

RONALD WILCOX

MULTIPLICITY

Multiplicity 1

There has been one and one only perfect moment
when the awful machinations of chance completely and smoothly meshed,
each part moving in single precision,
when the intricate multiplicity of myriad circumstance,
warm as shimmering hints of first life in the womb of our mother sea,
unified itself in peace and simplicity easily as the hidden logic of healing,
moved in that moment beyond even mercy, almost to comprehension,
and the memory of God being born that day split infinity to forever
be recorded in all living things,
among whom man, remember, is only one,
and this holy inclination, irretrievably barbed within the inmost core
of the gene and seed of each cell of our being,
is unequivocal as the sea's unfathomed geometry
which patterned impulse into pulse as life first stirred.

Multiplicity 2

There is an unnamed mesa in northwest New Mexico
eroded by the holy wind into a form as pure as an abandoned cathedral.
If you could climb to the top just before morning,
you might find the oldest living Navajo man, the patriarch Narbona,
who more than a hundred years before this day hid himself forever
 within the enigma of the cliffs of his youth,
sitting hunched over his holy campfire, facing the eastern indistinct horizon,
awaiting the daily resurrection of his undying sun-god,
muttering his ancient Athapascan incantations, whose meaning only he remembers,
in order that morning will send death this day winging like a golden arrow
 through his dry vitals
to snuff the last spark of life he feels glowing still amid his dusty bowels
whose ashes stir like the restless colorless embers which the wind disturbs
 before him,
and if you could stand exactly southeast of his wrinkling squint,
you might perceive in his brief and milky upward glance
reflections of the careless scatterings of the last stars in the night-time
 morning sky,
and in the movement of his eyes you could follow the subtle convolutions
 of his mind
as it etched upon the unrolling scroll of man's most ancient unfaded manuscript
 irrevocable lines between the stars,
lines invisible yet palpable, mathematically exact as a navigator's projection,
and with the low moon over his shoulder, like a dull lamp whose amber glow
 lulls as it dies,
he would read a secret language spelled in those criss-cross tangents,
for the calligraphy of his prophecy is written in flickering code,
 the silent telegraphy of the wireless ether;
the clear and piercing air of the silvered desert is to him sharper than
 fire-water,

more intoxicant than the first long draught of chilled pure alcohol of water
distilled in the crystal of a mountain spring,
and drunken in deep inhalation, his eyelids would droop and flutter;
he would see in this moment of drowse an unbidden instant's mirage,
hovering low as a smoke signal,
an inexplicable puff of something never seen before
at the edge of that vast and faceless distance,
but shot through with fear, he would suddenly start awake,
shake himself loose of his vision,
forget forever the unbearable moment of knowing,
for he would have seen clear meanings advancing,
flashing like a black thundercloud crackling with sudden comprehensions,
electric with threats of the consequences of unspeakable possibilities,
the naked face of unforgivable sin, knowledge of the final pith of things,
and trembling uncontrollably, he would draw his humanity up over his eyes
like a patterned blanket and hide, blindly patient,
awaiting the warm morning farewell and all-reaching embrace of Death,
his last fellow savage,
who would welcome him home as a friend returning from a long trek
through pathless lands, the endless timbered slopes of his life;
then you may see the long shadows of sunrise reach for him
through the sparse, hushed grass at the mesa's rim,
and up from the chanting cactus
locusts would rise like angels
and fly with his soul in their wingtips.

Multiplicity 3

On October 13, 1161 A.D. Awkwahtawn, the Huron Iroquois, blazed with his death song —

Chen Chen CHEE-kawn-wah

wailed through his blistered lips,
bubbled forth from his heart's core like boiling oil,
congealed in the wavering air like blood from his open wounds —

Chen Chen CHEE-kawn-wah!

His enemies, the Seneca Iroquois, had impaled Awkwahtawn for seven days —
slow roast on a spit;
how they had mumbled over his hovering in awe of his unflinching smile,
his clear, sweet song —

Chen Chen CHEE-Kawn-wah!

Now he sang in their savage dance as added branches burst and split
with buds of fire, as in spring,
consumed his soul with leaves of flame, as in autumn.

While he writhed in paroxysms of ecstasy, sparks whirled like stars,
and shedding his flesh in layers, as he would winter's weathered deerskins
in the heat of a sudden spring sun,

his pure spirit was ringing clear as a cool waterfall rilling in ferned pools
round stumps where his feet once were —

Chen Chen CHEE-kawn-wah!

Visions, whispering cold as winds amidst the pine,
fell lightly as snow past the tatters of his face, over his raked flanks,
and downward until the flames themselves seemed frozen numb.

Awkwahtawn was dimly aware of lumps of ice bluntly nudging at his legs —
Chen Chen CHEE-kawn-wah!

His nerves, ever hard and sharp as flints in his skin,
were finally dulled against those cold, vague stalagmites,
and far above dying Awkwahtawn a hovering eagle startled at his final cry
and soared toward the sun, calling —

Chen Chen CHEE-kawn-wah!

Multiplicity 4

The thought of his own death stirred in the brain of Mr.
John Edward Sheisty, 3327 Erstwhile Street, Los Angeles, Calif.,
once in the fall of 1947,
but he quickly forgot it, made believe, in fact, it hadn't happened.
The moment lasted exactly one millimeter of the movement of the pendulum moon
over San Fernando Valley:

time hung shocked in that moment of no movement, like

- (1) an October gourd
- (2) the last throb of the stopped heart
- (3) the clam-like glob of the insensate brain
just before catching on to a joke
- (4) the unspoken plea when you're losing the game
("For God's sake, time out!")
- (5) a moment of pause between heaves of morning nausea;

in other words,

it lasted approximately as long as $.3^3$ times the first jerk

of the shuddered spasm of the not quite immaculate conception
of the all but engendered John Edward Sheisty (affectionately nick-named
"Shy Jack" by his buddies on the high school track team in 1927
solely because of a painful reticence on his part in regard to fornication,
the fourth most popular activity of the student body,
a nick-name which stuck and which most conscientiously in all modesty
he had had printed in parentheses upon calling cards

JOHN EDWARD (SHY JACK) SHEISTRY

of his small real estate business, a growing concern in the valley
of the San Fernando at the time,

a moderate supply of the which his wife would conscientiously slip
like a packet of ammunition

into the breast pocket of his fresh white shirt each morning,
including Sunday);

but it never happened again,
not even on the day he died,

lullabied by anesthetics between hygienic white sheets of a sterilized
hospital bed.

(It seems his nurse tip-toed his soul painlessly away
in a shining aluminum bedpan

toward a reward of 99 and 44/100% pure oblivion,

an event recorded quite properly in history and eternal pity

by the Los Angeles Times obit section sometime in spring, 1948.)