

How Water Falls

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The way just now
you put your hand
to your face
as you've always done.
You do it always the same.
I know you're not a robot
because you checked the box,
and lack perfection—
your flaws give credence
to your beauty.

I see you now in softer light
than in the brighter day
when in sharper contrast
you are severe
beyond your years,
but in the softer light
yielding to
the inertia of the dying day.

How water falls intact,
in any moment a single thing,
its parts related,
bound to utter smoothness
by the tension of its surface,
as your gown falling
meets the floor
and folds upon itself.

Your flesh both taut
and yielding to my touch,
my eye follows the curve of your form
as a view of Earth from space
to the boundary made by lamplight
against the dark beyond.

Our urgent lust is all consuming -
wetness, warmth, every sense inflamed,
our parts entwined as if to battle,
drawn by a river of desire,

by a river of no regret, of no return,
to the cumulation of our urgent purpose.

Before the morning light
I lie awake
within a sphere untouched by intimacy
to hear you speak from sleep beside me
a single word
that betrays a thought
in daytime never spoken.

While Waiting for a Line to Dry

While waiting for a word,
or for a line to dry,
or for a thought to form within the air,
the mind wanders past the windowpane
to a world beyond,
to where words and thoughts still grow on trees,
treated by folks living there
as the most common of things,
with no regard to the uniqueness of their sounds
to one this side of freedom.

In the stillness of the afternoon,
we are spent and for a moment
see ourselves upon a leaf
floating on a whim of fate
but for that moment
without fear
of what that might entail,
like what was known but now forgotten
except within the marrow of memory,
as a song once known to be drawn forth
by the coincidence of a random note
or of a random touch,
when truth was briefly apprehended.

My solitude is as a pond
the surface undisturbed
by neither wind nor movement from within.
The Buddha, who sits on a stone in the bird bath,
was once a living man, but so inward turning
is now reduced and turned to bronze.

The world is inward turning,
one thing upon another turned,
entangled by its contradictions,
the new dark ages coming.
We'll wear old suits
turned wrong side out
and dungarees without the knees.
As amber hardens
we squirm to make our spaces
in bubbles strung together
by inanimate connections,
each to private folly
as substance slowly hardens.

This was not ordained,
it didn't have to be this way.
Another way was known,
or knowable by study,
but what can be seen or understood
dependent on its proper introduction.
There is concern
that pedagogy is broke down:
send the kids to school,
get them out of house
and off the streets,
no Greek or Latin please
just the ABC's of mediocrity.

Truth may not be sufficient to save the soul,
but by its absence damnation is assured.
Truth is worthy of protection -
they used to call it honor,
that of loyalty both to reason and to duty,
without which chaos is the rule.
One should expect what's on the front
to be consistent with the back.

What's hurt by what's unsaid, she said,
he said you should know the ship is sinking,
drawn in a maelstrom
to the bottom of the sea.

Of the unfolding of possibility
came consciousness that gave purpose,
a work in progress through the ages,

too large to be described or be confined
by a single mind or generation,
but given continuity by principle of truth,
that a father would not in place of bread
give his child a stone or
rescind a pledge made to a friend,
each new thing enfolded in rough harmony
or later brought the whole to new congruence.
Ever was the fear of gathered darkness
drew us to the fire
and bound us to our mates and fellows,
the unwashed smell of reassurance
beneath a ledge
or stretched skins upon a frame of sticks
within a ring of stones.

At the heart of the labyrinth lies an object
untouched by any starlight,
more silent than the subtle friction
of one thought against another
or of any inward movement.
It once lived,
but now transformed,
cannot speak reproach,
of what for want of courage
was left unspoken or undone.

A Turkey's Pardon

Last year for Thanksgiving
I pardoned a turkey,
did not stalk it when it yet
was wild and still could fly
through the tangled undergrowth
beneath a drawn November sky,
with youthful hands half frozen
cradled the polished walnut grain,
the cold blue barrel, impatient for its discharge,
the call now close that echoed through the trees,
the black primordial eye.

Or in my grandmother's yard raised
from a poult to perfect plumpness,
did not stretch its neck across the
blackened stump but stayed the hatchet,

did not unzip the carcass
to read its entrails,
so as to know the mind of God,
or to make a stuffing from its innards,
did not parboil it in
the cast iron cauldron so as to
more easily pull the feathers.

Nor did I buy it neatly packaged
at the super-store, where my act was
duly noted, sent a market signal back in time,
made one less egg, hatched one less poult;
but read the label, had visions of vast herds
of “free-range” turkeys driven
through Indian country to a railhead where
a callow youth lies dying on a barroom floor—
close followed by a picture
of an assembly line that begins in cacophony
with living birds hung by their feet on hooks
from a moving chain that passes
a long line of flashing knives.

The pardon is retroactive and inclusive
so as to cover any
crimes yet to be counted,
though I can’t think how a bird might sin
or for what might beg one’s pardon
unless inspiring gluttony a capital offence,
Christ come down from off the cross forgiven
for sins not yet committed.

My proclamation was—in this season of the virus—
an easy sacrifice, my table bare
except for its single setting, the other chairs
drawn up as in attendance. I’ve not
set out the crystal or the silver candle sticks, I’ve
sent no invitations. Old Albert died in ’18, so we’ll
not discuss again what caused the towers to crumble.
The other ghosts have no need of chairs or plates
but are content to hover. No one’s traveling,
the kids are hunkered down.

