

NORMAN FISCHER

Selected Poems

1980 - 2013

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My Father

Now that I am an adult I have the distinct recollection that my father each day after work came home and fell asleep on the couch after dinner. His boss was atrocious. Someone always was needed by him to remain until the bitter end, the factory closed and dark, the people gone, the machines quiet, and in the high ceilinged room a tight feeling of total despair prevailed and this person was my father. He oversaw the manufacturing of snowsuits. This person was my father. Bulky snowsuits for children, one piece, in assorted colors, my father's work. He was 33 years old at that time. And he made a birdhouse with a small hole in the front for small birds to enter. My amazement was — my father fashioned a birdhouse out of nothing with a sloping roof. First nothing, then the birdhouse. (Amazement.) That he would do so was certainly beyond the call and skill of fatherhood. It was a gray decade — it seemed whole armies wearing sealskin coats, bearskin earmuffs and thick reindeer boots advanced relentlessly upon us during the months November through March. We lived each day in our large apartment overlooking the street. War was not unknown. My father had a tremendous temper and a great capacity for endurance. What he did not know, which was considerable, he did not consider. But now that I am an adult with my own children who cry too much and are unreasonably demanding I am more in a position to appreciate the discipline necessary not to drink, not to spend too much, not to be cruel. My father lived through years that came hurtling upon themselves in abysmal succession. Once rigid, he became elastic. Once energetic, tired. Once in command, taking a back seat. My father produced snowsuits for children to wear out in the snowy weather. These were sorely needed. Now that I am an adult, with my own children who smile and sigh in the night, and am repeating, inevitably, the life my father led, I can see that. Eventually, in any given place, snow falls.

oooo

March 17

Norman since we have so little time
together in the morning
please put down that book

Norman since
there is little time
left put
that book back

oooo

Tom

The first step is
I realize I am sick I am hopeless to help myself
The second step
is to realize only God can get me out of this
The third step is I turn it over to God
But when I saw that boy
and the blue violas around his chiseled white chin
I ran over the santolina
and dropped a pallet of steer manure

oooo

Norma

Norma is unhappy with her present life
When she lived with Peter
things were better
in a certain sort of way
Maybe today
Peter feels as she feels
She smokes her cigarette

oooo

Tom

It is actually the body of Christ
One is allowed to hold it with only the thumb and index finger
And use those fingers for nothing else
Wearing purple robes — incense swings —
You eat Christ
Only if you are pure
Otherwise you go to hell for making a sacrilege of a sacrament
You kneel there under the vaulted ceiling never knowing
Next to a short Italian man weeping with prayer

oooo

3

which were not to the notion of multitudinous things
beginning unborn, unwise, unwashed, and unwished for
to take them apart and by visions of beauty replace
the dust bits and those born of moisture or mothers
Requiring pantaloons and baskets of many clothing
as the moon came up it will be cool for babies which are elves
various stones for the fog comes rolling up and rolling out
of the previous valley which for the gods condense
into the various forms of multitudinous perception

oooo

7

turning away from spells to the practicum the purpose the peevish
dour incidence of do not die now
or change your value system not to be bound by legal rule
which actually can be done
self-realization is free from speech discrimination
the footnote claims assertion and refuting the dust jacket
as the name on the spine contains the kernel of great variety of translation
equal to five candles and six boxes
there is reality and it is not pure nor defiled could be seen event of them

oooo

15

thoughts people hold and move toward
dour incidence of do not die now
nor cancel the good insurance
gives rise to the impression there is nobody present
still we believe the power of personality saves face
as my themes dissolve in snake-oil grim loudness
people who are seriously unique and die
there will seem to be a unity of feeling and a continuity of identity
so though we are untouched by smoke
like the virtue of the all but unspoken

oooo

23

there is nothing that is born, no entrance to an ample circularity
dangle, then nothing touching, certainly the
Lost in the ooze of sticking to the point
stance or a particular breathing pattern
in whorls she saw there and Jane
whatever when you approach her
steam complexity and she was confused by
Jane breathing in she knows she
A person who is really settled has
gence, what is — looking at her fingertips
and barn swallow nesting in barn roof

oooo

24

Now the physical power of thought
 which were notion of multitudinous thing
 proceed to know the means and conduct which
 characterizes
 the creaking of the table when the floor shifts
 the fact of the matter is that there is a little bit
 of personality in everyone two kinds of view
 1) that you are after my job or
 2) that I stand to make a lot of money on this
 but after all art becomes a business
 self-nature is unobtainable

for Alan Davies

ooooo

of personality is everyone two kinds of view
 what we do do and what we intend
 gaps time so there is a what to make and alter at
 tremendous expense
 closing the death statistics on because of a bee sting
 and the bakers have discovered better ways to bake it
 on that account there are irritations having to do with
 the delay
 it is afterward not a natural thing that before the
 drum some words concur

I don't think any money should be kept in that drawer

The week-end person should have access to that key.

