

Countertransference

These days, though, I always analyze myself,
Because analysis comes late, when the sun slips
Beneath the paper eyelids of the sky.
I first caught sight of her in the hazy hallway
Of the ward, peering through the shadowed window.
Trying to glimpse her flickering reflection,
Fluttering pieces drifting between life and death,
Like the wings of broken butterflies.
In her darkened eyes I can see a sense of self
Drifting like a midnight ship at sea,
Without an albatross to guide it.

We sit in the small room like stuffed men,
I am hollowed out to better see beneath
The skins of others, to blood that beats.
My artless pen stands poised upon the page,
Ready to scribble an impulse or imagined slight,
Or measure out disease with coffee spoons.
Pushing away the dread that comes,
Word by word, and spells truth before me,
That I have seen and known you all along.
The soft smell of wicker baskets and dust,
As fingers brush stray hair behind my ear.

The love within and without are often mixed,
Confused so that we cannot tell if we are loved
By ourselves or others or at all.
On summer nights, I would lie awake
Waiting for her to stretch beside me
And reinvent the world as it should be.
She would hold me mesmerized,
Like the wedding guest with the mariner,
On the ravaged plains of borderland.
Then, being acted on and acting were the same,
Because I was her and she was me.

Later, I would come to understand how little pieces
Of another's self could be imprinted
On a child's mind like petals crushed in a book.
Projected out for fear that kept within
The self might break, shattering into dust,
Leaving me crouched behind like Caliban.
But after it all, she would lightly walk away,
Trailing a smile and kiss on the skirts of her
Wilted wedding dress, playing Ophelia,

Liked I'd begged her, time and time again.
It was a rage so red it could not be remembered.

But soon I had spent my childhood on silly
Rosemaries and rue, grown too old to keep
Company that whispered and soothed.
Used up my childish charm like withered weeds,
Soon my very presence enraged,
Reminding of a youth long gone,
Faded with the rays of the westward bloom.
Then came the treacherous tomorrows
Without rhyme or reason
Oppressive like the cloying heat of a summer's night,
Which, waking, makes you cry to sleep once more.

Back in the sterile room my pencil
Drags across the page, tracing a portrait
Of instability, emptiness, and neglect.
She catches my face ablaze with recognition,
Pausing in her tale, her eyelids wink and drop,
And she knows that I am wriggling on a pin.
A wave of nostalgia rises on the tide
Of an unbidden sea of sodden memories,
Too blurred with confusion to navigate.
A smile begins to stretch across her face
With the heady knowledge that I cannot:

Abandon her
My mother