



a poem

by d.a. levy

We publish this poem as a memorial to its author, d. a. levy, who shot himself to death in his East Cleveland apartment Nov. 24, 1968, at the age of 26. This poem first appeared in Connections underground paper of Madison, Wisc.

Apparently levy had been in the U.S. Navy seven months and was discharged perhaps for "manic depressive tendencies." levy seems to have turned his apartment into a gathering place for young people. His poetry, often lewd in verbiage, displeased the authorities. The Cleveland Plain Dealer March 30, in an editorial defending levy, write: "Practically every time he looks up from his work he can behold a cadre of bluecoats, their hands ready for the quickdraw if the dangerous levy should ever show fight. Harassing him for writing words that are uttered from stage and screen and are scrawled on fences and walks all over town is making Cleveland look more like a province than it really is." Among his poems is one, "passover '65," and another saying he had "decided to commit suicide at the age of 17."

WHEN i was  
    six years  
we dipped  
apple slices  
& bread  
in honey  
touched small glasses  
of wine  
& sed 'to life'  
    'to life'  
that was the only time  
my father ever hit me  
his eyes were very sad  
& he sort of walked away  
knowing he was wrong  
or that he couldnt reach me  
i dont think he knew who i was  
perhaps even asking if i was really his son  
that was 1948—it is now 1968 and i know  
he is watching a football game on television  
in another city—his grey hair  
    his sad eyes  
and he is probably still wondering if i  
am really his son  
what father wants to admit that his  
son really is a 'poet'  
i think i was ten when i asked the difference  
between christians & jews  
and his reply was  
'the jews think jesus was a bastard'  
he was wrong again  
the jews believe in living, the christians  
believe in jesus and have formed a death cult  
around his image  
a cult dedicated to suffering & love  
as a means of liberation  
the jews know, that one becomes liberated  
thru living, not only thru programmed acts  
of masochism or blindness  
it was sometime afterward  
my father and i  
went to a temple to hear  
the services

sat down in time  
to hear that haunting  
language for just a moment  
when someone told us we had to stand in the  
back—we had chosen 'reserved seats'  
seats that had been paid for  
we left & it was thus i completed  
my external jewish education  
my father was right  
we never visited another temple  
& now i wonder how many jews are  
destroyed in this country each year  
my father with his lonely eyes  
trying to return home  
only to have the american god of money  
slapped in his face  
when we left it was as if  
he passed the message on to me  
'there are no jews left in this place'

and i spent years  
trying to fill in that  
hungry space denied me

on holidays i did not  
know about i found myself  
thinking of the old man  
and later trying to remember  
what i dreamt when i was  
a child  
i kept discovering his quietness  
when did the first images  
appear in my head?  
'a place with sand where it was warm  
the blue sky—strange trees'  
my fathers eye  
had never turned from israel  
i dont even know if he knew  
what was inside his own head

once visiting hillel house  
i was told about keeping  
traditions alive

lighting candles

the secrets i learned from my father?  
how does one pass them on?  
my fathers terrible eyes  
the loneliness

flesh phrases like  
'genetic memory?'

this poem?  
that i remember once  
being free to walk  
through all secret doors  
to walk with a free people

where did i learn that

when i think of my father  
i wonder if he can hear me

this poem?  
for my father  
who will someday be reborn in israel  
& this poem  
for my father  
that i may once again be his son  
& the name we carry  
was once a name to be proud of

now it is new years 1968  
in a barbarian country  
that has always felt  
alien to me

while blind men struggle  
to keep traditions alive  
my father watches football  
games on television  
to pass time  
& i dream of his sad eyes  
and i wonder about those blind men  
do they ever wonder who wrote  
their fucking traditions for them?

what songs will be sung  
in israel for the young jews  
beaten or murdered in the south  
trying to keep alive  
the internal spirit

what songs will be sung  
in israel to remember  
the young jews  
who took drugs into eternity  
trying to find the Spirit  
they couldnt find in america

what songs will be sung  
in israel to commemorate  
the subtle murders  
while rabbis danced the hora  
ate dates & figs  
& looked the other way  
to keep traditions alive?

my father watched football  
on television  
his eye did not lose sight  
of israel for even a moment—

and once a year  
i break bread with him  
quietly in my mind

