Sun Moon's Mother

Mark Young

Jeannie Smith © Reaching

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acknowledgements

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Synopsis

Crescent Valley High

In this week’s episode, Joel is caught with a cheat-sheet in the American History 1990-2000 exam. Amelia explores the mysteries of flagellation with her new friend Emily. After last week’s revelation that the boy she thought would be the love of her life is actually her half-brother given away before birth, Maple delves further into her family history. She finds that her mother and father may not really be her parents despite her being their biological offspring. The Halperin twins are arrested for stealing washing machines. Sun Moon’s mother experiences the joys of making tagliatelle.
Backtracking in the Early Nineties

The dispersed pieces of a former life fly together like a film run backwards. A single word sets them off — Owsley, king of the acid chemists, the eponymous chapter heading of a remaindered detective novel bought for $1 in a Woolworths variety store. I see it as I turn the page; & associations pile up so fast I confuse the front porch with Freud’s casting couch. Dear Doctor, I dropped a tab for the first time on an afternoon in spring some twenty-five years ago. No-one else was then & there though I do recall the cushions were this amazing shade of purple that sang to me, & a sudden satori gave me insight into the hidden meaning of the cover of Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band & the deeper mysteries that lay beyond.

In the here & now the cushions are red, have a black ideogram embossed on them to match the cane suite that they rest upon. The birds are back but it is the sun that sings above a lawn that is mowed & watered regularly. Each month the bank deducts the mortgage & the car payments automatically; & I am writing this on a PC paid for by credit card. Sic transit gloria mundi. Then into it all comes this chapter heading & I am out of it again. One word that probably cost me one quarter-millionth of one dollar & gave the writer even less dissolves the entire environment & once again I race through stainless steel tunnels where lights bounce back from the shiny walls faster than words, slower than the eye can see.
The Baggage Card

I move & my baggage comes with me. 
I stand still. It snaps at my ankles then rises up & wraps around me like a cloak or kaftan. (I prefer these images to that of a bodybag which also comes to mind.)

I try heading off in unexpected directions but it gets there before me. I visit friends. My baggage is peering out their window, waving me away. I go to speak & my words come out as echoes of what it has already said, pre-empting my thoughts. Silence is my last defence.

My baggage has become more than me while I am becoming less; & that is not becoming. I waste away. It tours the world, gets written up in the social pages taking in openings & art galleries, is seen at a bullfight in the Camargue, flyfishing in New Zealand, wearing leather in San Francisco. I break my silence, beg it to come back. Now it becomes the mute.

Finally
I receive a postcard of a Louis Vuitton valise with a Guadeloupe postmark. My name & address are written in an elegant cursive script. There is no message but the message is clear. My baggage has moved up in the world & I am on my own. Unaccompanied.
I Populate a Private Europe

On most warm nights you will find us walking the streets on the edges of the inner city. Sandstone terrace houses come right up to the pavement, there are no lawns, no patios. People sit on their stoops or first-floor balconies to take the air. Sycamores grown up over the last two centuries blunt the streetlights. Their branches stretch to the houses, we walk beneath them, shutting each other out of our thoughts in the same way the trees shut out much of the light. I drift through the mixed metaphors of a private Europe, populate my dreamy avenues with those I’d like to find there. You prefer to watch the passers-by, to take them on some private dance, up the street down the street round the corner where the real action starts. They’re innocent you say as I question your glances. I reply that innocence is a presumption, something you lay tenuous claim to in the hope no evidence will be forthcoming that proves you otherwise. In the dimness I risk the moral high ground. There is no innocence in the way either of us interact with our separate populations.
The Ideogram

It is the rain, initially, that acts as catalyst to combine the static elements. A thin patina of it on the road, & the slope of the hill behind provides the perspective that forces the shadows of the park sign, the gum trees & the low log fence around the park into the core of an image, an ideogram drawn upon the road. To concentrate the brightness, add low cloud with the city lights reflecting off it, & sodium lights above the intersection hidden by the houses at the top of the hill. Arrange the ingredients thus; cloud cover, sodium lights, gum trees, park sign, fence, rain on the road. I do not know what the ideogram means, but I archive it anyway, store it as a zipfile in my mind.

The ideogram is augmented later. A story on the 10.30 news has as backdrop to the newsreader a stylised image of a Japanese gate. Now I know what I am reminded of, & reach beyond it, through a simple gate of similar shape. To Akira Kurosawa's Rashomon, & that image of Mifune in the rain, bound with ropes but still defiant, the mud-smeared murderer in a story that has four tellings. Foretelling.

In the morning, without backlighting, the road is nothing more than wet asphalt. I bring in the newspaper. The death of Kurosawa is reported on an inside page.
Self Analysis

Neatly, ever so neatly, I have taken the top off my skull. Spread mesh across the opening to create co-ordinates & am now gently excavating the contents & sifting them to see what appears. I am pleased to report that I have found no fossils though there is a midden where previous inhabitants have apparently come down to the waterside to eat the shellfish they found there.

Already the diggings cover half the backyard. I have raised up some rows in which to plant potatoes, will train runner beans to follow the neural pathways that are drying in the sun. & I have in mind if I had a mind to have it in an exquisite bonsai maple which will sit perfectly in the brain cavity.
Lunch with Frank O’Hara

The invitation was accompanied by a new poem “dashed off” — your words — to celebrate the beginning of Senghor’s seventh year as president of the republic of Senegal. An ode to négritude, it wove together the work of Césaire with Apollinaire’s song of the ill-loved. Aimé, mal-aimé.

It came with its own travelling case, it was almost a book. On the front a drawing of you by Larry Rivers superimposed on slabs of Mayakovsky in the original Cyrillic. The back was a collage of newspaper clippings — Billie Holiday’s death, the visit of Kruschev to the United Nations, that famous photograph doctored to show him beating his shoe upon poems by Vosnesensky & Yevtushenko.

