



(though when we hearken  
here below  
high Heaven's  
signals sound  
like silence).

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*O Mensch! Dies ist ein Fluch,  
der nach dem Himmel schmeckt . . .*

בְּלַע . . . פִּלַּג לְשׁוֹנֵן

What jealous god  
despised our Art?  
Exiled us  
in pain and ruin,  
scattered forth  
our shattered parts?  
What god-sized  
misinterpretation  
made him read  
that soaring vault  
as an assault on Heaven?

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*ἀπλῶ λόγῳ τοὺς πάντας ἐχθαίρω θεοῦς,  
ὅσοι παθόντες εὖ κακοῦσι μ' ἐκδικῶς.*

*Das ist's ja, was den Menschen zieret,  
Und dazu ward ihm der verstand,  
Daß er im innern Herzen spüret,  
Was er erschafft mit seiner Hand.*

(Men simply came  
to gain a Name  
to bond our blood  
and keep us One.)  
What punishment—  
to quench man's bright  
imagination  
(given by God  
at man's creation)  
to crush his instinct  
to invent, to mount  
Parnassus' peak,  
ascend and seek  
a higher place.

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Was God so petty,  
vain, and small  
a modest arch  
could seem a threat?

Or did our best,  
most haughty Art  
fall short—  
like Cain's spurned sweat:  
inadequate?

80

*Es spricht der Herren Herr:  
Du sollst mich besser ehren!*

Then why did God  
grant words at all?

<p><i>Et extolle illos usque in aeternum . . .</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>non confundar in aeternum.</i></p>	<p>With cursed, imperfect craft perplexed, we'll cobble yet a steep, sublime, unwobbling tower: we'll brace and prop, heave up a more exalted Art He can't abhor — we'll pound and pummel at the Gate of God. Then when we've wrestled with the Hosts of Heaven and wrenched it home we'll taste again with tongues of flame that language parsed in Paradise, where grace perfects interpretation: all meanings mated, conjugated, each to each we are translated.</p>	<p>90</p> <p>100</p>
<p><i>Time will run back, and fetch the age of gold, . . .</i> <i>And heaven, as at some festival</i> <i>Will open wide the gates of her high palace hall.</i></p>		

— *Cori Martin*

## NOTES to BABEL

Line 15: And whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.  
(*Genesis 2:19*)

Line 24: . . . the work of giants fell.  
Roof-trees snapped, the towers ruined.  
(*Ruin*, anon.)

Line 26: The lofty splendor of the walls . . .  
One moment made them all lie in a shapeless heap.  
(*The Collapse of St. Elizabeth's Church*, Christian Hofmann von Hofmannswaldau)

Line 35: Strange tongues, horrible language,  
words of pain, tones of anger,  
voices loud and hoarse . . .  
make a tumult . . .  
(*Inferno III.25-30*, Dante Alighieri)

Line 40: . . . every language is to him  
as his is to others, which is known to none.  
(*Ibid. XXXI.77-78*)

Line 43: Confound their speech, and make the father  
a foreigner to his son . . .  
(*La Tour Babel*, Guillaume de Salluste du Bartas)

Line 54: O Man, this is a curse that tastes of Heaven . . .  
(von Hofmannswaldau)

Line 59: Destroy their plans . . . confuse their tongues.  
(*Psalms 55:9*)

Line 66: In a word, every god I hate  
that injures me who never injured him.  
(*Prometheus Bound*, Aeschylus)

Line 70: What makes a human being is just this,  
that he can feel in his inmost heart what he fashions with his hands,  
and that is what his wits were given him for.  
(*Das Lied von der Glocke*, Friedrich von Schiller)

Line 84: The Lord of Lords speaks:  
You must worship me better!  
(von Hofmannswaldau)

Line 93: And lift them up forever . . .

Line 95: Let me never be confounded.  
(*Te Deum laudamus*)

Line 102: (*On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, John Milton)