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Woke late, already a sailboat
was through the channel and another
coming in on the sound

and here I thought it was Monday
but it's just like Apollinaire
everybody's on vacation
except Dufy who is busy
painting sails flags our eager
empty sunbronzed faces o girls
of summer et cetera the blue,
that's what I'm trying to say, the blue.

10 June 2002

Cuttyhunk

=====

The eleven line stanza, the eight syllable line, and conversely. These are the modes of smiling*
poetry. Anything longer begins to frown. And it's interesting that Dante (3 x 11 ad infinitum) is, in
any given tercet, an epigrammatist, a carver of precise observations and sever judgments. Dante's
'epic' (as they wrongly call it -- he called it *comedy* and he was right) or 'lyric' arises from sequencing
these solo shots and riffs and jabs -- frames per second -- the *Commedia* our first movie.

* smiling means Mediterranean, California, Delhi in January, New York in April.

WHAT THE POET REALLY WANTED TO WRITE TO ELIZABETH BOYLE AS HIS
PROTHALAMION TO HER EMBRACE

This stone that means to be my shell
highland cattle on a distant beach
elegies from Italy my sun my sun
the stone moves faster than the shell
only in dream where Venice rises
unbearably distinct mosaic far
everybody needs an Adriatic Sea
with a Venice at the end of it, no
moon tonight, the black is at its full
music but why listen? You enter
for the first time this dark story
like the espresso still steaming beside
the aged mobster shot down in his café
I pick up and drink a dead man's stimulant
because it is like you (I said this
before, is anybody listening?) the luster
of oil along the coffee surface, the snug
meniscus where it meets the cup,
aye, many a dope fiend has gotten lost
pondering such kitchen demonstrations
of god's will made known in a matter world
the ill-grasped laws of physics,
because you are those laws, don't you see,
the cynosure (unpleasant etymology
skip it) all my eyes are trained on you
I'm like a fly where you're concerned
I see your past and future, pester you
till your assent to my rare silence
lets you move into my house, drunken

threshold, the swollen key. All I am
beats down on you, hard as threshers'
hands and meek as rain, my whole
science to reveal you, conceal you
your comings and goings trapped in this shell.

10 June 2002

Cuttyhunk

Enough said
like the man
said

as
not like
woman
not man

Why say
a thing
at all
let alone
enough

if not to you?

11 June 2002

Cuttyhunk

ON THE MARGIN OF SILENCE

The window I look out
is full of thinking
not much of it mine

you can be quiet now
I thought to myself
grammar
won't get there today

tomorrow maybe
it's like a party
remember everybody
goes home unsatisfied
irritated ashamed

but today the cold
air moves slow
the sun is warm
ornery as rain

sometimes it is humiliating
to be so forgiven
by language
when so much of what
I want to be or do or take
can wrap itself
leaf-tight in a word

the frost-killed rosebud

of somebody's name,

why is the sense

we make always

the opposite of senses.

11 June 2002

Cuttyhunk

TIMBRE

A buffalo
between me and sunset
stuck on a card
gets it there
despite the morbid imagery
an animal we exterminated
on a prairie we stole

what do the words
written beside it do
not just the USA 21
but the ones I put there
under such auspices
I love you I wish you

with me here
where we had never
done it never
lifted viking fists
against a sleeping world

and the sun is going
down only on us
the buffalo is dead

This kind of postage stamp
doesn't have to be licked
this kind of language
doesn't know how to apologize

11 June 2002 Cuttyhunk

will I ever get
enough of you
I try to think
about what enough
might mean

can come up
with nothing
no limit
to this need

as if having
most of you is
still having nothing at all.

11 June 2002
Boston

LA CHAIR DE LUNE

Swells plump with us
But not tonight
Tonight I look up at you
From way down her
Like a kid on the floor
Staring up his sister

Moon you are not
My mother not my wife
Not even my daughter
I don't know who you are

Did you come to me
About the water
How to slosh it up and down
Day after day the tide

The tedious game you play
With me? Don't tell me
You play it with others
Too, how could they stand it,

A Mass that never ends
A class that never lets out
Air full of birds
And none of them are you

Where does your flesh
Come from sweet moon
Who are nobody?
When does the skin of light

Come to touch me?

11 June 2002

Cuttyhunk

walking there and why would I be
after those long sonatas of Pandolfi
had carved the world into meaning

and a word could be. think
how long a word in being born,
three ages in labor in a hot month
with wind screaming like eagles
the word was born

the question asks itself
were we born before or after it.
This is the only question
of which the world is actually made.

Everything else is just geometry.

11 June 2002

Boston

white miracles in little trucks Good
Humor vexing the evening air
with over and over again
the same what kind of melody
it drives you crazy you want to eat it

because you were young once inside the piece of wood
split the fire and water's there
and I am water. I am the stupid god who started all this

a word and a word and then this.

11 June 2002
Boston

The internet. The internet comes back to remind us of morality. It even teaches morality up to a point*. Because it works in a binary manner.

At any moment you can click on the button or not click. There is always a yes or no choice in front of you.

Ditto in life. However your choices are motivated, initiated, even compelled by the whole weight of your background and the socio-economic grid, you still at any single moment can do something or refrain from doing it. That is binary. This is liberty. It may be the only liberty you ever have. It is at that moment you take your existential stand, stake your life, make your wager.

To choose to do this, or choose not to do it. Or, if the somber dialectic has its way, you only think you choose, the choice is dictated by the conjuncture — even so, the sense of choosing, the sense of saying yes or no, is the sensation of freedom.

The sensation of being free. Is that materially different from freedom? Is it how we choose, or how we feel about what we choose, that makes us actually free? There are spins in both directions, and I don't know the answer.

I do know it is bracing, exciting, frightening, demanding, to stand at the moment of choosing. To click the button. Or not.

