

Undine's Valediction

Men! You monsters!

All you monsters named John. John, John, John. If there is one name I shall never forget, it is this.

Every time the ramifications diverged and I entered the clearing; whenever the boughs brushed the moisture from my arms and the leaves lapped the droplets from my hair, I stumbled upon someone named John.

It has been a great lesson in logic: your name will always be John because each of you -- each and every one -- bears the same name and that name is John. And yet, there is never more than one. Just one J.O.H.N. is ever written on my memory in indelible ink. Even if I were to forget you all; if I were to erase your memory from my mind as completely and as wholly as I have loved it; even after the weight of the Earth's great waters -- the torrents of rains, rivers and oceans -- have long since washed away your kisses and your cum, the name would linger, reverberating beneath the waves because I cannot cease the calling: John, John.

You monsters with your heavy, disruptive hands; with your stubby, pallid paws; your grazed nails and their blackened cuticles; your white-cuffed wrists; your baggy sweaters and suits of uniform gray; your rugged leather jackets and casual, loose-fitting summer shirts! Let me make no mistake in exposing you for the disparaging monsters that you are because I will not come again. I will not heed your call -- your invitation to a glass of wine, a vacation, a trip to the theater. I will never, ever come again. Never again will the answer be yes and you, yes, only you and yes, I do. I do. All these words will no longer be spoken, and I'll tell you why: because you know the questions, and all of them

begin with "why". My life is void of such uncertainties. I love the water -- its impenetrable transparency, its green hues, its taciturn creations (and I'm about as dumbfounded as they!), my hair under water, immersed in its justice, the mirror of indifference preventing me from seeing you in any other light. Water-- the liquid reef between me, myself and I.

[...]

Never have the peoples of this Earth spoken thus of the circumstances surrounding their lives; of the human condition, the things that bind them, what they have built, bought and sold; of their perception of themselves as inhabitants of this Earth, some more ancient one or some future planet. It was right to have said all that you did and to have taken so much into consideration.

For never before did words exert such enchantment over the things of this Earth -- never was language so superb , so sublime, so sodden with superiority, so capable of inculcating insanity or revolt. Words could swell and rise in rebellion on your tongue. You did it all with the words and the sentences, took every liberty in employing them to express the inexplicable; transformed and reversed them to make yourselves heard; you re-defined the neologisms and the logic; and those things which could comprehend neither the even nor the odd words were nearly swept up and away in the verbiage.

No one in the world could play the games as well as you, monsters, because they were yours by design -- you invented them, each and every one: plays on words, mathematics and probability, passion plays, the sleep of dreams and the book of love.

No one has ever spoken this eloquently of himself. It is as close to the murderous truth as one comes. Bent now over the water, almost lost to yourself -- the world has

Undine's Valediction" a story by Ingeborg Bachmann, translated by Lilian Friedberg©
Trivia: A Journal of Ideas, 22. 1995: 103-11.

grown bleak. But I cannot throw you a line. There will be no clearing, not this time. You?
Different from the rest? I'm going down. Deep beneath the waves. I am under water.

And above me someone treads who hates water and all that is green. One who
does not understand and never will. Just as I have never done.

Almost dumb,

Almost numb,

Nearly deaf

to the call.

Come, just once,

Come!