

THE NINTH FACE SMILING

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by
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PREFACE

One poem in this collection, judged by its imagery and theme, could very aptly be entitled 'The Bird Shit Theory of Art.' That title I deemed somewhat cute, and called it instead, 'Yet Another Theory of Art.' But I wondered for some time from what digested ideas of others--what seeds, if that doesn't push too hard against the limits of the metaphor--this theory of mine, which stands behind much of my poetry, had grown.

'Yet Another Theory of Art,' 'Muse,' and several other poems in this book are conscious of the poem as artifact and concern themselves with how that artifact contrasts with its inspiration, the event the poem is 'about.' Ever since I began to notice a difference between those poems which I still liked six months after I had written them and those I did not, I have been aware of varying degrees of distance between the story the poem tells and the facts of the situation which generated it. Works which attempted to get closest to the occasion by exact reproduction of detail and emotion resounded with either self-pity or the incommunicative 'Wow!' later. Poems which retained their ability to make me feel a certain way were less true to the particulars of their occasions. Sometimes they lied, sometimes, chose an altogether different situation to point up the conflict I had been struck with when I decided to write the poem.

At this point most readers of poetry will think off hand of five or six poet/critics to whom I am indebted for this not-so-original insight. Literary catchwords pop into the head; the universal in the particular, the objective correlative, perhaps even 'emotion recollected in tranquility.' In the pretended disgust of my poem I call it, 'feces of feeling.' The statement of the idea involved here that comes to me most readily and is most responsible, I think, for my own theory of the relationship between incident and poem is found in W. B. Yeats's 'Lapis Lazuli.' The title refers to a piece of the stone into which have been carved three Chinamen, one of them a servant with a musical instrument. Yeats's thought is that although the two may be viewing the ruins of a civilization, when they ask the servant to sing and play, he turns the history to art and 'their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay.' The earlier stanzas support the same notion using tragic drama as their example. Yeats implies that human and natural disaster, while being endured, is cause for sorrow and pity. When it is later retold artfully it can gain the status of tragedy. Tragic emotion, then, cannot be experienced at the time of suffering. Art, I take Yeats's poem to suggest, cannot wallow in description of pain, but must treat it from a temporal or emotional distance. The series 'Poems from a Break-up' in this collection attempts to show the steps through which an event passes on its way from being endured to becoming enduring. There is no artist in the first poem of the series, only a sufferer. The fourth is written from emotional distance and gives perspective, even humorous perspective, to the dastardly desertion.

There are two parts to poem making then: the pain, conflict, or tension that the poet wants to tell of, and the crafting of the poem so that the telling is artful rather than melodramatic. Concerning the first, the occasion which gives rise to the poem, I have used the words 'pain,' 'conflict,' and 'tension.' Can't a poem be made from a pleasant experience? I am afraid that one of mine cannot. Not from a simple happy feeling. A well written word picture that so 'affect-'lively describes a peaceful scene (or a lily, or some violin music) that one can see (or hear) it is not a poem. With no small indebtedness to the New Critics I must demand that some tension be present in that word picture before it can be called a poem. The pleasant experience of looking at the stars on a clear night might well be subject for a poem if the looker is aware of his inability to comprehend what he sees.

Noticing such tension or conflict in a scene or event is my 'inspiration.' I cannot sit down and write a poem without having been struck by some such paradox. Once this inspiration is provided, the poem can be written. Although for many poets these two steps do not exist discretely (in writing the poem Robert Frost discovers 'something I didn't remember I knew'), for me the second part of the poem making process is a writing job like any other. The job description demands: the poem must be inclusive (another debt to New Criticism), that is, it must give fair coverage to both terms of the argument so that it is not doggerel, it must see the

event from artistic perspective, the language must be image-rich and non-discursive, the poem must be rhythmical, it should be able to exist and be understood without explanation, and its resolution should not be a 'cop out.' That the crafting process threatens to obliterate the idea or inspiration for the poem can be readily imagined. Sometimes it does, proving only that the idea was not worthy of being immortalized to begin with.

If the inspiring idea 'makes it' through the writing, it has very likely changed greatly. For some reason, in my writing, one change that the crafting process effects more often than not is the addition of a humorous or ironic view of the original event. The poet who is finally able to talk about the experience has attained a position from which he can see that what he endured was only one small scene from the Human Comedy.

