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Cruisin' Even

James Tate
JAMES TATE won the Yale Series of Younger Poets in 1966 at the age of 23, and has since published two major books with Little, Brown, *The Oblivion Ha-Ha* (1970) and *Absences* (1972), as well as numerous pamphlets and full-length collections with small presses. He spent last year in Sweden, and currently teaches at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst.

**CRUISIN’ EVEN**

In order to belong to the Million Mile Club one must belong to the Society to Prevent Intelligent Intercourse. The spirit is said to escape, especially in crowds, like a shout in the park. First there is an oral examination, such questions as: Can we just sit here in silence without resort to meditation?

What is the secret meaning of “organic”? Does everything change at the same rate? Is the typewriter organic? At one point, a brain-damaged highschool poetry teacher says, “Fantastic, look at that moon Marie!” Sitting on a sponge, practicing for the unknown. It will go away tomorrow, he thinks to himself, lost in long, hollow tunnels of night-thought. A long-winded novel about a man who thinks he is reading a long-winded novel. “What is the other me doing right now who is not reading this?”

Silence for forty pages. Comfort in knowing that you belong to a chain-gang of such wretches, from where this mobile of a life appears to stand perfectly still.
America, kiss my ass! I didn’t mean that, 
laughing myself sideways down the cul-
desac and into the Franz Kafka Re-election
Committee headquarters: Prague comes
to Prairie Village, a rather cuddly ghost,
still miraculously unweary of understanding
the speakable sadness of a dried-up port.

**EAVESDROPPER WITHOUT A PORT, BECOMING SMALL**

Arabs are twisting downshore, 
members of a leading desert tribe. 
Perhaps that have lost contact 
with their highschool peers, 
lovers, golfers and fishermen.

Waves can be as formless: over 
illuminations, cocktail nuts drift. 
The Captain in his bathtub tells 
terrible stories, false stories 
of breathless beginnings in a shivery cove, 
which turn out to be the same as this one 
by a thick thread of broken paddles.

The fabulous highwayman considers remaining 
on an island never adequately explained, 
without regard to time, space or spectators. 
And by rubbing granite cliffs together 
morning becomes Thor Heyerdahl 
on his way to work, and a cannon 
announces Spring groping its way 
as a hearse among lotus blossoms.

The zebras want to visit Chicago: 
it is said they have memories but they don’t. 
They receive their energies 
from a completely unknown source, 
some malignant force is directing them. 
The electricity from our nightmares?

Full of illusory weathervanes and silent cocks 
that sleep past noon, in a field of marble?