Between the covers were a series of made objects cut to postcard size & kept in place by a rubber band. Amongst them a de Kooning nude, body on body with that nude of Duchamp’s that you didn’t think about away from work, a couple of poems about painters, an abstract of a monograph expressing your thoughts on Jackson Pollock & a pixilated Lichtenstein with a soup can in the speech balloon. Oh yes, & another drawing by Rivers, of you in cowboy gear, with the caption “Pistol Packing MoMA”.

The invitation was written on the back of a postcard.

Let’s do lunch. As you can see I’m on Fire Island, but I’ll be back in New York at the beginning of August. Ring me here, or drop me a line at home.

I reacted nervously, started off to write a letter declining the invitation, to say that I would be unavailable at the time suggested, would be in Paris, at a meteorological conference to be held in the iron surrounds of the Eiffel Tower. But halfway through, swayed by the thought of lunch with you amongst those hum-coloured cabs, decided what the hell & rang. To be told you weren’t in, were down on the beach & not expected back until the evening. I’ll ring later I said,
but didn’t leave name or number; preferring to wait, to see if my bravado could also be expected back after sunset. Went out shopping & gallery-hopping, passing the afternoon knowing you would be happy that at least one person amongst the 8,000,000 was thinking of you & myself happy that I was that person. Only to overhear in an uptown pasticceria fragments of a conversation — Fire Island...first automobile fatality ever...poet; & suddenly realise that the meteorological conference had just been washed out, that lunch was over, that many others would be thinking of you today, for all

/ the wrong reasons.
I Never Did Get To See Nijinski Dance

I hurry through the streets of the Principality, towards the theatre where the Ballet Russe is performing, refusing the entreaties of the dealers & street whores who are as prevalent here as in any other time. I dodge the Ducattis & the occasional Hispano Souza on the roads, the Gatsbys & Grimaldis on the sidewalks. Looking around I see that my research has not been all it should have been, hope that the synthetic fibre of my tuxedo will not be noticed. I stay in the background, sidle into the theatre, take my seat as unobtrusively as possible. The lights go up just before going down again & I see several well-known faces in the loges. Diaghilev is in the audience tonight, hosting a party of his friends, amongst them Cocteau who will reprise the structure of this scene twenty-five years later in his Testament of Orpheus. Then the overture starts, the Bakst curtain rises, the dancers enter. I do not recognise the soloist. “Where is Nijinski?” I ask. “Sshh!” says the person on my right. The one on my left tells me Nijinski quit the company ten years ago, is now hopelessly insane. “Such a shame” she adds. I am forced to agree.
Mirror / Images

The thoroughness of your disappearance is outstanding
Michele Leggott

It’s simple really — all done with mirrors. Wormholes in space & time, & which, depending on what medium you’re currently working in or watching, connect quadrant to quadrant, dimension to dimension, either through some sort of oesophagus down which you slide or else an aqueous membrane that opens like a snake’s iris to show the black pupil in behind. In which I see myself grinning at such an outrageous overlay of symbolism. Black holes / heart of darkness / the sophistry of shadow worlds.

I could leave it there, let you use Boolean logic or a structured query language to search the poetic database for clues & keywords. There is an A-Z of those whose images I have pursued perused & used. Mirrors appear & disappear at regular intervals, looking at what I am whilst you are / looking at what made me. Or I could take your hand & pass through the mirror, from the interrogation room to the watching post behind — one-way glass, the old good cop / bad cop routine where I play both the roles — & turning say: Now look at me. I am here, & yet within that room I still exist, still “watch the mirrors / watching me”. We reinvent our selves continually, but keep the major templates safe, in another room.

& in another room MacArthur Park is once more playing, although where once was vinyl & Richard Harris is now Jimmy Webb on CD. Technological advances & a return to the song’s source — we move in both directions simultaneously. For every action...Newton’s third law, classical not quantum physics. It’s simple really, & all to do with mirrors. & smoke. This is no big bang theory of the universe but rather big bang prestidigitation. Go out on a high & leave the audience clamouring for more whilst you reappear in a different city learning how to do the simple street tricks that were once beneath you. With no assistants. & no tuxedo.
When I entered the country I told the immigration authorities I was a gatherer of bones, a polisher of stones, adding that I didn’t mind if the activities were reversed. They were sceptical at first, doubting that these were legitimate occupations, but a search confirmed it so they let me in, muttering that there were cemeteries for the first, rivers for the second, that if I didn’t find a job within three months I would be deported.

When I applied at the employment office their records revealed that it had been years since they’d last had a vacancy for the line of work I laid claim to. In the meantime however, there were part time jobs available in either an ossuary or a quarry that might help keep my hand in while I waited.

Which is how I wound up cataloguing storage bins of bones. A set of threes — three floors of a building in the old part of town, a common repository for the relics of three orthodox religions & which encompassed at least three centuries of active accumulation. It was an eclectic collection, incorporating anything that had the slightest connection with the religions without concern as to the provenance of the items. In the first few days I recorded five femurs supposed to have come from the one saint, discovered that polydactylism seemed to be a pre-requisite for beatitude, that to become a patriarch in the fifteenth & sixteenth centuries demanded a bone in the penis. I was especially intrigued by the relics of someone identified only by a sigil, whom I nicknamed Saint Fibonacci because of the way the number of his metacarpals seemed to increase, & who, it was rumoured, wasn’t even dead yet.
Despite all this I started out with good intentions, sought diligently for the correctly labelled specimens to complete skeletons which were then interred in perspex coffins in a reliquary that had been specifically built for this purpose several years before. Then expediency — & the fact that there were so many unidentified bones lying around — took over. I began to fill in missing parts, but still maintained the integrity of my own records, staying clear of scientific fraud in my determination to become the Bertillon of bones. But the fact that the papers I wrote appeared in non-paying journals whilst the reliquary drew an ever-increasing number of customers finally changed my attitude.

I began selling to traditional chinese medicine outlets bone fragments guaranteed to extend life expectancy. I crossed over from The Journal of the Proceedings of The International Conference of Osteopaths to The Southern Enquiring Truth with articles such as Widespread syndactylism a generation removed disproves the myths surrounding Saint Epimenides the Celibate. & then the activity which caused my dismissal, bringing out a calendar in which each page featured the bones of a saint whose day fell within the month, probably because of the context in which I placed them: “Miss July seeks solace with the ulna of St Theophrastus.”

