

The Division Between Fact and Experience

The Animal is in the World like Water in Water is a collaboration of drawings by Kiki Smith and poetry by Leslie Scalapino (myself), published by Granary Books in 2010. Kiki Smith sent me color Xeroxes of a completed sequence, forty-three drawings, which she'd titled, *Women Being Eaten by Animals*. I wrote the poem using the sense of an unalterable past occurrence: One female, apparently the same girl, is repeatedly, in very similar images as variations, bitten and clawed by a leopard-like, lion-like animal. Both person and animal have abstracted features, giving the impression of innocence or opaqueness. As in a dream of similar actions or a dream of a single, timeless action, the girl flecked with blood while being unaltered by the animal's touch, there is no representation of motion except stillness of the figures floating in space of page. Neither the girl nor the animal articulate expression, as if phenomena of feeling(s) do not exist.

Each of my poems (in my sequence) corresponds to a particular image of Kiki's sequence, my intention being that the two sequences (vision and text) would co-exist at once yet separate, having a double title: *The Animal is in the World like Water in Water/Women Being Eaten by Animals*. The two realities, or two views of the fact of the actual occurrence, are side by side. My title is a phrase from George Bataille's *The Theory of Religion*, a phrase he repeats as a poetic rift throughout his essay. My intention to use Kiki's title as a double (her title was later dropped from the Granary book) was intentionally redundant: the visual will dominate the viewer/reader's perception. The fact of women being eaten by animals, or of one woman being eaten by one animal that sometimes changes appearance (again, as in a dream), will seem to the viewer to be the primary, if not the *only*, real experience or true interpretation of the experience. Thus the double title would highlight the division between fact and experience. Absent, the double title is still implied (maybe more compellingly?).

The poem's present-time (sometimes a single word is a line, or *part* of a phrase is a line that as such alters the action of that phrase as it unfolds on other lines/presents-of-time), is to render the sense that 'the word' abuts sensory space that is of (in) the world. That is, 'the word,' as spatial, *also* makes a sense of sensory space, in relation to and different from the space of the visual world. 'The word' in *its* outside/space refers to and makes a sense of the undoing of social tyranny as undoing of *any* hierarchy in individuals' feelings and perception as well as in people's values (public indistinguishable from private). Without hierarchy, past-reality-future is apparently free paradise of childhood and of birds. 'This outside space of the word/or that is the word' abuts the other visible space of "Women being eaten by animals" (that original title of the visual images denied, however, by the fact that the female figure appears to be almost a child). The visual scene itself is denied

by 'not experiencing.' The viewer (while reading beside seeing the images, but also if only seeing the visual images?) has the experience of body and mind being separated as if that is *caused by* the outside world. This experience of the viewer arises from their sense, *in seeing*, that one is separated from the scene of the girl and the animal alone together as if making love (and a sense of separation arises from the girl and animal *not* mimicking expressions of experiencing sensations). The disconnect/that's itself the dialogue between 'not being experienced (by the senses)'—and separation *or* union of mind/eye and body/sight—has to be *first* enacted by Smith's visual images, in order for the language to broach this (subject) matter at all. Is dialogue possible without language?

My poem sequence is to reinstate (restate) experiencing in space, the mind/eye making estimations/approximations as concepts that are the *same* as their being in space: The language makes minute distinctions of its theme and treats these as spatial. For example, the poem-segments posit: society *not* based on emulation, no individual regarded as higher than another; and posit the individual perceiving in such a way—*not* having such feelings or behavior of emulation or sense of immanence—though (the segments posit) the individual is aware that others *do*, different from an animal's view. These concepts *in the world*, however, are not submitted to space. (In the world, concepts of feelings—such as peoples in societies feeling social values, having internalized these—are not submitted to *this* sense of space, of no-hierarchy.) *Here* they are submitted to space (of no-hierarchy) to be translated to (a sense of) free space/shape/place. The format of the Granary book is accordion-like, continuous pages, that could be a horizontal scroll in that figures on a page are complete yet an extension of a limb or body on one page may appear to overlap on the next page, giving the impression that we are seeing alteration occurring in a repeated scene (or: origination *in one similar*). This horizontal non/narrative, as apparent overlap of images in continuous connection/action of the same *or similar* figures, read horizontally, is: *not* having hierarchy that would value one individual image above another; nor is there hierarchy of narrative as transpiring event. The language (of poem-segments) approximates a state impossible anywhere except by being *in one* (can't be approximated except experienced by a person).

References

Bataille, *The Theory of Religion*. Zone Books: New York, 1989.