

6-1995

## junB1995

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## FACING

There are two kinds of shaving:  
looking at oneself, the shaver, in a silvered mirror or  
looking at the other, outside, usually electric.

Both of these courses have merit  
but I usually prefer the latter, for the view, my friend the Road  
seen from my window, and whoever  
comes along it, a man after my own heart  
ambling along keeping his distance

and a truck or two goes by and the little black Norelco  
buzzes in my hand, right up under my ear now, loud,  
not so different from the lazy assassins on their riding mowers,

buzz, maybe I'll look up and see the grass has been mowed,  
dead branches buzzsawed, trenches dug, the Curile  
Ædile with his saffron band inspecting boundaries,  
they're all stretching purple tapes along the ground,

from stick to stick a measure's taken! And the priests  
come hopping on one foot, their shawms  
snarling and their tambourines, their tambourines,  
and they call my bushes names in Latin,

things in Latin. They form cotillions on the village green  
and wave their plumed standards: eagles, lions, bears, bees,  
their golden bees buzz around my garden  
and I am staring in my eyes again, there is no difference,

my face is everywhere and now they're chanting Greek.

7 June 1995

*for Charlotte, as of 3 June 1995*

How could it ever have been different?  
That question is a feeling, the feeling  
is the answer, there is a world of empty answers.

We were born inside that quietness  
which is the heart of language—  
the words come later, hands and tongues, almost  
as the line of least resistance speak.

But first the quiet. You watched the sea  
from your own house, I watched the sea from a sea  
marsh.

I had to walk a mile to get there—  
so have to talk more, scribble more, faster,

to get to that quiet shore. And there  
you always are. Quiet beautiful body,  
quiet beautiful mind, understanding everything you  
saw  
with the analytic of alertness,

the shore you are.  
I came to you to learn perfection.  
Which comes exactly by observation, the prayer

of being intimate, unfrightened eyes  
the color of what they see, ocean  
that is always moving. But they don't move.

The sea also is serenity, or the shore  
(the shore you are) is that part of the sea  
which is its quietness. Where you let me come to you.

*for my Charlotte, my perfect Wife, in celebration of our second wedding anniversary, a seamark in the miracle of our marriage*



## PEREMPTORY DISCLOSURE

A coracle bobbing in the estuary  
bears shepherd and shepherdesses  
to my sheepless island. Rose  
without fragrance, forgive me.

Coral darkened with so many  
sunsets, forgive me. Green hill  
with me standing on it alone,  
forgive me. The life you give me

is a sky with a tree in it  
whose roots are everywhere,  
maybe even are normal, maybe  
even down in there. Ashore  
they come and call me but I hide.

8 June 1995

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What an angry face would remember  
if it could fall into piece. The water  
is disordered. I touch the crinoline  
grocers wrap their fancy pears in,  
the touch's as good as the taste,  
now why do I say that, not cloth at all,  
just crinkly paper, *this vegetable my aunt*.  
Sweet miracle, to come back home.

Artifice, all this artifice, plebiscite  
of pigeons, they all walk away,  
that's what they like to do, big-breasted  
strutting under benches, a pigeon  
is nothing if not tangential.  
And evidential. He remembers  
that home is not enough to come to.

8 June 1995, New York

## LANDSCAPE: GRAMERCY PARK

Antiquity is sunlight. Stripes  
of it that feel like wind  
when I touch the unfamiliar

open window. Screenless.  
Late rising city, light  
that fell. Time is travel

and there's an end to it.  
It is too early to brook contradiction  
outside and below

the hidden waters of Manhattan move.  
My city, I keep saying, my city,  
like a drunk over the snapshot of his dead wife.

But I have never explained the Fifth Secret,  
the one only I know  
rarer than the Eagle in Heaven

or Ship skipping on the Sea. The mystery  
of a city and its man  
and how it means me.

Maybe she would not have left me if I said.

=

When a city *has* as many as New York did, does, each of those it has participates a city of his or her own. There are, in great cities, as many cities as citizens, each of them duly inscribing its own way in the other. A city is a garden of reciprocals. It writes its streets into me, and by them I know myself, the passions or despondencies roused or soothed in each thoroughfare of what I suppose my own history. And I write my movements into it, wearing its literal pavements, blocking or easing its actual traffic. The thousands of New York streets I walked merge tunelessly with thousands I never stepped on or even saw, so that comfortable busy avenues in Corona or Hunt's Point were as blank and remote to me as Moscow or Wadi Musa. Men are bees, and ride lines of light invisible,



