

# The New Criterion

Poems April 2021

## The solitary bird (a translation)

by Beverley Bie Brahic

The solitary bird

by *Giacomo Leopardi*

From the top of the old tower,  
Solitary bird, you go on singing  
To the countryside until the day dies;  
And your song drifts through the valley.  
Spring everywhere  
Shines in the air and exults in the fields,  
And seeing it disarms the heart.  
You hear flocks bleating, herds lowing;  
Happy, the other birds play together,  
Ceaselessly turning in the cloudless sky,  
Celebrating this gladdest of seasons:  
You sit apart, pensive, watching it all;  
No companions, no flights,  
No show of joy, you shun their games;  
You sing, and singing spend  
The year's and your life's finest flower.

Oh, how like your dark plumage  
Is mine! Gaiety and laughter,  
Sweet companions of our earliest days,  
And you, love, youth's first cousin,  
And the bitter sighing that ensues  
I care for not at all, I don't know why;  
From them I all but run away;  
A hermit just about; and strange

To my native place, and so  
The springtime of my life goes by.  
This day, already drawing to a close,  
Is a feast day in the village.  
You can hear a bell ring in the calm sky,  
You can hear guns crackle  
From farm to distant farm.  
Dressed for the fête, the young people  
Pour from their houses  
And jostle in the streets  
To see and be seen; and their hearts rejoice.  
I alone, venturing out  
In this remote part of the countryside,  
Put off till tomorrow  
Every joy, every game: and yet the sun  
That's setting in the far hills, declining  
After this blue day, wounds these eyes  
Still lost in the clearness,  
And seems to say  
That youth's blissful day is also fading.

You, solitary little bird,  
Come to the evening of the life  
The stars accord you, you will not complain  
Of your life; your every whim  
Is the product of your nature.  
But I, if I cannot avoid  
Age's loathed threshold,  
When these eyes in other hearts don't echo  
And the world seems empty to them,  
And the days ahead  
Darker and drearier than the present,  
How will my solitude appear to me?  
What of these years of mine? What of myself?  
Oh, I will repent, and often,  
Disconsolate, I shall look back.

*—translated from the Italian by Beverley Bie Brahic*

---

**Beverley Bie Brahic**'s latest books are *The Hotel Eden* (Carcanet Press) and *Baudelaire: Invitation to the Voyage* (Seagull). Carcanet will publish *Apple Thieves*, her fifth collection of poems, in August.

This article originally appeared in The New Criterion, Volume 39 Number 8 , on page 41

Copyright © 2024 The New Criterion | [www.newcriterion.com](http://www.newcriterion.com)

<https://newcriterion.com/issues/2021/4/the-solitary-bird-a-translation>