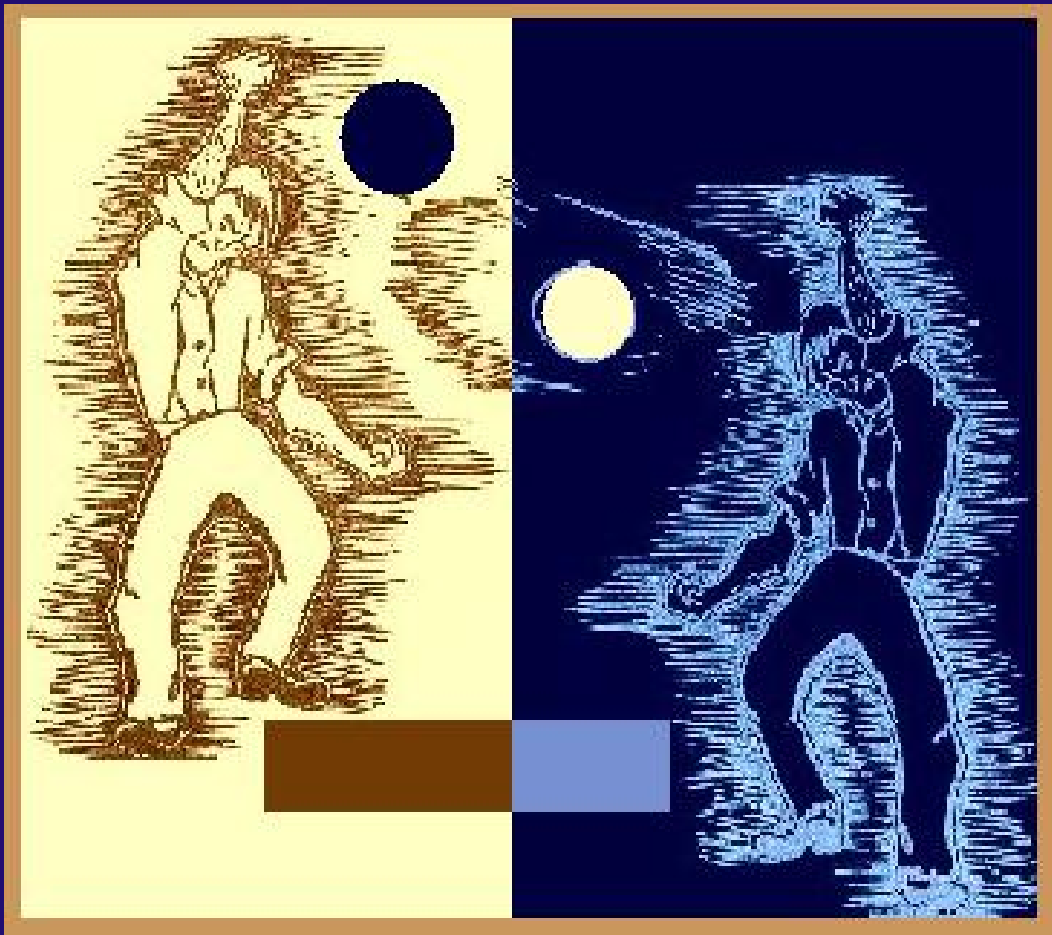


Max Wickert

[from]

DIGGING THE DIFFERENCE



Note: This entire sequence was written in 1978-79, concurrently with the first half of *Pat Sonnets*. Only a few sections were published, as indicated. The poems are numbered according to a peculiar system (difficult to appreciate in selection) that invites matching of pairs of poems along several axes. (PS: The cover design is my own, based on a drawing I did long ago for my college literary magazine.)

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a1:

Style and Content

First you see
if he
can speak,
then you hear
what he
has to say.

b2:
Zero Degrees

A
poem

is
only

a
hint and

a
label,

just
listen

and
look and

do
watch what

you're
doing

and

all that . . .

b4: *The Quality of Attention Required Here*

1

The harder

one

one

listens

listens

listens

the less

the less

the less

another

another

hears.

2

One

listens

(the Harder),

hears

the Less

(an Other).

3

"Here's

the garter!"

hisses

the lass

's mother.

4

Your

One

More

Way

To

Say

it

5

Was your mother's

performance

better?

--published in *Niagara-Erie Writers Newsletter* (I:4, October 1978)

a2:
For Piaget

First you speak
(if you
can hear)
then you say
what you
can see.

