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*A Honorable Mention
The Eleanor Poetry Award

Rural Blight

Bleaker than any desert,
my grandfather’s farm when the blight came.
After that year he died broke,
and my mother and hers went to live in El Paso
and opened a store by an alley.
My grandfather’s land is fallow now,
stubbed by seasons of weeds;
he is buried there
beneath those fields with the unrising seeds
and all above him fieldmice struggle
to live in his farmhouse of vertical boards.

Jo Ann Thrash
EXISTENTIAL OR ESSENTIAL

There is today a considerable amount of verbiage bandied about concerning the “absurdity” of the universe. Deriving from the Existentialists in Europe, - and, according to some, a good deal further back in the literary tradition - the assertion that the universe is ultimately absurd is a view based upon man's experience of irrational phenomena in the (objective) physical universe and in himself as well. These phenomena are designated as meaningless and those so-called meaningful relationships which do appear are casually dismissed by the sweeping assumption that they are mere coincidence, chance irregularities, whose apparent orderliness is considered mere human invention. This is actually a dogmatic rejection of information, as is the rationalistic belief that all things are understandable in terms of logic and causal law.

Is this sound procedure? Can anyone who witnesses the growth patterns of the mollusk's multichambered shell; or the stages of development held common by every living rose; or, particularly, the intrinsic relationship between the intricate crystalline and molecular structures of the mineral world; etc., responsibly deny all vestige of essential, meaningful order in nature? Granting that there is no grand teleological design involved, there still remain meaningful associative and causal relationships between an immeasurable number of things. Based on such relationships, there is even some limited certainty! To use an exaggerated example, I know that no live elephant is sitting on my head. I do not know this intuitively - I detect it in the same manner as I detect such other relationships as I have previously discussed. Based on such relationships, I could further assert that no live elephant will ever emerge from my kitchen faucet. Furthermore, I would challenge all comers, not to argue philosophically, but by demonstration, to disprove my point. It is by detecting the relationships that allow such assertions that man's brain was able to assist him in his primitive survival. We are here as living testimony to the existence of at least a little order and meaningfulness in the primal chaos.

One might here bring up the irrational phenomenology of dream and vision, and not exactly be grasping at straws. And though we do not consciously live in that "Land of Unreason," such may serve as a type of counter example. It must be admitted that for every logical development there is an irrational, chaotic one: i.e., ineffable sub-atomic particles implied by observable effects (ex., the neutrino) and abstracted into theoretical cause, then accepted as realities and woven into the fabric of physical science to be dealt with as objective "truth". The problem of infinite regress in an infinitesimal calculus that works on non-infinitesimal reality is also a baffling reality. The realization is that most apparent realization is that most apparent realization is that most apparent realization is that most apparent realization is that most apparent realization is that most apparent realization is that most apparent realization is that most apparent realization is that most apparent realization is that
The divisory nature of man's dilemma, Existential or Essential (irrational/rational, chaotic/orderly, physical/spiritual, and so on) is ultimately, in human terms, an irresolvable one. To opt either way is irresponsible, since pertinent data must be ignored when it does not fit the conceptual scheme. Both elements are present but the emphasis remains entirely with the particular disposition of the individual entity. One can not hold the other in contempt. They are integral aspects of a united field explainable only in terms of both. Even the nature of subjective consciousness is revealed as a sort of ambiguity: on one hand the subject wills itself to meaning and on the other, derives meaning intuitively from the self. These distinctions recede rapidly into hazy semantics.

At any rate, the realization of the Whole with its contradiction and at least the possibility of a transcendent supra-meaning for man and the universe, beyond human knowledge, is one which the responsible man -- be he Existentialist or Idealist or what-have-you -- must be continually aware. The degree of influence these factors bring to bear is what determines the variety of creative individual thought and life-style that makes being human worthwhile by perpetually enhancing that condition.

Michael Cannito
Canvas of Black

over and over the Artist paints
the same picture using the same
colors and exactly the same strokes,
time after time on each and every of the seven days He
sells His portrait to people who don’t buy it.
so the Artist buys his own Canvas of Black

and when His tired hands dropped
from the burden of what He had bought
so did his painting, all scattered shades
intertwining in a driggle upon the universal floor.

and still people come to the
grand opening of the pinebox museum
to judge His portrait. The picture
is of a mirror and still
people come, and they look
at it upside down.

Jo Jo Carthy

---

Hitchin’

Guitar, and far to go
playing highways of lonely measures,
solemn white and yellow lines between
empty spaces, I compose asphalt notes
with refraining footsteps, of songs that
never look back.