I have been working at the quarry for three months now. Very soon, a burial plot for a previously unknown schismatic seventeenth century sect will be discovered, complete with contemporary artefacts, their age able to be confirmed by carbon dating. I have learnt well.
Terra Nullius

December 1. Supposedly the day on which the season changed. Someone’s arbitrary determination after they had shifted hemispheres & found their world turned upside down. A quick fix, rendering the particular past, familiar to the names around to at the time, but selves as pest to don’t hold the soil native grasses traditional owners admitted six, Terra Nullius, Empty Land, the principle England relied on to claim ownership of the Australian continent despite the fact that it was already inhabited. done by attaching the unfamiliar & throwing overwrite the land. Fine pets rearrange them- overrun it. New grains together the way the used to do. & where the of the land sometimes sometimes two, de- depending upon what the weather was actually doing, now the seasons come around on the first of the month, every three months, a regular reminder of the debts outstanding on something that was taken, never loaned.
Left Behind

The transitional episodes of his life are defined by what was left behind rather than what happened. At various times, but never at the same time, he owned a Sun Records’ 78 of Elvis singing *Mystery Train*, a complete collection of *Le Surrealism au service de la Revolution* with titles that glowed in the dark & a 2ml Jena syringe from Switzerland whose plunger was made of bottle-blue glass. Not any more. There were other things, but as example this truncated list will do for now. He can remember where he acquired each of them, where he left them, what & when & who he left behind as he & that particular possession parted company. He has brought with him scars on the right ankle & the left foot that come from shooting Nembutal & missing the vein. On a much less physical level there are also *The New American Poetry*, a biography of Paracelsus & a piece of schist in which burnt grass is encased for all time. He cannot recall where he obtained any of them, though knows that at a certain point when other things were left behind he had them all. Still has them; but wonders if a time will come when he remembers leaving them behind & thus restore the memory of where he found them. He will never know when the scars were obtained.
A Done Deal

He refused to talk about the past. It’s a done deal he would say, something you cannot change even if you wanted to. That was the public face; privately he was reinventing it, rearranging it in a way that made it more palatable to remember, more profitable for a later presentation.
Nemesis or: Painting By Numbers
for Michele Leggott

1. The spelling

is probably wrong but, as someone once said, the Greeks have a word for everything. This one is νεµεστζ, divine retribution, a pre-ordained pre-destined fate.

2. Pre-destined.

If only it were / that easy. Begin with a word; & from there on in it is all downhill. No need to think, to struggle over images & how they hold together. Instead the remaining words are pre-determined; you only have to keep your fingers on the keys, & let them do the walking.

3. Michele

what have you started? That formal letter nine months ago; & I have spent much of the time since then working my way through the grey box of old poems, picking & polishing, rewriting some histories & leaving others well alone. But what to do with those that talk about some distant form of me, & yet still say “I am part-done; & with some work can be / completed”?

4. Elsewhere

I’ve talked of reliving the past, through books & discs that I replace as I wear them out. But this is different, this is me, unable to be digitally remastered or re-released in paperback.

5. Cézanne

was once asked, when trying
to sell for ten francs a still-life that
included ten apples sitting in a bowl
on a table, whether he would accept
one franc / for just one apple.

6. In calculus

we learn of sequences & series; & I realise
that working on the poems has created a
convergent sequence of three terms. The
first is the original grey box that now
sits on the table, too full to close with additional
revisions & emails & photocopies all mixed in.
The second is two sub-directories on the
PC. & the third is the stack of laser-printed
pages with a 24-point title on the top sheet
& on the next the not quite complete ISBN
that identifies it as a book about to come to term.

7. Perihelion

is one of the / part-done poems.
Excluded from the box it is
the only one left that I still want
to do something with. Encased
in Byzantine references to Yeats
& interspersed with intimations
of my own mortality that are some
twenty-five years out of date, there are
these lines about Che Guevara that I
still like. & want to keep, even if
it means I have to take some tangential
line to the original intent. So now,
with Che reinterred in Cuba & myself
resurrected in a western suburb of
Sydney, I have crafted this format
in which to lay the lines to rest.

8. & on the bus

I have been reading guevara’s ‘bolivian diary’,
day by day, each day more tragic &
everything so fucking inescapable I could not
bring myself to read the last few pages
& reach the one he never wrote.
I am a man with no ambitions
And few friends, wholly incapable
Of making a living

Kenneth Rexroth: *The Advantages of Learning*

That quality. That white.

Kenneth Rexroth: *Phronesis*

In Aristotle’s ethics (*phronesis*) is the complete excellence of the practical intelligence, the counterpart of *sophia* in the theoretical sphere.

*The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*

In another time
he would spend long evenings reading
the works of Juvenal & Pliny in the
original Latin & later debate the authors
through until morning about what he had read.
For relaxation he would translate *tanka*,
working from obscure & often anonymous
scrolls & woodblock editions, a kind of literary
*ukiyo-e*, poems of the floating world. He
found a threefold pleasure in it — the shape
of the poems & their calligraphy; the gradual
unlocking of the subtleties of a culture not
his own; the recognition of the inherent
universality of it all. Some kind of renaissance
man, as familiar with Gödel as he was with
goshawks, as experienced in climbing mountains
& describing their intricate geology
as he was with discoursing upon the similarities
that exist between all religions whether centred
on one or many gods. & all the time enamoured
of those twin daughters of Aristotle — Sophia
with whom he shared his life, & Phronesis whom he
desired more but was never able to bed. Twelve
thousand lines to one, twelve to the other. It is
the twelve that are the love song. Are the lemma.
The Science Lesson

The constructs. Had been
unaware that he carried them
round with him until some small thing
escaped & he had to put it back. Found
the traces of them then, in finding
that he did not know
where that single item went.

Realised these were probably not
things that came back at him
out of a mirror. Still
it was the first place he went looking.

