

Daniel Tobin

Imaginary Career

After Rilke

At first, childhood, its infinite abandon,
aim-less, nothing to renounce. O inborn bliss.
Then the sudden plunge into appetite and loss,
after terrors, barriers, captivity, schoolrooms.

In spite, the one cowed becomes one who cows
and, getting even, bids others knuckle under.
Beloved, feared, savior, rival, winner —
the conqueror conquers in every run of blows.

Then, alone in the cold, ethereal expanses,
still deep within that well-spun fabrication,
a breath is taken toward the Ancient, the Origin...

and out of the hidden-most haunt God pounces.



We Are*After Rilke*

just mouth — but do we sing the heart's distance,
that abides in the sacred core of everything?
Its boundless pulsing keys its beats to each of us
in whispered rhythms. And its enormous suffering
is, like its clamorous rejoicing, too much to bear.
So, always, since we are only mouth, we tear
ourselves away. But suddenly at once
the great heartbeat enters into us in secret
and we cry out.... Then, in that instant,
we are all creature, metamorphosis, and face.



The Bridge

After Rilke

Just as when the wingbeats of ravishment
lifted you over primordial depths,
so now build your bridge, an astonishment
that boldly reckons the envisioned arch.

Miracle's not only when some menace
has been mystifyingly survived;
a miracle is made miraculous
by something consummately achieved.

One shouldn't presume to work in tandem
with the inexpressible relation.
Being's braid unfolds, always more ardent —
still, it isn't sufficient to be carried along.

Make of your most practiced talents a span
till they're strong enough to hold at once
two contradictions.... For it's in the human,
why the All-in-All requires your advice.



Stars, Falling*After Rilke*

Do you still point up at them: the way
they'd steeplechase like horses across
the heavens, over the sudden hurdles —
did we have so many — of our hopes?
For then innumerable stars would leap
everywhere, so almost our every gaze
would hitch itself to their risky play,
and the heart feel itself to be whole
under all of that incandescent rubble,
and outlive them, somehow unscathed.



The Gong

After Rilke

This sound beyond measure before
even being heard. As though the tone
exceeding us were the resonance
of a vastness ripening —



Wild Rosebush*After Rilke*

The way it is just there in evening darkening
with rain, young and undiminished,
and all the offerings of its tendrils lifting,
but still so deep in its own self-possession

already its flushing blooms have opened,
each one untended, each unintended;
so, self-surpassing; so, superabundant —
so inexpressibly self-impassioned

it coaxes the traveler coming down the road
with his evening mulling uninspired:
Oh, look, look at me, how impregnable
I am here, unprotected, without desire.



In Passing

It rakes these leaves between
 the hell strip and the street,
this itinerant wind
 that gathers everything.
With particles, galaxies,
 the duration at your feet,
it rakes these leaves between
 the hell strip and the street.
They rest, for now,
 but its gust will not retreat
and even a felt stillness
 intends the fleetest wing.
It rakes these leaves
 between the hell strip and the street,
this itinerant wind that gathers
 everything.



My Offering

To Zoster*

Legion of infinitesimal blowtorches,
 and all the arsonists gleefully at work
 on the writhing bundles. Piquant tortures
 like needles, acid-tempered, or a pitchfork
 sulfur-dipped in the lees of Phlegethon,
 scourge with the credulity of a hairshirt.
 But the body wants none of it: this zone
 of fervid interest that scorches the flesh.
 Lesser archon, latency's drone, purveyor
 of the border between living and not,
 you who've girdled me in your half-armor
 brash with the blister-fallout of your rot,
 be done, at last, with your intimate flaying.
 Here, like a pain-patch, is my offering



*Herpes Zoster, better known as “Shingles.”

Gulls in Winter

They stand it seems a little stunned,
disciples who've rashly ventured out
to follow a master they can't see,
though where they've verged is only ice,
thin, the near channel waters rippling—
not that roiling metaphor, the sea,
for what seethes below but holds us up
or doesn't.

They could take off
at any time, one by one, or all at once,
into the gray-pink patina of sky
with its declining sun and fringe of cloud
the color of the birds themselves;
but stay, like markers pointing every way,
these gulls in winter. As they are.

