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Quarantine Notebook

WEEK 1 • 29TH 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, imitateness 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)

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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.
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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.