

Six Kinds of Weather

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Writing His Own Life

He often returns to those moments
When he discovered something vital.

The time he realized his mother drank
Or that his teachers thought him slow.

Mere glimpses originally, they become
Discourse running hundreds of pages.

The question then is one of invention.
Did the child really steal a mantle clock

From a department store and then throw it
Into the woods because he was scared?

Or was this merely a way to introduce
The celebrated chapters on mutability?

At some point, enjoying a quiet renown,
A habit as deeply ingrained as opium,

He realizes precious little separates fact
From the lies that make it up, an idea

That allows him to travel down rivers
That have yet to be explored or named.

There is a woman who causes an anguish
Even the prophets might have admired,

And a coming to grips with immensity
Before the night sky and a bottle of gin.

But who would, in his perversity, insist
Such things have a life of their own?

They're like colors before striking the eye.
Or the people Plutarch didn't mention.

After Their Kind

Inventory was a nightmare.
He had an endless list of folk names
For beetles that all looked alike.
Seven days out, the leopards took sick
With a fever that made them cross.
He'd discovered that both the giant sloths
Were female -- big trouble later on.
But he had enough to worry about now,
What with the weasels eyeing the vipers
And the nematodes proliferating
In the boat's grain reserves like plague.

He had to watch for salt
In the frog tank because a frog's skin
Is sensitive and a frog will complain.
Besides that, there were the special diets,
The herbs and the sea sick remedies,
Each beast hollering for its medication
Until the whole vessel sang with pain.

Sometimes he imagined sawing a hole
In the bottom, sending everything down.
He scanned the horizon, hoping for reefs.
The orangutans didn't smell very good.
They escaped their cages and gambled
With his sons, who were expert cheats.
He said, I don't understand why I'm here.
Did God forget how to make things?
Shortly thereafter, his wife got the cowpox
And wouldn't let him touch her.

Once, he thought he was on an island,
Lying in a hammock and drinking wine.
There wasn't a bird sound in the sky,
Not a single solitary whisper of animal life.
Emptiness is holy. He drank it in.
But that had been a dream. The hyrax
Was homesick and wouldn't eat a thing.
The bonobos turned the gila monsters
Into handbags. The mantis went insane.

The Inferno

The worst part is the waiting.
People in line in front of you.
Papers to sign, financing.
Someone once said God must love
The common man because

He made so many. Yet here we are.
Maybe we get what we deserve.
Believing in this place, I'm told,
Constitutes a serious character flaw.
At any rate, advance reports

Have been misleading. There are no
Circles, just the tedium of hallways.
One door looks much like another
And the reception rooms stink
Of camphor and rubbing alcohol.

It's not as bad as it could be, I guess.
The vending machines have fresh milk
And the cashews are reasonable.
Still, sometimes I get lonely.
I long to run into family or friends,

Unexpectedly, like on a cruise.
But I know I am just being selfish.
You have to think these things through.
Once, a man wept for his little girl,
And she showed up. In her slippers.

Six Kinds of Weather

1.

Today was the coldest day ever
In the month of July, at least
In this town which is shaped
Like a uterus or a spoon.

2.

I'm lonely. The gin stays
In a cabinet beneath the sink,
Beside the bread and the plums.

3.

The rain was splendid, warm
On the coldest day in July.
The rain showed its hip bones.
It danced in a tight dress.

4.

Official records start 1870.
Cloudy & mild, we're dying.

5.

Today my neighbor overslept.
She blames the weather,
Says a mirror fell at work.
The sky looks like skin.

6.

My daughter is in school now.
She dreams she sees a rabbit
In the closet and another
On a boat on the ocean.
The wind is restless and warm.
My daughter eats plums

In her dreams and says
The weather is blue on tv
And patient and full of names.

Concerning Immunization

Our children start out as carriers
Of disease, poisonous as apples

Sprayed to keep out of season.
True innocence is not healthy.

