

IX

Quarantine Notebook

WEEK 9 • 24TH May 2020

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STAY ALERT ▶ CONTROL THE VIRUS ▶ SAVE LIVES

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STAY ALOOF ▶ CONTROL THE DATA ▶ SAVE FACE
CHANGE FACES ▶ CONTROL THE GRAPHICS ▶ BURY THE FACTS
FLY THE FLAG ▶ RELABEL THE STOCKPILE ▶ FIND A SCAPEGOAT
KEEP CALM ▶ CONTROL THE MEDIA ▶ IGNORE THE OPPOSITION
RETURN TO WORK ▶ DON'T USE PUBLIC TRANSPORT ▶ SAVE JOBS
STAY ON MESSAGE ▶ DON'T MENTION NEW ZEALAND ▶ SAVE YOUR SKIN
DISTRACT THE MEDIA ▶ DON'T MENTION THE CARE HOMES ▶ BLAME THE N.H.S.
FOLLOW THE SCIENCE ▶ ECONOMISE ON THE TRUTH ▶ MASSAGE THE FIGURES
LOOSEN THE LOCKDOWN ▶ TRIAL THE APP ▶ LOSE LIVES
PROMOTE CYCLING ▶ DON'T MENTION DOMINIC CUMMINGS ▶ CLOSE RANKS
KEEP IT SIMPLE ▶ BURY THE TRUTH ▶ DON'T ANSWER THE QUESTION
TALK ABOUT TARGETS ▶ DO A U-TURN ▶ LOSE THE TESTS
STAND FIRM ▶ HIDE THE FACTS ▶ BURY THE DEAD

AFTER

I will be reborn without a heart,
still in the same universe,
still with the same head,
the same hands,
perhaps in a different tint,
but that would not console me.

I will be alone and cruel
and I will eat serpents
and bugs raw.

I will not speak to anyone,
except in the tongue of insects
or naked snakes,
in words that will live and laugh in spite of myself.

FROM 'THE BRAHMS BOOK'

The dial plate in the glass is that of a horribly pale make-weight with a massive canister (how come his pate lost all that hair?), rum ogles, a gig much too sharp for prime, hair over his lugs and a muns like a rose-bud (so Elise says). And if he opens that big-lipped bone box, he sounds not a day over ten years old (folk sometimes wonder if he's not been docked smack smooth).

FROM ALBERTO CAEIRO

I shepherd flocks of sheep.
The flocks are my thoughts
And my thoughts are sensation.
I think with eyes and ears,
With hands and feet,
And with my nose and with my mouth.
To think about a flower is to see and smell it
And to eat a fruit is to know its meaning.
So, when I feel saddened
By the pleasure that I take in some hot day,
Stretched out on the grass,
And with my warm eyes shut,
My body is in its entirety at one with what is real,
And I know the fact of truth and the enjoyment of it.

AUTOPSYCHOGEOGRAPHY: AFTER FERNANDO PESSOA

The poet is someone who pretends,
And pretends with such effectiveness
He pretends to be in pain
With the pain afflicting him,

While those whose read his work
Find nothing in the text
Of either of his pains,
Just pain they can't experience.

And so, to put our minds at rest,
We send along a shaky track
The ever-circling clockwork engine
Men agree to call a heart.

PARLEY DENIED

Words pick up accoutrements,
never lay their burdens down simply never
lay them down.

Half a dozen convoluted walnut shells
broken into, emptied
of meaning lie
in the grass at the foot of a tree
on the edge of a field.
You string a necklace, a charm
of them or clatter them to scare the words
which run a hand across the wheat
and set it coursing up the hill
to thunder drums and screaming violins.

DUNCAN MACKAY

21.V.69

*(Recollecting a Zukofsky reading, US Embassy,
Grosvenor Square, London. 51 years ago to the day)*

Of this pilgrim's passage

picking a word simple in mind Barely & Widely stumbling
to get wherever

stumbled into

intention come right

it seems now knowing less until the field clears space enough

what is in the air through itself as meaning

'murmur in almost a dialogue'

circumspect conversations

elegant patterns in the day-job spectra

foremost was his mentor's way of moving a line

by ear

& eye

for sake of the facts easy to forget fingers for stops

fingers for keys

as talking is doing

'tasting the sweet & the sorry'

in playing with meaning

text punctuates so faint as

to strain what is otherwise margins flaps blurb on the right

is this how things were then

when freshly minted 'at least as much mayhem as Punk'

forensically sensitive to traces remaining

hearing what happens

watching

all the discarded options

'I see us still, sitting at that table.'

A LONG SENTENCE★

And so referring to this summer now long gone: perhaps because I have become aware that, in the best of lights, I cannot look for many more before me and the chance of seeing that word 'last', with its unavoidable cadence, growing clearer at an accelerated pace, certain aspects of this world which seemed to have belonged to me alone, to us, throughout the length of all our days, have stunned me now as they never have before and have acquired a clarity of relief, of intensity, of presence; how can one put it, more, more, oddly enough, of a burning heat which we have formerly associated with those who sit closest beside us and it is, despite my knowing at this moment that this holds no literal truth, as if I had arrived at a belief concerning a proximity of feeling between the world of 'things' and that of man, a nearness that has permitted them to speak in their own tongue.

This must be a sign of a different type of relationship.

No matter: I can scarcely believe that it has just been the heat within me reflected outwards.

There's got to be more to it than that.

★ Translated from Jaccottet's *Nuages*, written in the closing months of 2000.