John Baker

Midlife, With Asperger’s

I

First, I notice that I haven’t aged, although my body has –
but even it is aging slowly;
I see this in the eyes of coeds before I look away.
It used to make me nervous.
My “theory of mind” may be opaque –
Aristotelian rather than Platonic –
but I have learned to classify those grins:
Genus: amorous
Species: libidinous pluripotentialis
They worry me no longer though;
the world allows that I am old, and so I’m off the hook. (Subspecies: unethicalis)

II

Less and less do I care to be embraced.
More and more does speech electrify me –
a beautiful ugliness with a mind of its own,
an unconscionable conscience for the potential of words,
a hopeless hope for the startling unsayable.
My new religion is Figuration,
in all its ancient self-possessions:
metaphor, diaphor, metonymy, synecdoche,
and their semi-noble sister, simile –
a dreadful case have I become of Aristotle
nursing at his master’s Forms.

III

Language seems the option it has always seemed,
a puzzle calling for complete examination,
like a strange machine rocking in the surf.
The dolphin half of me would leave it there;
but the human half would solve its riddle.
And so I am a student of the liberal arts,
a writer and a teacher of the same –
but always on the verge of speechlessness
at what I know the world is not.

IV

Aquinas and Kant agree: there are two domains,
two truths, one of which we do not make
and cannot know. And in the surf between them:
language, a sandy thing, amorphous,
a rusty breaker on the circuit
between eternity and time.
The limits of my language are the limits of my world,
but not of me. I dwell within a self
I never thought to name,
a dignity of silence at play in the fields of the Word.

V

For this I am alone,
a wolf among dogs, timid and perplexed.
More and more I make a habit of avoidance.
I let the moon beguile me precisely
with its lack of purpose; like a beacon in the sky,
it draws a moan of ancient, pointless feeling—
a wolf among dogs, alone,
until the puppies charm me, and I consent to play.

VI

And so I make what peace I can with time.
The compromise was slow in coming.
I think about my brother, dead, and all the rest
who die. (I’ve learned to count myself.)
Speech is all the restlessness I know now,
the angel at my shoulder a model of stoic silence.
But he will have to wait, for the woods are dark,
and the moon is bright,
and I am still at play.