

IV

Quarantine Notebook

WEEK 4 • 19TH 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

