

A Peep Out of Me

A Peep Out of Me

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New Things

I've never seen a Spring so searing green.

We are the first of men. No rituals
as yet, no epics but the ones of which
the subject's us. How here, I wonder,
hmmm?

From what sky have we fallen? Heaven?
Mars?

No matter. We have seen the earth below,
not blue like in the pictures: sooty grey
with print-thick nimbuses of history,
accumulated dates and data banked
like clouds, the smoggy sum, the total
smoke

and dirty weather of all centuries
ink-smearing across the round entire sky.
We passed the layers of that symbol'd fog
and glided birdlike through their level
plains

of cloud to touch upon this further world
with gentle and angelic toe. We bring
report of better weather, earthlings. Let
all telephones ring out the news: today
deletes the old sky's file, letters fade
upon the Azure Page (good riddance too,

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the old illegibles!) — released from text,
free punctuation rains upon us now
in exclamation points.

Leaving Meg

Now speed takes on the feel of altitude:
a night-black road beneath a road-black
sky:

white broken lines in endless vertebrae
slip underneath the car that seems to fly
across an x-ray of the daylight world.

Lit windows of the dark apartment blocks,
as thick as stars and no less infinitely
distant — yet far more unknowable —
these lights that mark unvisited warm
worlds.

A car is passing. I am in that car
that leaves behind who I have been to
you —

which was? Don't think, our thoughts are
now too fast,
too sharp and sparky — accusations and
excuses circling the atom fact
electronlike: of all the elements
the most unstable one is human love.

But let's be kind now. We can be no less
since we have learned that we can be no
more.

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You truly loved a man who puzzled you,
who loved you for that love, and who
remains
abashed before it even as he leaves.

My figure mirrored in the airport glass,
transparent shade, beyond it planes and
sky,
my weeping ghost, since I have passed
from you,
looks back with strong, defiant frightened
eyes.

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Ireland

Came a day I stared up at a sky
cooled with cloud, gracious greyness of
Dublin,

grateful change from the white angry sun
of a land that refused me its shade:

in this light things look dreamily clear,
much as if they were seen in a mirror,
or as if they were warmly recalled,
or reflected in glimmering verse,

I have stared at the brooch of a queen,
under glass, in a Dublin museum,
silver spirals and tendrils and curls
interwoven with circles of gold

wherein people and beasts interknit
in a forest of sparkling knotwork:
in the streets women worthy such toys —
they were lovely enough wearing jeans.

To Meryl, from Ireland

Here on this utmost island of the West,
world's verge, remembering a Middle East
more far than God, no easier to love,
my Promised Land — that broke its word
to me;

yet through the rain and darkness of this
place

I trace a sunless likeness of the land
I lost, another race whose heart can claim
a sacred language, but whose tongue must
speak

in English, holy ground that bears, like
mine,

the lying lines Brit diplomats have
drawn —

the cloven hoofprint of the *Sasanach*.

But I'm a stranger here, these parallels
can never really meet, and Ireland's
my Elba, though an easy one — a folk
that mean to cheer beneath their muffled
sun.

And here I walk for hours, though I find
no road that leads me closer to the one
who is my only homeland now. I write
these notes obsessively, as though the act

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could turn my life into a text and I
could pen you into being here with me.

So far away we live in different times!
Five hours lost between New York and
here.

I can't look upward to the moon and say
"This shines for you as well, perhaps you
stare

and think of me by this soft light," the stars
are cold astronomies of unshared sky,
unangeled heavens, measurable night.

Dublin

It's time to take the pulse of what is real:
this *is* the man who I grew up to be,
so thin as this, these glasses on my nose,
this cold bed-sit on Raglan road, a cup
of tea in hand, a heater at my feet,
an ancient text before me, 5 AM
— for one must be awake before the dawn
to steal the treasure of the land of dreams.

These books and books, the worlds I range
among,
my people's past, the myth-time strong
and true
as liquor in me still, though now I sit
within the steamy-windowed bus to work.

