

Temenos

Temenos was a seminar study group convened by Gil Bailie in Sonoma, California, meeting throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. We read the great works of Western Civilization and, later, of the Biblical tradition. Many of these poems are recreations and crystallizations of what went on in some of those meetings.

Temenos

a huddle of dry leaves, we lodge
in any doorway. swept
on the first gusts of a rising storm
we haphazardly attend the seminar.

our voices crackle, indistinct – if loud,
then static pieced into meaning
over distant radio; if low,
then brittle brown leaves blown and shifting
in discomfort (we voice our thoughts
in the seminar).

bits of litter rushed suddenly from their places,
we skitter over the pavement – small
complaints raised before a rising wind,
a sweeping dismissal, little voices
that blend within the impending cloudburst,
drive into startling silence,
leave impregnation, immensity, and waiting.

Dry Salvages

It is what it always was –
a groaner that sounds with the swells
unendurable, durable, enduring remainder
of what we always were.

Much as we wish to rush to the sea
the river rises nonetheless in wild flood
destroying, sweeping away pretensions
our presumption to know the sea's eternity
in the cry of the gull.

No one reaching open sea can afford to fail
to attend to the tributary river.

Only the self finds the path to no self.

Objective Correlative

(Shelter from the Storm; Lear)

Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.

Nothing! I have sworn.

The quality of nothing has not such need
to hide itself.

Nothing can be made of nothing.

Nothing connected with nothing.

I have no way.

Wherefore to Dover?

Who's there? Surrender

the terrified measuring psyche

let the storm dismantle

its framework of nothing.

Temenos, Ash Wednesday: The Word

special insight of Judeo-Christian night
beyond the pagan creation story and the deep ecology
creation story, the emergence of the Word

and God said

the *logos spermatikos*, the inseminating Word
neither big bang nor burgeoning green vegetation
leafing forth, but the Word

and its incarnation, the tradition in great danger
without it –

no listening, no obedience
no transformation

where there is deafness, absurdity – *listen*
the WORD
is what says humanity: the koan

*if mountains say bear
and oceans say salmon
what says humanity?*

only we could understand bear or salmon
to be said by mountain or ocean, and that –
that question centers on saying
reveals what says us –

the Word,

brought to consciousness
so that nature now includes and completes
itself. Physical revegetative burgeoning life
is not enough. The Word
can be known only in the negative,
by the light it throws on the inadequate
and the incomplete. It subverts and contradicts,
turning all words inside out, the words
that define and place and know
what is indefinable.

The Word lies as a seed, from the beginning
ripening in the human, coming to fruit,
but still unsaid and unsayable.

The seed in the apple's core
that was planted inside the eating humans
inviting God to impregnate them
and from their mouths the entire tree
blossoming forth, blooming,
limbs breaking, fruit falling to the ground, rotting
and as sap rising up again the no longer innocent
but not yet fully mature
humans singing, speaking, calling to the God
who is already within, seed, sperm, Word,
tree, knowledge.

Temenos Seminar

December 8, 1988

the apples slump
soft flesh, puckered skin
bananas brown
the overripe fruit splits open
spilling slowly to refertilize undug
graves of black winter earth

the lips of old women's mouths
the lines of their cheeks
the slumping line of their backs
down over their hams and the back of thick legs –
now one curve

the old wombs of aging women –
a circle of lamps
candles in paper bags
ring the seminar,
flowers that have passed
from beauty to beauty.

Weaving

Helen weaves the tapestry of war,
weaving the acts that men carry out,
weaving through her life the fabric of which war is made.
Penelope weaves and then undoes her weaving
at night, temporizing, delaying
holding the wrong solution in suspension until the moment is right.
It is only when Andromache leaves her loom
and Hector finds the human warmth of civilized life
breaking into the story of the *Iliad*. And Hector imagines
her at another's loom, weaving again. Leaving, he bids
her go back to her loom. The ancient weaving
is done in the womb and the thread that is pulled with the baby
from the birth canal is cut only twice in a life: once then
and once again at death. Andromache weaves whole cloth
to clothe life; Helen weaves battle, her life is the loom
upon which it is woven. Penelope weaves by day,
unravels by night, trying to suspend life
at a moment at which it might be picked up again.