necessitous, inescapable. The bee paths through the meadows of becoming, spoor of the hunt a city child is always on. Then the sudden space-smitten, vista-dazzled standstills of a child in the city! Immensity of avenues, Grand Concourse receding forever north, away. Great peopled away, away, from which one never can come home! A child gapes at such vastnesses, of buildings or empty spaces, he lives in such a tiny room, how can there be such vast spaces, how can there be a sky? And how can the sky fit so well into the hugeness of the city, the whole sky nestled, bobbing on the bottle green of the East River. And all those distances and endless ascensions have their match in inner distances, miles and miles of continuous erection. We walk the city into place, the city shapes us as we move. Walking holes in the darkness. Then light snaps through and is shaped incredibly just like one of us, the stars in heaven are ourselves we reach to touch. Dare to speak to. Can one speak to a stranger on the street? Pressing against the hot soft humid but unrelenting air of August nights in Brownsville, the crowds in light on Pitkin Avenue jostling in front of the basketballs in the windows of Davega's or smelling the garlicky meat at Kishke King, the nervous crowds of gamblers and baseball fans and intellectuals —each in a world of his own, dreaming his own futures, anxious for headlines that may never come — waiting for the tomorrow's papers at the newstand on Utica Avenue next to Dubrow's cafeteria, the papers come out and tell us what we think, we are nervous standing so many of us alone, and then the dark murmurous companies of old people summing up the day and the world on Eastern Parkway under the leafy shabby plane trees in bat-fluttering shadows they sit on slatted benches and talk the way we talk when all else is over and all else has failed, and this talk of ours will fail too, and we will pass into the streetless dark the bats fly so securely but till that moment we are humans, we have streets and language, and the place where streets and language live together is the city. The old ones hold sticks of burning punk in their puffy fingers, wave them listlessly, in hopes the listless smoke will dismay mosquitoes. But no one is ever turned back from his work or from his appetite, no one at all. We go on walking, always guessing, no doubt wrongly, that our real name is spelled with other roads.

9 June 1995, New York

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Flutterlife hemquick  
the wind's character  
to tease. Approachable  
reticences, apprentices

reach out for more. Any image  
is demi-monde,  
there is a real  
Society that does not look.

10 June 1995, New York

## THE HYDRANTS

Run from the pump-house  
to bring more fire,  
a sort of liquid that smarts the eye.

Who polishes the doorknob  
when the wind comes to call?  
Who rolls ripe pears  
on the kitchen floor

so that they wobble on linoleum  
soft as an old man speaking Gaelic?  
Who staked a flagpole in my lawn  
and what flag flies from it?

Can one mirror be eternity?

10 June 1995, New York

## P E A R S

Everywhere I look there are drawings of pears.  
We are in love with fruits, evidently,  
just as much as with lines and nubby textures—  
most of these pears are as fuzzy as peaches.

What do we want when we look at a picture?  
They are round and tapered, breastlike,  
testicular too, sexy and tasty and all too often  
hard as rocks when you take them out of the bag.

The Assistant Managers (Produce Section)  
must bring the ripe ones home to their mothers  
or worse. Leaving us with the picture, in grisaille,  
next to the espresso machine, kind of dirty,

fly specks on it. What are fly specks, anyhow?  
They seem to occur in novels a lot, as badges  
of inferior cafes, the way pictures of pears  
proliferate all over Manhattan these days.

Every bistrot has some ripe impersonal  
inedible image on the wall, but if I can't eat it  
I'd rather look at structures: the Pont-Neuf, say,  
or a bird's eye view of the Polo Grounds.

Of course it's the shape. Feminine, or in a pinch  
male muscular, curvy, just unsymmetrical enough  
to keep us interested, like Cleopatra's nose.  
Isn't it strange they all think we all want to look

at the same things everywhere. I could sit here  
and stare at my own wrist or as much of my forearm  
as I let peek out of my cuff. These pears are grey,  
a dismal prospect, graceful, promising not much.

10 June 1995, New York [done 14 June 95]

## POSTCARD

Here at the Gramercy a cool weekend in June  
the Pocahontas thing in the park but not so bad  
we walked right by and had the pleasure of a Blimp above  
and Jews for Jesus handing our cute yellow leaflets  
and not too far away — and not too loud — some Family Rock  
emitted evidently by the trees themselves.  
Where all the police bay geldings sheltered from the drizzle.  
After all, a city is mostly grammar. Outlives  
the semantic inclinations of its citizens, does not succumb  
to their momentary minds (“words”) or whims, keeps  
pure structure, or structure pure. Outcropping of bedrock  
near the museum, our native metamorphic  
fact. I mean the way streets fit together,  
the way you can or can’t get into houses — buzzers  
that never work, the key inside a rolled up sock  
tossed from the fire escape, catch it before it hits the gutter,  
the lurkers at the threshold, call from the corner phone  
and I’ll come down, it’s not such an easy thing to get inside  
as any schoolboy knows. Even the churches are locked.  
And even on the hottest days the wind swoops in from the river.

11 June 1995, New York

## SUPPOSE THE MONTH IS WRONG, THE CLOCK, THE CALENDAR

Yesterday the joyous shouts, the whistles,  
no one can whistle like Latinos,  
of the thousands, tens of thousands,  
Puerto Rican Day, thousand in white summer muscleshirts,  
their flags with just one star, big star,  
flag capes, headband flags, flag shirts, flags held  
modestly furled on litte sticks, the old women held them so,  
or flapped from jackstaffs, waved like Iwo Jima over everything,  
their flags and whistles, their shouts in unisons, word  
lost in the speaking, lost in the shouting, found in the air,  
thousands in the avenues, in the terminal, every train,  
joyous, offending nothing but the ears, the ears  
are meant to suffer, they  
are the organs of politics and complaint, the sluice  
of revolution, the dead sea of despair, the ears  
witness the vast throng, *thiasos*, throng of the apart,  
bewildering the world with whistles, troupes  
of bare bellied high laughers, everybody 23 years old,  
by the thousands, with whistles. And we knew  
what it must feel like to march into a fallen city, wild  
with the noises of our coming, the whistles, the rhythmic  
great shouts of our coming. And we knew what it must  
feel like to live in an occupied city  
when the troops of the new gods roll into town,  
whistling and shouting and waving weird flags  
and so happy with being themselves  
they don't have a moment yet  
to bother their smiling heads about us.

