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**Quarantine Notebook**

**WEEK 5 • 26<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2020**

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**MUSCALIET**

## CRITIQUE OF THE IMAGINARY

Combining splintered marble  
 With an opaque blue  
 Framed by tarnished gold,  
 Colour laid on colour

Between an elegiac spacing  
 Of capriciously dilapidated splendour  
 And a solitude of debris,  
 You have reduced the summary magnificence

Of intemperate presumption to a multitude of shades  
 Seen through ritual duplicities  
 Of stained and frosted glass  
 Burnished by the twilight's dwindling brilliance.

As for all the rest of it, the nacreous icons  
 Of transfigured trash all but hidden  
 By distorting agitations  
 Of damp air, the frivolous

Inversions and deep-vaulted labyrinths,  
 You consecrate the lot,  
 Along with the oblivion of unending night,  
 To repetition and the lethal rhetoric of time!

## BALANCING ACT★

Slow collage  
 clouds, sun, buds, birds  
 earthen ware  
 slightly out of focus spent belief  
 in traceable threads  
 of detail not exactly  
 safety ropes of text and image.

Does it really matter  
 that I've got my yellow boots on, Sidney Graham,  
 slipping off the little stepping stones,  
 scrabbling for a hand hold  
 on the moss and celandine,  
 while this current slides  
 time over the lip of the world?

\*This poem about the unreliable relationship between lockdown and reality refers in part to W. S. Graham's poem 'The Stepping Stones' and to a contemporaneous letter from him to Roger Hilton. The former can be found on page 235 in *W. S. Graham: New Collected Poems*, ed. by Matthew Francis, Faber, 2004, the latter on page 230 in *The Nightfisherman: Selected Letters of W. S. Graham* ed. by Michael and Margaret Snow, Carcanet, 1999.

LOOKING UPWARDS / LOOKING DOWNWARDS:  
SOME REACTIONS TO CONFINEMENT

I

For the furze-cutter on Egdon Heath there are two different worlds: looking upwards he 'would have been inclined to continue work', looking downwards 'he would have decided to finish his faggot and go home'. Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* opens on the heath in November and thirty-six years after its first publication Edward Thomas's early poem, 'November' contemplates a similar sense of different perspectives.

In his poem from December 1914 Thomas alerts us to 'the prettiest things on ground are paths / With morning and evening hobnails dinted, / With foot and wing-tip overprinted'. The path itself is trodden into earth where 'Twig, leaf, flint, thorn, / Straw, feather' are all 'Pounded up' and the shift from 'straw' to 'feather' is itself a reflection of the relationship between a Now and a Beyond: one, downward looking, the other upward. The sky is perceived as shining 'above the earth so old' and 'men stare' upwards at it:

One imagines a refuge there  
Above the mud, in the pure bright  
Of the cloudless heavenly light

The idea of a 'refuge', an ideal place of safety and security, is what can prompt the walker of paths to continue a relentless search for a place that is unchanging. The poem's focus at its conclusion is upon the ground on which we live and walk:

He loves even the mud whose dyes  
Renounce all brightness to the skies.

For Edward Thomas, walking was a way of seeking release from imprisonment and in 'Recollections of November', published in *Horae*

*Solitariae* in 1902, he suggested that in his suburban street almost every month was 'marked as it were in heavy black letter at its entrance':

Nature here uses a brief language, like the hand at  
Belshazzar's feast, and I know that it is November by the  
dull, sad trampling of the hoofs and feet...

From his 'mean street' in Balham Thomas recognised a sense of release by spying 'a seagull from my window – spreading her great wings in flight at altitudes whence perhaps she beholds the sea – an emblem of that liberty I boast, but do not feel'. This is followed by another image of release from confinement as a leaf blown into his room by the wind prompts 'such a feeble knocking' that 'will throw open many doors of memory.' The clouds which he sees trooping toward the west are 'all moving in one path' and he wonders 'to what mysterious shrine, were they advancing – to what shrine among the firs of an unseen horizon, with the crow and the bat?'

PHILIP TERRY

MR UBU

A SKETCH TOWARDS A COVID-19 FANTASY

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

MR UBU, MRS UBU.

MR UBU [*washes his hands, while singing the National Anthem*]: Pisschitt!  
Fuck the lot of 'em!

MRS UBU: Ooohh! Wash out your mouth with soap, while you're at it!  
You should mind your manners!

MR UBU: Bollocks to that! If I didn't know the neighbours were listening  
I'd give you a good old slap for the nonce.

MRS UBU: I'm not the one you should be thinking of duffing up, Old  
Ubu. No, Sir! There's someone else for the high jump.

MR UBU: By my Boris bike, I'm not with you.

MRS UBU: What, you mean to say you're happy with your lot?

MR UBU: By my Boris bike, pisschitt, dearie. Yes, by God, I'm perfectly  
happy. Who wouldn't be? Prefect at Eton, President of the Oxford Union,  
Mayor of London, Foreign Secretary – keeping all those piccannies in  
their place – and now I'm Prime Minister. Who can cap that?

