

SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION

*The opposite of biography stares out of
my face*

Bob Perelman

I

Portions of August coming between power failure and humidity signal a difficulty in spelling it self. Looks like sylph in this and slough in that version you type across my concentration. Figuratively speaking the car hit the pole but history has its versions I am not addressing you there was an explosion. What was one that was spelled waht as in want or in the case of heat water. There were the many tasks the article gave an illusion of covering: the flan, the tomatoes, the basil, the chapter, the shelves, the jam, the hammering going on next door, the call from Calais here's a breeze the cat feels it this makes a noun. If to cut into a passage is not to be in a passage how is to be in a passage not to not be in something upon which it draws, wherefrom metaphysics, cosmology, the fourth race at Del Mar on the outside "Hazard" by a nose. Ordinarily to write through it to the other side without distraction still attention has no life outside of its veering away from its appointed rounds else how to recognize you wearing rain. Someone the other day walks by looking like another person appears later in the dream also not another person comes back in a conversation can this be said not to be the person he wants it otherwise. No way to avoid it coming back as it does through the words one has to know in order to forget them.

II

Tending to run one into another reverse letters the condition of practical reason the corrected books and once a heavenly encoded message. Either what's lost is the point or something between the points it's like this in early Summer once again remembering you from last year: the writer, a swimmer, your better intentions. Whose are. My one. You gone. I no. An it balanced precarious between he (aviator) and she (silver idol) resolved Gordian knot like by mirror they. So much for. But, revived, he considers content, its beckoning from yon syntax as in a lathe turning a leg to sit on. This is its mode of reduction which, by adding self plus capital equals almost but not quite an idea. I am under consideration. Consider a pencil: cheap, easy to sharpen, applied to paper makes marks. Bringing home the bacon is not the point is not to be beside it. If so, you can hardly hold it, one running into another reverse letters the condition of heavily encrusted mess. One wants one's whatever to remain well useful without regard to object thus not to get worked up still one develops affections. Can't help the tools we love to ply with. Consider a book hardly worth the price its paper's printed on without who'll buy it and even then chancy. He goggled goes up into those clouds tending to avoid it's right in front of him still blue air has its allure. You can refer only so much to the material then it's a matter of who has a new car.

III

Not much arbitrary standing around though an interest in what results. Try again. Not more intentional lounging after all you said you said. Now you can, as it were, piece together where you went wrong, the fact while debatable nevertheless seemingly confirmed by their not writing you. A little evasive he was in his last. This graduated tiredness results in a little tic. A little tic. He to gain their attention shouts loudest, to pacify modulates, to endear effaces. A humble fellow rooting out signatures. Easy to substitute for the right sequence another sequence. Facile to insert for the appropriate light socket to the right bottle portmanteau finally until you pleurisy upchuck the bannister can you? You have to keep on top of the little critters; you have to phone them back. They need you. Comes the evening, smooth as sand, comes the movie black and white, over winter sleep with you, autumn daybreak blue on blue. I modulate sevenward the benign part of an otherwise miserable Tuesday in the ascendant last bars of a tune any tune the way you walk a yellow sweater reconciling number by beginning with one.

DEAR M.,

Thus am I having back you are my friend. You noticed I didn't write nor speak loudly enough can you hear? This crisis certainly involves all of the reading you can take, but it exhausts me by its bigness. Lately I have been planting when in my spare time I am not working. I have been listening as well, but the things are so difficult to exist by that I grow tired and then sleep. Once or twice I went to see what was playing, and they let me in. I felt deep gratitude but have forgotten what it was I saw. Oh, yes, there was a large pepper tree next to a river and elsewhere a pond. These images remind me of you, my old friend, because I am writing these down instead of forgetting them where they will do no one any good. The hedge is moving a little now; it's the wind, which this time of year comes in off the sea, I remember it all. It is good that you have been able to travel; there is so much to see and so little time. We must look very small from there who here appear so small. The twins, you see, did not really speak a separate language so much as one necessary in order to live in a town like that and with such parents. The film was made in three primary colors with several secondary ones to give it the flavor of reality. It is hard to know what they are driving at most of the time, our leaders, but they have a difficult job to do and do it to us in the best of our interests. Perhaps having power is like having images. This I what I saw when I fell asleep, a man trying to break down the door.

Love,

M.

