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CUPID'S BARB: A COMMENTARY

If it were then it always is—
a broadsword, a “violence”
cherished a thousand years

kids play at it
deep in the booths of their minds
aiming at the kill.

But never who. Whom.
Killing is a one-less twist,
a brave of bluster and sheer victory.

Blade. Arrow. Knife.
And gods green rockets
rattling through the woods.

The child dreams of wielding power against the nature. Children hate nature, their new home or prison. *Contra naturam*, all children are homosexuals, identical with themselves. All children are alchemists. Eros is an arrow in their grasp.

Hence the familiar picture we see so often: Valentine Cupids, and all of them, all these years, we miss the point of, though the point pricks us ever and ever. *A child is the enemy of the world*, and means to destroy all the adults in it, those incomprehensible, boring massive intermittent presences that haunt the child's spaces and tell it what to do. An arrow is something you use to kill.

Gun by gun, film noir, Roncesvalles or tournament. Learn to kill, and by the symbolic murder of the adult world, someday learn charity. When a child fantasizes being a knight or a sorcerer or a combat soldier, he does not see himself as a child. He borrows manhood for the occasion, to slay it in the other. He does not fantasize killing children but grown men. The whole Iliad is maybe one bawling brat, slowly ripening towards the less pure, less murderous Odyssey.

Maturity I suppose means not giving way to the desire to kill. Maybe even not wanting to kill. Any more. Maturity means one is now oneself the same age as your ancient enemy. For most of us, it is not so much compassion as confusion that's at work now, staying our hand. We drop the sword, most of us do, drop the gun.

Fierce cold winter night, the wind howls and scares me. Why do children like to kill? Era after era, they grow through phantom play at war. My submarines, my fighter planes, my scimitar. They are nothing but the bright permitted emblems of the child's rage, rage against the world of authority, money, politics, parents, laws.

Little Cupid with his barb pierces the heart of the adult world, Love too, that unsettling desire that breaks all laws and laughs at locksmiths, that sings at the wrong time and uses all the world as its fevered couch, love is its weapon. Love is the enemy of law. Falling in love is becoming a child again, with a new weapon, inexhaustible ammunition. Love makes us parricides and matricides and regicides, merry Cromwell sported with the ink he had just used to sign the death warrant of King Charles, I read it in a book, he flipped some ink into his pal's face, who flipped some back, two kids at play, with the fatal ink serving as those schoolboy's final knife.

14 February 2007

PYRAMID TEXTS

The ones who have *tu*.
Who speak always to *you*,
seldom identified
by actual name – second person
singular becomes their first.

I woke up knowing you are a part of me—
is that the same as I am part of you
and which came first and who
am I (is I) to reckon
any such arithmetic? Do I mean geometry?
Dull high school trig that tells me
I can measure my own soul
by measuring the shadow of the other.
The lover.

My point was that the ones
who say *you* and are always
saying *you* are infantile, are just
learning to speak, bleak Swedish tundra
stretching out before them
desperate for someone else's shadow
to jive beside them in the wilderness.

It is not sentimental, infants have no feeling,
only appetites and sensations. Feelings
come later, feeling are language, come from words,
we learn them by hearing people speak,
I *yóu* you, you *mé* me,
we verb each other like the simplest animals.

Light dying on the snow.
And when the sun comes in its brief again,
who knows who you will be then in me.
I fold up my Valentine and send it to the shade.

2.
Abstemious or other.
Pyramid and you.
Apex. Melody. Danube.
A week in Vienna

is not the same as
the romantic century.

It all is as it is, a bird.

Pyramid: the oblique shaft
by which You are entered.

Climb up to climb down,
shaft to the king's chamber,
bring your light meter in,
that's the secret:
it tells itself by the dwindling light,
which diminishes according to the square of the distance
from everything you've abandoned
to come here, crawling on hands and knees
into the throat. Stone against each shoulder,
terror.

Of such hard closeting love was made
back when they invented it
to teach an abject breed *specificity*
which alone lifts these humans above the grains of sand.
This man and not that one. This face
in what is otherwise just a crowd.

Pyramid text. With the flower
of the arbutus in your teeth
you crawl downward till you feel

in perfect darkness, fiddled only
by the tricks and japes of optick light

wet stone beneath your knuckles.
Lick this.

3.

The poet's business is to make
propositions. Offer these
as they arise, formed with clarity

just sufficient to induce argument
or at least make it possible.

Falsifiable utterance is the poet's
responsibility here. Like science.
Being accurate is possible, beautiful
even when being wrong. Leave
being right to others, to the other.

Scherzo. It breaks your heart
of someone else's but it still
can be called a joke. The poet
cannot tell a joke (unlike Kafka)
because a joke is not falsifiable—
put a null-sign above and it just
becomes a pointless anecdote.
The scherzo of Draeseke's first
symphony, full of jolly menace,
a suicidal regimental sergeant.

