

NIGHTS WITH GIORDANO BRUNO

A Novel

by Jack Ross

Grafton Amours

A la fin tu es las de ce monde ancien
– Guillaume Apollinaire, “Zone”

*E*t comme on passait sur un pont, le prince se mit à la portière pour contempler le panorama romantique du Rhin qui déployait ses splendeurs verdoyantes et se déroulait en larges méandres jusqu'à l'horizon. ... A kind of muscular, living pressure – not rubbery, exactly, though it has that same attribute of stretching and contracting, systole and diastole – a portal which does not so much let you in, as allow you to distend yourself. ... “And as they were standing below a bridge, he leaned over the grave-stone to observe the romantic panorama of the gully which ... displayed? deployed? ... its green splendours and wound away in large curves to the horizon.”

You pant and groan – rough, hoarse as an animal. Which is what you are, of course, though circumstances may sometimes obscure the fact for a moment or two. But scarcely here, now. Your ribs crack, crackle with the contrast between sweat and chill. *Il était 4 heures du matin, des vaches paissaient dans les prés, des enfants dansaient déjà sous des tilleuls germaniques. Une musique de fifres, monotones et mortuaire, annonçait la présence d'un régiment prussien et la mélodie se mêlait tristement au bruit de ferraille du pont et à l'accompagnement sourd du train en marche.* ... Is it four in the morning? Quite possibly. Are there cows in those fields? Not likely; but the children are certainly dancing beneath the disordered boughs of the trees: these children of your city, ill-dressed and ill-nourished, smelling of earth and rain and flesh. And, hark! far-off, through the death-fed trees, the music of a police siren, “monotonous and mortuary, was announcing the presence of an authoritarian constabulary, and the sweet sound blended with the humming noise of cars proceeding over the iron bridge.”

“F ... f ... fucker, bloody fucker ...”

No reply, at this point, seems appropriate or called for. But that is increasingly the case in most of life's situations, for you. A simple greeting across the lunch counter, a cheery “Enjoy the film!” from a cinema usherette, they each seem to demand the one, correct reply: that witty twist or humorous acknowledgement which would seal your commonality, commensals at the feast of life. You cannot achieve it. It demands a thousand words of long

EO

*Nella terza conformazione dello **Scorpione**, un uomo che espone il dorso ad una donna che lo percuote, mentre si tiene tutti e due i piedi con ambo le mani*

[+] tranquillità

[-] timidezza

	VIRTUES	VICES
EO	Tranquillity	Timidity
EU	Vitality	Hotheadedness
FI	Responsibility	Voracity
GA	Ambition	Boastfulness
GE	Optimism	Pedantry
GI	Intellect	Intolerance
GU	Forgiveness	Instability
AE	Firmness	Vengefulness
AO	Respect	Contempt
AU	Tenacity	Pigheadedness
BE	Diligence	Frivolity
BI	Joy	Presumption
BO	Dexterity	Vainglory
BU	Modesty	Indifference
CU	Generosity	Incontinence
DA	Rectitude	Irregularity
DE	Sobriety	Anomaly
DI	Punctuality	Sadness
DO	Ability	Overconfidence
DU	Kindness	Wastefulness
EA	Politeness	Condescension

EO

*The third emblem of **Scorpio** is a man exposing his back to a woman who lashes him, while he holds onto his feet with both hands*

[+] tranquillity

[-] timidity

I was a quartermaster and had charge of No. 4 lifeboat.

– Angus Macdonald

- **Scene [Opening Credits begin in darkness]:**

Bruno Lawrence
in
A Louis Malle Film

THE OPEN BOAT

As the words fade out, it becomes apparent that there is movement in these dark depths, but the audience is uncertain, disoriented. A faint pinging is heard, a swirling. Perhaps we are underwater? Is there a shape, black against the blackness, moving through it? We think there is, but are still straining to make it out when ...

EXPLOSION.

ACT I: Wreck

- **Scene [Awakening (Friday, November 6, 1942, c. 1 a.m.)]**

CLOSE-UP of **Angus's** eyes opening out of some fathomless depth. Was the noise only in his dreams? It seems not: there are clanging pumps and sirens, shouting voices, all coming from outside.

