

On Reading a Blank Page

David Clark Knowlton

I once sat on a plateau's edge
It began on my back, with updrafts.
They rose along the white escarpment.

No relief, my eyes
Could not grasp its on and on.

I felt the filling of a sandwich:
No mustard, no lettuce, just me.

So I sat. Wind rustled up my shirt,
Brushed my face, and snarled my hair.
At least there was difference.

"Young man. Yes. Please come in.
This room with books and papers
Overfilling chairs and couch
Is my study. You can see I have
A great light from the north
Burning through that window.
It makes words stand out from the page
Like trees against a cliff.

"So, yes. Please tell me about yourself?
Why have you come from Utah
To this town in Bolivia
Where it seems the miners
Are either on strike
Or dancing in bejeweled
Masks of the Devil and St. Michael?
Please, please sit down. No, just move
Those books off to the side.
The maid will bring tea presently.

"Now, young man. Tell me, tell me
All about yourself. It is not often
Blond boys come to my door,

"Especially not dressed in suits.
Although I must confess you
Could use a better tailor.

"Tell me what brings you here
So far from home like a
Migrating butterfly. With that tie
You could be a monarch.
What brings you here
So removed from the paths of your kind
Like a blue and purple insect
Blown by a hurricane
From its flight path?

"No, wait. Before you open those pamphlets,
I know something that will break the ice.
It is the best way to know someone
Deeply and profoundly in a short time
Yes. Young man. It will work
Please, please tell me what vices you practice.

"It is always best to know the dark things
Of a man's heart and mind
In contradiction is light and truth."

How do I know a plane,
When I sit and sit
Where it breaks into space?

I want to know it, but there are no stains,
No tears, no rips in its reflecting surface.
How do I make a map to return?

"I don't get this reading.
It makes my head hurt.
Why can't they write
In simple English
So everyone can understand!

"I am a simple person.
I do not plan to think
Complex sentences.
I am straightforward,
Literal, and pragmatic.

"What does he mean
'there is nothing but difference'?
I mean you should just
Say what you mean directly.

"Life is a straight line from birth to death.
If you just hold to that stainless steel
You get to where there is no
Contradiction and only peace.

"I am tired of this prose.
It goes nowhere.
What does he want?"

Like a winter fog, this gleaming plateau:
If I drive into it, how do I know
Another car in my lane won't be going slow,

And we'll crash? Maybe one comes up fast
Hits me in the rear and
Throws me into another plane.

I need perspective,
I need to break the plane apart,
To know its sleeves from its collar.

“No vice! Harrumph! Even one as young as you
Has had time to cultivate a vice or two.
Maybe you think impure thoughts. Maybe
You relieve tension in a burst
Of shaking in the night. Maybe you like sports
Too much or maybe you hide in books.
I think you must not
Tell yourself the truth. Surely it is a pretense,
This vicelessness of yours. You are like a poem
That speaks of love and passion but means
Enmity and death. I must read
Between your words to know who you are.
You obviously do not know yourself.

“You are a strange being, Mr. Blond Utahn.
Your words make no sense. Life is to be filled
With vice and pleasures before the long,
Trackless plane of death.”