

POEMS

Jeffrey Wainwright

THINGS ARE NOT WHAT THEY SEEM

Things are not what they seem.
This is the big idea of the detective story,
as of Plato. What is really happening
as I study his palm is that the conjuror
has taken my braces and my watch.
There is always a second world
and it is not even out there,
we're just watching the wrong thing.

But in the worst of mysteries there are no clues,
or, if you must believe in them, then they cannot be read.
Who took my braces, my watch, the lost children may,
the authorities say, never be known,
save in the parallel and smug universe of crimes.

BACK IN THE NEW ROUTINE

I am always on the lookout for routines,
and perhaps I can make one out of what I'm doing now.
I have woken early and stayed put.
Behind the shutters it is dark so what we call the day
is beginning only in noises: bird-song obviously,
which is at present an eight-call sequence
gargling in a pigeon's throat, other note-rows are
too fast to count. There are trees in a light wind,
a thousand leaves perhaps, and I realise
I have never thought to wonder how many leaves
a given tree might carry on a given day—
that will not be routine. A car starts and idles
as the driver checks her bag for tissues and for keys,
and further off—light is coming in now—a dull then whining pitch
resolves itself into a wood-saw. Whoever works it,
already stripped to the waist, is properly guarded I hope,
and alert. And little of this, really, is what I hear,
and what would the routine accomplish? Haphazard
attention? Provide exercise for the inner eye?
Be itself (reason enough for routines, but for this one?)
A wasp is buzzing by the wall.
There are, I'm sure, surrounding worlds.



TO CONCLUDE

He had been waiting for a taxi, Pamuk says.
He had got home at last, and just as he put his key in the lock
he concluded that any meaning anyone found in the world
he found by chance.

I'm not happy with this.
Must it not mean that if the only meaning comes by chance
chance is the only meaning?
But understanding taxis and understanding birds,
earth-worms or foxgloves,
following the methods each for each,
might reveal the same algorithm eventually,
and each algorithm slot into the next,
ever outwards until we have some such triumphal cry as
it is *l'amor che muove il sole e l'altre stelle!*
and, before you laugh, if one thing is to move
heaven and earth might it not best be love?
There is a voracity for laws which I know I feel,
just like the man approaching his own front door,
I would conclude, conclude.

