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English 206

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JOHN KOETHE

ENGLISH 206

Why would anyone even want to do it anymore?
Fifty-two years ago I didn't know what it was,
And yet I knew I wanted to do it too, like the idea of a mind
The self aspires to, the self a mind endeavors to become.

I still don't and still do. Yeats and Frost, Pound and Eliot,
Stevens, Moore, seen as from a peak in Darien in a college course
With a syllabus, lectures twice a week, a final exam---
It might not sound transformative, but in an incidental way

What I am now, what I'll die as, and how I'll linger on
For the small while that constitutes an afterlife
Was there from the first day: the urgency, the anxiety,
The sense of something insisting to be said

Again, before the mystery and necessity drifted away.
It looks different now. What's become of poetry
Are different kinds of poets, i.e., different kinds of people
Having nothing much in common but the name.

I miss the echo chamber, where you studied to become
Something unforeseen, recognizable in retrospect.
I miss the mystery, the feeling of history gradually unfolding
And the way it made no sense at all until it did.

In the afternoon of the author everything is there to see.
No one told me when I was starting out "that day so long ago"
That things become more and more familiar, then suddenly you're old,
With nothing to do and nothing stretching out before you

To infinity, reducing whatever you did or had to say
To a footnote, skipped over in the changing afternoon light,
That finally becomes, at best, part of the narrative
In a MoMA of the mind. But I'm glad I did it anyway.