

Ronald Wilcox

## **Prayers Public and Private**

i

God!

ii

No, Father, I never got over  
that first rush of anger  
like wings folding round me  
as I discovered the world  
was not what I thought  
it ought to be, or was,  
for angels' feathery armpits  
brought me down quickly:  
I found earth, far from a rest,  
moulders, panders before me,  
longing for my lively flesh —  
(. . . I hear promises whirring)  
I rise on my private hackles  
like my own hair growing, under,  
yes, by God, I shall grow upward  
even in my grave, and through  
blue intervals toward cirrus,  
like promises shining, and beyond,  
leaving even my dreaming behind!

iii

If memory serves me  
I'm dying to try my own way  
I said at twenty  
so left to my own devices I die  
trying daily to espouse no cause because  
I've forgotten what it was  
I started out to say  
the day I started trying  
but it will out I'm told if  
I just stick with it which  
I do at thirty-six but  
I keep disremembering what it was I was  
supposed to say but left to  
my own devices I still die trying.

iv

Black anger: to be bereft of God.

v

I  
striving for style  
in the striving stumbling  
blundering unendingly over m-my meters  
fear God (Critic in Exegesis Extremus)  
may like me find me not Jesus  
but a poor hung thief  
hung up wailing  
while a flow-  
ering Judas  
sings.

vi

I've been lied to often enough  
to know the truth for  
to be lied to all the time  
is good enough as true:  
words are hard  
compounded as they are  
of lies and truth together,  
I said to God.

vii

The courage to know the truth  
was always right in my eyes,  
and to proclaim the same, the same,  
until I realized  
not to know and to know not to know  
was the same, though unproclaimed:  
*there* was the surprise.  
Well, I went on, stumbling,  
lumbering in my way,  
as a bear does,  
claws full of sticky combs,  
not bothering even  
to brush aside each stinging fact  
as it dived, no, not on my nose,  
(a swelling nose is no news)  
but, ah, right into my bare eyes:  
my tears  
with their mirrored pupils of bees  
run with news,  
an agony worth noting.

viii

Catching on is wretched,  
I'd rather not know!  
(Water down the waking dawn  
to a dismal sputter . . .)  
The worm is working:  
death hunches in a corner,  
hardly meddling, idly  
unaware of his incursion.

Happily, happily, the brazen calf burning,  
unburdening ascending wisps of invective,  
such gaiety in matters of life and death!  
(. . . I'm slow, but so's a waking heart.)

ix

O bleak excellence, 'oblique of dreams,  
see the seething!

Consider

this massive effect of human effort:  
I have lost the angular visions of my youth.  
I see things now in horizontal planes.  
How quietly the preoccupation of my youth  
became my occupation: truth.

x

The day my father dies  
to whom do I turn,  
to whom do I say  
"I need" and know more  
than a stone shall be given?

xi

God!