The title of the poem is a product of the second half of poesis. It can be used to provide half of the argument for the poem. One poem in this book presents a case for women's sensitivity and disparages men's. I could not stand by and let that statement be made without recognizing the fickleness and undependability of women's sensitivities, so I call the poem 'Hysterics.'

Well, time has come to judge theory by poetry. Most of it has been written with close attention to that theory, although I must admit of one or two cases in which inspiration got control and refused careful crafting its part in the process. If the poems are successful you will be able to forget about such theory and division of labor while you read.

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MUSE

Some day I'll write this poem, too.

Arrange today's frightening silence in stanza form,

take from this confusion

one image.

Not the reflection which repeats itself endlessly now--

a mute caught between mirrors.

Some day I'll see among the string of stares

one ironic smile

amused at the stiff before and behind it.

And from that ninth (or tenth) face

smiling

this poem will start.

VISIONS AND GRAFFITI

Within the molded crystal domes
that will stay the quiet ice
two millenia hence,
little faith will attend
our nature myth
living then with brittle scholars in allusions:
that caked white death
in an April week
once rose again green,
swelled yellow,
lilac sweet.

That a morning forced petals apart
to take wet heat for the day,
and I broke a branch
of nodding yellow and white,
sucked its wine before communion;
drove, windows down,
spilling my rhythms
and blues all down
the front of a Southern Sunday;

past serious motels and offices
where vines like science fiction flora
crept to reproduce and bloom.

Past a church where grown-ups
who long ago gave up
the Easter bunny
were cued to celebrate
that day's promise
by the image of a bleeding
young man;
loved him in their white gloves.

Drawings in their basement bathrooms
will proclaim
 Spring's called off
 the body's been found.

TO KIT, A POET

I write my poems when I'm winning.
When I'm not, the paper is skin
and the pencil makes white marks.

You must be a hero
to lie down in love on a mat
weaved from bitter poems
on a warp of mad logic.

TWO AND A HALF VIEWS OF IMMORTALITY

Overnight the tight green calix freed its bud
as though the act did not give death a start.
From habit I bent and took the stem
to hold the overcrowded beauty of its life--
but stood instead and walked away.

i

Things possessed die sooner,
a would-be lover explained.
Not wanting to break my heart,
he lectured on love and freedom
with examples from art and nature.
A man of the world convincing himself
immortality means not being owned.

ii

A demon outside time possessed a musician I knew.
Is that immortality, she asked.
Her body suffused
by a genius of sound
changing sane black marks

to a music
never to be reheard.

She was a cellist
who sucked in air for her body's life
in short stolen pulls while she played;
who sawed on the strings a violence
heard in our stomachs,
who bowed bass nerves
until perception ached
with music.

I passed this morning
the second-day bloom,
its heavy smell released
from today's bared inner petals,
and thought of one who did not ask my name
when we loved,
who cannot look me up to say goodbye.

UNKNOWN

Steel afternoon in winter
cleaves the orange ease of sunset
laying open unrest.
Something is not done
and it crowds my overwarm car, racing
 toward a yellow room,
humid with dinner.

I pass the neighbor's kid, second-stringer
dribbling the ball toward its carport goal.
Using the slate hour til dark,
he isn't afraid.

WEDNESDAY

Everyone had a patience that night
for everyone else's poem,
not that poetry can forestall fate.
A girl fell down
and sat on bent leg in the street
amid brown glass and beer.
Someone took her away when her laughing died.
A man began to read
and his voice broke.
I know one of you will say, 'That doesn't make him
sensitive,
anyone can break his voice.'
But everyone had some belief that night
in the truth of a man's broken voice, or
romantic search, or
pious love, or
private poem, or
childlike fear, or
sold-out goal, or
profaned soul, and
everyone went home to sleep it off.

VAPORS

The day before, the South wind of a Texas winter
picked up the lake and shook it,
so when true cold came suddenly
from the North,
the ripples froze straight up.
By noon the sun was tight and hard in the white sky;
by four, frost held the rusted meadows in orange ice.
The midnight moon was an off-center hole in a tent
 star-staked to December,
and I was out in it,
breathing carbon that cut my throat like paper
 swallowed whole,
trying to find the link between cold and holy.
Purity just in from New England purged me toward prayer,
traditional western or eastern chic,
but none would come.
Poems from the night are now
trite carols, worse for their unplayed tunes.
Science joined myth and music in refusing to
 plasti-coat my night:
she bade morning trounce on my moments

with the vigor
of children committing first sins.
While the lake and meadows softened
another heathen slept late into day.