We want fever. It refines disease.
Our lives make fever proud.

A timid woman walks into the ocean.
A man refuses to leave his house

Until the wind is cold enough
To force him back inside.

We distill ourselves in the enemy.
We walk in his shoes and steal them.

We find proper accent and taste.
A man reads the same book for years.

An alcoholic takes a sober oath
And knows why he will drink again.

A child sees herself in a mirror.
She thinks there is more to vision

Than the strange and deliberate eyes,
The image that is no longer hers.

Concerning Fractal Geometry

Heroic size is a matter of disease.
Norse explorers stuck in Greenland
Wore out the gene pool.
Their children were eight feet tall.
Our green giant is that particular color
Because of a bad pituitary gland.
Science knows everything except
How the Norse wound up in America.
The Indians thought them gods because
They were so tall. Some were hump-backed,
Others missing limbs, but symmetry
Is not required of the divine.
Our jolly green giant peddles corn.
He'll be dead before he's thirty.
A bad pituitary gland, like all things,
Is an exercise in fractal geometry,
Simple patterns repeated over scale.
Like the stones the Indians stacked
For their new blond gods –
Long-houses on the North American shore,
The Norse hollering, "Get busy,
You fools." Or "Erik likes your sister."
We enjoy getting pushed around by giants.
We give them power over our lives
Even if they can't stand on their own
Two feet. The green giant sells corn
To people who can't see how fast
He is fading. This is pattern too,
Simple and empty, like what's left
Of the Norse settlements in America.
The stone chimneys and long-house walls.
The endless repetition of lichen and ice.

Concerning the Naked Woman on Her Porch

The Greeks had a word for it, *ate*, a visitation
From the outside, the supernatural come to
Set up house in the middle of one's chest.
But she isn't much interested in terminology.

She is presently taken with the tulips just up
Beside the driveway, the petals on the stalks
Looking this way and that as though curious
About the movement of the world, the traffic

And the sparrows caught in their tantric spasms,
Their restless need to be in as many positions
As possible before the sun sets and the sycamore
Takes on the look of the dead. The peculiar thing

About *ate* was not that it made you behave
In irrational ways, trade your golden armor, say,
For some in bronze, but that it was alien,
A state that seemed to belong to someone else.

For the Greeks, then, the intellect was the Self,
And anything else was strange and unwelcome.
But the woman, standing as she is, wholly naked
On her porch, might quibble with strict formula.

The breeze, made cold by its long trip over lakes
And through the forest still littered with snow,
Ignites something like fire just beneath the skin
And wakes her to the possibility of becoming like

The birds, those same sparrows rummaging now
On the tops of houses and free to ascend a breeze
If they so desire, flight being the very emblem
And effect of this or any state worthy of our attention.

Night Song

The neighbor shouts,
And faintly, like something buried in the air itself,
There is a threat on her life.
At least these are the words
Of the baritone as I understand them.
I am upstairs,
In the bathroom, and I wish the light were off
So that I could turn it on.

There is a great deal of banging,
Fences and door frames,
And a car pulling away in the rain.
Frustrated violence.
All of which leaves me alone
With the question of my role.

I walk downstairs.
Jung is waiting on the couch
Where I left him
To re-consider his theory of the animus.
Maybe come up with something
That slops outside the lines,
That refuses to obey the rules
Like some child taking the obligatory test.

Third grade math.

There are nights
When nothing you do is right,
When contentment is a form of cowardice
And the radio is too loud.

My wife is convinced the neighbor
Is an exotic dancer,
A woman who bears what matters least,
A conclusion drawn
From the woman's hours and appearance, and maybe
My wife is right, but who can rejoice
In the powers of induction
When she is asleep, and I ... well, I
Am in the company of others.

People I remember suddenly
And for no reason. The teacher

With the boil on his lip.
An uncle in thrall to the bottle. Salomé
And that head.

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