He saw nothing in his reflection;
but behind & beside him
were dried flowers in a twist & an
origami bird of folded alfoil. Also
some Escher drawings
which evoked the similar symmetries
of the tiles of the Alhambra but without
the strange loops. He recalled
a photograph of that “square brutal fortress”
in Bronowski’s The Ascent of Man, the
sky behind it turquoise. No clouds.

Thought Spain, thought music, wondered
which version of the Concierto de Aranjuez
he liked best. Remembered the
first record he ever bought. Realised
that he had grown up unaware
of the Sierra Nevada on the
opposite side of the world. There were
more mountains in there somewhere
plus rivers & the winter sea. Tamarind trees
in North Queensland & the mouthfeel
of a mango (though these came
later). Silk — or was it cinnamon?
Aretha Franklin singing. A lion statuette
from Sri Lanka. The sound of bees.

It was his first lesson in the nature of constructs.
The Masters

1. Is the Master you follow Basho or Bosch?
   Is your glass half empty or half full?

   If it’s Basho then empty your glass
   & your mind along with it. But if it’s Bosch
   then you’ll probably need to augment it
   with a whole lot of things. Maraschino
   cherries, coloured ice cubes, maybe one
   of those little umbrellas. & that’s just for
   starters. There’ll be so many additions
   by the time you’ve finished that a
   single glass could never hold them all.

2. I am often told that what is left out
   can be just as important as what’s
   included. &, moreover, I adhere to the
   precept, unlike those Flemish Masters who
   include so much in their paintings that it’s
   impossible to tell if anything is missing.
   I mean, who’d notice the absence of the
   kiwi in Bosch’s Garden of Earthly Delights,
   painted several centuries before New Zealand
   was discovered by Europeans, if it
   wasn’t there? & who but a New Zealander
   would notice the damn thing anyway
   in that mosaic of activity? But Hieronymous
   manages to give it the right balance, the right
   to be there, even though it took a couple
   of hundred years for that imagining to be
   realised, & meant ignoring his patron
   pleading from the studio door for
   more naked lovers, fewer flightless birds.
Inside & Out

I distrust elevators, am made uneasy by the way they miss out floors & I have to go up to 50 & come back down again to get to 47. Am totally turned off being told by an artificial unfeminine voice that I’m on the ground when the display shows 4. What am I missing out on here? I get around it by using alleyways, entering through the back door or the basement carpark & coming up the fire stairs. It keeps me fit but it keeps me in the dark. Which is why I am unaware that the moon is dying above me, presenting as a dull orange crescent forced downwards by the outlined ball of ashes that records its burning. Is falling, & not about to stop at any floor.
Lunch in Glebe

The nose & mouth of Akhenaten opened
the week, a postcard out of
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
sent to me from New York by Michele Leggott
on her way to or from a writers’ festival
in Germany. The televised death
of Allen Ginsberg in his apartment
in New York, at the end of a documentary
on his life, rounded it off. & somewhere in
between an email from John Parkyn, now
living in Mexico but going to New York in a
week’s time, bringing me up to date with what
people are doing two suburbs away from me
& seemingly apropos of nothing, telling how
I had introduced him to the work of Lorca.

In the same logging on
I discover through a fortuitous combination
of keywords that there is a review of
The right foot of the giant in the latest issue
of Landfall. Search the on-line catalogues
of the local university libraries to see who holds
the journal, find it listed at Sydney University,
go there on Saturday & track it down. See
that it’s by Ian Wedde so skim it with some
trepidation but it’s a favourable review. I
photocopy it on the only machine
that still takes cash & leave; & on the way
back to the car drop in at Gleebooks, the
first time I’ve been there since the launch
of Nigel Roberts’ book six years ago. I buy
The Magic Mountain for Lauren & a
$5 book of translations of Apollinaire for myself.

I’m feeling pretty good by now
so a little further up the road stop off
to have lunch — two sandwiches & a flat
white coffee — & read the review again.
Am flattered by the association with
LeRoi Jones, bemused by the congruence
of having lunch whilst reading references
to Frank O’Hara’s Lunch Poems & to
O’Hara having lunch with LeRoi in New York
& wonder, apropos of everything, if it was Lorca’s
Poet in New York that triggered John’s memory.
& my memory is triggered by
Ian’s comments on my Robert Desnos poem
of a much earlier email from Michele
in which she tells me of going out to buy
a book of poems by Desnos after
reading that poem. I momentarily
wonder if this is to be my lot
in life, an introduction agency for dead
poets, with today’s special Apollinaire.

But the thought recedes as some of those
with whom I’ve shared the week turn up
to share my lunch. Frank O’Hara &
LeRoi Jones arrive together, are
joined by Desnos & John Parkyn
& Ian Wedde & Apollinaire & Lorca
& Thomas Mann & Nigel Roberts. At
first it’s a bit of a boys’ club; but before too long
there are so many people having lunch
with me in Glebe that when Akhenaten
shows up there is no room for him
inside. I see him from my table, face
pressed against the glass, nose & mouth
prominent. I buy a disposable camera
from some Korean tourists who have a
duty-free bag full of them & take a
photo. Shall print it off later & send
it to Michele, to open up her week.
The Right Foot of the Giant

It’s taken forty years, but I’ve finally found the answer. In a vanity search of the Web I come across a mention of the right foot of the giant on the home page of some quasi-Egyptian Rite out of Ireland calling itself the Secrets of Isis & listing amongst its sources of inspiration *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* & the *Bhagavad Gita* as well as a generous serving of Greek mythology. Up until now I’d always considered *World Music* the most grab-bag name for a collection of disparity but this is equally amusing. & yet bits catch the eye when taken out of context. The part of the ritual which contains the giant takes place whilst the constellation Scorpio is predominant in the night sky, & that’s my star sign. The foot is described as resting on the head of a serpent, just like the universe in *Pipe Dream*, another poem of mine. But taken overall it is a theological fricassée made prescient by the presence of sufficient material of sufficient vagueness to ensure there’ll always be a measure of personal relevance able to be found in it. One thing remains — to pause instead of passing & belatedly set the right foot of my giant down so forcefully it triggers shock waves that blow the borrowers away but leave the library intact.
Now’s the Time

when I was so young and had so much to learn.

