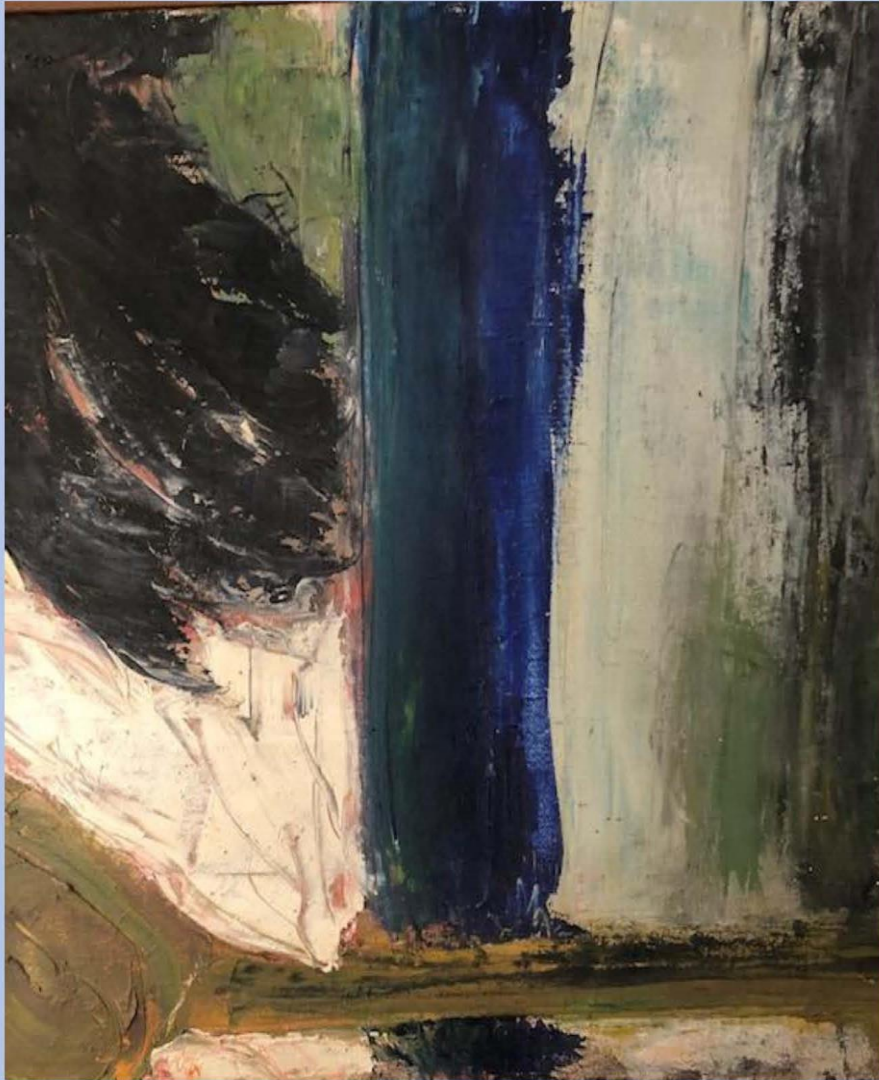


# THE PICTURE OF THE SPIRIT



ELIZABETH ROBINSON

# The Picture of the Spirit

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*in memory of Barbara Guest*

If you arranged the parts of the  
story, could you arrange the  
the picture to make  
the spirit. There is  
the beginning of the arrangement,  
the curlicue, the superfluity  
and its meaning.

The spirit itself wondered at itself, at herself, at her range of motion.  
Her concern  
was where the flesh of the image ceased to be flesh. How might she,  
within the image, make an about-face and touch what represented  
her. Measure the flush on its cheeks.

Merely to look, she thought, was to kiss it: brush one surface on  
another.

Her surface: nonexistent. Who. Who might her range of motion be  
without that surface.

A child knows the picture of the spirit, even if the spirit does not arrive. The child knows this picture with such intimacy, with such lack of shame, that the picture speaks to it in the middle of the night. How is it the picture knows every name, every name the child secretly has, and how the child will change its name to answer a call.

The frame has its own shape, its joints and articulations all of which turn the face away from the picture. She heard the picture from within, the way one hears sound in darkness. She heard the image as a supposition. She felt the 'hands' on either side of her face turn her sightless gaze away.

Mauve, irritated  
the image of the face  
collapsed into the image  
of the guiding hand, the  
twin of its own evasion.

Beckon  
one thing to recognize  
its durable features:

finger, mouth

suffuse, drain.



Visited on. Visited by. The imposition of memory upon.

As, when asked a question about time or place, the figure parted  
ways with itself; recurred to itself

and the atmosphere swelled, became balm.

Then the spirit was plural, was both  
seer and witness who fell, as a series,  
into that balmy  
pocket of air.

Gilt-edged: frayed with warmth.

Now 'it,' 'she,' 'us,' do not know to stand except at an interchange.

