

Poem in Three Parts [readings 40]
– John Ashbery

mark so

for Andrew Miller, Jon Jackson, and Martin Back

reader(s)

*each of 3 text parts read aloud, quite normal
next to/open to each other, somehow together: a triptych*

[1. Love

dividing, expanding division

[2. Courage

making consistent; continuous

[3. I Love the Sea

rêve—distraction; pauses, clouds

(each part, a simple study in a different feeling of voice)

*13 may – 29 july 2011
portland, me / denton, tx / joshua tree*

1. Love

[to Jason Brogan]

“Once I let a guy blow me.
I kind of backed away from the experience.
Now years later, I think of it
Without emotion. There has been no desire to repeat,
No hangups either. Probably if the circumstances were right
It could happen again, but I don't know,
I just have other things to think about,
More important things. Who goes to bed with what
Is unimportant. Feelings are important.
Mostly I think of feelings, they fill up my life
Like the wind, like tumbling clouds
In a sky full of clouds, clouds upon clouds.”

Nameless shrubs running across a field
That didn't drain last year and
Isn't draining this year to fall short
Like waves at the end of a lake,
Each with a little sigh,
Are you sure this is what the pure day
With its standing light intends?
There are so many different jobs:
It's sufficient to choose one, or a fraction of one.
Days will be blue elsewhere with their own purpose.
One must bear in mind one thing.
It isn't necessary to know what that thing is.
All things are palpable, none are known.
The day fries, with a fine conscience,
Shadows, ripples, underbrush, old cars.
The conscience is to you as what is known,
The unknowable gets to be known.
Familiar things seem a long way off.

2. Courage

[to Manfred Werder]

In a diamond-paned checked shirt
To be setting out this way:
A blah morning
Not too far from home (home
Is a modest one-bedroom apartment,
City-owned and operated),
The average debris of the journey
Less than at first thought,
Smell of open water,
Troughs, special pits.
It all winds back again
In time for evening's torque:
So much we could have done,
So much we did do.
Weeds like skyscrapers against the blue vault of heaven:
Were is it to end? What is this? Who are these people?
Am I myself, or a talking tree?

3. I Love the Sea

[to Sam Sfirri]

There is no promise but lots
Of intimacy the way yellowed land narrows together.
This part isn't very popular
For some reason: the houses need repairs,
The cars in the yards are too new.
The enclosing slopes dream and are forgetful.
There are joyous, warm patches
Amid nondescript trees.
My dream gets obtuse:
When I woke up this morning I noticed first
That you weren't there, then prodded
Slowly back into the dream:
These trains, people, beaches, rides
In happiness because their variety
Is outlived but still there, outside somewhere,
In the side yard, maybe.

Ivy is blanketing one whole wall.
The time is darker
For fast reasons into everything, about what concerns it now.
We could sleep together again but that wouldn't
bring back the profit of these dangerous dreams of the sea,
All that crashing, that blindness, that blood
One associates with other days near the sea
Although it persists, like the blindness of noon.