

Guest Editorial:

Old Dog. Same Trick.

David W. Jardine

Your cause of sorrow
Must not be measured by his worth, for then
It hath no end.
Ross to Siward, on the death of Siward's son.
Macbeth, Act V, Scene VIII

Give sorrow words: the grief that does not speak
Whispers the o'er-fraught heart and bids it break.
Malcolm to MacDuff. *Macbeth*, Act IV, Scene III

“The individual case . . . is never simply a case; it is not exhausted by being a particular example of a universal law or concept” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 39). There is no such a “thing” as sorrow or grief. It is always *this* lamenting in *this* arc of telling, of seasons, of breath and faces. To paraphrase John Caputo (1993), sorrow always involves proper names; grieving is always one's own and, one way or another, in one shape or another, “from it no one can be exempt” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 356).

That we might commiserate in such matters is not made possible by each of us deflecting upwards into some governing concept or essence or law or theme under which our sorrows fall. My sorrow does not find much voice or relief in such falling. It is not *given* words but is taken away and rendered and handed back as bones.

“The rule does not comprehend it” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 39).

We don't experience our affinity via this abstracting route. Commiseration cannot be sought in experiencing ourselves as examples or instances. Affinity is, instead, a lateral pass, one of kinship, kindness, love. In these matters, I am always, for good or ill, *someone*, full of gesture

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and just this word and withholding and waiting and perhaps embrace. And just this error of having waited too long full of good intent. All this.

I find myself nearly apologizing to some of the people who've read this. This work is hard to bear and, if it works (and it doesn't always work, and its working is in the hands of those to whom it is addressed), it's hard to put down. And I'll admit that there is a resounding joy to it precisely because of this. "Free spaces" (Gadamer, 1992, p. 59) and some relief, some lifting and lightening, some setting it down by taking it up and setting it down in words.

So yesterday, November 3, 2014. Father and grown daughter outside the Bragg Creek vet's place, big and old Great Pyrenees on a leash, matted and woolly and friendly and black and white. Big splayed paws a good six inches across. Well trod and often.

Inside to buy dog food, and, I'd say by her age and carriage, a woman and wife and mother, a bit in tears as she and the doctor emerge from a side room.

Yep. Got it.

It's time, it seems. And that semblance swirls up and around in the air.

Made sure I stopped on the way back to the truck to tell the old thing that he's a good dog. A little unspoken thanks. You need to thank your teachers, but the best thanks is turning away and practicing the teaching.

The language of this intimacy is a rough ride. Every pull towards generalities feels like a betrayal and yet I must give sorrow words. I can "identify" with that spot these neighbors seem to be in, but that word is too easy to use, too flip. Part of it is the coming due of the silent bargain some of us have made with these domestics. I remember a black-humored version laughed over years ago with friends:

"Don't worry. When the time comes, I will kill you."

Hah! Yes. I will. I promise.

I can identify with the spot they are in precisely because of *how* we are identical. Our cases are incommensurate and *that* is how we are the same. *That* is how each new case is an act of revival and rejuvenation, not just repetition. That is how our kinship remains alive, there in that unspoken parking lot. Our kinship is not identity under a rule but is had in, and through, the incommensurate and stubborn grace of particularity. We lean towards. We hear beckons. We are properly stilled and summoned. This child, this patient, this turn of phrase in a text, this upwell of warm air coming up off the wood for winter, that old Fido full of specific fidelities and keeps of memory, makes me stop over it and wait for what is to come.

Thus our cases, each intimate, need names and faces and occasions to be what they are. Sit. Stay.

Ivy. That was my dog's name. Ivy, right there all over again, up and run in that chance morning meeting of pets and coos and matted feet and leash pulled taut in the air of coming grief. Ivy's flesh being only half torn to bits by an inefficient cougar that didn't finish the job. The weight of her in my arms, tipping back in blood and glazed look and the sizzle-panic nickel-spittle rush for what turned out to be useless help.

My being drawn to this morning event is thus a lateral pass. It is not a passage through some shared "identity," but a passage into the passible kinship of the flesh, the eyes that see ghosts shimmering around and nearing from all directions, the big long nose arced up and sniffing something in the air. Beheld in my arms. My bones start tearing, but hush now. There is a secret pleasure here, too, to be near this happenstance, this teaching, this moment, and to write in order to stay near and draw others near.

Say it, then. Almost jealousy. That they have such luck to have such proximity to such a great teacher.

Good boy.

I remember after Ivy was half-killed and we had to put her down. That's such a phrase. It summons gravity and the falling of flesh to the earth. But it also says that we had to put her down, because if we didn't put her down we couldn't bear the weight of it.

And those post-traumatic reveries, still close and fraught and suddening, still imagining her running towards me down off the green hill, and having to say, again:

"No, Ivy. Go."

Good girl.

References

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