12c:

Peter Lorre on Conceits

"Conceits are poetry, but the idea of the conceit can only exist in the presence of someone's idea of an impotent imagination."

b12:

The Knight of the Blue Star

The Knight of the Blue
Star, lost in a rain
of blue stars, reaches
for one and asks, "Is
this the Blue Star?"

No voice answers: "No, all."

--published in *Niagara-Erie Writers Newsletter* (I:4, October 1978)

b13:
"No, All"

Aren't there
never no
simple, clean
answers at
all except
YES and NO,
entire
consent or
refusal?

b14:

Blow, Blow Thou Winter Wind

The people
who give you
their all will
be seldom
called people
who give you
their all. But
the people
who try to
and fail will
remind you
of all they've
not given.
That they fail
makes you call
them your friends--
of the rest
never mind
the success.

a3:

Please Validate or Cancel

First you see
if I
can speak,

then you hear
what I
have to say.

c13:
Short Story

"Howdy, pardner!
How goes the search for the perfectly unoriginal sentence?"

"You said it,
pardner!"

a4:

Coming out of Shock

First you see
if you
can speak,

then you hear
what you
have to say.

b23:

A Loser

The girl tells me
quite sincerely
that archetypes
don't exist. Yipes!
if she's right, pal,
your love and all
you expect from
hers have become
a myth, or at best
an endurance test.
and maybe she'll
maintain so still
years after you stop trying to
hold your breath for new vision or
her eventual collapse
in archetypal traps.

b24:
The Gorilla

"Physically she's almost the Wolf Man

but

intellectually she
is
a dog."

c12:
The Hype

Advertising is something that happens
in that it happens into us

a5:
Rape Trial Jury

First you see
if she
can speak,
then you hear
what she
has to say.

b29:

Age of Reason

1 Voltaire

whose palm of quick salute
to bleak futures closes
in shame over a smear
of ink--Shakespeare's (I think) . . .

2 Casanova

eases both hands between
her legs, then finds the time
to wag them in a breeze
and brags how cool they feel.

3 DeSade

smarter
than the
local
priest, he
hates the
fact and
hates the
priest, but
never
takes his
velvet
gloves off
except
to hurt
a soul.

4 Mozart

Father's,
Sister's,
Wife's and
Europe's
slave and
master
pays the
price of
clever,
simple,
faithful
fingers.

33b:

Indian Manifesto (or) Jeu Divin

The breath
is one
and not
a third
of an
other.

One breath
does not
go from
father
to son
and from
son to
father.

One breath
goes from
one who
creates
into
one who
maintains
into
one who
destroys.

One breath
is not
destroyed.

c7:

The Gulls

Every dog will have his day
and night must fall on the mind
and body I am in death
wagging his tail my master
the soul with a heart to say
Nobody's fool is a fool.

Every priest is burning to
spill the secret is out of
my reach exceeds my grasp for
the burning of something told
I hear and at times believe
Nobody's fool is a fool.

Every whore has a golden
heart and soul I am in love
with use come in abuses
mind and body night and day
I love how they use me all
Nobody's fool is a fool.

Every fool rushes in where
angels fear the dead who know
the secret's in the bag yes no
heat in lovers and friends who
hoot brightly to me in fog
Nobody's fool is a fool.

29b:

Romanticism

1 Homage to Blake and Its Subversion

"When the Imagination
is in chains the Body is
free. When the Body is in
chains the Heart is free.
When the Heart is in chains the Mind is
free. When the Mind is in chains
the Imagination is
free. Well, let the Mind be chained,
the Imagination free!"

"I see, Sir; in other words,
what possibilities for
the imagination in
suppressing the intellect!
and what possibilities
for the intellect in the
annulment of compassion!
what possibilities for
compassion in the squelching
of pleasure! and in the end
what possibilities for
pleasure in abolishing
the sense of the possible!
And when the pleasure is gone,
how (Sir) could I have gone wrong?"

2 The Origin of Transcendentalism

“The Child is Father of the Man!”
was what old Father William shouted.
A woman with enormous hams
split half her side laughing about it.

A woman with enormous breasts
picked with two sausage fingers William up
and dropped him in the half-split side
like a pink marble in a cup,

a cup that drinks the drinker up
and breaks the universe in two
and almost charms us both to think
that you're me, and I am you.

3 Unfinished Encomium

"Princely pass by
with ass displayed!"
is what just now
my Byron cried.

4 Oscar Wilde Haiku

The night grew so blue,
my anus was a scarlet
star anemone.

28b:
Christian Symbolism

The Wind around the Hanged

Man

finds
the Quickest Way.

