

ACE BOGGESS

**“... Like All Petitioners He Must Wait
(How Many Cups of Coffee in an Hour?)”**

—question posed by William S. Burrows
in *Naked Lunch*

Waiting for a screwdriver,
I sit at the counter sipping old coffee.
In West Virginia, the law says
no liquor sold before one o'clock
on Sunday—no conflict with church or Mass.
So I ask, *Is it to keep the congregation sober,
to draw worshipers from their other chapel
of stained glasses, cigarettes & need,
or to give the pious time for catching up?*
Minute hand moves like a traffic light:
slow clicks, anticipation. I wait with coffee,
my hands pale & cold against the mug,
to hear the clinking ice cubes, bells
waning in the temple of hard serenity.

**“Are You the People, Or Am I the People,
Or Is It the So-called We Who Are the People?”**

—question from Gao Xingjian, *Soul Mountain*

Forgot *they*, that they alien from we, I, you, us.
The unnamable they. The impenetrable mist.
The very “*they*” Dr. Arnold in my freshman course
in reporting said we must write
out of the text with the adjective ‘*very*.’
They are the people, the well-spoken others
who make their deals with handshakes,
dress like Fidel Castro & drive *BMW*s,
smoke cigars the size of Oregon,
drop the bomb on their enemies twice *for good measure*.
They are gods & makers of gods, the beekeepers,
scientists filing extensions for their taxes.
They make the decisions. They bake the bread
with another’s hands & codify in statute
the precise measure of sugar
permissible in any bottle’s wine.
What are *we* to this *they-the-people*?
Madmen. Mock Moseses.
One more momentary cult
of the uninformed.

“Are You One of Those Dreaming Grocers You Write Of?”

—question posed by Jo-Ann Greene,
a Lancaster, Pennsylvania reporter

I'd strum each squash like a banjo, bang the mango
drums & bongos made from cantaloupes.
I'd write a serial on corn flakes
while you waited, losing patience,
for ellipses to elapse in my concentration
so we might move the interview along.
were I one . . . I explain, instead,
how I've paraphrased Sartre's:
*society doesn't want a grocer who dreams because,
to the extent he's a dreamer, he's less a grocer.*
“True of reporters,” I say, implying, too,
no banker who dreams, physician's fantasia,
soldiers envisioning poetry at the front.
Yet you, by asking, have set off Chuang Tzu
in me: I'm suddenly a dreamer inverted,
dreaming himself a grocer dulled to verse
inherent in bubblegum, lip gloss, condoms, Coke—
I double-bag the milk & ice cream,
straining not to squash fresh buns &
bread; then I take your dollars, count change
as if a cashier made of clockwork,
ever staccato in his rhythmic hands.

“What is Poetry Which Does Not Save Nations or People?”

—question from Czeslaw Milosz’s poem, “Dedication”

tender aqua veins
on a woman’s wrist
carrying depleted cells
heartward
for their reinvigoration
in moments the lover runs
finger pads down the page
tracing lines
sensuous calligraphy of flesh
serifs stretching toward the thumb
his hands recite the verse
lips will sing
his transfixed gaze
will memorize her
metaphors
turns of phrase
this poetry
this imagery
this nation
without need
for a champion

“Who Says Existentialists Aren’t Happy?”

—question presented in an e-mail by
my friend, the poet, Marged Howley

Consider the second Camus—no Algerian
bluesman singing despair to the masses,
that Camus more his Rambert than his Meursault
who traveled to visit a mistress weekends, &
when his *being-for-others* burned in him
hotter than his *being-toward-death*.
Though I never saw an image of his side-wife,
eyes draw her with hair like embers over skin cool &
pale as Paris autumn. How she purred with the erotic
while his desperate digits charted thighs,
swam salty oceans of her back. Her perfume,
vanilla sweet as pipe tobacco, taught his groaning
lips those happy notes rarest to him,
more vibrant than what silence
after symphonies his friend Jean-Paul described,
so like every human death from life.

“How Would You Like Your Death?”

—question found in Mahmoud Darwish’s
poem, “They Would Love To See Me Dead”

Served with mystery: glance at constellations
unrecorded, unfamiliar sun. None of the certainties
answermen promise kneeling by a cancer patient’s bed,
squeezing his hand to impose a prayer.

Spontaneity mixed with spectacle:
head in a lion’s mouth, car leaping fat ravine,
politics awakening culture as the Tiananmen student
standing ground before a tank, steel belts agrumble
with his possible death, & for me, then,
no sanctuary in a camera’s lens.

“What is Your Concept of the Divine?”

—question posed by Bob Myers following a poetry reading
at the Unitarian Fellowship in Huntington, West Virginia

Not epidendrums' magma fingers; khaki stalks
that carry water off the root. Root also, & topsoil:
a nitrogen vault, extinctions of leaves, energy from decay.
Wind that spits out hummingbirds & honeybees.
First dark cloud, porpoise-shaped, splashing a mist of rain.
Tectonic, tidal, & electromagnetic musculature on the global
frame,
pulsing & pulling parts closer to the whole: mountains
unmoved by men & moving, men moving over ley invisible lines.
Songs from the road women whisper
on chapped lips slick with cherry medicine,
Chapstick carried in a pocket like condoms or quarters.
Love made with the Trojan; phone call made with the coin.
This & meta-this: an infinite progression
of connected quarks, themes, string theories &
unexplained dark matter. The epidendrums'
petals too, on second coming when their stain
should seem less stirring, doesn't. *Good God, no!*