POEM BY A BLUE CAR OWNER

In the middle of one of our urbane conversations
holding his coffee cup in two hands around the rim,
he said suddenly, after, 'How was your summer?'
'I missed you,'
as though he were saying, 'For Kant, of course,
things-as-they-are can never be known.'
Then, 'I looked into blue volkswagens standing
at stop lights while you were gone.'
I said, 'Thank you,' having learned last year
to take a compliment.
His next remark he got a foot into, climbed out,
and sipped coffee.

YET ANOTHER THEORY OF ART

Sixteen years or so ago
in freshman zoology
a woman in khaki shorts and binoculars
told our bird-watching group at five A. M.
that birds excrete no fluids.

Aha! We noted that right under
impressionistic descriptions of grackle calls.
(Try to write down a bird call sometime.)
'They need all the water they can save,' she said.

Now I'm looking at a poem I once wrote
titled from sufficient artistic distance,
word meanings cleverly overlap,
color images grow into conceits;
but compared to its provocation--
the unordered event itself--
the words down the middle of the page
scarcely recall that I wept.

This dried bird lime of a poem,

feces of a feeling,
has been passed and repassed
through absorbing organelles,
the acid and the water re-collected
to etch private pains on my memory.

ON THE TRANSCENDENT NATURE OF THE CLICHE

The moment of knowing a cliché
can offer a Variety of Religious Experience
or scare the shit out of you.
For instance, you listen to friends'
serialized crises,
you drink, blow smoke, joke,
they love you.
But when for a second week running you cannot talk,
only cry,
their eyes glide past you nervously,
rest on the crowd
until duty jerks them back,
because they like you when you play from strength
and they can't help it.
For the halflife of a thought you are all
those who have ever known that
Nobody Wants You When You're Down,
wondering why you never heard it
so many times before.
Resentment goes;
you, all of you, have proclaimed your insight

with the aha! of discovery
and In This Day And Age
You'd Give Your Eye Teeth for a discovery

Hearing a man read from his work
I invented the phrase
Poet's Poet.

We who worry in our poems
about why we cannot feel
felt shivers
supplant wise academic nods.
He finished.

I worried over the relative weight of my

 'Thank You'
and said nothing
academically.

Stupid.

The merest 'I liked your poems,' is probably,
for him as for me,
The World On A Silver Platter.

THE EIGHTH DEADLY

So new gods have got up a new sin.
At your hard words, its promise trembles in my spine.
Easily could I yield,
wantonly shut my eyes, clench both hands to the sides
 of my head and
shatter to pieces.
Ah-h-h
rather a good one for a virgin lunatic.
I'd fall next to my knees,
dart my eyes from place to place in jerky movements--
a strong symptom--
then curl to a ball in the cool cellar of No Consequences,
of 'She can't be held responsible.'
Because I still stand,
Satan himself seduces,
'Shatter, Baby.'
I smile back a smile you cannot read,
it could go either way
and your saggy eyes look ready to gather the shards,
when, straight from some untapped California
come--

Ta-da-a--

Tongues

and I say,

'You hurt me.'

BIOGRAPHY OF A GLASS

A short-story hero named Seymour Glass.
The 'competent reader' seizes the clue.
'Allegorical!' he exclaims, knowing then
this character won't change--
could Christian? could Pussy Galore?
And therefore, reasons a critic in the Atlantic
or Harper's,
or one should have,
we've heard our last of the Glasses,
Holden Caulfield included.
What more can be said of Seymour?
He must line his skin
with some shinier element
to reflect men's harmful rays,
or steam to death inside.
He dies, romantically,
from the greenhouse effect,
embarrassing his author.

George Platt (no clue there but it's earthy)
says, in a poem, he was ten in '42

so he came of age with the Glasses.
He went to the army from Baton Rouge
and hasn't left since he got back.
Two decades later
and the holiest of we
wipers-of-filthy-words-from-walls
has screamed Fuck You! to someone
but you can still see straight through
George Platt's skin.

Pan me, Harper's critic
when I outrage our suburbanity
and call him hero.
He burns, though not up,
his life as member of
The American Institute of Real Estate Appraisers
lacks rhythm,
his poems lack unbelief,
he's been married for twenty-two years
and can't walk through his front door at night
without looking hungry for supper.

