

6-2004

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## MIDNIGHT: EDGARTOWN OVER THERE

Behind the visible  
there is always a city,

sometimes small  
sometimes a pencil could stab it

make its accurate lineaments  
and not even lose its point

where is my sharpener  
where is my sack of flour  
to fill socks with on halloween  
and whack people on the back with  
white fugitive stains on their blue wool

where are my stains?

o time comes early when you're born

and Nostrand Avenue seems so narrow now  
with buses up and down it  
and everything starts to remember me--

smoked glass Tuesday  
to see the Transit of Venus

in a cool spring

over this island also the god of love will pass.

6 June 2004 <late>

Cuttyhunk

## CANAPITSIT

something with a name  
to go by

a strait      Skylla waits  
out there to squeeze  
the haughty immigrant.

Danger rush of channel.  
Star river, full of blood.

6 June 2004, Cuttyhunk <late>

=====

For one blazing blur  
the sun came out, six thirty over Nashawena  
above the massed clouds thereby  
suddenly made storm black.

Golden light on a deck chair,  
gold green kindling lawn  
then it went in again,  
the beautiful grey luster,  
the mask it wears now,  
wind blowing the feathers and monkey fur of the sun mask.

7 June 2004, Cuttyhunk

=====

a stain of glory  
we are after

7 V 04, Cuttyhunk

## PHILOPENA

Proust uses it, a forfeit  
in love's game  
or a game where lovers pay  
penalties to one another,

spin the bottle, is the kiss  
the punishment? Philopena,  
small love wound,  
the fatal hickey  
that meant a loves b

or just the orange that she bit  
she gives you now and you  
must finish eating it

swallow the drenched flesh of her bitemark  
sealing all the juices together in  
that inside-out kiss that eating is,

Philopena, a brand of losing  
that lovers love,  
fond penalty, what kind of game is this,

and Christ on his cross a lover's forfeit too?

7 June 2004, Cuttyhunk <late>

## TRANSIT OF VENUS

In front of me  
rising over the Elizabeths  
a sun visited,

a *Venus transit*--  
such a thing hasn't happened  
to American poetry since Longfellow died

that comely mind at peace with its powers  
and anxious still to know the Other,  
Tuscan, Finnish, Algonquin,

and now she comes  
to visit Him up there and visit him as well,  
Mary bringing tidings to Elizabeth,

a girl between me and the sun.

2.

Other aspects of this transit.  
A motorman asleep in his cab  
but the old ocean stays on track,  
a cold wind from the west  
runs down my back.



It's coming from America right behind me,  
a big confused island of nice people at war.  
They have more enemies than they can count,  
a proper state of affairs for people whose  
first inclination is to fight, o sweet  
and bellicose my people,  
and their wind makes me get up to shut the door.

3.

Je t'adore. I never studied French in school  
so need a place to put this stupid pun  
I just heard in the words I wrote  
sounding them aloud, cadence  
of the strophe and count my breaths.  
*Je t'adore* and who is *t* today  
when Venus walks across the sky  
Shouldn't she be everyone?

4.

Everyone between me and the sun,  
riotous seagulls in their synagogue,  
golden sunglaze laid across the channel  
and the Neck cuts it, filmy dark of dawn land  
hardly seems you could walk on it  
let alone build the big house the Dorrs did  
out at Canapitsit, all alone  
like a house in a book, old book

but not too old, 1920, 1880,  
something like that,  
when Venus last came stirring from her Loom  
to irritate these human wombs  
to nobler bearing, makes me think  
of the great ones who will be born  
nine months from now, I hope I live to see  
at least their juvenile insurrections  
before I go back and lie down at her feet.

5.

Men are gods who lost their jobs.  
Chomeurs. Temporarily  
out of work and waiting.  
We stand around  
on street corners of the sea.  
Consult tables of the moon and tides  
to find employment.  
Waiting to read in smudgy little print  
a want-ad that spells my name  
more or less correctly and says Come to me.  
I am always coming.  
I watch the clouds all day  
for some sign of who I'm supposed to be.

