

Notebook Fragments

BY *D.S. Waldman*

It's April and all my friends are married. The Japanese maples, in their pots on the balcony, need to be weeded and pruned.

The reds and yellows we associate with autumn leaves are there all the time, I read. But we only see them in dead or dying leaves, in the absence of chlorophyll.

The cruelest month—who said that?

Reading the posthumous Ashbery, edited by Emily Skillings—five unfinished longer works—I pay more attention to his xeroxed drafts than to the finished poems. *Edge* becomes *hedge*. *Rigorous*, *peaceful*. At the bottom of each typescript page, a date and location.

*For to be finished
is nothing. Only children and dinosaurs like endings*

On my desk: beeswax candle, lit / three twisted stacks of books / loose: Joanna Walsh's *My Life as a Godard Movie* / two gold hoops / tiger balm / G's water bottle, with her company slogan, *come see what we see*, on the side.

Ashbery loved film. He watched Turner Classic Movies in his basement in Hudson, talking to friends on the phone.

My therapist suggests I journal in present tense; she says it might encourage epiphany.

I open the windows for a cross breeze; reminds me of summer in Kentucky, waiting in bed for the room to cool.

"It's after 10 on a November morning nine years ago"—a sentence written in the present about the past—"light through narrow leaves makes an easy pattern on the sidewalk."

G gets back tonight—a work retreat in Portland. I've left her chicken sausage and rice on the stove. She climbs onto me in bed, asks if I'll tell her what I told my therapist this week.

All language left in the air, without a response, starts to sound crazy, or like poetry.

Skillings includes, on page 115, a handwritten draft of "An Unspecified Amount." The handwriting is legible but not neat. Ashbery's lines, though, sit atop each other like skinny books or sheets of paper.

I can't tell through the window what's late traffic on MacArthur and what is wind in the trees.

Epiphany: night jasmine smells the way candy necklaces taste

Later, G long asleep: midnight across the floor, dim and blue.

In a dream, I wake with her in a cottage on the leeward side of Eleuthera. Peter and Olivia are gone, already in the water, the sun blood orange through the horizon.

You're allowed to ask questions, my therapist says, you just might not get answers.

The difference between adult and children is the ability to pause between stimulus and response. G says so. "I bring this up not as an accusation, but as a means of deepening with you."

Regarding his practice, Ashbery spoke of a current or stream he drew from, little by little, every day. "I don't look on poems as closed works," he wrote, "I feel they're probably going on all the time... and I occasionally snip off a length."

G's attic: rack of light jackets / eucalyptus sprig on the window sill / mattress on the floor / low alter with candle / yoga mat, purple and made of cork

*The winds that lie in the mind,
the ruinous winds*

In her garden, Louise says my work suffers under the speaker, that I should consider removing the I.

Ashbery would argue sometimes with translators. You can't say that in French, they would explain, referencing an out of place noun, verbs in clashing tenses. And Ashbery would reply, you can't say it in English either.

G says to keep her out of poems for a while, *unless it feels, actually, like a love poem*.

Addicted to processing?

Have been trying instead to include my cat in as many poems as possible. Louise says either he's a red herring or, once in a while, the emotional center of the piece.

I wonder at the terms "linguistic malleability" and "tonal virtuosity" which, according to Skillings, made it difficult for Ashbery to remember which language—English or French—was his. Overshared to Jalen about our sex life. G punches me in the shoulder when I tell her, southbound on the 5 near Mendota.

Why do we out ourselves?

The true content of a photograph is invisible, for it derives from a play not with form, but with time.

Epiphany: no one lets anyone else scroll their photo library

Dream of a potted orange tree small enough to live on top of desk. Oranges the size of marbles, blossoms unfisting white among waxy leaves.

At the farmers market a man named Earl Ochre sells Topanga honey, touches G on the arm. The Ochres go back 100 years in Los Angeles, he says, since the valley was just avocado groves and citrus.

*Every year at this time of day I get a feeling of a pain,
like roses and dried figs.*

Overheard by the kraut stand: the four bodily humors—phlegm, yellow bile, blood, and melancholy

Poppies everywhere in Adams point. Silk tea cups in the yard, citrus orange. Little spills across the median on MacArthur.

I call them feminine; G calls me basic.

As on a festa day in early spring
The tidelands maneuver and the air is quick with imitations

Sitting with the phrase "genius for deferral," which I've found in my notes, unattributed.

I scratch the cat's neck while G smokes on the balcony, next to the maples. The red one is sturdy and full, vertical in its reach. The green splits, somehow, into two little trees, bent in their directions.

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