

Photographing Change

for Ernestine Ruben

How can it be that empty, intangible age
is stronger than we are?
Fuelled by the sun, its sky-writes begin here
on the eastern, left-hand corner
of a turning page
every morning when, expectantly awake,
we use up hours that taste and feel alike.
So why are days so differently
the same? Think, days will happen after you
and I no longer need to plan them sensibly,
or bring to mind a few
urgent forgettable things we have to do.

Think, too, of the split second when a finger
triggered this snapshot,
shooting time dead. Only when it won't
recur can "that wonderful time" be caught
on sepia fly paper.
So the old rascalion visits his wedding
fifty years after the marriage ended in
pained, unphotographed divorce.
And the dressed-up, smiling guests don't know
of course,
how long they'll be arrested for. "That's... who?
I can't remember what her name is now."

Is it an either/or game—keep your face
and lose your name,
or lose face by attending to the stream
that keeps you inconsistently the same
through time and place?
Try photographing change. Try stones, try
trees. Bearded with lichen, they are streaming by,
free of Plato's petrified ideal.
One wave laps into another, the foam-white
struggle of the brook is its appeal.
Let a river be invented by a stroke of light
that anneals it as it vanishes from sight.