Jo Jo Carthy

---

THE LEAP

Such pure release of motion!
And in the aftermoment
The street, the rainpuddle circuit
Dropped back into its stillness
Trembling yet a little
With that sudden, leaping joy.

And the frog squatted in its ditch
Denying its explosive loveliness.
The evening tinkled into place around it.

Derry Tutt
DRESDEN

My mother fondles the figurine, respecting its fragility.
Turning Adonis' feet to top
she examines the seal in large, clean letters:
    DRESDEN,
    Once my father in pilot's suit
    flew a plane through nervous black
    and below in the mobilized city,
    fire bristled.
    When rescuers finally pried open
    the shelters, there was only ash
    and hot fetid air.
My mother is pleased,
and reaching she places the counterfeit human
    gently on top of the mantle
to stand on those terribly lucid letters:
    DRESDEN.

DEPARTURE

This sad, pathetic, bitter man ---
What is his reason to live?
Always alone, yet not quite alone;
    he has his scores and broken cane,
    and half a bottle of wine.
He chose companions from the best,
    and disdained better men than him.
He spits out oaths in back-stage alleys,
    and flicks the tears from jaundiced eyes
    with fading dexterity, from faded halls
    where he performed Rachmaninoff.

Those gnarled, prophetic fingers! Those fingers
    that were once so soothing
to perfect ladies' supple breasts
now clutch a cane, and soothe a face
    as wrinkled as the coat he wears.
He feels despair in cold existence ---
    and something cooler in the wind.
He slouches into darkness
    to commune with the shadows
of long-departed composers;
Then raises his head to supplement
    DRESDEN.
The Pulse Short Story Award

THE LIZARDLY THING TO DO

I am a materialist, I swear it,
and I’m not going crazy, either.
But there’s something wrong.

- Jean-Paul Sartre, The Wall

Opening one eye, I thought I caught a faint rustling disturbing the dark silence of my bed room. I rolled across the bed and reached for the lamp at its side when a harsh voice hissed, “Mut’tn touch!”

“Damn if I won’t,” I cursed and flicked the switch, turning toward the source of the sound. Of all the strange figures I could have imagined, the thing that met my startled gaze had to be number one: a huge lizard, some six feet long, of vaguely man-like proportions, was sitting cross-legged on my dresser, casually lighting a cigarette. Its scaly face glittered in the lamp light, an iridescent green. It seemed to resent the reflected glare and gestured at the lamp with an air of immediacy. I turned it off and the room began to glow, gradually, until all was visible in a soft and glareless light. The lizard stroked what seemed to be the surian equivalent of a beard that dangled from the lower portion of a mouth that appeared at the same time vicious and comically expressive. It then reared the bony crest that stretched along its skull and spine, seemingly content. Closing its eyes (the two that normal lizards wear), it opened a third one in the middle of its forehead and peered at me intently.

“Good day thir,” it hissed, “I hope you don’t mind my thmoking.”

I laughed. My sense of the ridiculous emerged unchecked and I simply quaked beneath the sheets. Goddamnit! If there’s anything I can’t stand its a lizard with a flap. No, No. This is the wrong approach, I thought, gearing that sense back down to first. “This isn’t real, it can’t be. This sort of crap doesn’t happen - not to me, not to anybody. I must be dreaming, its the only sensible possibility.” Turning toward the lizard, “Good day my ass, it’s three o’clock in the morning! What in blazes do you think you’re doing here? Smoking my cigarettes, no less!” I demanded, thinking that this was one of those all too frequent dreams."

“Well, naturally I didn’t bring my own. I am rather embarrassed but you do have almost a full pack.”

“Forget the goddamn cigarettes.”

He sent a train of smoke rings skyward, “I thought you’d understand.”

“Flashin an ear-to-ear grin my way, it displayed a prodigious set of long, curved fangs. No, I didn’t want any nightmares with that in it. "Are you ready to come home now?" it hissed with an air of patient fatherhood talking to the wayward son.

“Home?” I asked with a sort of ‘who, me’ voice.

“Yeth, of fourth. Where do you think? Don’t be too naive. You can’t fool me like that.”

“Like what? What the hell are you talking about?”

“Oh dung! You know exactly what I’m talking about. Now get out of bed and we’ll be on our way. You ought to know better than to run off. Poor little Thanaratha will be worried thick about you. Now come along and everything will be all right.”

