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*Miming the Phrase*

Review of *(As) on things which (headpiece) touches the Moslem* by Gail Sher (San Francisco: Square Zero Editions, 1982).

Gail Sher places an incredible weight in each phrase of this book. They are phrases mostly, the discreet & seemingly incomplete units which make up this short book. I find the weight in the phrases, not on them; they are not burdened, rather each has its own volume & density, can attract the phrases around them or be inert and integral. Take the phrase: “Tubers & iron/even to prepare/this.” From their natural state, both the vegetable & the mineral are prepared by heat, in that sense they’re even (or equal). Very dense consistencies also. Then the “this” which, locating only itself (i.e. not subordinate as in “this thing here”) pulls down on the three words above it & the question is not “even to prepare this what?,” but can the middle phrase double itself? Rather than one incomplete phrase, there are two phrases here, with “even” meaning “as well” and “equal” simultaneously.

A line by itself reads: "Mime is first"; and yes the words are, at first reading, gestures of phrases. Like a mime (on a still, empty stage) pretending to be thrown forward by the short stop of a bus he's not riding on, these phrases imitate the motion of phrases in a context, but are surrounded by white space & make their own sense: "Dawns or/parson."

The next line is "Or go god," That's a real choice in this poem which invites speculation on whether or not religious characters (specific & general): "monk", "god", "nun", "Christ", "the Moslem"), religious actions (vowing, chanting, renouncing, gracing) & religious imagery ("the/shepherd", "The wooly flesh") can maintain their religious meanings in such undevotional as well as non-moralistic phrases. And of course they can if you let them.

The poem is not didactic, offers choices. Hence, the only pronunciation is a handful of parentheses at the beginning which sets the mood for the optional: "Saw (too) to/cling here"; take or leave either "to" or "too" or both. Some phrases end with "this" or begin with "As," attracting surrounding phrases (but there is no syllogistic sense which definitely connects any

two phrases and hence the connections are optional).  
The poem offers the choice between action and  
being: “A rung or yelling,” “The grit or/hear”; but  
wonderfully & conscientiously blurs the distinction  
between the two “As hover from the/elbows is  
something/growing.” And so the distinctions  
between mime and the actual are blurred.

Berkeley, 1982