

Endmatter

AMSTERDAM, 1656

by *Paul Trainor*

I. Spinoza is exiled from the synagogue

We followers of Abraham
are tolerated like houseflies
on a sunny, spring day
when the windows are open to the tulip gardens
and the buzzing soothes
the master of the house,
as the lapping of waves
against sea walls
drugs a dulled mind.

When storm clouds gather
and windows are shut,
one fly is an undomesticated crowd spoiling
bread and wine, inciting
immediate retribution.

You, our friend, are a fly crawling over
their *Book of Revelation* at sermontime,
a distraction from their apocalypse,
a temptation to ours.

II. A dream fragment

Before hanging the flypaper,
the exile of Amsterdam paused.
Instead, he captured the housefly,
and placed it tenderly into the spider's web,
as the Levite woman placed her son in an ark
at the Nile's edge.

[*Zygon*, vol. 26, no. 3 (September 1991).]

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III. God-drunk

Wowed by God's appetite for sacrifice,
the exile from the synagogue
captured yet another housefly.

He paused for a moment
and watched a spider
spinning a web
along the path
of flies.

God-drunk,
the exile freed the housefly
from the entrails
of the eternal order
of the violence
of things.

Note: Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677) was a Jewish philosopher, trained as a rabbi, whose unorthodox beliefs led to his expulsion from the synagogue in Amsterdam. He earned his living as a grinder and polisher of lenses. Spinoza's aim was to articulate a metaphysics that could both serve as a foundation for modern science and meet the spiritual aspirations and needs of thoughtful people. He believed that clarity and understanding of ourselves as enmeshed in an eternal causal nexus could provide serenity and steadfast cheerfulness of mind. For Spinoza, there is only one thing that exists in and of itself, God or Nature. Mind and matter are two of God's infinite attributes. Thus God is the immanent cause of all phenomena, or all things reveal God. Historians have referred to him as the "God-intoxicated philosopher."

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