LYRICS FROM THE SUBURBS

For Mac

The dream in which you left me was so real
daymare alone could supply such detail
to unimagining sleep.

I woke and you were on some business trip
or other, so I flexed the unused thought:
'He's gone,' I sang out loud through my house
like some spangled Nashville bombshell
whenever I wanted the dishonest pain.

Speaking of country music's suburban appeal
a friend said,

'Its simplicity is disarmingly effective.'

Perhaps, but so costly.

Can I afford to tell you between trips
that I need you?

This is not Tupelo.

When you are again gone
don't ever leave me
in a dream.

LE GENOU DE CLAIRE *

A band of cragged Alpine green
between Geneva's gloss
and the gods' matte blue
circumscribes the scene for a man's middle age.
The sun's Swiss optics focus the field,
fine-tune his unease while we watch.
A man wise in his past,
holding 'love' and 'life's work' in perspective.
But the pressure,
perhaps of this magnified beauty,
perhaps of his year,
the pressure grinds a new view.
A young girl's movements prick his Desire,
It cavils; insists It is Reason--
ah! poor Pan, in distorted Cartesian pose.
A dog day in August
overtakes that place
at a locus meant not
to inform her innocence
but to deflower his casuistry.

* 1970 French film by director Eric Rohmer

ATTEMPTS ON THE LIFE

Attempts have been made
on the poet's life.
Not the everyday curses
upsetting enough, though harmless,
of mothers protecting their young
from long talks with the man who believes in nothing,
and has, furthermore,
no job.
But serious attempts
to stomp on his fingers
as he hangs for poetic life
from his bridge.

Like the imaginary line
we are told
separates the hemispheres,
or Portugal's New World claim
from Spain's,
so his bridge divides Belief
from the skeptic's slick claim.
For days he has stood unshaking

like some new Odysseus
between Scylla and Charybdis.
This morning he hangs from a girder,
a threat to himself,
and the stompers see their chance.

They are treacherous, those righteous:
short-haired young men in twos, peddling God
 on bicycles with leaflets and gentle eyes;
long-haired men, cross-legged on the river's edge,
 offering healthful exercise and diet, only to teach
 on the sly, control of the breath
 and the mind.

Fatal belief may lie coded in the mystical promise
 of a match book cover dropped by a suicide
 on the bridge.

Perchance his own squeezed white fingers
 and soul may let him drop from exertion
 to the voluptuous swells of Mother Church.

No dissembling from the others,
the intellect's left-bankers.
They do not approach the poet,
but beckon with the flash of their teeth

through curled I-know-that-I-cannot-know lips.

By this night he may accept belief,
his mind resting in peace;
he may approach with crooked smile
the skeptic's kamikaze thought;
or restand on his imaginary line
unfirm
and make a poem.

AN ACTOR AND A CLOWN

Three scenes later a bit part suicide
coming back angry in some Intensive Care unit,
asks why I go on living.

Heady from asepsis and the question
I straight-face, 'Works in Progress,'
because the lie I really live by
wouldn't fit her drama:

Imagine the posthumous outrage
to my sense of good theater
(make that theatre)

when my 2 A. M. finale,
grand with gore as I had made it,
was in four short hours upstaged
by pale unspeaking day.

EXHIBITING

These poems are like your
black dress with the flowers
you thought no one would like.
I get into them
as you did that dimity
and parade around my head
when no one else is there.
If discovered, I blush
like a shy transvestite
or feign indifference
with a stripper's stare--
yeah, that's it,
when caught naked
in these black flowered poems--
eyeball!

HYSTERICIS

for Patricia

We escaped our daughters
to hide in tall new grass.
We talked of absent lovers,
wishing, though we knew better,
they talked of us
in tall new grass or cars.

I looked at your eyes
and knew to hold you
as a grey wave tucked us into itself.
We came up
spitting ocean and asked why
they
do not know from our eyes
to hold us in
and out of waves.

They
missing from oceans grasses crying cars

returned for signings dinners decisions sex.

We should not have let the grasses learn their names,
we will never hear the end of it;
should not have let the sea find us hollow
with their absence when it pounded our skin;
and must even your eyes
reflect our incompleteness?

EVOLUTION

It has already begun.

My lover has moved with his talk and belongings
into my head,
has put his books
on the white shelving there,
and it seems to be settled
that we'll live here.

