

## LISA ROBERTSON / Duet

### Scene

*for Ted Byrne*

Nothing happens for the first time  
it likes what I said

it increases in speed like a train  
because newness is possible

I was eating apricots on the train  
with the sense of a relay

as the blunt monuments of the nuclear reactors  
rose from a refulgent landscape

or l'excès, l'audace, la marge et l'érudition  
in the images of Poussin

I continued in the presence of fear  
to try to think about the spaciousness of poetry

I brought the horror of the political economy into my body  
and this became a style

but I escaped from most things  
at uncertain intervals and unsuitable times

words, the eye, bodies, tall ships, scoured plains, huge forests  
perhaps they flank the subject

like porous baffles that refract  
every organ's part in living

to seek the indifferent order  
of a childhood

a field slowly regurgitates its stone  
it is then heaped at some half-hidden site at the edge

from which clandestinely grows  
buttressed by rusted scrap and gorse

a lanky wild cherry tree  
beneath it I stand, spitting seed

I eat the over-ripe, splitting-open fruit from the ground  
as would any animal

in June here the fox turds are clotted  
with pale cherry pips

it is the field's slow work to produce such turd  
from stone

thinking is this hesitant  
I keep pushing colour into it and then I sand it off

what I love is pleached  
the day retreats from the present

the movement, just outside perception  
traverses limbs, skin, organs, hair

as if it were the meaning of this sentiment  
not to be expressed

the extent to which this meaning does not exist  
ripens

there's a whirring of birds over mustard  
their wings are troubling the pods

with irony and tenderness  
like it wrinkles, puckers, near a scar

the image is not optical  
the same for beauty

I was using my own body  
as a needle

to play out an idea about beginning  
as a practical, portable gift

when a bell rang three times, behind it  
the river and massing of boughs

a young girl is by herself in a yard  
throwing darts

she fiercely flings her weapons  
at very close range to the target

reaches forward to collect the darts  
then throws them again

she repeats the ritual three times in all  
(it is late afternoon in the village)

then she retrieves her cane from the long grass  
limps slowly to the house

I feel a deep identification  
with the sullen awkward girl

who seems not to have chosen  
her own oddly flounced skirt

the spirituality of the present  
cheats in its yard

and is unlegislated  
ideology

savage with gravitas  
whose mystic target collapsed

tottering with the load  
like a fratricide ballad

all stomp and clap  
and esoteric cruelty

an apple tree  
clotted with mistletoe

seen from  
a train.

## Song

Sang indigent Venus with shimmering wet-data  
Venus robed in thrifted peignoir  
Indivisible Venus of colonial backwater  
Incommensurate Venus in zoological foray with requisite miniature dialectics  
Plus bibliophilia:

I was a freelancer and a renter  
I was holding my sexual organ in my two hands, as in myth and ritual and politics  
Nature was shaking like a theatre  
I should have liked to be a sailor  
Rhythm-wracked and grasping at flotsam  
But I had underestimated the craving of my sponsor  
Poetry was the rage at the bar  
This bird was crying baby, baby, baby, as if love were a salty thing with a ruthlessness  
What part of history polished my appetite?  
Everything I perceived became a proposition  
It was food, and inadequate, because I had money to be marketed to  
Of course I'm lovely  
In the brain cavity, in the marrow of the backbone, in the kidneys and their heat, in  
the lower bowel region, the subtle rounded atoms are afloat in vast reservoirs of  
silence  
About the olden glammy season—  
—about cosmic love's commemoration—  
I made everything inside it, but they once had human faces.  
And who will fund this mooching sorti?  
Will it be you, Memmius?  
Or do you too subscribe to debt-contagion?  
I fling down my body  
Space responds  
Something about fear and the heavy coats and the crashing objects  
Something about the desperation of a pawing

Something about nilling  
They just never reveal  
Your culture despises the people you lick.

I did have the feeling that the violence I saw was merely a rehearsal for worse violence  
So I hid in the part of pornography where there's quietness  
As the cattle flocked and the fields oozed their crops, and curséd nothing ever stopped  
—not the maggots in the grapes, not the dog's cry at storm, not the unstymied dialect—  
Which has the greatest appetite for superfluous ornament?  
Whatever's moving the worms in fruit, it's not just social, it's not just ontological, it's  
cosmical. The shit is cosmical, and it resides and breathes in money  
No matter what happens, I'm willing to walk with it  
Nothing can alter my resolution  
But for lack of ritual acknowledgement I have become a style  
Where style is my body  
This being a god's recourse to the present.

A rotting whale was speaking constantly about financial themes  
Ponderous, awesome materiality! Nothing left but to penetrate it  
When this gesture dwindles, looses its place in the hive's self-organization  
The field just slowly regurgitates its stone  
I unwisely ignore the facts—unease and incompetence, the telepathy of doubt  
It sends a weakening signal  
My friends said I had mistaken my vocation, that I was soaring in purple  
But if you're using public money you have to tell people what you think  
I hardly saw anybody mourning in the streets  
Was it my bed or my sleep, that whale?  
In the anatomy of my funding  
The image is not retinal  
It's sensing's fungible organ  
Everything looks like somebody's thought.

Part of me crawled to the circus  
The village snake, with his long teeth darkening at the edges, he is lodged with his  
widow-mother who is growing fatter every year  
On her diet of mystical and visionary literature  
It was here the leaf-hut  
Here the wild-orchid—  
Oh yeah, sadness, it's here  
Is there a kind of sorrow for the tatted half-curtains?  
The gentlemen of the place are those vulnerable shamans, those pathologically modest philosophers, you know  
And myself an aching parasite!  
In unaccustomed longhand  
I would dull my thingish senses with a fop  
So you'll be freed up to read this, Memmius, so  
Just for an instant, money would stop—  
But I just fall asleep in my earrings.

I dream a young girl seated beside me on a train  
Reads intently in her magazine  
“Pourquoi est-il muet pendant l'amour?”  
Pendant la vie  
One might ask.

I have tried lateness as a structure of feeling:  
Pompons, bosoms and bottoms  
I have learned the language of Miss Tennessee  
Like pleasure near a river  
Dimpled as a thimble—  
Is it good yet?  
Here is a vast glittering fabric brocaded with all the forms of life  
The whole formidable apparatus  
Bucking and flapping

With the help of this fabric  
I want mostly to hide from totality  
And have the sea be my emotion  
Free, generous and serious  
Like the asymmetry of compassion.