27b:

Comprehension Cap

1 An Old One

Because every blade of grass
points to a star and all light
has been leant to another world,
because wind and water
have enfranchised the swishing
of bare feet and the sleepy
cicadas, and because now,
although the road is endless,
the concrete of the road ends
by your toes, nobody knows
that a girl strips off her black
sweater in the pitch dark while
her lover lies smiling and
skinned, invisible even
to himself, and only the smell
tells field mice and foxes what
shape to give unfamiliar
fright, until night glides away

like a ghost in a garment
and morning paints nakedness
cleanly back on the landscape.

2 .Autobiographical Doobedoo

Could it be that I
and all these old ones
have such an itch to
be poems I know
submit to a test
be they good or bad
my capacities
but why do new ones
for getting in touch
I doubt and I doubt
and all these old ones
be poems at all
be poems I know
insist on coming
be they good or bad
could it be that I
but why do new ones
have such an itch to
I doubt and I doubt
submit to a test
be poems at all
my capacities
insist on coming
for getting in touch?

5a:
To the Barbarians

First you see
if you
can speak,
then you hear
what we
have to say.

25b:

Brisk Trade between Gratitude and Modesty

1 *"I owe it all to you"*

Let's have no such
carryings-on.
I tell you what
you should do and
if I give you good advice it
must still be you
who accepts it.
Whatever I
may carry in,
though the notion
be all mine, the
moral labor
is all yours to
carry it out.

2 *"Don't mention it"*

Although you may
owe me nothing,
I will not claim
the credit for
not recalling
my good fortune.

c3:

Maya

No woman here? 0
at least one. Of whom

nothing finally
is predicated.

Lurks in shadow like pond pike or hovers

a dragonfly in
light--nor waiting for

imminent strike nor
capture--and we watch

her changes to catch while she vanishes

into the shimmer
of a gone world smile.

--published in *inc.* (#1, 1979) and *Just Buffalo Broadsides* (Fall 1979)

24b:

Such and Such

1

Women and
natives and
blacks and gays
can be such
regular
guys--even
though always
a little
unruly.

2

Ethnic minorities
show such discomfoting
kinds of conformity.

3

"If she's
so good,
let her
abort
the son
that I'm
about
to call
you, boy!"

4a:

Voices from the Holocaust

First you see
if we
can speak,
then you hear
what we
have to say.

17b:
The Final Solution

Would you rather
have Poetry
Readings Against
World Hunger or
Hunger Strikes For
World Poetry?

3a:
Descent of the Aliens

First you see
if they
can speak,
then you hear
what they
have to say.

14b:

The Hunt

Demystifiers dispel
not the mystery but
the shadow of mystery-
the mystery remains an
indiscriminate brightness
never understood except
through discreet words
held against it. To be mystified is
to be fascinated by the
discreetness, blinded by
the act of understanding,
engulfed by the shadow
of the word. The nemesis
of the demystifier is
that he too can use only words.
Having scattered the shadows
of others, he is in flight
from his own. Liberation
is the sense of the speed of
the flight. Like Atalanta's apples,
words are let fall by
the liberating spirit
to delay the swift pursuit
of shadows; like Cadmus's
dragon's teeth, the mordant words
rise up to join in the chase.
Culture is the great hunt of
words for intelligence and
it is always the quarry
which organizes the hunt.

13b:
Gnostic

This life is not mine.

Watching it working through me,
I am both guardian and sieve.

The moment I repeat myself
in the patterns I let it make--

as in part I do now--

I will be set free of it.

--published in *At the Carrying Place: Pinecone #3* (White Pine Press, July
1978)

9b:

The Golden Rule

In the indifferent
world
only indifferent
souls
can make a difference.

8b:
Another Golden Rule

The first virtue
is
to give nothing.

The second virtue
is
to ask
for nothing.

The second virtue
without the first virtue soon

becomes a painful version of the first virtue.

2a:
Truth and Consequence

First you speak
(if you
can see)
then you have
to hear
what you say.

5b:
The Good Voices

These peerless

voices do not whisper
in the darkness,

they cry into

the darkness, cry
fearlessly

into the far, far dark.

4b:

To Be Recited Nine Times

Listen to the voices,
listen to the voices,
listen to the voices,

listen to the voices
that have lost the sense of
the unspeakable.

Listen to the voices,
listen to the voices

of death.

3b:
Same Thing?

Either all these sounds
are competing for
your attention or

they're all enraptured by attention to
the same other thing.

8c:
I Do

Do you ever
have a suspicion
we won't last
together?

I do.

How it would
reassure me
to be told