

**IV**

**Quarantine Notebook**

**WEEK 4 • 19<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2020**

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**MUSCALIET**

NECESSARY MODERN MANNERS

Watch it, Samaritan!  
Pass by on the other side!  
Masked – and anon –  
We judge each other by the spaces we provide

MAIDEN IN THE MOR LAY

socially distanced. *Wat was hire mete?*  
The false nettle and the violet.

Streets emptying and *welle was hire bour:*  
*the red rose an the lillie flour.*

Old men fighting in supermarkets.  
The stricken shouting from televisions.

*Maiden in the mor lay. Wat was her dring?*  
*Chelde water ant the welle-spring,*

*primerole ant the -, primerole ant the -*  
dominion of the bleeding lung.

*The dancers are all gone under the hill.*  
Mullet push upriver on the making tide.

REFLECTIONS BENEATH A CLOUDY SKY

*(Final part)*

once those beating wings are beyond our horizon  
I know that never again shall we retrace  
these steps nor avoid the shadow of the axe's fall.

Fellow-travellers. We shall not be glimpsed upon these paths again,  
just as we never catch a wisp of shadow  
of our own returning dead ...

Ashes are their corpses now  
and into ashes their memories and shadows;  
scattered by those unnamed faceless winds,  
those winds which are themselves dispersed.

Nevertheless,  
In passing, we shall have still heard  
the birds calling beneath the clouds  
to rend the silence of an empty October noon;  
cries shaken out both far and near  
(at intervals within the shadow's cold  
creeping forward behind the ploughing rain),  
they chart our space...

And to my ears,  
A traveller beneath them, they seem  
to speak; not questioning or calling but as  
though in answer. Below the heavy October clouds.  
And already it has become another day and I am elsewhere;  
already they talk of other things if they talk at all.  
I travel on, stunned, unable to speak another word.

A HOUSE OF THE DEAD

I hear you murmur from the other side of the wall inaudible  
from the source code from the foundations  
from the pipes behind the sink  
from the wind northerly & veering into the northeast quarter  
the moaning pivotal through the horseless carriage through the quarter-light  
I hear you  
from the film comes flickering as though to life  
contained all plans that there are in the world  
on hold from the world  
from the wind dragging its foot  
from the medium as though to Life  
from the conduit from the midpoint from the median the material  
then broken  
from the DNA from the virus I hear you  
from the invaders  
left behind

the airliners on hold & stacking silence  
the air pollution clears  
the sky of stars tilted on axes  
noiselessly for a quieter world  
so far in the future hour by hour day by day by minute & second  
from the instant I hear you juju plaything  
so far in the shadow of the bells  
from the snow & after the event  
to construct a new paradise from marigolds & their rot  
is to crack the gaze  
in the face of the acid orange gaze  
but this is the beginning & the start of the beginning  
beginning the poem increases the strike & the risk  
to personal safety to understanding as the personal  
busy with animation busy  
& personal where the blues turn to purple & to bliss  
in the context in the country  
in the signs of his mouth I listen  
on a loop you my partner my opponent

my stranger stranger than strange  
echo back disinterested  
Time reversed fingertip close  
language the border barrier  
& the explanation transmitter  
the beginning & the end of the day where the sun floods  
the living room walls tell the story between  
nighttime & daylight simple  
& broken  
or choose the blank pages

SIMON SMITH

MIDNIGHT NEWS

for full orchestra  
the fullness of space & air  
a full rainbow within a rainbow  
light stuck to the arc  
today arriving still  
& true as a kitchen table & alphabet  
where the alphabet aligns language's DNA  
& full as the full range of numerals scorched into a board  
fanned in the shape of  
& scored by the god of  
who knows what to connect with god knows who  
into the atom & to the letter  
each element to self  
to isolate  
the left hand from right  
is to brush the keyboard

tinker through a hymn sat at the harmonium  
ghost-like to hum  
music with comb & paper  
with a duty to colonise  
with sound in the room alone of words  
the words are dorsal  
the words are fins above water the words are  
speaking themselves alive  
into the air the ark to sail  
right into the riddles  
collapsed time in the tongues  
shuttered frame by frame in the slow-mo  
I am the book's companion  
in the darkness & confinement  
of the room the poem writing itself  
is to recite like hopscotch like shattered twilight  
stone unturned the scattered UV light  
where I'm responding to questions  
at base blue to the blue-grey end of day

scores the light into the table top to sing out the board

send out the ripple the echo

project the achoo

ding the universe

& tailspin the day into reverse

answer in the blues

reflex

float off in letters & numbers

add star jasmine to night air

green parakeets to a garden wall add

troubling house sparrows

add sand & pebbles & chalky earth

add aerosol for all things in my DNA

sign off “good bye”

on my breath in the blueish of dawn

SIMON SMITH

## TO TELL THE STORY

to tell the story to tell the Truth the poem will

breathe in the poem blow across the Ouija

& check the story off

from the Ouija beginning

middle & end all in a row

of a life

the trick to it hands tilted towards the upturned glass

can't tell what's going on in the secret notebook

or what rings true to the glass rim all in a game

what this here that one there losing dimension

losing shape

twigs greening the photo stop-frame

photoshop of error & Eros

image gouged from the eyes

gouged from marble

from the gaze losing

of a human you can't look  
or avert  
of entanglements & of estrangements  
the old stories of sand  
eyes adjust to  
tell the story of your story  
to strike the right tone  
of rings of circles  
haunting the lines  
written into memory  
on the return like a tuning fork  
the way breezes turn around rose leaves  
like strings they do like the lyre lies  
its pizzicato-like razors  
the liars second or third rate but in line  
& third hand faded or used  
memories browning sepia-like  
twisting in the branches  
of memories & to sing out

is to risk of play & flags  
or not to tell the truth  
is to sing out the ballad like ballet



