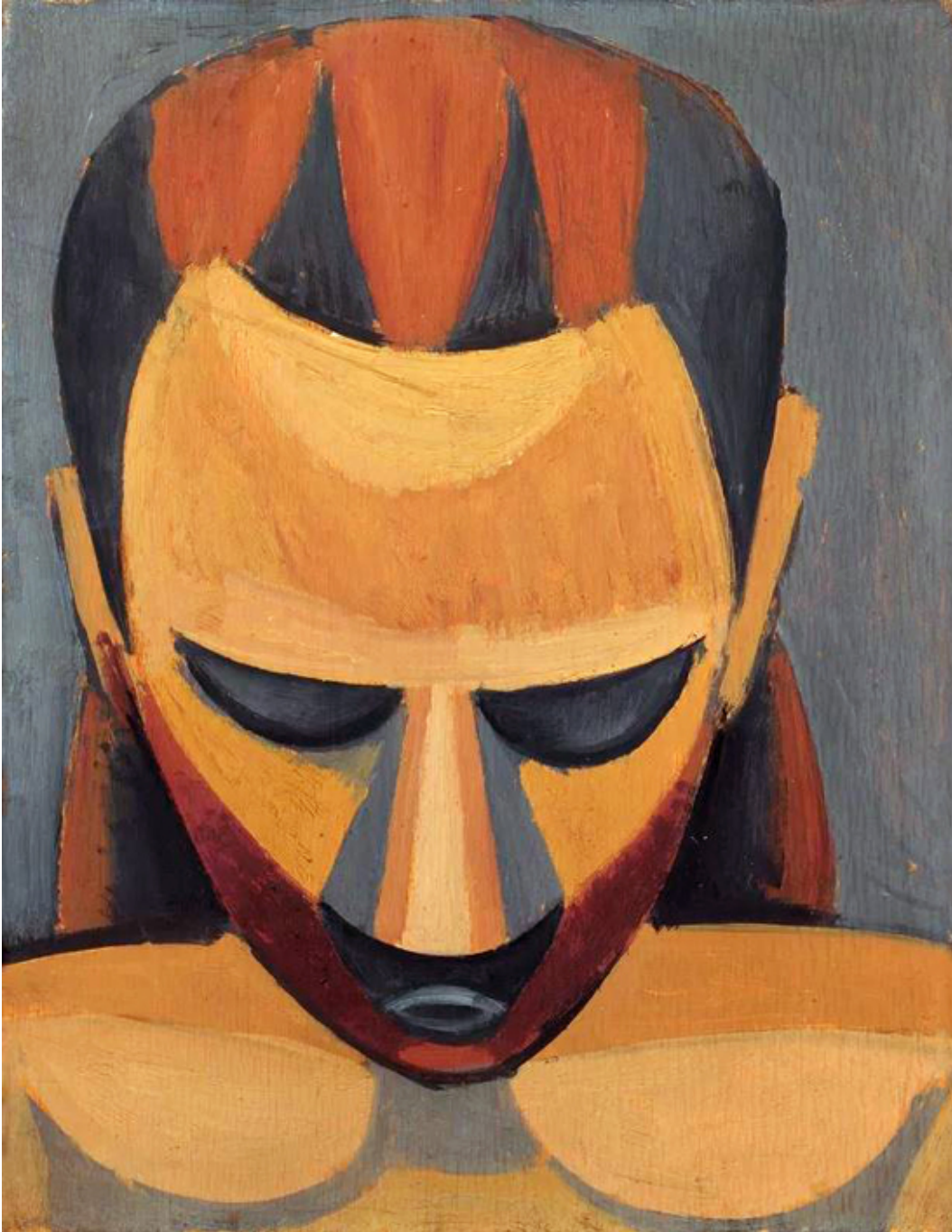


Man-Child in Charybdis

by [Martin Pedersen](#) (April 2024)



Tête d'homme –by Pablo Picasso, 1908

Man-Child in Charybdis

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a

child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. (I Corinthians 13:11,12)

They're praying for me tonight, a circle of young adults in Colorado with their heads bowed giving it all they've got
Passenger-pigeon notes across the prairies and hills, the rivers and valleys and oceans all the way here to Aridity
They address the prayers 'Dear Lord' but it's me they're really after

'We're so sad you won't play in our angel band.'

