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Dear Shadow

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Dear Shadow

Annette Dekker

Dear Shadow,

When I look at you, can you see me?
Or is that your face against the cement wall of the canal?
Do you even have a front or a back?

I sound like a prisoner shackled in Plato's cave,
convinced that the shadow on the wall is real—
resisting light that might reveal illusions

You do not reveal as much as Mirror does—
you could be the shadow of any woman of any race or any age
but I declare you like a three year old
'That's MY shadow!' —
for you are the keeper of the secrets of my unlived life

Narcissus fell in love with his reflection, not his Shadow
Apparently that was his downfall

My mirror image still doesn't know left from right. That's far less confusing to me than reflecting on my reflection, especially as a teen, because I wasn't sure who was looking at me and because it was narcissistic to look too long. But heaven forbid that anyone would think I looked dreadful because my bangs were crooked, and god forbid I should feel good about what – or who - I saw in the mirror, because pride is one of the deadliest and had to be pushed way, way down – less far to fall. Still, it was best to look my best and try my best in everything. Perfection, while an unattainable goal, was worthy of my utmost but my utmost was not a thing to feel too pleased about. All as warping as distorting mirrors.

Shadow, do you see your dark reflection — like one of MacEwen's *
dark pines under water — in the cesspool? I used to think you lived there.

Nasty, but you do remember,
don't you, how in my youth, the Freudian notion
of an unconscious cesspool of sexual and other primitive urges
was so nicely coupled with the Calvinist dogma of total depravity?
All of it SIN — which apparently I was originally conceived in.
Strange distortion of LOVE.

I learned to consign actual and imagined nasties to you, dear Shadow.
You kindly hid them in some deep place. I could keep my illusions.
Thank you.
You saved me from drowning.

But I'll take some secrets back now
because—
"there's something down there
and you want it told".*

* MacEwen, G, (1969). Dark Pines Underwater in The Shadow-Maker, Toronto: Macmillan, p. 50.