

Essay on Mis-Labeling

Simone Weil, 1909-1943

Assured, or cocksure? Astounding, her
severity of judgment. Preaching
neither love nor virtue, she traded in money,

ration books, coal, lodging, instruction, help
with job-seeking, passports, citizenship
& testimony.

*A paralyzing deep-seated sense
of ineffectiveness coexists
with hyperactivity and apparent over-confidence, as*

the clinical text says. Perhaps. But to learn
“they” come from tight-knit
non-fighting families prone to conflict-avoidance

and live out the remarks made about them . . . well,
some, maybe all, bodies resonate
to another's spoken words, but here, it seems,

words eaten. And re-heard. *The anorexic
feels herself to be a victim
of nicknames, of wrong labeling.*

To call Olbers' Paradox Olbers'
Paradox is wrong labeling. Miss Gingerbread
Dickinson is wrong labeling, unless we imagine her

indeed a witch, *maîtresse* of a sugar house
she baked which did not melt
around its own oven, sensing she must court

the children of the place. Stein
(as opposed to Gerty M.) barely able
to be labeled — as she engineered —

but a lot of “wrong” fluster and not
anorexic; so, perhaps too *broad* a cause,
one must pause before relying on it.

*For an anorexic, an autonomous woman is
a contradiction in terms. Whereas
for Simone, “decisiveness” exists in the privileged*

castes. Others come to see it as a truth and fact
of nature. And *she* came to see it, who knew
it wasn't so, temporarily immersed

in the work of those
others; she, too, eviscerated; entitlement lost
in a practice that occurred directly

on her body, scheduling her body. “Qualities
I thought my own, of my mind, were removed
inside one hour on the factory floor.”

Why struggle to combat affliction?
In order, she answered, to restore the false
sense of a rightful self to every person

that they might make the only significant
choice open to them, *how* to renounce it
again, turn or not turn, leap — or stay; but since

it is the only choice, the only *human* thing,
the conditions of a full life being the same
for all human beings, our vocation

in the world is to restore the sense
of a rightful self to those deprived of it. To all,
that is. You and your partner, in every

interaction, restore,
or defeat.

Tertium non datur. Simone

was acute. Stein dark and sparkling. Money
was prominent in their writings,
and how wealth grows and families, and peoples,

and “pleasant family life,” and one's native
language: roots of every sort. That knowledge
thrown up in a person kept apart, then

displaced, then again driven out — of her refugee
country, on her third reversal of fortune,
and so forth. Weil advised De Gaulle

to free Algeria: Antigone,
defeated, echoing Cassandra's wail —
our firebrand brother, Paris,

burns us all. *Aii-eeee!*
she said, do you know with *whom*
you deal? Or the stake? Or *how* they are called?