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## **A TRANSLATION FROM THE LIBERTINE**

across the room I could feel  
the actual heft of her  
the contact he made with her  
when he slapped her  
shook its way through the earth  
and up my legs to find me

o god o god we are temples for each other  
and in the deepest holy of holies inside  
we live in each other  
in a body that only thought can find

though we try every other body that we know.

26 November 2002

## **I STAYED TOO LONG**

I stayed too long at the bar  
dawn had happened already  
and even the leaves had left the lawn

the principle of the thing  
seemed to involve dancing  
the long walk home from the subway

the occasional little brown bat  
channeling towards my face  
but missing, always missing

and some animal in a doorway  
meaning no harm  
I wanted to pet it but held back

don't excite expectations  
especially in streets empty as these  
everyone has gone to dreamland now

and stands on a bewildered beach  
breaking sapphires off the tree of the sky  
and crying for their mothers

dead city and when I call you dead  
I don't mean anything bad or final  
just the ropes have broken and the sails

flap free and there is no boat  
no birds no trees no crystals  
everybody asleep and I miss you

you'll never know how much I'm yours.

26 November 2002

## QUALITAS

Find the nature of the animal you mean  
you miss some quality Aristotle didn't mention  
busy as he was with everything, this small  
immensely precious quality eluded him perhaps  
since it was waiting for you to manifest it  
and me to find it in you. But who are you?

The question recurs like Oklahoma tornados.  
When I think *This is you* I can't think anything else  
I can hardly breathe or figure out the waiter's tip  
everything is up in the air, any single thing might  
turn out to be everything after all. You could be  
the real you. The quality might be ready to show through.

What I know of its moment: something  
is spoken. Then nothing is ever the same again.  
Something is touched. Someone touches you  
where you have never been touched. Maybe that  
—rather than sculpture and feats of engineering—  
is why we have hands. Maybe not.

Once the ritual gets started it goes on forever.  
This quality turns into quantity. I am a new man  
just thinking about it. “Animal” means  
you move around wherever you can make your body go  
and I can catch you there just following the words  
because I am the same sort of chemical myself.

26 November 2002

## AS THINGS CHOOSE US

Find out anything where anyone is  
as a rifle finds a shoulder first  
and then the enemy animal  
you think you have to kill

*a square of sunlight on the forest floor*

sequences of scarce voluntary decisions  
like choosing a book to read  
in a country library in summer  
a book somehow steeped in the place  
the smell of ocean in the paper  
a book you think is waiting for you  
how does it find its way into your hand  
and later you read it, in the old Adirondack  
chair careful of splinters, in sight of the sea  
but you're not looking at the sea  
just the soft pages of this fated book  
the voluble old woman who rents a strange house  
and someone is murdered it seems on the back stairs

down which the kind of Turkey carpet called  
a drugget is laid and you think about that  
just as midnight after midnight you remember  
a pale square of sunlight on the forest floor

nobody home nobody gone  
the book is old but the story holds your interest  
it's not your story but you're reading it  
the person who wrote it is dead  
the persons described in the story were never alive  
but the pages are still soft in your fingers  
almost as if the words were on their way  
to being sand or talc or something that blows away  
or the pages if you riffle a few of them  
feel like pieces of white bread your mother unwrapped

about this time of day when the sun  
would define a patch of light on the forest floor.

Do you think you'll solve the crime  
before you get to the end? Sometimes you fall asleep  
still reading and dream the story forward  
then have to backpedal awkwardly when you wake up  
book in your hand and the wind blowing,  
do you think you'll finish the book before you have to leave?  
Do you think you'll get it back to the library  
before you take the last ferry  
or just leave it in the cottage all winter  
with the sun occasionally coming in the window  
and embracing the book as it lies on the table  
resting in its own little pool of light?

27 November 2002

## THE PROBLEM

Everybody knows everything  
except that he knows it she knows it.  
What is known is only there for them.  
Apart from objects of knowledge there are no objects.

I too was on a train, I too met a woman,  
we made love right away, it was strange  
in the dark of a tunnel, and only once  
ever again, years later, and it was no good.  
It was better when we were nobody to each other,  
consciousness only of the dark. Everybody  
comes back, all roads wind inward  
ever-closing circles, knots, clover-leafs,  
Armageddon when we meet again.

