

I

# Quarantine Notebook

WEEK 1 • 29<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2020

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**MUSCALIET**

吹禪 BLOWING ZEN

“my attempts to forge connections between poems and events are of course pointless: I doubt whether we can say what is really connected to what... beside words, besides rhythm, besides meaning, what else is there?... without what does life seem emptier than empty?” (OS)

“these meditations, however sincere philosophically or biographically, cannot be sincere poetically... for they do not through their technique question the existence of language, reality, or the fact that poetry mediates between them, they rely on and refer to experience rather than question and explore it.” (V F-T)

“the true function of poetry [is] that it must create a middle area [between form and content] where ‘artifice’ can open up imaginative possibilities in both forms and contents of other languages, and thus transcend the world these impose.” (V F-T)

“more often than not poets either say something they did not intend to say, but have uttered through a slackness of mind, imitativeness or in the hope of an ‘it may work’ or ‘how about this’, or they say precisely what they intended to say (where the urge is usually to say something utterly shallow and egotistical).” (OS)

“very few combinations of words amount to poetry: sometimes just a line of poetry, sometimes two or three words.” (OS)

“you see, to speak more modestly, a perfect, flawless thing is impossible, but here’s what is possible: the completion of a task that you personally, based on the sum of your past and present, are incapable of completing. this is possible and has been attested to numerous times.” (OS)

“something that cannot be there if it is paraphrased, something that can only exist in the poem as a whole.” (CC)

★

*Quotations from Olga Sedakova, Veronica Forrest-Thomson and Caroline Clark in Clark’s ‘In Praise of Artifice’, Tears In The Fence 69, 111-119 (2019).*

MONSTRANCE: ON A THEME FROM MALLARMÉ

Peremptory enough to dull the force  
Of what had been compounded out of metaphor,  
You offered up in stained and dented gold  
An absolution of the very silence

That establishes a past whose grandeur  
Is the shadow it itself unfolds  
Into a prescient and mournful twilight  
That consecrates the memory to its vanishing.

Gilded over polished sandalwood  
Transfigured by uncertainty into illustrious  
And well-rubbed images long since obscured  
By grains of fetid incense and the immemorial

Accompaniments embalmed in them,  
The monstrance is as solitary a captive  
Of the threshold as are these  
Ice-cold gemstones of oblivion!

GENERATIONS

My grandmother, Daisy Barrett,  
Was dead at thirty-five.  
Spanish flu, they called it.  
My mother (aged nine) survived.  
But was kept out of sight.  
Was not allowed to see her mother,  
Living or dead.  
It was not thought right.

Thus an eye's blindness, an 'ear's deafness',  
Over two generations.

SIMON SMITH

SONG MADE OUT OF PRONOUNS

say I arrived spelt out from the Ouija board  
what am I to do to say it  
dream bricks & girders recount a spelt out past  
from the foundations there & as real on the board  
as daylight  
letter by letter cursive by type dragged  
voices from out of the shadow  
& presently flick through magical email & social media  
construct a walking tour of the city  
find the drab of rooms  
watch the World crumble the Universe recede  
where sparrows flip up the dust & hop  
bathe their dun plumage  
spill passwords sparkly sparkle log on  
pass through to witness of being alive  
the place speaks out of

perhaps & there I am trailing  
translating the everyday deals into the rains  
of coins & ruins of them  
stealing the flags & the gold  
the houses the factories the shops  
the ghosts say again the beginning  
the ghosts take against the beginning  
the non-curve of narrative  
but scared to dance take steps  
at the beginning being apart  
say it tonight my voice  
say I found tonight in night  
whisper the divide  
exploring the vicinity on foot  
street by street map in hand  
named & the random conversations below  
& the word of newspapers the shadow  
of newsprint on fingertips  
scared to death scarred

to find my compass  
my compassion my corpse  
unlock a casket  
the needle pointing due north  
worked out from there & walk  
with voice against the air  
so that breath may be seen  
space speak out for itself  
say I say as you do murmur  
go on I say say it over the floating  
garden & over the wall  
all of those I can't speak for  
& air & floating & gate & wall & tree & flowers & those gone into laughter  
& out of sight

PHILIP TERRY

## UNTITLED

*after W. H. Auden*

Jetlag after a long flight,  
Crowds at the ticket barrier, a face  
To welcome which the Pope has not contrived  
Mitre or stole: it stares up at the famous ceiling,  
Craning the neck, and takes a picture,  
And at once a figure approaches saying: "*Noc amera, noc amera*".  
A slight cough distracts the stray look with mild concern.  
Rain is falling. Clutching a red umbrella  
He walks out quietly to infect a country  
Whose terrible future may have just arrived.

COMMODITIES

tainted air  
a response to dying  
no longer prayer  
but panic buying

THE BEE

So delicate and deadly  
Is your sting, golden bee,  
That I have thrown no more  
Than a dream of lace over my fragile basket.

Pierce the rich gourd of my breast,  
At the point where love is dying or asleep,  
So that a little of my self's deep red  
May rise from rounded and rebellious flesh!

I am in urgent need of a sharp pang:  
A pain, both sudden and soon done with,  
Is far better than extended torment!

Let my feelings burst into the light,  
Released by this minute gold key,  
Without which love lies dead, or sleeping!

ON SPLENDOUR ... [1]

Shiny marchers  
past the hospice shop, drums  
tuba, susaphonic brass  
reflections  
lost among the smiling posters  
on the glass affirming that the end  
is nigh, but needn't be so bad.  
Shiny marchers  
past the hospice shop, drums  
tuba, susaphonic brass  
reflections  
lost among the smiling posters  
on the glass affirming that the end  
is nigh, but needn't be so bad.

ON SPLENDOUR ... [2]

Mid-afternoon the sun gets round  
to fingering a prism  
in the window



PHILIP TERRY

## ALBA

Waking, I mistook a leaf in my line of vision for a man walking on a neighbouring roof.

Voting, a nation mistook Boris Johnson for a man who had their interests at heart.