

KEN. So I read Nietzsche. *Birth of Tragedy*, like you said.

ROTHKO. Like I said?

KEN. You said if I wanted to know about Jackson Pollock I had to read *The Birth of Tragedy*.

ROTHKO. I said that?

KEN. Yeah.

ROTHKO. I don't remember. It's very like something I would say.

KEN. So what about Pollock?

ROTHKO. First tell me what you make of the book.

KEN. Interesting.

ROTHKO. That's like saying "red." Don't be enigmatic; you're too young to be enigmatic.

KEN. I think I know why you wanted me to read it.

ROTHKO. Why?

KEN. Because you see yourself as Apollo and you see him as Dionysus.

ROTHKO. Don't be so pedestrian. Think more. *(Rothko adds turpentine to the mixture, checks the consistency by letting it run off his paint stirrer. He wants it thin, like a glaze. Ken stops working.)*

KEN. Dionysus is the god of wine and excess; of movement and transformation. This is Pollock: wild, rebellious, drunken, and unrestrained. The raw experience itself ... Apollo is the god of order, method, and boundaries. This is Rothko: intellectual, rabbinical, sober, and restrained. The raw experience leavened by contemplation ... He splatters paint. You study it ... He's Dionysus and you're Apollo.

ROTHKO. Exactly right but for entirely missing the point.

KEN. How so?

ROTHKO. You miss the tragedy. The point is always the tragedy.

KEN. For you.

ROTHKO. You think human beings can be divided up so neatly into character types? You think the multifarious complexities and nuances of the psyche — evolving through countless generations, perverted and demented through social neurosis and personal anguish, molded by faith and lack of faith — can really be so goddamn simple? Pollock is Emotion and Rothko is Intellect? You embarrass yourself ... Think more. *(Ken thinks as he continues to work on the canvas. Rothko continues to stir the paint, occasionally glancing at Ken. Ken stops.)*

KEN. Maybe it's like one of your paintings.

ROTHKO. Most things are. How?

KEN. Dark and light, order and chaos, existing at the same time in the same plain, pulsing back and forth ... We pulse too; we're subjects of both Apollo *and* Dionysus, not one or the other. We ebb and flow, like the colors in your pictures, the ecstasy of the Dionysian at war with the restraint of the Apollonian.

ROTHKO. Not at war.

KEN. Not at war?

ROTHKO. It's not really conflict. More like symbiosis.

KEN. They need each other. Dionysus' passion is focused — is made bearable — by Apollo's will to form. In fact the only way we can *endure* the sheer ferocity of Dionysus' emotion is because we have the control and intelligence of Apollo, otherwise the emotion would overwhelm us ... So back and forth we go, myth to myth, pulsating.

ROTHKO. And the perfect life would be perfectly balanced between the two, everlastingly on the fulcrum. But our *tragedy* is that we can never achieve that balance. We exist — all of us, for all time — in a state of perpetual dissonance ... We long for the raw

truth of emotion, but can only endure it with the cool lie of reason ... We seek to capture the ephemeral, the miraculous, and put it onto canvas, stopping time but, like an entomologist pinning a butterfly, it dies when we try ... We're foolish that way, we human beings ... We try to make the red black.

KEN. But the black is always there, like the mantel in Matisse.

ROTHKO. Like the snow outside the window. It never goes away. Once glimpsed, we can't help being preoccupied with it for the intimations of our mortality are (*He gestures: everywhere.*) ... But still we go on, clinging to that tiny bit of hope — that red — that makes the rest endurable.

KEN. Or just less unendurable.