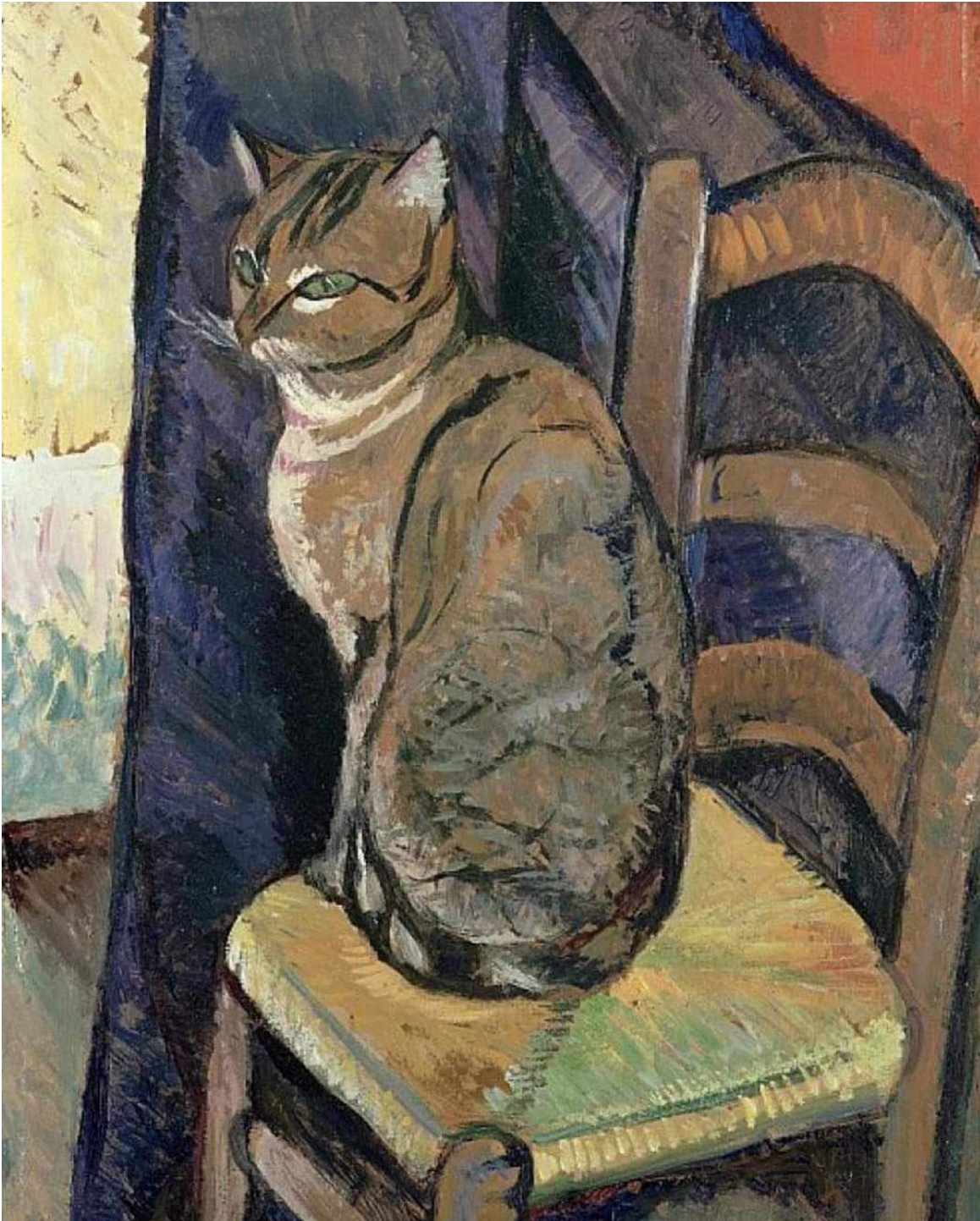


# The Loneliness of Memory & 4 More

by [T.P. Bird](#) (December 2024)



Study of a Cat (Suzanne Valadon, 1918)

## The Loneliness of Memory

*A poem that comes up out of the darkest, saddest waters will be a fleeting thing, a halo of prisms, the undoing, the desolation of weight. –Kay Ryan*

It is hard to recount how many times we all went together, body and soul, into

the then and there of our yesterdays—  
a place we seemed to live without mindfulness.

Now, at present, though often blessed to remember who, when and where—I find

I'm cursed to go there alone, and return feeling lonely. The ghosts I leave behind remain in stasis,

never knowing I was there prowling in the dust, nor following me out through the fog of time.