Our dear leader pardoned two
warming up for Flynn and others.
Now I’ve done my one,
I too will give thought to

the forgiveness of myself, but
that is complicated, best left to other seasons.

Of a Skein that Threads Through Time

God is a name we give—
the shortest word for metaphor,
is of a skein that threads through time,
is a word that winds
through deed and circumstance,
defines the theme of our existence,
starkly in a moment,
recedes from one's awareness,
to reappear, as a refrain,
when least expected,
or finds oneself soul-naked,
distraught of loss, bereft of consolation,
or, in the moment of our triumph,
whispers of humility,

is of a sheen that spreads o'er all,
the word we find for reason
of life that springs in season,
of bounty gathered in the fall.

God thought, but what he thought,
man might not presume to know,
might not presume
to know the mind of God—

or put form to what was ever essence,
the pulse that beat
throughout the fabric of the world,
communion of its constancy,
our howling selves against the silent void,
orphans on a journey seeking place,
huddled with our mortal fellows,
seeking comfort
beneath a dripping ledge,
where was fear but ever extant,
where felt the dark an entity,
first worshiped fire, the power
that pushed back the heavy cloth of darkness,
gave hope against the horror,
content within that moment,

Commented [jr1]: last stanza after Descartes

but to be warmed and fed,
within the circle of our band,
made music of inchoate longing,
made colored magic on the walls of caves,
depicted outcomes as our prayers—
bounty of the hunt,
fecund copulation,
pictured joy
in a moment less encumbered—

before the mystery was foretold,
before the planets moved
by the priesthood's proclamation,
before the sleight of mind
that moved truth from its axis,
when to see the world
was but to see the face of God,
when spirit was the world,
before His exile to the firmament,
before passion's circumspection.

Make no god of certitude
but soften to allude
to what can be not ever known.
How know solace except surrender;
how know hope except by beauty's apprehension.
The name of God, unspoken,
was ever more of mist
than was of substance. Give Him
no mortal attribute,
take not the name in vain
but save for what is not explained.
Say not to know of purpose.

Call what pleases by His name: all beauty,
all harmony, all that sings for joy,
all left of loss when sorrow's passed,
all of wonder or of hope,
continuance of star light,
wholeness of water and of cloth.

He has mellowed from the time of burning flesh,
when, disdainful of Cain's offering,
shamed him to a mortal fury,
then cursed him for his rage-wrought deed,
now, in maturity, less concerned

of absolutes, less challenged
by Eve's shy theft of knowledge,
tires now of the Serpent's cunning,
rather now bemused of our audacity,
such would make our world anew.

Our longing was
before the object of affection,
before we clothed our longing,
named it, hung it on a frame of sticks.

Oh, you prideful gods,
we made you not of dust
but essence of an inspiration,
was of spirit, not of thing,
a fulcrum to our understanding,
an ideal that had no separate substance,
but by which to know our imperfections,
by which to know what is
and what might also be,
by which to make our laws,
by which to worship harmony—
not cause of flame but that
of which all flames have common.

God is, yet is no thing,
is in the symbol π unending,
is within emergent Spring,
Autumn's death,
and pregnant Spring's return,
is within the song that's sung,
Ode to Joy the joy itself,
is within a garment mended,
or any work well done,
is in the thrill that's felt
when one's thoughts are turned
to someone loved whose love's returned,
or in the grief of memory,
a pain through time to be assuaged
but not to be relinquished—
the remnant of that presence.

Descartes saying
God is the highest concept,
therefore, He is,
is caught red-handed,

in the act of making God.
All speculation of Creation,
of transcendence of impression's wall,
is what unbound reason,
from emergent self,
would project from commonality,
an order on the lack thereof.

Metaphor

Metaphor the means
by which we may approach
what cannot be more plainly spoken,
of fear, not of what, but of fear itself,
or void left by loss. How explain
what's undefined by reason,
the sense of self a part of all,
except by metaphor, a shell within
to hold the substance of the ritual.

As once we sat within a space enclosed in stone,
worn wood, polished metal, and soaring vault,
a dimness pierced by shafts of light,
perception circled by ones' private ghosts.
A structure made for worship,
of what perhaps mattered less than form,
but solace, hope, and fellowship lived there,
as when images were drawn on rocks,
or made from sticks,
invoking magic as a lantern in the dark.

We are now divided from our former union,
no request for sacrifice,
no ardor of ambition beyond celebrity.
Ancestors shiver in eternity,
without the warmth of our remembrance,
without solace of continuation.
We are perhaps between religions,
the cross so hoary, gray, and splintered,
too old, too slow for an impatient age,
too assumptive of respect where none is given.

A new home for Metaphor arises,
better suited for transients, such as ourselves,

all steel and glass, with drive through Eucharist,
and only of the moment, no regularity required.
Your several sins, your many indiscretions,
extirpated one and done.

Or, rather, we will begin anon
to build a pantheon for Metaphor,
meant to last, but adjusted to the times.
Truth will with His consort, Beauty, rule;
Continuity, also known as Time,
will be the river there that flows
unhindered through all things,
and all entwined by Harmony.

The river flows until the unknown sea
from whence spirits rise to glide
through troubled sleep,
their source the vortex there
that pulls the unending flow
to caverns well below, where
travelers will emerge on shore
to speak to those who've gone before,
and metaphors remixed,
return in different form.

Give the gods their meal of burning fat and bone,
keep for thyself and friends slow roasted lean.
Toast the gods but drink the wine.