

Everybody's Pastoral

*Read left to right across the parts,  
with two readers.*

BIRD'S:

Here I am,  
a bird singing  
in the tall yellow grass  
and wheat,  
in the yellow landscape,  
nude, a red bird singing  
nude  
the grass is dry  
catching fire, nude,  
till you sing with me of things lost,  
till it has almost caught my red,  
we singeing,  
one letter between golden  
the old peace on my  
death breathing on my  
the wheat fields

GOLDEN:

nude,  
red  
fallen  
of the lost golden  
fire,  
till it is almost  
fire to my orange,  
you singing:  
singe with us now,  
between red burning,  
left wing,  
right wing,  
behind us, disappearing.

Excerpt from *The Book of Blind Dates*

Appreciative gaze: you weren't lying  
on the phone, you look nice, she says.  
I'm definitely not disappointed either,  
said with a calm ocean of lust purling  
beneath it. Eyes never lie when they see  
something they like: clink, clink, tall  
and approachable looking bashful,  
you're funny. Hey, thanks for coming out...  
Not many guys would give a single mom a shot...  
Oh, please, he says, as if discrimination  
were a tall, unthinkable glass of water.  
Date ending, have to get back to the little one.  
Okay. And, oh? She wants a kiss? She says,  
"How about like how they do it in Italy?"  
Oh, he says, all'italiano, peck peck  
on each cheek. In other worlds,  
blind worlds would have made love,  
but it was goodbye forever and no sparks.

...Excerpt from *ENCYCLOPÆDIA SOMNAMBULA*...

## Leopardi, Giacomo

Giacomo Leopardi (June 29, 1798 – June 14, 1837) was an Italian poet, essayist, philosopher, philologist, and professional insomniac. He was born in the papal-state of the Marche, in the provincial town of Recanati, of a noble family, where the moonlight rimmed the hills with silvery dryer lint. His father, the Count Monaldo, was a gentle man. . . .

[TEXT MISSING, MICROSLEEP]

. . . the young insomniac boggled minds as he booked it from the astronomical treatises of his early teens to the forgeries of Homeric texts, learned pranks that fooled even respected scholars.

This has the benefit of all being true:

[TEXT LAUNDROMAT, MICROSLEEP]

As an atheist, Leopardi was bound for collision with staunch Catholic poets, like Niccolò Tommaseo, who claimed that the young man's philosophy was like a frog endlessly croaking:

“I'm a hunchback,  
I'm a hunchback,  
I'm a hunchback,  
there's no God.”

But the young poet rebounded, replying:

*Ebbene, signore*—Well, sir: You've taken aim and missed the point of my art:

My quarrel isn't with God (*with the maid returning from the fields  
in sheaves of wheat*)  
but with problems of evil.

Try my utilitarian calculus and see what I mean:



On one end of their curves the integrals carry SUFFERING, figured as a serpent writhing, and on the other, HAPPINESS, figured as a pig mounting an immense cornucopia that looks like a landscape disappearing.

But happiness and suffering are invisible, so the serpents and the cornucopia of landscape are

[NOT FIGURED HERE, MICROSLEEP]

But, Niccolò, I wanted to tell you,

my voice, my body, and my suffering ring out amorally approaching joy,  
*when everything feels sharper and clearer at 4am, wide awake,*

and the outcome of our different calculuses is:

*(of the fields silvery battered moonlit marshes and fiery planets)*

to understand how we are rippling

like the muscle under the black-and-white tigers

going extinct in Siberia,                      wrung out amorally approaching joy,

and I wanted to tell you what I saw, impossibly, between the blurring of last night and this morning:

it was a girl

walking past my hill into the fields with a dutiful air and a textbook of mathematics under her delicate arm, making a musical sound,

*bling bling bling bling bling bling bling*

sounds impossible to make in Italian, as though she were from England or America, but expressing a language I well knew, the musical birdcall of our inhuman calculus, but happier. . .

[ad infinitum, TEXT MISSING]

## The Great Chain

Time blurred to a stop  
where I stood in the  
cobblestoned globe  
of the Italian village—  
yet the couples danced  
Time into movement when  
the black kerchief of  
the woman swallowed  
in a black dress leapt into my eye,  
an ancient woman leaning  
her body into her cane  
onto a stool where she sat  
on the balcony, watching  
the dancers whirl round  
in circles and squares,  
high in the mountains,  
in the old town of Scanno  
in the piazza, where we  
watched the forked bodies  
dancing in circles and squares  
in the dance of the Catenaccio,  
or, *The Great Chain*, the old  
nuptial dance for natives  
of the town, as my being  
swung like a boom camera  
over the stones and I sank  
deeper into the whirl  
of the forked bodies  
of what felt like a vortex  
in the chain of Time,  
till satisfied I walked  
down the mountain home  
into the house where  
my father was born