

The Cartographer's Rant

North won't stay still.
The meandering magnetic pole wanders like a dog
circling a spot to sleep. The tundra, the shore,
it puts the truth in terms like "declination."
What can you count on, if the lodestone fails?
Well, not fails; just can't be relied upon.
True North? Ha! What good is a compass?
What does it track? The unseen rotations of an iron yolk
at the core of this old egg. I had a girl like that once.
She came and went like a breeze in a curtain.
If I offered to meet her at some place, she'd happen
through. Were I late, or she thought I was, off she'd go,
a candy on someone else's plate. I mapped her
peregrinations like an ornithologist: my room,
her room, this tavern, that show, this room,
that room. I never saw her has my future,
but she was amusing to trace. Now? She's half
the world away, living like a queen with a Western man
in a Far East nation: servants and drivers and cooks.
I have a nose for places, not for faces. I won't remember
a name, but I can't forget where someone lives.
I can find any damned thing at all in my own house.
Except North. What means North to me? Inexactitude,
intractability, vagary, the geographic uncertainty principle.
Using all my skills and all my tools I can chart the where,
the what, but not motivation in a soul. Such a pole:
capricious and moving like a vertigo. And you know?
I wouldn't want it calm. All it takes to keep tides
beating like a terrestrial heart is the vapid circling
of one adoring face. Even the moon has favorites,
and even the moon has an axis, her pole gone cold,
still magnetic in the static mania of attraction.