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## junC1994

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## SEASURGE

I'm not sure I have the elegant American clarity  
to deal with this spider web, jewel garlanded with raindrops  
between me and the sea, an unlikely flower from the windowbox.  
Ratnamala, a wreath of gems. A rosary of rare.  
How can I count them? These drops are magnitudes  
like stars, and range in size. Sizes. Sixteen jewels in one length.  
Twenty four lengths on the outer ring. Nine rings in the most regular  
regions.

Seventeen radiuses, each with jewels of its own. Survey of reality,  
small, nearby, preparing to count the rain. Twenty-three drops on one  
radius

I happened to count. Some more, some less, some other  
longitudes cut or incomplete but with their perfect raindrops too.  
Webs don't have a center they have a *zone*  
(but I'm supposed to know the flag of every nation,  
a need I make me have, *a lust to know*

*but fruitless so*

((as the rain drops dry it is as stars go out)).

The only thing he brought home is one jewel. Every journey  
he makes he takes it with him, and brings it back  
each time more lustrous till it's perfect. By evening the web's  
invisible but the spider walks on it now, stops  
when I sneeze and looks at me, then goes on with her tireless  
geometry. Down by the beach in fog strong scent of the sea roses

hovering in the wind. Low tide, ducks courting on our lawn.  
My breath comes back to me from the other side of the sea.

14 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

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The composition is always waiting  
beneath the intention,  
it tries to know itself clearly  
through the scrub oak wilderness outside the city  
where mauve tail lights of furtive autos tell  
all there is to know of motivation.

15 June 1994 Cuttyhunk

**AN EXORDIUM TO THE PORTUGUESE IN ME**

who came here  
to salt our fish  
inevitable karma  
consequences  
of what we find

put up  
with where it goes:  
the immigrant

sea— namely order  
(blessèd order)  
and glasses of 1798 malmsey  
such as Sidney Smith set before me  
once at St Catherines  
when wet clematis was blooming on the crescent  
and these things I can stop trying to forget

find

me the catalogue  
I have exhausted the patience of the wise,  
a blue god  
bothering sleeping heifers  
with sudden bliss

the dark skin is what does the love

the is  
and the is not are both  
at our disposal

And so the smallest thing is ready to help me decide.

15 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

## ISLANDS ARE PROVISIONAL OBSERVATIONS.

Manhattan. Kowloon. Esmeralda dances, Phœbus falls—  
There is a difference, island people however city,  
an island knows more about the sun, no phase of Her  
unvisited —spray of mist— why wake so late, my bride,  
it's almost seven, the vicar's on his way to heaven —heave  
your horns and join her twice— we were talking  
strictly about weather— Singapore. How much of me  
fits in this destiny? A *schuhglanztuch* foil-wrapped  
like a condom, souvenir of a German hotel, to wipe shoes bright.  
An island seems to be the place to get it right. Or at least  
to drag by tide or shoulder everything you ever thought. Things.  
And the thing to be wary of is lyrical. Or: what comes in winter  
has another meaning. Try to place it in the moon. Watch  
the satisfaction on his face as it goes in, mirror of your pleasure.  
There is no measure for that geology except the oil we think.

2.

Keep this book safe from floods. How can you resist the rabbit on the  
lawn?  
Folk wisdom of the long migrations, soul by soul, a little sailboat  
shrouded  
and then the summer comes of gay marinas —where's my wise winter  
then?  
Be wary of the lyrical, it turns into a guitar sleaze-strummed on Mass  
Ave  
to beguile the demoiselles of despair. Be wary of the song lest you be  
sung.

3.

One rests from what seemed to be labors, and you are one. Work does  
itself,  
we're just along for the ride, muscles on their own. We climbed the  
hill  
in the dizzying southwester, no part of us dry, a joy to carry, no  
differences  
perplexed us, the slog uphill was beautiful in wet.  
Wade on through. Fake science is enough for me, calcium  
to smear on walls, phosphorus to make the sea a script at night—

all midnight long umbrella lightning shimmered constantly.  
Only hours after did the thunder come —punor— who wakes?—  
and the paltry genocide of fishermen suspend in mist.  
You think at first: the world doesn't know what I'm thinking about it  
and then you realize: you're just a part of all that you suppose.  
Your thinking is just a part of what thinks you, cause upon  
cause without end — what we call 'effect' is just some sudden now,  
a lull in the weather of neglect. It means you notice it.  
And it is all there is of all that was. Then it's gone into the west—  
don't worry, by then you'll be thinking something else.

