

SAMPLER

Casual Ties

ALSO BY DAVID WEVILL

Penguin Modern Poets 4 (with David Holbrook & Christopher Middleton,
Penguin Books, 1963)
Birth of a Shark (Macmillan / St. Martin's Press, 1964)
A Christ of the Ice-Floes (Macmillan / St. Martin's Press, 1966;
Tavern Books, 2016)
Firebreak (Macmillan / St. Martin's Press, 1971)
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Child Eating Snow (Exile Editions, 1994)
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David Wevill

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for the loved ones & the ghosts

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*Let us imagine a first drawing,
which decrees the death of a man.*

—Borges

*The longer one hesitates outside the door,
the more one becomes a stranger.*

—Kafka

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The Wall

A man at night walks up to a wall at a place where he believes there is a door. But he bumps his nose on hard wall and steps back. I was wrong about the place in the wall where the door is, he says. I'll try again farther along.

He tries another place and bumps his nose on the wall. Wrong again, he says, rubbing his nose. I must use my hands and think more. I must measure this wall with my hands and arms to find the place where there is a door.

He does this, five or six times, then seventeen and eighteen times, until his hands are raw and no longer sensitive and his arms ache from reaching out. I was wrong about the length of this wall, he says, stepping back to think. I will crawl the length of the wall, brushing it with my left side until I find the place where there is a door.

He crawls the length of the wall until the clothing on his left side is rubbed threadbare, but he has found no door. Now my right side, he says, and starts off crawling along the wall. It is the same result. The man gets up, his clothing falling off him. I was wrong about there being a door, he says. This wall must be climbed. But how high is the wall?

He jumps up against the wall trying to touch its top. He fails to find a top to the wall at this place. He jumps up, here and there, higher and higher, seventeen and eighteen times, until his naked chest is scraped raw. There is no top to this wall, he says, and no door. There are no fingerholds to help me climb. But the wall goes in two directions and must have two ends. I will walk to the end on my left and go around the wall.

But he can't find the place in that direction where the wall ends. So he walks back to look for the place where it must end on his

right. Again he fails. The wall is circular, he says. I've been at this exact place before, these are the remains of my clothes. To reach the other side you need to have always been there. Or wait until the sun comes up and shout until somebody hears and comes and rescues you. But is there anyone over there?

It is quiet, and now the sun is coming up. I see, he says. The door I remember is my shadow on the wall. There is no way up or out. But I can get to know myself for the rest of my life, and, with patience, scrape out a small hole in the wall with my finger, and mate with my shadow, engender myself again and again in my shadow.

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They that hunt you

They that hunt you know two things about you: your location and your name. Knowing your location, they can always find you. Knowing your name, they can always locate you.

You are free to move about in the world as an unlocated name until your name locates you. You are free to stand still in the world as an unnamed location, until your location names you. Either of these might happen at any moment. They are not an either but a both.

Your change of name has not helped. Your change of location has got you nowhere. You are still what you are and will be taxed as such. Your long list of unpaid parking fines will spell out your name, retrospectively, and point to where you are this very moment. The children you leave behind you, if any, will lead them to the door you think you closed forever, the house whose number you changed at night when you thought no one was watching. Your post mail has your name and knows where to find you.

This is the law. You are your own law, but this is the law. The law is the mask of the god with eyes but no other features. The eyes are empty. The eyes require your eyes to make them see. The sightless mask is hunting your eyes even now. Give, give generously.

It is for your own good. Your good is their goodness, you will be rewarded. You will be allowed, at times, to wear their mask, to fill its empty eyes with your eyes, to hunt for others as they hunt for you. The feeling of power, though occasional, will make it seem worthwhile. In between the times of power you can laugh, dance, sing, and play the fool you are. They are responsible and will take care of the others. You have no need to feel afraid. Fear is what brought you to this. Now you are cured.

Smile then. Exercise yourself in contentment. You are neither still nor moving, nameless or named. Your name and whereabouts are known to them who possess them by right. They are on loan to you until the time comes to recall them and reassign them to another who even now is being prepared to assume your name and place, your fear and ecstasy, your dread of living and dying.

Love him as you love yourself. Love them who made this possible. Love is generous. Love is to give to the hunter what he asks. Be freed by this. Go forth, be glad, and multiply.

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The City of God

Your dreams are the landlocked onion domes of a city you never visited, There is no water for miles. It is a child's drawing. But that shimmer of heat in the air is time past, hovering, unaccounted for: is dead breath haunting the possibility of this place which is your paradise, decay of body, health and sickness of its parts: your memory.

Wherever you go now, this perfectly preserved ruin is your future. Wars collide in history and are never settled. You are the magnanimous computer, the inhuman scanning device on the South China Sea looking for survivors. Nothing and no one is excluded from your dreams, they gather at the city gate with outstretched hands crying to be let in. But you their master neither live nor rule here.

You are more like them than the god they appeal to. The great gate is locked, except at night when your body spirits you into itself, age being your key. A particle of your self, metastatic, dangerous, wanders the streets looking for a doorway, a place to settle, and there is none. You do not know yourself. You do not know the others who search for you.

What you have loved is what happened to them, the parts of you no surgery can heal. On a bed in Mexico in 1934, two naked bodies entwining in soft brown light. They might both be women: the faces are hidden and it is too dark to tell. In this city there are such darkened rooms if you can find them, and you will recognize the occupants. They are what you have been and cannot touch again. Someone took a picture of you while you weren't there. Memory is erotic. Pornography is the meaningless act of the moment. The bodies appeal to you to break their embrace, or to share it. But you can't touch them.

So this woman, dressed in a black sequined dress and wearing no underclothes, is dragged across the floor by a man. He lifts her up in his arms, and she begins laughing, farting, louder and louder farts. He is angry now and throws her down. He forces some medicine down her, she screams and kicks against it. The medicine affects her bowels, and she begins defecating helplessly, soiling herself and the man who holds her down, screaming and kicking against him. She is beaten then, she is humiliated. She is quiet under the weight of her torturer's body, his will. The dream ends, the doorway is passed. This is history. The distant city of domes under shimmering light is the same.

But there has to be some answer. Weeks, maybe months later, the same doorway repeats itself. The woman wearing a black sequined dress lies on the floor, her dress pulled down to her waist. Five men kneel around her. They soothe her, stroke her body, and one reaches down to touch the soiled place between her legs. She lies there, defeated and at peace with the others, with the moment. Her bachelors have stripped her bare, and she has given them excrement for love. There is nothing left now to give or take.

The people hammer at the city gate. They want in, they are hungry. There is no future for them outside. The mirage fades. The people gather in little groups. Their faces are hidden behind newspapers. I read the print at a distance and cannot make out one word of what they are thinking.