Miles Davis: The Autobiography

The reed of Charlie Parker's sax
squeaks from the car cassette player as I
drive down the motorway towards the
city. It is a Miles Davis compilation, his
eyear work, old 78s that have been
"digitally remastered"; & this the oldest
track on the album, Now’s the Time, by
Charlie Parker's Ree Boppers. Caught up
by the rhythm of it, my thoughts move
in a different direction to the one in which
I am driving. Away from the exam I am
about to sit, where I will be expected
to display my erudition by writing page
after page on management processes &
systems, & measuring that supposed
exposition of knowledge against the ability
of these musicians to express so much
in three minutes. I am thinking of the friend
who ended a letter with an apology
for its length, regretting that she did not
have the time to make it short. Of Borges
whose Ficciones each compressed
into a few pages what most others
would take volumes to express. & of the
Japanese black-ink painters who let
the viewer's heart fill in the outlines. Then
the toll booth brings me back to the now
of it. Parker drops in a phrase from
Willow, weep for me just as I drop my
dollar fifty into the basket; & as I drive out
the other side we separate. The musicians
are back on 52nd Street creating history
with their pre-vinyl haiku as I merge with
the traffic flow again, an indistinguishable
part of what my textbooks describe
as an infinite population whose arrival
at the toll gates followed a Poisson
probability distribution, & whose service
times were exponentially distributed.

But what it says is that our youth has gone.

Amiri Baraka: When Miles Split
From the Pristine Vocabulary

Hidden away
we probably all have
a cache of
special words we
rarely get to use
if ever. I am
delighted, then, when
I go outside for a cigarette
& find a quincunx
of olive-backed orioles
perched on
the rotary clothesline.
A Small Stone for Alan Brunton’s Cairn

It is the last Saturday in June, well into the southern winter, the wind coming off unseen mountains to bring the big chill up to the door of the backroom where I sit at the computer, the cat on the stool beside me & the hissing heater keeping us company. I am surrounded by books, many of which I have read over & over, as I replay favourite tracks from tapes & CDs — Youssou N’Dour & Neneh Cherry singing 7 Seconds, Miles Davis’ Time after Time. I am surrounded by instruments of memory.

I am surrounded by words, many of which I use over & over, time after time. There are also those of which I was enamoured but never got to use, save all together, in the one poem. & there are some that I have kept hidden, in pristine state, mainly adjectives, because I never found the proper noun to give them to.

I am isolated by instruments of memory. Even when the computer is turned off Michele’s email is retained as an image burnt on the eyes as the light departs. “He’s gone.” & the sound system is the one on which I listened to the Big Smoke tape & heard Alan’s voice for the first time, was caught by it & drew from out of the secret stash to give to him

mellifluous.

Isolate, desolate, surrounded by instruments of memory, I will read Michele’s email over & over even if I never see it again; & though I retain the sound & the sensation of the tape, I know that when the wind dies down I will play it once more, to listen to that voice again, as sweet as honey.
December 6, 2002

Fish & chips for tea, cricket on the radio.
A new moon with the old one sitting in its lap.
That’s what my father used to say
when he saw it like this; & even as a bare crescent
he would turn whatever silver coins he had
over in his pocket & bow
seven times in its direction to ensure
fortune favoured us in the coming month.

Across the Tasman, in another time zone,
the Memorial Concert for Alan will
just be finishing. I’ve seen the program. Eight minutes
for this performer, five for another. All
spelled out, such temporal precision.
Hope it went off okay,
Wish I could have been there to be part of it.

Though in a way I was. My poem for Alan
went up on the website last night. First time
I’ve looked at it for five months. Still like what
it says although a small part of its construction
irritates. I want to change a couple of words, feel
a bit guilty that I do, engage myself in
some sort of internal debate over whether you should
leave what was written as a reaction to something
as it was first written or revise it later
when the critic kicks in & kicks out
some of the emotion. Decide to change my
paper copy & leave the electronic version as it is.

Lauren should be home soon so I
turn on the carport light, find five minutes afterwards
that an armada of Christmas beetles has invaded
the illuminated space, arriving out of nowhere
to throw themselves in a kamikaze frenzy
against the walls, the concrete, the cat’s
water bowl. A prototype clone army —
such fanaticism, such uniformity, all
the same size, the same bronze colour.

Confronted with this display of karmic inevitability
I wonder about the power of my father’s
eccentricities. Would Alan have been safe
if he’d carried silver guilders &
turned them over in his pocket as he bowed
to the moon? From what I know about him
nobody would have thought
the actions strange. Don’t know if he
would have shared the superstition.

So cold when I was told the news of his
death. So hot now. Bush fires ring the city,
fanned by the same winds that brought
that big chill earlier. Two hours ago,
as the concert was beginning, a procession
of helicopters were doing the round trip
to the latest fire, off to catch their
15 seconds of flame for the evening
news bulletins. An hour later, at intermission,
with twilight making it too dangerous
to fly at the low height necessary in its
current role as a dive bombing super watertanker,
the giant skycrane nicknamed Elvis
after its home port of Memphis, Tennessee
rumbled overhead returning to its temporary base
& six hours of overnight maintenance. Now

the concert is over & I am alone with the beetles.
I put one of the Modern Jazz Quartet’s recordings
of the Concierto de Aranjuez on the CD
player, am reminded that I’d always wondered
why Chris Bourke used their Django in the
Big Smoke broadcasts. It’s fifties music after all.