4.
Unscroll it later. The tip of your tongue
still feels funny. Tingling
from the wet stone. What made it wet?
Who wed beneath the stern geometry,
stone aimed at the star? Who
will you wed? In such a dark canal
a sense of responsibility slowly forms
like a pearl around an accident. Or egg.
Ovum of the other. You know
you like it when you want more.

15 February 2007

POLITICS OF FLOWERS

is what we need,
the empery of the rose
say, or lily heresy

atop the iridescent glimmer
of petrosolvents, car stalls
sticky from their ooze, the lovely
summery wooden slat floors of garages,
really, doctor, you should smell mes fleurs.

Now Amaryllis A is wilting a bit
in its second flowering, the first
quartet of crimson lasted
many a day,

and B along the sill is listening,
Bach might help. or Marc-Antoine Charpentier,
that piece of his where girls
bark like dogs and men meow
and both do donkey braying,

intermède from Le Mariage forcé

this will confuse the flowers
in their strange indoor seasons
and the scarlet blossoms of bewilderment
shrug their epaulets in morning light.

And in all this beauty find no cure.

2.

No effect. Since *spagyrica* is tragic too,
that we pass at twilight
and cry out their names
who cry to us from hedgerows, from roadside culverts,
from Ruth Oja's garden below the rock wall
sedums and such,

or even summer soon the irises, irides,
call and nothing answers,
their story ended, long ago as Oedipus,
blind flower, and the wind leads him by hand.

3.

What name are you calling
yourself these days?

Swamp water ever
orchid shadowed horror—

we share this planet with other forms
of life, we share this mind with life.

4.

We share this mind with living.
When sensing-spiralling is all you want
(lack or desire),
cactus blossom every year.
Wallpaper cabbage roses
serve you – polygala
rarest of springtime flowers.
Most common vinca. Vetch.

16 February 2007

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Be true to myself
but who is that?

Our astrologers counsel being true to oneself but never give a clue to who or what that is. Are we just supposed to know? And if we do know that, why do we need any counselors, astrologers, stars, world?

16 February 2007

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When you see yourself
as you were
the end has come.

mid-February 2007

AT A CONCERT OF DVOŘÁK, MARTINŮ & BRAHMS

1.

Where does the stream go? The bird knows how to what we call sing. It teaches us something, or other. But not that. “Put on your sweater,” I said once long ago – and someone wept. You, or me. Was it good counsel? Even so, was it enough?

2.

I am to be a different kind of man. Isolato. Dvořák with no Iowa, I take my refuge in the mind – which is an infinity larger than the thing you think you think with.

3.

Thinking is a European invention to keep you from awareness. It spends the organs of alertness on mere analysis, base cogitation. Mathematics is neurosis.

4.

The bassoon, with its few incisive notes, makes us aware of how vain our lyric hopes have been. “Measure, measure!” it bleats with a donnish snicker. Noises off: Death eating crackers.

5.

The bird recurs. A woman reading in the café folds away her paperback Nietzsche and takes out William James. The difference is like a flute. Or the distance between this larch tree and the Alhambra. Then I remember it was cut down two years ago. Improvements. A flute?

6.

Can you go on alone along time? Embankment. Walk. A-24 to Camden Town. When men walk, it seems that wind is working all around them. The loose tubes of their trousers ripple, quiver. Somewhere nearby out of sight somebody is always playing cards. A woman wearing a garnet bracelet – 33 carats total weight of stone – holds heaven and earth together. There has to be a center. But why?

7.

The volume enclosed in an ordinary cello is one-millionth the volume of the Great Pyramid at Gizeh. Or is it one-billionth. Hard to make out the zeros in this light. The curve, though, of the bell of a French horn would, if continued outward, fit precisely around the equator of Io, third largest moon of the planet

Jupiter before the end of the first movement of Brahms' Second. The whole universe in fact is the shape of a human listening. And perhaps of a listening human.

8.

Interlude. A raft is sinking. Coal miners cough in fog. The month Pluiose. There is a name for everything, only no one knows it. On the heap of slag at the end of town grass lies green. Snow rests on it now though. Green shows through. Iron shows through earth. Air rusts iron. Nature is just one more construct. The gods come sailing down the sky to visit us; they come in blue paper boats, they wear gilt paper crowns.

9.

How could this single complex sound we hear, sheen of all the string choirs playing together, not be everything? This sound is everything. We can walk there easily from here. The road curves, bends us onward. Low hill, and then another, same. Same same same. And in between, a holy well. No one comes there much any more to drink. The water has a sheen of red to it, Mars or iron or blood or. But still the stars reflect in it, color or no color, man or maid.

16 February 2007

HARMONIELEHRE

Suppose I were. Gold too, along the edges
who would tread my glib illuminations
historiated – where the picture comes alive
in the colors of the letters strewn
through the alphabet like shells and agates
on Church's Beach after a storm at sea.
It is more than the beaches. The rim.
Sun on old brocade. Thank God
for all our winters, Bach partitas,
Glenn Gould still alive I hear him breathing.

