

J. J. Steinfeld

## **Darkness and Resonance**

No accurate description  
for the ideal love  
you found in the darkness.

Darkness, you see,  
is the trick  
the laughable cunning.

No accurate sound  
for the smooth answer  
to a serrated question.

Resonance, I hear  
is the trick  
the visual deception.

## **Metaphysical Confusion**

This wasn't the room I began in  
the colours have been altered  
out of spite or cunning  
so difficult for me to  
ascertain with certainty.

The room changes again  
a strategy I cannot comprehend  
but I take notes to refer to later  
when I'm in another room  
newly decorated in concrete and regret.

The room starts to quiver  
like a mirage suddenly seen  
then to expand in metaphysical  
confusion so that only a deity  
of rooms and regrets  
will be able to explain.

## **Forgotten Sleep**

In a crevice of the night  
the pompous battle the pious  
a nonsensical game  
a replica of sanity  
but what can you do  
when you quarrel with  
larger-than-life gods  
more cunning and cruel  
than earthly opponents  
you trapped in wakefulness.

Perhaps if you curse  
into the darkness  
the darker the better  
painting both reality  
and scheming illusion  
with similar colours  
you'll catch the eyes  
of forgiving adversaries  
you'll reshape your dreary  
self into someone remarkable.

Now sit at your desk  
in the dark fashioned  
from long-past nights  
and begin to list  
reasons for sleeping  
at inopportune times  
for preferring a clever word  
for composed darkness  
to the inescapable loss  
of wakefulness.

## A Topic of Conversation

The night entered  
halfway through the day  
like a criminal  
upstaged by the crime  
no tempest in the forecast  
nothing untoward  
or even mildly mystical  
when the mystical  
just might refine the day  
reshape the blandness and boredom  
into a topic of conversation  
that exceeds eclipses  
even inexplicable happenings  
that are an affront to the ordinary  
to the day-to-day  
even as you sink  
into the ordinary  
and the day-to-day.

## The Darkness and Its Unsympathetic Ambiguity

Staring into words  
surrounded by uncertainty  
it is quiet  
except for the disgruntled dog  
barking from time to time  
into the darkness—  
*what does it want from me  
and from the heavens?*

My late-night desires are without cunning  
wanting words for wordlessness  
voice for voicelessness  
for mistakes remembered  
enumerated and tidily ordered.

Fighting forgetfulness  
I open the window  
and shout into the darkness  
at every disruption to the soul's reflection  
wondering if the dog  
will remember my curses  
or will I have to devise new ones  
for the darkness  
and its unsympathetic ambiguity.

## **This Guiltful Thought**

I wait two full days  
and two full nights  
to make this confession.  
Yesterday I had another word in mind  
but tonight it is *confession*  
*revelation* sounds too strong  
belonging to someone else.  
When I was ten years old  
after I had my summer's haircut  
I was walking home  
finding a little dog dying  
close to the railroad tracks  
wrong side or right side of the tracks  
how many railroad tracks  
in childhood memories  
or in adult films  
I found a little dog  
as I started to say  
and I did not say a prayer for it.  
Now I find this guiltful thought  
half as ludicrous  
as last night  
and the night before.

## **If We Didn't Have a Word for Beauty**

*Beauty is irrational.*

No, beauty is as beauty does.

Unbeautiful

the opposite of beauty.

Is longing for beauty

the absence of beauty?

A life without beauty

a surfeit of beauty

a hundred words for beauty

beauty is wordless

beauty to the blind

imagining beauty

defining beauty

comprehending beauty

beauty as archetype

language, perception

if we didn't have

a word for beauty

or weren't forever caught

by the words of beauty.

Break the mirrors

erase the words

begin the portrait

over again.

*Ugliness is irrational...*

## **Regardless of Location or Sense**

WE CONFUSE DREAMING WITH WAKING

WE BECOME WHAT WE SEEK AND FEAR

this was the graffiti

on the apartment building

in a language a tired old translator

spent the night translating

and told anyone who chanced by

it didn't make a whole lot of sense  
nonsense scribbles  
but it was his job  
to translate wall writings  
regardless of location or sense  
the sadness, he said,  
was when the walls were blank  
and he had to make his own work

a lifetime of translating  
warnings  
divine messages  
schedules  
first utterances  
final thoughts  
manifestoes  
doctrines  
philosophies  
ancient texts  
anticipated revelations

he had seen and translated  
even Bedlam's wall-writing  
made sorrowful and disheartened  
in the translating—  
all languages are foreign to me  
even my own, he thinks,  
laughing at his out-of-placeness  
so little to laugh at these days  
and he begins to translate the next message  
feeling both furtive and gentle

FURTIVE TRUTHS ARE TRUTHS NONETHELESS  
GENTLE LIES ARE LIES ALL THE SAME

## About the Poet

Canadian fiction writer, playwright, and poet J. J. Steinfeld has published 19 books, including *Would You Hide Me?* (Stories, Gaspereau Press, 2003), *Misshapeness* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions, 2009), *Identity Dreams and Memory Sounds* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions, 2014), *Madhouses in Heaven, Castles in Hell* (Stories, Ekstasis Editions, 2015), *An Unauthorized*

*Biography of Being* (Stories, Ekstasis Editions, 2016), *Absurdity, Woe Is Me, Glory Be* (Poetry, Guernica Editions, 2017), and *A Visit to the Kafka Café* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions, 2018). His short stories and poems have appeared in numerous periodicals and anthologies internationally, and over 50 of his one-act plays and a handful of full-length plays have been performed in Canada and the United States.