6.

And then the sun runs out of light.

She kisses him now, a veil flutters over them,  
a cloud actually rises, comes up out of ocean,

grey as it begins to ascend then

when it gets near the sun takes on

a white condition like mother of pearl,

now laps at their union,

six-fourteen a.m., covers them.

Now the actual intercourse recurs.

Don't look. The world is being made again

and me with it. In the thalamus of sky

they're sleeping out their brief eternity.

8 June 2004, Cuttyhunk

## THE CASUIST IN THE BATHROOM

The casuist in the bathroom  
explains himself away  
to the mirror. He works hard  
to fool the glass -- it can be done:  
Radipert did it in Bohemia  
with Klidohild, a nun.  
And Jehosaphat, a Lutheran druggist,  
provided some for Ludmilla,  
unbaptized child of a Bogomil and a Turk.  
Which profile is best?  
If I want her to worship me,  
should I shave or be scratchy?  
I am older than I want to look,  
congested skin, veiled eyes,  
maybe at a pinch I can look dignified.  
Can I pinch you? Did I take pleasure  
alone or with others? Why has this mirror  
been on my case so many years?  
If Philipond, a Huguenot, embraces  
Galingale, a lady of a certain age  
who failed to make her Easter Duty  
three years running, may the fruit  
of their concupiscence later be  
ordained to minor Orders without  
special papal indult? It is to wonder.

There is more here than meets the eye  
but the real problem is what the eye does meet  
when it looks through all this history  
and sees my own bare face staring back,  
a wild man in a mirror with no shirt,  
turning his face from side to side  
to see if there is any hope at all.

8 June 2004, Cuttyhunk

## THE STAIN OF ORANGE LIGHT OVER NASHAWENA

The cool night breeze still with us five a.m.

Places, names.

Because we *believe* these things.

We don't believe in gods and demons

but we believe Woods Hole is different from Canapitsit.

We trust location. We believe in place.

This faith may save us yet,

a code scribbled in the earth

before we were.

The generative power of a place.

Powers.

The whole sky turns red.

On a day they say will be the hottest in three years.

They say and they sat.

And then the sun is actually there,

that strange skyey *there* that seems like *here*

and the gull too comes right up to my face,

we startle each other

he by being where he always is

and me by standing half an hour too early on the deck.

The things they say

even now down among the wild sea roses

where the blackbirds and robins and sea swallows carry on,

naming, being names.

In a foreign place it's hard to get proportions right.

How much sugar in this strange cup.  
One gull complaining to another.  
Forain, having to do with fairs and market days,  
a fair is something intermittent,  
a fair day but it can rain and still be fair  
and all the dairy maidens come home wet.  
The fair merchant sets up his stalls  
or wanders through the crowd selling.  
Cheese stands still but watches walk around.  
So foreign to this island life,  
an island is always on.  
Where forane first meant outside the walls.  
Outside the usual boundaries of the word.  
And then the other gull complained.  
Foreign meanings,  
tragedies of prose.  
Cheese without interpretaters,  
a hundred grams of grana in Bolzano.  
I am a travelling salesman of the obvious,  
a fated man.

*ill fate and abundant wine*

The poet always plays with marked cards  
this is what makes poetry possible  
but limits it so strangely.  
The word says everything but it's still just a word.  
Just something you heard  
or almost heard

as you were going to sleep,  
your mother's voice calling your name,  
and she dead so many years  
and nobody knows that name of yours these days.

A word has such high walls.

But if you manage to clamber up and stand on them  
or just chin yourself up and look over them  
how far you can see.

Believing in places

*the things you see beyond the wall,*

*the place you stand*

believing in places is the origin

then you believe in names.

The first words are where things are.

What is this place the robin's hopping on?