Cold wet and dark the Georgian Dublin
streets
this evening; sweet, sad the hawker's cry
of "Eve-ning Herald," golden warm the
light
from restaurants wherein the human *sidbe*
are feasting; silver-cold the rain that falls
on anarchists and poets, frayed-cuff men
who've only got a fistful of ideas

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to make the world's entire amends to them.

Meryl: an Idyll

Like two small boats moored side by side
along
a dock, that see-saw slightly, gently bonk
as one wave underneath them both impels:

our bodies, length by length in bed,
breathe in
and out, each belly, subtly bellows-like,
falls, rises, with one shared upholding life.

Our fingers interlace, and hard to tell
whose hand is whose. We warm and press
against
the drunken warmth of one another's
flesh,
aligning, overlaying, synchronized,
heart-beat, quick-breath, one flutter, one
sharp cry —

like Angus and Etain both turned to bird,
a pair of freed swans circling upwards,
linked
from foot to foot by one long golden
chain.

Elegy for Allen Ginsberg

(April, 1997)

Now the Twentieth Century's his – none
begrudge him the final three years.

All that Williams or Pound ever planned –
he achieved and proved right and made clear,

bringing poetry back from the dead, made
anew from the bare primal stuff,

thought's *materia prima*, where Being is one
with perception, the rough

elegance of spontaneous Mind, rythm'd
idioms out of plain talk,

as unfussily, artlessly *art* as the shape of a
Zen-garden rock.

This is known. I am only a witness – no
judge. I recall and repeat

certain incident details of time: things he
said, clothes he proudly bought cheap

from the Salvation Army; the items he
clipped from the paper and saved

so's to show how the government lied;
Mount Blanc pen, and the full-scribbled page;

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conversation sliced painfully thin by the
telephone's fame-powered ring;
and his incense and tankas and bells. All
the mortal montage of his things,

a kaleidoscope twenty years wide tele-
scopes to a moment, a lens,
to the tears that are hot in my eyes — now
I see, whom I'll not see again.

I was seventeen then, when we met, and
that's twenty years gone, and too late,
and I made him too little return on the
much that he gave and forgave.

It's no fine thing to say how I envied his
fame, and a source of small pride
the cruel youth of some judgements I
made — more my shame if at times I was right.

It's a hard sight, the look of myself in the
light of the life of the man,
one so good that beside him I look, as
without him I feel, like the damned..

At the funeral, press was in wait, cam'ras
raised as the mourners arrived;

I was angry to see them at all, and enraged
because not many times

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that poor number. All's loss, nothing's right, there's no way you can win against death.

For the service the most had a prayer, and a few of us, scotch, on our breath.

There we stood in our socks and our grief,
with the hallway floor covered with shoes,
while the Buddhist priest groaned out his
chant in the ears of a great many Jews.

Poor Me

We all were poets in our student days,
when we'd a lot more friends and fewer
things.

But that world ended many years ago,
“the heavens rolled up like a scroll,”
reduced
to paper moons and cut-out silver stars.

My spiritual practice simplified
to getting drunk on all the holidays.
I drank and watched the color start to
bleed
back, start to warm the surfaces of things,
till I could stand to start to think again.

My life became a landscape under fog,
a doubtful wandering in heavy haze,
and here and there I'd see a dull red flare
that stood for sex.

I'd sit deciphering
the label on the bottle: heraldry,
an 18th century engraving face
that seemed to promise knowledge of a
rare
mysterious sort. The neon bar signs shone

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a blurry blue, like all I still recalled
of metaphysics. I was forty-two.

Man

Aquinas, more an angel than a man
in knowledge, has he any mystery
between his pages as profound as that
which every woman hides between her
legs?

I think that woman is perhaps the last
refinement in idolatry. To feel
her neck beneath your lips, to smell her
skin
alone persuades that death can be deferred.

This gift for softening the cough of man's
mortality makes woman better loved
than God, if less believed in. Unreturned,
the compliment. To woman death appears

less real than phonecalls. Thus she busily
outlives us by a decade, during which
— she finishes her errands, I suppose.

