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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

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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,

volutes 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