Tomorrow is the anniversary of Pearl Harbour.
Think I’ll celebrate it by putting together
a ragtag armada & launching a pre-emptive strike
against the Americans & their weapons
of mass destruction. Take Elvis along, liberate
the Spirit of St Louis & the Wright brothers’ Flyer
from the Smithsonian — a delightful irony, &
I have the floor plans on a T-shirt. Then there’s
the Gossamer Albatross that crossed the Atlantic
under pedal power, the hotair balloon
in which Steve Fossey circumnavigated
the globe, da Vinci’s flying machines. An airshow

Then again, tomorrow in the USA will be today.
Or maybe it’s today that is tomorrow. I can handle
the time zone differences in hours ahead or behind
but the days confuse me. It’s why I’ve
always thought JFK was assassinated on November 23.
I decide to wait one more day. Then I will act.
I get strung out writing didactic poems. They swallow me up, & I never seem able to achieve resolution. The new year is half-way over before I realise it. By the time I work out if the smoke comes from fireworks or bushfires the rainy season has begun. The lightning that punctuates it frightens me, but I manage to calm myself by counting the number of seconds it takes for the thunder to arrive.
The artist in residence

Structure is easy. Bits of board, the occasional nail, string if nothing else comes easily to hand. A centre post; or strategic posts with a hole for the smoke to escape through. Palm fronds plaited to form the roof. No manuals necessary. Merely the human form & a box to keep it in. Alive. Optional windows. A necessary door.
Chaos Theory Does Hollywood

Have just watched Blade Runner on DVD, enjoyed it as I always do even though a small part of me sits there running a reality check. It’s the risk you take when writing about the future; having it reviewed at a point that is closer to the concept than the conception. Pan-Am didn’t even make it to 2001 let alone the time this movie is set. The arse has fallen out of the yen & though Sony still owns Columbia not everyone speaks Japanese & most of the noodle bars are owned by immigrants from Vietnam or Mainland China. Two days ago I bought an album by Youssou N’Dour & the next day Senegal surprised by beating France in the opening round of soccer’s World Cup. Maybe that’s the way to influence the universe. Don’t just make the movie, change something small in the real world & eventually the film may be seen as cinéma verité by the time its time has come. Forgo those fastfood franchised tie-ins. Instead give everyone a butterfly to kill.
Flirting
for Eileen Tabios

It is a dance in
two parts. Is ritual.

Pop song from the
Forties. A trip to the moon.

The bull, the matador.
Dance, ritual, death.

Whose death? A las
cinco de la tarde?

Usually the bull. Sometimes
the matador. Provocation
can have unexpected results.
A procession of flagellants
passes by. I am drunk on the
smell of fermented mangoes.

Red sand blood white.
What colour are your eyes?

So the distances are Galatea
and one does fall in love
Charles Olson: The Distances
The Large Glass

We have folded our tents & rolled north. To Rockhampton on the Tropic of Capricorn, a city one per cent the size of the one where we’ve spent the last thirty years. It is nominally mid-winter, but I’m sitting outside in shorts & a short-sleeved shirt wondering how I’ll cope when summer comes. The sky at night is vivid black & it seems that we’ve been given a whole new set of stars to be guided by. I’d previously placed no faith in the heavenly maps drawn up by the ancients. Two millennia of fuzzy interpretation had already worn them out before they were further dimmed by the light pollution that a city of four million people generates. But now I see what they were getting at as I sit beneath Jimi Hendrix’ guitar & pick out in a more distant quadrant Madonna’s pointy bra, Man Ray’s Iron.
The Accidental Intersection
for Daniela Stehlik

Plain beginnings. I am here
with Lauren, dropping off a bar fridge
that we’d bought on special
for her office. Down the hall
you are packing for your move
across the continent, the room full
of unsealed cartons. My eye
isolates a book by Umberto Eco
on top of one of them; I am surprised
to see it here. Not in this
specific place — I do not know you,
know your tastes — but in the wider space
that is Rockhampton. It took the
local bookshop six weeks to bring in
Baudolino for me & I forget
how many times I had to spell
the author’s name, the book’s
title. (Alberto? Echo? Bordello?)
I make a comment on it. You spontaneously
give it to me. An unwrapped gift; but the panel
from Bosch’s Temptation of St Anthony
that decorates the front cover
is better than any wrapping. Triggered
by some spark, an arc in the air
that adds to them, impetuous presents
are so often the best. & Serendipities
is such an appropriate title in this
happy & accidental intersection where I
have gained from your generosity.
**Pi, Pythagoras & I**

Given that you can determine the length of any side of a right-angled triangle by the fact that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides & calculate the area under a curve by integration provided the equation of the line that the curve follows is known or be tested to see if you are pre-disposed to diabetes or ms or even cancer by the make-up of particular genes & the use of instantaneous sequencing machines why can’t I by assigning weights to all those things I love or hate or am indifferent to arrive at a formula that can easily determine who I am & what is pre destined for me?

kurosawa movies with mifune in them tropical thunderstorms self-propagated macadamia trees ready to drop their fruit driving long distances up & down the coastline little frogs that cling to the security screens bach the sun just before it goes behind the hills lemon drink night skies full of stars the poems of frank o’hara living with lauren certain species of birds that I find exciting because of how they look how they sound fruit bats tasty cheese umberto eco a whiter shade of pale heard for the first time broadcast on a.m. radio 1700 kilometres away & still sounding great despite the static stone gardens meerkats overgrown gardens my cat certain tokens that were given or found & have acquired a patina of magic ray charles & aretha franklin together is a duet i would really like to hear whales south park black-ink paintings with their zen over- & undertones the sound & sight of the sea at all times but especially when it’s stormy vietnamese food fifty years of miles davis unseen trains & seen mountains the croak of frogs below the window rené magritte a new moon with the old one sitting in its lap the chime of bellbirds along isolate forest roads. an extreme distrust of right-wing amerika
a is for absinthe

