

VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY EINSTEIN

Someone is standing
on an embankment.

Someone is in a train carriage
that moves with an arbitrary,
but definite velocity
past.

Restraint holds her legs to the seat.
The seat is bolted to the floor.
This keeps it from shifting back,
holds the perspective of clouds
along the horizon to her window,
linear. A narrative that doesn't include
the bend of tracks outside stations
in Germany, France, or Carthage,
Missouri, where it leaves
seven minutes late.

Along the line someone
may be waiting, unnoticed,
like the time between
frames in a movie

I blink constantly.

Every description resolves
itself into a number
of statements,
each of which refers
to the space and time
value of two events.

If you had a die you could roll it.
Consider the dots that land right
side up as the appropriate
number of statements.

It's not arbitrary—chance
holds its fictions in place.

For example:
A man stands on an embankment.
His hands arranged nervously
at his waist. He looks across
tracks thinking of decisions
that brought him there.

It is 6:32pm.

There is a woman in a train carriage that moves with an arbitrary, but definite velocity past. Her elbow is propped on the arm rest, her head rests on her hands, she looks out the window at the embankment thinking of what carries her.

She is past

While I blinked.

It is some time before.

There are two voices in time: one, on a long distance connection, fades in steady increments of change. The other, interior, shapes the conversation to end when the money runs out. It doesn't matter if the woman on the other end has already finished speaking because she has a train to catch—simultaneity is impossible.

This can be shown
in different ways.

If the man and woman
stood side by side at a fixed
point in a field and witnessed
lightning or a lamp in a distant
window going out, this immediacy,
until resolved in darkness,
claims you or I, but never both.
Like memory, sympathy is
the coincidence of recollection
and desire, *after the fact*.

And if she covers an eye
with her hand, seeks
the boardgame terrain
for a sign, looks behind
the trees, limbs and wires
that hold the scene
in front of her,
and notices at the bottom
streaks of light that angle up
to the cut-out moon,
would she deny love
carefully traced its tracks
to where she stands?

We're obviously separated
by more than time. Decisions
mark passage more accurately
than hands on a clock sweeping
through the area of you and your
desires, me and mine—dimensions
with room for missed connections,
room enough for single notes
under the jetstreams of dusk
after a storm.

And in a story, these die
continually, permanently in love—
what words will afford.

And in the description
of any event, coordinating
conjunctions lose their meaning.
Statements become atonal
compromises which resolve
themselves in endless narratives
as someone stands, waiting,
while someone moves past.

A woman on a train, for example.