

The Old Meaning/Moaning Dichotomy

On bad days I seek a theoretical basis
for my actions, a point of origin, a strategy,
a thread to pull me through,
family tree, concentric circles,
dates of birth and death, lists. Because
meaning is not so much in things
as in the story the thing implies,
like melody implies harmony,
a setting that makes the pattern perceptible,
lets the tune make sense. Because
being challenged is not the same as being thwarted,
and the progression from classical
to whatever comes after classical
has to do with sympathy—familiarity with
and fundamental acceptance of
the implied organizing structure—
making departures from an implied standard
without rejecting the standard on principle.
Our overriding impulse is toward resolution—
this subsumes both the pleasure principle
and the death wish—coming and going.
When we behave radically, or irrationally,
it is because we do not perceive ourselves
in meaningful relation to the field,
and this is very distressing, even terrifying.

This is chaos—the inability to perceive
the ordering principle at work. And so I say
on bad days I seek a theoretical basis
for my actions, or else I seek experience,
drink experience, as if by sucking and swallowing
I could replenish some heart center,
something I did not even know was empty.