ambition is the cruelest month
bravado comes creeping on little cat feet
courage & the slithy toves did gyre & gimble
death spreadeagled in the empty air of existence
ethics has a man in it. he is transparent
fame is glazed by rain water
greed considered as a
hunger of semi-precious stones
inventiveness we trust
justice comme je suis
karma just happened to come along
liberty at five in the afternoon
minestrone wears a glove on which his crimes cannot be read
nature died in the church & was buried along with her name. nobody came
optimism loses all the time
prejudice is poisonous but pretty in autumn
quietness bent over a blue guitar
rapaciousness is no country for old men
sleep in whom I dream angels
tension was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair
unhappiness saw him disembark in the unanimous night
vanishing species on the left hand side of the beach like a motorcycle club
water was ours before we were the land's
xenophobia breaks where no sun shines
youth your rooster crows at the break of dawn
zodiac signs with few friends & no ambitions
Elsebet Schwarzvogel, consumptive third daughter of the fourth Grand Duke of Lower Saxony, is reputed to have been so enraptured by the resonance of the cello she gave instructions & a large sum of her father’s money that on her death her intestines were to be taken out & stretched & strung on a quintet of instruments she had had especially made by those craftsmen from Cremona. She also commissioned small works from some of the greatest composers of the time, & asked, without the accompaniment of money, that they be performed on each anniversary of her passing. Sadly nothing now is left except the tale & a fragment of music that emerged in the 1930s as Bye Bye Blackbird & was also destined for erasure until revitalised by this recording made, in a nice twist of synchronicity, on the tercentenary of her death by that great quintet of Miles Davis from the early fifties, with Coltrane on tenor & Philly Joe Jones driving it along. Close your eyes. Listen for the cello breathing in the background.
Serendipity

They were alive and they spoke to me!

Henry Miller: *The Books in my Life*

No matter how large the library, the book I wanted was never in or else it was forbidden me.

Henry Miller: *The Time of the Assassins*

Years ago, in the belief that it was a book of short stories by Arthur Miller whom I knew of as the author of *Death of a Salesman* & the husband of Marilyn Monroe, I picked up a paperback from amongst the detritus left by the previous tenants of a house into which friends of mine were moving, & was half-way through it before I realised it was by a different Miller, first name Henry, whom I didn’t know existed until then.

The writing was alive & it spoke to me! & the titles! Someone who could come up with *The Alcoholic Veteran with the Washboard Cranium* was someone I wanted to read more of. But life imitated art. Many of Miller’s books were banned; most of those that weren’t were out of print; & I could find nothing more of his until, in a second-hand bookshop, I unearthed *The Time of the Assassins*, about some French poet, first name Arthur, second name Rimbaud, whom I also didn’t know existed until then.
A Season in Hell

Came down by abyssinian camel train, rimbaud riding shotgun & wearing a sweatshirt emblazoned with the head of de sade & the enscribed legend: ‘voici le temps des ASSASSINS’.

Came down through somaliland, heading for harar & addis adiba, stopping over in various villages where we fucked the young boys given us nightly by the local chieftains.

Sold some guns / bought bhang / drank absinthe / fought camels / got fucked by the local chieftain. Young boys came down on donkeys, de sade came down with his prick up the arse of a male goat, rimbaud came down with malaria & raved for days.

Sold more guns to an enemy village, but salved what little conscience we had left by acting as neutral nurses in the ensuing battle, crucifying the dying or tying their limbs to camels which we whipped in opposite directions. Gathered up the guns left by the dead, smoked bhang, pulled each other off & came over icons of the coptic saints. Drank absinthe till we stank /
of wormwood.

The sand burned our eyes & throats, & even the prettiest of the young boys couldn’t put the fires out. Sold the re-acquired guns to those left living at exorbitant prices — many slaves, much ivory; even myrrh & frankincense & gold which we bargained for off three senile fools who’d got lost while searching for some star. Fucked them also. & their camels. Then set the slaves to diddling themselves with elephant-tusk dildoes. Went to sleep dreaming of some place called bethlehem.

Moved off on sudanese asses, me riding shotgun, rimbaud tied to the leading donkey with another bout of fever. Fell partway off so his head traced runes in the sand. Raved about quinine
but couldn’t find a rhyme to go with it. Up-right by khartoum, so we went looking for the mahdi & instead found verlaine who was / looking for the harbour. Three days spent drinking with him, until he suddenly pulled a gun & shot rimbaud in the wrist. It healed quickly — he always was a bad shot — but we’d had enough by then, & consigned him to the nile & a blowjob from a crocodile that left him screaming for his wife & mother-in-law. Gave him a good funeral, though — the barge he sat in, like a burnish’d throne, burn’d on the water; purple the sails, & so perfumed that we saved on the incense.

But even in cairo we could still smell it, so we moved east. Waited for the red sea to open, then on to aden to arrange another arms consignment. The night spent in a whorehouse, & off on a dhow before dawn, bound for zanzibar.
The Armory Show

Flying in from Adelaide
on a Friday evening, caught in the
usual end of week holding pattern
above this busiest of airports. It has
been raining & the roads below
are shiny black because of it. Long
chains of car lights animate
the electric calligraphy, each block an
ideogram: & in the complexity I pick out
runic patterns, crop circles, fractals.
It is a continuum of mythic symbology
that elates me. At home, a week or so
later, I am drawn outside by an
ever-increasing roar. See nothing at first;
but then remember an item in the morning newspaper
about security preparations for the
coming Olympics so search within the noise
to find six Black Hawk helicopters, in tight
formation, flying low & without lights,
following the line of the motorway into
the city. They are almost invisible, taking on form
only because of the cloud behind & even then
indeterminate, like fish in a river. All
previous contact I have had with them
has been at one remove, just as their
entry here is filtered through a press release
where they are presented as protectors.
But as eyes accustom to the night
the angularity that defines their purpose
becomes more clear. They have
an obscenity about them I had not
previously been aware of; & though
they come across in this environment more
as classical mythic archetype it is easy now
to understand how they became the feedstock
for modern urban myth. Above / below, where
I saw animation / they see threat. Which is
how I finally see them. There is
no longer any script. As they move
across the sky the myths dissolve.
This written for the future, something to look back on, to see what my thoughts were at the time. A commentary on what is now before me, how you feast on the dead, play replay after replay, from different angles, rewritten as choreography, a Hollywood blockbuster with the producers wanting to make sure the audience gets its money’s worth. It is what you’ve come to expect; but most movies are cleaner, have stars that are paid more for their one performance than this whole episode would have cost to carry out. Think on it. Brood on the implications of what you’ve learnt in the two days since. The stand-in pilots had work visas, lived next door, supported themselves & contributed to the economy of the country they have just put on notice. The airlines paid for & provided the bombs. The extras paid for their own parts. There was no need for rehearsal.
The waiters on the Trans-Continental Railway each speak at least three languages & display their linguistic skills by not saying very much at all. They hover around The President, daring him to order some unfamiliar item from the menu so they can pretend not to understand what it is he wants, ask him to point it out, then enunciate the name of the dish with precise & perfect intonation & such an undercurrent of disdain that he ends up meekly ordering a soda water & a club sandwich to go.
All Things Bright &

On an otherwise uneventful day
the sun turns an angry
shade of burgund, birds
fall screaming to the ground
& the whole cicada universe
rises in a stirring rendition of
Bohemian Rhapsody. There is
an underlying humming
which is unsettling everyone.