The Armor of Achilles

only the innocent mourn the loss
of innocence.
not Patroclus, the fair, the youthful –
not Briseus, the fair votary –
no, it is the loss of his armor
that enrages Achilles.
the invertebrate laid bare by the loss of his exoskeleton
soft the inner man exposed,
innocence itself slain by the stripping
of its armor.

sheer innocence to rage
against the loss of the innocent;
the one who survives lives
identified with his armor
covering his great reservoir
of un-lived life; like a baby red-faced
and howling, helpless, vulnerable:
the vaunted wrath of Achilles.

the famous shield of Haephestus, the city there,
the public realm where,
though murder be done, it is done in public,
a people living identified
with their skin, the outer sheath.

all progress since the Trojan War
nothing more than what Haephestus engraved
on the shield of Achilles.
more than two dozen centuries later,
Western Civilization a testament
to how far this set of armor will carry us.

the Myrmidons tremble to look on it,
their knees shake – the Myrmidons
who do not tremble at man-destroying war, who
could look even on the Gorgon's shield – why? because all their furious valor
vaporizes
like a morning mist, the mythology
of anger dissolves, their manhood
threatened by consciousness.

Achilles worries that Patroclus may decay.

Achilles, hoping to re-erect the defenses,
Achilles hoping to find all within unchanged.
Achilles, courting death rather than face change.
Do we live on the surface of Haephestus' shield,
renewing in ritual sacrifice the thin layer of violence
and blood that averts the war of all against all?
The civitas, the polis a mesh
against unbridled rivalry, the war for dominance
and territory. Killers, scapegoats?

Or, the view, just as old, that bases community
on communion, common mind?

“Absolute action”, stepping out of history,
no antecedents
no anticipation of consequences,
no historical dialectic –
the act of free consciousness uprooted
from historical conditions –

an act of the collective unconscious?

the attainment of enlightenment
ordinary reality?

the turning point in the “arms race”, in the Illaid,
racing chariots turn at the point marked
by two white stones leaning against one another,
victim and victor, exhausted, failing
into one another's arms, weeping.

one cries “what have we done?”
the other “what has been done to us?”

everything depends on how this turn is made,
the pivot of history,
the post marking the sacrificial victim
in the arms of the soft invertebrate
stripped of his armor.

in that turning lies revelation.

religere, binding back (not progressive),
cyclic
a spiral

the dialogue with the One who stands over against
and That Thou Art.

not delivered into the arms of the enemy
but the enemy's arms our own, opening.
as old as the old blood sacrifice,
as central to the establishment of human culture,
as renewing as the turn about that point
that lies not in the future,
in spiritual evolution or the awakening of
consciousness,
but emerges beneath the old armor stripped off.

Anthony & Cleopatra

If Cleopatra finds in Anthony
and he in her
that thing which transforms
that which began their encounter
– then what?

Or what *would* it take to wed Desdemona
to the huge Moor – and have it succeed?

They have no relationship but to that
which drew them together – that which
they are transforming in one another.

How will they marry
when the act
moves its very ground?

Abraham & Isaac's Mountain

Going to the mountain-top, for Abraham
the way up was steep, sheer rock at times
under the brilliant searing light of midafternoon.
For Isaac, the way down took the rest of his life.

God will provide. So Abraham took the goat
and stayed his knife. And Isaac left the land of Abimalech,
and returning to his father's land, dug the wells
his father did and gave them the names his father had.

To name success is to give the name of the Enemy
unless success becomes the succeeding moment
and happiness what happens – a failure, an attempt
to name God, who is the only success and the deep enemy.

They flee, though no one pursue.

Aeneas

Surrender –

turning away from the great temptation
to perpetuate the old cycle.
Death of vengeance,

the abundant passion
once rejected supplies energy.

Conscious suffering stands up in a mob
in the midst of a world disintegrating
comes to maturity, accepts responsibility
shuts the gates of war.

Self-control, then gradual assimilation
then transformation.

Winning and losing are intimate
in a dying and rising universe.

A few thousand years is very little time
to reach across
in the breasts of men and women
who are capable.

Retelling restores the story
to something a little more truthful.
The hard facts contain no truth, only
what we've done with those bones.

Original Sin –

being that thing that we have in common,
all humanity,
is not an individual thing
and has nothing to do with personal
alienation. and redemption –
being that thing that lies beyond us all,
all human progress,
has nothing to do with personal
power. each speaks
to the same thing
– death

Faith

Faith dwells in darkness
moving over the face of the Deep
Faith speaks "Thou" into the Unknown.
Faith surrenders and comes to itself
is not impelled; yet –
 Thy will be done.
Faith follows not after the truth
 runs before;
an unbarred gate swinging open
onto a landscape unbounded.
Faith must be done again anew each day
no mere lazy inheritance
received at the reading
 of the Will.

