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If I at Least Believed in God

Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke

Philip Ramp

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“I threaten—I overthrow”
“My baby’s hungry.”

The body gives birth to its justice
and defends it.
The body makes the flower
spits out the pip-death
tumbles down, flies
motionless whirls around the cesspool
(motion of the world)
in dream the body is triumphant
or is found naked in the streets
enduring;
it loses its teeth
it trembles erotically
its earth bursts like a watermelon
and it’s finished.

If I at Least Believed in God

If I at least believed in God
your hands would have
infinite interpretations
when they move
and lift me up to heaven
a heaven like Rilke’s
with sad angels
blowing loneliness
down to earth
implied wings
timid in their speech
for they do not exist.

If I at least believed in God
my absurd insistence on self-torture
on stepping out of the white circle
of small happiness
would have been explained to me
I would have a stone in me

strength
for the endless elegy
of my life.
But I'll remain
with my elbows on the table
motionless watching you eating
hoping for an unnatural memory
longer than any light
you'll live.
When your sun has set
in time
with your swelling curly basil
the grey of your head
helpless, blind
you'll call out for your son Benjamin
in the dark
cataract death
clouding your glasses
and as the nurses
noiselessly close the doors
in your brain
the syllables will tumble down
my voice will deafen you
as if I were calling your name
beyond the sea.

If I at least believed in God
the separation from your body
my body
would be temporary
and death would have no
other consequences.

Chicago, March, 1975

Translated by Philip Ramp