

EDITORIAL

The Image

Image fashions our understanding. Humans learn by picturing, as evidenced plainly by studies that demonstrate how schoolchildren grasp mathematical concepts more sharply by adding and subtracting apples and oranges. We ground our knowledge by making the elemental and theoretical concrete. Or not so concrete, for what is the image but an airy depiction of the thing itself on our inner visual field? But the image speaks of the thing or idea; it reminds us of it. The image is the relationship, the doorway, so to speak, between us and things, people, ideas. It is the door that always implies another side.

When a word-image of a thing bears with it rich and myriad meanings -- a plate heaped with spoils from different lands -- it is called metaphor. The metaphor is not static; it transcends the vertical and horizontal planes of time and space. A veritable time machine and shape-shifter, it works at a diagonal angle, dragging with it like a threaded needle its encounters to each moment it is encountered. It brings us away from the surface moment and shows us the shifts and rifts in the fabric of existence. Its power is emotive and binding; as such it takes us back to the clouded past and through the strange cultures of other peoples in order to launch us, in our unique moments of undertaking, outward, into something new, something that was before unimaginable.

When we are open to an image, the image strikes us, moves us as an other, pulling us toward it while we draw it near. To speak of a relationship between the image and ourselves in terms of spatiality may sound odd. How can one draw near to an image when it is only a mere epiphenomenon of imagination? Yet to speak of an image already cut off from embodied engagement with the world-- with things and others-- is already to have engaged with an image that has been severed from its residence in the world. Images can wander, homeless, vagrant forms, outlines with little depth or feeling.

We are accustomed to believing that the image is an internal projection superimposed upon the world of brute reality. The image is private, subjective, and ethereal, while reality is public, objective and physical (Hillman). If space is measured in terms of extension, we cannot be moved by images, nor can we dwell near them, embrace them, touch them. They could not shelter, hold, and touch us. Such an image of the image imagines the image without world, world without image. But may the image be imagined otherwise?

Perhaps to imagine the image otherwise is not to will the image to be otherwise, but to allow it to be. If we were to listen to, even touch the image, let the image be an image, we might come to hear the call of the image to be imagined otherwise. And perhaps we might learn that imagining the image without world and world without image has come to a breaking point. The image might reveal a symptomatic world, a world of "breakdown," and we might wonder if this pathology of the world is the world's response through the image to our preoccupation with the internal imagination at the expense of the world's imagination. Perhaps world and image would reveal our folly in believing that it is *we* who possess the image when the image has all along possessed *us*.

One of the great strengths of literature, especially poetry, is that it makes us keenly and palpably aware of the act and process by which the image emerges, "imagining the image." The poem, a project that demands the creative and visionary efforts of the poet, poem, and reader, is a map of change in that the manifest images and their lure as radically altering entities are spelled out from a beginning to an end. When the poem or story is physically placed before us, we can traverse the whole from the origin of the so-called metaphorical device to its denouement and fulfillment in meaning. Yet the image itself has no end; a fairly mercurial thing, its fulfillment in meaning is achieved by continuing with us, and it imparts new feeling and knowledge in whatever context we meet it again.

In Seamus Heaney's "Punishment," the speaker of the poem relates witnessing the exhumation of a primitive woman's body from a bog. The poem, a terrifying and dark one, begins with the lines: " I can feel the tug/ of the halter at the nape of her neck/ . . . I can see her drowned/ body in the bog . . ." (192). Immediately we are engaged with this metaphor, this image. Not only the poet and speaker of the poem are hard at the work of imagination, but we as readers are enticed, *possessed* by the image so much that we can suddenly feel as this woman felt and see this new dark landscape as well. Heaney continues later in the poem:

I am the artful voyeur
of your brain's exposed
and darkened combs,
your muscles' webbing
and all your numbered bones. (193)

