

Heart Sutra
(In the guest bedroom at dawn,
after the pandemic)

Charles Shirō Inouye

1

Today we scorn Russians,
But we were invaders, too.
Our lifestyle at stake in Iraq.
Searching but not finding.
Blood and bones and dirt.
Infection and tears.
Fighting to prove . . . what?
Truth? America? God on our side?

Twenty years ago, I heard the monstrous jets
Hauling tools of war to the battlefield.
Tanks, helicopters, candy bars, beer.
The sound shook the glass in our windows.
Lexington. Home of minutemen, Hanscom Base, and patriot missiles.
Good schools for my three kids.

Again this morning, the rumble as heavy
As twenty years before.
Now to Ukraine.
Basso profundo.
Doing the bidding of hollow men.
The blood lust of Khan mixed with goat's milk.
“Hurry out of town, Monster Planes,
Before someone sees you!”

lying next to me—
my young dog yelps in his sleep
front paws quivering

2

I look to the far wall.

An amber bottle catches the weak light of dawn.

who put that perfume
on the shelf in the middle?
the glimmering vile

I'm not a child!

Once fascinated with color, I held your beauty before my eyes.

Now, I'm a gray beard with aching joints.

So why does that bottle still tempt me?

I've seen the edge of the world.

I've done enough searching!

The only place I really wanted was home.

Here not Heaven.

Locale not location.

Nothingness not nihil.

Love not desire.

to be a great man
you have to be willing to kill—
it's just that simple

Not enough light! Too much light!

Lack and abundance share a color.

Get dressed in the dark, and you will never know

If your socks are black or brown.

Look to God as Truth (with a capital T),

And you will go blind.

色不異空、空不異色。色即是空、空即是色。¹

Form is no different from emptiness,

Emptiness is no different from form.

1. This is the very heart of the *Prajnaparamitahrdaya*, the *Heart Sutra*.

Form equals emptiness.
Emptiness equals form.

3

After the pandemic comes spring,
When the buds on cherry trees swell.
What did I learn from sickness and disease,
From two years of masks, zooming, and vaccinations?
What did I learn from the death
Of my favorite brother?

on the night after
we pulled the plug on Dwight—
my puppy was born

I know now. Know now I. Now I know. Know I now. I now know.

Now know I.

Life is no different from death.

Death is no different from life.

Life equals death.

Death equals life.

Co-coo, coo, coo, coo.

Co-coo, coo, coo, coo.

The pandemic struck me in the gut.

Overcoming nothing.

Understanding nothing.

Dizzy.

Clumsy.

Spinning.

Striving for *wuji*.²

2. *Wuji*, 无极 “without extremes, not-polar.” Beginning as opposition in all things, yin and yang create motion, which allows us to move toward the center, where woman is no-woman and man is no-man, extremes opened up to nothingness, all things present without separation.

My footnotes to Nagarjuna
 Rather than to Plato.
 Once again, we have a failure
 To communicate.

Ah, to be my bird dog, chasing pheasants in my sleep!
 Better yet, to be the woodcock in his colorless dreams!
 Then maybe I could be present,
 Knowing the now I once knew.

4

Here I am, send me.
 Such a bastard.
*Shikata ga nai.*³
 Blame us for living in the briars,
 Caught up in sex, color, and form (色),
 Our days acquiring, our nights scheming.
 Form is nothingness.
 Thing and spirit
 One and the same.

Is this the agony of Gethsemane—
 The present unopened?
 Pushing through sorrow,
 Rebelling,
 Mourning,
 Choosing an opening.
 Falling back to the burning house.
 Condescending toward an
 Eternal waste of melted nails, masks, and bombs.

Is this the true beginning?
 Or the false end?

3. “There is no other way.” Lucifer’s Japanese-sounding truth to Eve, before her planned escape from Eden.

If now is the end, it comes too early.
If the beginning, it comes too late.

5

Surely, someday, someone
Will drop a nuclear bomb on Lexington,
My perfect American town.
Bowman, Harrington, Clarke, Diamond—all good schools!
Maybe next week.
Every frozen pizza cooked to perfection.
Every million-dollar house
Spread like crunchy peanut butter
Over the scorched earth.
Each green tree and blush of a child's cheek
Reduced to ash.

then comes the dawn
when our sinful world ends—
brilliance without hope

And in the dove's unblinking eyes,
A demand for more justice! More punishment!
Lucifer, Prince of Light,
Take your glorious moment
And go straight to hell.
Who are you fooling?

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