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MIDNIGHT: EDGARTOWN OVER THERE

Behind the visible
there is always a city,

sometimes small
sometimes a pencil could stab it

make its accurate lineaments
and not even lose its point

where is my sharpener
where is my sack of flour
to fill socks with on halloween
and whack people on the back with
white fugitive stains on their blue wool

where are my stains?

o time comes early when you're born

and Nostrand Avenue seems so narrow now
with buses up and down it
and everything starts to remember me--

smoked glass Tuesday
to see the Transit of Venus

in a cool spring

over this island also the god of love will pass.

6 June 2004 <late>

Cuttyhunk

CANAPITSIT

something with a name
to go by

a strait Skylla waits
out there to squeeze
the haughty immigrant.

Danger rush of channel.
Star river, full of blood.

6 June 2004, Cuttyhunk <late>

=====

For one blazing blur
the sun came out, six thirty over Nashawena
above the massed clouds thereby
suddenly made storm black.

Golden light on a deck chair,
gold green kindling lawn
then it went in again,
the beautiful grey luster,
the mask it wears now,
wind blowing the feathers and monkey fur of the sun mask.

7 June 2004, Cuttyhunk

=====

a stain of glory
we are after

7 V 04, Cuttyhunk

PHILOPENA

Proust uses it, a forfeit
in love's game
or a game where lovers pay
penalties to one another,

spin the bottle, is the kiss
the punishment? Philopena,
small love wound,
the fatal hickey
that meant a loves b

or just the orange that she bit
she gives you now and you
must finish eating it

swallow the drenched flesh of her bitemark
sealing all the juices together in
that inside-out kiss that eating is,

Philopena, a brand of losing
that lovers love,
fond penalty, what kind of game is this,

and Christ on his cross a lover's forfeit too?

7 June 2004, Cuttyhunk <late>

TRANSIT OF VENUS

In front of me
rising over the Elizabeths
a sun visited,

a *Venus transit*--

such a thing hasn't happened
to American poetry since Longfellow died

that comely mind at peace with its powers
and anxious still to know the Other,
Tuscan, Finnish, Algonquin,

and now she comes
to visit Him up there and visit him as well,
Mary bringing tidings to Elizabeth,

a girl between me and the sun.

2.

Other aspects of this transit.
A motorman asleep in his cab
but the old ocean stays on track,
a cold wind from the west
runs down my back.

It's coming from America right behind me,
a big confused island of nice people at war.
They have more enemies than they can count,
a proper state of affairs for people whose
first inclination is to fight, o sweet
and bellicose my people,
and their wind makes me get up to shut the door.

3.

Je t'adore. I never studied French in school
so need a place to put this stupid pun
I just heard in the words I wrote
sounding them aloud, cadence
of the strophe and count my breaths.
Je t'adore and who is *t* today
when Venus walks across the sky
Shouldn't she be everyone?

4.

Everyone between me and the sun,
riotous seagulls in their synagogue,
golden sunglaze laid across the channel
and the Neck cuts it, filmy dark of dawn land
hardly seems you could walk on it
let alone build the big house the Dorrs did
out at Canapitsit, all alone
like a house in a book, old book

but not too old, 1920, 1880,
something like that,
when Venus last came stirring from her Loom
to irritate these human wombs
to nobler bearing, makes me think
of the great ones who will be born
nine months from now, I hope I live to see
at least their juvenile insurrections
before I go back and lie down at her feet.

5.

Men are gods who lost their jobs.
Chomeurs. Temporarily
out of work and waiting.
We stand around
on street corners of the sea.
Consult tables of the moon and tides
to find employment.
Waiting to read in smudgy little print
a want-ad that spells my name
more or less correctly and says Come to me.
I am always coming.
I watch the clouds all day
for some sign of who I'm supposed to be.

6.

And then the sun runs out of light.

She kisses him now, a veil flutters over them,
a cloud actually rises, comes up out of ocean,

grey as it begins to ascend then

when it gets near the sun takes on

a white condition like mother of pearl,

now laps at their union,

six-fourteen a.m., covers them.

Now the actual intercourse recurs.

Don't look. The world is being made again

and me with it. In the thalamus of sky

they're sleeping out their brief eternity.

8 June 2004, Cuttyhunk

THE CASUIST IN THE BATHROOM

The casuist in the bathroom
explains himself away
to the mirror. He works hard
to fool the glass -- it can be done:
Radipert did it in Bohemia
with Klidohild, a nun.
And Jehosaphat, a Lutheran druggist,
provided some for Ludmilla,
unbaptized child of a Bogomil and a Turk.
Which profile is best?
If I want her to worship me,
should I shave or be scratchy?
I am older than I want to look,
congested skin, veiled eyes,
maybe at a pinch I can look dignified.
Can I pinch you? Did I take pleasure
alone or with others? Why has this mirror
been on my case so many years?
If Philipond, a Huguenot, embraces
Galingale, a lady of a certain age
who failed to make her Easter Duty
three years running, may the fruit
of their concupiscence later be
ordained to minor Orders without
special papal indult? It is to wonder.

There is more here than meets the eye
but the real problem is what the eye does meet
when it looks through all this history
and sees my own bare face staring back,
a wild man in a mirror with no shirt,
turning his face from side to side
to see if there is any hope at all.

8 June 2004, Cuttyhunk

THE STAIN OF ORANGE LIGHT OVER NASHAWENA

The cool night breeze still with us five a.m.

Places, names.

Because we *believe* these things.

