

On Life and Meaning

MARK PERES

Episode 23 – Phillip Larrimore – Out of the Mist

Hiding in Plain Sight

And now a personal word,

Sometimes in an interview one misses the obvious because the obvious is hidden in plain sight. There is a scene at the end of the movie *The Usual Suspects* when a character with cerebral palsy named Verbal Kint, played by the actor Kevin Spacey, is being interrogated by a detective in a police station. Behind the detective are random news clippings on a crowded bulletin board. Kint tells a story about a legendary crime figure named Keyser Söze. As the scene plays out, we realize that Kint's entire story was pieced together from details on the bulletin board behind the detective. Kint leaves the police station, gradually dropping his limp and flexing his supposedly palsied hand. It dawns on us that Kint is in fact Keyser Söze hiding in plain sight.

I think of Phillip Larrimore as hiding in plain sight. Here are the clues on the bulletin board:

- He says his art is about appearance, disappearance, and reappearance.
- His poetry is about what comes out of the mist.
- When he was young, he hid from his family in cemeteries, and classmates called him Eddie.
- He left the Corcoran School, joined the Weather Underground, and assumed the identity of Phillip Gerrard.
- In his forties, he reclaimed his birth name and reappeared in North Carolina.
- He produces his work in private for months at a time and reappears occasionally to show what he has produced.

Here are the many questions I didn't ask:

- Why did he leave the Corcoran School to join the Weather Underground?
- How long was he with the Weather Underground?
- What did he do for the Weather Underground? Was he an anarchist? A spy?
- Why did he change his identity?
- How did he live without a social security number for nearly twenty years?
- What was it like caring for people dying of AIDS?
- Did he lose someone he particularly loved?
- What happened to his friend and business partner Baruch Himmelstein?

- What has it been like to live as an adult with his parents?
- What sustains his caregiving?
- How did his father's death affect him?
- What connection is there between his caregiving and his art?
- What does he believe about manifestations of God?

There is so much mystery about Phillip. What is in plain sight is that Phillip is the art he creates, and the art he creates is him: multilayered, abstract, shape-shifting, shadow-casting, referential, between, betwixt, seasonal, perennial, apparitional. Phillip may not be Keyser Söze, but he is an artist to whom we must pay attention.

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