

My Papa's Waltz

BY THEODORE ROETHKE

The whiskey on your breath
Could make a small boy dizzy;
But I hung on like death:
Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans
Slid from the kitchen shelf;
My mother's countenance
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist
Was battered on one knuckle;
At every step you missed
My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head
With a palm caked hard by dirt,
Then waltzed me off to bed
Still clinging to your shirt.

(1942)

Tradition

BY JULIANA SPAHR

I hold out my hand.
I hand over
and I pass on.
I hold out my hand.
I hold out my hand.
I hand over
and I pass on.
Some call this mothering,
this way I begin each day by holding out my hand and then
all day long pass on.
Some call this caretaking,
this way all day and all night long, I hold out my hand and
take engine oil additive into me and then I pass on this
engine oil additive to this other thing that once was me,
this not really me.
This soothing obligation
This love.

This hand over
and this pass on.
This part of me and this not really me.
This me and engine oil additive.
This me and not really me and engine oil additive.
Back and forth.

All day long, like a lion I lie where I will with not really me
and I bestow upon not really me
refractive index testing oils and wood preservatives.
I lie with not really me all day long,
and so I bequeath not really me a honeyed wine of flame
retardants and fire preventing agents.

I make a milk like nectar,
a honeyed nectar of capacitor dielectrics, dyes, and
electrical insulation
and I pass it on every two hours to not really me.
Not really me is a ram perched on a cliff above a stream,
unable to be quenched by the flame retardant in furniture.
Not really me comes near
and takes a nectar of insulated pipes, and some industrial
paints.

Later I pass the breast cup to not really me,
a breast cup filled with sound insulation panels and
imitation wood with a little nectar and sweetness.
And not really me drinks it and then complains a little,
rebuking me, for my cakes of nuts and raisins
are cakes of extraction of crude petroleum and natural gas,
for my apples are filled with televisions and windshield
wiper blades.
On my breast are the curls of not really me
and against the brow of not really me wafts plasticizer used
in heat transfer systems.

As drinking not really me takes in anger and in need
not really me drinks from the hand of that sweetest sleep the
juice of me
that cup of adhesives,
that cup of fire retardants,
of pesticide extenders.
And as not really me drinks
I cradle the moon and not really me in my right hand
my lips kissing with the dedusting agents and wax
extenders.

Then later in the night,
the bed scattered with the stains of cutting oils and gas-
transmission turbines,
the blankets with blends of hydraulic fluid,
we lie there together
handing over and passing on
filled up and attempting to think our way through
economics and labor and time and biology
me and not really me

together.

I'd like to think we had agreed upon this together,
that we had a tradition,
that we agreed these things explained us to us
but when not really me wakes
after drinking the pharmaceuticals and photo chemicals
night after night
and day after day
not really me will sing a song of rebuke,
sing the song of not really me, the song that
goes like Salutations to brominated fire retardants of
Koppers Ind.
goes like Salutations to water/oil repellent paper coating of
3M
goes like Salutations to wiper blades of Asahi
goes like Salutations to bike chain lubrication of Clariant
International
goes like Salutations to wire and cable insulation of Daikin
goes like Salutations to pharmaceutical packaging of
DuPont
goes like Salutations to nail polish of Dyneon
goes like Salutations to engine oil additive of Agrevo E
goes like Salutations to hair curling and straightening of
Agsin Ptd. Ltd.
goes like Salutations to insecticide and termiticide for
empty green-houses of Chevron Chemical
goes like Salutations to greenhouse flowers of Monsanto
goes like Salutations to insecticide to kill fire ants of Rigo
Co.
goes like Salutations to plasticizers of US Borax Inc.
Not really me's song will go on and on
Not really me will sing it all night long
hour after hour for weeks on end.
It will have eighty-five company names in it.
It will have twenty-one chemical functions in it.
It will have ninety-seven products in it.
It will have two hundred trade names in it.
Not really me's song will rotate through these names in all
their combinations.
And then it will end with another part that is as long as the
first and inventories the chemicals that not really me
does not yet know.
But oh those of you who are not really me at all
I say let wisdom be your anvil and knowledge your
hammer.
Hand this over.
Pass this on.

(2015)