We don't believe in gods and demons

but we believe Woods Hole is different from Canapitsit.

We trust location. We believe in place.

This faith may save us yet,

a code scribbled in the earth

before we were.

The generative power of a place.

Powers.

The whole sky turns red.

On a day they say will be the hottest in three years.

They say and they sat.

And then the sun is actually there,

that strange skyey *there* that seems like *here*

and the gull too comes right up to my face,

we startle each other

he by being where he always is

and me by standing half an hour too early on the deck.

The things they say

even now down among the wild sea roses

where the blackbirds and robins and sea swallows carry on,

naming, being names.

In a foreign place it's hard to get proportions right.

How much sugar in this strange cup.
One gull complaining to another.
Forain, having to do with fairs and market days,
a fair is something intermittent,
a fair day but it can rain and still be fair
and all the dairy maidens come home wet.
The fair merchant sets up his stalls
or wanders through the crowd selling.
Cheese stands still but watches walk around.
So foreign to this island life,
an island is always on.
Where forane first meant outside the walls.
Outside the usual boundaries of the word.
And then the other gull complained.
Foreign meanings,
tragedies of prose.
Cheese without interpretaters,
a hundred grams of grana in Bolzano.
I am a travelling salesman of the obvious,
a fated man.

ill fate and abundant wine

The poet always plays with marked cards
this is what makes poetry possible
but limits it so strangely.
The word says everything but it's still just a word.
Just something you heard
or almost heard

as you were going to sleep,
your mother's voice calling your name,
and she dead so many years
and nobody knows that name of yours these days.

A word has such high walls.

But if you manage to clamber up and stand on them
or just chin yourself up and look over them
how far you can see.

Believing in places

the things you see beyond the wall,

the place you stand

believing in places is the origin

then you believe in names.

The first words are where things are.

What is this place the robin's hopping on?

Happening in?

Don't be ingenuous, poeta,

this opera needs you to be serious and smart,

die or be died on in the last act

with a sob the size of an orchestra.

Andrea Chenier, see, they call your name out,

the jailer of the world

invites you to the civil executioner

with all the universal explanations of religion

worthless at this hour

when all you can think of on the scaffold

is the pretty dappled hide of so many women

smiling up at you in sunlight
alert to your last opportunity to speak,
one more impromptu then the knife.
Blade fall, curtain fall, the veils
fall away and you are you again,
no music, wordless as a glass of water
with dust on its surface it's been on the table overnight
it catches rising sunlight now,
the sun plays with it,
the way it touches everything
if once you let light into the room.
You look down at what
if anything you've written,
lean lines of something or other, color of slate.

9 June 2004

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Things waiting for me
are a street
speaking a juicy language
I don't recognize

I like to hear them talking
as I walk by
happy for the warm shadows
under the striped awnings

hot today! A street
running from 1892 till now,
with women selling herrings,
with men selling neckties from pushcarts

and the ties are gaudy and fat
crimson and yellow and silver
on a day like today
I can believe anything

even your footstep at my door
you who are always
coming back from the night.

9 June 2004, Cuttyhunk

OVER THE NEW HYDRANGEA

Meeting. Morning. Choosing

the selectmen of the day.

I am a gull for it, and a cloud.

Assert a box. A boat.

Lift it on its trailer

to ride to the water.

A box. Put things

inside other things.

Crack the pronoun.

See what lives inside.

Divide I. Seeing

what lives inside.

Assert. A leaf

thinks it is the only one.

A yellow dog runs up the hill.

Palling around.

The way they do.

Crowd in the market.

So many things for sale.

Shoes. He can't bear

looking at shoes, all shoes

should be the same. Variety

is wasted on the feet.

Open the gate.

Have opinions.

About Parmenides.

*I am trapped in the sound of words,
you are trapped in their meanings.*

*This gives us both a lot to do,
keeps you interested, keep me
at the mercy of other people's mouths.*

Medical dictionary.

Look up obsession

depuration lavage.

If the sea were pure fish would be gods.

Predicate adjectives permitted.

Ear wax. A box.

Ear battle, a voice.

A bottle of drink me.

Go on living.

You said you.

One pair for summer one for winter

one for parties one for hiking

one pair for kicking the dog.

Voting.

Voting is kicking.

Eating. Eating is pie.

We are near enough to remember.

Skyline of small cities I like best of all

see something you can walk by later

buildings you can touch

stone to kiss.

Crowd on the market
steeple over courthouse.
God doors closed all week
to keep the poor from sleeping in the pews.
But what can you do?
The poor you
will have
always with you
his curse or blessing, tell.
The bishop told the priest you are no priest
you love too many people
you love me
a priest should just love god and gather tithes.
The poor you
has always
with Him.
Skyline of small people
most beautiful of all our arts
the uncalendered differences galore
between this no account house and that one
the splendor and glory of the godhead dwells.
The crowd of steeples.
Lithograph of Brooklyn from before the War.
New Bedford. How slow
color ripens in this flower.
So many shoes he can't bear.
Burdens of the night

such legal music.
Comfort and carry.
Squidding line on his reel
to aggravate the sea.
Wait for me. In boxes
the mind is organized.
A message on no telephone.
A letter and no mail.
How can there be a cherry
without a god,
a sky without a steeple?
A word is a riddle waiting to bite.
Be pressure treated
like the wood of your front porch.
Resist the elements.
Have no opinions
the best way,
Open crowded market gull goes by.
Some house hides the sea.

10 June 2004

Cuttyhunk