Earliest man,
he has recently read,
did not have consciousness.
'This Homo sapiens,' he explains,
'was habit-moved
and stopped cold, even dead,
by change.'
Oh I say, seeing already how the evening will go.

'Stress caused him to hear
unremembered commands
from some early group leader, long dead,

to whose voice he gave a name--god.'

Clever idea, that. Where does it lead?

I ask to hide my impatience.

'God became consciousness,' my love leads on,
'spread itself around the brain giving orders,
took over the greater part of man.'

He pauses, then says,

'Perfect assimilation will be death for god.'

Yes, of course. I'm votive.

Or divinity for man.

And now this man beside me
whose sex I have never seen
seduces me with blue movie narrative
of the sensuous life he has
but recently left.
Eros has become word.

I give up and respond, a second-grader with the
right sum:

Yes, I say, as we know from Plotinus, Beckett, Swami Vishnu,
the Beatles, Leonard Cohen, and others.

Correct recitation is my only satisfaction
and he has nodded.

He plays his booming music to shake the floor
(and for my stimulation?)
Vestigial appendix, this music,
and must soon be excised
by those who cannot risk infection
while on journeys in search of themselves.

I, like the caveman, have a body
habit-moved,
but I feel the press
of history too, and I follow.
My muscle filaments vibrate with a scream.
I can feel the scream through my skin.
It is real
but inaudible
so loud our heads now
with divine noise.

POEMS FROM A BREAK-UP

i

Song in the Passive

Let my friends have me back.
You can do no less
nor more.
You brought me here to get things settled
and instead stirred them up
in me.
I am good for no action
but passions
you cannot endure.
Let me be taken home.
Let my friends have me back.

ii

First Thought

Because I believed you
when after two solid hours
of frowned deliberation, especial care given
to proper qualifiers,
you said, 'Yes, I think I can make that commitment.

We two will work at making a go of it,'
because I believed you
I deserve my standard issue dress,
my pale room and my roommate with
(the ward matron tells me)
'such a like history, dear,
you wouldn't believe!
Mid-life, you know.
Pity.'

I've found a thought
lying here in the bin
and since I've no room for it
you take it:
Believing begets tragedy;
reserves us our rooms in this wing, our darkness,
our suicides if we're quick at the first.
Those on the floor at the end of the play
and the middle of their years
believed.
You standing-up comics do not.

iii

Voice

One day in the fourteenth year of our daughter
he went to live with a young woman.

I lay abed for two days

chanting, 'The life of the mind, the life of the mine, the life

On the third day at lunchtime

(executive lunchtime, albeit)

I rose and turned the thing to art

to limn for myself what it was.

Turned it to third day art, anyway--

too swollen for a poem.

One day

I'll clean and drain it.

iv

Shoot Out

In the big scenes

deaths,

desertions, and so forth,

the words are all spoken by Gary Cooper

in a dry cowboy town

with long spaces around them.

You've heard them,

words that spiked the first railroad,

Manifest Destiny Lines:

'This is (a rotten break for you, kid) or (God's will),

but get up and get on with it.'

'Life is so short, I must move on.'

Then somebody walks up

with no proper jingle or clomp,

saying, with an ungunned gesture

that would never have won the West,

'Use me,'

and shatters the scene;

blows the cowboy ghost

clear out of the street.

FOR JOANN THAMON
(died October 1971)

When we asked her to read for us
she had already suffered,
was thin and not straight,
as she said, yes, she would, color
rushed her.

She showed up
all pressed
like a mother had over-dressed her
for a party
instead of a giving.
From behind ivory lace
and underneath ribbands
she read about mustangs, marriage and waves.

We went to her, unclapping
at the end
knowing the seeds of her poems
and that their blooming
would take her life.

THEME AND VARIATION

We've got quite good at Doing It, you and I,
since you left.

Doing It

'Does she Do It?'

The high school boy's
self-certifying question.

Yes I Do It.

Now dinner is not a series of snaps
at the kid

and accusing questions to me:

'Why can't she use a knife properly
at twelve, that's what I'd like to know.'

Now I haven't watched you all evening
flaunt that phoney frown
to class up your farting
and your apathy.

From three wordless hours
your arm would reach out
heavy with lack of lust

to touch my farther hip,
shallow rim of a saucer under the sheet.

You would tip it toward you
on its edge and,
still wordlessly,

It
would begin.

What possible warm saucer tea
could you think would spill
over your loins
from a plate set out so long?

