

Alas, alas

Chris Sharp

Characters:

THE BECOMING SUBJECT (TBS)

THE STRANGER

THE LIBRARIAN:

A kind of big, burly Hell's Angel type, replete with tattoos, unruly facial hair, and heavy mascara, sits at the help desk intently reading Edmond Jabès's *Le livre des questions*.

Location:

A library, which is also a theatre. Or to put it another way, the library is a real, fully functional library, but part of it has been cut away, or rather seamlessly conjoined with, as in a dream, a theatre, such that the library seems to be on stage.

Time:

The time of someone, the time of everyone.

[enter TBS from street-side door {which gives onto a real, bustling city street, horns honk, etc as door opens, goes mute as it closes}. Aside from a broad-rimmed, black hat, she is naked, slightly bewildered look on her face. Looks over at librarian, as his hulking figure is suddenly wracked by a sob]

THE BECOMING SUBJECT:

Oh!

LIBRARIAN:

[closing the book and wiping a tearing from his eye, mutters]

So fucking beautiful.

[sighs, clears throat, and asks her, authoritatively]

Can I help you?

TBS:

[walks over to desk]

Yes, maybe, I'm not sure. I hope... A book!

LIBRARIAN:

[looks at out at theatre]

A book!

THE STRANGER:

[sitting alone in the theatre, a vague, nondescript figure, eclipsed by the darkness, guffaws, and parrots]

A book!

[all three laugh together, as if this were the funniest thing in the world, until their laughter is exhausted, peters out]

LIBRARIAN:

[having mastered himself]

Can you give me a few details about this so-called book...

[looks her up and down]

lady?

TBS:

Ummm,

[long pause, tentatively]

book book?

LIBRARIAN:

[eyebrow raised]

Book book?

TBS:

[nods]

Yes, a book book.

LIBRARIAN

[archly]

The book of books, or maybe that was the song of songs?

[now sarcastically]

Or maybe that was the book to come?

TBS:

The coming book. Come and gone. Like language. The language book. Book language of language coming, book.

[pause, quizzically]

Book book. Of language. All the language.

[with more certainty]

A deluge of words flooding and flowing forth from the book. On the page. All over the page. Pages and pages of book. Language. Smearred like beautiful dead, black bugs across the page. Or pages. Page to page. Like flesh to flesh. Copulating papyrus? Word to word. Like bodies, you know, like. Words desperately rushing into words. As if for solace. The sound of pages. Fluttering by. Irrevocably. Irreversibly. Invisibly. The true measure of their impact, of course, unfathomable.

THE STRANGER:

[interrupts, yells]

Whatever! My five year old!

[throws book at TBS who dodges it]

LIBRARIAN:

[barks]

Patience fool!

TBS:

[walks over, picks up thrown book, reads spine, shakes head]

Not THE book.

[drops it back on stage]

LIBRARIAN:

RESPECT!

TBS:

Oh right.

[rushes over, picks it up dusts it off, places it carefully back on the ground]

[librarian grunts]

THE STRANGER:

[gazing about him for support]

I tried!?

TBS:

A word about the book. That I would the book of a book were book book. The book of books. Of all books. Or the book of no book. The no book. Obscene. Heartbroken. Fixed. And pure. The book to end all. Window book. Like gazing out. This book. Made of books. Books and books concealed deep within its pages. Like landscapes in a landscape. Or figures within clouds. And windows within windows. And

curtains of course. Must not forget. Curtains. Flowing back and forth, like books. Hence the silence of books. ShriII, unendurable, apoplectic, to say nothing, nothing at all of the intolerable beauty of the sudden irruption. As if to a halt. Language gathering up behind it, word colliding, exploding and imploding into word. With terrifying clarity. This is it. What had always been sought. Without even knowing it. And just as suddenly disappearing. Thwarted. Into the great book. The vale of books. Like tears. Falling on books.

[dolefully]

Disclosing

[whispers]

the all book.

THE STRANGER:

['getting it']

YES!

TBS:

NO!

[general confusion]

TBS:

[seizes la parole, continues]

The thousand book in the book of thousands. Inconceivable myriads. Of books. Huddling together. Within books. Sustaining. I am language. But I am not language. Beyond the domain, the jurisdiction of language. Deep within the pages of the first book. Which is also, inevitably the last book. The first and last. An ever flowering stain on the human soul. Of book. The infamy of books, and of language. Corrupting the soul. As if that were the point of it all. To deform. To imply, state, to instate, inexorably, programmatically, perhaps even blissfully: 'Deformation has taken place.'

THE STRANGER:

O wondrous, hideous and unpalatable truth!

TBS:

Engendering books. Like violence engenders violence. Or vengeance, vengeance. Or finally love,

[pause, gazes about her bleakly]

love.

LIBRARIAN:

[improbably]

Alas...

THE STRANGER:

[even more improbably]

Alas, alas...

TBS:

[after a long pause, soberly]

It's only a book.

A book falls from above with a loud thud on the stage. They gaze at one another in bewilderment. Another falls in the seats in front of the stage. Then another falls next to TBS. Another on the help desk of the librarian. They look at one another, alarmed, and begin to creep off stage, out of the theatre.

[exit all]

As they exit, more books fall. Slowly at first. Then with greater frequency. Until suddenly, the stage and the theatre are inundated by a deluge of books.