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Parables

*To Accompany Twelve Water-
colors by L. Albert-Lasard*

*Suddenly a strident anger runs through
the aviary. They rise astonished and
take off one by one into the unreal.*

R. M. RILKE, *The Flamingos*
(Jardin des Plantes)

Man is neither angel nor beast.

BLAISE PASCAL

When there were no more than Beast and Angel,
And GOD lively everywhere, in that Garden;
The flyers in the air, and on the ground
The crawlers, and in the profound
Soundless abyss the darting shiverers;

When God and Things and Beasts and Angels
And Light the Archangel were all that were:
IT WAS THE EPOCH OF THE PURE.

Pure the Lion, pure the Ant,
Pure the Bull and the Serpent,
Pure the Dragon, pure the Virtues,
Pure the Thrones and the three high Orders;

POEMS IN THE ROUGH

Pure was the Earth, pure was the Light,
They were all pure,
Each being that which he was,
Each doing that for which he was made,
Faultless and marvelous:

Each the fruit of a Thought of life
Exactly converted,
Without remainder.

AND I, all this I knew
With an utter strange clarity;
And yet was aloof, standing
Apart from my inward word.

And then, as I was this notable distraction,
No longer a someone, no more than my own fraction,
As my mind's eyes reflected this purity,
Receiving as the mirror of a calm water
The balance and brilliance of things without flaw,
Innocent of notion,

Look! from between the leaves came
To light a Figure, a Figure came
Into the light,
Looked all about him,

And he was "neither Angel nor Beast."

THE GLASS of my sheer presence quivered
As the calm of a calm water
Wrinkles to the course of a form,
Or as when from the full depths and the height's
shadows
Glances without emerging
A creature one never sees.

PARABLES

On my enchantment's mirror of virgin duration
Appeared a trembling;
Over the forehead of the pure hour scattered
A kind of question that bowled like a leaf
The rosy picture; and like a cry,
Like the grip of an unexpected hand,
An unknown power was closing about my heart.

MAN was this event:
Such the name that I give you.

I KNEW, as if within HIM, that he was neither

ANGEL NOR BEAST:

By unexampled suffering I knew him,
Unexampled, unpicturable,
And nowhere in the body;

A wonder of incomparable suffering
As of the sole and insupportable Sun
Whose anguish lights the world. . . .
O pain of the Sun they call joy and splendor,
Your brilliance is a bitter cry, your agony
Burns the eye! . . .

HE FELT, there was, I sensed it,
A presence of sorrow apart,
Denied to the Pure Existences,
Neither ANGEL NOR BEAST can sustain it.

FOR ANGEL IS ANGEL, BEAST BEAST,
Nothing of either is a thing of the other, .
There is nothing between them.
But HE was neither the one nor the other,
This I sensed with instant perfect knowledge,
Knowledge of suffering, suffering of knowledge;

POEMS IN THE ROUGH

And MAN's silence and my silence
Were interchanging spirits instant by instant. . . .

"ANGEL," said in me He whose absolute presence
I had made my own:

"ANGELS," he said to them,
"Eternal marvels of light and love,

Pure acts

O only knowable by desire,

By hope, by pride, by love,

By all that is a presence of absence, You are

Still mysteries that burn

A little higher than my highest I. . . .

"BUT YOU, BEAST,

The more I regard you the more I become MAN

In Mind, O Beast,

And the more you become strange,

For Mind knows only the things that are of Mind.

"IN VAIN by Mind I hunt you,

In vain by Mind set snares

Baited with gifts of Mind:

ORIGIN? PURPOSE? PRINCIPLE? CAUSE?

(OR CHANCE even, and all the TIME that needs)

O LIFE,

The more I think of you, O LIFE,

The less to thought you yield. . . .

"TO DIE, not less than to be born,

Eludes all thought:

Love, death, are not for Mind

That eating amazes, sleeping abashes.

My face is a stranger;

PARABLES

The contemplation of my hands
Poses me questions; to their latent powers,
To the numbers of their fingers, no reply.
Not by thought could one divine
The roll call of his members nor their forms:
And yet through them alone I know the Other.

“The happiness of the BEAST is all happy,
A joy without shadow.
He does not and he cannot know
The adulteration of joy with sorrow,
Of sorrow with joy,
Nor the mixing of time with time,
Or of sleep with waking.
No matter how quick to the leaf’s least bruising,
He savors the moment, consumes the gift:
Pure he is thereby.

“AND NO REGRETS, remorse, suspicions, care:
For what is not is not;
What will be is not; and what would be;
What was, what might have been,
They are not. . . .
Nothing departs from order: his mindings backward,
His lookings forward, do not dilute his present.
Pure he is thereby.

“BUT WE! . . .”