

J. J. Steinfeld

Darkness and Resonance

No accurate description
for the ideal love
you found in the darkness.

Darkness, you see,
is the trick
the laughable cunning.

No accurate sound
for the smooth answer
to a serrated question.

Resonance, I hear
is the trick
the visual deception.

Metaphysical Confusion

This wasn't the room I began in
the colours have been altered
out of spite or cunning
so difficult for me to
ascertain with certainty.

The room changes again
a strategy I cannot comprehend
but I take notes to refer to later
when I'm in another room
newly decorated in concrete and regret.

The room starts to quiver
like a mirage suddenly seen
then to expand in metaphysical
confusion so that only a deity
of rooms and regrets
will be able to explain.

Forgotten Sleep

In a crevice of the night
the pompous battle the pious
a nonsensical game
a replica of sanity
but what can you do
when you quarrel with
larger-than-life gods
more cunning and cruel
than earthly opponents
you trapped in wakefulness.

Perhaps if you curse
into the darkness
the darker the better
painting both reality
and scheming illusion
with similar colours
you'll catch the eyes
of forgiving adversaries
you'll reshape your dreary
self into someone remarkable.

Now sit at your desk
in the dark fashioned
from long-past nights
and begin to list
reasons for sleeping
at inopportune times
for preferring a clever word
for composed darkness
to the inescapable loss
of wakefulness.

A Topic of Conversation

The night entered
halfway through the day
like a criminal
upstaged by the crime
no tempest in the forecast
nothing untoward
or even mildly mystical
when the mystical
just might refine the day
reshape the blandness and boredom
into a topic of conversation
that exceeds eclipses
even inexplicable happenings
that are an affront to the ordinary
to the day-to-day
even as you sink
into the ordinary
and the day-to-day.

The Darkness and Its Unsympathetic Ambiguity

Staring into words
surrounded by uncertainty
it is quiet
except for the disgruntled dog
barking from time to time
into the darkness—
*what does it want from me
and from the heavens?*

My late-night desires are without cunning
wanting words for wordlessness
voice for voicelessness
for mistakes remembered
enumerated and tidily ordered.

Fighting forgetfulness
I open the window
and shout into the darkness
at every disruption to the soul's reflection
wondering if the dog
will remember my curses
or will I have to devise new ones
for the darkness
and its unsympathetic ambiguity.

This Guiltful Thought

I wait two full days
and two full nights
to make this confession.
Yesterday I had another word in mind
but tonight it is *confession*
revelation sounds too strong
belonging to someone else.
When I was ten years old
after I had my summer's haircut
I was walking home
finding a little dog dying
close to the railroad tracks
wrong side or right side of the tracks
how many railroad tracks
in childhood memories
or in adult films
I found a little dog
as I started to say
and I did not say a prayer for it.
Now I find this guiltful thought
half as ludicrous
as last night
and the night before.

If We Didn't Have a Word for Beauty

Beauty is irrational.

No, beauty is as beauty does.

Unbeautiful

the opposite of beauty.

Is longing for beauty

the absence of beauty?

A life without beauty

a surfeit of beauty

a hundred words for beauty

beauty is wordless

beauty to the blind

imagining beauty

defining beauty

comprehending beauty

beauty as archetype

language, perception

if we didn't have

a word for beauty

or weren't forever caught

by the words of beauty.

Break the mirrors

erase the words

begin the portrait

over again.

Ugliness is irrational...

Regardless of Location or Sense

WE CONFUSE DREAMING WITH WAKING

WE BECOME WHAT WE SEEK AND FEAR

this was the graffiti

on the apartment building

in a language a tired old translator

spent the night translating

and told anyone who chanced by

it didn't make a whole lot of sense
nonsense scribbles
but it was his job
to translate wall writings
regardless of location or sense
the sadness, he said,
was when the walls were blank
and he had to make his own work

a lifetime of translating
warnings
divine messages
schedules
first utterances
final thoughts
manifestoes
doctrines
philosophies
ancient texts
anticipated revelations

he had seen and translated
even Bedlam's wall-writing
made sorrowful and disheartened
in the translating—
all languages are foreign to me
even my own, he thinks,
laughing at his out-of-placeness
so little to laugh at these days
and he begins to translate the next message
feeling both furtive and gentle

FURTIVE TRUTHS ARE TRUTHS NONETHELESS
GENTLE LIES ARE LIES ALL THE SAME

About the Poet

Canadian fiction writer, playwright, and poet J. J. Steinfeld has published 19 books, including *Would You Hide Me?* (Stories, Gaspereau Press, 2003), *Misshapeness* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions, 2009), *Identity Dreams and Memory Sounds* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions, 2014), *Madhouses in Heaven, Castles in Hell* (Stories, Ekstasis Editions, 2015), *An Unauthorized*

Biography of Being (Stories, Ekstasis Editions, 2016), *Absurdity, Woe Is Me, Glory Be* (Poetry, Guernica Editions, 2017), and *A Visit to the Kafka Café* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions, 2018). His short stories and poems have appeared in numerous periodicals and anthologies internationally, and over 50 of his one-act plays and a handful of full-length plays have been performed in Canada and the United States.