□

Yes, I can easily go back nearly sixty years to the porch where I drank instant ice-tea

while reading a paperback on early Dylan. Biff, our old orange tabby, breathes

through his mouth in mid-summer's heat. My younger brother washes the dog.

However, there is a dark side to this memory: the old cat is gone and my brother is

no longer washing the dog—the dog

is gone—both animals dying in ripe old age.

My brother is now, on occasion, a voice on the phone; in our separate memories we never meet.

□

And yes, I can easily go back to a night of foolish anger at friends in a crowded bar in old New York—

the summer of '74 turning over in my head like a sleepless man. But no, I can't really

go back and try to lighten my heavy mood; we are not really there. Our ghosts are just like

empty paper cups—waltzing in the middle of a city street in a never ending breeze—yet,

all staying put where and when I later raged against that terrible music playing in my head,

the darkness of my mind—a dire demon exposed, a terror now to my restless after-thoughts.

□

These memories are like watching old movies on cable TV; I'm always watching alone—never

in the bacchanalia of a night spent with those meant to become old friends. No. I'm alone

in old memories. The old world remains the same—despite my weary efforts to make it all okay.

## Answers to Questions Never Asked

*The insecurity of man's life goes to the root of his being, to his position in creation . . . In a word, anxiety is descriptive of man's radical freedom, the source of both man's creativity and destructiveness, the locus of both his dignity and his misery. –Gordon Harland*

I.

The history of our time is not complete; the days left to us grow short, but are fat with apprehension and expectancy.

The remaining tomorrows may hold questions we cannot answer just yet.

So ... go to bed fully clothed, ready to rise and act at a moment's notice.

□

It should be noted ... while some people cry in alarm over evils they imagine to be true, they don't notice real dangers like poisonous snakes waiting in the thrown-aside woodpile of history—ready to strike and destroy.

Learn to take serpents and woodpiles seriously.

□

While fear mongers and the cavalier wrestle like children for the right to be king of the hill...

choose now—wisely if you can—who best to ignore.

□

Things of great importance is a relative term,  
not recognizable until the truly insignificant and  
meaningless have left the room, and one is left  
quite alone with the profound. It's anybody's guess  
how one will respond.

□

When your eyes are full of bad weather,  
you might not have those veritable blossoms  
of beautiful dreams, but see only the dark side  
of the psyche.

If so, ask yourself at such a time—  
how many people of sound mind did Freud drive mad  
with suppositions beyond anyone's natural inclination?

II.

When tall trees leave long shadows stirring  
in a robust wind across a summer lawn—  
close your eyes.

Behind your lids you will view a totally  
red hour in which smoke-like shadows  
bounce in the currents of the blown-about,  
early evening air. Once here . . .

let the territory of the heart become calm, these  
shadows of the aging day covering your wounds.  
Sit quietly in this welcoming solitude,  
and wait for any healing to begin.

□

When trees of differing genus grow together  
in the same time and space—their leaves rubbing  
one another—there is no heated clash, no animosity

between them, no shouting out in anger as each strives towards the light.

Spend some time with trees and learn from them.

□

After pushing your way through a thick undergrowth of briars and sapling maples, you arrive at a small stream slowly winding its way down through a dark woods. The stream is gullied quite deep—indicating many years of watery transport. This is not a staying place, not a knowing place. Heavy foreboding and noisy crows rebuke your presence.

Find a hilltop where your thoughts will be higher and all your own.

□

Go out into a certain field and look at the old gnarled maple. It must be over a hundred years old. It's like a buoy in a vast green sea of grass.

Perhaps it will remind you of an elder statesman standing with dignity against the torrents of time and elements that can destroy both vitality and veneration. One day it won't be there.

Consider this a symbol of the inevitable.

### **While Under the Linden Tree**

*Contemplation is the sudden intuitive penetration of what really IS. It is the unexpected leap of the spirit of man into the existential luminosity of*

*Reality Itself.* –Thomas Merton

Most mornings, I take my dog for a walk.

