

Twelfth Night

Twelfth night: *the evening or*
says the Seventh New Collegiate
sometimes (where the new day starts
at sunset) *the eve of Epiphany.*

Floating in nothing, the earth by force
of attraction the moon by spinning, the two
opposed not to one another
but the sun keeping both in place
in orbit, nothing personal
pure coincidence of physics
geology and time, abstract
matter an oxymoron meaning
less than we think feel or imagine,
small talk among chance acquaintances
the absolute zero of outer space
meaning nothing at all but being
leaving it up to each of us
how in our pantomime of free
will we choose to live or die
our microscopic lives,

given

of course certain social constraints
to guard against the utter despair
we might otherwise confront in
the cold physicality of fact:
our short, sublunary existence —
certain idols, myths and instincts,
cultural epiphenomena
so old they're like second nature
so subtle they cross the placental shield
informing us even before we're born
with defenses against the natural
tendency of the nervous system
as it runs down to dwell on the most
unpleasant realities like death
loneliness and regret, making us
prone, for instance, to forget
the flood of piss, blood and shit
that washed us onto this lost coast
one of the earth's beautiful places;

making us, for instance, subject

ourselves to custom, pair up
in desperation with whoever's
handy when we need a hand
convince ourselves we belong to one
another, part of the team, the in-group
the peer group — age gender class
color locale energy smell —
our most intimate problems
massaged away by familiar fingers
sympathized into platitudes
whatever vision we might have had
homogenized by talking heads
and sitcom characters
circumscribed by the family circle:
hive and herd clan and tribe
church nation neighborhood
monkey see monkey do
marching off under flags bearing
our favorite Us Them brands;

making us prone to accept, for instance,
the deadly routine of the guinea pig race
wheels within wheels in the cage and maze
numbing the heart and mind and spirit
with handheld and labor-intensive
conveniences, the latest gizmos,
snug homes, weekend lovelives
newly improved by sundry devices
relentlessly advertised:
clothes credit drugs and fun
the old standby bottle of wine
emotional blackmail and spiritual rape
convincing us it's our own fault
stadiums filled for the group shout
illusions of grandeur delusions of power
exercised on whatever poor creature
happens to be next after us
in line at the bank or graveyard;

making us prone to believe, for instance,
our contradictory fantasies,
schizoid dreams of love and peace
where roses happily ever after
lose their thorns and tigers their carnal
appetites, lovers seeing

eye to eye satisfy
each other always, lives don't grow
apart, bodies don't fall apart
love is not a market function
desire is not a playoff game
communion is not a *quid pro quo*
separations are temporary
sickness and pain aberrations
platitudes and ideals are real
maternity and family
always occur together beauty
just happens love just happens
nature is good it all makes sense
it all comes together in the end;

keeping us, for instance, bent
down, nose to the grindstone
shoulder to the wheel eyes
downcast properly positioned
over the barrel to be entered
rudely, from behind, by force
of distraction ignoring the lunatic wheel
spinning out our twisted threads.