

Empty / Fill

by David Myers
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I think that when he pulled into town he must have expected me to bend over backwards or forwards or to have some extreme reaction that I in fact was not prepared to have. I think he thought we were long lost friends who loved each other forever and had completion fantasies about our life together in a cottage in Maine or Northern California. I was unsure of how to tell him that this was not the case, that while I enjoyed the time we had spent together, I thought (hind-sightedly) of that time in my life with a quiet Buddhist solemnity. He was part of my ancient floating world history, a floating world that I never expected to find me in my new home. I had gotten away from it all. I was tired of those people and places.

“Home is where the heart is,” I said, “Home is where the heart is,” and the homeheart unity is malleable and moving—and now I had finally moved myself to a different and new location. Jeans were just dirty enough that I wondered if anyone would notice them, to say, really, I wondered if that floating world would notice, would that past in me take a look at where I am now? And what would it think of this place? Alamogordo, New Mexico of all places to be, a state not even in the country for which it’s named.

This was the beginning of my thinking on the issue, walking down the street raining, the lump lop of my feet against the cement, writing haikus about the gummy asphalt used to repair the streets, “This sticky wonder! Hardened surface growing beneath,” and later, “Sun sets tonight: a long road yet explored.” I felt I had a long way to go, still nowhere close the master Shiki and his vivid poem, “The sparrow hops along the veranda, with wet feet.” But this is the highway in the panhandle plains, gummy asphalt on the street, wind whispering thru my hair like plants on the ground. This is no Japan. Shiki is more a bush that I don’t want to sleep on than a Japanese master poet. Not on this highway. This highway was at once masterfully two paintings: man walking down sun-drenched highway, light wind, New Mexico heat (sky everywhere) and secondly, man in rainy day on highway, cars zipping by, water splash, slash in the sky (grays and shadows). And here I walked. Pit. Pat. Raindrops falling, sun setting, mind humming...

My friend Mike had pulled into town a week ago. A “surprise reunion” when I saw him at my front door. I was excited to see him as one would expect, and I embraced him warmly on that first day. We immediately began drinking beer and telling little stories about what we each had

been up to for the past 4 years. “Well,” Mike had been in Northern California for a while, fighting forest fires, before moving to New York to pursue a career as a producer for tv and film. I listened to his story, as etiquette commands, with all due respect and interest. It did occur to me, while listening to Mike’s impressive tales, that our relationship never hinged on story telling. Our friendship solidified over the year that we spent together studying abroad in college. We traveled across Europe, noting the differences in the cafes from London to Budapest. Mostly, we drank elaborate coffee beverages we had never heard of and made fun of how queer and wrong other cultures seemed. It was a friendship based largely on making fun of others, not on regaling each other with stories from out pasts. As Mike shared his adventures, I found my mind wandered and I recalled a coffee beverage we once had together in Southern Italy. The barista made an espresso and put it and some crushed ice into a martini shaker. He would shake it vigorously for 15 to 30 seconds (quite a long time if you think about it) and serve the cold coffee in a martini glass. For some chemical reason I don’t understand, the coffee foamed at the top and you were left with a sort of deliciously cold, milkless, cappuccino-like beverage. What was it called?

Mike looked good. Like a man, in fact. His curly hair which once seemed goofy and youthful now seemed to hold stories of adventures fighting fires in California, meeting women in bars in New York City. I wondered if all my old friends suddenly looked like grown-ups and began running through a photo album in my head.

This was how his visit began, honestly welcoming, though somewhat distant. By the end of the week however, I had had enough. He never shared and plans of leaving my house, returning the couch to its normal usage of naps, snacks and t.v., and after a somewhat complicated conversation over whom was making breakfast and what was being made, I stormed out of my home and began walking out of town.

Alamogordo, New Mexico. The town I left. “Had enough of that old town anyway,” I thought. The truth was that my time there was never intended to be all that permanent. The intent was to take a brush to my insides and clean all that crap out. I wanted to get away from the floating world that kept following me around and I wanted to reach some kind of holy emptiness, to

reserve my energies for two no-things: ideas and infinity. Alamogordo was the closest town to The White Sands Desert and I had struck out to camp in this desert. I did so for several days in fact, was hot and backed during the day, cold and shivering at night, but finally empty and happy. I had decided to rent an apartment in Alamogordo, so I could visit the desert as often as I needed.

When I was a child, it was my feeling that I would fill whatever space I was living in, as if I were a gas cloud. Normally, I spent time in my bedroom and would therefore have to take up all of that space—to fill it (my particles stretching out against the walls). When I was home alone, I was forced to fill the entire house with energy, which exhausted me and completely drained me out. The desert though, seems endless—it isn't, of course—but it seems endless and so empty, so finally and definitively empty, filled by the emptiness, full of nothing and sand, so full of nothing that it becomes something. A unit of nothing. There is no pressure to fill it, you couldn't if you tried. “That makes me happy,” I thought and rubbed my belly (which too was filled with nothing).

But now I was being followed, or visited at least, by someone who knew nothing of my hope for emptiness. He came with a crash into my temporary home and began talking about the richness of life, sharing the fullness of his experience. This was terrible. What does he want from me? To sit and talk about society? Relationships with women? I had no interest. So here I am, lump, lop, lump, lop against the rainy pavement.

(counting the syllables on my hand)

crowded couch
with old world friends
emptiness is all

Then, in its big wisdom, the flat nothing came. Mountains in the distance, sure, big rocky things jutting in all kinds of different ways, but for right now it's flat blank, empty and holy. I took a deep breath, bent forwards and backwards, opened my arms, sunshine on my chest and sat down, thinking how it would never end.