Class Struggle: Section 17, The Annunciation by Carlo Crivelli

written by Robert Kelly | February 25, 2010

THIS IS THE RENAISSANCE,
everything is for sale. The poor man
is greedy (that's why he's poor –
does Ficino tell us this, or Bruno?),
ill-dressed, his hair a mess.
Yet this transaction is directly underneath
the glory of God.
These characters (dubious seller,
too-comfortable doubtful buyer)
are closer to the Divine Light
than Mary is. What does this mean?

The class struggle
is the meaning of history.
Any light there is in the picture
rational, knowable,
tractable, divine,
illuminates that,
the conflict, the scruffy
poor man and the glib aristo.

THEY ARE US, rich and poor,
big and little, prosperous and needy,
greedy, on rooftops which are arches
which are bridges over spaces
which are roads from one wall
to another, who live in houses
but stand outside them terrified,

not even one of them looking
up at the sky, we stand in areaways
in alleys in courtyards between
one house of life and another,
we are them, the ordinary everybody
for whose sake this whole bizarre
business of a bird from heaven,
virgin mother, god on scaffold,
dead man talking with his friends,
a book comes on a visit, a book
no one can understand, all of it,
everything comes down. Comes
for us. Sometimes businessmen
haggle to keep from crying.
From doing what we always do.

Footnotes