

THE MATHEMATICAL HEART OF DARKNESS

I'd like to tell you the number of black kids
I counted as friends when I was growing up,
but I'm grappling with the concept of zero—
of just how much time, if any, it takes
to count to zero, given that all events
take place within the fabric of space and time
(if the theoretical physicists are to be believed)
and zero being zero should not, theoretically,
take any time at all, so that there is no time
to count to zero—either up to zero
or down to zero—so that I cannot tell you
the number of black kids I counted as friends
because there is no time to do so;
 though there was one kid who
 almost became a friend, then didn't,
 so he just might be represented as negative one,
 but that's a mathematical territory you don't want
 to tread in, the calculus of imaginary numbers,
 which is a shame and a loss, a loss among
 a multitude of losses, because at least that black kid
 would have counted toward something.

ON BEAUTY

I'd like to think the organizing principle in my life
Is that of beauty.

Wouldn't we all.

But beauty is in the eyes of a species
That's rarely aware of how limited its senses are—

The frequencies of sound we cannot hear
The spectra of light that go unseen

We are comprised of atoms and atoms are comprised
Of a vast geography of empty space. The quantum contradiction
Of what keeps us tightly bound.

We have so little understanding of even those we cherish.

Perhaps this is why their bodies resist when we try
To step through them.

Perhaps this is why the velocity of beauty fails
Where that of a bullet does not.

DREAMS OF BEING ANYONE AT ALL

When I say survival, I mean
Do not focus on any one thing.
As when your brother brings you war
In the cupped palm of his hand, do not
Count the dead. Or listen to their names.
Do not reach down into any one story
And wonder how you might have
Changed that story.

And when your mother brings you
Your own birth and draws a line
Down the center of your body to show you
Which side belongs to her, and which
To your father, do not try to side with yourself
For nothing of you has been left unclaimed.

And when your father disregards the boundary
That's been etched into your flesh
And asserts that you're now under his autocracy,
Turn on the tape loop of surrender just before you go
Underground into a life you've well provisioned.

And when, in time, you come to single yourself out,
Remember how often the son of God has been carved in plastic
And nailed to cheap imitations of the cross.
And while you may think of yourself as a gift shop relic,
Do not think of yourself as a savior.
Do not think for a minute that that is something you'd survive.

THOUGHTLESS
After Tom Hennen

Night is tethered to the dock.
The wind has risen just enough
For the night to sway,
To pull taut the line...

Then turns to float upon its back,
Careless and unconcerned, as if what lay between
The lake and the stars wasn't its own immensity.

SONG OF SONGS

There is a tree outside my window and it bends
Even on days without wind; branches thrown back
From whatever force of birth or long weather
The years have visited upon it.

The same long years I've religiously listened
To the ethereal chorales of Renaissance polyphony;
The strata of voices marrying, on some mornings,
The staves of Palestrina to the Biblical song of songs

So that it seems the uppermost reaches
Of the tree are leaning back as if to offer
Their own reverential voice up to the heavens.
And to God.

Though there are no heavens.

And there is no God.

So perhaps I could then say there is no tree.

But there is a tree.
And it is singing.