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Niels Hav - Poetry

THE ANESTHETISTS DISCUSS ASTRONOMY

The anesthetists discuss astronomy
elevating in the lift
while patients arrive in taxis
accompanied or not by family.

The universe
consists of 100 billion galaxies.
If there are sentient civilizations
on just a millionth of those planets
we are far from alone.

Outside: cold rain,
December.

A sick person
sitting in the waiting room
among frayed magazines
with his threadbare life
has only one single prayer.

Translated by P. K. Brask

Something has happened

We want to leave traces
in words.

But language is no private invention.
To love, to be abandoned;
to discover the clock that counts the seconds
inside the body. The pain in the light,
fury,
helpless grief. Language knows all that.

What then is my own? Is it possible
to gain personal experience
and attach words to it
that are not simply conventional?
To make an addition?

Something has happened, something big,
yet I cannot explain
what it is.
Assertions betray themselves.
I must accept my embarrassment –
and listen to the words
reproducing with reality
everywhere.

Translation Martin Aitken

The Institute For the Blind

Passing by the institute for the blind,
looking on the black side a night in December,
I saw the sightless dancing the tango
behind the picture windows. The whole building
was lit up brilliant like a UFO,
or a house pervaded by metaphysics.

I stopped paralysed
outside in the real darkness
and stared myself almost blind.

Translation Martin Aitken

NEKOPIRATI

On His Blindness

1

Is it cheaper now, I wonder,
to write in ink, since Borges dictated
his labyrinthine tales in Buenos Aires?

The Homer of the Argentine considered words to be
symbols we share with others. "I believe abstract
aesthetics to be a vain illusion," he wrote
in one of his prefaces, where he delighted in renouncing
originality. Almost without affectation. Only after going
blind did he make eye-contact with John Milton
in his Paradise Lost.

2

Love makes blind. But it took forty years!
Forty years of preliminary studies, imitation and outbursts
of rage when the dreamtiger escaped. Now and then he'd
consult oculists, each time a disappointment. He studied
Joyce, who must have loved Nora, though he never went
completely blind. Only when Alonso Quixano lost his
mind and called himself Don Quixote did he leave his
father's library; and not until forty years after finding
love in Geneva did Borges go blind –
as blind as Beethoven was deaf!

3

He worked in the dark and polished his sentences
in memory until they sparkled from sheer metaphysics.
“If one is a poet, one is always a poet, and all the time
assailed by poetry.” Borges absorbed nourishment
from his misfortune and replaced the visible world
with sagas and Old English verse, thereby transforming
blindness into a gift: Only now did he come eye-level
with Homer, and only now was he able to see deep
into the dark, wide world and into the dizzying
moment that is eternity.

Translation Martin Aitken

Blind Man's Bluff

They covered his eyes with a scarf
and spun him around, he loved that game.
Dizzy from the dark, he reeled ecstatic
between his cousins, three Graces
squealing with laughter. They laughed at him, his euphoria,
which also was theirs. He caught them one by one,
but guessed systematically wrong, and the party continued
the entire afternoon. He was happy in his darkness,
tireless and bold, a line had been crossed,
he touched their blushing faces;
his hands were happy. And he wished only
to go on when they mercilessly loosened the bow
and pulled the scarf from his eyes. He stood bewildered
on the brink of tears, shocked by the light
that for a moment turned him completely blind.

Translation Martin Aitken

When I Go Blind

Love makes blind –
and every single day as the blind man
shuffles along with his cane
traffic comes to a complete stop
while God's angels ascend and descend –
and the eye specialist closes his clinic.

Love makes blind, but sex is harmless;
there's nothing wrong with my eyesight
I can see everything.

That's why my love poems are such failures.
Eyes closed I whisper into the phone
and outside the train station the blind man stands,
a holy evangelist
humming in the rain
– crippled by love.

The new lovers kiss each other's fingertips
I do know that.

Translated by P.K. Brask

A FATAL ERROR

It's a fatal error of the human imagination
that we can't empathize with each other's catastrophes.
We were granted this defect for our psychic survival –
not in order to produce lame jokes about the misfortunes
of others. Humour is a form of self-defence
but ironic smirking is out of order
when tanks come rolling in and flesh and blood
from human beings drip from trees.

Some maintain that we' haven't the right to talk about
these things without being there ourselves
without having stood with a torn off arm
or a smashed brain in our hands.
We already wallow in terror and cynical pornography.
Resignation is a possibility.
But we've also no right to overlook
the world's evil just because we ourselves
by some fluke landed in a ghetto of pink obesity.

We are now more than six billion people on the planet;
each one equipped with a unique individuality,
and a claim on respect. By plain knowledge or physical
recollection of our own thin skin we ought to let ourselves
be touched by the misfortunes of others. Irony
is an impossible escape on the day when we are lying
screaming in pain on the street or in the hospital
and all internal defenses fall apart. Then it's for real.

Translated by P. K. Brask

WHERE ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO GO WITH YOUR PLASTIC BAGS?

1

That guy with two clubfeet
and several layers of ragged coats
sitting in a corner of the train station
filthy and surrounded by abomination
like a distinctive stench you can smell
from five blocks over.

He's a terrible temptation
every time you pass: to give up
this life of routine as an idler
throw away the key and sit down
next to him, could possibly be celebrated
as a homecoming to the holy light
shining on the mind's original pastures
and the primordial fieldstone
lying deep in childhood
where you first sat and watched
people passing by.

2

That is if homecomings existed.
But Gladstone Gander has sprayed the fields
with poison and Donald Duck drives his tractor
around in the toxic light
while he roars a song by Gene Autry.
There's nothing sacred here
apart from cash, cunt and chemistry.
And the primordial fieldstone has been blasted
with dynamite.
So where are you supposed to go with your plastic bags?

Translated by P. K. Brask

TOKYO, ENCORE

1.

If the dead of Nagasaki
resurrected
on whose payroll should they be listed?

2.

The cherry trees in Shinjuku belong to poetry
more than to reality – and here they stand again
in a poem: blossoming, real.

3.

Yellow smog over the palace, never mind.
The emperor is no longer divine,
he watches the telly and is impressed.

4.

Even in Tokyo the sparrow is
at home. But if God lives in nature,
his place is growing filthier!

5.

MADE IN JAPAN
Lost faces
The Haiku moment

6.

A fresh mystery: Fuji just stands there.
Cars rust, and the Tokyo Tower. What's new?
Nothing. But the planet is sick.

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7.
Caught in a traffic jam,
Springsteen on the car radio -
Japan no longer lives in Tokyo.

Translated by P.K. Brask & Patrick Friesen

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