

SILENCE IS OBSOLETE

Silence is obsolete, that thick silence
Soft as snow or a slow bird's wing
Spread over the world, which I remember
From the days of a farm childhood
5 When cars did not run on the winter roads
And we sat in the snow-dark house
Without radio or television or telephone
In a family not given to chat,
Each wrapped around in the folds of his own thought,
10 Deep and dark as wool.

Awakening to the roar of Hondas
Or my neighbour playing his transistor in the bath
Through the too-thin walls of the apartment building,
I regret that we have abolished silence.
15 Now, although we may perhaps be lonely,
We are never really alone,
And therefore never perfectly together.

Elizabeth Brewster

MRS. REECE LAUGHS

Laughter, with us, is no great undertaking;
A sudden wave that breaks and dies in breaking.
Laughter with Mrs. Reece is much less simple:
It germinates, it spreads, dimple by dimple,
5 From small beginnings, things of easy girth,
To formidable redundancies of mirth.
Clusters of subterranean chuckles rise,
And presently the circles of her eyes
Close into slits, and all the woman heaves
10 As a great elm with all its mound of leaves
Wallows before the storm. From hidden sources
A mustering of blind volcanic forces
Takes her and shakes her till she sobs and gapes.
Then all that load of bottled mirth escapes.
15 In one wild crow, a lifting of huge hands,
And creaking stays, a visage that expands
In scarlet ridge and furrow. Then collapse,
A hanging head, a feeble hand that flaps
An apron-end to stir an air and waft
20 A streaming face . . . And Mrs. Reece has laughed.

Martin Armstrong