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The Thirteenth Station

Abstract: This poem was first presented as part of a collection of fourteen poems, reflecting on the Way of the Cross and our Lord's journey to Calvary. I often think of the elegiac metre as something quite playful and passionate, so I wanted to try and capture the emotion of the rhythms with which I was familiar, and reign that into a much more sombre setting: almost an extended funerary epitaph to Our Lord on the cross.

The voice of the poem is broken as one who suffers, and the narrator seems to bleed in and out of consciousness. The weight of the speaker's shared words are reflective of the shared sin of the world which stood trial on Calvary, and the visceral and morbidly figurative language cuts into Jesus; just as each sin is a thorn in the crown upon his head.

'The Thirteenth Station' was originally presented without translation but printed instead alongside Biblical verses of lamentation that had inspired it (Lamentations 1:12, 16; John 19:25). Just as the pangs of death ring out in an incomprehensible wail, so too we do not need to understand every single word of a lamentation in order to feel its intense pain and suffering. I hope that my rather free translation will do justice to the awesome moment of God made vulnerable as man.

transgrediens sistet spectatque manetque relinquet.
cur nemo plagas mi requiescet acres?
cuiquam morosis cruciatibus antea diuus
crudelis poenas extenuante dedit?
arborem iuxta Christi consistere maesti 5
- O pia, O clemens! - alma Maria. dare:
fessum spectantes truncum orbi, languide, tingunt
tantis de rebus longius acta fleo.
non ullus constat, mea nullus pectora mulcet
neque ullus casum obtulit recte mihi. 10
priuatus pendet ramo modoque agninus alte
quod crudus gannit dentibus usque lupus.
transgrediens sistet spectatque manetque relinquet.
cur nemo plagas mi requiescet acres?

Passer stops - takes a look, then he walks on so slow.
But won't he quench fires who burn smouldering blows?
Did relentless Lord deal crux to wanderers before,
ever did yet he sentence one with torments so sore?
Beside wretched Christ's tree comes standing Maria, 5
all-nurturing she speaks - *O clemens! O pia!*
'My eyes, broken child, run wet on your frame;
I weep on what's done, so long. All the same.'
Not one here waits by, none to tame breast that bawls,
Nor one more stands here, yet to lighten my falls. 10
As lamb, strippèd bare, on that tree 'ere he hangs,
And wolf gnashes teeth, and he howls o'er the land.
Passer stops - takes a look, then he walks on so slow.
But won't he quench fires who burn smouldering blows?

How Many Books?

***Abstract:** To my dismay, I have discovered that book collecting is neither the cheapest, nor the most practical hobby in the world. All too often my eyes flit across my shelves and see books stacked in front of books. Books stacked on top of books. Books propped between the shelf beam and another stack of books, precarious to behold. I wonder whether the last book was one purchase too many.*

But I cannot throw anything away. Each book is an adventure. Each book has a voice, a history; each book has made me part of its story. The leaves of any book are by far the most beautiful foliage that I will ever cultivate!

ἄλλα πόσας ὥρας τερπνὰς γέ διήγαγον, αἴτης,
 ἐκδήμων δρυμῶν γράμματά που καταψᾶν;
 ἄλλα πόσους θρήνους ἐξηλοῦν, εἵνεκα σταθμῶν
 μικροτέρων ὄντων ταῖσδε πάσαις γέ βίβλοις;

Now then, you might ask how many pleasant hours I've passed
 thumbing the leaves blown from many a-distant country.
 But what I want to know is how many times I've heard that age-old complaint,
 that my forest's branches bow under the strain of all the blossom!

A Talk of Silence

Abstract: Perhaps we do not appreciate the beauty of something until we do not have it, or until we are forced to reflect on the fact that we are about to give it up. This talk of silence by Mowbray is as much a panegyric of language and the eloquence of speech; it lends itself to meta-poetic games on reflection of nuance and style of language.

The Greek world is one full of stories and story-tellers. The Homeric bards, the nine Olympian Muses, Aesop and Orpheus...the Greeks loved to use the skill of a speaker for the pleasure of hearing a good story. These Greek ideas of the importance of speech and story lend themselves so beautifully to the weight of this passage, and the images and ideas used in both English and Greek idiom work together harmoniously. A good translation tries to find dynamic cultural equivalents, and so I have tried to make the world of Shakespearean Middle England and Sophocles' Athenian stage meet somewhere in the middle of this interpretation.

κρίσις, τύραννε Διογενές, δ' ἔμε βρίθει,
 ἥτινα λέγεις σου κύριης γλώσσης ἀπό.
 κούφου γὰρ ἄθλου, οὔδε τοίγαρ ἀθλίου,
 τοῦ δῆτ' ἐλαυνόντου με μὴν πέραν πύλων,
 πρὸς χεῖρος οὕτως ἀξιῶ τυράννικος. 5
 Μοῦσαι λόγους μοι ἄρ' ἐπαίδευσαν πάλαι,
 Ἑλληνίκην δῆτ' οἰκίας γε, λειπτέους.
 ὡς τις λύραν Λητῶαν αἶρει, ἥς τρύφη,
 ἢ τ' ὄργανον παλαιὸν ἔμπροσθεν φέρει
 χεῖρσι τραχείαις δῆτ' ἀμάθεσι τῶν γλύκων 10
 ὑπ' Ὀρφέως μούσων ἄρ' ἀσθείσων πρὸ νῦν,
 ὡς γλώσσα μου βέβηκεν μᾶλλ' ἀσυμφόρη.
 γλώσσαν κενὴν μου καὶ κάτερξας εἰς στόμα,
 αἰρουμένην χεῖλεσσι δ' ἀμφ' ὄδουσί τε.
 καὶ τ' ἀγνοεῖν δὴ δυσχερὲς γ' ἄγαν πικρὸν, 15
 ὄν γίγνεται μοι φρουρός, ὄν κύρει κένον.
 ὠρᾶν ὅλας Ὠρας θάμ' ὥστε τοι τροφὸν
 σαίνειν πάλιν εἰς τ' ἄττα φοιτᾶν οὐκ ἔχω.
 ποῖα κρίσις, εἰ μὴ μόρος σιγᾶν ἔλων
 τὰ πνεῦμα λαμπρῶν ἐγγένων ἔπων ἀπό. 20

THOMAS MOWBRAY

A heavy sentence, my most sovereign liege,
And all unlook'd for from your highness' mouth:
A dearer merit, not so deep a maim
As to be cast forth in the common air,
Have I deserved at your highness' hands. 455

The language I have learn'd these forty years,
My native English, now I must forego:
And now my tongue's use is to me no more
Than an unstringed viol or a harp,
Or like a cunning instrument cased up, 460

Or, being open, put into his hands
That knows no touch to tune the harmony:
Within my mouth you have engaol'd my tongue,
Doubly portcullis'd with my teeth and lips;
And dull unfeeling barren ignorance 465

Is made my gaoler to attend on me.
I am too old to fawn upon a nurse,
Too far in years to be a pupil now:
What is thy sentence then but speechless death,
Which robs my tongue from breathing native breath?

- *Richard II* Act I, Scene III