MRS UBU: So what! Just because you saw off that Jezzar Corbyn, you're  
content to spend your time getting Number 10 refurbished with velvet  
curtains, when you could get your loaf measured for the crown of Great  
Britain?

MR UBU: Huh? I don't understand a word you're saying, dearie. And

now we've lost Ulster to the Republic, and Scotland's devolved, we're  
no longer Great Britain, strictly speaking, more Lesser Britain, Smaller  
Britain, Diminutive or Petite Britain.

MRS UBU: How stupid can you get? Didn't they teach you Macbeth at  
Eton?

MR UBU: By my Boris bike, Queen Lizzie is still alive, isn't she? And even  
if she does kick the bucket, hasn't she got lots of children, or have they all  
gone off to Canada?

MRS UBU: Why shouldn't you finish off the lot of them, they're not the  
most robust of people, in fact your slow start in tackling Covid-19 will  
probably do the job for you! Then you can call a National Emergency, and  
put yourself in their place, just like Cromwell if you remember that crook.

MR UBU: Ha! Now you're going too far, dearie. And you shall very  
shortly be beaten up good and proper.

MRS UBU: You fat slob, if I get beaten up, who'll patch the seat of your  
pants?

MR UBU: So what! Haven't I the right to show off my bum cheeks like  
everybody else in times of crisis?

MRS UBU: If I were you, I'd try to get that bum perched on the throne.  
You could become enormously rich, eat as many bangers as you liked, and  
roll through the streets in a limousine.

MR UBU: If I were King, I'd get them to make me a nice bonnet.

MRS UBU: And you could get yourself a nice new umbrella, and some  
sock suspenders, then your socks wouldn't trail round your ankles when  
you went for a jog for the cameras.

MR UBU: It is more than I can resist! Pisschittabugger and buggerapisschitt,  
if ever I come across Lizzie again with her gloves off I'll give her a firm  
handshake, and a big slobbery kiss to boot.

MRS UBU: Well done, old man, now you're talking like a true Etonian.

MR UBU: Oh, no! Me – a Prime Minister – take out the Queen of England! I'd rather die! [*Washes hands again, singing the National Anthem.*]

MRS UBU [*aside*]: Oh, pisschitt! [*Aloud.*] So you want to stay poor as a church mouse, Mister Ubu?

MR UBU: Corbyn's bones, yes, by my Boris bike, I'd rather be poor as the measliest mouse than rich as the cruellest cat.

MRS UBU: And your bonnet? And your umbrella? And your sock suspenders?

MR UBU: And then what, you scheming bitch?

*He leaves, banging the door behind him.*

MRS UBU [*alone*]: Pfarrrt, pisschitt, what a stingy bastard, but pfarrticles and pisschitticles, I think I've got him cogitating all the same. Thanks be to God and myself, in a few weeks I may be Queen of England.

CHRIS McCULLY

## CHILD, IT IS A WEPYING DALE

*Lullay, my herte and my swetyng,  
Born under a defaulted star  
And mad Herod's infected pout.  
Sleep for this moment far  
From hobgoblin, mania's drum,  
From gun-lobby and self-doubt  
And from all to come.*

*Child, it is a wepying dale.  
Most of the mirror's tears have term,  
Nor is there anything like fate —  
Just choice, and consequence, and germ.  
Lullay, lullay, reste thee a throwe.  
The selfie-stick can wait  
While the vaccines grow.*

*Lullay, lullay, wel myghte thou crie  
For germ and time and the harde bonds  
Of love-longyng that once compiled  
Uniqueness from their wounds,  
Whose logic can't be wished unborn  
Even when most reviled,  
And dust its crown of thorn.*

Call it an astronomer's lot  
    between linewidth & luminosity  
    manifolds without metric to keep us close  
    with or without an emoji jacket to reflect mood

after all its live capture out of the clutter  
    a tasty rap with primal bass beneath

    & by tilt of the head  
    always the error  
    of accuracy & precision

in that snub-nosed shocked H-alpha stream  
    the dusty smoke of a receding star  
        in brittle & spiked ionized air  
    tough to catch the short-lived

hence this  
    when bliss it was & to be young

    spatial resolution linked by the elongated  
    delineated by the rotational  
    immersed in gigahertz continuum

at first without thought  
    unwritten  
    unread  
    before building word for word  
    in rhythms of perception

    now tracking west dropping south  
her line as gauge & pace for meaning

    whether of observation  
    measure felt of thought  
    the act is of recognition  
& redistribution  
    smudges circled arrowed even unmarked  
    marking the mood  
pinning down a central dusty filament  
    in greyscale clear as day  
    bipolar red & blue lobes shifting.

ALL OTHER LOVE IS LIKE THE MOONE

Needles won't float.  
The moon's gone bust.  
Sink or swim, wax or wane:  
Gravity and dust.

Sun hard to trust,  
Flower nipped in bud.  
*Fair and fallow, wop and wo:*  
Autoclave and blood.

Milk turns to mud,  
Dazzle to dross.  
Graph and graphic fail to prove  
A light-splintered cross.

All other love  
*Is like the moone.*  
Tide has fled, needle's red —  
Not tomorrow. Soon.