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ALASKA

The red light lasts as long as the floe.
Introspection on ice – turns out, terrorists
had inserted a “small atomic bomb” in
a lip-plug of the dying whale. In our
own neighborhood too – what to do,
how to tow it out to sea or somehow
disarm it here in the canal right
beside our house. And why had we
of all people bought any whale, this
sinister specimen in particular,
and from whom. The chapter ends.
Reading is so feeble, especially
a novel you only read in your sleep—
yellow cover, big page, a dying whale.
The one time I met I. A. Richards
he was on his way by bus to Point Barrow.
Elegant trim language of his, a kind
of spoken pemmican, brought him
and his sweet wife to the ends of the earth.
Tongue travel. How can we know
language unless we know every place
in which men might have reason
to speak? he must have thought.
We waved good-bye. My next Welshman
was a girl, I hear her still now and then
talking about the slag heap at the end
of her village in Ebbw Vale, that slowly
with the kindly years took on
a coat of grass. We make the world
I said, while I thought: we make nature.
But no girl is ready for that.

5 July 2007

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A man would have to be stronger than I am
to read this essay. Someone wrote it
using milk she'd saved from nursing her last-born,
using ink she distilled from six old [].
art of the world. She wrote it on paper
that once grew on the coast of Oregon
saved from Japanese submarines and totem carvers
and here it is with words all over it,
making allusions, citing evidence, being right.
How terrible it is to be right in a wrong world,
when love happens only between people
and then mostly by mistake, and only a few of them
even at any one time. When love should be
crackling in the air between trees and ships
and freight yards and anything you can name
including us, but not just us. We hog
all the love in the world, hoard it up,
and then are surprised when it spoils,
goes bad, cupboards full of rotten love.
The heart is a lousy refrigerator
and love grows the way muscles do, by use,
flex, press, squeeze, just stand there
smiling at her and me, your whole
weight bent against forgetting.
You made it— now love this place.
All of it, not just all the gorgeous civilians.

5 July 2007

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Out of no dream
some come. Marsh
to begin not even
river ever. But to go
along and *in* from
might have been.
The imperial
word, the fact doll
cracked face underfoot.

6 July 2007

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I asked you you said
what you said a tansy
more than a peach

uncultivated presence
the weed mind
on ever island

6 July 2007

OTEGO

in mem. R. M.

Burdock takes over
the pig run a fence
parenthetical neglect
the widow elsewhere
so many definitions
nobody can live.

6 July 2007

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Your small anxiety
wasp in your pocket

what is the world
a mess with pronouns

till the trees forgive
the month old newspaper

our father
which art.

6 July 2007

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Chances of rain
and actual I heard
drowned guitar
Narcissus never
relents when he can
make me hear him
he exists but only.

6 July 2007

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Trying to bless everyone in sight
the prayerwheel spins

the dog the catch midair
the descent the miracle the man
walking out of the earth the man
on the ladder and there is no ladder

the man in the air
and there is no air the man the man.

6 July 2007
Start of Notebook 300

SURVIVORDOM

So I'm still alive after all that,
a pigsty near the forest, a stile, an actual
old-fashioned step over the fence.
A ring on my finger a corn on my toe
I shall have tsurrus wherever I go.
It must be true, it rhymes. Occasional
blue cigarette, what place was Luitprand
once the famous bishop of? Name me
or I'll eat you. I'll eat you anyhow.
I am who for all reasons mostly what?
Autumn's fall'n leaf, a pachyderm tree
fond of lightning. On me they feed.
Name me or I'll die. The pig came out
to look around – a few more days
and when they harvest it they'll harvest
me he thinks, and let me tell you,
pigs are good thinkers. Not much
for feeling but they are logical to a fault.
If you could get their attention they
could solve your Fermats and your Cantors
for you. But all I want to do is eat.

6 July 2007

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We finally get used to it
like a bench by the fence
shady but vexed with gnats
and a deer genuflects
at times in the bushes
back of the summerhouse
and the bus stops outside.
You can still hear a radio
so hell can't after all be far.
Supposed to be Earth
according to the ad, all lies,
you never know who writes
these lyrical prospectuses,
animals mostly. *The Northern
Bee*. The elephant perhaps
never forgets but he's nowhere
in sight. No, an animal believes
that wherever he stands
is where he's supposed to be
or at least where he is.
We don't ever have that fantasy
unless we're on the dean's list
in self-deception, the kind of people
who peer down their legs and say
that's not such a bad foot at all.