A work that can do nothing
that grace leaves undone.
Faith is a living, not a having,
puts one foot forth to step
where no ground appears,
creates that which it upholds,
forms beneath the foot,
comes up to meet it.

*We put out to sea in a storm while Jesus falls asleep,
tossed on wind-foudered waves.
What comes of us now? He sleeps.
We run to wake Him but stop in awful fear:
He climbs over the side of the boat,
walks the water, holding his hand out to us,
 God –
 there
shouting down the wind, heaving the seas.
We needn't run waken the Divine; it is awake
in the midst of the storm we most fear,
the one that will strip us of who we are.
It is we who sleep and suddenly cry out,
realizing this isn't about personal salvation.
The world is our concern.*

Living it heals and creates. Faith sees.
Death, illness, aging, all
beside the point it sees.

Faith Helps Us Back into the Boat

Faith helps us back into the boat
recrosses the inland sea
and then forgives
the sin of simply being.

Faith is no salve, but an expensive perfumed oil
best spent anointing death.
It is what we are called to do with death
calling forth that which redeems.

We enter faith when, coming to the end
we can go no further
choosing the ground
on which we rest
trusting in what, so intimately known
we know in the same way we know ourselves.

Crucifixion

comes like a bloom to the dead
land. the wounded king
lay bleeding many years before the rose
bloomed in the land; the rocks bled;
the quest, the sacrifice, the passion
were suffered; the trial by blood;
and the land
lay waste many years before,
the land sickened with the old king
and lay with him in a bed of shame,
in gray destitution, in misery unhealed –
all this
before, many years
before the crucifixion came
like a breath of spring
voiding the meaningless waste.

Give us this Day our Daily Bread

The bread of tomorrow and of today,
what is needed to go on – no more.

The bread that guards against the famine of God,
the God on whom we feed, God feeding God.

Give enough for one day, and the next morning
enough for that – to this we are called,
that bread will be daily provided.

and Lead us not into Temptation

but deliver us, spare us from that
test we know we would not pass
allow us instead to spare another –
only that way, forgiveness rips through the heart.

Putting Out to Sea in a Storm

Putting out to sea in a storm, our little boat,
our few companions. *Midway this way of life*
we're bound upon Jesus falls asleep.
Having left the dead
to bury the dead, we toss, wind-foundered.
What comes of us now? He sleeps.
Shake Him – our little faith.
Listen instead with the ear of wind
and upheaving waves. Listen,
hear what they hear – God out there in the midst
of the dark lake shouting down the wind,
heaving the seas. No need to wake the Divine.
It is the storm itself, the storm we fear
will strip us of what we need to survive.
But we must live on other bread and water
now, the storm.

Night Sea Journey in a Cooking Pot

the dark night
the cloud of unknowing
the tempest
on the sea of the unconscious
out on the sea of God
out on the unknown alone
the deeps suddenly
heaving underfoot –
the best we can do
is not to provide ourselves
with a small boat
and hang on –
these are the waters
on which we find Jesus out walking,
and blown sideways in the wild spray
we must get out of the boat ourselves
and walk the water too,
grasping at a word
that bids us to safety
where we most fear to put our feet
the abyss no longer hidden
faith walks longing through the worst storm of all.

Longing for Ground

*let us sit upon the ground
and discuss the death of kings.*

Richard II

humus, the humility of the ground.
longing for ground.
ground, decomposition of living things.
fertile ground, the ground of being.
grounded, centered, at peace.
stepping onto sacred ground, one
removes one's shoes. we bow
to the ground, no grounds
to do otherwise. only the well-
grounded know, only those in whose
upbringing is their grounding,
only those for whom the ground
beneath their feet and the ground
of their soul are common ground.

The Grace of Fate

two sides of a coin –
grace and fate.
why is there suffering
in an unjust world?
it is this lottery
of the gods
and it is this sacrifice –
to make holy
to give over to the Gods
to restore the primordial unity
to put together again
what was once whole
and has been broken –
this grace and this fate.

Throwing Out Junk

Not the dogma not the scripture
not the holy relics not the images
not the crucifixion not the assumption
not the resurrection not the annunciation –
NOT this. Not the temple
not the tabernacle not the muezzin
not the church not the alter –
nothing that is not lived.
Not the Bible not the cross
not the Lord's Prayer not the Virgin –
none of these un-lived.
God unfettered, God unimagined, God undocumented,
God unorganized; ONLY God
only walking before God,
only saying Thou.