

The Deaf Dancing to Rock

The eardrums of the deaf are already broken; they like it to dance away the pain of silence, of a world where people blink and wince and smirk and burst into tears over words they do not understand. As they dance the world reaches out to them, from the vibrating walls. Now they hear the ongoing drone in its nearly endless fall through space; they hear seedlings through the crust of the earth in split-second thumps, and in part of the world, the thud of billions of leaves hitting the ground apart and together, in the intricate rhythmic patterns we cannot hear. Their feet, knees, hips, enact the rhythms of the universe. The arms signal the sea and pull its great waves ashore.

1. Do gorillas have birthdays?
*Yes. Like the rainbow, they happen.
Like the air, they are not observed.*
2. Do butterflies make a noise?
*The wire in the butterfly's tongue
hums gold.
Some men hear butterflies
even in winter.*
3. Are they part of our family?
They forgot us, who forgot how to fly.
4. Who tied my navel? Did God tie it?
*God made the thread: O man, live forever!
Man made the knot: enough is enough.*
5. If I drop my tooth in the telephone
will it go through the wires and bite someone's ear?
*I have seen earlobes pierced by a tooth of steel.
It loves what lasts.
It does not love flesh.
It leaves a ring of gold in the wound.*
6. If I stand on my head
will the sleep in my eye roll up into my head?
*Does the dream know its own father?
Can bread go back to the field of its birth?*
7. Can I eat a star?
*Yes, with the mouth of time
that enjoys everything.*
8. Could we Xerox the moon?
*This is the first commandment:
I am the moon, thy moon.
Thou shalt have no other moons before thee.*
9. Who invented water?
The hands of the air, that wanted to wash each other.
10. What happens at the end of numbers?
*I see three men running toward a field.
At the edge of the tall grass, they turn into light.*
11. Do the years ever run out?
*God said, I will break time's heart.
Time ran down like an old phonograph.
It lay flat as a carpet.
At rest on its threads, I am learning to fly.*

Silent Poem

backroad leafmold stonewall chipmunk
underbrush grapevine woodchuck shadblow
woodsmoke cowbarn honeysuckle woodpile
sawhorse bucksaw outhouse wellsweep
backdoor flagstone bulkhead buttermilk
candlestick ragrug firedog brownbread
hilltop outcrop cowbell buttercup
whetstone thunderstorm pitchfork steeplebush
gristmill millstone cornmeal waterwheel
watercress buckwheat firefly jewelweed
gravestone groundpine windbreak bedrock
weathercock snowfall starlight cockcrow

"Disintegration" is by Richard Kostalanetz (1970); "homage to my hips" Clifton (1980); "Questions My Son Asked Me, Answers I Never Gave Him" is by I (1982); "The Deaf Dancing to Rock" is by Lisel Mueller (1979); "Drift" is by I (1983); "Silent Poem" is by Robert Francis (1970). (The dates given indicate when first published in a book.) For a student response to "Drift," see pages 450 and 46

Drift

Imagine bouncing bumping humping over a cliff
the briskets heaving the baskets hooping the birds inside out
Imagine settling out of the high air
loops beaks tiny dolls with inch-long skirts

Then imagine rain The draggle of it
glinting mud drying paste
one doll's skirt over its head
the feathers stuck their quills all whichways
and wind winds

homage to my hips

these hips are big hips
they need space to
move around in.
they don't fit into little
petty places. these hips
are free hips.
they don't like to be held back.
these hips have never been enslaved,
they go where they want to go
they do what they want to do.
these hips are mighty hips.
these hips are magic hips.
i have known them
to put a spell on a man and
spin him like a top!

DISINTEGRATION

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