

Response to "The Same Old Jazz"

This poem seems to be more of Whalen's shtick: observations of his surroundings which lead to long trains of associations interspersed with philosophical ponderings. Although it is enjoyable to follow some of these trains, such as the weed branches to antlers to a menorah to the linguistic roots of the word menorah, at first glance I didn't think the poem offered much more than this, making the title ironic because the poem itself is "The same old jazz."

I found other parts of the poem to be humorous as well. For instance, I was surprised by his use of the word "satyr." Maybe Whalen has some preoccupation with satyrs because he also used the word in his poem "For C." In any event, to me a satyr, the half goat/half man mythical creature, has little connection to a male cat. I think satyrs might always be male and are known for seducing females, so I suppose seeing the pregnant female cat is what triggered this odd association. However, Whalen's unusual choice of words reveals the uniqueness of his thoughts, establishing his individuality, which is surprising considering that he rambles about the philosophy of selflessness.

Likewise, the interplay between the two cats is comically rendered. Imagining that one cat sniffing another's urine is a message from "Sweet Papa" to "The White Queen," Whalen lightens the tone of the poem, providing a contrast between the earlier serious portions of poem where he mentions some of the common questions regarding the meaning of life such as, "what if I never told any of this?"

This leads me back to the repeated question, "what's wrong with two?" Originally, I thought that this question referred to some sort of profound spiritual connection, but after thinking about the parallel between the two cats and the narrator and Cleo, I came to the conclusion that perhaps Whalen is satirizing the pensive philosopher who sits and observes the world, thinking deep thoughts. He indicates that the answers lie in the natural connection between two people, in the physicality of "some of [his] age [whirling] down the bathroom drain."