4.

Go to a place to guess the mind free there if you can. What happens  
in your heart there in your head. Travel, like every masochism,  
is a quest for knowing, the irrefutable evidence of pain. Voices  
raise in mist, "I didn't really like it," a woman says away,  
and that's all the information comes, a preference floats in fog.

5.

Steel straight, like a bridge between two maybes, and it sure is river.  
Tom-tom. Cruelty is an island in the mind where no one lives but me.  
I rule ruin. Things fall for me. The fog came thick tonight, sea loud  
and nothing seen. A house is a light in the dark, that's all. We really  
are for other people, if we only knew. Or knew how. I don't, I faint  
at every doorbell. I pretend to be the wall. For wall is ecstasy  
and silence and come true. At dusk at Gosnold Pond we saw three  
crows—

first I've ever seen on this island. They lurched through dead aspens,  
a hawk there was also, and two swans, in godly mist the light stayed  
firm.

Bayberry anecdotes rustle in cold wind. War memories to invent.

15 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

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There are many here, the struggle for union  
Taking toll. Pineapple, a piece of chocolate,  
And Hamburg burns. All we mean  
Is to be each's other. There is no issue  
Past that. And past that there is only  
Freedom. The sticky flower no one knows.

2.

I thought about the old Crayolas stuffed in the glass,  
ultra blue, orange, fluorescent green, and gray.  
The least popular colors are what get left  
After the noble primaries have found their Mondriaan  
And left for weddings. Dinners. Men with striped trousers  
And dove-grey waistcoats, high priests with *uatchets*,  
Typewriter salesmen in the desert, fleas. Smoothness  
Is a matter of ratchets. Ice hockey. Semaphores. You know  
I can keep it up all night. But in the small hours Lady Iris  
Half-watching herself in the ceiling-tall gilt-rimmed pier-glass  
Begs me if I know no better game than names. A leg  
Thrust out beneath a redingote. A tulle surprise.

3.

So I summoned for once the Supreme Council of the Knights  
Paladin of Indianapolis of the Second Order of the Third



Arrival —those who had been waiting at the door all night  
Knowing they'd be needed— and asked them for the oil they saved  
Like prudent virgins from all the years of harvests, tree  
Upon tree. They had no answer but their black fingernails.  
And all my royal state is known and shattered, free of inference,  
Blank as binomials. But what they had they gave me I brought home.

16 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

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Not having to know what came before —a kind of humor— a sputter  
of downhillness in the fisherman’s old car — the sea is waiting.

“Yesterday,  
at twilight we came to the pillboxes high on the western bluffs. The  
sea fog

was meeting the land mist, and the low trees and bayberry thickets  
down there around the cove were green and new like the first  
morning of the world come back just before dark. We called it

matinee  
when we were kids, the morning that leads to night. Three crows  
were there,

first we’ve ever seen on the island, and a hawk. Two swans were  
plowing the relaxed lagoon.

No sound except the surf out of sight beyond the pebble beach  
we saw the near flank of, where deer run but none did.”

In the delicate web system (DWS) of these lower stars, a hunk of  
bread

changes everything. A gull is always waiting. Feed the gull.

Everything causes everything. No neutral on these gears. Save sleep  
maybe, when I am done without doing. *Be it done to me*

*according to thy word.* “You lay alone those weeks of isolation,  
how heavy the body is, but how also far away. The doctors watched

in their absent-minded well-meaning way, almost you wished they  
were indifferent,

their tender glances asked too much of you, as if you had to heal  
yourself

for their sakes, their spirits part of your burden, the part of you  
that must be gladly. The dance.” Bodhicitta. “Go shelter  
in the house of abstract love, sweet innuendoes of the living.”

Sea march I hear but I don’t see. Gull conversation. Yellow  
aftermath

of too much blue. The sun on its shield, those old high reciprocals  
of ancient obvious heraldry, both hidden now. “A mist is mercy  
when you’re on the land, the sailboat with lowered mast dreams on  
the lawn,

its sky a brown tarpaulin no smaller than those starry canopies of  
Egypt

inches above the snoozing noses of mummied pharaohs, the actual  
stars. The accurate. For in a special sense all beings are asleep  
and mummies just make it obvious. Think when you stroll through

Cairo or Berlin

and smell that mummy-stink: those characters wrapped up in agony  
are me, for I am sleeping now, afoot in the interminable museum.

