1999

Upon Discovering the Café Alone

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Upon Discovering the Café Alone

Tonight everything reminds me of home.
We searched for this place
(you and I).
I have discovered it
alone.*

Tonight I would smoke
here
if I didn't hate cigarettes

and I would speak with you
if I was not sequestered here.
I would tell you not to smoke.
You’re killing yourself,
I’d say.

Then explain to you that sometimes I
feel rebellious and
take it out on my poetry
(unfairly),
stripping it of all capitalization
and at times
even punctuation -
then I dress like a beatnik
and walk alone down
busy streets
(ridiculous).

You’d laugh and
say that when you feel rebellious

* my heart so full of ideas
and I feel bereft of words.
you mix some wicked drink, repeating this until rebellion is reduced to giddiness. I would wish I had your abandon then be grateful that I do not carry your regrets. You’re killing yourself, I’d say (secretly envy you).

Here a sweet odor clothes the cool air, which seems heavy with memories that I cannot even summon to form thoughts close enough to catch (I know I was with you somewhere like this once). Faint reminders rise and disappear - like steam - around more tangible distractions and yet something begs me go somewhere that I cannot.

I am not a tortured artist but tonight I feel like one, wondering what a tortured artist might be (nice work if you can get it), certainly not some washed-up poet who paid too much for coffee ...cold coffee.

Tonight I would smoke here if I didn’t hate cigarettes

so I order an Irish Cream (like I used to), an old drink for old time’s sake.

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I'm a sentimental fool.
(They say one should never drink
alone, but I
doubt if that applies to coffee.
Besides, if you were here
There would be no poem.
I would be telling you these things,
telling you that
sometimes I expect to find a kindred spirit
on the highway
because we look over
and discover that
from different cars we are
singing to the same song on the radio -
telling you that tonight
everything reminds me of home.)

Becoming

I always arrive
at places like this
to see
the endless parade
of souls
screaming to be regarded
(contempt or
admiration—much the same
to some).

If I am honest,
I say that I also come
to be seen,
to take my part:
(to look the same or
go against the grain—much the same
to some)
this masquerade
is more to feign than to become.