

Rob Schouten

SANHEDRIN

*--for Coralien*

“By what power or by what name have you done this?” (Acts 4:7, *Addressing the Sanhedrin*;  
New King James Bible)

translated by Willem Groenewegen, 2020

for Dutch Foundation for Literature's extract translation subsidy

-----  
NB: geen paginering bekend, aangezien de bundel nog moet verschijnen bij de Arbeiderspers.  
Ik heb dus maar het document genummerd. Het zal weinig afwijken van de uiteindelijke  
bundel, omdat het de eerste 13 gedichten daaruit betreft. PDF bijgevoegd van origineel.

- regelaantal: 201 (incl. titels individuele gedichten)

- Times New Roman 12pt, rgl.afstand 1,5, niet uitgevuld

bankrekeningnummer (ING)

NL44 INGB 0006 0054 68 t.n.v. W.M. Groenewegen te Assen, Nederland

Adres (ongewijzigd):

Anton van Duinkerkenlaan 15

9405 AP Assen

06-21558131 (geen vaste lijn)

IT'S JUST NOT DONE

No human head on a horse's neck!

But what if Chiron does come sniffing

or someone actually looks

a little bit like a centaur?

Oh short while that all was right

and nothing truly appalled me

till I was being bombarded

with myths and opportunities.

You lay on my side of the bed

and for hours I lay without sleep

without divorce or death.

A little but just about enough

to see those tiny critters

freely crawl about.

Was that really the only way?

BROTHERS

They just keep doing what they must, they warble,  
nod their little heads, unmoving they lay still,  
quite cheerful for no mortal holds it against them.

Much has been written and said already  
on this mysterious behaviour or non-behaviour  
by all those liars, all those mythomaniacs  
who use this to sate their hunger to ventriloquise  
as if they have all sorts of things to undergo  
and to communicate, are hearty eaters,  
share a love of each other and stage concerts.

Also strike through 'cheerful', far too little praise  
for this inhumane, impermeable performance  
that has beguiled us since time immemorial.

AMSTERDAM CENTRE

The city lays the helpless cyclists bare,  
both irritating and despicable  
that this irks me; is it nature's fault  
when apples fall and shrubs block roads?

It's always man who spoils it for us,  
a builder of cities full of confused behaviour  
that delightful creature with its ambulances  
starts vague as a toothache, then suddenly roars  
to quickly rectify the situation, pull up  
weeds and test one's financial status.  
In bed at night we then run rampant:  
seed-bolls full, ripe stems and shoots.

And afterwards the gathering reposes with wine.  
Oh foolish existence, oh honoured gestures!  
I wish this poem would've gone a different path,  
suddenly hastening, waving, lapsing, letting go.

INDIAN EATERY

There you go: a billion or so.

I'll feed them all, this spicy land:

a pinch of raja, tablespoonful of colony,

a sixth part dalit, some IT-sector.

Come on, look, there's something for everyone,

you too, both Indians and gypsies,

a billionaire's face

with greasy blackheads.

There you go, the cancerous karma:

a thousand times a thousand times a thousand's fate,

humanity in the making.

Wretches and sovereigns, I say brown

and you just have to stomach it,

to fuck it below the celestial jewel.

LONELY FUNERAL (NONPERSONAL)

*-- for Menno and Frank*

I can't recall the name  
nor relate the family stories  
below the empty skies.

Bereft of youth, the future done,  
no-one to hear me tell of mine,  
I may seem dead

but am completely deceased,  
misanthropic and detached,  
already dead for years perhaps.

No prizes, studies or dinners.

*note: dedicated to the memory of poets Menno Wigman  
and F. Starik, who both passed away in 2018,  
aged 51 and 59 respectively. Starik organised Amsterdam's  
'Lonely Funeral' programme.*

GRAVEL

Love's a complicated thing I think,  
my girlfriend says I just don't get it,  
that she's my ex. Perhaps amoebas  
and the lower orders have it easy.