7 July 2007

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Leave me alone
he remembered
little blossoms
falling from some tree
dryish yellow
no source
he could see.
Is that enough?
Is that marvelous
or just miraculous
the neverending song
bare gravity?

This turned out differently. I didn't want to talk about the big stuff, the bang our ears still buzz from so quietly that we only hear it sometimes when nothing much is going on. No, I wanted to talk casual, a kitchen, wife to husband and vice versa, all familiar, soapy maybe but clean, at least clean. I wasn't asking for miracles. And yet she wept: crystal tears, aqua tears, emerald tears from Tara's eyes – these, She told me, these are the solid evidence of my eternal smile.

7 July 2007

CONFESSIO PECCATORIS MAXIMI

I have never
doubted anything.
Only everything.

7 VII 07

AFTER DANTE

You and him and me, no names please,
we who once were big shots in Utopia,
aldermen of Atlantis, it's time for us
to seize power over all the trendy
Wednesdays of the world, Ordinary
Time like the Anglicans say, who live
in a utopia of their own (money)
while you and I and he, poor old guys
trapped in a boy's book, stagger
from doom to doom yelping tunefully
till someone writes it down. Usually us.

And at the end of the day (as everybody
says these days, but never tells us
which day, and what day if any comes
next, a new day to have a new evil
of its own), life can't just be these
talkative joggers noising along my
Sabbath street, got to be more meat
on the bone than that, to clutch
an infelicitous metonym from my
Iron Curtain past.

You and him and me,
naughty men by Narnian standards,
archbishops of folderol and heartsease,
historians of bad habits, listen, you
and him and me, we'd better hire
somebody good with his hands to build
us a raft, no time for an Ark, a raft
will do it, a crow for our dove messenger,
you can catch eels and he can interpret
the writhing images their struggles
inscribe on the pale wood of what's
left to us, leaving me to sob at the stern.
leaning my not inconsiderable weight
on the tiller, whatever that is, do rafts
even have them, guiding us slowly
and riskily down the straits of confusion
towards the little duchies we are fated to rule

if only I could remember their names.

8 July 2007

SCHMERZEN (1)

You are a wound I don't know how to heal.
The pain of you being there
and not being there for me.
Maybe one day I wake up
and the pain is gone. And you are
wherever and whatever you are. A gap
instead of a scar. A night sky
waiting for one more star.

8 July 2007

SCHMERZEN (2)

In an instant the long
practice of obsession
can take hold. Bewildered
by the sudden onset of misery:
hopeless love. Without
any of me consenting,
somehow it all by
itself consented in me.

8 July 2007

NESTORIAN PROMISES

Those postmen along the road
don't move very much. Sand
gets in their loafers, the mail,
well, that's another problem
isn't it, where *is* the mail?

So long ago I sent that bluebird out
you'd think some creature if not she
would come back if only to be civil.
Are these mailmen alone? Their legs
have letters carved in them – words

presumably, but you can never tell.
It all might be just a chemistry of cut.
To touch. Touch and that be enough,
superior angels in town for the weekend.
There's writing in me too. You.

8 July 2007

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Frivolity of mother tongue
like weekend sunshine or
Major Hoople with his carpet beater
sneaks out of the cartoon
into the semi-permanent imagination
we call the ordinary world all round.
All round whom? Not me, buster,
my money's on the noumenal, mind
on the rocks, without a chaser.
Years ago or yet to come but never now.
Now is the biggest effing myth of all.

9 July 2007

IRISH

Wouldn't trust that branch
to sit beneath. Trust comes
not easy to my people. Sand
falls from the castle, shape
softens into its constituent
foam. And the branch
could fall, those moon-men
who knocked down Cyrano
could do me in as well. Gravititas,
our old fiend. I wouldn't
venture far in a canoe
par exemple. Couldn't
in fact, given my anxieties,
instability, neuroses, sunspots,
Venus in Virgo with a mind
on meat. Coarse lusts.
Still the lawn is lucid
and the shade is nice, just nice.
The dangerous sweetness of relax
inveigles the soul in its charmeuse
shawl, mind and soul sitting
together here, old folks
rocking on the porch just not
quite in synch, a couple
of kids necking on the grass.

9 July 2007

TABLE

Permitted? Ou non?
Can't say. The chair
so spindly supports
a president, the lawn
so big a little woodchuck
dominates your sight of it.
All right, sit down,
order your kir, I'll pay,
you want to confuse me
with all your otherness
and I'll bite. I bite.

9 July 2007