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Sonnet 29

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Happily I think on thee, and then my state,
(Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate;
 For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
 That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

~William Shakespeare

When

This is the imposition of narrative. Two tramps in baseball hats wait at the corner of Wilshire and La Brea. Public transportation. Traffic signals. Smells of exhaust, jacaranda, the distant bay. Past. Future. Traffic. Here is a fact: the sky in Los Angeles is distant and uninteresting. Here is a fact: the sky in New York is distant and uninteresting and often obstructed by buildings. Here is a fact: the witness refused to speak. Some define lyric as a moment out of time, the opposite of narrative. A timeless locale. A place without when. A stigmata. The then folding back again into the then. Here is a fact: it's 5:30 in the morning and it's dark outside. This fact will change. There will be the fact of memory of this darkness. But the facts will have changed. The vinyl is fact. The leitmotif is the story we tell. The lyric is an orange peel on the coffee table, left from the night before.

In

The man who invented the word “in” was very alone. There were others who lived near him, but no one lived in his village. No one ever came into his house, sat in his favorite chair in the small, brightly lit room he called his parlor, talked to him about the weather or members of the school board over a nice cup of coffee. He didn’t have coffee. He had the beans, had smashed them on his countertop with a hammer until they were a rough powder, the consistency of ground coffee. But he had no way to heat the water. He had a pot, and he had a stove, but he had not yet discovered that he could put the water in the pot. He turned his radio on. Big band music was playing. *Benny Goodman*, he thought. He sat on the floor of the kitchen and listened to the music. He looked up at the stove and the pot and the neat pile of crushed coffee. He thought he’d like, perhaps, to eat the coffee, for he was very hungry. But he had no way to put the beans in his mouth. He looked at the floor and was overcome with sadness. He decided he would do something, something he had never done before. He would leave his house, go outside. He pushed his front door open, went outside. It was warm. The sun was shining. A few kids were playing a game that involved a stick and a Frisbee. A pretty girl walked by and smiled as she passed. *Good god*, he thought, *I am in the world. I am in my body in the world.*

Disgrace

I once read a novel by Kundera—or was it by Coetzee—called *Disgrace*, but I have since forgotten the plot, the characters, everything about it except for the feeling I was left with after reading it: a thick, numbing, oppressive pressure on my skin. That feeling stayed with me for a long time. I can recall it even now. Yesterday I met a kind old widower on the bus. He was carrying a beat-up guitar case. I asked him if he played, and he said no, not a note. But he had promised his wife before she died that he would learn “Love Me Tender” for her. He’d been carrying his guitar with him every day since her death. “When did she die?” I asked. “Twelve years ago,” he said. He’d been carrying his guitar around with him for twelve years, but he’d never learned to play it. “I can play a little guitar, and ‘Love Me Tender’ is a simple song. I’d be happy to teach you.” His body tensed and the kindness on his face faded. He turned away from me and looked out the window at the passing scenery. I opened a book and pretended to read. “Grace” is a word that only has relevance if you believe it means something. You have to have faith in the referent. But of course, “faith” is the same.