

The Abelard Poets

**CONFORMED
TO STONE**

By
DAVID JAFFIN

CONFORMED TO STONE

by David Jaffin

This newest addition to "The Abelard Poets" introduces a young poet who sees more with the mind than with the eye. His poems are delicate and wistful, and concise in form and meaning, as he believes that "poetry is after all the art of absolute compression." Mr. Jaffin uses a sparse abstract diction somewhat similar, because of their confessional tone, to certain Elizabethan sonneteers. This diction has, however, passed through the emotional mill of surrealism and found its form in the short line.

The poet creates an inner world of symbol and sense based upon recurring imagery, patterns of idea, and reinforced by the intensity of rhythm; a world reflective and lyrical, mystical and sensual, aesthetic and intellectual, social and satirical; a world of person and place, of touch and response, of God and the possibility of belief, of idea and the limitations to idea, of man and dehumanized man, of "passion conformed to stone."

"I should hope that once one has truly entered 'my world,' the gate is forever closed behind him."

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DAVID JAFFIN

—
*Conformed
To
Stone*
—

ABELARD-SCHUMAN

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

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Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 68-18971

Standard Book No. 200.71548.8

Printed in the United States of America

LONDON
Abelard-Schuman
Limited
8 King St. WC2

NEW YORK
Abelard-Schuman
Limited
6 West 57 St.

TORONTO
Abelard-Schuman
Canada Limited
1680 Midland Ave.

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For my wife, Rosemarie

THE WINDING DOWN

The silence
Of others had
Blinded my
view (and
the lamp),
For I stood
At the top
Of the stairs
Awaiting the
Winding down
(the steps):
Material si-
lence (and
the manner of
the fact).

RAINING

It was raining
(i wanted to
tell you i
am not enough);
Do you hear
The rain, do
You know what
I want to tell
you?

THE LAST SNOW

The snow had
Come, there
Was a sadness

In the night
(though i
could not
explain it
to myself)
Wanted to take

Your hand a-
gain (and a-
gain), hear the

Colors of
Your dress—
This loneliness

Of thought
(as stars ar-
ranged in
the winter
night), when
I came to

You as a child
(and wanted
to be touched
and talked to)
And told some-
thing that

Would waken
your eyes.

INDECISION

The afternoon
Stood still,
A bird poised

Its song in
The clear
Light—what

Was it I
Wanted to
Say (relative

to song, or
attributes
of light)?

The afternoon
Conscious of
Neglect (and

I paused to
reflect), a
Bird balanced
with string.

THE DEER

We saw it
First after
The rains, it
Stood beside
The advancing
Columns of
Night, unafraid;
What it knew
Was only real
In the moment
That it knew,
The flight to
The world with-
in.

FOR GRIEF

Wanted for
Grief, the leaf
Falls, as if
Hands pur-
sued it there
(through the
silent air)—
That's death:
Alarms of light,
The final
Calm of flight,
Take me in
Your hands,
Thus.

WOMAN IN MOURNING

You should
Forget (as
i have done),
Let light and
Pleasure be,
Become, ap-
pear, appro-
priate . . .
Winds could
Chill, your
Hands would
Take the blame—
Be not again
A face and mar-
belled hands.

MERRY-GO-ROUND

for S.E.

(and round a-
bout the world
would be, plea-
surably turned);
A mind of my
Own (but cared
for less), as
Candles blown
But bright (and
round about
the world would
be); conversed
With stars
(though paper
be their in-
tent)—we
Slowed, the
Going smoothed
(as silk to
be touched),
My mind was
A mind of si-
lence (and
round about
the world would
be, pleasurably
turned).

TO THE TASTE OF WINE

Thus as I
Break this
Bread (with
coarse hands)
And touch my
Lips to the
Taste of wine
(that sunlight
shimmers in
my veins),
The silence
Between us is
Broken too—
My hands (as
birds released
in flight),
My lips form
Your presence;
But lightly
You come (re-
hearsed in whis-
per), your
Dress woven of
The wind,
Jewelled with
Seven stars,
Your feet as
The falling of
Leaves; but
So lightly you
Come that my
Lips close
your presence.

