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Beverly Dahlen

FROM *A READING*

He writes these things speak to you, flowers, for example, but it is only because one is filled up with them, watching them intently, concentrating attention on them. They seem to take on a life within one, as if they had spoken, as if some words had penetrated memory, but it is just because they are the same and one replaces an iris with another. Because they are not speaking to you and are different from anything spoken, and are not beside themselves. If they seem to live in one, it is memory that they match and bring to life again, it's really the continuity of memory.

But if the order is merely technical, one calls attention to it. You wouldn't expect to find it there in an ordinary newspaper article: "The rim is 7,100 feet, so winter is the main season."

On the other hand, it rarely rains in the summer, but what does *it* signify in that sentence? Why is it "useless" to say "a thing is identical with itself"? It is full of itself, there is no need (nothing felt in one) to add or subtract, so that is perfect, one's sense of perfection is fulfilled. There is no need inside one. This is nothing (a sense of perfection) one finds in speech or writing. Words do not fit themselves in that way because they have no definite boundaries. One senses them as one does fire in constant motion. They are a part of the world of light.

actively waiting
a summer morning increases
darkening still
streaks of rain
the old chimney harkens in the glass
itself and its shadow doubled
not a plain shape but ridged
and notched and the roof
a line running away to the edge

it does not "run." it is still, a line one's eyes "run" upon. but a running eye is an eye that weeps.

and the eye is never still, flaming and foaming, but seeks rest, coming to rest it still “sees,” desires seeing and looks even in sleep, but there never sees perfection which is always an artifact of the day and comes to light in the light of the sun and not in dreams.

★

If one were another, the lights blazing. No one would mistake this for a poem, she said. She had an idea of the poem as something recognizable but then how would you describe it apart from itself. There was no putting that action off the train, the train is contemporary with American music, the music contemporary with the loneliness of slaves, the slaves shamefully kidnapped from the west coast of central Africa.

This was an example of the expansion joke: a repeated form growing. Each time the smaller fish is used as bait for the larger fish, the third fish will fetch the monster that drags the fisherman into the depths. Part of the pleasure is watching it come, the pleasure of repetition and accumulation until it reaches its limit: the bubble bursts, the man drowns, the audience collapses with laughter. One, two, three. Enormous expectation based on repetition. If anything happens once, it may be repeated *ad infinitum*. But the first time? What are the laws governing that first occurrence?

Is there a rule about it, must there have been a definite beginning. Was it not always so, the flowers filling themselves up, how we all sang “landlord fill the brimming bowl” the other night, how a child wonders what it’s doing there, what is anything doing.

Nothing doing, they said. rather menacing, or the degree of light and the shadows there which seem so defining because there aren’t any trees. a bleak

carpet of simulated grass
and withered cactus
in a trough beside the
Restroom
door

rusty faucet rigid dust stuffed bucket under the sink paper towels & they lie in wads & wet balls scattered filthy sheets across the floor the

sand blowing in even with the door
closed. over. little squares of gray toilet paper.

The men out there talking in the heat the sweat sticks to the
neck the window with its prison fence a dried hairy weed head
pokes up moved by the wind a kind of thistle
prehistoric

★

the excess of abundance or the piling on of repetition, yet who is it,
exactly, the subject disappears

and appears again in dreams as another, so the dreamer looks on from
outside the body. Where is the dreamer?

Days spent in planning the difficult moves, constricted against the
full and easy (empty) sky, the excessively lavish ornately decorated
dome of the theatre, wisps of cloud curling upward tinged gold, the
skirts of their dresses just so, the drawn drapery. Say everything is
voluptuous in contrast to this exasperating lack of breath, these con-
tiguous states of being.

At the moment when the two halves of the brain fall apart. To resolve it
into animal, chemical, mechanical. The subject is "metaphysical," disap-
pears when one looks for it, a truth made famous by Buddha.

Sitting there, the open window gave onto a lawn, trees partly seen,
flowers, suggesting an opening into space, another world, something
to be out there in the garden among tamed nature, artistic ponds, a
small heaven in which nothing is itself, not a stone but a rocky sea isle,
there where tautology succumbs to art and one is charmed by the
doubleness of consciousness, both in and out of history. To be in, pass-
ing "an eternal ideal of mortal beauty"

the rasping of grasses actually tules blooming along the shore.
Walking far in the marsh the dead singing now dry pan the sudden
crackling on the trail and still a low wind in the ear hair gray and

tearing. flat corpses. grass nearly white with dessication. casting about
for whatever had been strewn

one's career among bones.

So given in the accumulations of time likening the earth to a garbage
pit, the remains of mass extinctions again nothing piling up like death
on the way to the car

abstract death a hole in the skull

the egret in its white flight trailing legs

★

counting pennies in the rain, going down the road streaked blurred,
the windshield wipers thwacking out a fan, dissolving trees, walls,

“all that is solid melts into air” resolved

& returning in the morning

Hear a crow imperative
(characterizing
each thought's rear
bored out of my skull she said
with the anthropocentric world

Which one will you have? passing around the plate of tea biscuits
so many & so many different kinds how can one ever

choose no going back to that road the gate closed no

so many choices options press star to return to

main menu

having it all

all the time

the big woofwoof WHAT a dreamy place to grow up in

A lovely day, yes, we've had a lovely day, haven't we?

In opposition a father's narrative over and over the old whine of
dead events in the ear one is alone with now. He's mad of course and

his daughters are gone one beyond the sea and the old lady gone flying
around the universe so what's left. A son to support him sometimes to
give him succor what did he recognize in his long life children and
grandchildren to no one beholden him whole self be all there is the
solipsistic spider

"I heard a bonny cow low" surely isn't it a comfort a consolation to
know there's a world outside your own skin a chair to sit in

★

how
well
to pause leaning over the railing
to regard reptilian time in the pit below
crocodiles lounging on rocks
surrounded by pond
nothing moving
bitter slow beasts down down
down and far, fences of time and space between us
so still difficult to see them in the eye that jumps
that cannot focus quite on their arcane solitude
their legendary ferocity

caught let the part for the whole suffice
half man half human what beast is that?
in the museum of natural history

then one by one the children
doubly or marauding in groups
disrupting the orders of death and naming
here you are
caught in the taxonomical niche that defines you
a heart a brain divided a backbone symmetry
five fingers like the crocodile spread out on the rocks
count
one two three four five aging
and the orders of extinction

