

7 POEMS

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SIT-CALM

In the excitement phase
we think we want something
we're made up to seem
exaggeratedly unfit for,
say, touch.

This is the funny part,
but also the dangerous
moment. Right away
were talked out of it –
no harm done –
by a band of wise-acre friends.

“I don't know
what I'm thinking,” we say,
to a spike of merriment.
Here is the warm
human part
which dissipates tension

THING

We love our cat
for her self
regard is assiduous
and bland,

for she sits in the small
patch of sun on our rug
and licks her claws
from all angles

and it is far
superior
to “balanced reporting”

though, of course,
it is also
the very same thing.

THEORY OF EVERYTHING

It both hurtles
and fidgets,
otherwise
its empty space?

*

A wide swath
of baby-talk —
blue
and feathery green,
I insisted,
swinging up,
but Mother
was no longer playing.

*

Everything that stays
once meaning has cleared out
is *true*?

*

Tomorrow
the sun eats the earth,
now
so many leaves are new,
not asking
to be recognized.

EMPTY

The present
must be kept empty
so that anything
can happen:

The Queen of England visits
Amanda's hot tub
as a prophylaxis?

*a discrepancy
between ones view of things
and what comes to pass.*

*

Its ironic when something
has a meaning to someone

“Gotta go
Gotta go
Gotta go
right now”

*other than that
intended by the speaker.*

sings the bladder-control model
from the fidgety TV
above the dying woman's bed.

*

It's ironic when a set
contains no elements.

*Of a person, frivolous.
Of a body, shrunken.*

THE SUBJECT

It's as if we've just been turned human
in order to learn
that the beetle we've caught
and are now devouring
is our elder brother
and that we
are a young prince.

*

I was just going to click
on "Phoebe is changed
into a mermaid
tomorrow!" when suddenly
it all changed
into the image
of a Citizen watch.

*

If each moment is in love
with its image
in the mirror of
adjacent moments
(as if matter stuttered),
then, of course, we're restless!
"What is a surface?"
we ask,
trying to change the subject.

ONCE

1

Once there were people among whom
each one had to be convinced
she was the most wondrous alive
in order to go on living.
It was creation ex nihilo
all over again.
Crews were organized in shifts.
“Skin as white as snow
and hair as black as night,” they chanted.
In off hours, everyone smirked
at the result
and called it sentimental.

2

At last the camp melodrama
of Dan Rather
relaxes
into the pseudo
sibling raillery
of the local newscast.
Since we’re being escorted
from moment to moment
by what’s already
familial,
we should be able
to follow this track
back
home
to our previous thought.

3

The opposite
of nothingness
is direction

BACK

The teacher said
two mirror images
could come into being
by borrowing
from zero – but only
if they agreed
to cancel one another out.

We followed
from inert matter
by offering
to eat each other up.

*

What sort of place is
existence
since we can “come into” it?
A point coincides;
it has no dimension.

Some say
matter’s really energy
and energy is force
of law
and law is just
tautology.

*

We were taught
to have faces
by a face
looking “back”

RAE ARMANTROUT's most recent books are *Up to Speed* (Wesleyan, 2004), *The Pretext* (Green Integer, 2001) and *Veil: New and Selected Poems* (Wesleyan University Press, 2001). Her poems have been included in numerous anthologies, including *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology* (1993), *American Women Poets in the 21st Century: Where Language Meets the Lyric Tradition* (Wesleyan, 2002), *The Great American Prose Poem: Poe to the Present* (Scribner, 2003) and *The Best American Poetry* of 1988, 2001, 2002, and 2004. She is Professor of Writing and American Literature at the University of California, San Diego.

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