Whereas we, grandchildren of those  
who knew it all and spread their legs,  
we're thoroughly alone  
and cursed with love.

In the trampled garden of delights  
--painted ladies, snails, small birds—  
we give chase and eye each other,  
it seems this is the way.

But on the drunken path to bed  
there's mostly the grate of gravel.

WOMAN 1: 1-3

It was a splendid specimen  
but when I touched her she cracked  
the smallest part delicious,  
the rest as bitter as bile.

Another case of Him abandoning me  
leaving us to sort it out ourselves,  
and so the general staff pore over  
the well-established map,  
the psychotherapists were called  
and you could hear the mystics pray  
for the woman tragically cracked.

But look, a hand was chalking on the wall:

Do a 007,  
jacket over your shoulder,  
into the sunny marina  
and get yourself a new one!

(here endeth the lesson)



WATCH IT!

Really, love at our age  
goes down differently,  
more like an ox  
or mule.

Courtship's out,  
as are musth and burling.

The gluteal glasses  
on your lover.

Just kidding!

Rejoicing hormones squirt  
from arid nipples,  
bed creaks  
and ex-predator  
cracks the code  
of the allegedly  
worn vagina.

TRUE LOVE

Suffering from true love I was.

I stood at the window looking out

because I was in love in love with her.

Or am I exaggerating, was it average love

or just a little bit along the way?

What do I know? Should I take a course

that keeps me awake at night

or listen to nobody at all,

not to the rushing in my belly,

nor to sensible words from friends?

True love, little love, run-of-the-mill:

items of interest for future museums,

various lovers on show behind glass,

perhaps a medical experiment?

But first the tender touches,

the heavy breathing,

the sacrament of sheets

and then the abandoning.

NIGHT SONG

The sensible civilian goes to sleep on time,  
but in his bed on earth the universe prevails;  
is this then the intention: deepest darkness  
or are we yet to get some sort of show?

Without beginning or end then and why  
isn't there just nothing? Suddenly he's alone  
and people fail to stroke his trembling head  
in the universe's present hopelessness.

But wait, they have come up with something,  
by morning there's just the small discomfort  
of exhausted, lobotomous fabrications.

Be a man and work, the Redeemer cries,  
don't harm a living thing, be mortal!  
Look, monotony melts away where you stand.

THE LIVING

My mother, little, stooped, could do with a dream:  
father, stone-dead, isn't keeping to the facts,  
he lays beside her perfectly cool;  
perhaps she is concealing he sometimes  
lays on top of her as one possessed,  
-- good on her though, she isn't scared by that.

By morning he's back in the coffin,  
she picks up the thread of being widow  
and I take her for a walk along the lanes  
for a slice of apple pie at Hoogenbirk's.  
Returning home she asks with caution:  
Do you still visit the grave these days?

FOR THE SAKE OF A NEW LEAF

I care fully not to be with you,  
far too humiliating; at home in poetry  
it's more reliable, there I reign with  
the best of myself.

Look at me lying there with a kitchen roll  
and on the screen the most miraculous  
things in the nude, according to the jury.

But seriously now:

so much sleep where nothing happens, or sometimes  
as Freud dictates or high up on balloons.

You tell me to dream

but I can't manage, too complicated,

I just don't know how, perhaps violation?

To be honest, I'm done trying.

AMOROUS SONG

I take great pains these days,  
a basketful of hearts, the kissing of lips  
and songs I used to leave by the wayside;  
when she murmurs, I come running eagerly.

It must be some kind of commitment  
the kind my father would have liked to see  
but then to God, although He lacks the eyes,  
the legs, that Pre-Raphaelitesque.

Traverse the deserts, pitch my tent on summits,  
mumbling: thou art beautiful my love,  
the courting game: the beetle I, the butterfly thee.

Then trace her throat in every language,  
wheeze my lungs out and consider  
even the most prohibited poem.