

“Quiddities (Philosophical Poetry)”

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Apologia

Ezra Pound famously remarked that when poetry strays too far from music, it ceases to be poetry. I would like to opine, as a tangent thought to his, that when the higher arts stray too far from philosophy, they cease to be the higher arts. Philosophy, no less than literature, is a series of narratives; and that higher-end, intellectually ambitious literature should twirl and torque around philosophical quandaries and concepts is something that English-language poetry has forgotten in the last half-century (and I mean “pure” philosophy, as differentiated from literary theory). The leveling process by which no distinctions between high and low art are made, as a precondition to post-modernity’s preponderance, has effaced interest in the “fundamental questions” in favor of narrow, nihilistic ironies and corrosive but intellectually superficial cultural critiques. But that, without reprising Romanticism, English language poetry can reclaim interest in pure philosophy and the crux questions of human existence, is the assumption these poems make. As such, they are angled against everything in the English language oeuvre after T.S. Eliot’s “Four Quartets.”

#1345

Two hedgerows with a little path
between— to walk in the path like
some do, as if no other viable route
exists, to make Gods of hedgerows
that make your life tiny, is a sin of
some significance in a world where
hedgerows can be approached from
any side— I said this to a man who
bore seeds to an open space, and he
nodded to someone else and whistled
an old waltz to himself in annoyance.

#1613

Follow Abraham up the hill:
to the extent that the hill is
constituted already by kinds
of knives, to what extent can
a man go up a hill, shepherd
a son to be sacrificed, to be
worthy before an almighty
power that may or may not
have had conscious intentions

where hills, knives, sons were
concerned, but how, as I watch
this, can I not feel that Abraham,
by braving knives, does not need
the one he holds in his rapt hands?

#1617

Philosophy says that poets want to lose.
What are conditions of losing: to whom?
The conditions (to whom they concern, to

unrepresented phantoms, mostly) are colors,
which, to transcribe, require a solid core of
nebulous necromancy which philosophy calls

(for its own poetic reasons) “loss.” I took this
from one strictly (which necessitated looseness
towards me) for himself, took several median

blended colors and painted a razor on the roof
of a red building. Then I fell off. But I lived.

#1622

Poor Schopenhauer's axioms:
all in the will is a fight to beat
other wills. I see him in his
meager room, his will bent
not to do much, save himself
the trouble of fighting these
ineluctable battles, but not
able to refrain from eating,
breathing, shitting, fucking,
all those simple acts that are
will-to-survival, but Arthur
casts himself into a future of
power, not knowing when it
arrived it was to be a crass joke,
ended with face in turtle soup.

The "I" that writes cannot be
(he told us, perched on a hill of
flowers which he crushed, but, of
course, incompletely, and not all of
them at once) strictly for-itself as it
has no substance: a student walked

up, pricked his forearm (the back side
of it) with a small razor, he cringed but
only briefly, leaning forward so that a
row of buttercups doused him yellow.
The "I" that writes has a relationship
that is very much for itself, but it has

a strictly independent existence, so that
what constitutes a human "I" has no
meaning for it. Now, you need to know
this: I was not the student with the razor,
but I supplied the razor to the student
that cut the professor's forearm, but you

will never know how I got it, or why.

#1476

Days follow days off cliffs—
do these things we do have
any resonance, do they rise
into the ether, or are they to
be ground down into pulp,
briefly making earth sodden,
then dissipated dust scattered
over plains too vast, blasted
with winds, rains, storms, to
be counted or harvested?

#1480

How horrendous, to realize there are people in the world with no soul, walking zeros, hollow spaces, dead end interiors, permanently frozen faculties, how horrendous to watch how they borrow words of others to sound profound, but each echo reveals there's nothing behind it but the kind of charred silence that comes after a corpse is burnt— how horrendous, how it makes some of us cling to what we feel, how we feel, that we feel, and that everything we feel is so precious, specifically (and only) because it is felt, and stays felt.

#1281

You can take for granted
lots of God-awful garbage
in places deemed important
by fools; this goes for every
thing, including poetry. Why?
Because the world runs (has,
will always) on mediocrity, so
safe, so comforting, like a mug
of hot cocoa on a winter's night,
or a mediocre simile, people want
others to be mediocre, to be fools,
that's just the way things go, people
are nothing to write home about, or
(if you are writing to God) nothing to
write about at all, the world is no mystery,
all the mystery is in the night sky, looking up.

Why does no one tell the truth?
Because the truth is (more often
than not) absurd. No one wants
to look absurd, so no one tells
the truth, which creates even
more absurdity; worlds grow
into self-parody, systems grow
down into gutters, whole epochs
are wasted in perfidy; Cassandra
finally opens her mouth, no one
listens, they want her to star in
a porno, set her up with a stage-
name, she learns not to rant,
visions cloud her eyes, cunt—

#1168

The essential philosophical question
is incredibly stupid—
why is it that things happen? You can
ask a thousand times,
it won't matter— nothing does, except
these things that
keep happening, “around” philosophy.

#1067

I want to last—
to be the last
of the last of
the last to be

taken by time,
but the thing
about time is
that it wants,

what it wants
is us, all of us
wane quickly
for all time's

ways, sans "I,"
what I wants—

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(all poems in this collection are drawn from the Blazevox '10 book “Apparition Poems”)

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