12 June 1995

Back from the Mythropolis

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One summer day the man woke up and thought December,  
the ink runs uphill in my veins, the trees are sluggish.  
He didn't believe a word the sun said, or the rain  
thereafter, gentle, even when it was full of yellow pollen  
that left a map like China on his window sill. Belief  
is difficult. His dreams were nothing special, no snow,  
no arctic terns, no bitter winds tattooing naked skin  
with symmetries of shiver. He just knew it was winter,  
the sun an accident, not an essence, of Time. He woke  
and maybe deep inside his wrongness was a yearning  
to be wrong. Maybe that is our love too, to go astray,  
make the wrong move, be late, get lost, stay on the train  
when the doors close and your neighborhood slides behind,  
the only thing you ever knew. Only the wrong turn can help me now,  
at the end of every street somebody's death is waiting.

12 June 1995



## AU PAIR DE LUNE

she comes in with viaducts for hands  
a vital sign runs down the fresh skin of her young throat  
she swallows her lunch in Swedish  
she forgives me for needing so much car

for I was born at night time and when dark comes  
back again I come to life and scream  
or listen to old opera records on the phonograph  
she touches me to soothe or startle

and here I thought I was all alone in the music  
but she is suddenly there with her pale skin  
the 78 rpm turntable slings round so much noise  
is it Salome content to die for love and die she does

or is it Dalila inveigling her husband? Really  
we have to trick ourselves before we can trick others.  
I have to imagine the taste of her arm  
since all I taste is my own spit left from the last nibble.

I love her white clothes. I love it when she turns from me  
and steps out of them into the bathtub, forgetting  
that I'm there or remembering it and wanting to teach me  
what it means to have the Moon for my maid

and I watch the water gushing over her shoulders and flanks  
she is pink behind the vinyl shower curtain printed  
with a map of this Republic, her elbow is in Maryland,  
her left knee in Colorado, I will never have landscape

that does not look and feel and taste and move like her.  
So in my whole life she is the only place I've ever been.

12 June 1995

## COSMOLOGY

Compose the night. The excitement  
you want to understand  
is pain. The sadist  
teaches that all pleasures finally  
hurt. Attachment  
burns the skin. And then goes in  
deeper, to meet  
the emerging greed. At the level  
of my sense

of being me

they meet.

This self is that pain, the night  
full of joyous rowdy futile shout.  
Inside the quaking bed  
we lie in fear.

I thought this  
watching the poor girl with a tattooed breast  
bared to the travellers, smiling,  
brushing make-up on. The pain  
we give back to the world  
trying to make it smile.  
Cosmos is remorse. Cosmology is confession.

13 June 1995

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One is happy in one's fashion.  
Self-destruction is hard work  
and keeps one busy. Sister,  
I wanted to cry, it's the wrong

self you're destroying!  
But what do I know, I who am  
and am so busy destroying  
the self I see, that never did anything to me,  
and leaving undisturbed the secret enemy.

13 June 1995

# The measure once determin'd

The patrol of frogs  
incantation —dawn— ururura  
dixunt babuinae  
cantilena melismatica  
mode of Turquoise  
big as a ripe grape  
held in the bronze lips of  
a statue of the Other God  
—in this little pyxis  
my image waits.

For we magians carry our souls in little boxes,  
red leather stencilled in silver, here and there  
a turquoise or some amber, ladies, to soothe  
eye-ache or the pain of truth, or crystal, or coral  
prong to pierce the prairie nights,  
the steppes of Central Labor.

We carry and we peek inside  
to see if Who We Are  
is resting or awake  
scheming or dreaming  
this plot you take for the real—  
hardly awake yet, barely morning  
and the wave falls.

14 June 1995

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Beyond this hate  
the hope not to abolish  
but see through it  
so ardently and well

reveals the opening.  
Door in the sky. Cloud.  
Window. Wait.  
Wait but wait alive,  
  
seeing without the least look.

15 June 1995

## T R A W L I N G

Trawling, is that  
what fishermen do?  
Slow movements  
of the line, alertness  
softly waves, allowing

and allowing, and listening  
until it comes,  
the word, is it a word,  
means you (needs you)  
to say. For this

you need a lot of morning.

15 June 1995

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So much theory and whining and graduate school chalk dust.  
For Christ's sake, try to write something that would make  
your mother happy if you laid it on the table in front of her.  
Writing is pleasure, and to give pleasure, and give more.  
Can you give pleasure? Take back the Net!

15 May 1995