All we’ve made!” The choice of wrappers: the long driveling odes  
of Bacchylides (just like these) tear into strips and wind round your  
chest.

We dress in the fashion of departure, *a body and an island*,  
*no more need I!* sang the cold paladin in the empty sky.

16 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

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They want the weather for what it lets them do. Kill fish for instance  
or play on sand. The cooperant Jupiter of our wishy prayers.  
There are words we won't let our fingers write. Not found in official  
poetry.  
These words agitate me in the night —a hat, a scarf, how could I  
dream  
about a woollen scarf? It was a book at bedtime that dreamed for me.  
It wasn't Zurich on the Limmat, it was Austria, a lake with many  
swans  
and a woman with dark eyes, pleading like a Catholic saint, forward  
crest  
of her perfect baroque profile towards sleazy older lover, bleak  
noncommittal businessman. Her urgency and grief. Beauty. And the  
swans  
poured by us both, and I was full of her grief, poverty of my  
understanding,  
why doesn't she see through him, through me, see through all her pain  
the quiet light of no more hoping, afterglow on the lower Alpine  
ridges,  
and still she wants something of us all.

16 June 1994, Cuttyhunk



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Heigh ho, what shall the measure be,  
stress in the wrong place and music listening?

Not to Sheol go by refining  
afterthought or meta-fire  
as a bee  
might aspire all its life  
to just this flower  
never knowing so,

we go  
where our need  
is obvious,  
the compulsion  
is miraculous  
and plain,

every instant  
instant afterlife.

17 June 1994, Cuttyhunk  
[20 June 94]

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The d-minor symphony begins like Homer “in the middle of  
*things,*” tune-up and suddenly you’re right in the story, some story,  
gasping for breath, who are these people?  
Or Prince Andrei, how could that sky  
have been there every day of my life and I not see it?  
Do I see it now? Mist hides the Vineyard, the slow  
poignant second movement, a gull glides off the world forever.  
To have reached the ocean beyond appetite and still love you.

17 June 1994, Cuttyhunk



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The island— how to be hot and cold at once  
the mist the sun the clammy wind the sweet  
freshness and the glare all one, all dawn  
on Cuttyhunk this little Albion  
and so to map it, Druid stones and Pict fort  
up the western bluffs three wars ago  
some strange antediluvian strategy decreed  
pillboxes of concrete were needed, gun emplacements,  
rotting iron fences, cubic caves to magic enemies  
or ships or stars or what do wizards see  
when they send, Henry, one country at another  
like a dog at the throat of a dog.

18 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

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*for Charlotte*

In this fog now grey as churches  
if anyone comes sailing Buzzards Bay  
they'll slip past us unseen  
even if from the Rhode island shore  
a thousand flaming Manitous  
glimmered our way low on the wave  
as if those angels too were  
fishermen or cormorants  
but nothing kill. The land  
has its own gods, they live in hiding  
or they live hidden, but now the sun  
comes through the mist like the full  
moon on a cloud thick night  
and hangs there in the grey uncertainty  
full of the energy that agitates us  
also to seed and help and sympathize,  
quiet sun like a word from her mouth.

18 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

## IN ISLAND MIST

The apparition is not simply what appears,  
it has a mind too, a Japanese  
turn of shoulder towards the tree,  
pine, a whiff of oil,  
motor oil, clump of bayberries by the cliff,  
a monk peeing in the mist.

2.

Down the hill a woman's washing windows  
poised under the eaves on the shed roof  
with the vague sea behind her — an old  
man it turns out to be, the wild white hair  
made me think otherwise. But that's my business,  
thinking otherwise. And the language of the pine,  
rare here among the stunted bays, the measled plane trees  
crouching in mist-twilight, hung with catkins smoky pale.

3.

Nadis. The channels of entitlement  
that make me me. Through this neck or sly canal  
my mother goes, casting me right and left until I am or be.  
Teach a child an unknown word, what else  
do most of us have to give, or a word  
in that unknown language called Language, what happens  
in the mind in a child when the word says  
and hears itself in a child's mind and never mind who's talking?  
Or the mind of a woman washing shadows.  
A word is enough. A little knowledge and pebbles  
on the beach, sea shushing,  
dare me to appear. And there I are.  
Bullseye in the empty channel, heeling hard. What appears  
only happens to be there. But there's nowhere else for it to be.

