

Tom Mandel

Comment On A Poem

*Open Rebuke (Concealed Love)**

Sometimes a poet knows exactly what he means but not for long, for as long as it takes to write the poem but not much longer. My poem meditates on the fate of its protagonist and on a force that controls that fate. This force seems to be divine, and the protagonist appears engaged on the study of that enigmatic force – whose rebuke is open, whose love is concealed – and to be fascinated by it. Although his study may yield no understanding, the fascination itself is nonetheless a kind of recompense for fate. In other words, however helpless, my protagonist is not a stoic; he cannot be, for he is a Jew or stands for Jews. And his theology is clearly enough expounded in part two of the poem. In the narrative of part one, the brother and sister may echo the *Song of Songs* (although they didn't echo it consciously in my mind at writing). In parts three and four, my protagonist, now a poet and willing to discuss himself and his fellows, seems to be enjoying his isolation. But in part five we see something else emerge, something unreconciled and abandoned but in contact with itself. The poem ends in a kind of fugue on the subjects of fragility and durability; its morphology shifts from a figure of Adam as Humpty-dumpty to an image of a jar, a container inevitably empty but which reminds us of what it once held. Did it ever contain more than the memory it holds here? The other day I happened upon Wallace Stevens' famous poem, *Anecdote of the Jar*, where an object randomly placed works to transform an entire landscape. In my poem it seems the opposite: human beings do all they can, and it fits in a jar. The big inside the little – in Jewish theology that's divinity, the force I referenced above.

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* Published in *Letters of the Law* (Los Angeles, 1994 : Sun & Moon) and in *Best American Poetry 1993* (New York 1993: Scribners, ed. Louise Gluck & David Lehman)