Strollers

John Cassidy

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The two of them walk under the frayed flowers
Of park almond trees while their child and dog
Trot and wander along the verges.

He watches a point six yards ahead on the ground
With a deliberate fixity as if his eyes
Were headlamps. He does not speak.

Her neck stretches and twists and never
Rests. She is questioning, jabbing at him,
Moving like a vigilant long-billed snipe.

Her voice flings splinters of ice across a smooth
Evening. The sun hurries to get down
Behind long shadows. The air stirs, cooler.

John Drew on John Cassidy

There could be no more appropriate occasion than a symposium to resur-
rect a Romantic notion of poetry at least as old as Plato, and older—as old
as Orpheus and the Orient.

When Plutarch argues a poem will have power to move us if it is con-
sonant with the doctrines of Plato and Pythagoras, I take it he is especially re-
fering to the doctrine pithily summarized by Archytas: “He who knows
universals properly will also have a clear perception of the nature of par-
ticulars.” Put that way, visionary experience sounds remarkably dull; Plu-
tarch himself suggests what it’s all about much more vividly when he has
Timarchus, a Hellenistic Lopsang Rampa, enter the Cave of Trophonius,
his soul ascend through the parted sutures of his skull and see in the hea-
vens the astral islands of the best.

In this particular experience, everything, or at least a very great deal,
has been made known to Timarchus. Likewise, a poem finds its true self
when, ostensibly about some one thing, it leaves the reader with the im-
pression that everything, or much, has been made known through it. For a
brief moment the decent human voice, however local the subject of its dis-
course, speaks not only with the tongue of men but of angels and has love
—and is, in a word, divine.

At its most intense that moment cannot be apprehended even in the
writing of the poem. A poet can only hold out in prospect the hope that a
word, an image, an idea will prove to be the proper incantation, the mantra
capable of evoking the immanent deity. Wainwright’s fine poem “Thomas