Try to move it to the other desk.

That's often what happens.

The drawer is never open. You should know where the key is. Anybody should. No change and no stamps.

In the way in which we do it. You have to ask permission to use the bathroom. "May I use the bathroom?" Mere cleverness.

What would be the alternative. I think it's 3:30 but actually it's 12:21. There isn't a gathering. Although it does have some of the same function. Some of the same function.

There's a range of ways of hearing the rules. One thing is: the kids are ill-behaved. And another is: there's no use making comparisons.

We've done that in the past. Several years ago, six, seven, eight years ago. Before we depart. It's your birthday and we would like to have a pizza. Rather you would like to have a pizza, we will accompany you. You would rather pizza, or, prefer pizza. You would prefer pizza.

Get two half gallons. Don't you think we'll lose our membership card if we don't get Hagen Dazs. Who wants to go to the bathroom? Where did everybody go? Out the door. Who wants to go to the bathroom? Elizabeth does. Shake it up and dance all night. Love's a gamble and I'm glad I'm winning. No one would be interested but me. Oh baby. Now we've already finished the pizza.

Stay for the part about the perennial and herbaceous border.

I won't go to Detroit

I will go.

I'd like to.

Yes, I'd like to go to Detroit.

oooo

So these days pass and the gimmicks multiply,

A benevolent hierarchy taking care of us all

Just as accustomed paths are washed out, fade away all but.

Let's leave one or two.

It's always a question of going outright toward the greatest hunger

And it isn't going to change no matter what the old-timers say.

If only one person understood!

Large, sweet, searching eyes

Worked themselves up to a frenzy hence Plato hexed the rutting Greeks.

You can't blame him for administering balm to a hunk of displaced meat.

Uh oh, my half hour is up.

Incandescent pen, lackluster ink.

Here is my body, no gainsaying that, the bare chipped

Table leg is just another instance of the unvague.

Plato says the slipper exists perfectly at some distance

But my argument amounts to nothing more than a headcold.

oooo

But are the steps not determined by the illness
The sensations, not the descriptions. And whatever you include
In thinking also in the middle of a train of thought
Say it was a picture (not a sensation, like hot) can't you
 Observe yourself and say "Who is doing this measuring?"
You expected this and that surprised you — what kind
Of a mistake was it? And is our confidence justified?
What would better relay it to us than success? Such as if you say
 "Fire has always burned me," are you
Just rounding things off? It could possibly remain in the air
And not fall, then he will see the light, it will
Dawn on him that "Aha, now I have it!" but will he be able
 To go on after that?
Because, for instance, where else might he get to so suddenly?
A gesture of resignation.
All right then why not suppose that thinking is always in a Language and
 The rules are sometimes in a Syntax
And the expression is tending toward a technique
Of a concept in a tradition.
Then you have to be too, slight, after all it won't do
 To make a false move. And what about memory & expressions like
A smile? Either you
Have this experience or you don't (to quote the law of the Excluded
 Middle

oooo

On Thinking

And after you die, what then? Somewhat? Or only more of the same.
Spring has come; Spring is here: what profits these boots, this beauty?
So when a man laughs

His sleeves shake like bamboo leaves in the cold hills' folds —
Not as you'd imagined. Hence thinking takes the form
 Of plans & schemes in which you are central stage
To grand designs of projected events' passage
And their concomitant consequences: yet you worry and that is why
Thought churns, moves, through all those difficult passages
Somebody else's words tick. I want to find my coat since the party's over
 But it is not necessary to fill out a form.
Other times thinking chases itself like old foxes
 Beads of sweat appear on the brow because you can't remember
The color of your baby blanket. But as such can be
Free of thought, or free for thought, either one.
Thought is in & of the body, that is sure
And thought is a tender one more & more
The boat which is pulling away. Thought grows to go out from the body
To stir all buds to make a Spring
As a line of trees first silent locks the world
And then by thought is caused to stir, unwinding,
A strand the morning hurls to frown.

ooooo

The Knack

One had the knack
To remember the distant stranger
And the trees that came by the by

Flying by the airplane's window
It was love at first sight
Between me and the dark stranger