

Soft Soil – Five for Sixfold May 2021

Soft soil

today I tossed a shovelful of soft soil
on the cheek of my dead dog

I knew for certain she was dead
or I wouldn't have dug her grave
lowered her in it
then tossed the soil on my friend's face
but still...

have you every buried a loved one?
I don't mean watch them get buried
but buried them, in the old way
digging, sweating, crying, denying
wishing it were all an awful dream

the first shovelful landed on her hip
and the hip quivered when the soil hit
but it was a quiver of impact vibration
not of life, I'm sure
because I had watched her die while my wife pet her
with the tenderest of touches and sobbing attention
in the dreamtime of this mid-day

today I looked death in the eye
in my shepherd's eye
I saw confusion, a stare to the beyond

death is a continuum, I know
from her tumor diagnosis
to her revival, then weakness, then collapse
then the last outbreath

I saw that outbreath.
I so wanted to turn away,
but my wife was very brave, so I too looked on

who knows what pains my girl felt near the end
she was tough; like most dogs, tougher than most people,
at least for these types of things
the things overthinking and overfeeling don't resolve

my other dog, her litter mate and pal of 9 years,
lay nearby as she faded and passed.
nothing mystical showed on his face
he was calm, grounded, just lying there
animal wisdom at its best; he knew.
his was a grief in realtime, without stages

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Hollow

1.

To be hollow,
this implies a space
that could or should be filled
with something of value.

It's the could or should
that gets you,
brings on despair,
a sense of inadequacy,
of unfulfillment.

A thing, a person
should not be left empty, it seems
but filled up with something;
something must be poured in;
we are uncomfortable with vacancy.

These days I don't dismay as much
when I'm feeling empty, hollow;
it's a relief at first,
a mysterious transfer of burdens
into some other space,
some other dimension, perhaps.

But soon the old fear appears,
an ancient patronly concern,
warning that I cannot function
in the world
if I am hollow,
for then I have no value.

When I was a younger man
I was vigilant of the hollow times
and responded to them
with diligence and duty;
I filled them up quickly
with something, anything,
usually of pretend value.

2.

A clinched hand
cannot receive a gift,
nor can it give one;
I would like a hollowing
to teach me a lesson like that,
imbue me with such wisdom.

To get somewhere meaningful
we must break down
the inner walls of habit
and persist through the most uncomfortable
aspect of human existence:
change.

3.

I vow to appreciate
emptiness for its own sake;
to honor the master of potentials,
the lord of nothingness,
the peace that flourishes in those hollow moments
when absolutely nothing manifests.

Then I will ask of no one
deeper questions about value;
and I expect the only way to hear
an answer, in the hollow,
is to listen intently in the silence
that is absent of judgment.

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Morning after

Bleak and weary
The early morning after
Standing outside alone I gaze
At a dark and forbidding
Michigan sky

Teardrops of heartspeak
Roll down my chilled, stubbled cheek
As I shiver
In the embrace of a November wind

Two days rueful remembrance
Two nights anxious vigilance

I turn towards my childhood house
And through the window I glimpse
The faltering glow
Of last night's disconsolate candlelight

Momma died

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Seed of nirvana

The work

So many years, seemingly lifetimes
of sitting practice - zazen
contemplating, looking, asking, listening
being present with the breath
and stuff of mind, feelings, sensations
so many fluctuating energies in the body

An unexamined life is replete
with the bliss of ignorance
Can awakening be unchosen?
the catalytic process has begun
The fuel feeding this fire burns clean
the slow roast of this work in a pit oven
permeates to the marrow of soul

The work unfolds

An evolution of love, compassion, and empathy
the emergence of a larger conscience
and consciousness
the stuff of spiritual fairy tales
and painful awareness of
their unexpected counterparts
guilt, shame, and glaring past transgressions
subtle and not so subtle acts of insensitivity
even violence in the name of self defense

By grace, a revelation

A space, a place
a mode, a natural state
the mythic other shore
an alternate style of living
an absence of expectation, narrative, and longing
a freedom from pretense
the game of hide and seek evaporates

A gift is given

A seed of nirvana
plant it, nurture it, value it
love it, I am told
eat of its restorative fruit
share it, and know
it's not yours to possess
as no thing is

Delivered

Firing off the weighty rifle
It's just a toy
Killing off your countrymen
You're just a boy
You overlook morality
To fight for what They believe
Lost is sensibility
Found is confusion

You used to be a fisherman
In a legacy
Standing proud under silver clouds
You saw eternity
Then They came and took you away
To fight for what They believe
Lost is your dignity
Found is an illusion

It's been two years and nothing's changed
You wonder why
Cleaning out your rifle now
It's a stormy night
If only you could fish again
And be with your family
If only God would deliver you
From this misery

Now something's hit you in the chest
You're on your knees
Flashing memories before your eyes
No time to cry
You think of the fish again
And your family
God has delivered you
From this misery