

WESTERN WRITERS ON "DIRECT PERCEPTION"

James Agee. "Preamble." *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. NY: Ballantine Books. 11.

For in the immediate world, everything is to be discerned, for him who can discern it, and centrally and simply, without either dissection into science, or digestion into art, but with the whole of consciousness, seeking to perceive it as it stands: so that the aspect of a street in sunlight can roar in the heart of itself as a symphony, perhaps as no symphony can: and all of consciousness is shifted from the imagined, the revisive, to the effort to perceive simply the cruel radiance of what is.

This is why the camera seems to me, next to unassisted and weaponless consciousness, the central instrument of our time. . . .

* * *

If I had explained myself clearly you would realize by now that through this non-"artistic" view, this effort to suspend or destroy imagination, there opens before consciousness, and within it, a universe luminous, spacious, incalculably rich and wonderful in each detail, as relaxed and natural to the human swimmer, and as full of glory, as his breathing....

Sharon Butala, *Perfection of the Morning: A Woman's Awakening in Nature*. Hungry Mind, 1994. 124-125.

This practice led me to the first of my strange experiences on the prairie, the one where I first found the stone circles – where I felt drawn to them – and where I found myself trying in some simple and direct way to acknowledge the power I found out there. After such an experience, which felt to me complete in itself, I could not doubt that rightness of the approach, and I incorporated it into my daily walks. I began to tune in to this strange new perceptual experience which came from where I didn't know, and for which I had no name, and which required of me stillness, intense alertness and if not a casting away of the will, at least a subjugating of it to what I sometimes thought was a larger will.

I began to try to stop thinking about anything else but the dirt on the road, the grass beside it, the stones, the fields spreading out on each side, the hawks circling overhead, the song of the meadowlark or red-winged blackbird, the sound of the wind in the grass, a particular rock high on a hillside. This required concentration, I found, and a constant calling myself back from thoughts of other things to my surroundings at the moment.

Henry Miller, "Creative Death"

Strange as it may seem today to say, the aim of life is to live, and to live is to be aware, joyously, drunkenly, divinely, serenely aware. In this state of godlike awareness one sings, and in this realm the world exists as poem, no why or wherefore, no direction, no goal, no striving, no revolving. . . . [O]ne is rapt by the ever-changing spectacle of changing phenomenon; this is the sublime, the amoral state of the artist, he who lives only in the moment, the visionary moment of utter far-seeing lucidity. Such clear icy sanity that it seems like madness.

AIX EN PROVENCE: SPRING

There are no images here
In the solitude, only
The night and its stars which are
Relationships rather than
Images. Shifting darkness,
Strains of feeling, lines of force,
Webs of thoughts, no images,
Only night and time aging
The night in its darkness, just
Motion in space in the dark.
It is a night full of darkness,
And space, and stars, and the hours
Going by, and time going by,
And the night growing old, and all
The webs, and nets, of relationships
Changing, and it is Spring night
In Provence, here where I am,
And under the half moon the almond
Buds are ready to burst. Before noon
The blossoms will open, here by
This peach colored house amongst
The steel gray pines and the gray
Limestone cliffs. Now the buds
Are round and tight in the dim
Moonlight, in the night that
Stretches on forever, that had
No beginning, and that will
Never end, and it doesn't mean
Anything. It isn't an image of
Something. It isn't a symbol of
Something else. It is just an
Almond tree, in the night, by
The house, in the woods, by
A vineyard, under the setting
Half moon, in Provence, in the
Beginning of another Spring.

--Rexroth. "Aix en Provence: Spring." *Natural Numbers*. CP 610-611. 1958-59.

WESTERN WRITERS ON SPONTANEITY IN WRITING

Denise Levertov. From "Work and Inspiration: Inviting the Muse." *The Poet in the World*. New York: New Directions. 25-26.

Poems come into being in two ways. There are those which are--or used to be--spoken of as inspired; poems which seem to appear out of nowhere, complete or very nearly so; which are quickly written without conscious premeditation, taking the writer by surprise....

There is nothing one can say directly concerning the coming into being of "given" or "inspired" poems, because there is no conscious process to be described. However, in considering what happens in writing poems which have a known history {"conscious poems," the second and more common kind of poems, the type a poet has to revise over a period of time}, I have come to feel convinced that they are not of a radically different order; it is simply that in the "given" poem the same kind of work has gone on below, or I would prefer to say beyond, the threshold of consciousness. The labor we call conscious is...not a matter of a use of the intellect divorced from other factors but of the intuitive interplay of various mental and physical factors, just as in unconscious precreative activity; it is conscious in that we are aware of it, but not in the sense of being deliberate and controlled by the rational will [though of course reason and will can and should play their modest part too.]

[Discussing what was wrong with a poem she was struggling with:]

"...the words themselves were straining; instead of waiting in that intense passivity, that passive intensity, that passionate patience which Keats named Negative Capability and which I believe to be a vital condition for the emergence of a true poem, I was straining to find words; the word had not found me.

-- p. 29.

From *Perfection of the Morning: A Woman's Awakening in Nature*. Hungry Mind, 1997. 95.

When I was ready, I sat down at my desk and typed *The Perfection of the Morning*, then waited in that state of suspension of writers like me, of hold breath, obliviousness to one's surroundings, the moment fraught with tension and with prayer, a kind of intense concentration not on some particular but on emptying oneself so that the right words might have room to form. And then, as so far has always happened, ideas began to flow, to shape themselves into words, sentences, paragraphs, as I typed.