

Bernard Dewulf

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Waar de egel gaat (Atlas)
Blauwziek (Atlas)

Translation Dutch into English**Translator** Willem Groenewegen

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From The litany of Marthe Bonnard

1.
I lie in water, blue-green water not
just bathing. I'm in water
as that's where I exist. See my girlish hips
bloom under water. See me out of the water,
where my weight is a woman's.
Out of the water I don't sway from myself.
I float myself from me – a pale moon
from the body's gravitation.
I lie in water, blue-green water. Don't think,
don't think what I'm doing is just bathing.
I will stay in water till the water
enters into me. Till it is me. And I it.
Until I think like water.

2.

Tell me what's my colour.
He paints me black and blue
until my flesh suits him.

As a thing I form a woman.
I absorb the light and I am silent.

Sometimes I have to sing. His brush then
starts to dance and I stand staggering
an opaque nude
on red, transparent heels
in a whirling, blue-sick bathroom.

Tell me what's my colour.
He paints me yellow and grey,
a canary in dead light.
See, the women-friendly paint
on his claw.
He strokes me like I'm prey.

Yellow's the blush of his grief.
He parties and mourns the light
on my living, parting body.
He soon sees through my colourful corpse.

7.

I lie in water, water pale as death.
Sitting on the bank, in our theatre's slanting light,
my painter.

He outlines me in the draft
of the day. Later he discolours me like ice fish
in a hole.

What he sees occurs nowhere
but in memory of the present. The now swarms past
into the painting.

The way I float, a blotter to the light,
is how it should remain forever.
See him sit, sky-high above me,

a pencil like an ice pick close at hand,
already waiting at my surface
for that one thin moment.

Homecoming

I love you, though there's no way I can know.
I think of this when you come home from a day
in your life. But it is not a thought.
You stroke my cheek and who knows,
that gesture. It's made a thousand times
before it exists. Hangs your coat on a peg,
something from nothing, but tomorrow it might
be missing. Or shakes the day from your hair.
What I then see in this, is the beginning.
The house comes about, the table takes its place,
we cause each other. Surely it's unimaginable
that someone's making all this up.

Insomnia 3

(Dearest)

How do we converge. The night makes many bodies
and there is just one. I count you like the sheep,
the room is filled with shadows and other names than yours.

How do I kiss you to a vivid body inside me.

What do I call you, fair stranger asleep beside me.

Don't let me lie, empty in so many guises.

I have dressed you up with toys and summers, torsos
and mouths, the carnival of thighs just reels on past.

I shall not rest till I unmask you.

I shan't unmask you till I rest.

The walls are dark inside as in love's depths.

And sleeping everywhere, a watchful, staring cold, always.

Knitter

Drawers full of warm rollnecks
she knits and so tracks people
down who all the year round
brave the winter in her.

Needles are the final language.
One after another rhyme has
imposed silence on the living.
Yet they're all still here.

Their alphabet's a perfect secret,
it's under wraps, unspoken.
The one to speak can't grasp it.
Their conversation ticks, ticks around me.

Little son asleep

During a typical weekday afternoon,
a century's dispatched outside.
Your sleep is murmuring in an electric ear
in the ether of the first house.

Windows open wide to a summer
and the pidgin of another new age
works its way into our silent rooms.
Now let the future have its day.

We'll live together here till later.
Till I fit in you, a father in a father.
Till this house makes you move out.
Till it's as if I'd never been there.

Here I am, after my day's noon.
I know, your head is dreaming now,
but listen. Something in our rooms is singing
of each age. Breathe, breathe deeply with me.

Moi Bonnard

Grand nu bleu, 1924

This is my wife. She is my thousand-and-one.
Broader men have similar by the thousands,
in her alone I've seen the thousand others.
She was the closest, the furthest among the things.
I did nothing wrong besides approach her.
The paint was as close as I got. The paint
became her flesh. Her flesh was difficult
as is all grass. I wanted it to visibly sing.
Every lament it broke into changed to my colour.
In my thousand colours I looked for the same.
To always look more closely, as myopically as I could
to completely cover the horizon of her skin.

Note

Get up quietly in the early hours
just to see first light again.
Wash, put on old clothes. Coffee
and then life before the open window.

The seagulls wheel around some bread.
The children add a few more years asleep.
The pigeon's in the gutter every day.
The clouds appear to actually sail.

While I'm writing all this down,
seeing no other question besides looking,
slowly the house begins to move.
Just looking is never enough.

Song

While we walked in similar ways,
we did still walk apart.

While we, or so we thought, converged,
we didn't cease to be.

While we lay together daily,
we caressed at a remove.

This is how we have existed,
always in drawing near

something began to sing and, singing,
to disappear.