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## Sitting in the VD Clinic

Ross Talarico

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The leaves appear, in fall they yellow and curl,  
And I know the constant change in direction is a  
Ruse to make it seem more humble.

Again last night

The biplane landed in my neighbor's field.  
It caught fire, but when the wind finally blew  
It out, I felt like the child who snuffs a match  
In a closet and finds himself alone and bodiless.  
Just think: I forgot the dream today. I woke  
And drank my coffee, washed, put on my clothes;  
On the way to work, I stopped and turned back,

But couldn't think what it was I had forgotten.  
It was like the biplane from World War I, my father's.  
Beyond the window, the tree was waving its arms.  
A pilot from long ago, wearing my father's cap  
And goggles, was waving his arms. Now I remember.  
It was my father's dream, told to me as a child,  
Put on like a coat that one day fits. I rise from  
My window seat. Remember the child who wanted never  
To grow up? The child has gone and found his way.

## Sitting in the VD Clinic / Ross Talarico

In the VD clinic

The poet waited his turn, trying  
To work out a metaphor for the new blossom:  
The red sore on his penis,  
Blood flower on the severed root . . .  
He considered the possibilities,  
Children without limbs singing his poems  
Under the blue sky;  
Himself, growing blind, seer, prophet,  
Putting together the black pieces of a puzzle  
Until he blotted out the light  
And the glimpses of her sweet face  
Into which he moaned his deadly lyrics.

Next to him, a stranger  
Opened his newspaper, a journalist's wings,  
And there was the poet's photograph  
And an article announcing his visit  
To a city whose poem  
Struggles from hand to filthy hand.  
The poet tried to look away,  
His identity an embarrassment to centuries,  
But the stranger was not blind,  
Not yet anyway . . .

And the stranger thought to himself  
*Here is a man*  
*Who, with a voice that sings itself*  
*Into the blood of the unborn,*  
*Celebrates his own disease . . .*  
*Even now*  
*His face tries to enter*  
*The dignity of the photograph's stillness,*  
*As if nothing were eating at his flesh*  
*And his hands, cupped in his infected lap,*  
*Had never groped*  
*For the deathly affection of strangers . . .*

He turned away, disgusted,  
Determined never to set his eyes  
On the poet again, nor on a poem either . . .  
But later, feeling  
His own crusted sores burning  
At the center of his body  
And struck by the silence that echoed  
Like a meaningless shout  
From the throats of those sitting around him,  
He snuck a look at the poet  
Who was waiting his turn;

And days later, the secret festering,  
He opened a book  
Of the poet's work,  
Repeating the words with his voice  
That had not spoken in days,  
Repeating the lyrics about love

With disgust and contempt,  
Knowing the blood which the poet said  
Flowed with the earthly rhythm of desire  
Was really a river of disease . . .

And the moon could no longer  
Discover itself in the white flesh  
Because the body had gone  
Black in the crotch,  
And the mind itself a mere shadow of idea . . .  
He opened the book again and again,  
Contemptuous, wanting to tear out  
The pages, wanting to hold the print,  
His voice, to the ugly mirror,  
Until the lyric and the rot  
Became indistinguishable,  
And the singing and the dying  
Became the same breath, under which  
He wished the poet the same fate,  
The same miserable fate.

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CRITICISM / BARRY GOLDENSOHN

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## Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater

The Bread and Puppet Theater was deeply involved with the civil rights and anti-war protest movements and is marked by their political moralism in two important respects: its concern with domestic issues, the home front, and its primitivism of technique and morality. This primitivism is very clear in one of their earliest pieces, *The King Story*. You are seated before a large red cloth which is supported by poles on either side. A small, roughly modeled puppet head with a crown rises from behind and announces that he is the King of a country threatened by a Dragon. He does not know what to do. A White Knight in a horned helmet, and with an enormous fist and sword offers to kill the Dragon. The King asks his Advisers and People and they all counsel against using the Knight. The