It is not a far walk—we cross a wooden bridge that straddles the small creek that runs through the

land where I live—only to return after the hound has rambled through, rolled in, and sniffed the high green grass of an open field. I then climb a slight

rise to an area—where I sit under a wonderfully spreading linden tree. The dog wanders off to put her nose in woodchuck holes, and other interesting

places only a dog could find. It is a quiet life we live. Yet, here, while under the shade of the linden, and under the influence of nature's surrounding beauty—

I begin to ponder with my limited human intellect, the idea of simply, being. In the midst of my reverie, I had to ask—how can a mere man truly speak of

beauty, let alone the mystery of the ineffable in mere words, sentences—even in the lines of a poem? But then, noticing the linden's rich, listening leaves astir

in a slight breeze above my head, I imagined the tree wanted to cover my undefined thoughts with its own simple knowing. Sitting in silence, I felt the urge

to look up through the tree's multiple trunks and limbs, conjoined with heart-shaped leaves—to find small windows left open to the sky above.

Are the answers there, I asked the linden tree?

The tree seemed to reply, yet I knew the contents came from elsewhere; perhaps from Being itself.

Not particularly in the sky. The answers you seek are all around you. Creation has many names, just as you have been given a name—it is Man.

And, as your name was given you, oh Man—you gave this tree its name. What you call Mystery is not nameless, but is called Truth, and it can be

known—yet, not as a tree knows, and lives by it. Because of the name given you, oh Man you can know it and live its beauty to the fullest.

### **Older Men Sitting at a Table, Talking**

Usually in a diner, a cafe, even a fast food place. At the arrival of three, four, possibly five, the banter begins without introduction or real substance—words

seldom rehearsed, replies without real mentation. Meal orders made—coffee is delivered, or soda self-served from a machine. Each man begins to warm to possible

conversations—ready to search through a tangle of current events, anecdotes, and personal concerns. Jokes are attempted—just to stir things up a bit.

Seldom do they speak of what they left behind at home, or someplace earlier inhabited before gathering together in this commonplace setting. It being a world apart—

each man must decide what he will share of his other, private world. These older men might sit at a table in a near empty space, or one filled with other groupings



living in their own separate, private worlds within this cosmos of public discourse. Like the world outside this scene—a cloistered world is not perfect. Sometimes,

the piped-in music is too loud; sudden sharp laughter and chatter of others presents itself; sometimes it's the workers behind the counter. The drama done, the men

smile knowingly at each other, and quickly leave it behind—much like when they finally left behind their youth with all its energy, sense of importance, and male bravado.

These gatherings may be a time of small talk—casual concerns of life—everyday maintenance lived out in both body and soul—a fix of this, an adjustment of that.

Perhaps they speak of decisions long delayed, an action never attempted. What they possibly seek from each other is a subtle approval, or a delicate approbation; it doesn't

really matter which one. As to the world outside this setting, these men believe their observations are simply an attempt to find the humor in the oftentimes absurd and sad affairs

of human existence. Other times they will weigh-in on more intellectual subjects like politics, religion, or the yet unrevealed or lost philosophical aspects of everyday life.

Some may have studied for years among ivory towers, while others—not so; Yet, it doesn't matter. Each man sees his opinion on a subject as sacred ground. Yet, it's also

understood their ideas may be like old, empty buildings—meant for condemning, tearing down, and then paved over with real or assumed facts by either sheer brilliance,

grand strategy, or bold bluffing. The competitive nature of

most men only fades a bit with age and experience. But all know it's just friendly jousting between retired knights—whose table does not necessary need to be round.

### **A Scene from the World As We Know It**

After a daybreak cup of coffee,  
the morning came alive as agitated

blackbirds flew to and fro in a roiling ball  
among sun-filled, late spring yellow birches.

Before long a small, young hawk—  
possibly a sharp shinned—landed,

the birch's branch barely feeling its avian weight.  
And here the bird of prey settled in, its body still,

its head darting ninety degrees left and right,  
forty-five up and down—alert among the nervous

chitterings, chirping and motility of the local fowl.  
Then, single blackbirds began to dive through

the birch's spring growth at the brazen intruder  
who ducked his head and covered his body with

spread wings—all followed by robins and sparrows,  
in ones and twos, even threes, alighting in nearby

branches—each in turn harassing the immature  
predator who invaded their neighborhood.

Retrieving my field glasses, I missed

the young hawk's escape from this aligned and

provoked flock. No doubt both predator and prey acted on the instinct of survival. Yet, I think

only one lot was outraged at the death of a blackbird, that I later found lying in the calm, green grass—

missing its feathery black head.

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**T.P. Bird** has published in a number of journals and is the author of a chapbook, as well as five full collections, the latest from Wipf and Stock, *Upstate Trilogy*. Bird is a retired Industrial designer and minister. He lives with his wife, Sally, in Lexington, KY.

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