Is he good in the sack?
not a school girl's question,
a woman asks another.

Hard women?

'Harder,' I've heard you wager with a nasty laugh,
'than the men they sleep with,
heh! heh!'

Yes, you're good at It.

Now you aren't nagged all evening
for coming to table shirtless.

Now you need not watch me
in my god damn robe and lethargy

on the bed
right after dinner
reading pointless prose with pen in hand.
'Someone else's life,'
you would finally scream,
'when will you do something yourself?'

Now it is not night.
You have come here still drying
from someone
and I begin It
with words, I begin,
'From whom,' I ask, and 'Why
why

SAINT EMILION

A twelfth-century French city, much unchanged today,
St. Emilion was dedicated to the holy Emilion by the
Benedictine monks.

Eight hundred years old,
those men working in woolen jerkins
who quarried and placed these stones
one upon one or side by side
where tourists of tongues
unknown to the builders
now traipse.

What was their talk
as they stacked church over hidden catacomb,
spire over church?
Not the sightseers' topics;
how many francs to a dollar?
how many hours to Houston?
how many blank to blank?
how many?

Nor could they have spoken
what the tourguide speaks,

for only now does his cruising finger
like some Grimm fairy wand
transform this man, then this man's
scream of pain
to historic attraction.

Was it unidle even then, the talk?

Did they know?

Do we know by what we are saying
that we will be someday A Sight?

Only part of the story
is caught by the foreigners.

'Martyrs,' they get that,

'beheaded,' perhaps,

'catacomb, tombs,

morte morte

SAN ta me YON.'

Out of the tombs

on to the tower they move.

The tombs were not enough,

do you believe it?

Difficult, taking all this in,

straining for key French cognates.

the chill on their arms

distracts them.

Yet by the same hocus-pocus
of the Latin mass and the African dance,
the age of these stones
the lives of these dead,
work their holy magic--
a tourist in jeans and late thirties
from Houston
whose husband will leave at the end of vacation
for good
sees that his actions do not matter at all,
for the moment.

LIFE LIE

The heavy air was almost rain there,
land slid undersea and moved without a breath
to climb out on a far continent.
Earth sea and sky could not hold their distinctions,
and I, ninety-eight parts water,
belonged not to the solid land.
Why did I give in that day
after holding to bulky body so long?
Why that day lie
down under the shrouded sun
to have rolling waves
rise and burst in me?
suck us back together to rise
and burst again?
Like the waves
I did not feel the land
as we pounded
and slid down its side.
Like them
I can not recall the spent time.
Yet I knew time

had been lost
when the final roll left me beached.
I squeezed some grains of dry sand
in my hands;
the pain path retraced my arm
and, squinting, I drew a horizon.
Far away, cut in half by high tide,
a fisherman stood rubber-suited.
Reeling and casting in rhythmic
control,
catching meals,
so I stood.

...and work now back
away from the water's swelling and lapping
nagging at the spine
promising convulsion
withdrawing its promise.
Amid land vines
ungreener branches
trace white then bright
on my face.
I make headway
pushing my body into the land,

do not turn
reface the edge
shudder
and be sea,
but say inland
that I heard Sirens.

I. D.

I thought at first they were partners
stepping an implicit pavan
outside a classroom window.
They backed to a bench from opposite sides
sat facing where they had been
and each other.
A sinking swelled in me
before I knew
I knew why.

They are identical sisters,
two people meant to be one.

I watch them speak without gesture
as we do when we muse to ourselves;
they hear unsurprised what each other says
as we do when we listen to our thoughts;
sit inanimate together
as we do when we sit alone.

They appear to be not of our time.

Come forward, perhaps, from a more formal past
of balance and symmetry,
of, 'The twins will play a duet.'
From before the rise
of our self help religion: Be Yourself--
there is no one alive
quite like you.

Or they have come back from the future
of lives cloned from one cell,
to be coined 'isidentities,' not twins,
or public entry into private dream,
or human functionary A
and human functionary A-prime.

But nature allows no such errors of timing.
Perhaps I have misseen.
Could she be only one girl
and I, fooled by mirrors?
Oh, please be sitting at some misplaced concrete
vanity,
twisting, back to the glass;
be unique, stereotypic Belinda;
have a unshared self

centered thought.

I will leave this window

and not look back.