IN DEFENSE OF FREE WILL

Spring had
Chosen its own
Fancy (a floral
setting), whims
Of light (and
pipes of Pan),
Selected at
Intervals (3rds
and 4ths), and
She matched
To her dress
A fineness of
Scent and
The fashions
Of wind.

FROM SUMMER'S END

for my father
(the farm in Vermont)

The oars would
Sing this sun
Away into the
Wood at sum-
mer's end,
The quiet re-
gained, we
Would glide
As wind through

The grass;
Your hands
Dipped again
At the cur-
rent's edge:
This water
Was glass bro-
ken, the pond
A child who
began to sing.

CONFORMED TO STONE

A poem is
The clarity
Of winter,
Light re-
flecting light,
Passion con-
formed to
Stone; a poem
Is the mir-
rored facade,
This gleam of
Words reflected—
You wore a
Velvet dress,
And, while I
Much admired
It, preferred
Your nakedness.

THE INEXPLICIT

The perman-
ent decline
Of fact (and
i grasped
at your hand)
Through the
Fictions of
Night (where
stars subdued
and calmed)
To this bed
Of stone and
Laughter,
Night ceased
to define.

STUDY

(woman around 50)

Your face a
Web of sadness
(the lines
were broken
through);
Deceptive words
(the partial
pain) patched
The image true.

SUFFICIENTLY HUMAN

A painted
Smile (the
rendered pose),

Sufficiently
Human to touch
And expose

Where the lips
Creased and
Eyes opened

Full to the
Artificial
Light.

THE IDIOT

I looked for
Light when
The others were
Away, found the
Stone that was
Almost me, pressed
It hard, until
I could smile.

WOODCARVER

(in memory of Barney Jaffin)

I carved with
The tools of
Winter, the
Sharp branches,
The rook's claw;
Remember when I
Was old (bur-
dened with sha-
dowy shapes of
the city), this
Sharp sun go
Down.

“ET IN ARCADIA EGO” II

(Poussin/Panofsky)

Inscriptions
Fade (dis-
tinguishing
features):
Wounds of the
Blade extracted
From time (pro-
tracted), as the
Chance of re-
cognition.

CREATURES OF STONE

Creatures of
Stone con-
firmed as flesh

Blood and bone,
Insufficiencies
Of time in the

Shadows of the
Fact (dimin-
ishing proba-
bilities of
Thought); crea-
tures of stone

(features of
man), construc-
tions of the

Idea (tran-
sitions fail).

SELF PORTRAIT

(at age 30)

I saw in my
Eyes (re-
flections

still) where
Birds crossed
Their flight

(in and out
into the
night),

Cried out for
Want of light
(the adherence

of fact),
And my eyes
Were a mind

Of silence,
My flesh the
Dried fields.

THE QUIET WITHIN

The pain of
 The quiet with-
in, the piercing
 (dying) sun
In the sickled
 Shadow of win-
ter, birds
 Thrown to the
Sharp winds a-
 gainst the
Unbroken sea,
 The snow high
In the dark,
 The pain of
The quiet with-
 in.

THE FEAR OF WINTER

I, thrilled
With the sharp
Veins of this
River run, see-
king my song
In flight; win-
ter is come,
The rock nar-
rowed to the
Scope of fear.

WORLD THAT WASN'T
THERE

I was writing
For a world
That wasn't

There—stars
In the uneven
Night blown

As moments of
Regret, throbbing
with the

Autumn rains,
Dry and un-
spoken now;

Had I remained,
My voice in
An unseen light

Would brighten
Dimly clear,
Unheard (by

a world that
wasn't there),
It would tear
And splinter.

ANNA'S DREAM

Snow was coming
(a stranger
with a sin-

gle eye):
His feet im-
pressions of

The mind, his
Heart sped with
Pain, but that

Face (you know)
Was mine. His
Hands were gnarled

(the pulse u-
pon the cane)
That beat his

Heart too
(dried and
burned with

rain); but
A single eye
He turned to

Mine, turned
Away the will
Of time.

