

THE GOOD GREY POET

Look to your words, old man,
for the original intelligence, the wisdom
buried in them. Know however that it
surfaces when it will. Perfect comrades
words have been, constant like few others
in your loneliness. But they too have a life,
a time, of their own to mature. Experiencing
the slow, essential music of their natures,
they must go their ways as you go yours.

After so many throes, so many convulsions,
not only a war that threatened to tear
your world to pieces, the world you had
most ambitiously dreamed, all the pieces
of bodies you had seen stacked under a tree,
the maggots working overtime, but deaths
accumulating of those dearest to you,
politics, conviviality, love, the rest
at last exhausted, do you not hear hints
from the vantage point of what you've become?

Your ideal, you wrote a healthy time ago
to guide yourself, was Merlin: "strong
& wise & beautiful at 100 years old."
Strong & wise since "his emotions & care
complete in himself....He grows, blooms,
like some perfect tree or flower, in Nature,
whether viewed by admiring eyes or in
some wild or wood entirely unknown."

For your liver fattening, the cyst ripening
in your adrenal, the left lung collapsed,
the right perhaps an eighth suitable
for breathing, a big stone rattled round
in your gall bladder (righter than you knew,
you were--and even at the time you wrote,
rock-bottom feelings under you, your poems--

truly incorporating gneiss!), the ball of string tangled in the gut like a clue to knit up all contrarieties, you must be more and more yourself.

Often, leaning against a ferry rail, the sea your company, your words beat out a rhythm so continuous inside your body that you hardly noticed it, content to let its current carry you along, wherever it took you your place.

Now you, who thought--sufficient stores laid in--that your awareness had already pierced the distant future, view these phrases and that rhythm, still pursuing its course, as any stranger might.

Your doubt does not surprise. Who can miss the unexpected things emerged to startle you, even waking shame and fear?

But then you surely realize how lucky you are, not only to have them, these words, striking out on their own, bearded with faces you scarcely recognize refusing to bend to your wishes or regrets, refusing to acknowledge you in any way, but to be able to use them--most because they refuse--to measure that essential music as it, and at its own sweet pace, moves on to find the latest version of the truth in the changes it is making.

Beyond that, your words work, and work for you, by what they do to others, bringing you--this from far-off continents--reports of pleasure,

love, the tender might your poems go on gathering as they inspire it.

And those, the first breezy verses informing the winds, your words in all their youthful innocence, become so different, yet so much themselves, like fruits more and more are bearing, bearing out their father tree.

