

My Olson Elegy

*I set out now
in a box upon the sea.
—Maximus VI*

Three weeks, and now I hear!
What a headstart for the other elegists!
I say, No matter! by any route and manner
we shall arrive beside you together.
Envy, Triumph, Pride, Derision:
such passionate oarsmen drive my harpooneer,
he hurls himself through your side.
You lie and wait to be overtaken.
You absent yourself at every touch.

It was an adolescent, a poetboy,
who told me—one of that species, spoiled,
self-showing, noisy, conceited, *épatants*—
voice breaking from the ego-distance like
a telephone's, not a voice indeed
but one in facsimile, recon-
stituted static, a locust voice,
exhumed, resurrected, chirring
in its seventeenth year, contentedly
saying, "And I've just completed
section fifteen of my Olson elegy".

Landscape on legs, old Niagara! —all
the unique force, the common vacancy,
the silence and seaward tumultuous gorge
slowly clogging with your own *disjecta*,
tourists, trivia, history,
disciples, picnickers in hell;
oh great Derivative in quest
of your own unknown author, the source,
a flying bit of the beginning blast,

sky-shard where early thunder slumbers:
 the first syllabic grunt, a danger,
 a nameless name, heaven's tap on the head;
 you, Olson! whale, thrasher, bard of bigthink,
 your cargo of ambergris and pain,
 your steamy stupendous sputtering
 —all apocalypse and no end:
 precocious larvae have begun to try
 the collected works beneath your battered sides.

See them now! dazzling elegists
 sitting on their silvery kites on air
 like symbols in flight: swooping daredevils
 jockey for position, mount a hasty breeze
 and come careering at your vastness
 to read among the gulls and plover
 —but the natural cries of birds do not
 console us for our gift of speech.
 Embarrassed before the sea and silence,
 we do not rise or sing
 —wherefore this choir of eternal boys
 strut and sigh and puff their chests and stare
 outward from the foundering beach.

King of the flowering deathboat, falls,
 island, leviathan, starship night,
 you plunge to the primitive deep
 where satire's puny dreadful monsters,
 its Follies and its Vices, cannot reach,
 and swim among their lost originals
 —free, forgotten, powerful, moving
 wholly in a universe of rhythm.
 and re-enter your own first Fool,
 inventing happiness out of nothing.
 You are the legend death and the sea have seized
 in order to become explicable.

—Smell of salt is everywhere,
 speed and space burn monstrousness
 away, exaltation blooms in the clear:
 fair weather, great *bonanza*, the high!
 —swelling treasure, blue catch of heaven.
 The swimmer like the sea reaches every shore.
 Superlative song levitates from lips

F E L D M A N

of the glowing memorialists,
their selves flash upward in the sun.

Now you are heavier than earth, everything
has become lighter than the air.

To a Fairly Well-Known American Poet

*The most amazing thing about my life
is that I could go from there [the "darkness"
of "Pittsburgh"] to being a fairly well-known
American poet.*

—Name withheld

Bright object of our recognitions, what,
dear luminary, amazes you so much
when your effulgence leaps up to behold
its nicely calibrated magnitude?
Is it mother Pittsburgh putting out her lights
and sinking deeper into benightedness
to show off her sonny boy's current lustre?
Or is it, rather, the marvellous justness,
the cosmic coming-around of the gone around?
—since Pittsburgh is well-known to be quite
a fairly well-known American city.