

## Beverly Dahlen

### FROM *A READING*

He writes these things speak to you, flowers, for example, but it is only because one is filled up with them, watching them intently, concentrating attention on them. They seem to take on a life within one, as if they had spoken, as if some words had penetrated memory, but it is just because they are the same and one replaces an iris with another. Because they are not speaking to you and are different from anything spoken, and are not beside themselves. If they seem to live in one, it is memory that they match and bring to life again, it's really the continuity of memory.

But if the order is merely technical, one calls attention to it. You wouldn't expect to find it there in an ordinary newspaper article: "The rim is 7,100 feet, so winter is the main season."

On the other hand, it rarely rains in the summer, but what does *it* signify in that sentence? Why is it "useless" to say "a thing is identical with itself"? It is full of itself, there is no need (nothing felt in one) to add or subtract, so that is perfect, one's sense of perfection is fulfilled. There is no need inside one. This is nothing (a sense of perfection) one finds in speech or writing. Words do not fit themselves in that way because they have no definite boundaries. One senses them as one does fire in constant motion. They are a part of the world of light.

actively waiting  
a summer morning increases  
darkening still  
streaks of rain  
the old chimney harkens in the glass  
itself and its shadow doubled  
not a plain shape but ridged  
and notched and the roof  
a line running away to the edge

it does not "run." it is still, a line one's eyes "run" upon. but a running eye is an eye that weeps.

and the eye is never still, flaming and foaming, but seeks rest, coming to rest it still “sees,” desires seeing and looks even in sleep, but there never sees perfection which is always an artifact of the day and comes to light in the light of the sun and not in dreams.

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If one were another, the lights blazing. No one would mistake this for a poem, she said. She had an idea of the poem as something recognizable but then how would you describe it apart from itself. There was no putting that action off the train, the train is contemporary with American music, the music contemporary with the loneliness of slaves, the slaves shamefully kidnapped from the west coast of central Africa.

This was an example of the expansion joke: a repeated form growing. Each time the smaller fish is used as bait for the larger fish, the third fish will fetch the monster that drags the fisherman into the depths. Part of the pleasure is watching it come, the pleasure of repetition and accumulation until it reaches its limit: the bubble bursts, the man drowns, the audience collapses with laughter. One, two, three. Enormous expectation based on repetition. If anything happens once, it may be repeated *ad infinitum*. But the first time? What are the laws governing that first occurrence?

Is there a rule about it, must there have been a definite beginning. Was it not always so, the flowers filling themselves up, how we all sang “landlord fill the brimming bowl” the other night, how a child wonders what it’s doing there, what is anything doing.

Nothing doing, they said. rather menacing, or the degree of light and the shadows there which seem so defining because there aren’t any trees. a bleak

carpet of simulated grass  
and withered cactus  
in a trough beside the  
*Restroom*  
door

rusty faucet rigid dust stuffed bucket under the sink paper towels & they lie in wads & wet balls scattered filthy sheets across the floor the

sand blowing in even with the door  
closed. over. little squares of gray toilet paper.

The men out there talking in the heat the sweat sticks to the  
neck the window with its prison fence a dried hairy weed head  
pokes up moved by the wind a kind of thistle  
prehistoric

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the excess of abundance or the piling on of repetition, yet who is it,  
exactly, the subject disappears

and appears again in dreams as another, so the dreamer looks on from  
outside the body. Where is the dreamer?

Days spent in planning the difficult moves, constricted against the  
full and easy (empty) sky, the excessively lavish ornately decorated  
dome of the theatre, wisps of cloud curling upward tinged gold, the  
skirts of their dresses just so, the drawn drapery. Say everything is  
voluptuous in contrast to this exasperating lack of breath, these con-  
tiguous states of being.

At the moment when the two halves of the brain fall apart. To resolve it  
into animal, chemical, mechanical. The subject is “metaphysical,” disap-  
pears when one looks for it, a truth made famous by Buddha.

Sitting there, the open window gave onto a lawn, trees partly seen,  
flowers, suggesting an opening into space, another world, something  
to be out there in the garden among tamed nature, artistic ponds, a  
small heaven in which nothing is itself, not a stone but a rocky sea isle,  
there where tautology succumbs to art and one is charmed by the  
doubleness of consciousness, both in and out of history. To be in, pass-  
ing “an eternal ideal of mortal beauty”

the rasping of grasses actually tules blooming along the shore.  
Walking far in the marsh the dead singing now dry pan the sudden  
crackling on the trail and still a low wind in the ear hair gray and

one's career among bones.

the egret in its white flight trailing legs

his daughters are gone one beyond the sea and the old lady gone flying  
around the universe so what's left. A son to support him sometimes to  
give him succor what did he recognize in his long life children and  
grandchildren to no one beholden him whole self be all there is the  
solipsistic spider

"I heard a bonny cow low" surely isn't it a comfort a consolation to  
know there's a world outside your own skin a chair to sit in

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how  
well  
to pause leaning over the railing  
to regard reptilian time in the pit below  
crocodiles lounging on rocks  
surrounded by pond  
nothing moving  
bitter slow beasts down down  
down and far, fences of time and space between us  
so still difficult to see them in the eye that jumps  
that cannot focus quite on their arcane solitude  
their legendary ferocity

caught let the part for the whole suffice  
half man half human what beast is that?  
in the museum of natural history

then one by one the children  
doubly or marauding in groups  
disrupting the orders of death and naming  
here you are  
caught in the taxonomical niche that defines you  
a heart a brain divided a backbone symmetry  
five fingers like the crocodile spread out on the rocks  
count  
one two three four five aging  
and the orders of extinction

so say            suspended in midair            one of the quirky saurs  
not one of us    dug up and hung there

No one she said. No he said. They aren't like us and would rather stay with their own kind. Let's not get everything all mixed up she said.

No. Let's do keep order. keep it, don't waste it, don't throw it away. then that day ended and that. and then the next came and went and ended and then there was no going back, nothing left now, everything gone, used up. bit by bit and then it was over. slowly and slowly one day after the next and then the end.

seen from outside itself: nothing in the center of plenty,  
of pleasure

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