

## Two Streams: the Sauve and the Lez<sup>1</sup>

Here the light is as hard, firm, and bright as the rocks. But tossed over them are these velvets, these worn cloths, this coarse wool. The whole mountain has transformed itself into flocks and sheepfolds. Everything is connected, everything holds together, as on the first day. That's why this huge space feels like a home that welcomes but doesn't confine you.

It is here that the day was born, today.

Here doubt has no place. All stands firm and clear. All calm.

Although this is no more than a moment in the day, in the season, a moment of our lives; although, in this fleeting instant, our fleeting beings hold onto no more than ember and dust in an endless journey from abyss to abyss, this place and this moment are no dream. In our attachment to them, there's something that cannot be weighed, measured, or judged.

Everything holds together by knots of stone, like so long ago. You may lean and rest on this dazzling light, the only impregnable fortress I've ever seen.

In fact we're not very high up. Here, still, is a last orchard, all blossoms gone, against a backdrop of stone and dusty earth, and paths that soon get lost in tough bushes of boxwood. The last farmer living at this height would turn away if he spotted you (to protect the farm, or to escape loneliness, he has erected around his farm little totem poles of scrap iron and old wood). So, even here, things run their course, changes, movements have their share. Time, despite all seeming, has not stopped flowing. You witness, for instance, the mountain-shaped shadow of a cloud climb over a mountain ridge. Still, nothing wavers or falters, nothing seems to melt away.

One stands tall on a bastion, once peace is concluded, the truce signed.

The one who doubts there is a world, who doubts his own existence, will be cured here of what is mere illness, weakness, or cowardice. This terrace of broken paving stones overrun by straw-toned grass is just as real, under this very light, as the sharpest pain.

And here they are: born in these heights, dried up for many summers, today the waters of the Sauve redescend these rungs of yellow stone they had scooped out like the steps of a staircase in an old house, waters all the more alive and clear for being so new. Nearly the entire way down, barriers, walls of bright foliage hide them from view, blur their sparks. At the first turning where they're finally unveiled, it's impossible not to hold your step. You kneel down to bathe your hands, you drink. The rock where the waters

glide is sunny and yellow, soft as the palm that has gathered this cluster of water.

Once more, this is only a torrent. A limpid rush that spreads out, farther away where the current slows down, into an opalescent dish by the foot of rocks.

I'm reminded of these words of Hesiod, now twenty-eight centuries old: "Suffer not your feet to cross the eternal rivers' goodly waves, until a prayer has been said, with your eyes turned toward their handsome course, and your hands cleansed in the lovely milky stream..."

Everything holds together, here, today. Even the mist of new foliage shading the river banks. Nothing tells of exile. Nothing speaks of ruin, not even do the ruins. Nothing voices loss, not even these fleeting waters, so clear that you believe it's the sky that has laid them out for us on these layered stones.

There where the broad riverbed, for months, was nothing but loose stones, cracked slate, dried reeds, and skeletal branches, a mix of dulled silver and yellow just about the color of death, overnight the waters gush out again, released from sleep, revived, plunging stunningly against the other bank and wearing it down, so that were they any other creature you would call them wild and frenzied, but this is not the case here...

Hasty, surely! but not at all anxious or febrile; as always, like all wild waters, too alive and clear to tarnish.

A rapid race, happy, one might say, but in reality alien to all emotions of this sort, a race made visible only by the obstacles deep down, thanks to the rein and bit of pebbles and dead branches, where the waters foam suddenly like horses.

Like horses racing so swiftly under the crop that they seem to stretch and flatten out, to graze the grassy plain for the least air resistance: a cavalcade seen from afar, on hoofs not of horn but of silk.

A single-minded jostle, as when class is dismissed and everyone wants to get out first to frolic about, at last, or go home. (If you will).

The waters froth and flower at the faintest hurdle; not so different, in a way, from blossoming orchards, if only orchards knew how to float away ...

No need to drink at this ford: the view suffices to quench thirst!

Fresh, lively, prodigious, unseizable, multitudinous.

How lively, but unconscious, runners level with low-lying banks. They run and pass by, but their vigor grows. Softly as arrows they glide, swift but almost soundless, for the slope is gentle: a glistening flight that slakes thirst.

Gushing out of stones in cool scintillas. Surging from the forge of waters.

You might say they dream of running ever faster, that their joy is in speed, insouciant of where they head. Tumultuous. Drunk with flowing. Drunk, but pure. Hölderlin once wrote about a lake, where he had watched swans dipping their heads, that the water was "sober" and "saintly," or "sacred." By "sober" he probably meant "reserved" and "restrained," as the human spirit must be when beholding the divine, as the calm, contained mirror of a lake may suggest. These waters here are at once pure and inebriated; you see neither their beginning nor their end.

You could almost believe that they are laughing, that their haste is a kind of laughter. But no more than their haste is anxiety or frenzy, their laughter would be a far cry from insolence or mockery.

They would have learned to laugh, like the goats, among the rocks, amid the loose stones, in the shadow of the last eagles.

If I let myself go, I'd gladly turn them into the gleaming harness of Time.

They have sprung up, like something locked up too long in a fist of stone or ice.

Harbingers from the peaks, the long winter's granddaughters, steeds shut up too long in dark rocky stables.

These are the waters of the Lez, in April, at the ford called Bramarel. You look at them for a moment longer before going home: ephemeral, and as if eternal. Turning toward the west, you see the waters widen and open out to the measure of the sky, where the light dazzles.

Wondrous waters, which will never retrace their steps.