WIDE-ANGLE shows his narrow, cramped cabin. There are a few pitiful ornaments: a little china cup, framed photographs. He rolls out of his bunk, starts to huddle on clothes and sea-boots.

Out on deck. **Angus** comes out from behind a steel bulkhead, and is shown pushing his way through a chaos of people running and shouting.

Voices scream: "Over here!" "Out of the fucking way!" "Diana!"

Down

1.	GA / GZ	Scorpio	(Oct-Nov)	WATER	<i>Boat</i> iii	[EE E]EO
2.	GB / GY	Sagittarius	(Nov-Dec)	FIRE	<i>Kings</i> i	EU [FA FE]
3.	GC / GX	Capricorn	(Dec-Jan)	EARTH	<i>Antarctic</i> i	FI [FO FU]
4.	GD / GW	Aquarius	(Jan-Feb)	AIR	<i>Desire</i> i,ii,iii	GA GE GI
5.	GE / GV	Pisces	(Feb-Mar)	WATER	<i>Boat</i> ii	[GO] GU [HA]
6.	GF / GT	Aries	(Mar-Apr)	FIRE	<i>Kings</i> ii	[AA] AE [AI]
7.	GG / GS	Taurus	(Apr-May)	EARTH	<i>Antarctic</i> i,ii	AO AU [BA]
8.	GH / GR	Gemini	(May-June)	AIR	<i>Desire</i> i,ii,iii	BE BI BO
9.	GI / GQ	Cancer	(June-July)	WATER	<i>Boat</i> i	BU [CA CE]
10.	GK / GP	Leo	(July-Aug)	FIRE	<i>Kings</i> iii	[CI CO] CU
11.	GL / GO	Virgo	(Aug-Sep)	EARTH	<i>Antarctic</i> i,ii,iii	DA DE DI
12.	GM / GN	Libra	(Sep-Oct)	AIR	<i>Desire</i> i,ii,iii	DO DU EA

Up

13.	DO DU EA	<i>Desert</i> i,ii,iii	ARIA	(Sep-Oct)	Bilancia	GM / GN
14.	DA DE DI	<i>Ice</i> i,ii,iii	TERRA	(Aug-Sep)	Vergine	GL / GO
15.	[CI CO] CU	<i>Space</i> iii	FUOCO	(July-Aug)	Leone	GK / GP
16.	BU [CA CE]	<i>Ocean</i> i	ACQUA	(June-July)	Cancro	GI / GQ
17.	BE BI BO	<i>Desert</i> i,ii,iii	ARIA	(May-June)	Gemelli	GH / GR
18.	AO AU [BA]	<i>Ice</i> i,ii	TERRA	(Apr-May)	Toro	GG / GS
19.	[AA] AE [AI]	<i>Space</i> ii	FUOCO	(Mar-Apr)	Ariete	GF / GT
20.	[GO] GU [HA]	<i>Ocean</i> ii	ACQUA	(Feb-Mar)	Pesci	GE / GV
21.	GA GE GI	<i>Desert</i> i,ii,iii	ARIA	(Jan-Feb)	Aquario	GD / GW
22.	FI [FO FU]	<i>Ice</i> i	TERRA	(Dec-Jan)	Capricorno	GC / GX
23.	EU [FA FE]	<i>Space</i> i	FUOCO	(Nov-Dec)	Sagittario	GB / GY
24.	[EE E]EO	<i>Ocean</i> iii	ACQUA	(Oct-Nov)	Scorpione	GA / GZ

Upwards, or Downwards?

meandering monologue, or none. Here, at least, you should be safe from it, if anywhere. Your ankles itch beneath their heavy woollen socks. The tan Doc Martens boots feel positively puddled with perspiration. The body approaches its crisis – should you be hoping for an expiation of sins? *Des villages heureux animaient les rives dominées par les burls centenaires et les vignes rhénanes étalaient à l’infini leur mosaïque régulière et précieuse.* “Happy villages animated the banks dominated by century-old castles” – miserable old suburbs burdened the slopes dominated by a thirty-year-old motorway system – “and the Rhenish vines extended their precise and regular mosaic to infinity.” Steel-shuttered bottle-shops displayed their graffiti-clad corrugations to disappointed late-night revellers: revellers bound for here, for the nettled undergrowth of the gully.

