

# MERIDIAN

The Semi-Annual  
from the  
University of Virginia

Issue 9 ♦ Spring/Summer 2002

DAVID YOUNG

## *Plato and the Fall*

Socrates says that trees have nothing to teach us. And with that, the fall begins, the human fall from grace. A fall the trees could, of course, teach us about.

Plato can have a dialogue with his own texts; he writes them out, he studies them, he has more thoughts, the process now has its own momentum. Who needs trees? Who needs winds to breathe with, streams to enter and converse with? We fall from the world into language, a delicate, terrible prison.

I babble, therefore I am, thinks Descartes, a little later. Beyond his window, the world fades away, flattening and draining. Leaves stop talking; tongues are the only tongues.

This labyrinth, this mental forest stocked with non-trees. Memories are stalking me, thinking's a walkabout. I raise my hand within my mind and wave. To what?

*Petrarch Watches the Moon Rise Over the Vaucluse*

What does it mean to say an aging man loves a younger woman? Phyllis is depicted riding around on Aristotle's back, in his study, among his books. He's happy, apparently, just feeling her warm fundament and full buttocks on his old back.

Emotional chaos, forming into an order of opposites: his humiliation, her indifference.

\*

Why would he not love youth, love beauty, things he is not? We revisit our necessary energies by any means we can, hoping the visits are relatively harmless. The angel of age is a sleepy fellow, a shaggy woodman, a puked-out volcano.

Youth and beauty are such a headlong thrill when you don't possess them yourself.

And yet one feels ridiculous. "I don't wish to play Pantalone," said M, looking a little desperately at me.

\*

A peach orchard stretches eastward from this point.

I walk with you often, even under icy skies. Fires smolder on some horizon.

And whoever drinks from this particular well can taste the underlying bitterness in its clear sweet water.

\*

A darkened village and a careful stroll through, holding a lantern. If a shutter would swing wide and a hand and wrist appear, beckoning. But it's just a theater set, already being folded and carted off to storage.

\*

A rock and another rock. And the name of this flower, is it aconite?

Mornings filling with birdsong. Even the gulls want to be musical, knifing through clustered mist, mewing.

And is the imagined mouth the one we really kiss? Can one kiss, innocently bestowed, flower forever, a moisture and softness that mollify the demon?

\*

Simple visits together, one to a shop, one to a large open-air market. Two lunches. A brief look at a small room, neatly kept. A chair next to a window.

A bag of bay leaves, bought in a dark and fragrant emporium, gradually used up for cooking.

\*

To take communion between your legs!