

SENESCO SED AMO

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Donald Revell

*Starlight is almost flesh.*

— Basil Bunting

One life, not one among  
A thousand others of quail  
Like tipsy mandarins crowding  
The cold of a low wall  
Along a line of trees, the angel  
Promised me and nothing more,  
Nothing to weigh in the balance.

Menippus and Lucian  
Be with me now as I  
Feel my way among  
Misted pillars and ghosts  
Of breath on upper Broadway.  
A quick kiss in the crosswalk is  
More to me than mankind.

There is no middle ground.  
There is our empty bench.  
There is the stoop of pigeons.  
Either I have been alone  
Every hour of my life or  
Never once, not even  
One moment, and the mist rising.

Angel, how stern you have become.  
Stricken, almost as strange as Uruguay  
Against traffic in the middle distance,  
You stride, and there is bread in your step  
And sunlight ground into fine powder.  
All the same, I feel comforted.

The sharper the mist, the sweeter the hour.

For good reason, enormous windows  
Gape the walls of our museums.  
Brancusi's woman asleep awakes to see  
Riotous sunlight feeding the air  
Because air is what becomes of light  
When no one is looking. Only myself,  
And I have never been alone until now.

The stern angel gives me bread and the courage  
Of satire. Crossing the street toward me  
Menippus and Lucian extend their arms,  
And birds alight upon their arms, shitting,  
Cooing. What is mankind to me  
When I have remembered a kiss in the night sweats  
Against the traffic, without a breath of air?

The word "steadfast" comes to mind, a word  
Like "dusk," awaiting its formal elegy  
In abandoned train-yards. Little fires  
In bins are all that remains of English.  
I step into the crook of the wing of my  
Steadfast angel. I catch the scent  
Of newly washed hair, and she says to me

"Shelter here." Satire is shelter in extremis.  
Christ has the dispatch of it, having  
Inscribed bitter verses upon human eyes  
For angels' delight and the increase  
Of crooked human sleep. Let mankind sleep  
Forever. Christ has suffered enough,  
And my angel is clean enough to kiss. We kiss.