By forty men are who they are to be,
drawn clear as confidence could make the
line
and choice define. We fill at last the gap

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our loss will leave—which shows how
small it is.

The skeleton's not sexless, rather, male
— the baldness by itself should make that
clear —

the human, all its femaleness removed,
all softness gone. So economical
of mystery, so bare a thing is man.

Borden Town

The twentieth century's over and I'm still
not packed,

unresolved neuroses accumulated in psychic
corners, like malodorous snow-drifts of un-
washed clothes,

my mental balance a teetering pagoda of
dirty dishes in the sink.

What do I do with the private library of
unread books unheard cd's bought with smug
squander of insufficient savings?

How to roll small the Christmas list of
uncollected karmic debts, betrayals by friends,
inconvenient deaths and bitchy remarks,

my sleepless bedtime mantra and daytime
gloomy review?

I've lived half a century, would another
hundred years suffice

to redeem the sufferings of the Jewish
people, win my dad's approval by prudent
money success, finish learning Chinese, stop
jerking off?

What will I do when the movers come any
minute to rescue me from Fall River
Massachusetts,

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blue collar Portuguese factory town on
the skids since the wool trade moved out in
1900,

its Main Street of vacant stores with
signs in the window “Come in, we’re open!”

now a noisy highway through clustered
dwellings with no more reason to be there,
three-floor yardless worker housing with
Jesus and Mary as garden gnomes,

outside staircases to sit in shirtsleeves
and beergut,

moustache and baseball-cap dads, summer
eves digesting codfish stew and neighborhood
adulteries.

The only trade left is in white sparkly
pleated wedding and communion dresses,
or white sparkly pleated plaster Catholicism,
a town that never had a bookstore or a Jew.

In the center, heavy on the city’s heart as
the butt of Mother Church,

St. Anne’s, like a gay fantasy of Dracula’s
castle,

two penile towers jutting from a grey
gothic wedding cake,

carved into curlicues, massy granite
stack of *Ora Pro Nobis*.

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In its basement, transparently boxed in a
funeral fishtank,
life-size wax mannequin of St.
Concorde, patron of babysitters,
looking sick to her stomach, eyes rolled
back in china-doll face,
a brand new pair of glitter plastic platform
sandals on her scourged bleeding feet,
like the benevolent aspect of Fall River's
other public virgin,

Lizzy Borden,
her house a museum now on 92 Second
Street, across from Bonanza bus terminal,
pig-eyed kleptomaniac lesbian lectured by
her miser father over lunches of rewarmed
mutton stew
listening sullen staring at plate with
weighty face, planning the axe,
a loathsome teethed machine grinding
food to slurry,
Lizzy Borden, human form divine seen
in least flattering aspect,
shit-filled anaconda of intestines coiled
in the belfry of bones, massaged by muscles,
delirious being fueled by fat and anger,
doomed, unable to survive even one
body's unlovely work,

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doomed like all of us, like me already
losing my things, my teeth, my train of
thought.

It's already the 21st century and never
having played a Game Boy or worn Underoos
how could I hope to cope?

Ready or not, I return from five years
exile in cold New England,
upright tidy saltbox houses, weathered
grey clapboard,
narrow tall windows to spy unsociably
out
while admitting no glimpse within.

There wouldn't be windows at all, except
they need to keep an eye on the neighbors
who, after all, might be sinning.

The tourist only sees New England's
autumn-colored centuried trees,
severe wooden churches yarded round
with askew tomb stones, winged hour
glasses and anxious-looking cherub heads,
splendidly weathered, chipped and lapped
in lichen,
moss-embossed, novembered in yellow
late afternoon light,
placid clarity of death's presence.

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They've been dying for a long time in old
New England,

some couldn't wait but died on the first
ships over:

those that live there now are precociously
cold.

I know, four years I lived there so lonely
I bought myself goldfish for the
company.

My curse upon you all, you sour buckle-
heads,

black-hat puritans still chasing turkeys
across the psychic landscape,

with buckles on your shoes as well, like
sinister leprechauns

crooning in your fogs, where never
comes a rainbow,

over your miser pots of gluey beans.

