

The Green Burial

[I]

The fears
that fueled my youth
with jitter and fog—
the days uncertain
the nights long
her hand down my pants
groping the virgin hardness
unidentifiable gods crouched
in the shadows—

are gone

I lie on my back
beneath the live oak
naked winter branches
jab the night sky—
as long and delicate
and twisted
as my life

I fear nothing now

Born into religion
I will die an atheist
not with certainty
but with probability

Despite

the godless universe
I found happiness in numbers
and love in single digits—
my friends, my wife
my solitude

[2]

Above me
stars cluster
round the stark tree
meteors shower
the scanty branches—
a flickering ambush
of sharpened points,
fireballs
lit and tossed
by far away armies—
they thread the sky
and poke the darkness
alerting me to distances
and nebulous beginnings

I was the sperm
that crossed the finish line,
three hundred million
others on my tail,
I beat them all
to the killing wall

The signposts were numerous
and misleading
no time to ask for directions

I knew exactly where I was headed

I penetrated the egg
drilled through guarded walls
behind me
the gates slammed shut

In close pursuit
my rivals
met their death
in a chemical boil
released by the egg

When it was safe

I opened the sealed envelope
and delivered my DNA

[3]

As old as the beginning
my atoms fuse and shift
the shape of things—archetypes
created and destroyed

I've been a lover
a rake and a recluse
I warred, rattled
and retreated

I played dumb
and feigned erudition,
labored and leisured

I've been praised
as a knight, belittled
as a pawn

Or is it
the other way around?

I've been called
many things

*a mathematician
and a military engineer
a general's physician,
footman, and charioteer*

*an artist and philosopher
a King and a Queen
a farmer, a butcher
a merchant Marine
a doctor, a soldier
the wars that I've seen
a cobbler, a preacher
a groom have I been*

I was born in a palace
I was born in a shack
I was born with a phallus
and the world on my back

[4]

I was young
when she pulled me
into the shadows
between two tents
More experienced,
she touched me first

I feared where it would lead

Along the way
children sprinkled our
ups and downs
our ins and outs—
we made ends meet,
balanced the checkbook,
pennies wobbling
at the decimal point—
raised our kids with abundance
of care and rickety wisdom
I feared for them

They grew strong
and satisfied
and moved away

Their spirit filled the circuitry
of an empty nest
my wife and I rediscovered
our lost youth, we
embraced at random times
uninterrupted by whimpering
and exigence

we traveled
met new acquaintances
made dinners for old friends
we lived a quiet life

She had always cooked for me
gardened and made love
now she slips away to study
the Tree of Knowledge
and brings home fruit
to share

A bite of understanding

She often gave me
too much rope
to find myself
and I would veer
from the road on occasion
I could have hung myself
with all that rope
but I stuck around
she kept me off my
wandering toes

I dug my heels into marriage

Now I touch her, Eve
my wife, my love, my friend
my eternal woman
day and night

My hands travel up
beneath her blouse
I transfer the contents
of her bra into my palms
and hold her breasts
I kiss along her neck
and continue, a trail of kisses
down to her toes

Up again between her legs
my lips a slow glide
along her thighs
I enter the garden
of forgotten delights—
an atheist's heaven

[5]

Above ground
the oak is a sprawling
shape against
the star-splattered black

Below
roots frozen

in the February stillness
sequester CO2

anaerobic critters
and other crawling things,
no eyes
and too many legs,
mine the elements

I hear the red wigglers
crunching the compost
we feed them—
a ganglion of worms
social and egalitarian—
they squirm before the storm
turning the earth beneath
my back. The waste
cycles round,
in one hole out the other
soil makers,
singleminded—
munch, make babies and multiply—
happy little creatures

We're planting a garden