can't afford
to care less about what it brings to light
just as I'm told the table does not

occupy itself with cleanliness
nor the made bed with desire,
but it is difficult to believe.

I do not imagine it simple to strip
from any given afternoon
the intentions of the day.

Not when a contingent darkness
announces itself at the door
like an ordinary to-do

and not when, in the winter garden,
the beautifully managed trees
toy with shadows of themselves.

A skim of plausible survival
settles on what I do while, in the museum
of the everyday, no dust whatsoever

is to be found on the bedside chair,
unopened perfume,
impeccable gold quilt.

It may well be possible to separate
into a fiction of forgetfulness,
the accomplished house,

but I don't believe in it either.
There is before and after,
surely, and there is discretion

to be accounted for, and grief,
night after night, city after city,
word after functional word.

This is whatever time I have.
My whole body has to find a way
to be in possession of itself

like a shop selling only white things
or the way two bridges on the same river
will have knowledge of each other.

X

straight lines only
no curve or arc
to double back

no circle in sight
from which silence might slip
like the strap of a dress
off a shoulder
one summer field

a shape
signifying nothing
but a puzzle of itself
made in the box of morning
untangled over years

from each and every corner of which
is visible white space
as if here and now
were equal lines
fused the way lovers are fused
for as long as it takes
to pass through the eye of love
to recover, to egress.

Brushstroked husband
and brushstroked wife
finding in skewered union
a defence of loneliness

sectioning in four equal parts,
as if it were a family,
that safe place,

once being
full of itself,
now cornered, quartered, hinged

on a mark that closes
on common darkness
the heart of which is silence, certainly,
a need expressed in what distends
beyond what will not be
acknowledged,
what will not be
allowed

the length and breadth of days
that bleed into other days
on which occurs
an ardent solitude —

windows opening and closing the one sky.

I may begin to fold myself
along four even lines
into the centre of those days

to learn how a life may come to rest
on the absence of a life

as crosshairs train on a blank page

as arrows turn in on themselves

as the blades of a bedroom ceiling fan
come to

a perfectly obvious stop.