The sense of peril has not abated – an exodus threatened by every shift of that rippling back, those bony thighs – and yet some progress has undoubtedly been made. Another test, another examination, another assessment of some kind of strange achievement. Can you think of tree-alphabets, do arithmetic problems in your head, translate half-remembered fragments of French prose, long enough to climb Mount Moriah? To what end, really? So that we can all sleep?

Quand Mony se retourna, il vit le sinistre Cornabœuf assis sur le visage d’Estelle. Son cul de colosse couvrait la face de l’actrice. Il avait chié et la merde infecte et molle tombait de tous côtés.

Oh, the filthy, filthy brute! Poor Estelle, whose only crime had been to strangle her maid in the ecstasies of mutual cunnilingus. No-one should be made to translate *that*, in your opinion. You’re not as bad as that, even if you are in the city’s oldest graveyard at the darkest time of the night, performing the act of sodomy on a convenient gravestone, with a svelte young sprite, whose very sex seemed ambiguous until a moment or so ago.

Il tenait un énorme couteau et en labourait le ventre palpitant. Le corps de l’actrice avait des soubresauts brefs. ... “His immense knife was stabbing into her living flesh.” Yes, it *is* hard, achingly hard, which is more than you expected to achieve at first, when approached. That agonising over-excitement which is so fatal to so *difficult* an enterprise, so profound a challenge, to penetrate the elastic walls of an organ which defends itself so sedulously from intrusion. “The actress’s body jerked galvanically.” You *are* disgusting! You’ve pulled up the ripped black T-shirt, and are kissing the malodorous shoulderblades and neck-muscles of your ... companion in crime; your hands control those smooth brown

“The Open Boat”

Cancer / Scorpio / Pisces

Element: WATER

(cold-moist)

Region: Sea

Season: Winter

Animal: Fish

Wind: West, *Zephyr*

Planet: Moon

Organ: Kidneys

Humour: Phlegm

(phlegmatic: equable, thick, cold, moist, slow)

Old Age, Death, 60 upwards

I poured water for my father and my mother in their city of eternity

Figura Aquæ

Aqua	Terra	Aër	Ignis
Terra	Aqua	Ignis	Aër
Aër	Ignis	Aqua	Terra
Ignis	Aër	Terra	Aqua

[Ramón Lull, *Ars Demonstrativa* (c.1282)]

Angus is shouting now, too, has seized someone (a seaman) by the lapels: “Make way there! Get those lashings loose.” He is clearly in some kind of authority, because people, mainly half-dressed civilians, are climbing into the lifeboat, as he points and yells, overseeing the operation.

We see a name painted on the side of the lifeboat: *City of Cairo*.

“Heave out there, heave out!”

The boat is now being lowered, and **Angus** takes a moment to look around him.

“Angus, Angus.” Through the confusion of sound and activity, it gradually becomes clear that someone is shouting for him. He looks a little puzzled, as if the voice were coming from elsewhere, some other place or time.

- **Scene [Helping Bob (Friday, 6/11, c. 1.10 a.m.)]**

Angus re-enters the slipstream, and starts to make his way to starboard, pushing past busy sailors and milling passengers.

He collides with **Bob**, who shouts, clearly on the edge of panic: “I can’t lower the bloody boat.”

Angus climbs inside the stalled lifeboat to try and clear a rope, which he does (after a couple of tries) with a violent flick of the wrist; then stays there, fending the boat off the side with a boat-hook, as they begin to lower it into the foaming sea.

EXPLOSION.

Splash.

The camera draws us down into the water.

“Angus, Angus.” A voice is echoing in his ears, but now it sounds like a woman’s voice; we cannot tell whether young or old.

- **Scene [Swimming (Friday 6/11, c. 1.15 a.m.)]**

CLOSE-UP as **Angus’s** eyes open again. The camera draws back to make it apparent that he is now floating in the sea, supported by his yellow Mae West lifejacket. His lips move. Though clearly dazed, he is trying to say something. It is a name: “Ellen.”

[see image 1]