In this land where lemmings
are unknown, it falls to the
lemurs to be the first to throw
themselves en masse off The Gap,
the local focal point of ultimate
reconciliation for those for whom
the parts of their lives were
previously irreconcilable. Llamas
& meerkats watch in trepidation
as the humming grows louder.
Rising from a bunker deep below
an organic mink farm in the Rockies
what started off sounding like some
tantric mantra has finally resolved
into a tuneless anthem. After many
false beginnings the content now
seems settled on. There is an axis
of evil that threatens the world.
The Homeland must be protected.

Armed men stream forth to make
it happen. They are adorned with
blackened faces & head mikes, symbolic
decoration to show just how far beyond
the godless underdogs this nation
under god has progressed in a
sesqui-century — all the way
from minstrel shows to Madonna
concerts. They roam pro-
claiming they are on a holy
mission, a jihad to rid the world of
something so insidious it cannot
be seen, can only be identified
by scanning equipment that picks up
aberrations in the brain’s alpha
waves. Billions are dead before
it is realised the equipment is so imprecise that any brain activity is considered to be aberrant.

When no one else remains the missionaries turn upon themselves fearing that they too may have been contaminated. Leaving behind only the cicadas continuing to work their way through the Queen songbook; the mink who, finally freed from enforced separation & a diet of vegetables & vitamin supplements, are frantically fucking their tiny tits off as they prepare to inherit & ultimately overrun the earth; & someone somewhere saying “See, Gaia. I promised you a fur coat, & Daddy always delivers.”
George W’s Language Primer

He put words in my mouth.

I do not like the taste of them, I said. Certainly I have used them all before but they feel strange in this context, have no real meaning to me. This is not how I would arrange them.

Spit them out & let me look at them again, he said.


An advisor hurried up & whispered in his ear. Let me re-arrange them for you said George W. when the advisor had finished. Swallow them again, taste them, roll them around in your mouth & see how they feel now, how they sound. Say them over & over, like one of those Buddhist montereys or manta rays or whatever they are called. Remember too that you are either for us or against us, a friend or an enemy — there is no middle ground.

I put his words in my mouth again. I tried what he said. Tasted them as they came out. This time they had a ring to them that I could learn to live with. Hate mother-fucking anti-American flag-burning Arab terrorists.

I tried them again & they felt even better the second time around. Now I use them all the time. I am proud to be called a friend of the President.
The Road to Damascus

There is shouting in the street. Children’s voices. It seems too late for them to be out & about. I cannot help myself. I go to the window even though the television screen at the other end of the room is showing the downward plunge of missiles, the subsequent eruptions. No colour as we normally think of it. Instead the washed-out green & white of night vision lenses.

When birds dive for food part of their flight inevitably follows the same parabolic curve that missiles take. Kingfishers start from a branch above the river. Flashes of real colour as they plunge. The water broken & then broken again with the upward thrust. They take only what is needed when needed, return by the same path to the same spot save for the time spent under water. Would that missiles would do the same.
The Return of the Hapsburgs

Take the old shotgun
out of the cupboard & give it
a thorough inspection. You feel safe
with it around but it’s been there for so long
it has probably rusted. It’s time for an
upgrade. Think how much safer
a well-oiled Uzi would make you feel.

*

It’s time to take down all the crucifixions.
They come across like early Mapplethorpes
before he discovered foreign objects. Put them
in museums. These days it’s
gospel halls that outdo shopping malls, all
praise the lord & pass the collection plate.

*

Burn the balaclavas & the
makeshift body armour, the placards
extolling anti-globalisation. What
makes you think you can win
by using force against force? You’re amateurs
playing power games against self-interested
Masters. There are other stratagems
& the accessories are still there
in the bottom drawer
longing to be used again. Take to the streets
wearing ankhs & amulets. The time
is once more right for. Dancing.
It’s one of those things you don’t forget.

*

Terminator Arnie’s one-man army
is on the march to Sacramento, the victory celebrations
compered by a talkshow host. Maybe
the whole set-up is the lead-in
to another Jay Leno one-liner. The comparisons
are with Reagan, but he was just a fuckwit
puppet. It’s Jesse The Body Ventura
who’s got a lot to answer for.
Their Given Names

for Chris Murray

If we wanted or needed to, we could find out the names of not just the nine that prompted your poems but all the coalition personnel who have died in Iraq. We won’t, however, see any TV footage of the ceremonial choreography when their bodies are returned to the States – the visual documentation of the nightly disassembly line that was the daily dead coming back from Vietnam put paid to that forever. We do see footage of the unscripted funerals of Iraqi civilians, some of it anyway. There aren’t enough camera crews around to cover them all. Nor enough time. But try finding out their numbers & their names in the sanitised anonymity of acceptable collateral damage a category whose equation seems to have no upper limit unless we give it one. & that won’t come until we give them back their given names. & write about them.
Pelican Dreaming

Later he would walk down to the lagoon to look for the pelicans. They were his touchstone, the way their solid bodies gave substance to the landscape, a centre to it. Only when they found him would he return.
Mark Young
Recently published work includes a collaborative e-chap with Jukka-Pekka Kervinen, The Oracular Sonnets (Meritage Press) & an e-book, calligraphies, from xPressed. He maintains two weblogs, pelican dreaming & mark young’s Series Magritte. He has an author’s page at the New Zealand electronic poetry centre.

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