BRUCKNER

I know your
World (the
God whose pain

and light
left the stars
and the night

at the cross),
The valley of
Birds, the

Rock that bent
The crescent
Moon into the

Wood, fields
Of river,
Wings of desire . . .

Because the
Snow was mounting
In the autumn

Sky, birds
Whirled from
The wood in

Rows of seven,
Their wings o-
pened the light

Of memory,
The trees were
Dead—is there

A flame that
Keeps our
Song among the

Ashes? In
The glass of
Winter, the blue

Of the after-
noon was bro-
ken with the

Edge of twi-
light: I
Heard a cry,

It came from
The night,
Stars creating

Light, another
Cry before
The sun was

Struck from
The blend of
The mountain,

It was the
Nails splitting
The cross . . .

Spring begins,
Cold and dark,
But the rivers

Run, the fields
Gather light.

AM I?

Am I, for
Example, the
Way you look
In my eyes;
Am I the
Wind (or
the rain)
Spoken or
Believed, or
The possibility
Of many i's:
These words,
The protracted
Silence?

ABBREVIATIONS

Actualities
Of the present
(abbreviations
of intent),
The real as
Imagined (i-
maged as
real), the
Image of i
(the i as i-
mage)—
Time reflecting
Time (ap-
pearance and
light), the
Real exposed
To thought.

POEM OF REDEMPTION

Once the sun
Became ap-
parent, it
Ceased to mean
(altogether)
What we'd thought;

Its light re-
tained the
Presence of

Fact, main-
tained the
Fictive stance

(you might
ask of the
sword, the

blunted edge)—
Time eclipsed
The moment in

The shadow
Of the fact,
And we asked

(i'm not cer-
tain of the
question or
its relevance).

A POEM OF DEFINITION

Though it was
Only words
That you spoke,

And I heard
Them not (for
the awareness

of you became
the conscious-
ness of myself);

Though it was
Only words—
But you laughed,

Revealed their
 Meaning.

AUTUMN AFTERNOON

The light
Too soon wanted
(this autumn
afternoon),
Breakwood be-
tween I and

The understood;
To touch was
To seem, to

Want to dream,
Light reflected
Sight (not

the form or
presence); as
From a fixed,

Point par-
titioned,
A bird de-
ciphered
Flight, the
Impermanency
of light.

THE LAST ONE

Once more for
The circus—
A pfennig or
Two, I'm The
Jew, could
Grow a beard,
Keep my hat
On, smile
And dance; the
Indian has
Feathers (a
pleasant stance)
Proportioned
To romance—
Come one and
All (blond
and blue-eyed):
A pfennig or
Two, I'm
The Jew.

PROFESSOR K

It's difficult
To believe
 (forgive me,
 forgive me)
A German of
Age, capable
Of praise, but
Your teeth seemed
To dance (ir-
regular, im-
perfect), as if
Laughter were
Possible now.

RACHEL

“als Israels Leib zog aufgelöst
in Rauch” (*Nelly Sachs*)

This land is
Dry (and i
thirst), my
Mouth parched
(the impression
of words),
My heart the
Image after
The fact; this
Land's dry,
Faces of stone
(flesh and bone)
Reduced to the
Common truth,
My hands re-
count (after
the fact) the
Twilight in-
stance—but
I wanted to
Touch the pre-
sence of your
Eyes (that
waken from
the dead, re-
semble the
thoughts of

suffering);
This land is
Dry (the will
of silence),
Stars arrange
Their form
To the pre-
sent bourgeois
Norm.



DAVID JAFFIN, born in America in 1937, earned his doctorate at New York University, where he won several awards for his scholarship. He settled in Munich, Germany, because he felt himself deeply drawn to the Central European artistic tradition.



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Standard Book Number: 200.71548.8

PRINTED
IN
U.S.A.