It came down from the dresser and shuffled across the room. I decided to let it ride, anything to keep this weird dream from becoming a nightmare. The sooner I got on with it, I felt, the sooner I could get some honest rest. Besides, I didn’t like the looks of those teeth. Beckoning me closer and hissing (hissing, rather) violently, it traced a cadaveral symbol on the wall with a claw. In a flash, the wall shimmered like glass, but silently, and fell as fine powder to the floor. I found myself facing into another room. It was long and low, illuminated by the same soft light, with a fountain in the center and large comfortable looking cushions scattered about the flagstone floor.

The lizard stopped across the breach, “Come on!” it said. I followed. Once across, the wall materialized in our wake like a movie played backward in slow motion.

“Typical dream surrealism,” I muttered and made a mental note to call a psychoanalyst in the morning. This side of the wall was translucent green, with strangely carved animal motifs brought upon it in bright gold, to the uncanny effect that they seemed to be suspended in a static, green sea. “I must really be working out my hang-ups in this fantasy,” I told myself aloud.

“Thot babbling, creature. Thanaratha will be thrilled to know you’re well. Thanarathaaa...” it crooned lispingly. Two more lizards emerged from a beaded entrance way. “Look what daddy found,” said my host, nudging me forward triumphantly. Nine eyes inspected me with careful discrimination: three soaringly, the other six aghast.

“Oh daddy! That’s not the one.” Hissed the smaller of the new comers. This one could pronounce its S’s to a gratifyingly uncomfortable effect.

“You bungling klutz!” snarled the other with all the vehemence of an angry cobra. “Can’t you tell your own daughter’s favorite pet when you see it?”

“B-but pretty scales...” straining and with much practiced effort he managed to get ‘scales’ out intact.

“Diot! Imbecile!” she was not impressed.

“B-but hon...”

“But nothing. What do you expect me to do with that?” she cried, gesturing at me sarcastically.

“Well, I'm not all that bad," said my three eyed friend defensively.

“Little one, Attitra,” the other added, "is not entirely wrong. It's not as simple as all that...”

“Not at all...”

“Is it?”

“Perhaps...”

“Now then, Mr. Sartre, what can I do for you?”
"Baby, baby. They all look alike to me!" He called after her.

By this time I was feeling quite indignant but a little more secure in the knowledge that I was not who they were looking for. "These things have a strange capacity for working themselves out if you don't let your dream turn into a nightmare," I congratulated myself on my superior control of the situation. With this in mind I began to say a word in behalf of the poor green slob with whom I sympathized immensely.

"Silence creature! You speak when you're spoken to," the wife cut in abruptly, shaking me with her claw as if she were scolding an overly obnoxious dog. This was not what I wanted at all, but at the sight of the sadistic gleam in her eyes and recalling those vicious fangs, I closed my mouth.

"Universal woman," I thought shakily.

"What are we going to do? We've got to get it out of here. You saw how it upset the child," she continued to her husband.

"Yeth dear, I'll run an ad in the paper.

"No. We haven't time for that. I'm already about to go berserk. I swear, if we can't find poor Goork, absolutely no more pets. Do you hear me? None!"

"Yeth dear," he said. His insipid submissiveness was beginning to get on my nerves.

"I'd better go call the pound." She turned haughtily and followed her daughter through the bead.

I approached my host. "Wait a minute, don't let that bi--I mean, her, push you around like that. Stand up to 'er." I spoke sympathetically. I didn't like the way things were turning out. Why the devil couldn't I just wake up?

"Don't be the ungrateful, you wicked creature. Be glad we're not turning you out in the cold."

She really had this guy pinned. We both knew it and I was becoming increasingly unnerved. "I don't like this business about the pound at all, you know," I said sharply, hoping to brow beat him in the fashion of his mete.

"I'm awfully sorry, but it's the only lizardsly thing to do in thist predicament. Do try to understand."

"Can't you bring me home?"

"Goodness no! Don't be slilly. That wall will barely last through one more journey and we can't possibly aford another. And poor Goork yet to find it would be an awful waste of time. Think of how Tnaratha would feel. Anyway, it would be moht unlizardsy and none of us would hear of it."

"Most unlizardsy?" I was shaking, I'd had enough. "Is this some kind of joke?" Visions of asylums for paranoid schizophrenia danced in my head.

"No. No joke, dear creature--I sthure you, No joke at all. Plesafe take hold of yourselvelf, you're not that important," he spoke so earnestly that I knew he wasn't kidding. His wife came in.

"I phoned the pound and the lizards are on their way ower," she said, turning toward me. "Don't worry creature. They're most gentle. I did inquiry for you, it only takes a moment and they say it doesn't hurt a bit. We wouldn't have it any other way. We're not hearless, you know. It will all be handled in the most lizardsly manner possible."

