I could call this “Irony and Sorrow.”

FIRST CLUE: DIFFICULTY

People often ask me: Do you mean for your poems to be so difficult? Why are they so difficult?

A shadow of a response that I always have: Why do you want them to be easy?

But what I mean is: What is “difficult” anyway? and, What is easy?

I begin to feel a little bit worried. (Am I difficult?)

And then I wonder: Does that mean that other people are easy?

Hours later I might be asking myself: Is there such a thing as “good-difficult” and “bad-difficult”? “Good-easy” and “bad-easy”? And who gets to decide.

Over the years, however, I have actually given one or more of the following answers to the question:

1) I feel terrible, and I’m sorry.
2) Not my problem.
3) No, I don’t mean for them to be difficult—I don’t mean for them to be anything in particular.
4) Oh! No no no—that poem’s not difficult. Let me show you why….
5) Are you trying to tell me that you hate me?

I have had a long theory on very personal first-languages that each of us has uniquely… which we spend our lives both translating into and refusing, to some degree or another, (the nonexistent) Standard American English.

But I’m becoming less and less inclined to give or believe these answers. And I’m becoming more and more inclined to think this is a conversation about gender.

And about sex. And about money.

Specifically, this is a conversation about you having sex with me. And more generally, about poets having sex with each other.

But let me go back for a minute.

CLUE: SORROW

When someone says that a poem is difficult, does he or she simply mean that the language of the poem, or the mind of the poem, or the sentiment of the poem is not like his or her language or mind or sentiments?

Or do they mean that they have had to spend a lot time and effort figuring the poem out? That the poem is hard work for them?

Or do they mean that they did the work, they “understood” the poem, and they just don’t like what they ended up with—all that work for little reward.

Or perhaps they are saying, saddest to me, that it has been simply impossible for them to connect with the poem at all.