The pronoun is the inner ear by which the gaze claims equilibrium.

To remove it is to cause the image to fall.

Makes the spirit, her eros exceeding her, brim over us, who  
unsteadies us,

her fluid gown unseamed, unbalancing the parts we once were.

Provoke, partake

such image, and how, and it is awkward

whose hand came  
to paint verity

verily —

the slick oil of presence glowed,

joining with absence in ether.

Slowly the hand turns palm up  
and she, in turn, to it  
absorbed into  
its tint—  
color's creases  
and whorls.

Seen that way, we spy upon what we look at.

Profound surround. The assault on the spirit's frame is a form for

the hope of return. "I am going away" and "I am coming back" — both present tense.

Dizzy.

Seer, see this:  
"She" and "she." "I" and  
whom. Wedded to each  
other. The light backlit them  
even as it carried their ether bouquet forward  
and fumbled through the blur.

The union  
was the border  
that held the image which shed itself  
into light readily.

Here, I [we] record its [your] fingerprint. Maze. Flower of tight lines.

Faith is of the contracting

world. The  
way out has its  
own voice, warm  
and pink. Did  
I [you] know what  
I [it] might ask? Did  
the finger induce whose  
pattern to correspond  
thus?

Had the figure the ability  
to waver  
in desire  
like a bit  
of light  
lifted from  
its fuel.

Irked  
by the body  
who forsook need,  
who put the  
burning thing  
at the dividing  
line, border that  
knew  
to guard it,  
to burn it  
straight down  
to its hesitation.



*Someone.*

Not benevolent, spirit.

As the image has a purpose, benevolence was not it.

Did dare to look directly – witness who saw a self: a contraction from deep within whose line of vision shuddered consonant with my spine.

Image, she could say what I could hear. So I fell and with me her tenderness, aligned, misaligned. And I clutched it to me.

Toward release?  
No.

Something more strenuous and more of the viscera, the limbs of the  
apparition. It  
would not say that pain is arbitrary. Pain  
is not arbitrary.

All is ready, each one partaking subordinate  
to any —

to any rationale that illumines —

A name is a potent word, as one can see it  
when she closes her eyes, can see it

glowing from the roof of her mouth  
where she might  
have said it.

For the mouth  
is an outline.

And then

light fell

as snow.

The ear

keyed

to the apparel

of weather's

resolution.

Glitter

on silence.

Pronouns, precipitate,

drift,

sometimes

sideways.

We do not

keep

balance

in spirit

weather.

Sometimes

the robe

of air

will pull

the pronoun

back

to its cloud.

And then

amen:

no interchange.

(Now wasn't the cloud a pleasing — a sufficient — image of the image?  
Wasn't it vague, shifty enough?  
Backing through it, the spirit banged her shoulder, the back of her  
head, an elbow  
on the frame that held its picture.)

*turned, wanting*

*transparency, not translucency*

*figure buried in the depth of*

*thus to go elsewhere*

*whose destroyed experience*

*another ear heard, heeding*

*turned iridescent*

The spirit  
moved like  
a vein inside  
a pulse  
within a corridor  
that was  
a wrist, all  
palpating, all  
hands held up  
to guide, self-defend,  
or otherwise  
truly, yes.  
Yes,  
see.



I was myself a white and naked image of a child. This: what I held before me, the way a person raises hands before her, groping down a hallway in the dark. As I groped, the image bloomed within me, a sound and not a picture. Then image or deity: hand on my forehead who lit me up like a transparency projected on darkness. On very darkness.

The spirit knows nothing of how she is depicted. When her interviewer says, "portrait" she hears "tangle." She who tries to draw a comb through the fine protein that threads the universe: static electricity. Spark interviewing her. Afterimage coating the true function of whose eyes.

Or.

The spirit leapt: backward and hands raised, its long tress trailing  
and preceding it to  
an expanse below.

It was impossible to feel distress, only white foam.

About the mind there is no changing, but the body spends itself as  
more adept.

About the body there was air, fume, perfume.

Yes, the image spilled like a glass knocked over. It was meant to do so. To make danger. Cutting or making-to-fall. Shards in bare feet, slippery surface, and so forth. The image likened itself to this. It loved its own agency. Its similarity to the similar.

The image confounded.  
Why was the spirit  
so likely  
to desert the believer?

The mere idea of the believer  
forced to become ever more  
implicit.

Light was dropped like an object,  
and did not rebound to the hand had that let it go.

To be pure spirit, she thinks, would be to engage with these forms of betrayal. Can pure spirit think? She defends herself by forming each element as a question. But this is another form of adulteration. She strokes a hand. Any hand will do. Any hand will conjoin with the ubiquity of betrayal.

In sum, the object of faith was to trust no one, but the aim of faith was to trust all.

Were the spirit to arise, a convection, on the bloated air of this aspiration: null and void. The goal of faith, then, is this. Irradiated cancellation.

Yes, leapt backward.