OF GOD GOLD ROMANCE AND MECHANICS

i

The Great Chain

Beasts feel
Man reasons and
God is Love

I cross-stitched a sampler
that said God is Love
when I was six
before I knew
equations work both ways.
Love is man transcending
that's all she cross-stitched.

Man in his medial slot
thinking
reason secures him the place,
while he feels around
in logic's hollows
for love.

Evolution's only idea,
unremarked by primate researcher
or priest,
love permits man to transcend himself
and ape.

I cross-stitched a sampler when I was sick
that said God is Love.
Look at me.
You see it.
Don't you see it?
I am ungodly.

ii

Basic Mechanics

Another friend whose intellect I admired
said he thinks man is basically good.
Like atoms and galaxies
man just tries to keep his valence.
To call that good or evil
is romance.
Crash! Two electrons barge in here.
Zip! Two electrons go off somewhere there.
What comes in
goes out.

Put in guilt, out comes the Golden Rule.

Ionism's painful, man,

stay even.

I'll give you this much,

friend whose intellect I admire,

You think I'm smart?

I guess you're right.

iii

Creed

But for my faith that there is no god

there are times I could not go on.

If I thought this mindless idiocy, minded

I wouldn't stay.

But accident may decree that

a star wringing loose tomorrow

will blow us to baser metals,

or I may be waked at midnight

by someone standing on my stair

yelling 'Stella' in a T-shirt,

so I'll hazard a chance.

It's just, after all, by chance that it's chance,

it could as easily have been planned.

Lovin It

Stripped
grey
no golden tan
brain,
nor gilded gods.
Free
animal-hued
safe
but for fallout,
explosion clouds
of late beliefs.
The particles filter down
coating my yellow-green.
At angles just right
sun glances off this refractory bilious body.
My god! I fairly gleam.

ANIMAL/VEGETABLE/PARABLE

i

Those Who Find Love At Last

are brave as snakes
who slough choking skins
and are deemed sneaky
by tentative legs.

Love found at last
is dark trees
that give up monthly moons
penny by penny
and wear snake skins
on their bark.

ii

Nothing New

everything's merely all that became of its parents
which were all that became of theirs.
Mystery helix
twisting down through years of harvests
unsevered

whether womb survives through seasons
or bloom dies giving fruit.

OUTSIDE IN

The week just past was the ep' i tōm,
as we used to say in joking,
of autumn.

Yesterday I had the whole of nature
dying in stylish fall tones inside of me
as I typed.

The work had been put off too long
in the name of Existentialism.

So as I sat in Essential virtue
I told myself:

tomorrow I'll get out and--

I did, and find it has taken more
than all inside me to
cover all the ground,
the leaves have turned grey in the process.

The family near me nags its father
because he reads his paper.

I want to be critical but cannot--
at least he's ramming his head against autumn.
I left fall's epitome in my mind

thin sliced, easily seen through, and
yesterday.

STAR-GAZER

He would rather have dealt more with people
but, well, done is done
and he studies the origin of the Universe.
He's every party's sexual intellectual,
wined and whored in houses of unknown hosts
where someone with wondrous Milky Way tits
asks him, 'Whence the primal gas that Big-Banged?'
'From nowhere,' he says.

In the fifth or maybe sixth party year
of 'Does space ever end?'
'No. Never.'
he formulated his theory:
Nothing can be understood, he told them,
which must be explained in the negative;
a self-effacing theory,
no one noticed,
and it freed him
long enough to drink
away the middle aged sun,

and distances measured in time,
and the star some say lighted the way
to a God to end gods
of warring planets.

And almost soon enough it goes round and round
in his head
and he says 'I'd like to grab a bite to eat
and then screw
if that suits you,'
(all scientists are poets)
and so finds himself
on one suburban sabbath
half of a split-second couple
remanded to each other's weekend custody
waiting for Monday morning
's stars.

INCOMPLETE ANCIENT SURGERIES

They are the man
who must work all day
and wants to be fed
all night,
and fed.

I understand

Before his eyes open in the morning
they meet briefly.
Struggle? Rarely
They know who must leave
for the day.

It is not contumely
to call him dual
personalities.
But to hate?

We are the woman
who wants to run

my own life all day
and be taken
care of at night.
I meet her between times
driving home or to work
alone in my car,
we change places
sometimes saying, 'What do you want?'

Some day
one of us will be late to arrive
the other early to depart
and there on the way home
or to work
I will become
one
undefined
space between.