

# Notness

## Selected Writings 7

RICHARD BERENGARTEN was born in London in 1943, into a family of musicians. He has lived in Italy, Greece, the USA and former Yugoslavia. His perspectives as a poet combine English, French, Mediterranean, Jewish, Slavic, American and Oriental influences.

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## *Metaphysical Sonnets*

RICHARD BERENGARTEN

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*For Barrie and Patricia Irving*

He sat and expounded to them: The *Shekhinah* is below as it is above. And what is this *Shekhinah*? Let us say that it is the light that has emanated from the Primal Light...

SEFER HA BAHIR

And now the moment. Such a moment is unique. It is, of course, brief and temporal, as moments are, ephemeral, as moments are, passed, as moments are, in the next moment, and yet it is decisive, and yet it is filled with eternity. Such a moment must have a special name. Let us call it the fullness of time.

SØREN KIERKEGAARD

When I seek for the ultimate reasons of mechanicalism and the laws of motion I am surprised to discover that they are not to be found in mathematics and that we must turn to metaphysics.

G. W. LEIBNIZ

I believe that if one takes Einstein's general relativity seriously, one must allow for the possibility that spacetime ties itself in knots and that information gets lost in the folds.

STEPHEN HAWKING

Neither a pure flow nor pure present moments make any coherent sense. And yet in music we hear this impossible reconciliation. To believe the evidence of our ears is therefore to deny nihilism.

CATHERINE PICKSTOCK

Enlarge art?

No. On the contrary, take art with you into your innermost narrowness. And set yourself free.

PAUL CELAN

# Contents

## I. DWELLING ~ FOR THE *SHEKHINAH*

1. Moon over sea	3
2. Home	3
3. Siesta	4
4. Night bathing, Aegean	4
5. Though numbed by passing	5
6. True to your absence, glory	5
7. Insomniac presence	6
8. Radiance, palpable	6
9. This scintillating night	7
10. Soul of my soul	7

## II. BITTER LOVING

1. She had to leave	11
2. To himself ~ after Tin Ujević	11
3. Because she left him	12
4. The Gulf ~ after Tin Ujević	12
5. Anniversary	13
6. Leave me the chasms ~ after Oskar Davičo	13
7. These stubs of pain	14
8. Inner calmer	14
9. First kiss	15
10. You	15

## III. IDENTITIES

1. I am not double-barrelled ~ after Oskar Davičo	19
2. Anybody's guess	19
3. Being aloof	20
4. Pronouns	20
5. Hence into suchness	21
6. Past and through	21

7. Then doubts devour	22
8. I empty and I fill	22
9. A conception	23
10. Stone	23

#### IV. ON SYNCHRONICITY

1. When anxious waiting stops	27
2. When it arrives	27
3. The flows of time	28
4. When things fit	28
5. Anomalous phenomena	29
6. Fuse	29
7. Things constellate	30
8. Approach me not	30
9. After eternity: a dialogue	31
10. Time's porous skin	31

#### V. PASSAGE

1. Passage	35
2. Give time	35
3. Allegro ~ after Nasos Vayenas	36
4. Then	36
5. Me from the future	37
6. This far, so soon	37
7. An ephemeral mark	38
8. Fall on my heels	38
9. Blackout, hospital	39
10. I dreamed I slept	39

#### VI. A DISCIPLINE

1. A discipline	43
2. Death moves towards my death	43
3. I work, but nothing I do works	44
4. I longed for fame	44
5. It goes with me hard	45
6. My stoic motive falters	45
7. Space, time, hope, work	46
8. Come, word rows	46
9. Into these poems	47
10. Will	47



## VII. NOTNESS

1. <i>Notness</i>	51
2. <i>Notness</i> , in doubt	51
3. <i>Notness</i> , mirroring	52
4. <i>Notness</i> , end	52
5. <i>Notness</i> , unapparent	53
6. Bogomil	53
7. Aye and Nay	54
8. Yes and No	54
9. Statues ~ in the temple of Eros and Thanatos	55
10. <i>Notness</i> , puckering	55

## VIII. NOW

1. <i>Now</i>	59
2. <i>Now</i> , point	59
3. <i>Now</i> , crumbling	60
4. <i>Now</i> , brimming	60
5. <i>Now</i> , drum	61
6. <i>Now</i> , cup	61
7. A point, a cup, a drum	62
8. Concerning music	62
9. Here is no mourning	63
10. To light, in an interior	63

## IX. TWICENESS

1. Twiceness	67
2. Once, twice...	67
3. The doubling	68
4. David	68
5. Reasons, cores, sheens	69
6. Dot	69
7. Text and intertext	70
8. A resonance	70
9. Ground	71
10. Walking	71

## X. FOR AN UNBORN CHILD

1. My life is the horizon	75
2. These subtle seasons	75
3. Since I unhesitatingly maintain	76

4. With what bravado	76
5. <i>Nothing</i> can never No you	77

#### A GIFT

1. A gift	81
2. Leash, long, flexed, wound, plaited	81
3. The ghost of the nineteenth century	82
4. I dreamed I wrote	82
5. This book	83

<i>Afterword</i>	85
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<i>Acknowledgements</i>	86
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<i>References, Notes, Dedications</i>	88
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Dwelling  
~ for the *Shekhinah*



## Moon over sea

Times when joy's so full I feel I could burst –  
when in fact *I* does burst: explodes in thous-  
ands of connecting splinters, the way those  
moonflecks spill and ripple tide-wide waves. Best  
then never swell to encompass this beast  
(many-faced) identity. Rather with these  
phantasms, let all fail, flake, fly. Since all withers  
eventually, why flinch, fluster, flail, wail, boast?  
Catch joys rather in their moments of disappearing  
into unthinking, únthought, thought's entire  
*notness* – past fellow feeling, past fearing  
of falling apart, past loss, past past desire –  
and never mind their melting or those searing  
yellow and blue flames vaulting in black fire.

