

Me and My Potbelly

You know how it is!  
this body in decay...  
months without the needed stretching, exercising, "the workout"  
merely a walk here and there  
lip service to the obvious need for exercise  
but now a chance  
here in this gym  
I book a trainer.

Yet here, in this gym  
I report  
be-sneekered and T-shirted up  
looking a bit floppy  
with my pot belly  
eager for her advice.  
All this makes the French trainer smile in condescension.

Around are the enthusiastic toned, buffed  
gym designer-wearing treadmillers and bikers  
weight lifters and ugh! crunchers.  
All busy and looking so earnest  
as they work so hard to burn burn burn calories  
and tone tone tone muscles.

I come to her for advice and more for inspiration  
as to how to overcome my absolute inertia  
my abhorrence of this physical business  
this boring mind-killing workout  
hoping she might just work with me just this once  
and that should do it for ever.  
Maybe she holds the magic key to my insulin resistance  
maybe she can manufacture daily time for a workout  
for stretches weights and cardiac exercise  
without any effort!  
Or help me mourn the loss of this most precious morning time  
reserved for reading and study  
before the first patient.

I know I know...  
it is necessary...  
lord knows I preach it...  
I preach to to my diabetics and heart patients  
my obese and neuropathic patients.  
But isn't that so much easier than practicing  
the very lessons and results of statistics I state by rote

Me and My Potbelly

as to the benefits.

It is necessary, I admit, for it pushes off my fatigue  
that sets in earlier and earlier in the day  
as I age,

and it eases the nocturnal cramps and joint freezes that awaken me at 2 am  
both combining to indict me for my laziness  
to which I readily admit.

I even admit to it lowering the daily morning sugars  
to which my glucometer is the best prosecuting attorney.

Yet here I am at the gym  
among the men with those swollen muscles and abs  
pumping their iron and sweating beads of effort  
And me, and my pot belly!

Mother used to gauge a man by his pot belly.  
It seemed to tell her everything about his character  
his addictions to fat,  
his "lack of control" over his "baser desires"  
for food -therefore for everything else as well!  
inspiring in us children an automatic contempt for  
other portly folk that crossed our path  
with a Pavlovian instinctual response that lasts until even now.

In the mirror- I have become that man!  
for comfort foods do indeed push away the need for a moral tune up  
or the feeling of depression and anxiety,  
they push away the need for the necessary blood work that will inevitably reveal the  
moral decay of my metabolism.

So using this rare opportunity for an objective opinion I stand before her as upright as I  
can and pull in my pot belly in shame.

A slightly ridiculous posture which can only last a few minutes  
as she outlines our program  
and I lose my breath in disbelief.  
She can't be serious!

Then off we go... machine after machine  
(which sadist invented these torture devices)  
each designed to test and tone a particular muscle  
isolated, with no friends to help out  
each joint localized and lonely  
as I pant and attempt to reach her goal of 10 or 15 curls etc.  
This French trainer, thick in accent  
telegraphic speech, continuous commentary  
like a medieval Rabbi writing on the bible,

Me and My Potbelly

clip board in hand,  
watching, watching,  
what is she thinking!  
Pushing pushing me to do another one or two  
as my muscle burns with lactic acid.

As we proceed the greek god, this adonis ahead of me has notched up each machine  
to weights I cannot even imagine!  
and each time French instructor pulls out the key  
and plunges it into the notch in some low low weight  
that she thinks I can manage,  
(they do not make lower weights than that!)  
I laugh at myself inside following this weight lifter ahead on the next machine,  
then cry.

As the hour progresses I begin to hear my body responding  
with noises I have not heard before,  
crackles of joints and cracks in other places,  
each complaining in its own way,  
a muscle burning here,  
a cramp there,  
muscles I thought I had forgotten existed  
from my human anatomy days!  
All this slowly adds up to an aching body as the French torturer  
(now I realize why she was French) pushes me in her horrid accent  
and I get dizzier.

This body, this frame,  
the muscles and fat,  
the pendulent abdomen  
the lack of upper body muscle  
all betray  
a life of sedentary work  
the lack of tone  
a life on the run  
on coffee  
running on nerves  
too harried  
too hurried  
to give the body the sacred respect it deserves.

Yet today,  
it has responded to me in ways I never thought possible.  
It is telling me "there is still time"  
"I have the wisdom you seek"  
"if only you could invest time in me!"

Me and My Potbelly

But can I reorient my priorities to give it this precious time?  
The pot belly looks smaller after her working me out this morning-  
I look again in the mirror and see the possibility-  
it indicts me nonetheless,  
Could it represent once more my mother's ideal- flat bellied-  
"self-controlled" man?  
a man in control of his passions and his life?  
and then I let out this hysterical laugh, a guffaw, that gets me dirty looks for the other  
serious men showering and pruning themselves before the same mirror  
these greek gods do not take kindly to my laughter,  
but I just cannot control myself  
in this locker room of the gods  
I just cannot take myself so seriously!

This body, in pain and in pleasure,  
neglected mostly for the pursuits of the mind  
pursuits of career  
and plain need to work-  
remains my vehicle,  
even in decline,  
with its pot belly,  
like a beloved old 1950 Austin Healey  
that I just cannot ditch, despite the insane Lucas wiring.  
And it alone carries the genetic secrets of my lineage and culture,  
ethnicity and race.

So.... I will attempt in this season of resolutions,  
to make a little more time,  
suffer the boring passage of time,  
time for the body without mind,  
and look a little kinder ,  
on my pot belly.