

红狐丛书·西北欧卷
语言丛林的游戏

An Essay on Mourning

John Burnside

哀悼随笔

[英] 约翰·伯尔尼塞

郑政恒 译



江苏凤凰文艺出版社
JIANGSU PHOENIX LITERATURE AND
ART PUBLISHING, LTD

哀悼随笔

[英] 约翰·伯尔尼塞

郑政恒 译

An Essay on Mourning

John Burnside



江苏凤凰文艺出版社
JIANGSU PHOENIX LITERATURE AND
ART PUBLISHING, LTD.

图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

哀悼随笔: 英汉对照 / (英) 约翰·伯尔尼塞 (John Burnside) 著; 郑政恒译. — 南京: 江苏凤凰文艺出版社, 2018.1

(红狐丛书. 语言丛林的游戏)

ISBN 978-7-5594-1382-6

I. ①哀… II. ①约… ②郑… III. ①诗集—英国现代—英、汉 IV. ①I561.25

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2017)第 272880 号

书 名	红狐丛书·语言丛林的游戏: 哀悼随笔
主 编	北 岛
著 者	(英) 约翰·伯尔尼塞
译 者	郑政恒
责任编辑	于奎潮 王娱瑶
特约编辑	薛 倩 傅春晖
装帧设计	周安迪
出版发行	江苏凤凰文艺出版社
出版社地址	南京市中央路 165 号, 邮编: 210009
出版社网址	http://www.jswenyi.com
印 刷	江苏凤凰通达印刷有限公司
开 本	787×1092 毫米 1/32
印 张	1.375
字 数	18 千字
版 次	2018 年 1 月第 1 版 2018 年 1 月第 1 次印刷
标准书号	ISBN 978-7-5594-1382-6
定 价	60.00 元 (全十册)

(江苏凤凰文艺版图书凡印刷、装订错误可随时向承印厂调换)

Contents

An Essay on Mourning

1

目 录

哀悼随笔

19

An Essay on Mourning

for Lucas

I On Digging a grave for Oxy, A black tabby kitten, October 2016

"It is bitter - bitter," he answered;

"But I like it

Because it is bitter,

And because it is my heart."

—Stephen Crane

A fair day, for this time of year,
sun on the hedge trees, a lone
sparrow-hawk over the paddock.

Digging on this ground is hard, and then it gets harder:
six inches down, I have to go back for a pick

to prise the larger stones out of the clay;
and then, with the blanket-weave shroud laid out in
the open,
we finish the job in silence, only

stopping once or twice
to estimate the depth and catch our breath.

With nothing to say, you crumble a fistful of loam
so it warms in your hands,
and sprinkle the grave we've contrived
with the raw, dark crumbs;
and, after a moment, I follow, respecting the silence.

Nothing to say, but far at the back of my head,
a voice from an old commercial, calling to mind
the New Jerusalem of every song
my mother made me dance to, pink
confetti on my shirt, the latest girl

a chimera of sequins in my arms—nothing that made
any sense, but just enough
to contradict the '50s narrative
of lavender and naphtha in
her wedding dress, the hollow of her sleeves

more ghostlike than the bride I never saw.
So much to grieve for now,
I can barely keep track:
sitting up late with my books, in the anglepoise light,
heart on a fish-hook, I feed on whatever I can,

then sleep late, like a latter-day
Neanderthal, the plains
implicit in my basal ganglia,
a dustfall in the hall, the noonday sun,
some *dolce stil nuovo*, of sorts, at the tip of my tongue.

So much to grieve for—and all of it
happenstance,
the curse of a lifelong vocation for standing my ground
while all that I once thought solid frittered away
like snow on a lit *hibachi*

I see how alike we are, and how unlike;
and I see you have reached that condition where
misunderstood

is also a kind of vocation, the hardscrabble refuge
you cling to because it is hard,
and because it is yours;

yet I have to accept that you are inclined to grief:
by no means a gift, but a treasure that must be
guarded, like the heartbeat of a fallen
songbird, gathered up and carried home
to safety, till it dares to fly again.

More often than not, as we know, that presence fades
to a morsel of warmth in a shoebox lined with moss,
but once or twice it soars from your parted
fingers, soft surrender to the air,
as it flickers away to the trees.

From that point on,
no song will be the same;
you listen for yourself, for some thin trace
of healing in the varied dialects
of mistle thrush and robin.