Alone in a tawny desert, an old miner's shack but no mine, or even old miner, or shack even

Army surplus stashpile of rusted cans, no opener, or nothing at all, it doesn't matter

Alkali water, just bitter enough to keep me alive for one more burnt foot

Now and forevermore, there's no use moving, the sun's stuck at noon.

If I can only recollect that one note you played over and over
Your vices and moods long forgotten, your mud hair in a paper sack I lost

I searched the globe and hollered in every canyon God's names
But there is no God, without time, place, language, or you.

A hot fetid blast bruises my hide, I don't care, the shrubs are all brittle gray ash to the touch

I had a picture of a bird once, off a cliff it blew south

My orbs roasted some 20-odd years ago, and I can't smell or taste or hear anything but the wind

This is not a trial, a testing, an initiation—just my own version of Wonderland.

Crumpled in the hard sand I gradually shrivel,

But just before I die

I dream I whiff your presence—
That's plenty. I go smiling.

So, keep your prayers and thank you just the same, I may seem
like the lost one, I may be lost
I have thrown it all away again, and would do it again, and
would do it again
Nothing minus nothing, no purpose, no law, no religion
Except that one strident note which implies all the way back
to the source.

Only Way Through

The only way through the world
is with the right map
even then the representation must be geometrically accurate
flat media projections general enough to reduce irrelevant
characteristics
thus simple enough to read.

The only way through the mine field
is with the right map
passive area-denial or channeling into predetermined fire-
zones
land mines kill even decades after a war ends
after peace has been confirmed between enemies.

The only way through to-day
is with the right map
keeping appointments with three squares per date per person
bowel-movements, make a note, add more research
I fought panic as I dreamed I'd completely forgotten the
ceremony.

The only way through the stars
is with the right map
to a place never before seen by human eyes, never before
touched by human fingers

curiously we put our spirits in a vacuum where nothingness happens
to satisfy the requirements of cartography.

Except for the scientifically-proven fact that all true maps are drawn with disappearing ink.

Retreat

retreat

we say recreation when we should say fall back
re-creation as if to play could stop our step back
chase of death make us not keep eyes stand down
on the road look sideways like passengers take a look at
yourself
out into the landscape escape into another in movement
wonderland off train off plane on the good earth frenetic
6 in the clouds flying arms spread or climbing jerky
across rivers and valleys on one's belly gibbering
look how far we've come what a trip time out
ugly and filthy I am so happy I got this stand still
just as it is as long as I could play shadow tag be aware
all day and rest all night I'm ready now to go you are there
backward to stop fluttering about breathe
regroup

repeat

soldiers as to war the giant struggle for survival fall
forward
the fittest hardly the lucky lottery winners immune to step
forward
whatever caused the next epidemic land down
leave your natural selection alone take a pic of yourself
forget all engagement strategies no movement
focus your skills retrain your brain squished
to push aside the clutter crushed
of broken crab legs still clicking dead ahead
on a marble counter in East Berlin time up

to look in out above beyond seeing & being seen road kill
the current war is the only war be a prayer
you won't win win's impossible you're nowhere
you at most can endure gag
if you're in control by relinquishing undo
delete

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E. Martin Pedersen, originally from San Francisco, has lived for over forty years in eastern Sicily, where he taught English at the local university. His poetry appeared most recently in *San Antonio Review*, *Danse Macabre*, *Neologism*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, and *California Quarterly*, among others. Martin is an alumnus of the Community of Writers. He has published two collections of haiku, *Bitter Pills* and *Smart Pills*, and a chapbook, *Exile's Choice*, from Kelsay Books.

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