Happening in?

Don't be ingenuous, poeta,

this opera needs you to be serious and smart,

die or be died on in the last act

with a sob the size of an orchestra.

Andrea Chenier, see, they call your name out,

the jailer of the world

invites you to the civil executioner

with all the universal explanations of religion

worthless at this hour

when all you can think of on the scaffold

is the pretty dappled hide of so many women



smiling up at you in sunlight  
alert to your last opportunity to speak,  
one more impromptu then the knife.  
Blade fall, curtain fall, the veils  
fall away and you are you again,  
no music, wordless as a glass of water  
with dust on its surface it's been on the table overnight  
it catches rising sunlight now,  
the sun plays with it,  
the way it touches everything  
if once you let light into the room.  
You look down at what  
if anything you've written,  
lean lines of something or other, color of slate.

9 June 2004

=====

Things waiting for me  
are a street  
speaking a juicy language  
I don't recognize

I like to hear them talking  
as I walk by  
happy for the warm shadows  
under the striped awnings

hot today! A street  
running from 1892 till now,  
with women selling herrings,  
with men selling neckties from pushcarts

and the ties are gaudy and fat  
crimson and yellow and silver  
on a day like today  
I can believe anything

even your footstep at my door  
you who are always  
coming back from the night.

9 June 2004, Cuttyhunk

## OVER THE NEW HYDRANGEA

Meeting. Morning. Choosing  
the selectmen of the day.

I am a gull for it, and a cloud.

Assert a box. A boat.

Lift it on its trailer  
to ride to the water.

A box. Put things  
inside other things.

Crack the pronoun.

See what lives inside.

Divide I. Seeing  
what lives inside.

Assert. A leaf  
thinks it is the only one.

A yellow dog runs up the hill.

Palling around.

The way they do.

Crowd in the market.

So many things for sale.

Shoes. He can't bear  
looking at shoes, all shoes  
should be the same. Variety  
is wasted on the feet.

Open the gate.

Have opinions.

About Parmenides.

*I am trapped in the sound of words,  
you are trapped in their meanings.*

*This gives us both a lot to do,  
keeps you interested, keep me  
at the mercy of other people's mouths.*

Medical dictionary.

Look up obsession

depuration lavage.

If the sea were pure fish would be gods.

Predicate adjectives permitted.

Ear wax. A box.

Ear battle, a voice.

A bottle of drink me.

Go on living.

You said you.

One pair for summer one for winter

one for parties one for hiking

one pair for kicking the dog.

Voting.

Voting is kicking.

Eating. Eating is pie.

We are near enough to remember.

Skyline of small cities I like best of all

see something you can walk by later

buildings you can touch

stone to kiss.

Crowd on the market  
steeple over courthouse.  
God doors closed all week  
to keep the poor from sleeping in the pews.  
But what can you do?  
The poor you  
will have  
always with you  
his curse or blessing, tell.  
The bishop told the priest you are no priest  
you love too many people  
you love me  
a priest should just love god and gather tithes.  
The poor you  
has always  
with Him.  
Skyline of small people  
most beautiful of all our arts  
the uncalendered differences galore  
between this no account house and that one  
the splendor and glory of the godhead dwells.  
The crowd of steeples.  
Lithograph of Brooklyn from before the War.  
New Bedford. How slow  
color ripens in this flower.  
So many shoes he can't bear.  
Burdens of the night

such legal music.  
Comfort and carry.  
Squidding line on his reel  
to aggravate the sea.  
Wait for me. In boxes  
the mind is organized.  
A message on no telephone.  
A letter and no mail.  
How can there be a cherry  
without a god,  
a sky without a steeple?  
A word is a riddle waiting to bite.  
Be pressure treated  
like the wood of your front porch.  
Resist the elements.  
Have no opinions  
the best way,  
Open crowded market gull goes by.  
Some house hides the sea.

10 June 2004

Cuttyhunk