

II

Quarantine Notebook

WEEK 2 • 5TH APRIL 2020

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MUSCALIET

REFLECTIONS BENEATH A CLOUDY SKY

(Written in 1976 soon after the death of his friend Gustave Roud)

I possess now no conviction that we'll ever make that voyage
across skies of simple opening brightness,
Defying every shadow's law in our pursuit;
I have no vision of us now as unseen eagles, eternally
revolving around undetermined peaks
in blinding light...

(Pulling together shards of time
does not erect eternity. Like gleaners we just
arch our backs and see no more
than the horizon of ploughed fields with its tracks
that trace across our patient graves.)

★

The lines are the opening ones of Philippe Jaccottet's poem 'Pensees Sous les Nuages' dedicated to his friend Gustave Roud who had died some months before. I am working through this longer poem at the moment and therefore offer up these little openings (what Jaccottet might call 'ouvertures').

Upright but witless
print's persuasive fixing
words to words words to world
bobbing for apples as referential target

what describes the tender act
of longing & grief
furtive thefts one by one

prompting for purpose in the way of thought
a subset of the possible
observe that conciliation in making meaning

is this a descriptive adequacy an implicit knowledge
schematic these strings projected reality
at least a family resemblance

in illusions of mental depth & the improvised mind
at least a consistency without account
tricked into coherence by desire
the process ratcheting up

as if the mind were flat on its back
& the bargains by which we discover who really wants what
are struck.

CHRIS McCULLY

COMMODITIES II

quiet on the roads
London, Birmingham, Manchester
rostered for morgues

who knew the details
the etiquette of coughing?
where it all would lead?

shortage of condoms
stuff rotting in fields
goats roaming streets

JOHN WORTHEN

GERMAN BELLS

Churches now ring bells, 19.30 pünktlich, every night;
Banged, whanged and clangd the German way.
No change ringing, no progressions or melodies.
Just a jangle. How undisciplined! And probably right.

TRANSCENDENTAL INTERLUDE

Vesperal chimeras of white cloud
Exalt themselves into a radiance
Transfixed between what was
And what there will be, day and death.

Forgotten waters merge in obstinate
Redactions of the memory
Along with bare and crooked trees
Oblivious to whatever

Skewed or potent artifice
Harmonies transposed from elemental
Discord might rehearse, indifferent
To lascivious proximities of ash and gold.

For you, in unimagined gardens
Of the air, too immediate
For veiled, uncertain brilliance,
The plaintive antiphons of final splendour

And endlessly augmented agitations
Of the light are transfigured into suppliant
Disturbances of absence, riven into fractious
Motion as and where you are!

VIVARIUM

Beyond the Kuiper belt.
beyond the Oort Cloud
who knows

meanwhile, this insouciance
this little blue acrylic fishbowl kit
bounces along in its experimental way

Chambers in this vivarium
are reserved for antics
slapstick tumblers
over scree and brittle
cut grass sedges
deadpan

