

Mother

my entire hitherto life might as well have passed
in stony silence, almost forty memory years erased
since you must have crooned love over my baby head;
it was of such a peculiar, ambivalent nature
I soon mistook it for coldness, disapproval,
and opened for myself an abyss of contraries,
demanding or expecting that which therefore
could not be forthcoming, rejecting with anger
that which therefore could never be adequate;
and when, in parting from you half that time ago,
I turned away dry-eyed and bitter, appalled
yet also gratified by the fullness of your pain,
I rejected the bitterest along with the sweetest
part of myself; and so I proceeded
first with one wife, then with another,
and incidentally with many another female receptacle
along the way, to raise in myself expectations
of those gifts which therefore could not be offered,
and to reject even their utmost fullness
on the grounds it could never be adequate;
but when, returning twenty troubled years later again,
ready to shed tears, my heartlessness visibly cracking,
I sought and pleaded for you in your eyes,
only faint forgiveness, soothing sadness and acceptance
came to me; I was resigned yet in despair,
shedding my tears over the telephone instead
to an age-old substitute mother who is your close friend,
over a lion-hearted colleague's poem on the death of his mother,
over mother Africa and the pitiful conflicts of her children,
until, when the moment of our second parting drew near
and I was hopeless, dreading the imminent resumption
of my mind's ossification, the others I held dear suddenly
paled into people and your hard old tears met mine
at last; so now I shall have at least one grateful memory
to warm my next twenty or forty years and,
if I am fortunate, to illuminate some corners of those past,
while you, your suffering time so nearly come and gone,
will travel your ancient way and be as always
mother

Martin Sivad