12 June 2002, Boston

* It will actually teach morality when we get rid of the BACK button. There is no reversing in a moral universe.

BEING HOME

Being

And being home

And what being there

Means when it is here

Here is other

And other wise

The wisdom of being

And being quiet

No the wisdom

Of being and being

Something else

Even somebody else

Somebody else's body even

Eve or Else

Or anybody even

13 June 2002

...

To be at peace
the way the ceiling is
old plaster
mildly slowly flaking

but nothing falls today,
to be at peace like an old
sea chart, portolan
showing the way

to nowhere you know,
just here
quiet as the ceiling is
dry plaster remembering

quiet, to cling
to the surface of life
and be your own color
as long as you can,

this is what it teaches
to be anywhere.

13 June 2002

Siegmond is dead

Siegmond not Siegfried
the young intender the lover
not the one fooled by the merest
mime not the one bamboozled
by a hedge of fire

no, the young one
killed by the spear
of someone else's
interpretation.

I heard his death
and I heard Jon Vickers singing Troilus,
James King singing Apollo's
Every sacred morning

but some mornings
you wake up and have to die

13 June 2002

SHELLS FROM FLORIDA

nautilus triton ark shell auger shell surf clam giant clam
abalone helmet shell scallop tellin cowrie moon shell
tulip top shell Venus clam pearl oyster periwinkle whelk sundial
cone shell murex penshell turban
limpet conch cockle shell mussel lucine cone shell jackknife clam

1.

Some of these I know my own
some of the shapes attend me
waiting for the sea to fill them

fill the names with sand
fill the names with salt
fill the salt with _____

some of the salt names me.
Some of the names shape me.

I know my own. I know my shell.
My shell attends me
A pen shell writes with murex ink
A letter to the sundial:
Stop talking.

2.

Capital V for Venus. No capital
J for jack. Somepeople are lucky.

Some people are god.

God knows His own. A pen
Knows the word up its sleeve.
The murex dies painfully
(every death is painful)
to write my latest trash.

Fill what I say with what I mean.
Be my Venus. Be my clam.
Let me be the pearl in your mussel.
Do they come that way.

Does anything happen when the shells jingle?
Noise in your pocket.
Does anything happen when it sings?

Listen carefully the shell doesn't change its tune.

3.

Cowries change hands.
Money talks.
Shells change hands.

What changes your hands?

4.

Poetperson, are you not a stevedore of unlikely commodities?
Do the things your hands carry from ink to paper change your hands?

What do you haul up the gangplank of that strange craft
(you even dare to call it) you ply the Seas of Absence with?
Where do you take it? Does it change them there
Where it happens on land? Does it change you to go there?

Shells were used for currency. Currency means running
from hand to hand, afraid to stop — picture a hollow shell
locked in a drawer, listening to the sea by itself,

a nasty picture. Be chaste if you must but remember.

14 June 2002

A HISTORY OF COFFEE *in ten chapters*

1. It began to live in Africa. In the mountains of the Harrar, in what the Greeks called the land of the Aethiops, north of the great valley where Mother Eve lived, and summoned out of *adamah*, the ground, her adoring male consort, father of the human race.

2. The first of us who used coffee used more from the tree than we do. From the leaves, dried and sometimes fermented, they made tea, a to drink with the rest of what the tree offered: the coffee berries, bright red outside to begin with, pale brown when dried, roasted a little then ground into a paste and sweetened with honey: something like our peanut butter. They wrapped the paste in leaves and ate it on their journeys, like pemmican, full of roughage and calories and oils; they drank the tea made from the coffee leaves. The tea, incidentally, contains more caffeine than our coffee does.

3. The Greek gods were the first outside of Africa to know about it. Actually, many of the gods had come from Africa in the first place, and remembered their native food.

4. In Homer we hear about coffee several times. The gods go off to Aethiopia for a feast. This is really a coffee party (*kaffeeeklatsch*, in the demotic). That is where the gods always go for a holiday from Olympus. And that is why they go.

5. Coffee, chariot of the Angel Caffeine, was the only effective chemical stimulant known to the ancient Mediterranean world.

6. Later, when the Romans shifted their attention to Northwest Africa, the secret of coffee was lost; this loss ultimately resulted in an extremely sleepy, constipated people called the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire followed by the Dark Ages. The Dark Ages ended when the Rise of Islam occasioned the cessation of beer and wine drinking in the Near East, and its replacement by coffee, propagated from the African hearth to southern Arabia and the Yemen. The extremely stimulated Arab tribes woke the world up with their jangling nerves, the clatter of their armies.

7. But back to Homer. The main Homeric citation of coffee is in the mysterious (but only to classical scholars) drug *molu*, given to Odysseus by the gods to help him resist the torpid sorceries of Circe. Resist by watchfulness, alertness. *Molu* is described as first black, then white. Can we intuit what Odysseus was actually given? (Hint: no pigs drink coffee.)

8. But back to the Arabs. The Age of the Enlightenment as it is called in Europe began with the defeat of the invading Moslem armies at Vienna in the 17th century. The Ottoman fled back into nearby Balkan mountains which he would continue to rule for hundreds of years, leaving the great European plain (puszta, steppe, prairie) to the Catholics and Protestants. But the Turks also left behind them the practice of coffee. Coffee spread from Vienna throughout the Judeo-Christian world forever. Biber. Bach. Mozart. Beethoven.

9. And Balzac. Coffee is the juice of music, muses, poets, novelists — all those *who make or tell the thing that is not*. Coffee is the chemical from which lies are brewed, those curious lies that turn into truth.

10. The world, Wittgenstein observed, is whatever is the case. Coffee, on the other hand, is on the other hand. Coffee is whatever is not the case. Yet.

14 June 2002