Triptych for Meryl

1

Like when the price and pocketful of
change
 exactly match — when two at once
pronounce
 the same word, stop and laugh — a lucky
guess —
 found money — causeless joy — another
chance —

I've never understood these things, nor
why
 when eight and thirty years were gone we
met,
 like some rare pair of animals, so scarce
they almost count as mythological

and only mate when circumstance aligns
in ways so choice it's just ridiculous—
two beings so unlikely and so fierce
they'll only stand each other's company

— at times not even that. We are as if
two biological experiments

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(top-secret and ungodly) both gone wrong
in ways uncannily alike, and now

they scratch the glass and wreck their
habitats

if either glimpse its fluffy evil twin.

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2

To me you've never aged since first we
met —

instead you just seem younger, you become
a changeling child, only serious
when playing. That would be the reason
why

I keep confusing you with Life itself.
(Or Wisdom? You could stand for
Wisdom too)

Forever new, forever quizzical,
forever young.

Now who will you believe
regarding this? Me, who have known you
all

of seven years, some stranger who has
known

you barely seven minutes, or that glass
that knows not you, nor anything at all?

3

When you have passed beyond the
physical,

beyond the power of time and sinuses,
beyond all partial knowledge of the Real,
I'll be there (for I plan to predecease

if possible). My soul will flutter up,
ecstatic, like a drunken moth. You'll sit
at heaven's bar and watch me zoom
around

your glass, the angel barmaid will enquire:
"Your boyfriend, huh? Does he like
peanuts?" You

will pop me in your purse, then, curtly,
"No."

— Or else, we may incarnate once again,
you'll be a new emergent butterfly
that dries its wings upon an asphodel
(that flower that the Greeks believed grew
both

on earth and in Elysium).

You'll wait
until your wings are dry, (they're bright and
gay

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as candy paper), then you'll hear a voice
behind you, thin and spiritual, cry:

“O Jesus fuck! This thing won't let me go”
There I shall be, half out my chrysalis,
bedraggled.

“Rabinovich, is that you?”

Teeth

“Your dental X-ray is an absolute identity,” the hygienist explained.

Those pallid shadows of my smallest bones!
This film (embarrassing exposure), sad
invasion of the private life of teeth!
This colorless bouquet, long rooted blooms
with grayish cuspid buds! Ah, lipless me!

“It’s more securely you than DNA”
the hygienist went on, all easy cheer
and bodhisattva calm. So, it would seem
the dental record sings the song of self
securelier than poetry. Ay me,
dust-bunny that I am. My finery
is beggar’s velvet, shadows on a screen.
Not even flossing helps me now.

I knew
the teeth were trouble. Teeth, that only
part
of all the skeleton that’s visible!
O sorrow teeth, impermanence itself,
my achey and deciduous ID.

New Jersey: Forest in July

The last year's leafage on the ground will
yield
its brittle specificity, be dust,
be dirt. A chipmunk hurtles through — a
hiss
of crispy dryness.

Now the summer heat's
at height, the leaf-roof overhead most
thick.

This path, this lower less-lit layer here
where last year's dead leaves lie is where I
watch
the ugliest of artists weave herself
the cruellest of abstractions, sticky threads
of destiny, the enemy of all
that's delicate and flies.

Far off, in field,
a butterfly takes wobbling sunlit flight.
A distant river's trickle flashes sun
like spilt sky. One bird perching three trees
down
looks over-shoulder back at me as if
to ask if I am getting all this down.

Illumination

When moon-flight first traversed the map-
less gap

of space, a vagrant spark that shot from
God's

creative hammering; the anvil, earth —

Man rode his fireworks across the night!

and then first saw the agate marble globe

roll blue and white through nothingness,
the stars

a scattered sugar on the warmthless black
and indigestible infinity:

the astronaut read Genesis, a spell

to cosmicize the chaos — so we now

speak poetry against the emptiness,

and what rings true is Torah. Follow that.