VARIATIONS ON BENVENISTE
AND THE MASTER LIST

I am one who goes by the name of one,
 I speak the word ungarbled,
I am he whose name begins with *h*
 Mother of Voices, Black Swamp,
I announce myself as one who announces,
 Apple of Beauty and Discord,
I by being I remain eternally he,
 Thrilling Wonder Stories,
I am the speaker who is the speaker of I,
 Mysterious Barricades fall away,
Oh All, how I yearns to be you,
 to be taken up in your Society of Corresponding Fellows,
The pick, the arrow, and the wheel are not in nature
 but I am the one who wields them, you
 make me curiously strong, you
 indicate me,
And I am the echo of your you, the one
 who says you to me,
 Good Morning Teaspoon,
In the circle of them, many persons exchange
 small tokens,
They are that who cannot speak as I
 but send him forth alone
 uttering "I."

from Prose of Fact (The Figures, 1981)

YOUR AVERAGE YOUTH

For Lydia Davis

I

Growing up as a young man I gradually became older. Someone tried to pick me up, but I got away and learned quite a bit from it. Once this thing happened; I forget, but it made quite an impression involving some older girls. At first there was a lot, then there was a store. It's as simple as this: they treat you like a kid but you store up some insults to use later. I remember at camp thinking they're back there having a good time at my expense. I could never forgive them for that. I wasn't the easiest person to get along with which resulted from my superior judgments of others. From the very beginning I wanted to make a little machine that worked by itself. One day I invited some friends over to witness the unveiling. One day somebody showed me his little thing. I only recently realized what it was. There was this really dirty kid on the block named "Bummy," and if you felt bad you could punish him. I was first kissed under the house. Looking back into the crawl space you could barely make out a couple of gleaming eyes. Something smelled funny. Once someone dug a hole, covered it over with a tarp and I fell in. I was not to know myself. Only recently did I realize what it meant. When I was younger I was always getting these ideas. Holding them in contempt was even better than being liked. I tried to tell the truth but they warned me about hurting others. They said if you keep on doing that they won't grow back. The best thing was lying on your back and watching "the Flying Wing." They don't make them anymore. It was very far away.

II

It is all me because I wrote it. The ranunculi bobbing in the wind, the freesias bending toward the space beyond the shadow. They're in, and I'm in and someone wrote it in a book of natural science. Being your average boy having your average understanding of the neighborhood, its short-cuts and back alleys. Having that particular pleasure in stepping from one town into another next to the sign. Over here it's all a swirling movement while over here are intricate gardens, hedges and peeing dogs. Over here it's early spring; a dog appreciates the concrete where it's available. Little red places on the limb suddenly turn white, then bud forth with something green. After the accident I learn to read, being the sort of person who holds everyone in contempt for what he is insecure about. The production of my first system. They were all flanked about, smelling slightly of wet clothing. I was to pull the switch by which a train of events would run by itself. Rules were enforced for inattention. There ceased to be a family, its kinship rules carried on over there under the palm, its washing and bathing rituals. I ought to know; I share a machine with them. In one sense one replicates these economies in the way one crosses the street in a large city, in the address to a perfect stranger phoning a wrong number. You avert your glance or try to sound concerned. Having written everything, you should have no trouble. I recognize you by your button.

The Problem of Literary Modernism

“Elpenor was stricken down with impotence from abundant wine and a poorly chosen footstep.”

“There is nothing psychological about it [Hell]; once you’re there you’re there.”

“I say relatively because there appear to be some women who are constantly talking of Michelangelo, but never pay attention to him.”

“All in all, Pound’s Hell is as good as any place else Odysseus has or is going to visit.”

“The underworld, which is called Hades, represents a place in which things are rough.”

from *Prose of Fact* (The Figures, 1981)

IF TO WITNESS

If to witness is to persons unafraid or blank that is where a blue line meets a convinced corner. If to judge by violins or a lozenge the results be they of a mottled or variegated surface and distinguished by no less than three nor more than five contusions upon the skin a confidence may be restored, the guests issued into the cold night and you satisfactorily returned to your small rural home with dog. Which is to say if to declare by canopy or other brightly colored awning that a person of such-and-such a height wearing green or gray plaid could exert him or herself in a way so as to render amazement, as it were, a foreign sentence dropped amid the conversation and you off by train tomorrow for the north then passing references to your person incomprehensible during the evening and concerning the better part of one's capacity for writing in journals might attain that point or points wherein your intention to speak coincides with their intention to hear, the resulting uncomfortable silence being the only sign of such freedom that further conversation could only exacerbate an already tense moment and remind you of a technical device something like a microphone or perhaps a mushroom growing beside a fallen cedar somewhere else.

from *Landing of Rochambeau* (Burning Deck, 1985)