

NO POSSIBILITY OF ARTICULATION

I'd rather not talk about your pain
or my pain or his pain anymore.
Please, I'm getting bored.

If you insist on talking about pain
talk about, for example, a horse, his lungs,
the pain in his lungs after he's run,

say, five miles, ten miles . . .
That's the kind of pain I'm interested in.
Unattached pain, pain attached

to muteness, pain
with no possibility of articulation.
Understand what I'm getting at?

Pain that's gone so deep
and spread so evenly
that it becomes only a faint hum,

the blacker and blackest hum
settling casually
around the center of our lives

You Could Be Wrong

Norman Dubie

In the poem "There Are Many Things That Please Me," I am interested in the attitude of the poem. The poem is a beautiful annoyance, its methods are a nuisance, are "euphuistic." Lux's use of repetition and alliteration seem as important as the repeating figure of the poem and the poem has chosen for its repeating figure the mere phrase, *I'm pleased*. Poetry, here, however, is not just speech framed to be heard for its own sake nor is it just speech copied and understood, copied to be understood. The little mannerist with his sack of disdain who closes the poem is such a specific source for the poem that he can't be ignored, though he ignores us, and his purpose which is original or mythical is the purpose of a real source, the sun. There is a kind of idiotic development to this poem that is balanced with motive. But I think the poem is to be believed, that is to say it's warming up. The poem happily accepts the responsibility for the invention and release of a new day. Another day, really, is what the poem admires and another day is what the poem chooses to hold in disdain. What could be more natural? Who hasn't cursed the morning?

We all remember Robert Lowell's sonnet to Hart Crane; Lowell, the Hollywood columnist, pushed by tribute and anybody's *real* story. And now twenty years later Tom Lux's "Longitude and Latitude: Hart Crane"; I find this a touching poem. In 1917 when Crane's parents were finally divorced Crane adopted the maternal surname, Hart, for his own first name and Lux makes a similar decision in his homage, twice calling out in playfulness: *heart* jumped from the bow and *Heart's* still around. Crane appears in the poem, a fabulous rumor, and as a mixture of metaphor: an arrow, a meteor and then some large fish. So on April 24th, 1932, Crane sailed from Vera Cruz on the S.S. *Orizaba*. Days later he jumped into the Caribbean and was drowned. *The body has been recovered.*

I wonder about Lux's "No Possibility of Articulation"; is this poem, which speaks of a pain that is without opportunity for articulation, articulated? It is; and it is even noisy at the end. Doesn't the poem feel "that a single thing remaining, infallible, would be enough." "Ah, douce campagna of that thing." What's rehearsed here all day is not a speech but movement, movement is the clue to the success of the phrasing of this poem. Again, everything is deliberate and tried twice, and fluid. But the poem like the Stevens poem doesn't say anything, ever. It just exhausts itself and settles with great resonance around the center of something inscrutable, my life.

I enjoyed these poems and I enjoyed talking about them; talking like them. But I take my instructions from the last lines of Lux's first book, *Memory's Handgrenade*:

And the woman, don't forget her,
on the other side of the lake.
She's yelling something.
You can't quite hear her,
but you don't think she's saying goodbye.
You're too far away to read her lips,
but you don't think
she's saying goodbye.
You could be wrong.

Thomas Lux's Response

I'm glad Norman Dubie enjoyed these three poems and I'm glad he enjoyed talking *like* them. His readings of the poems are quite close to what I'm trying to do in them. By that I mean he's gotten a good sense of the poems and he's reacted to them through his *own* voice, eyes and ears. That's good. I don't think any reader can know exactly what a poet had in mind when he wrote a certain poem or even a certain phrase in a poem—but, when the poem is clear enough and evocative enough so that the reader can take the poem into his own life,

then, at least in my opinion, the poem is successful. How successful? Neither the reader nor the poet will probably ever know.

I think now I should comment specifically on Norman Dubie's comments on these three poems. His reading of "There Are Many Things That Please Me" is quite close to my own reading and my own intentions. Of the three poems, I like this one the most. It's also the poem with the most contradictions; it wavers between the pessimistic and the optimistic, and finally, I hope, ends optimistically. The sack of disdain is being spilled, lost. There's no mention of it being replaced by anything but at least the disdain is gone. And there is something conscious and joyous about this spilling. Norman Dubie is right when he says "Who hasn't cursed the morning?" In this case, however, I'm *not* cursing the morning. I'm celebrating it because I'm comparing the way morning (light) climbs a hill to the spilling of my (the narrator's) disdain. Dubie mentions the repetition in the poem, something I'm, of course, aware of. The entire poem is built and gets its movement from the repetitious device of "I'm pleased" (and its slight variations). I wasn't, however, aware of the alliteration he mentions. But I don't think, and neither does Dubie, that it's *over*-alliterative. If it was I'd surely be embarrassed. I also like his adjective for the development of the poem: "idiotic." He's right: the poem tries to jump from comic to serious to comic to serious throughout. Ultimately, it ends up serious but happy. What could be more idiotic?

I think Dubie reads a little too much into "Longitude and Latitude: Hart Crane." I mean, he doesn't take it quite as literally as I intend it. There's no arrow, no meteor, and no large fish in the poem. The arrow I don't understand at all. The meteor, I guess, is the curve in the air Hart's body left when he jumped from the bow. The line means exactly what it says: the delicate curve, the arc his body made from the bow until it hit the water. The large fish—of course I can understand Dubie's reading, his own metaphor—but to me: no fish, just Hart Crane himself metaphorically swimming upriver into America. I'm so glad Norman Dubie thinks the poem has recovered the body, Hart's body. If *any* reader thinks the poem has in some way recovered Hart's body, I'm glad. The last thing I'll say about this poem: I'm ashamed of it, I'm ashamed because it's so small, it's not nearly big enough to explain how I feel about Hart Crane as a poet and as a man.

I also wonder (as does Dubie) about "No Possibility of Articulation." I've never been too sure about the poem, particularly the ending. I've always wanted it to end on an upbeat. I hate the last two stanzas even though I believe them to be true (for this poem). Dubie's right: the poem doesn't say anything. The speaker and the attitude *are* exhausted, they *do* settle around the center of something inscrutable: my life, Dubie's life, whoever. I don't like the poem. I have a lot of sympathy for the horse in the second stanza but no sympathy, really, for the narrator. Fuck sadness!

Best of all, I like the title Norman Dubie chose for his piece. I like it because: 1) he, you, me *could* be wrong, and 2) because I've cut that line from the last poem in the book. So: when you read the section of the poem he quotes—think about it for one-half of a second, then forget it.