

MADNESS

I

She lived like a lady
Far too long.
Swallowed her anger.
Did as she was told.
Cried.
It's easy to cry but it doesn't
Solve anything.
There is no retribution in it.
Only immobilization.
Finally she took a stand
And made a statement.
Now she bellows,
"Shove it up your ass!"
Whenever he comes near her.
And bites the patient
In the other bed.

II

She hated clocks.
Refused to have them in the house.
Defied their loud control,
Their marching orders.
After she left
He filled her absence
With the rhythm of her fears.
They bong and chime
And drip like leaking faucets
Filling every room.
When she comes home for weekends
She can't stay.
The ticking drives her out again
Holding her head to dull
The pounding pulse.

III

He travels now.
Takes tours with wealthy widows
Well trained to appreciate
A man his age.
She doesn't mind.
There is a certain peace
In days that come and go
Without his face.

IV

She waits.
She's always waited.
The institution
Closing around her no more
Threatening than her own kitchen.
At least it's real, this madness,
Well acknowledged.
No longer just a private,
Pointed place.
Denied, invalidated, and dismissed.

V

This is her joke.
Her last laugh and lewd gesture
At the world.
She doesn't care.
She doesn't care about the rituals
Of civilized behaviour.
She has escaped the need to please.
Freedom means it doesn't matter.
Nothing matters any more
Except dessert.

VI

On her birthday
They gave her a happy pill.
And she didn't swear or kick me.
She was polite.
Pleasant, even.
But when I left
Her small voice said,
"I thought they'd have a cake."

VII

Sometimes I see her
Hiding behind her eyes.
And I want to call her
"Mother!"
Reach out and hold her like a child.
Gather her bony body to my breast.
But the moment cracks.
And once again she becomes
A crazy old woman.
Crafty and unpredictable,
And definitely dangerous.

Vaughn Jelliffe
Nepean, Ontario