

Stella Hayes

DRUNKEN NIGHT FOR TWO VOICES

after Berlioz's *Nuit d'ivresse et d'extase infinie, Les Troyens*

[Prologue]

Sunk in darkness, out of which, the voice that's voiceless grasping to become a cord

The male voice pleads for the night to keep its darkness full

Her wrist on his throat feeling for the tremble of the vocal cords

in French, chords cording

The voices are too female & too male

trapped inside the night —.

[Act I]

We are not in my delirium

on your knees on the hardest surface

of our floor —. You ask me for something important to you —,

*

(You is abstract & specific, it's a beloved, a lover, a father, a warrior)

*

you are swelling up with our violence

You grow louder —, shifting me in gravity

I keep vigil for my dead; my dead breathe our air. The air isn't ours to push. The dark covers you so suddenly. You vanish suddenly. It wasn't long, just for a moment in time,

which for us is an eternity.

If the universe were a plant —, it would make itself stop growing & bearing fruit

You must feel ashamed of this small transgression —,

(Against You)

Why won't you speak to me —

Silence has no path, you should be making one toward me, as dark as the light is between two
bodies rounded out by longing

(Against Aeneas)

Somewhere, the Middle

[Act II]

A man's suffering is more beautiful than a woman's

I watch yours like a Tarkovsky move on film — a black or a white horse falling down before a
prophecy —, buckling & bowing at someone's invisible feet

It feels like something is letting my blood, siphoning it off in gulps

Scene after scene

at last seeing what is invisible here in vivid darkness

*

The shield his mother bore

It's still alive —,

And the distance is mine

father's dead shadow is alive

In the darkness that obliterates the memory of his abridged life

I am a master of violence

(Against my male figures)

*

Aeneas & Dido are heartbreaking

(How they break in me)

Aeneas follows his destiny to found Rome

(Let's watch her body's ambers die)

Dido drives Aeneas' sword into her diaphragm as she walks into the fire

The sword casts a light & shadow

Aeneas follows her into the fire until he recoils from its elements

(The gods have spoken)

*

Dido loves

& burns half-alive in the fire

*

Aeneas abandons Dido, Queen of Carthage

He flees from her love to found Rome

(the gods have ordained it to be)

[Épilogue]

I can hear silence in its voiceless cord, a nocturne in G flat major

I didn't learn to read music

The language of gaps & pauses

Timing —, the shame is mine alone

Time isn't going to heal all wounds —,

*

A stray child too is there rising out of fertility

(Venus, Aeneas's mother, a god, commissions a shield for her son)

(The last ekphrastic scene, Aeneas's walk down to the underworld)

Walking down overgrown grass rising to heaven —, or maybe to its opposite.

I am never sure. I'm not sure of anything. We're lost inside our own rules. Snow & ice yield to the overheated chords. The child runs toward a figure that looks like a young mother,

with luster in her loins —.

*

The daggers being caught inside her are just daggers, which when at last extracted will become daggers —

Everywhere it is as violent as when the world began in one outburst

The night unable to move the insects in flower beds to sleep

Its dangling flowers stilling in despair's lows

*

The reasons for ensuring the night unfolds.

In such a night —, I am outside myself

Taking my final leave, leaving for good all the good that I've known —, & I am grown

Who am I in you. My one side is mine, another is yours. Is it really music. No, I refuse to make it with you.

(My music is mine. My discordant chords.)

What dawns on me —,

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF BEAUTY

I

I latchkey the lock heavy as an ocean. One turn to the left / Click / the door unfurls, allowing entry to my lurksome visitor. *He* ricochets *the body of us* into my bedroom — the family dining room —

Bed / Body / Supine / Senses / Defenseless / Heart / Desist / Deceased

in my bed
him

under
my *body*

[Blank. Blank. Blank.

Blank. Blank. Blank.]

 Onset of the Dark Age(s)

II

My *Monday* —, day-of-the-week underwear —, & mattress sheet —, confiscated by the Chicago Police Department detective(s) for hard evidence —

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After the hospital —, *Home*. I (over)hear a private conversation between my father & mother. Echoes of echoes swallowing the texture of time —, time withheld from itself. My father lusterless like an old photograph, at the dining table, washing down sorrow & a fistful of heart pills

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I pick up *my red-haired* Barbie, her long nylon hair resembles fire. I pull —, her underwear off —, the hard plastic, not resisting

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dirty dirty dirty dirty dirty dirty dirty dirty dirty dirty dirty dirty dirty dirty dirty dirty dirty dirty dirty dirty

//

The room is deleted from the cerebral cortex. Malformed in an adolescent's brain. I am —, (dis)abled to see pain through an abstract apparatus

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The room refracts an outline of a family. Dust collects inside its corners. Three people living here create a culture. Roomful / Uncompanionable. *Movements of Meaning / Anxiety / Loss / Shame*
From here on in & out, this is my life —

SITTING SHIVA

After the burial, my parents' friends filled our small apartment, at the door washing their hands from a pitcher of water before entering. They brought cakes, cookies — traditionally sweet baked goods to take the sitters out of mourning playing out in real time — as pain played a central role. The Soviet Jew wasn't used to this kind of natural order of things. We were stunned by pain, grown numb by its avarice. My sister's & mother's faces were soft & the puffy redness that settled just under their skin seemed like it was always there. They were being rolled, as by a storm, an invisible violence. My sister tore the lapel of the black blazer she gave me to wear, part of a pantsuit. It was new, not a hand-me-down like most of my clothes in those early years as refugees. All I could think was that I couldn't wear my sister's beautiful suit again because it was ruined. I mourned a suit. I would grow into loss much later, after I had kissed a boy for the first time. According to custom, we had to sit on low furniture, but we had stately chairs & sofa, an anonymous donation from a wealthy family. Everywhere I looked, I saw poppies: heads bowed, heads bobbing.

WHISPER IT TO ME

here on the edge of everything
I've spent my life braiding

I ride in & out of wishful thinking
ropes in one room & dying in another

without him

in my rooms
unbraiding rope

he keeps me
from rope

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