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when it has a bright yellow beak
it is a starling, when I can't see
the beach from here it is fog.
That's as much as I know
of this *alta tragedia*, life,
island, the street wet
but no rain, the evidence
is in, but of what, whole day
around me a quotation
from someone who misses me too.

4 June 2005, Cuttyhunk

= = = = =

Not seeing anything but
what keeps me from seeing
is seeing enough. Cotton
of the light, the soft on skin
I wake and feel it on my hands.
And then there is the sea
lost in it somewhere nearby
doing something I can hear,
one more word I don't know.

4 June 2005. Cuttyhunk.

FAMA / 1

Delighting in celebrity
one's skin lights up.

This is what is called *scîn*
or 'shine' in the old days,
a glory, a ghost light
round a fated man.

If you delight long enough
you get to be great.

You walk surrounded by
your very own light –
hence they call you a 'star'
among us poor wanderers,

allow no one to come too close—
they get burned and you lose glow.
A star is all about distance—
close up, just a pinhole in an old black pan.

4 June 2005, Cuttyhunk

FAMA / 2

Fame feeds me, Doctor,
better than a heel of rye
or an ox's bone, poor
thing, I walk with Dante
and Virgil in a field
hurting nobody, talking
with them and speaking
as of their company.

Hölderlin came back from Bordeaux
knowing there was nothing
in the world but what he knew,
inexhaustible radiance already
round him he could live in
like a snug kitchen, little bedroom
with a window open on the garden,
winter, no flowers, a far moon.

4 June 2005, Cuttyhunk

JOHN BUCHAN'S *CASTLE GAY*

The paradox of conventional fiction: no matter how dull the character or the circumstance might be, close observation freshly registered in words makes an epic or an Everest of it. So the timely delights, the time-passing delights, of Buchan are not so different from those of reading, say, James. It is only later that a sense of difference sets in, a feel of gravity or purport or catholicity of meaning. Till then, who would not want to move in this gentle world of precise observation.

4 VI 05 Cuttyhunk

= = = = =

Walk to the top of the hill
to the top of the hill and come
back down the way you upped

and try to be beautiful and clean
the way a chunk of green beach
glass is, translucent stillness

cast up by last night's storm
not here. Another place.
Where glass is made and broken,

Where lighthouses fall into the sea.

4 June 2005

SAINTE TERRE

Grotto of you.

No cross no star. Emblem else.

Something older than a stone.

When they built this abbey they had another god in mind.

Less law, more necessity. How many years
already we have given to each other,

presence, presence, us unwrapping us to find.

Now the bluish lilac
of a cold spring stands in the doorway,
shadows immigrant, a broken
window. Ogive.

In your hands gently touched together in the habit of prayer
there's enough light left
to see through your loose fingers
our ancient masonry.

How we are made.

No roof to us, open to the sky.

Do you know what the sky *is*?

Eyes in your hand,
see through. Touch the sky.
Rules of craft.

We touch
lightly, a ship
sailing down the cloud.

Wind fustigates the saint above the door, wears
her smooth hip rough. What saint
is that? She is the Magdalene
who loves us too.

Ivy
grew up round our ankles as we stood,
we grew part of what we witnessed.

In other words the Middles Ages never stopped.
Any renaissance at all is us, all this philosophy
all these new abscissas and mantissas
these fossils, Darwins, Freuds and quarks
are just phases in the Very Late Romanesque.
We breathe inside the imagery, we live
by images
and while we do
the Renaissance will never come,

we still live inside
broken cathedrals,
still hope for heaven
we call it having,

still hope.

O be my Jew again and get beyond the actual
into the real, abandon images
because the image always
is an idol, the actual
is idolatry.

Only desire gets beyond the image
into the dark of possession, being taken,
locked inside the moment of

and it is dark. Electric light began the reign of Antichrist.

It is why we are most ourselves in ruins
jagged walls piercing the sky

o break the light
at last

and let us free
into the dark understanding,

no roof on us, no stars
but what we choose,

volutess of desire burst into nova flame.
And all around us the stone is laughing.