2.

But childhood vexes. Polish princess.
My thought circled round the auditorium
until it caught the special *line of sound*
that came from her instrument, then quick
my thought rode down that trajectory,
made itself lean and searching, sailed
along the line majestic down the bowstrings
to her hand and came ashore in her,
all up her arm surged and filled
the busy population of her port,
distracted as they were with all the music.

3.

Admonish me from such histories –
history means seeing for yourself said Olson
but I know it means peering in the cracks
being there with all your eyes wide open
even if you have no self. And there I was,
a slender observation leaping down the music
up her arm and deep inside. Change
the genders if you like – gender is just reflex,
a bad habit of attention. The point
I'm after here is riding down the sound
itself into the singer. But no one sings.

4.

Vulnerable as we are. I write
more than I transcribe, transcribe
more than I show, show more
than I read aloud, read aloud
more than I publish. Some words
I write will be never read again
until the end of time.
And yet the Solemn Mass of their
Inscription has been said,
candles quick and frankincense
smoking and all the population
of the world for one instant only
blessed or puzzled by their passage,
strange liturgy of one against his kind!

17 February 2007

= = = = =

Lenin takes leave of Stalin carefully, even tenderly, placing Joseph's hands together palm to palm, then slipping his own hand out from in between. The result is that Joseph's thick fingers, thick palms, are held tight together, not though in the likeness of prayer, but tilted downward, almost level, the way one might see them held by a person of a certain age or certain bent who is standing enraptured before a work of art. Just such a work of art as I was seeing now, in the great pale fresco murals at Jaroslavl titled *Lenin Takes Leave of Stalin, Having Placed Him in Charge of the People's Development*.

17/18 February 2007
As dreamt.

= = = = =

But there might be someone waiting
always, as if a taste of chocolate
or this espresso has a cognac flame
quick edge in the core of it, an aesthete
in trouble on the bus, dog chained
to lamppost as if he more than any
passersby needed the security of light.

Can we tell another person what
it feels like to be somewhere, say
the back road past the high school
in Saint Jean, up the shallow slope
to La Borne and beyond through
the hamlet of the mosses to the steep
jut of the road just past the church
where the climb to the cliffs begins?

Name name names and hope. Maybe
from the noise of words some sense
will fall, expressive of that woodshed
where the road forks or the villa
called The Lilacs smothered deep
in an altogether different flower
almost autumn when you see it
you guess there's snow in the mountains.

Hot down here. Tee shirt. Road
It's all about roads, this history stuff,
houses are just accidents, minor
flesh wounds that happen to a road.

18 February 2007

TRUTHS AND TROUGHS

And trust – which sounds like *consóle* in German and means hardly anything in English.

Those who use the word mostly do so to deceive.

Make a list:

WORDS THAT ARE USUALLY LIES WHEN SPOKEN

Trust
Reliable
Dependable
Free
Real
True

Query: are there any words at all exempt from this list?

Moon, how about moon?

Yes, that may really be the moon up there. But why are you *saying* it? The saying it is what makes it a lie.

It may be that you have some motive for remarking on the unremarkable presence of the moon in the sky, where it has roamed at peace for thousands of years,

and may even be aware of your own motive, using the moon as a seducer would, or a thief, or someone wanting to distract me while he snatches the last muffin from the tea plate, dark early these days, before the tea is even cold.

Or you may not even know that, the word just comes moaning out of your mouth like a swoon or a drool, why, why, why say it?

It's there, it's there if it is at all. It says for itself. It says itself.

Maybe words are only true when they're rescued from speaking.

When we contemplate them one at a time, or calmly linking together.

Poetry, in other words. Or play. When someone on the stage mouths one or more words for our rapt comradely contemplation, and we receive, we ponder, we feel. The words are speaking for themselves, only using the actor's body to present themselves to us. An actor is a robe. An actor is a disrobing.

Free from any motive, given freedom by the actor's sheer body, the word comes to us.

True at last.

19 February 2007

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It's all a technology, that's the point.
Not new visions, new techniques.
Or as our first arrogant vanguardists
insisted, new *technics*. Rhyme royal
was just a thing like Fortran, useful
in its day, no longer needed. Because
we are consumers and we need
to be programmed by and for
the technology we are meant to consume.
Art appreciation is consumption,
Appreciation means increase in value.
There is nothing but commodity.

20 February 2007

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Lassitude of Sunday morning strikes Tuesday.
Then Tuesday gets hit by a fragment of
a political asteroid that collided with
the Saturday morning gloomy mood. Eheu!
Then Wednesday's busy cogitations
swamped Tuesday's planfulness. Confused,
I stared into the shimmering uneasiness
of my coffee still steaming in its mug.
How did we come here? What did we want
so long ago we thought we could find here?
I examine yet again the lines on my palm
hoping to find the star chart of the original
country. The one where all the explanations
are still stored, wise, voluptuous as Friday.

20 February 2007