I remember the morning we walked
from Leukstadt to Susten:
lost the first quick snow, your brother and I
and you, running on ahead, to make
new footprints on the path between the vines.

Someone had left, or died, and their grapes
were black on the trellis,
shrivelling, now, in the cold, but still
so fiercely alive, in their way, an indelible script
of purpose and blind resolution inking the wires.

We climbed the icy track at Alte Kehr, the new snow
thick on the dry-stone walls around the town,
and everything, it seemed, was legible,
meltwater filling the tracks where a cat had lingered,
the snow-light on your faces, like a blessing.

In these parts, I've heard it said that, now and then,
a woman will leave her bed without a sound

and go out early in the morning snow,
leaving no prints as she walks to the end of the track,
no vapour on the air, no sound, no stain;

and though she is one of those we would surely imagine
as loyal and decent, a careful and loving mother, we also
know
she has travelled beyond any strong
attachment to the place she leaves behind, or those
who carry on without her:

a woman at dusk, in a white shirt and wine-coloured
sandals,
singing, because she thinks she is alone,
or bending to fuss the cat, while the snow-clouds gather,
and all that seemed sure stands poised for the darkness to
come,
vineleaves and meltwater, hedge-blossoms, fish blood
and bone.

II A Changeling

*How ravished one could be without ever being
touched. Ravished by dead words become
obscene and dead ideas become obsessions.*

—D. H. Lawrence

In the fields between Fulford Burn and the fallow
parish of Benarty,
the boy I had been went astray, and was never found
by the men of that place, who had promised to fetch
him home
intact and unharmed, before the first blue of evening.

No one would ever have said
that my absence was close
to exquisite, the void shirts
dripping on the line, the narrow bed turned down
in the curve of the box-room, under the devious stars

and nobody pretended to believe
when word came of my perfect
likeness in the back seat of an Austin
Cambridge, all the toffees he'd refused
preserved in a tamper-proof bag for the deposition.

If only he'd known, he could have walked away,
but home is where they have to take you in
and he was perfect altar boy
material, his body cold as stone, and in his eyes,
a look that said he'd do it all again;

and though it wasn't all on principle,
I stayed away for reasons of my own,
a shadow in the wildwood, laying snares
for creatures long-extinct, and barely a hint
of caramel, or Woodbine, on my fingers.

III Self Portrait in 1979

*Whatever the misery, he could not regain
contentment with a world which, once
doubted, became absurd.*

—Sinclair Lewis

As if he had a Babylon to lose
or years of mother love to wash away,

he makes believe the skin is fanciful,
a ripening delayed just long enough

to memorise the rain;
and though it cannot last, this narrative

of curdled sheets
and methamphetamine

is all the Boy's Own Life he's ever known
that doesn't stink of aspic or fair play.

No one is there to tell him that the heart
is mostly grease and muscle, home

more rented room than permanent abode;
and summer comes too early, dry leaves

powdered in the dust, the cesspits
crusting in the backstreets, clogged with hair.

Away, on the thin edge of town,
stunned animals go down into a fold

of blood and night to make the burger meat
the tourists fatten on, obese and white,

but slick with sitcom sass.

At daybreak, rum and perfume on his lips,

he dips from sleep to waking, sleep
to sleep, until the train slows on a stretch

of brush and tinder, light
and fog streaked through the grass and all

the usual rubbish, chunks of bottle glass,
old beer cans, spills of newsprint, plastic scrim.

For a moment, under his breath, he sings,
there must be some way out —a memory

of soft scald at the bone, and all at once
he wants the same again, same words, same gaze,

the same good story from the same old song
—*there must be some way out* and, after all,

he knows they have people for this
in the great beyond,

experts in luring the out—patient back to his cell,
and lighting a lamp, the city receding at last

while the key in the lock turns so softly,
he has to believe

he will know what he loved all along,
when it comes to the Rapture.

IV Indelible

I should like De Haan to see a study of mine of a lighted candle and two novels (one yellow, the other pink) lying on an empty chair (really Gauguin's chair), a size 30 canvas, in red and green. I have just been working again today on its pendant, my own empty chair, a white deal chair with a pipe and a tobacco pouch. In these two studies, as in others, I have tried for an effect of light by means of clear colour, probably De Haan would understand exactly what I