

THE SILENT BARD

Biljana Scott

1. New College choir

Sight calls the shots; sight strikes the silent chimes.
Choirboys by candlelight, their cassocked master,
oak stalls, carved saints, translucent tremor
of the organ glass. I sense an ancient pain – sublime
in its command of passion, and its disdain –
but shut it out, don't let it register.
This is the angle, this the chorister
and this the chiaroscuro I want to frame.
Starched ruffs, lips parted ... and there it is again:
the lyric flight of man the sufferer
raised like a trophy to God the father.
I close my eyes and train my ear to the refrain –
hear praise sustained, hear pain, hear passion borne in time
and place escape the slicing shutter, its soundless crime.

2. Intervals

Distance and dials framed and foreshortened
collapse the intervals in which, drawing
breath, we modulate – sometimes with forethought
or with the tutored talent of a master singer,
but often, yes, often so unheedingly
that we surprise ourselves and others (')
– meaning upon release. Is this a crime?
Photographs are not the only culprits
to parse the world in silence – nor is silence
mute. A pulse beats between parentheses,
each interval is phrased. Whether to breathe
in hope, or [rebracketing] to breathe in
hope – there is beauty in a pause...
and pain.

3. Portrait shoot

Thank you, he says to his model students
for putting up with this considerable...
(cornered by a collocation?)... *inconvenience*.
I meter, frame, shoot and reframe. Invincible
in the ensuing cross-fire, not between Rorty
and Rawles, which he stages, but between
sheriff and sharp-shooter – my trigger-happy
righting of the world with what's to be seen.
In the panelled room a single candle burns:
sunlight and flame, a happy balance.
Idling, I frame gothic with gilt. Chance turns
intention. Are all links wrought, all semblance
assembled? Beside the candle, an apple – keen
with the surge of what-else in this found scene.

4. College windows

Arse about face laughs the instructor
Lots fail because they don't bother check it.
What we say – and misportray – of others
tends to sink with Narcissus, self unsuspected.
As do these shimmer egos that partner
us in full technicolour, minuet-like
in their moves and mores: two steps closer
for the promise of more – not quite, not yet...
now for the chained unconcern of a turn elsewhere.
A Pop-art brush made to paint Univ's turrets
centuries ago, while at New (*move on, don't stare!*)
Plato's cave melts into a Munchian scream.
Set on permanence, we miss our own cameo
– framed for a flicker – then lost in the flow.

5. Orcadian scene

Loved as the view from my father's window
stone wall, sea-gleam, broad pasture in between:
the hum and glow of a breathing Rothko.

The clouds in their flight cannot quite be seen
but a cursive script imprints the land
– if only briefly: this would have been

a scroll worth reading. The head and hand
on a Roman statue are now long gone,
yet veiled diaphanously, she stands

unrivalled, not asserting but – how is this done –
revealing both her beauty and his artistry
through seemingly see-through stone.

Fine-tuned to a world that could well be
we seize the fleeting, frame, then set it free.

6. The Silent Bard

Mute witness to the wedding day, no harp
nor voice, but in his eyes a story.
What does he sing of, the silent bard?

The couple drift in dreamy ecstasy
above the banquet's chatter – as if sus-
pended on the hum itself. Perhaps he'll

cut and spread some snaps to show us
it's not what you *can* see but what you can't
that drives the story: the must be or must

at least *have been*, the could or couldn't
it *maybe* mean? He cuts again, a fortune teller
now. Will you tell me what happens? He won't.

Out there somewhere beyond our chatter
drifts the smile of a song we cannot capture.