4 June 2005

Cuttyhunk

ALBESTONE

And watching.

It waits near,

a smooth white stone

no one found yet

or it is in my hand

unknown, weighs,

waits. A stone

knows how to.

Having and knowing

so far apart,

even the hand.

Shadows of shadows.

5 June 2005, Cuttyhunk

= = = = =

Sun makes a house stuffy
as if a house were not supposed to be.

Rain and fog relax it.
It lives for this. And we,

what do we live for?
Ely? Chartres? Pantheon?

5 June 2005, Cuttyhunk

THE TRAVELER RETURN'D

Manganese and Painted Desert

Iron and Roussillon:

I am a palimpsest

someone writes.

Ill-erased songs of my former meaning

--purport – tonor – trobar – opera –

enough shows through to make me

a very uncomfortable read.

Give me a cup and I'll shut up,

eat my blue corn in the corner.

5 June 2005, Cuttyhunk

ALBESTONE, 2

The size of the thing intended
waits for The Blue Virgin to sail
out and bring me lemons back
from where the lemons grow

and sherbet from the mountains
while I recite her names,
titles, properties, her size
in megabytes and summers,

she has elm tree shadows
on her back I try to bush off
and then we're gone
from each other. The lemon

is a stone. It is so far
from here to Calvary,
no distance back.

Once a thing happens

it stays happened
forever, close as your skin,
part of you, the part
that keeps you apart from the world.

3.

If a boat went out the way a woman does—
the Imam paused.

Which boat, which
woman? They're not all the same.

If a boat, if a woman, I don't know,
things sail through each other, or across.

I wasn't listening, I was seeing.



Why do we do what we do?

Why is pleasure?



Some say aluminum sulfate
makes them blue.

Others talk big about copper.

Alchemists are such a breathless lot
everything is such a federal case –
the only secret is to go on.

Any Atlantic City can tell you that.

But the Imam's pause went on.

4.

Suspiciously, in checked trousers,
offering baksheesh the way we do
(rent, tax, invoice, fee
to keep a rolling world beneath our feet,
he offered me a smooth white stone.

You are not the first to offer me
evidence of arcane survivals
symbols of what is always true
and that we always hated,
I threw the stone away, far
as you'd toss a green
tennis ball to please a retriever.

It lay there in the grass
still gleaming,
waiting for its dog.
Why is pleasure?

There is an afternoon when time comes true –
after is the only time.
Morning lies and night forgets
so wait for the lengthening tune,
time of the shadow growing.
Then listen hard, it's hot and mean then,
it's the way things are.
The cars.



Where is the stone now when we need it?
Where does the farrier go when the horse is dead?
The great staircase in the Rhinecliff Station
rises to a door kept locked.
The whole stone building
is like Gordon Craig's set for Hamlet
and we are ghosts on the battlements,
the door always locked, no way
into heaven, no way off the earth.
And the train seldom comes.
We haunt the river and the hill.
We harrow hell.

For when Christ died
(in Vienna you see him on his way
uphill among the multitudes
tiny figure different only by the cross

he bears among so many,
Breughel shows it the way it is,
every act is lost,
every face a mask, every mask
lost in the crowd)
we all died too.

We all are eastering always.

This white stone
(I retrieved it at last, ashamed,
washed it, set it on my table
to hold down pages never written,
my history of the time to come,
my careful description of the end of the world)
is the stone the angels rolled away.

No angels. He rolled it away himself
to see what the outside was like,
that famous place death's supposed
to be the gateway to. The interview.

That little girls are supposed
to lead you to? carrying palms?
he asked. Be aware
they lose their shape when they get older
he said. But everything has a shape,
no matter what it is, it is it's shape,
given to us to please us and declare.

That's a childish objection,
like a painting by Monet.

5.

But maybe when you die
you're born inside the stone.
That would be hell, wouldn't it,
all that compression, breathless weight,
moveless, hard?

But it might be white,
translucent, a lovely sea fog
that never loses



and an island in it.

That is you.
You are apart from everything.
You know nothing.
Or the tender things you know you doubt.

5 June 2005, Cuttyhunk