## Home

Gift to my heart, my soul's hostess and home,  
interior, bless'd before time ever was,  
before *wherefores* and *whys*, before *because*,  
temple of skies with starred or clouded dome,  
treasure so quickly gone I cannot wait  
when loss sets in with its cold stony grin  
and occupies all space that's left within –  
useless I call, *Gone, gone*, but call too late  
through absence to scry miserable fate.  
Yet home is this and you whatever this  
in presence proffers to my innerness –  
you guest, you gust of wind, you swinging gate –  
with you and this now how could I not still  
be sure that I belonged in miracle?

## Siesta

Where does your skin, or mine, begin or end?  
Stilled in the wake of storms we woke and spurred,  
my borders, lying next to yours, float blurred  
among these waves we failed to tire or spend.  
Through hand-clasp, elbow-crook, hip-fold, knee-bend,  
you wrapped me in you as our passion stirred  
(and through each other's passions, more incurred).  
And still our bodies merge. Our beings blend.  
What shall be said then (rich loss? faint *tristesse*?)  
when what we know is this calm tenderness?  
How sudden separation is – and yet  
now, as we sleep-wake, cool net curtains let  
kind breeze in from this sunny afternoon.  
Relishing this, we'll shower, go out soon.

## Night bathing, Aegean

On the beach we strip, watching pin-eyed ships  
flicker through dark. Nor shall we wait to hide  
our nakedness, but running, cast aside  
warm sun-bronzed skins of daylight's swimming dips.  
Now you are all moons, ovals in ellipse  
orbiting me. Pale, glistening, purified,  
slow we come in to land, lapped by the tide –  
to suck out salt from *Aphrodite's* lips.  
Listen, love, to the waves. Hump-backed, they're hauling  
nets of black light around the flanks of Greece.  
A creaking-timbered moon, full sailed, is trawling  
this August night for shooting stars, its fleece,  
while, curled up in their wake, someone lies calling  
small white cries, like a seagull, for release.

## Soul of my soul

Soul of my soul, my soul's inner retreat  
and nucleus, you still innermost space  
that occupy no space yet light her face  
in glance of recognition when we meet –  
you now as commonplace on way or street  
as stone but quite untouchable in place  
being her possessionless pure grace  
and miracle – perfectly incomplete  
for being instantaneous, lacking name,  
beginningless, unpassing, without end –  
movement through leaves, sensed radiance and sheen  
in all things, yet yourself always unseen –  
in me be present yet and through me send  
breath, spirit, ghost, and ecstasy of flame.

## Though numbed by passing

Though numbed by passing and surpassing fear  
and bound to *being* on this trembling ground  
I stand on all the while you spin me round  
the axis of a passion or a year,  
giddied I listen, having no choice but hear  
your song composed of noteless silent sound,  
as if unhemmed, and your whole nature crowned  
in glints, caught up in waves, now blurred, now near.  
Over the waters, shimmering, a face  
I've half thought yours appears to smile and call  
and back I call, Time, come, I am the space  
you long to lodge in, and take over all  
its darkest corners from, and light in grace,  
unsure if still I stumble, rise or fall.

## True to your absence, glory

Is glory in the residue, mere evidence,  
in shining track, in afterglow, in spoor?  
Being too poor to meet you in your residence  
I plead with glory, greet me at your door,  
fully resplendent, present, now, revealed  
hostlike to your *main tenant* in this space.  
But you come always partially concealed  
in mist, with indistinctly profiled face  
hanging in haze, ghostlike. We shall remain  
true to your absence, glory, seeing you are  
bright only as a long exploded star,  
a mote in darkness, spreading like a stain,  
present but in the shrinking and the swelling,  
their course in timespace, and their aftertelling.

## Insomniac presence

To wake up, and to be – being wide awake –  
are different. The first calls *dawn, arising*,  
a first sun pouring light across the lake,  
brilliance for seeing through, not analysing.  
Night, sinking fast, a drowning wreck capsizing  
under the ghosthood of its foamless wake,  
gives way, itself away, all compromising,  
and brittle vials of dark expand and break.  
But I dream of a being that can't sleep  
whose constant state is steadily aware  
of all that is and can be, anywhere.  
Insomniac presence, missing you, I weep,  
denied in thought-knots as I watch and keep  
calling for you, on you, who are not there.



## Radiance, palpable

Time is a chance we cannot choose but take.  
Outside it, from this world at least, the odds  
are nought to zero. Push our luck and break  
rank from all other runners, not being gods?  
If we'd been brought to life through play or mime  
into some scarcely recognizable vast  
non-time, un-time, anterior to time,  
in which the very pastness of the past  
had turned (or has, or even will have turned)  
into radiance, palpable – to a glory  
so overspilling presence that the burned  
disintegrating day-ends of our story  
dissolved – then, might we really take our chance  
to be, outside of being, in that radiance?

## This scintillating night

This scintillating night is filled with subtlest  
variations of light. They interlace  
then cancel, like expressions on a face,  
yours, in this case. How curiously we're blessed,  
witnessing this, as if being called, addressed  
directly, on this huge-dimensional base  
by all the puzzling splendour of time-space  
that placement and momentum might attest.  
Let us be true, then, to each other's love  
though what we'd track in passing can't be touched –  
scarcely discerned – in those far heights above,  
and though we pass like shoals of arrows clutched  
by wind in soaring flight and lightning-flecked  
in sentient transience here all things connect.