

Fifty Lines for Al Filreis on his 50th Birthday

Even John Cage worked within the limits of his name.
I am only describing something—and that never stopped
Cage from introducing himself.

You have a question for the six-year-olds;
a question for *all-the-same-height* third graders;
a question for the spinning middle school kids
who also sing.

You have a follow-up question for the one-word answer:
yes, no, Whitman high school students;
and many questions for the *I-like-it, I-don't-like it*
college students—the college students.

And for openers you problemitize “problemitizing”
for the graduate students.

And you have a question for the adults
and many more for yourself.

Or the question you asked me—to gloss
the Wallace Stevens line:

“Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.”

And where do questions come from—
and where do they go?

“Nothing + Nothing = Something, that is ‘Nothing,’
which is *really* Something,” I said not knowing
where that came from. But is it all about the questions?
It’s the amplitude you feel, hear, see, and
for the moment—and longer (we hope)—we feel,
hear, and see too.

I am describing *you* at our limits, that is, our best
failed distinctions.

As there are suppers and there are *suppers*:
a butterfiled fillet of sole resting on its crunchy skin.
And it’s not that you grew your beard, but
you never shaved it off, and that it continues to grow.
Your beard in its place is an invisible element
of that place—made visible.

Here is a line for not talking, which isn’t silence,
(the privacy of public communion).

Here is a line for braving dark distances on foot.

Here is a line for space and classical amber bees.

And one for all the ones crossed-out.

I am only describing, as words are one way,
and walking is another.

So cross the street and step out for a walk,
one we will never take again. I am only describing something,
the way the finest grit becomes the sand we love.

And its warm color comes from whatever light there is,
even if there isn’t much at all.

And old John Cage doesn’t go away—new John Cages
just get added.

Past, present, future: our presence is requested.
And where is where? And XYZ is where too.