For example you can't lose me.  
Only I can lose myself. Struggle  
with a handful of coins on a trolley car  
it could be Vienna, a drunk is sleeping,  
it is usually November. Someday  
I'll find out where I came from,  
why I'm not anybody important, why  
I don't like dogs and butter and guitars.

28 November 2002

## THE BLUNDER

Every now and then I'm dumb enough  
to lace a Greek word through my weaving  
himeros it might be or last night  
what the gods have in their hearts  
while men are dying. I believe  
the original language of humanity  
can be recovered by touch, by dreams,  
by signs left in the sky by birds,  
ice cracks on a rock face, the crawl  
of turtles up from the sea, legends  
of our footsteps, weeds straggling  
just under the water in a stream.  
And Greeks. Greek has a little  
of it left, in the multinational  
Afro-Celto-Scythian Hebrew blend  
of those weird islands something lasted  
that tastes like the real thing. Tastes  
sometimes like the smell of your hair,  
honey, or the sound of an apple  
falling from the shabby tree in lank grass.  
Everything is ripe. Ripe and new at once:  
that quality, this dry old word  
juicy as a new lover. Do you know  
what I'm saying? Do you know how hard  
I try to find the world in you and find

a place for you in my world at once,  
how hard I'm trying to be me, to give you  
what I really am and where I come from,  
a truth the body has to keep blurting out.  
Some day all the new words will be ripe  
ready to burst out of somebody's lips,  
wipe you brow and say it, you're right,  
nobody knows what it means, it's too new  
to mean anything, we have to live  
our way to it, through it, on.  
I touch your shoulder as you leave the room,  
it leaves a mark on my hand forever after.  
This mark is called my skin.

28 November 2002

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Reading record reviews

I hear nothing. Looking  
out the windows I feel no wind.

29 November 2002

Boston

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It is morning, I can't see the dark.

The glass is empty but my mouth is full.

29 November 2002, Boston

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Someone laughing looks so alone.  
I feel so sad even as I share the joke,  
how much I love her, her wit,  
her heart. But how alone  
we all are inside. It overwhelms me,  
the huge hollow inside a feeling.  
What is it I feel? What is feeling?

29 November 2002

Boston

## THE OTHER PART OF THE OTHER PART

Another church begins right now,  
Saint James's mystery, the true Jerusalem  
lost in the west. Leave the old city  
to the Muslims and the Christians and the Jews.  
That was only Salem, only a hill  
and a field. We go where the true is,  
the church that rhymes with everything.

29 November 2002

Boston

## A BROWN BEARD

A Bruno board. To sanctify the man  
and relapse history. Listen to the Vatican's  
classical Confiteor, sung  
beneath the big basilica of sky  
like a Unitarian translating Homer  
war is a necessity, though sad.  
I want more from poetry than that.

I want the unkillling temperature to begin,  
a deck of cards with no knives,  
a recognition of Palestinian rights  
phrased this way:

reality

is not reversible. What is the case  
is where you have to start,  
not how you wish it were  
but how it is. They are here,  
the land beneath their feet is theirs.

What is, is the only citizen.

And then it was I thought to run  
by fingers through my beard



wake from the brightness in their sleep  
to the shadows round them

the Lord gave me a dark bedroom and I slept.  
And from the scribbles of the smoke that slew me  
I made out words, and these  
I breathed in turn into your sleep.

And so it comes you dream of me.  
And how it is contrived that a dream  
of a brown beard suddenly grown full  
could be in fact a proof of the  
restoration of the Universal Church  
in every color and the rights of man,  
apocatastasis and all comes right again.

I woke because the beard was so big so young  
whereas in specious waking life it would  
be grey or white. Now fully awake  
I understood the moral fact at last,  
which is the same as human chemistry:  
the only way to change the situation  
is to take it as irreversible, change  
can happen only forward.  
You can't pretend people aren't here  
because you wish they hadn't come.  
Everyone is where they belong.

This is now. It is what it is. Now what.  
You can't start anywhere unless you  
leave from where you are. Amen.

Morality is the only politics that works.  
Silence I insisted was most beautiful  
but he: in certain music you can hear  
an order inside the tumult of things,

a hint behind the havoc, maybe, Bach  
on the keyboard understanding something.

In every insult blind authority  
imposes on intelligence and art  
we have to find the Bruno angle

the geometry of historical inference  
that shows us where to turn next  
how to coax ourselves towards justice

as if it were a place we could travel to  
and come there blameless, almost kind.

30 November 2002

Boston