

# On telling the truth

*Dawid Jung*

Motto:

*Don't hold it against me, for I must tell the truth about the dead even,  
to make the living fall in love with the real dead...*

Juliusz Slowacki, Letter to mother, Paris 1845

## 1

I don't know who told him to stand  
and wait, holding a swath of red and a brush of rabbit fur  
[rabbi forgive, I will wipe your face clean].

certainly not he, who was here before me and dug in the rain.

the thick carbon block, in which he listed potters, tilers, farmhands'  
courtesans, incompetent seers, ladies with perfumed warts,  
was to be his life's masterpiece, *ars moriendi*, which they will mourn.

my duties include watching to  
see if invisible censers retain no ashes, or if cloth  
does not lie crooked during special mass, delicate like a young cockle.

my duties include watching to  
check the earth does not collapse beneath the weight, or sprouting weeds  
do not cover the sun baked letters [crafted by masters  
from Welnau, when gothic was in fashion thereabouts]. now is the time of  
the coltsfoot, soft beneath the chin when you doze in the heat and hear  
how women carry milk to the nearby wastelands, beyond the train  
embankment.

things without worth or meaning.  
I gather after them sourdines and turf.



2

we have seen (speak in a whisper).  
concealed, we stood, before the day was declared done  
and given its receipt. those falling asleep in the street  
we gathered up before dawn. may dreams release them.  
we have seen (speak in a whisper).  
in shades of blossoming cherry or atomized pesticides.  
the earth then cramped in pain and somewhere above the demarcation  
line (horizon and sea) chartered jets fell through turbulence.  
we all saw, each according to need  
adjusting their voice to emotion. Some impressed  
enough to die early, others waited patiently drinking cold tea  
on the verandah, until they received this:  
porous nematode against the lips.

3

it is too early: mystics from the vicinities of Styx  
have made a pact, keep silent in salvation.

I will give you stage directions to my skin - a cut belt  
of mould: whispers: come closer,  
else I will go mad.

in the orifices of grass and liquid mercury I do not hear you,  
and that which poured into the reaction of oxygen stuck, not a trace  
of unleashed odour.

it is too early: a man in the street feeds bones  
to three dogs, nuns in cammo ready  
for ops, someone singing sky blue,  
not wanting to reveal themselves.

up on the hills kindle fires,  
let the barbarians see how many strong we are.

4

of all the transient things I choose death.  
my body, unshut *dichtung*, will carry me only so far.  
I choose to pass away calmly among strangers. moments of sorrow and tears.  
permanent things will follow.  
glory to those whose foreheads the bedridden earth nurses  
glory to those whose tongues the bedridden earth lies against.

5

our dead are necessary to us,  
who better to supervise, remind, shriek,

our dead are necessary to us,  
let's count the bones in our dead,

our dead are necessary to us,  
we will raise monuments for our dead,

our dead are necessary to us,  
we will draft lectures about our dead,

our dead are necessary to us,  
our tourists admire our dead,

our dead are necessary to us,  
wars were fought thanks to our dead,

our dead are necessary to us,  
debates were held over our dead,

our dead are necessary to us,  
our dead are surrounded by dust,

our dead are necessary to us.

only to us.



the blessed see how light evaporates.  
it will fall upon them that they are mad. they will be written about:  
they saw meadows swelling with silence among golf courses,  
where rich boys learn to pass away,  
and their waif girlfriends read Homer to sleep.  
they will write the truth: they heard the drains carrying sludge  
and insects hovering over. when the crowd chanted: exodus, exodus,  
among heavy clouds someone was lowering the flight of wild fowl.  
they believed that they exist to have their bodies speak: the air above you  
is ripe, no matter what you do, anywhere  
you go you will leave behind not your own death,  
but a paragraph begun.