

Christian Bök

A Nocturne for Eurydice

for "the maiden in her dark, pale meadow"

Twilight through the roof of a rain forest
 shatters like a chandelier of green glass,
the shrillness strafed by keening cicadas
 and unseen flocks of cockatoos that caw
their catcalls at the meltdown of the sun.

Dimming of the day bronzes a pathway
 that we follow under vaults of booyong
down a terraced stairway to this canyon
 of warm mist, where a waterfall loiters,
draped in a grotto, like a soaked sarong.

Shadows deepen the tinges of each fern
 to jade, while we descend into the nave
of this cavern where paramours gather,
 unmournful, by the cascade, to witness
the arrival of bright nymphs at nightfall.

Prattle, muttered by the gentle shower
 in its pool of shade, softens our voices
while we wait, rebuking the ruby glow
 from a camera, its lamplight forbidden,
a red ray doused to darken the drama.

Lovers who kiss near the railing confess
 their joy upon seeing the mossy shine
 of dew, luminescent on the black walls
 of rock, these blurry photos of bijoux,
 mimicking shimmers on radium clocks.

Umbral, the Day-Glo from every fey fly
 stipples the cave, pinpricking crevices
 with a spray as numinous as absinthe,
 the basalt hung with threads of saliva,
 like dewdrops bedewing a spiderweb.

Wonder spins a tinsel that embroiders
 our mood as we marvel at this roomful
 of minuscule creatures, each flea as far
 from us as a star, whose constellations
 loom over us, guiding us to our doom.

Glyphs, unreadable by the wispy gleam
 of fox fire, foretell no fortunes for souls
 who appear with their private oracles
 to view these tapestries, then file by us,
 like a queue of lanterns leaving a mine.

Bereft of our path when left in the dark,
 we take delight that, blind at the entry
 to this shrine, we find a dim dot of red
 taking flight, a match-head lit in a waft
 of perfume, its spark lifted like a kite.

Adrift, the speck is our distant galleon
 with sails ablaze at night upon a black
 ocean, a feeble beacon whose glimmer
 disputes the puniness of living things
 that strain to remain afloat in the void.

Clouds of pollen, orbiting the orchids,
 ignite, then cavort, alongside the banks
 of the cataract, each downslope aglow
 with muddled smudges from luciferin
 in green fungi, blemishes of limelight.

Unease amid this awe that consoles us
 still impels me to grope for a guardrail,
 retaking your hand in mine to guide us,
 like a blind man, up a cliffside staircase,
 unseeing in the blackness what awaits.

Lovers know that, of all demons in Hell,
 love is the most dire, duty-bound to tear
 all spirits to tatters, to spare no thought
 for the remnants of misspent romances,
 which defy the gods but end in despair.

Deeper than this ravine with its river
 flows a duller stream of forgetfulness,
 our dream, like some oasis from chaos,
 where devils avow that, if love is woe,
 best then to dwell alone in the cosmos.

Regret is the ember that calls the moth
 to burn in the spittle of a glowworm.
 Let me keep my faith aloft, like a flame,
 my firm gaze, unreturning to this rift
 behind us at the blind spot of my loss.

Let me promise bravely to uphold you,
 though we falter at the threshold when we cross.