

Existentiality & the Breath line in Artie Gold's "some of the cat poems"
by Nikki Reimer

"There is, incidentally, no way of talking about cats that enables one to come off as a sane person." -Dan Greenberg

Though allergic, Artie Gold lived with up to 3 cats at a time, if his autobiographically-arranged poetry is to be believed, & he seems to have regarded them with simultaneous bemused detachment & impassioned affection.

An introduction credited to "The shortstop of the heart" (perhaps either Cat or Gold himself) in "some of the cat poems" complains, "I cannot understand the strange distance A. Gold is apart from his cats that allows him to sit back on his typewriter and coolly every few months knock out a poem about them. I shake my head. He sneezes."

This distance is a myth; the cats are always there beneath our words. Their methods demonstrate a possible template for existentiality if we are attuned to it. I tried to read Artie Gold's "some of the cat poems", but a ginger cat crept up on my shoulder all purring & velvet & I had to put the page down.

Each person who has let a felicitous feline creep onto h/er shoulder and into h/er heart will eventually come to

I confess
I cannot
put broken cats
back together but neither
can god).

A quiet embodied grief that gathers at the end of the page like "rain gathers downwards/in abnormal sonatas." The steady beat of the short lines like steady thudding of cat paws 'cross a carpeted floor.

That the cats are simply there, existentially so, "even if they aren't your bloody cats or my/bloody cats" is a truth far beyond the poem. Cats make their own decisions about things, you see, as writers from Eliot to Kipling to have noted. (C.f. The Cat That Walked By Himself.) Or

Waldrop: "A cat of any color can descend into the pit behind her eyes and yawn herself right back to the blond surfaces that represent the world in the logical form we call reality."

Gold's lyrics enjamb down the page in lines that meander like a cat stopping to sniff, first telegraphing its intent or doubling back to re-sniff & quietly confident in its it-ness. "A sketch of a cat...since disappeared." Absence represented by the erasure of "every presence;" the sketch of the cat now "yellow sheet of paper;/scotch taped edges." In the next page the absence marked is that of a lover, though at first we might think the narrator is still speaking to the cat, each being has "left (him) left not a trace."

The impatient ennui of "cats first winter:"

sometimes they drag their minds and bodies and voices all
at once, weave down the long hall, broken-hearted. like
I once did when I'd not been able to reach my muse, day
after day, I collected bluer sombrero feeling jilted be-
ginning to feel the cartoon of misery, museless useless
then came the poem as I conceded on time, though late as
always.

That moment when writing is as natural as breathing is to the cat, alive within her fur & awake to the terrifying present. The cat's life is akin to the writing process: muscularity, sinuous, all gathered adrenaline & charged electricity ready to pounce, or quiet repose, fur and breath line. Short lives of restless intensity. Masters of the metaphysical: "why there is my lovely tomcat...The stillness unwinds ticking like/a home movie projector whirrr."

Or comic tragedy, when cat "has a kind of a mange of the ass."

Cats are entirely sensuality and emotion, which is why writers like them. We commune, late into the night. Me and Artie Gold. "I and cat."

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