4.

Sundown anticipated midmorning. The scratch of noise

against irritable tissue, one man's music.  
Founded in aggression, a sound colonializes.  
Empire of space, while you can hear me  
I must rule. Listening to other people's radios  
is like being made love to by the wrong people. Skin  
has this awful insistence on its own.

5.

I don't like weddings though I like marriage fine,  
too many people at the ceremony, too many words, sounds, foods,  
informalities. A word is enough. I fear it is a formal one I am,  
having the need of circumstance and stanza, forest-green  
my Gypsy caravan, and silvergilt with fixed stars most orderly.  
Sway through beech woods! Annihilate the obvious!  
Or everything but the obvious. The sun, you oldest hammer.

6.

The flamenco dancers have gotten mixed up with the carpenters,  
heel taps and hammer taps, the differences disappear, a shout  
names the local deities, they come and drink with brazen throats  
the delicate arrangements of bride and groom and money and a little  
house with roses just planted at the door. Muse me more money, quick!

18 June 1994  
Cuttyhunk

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Should be impossible, like pottery,  
something turned, then shaped carefully  
by hand, like the lips of a mouth  
formed over accurate teeth or  
a room painted turquoise everywhere  
and furniture carved of color, a game  
they play with light. The light loses.  
Between hot and cold, a castle on the horizon.  
Of course it's just an ordinary house,  
people stand on their feet, the wind  
coils around them, words are misunderstood  
everywhere. Or not heard, wind  
hissing in the privet. Far out a schooner  
self-consciously a blade of light.  
A man carries a boy down the hill,  
the boy makes himself stiff, like a log  
the man carries in front of him  
like a sign of something. There is humor  
in them, some kind of dialect of motion  
being spoken. My eye keeps going to the little ship  
light-hearted on such an earnest old ocean.  
I love the world because it's far away.

18 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

## MUSIC THERAPY

You tell me how music makes men better  
and I'll teach you a song I learned in the marshes  
when a stray bittern off his course began to boom  
and the hunkathunk of his Mahler mind  
opened a moony heaven to me cloud by cloud.  
Since birds are always there. I think you're wrong,  
and the only thing that heals is silence,  
real silence, not just some truancy of sound.  
I was absolutely alone —the way young men are  
but also the way we all are when we die. Alone  
I watched the marsh turn limitless at twilight,  
edge turning into edge forever, the sea was there  
by intuition and since by day one saw the sea.  
But now was nothing but that grey of timothy,  
eelgrass, terns complaining I was near their house.  
Alone — and all the music that ever came to mind  
had some of that distance and dismay in it,  
that huge awayness that a marsh at evening has  
and never came home. Almost it could cure me of me.

18 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

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As if a cause knew its effect  
only by the sweat on its hands.  
Or is it a rock, rough as a wasp bite  
that lies there, red when you look  
but who knows what when you sleep?

18 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

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It's time I learned the gulls, they're troubadours like me,  
greedy gallants of the lower airs, *Larus* I suppose  
*orphericus* or something like it, shrill prophetic  
bird diving white but black-rimmed past the sun

as if the sun meant nothing to him, just one more god?  
No, I should go look in the bird book, every house has one  
by the sea, yesterday the catbird where two years ago  
you saw your first scarlet tanager in the low maples

themselves rare on the island — who needs a bird book  
when he has a wife, quick to note the blaze of crimson,  
depth of color on a she-mallard's wing, the rank  
of blackbird by the hue of his chevrons, you! Meantime

the sun's a little higher, sheen on Barges tide, three slim  
pleasure craft from Moneystan moored in the outer harbor  
silhouetted, bows towards me into the west wind.

The prevailing condition of our flowers. Weather reports,

that's all this is, like Mallarmé's leisures of the mail  
in this respect alone: making something out of nothing, rhyming



the weather with who you are. To my wife Charlotte  
(rhymes with scarlet) in her house by the sea.

Of course the sun sheen aims at me. That is the nature  
of nature. (The weather.) I hide my eyes behind the windowframe  
but keep my face in the wind. Low chiming of wide sea,  
the hush of her, no traffic but the intermittent gulls.

