

SENESCO SED AMO

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.