"Thanks," the word fell flatly from my tongue. At that moment I experienced the full, dark weight of my insolent predicament and realized that this was no dream, no nightmare. I wasn't safely home in bed.
Marriage '72

What more do you want from me?
All I had to give is gone,
All blown here like dandelions
Escaping from the placid lawn.

So much of me has been poured out
There's nothing left for myself.
My soul's been packed neatly away
And laid to rest upon the shelf.

Now, now what's left?
Nothing, nothing at all.
Empty, a wilderness I stand;
Nothing, nothing at all.

Love, you say love,
What's love, I can't remember
Or did I ever know at all?
Is it that inward Fire
That gives inspiration to every act
Or the clear calm that comes
From knowing and knowing well?

Why plague me with a hundred tasks
Which lead to your esteem and my degradation?
Sorry, but there's no known vaccination
For boredom. Yes you can take a month's vacation
From me. But what will be my destination
For a needed rest from myself?

Never mind, don't bother to reply.
It's like talking to a wall.
Shall I stand out in the hall
Or in some other Limbo?
Shall I tie an apron around my waist
And get your dinner with efficient haste?

It's waiting for the light that never gleams,
The water that never boils at all,
This, the boredom of the never-ending Dream.
If you need anything, just call.

Parma L. Jeffcoat
VEGA

Vega.
Emerson says, will one day be the Polestar.
By then Lyra's rhomboid and triangle will be gone,
Erased by the recurrent rub of years.
Polaris will be forgotten, a dim star
Noticed only by shepherds or astronomers.

This evening, though, Polaris still
Marks the pivot of the turning night,
And Vega, slipping imperceptibly northward,
Silvers (for the moment) at the zenith.

Darry Tutt

Blue

A timbre of victory rang in the wind
As he climbed the limbs of the ancient tree;
And hoarding them all, the three unhatched,
From their roughly thatched cradle in the fork
He made the descent.
As ageless as death now,
Those babies in their shells;
And what did he care if three robin ghosts
Would haunt him? He took the blue coffins
From his pocket and stared.
The sky was clean above; unblemished
By real clouds it curved blue around him,
Like the inside of a robin's egg.

Back Street Pieta

All smiles and joy,
We left the Christmas party.
December's late night chill was cracked
By the dull stroke of collision.
Split beneath the muttering of some receding engine,
A stray bitch walked her murder to the world --
She tumbled from the auto track
And dragged her pain to roadside.

We screamed and ran to give our aid --
Stood frozen at such agony,
Despite all we had bought knowledge.
We touched this helpless dog,
Too weak to bite.
That let herself be comforted.
Accepting final love,
Two strangers' only gift,
She settled down to die.

Small and helpless in the face of death,
We children cried for that baby,
As for ourselves,
We hadn't hit the beast.
Remember That Crazy Night Two Years Ago When

L.S.D. FOUND TO CAUSE DAMAGE, CHILDREN BORN HOPELESSLY DEFORMED, screamed the headlines. She picked up the paper and smiled at herself in the mirror behind the counter. She ordered coffee and petted her hair back into place.

"L.S.D. causes chromosomes damage. **I wonder what is keeping him? he did say 5:30.---Chromosomes, chromosomes, oh yeah the genetic code, the message part. **I wish he'd hurry the waitress is looking over here. Oh he looks so nice in blue.** there are so many things to do before the wedding. **L.S.D., I hope he can see me over here. Hope he remembered the flowers.

"Sorry I'm late darling, I got hung up for a few minutes."

"You look so handsome; I think I love you."

"Aren't you the romantic one, I'm going to love coming home to you at night. Do you mind if we eat here? I'm starved to death."

"No, I don't mind."

"Miss, I think we'll move to a booth; will you bring us a menu? Thanks."

"I called the florist today; orchids for the mothers and roses for you. That's what you wanted?"

"Yes, perfect; oh, that reminds me darling, they finished with the den today. It looks great. I think you'll be very pleased."

"I think I'll have the fish; what would you like? When will they be through with the rest?"

"Next week, I think I'll have the shrimp and tea."

"We'll have the shrimp, the fish, and two iced teas. Thank you. The paint smell will be gone by the time we move in. You know honey, I'll be so glad when all this mess is over with and we can be alone and normal instead of all this running and planning."

"Sometimes I wish we had eloped. Or even just started living together."

"No, it's not that bad. I'm no kid. I'm ready to settle down. Shacking-up is for teeny boppers and college kids. I'm ready for a beautiful home, a lovely wife and a house full of children."

L.S.D. CAUSES **

"Oh my God" she whispered under her breath.