

FIVE PROSE POEMS



Russell Edson

DICK AND JANE AND THE MAYONNAISE FACTOR: AN APPRENTICESHIP

Let us say that life and art are a buffet served on a long table where, for instance, if one misses the chicken salad, one soon comes upon the tuna fish salad, mixed like the chicken, with mayonnaise...

There's the chance to taste everything. One misses nothing while almost missing everything. Yet there is enough in the smallest of hints to open huge landscapes of inspired speculation.

Adolescence comes to term, and the man is born. In his portfolio of literature he finds Dick and Jane, and a bit of Horatio Alger, Jr., whose inspirational books had come to him as his childhood died.

Perhaps it is that we love best those books we open first. But, in a world of substitution and invention, does it matter if chicken is tuna, or tuna is chicken?

The first book I mastered was the primer. And it was here that I first met Dick and Jane, and a dog named Spot. Little did I know that this book would become the spiritual matrix for all that I would ever do.

Simple paragraphs of Dick and Jane living in their nouns and verbs...

The Dick and Jane stories are flat, distracted by grammar and spelling; and never achieve a true fiction of developed description and story. If the Dick and Jane stories are not great literature, they still provide a holding place where one's own substitutions and inventions can find root. A matrix, as it were, of possibility.

It's like chicken salad or tuna fish salad, with mayonnaise who knows the difference, or even cares?

It is the simple and the obvious that are the most mysterious and difficult to discover. Originality and truth are rooted in the obvious; that which is always there, hidden only by its easy availability.

The kit of the beginning writer is like something found in a toy shop. Like a child's toy doctor-kit with its plastic stethoscope and wooden thermometer. In this make-believe a child is also a toy. A toy doctor who performs lobotomies with a scalpel made of rubber.

The Dick and Jane stories are a toy literature where a toy writer begins an apprenticeship in distraction.

Thus to forget originality, and to write of the small and the trivial with good cheer, thankful for whatever falls to the page. For in the great mayonnaise of things who can tell whether it's chicken or tuna? It might even be chopped ham or turkey. It might even be egg salad. But in the end it is all mayonnaise spread between two slices of bread.

Surely it is better to write an inferior form than fail a better one; for, so it seems, just this side of sloth is the virtue of stillness...

And never to forget a dog named, Spot...

SANITY

I'm not always so fat. Some days I look like a corpse where maggots have feasted for a thousand years. Other days I look like a society of overweight women worked into a man.

Today I'm fat, but, as I say, I'm not always so fat. Why, only minutes ago I was as thin as a sheet of onionskin with my own death notice printed on it.

Maybe I'm insane? But I don't think so. Which may be the sign that I am. But if I admit to being insane then perhaps I'm not.

If that's what it takes, I'll admit to insanity to prove my sanity. But if I'm only admitting it to prove that I'm not, perhaps I am...

NOCTURNE

There was an old woman who awoke and thought to jump from her bedroom window...

Floating through the moonlight like a sonata, her nightgown in

parachute. But that someone looking into the sky for God saw a moonlit rectum, and thought it to be the armpit of an angel...

There was an old woman who awoke and thought to break a hole through her bedroom floor with an ax, and to descend on a bed sheet as if a spider to protect her rectum from someone, who looking for God looked into a moonlit sky and saw the armpit of an angel nearing itself to earth, and thought it to be an old woman's rectum caning to earth...

THE GRINDING

Cyclops needs glasses. His oculist grinds him a monocle.

Then Cyclops goes looking under women's dresses to see if there's anything up there that might interest him.

He finds mostly underwear. But then he sometimes finds something that makes him cross-eyed.

This brings him back to the oculist to have his monocle reground.

Then he goes back to looking under women's dresses, but still finds mostly underwear.

Cyclops scratches his head, and returns once more to the oculist. But this time, because the oculist is also an amateur dentist, asks to have his teeth ground into sharp, little points...

URINATING

After urinating I was ready for anything. I said, fella, you name it. Of course I was speaking to myself. I call myself fella to keep that all important objective distance. When I call myself by my actual name I suddenly implode into subjectivity.

So I said, hey guy, what are you up to? I sometimes call myself guy for the same reason that I call myself fella.

After sitting for some hours with my head in my hands, trying to figure what to do, I was ready to urinate again. And so I did, and felt ready again for anything. But what?

And so I drank several quarts of water and sat there while fella and guy snored quietly in my head...