

III

Quarantine Notebook

WEEK 3 • 12TH APRIL 2020

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MUSCALIET

CHRIS McCULLY

GOLDFINCH

How did this happen? You don't know.
The day goes pacing, gardens grow

Into a vacuous loveliness.
Devoid of voices, you address

The holly and the saxifrage,
Self-isolation and the page

As you have almost always done.
No help there, in the fretting sun:

The birds have left last winter's seeds,
Magnolia combusts, sap bleeds

From broken branches, shadow carves
At cages where the goldfinch starves.

★

Quiet on the roads. Along the fence
The pigeons breed in pestilence.

John Caius described 'the English sweat'.
Sweet feverfew and violet....

No remedy.... The rat, the louse...
'The king's grase moved from house to house...'

A snake slid through the green man's eye.
Before the moon rose you could die.

'...so scharpe, so painfull and so sore....'
Extinction hid in breath or straw.

Life emptied. Weeks brought one face less
To love and love had no address.

★

And now that days and breath draw thin
You blame the bat or pangolin

And fail to stay the fretting sun
Or fathom what the moon has done

To play such havoc with the chime
Of lute or shawm or forms of time.

Aberrant, afraid, you try to write
Or walk the garden at midnight,

Find Venus tangled in the trees
And holly, saxifrage, heart's-ease

Holding an emblem for an age:
A goldfinch starved under a cage.

GERMAN BELLS STILL

Bells still at last. It's a curfew, too,
A tocsin for the boxed-in?

ON THE KINDNESS OF THE SUPER MOON

Earth's lifeline:
A knotted string of grubby days
a scourge, nine-tailed rosary beads
snagged on news bulletins

and the moon
bends down so kindly close

silver shaman

Netted in space
the planets call to one another,
send elyptic sonar signals,
sing out, sometimes, at sunset,
over the roar of rock strewn turbulence

and so the moon
leans low on our hill

REFLECTIONS BENEATH A CLOUDY SKY

(Part 2; for the final part see Quarantine Notebook 4)

– To tell the truth, we have seen little of the sun these recent days,
and to cling to hope beneath a weight of cloud is never easy;
the mountain's platform shimmers through the density of fog...

(And yet we must be very weak of will
to beat retreat for the lack of sun,
not bearing on our shoulders a sheaf of cloud...
We must be residents of a naïve world
to think we can be saved by the sky's blue
or be punished by both night and storm.)

– But where did you think your worn feet were leading?
Just rounding the corner of the house, or crossing
a new frontier?

(A child dreams of venturing to the mountains' other side;
a pilgrim sometimes makes that journey and exhaled breath
takes form, as is said of a dead man's soul...
We wonder what reflection he can see in the snow's mirror,
what flickering light and whether he shall discover
a door half-open behind it.
We imagine such a truth in those distant landscapes:
a candle-flame in a mirror,
a woman's hand close by, a loophole...)

But you, dwelling now, just as I find you here,
shall sip no longer from those flutes of crystal glass;
your ears shut up to the bells in high towers,

eyes blind to lighthouse beacons still revolving in the sun;
faulty steersmen for such a narrow passing...

One can catch a better glimpse of you in plough-land ruts,
sinking beneath the sweat-line of the dead
more than rising towards the last flight of proud swans...

MICHAEL GRANT

SEMBLANCE

No matter what, if any, absolution
The sacred artifice you've served so long

Extracts from a divinity half-drunk on incense,
It is nowhere else but here

That you can retrieve, appearance
By appearance, past all actual seeing,

From what there is of a precarious
And opaque transcript, scorched by chance and fire,

Some nimbus owed to posthumous decay,
A void of wavering starlight

Shining in the waters it transforms,
Stone by glistening stone,

From an abysmal sentience of pallid reed and mud
Into a diadem of tutelary nothingness—

The shining calyx
Of a pure and covetous desire!

DUNCAN MACKEY

Most of the time

& truth be told
face on
complexities not easily studied
word was that very thing

along a line of sight
plane of sky
collimated filaments

of light shade a few questions

all the unintentional errors of noise in any simulation

until words

in that place this hold to hold
nothing so far as

viscous dissipation
masers that mark a protostellar merger

remote from the heady fumes of imported theory
accidental words

life drains from passing stars.

