

The National Library, Edinburgh

The reference librarian crimps
and clicks across the room
call slip in hand, her heels
ticking off the tiles.

The sensuous sag of a Moreau mouth
echoes in the full red skirt;
the tense black bosom
elbows its way
into the Short Title Catalogue
as she reaches for Granger's Index
or the Reference Guide
to Current Periodicals.

Eyes lift up as she passes
eyes that are moved for nothing
less than the inexpert cracking
by a novice, of some rare—
spined and ancient volume.

Eyes used to opening covers
do another trial uncovering;
it is, after all
a room in the Classical manner
and apart from the Northern
nip in the air
it could be the isles of Greece
or a bookish and quick Polynesia!
But would it be worth it after all
in this north, to outdo Gaugin
and Stevenson; to have all that
bouncing librarian naked
bringing finely bound
copies of Hume
or the CBEL
neatly served up on a plate?

— Alan Kennedy