

Jack Spicer / THREE POEMS

UNTITLED

The dancing ape is whirling round the beds
Of all the coupled animals; they, sleeping there
In warmth of sex, ignore his fur and fuss
And feel no terror in his gait of loneliness.
Quaint though the dancer is, his furry fists
Are locked like lightning over all their heads.
His legs are thrashing out in discontent
As if they were the lightning's strict embodiment.
But let the dancing stop, the apish face go shut in sleep,
The hands unclench, the trembling legs go loose —
And let some curious animal bend and touch that face
With nuzzling mouth, would not the storm break —
And that ape kiss?

1949?

Final version 1956

PSYCHOANALYSIS: AN ELEGY

What are you thinking about?

I am thinking of an early summer.
I am thinking of wet hills in the rain
Pouring water. Shedding it
Down empty acres of oak and manzanita
Down to the old green brush tangled in the sun,
Greasewood, sage, and spring mustard.
Or the hot wind coming down from Santa Ana
Driving the hills crazy.
A fast wind with a bit of dust in it
Bruising everything and making the seed sweet.
Or down in the city where the peach trees
Are awkward as young horses,
And there are kites caught on the wires
Up above the street lamps,
And the stormdrains are all choked with dead branches.

What are you thinking?

I think that I would like to write a poem that
is slow as a summer,
As slow getting started,
A 4th of July somewhere around the middle of
the second stanza
After a lot of unusual rain.
California seems long in the summer.
I would like to write a poem as long as California
And as slow as a summer.
Do you get me, Doctor? It would have to be
as slow
As the very tip of summer.
As slow as summer seems
On a hot day drinking beer outside Riverside
Or standing in the middle of a white-hot road
between Bakersfield and Hell
Waiting for Santa Claus.

What are you thinking now?

I'm thinking that she is very much like California.
When she is still her dress is like a roadmap.

Highways
Traveling up and down her skin,
Long empty highways
With the moon chasing jackrabbits across them
On hot summer nights.
I am thinking that her body could be California
And I a rich Eastern tourist
In a purple Cadillac, in a sandstorm,
Lost somewhere between Hell and Texas
Looking at a map of a long, wet, dancing
California
That I have never seen.
Send me some penny picture postcards, lady,
send them.
One of each breast photographed looking
Like curious national monuments,
One of your body sweeping like a three-lane highway
Twenty-seven miles from a night's lodging
In the world's oldest hotel.

What are you thinking?

I am thinking how many times this poem
Will be repeated. How many summers
Will torture California
Until the damned maps burn
Until the mad cartographer
Falls to the ground and embraces
The sweet thick earth from which he has been hiding.

What are you thinking now?

I am thinking that a poem could go on forever.

1949?

Final version 1956

THE SONG OF THE BIRD IN THE LOINS

A swallow whispers in my loins
So I can neither lie or stand
And I can never sleep again
Unless I whisper you his song:

“Deep in a well,” he whispers. “Deep
As diamonds washed beneath the stone
I wait and whisper endlessly
Imprisoned in a well of flesh.

“At night he sometimes sleeps and dreams
At night he sometimes does not hear my voice.
How can I wound you with my well of sound
If he can sleep and dream beneath its wounds?

“I whisper to you through his lips.
He is my cage, you are my source of song.
I whisper to you through a well of stone.
Listen at night and you will hear him sing!

“ ‘A swallow whispers in my loins
So I can neither lie or stand
And I can never sleep again
Unless I whisper you his song.’ ”

1955?

Final version 1956