The inside images conjured by this earthy, somatic language serve to bring us, though we may not be immediately conscious of it, to a dark and whispered secret, a hidden knowledge. The vision with which we are gifted-- the speculated biography and marred features of the mirewoman-- is horrifying and captivating. Heaney finally,

resolutely shocks us by paralleling her fate with that of adulteresses who rendezvous with British soldiers in conflicted, modern-day Ireland:

I who have stood dumb
When your betraying sisters
Cauled in tar,
Wept by the railings

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge. (193)

In a few quiet, resonating lines, the primitive and modern ways of life are brought together. Participating in this art, entranced by these sad images, we, like the speaker, understand the undercurrent, the powerful pull of ritual, of human interaction and feeling. Although such images hurt us, we find that we cannot judge; instead we sit with this knowledge, we let the image be. Thus substantially related, the image invites us to acknowledge other because inevitably, behind the door, *other* makes up the moiety, completes the whole of us.

Art therapist Shaun McNiff shows us that to "stick with the image" is to engage in a sustained communion with "the other." We leave the image behind when we adhere rigidly to what Blake called a "single vision." Such a "stuckness" means that we have "left the image and become enveloped in thoughts" (55). When the image is freed to be itself, it reveals itself as a nexus of multiple meanings, which shift and oscillate with the context of the world and even speak to us of our own lives. The image also gathers the world, but not as a mere projection of human signification. The world can reveal itself, for example, as "inundating me with its unalleviated suffering" (Hillman, 99).

To "stick with the image" is to engage with the image phenomenologically, for it asks the image to show itself from itself. A fine example is depicted in Melville's *Moby Dick*, as Ishmael contemplates the rich, unfolding meaning of the whale's tale:

Out of the bottomless profundities the gigantic tail seems spasmodically snatching at the highest heaven. So in dreams, have I seen majestic Satan thrusting forth his tormented colossal claw from the Baltic of Hell. But in gazing at such scenes, it is all what mood you are in; If in the Dantean, the devils will occur to you; If in that of Isaiah, the archangels. (263)

"Mood," as Ishmael speaks of it, is not a mere projection upon the blank canvas of the world; it frees the whale as *other* to speak within the clearing of world. In being thus spoken to, Ishmael is transformed and discovers that both himself and the other constantly unfold in a perpetual system of becoming. As Mazis writes, "One could read all of *Moby Dick* as a demonstration of the gradual phenomenological 'letting be' of the whale as phenomenon for Ishmael" (118).

When we think of image, we think of it as mimetic, a mere copy, secondary to the actual. Yet when we speak of the image as resemblance we can consider Giacometti who writes, "What interests me in all paintings is resemblance-- that is, what is resemblance for me: something which makes me discover more of the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 165). Or we can consider Andre Marchand's revelation:

In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me, where speaking to me . . . I was there, listening . . . I think that the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it . . . I expect to be inwardly submerged, buried. Perhaps I paint to break out. (Merleau-Ponty, 167)

The artist teaches us to see the world as the "coming-to-itself of the visible" (Merleau-Ponty, 182). The artist returns us to the image and shows us how to listen, touch and taste the image and how to be near or far away from it. The artist helps us to discover a different space, neither intrapsychic nor external, in the moment prior to the cleavage of subject and object, wherein the flesh of the image is both sides of eye and world. The image, the artist shows, is carnal to the core, for it shows itself in the moment before the flesh of the body becomes body and the earth becomes world.

Reader, as you ponder and pore over the poems, essays, and art of this autumn issue and its diverse themes of visions, doorways, subjectivity, dreams, etymologies, love, experience and change; as you sit reading at your desk, or perhaps curled in a chair under lamplight with this small volume in your lap, reflect on the words of W.B. Yeats' resounding conclusion in "Byzantium":

Those images yet
Fresh images beget,
That dolphin-torn, that gong tormented sea. (249)

And know that the anomalous image formed in the vast and formless schism between thought and the world is our constant mediator and reminder that the little knowing we have springs forth violently from the ground itself, a Hippocrene for the fertile muses kicked open by the hoof of a winged horse.

The Editors

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