

Dan Disney

Four Villanelles

(i)

Paris Review, Fall 1970, #50 (George Seferis)

without history, strange instrument with music in it, our notes are glossaries
of atmosphere, propagandistic tact for exiles, ours
the language of ruined ground, wine and bone murmuring *ah!*

and our voices habit-fashioned, Byzantine, slow
fables in the abstract weather of us, cosmopolitans floundering
without history, strange instrument of meaning

the panoramas bucolic, expressing absolutes and overplayed with
light ashore to fault-lined archaeologies
of language, ruined ground of wine and bone murmuring

among the folklores, transferred to sunny forgetfulness
we're nailing crops of bookcases to each horizon, empty
without history, strange instrument with music in it, minds scanning

the austere functions of memory – *check one two duh duh duh* – elaborate
scenes jazzed up in the concrete dark
of language, a ruined ground with wine and bone murmuring 'we ask

that you ask nothing of this calamity (please
edit all behavior inside these carnal, antipodean woods)
without history, strange instrument with meaning in it, we call our acts moral
in the language of ruined ground, wine and bone murmuring

ah!

(ii)

Alain Badiou, 'Art and Philosophy' vs Samuel Beckett, *The Expelled*

truth exists as a charm (Lat. *carmen*: song), an epic dimension
amid overgrown nakedness, geraniums, countless procedural fingerings
we know not where to begin, nor how to

announce disappointment in the rhetorical equipment
of the gods, hair seizing in the muddy breeze, a church of hats lurching in finitude
truth exists as a charm (Lat. *carmen*: song), where rats

gallop unsurveyed by mystics
alienating in near-beastless gardens, opening ground in the name of tragedy/completion
we know not where to begin, nor when

to take the pulse of that old society of friends
in a matrix of poses declaring taste, flash of themselves in front of closed windows
truth exists as a charm (Lat. *carmen*: song), an incarnation

calming hysterics beneath fruit-laden trees
protocols to modulate the snaky production of absolutes, where
we know neither where to begin, nor whence

to embrace those idols speaking behind half-loved moustaches, ascribing
memory (imperfectly) to the void
where truth exists as a charm (Lat. *carmen*: song), an epic dimension we know
not how it begins, nor where it might end

(iii)

Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'
vs Alain Badiou, 'The False Movements of Cinema'

I don't think there can be generalizations at all
amid the existence of villains looking wonderful in blunt, patrician ways
we swarm, a system of spasms, and finally *we are*

nowhere with our skin on, populating divine garrets, hospitals, our
morally haggard personalities in dull brick universities, status pure (?)
there can be no generalizations

inside each new odyssey of bad coffee: we are indifferent, hysterically
the weather always next question, a flat presence
around little portraits of ourselves clutching accoutrements and

finally *we are nearly harmless*, demigods inside radio
murmuring in morphine clouds of 'I don't think so' and ... *there!*
I don't think there can be generalizations at all

among tyrants riding up front of newly-exploding places
practicing I want I want, avenues professionally heavy, swarming
accidental as physics, and finally *we are*

a *frisson* of hello raging aloud
waving theatrically at the terminus of each hell, our mouths smiling
and there can be no generalizations
(I think) finally, swarming, *we are nowhere* at all

(iv)

Paris Review, Winter 1972, #53 (John Berryman)

to the smallest rooms of history, the
wonder of death is plentiful with supernatural, factory-made flowers

and this is where we started to forget
the anarchy of pleasure copied across our magazines, décor outright sacred, those
compositional spaces fitted with bright pictorial themes

in the smallest rooms of history
immensity accelerates, self-organized into an eternal portrait
of objects, voices moving about on bicycles across unfamiliar streets

and this is where we'll start
forgetting the crime scenes of desire, mysterious plots narrated by boys
qua breathless boys dissecting wildly pure (?) ideas

in the smallest rooms of history
the erratic hand movements of hierarchy, social as authority and boundlessly
nostalgic for the shape of dead reactionaries

we're starting to forget (all
mechanical production impairs the validity of memory) while
ceremonial magic screens parasitic in endless intervals over material space

starting to forget
we retire to the smallest rooms of history