



George Szirtes
*from **The Yellow Room***

1

Late father, you mystery, father of diminishing returns,
how do you weigh in the scale now, by what measure should I
examine you, when you are literally dust, which is nothing
but dust, not a meaning that might any day cohere
into the complex singularity that was addressed by name.

There should, I feel, be something solid about a name,
something gathered and whole, something that brought us here
as if by appointment, that had not arisen out of nothing
but out of name itself, the point at which you become an I
and to which the whole that is gathered eventually returns.

2

Once there was a room which was, like any other room,
fit to be born into or to stare out from, a room half-darkness,
half unquenchable light. Someone might lie down in it
or sit at a table, engaged in the act of doing and thinking,
inhabiting the room into which you as a self were born.

Let me imagine that moment, the instant of being born,
carried into a world that is not particularly thinking
of your particular moment, unconcerned with your place in it.
Time starts collapsing: it vanishes into the musty darkness
it waits in and fills up every secret corner of the room.

3

Chairs and sofas and pictures and sideboards and mornings. The door
is open. The noise of the morning is wheels, bells and cries.

The street is the one street. The house, one among many
closed universes, rushes backwards in time as you thrust forward.

You have arrived just in time, just as time was closing,

closing and collapsing, just as the door itself was closing.

There never will be another opportunity to look forward
to this. It is at this point that you become the many.

I am trying to distinguish your cry from all those other cries,
but all there is is the door, which is by now a closed door.

4

I understand nothing.

I have followed no trail.

When leaves move against the wall, it is no language.

When sun strikes the leaves it is an exclamation without sound.

I overhear it is all incompleteness, the tongues of leaves the open mouths of flowers.

Things happen. They stand in rows. They form orderly queues. They are hungry.

I cannot begin to unpick the clues without language. I need to understand
what a clue is what language is.

These lines are blown across the page as in a gust.

I must order them.

5

These stanzas are closed rooms closing on themselves
with stiff internal doors. I enter, stirring a draught,
raising the corners of newspapers, and the reader
rises, or raises an eyebrow, briefly to register
an entrance, then returns to the fascinating article

he was reading, himself becoming an article
in the space provided, and I am not sure how to register
his presence, or yours, my patient, magnificent reader.
The doors of our meeting seem to permit of a draught.
Closed doors must have been opening themselves.

6

Listen, do you hear the sea? Neither can I,
except in this narrow gap as it runs under the door.
The prom is down the street, the wind is rising
like a reader disturbed in his reading. The sea
is as dark as the night, as salty as your lungs

where you stand looking out, filling your lungs
with sea air. You have some business with the sea,
this is why you slept and woke and keep rising
each morning. This is why you must open the door
to listen out for the question. Where am I? Who am I?

7

So you lie in bed, as you were, as defenceless and small
as an anecdote, a one-line perfection, and here come
the elders, the old with their gifts of sweets and cakes,
their melted offerings, and a faint yellow smell that follows
them about that is nothing to be ashamed of,

which is neither soiling nor wetting, but down to being of
a place just like this, that is yellow, from which must follow
the story the old will not tell you, where are no cakes
but a faint yellow light to which whole cities have come,
to this room, to this house, something irreducibly small.

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