



BABEL
VIA
NEGATIVA

HYBRID SCRIPTING

DESMOND KON
ZHICHENG-MINGDÉ

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And for ages men had gazed upward as he was gazing at birds in flight. . . . A sense of fear of the unknown moved in the heart of his weariness, a fear of symbols and portents, of the hawk-like man whose name he bore soaring out of his captivity on osier-woven wings, of Thoth, the god of writers, writing with a reed upon a tablet and bearing on his narrow ibis head the cusped moon.

James Joyce

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

Stop it, you fool! Stop that roll call of the Birds!
Are you utterly daft, man, inviting the Vultures and Eagles
and suchlike to our feast? Or weren't you aware
one single beak could tuck it all away?
Clear out, and take your blasted ribands with you.
So help me, I'll finish this sacrifice myself.

Aristophanes

The Birds

The thing about Zen is that it pushes contradictions to their ultimate limit where one has to choose between madness and innocence. And Zen suggests that we may be driving toward one or the other on a cosmic scale. Driving toward them, because, one way or the other, as madmen or innocents, we are already there.

Thomas Merton

Zen and the Birds of Appetite

TWEET
GOES THE
POPLAR TREE

He kicked off his sandals, walked barefoot into the kitchen.



“I want to believe you. Will you let me?”

The very act of being, carnival as concept.



But the Guardians went atonal, deaf
as this Patagonian Desert.

An ankle bell fell into the sand.



Odd.

LOST ACTS OF TRANSLATION

fête champêtre { rustic festival }

There is garbage outside the gas station. A single mound of used furniture. A love seat, mildewed with blotchy stains. A foldable table, its missing leg ten yards away. The attendant's wife is walking around with a gigantic tarpaulin bag, half-filled with things. Her daughter is seated on the pavement, reading *The Cappuccino Years* by Sue Townsend. A jukebox even, its glass smashed in, and round plates in neat piles. The attendant is looking over this mess, his cigarette dangling from two fingers at the side of his hip. As if he's contemplating setting it all on fire, and watching the ambers glow in the night. Tonight's sky will be cast in an orange hue, or so the weatherman said. The colours will walk into each other, no more different than one thought writing itself into the next, one abandoned to issue an awakening. The scroll is crisply burning, as is the painting of Xiamen and its port of 14th century merchants.

in aeternum
 { into eternity }

An awkward plant that tilts out from under the grass. It looks like the pedestrian on the embankment, keeping unnaturally still. As if frozen in time, in mid-thought, like Laotzu dreaming of Zhongdian. “I saw Shangri-La once,” the woman beside him says matter-of-factly. “I lived in a Tibetan house. I ate at their table, slept in all day because of the cold.” This could be Shuodu Hai or Haba Village, no one can be sure. There are no landmarks. Only vast tracts of land, and a range of mountains only the locals tell apart, and name, intimately as if calling out to a friend. The tree behind the guesthouse has drooped its branches to nearly touch the ground, the ground dry and cracked all the way to the pond of ice. At the edge of the cliff, another tree, an old willow, grows out into the mist.

coup d’oeil
 { quick glance }

Bodies down. There is love in rarity, in being scarce about reifying. This folding, this folding panels the whole bones of us. We are broken, again and again, and we are not. There is a treatise on Lippo di Benivieni’s “Lamentation over the Dead Christ”. In obverse. Tempera and gold leaf on wood. Its frame was added on. Today is suddenly a day in 1320, yet it feels like any other day. I didn’t know sweat turned green like lime that sours only to clean. There are two men with four iron spikes, and women. They kiss holes; they kiss holes. There, on the left, the missing centurion who looks at the sun go down. And the spear that’s rolled off his grip. How can death be tempered with such good and such bad, the way gold demands the light and dark in all of us? We are all men and women, as removed, as quiet, like yesterday’s early moon. The four angels nosedive, parrots to hawk their claim. We can be contingent as harpies. Green faces need lifting, like wars and camouflage paint on more faces. So does death, so we are allowed the mourning and more marble greens.

ROUNDTABLE
ON NEGATIVE
THEOLOGY &
ITS DISCONTENTS

after the chicken
chickened out at the crossing,
ignis fatuus road

Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing.
Let it be, so it won't be,
let it be, so it won't be — let us say:
Small invisible yellow chickens
peck at the stars.

~ Attila József

Pheasant and chicken, chicken is a peculiar third.

~ Gertrude Stein

THOMAS AQUINAS:

...we proceed into God through the way of negation (remotio); first we deny of him all corporeal realities; and next, even intellectual realities as they are found in creatures, like goodness and wisdom, and then there remains in our understanding only that God exists and nothing further, so that it suffers a kind of confusion. Lastly, however, we even remove from him his very existence, as it is in creatures, and then our understanding remains in a certain darkness of ignorance according to which, in this present state of life, we are best united to God, as Dionysius says, and this is a sort of thick fog (caligo) in which God is said to dwell...

AUGUSTINE:

...in what way, then, does that which does not know itself, know itself as knowing anything? For it does not know that some other mind knows but that it itself does so. Therefore it knows itself. Further, when it seeks to know itself, it knows itself now as seeking. Therefore again it knows itself. And hence it cannot altogether not know itself when certainly it does so far know itself as that it knows itself as not knowing itself. But if it does not know itself not to know itself, then it does not seek to know itself. And therefore, in that very fact that it seeks itself, it is clearly convicted of being more known to itself than unknown. For it knows itself as seeking and not knowing itself, in that it seeks to know itself...

GERTRUDE STEIN:

...no one to be behind and enclosure. Suddenly two see...

JOHN OF THE CROSS:

...contemplation is called "secret" not only because of one's inability to understand but also because of the effects it produces in the soul. The wisdom of love is not secret merely in the darkneses and straits of the soul's purgation (for the soul does not know how to describe it) but also afterward in the illumination, when it is communicated more clearly. Even then it is so secret that it is ineffable. Not only does a person feel unwilling to give expression to this wisdom, but one finds no adequate means or simile to signify so sublime an understanding and delicate a spiritual feeling. Even if the soul should desire to convey this experience in words and think up many similes the wisdom would

always remain secret and still to be expressed...

GERTRUDE STEIN:

...some say some say some say so...

CHICKEN LICKEN:

...the sky is falling...

GERTRUDE STEIN:

...imagine imagine it imagine it in it...

GERTRUDE STEIN:

...as loud as that as allowed as that...

BENJAMIN SHVILI:

...I gave birth to air, and the air gave birth to wind,
and from the wind

A wind was born and afterwards

Water and the water gave birth to air and from the air

Was born

Wind and afterwards water

And the water gave birth to air

And heat from the intercourse of the air in the wind

and the wind

in the water and from the heat

Was created fire which gave birth

To earth and the earth gave birth

To me

And I gave birth to love...