19 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

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It is, I suppose, a letter. An ask-you  
clocked into sunlight (the wind suddenly fallen  
for one hour and for the first time in a week  
the cliffs at Gay Head were visible, white,  
the typography of the sea. The mother  
and her daughter sit as usual across the way  
on the stoop of their white sided house,  
nothing to do but look around and smoke  
in the passing evening light. What do I ask?  
A white boat in the channel. Someone to set  
these words to quiet wishful music, à la Rorem  
maybe. For music should find its own measure,  
chew its own gum, leave me loose with logaedics  
as I choose. I am too Sunday to play Saturn  
for conservatory graces. Be sinewy with listening!  
That's what I'm asking. Or suppose me water  
into which you half-reluctantly descend,  
quick surf cold still at just the start of summer.  
I see the musculature of a grandiose upper arm  
wielded in half-light to make song possible,  
grisaille maybe of some neglected double-entendre  
in the passagework of The Creation of the World,  
somewhere between the sixth and seventh days.  
An arm that might be music. Or the shadow of my own.

19 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

---

First morning Gay Head's visible, last night first light (white, pause,  
red). A week of tender haze goes by and now the shield  
is struck in heaven, the Yellow Warrior is back  
shouting outside my cave. But the sheen of him  
is beautiful on water, after all, and his sparkle further out,  
and his cormorants slink by in heaven, and his white boats.

20 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

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windless  
this misted hill an island too  
I hear the sea through the front windows  
and at the back door  
the hum of bees in Betty's garden  
bees in deep sea fog  
working.

21 June 1994

---

I could have wondered what that was  
the solid look the sea has today  
as of a piece of steel  
uneasy below the solar fugitive

cold wind. Summer starts today.  
I could have wondered why time  
has such detail in it (so many hours,  
so many weathers, the heart

a lexicon of terrors, o love,  
why can't I bring you where a gentle  
habitant renews the earth  
with animal gentleness and human

tenderness, a hobbit or a marmot,  
something private, public  
as a chair, banana peel, newspaper,  
radiance a sleeping person yields

into the astonished darkened room,

why is it always me again  
me with my sea and my sun and bafflement  
like the wind trying to turn a doorknob

forgetting the threshold and merciful space?).  
Instead I took it as it came, the Absolute,  
the hurrying encyclopedia, and trusted it  
the way a gull trusts the sky.

21 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

---

Suppose I was that boat out there  
the one I can barely see  
where the channel pours into the sound  
black with a hint of red

and nothing was near me and I  
hardly was near myself  
so busy would I be  
with the waves and the wind

just something between  
ocean and sky  
made up of a few colors  
and busy not sinking

would a house be different from it's me?

21 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

## **A THEORY OF LITERAL THEOLOGY**

There are some people who  
are sunrise but not many  
how many days are they?  
By clock time the boat never makes shore.

So it has to be a narrow thing to say,  
has to be glamor and blackbird—  
something happens by just saying it.

22 June 1994, Cuttyhunk



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And doesn't know why it is as it is  
yellow tapestry of the butterfly and Archer's daughter zapping  
grass borders with a string-cutter the snarl of things  
and the bluest sea today waves high and the pale  
lemon of the butterfly the waves  
a kind of fish you don't see sparrows here  
there are sorrows the postmistress knows  
blackbirds and catbirds and sleazy yachts far off making for

Menemsha

the commerce of the island largely conducted in golf carts  
though there are several trucks red the worker grey the carter  
green the garbage slung in a mid-island dingle  
you see it smoke at sunset you see gulls patrol it  
just takes it as it is the pause the listening.

22 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

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*Deare heart, how like you this?*

And suppose you woke up one day  
from a life you inherited just like everybody else  
and discovered you were suddenly  
at the mercy of small peculiar perverse desires  
and these alone could satisfy

and all the scheduled comforts of your station  
meant nothing or not much  
just this touch or that beholding  
in the bosom of some special fragrance and  
who is there to tell?

Who is there ever to talk to of what you are?  
Wouldn't you try to forget the whole thing  
and pretend for a long time to be not somebody else  
but the self you were before you woke,  
whoever that was, you impostor of an impostor?

And how hard it is when people ask you  
how you like this or like that  
and you have to answer with what you think they do  
and all the while there's nothing but that picture  
of what you want to happen, it never happens, it never

will, it hangs there in your mind, untouchable horizon.

22 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

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*This ought to be dedicated to John Cowper Powys, bard of the  
impossible heart.*

